Articles

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Representations of Inuit Culture in the Cambridge Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology

Résumé

Cet article analyse les problèmes de représentation et d'interprétation de l'art Inuit au Musée d'archéologie et d'anthropologie de l'Université de Cambridge. L'auteur utilise une approche sémiotique et postcoloniale pour analyser les objets et les informations écrites utilisées dans l'exposition d'art inuit du musée. Certaines questions sont soulevées, en ce qui concerne la finalité de l'exposition, le public attendu, les messages communiqués, et l'histoire de qui, exactement, est représentée. Nous discuterons ici de certains problèmes associés aux éléments signifiants à la lumière de l'aptitude des rédacteurs et des concepteurs de l'exposition à se tenir sur des positions fermes, ce qui se révèle à travers leurs choix.

Abstract

This paper examines issues of representation and interpretation of Inuit art at the University of Cambridge Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology. The author uses a semiotic and post-colonial approach to analyze the objects and informational text used in the museum's exhibit of Inuit art. Questions are raised about the aim of the exhibition, its intended audience, the messages communicated and exactly whose history is presented. Problems associated with the signifying elements are discussed in light of the ability for deeply held attitudes to be revealed through the choices made by the writers and designers of the exhibit.

Semiotics can be applied to anything that can be seen as signifying something. Semiotics is generally associated with the work of the American philosopher C. S. Pierce and semiology with the work of Swiss linguist Ferdinand de Saussure. Both are concerned with how meaning is generated and communicated. In his book *A Course in General Linguistics,* Saussure (1966) states:

> Language is a system of signs that express ideas, and is therefore comparable to a system of writing, the alphabet of deaf-mutes, military signals, etc. But it is the most important of all these systems.
>
> A science that studies the life of signs within society is conceivable; it would be part of social psychology and consequently of general psychology; I shall call it semiology (from Greek, *semeion* "sign"). Semiology would show what constitutes signs, what laws govern them. (16)

Saussure suggests that signs are made of two parts: a signifier (sound, object and image) and a signified (concept). In the present context, the signifier is the exhibit itself: the objects on display, the text used in the display, the display panels, the lighting, for example, and the signified is what these things mean. The primary goal of this paper is to establish the underlying conventions, identifying significant differences and oppositions in an attempt to model the system of categories, relations, connotations, distinctions and rules of combination employed. For instance, What does poor lighting in a museum exhibit say about the values of exhibit designers? What

assumption does the use of the word "Eskimo"[1] in a museum exhibit make about its audience? or What sort of reality does the exhibit construct and how does it do so? Examining the sign systems (such as space, language, photographs and objects) of an exhibition to determine the meanings intended by exhibit designers is a method Hodge and D'Souza (1999, 55) utilized in their semiotic analysis of the Western Australian Museum Aboriginal Gallery, in Perth. They found a number of problems with the display. For example, they concluded that the absence of Aboriginal signs signified disregard for Aboriginal values and much of the language used in the display perpetuated the idea of "Other."

The purpose of this paper is to examine the Arctic exhibit (signifier) at the University of Cambridge Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology to determine what meanings or messages—whether explicit or implicit—are communicated (signified) within a post-colonial framework. The objective of European museum representational practice for at least the past three hundred years has ensured that indigenous peoples and cultures have been represented as the past of European modernity. The production of European identity as modern, in fact, depended on the representation of Indigenous peoples as primitive (Cummins and Arinze 1996, 2). This is a result of hundreds of years of European colonialism, in this case British colonialism where British explorers and officials extended the nation's sovereignty over territory and people outside its own boundaries, to facilitate economic domination over their resources, labour and markets. Years of conquering indigenous peoples, exploiting their land and resources and forcing them to assimilate to a unified British culture was driven by attitudes of superiority by the colonizer and cultivated attitudes of inferiority in the colonized (Battiste 2005, 154). This prevailing ideology of racial superiority fostered curatorial practices that viewed Aboriginal people as a "Romantic Mythical Other," different from and inferior to the dominant culture, but exotic, quaint and worthy of study (Bouchard 2000, 11; Stone 2005, 216; McMaster 1999, 83). Traces of this ideology remain today. Although Canada, Australia and parts of Europe have seen shifts in museum practice, and Aboriginal people are consulted and provided the opportunity to present their own cultures (Jackson 1994, 38; Bouchard 2000, 11; Bagg 2002, 184; Galla 1996, 83), some museums still display indigenous people as warriors, lone hunters or forlorn children wrapped in blankets, or as "helpers" to European explorers. In such cases, histories are presented from a Eurocentric point of view and focus on the pre-contact and early years, contributing to the view of Aboriginal people as a people of the past who do not occupy a place in contemporary society, who are not dealing with contemporary issues and who have not yet entered the modern world (Eldridge 1996, 11).

