

Not a Gift Shop: Arts-based Narratives of the Canadian North

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In June 2006, I attended the Alianait Arts Festival (AAF) in Iqaluit on southern Baffin Island to conduct what would be the third and final advisory group meeting for CBC ArtSpots in Canada's North (the Northwest Territories [NWT], the Yukon and Nunavut). ArtSpots was a multi-modal project resourced by the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation (CBC)'s English media services from 1998 to 2008 that featured more than 300 artists and their artwork on television, on the Internet and in exhibitions. At the AAF, I met Northern artists who turned out to be the last whose artwork would be profiled as ArtSpots nationally and on the regional Northern television channels. As in earlier meetings in Yellowknife and Inuvik, the Iqaluit ArtSpots advisory group was composed almost equally of artists and curators. Unlike the tightly timed ArtSpots meetings of volunteer expert advisors in Montreal, Vancouver, Winnipeg and Halifax, the volunteer Iqaluit advisory group session started early one morning and meandered on for almost the entire day. Artists, curators, admirers and collectors dropped in and out of a makeshift backroom while attending the AAF. This was a low-key, integrated approach to talking about art from the community, and it reflected how dynamically art permeates day-to-day life there, and the shared nature of the responsibility to support artists and their work.

In this essay, I turn to the concept of creative citizenship to describe what ArtSpots did, providing a working definition of the concept and describing some crucial features of the media initiative. ArtSpots is then reframed and contextualized in relation to an important historical debate about Northern art, and to two contemporaneous cultural productions engaged in expressions of Canada's North. I compare ArtSpots to *Eskimo Realities*, a visual and textual meditation about Eastern Inuit (Aivilik) art by Canadian media and anthropological scholar Edmund Carpenter (1973) based on his sojourns on Southampton Island off Nunavut's coast (then part of the NWT) in the 1950s and lovingly presented in a glossy publication. Carpenter's curatorial and analytical work—along with that of George Swinton and James Houston (McMaster 2010)—is a touchstone of mid- to late-20th-century interpretations of crucial forms of Northern art in North America. I contrast this with the tough and tender beauty and power of the feature film *Before Tomorrow* (2008), conceived, written, directed and produced by the collaborative writer-directors of the Arnait Video Productions Women's Collective (active since 1991) and co-producers Igloodik Isuma Productions and Kunuk Cohn Productions. The film is seen in the industry to be visually representative of tensions in today's Northern culture, and to acknowledge the specific, violent history of stories of contact over the last several centuries (Connolly 2009; Garcia 2009). Finally, I turn to a curated group exhibition, "Magnetic Norths," mounted at Concordia University's Leonard & Bina Ellen Art Gallery in Montreal in the winter of 2010, curated by Charles Stankieveh. Much of the work in the show highlighted non-Aboriginal artistic interventions in the landscape of Nunavut and the Territories over a 100-year period. Using these comparisons, I aim to suggest how each set of narratives encounters and talks to Northern art and to one another. Narratives shared and navigated across eras come through the mediated works of film, television, digital media, literature and art I have chosen. I am interested in the potential of creative citizenship to tease out the shape and shared meanings of carefully authored performances of identity or affiliation in

Northern artwork. The idea of creative citizenship helps us analyze how artists consciously turn their work toward significant narrowcast audiences, including government funders, tourists and niche art collectors, as well as their own communities, while simultaneously ensuring that key elements representing their identity, culture or interests are engaged in a manner of their choosing. Heather Igloliorte calls this orientation in art production “sites of cultural resilience” (2010: 44–45).

Creative Citizenship

The term “creative citizenship” (Luka 2013) suggests that artists and creative workers who engage in everyday practices of creativity are also occupied with the dynamics of civic interventions in a creative environment. Their responsibility is simultaneously to their artwork and to networked flows of social relations. Such creatively informed social relations include expressions of cultural identity and values, sometimes incorporating economic considerations and always involving attempts to engage and share knowledge with specific narrowcast audiences. A broad definition of creativity in relation to cultural production is required to mobilize creative citizenship as an analytical tool. Vicki Mayer (2011) expands the traditional purview of creativity in the context of media studies beyond the conventional expertise of writers, directors and designers to include individuals building hardware (such as televisions), camera operators producing soft pornography for reality television, and policymakers developing community programming. As the literature on cultural citizenship suggests, conceptual art places the viewer in a central position in relation to artworks in a manner similar to television (see Hermes 2005; Miller 2007; Murray 2005). In both cases, specific audiences are needed to produce meaning by consuming or interpreting it on their own terms. Convergence culture literature (for example, Bruns 2008; Jenkins, Ford and Green 2013) pushes the understanding of audiences further, by suggesting that the contributions of fan or narrowcast audiences are vital. This means that access to production and dissemination technologies is crucial (Shade 2010; Moll and Shade 2011). Comparable sites of interaction for visual and performing artists to meet potentially co-creative narrowcast audiences may include non-traditional spaces such as multi-sited participatory public festivals like Word on the Street. [1] Public service announcements created by artists for digital playback devices are also examples of virtual or physical meeting spaces with interactive potential. Such creative processes can carry both intrinsic and exchange values:

