Museums in a Digital Culture

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Digital technologies are providing heritage institutions with a range of possibilities for sharing curatorial and ethnographic authority with communities of origin. In recent years, a number of digital projects have demonstrated the potential for museum digitization initiatives to connect tangible and intangible cultural collections to indigenous peoples – in particular, opening up discussions of the opportunities and challenges associated with “digital repatriation,” the return of heritage documentation in digital form to communities of origin1 (see figure 8). In these projects, technical experimentation and innovation intersect with diverse cultural contexts and protocols, research ethics, and approaches to ownership of cultural property. For example, the Mukurtu Content Management System and the Plateau Peoples’ Portal have demonstrated possibilities for integrating digital cultural objects into archives that respect and support existing cultural traditions and practices by replicating dynamic protocols for access and circulation of cultural knowledge.2 These protocols, digitally encoded through long-term collaborative design and production, have challenged the default of open access in favor of local control over sensitive cultural heritage.3 In another research collaboration between the Cambridge Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology and the A:shiwi A:wan Museum and Heritage Center of Zuni, digital collections were made available for reconnection to narrative and other forms of intangible knowledge, while demonstrating the extent to which institutional ideologies and practices had previously excluded Native American interpretations of their material


culture. GRASAC, the Great Lakes Alliance for the Study of Aboriginal Arts and Culture, was created with the goal of determining if it would be “possible to use information technology to digitally reunite Great Lakes heritage that is currently scattered across museums and archives in North America and Europe with Aboriginal community knowledge, memory, and perspectives,” suggesting possibilities for the generation of new cultural knowledge by reuniting fragmented Aboriginal collections. My previous work with the Doig River First Nation in British Columbia on the virtual museum exhibit *Dane Wajich – Dane-zaa Stories and Songs: Dreamers and the Land* has shown that while the digitization and return of cultural documentation to communities of origin can facilitate self-representation and the articulation of local cultural property rights, digitization and circulation can make it virtually impossible to enforce those rights.

With the initiation of these projects and an exponential number in production and being planned for years to come, new sites for the ethnography of digital cultural production have emerged at both institutional and community scales. In this chapter, I ground a preliminary exploration of the effects of digitization and virtual repatriation in the Reciprocal Research Network (RRN), an on-line museum portal that has been co-developed by the Museum of Anthropology at the University of British Columbia in collaboration with three Northwest coast First Nations – the Musqueam Indian Band, the U’Mista Cultural Society, the Stó:lō Nation/Stó:lō Tribal Council – and more than twenty-five international museum institutions that have made their Northwest coast collections data available in a single online archive. The RRN represents a significant site from which to trace the evolution of digitally mediated research relationships, reconnections of museum collections to originating communities, and the development of reciprocal research and curatorial initiatives between museums and stakeholder communities. How do new media practices shift the balance between institutional expertise and Aboriginal participation in the representation of their cultural heritage? How are existing systems of ownership, copyright, and intellectual property rights challenged as originating communities gain better knowledge of their cultural property in museum collections? How are

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these technologies able to accommodate and reflect indigenous protocols for the management and circulation of cultural knowledge?

I begin to answer these questions by describing elements of a virtual museum exhibit created by the Inuvialuit Cultural Resource Centre in Inuvik, Northwest Territories, Canada, and collaborating researchers, curators, and media producers (myself included). This project, Inuvialuit Pitqusiit Inuuniaratait: Inuvialuit Living History, used the RRN’s Application Programming Interface (API) to curate and remediate object records from the Smithsonian National Museum of Natural History’s MacFarlane Collection – which originated in the Anderson River region in Inuvialuit territory – and to reconnect the collection to intangible knowledge, local cultural practices, and revitalization initiatives. Through the lens of this

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The Reciprocal Research Network