Scholars from a variety of disciplines are examining the influence of colonialism—its ideologies and power relations—on the ways in which objects are understood (McMaster 1999, 81; Hooper-Greenhill 1998, 130; Barringer and Flynn 1998, 2). Post-colonial theory, as defined by the online Wikipedia dictionary, "refers to a set of theories in philosophy and literature that grapple with the legacy of colonial rule." It is built around the concept of resistance against this idea of racial superiority, of resistance as subversion, or opposition, or mimicry. While some exhibits in the Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology criticize museum representational practices concerning indigeneity as well as dominant versions of European history, others reproduce the very erasures that the museum critiques and represents. Does the University of Cambridge Museum perpetuate the idea of indigenous people as the "Exotic, Mythical, Primitive, Other" in its Arctic exhibit, or have the museum's curatorial practices moved toward addressing the current issues of colonialism and acknowledging the contribution of indigenous peoples in their permanent displays? Does the Arctic Exhibit do anything to promote an understanding of the position that Inuit occupy in the world today? These are some of the questions explored in this essay.

Fig.1
The Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology.

In her paper *Status 2000: Presenting Contemporary Inuit Art in the Gallery Setting*, Christine Lalonde (2002) highlights three issues central to the display of Inuit art: "the location of permanent exhibition space, the relationship and roles of the curator and the artist, and the audience response" (203). When speaking about location she quotes Vogel (1991) emphasizing that the museum communicates

> values in the types of programs it chooses to present and in the audiences it addresses, in the size of staff departments and the emphasis they are given, in the selection of objects for acquisition, and more concretely in the location of displays in the building and the subtleties of lighting and label quality. (200)

The Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology (Fig. 1) is a part of Cambridge University and is located in the southeast wing of a large, impressive 20th-century building designed with a central courtyard. It was called The Museum of Archaeology and Ethnology when it opened in 1884. Its founding curator, ethnologist Baron Anatole von Hugel, took precious collections from old Cambridge and from the world beyond. By 1912, city and university support had enabled the building of the present museum on Downing Street in Cambridge.

The primary mission of the museum is to support teaching and research within the University and to make its collections available to as wide a research public as possible. The curatorial staff of the museum promote access through their own research and teaching, through support of visiting students and scholars, through increasing on-line access and through a number of collaborative projects with cultural interest groups around the world. The Departments of Archaeology and Social Anthropology offer courses in museum studies, in conjunction with the museum, for those who are interested in exploring the relationships between museums and society. Therefore, unlike many other museums whose purpose is to collect and display objects for the general public, this university museum was established mainly as a collection for academic research and teaching. Anita Herle, curator for anthropology at the museum,[2] states this is still its primary function:

> This museum is a university public museum embedded in the disciplines of anthropology and archaeology. Its purpose is teaching and researching. Exhibitions are aimed at a higher level than the general public—for example, educated students and professors. Actually the museum provides special services to visiting researchers and over 160 researchers came this year to work with collections … this is a higher educational system with some broader public audience but the public is not the museum's main emphasis.

The Clarke Gallery is on the ground floor of the museum and displays the archaeological collections: human history from the earliest stone tool users to Medieval Britain. Collections on display cover the world with exhibitions of paleolithic Africa, Asia and Europe; the neolithic and Bronze Ages of Europe and West Asia; mesolithic Britain; pre-Columbian America; prehistoric Asia; Iron Age to the medieval of Britain; as well as several changing exhibits.

One display case in this gallery is devoted to "The Americas" (Fig. 2) and includes "art-objects of the Dorset tradition." The Dorset people are believed to be the ancestors of the Thule Inuit who migrated eastward from Alaska to Greenland (Crowe 1992). This small object-based exhibit displays the artifacts with a number attached to each one. To identify the object one must read a label and match the corresponding numbers. The label does not describe how the objects function or where they came from, other than the large geographical area of North America. Following is an example of the exhibit labels:

Fig. 2
Display case "The Americas."

Art-objects of the Dorset tradition, Abverdjar:

1. Miniature mask, bone, 1950, 366
2. Walrus-head amulet carved in walrus ivory, 1950, 407
3. Man and child figures carved in walrus ivory, 1950, 369, 405
4. Head of polar bear, walrus ivory, 1950, 406
5. Figure of dead polar bear, walrus ivory, 1950, 406
6. Seal carved in walrus ivory, 1950, 407
7. Great Northern Diver, carved in walrus ivory, 1950, 370
8. Foreleg of caribou, carved in walrus ivory, 1950, 370
9. Paddle-shaped pendent, walrus ivory, 1950, 410
10. Section of caribou antler carved with 27 human heads, 1950, 411
11. Polar bear carved in walrus ivory, 1950, 369
12. Toggle-like pendent, walrus ivory, 1950, 408

Little effort has been made to include in this display any historical or social information about the people who designed, created and used these objects. Two small panels briefly describe "The Arctic Small Tool Tradition" and "The Dorset Tradition" (Fig. 3) indicating the Dorset people (the many differing Inuit groups are assembled in one category) were prehistoric bone and stone tool craftsmen. The absence of social and historical context is indicative of the fact that this display case is located in the archaeology section of the museum.