[A] 2010 United Nations report states: “adequately nurtured, creativity fuels culture, infuses a human-centred development and constitutes the key ingredient for job creation, innovation and trade while contributing to social inclusion, cultural diversity and environmental sustainability.”... [T]his... underlines how expressive value is concentrated in the core creative fields, recognizing how it permeates into the creative industries and the economy as a whole. (UNESCO in CNSLC 2012: xix, 42)

This perspective is embraced by cultural studies literature concerning national, diasporic or localized identities and cultures and the creative economy. In Canada, it is found in recent essay collections such as *Diverse Spaces: Examining Identity, Heritage and Community within Canadian Public Culture* (Ashley 2013) and in culture-sector discussion papers such as *Public Engagement in the Arts* by the Canada Council for the Arts (2012). It also forms the basis for the Canadian Broadcast Act (1991), among other media and arts-related policies.

Creative citizenship explicitly suggests that the civic potential for the creative worker in media and the arts emerges from his or her fluid, contingent and net-worked practices of cultural production, potentially integrating cultural identity, experimental creative practices and economic

concerns. This includes diffusion to specific narrowcast audiences as well as the articulation of identity and citizenship concerns within media and arts policies to support such practices (Luka 2014). Creative citizenship is an opportunity for the dialogue-provoking nature of the artwork analyzed in this essay to be understood as a series of vehicles that generate complex understandings of events, such as Coco Fusco's performative reclamation of imaginary native identity in the early 1990s. Fusco and Guillermo Gómez-Peña invented an Aboriginal tribe they "performed" while "on display" in cages placed in art institutions and public spaces (Fusco 2010). This drew attention by imitation to historical events, such as the documentation of two Inuit families caged and put on display in Berlin in the 1880s until they died (Abraham's Diary 2009). Compare this with Charles Stankievech's curation of constellated artworks in the 2010 "Magnetic Norths" exhibition, or with Carpenter's curatorial text in *Eskimo Realities* (1973b). Although critical of the dominant European narrative of the North, both of these examples are marked by the absence of Aboriginal voices, even when Aboriginal artworks and references are included.

Compare the approaches of Carpenter and Stankievech to time-based media given over to artists' voices, as in interviews conducted for ArtSpots in Inuktitut and English, and especially in the narrative structure of *Before Tomorrow*. The production of increasingly complex meanings can be unpacked and reconstructed by all those involved: artists, curators and audiences. Ella Shohat and Robert Stam (1994) suggest this is what has occurred with filmmaking in Latin America, empowering artists and Indigenous audiences by reclaiming and shifting symbolic meanings in artistic production. Iroquois visual arts curator Steven Loft (incidentally, a former ArtSpots advisor) suggests creative control is crucial:

Control of "our" image becomes not only an act of subversion, but of resistance, and ultimately, liberation.... What is at stake here is not how the image is presented (aesthetics aside) but who controls it. This is the fundamental challenge to Aboriginal artists and cultural producers. (Loft in Igloliorte 2010: 44)

Stories collected by Julie Cruikshank (2001, 2005) about glaciers and western Arctic peoples, and the intergenerational stories collected by Nancy Wachowich (1999) and others integrate oral history and TEK (traditional ecological knowledge) practices as well as redefine what is regarded as tradition in the North. Such integration complements histories of feminist and co-operative media production and filmmaking in Canada, including the founding of the Aboriginal Peoples Television Network (Roth 2005), Isuma TV's networked communities in the North and the digital media research-creation project *Aboriginal Territories in Cyberspace* (AbTeC), which mobilizes Mohawk history and culture in the digital environment (Lewis and Fragnito 2012). There has also been much writing about the finding and sharing of stories, images, words and meaning about the North, including descriptions of relations among Northerners and with Southerners (Highway 2005; Kroetsch 1995; Kusugak 1989, 2006; Lill 1987; Roy 1974; Wiebe 2003). The richness, complexity and historical specificity of artwork originating from Inuit artists over several centuries has been closely examined in recent publications and exhibitions such as *Inuit Modern* (McMaster 2011), including debates about Inuit, Inuvialuit and T'lingit art. In the encyclopedically described texts about and images of the North juxtaposed to one another by Sherrill Grace in Canada and the *Idea of North*, Grace (2001) addresses the relationship between identity and particular forms of creativity. These plays, poems, children's stories, short essays, novels, meditations and other pieces of creative non-fiction authored by Northerners and Southerners generate a well-written, flexible narrative that incorporates evocative and compelling discoveries, experiences and dialogues.