The Reciprocal Research Network’s home page10 features a welcome in three First Nations languages – Ḥən̓q̓əm̓ən̓, Halq’eméylem, and Kwak’wala – representing the languages of the project’s co-developers, the Musqueam Indian Band, the U’Mista Cultural Society, the Stó:lō Nation / Stó:lō Tribal Council. In January 2012, the RRN listed access to over 400,000 objects from a growing number of holding institutions, including the First Nations co-developers. These digital object records are available to registered users through a faceted search interface, which at the highest level starts with What, Who, Where, and When, and then drills down into increasingly specific categories of objects such as culture, place collected, material, manufacturing technique, and many more. Users can create their own collections, virtually dropping them into a metaphorical Northwest coast bentwood box, invite collaboration and conversation from other researchers and holding institutions, and attach media and information to object records.11

The RRN’s home page includes a link to its API (Application Programming Interface). This API is essentially a set of encoded rules and data that gives developers access to digital collections records on the RRN, which enables developers to remediate institutional collections data in new works,

9 Natasha Lyons has articulately explored our team’s strategy for “creating space” for collaborative research engagement in Lyons. See “Creating Space for Negotiating the Nature and Outcomes of Collaborative Research Projects with Aboriginal Communities,” Inuit Studies Special Issue on Intellectual Property and Ethics 35 no. 1-2 (2011): 83-105.
10 http://www.rrncommunity.org/.
virtual exhibits, or as XML feeds. While the API facilitates a new degree of public access to collections, it also represents an opportunity for originating communities to re-contextualize their cultural heritage in museums in new digital forms, potentially shifting power over representation from institution to Aboriginal publics. According to project lead Sue Rowley,

Our goal was to develop a new research tool for accessing information housed in geographically dispersed locales as well as providing networking functions for effective engagement and collaboration among researchers with diverse backgrounds. Most significantly, the creation of this virtual research space emerged from the desire of all participants to base the project on the principles of respect for the originating communities’ different knowledge and value systems as well as for the partner museums.\(^\text{12}\)

In keeping with these intentions, the RRN homepage also displays a vibrant blue, black, and white logo designed by Terry Point, a member of the Musqueam Indian Band, and William Wasden Jr., a member of the ‘Na̱mg̱ is tribe of the Kwakwä’kä’wakw First Nations. The logo depicts dynamic elements of salmon, killer whale, human beings, and a canoe. The RRN website further describes how Point and Wasden, both RRN interns between 2004 and 2005, developed the logo considering traditional navigation and creation themes, and relating ideas of communication and renewal of knowledge to the function of the RRN:

Umeł, Chief of the Ancients Raven, needs to be treated carefully, because he is the all-present trickster. He has human qualities and is able to transform himself into a man; the figure in the beak represents that ability. The dorsal fin of a killer whale is depicted by the Raven’s beak with a stylized ovoid hole in it. The front seat of a sea hunter’s canoe will have a hole carved in it and when the hunter dies, the seat will become his dorsal fin when he transforms into a killer whale. The human face in the beak represents the raven’s human qualities as he is able to transform between forms and also connects to the sea hunter. He holds the messenger canoe in his mouth, upside down. This refers to people saving young salmon caught in a river with low water levels by placing them in a canoe and dumping them into another river, the salmon would survive and colonize the new stream. In the centre of the canoe is a box of treasures,

representing the knowledge being returned to the communities through the RRN. The salmon in the logo are wild, indicated by the presence of the adipose fins; the male is depicted above the female as if in spawning position and both their tailfins continue as negative space along the design of the raven. There are four stars with four points each, because four is a sacred number in Kwakwa̱ ka’wa̱k cultural beliefs. The colour is Reckitt’s Blue – a laundry blueing agent introduced to the Northwest Coast and quickly adopted as a paint. William has observed that this particular blue shade is used in art around the world and seems to have close representational associations with the supernatural.¹³

Supernatural agents of transformation – raven, the trickster; the sea hunter’s canoe; the human being – are presented as metaphors for digital transformations integral to the function of the RRN. As tangible cultural objects in museum collections are digitally documented and circulated over the Internet, they take on new significance and consequence as digital objects with unlimited potential to be replicated and shared. Like the salmon rescued from thirsty rivers and introduced to new streams to propagate, colonizing new territory, so the digital objects being produced by the RRN partnering institutions and Indigenous co-developers constitute new flows of information populating diverse online spaces. Reckitt’s blue, adopted by Northwest coast peoples as a paint, alludes to the ongoing Indigenous re-purposing of colonial technologies for specific cultural and artistic innovation, a dynamic that may be at play in the development of the RRN itself. The logo’s representation of the box of treasures, finally, finds its digital counterpart in the RRN’s servers, processors, and data storage, which have been structured to support the reciprocal sharing of knowledge among researchers, members of originating communities, students, and museum institutions.