Upstairs, in the Maudsaly Gallery, anthropologists have tried to draw on contemporary issues and debates both as a way of eliciting current ideas on culture and as a means of negotiating the many problems in cross-cultural interpretation, in addition to displaying historical objects. The first floor Maudslay Gallery, which provides an introduction to the history of the ethnographic collections and displays over 1000 objects from around the world, is organized according to geographical and cultural areas. Anita Herle states:

> Anthropology aims to explore the many different forms of human existence and experience. Anthropologists collected many of the objects in the museum during fieldwork. This method of study often involves anthropologists living with a particular group of people for a prolonged period of time. For example, Dr. Barbara Bodenhorn, a consultant who spent several years doing research in Barrow, Alaska, put the Arctic display together.

Upon entering the gallery I was awed by the sight of a fourteen-metre high Haida totem pole from the Canadian northwest coast in the centre of the room. Area-wise, the gallery is small, but it covers a wide range of geographical regions—from Britain to modern indigenous art from the Pacific, North America, Asia and Africa. There is a 17th-century screen from Winchester Cathedral on display, just one example of the array of objects presented. According to Ms. Herle, the motivational goals of the gallery are "to give an overview of a diverse range of cultures, to show the strength and depth of the collection and to incorporate contemporary issues in displays that are primarily historical." Ms. Herle further states: "No attempt has been made by the museum to suggest that curators of displays have been adequately accurate."

The Arctic exhibit, opened as part of the refurbishment of the world anthropology Maudslay Gallery in the summer of 1990, is the second display in the room. There are three glass cases of objects (Figs. 3-5) from the Eskimo people accompanied by panels of contextual information. Anita Herle says Dr. Bodenhorn, an anthropologist who studied in Alaska, designed the Arctic exhibit, but her name is not attached to the display in any way. Her intended aim with this exhibit is to convey an understanding of Eskimo ways of life, attitudes towards life and ways of thinking. The preliminary analysis highlights problems facing the display designers. The major messages concern key relationships—between humankind and the environment, European and Aboriginal, past and present; each of these relationships being blurred. The thrust of

***Figs. 3** (Left), **4** (Lower Left) and **5** (Lower Right) Various display cases, Arctic exhibit, University of Cambridge Museum*

the exhibition is divided between scientific and educative, concerned with history and facts or with attitudes and values, as it presents Eskimo life for a European and Eurocentric public. One general but very important message the display is intended to communicate is that an understanding of Eskimo life is important. Analysis of the display reveals unintended messages that are less positive.

The objects are displayed to emphasize their aesthetic qualities (Fig. 6), not for the educational purpose they may serve in informing the museum's audience about an Eskimo way of life. This is evident in how the labels are displayed. Like the downstairs glass case in the Clarke Gallery, these objects are presented with a number beside them so that to determine what they are or where they are from, one must look at the very narrow and long label at the bottom of the case. This label is presented on a 45-degree angle and is tucked down behind the glass making it difficult to read. In addition, the lighting is focused on the glass case in such a manner that it creates reflections on the glass, hampering one's ability to see some objects and making it challenging to read the small print on the label. This indicates museum officials are not overly concerned with presenting information in a fashion that can be easily seen and read by visitors. Does this suggest a slight towards aboriginal people or is it a mere lack of money and facilities to address the problem? In some instances, designers chose open displays for larger artifacts and lower cases for optimal viewing. The Inuit kayak is displayed in such a manner suggesting a concern for optimal viewing in this particular case (Fig. 5). It is unfortunate that the other two glass cases were not designed in the same manner.

The objects are divided into six categories. Where known, objects are identified; the material used in their creation and their general place of origin is recorded; who collected them and what year they were collected is noted; and a museum catalogue number is provided. There are 101 objects in total displayed in 3 glass cases: 56 in the first glass case ("Marine Resources," "General Household Items," and "Hunting and Sealing"), 38 in the second glass case ("Carvings, Ceremonies and Rituals") and 7 in the display case on the floor ("Hunting Tools").

