Collaborative Practices and Decolonial Media Production for Museums

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1. INTRODUCTION: COLLABORATIVE PRACTICES FOR DECOLONIAL MEDIA PRODUCTION FOR MUSEUMS

How are collaborative media production practices in museums changing professional and community-based heritage and representation practices? In my presentation I will highlight recent projects I have been involved in developing as a producer and designer. I ask, if the creation of new media for museums is to take culture seriously (Balsamo 2011) in design and methods of production, then how might museums be shaped by, or actively reshape the discourses and practices that maintain them (Hennessy et al. 2018)? As scholars Zoe Todd and Crystal Fraser (2016) have highlighted, the structures and policies that govern the organization of and access to colonial museums and archives have amplified Eurocentric perspectives that support on-going violence and dispossession. They argue that it is "essential that we continue to recognize archival spaces, especially state archives, for their original intent: to create national narratives that seek to legitimize the nation state by excluding Indigenous voices, bodies, economies, histories, and socio-political structures" (2016, pp.71–72). In this context, I will ask if collaborative practices of media making in the museum, which includes the creation of new digital collections networks and emerging documentary technologies used by memory institutions at a range of scales might move beyond what Robin Boast (2011) calls "neo-colonial collaboration" toward transformative instances of reconciliation. In particular, I will discuss how the creation of *relationships* between museums, multimedia producers, and originating communities in the creation of digital representations of history, culture, and belongings is central to collaborative work.

2. FEATURED PROJECTS

I will discuss two recent multimedia exhibition projects I have been a part of that used participatory video documentary methodologies and online collections networks to make the intangible qualities of cultural belongings visible and to communicate a decolonial perspective on intercultural histories and museological practices.

2.1 Sq'éwlets: A Sto:ló-Coast Salish Community in the Fraser River Valley

Figure 1: *Sq'éwlets youth and elders camp Place Names Tour, 2014. Photo by Reese Muntean.*

This Sq'éwlets: A Stó:lo-Coast Salish Community in the Fraser River Valley (http://digitalsqewlets.ca) is an online exhibit produced by the Sq'éwlets First Nation, Stó:lo Research and Resource Management Centre. Funded by the Virtual Museum of Canada, the project was collaboratively produced between 2013 and 2017 by intergenerational community members, archaeologists, media producers, exhibition designers, and museum anthropologists. The exhibit was initiated with the intention of sharing documentation of over 20 years of collaborative community-based archaeology at a site known as *Qithyil* along the banks of the Fraser River in British

Columbia, where Stó:lo and Sq'éwlets people have made their home since time immemorial. However, in the course of collaborative production, the online project developed into a portrait of contemporary Sq'éwlets life and resilience in the face of on-going colonialism. Digital Sq'éwlets is at once a virtual exhibit, a documentary film project, a Halq'eméylem language tool, a photo-essay, classroom resources, and a series of physical museum exhibitions inspired by the digital exhibit.

2.2 Documenting Haida Now: A Visual Feast of Tradition and Innovation (Museum of Vancouver)

This *Haida Now: A Visual Feast of Culture and Innovation* at the Museum of Vancouver presents a view of what it is to be Haida today, while showcasing over 400 cultural belongings. It was curated by Kwiaahwah Jones and Viviane Gosselin, and included a series of video documentaries produced by students at Simon Fraser University's School of Interactive Arts and Technology in collaboration with curators Jones and Gosselin and members of the Haida community. As Gosselin wrote about the video projects (Museum of Vancouver 2018):

> Acutely aware of the role public institutions have played in upholding colonial power and of colonialism's devastating impact on First Nations, the Museum of Vancouver, alongside other museums across the country, is invested in repairing and renewing relationships with First Nations. This means revisiting how we collect, let go, interpret and display collections of Indigenous belongings. It means treasuring relationships with individuals and communities over objects.

> A collaboration with the School of Interactive Arts and Technology (SIAT) at Simon Fraser University helped the museum document the building of new relationships between members of the Haida community and MOV. Students produced a series of short documentaries for inclusion in the exhibition. They largely feature visits by Haida artists, performers, and scholars at the museum where they met the curatorial team and

reconnected with the collection of Haida works. A few other interviews speak to the long lasting relationship between the Haida, the local host nations and the city.

Figure 2: Video still of Haida artist Jim Hart commenting on the Museum of Vancouver's Haida collections, 2017. Video by Aynur Kadir and Reese Muntean.

3. REFERENCES

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