Can the Reciprocal Research Network possibly deliver on the promise suggested by its logo? Or is the RRN one of many emerging “asymmetric spaces of appropriation”¹⁴ being developed in the name of collaboration and repatriation? Does the project merely replicate anthropology’s salvage paradigm in digital form, hungrily seeking additional cultural data to enhance institutional collections without giving in return? Or might technical experimentation and innovation, the forging of new partnerships, and

collaborative media production facilitate the kind of reciprocal research initiatives that the RRN was built to create? The RRN is a promising starting point and space of interaction in its own right, but certainly not an end in itself; rather, as I suggest below, the RRN might also be understood as a tool for Aboriginal self-representation and reclamation of ethnographic authority, a process that "requires that museums learn to let go of their resources, even at times of the objects, for the benefit of the use of communities and agendas far beyond its knowledge and control."  

**The Inuvialuit Smithsonian Project: Beginnings**

In the fall of 2009 I travelled with an Inuvialuit delegation from the Western Arctic and a team of filmmakers, archaeologists, and educators to view the MacFarlane Collection at the Smithsonian’s National Museum of Natural History. We spent a week examining, handling, discussing, and documenting this collection of ancestral objects, aware that this was the first time that Inuvialuit peoples had come into contact with them since they had been sold to Roderick MacFarlane at a Hudson’s Bay Trading Post at Fort Anderson 150 years earlier. At the same time that our project team was considering how to best facilitate greater Inuvialuit access to this remarkable collection, the Smithsonian Institution was working to make a selection of its digital collections available online through the Reciprocal Research Network. We proposed that the Smithsonian make the MacFarlane Collection available through the RRN. We then asked them to give our team permission to re-mediate their digital collections data to create our own representation of the MacFarlane Collection in the form of a virtual exhibit, and we have been collaboratively developing and populating this website since then.  

In the context of the collaborative production of the *Inuvialuit Living History* project, our team has been engaging with a range of themes and

16 The delegation to the Smithsonian’s National Museum of Natural History included, from the North: James Pokiak, Albert Elias, and Helen Gruben (Inuvialuit Elders); Karis Gruben and Shayne Cockney (Inuvialuit youth); Freda Raddi (a seamstress); Brett Purdy, Dave Stewart, and Maia Lepage (documentary producers from the Inuvialuit Communications Society); and, two trip organizers – Cathy Cockney, Manager of the Inuvialuit Cultural Resource Centre, and Mervin Joe, from Parks Canada, Inuvik. From the South, our team included: Natasha Lyons (Ursus Heritage Consulting, project director), Charles Arnold (University of Calgary), Kate Hennessy (Simon Fraser University), and Stephen Loring (Smithsonian Institution, Arctic Studies Center).
17 Lyons et al., *The Inuvialuit Smithsonian Project*. 
practices, generating new knowledge of Inuvialuit material culture and
digital platforms for representing it. Broadly, we have been questioning
the idea of digitization and circulation as virtual repatriation\textsuperscript{18} and ex-
perimenting with the creation of alternative representations of tangible
and intangible cultural heritage; we have been exploring institutional and
culture-specific development of digital information systems and practices,
including systems of ownership of traditional knowledge and collectively
owned cultural expression; and we have been engaged in collaborative
media production and exploring the possibility of reciprocal research and
curation in digital environments.\textsuperscript{19} While a full discussion of these collabora-
tive explorations is beyond the scope of this chapter, I focus here on several
key aspects of \textit{Inuvialuit Living History}, still a work in progress: namely, our
re-framing of the presentation of institutional collections data, relationships
between media objects, and systems of indicating ownership of digital
cultural property. These elements highlight tangible and digital collections
as significant documents of dynamic relationships and collaborations,
bearing the traces of shifting technical, curatorial, ethical, and disciplinary
practices. They also foreground digital museum collections and their re-
contextualization by originating communities as significant locations in
which ethnographic authority is being relinquished by museums in support
of, in this case, Aboriginal self-representation.