The names of the Inuit craftspersons or artists who created these objects are not found anywhere on the labels or in the display. In some instances an Eskimo group is identified on the label, for example there is a scoop and a cooking pot collected from the "Caribou Eskimo." Presently, there are six groups of Caribou Inuit living in Nunavut. The particular group from which this object was collected is not acknowledged. Was it collected from the Arviamiut,[3] Ahiarmiut, Padlirmiut, Hauniqtormiut, Harvaqtormiut or Tassiujormiut? These groups of Inuit lived independently in small semi-nomadic groups and their social customs, hunting traditions and even tool-making methods were all different. The fact that specific Inuit people or Inuit groups have not been identified by those who collected these objects—Captain Bernard 1910-1914 in this particular case—indicates he did not value the individuality or the culture of the persons who made the objects. As a result, by failing to present comprehensive information, the museum has not succeeded in educating its audience either, whether academic or general.

In most cases, the objects' functions are not recorded on labels. However, for eleven out of fifty-six from the first glass case, usage is noted. For example:

> 33. Ulu Woman's knife, made of slate. Depending on the size these are used to butcher animals, cut meat or when they are small, to sew. Iron ulus remain in common use.
> Western Alaska, United States
> d. I.C.G. Clarke
> 1922-1550

That label description is quite complete compared to the vast majority of the others. In most cases, little information is given about the function of the object on display. For example:

Fig. 6

10. Wick Tender
Clyde Inlet, Baffin Inlet, Canada
c. & d. T.T. Patterson, 1934 Wordie Arctic Expedition
1946.503

What is a wick tender? Was it used in a lamp? If so, what kind of fuel was used in the lamp? What was the lamp used for, lighting or cooking or did it have some other function? When the intended purpose of this display is to present Eskimo culture, answers to such questions would provide important insight into how traditional Inuit lived. What does this say about the anthropologists who collected the item? What does it say about the decisions by museum officials to display objects that contain very little contextual information? The on-line archival database indicates that there are 1,787 objects in storage at the museum, many of them with valuable contextual information. Surely, one hundred items with complete information could be displayed so that visitors are provided with a better understanding about the functions of the objects on display and, in turn, achieve a more knowledgeable outlook on Inuit culture.

The panels containing written contextual information to accompany the objects are a token attempt to situate the objects in a socio-historical context. Often, curators have acted singularly, perhaps as armchair "pioneer-explorers." The premise of this role, states Christine Lalonde (2000), is the notion that, "in order to appreciate Inuit art, the audience needs to be educated about Inuit culture first, and the artist second" (201). Dr. Bodenhorn, who lived with the Iñupiat[4] of Alaska for three years, has done precisely this. She attempts to educate the audience about a general Inuit culture through the use of information written on panels. This is accomplished by the presentation of historical information with contemporary issues. Unfortunately, the Iñupiat of Alaska, whom she studied, is just one of the many diverse groups of Inuit living in the Arctic. Much of the information displayed relates specifically to this particular group, but it is generalized, referring implicitly to all Inuit groups. In addition, the exhibit attempts to emphasize the formal aesthetic characteristics of the artifacts as well as the cultural context, but the contextual information does not relate to the objects in the display. Thus, overall layout is incongruous; the objects are historical, but the panels present contemporary issues.

Museums have a long history of interpreting Aboriginal art from the "objective" perspective of trained museum professionals and presenting it from a clearly-defined curatorial perspective. The contextual panels in the Arctic exhibit present Inuit as the colonized exotic Other and Inuit culture from a completely Eurocentric point of view. It is evident that no Inuit group, not even the Iñupiat of Alaska, aided in the creation of this display. The idea that the interpretations of heritage resources by indigenous peoples have been ignored, or even suppressed, has been explored by Peter Stone (2005) in his paper *Presenting the Past: A Framework for Discussion*:

> Unfortunately, in a Western-dominated world that has tended to focus on the written and printed word as the primary source of evidence about the past, these other heritage resources and how they have been interpreted have not always been utilized to their full educational potential. More needs to be made of these elements of the often 'excluded past' in formal and information education, especially where they expand history by including interpretations of 'prehistory' and the perspectives of indigenous peoples. (215)

When asked why Inuit were not consulted in the creation of the Arctic display, Anita Herle states,

> Special expedition curators collaborate with indigenous communities in a consultative/collaborative process and curators from indigenous communities are hired whenever possible for the temporary exhibitions … but this collaboration is impractical for all displays and is generally not done for the permanent displays in the gallery.

Due to money and time constraints, therefore, the museum chooses to display the Inuit culture in a glass case with contextual information that is inaccurate and presented from a Eurocentric perspective. For example, the intended aim of this exhibit is to convey a tribute to Eskimo ways of life, attitudes to life and ways of thinking, but the use of the word Eskimo in no way conveys the message of tribute. In the past, these people were called Eskimos by Cree and European explorers. It is now considered a disparaging, derogatory term. Their own term for themselves is Inuit (the Yupik variant is Yuit), which means the "real people."