\section*{From the MacFarlane Collection to \textit{Inuvialuit Living History}}

Roderick MacFarlane was a Hudson’s Bay Company trader who estab-
lished Fort Anderson on the Anderson River in the Mackenzie Delta in
1861. It was the first post in the Northwest Territories aimed at trading
with the Inuvialuit, but it was abandoned in 1866 because of the dif-
ficulty of the overland supply route and the first disease epidemic that
ravaged the region.\textsuperscript{20} While serving at Fort Anderson, MacFarlane was
recruited by Robert Kennicott, an agent of the Smithsonian Institution,

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\footnotesuperscript{18} Kate Hennessy, “Virtual Repatriation.”
that have explored these dynamics and their technical applications in the context of Indigenous
cultural knowledge and digital heritage.
\footnotesuperscript{20} D. Morrison, “Painted Wooden PLAques from the MacFarlane Collection: The Earliest
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to collect natural and cultural history specimens for the museum. The MacFarlane Collection came to include approximately 5,000 objects, including hundreds of ethnographic items such as skin clothing, hunting tools, pipes, adornments, and graphic arts, as well as thousands of natural history specimens such as the skeletons and skins of both birds and animals, and dozens and dozens of bird eggs. The majority of these objects went to the National Museum of Natural History in Washington, DC, while some were donated to the McCord Museum (then the Natural History Society in Montréal, Canada) and the National Museums of Scotland (then the Edinburgh Museum of Science and Art). 21 A small number of the MacFarlane collected objects that came to the Smithsonian were later exchanged with other institutions principally in Chicago and Copenhagen. The recent digitization of the Smithsonian’s collection, as well as similar initiatives at institutions like the McCord Museum, make eventual reunification of the fragmented collection a distinct possibility (see figure 9).

The MacFarlane Collection is arguably the most significant assemblage of Inuvialuit ethnographic artefacts, but it has never been exhibited in its

21 Morrison, “Painted Wooden Plaques.”
entirety. In the course of the Inuvialuit Living History project, it has become clear to our team that the MacFarlane Collection has great importance to contemporary Inuvialuit peoples, who are actively engaged in building educational resources for Inuvialuit communities and representing Inuvialuit culture and language to local, national, and international audiences (the long-term film production activities of the Inuvialuit Communications Society, and the cultural revitalization activities of the Inuvialuit Cultural Resource Centre being central examples). While the collection had been partially photographed and digital catalogue information was available on the National Museum of Natural History’s website, the collection had remained largely inaccessible to Inuvialuit peoples, separated by great distance and unfamiliarity with the Smithsonian’s online catalogue. Available online catalogue information communicated what little was known about the objects and organized the collection using generalist regional identifiers such as “Northwest Territories, Canada” and outdated categories such as “Eskimo” or “Esquimaux.”

In November of 2009, our delegation spent five days in the collections storage facility at the Smithsonian’s Museum Support Center with curator and project partner Stephen Loring. Trays containing Inuvialuit articles of clothing, hunting tools, artwork, and natural history specimens were carried out of their places in storage, and the objects were carefully handled, inspected, discussed, and documented by members of the delegation. These moments of exploration were charged with excitement, as Inuvialuit peoples were able to physically access the objects for the first time since their collection by Roderick MacFarlane a century and a half before. Recognition of the responsibility of museums to make their collections accessible to descendant community interests has been a defining component of the Smithsonian’s Arctic Studies Center since its inception.22 As well illustrated in Ann Feinup-Riordan’s explorations of artefacts with Yup’ik elders in the

Berlin Museum of Ethnology, or in James Clifford’s description of Tlingit elders’ telling of oral narratives inspired by objects at the Burke Museum, museum collections represent significant repositories of intangible forms of knowledge that are encoded in tangible objects. Indeed, according to Christina Kreps, “Objects stand for significant traditions, ideas, customs, social relationships, and it is the stories they tell, the performance they are a part of, and relationships among people and between people that are more important than the objects themselves.” The responses of our Inuvialuit team members, similarly inspired by reconnection to their material heritage, were documented by Inuvialuit Communications Society producers and became a documentary that is featured in our virtual exhibit, called *A Case of Access*. Moreover, beyond communicating the results of our workshop, our team began to explore the possibility of using digital tools to extend the experience of exploring the collection to more Inuvialuit peoples and the general public, and to create a forum within which Inuvialuit knowledge of the collection could be elicited, curated, and represented on Inuvialuit terms. Our delegation was small – necessarily so, primarily because of the cost of travel from Inuvik to Washington – meaning that only a few members of the large Inuvialuit community could participate in the interpretation of this valuable collection. At that time, Elder Albert Elias told us, “A lot of the objects that we saw, we haven’t seen before. I think it is a living document: a living project,” added Elias. “When we go back home and we do our presentations and we show these objects to schools and communities, their input is going to be very important too.” We decided to embark on the production of a dynamic virtual exhibit that would contribute to the revitalization of the MacFarlane Collection as a “living collection,” hence the name of the site: *Inuvialuit Pitqusiit Inuuniarutiat: Inuvialuit Living History.*


25 Inuvialuit Communications Society 2011.

Digital Technology and Cultural Production

According to Eilean Hooper-Greenhill, “Visual culture within the museum is a technology of power. This power can be used to further democratic possibilities, or it can be used to uphold exclusionary values.” It was in this spirit of opening up their collections to ancestral owners that the Smithsonian Institution granted permission to the Inuvialuit Cultural Resource Centre to re-mediate and re-contextualize their MacFarlane Collection digital data, without limitation. Working with the developers of the Reciprocal Research Network, we used the RRN’s API (Application Programming Interface) to appropriate images and catalogue information, a practice that I describe in more detail below (see figure 10). The Inuvialuit Living History virtual exhibit in its present iteration is organized around the presentation of both objects in the MacFarlane Collection and multimedia documentation of our delegation’s first encounter with the objects in Washington, DC. Further, it has been designed to function as an archive of user contributions, ongoing research activities, and community projects that are being developed as interest in the collection grows and as funding and resources become available. The exhibit has been created to be fully editable by our team so that the website itself can grow and change as priorities and interests shift over time.

In the course of production since 2009, we have conducted several major community consultations in the Inuvialuit Settlement Region, visiting with elders, community workers, and teachers and school children, each consultation raising new questions about the collection, access to it, ownership of it, its potential repatriation to the North, all of which have informed successive iterations of our exhibit design. Our team has rewritten curatorial descriptions of the objects, photographed undocumented objects, revised their classification categories, used semantic web and tagging to build new relationships among objects, records, and related media, and experimented with media licenses to denote a spectrum of approaches to media ownership and copyright. The elements of the virtual exhibit are presented below as representations of knowledge and relationships – representations of and between material and digital objects – as well as disciplinary and technological practices that are illuminated in the process of digital cultural production. They exemplify specific digitally mediated

practices and collaborative approaches to virtual exhibit design that are contributing to a shift in control over ethnographic representation from heritage institutions to originating communities. For our project team, these elements of the exhibit point to the development of further research questions and methodologies that have yet to be determined by our project team in our work together in subsequent phases of the project.

The RRN’s API

*Inuvialuit Living History* takes advantage of the increasingly standard network development tool, the API (Application Programming Interface), that allows developers to stream data from one source to another and to represent shared data in new contexts. APIs are used to create access to information architectures and data, but it is important to note that the structures of APIs – their design, which varies from institution to institution – both mediate and determine what access to data means.29 Once the Smithsonian had made the MacFarlane Collection available to the Reciprocal Research Network, our team was able to use the RRN’s API to take the Smithsonian’s digital data and bring it into our own virtual exhibit. Via the RRN’s API, we used the template for object record viewing and user contributions created by the developers of the Reciprocal Research