The more current and acceptable use of the word Inuit is acknowledged on the panel entitled "The Setting," where it states: "The costal regions of the Arctic are settled primarily by the Inuit (which means 'the people'), an umbrella term chosen by those who for the last few centuries have been known to the Western world as Eskimo." It is necessary then, to ask why the labels use the word Eskimo instead of Inuit. This appalling oversight or, more to the point, this choice to ignore the proper name, Inuit, indicates the museum's disregard for

Inuit wishes and values. Furthermore, it perpetuates the Western colonial ideas of a Eurocentric public that Eskimos are the exotic Other—to be examined and labelled, but certainly not valued or consulted. What makes this disrespectful action even more disturbing is, as Ms. Herle states, "this is a higher educational system with some broader public audience but the public is not the museum's main emphasis" and "its [the museum's] purpose is teaching and researching." What is this museum teaching? It teaches that it is acceptable to present an indigenous culture in a manner that in inaccurate and disrespectful.

The panel titled "Hunting is the way of a provisioning society" is actually printed directly on the glass of the first case, not on the front of the case, but on the side where it is almost impossible to see. I just happened to notice it as I was video recording the labels 47-56. This suggests the museum's disregard for proper presentation of contextual information and a general lack of emphasis on the importance of communicating ideas to the audience. Furthermore, the information presented on the panel is outdated and inaccurate. For example, the panel states, "Young men listen, watch, take note …[5] and young women help their mothers cut up animals, render the fat, preserve the meat and tend the skin." This sentence indicates a belief that traditional Inuit gender roles still exist in all Inuit societies and, as a result, perpetuates an idea of Inuit culture as static; an idea that Inuit are still living in pre-contact times.

Traditionally, Inuit men and women had their own tasks and spent most of their time in the company of others of their own gender. Many scholars have interpreted this economic pattern to emphasize the dependency of Inuit women on men (Friedl 1975, 40). They point out that the very survival of women and their children in some seasons depended wholly upon the food that men brought home. This control over the most important resources in the society suggests an advantage to men, who could have used it to control women in any variety of ways.

Other interpretations focus more broadly on the process of economic life and find the division of labour to be a complementary male/female partnership as the key for survival (Balikci 1970,104; Guemple 1995, 19-20; Spencer 1984, 327; Ager 1980, 308). The time and effort that hunters put into each hunt meant they were precluded from participating in other necessary chores. The warm, waterproof clothing made by the women, ensured the men could survive a winter hunt. Women also secured the homes and prepared food for hunters who returned from the hunt with little or no energy. Additionally, childcare—essential to the continuance of the society—was firmly in the hands of the women. While women could not have survived without the products of men's labour, men likewise could not have continued to concentrate on hunting without the reciprocal work of women.

Today in Arviat, however, where I lived and worked for three years, the particular gender roles of my Inuit friends are different from those of their parents. For example, historically, the male was the hunter who provided food for the family. My Inuk neighbour, Simeonie, at times fills this gender roll; his wife, Rosie, however, is also a capable hunter, and many a Sunday I joined her out on the tundra in search of food. An excellent shot, Rosie always gets her caribou. What is even more striking about this example is the fact that, while Rosie is hunting, Simeonie is at home taking care of their seven children, a task that was historically a female responsibility. Also, as a teacher's assistant with the Arviat District Education Authority, Rosie provides the regular cash income for the family. This is the case in many families in Arviat; the men stay at home with the children as the women head off to work. Even the elected Member of Parliament for the Kivalliq region is a woman from Arviat, Nancy Karetak-Lindell. One might argue that, similar to non-Inuit women, these particular Inuit women are dealing with much more demanding roles now than they did in the past. This reality is in no way communicated in the "Hunting is the way of a provisioning society" panel. Museum officials would have audiences believe Eskimos are still living their traditional lives, once again perpetuating Eurocentric perspectives of a romanticized exotic Other.

Another example of inaccurate information displayed on this same panel can be found in the following statement:

> Whereas many hunting societies develop a sharing ethic because they have no way to preserve food, Inuit use the permafrost (ground that is frozen year round) to construct ice cellars in which meat may be frozen up to a year. Similarly, Arctic mammals provide thick layers of fat which may be rendered to mineral rich oil which will preserve meat for months. Learning how to preserve food, freezing, drying, smoking, or storing in oil is an important part of a young person's education.