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We then adapted the presentation of the MacFarlane Collection data to embed it in the context of our particular project and to address the Inuvialuit Cultural Resource Centre’s goals for remediation of the collection and representation of the project: to make the collection accessible to Inuvialuit peoples, to represent the collection using categories and descriptions that were relevant to Inuvialuit experience, and to reinvigorate the collection through its reproduction in everyday life. The Smithsonian Institution’s willingness to transfer control over representation of their data and to support Inuvialuit ownership of the collection in digital form represents an ongoing negotiation over ethnographic authority and cultural representation that I consider remarkable and a productive outcome of the project so far. For our team, the Reciprocal Research Network and the design of its API facilitated the re-contextualization of institutional data by our team members, shifting control of representation from the Smithsonian to members of the community of origin.

Categories and Classifications

Information associated with objects in the MacFarlane Collection represented information documented by Roderick MacFarlane at the time of collection and subsequent curatorial interpretation generated outside of the context of Inuvialuit cultural life. Our team decided that exhibiting the artefacts online required the re-classification of objects into types that were consistent with contemporary Inuvialuit identifications. Led by team member Charles Arnold, objects within these types were then assigned tags demarcating categories that more accurately describe relationships between objects in the collection based on their type (for example: mittens, harpoon, pipe), use (sea mammal hunting, sewing, adornment), materials (sinew, baleen, ivory), techniques of manufacture (cutting, scraping, lashing), and linguistic terms (in the Inuvialuktun dialect of the Anderson River region, Siglitun). Visitors to the virtual exhibit can search the collection using any number of these tags and generate results that differ from the collection’s former institutional online presentation. The site’s content management system creates new relationships between media; for example, photographs and videos documenting our trip to Washington, DC become related to object records; objects’ records are accompanied by media documenting Inuvialuit engagement with the collection. A visitor’s experience of the collection is determined by individual interest and priority, while the semantic

30 Rowley et al., “Building an On-Line Research Community.”
relationships created between objects in the collection are flexible and overlapping, and will likely change over time as users contribute additional tags and contextual information. The reclassification and categorization of objects in the MacFarlane Collection – and the possibility that these classifications and categories will change over time in response to user contributions – represents a departure from the relatively static representation of collections data shared by the Smithsonian.

**Curatorial Descriptions**

Objects in the collection were accompanied by little information, and according to project team members, were often incorrectly identified or attributed. A central element of the project has been the researching and rewriting of curatorial descriptions of the objects, from general descriptions of object types to specific materials, manufacturing techniques, functions, Inuvialuktun terms, and associated traditional knowledge. Led by Charles Arnold, this has been a collaborative process involving Inuvialuit traditional materials specialist Darrel Nasogaluak and partnering curator Joanne Bird (although the goal of this element of the project is to involve as many elders and community members as possible as the project continues). Not wanting to erase previous institutional interpretations, the *Inuvialuit Living History* website follows the lead of the Reciprocal Research Network’s presentation of institutional collections data and maintains the Smithsonian’s original records, co-presented with contemporary interpretations. Each object record is linked back to institutional descriptions in the Reciprocal Research Network itself, so that users can see and evaluate different versions of the collections data. These newly drafted curatorial statements present an alternative to institutional representations of Inuvialuit cultural heritage, and they are in keeping with broader Inuvialuit expressions of contemporary identities and claims for self-definition.31

**Web 2.0 and Control of User-Generated Content**

The virtual exhibit’s “object type” records include a feedback link that invites visitors to contribute their knowledge of the artefacts and to build the Inuvialuit Cultural Resource Centre’s archive of Inuvialuit cultural...
information and practices. While our web project welcomes the contribution of user-generated content, our team made the decision to limit un-moderated discussion about the objects and the project as a whole. Users are encouraged to make un-moderated comments and contributions within the password protected Reciprocal Research Network (there are links from within each object record in our site to that object within the RRN). Expectations of openness, public contribution, and participation are tempered by a commitment to the Inuvialuit Cultural Resource Centre’s right to represent the collection on their own terms and within their capacity to moderate and engage in public discussion on their own website. While requesting feedback from visitors to the exhibit and from project participants, user contributions will be directed to a committee comprised of team members at the Inuvialuit Cultural Resource Centre and Smithsonian curatorial partners, who will determine which contributed information to make public and which to incorporate into the exhibit. Web 2.0 functionality and principles of sharing and access are in this case moderated in the spirit of greater control over cultural representation. The process of deliberation on how to manage and maintain the site and its contributions has opened discussion among members of our research team about both opportunities and tensions associated with the virtual repatriation of digital heritage, aspects of which our team will continue to explore in subsequent phases of the project.