The Inuit of Arviat live in timber-frame houses with electricity. All homes have at least one deep freezer, a freezer above a refrigerator and a cold room located at the back of each house. Caribou caught by the men and women is kept in freezers in the home or at the local town freezer. Most hunters do not bury their catches in the ground in the form of caches anymore. This is a custom that has almost disappeared due to modern conveniences. So, "learning how to preserve food, freezing, drying, smoking, or storing in oil" is no longer "an important part of a young person's education" in Arviat or any community along the western coast of the Hudson's Bay. Again, information about Eskimos intended to present contemporary Inuit life is relayed, but in reality it perpetuates an exotic romanticized ideal about Arctic living that is static, set in pre-contact time.

The text on the "Ritual and Celebration" panel states, "In essentially egalitarian societies knowledge is accessible to all rather than restricted to specialists. To a great extent, most Inuit groups conform to this pattern." I have grave concerns when a scholar describes the Inuit society as an egalitarian one. Michelle Kisliuk (2000, 26) conveys similar apprehensions with scholarly research about the pygmies in Central Africa. Previous research about the music of the pygmies in Africa reveals that their singing style represents the egalitarian lifestyle they live. Skeptical of these conclusions, Kisliuk takes a performative approach with her research to try to understand the performance style, aesthetics and micro politics of BaAka social life.

Kisliuk reports that the gender tensions revealed through performance of women's dance illuminates that the BaAka of the Bagandou region do not live in an egalitarian society. The BaAka are responding to changes in the economic and political conditions of their society, making choices about their future and determining who they wish to become. This is a dynamic cultural process where the activities of men and women in real social situations reveal ongoing contradictions and struggles.

As a model for my ongoing research of Inuit music in Arviat, Nunavut, Kisliuk's performative approach to the musical discourses and practices of relocated communities or communities undergoing massive socio-political upheaval helped shape my methodology.[6] Like the BaAka, the Inuit traditional hunter-gatherer society has been influenced by colonization, missionization and relocation to larger towns, and I found these influences have had a similar impact on the shaping of gender identity and power relations in the community of Arviat. Changes and power shifts have taken place in hunting traditions, religious traditions, political traditions and even family traditions, revealing the notion that Inuit live in egalitarian societies to be untrue. Dr. Bodenhorn's claim that the Inuit "conform" to an egalitarian society indicates she is romanticizing an "exotic" lifestyle of these people, a common mistake of Western-trained anthropologists who study indigenous people.

Another comment from this panel that warrants discussion and analysis is that:

> Shamans, however, are specialists and possess powers not available to other humans. Traditionally they were asked to intercede with spirits in matters of weather or illness, or to divine the cause of inexplicable events.... Although Eskimo dancing is no longer the most common way to wile away a winter's evening, it still underscores the importance of community events.

Drum dancing is still practised in communities such as Arviat, Qamanittuaq, Iqaluktuuttiaq, Uqsuqtuuq, Kangirliniq, Naujaat, Kugaaruk, Kugluktuk, Taloyoak and Iglulik. Unfortunately, in most communities it is generally no longer part of regular traditional practice. Rather, it is performed as a cultural symbol at celebrations, such as opening ceremonies for conferences and festivals, at graduations and in movie productions.

Most Inuit from Arviat may say there are no more shamen and that drum dancing is done now only for performance, but an Inuk friend of mine, Ee Ulayok, informed me otherwise. Ee knows most people in Arviat are Christians now and that to practise shamanism would be considered wrong by most outsiders. Yet he says that many older people still believe in the spirit world. Many can even "cast spells" or "provide good hunters." He says that there is a rather large group of Elders maintaining the old traditions and for some Inuit, "Eskimo dancing" is still a very common way to "wile away a winter's evening," not only for enjoyment, but for spiritual reasons as well. Shamanism is still practised in contemporary Inuit society and has been examined by scholars such as Saladin d'Anglure (2000, 7), Jakobsen (1999, 208), and Atkinson (1992, 308). In this instance the curatorial practice of the museum demonstrates a grand generalization about the culture of all Inuit and suggests that museum officials have fallen into the trap of many Western-trained anthropologists and curators who have problems interpreting and displaying the objects of indigenous peoples: they seem to be positioned

on the outside looking in, missing valuable cultural information and presenting interpretations that conflict with Inuit reality.

Finally, on the panel marked "Contemporary Issues" there is no mention of the creation of Nunavut as a new territory of Canada in 1999. The panel reads:

> Recently the discovery of valuable oil and mineral deposits has increased outside pressure on the land throughout the circumpolar North and has strengthened indigenous resolve to exercise autonomy over their territories. Greenland was granted Home Rule by the Danish Government in 1979; the Iñupiat established a Home Rule Borough in the State of Alaska over massive opposition in 1972; a land settlement was enacted in Alaska in 1971 and several others have been under negotiation of Canada during the 1980s. All of these simultaneously protect and threaten Inuit control over their resources.