**Media Licenses**

Our process of bringing Smithsonian Institution data into a media space “owned” by the Inuvialuit Cultural Resource Centre and combining it with documentary media and other user-generated content, made it clear to our team that our site needed to creatively represent variable approaches to ownership of digital content contributed by a range of institutional, community, and individual actors. To this end we created an upload system in which media added to our exhibit such as photographs, videos, sound files, and documents could be assigned a range of copyrights and ownership licenses. These range from All Rights Reserved to specific identifiers and watermarks (such as the Inuvialuit Communications Society, or Smithsonian Institution) to Creative Commons (non-commercial, no-derivatives) 3.0 licenses. In future iterations of the exhibit we hope to integrate Traditional Knowledge (TK) labels developed by Jane Anderson and Kimberly Christen initially in the
context of the 2011 Mukurtu project and later at www.localcontexts.org. While these TK labels are not legally binding, they draw attention to documentation of traditional and Indigenous knowledge as dynamic and collective forms of expression, for which ownership paradigms are not adequately represented by Western copyright schema. Our team hopes to experiment with the use of TK labels, applying them to appropriate media as Inuvialuit community members contribute to the exhibit. In creating the ability to assign a range of ownership designations to Inuvialuit and other media, we aim to develop a better understanding of the role of digital technologies in the context of Inuvialuit cultural documentation and revitalization initiatives, and in digital heritage safeguarding and Indigenous media production more widely. Acknowledging and representing the complexity of ownership of media and cultural documentation in the digital age is yet another way in which originating communities are asserting authority over the representation of their cultural heritage in museums.

Conclusion

In the course of bringing the *Inuvialuit Living History* project to life, our team has observed the beginnings of shifting institutional and community relationships in which technical interventions and digital experiments are understood as central to our collaborative ethnographic process. During our first visit to the National Museum of Natural History to view the MacFarlane Collection in 2009, filmmakers from the Inuvialuit Communications Society documented the responses of the Inuvialuit delegation as they handled and discussed their ancestral objects. The filmmakers interviewed team members, including curator Stephen Loring, about their experience and hopes for the project, creating a record of our interactions. This video documentary now accompanies the digital collections records in the context of the *Inuvialuit Living History* website. The production of this documentary film, shot in the vast storage facility of the Smithsonian’s Museum Support Center, represented the first of what would become a more complex digital representation of the MacFarlane Collection by our project team that includes contemporary engagements with these belongings.

The *Inuvialuit Living History* project, still a work in progress, constitutes an attempt to relate media objects and cultural knowledge in new ways, and

to communicate both the experiences of our Inuvialuit delegation with the MacFarlane Collection and the research questions and the methodological approaches to digital ethnography that have emerged in the context of our collaborations. The project is leveraging increasingly common developer tools, such as the API, re-framing institutional collections data, facilitating the creation of new and dynamic relationships between media objects, and testing paradigms for signaling ownership of digital cultural property. In this way, processes of digitization and virtual exhibit design practices are themselves productive sites for digital ethnography. Since the official launch of the Inuvialuit Living History project in 2012, we have continued with a new phase of our collective work in which we hope to better understand the effects of institutional collections digitization and Inuvialuit remediation. As we use the Smithsonian’s digital data in ways not previously imagined by the institution, and indeed beyond institutional control, we see digitally mediated practices in museums and originating communities opening spaces, both online and offline, for the practice of collaborative research that illuminates wider relations of power embedded in ethnographic and curatorial practices and new technologies.

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