The Inuit of Nunavut have had self-rule for six years and control over their institutions since the creation of the new territory in Canada on April 1, 1999, nine years after the mounting of this exhibit. This is certainly enough time for museum officials to update the Arctic display. The failure to do so suggests museum officials deem it unnecessary or unimportant to keep up with current events. The Inuit of Nunavut would be disappointed to learn their hard work at obtaining self-rule has been ignored by this institution. A shortage of funds to cover the costs of making changes to existing permanent displays may play a role in this oversight.

Furthermore, none of the signs in, or on, any of the three display cases, or any of the language used on labels is written in Inuktitut. The absence of Inuktitut signs in this exhibit is yet another general, though unconscious, sign of the significance—or insignificance—the exhibitors place on Inuit values.

The inclusion of three Inuit narratives "The Four Disasters," "Whales and Humans" and "Origin Myth—Whaling for Land" in the third display case is a sign of an effort to include the Inuit value of oral tradition as a means of recording history.[7] This display would have a more meaningful effect if the audience was given more information about the speakers: where they are from, the context in which they re-told these stories, what the stories mean for the Inuit hearing them. The stories, however, are posted on panels displayed in front of a kayak, indicating their presence as a mere token. Their inclusion is intended to communicate the museum's value and worth of Inuit perspectives of life and history, but the actual message conveyed is a patronizing one.

It is imperative to mention the use of photographs in the display. All of the photographs are historic (only those located on panels containing contextual information are of contemporary situations). There are four photographs of Inuit participating in a variety of activities (e.g., Fig. 7). Not one of the four photographs is accompanied by information that identifies the people or their place of origin. Are these people so insignificant that museum officials chose not to display their names or any information about them? On-site long-term displays closely reflect the mandate of the institution and convey strong signals about the value of that which is exhibited. The message about this group of people is relayed loud and clear: this museum has very little value for the Inuit living in the Arctic.

Responding to a heightened awareness toward the (mis)representation of other cultures by the West, art historians, anthropologists and museum curators are beginning to present the Inuit point of view in their analysis of Inuit art in a concerted effort to avoid imposing Western assumptions about the nature of art onto the work of Inuit artists (Bagg 2002, 184). Marion Jackson offers a curatorial strategy that attempts to expand on this by involving the artists more directly:

> An alternative mode is emerging which acknowledges that understanding is enriched by an awareness of the values and intentions of the artists. In this model, the curator (whether from within the culture or without) attempts not so much to impose a curatorial viewpoint as to facilitate communica-

Fig. 7

> tion between artists and audience and to acknowledge the complexity of the human experience embodied in the works of art. (1994, 38)

The Andrews Gallery is on the second floor of the museum and is used for changing exhibits. Curators are beginning to utilize contemporary museology trends when creating exhibits for this gallery. As stated by Anita Herle, "special expedition curators collaborate with indigenous communities in a consultative/collaborative process and curators from indigenous communities are hired whenever possible." In contrast to the content object-based exhibits downstairs in the Maudslay Gallery that do not include the perspectives of the indigenous people they are meant to represent, the temporary exhibits in this gallery aim to be more comprehensive. Curators work with people from indigenous communities to include indigenous perspectives and ways of thinking in the creation of content-based displays that more accurately represent the people they exhibit.

Anita Herle curated *Past Times: Torres Strait Islander Material, Haddon Collection 1888-1905,* an exhibition that was displayed in the Andrews Gallery in 2004, and states she worked with Elders from the area when considering the construction and presentation of the display.[8] Unlike the Maudslay Gallery, here a valiant effort was made to include indigenous perspectives in the exhibition and to present the Elders' storyline.

Conclusion

The Arctic exhibit is an ethnographic display intended to convey an understanding of Eskimo ways of life, attitudes towards life and ways of thinking. This examination of the exhibit revealed the problems inherent in presenting the Eskimo culture in a glass case. Issues with poor lighting, location of contextual panels, presentation of historical objects with ill-informed commentary on contemporary issues, use of the word Eskimo on labels and exclusion of Inuit collaboration in the design revealed the attitudes museum officials have toward Inuit: the wishes, values and interests of Inuit are absent. This indicates that, with the exception of the "changing exhibits" in the Andrews Gallery, the museum has not moved towards addressing the current issues of colonialism and acknowledging the contribution of indigenous peoples in their permanent displays.

The Arctic display located in the world anthropology gallery has been created for the colonial population about the Eskimo population. The use of the outdated, disparaging and derogatory word Eskimo lends support to this argument. It suggests the Euro-American public would better recognize "Eskimo" than the preferred term Inuit and therefore the older term is utilized. This Eurocentric museum attitude actually alienates indigenous peoples by presenting stereotypes of their culture.

The primary mission of the University of Cambridge Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology is to provide and maintain collections for academic research and teaching. As part of teaching about culture and the past, archaeologists, curators and other museum officials must accept that there are indigenous specialists who are, in some cases, outside the Western academic and pedagogical traditions, but who nevertheless should have a central role in teaching about their own pasts. It seems obvious that indigenous peoples and other minority or oppressed groups should be consulted about the display and interpretation of objects related to their pasts. Perhaps then the cultures of indigenous peoples—or any peoples—will be accurately interpreted and represented, and audiences will be accurately informed.

Notes

1. While it is not my word of choice, throughout this paper "Eskimo" is used because it is the word used in the display. The word Eskimo is not an Inuktitut word. From the Algonquian word family, the word Eskimo means "eaters of raw meat" and became commonly employed by European explorers, but is not now generally used. Their own term for themselves is Inuit (the Yupik variant is Yuit), which means the "real people." A discussion about the use of the word "Eskimo" in the "Arctic" exhibition will come later in this paper.
2. I conducted an hour-long interview with Anita Herle in her office at the University of Cambridge Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology, 8 July 2005.
3. Arviamiut (people of the bow-head whale) were coastal Caribou Inuit that lived near Eskimo Point (now Arviat). Ahiarmiut (people out of the way) were inlanders living along the upper Kazan River near Ennadai Lake. Padlirmiut (people of the willow thicket) were inlanders who were nomadic and spent their springs and summers in the community of Arviat with the Arviamiut. Hauniqtormiut (people of the place of bones) came from places around the communities of Rankin Inlet and as far south as Whale Cove. Harvaqtormiut (people of the rapids) occupied the lower Kazan River just south of Baker Lake. Tassiujormiu (people of the place like a lake) occupied winter residences inland on the shores of the Kaminak Lake just west of Whale Cove and spent their summers hunting seal on the coast around Dawson Inlet.

Most of these groups are now living together in communities in Nunavut, but they still recognize their ancestral names in contemporary living. Knowing the exact origin of an object in this display would be considerably important for an Inuit audience and should be important to a non-Inuit one as well.

4. The Iñupiat are situated in Alaska, in an area stretching from Norton Sound to the Canadian border.
5. At this point, some of the words on the video clip were indiscernible.
6. In a paper entitled *Gender Relations in the Traditional Drum Dance in Arviat, Nunavut* I demonstrate how the analysis of the performance of Inuit drum dancing among the Inuit of Arviat, Nunavut reveals complex issues of gender within historical and contemporary society. The focus on gender relations during performance of present day Inuit drum dances illuminates how Inuit negotiate power within dynamic circumstances. Inuit men, who disagree with women drum dancing, could be understood as expressing the fluctuations and frustrations of their own status in the changing society of Arviat. Changes and power shifts have taken place in hunting traditions, religious traditions, political traditions and even family traditions revealing the notion that Inuit live in egalitarian societies to be untrue.
7. The Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples states the Characteristics of Aboriginal Knowledge are: Personal Knowledge, Aboriginal knowledge is rooted in personal experience and lays no claim to universality; Oral Transmission, oral teachings are necessarily passed on in the context of a relationship, intellectual content and emotional quality of the relationship; Experiential Knowledge, knowledge of the physical world, which forms an essential part of the praxis of inner and outer learning; Holistic Knowledge, all of the senses, coupled with openness to intuitive or spiritual insights, are required in order to plumb the depths of aboriginal knowledge; Narrative and Metaphor, traditionally, stories were the primary medium used to convey Aboriginal knowledge.

   Stories were used to record a history of a people, to guide moral choice and self-examination. In Inuktitut, Aboriginal knowledge is known as Inuit Qaujimajatuqangit (IQ). "Inuit Qaujimajatuqangit encompasses all aspects of traditional Inuit Culture including values, world-view, language, social organization, knowledge, life skills, perceptions and expectations. Inuit Qaujimajatuqangit is as much a way of life as it is sets of information" (Louis Tapardjuk. Report of the Nunavut Traditional Knowledge Conference 1998).
8. Alfred Cort Haddon, an Englishman, first travelled to the Torres Strait Island in 1888 to study marine biology. He returned in 1898 with a Cambridge Anthropology Expedition which, over a seven-month period, recorded, collected and analyzed the islands' people and their traditional customs. Haddon and his expedition collected over 1,000 objects from the Torres Strait which have been stored and displayed as part of the University of Cambridge Museum Collection for more than 100 years.

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