Probing the "Magnetic Norths" exhibition, the film *Before Tomorrow* and ArtSpots interviews with Northern artists such as Shiela Alexandrovich, Mary Okheena, David Ruben Piqtoukun, Noah

Maniapik and Megan Waterman provides an opportunity to consider how Aboriginal and other artists and curators present what has been called “hybrid” work. The term “hybrid” is often used by such artists to describe work that successfully integrates disparate artistic traditions. However, it is also employed critically in Homi Bhabha–influenced analyses to grapple with the impact of colonialism in relation to such work, for example in reference to Inuit art of the 20th century (McMaster 2010: 9; Igloliorte 2010: 41). I am curious to know why and when this divergence in emphasis occurs. Some theorists and curators resist the idea that hybrid work can explicitly and successfully integrate historically specific narratives and approaches with present-day ideas and cultural influences. For at least some artists, hybrid work, by virtue of being made and shared, transforms oral history, values and narratives into new forms and maintains ancient knowledge. The extended debate about the ethics and meanings of transformations, involving (among others) Edmund Carpenter, James Houston and George Swinton (Hessel 2010b: 78; Lalonde 2010: 27, 30), takes new shape with the deliberate assumption of responsibility and authority by the artists and curators involved in the production and distribution of work. These actions embody civic elements of creative citizenship.

ArtSpots in the North

CBC ArtSpots was a television and Internet programming initiative about visual art that I founded in 1997 following an artist residency at the CBC Halifax office. It ran for more than a decade, and produced more than 1,200 short videos and several long-form arts documentaries, exhibitions and broadly available digital material about more than 300 artists and their work, including a national television and Internet broadcast (Luka 2004; 2013). The ArtSpots volunteer-expert advisory groups included local artists, curators, artist co-op leaders, gallery directors and media producers. Together, we discussed each region’s artistic priorities and the artwork being produced that demonstrated the artistic concerns and practices of the area. These dialogues were intended to identify artists to feature on ArtSpots. There was an emphasis on work generated by emerging artists, women and members of geographically and culturally diverse communities, reflecting the genesis of the program mandate in the 1991 Canadian Broadcasting Act. As discussed elsewhere (Luka 2013), the goals, values and criteria of the program guided a collaborative approach with each artist involved: the artists could veto the material produced about them and their artwork, and participated in developing concepts for their productions.

As the decade progressed, five core production and distribution approaches were generated. First were thirty-second items for television and the Internet, each featuring artwork chosen by the artist. These played in unused commercial breaks regionally and nationally, as well as on Opening Night, the CBC’s then-flagship televised arts program. Secondly, interviews originally recorded to guide the editing of the thirty-second items were themselves edited into two- to five-minute videos. These were used in regional news programs, on CBC’s cable channels and at film festivals. Third, several long-form documentaries about fine art and craft were produced for national, regional and digital broadcast. Fourth, the ArtSpots website incorporated all of the above materials plus additional textual information and exhibition-style thematic features. This was during the early 2000s, when the transition to a digital broadcast environment was underway, and few artists or galleries had the capacity to host video or interactive websites. Lastly, several exhibition and broadcast partnerships were generated to curate and circulate ArtSpots material, or to generate art- and craft-related content not necessarily intended for the ArtSpots venues. Sites included provincial art galleries, national parks and the Canadian Museum of Civilization (now History). Significantly, artists were provided with copies of the CBC-produced material for exhibition, promotion or non-profit uses at sites of their own choosing.

In July 2002, during the Great Northern Arts Festival (GNAF), I visited Inuvik, NWT, tucked inside the Arctic Circle. During my visit, I made a discovery, as many have before me. Not only did the temperature easily top 35° Celsius in mid-summer, but with almost no evening darkness, there was never an opportunity to cool down. I had anticipated the temperature, but not the sensory experience. It was my first time in the North as a producer and curator of the visual and media arts, and only the second time in my life that I had been north of 60. [2] At the advisory group meeting here, there were fewer participants from artist-run centres, co-ops and galleries than there had been in other Canadian locations, since there are fewer of these formal structures in the Canadian North than in the Southern half of Canada. Likewise, there were more artists than usual, which meant artists rather than curators spoke for other artists with similar practices. The discussion focused mostly on Yukon artists, given Inuvik's position at one end of the Dempster Highway, most of which passes through the Yukon. Artists from the NWT and Nunavut were also discussed, particularly those whose work was included in that year's GNAF.

The GNAF represents a rare coalescent moment in art production each year: a time when artist peers gather to dialogue with one another and compare their work. Listening to and working with artists was a key element of the ArtSpots process, but generally there was a significant gap in time between each phase: selecting the artists, developing ideas about which pieces to shoot, putting together a shooting schedule and actually shooting the artwork. In the North, this timetable was shortened and the sequence changed. The day after artists were selected by the advisory group at the GNAF, the CBC team (a producer from Yellowknife and the Inuvik camera operator) began recording, in order to document and discuss the artwork in the presence of artists before the artists returned home and the artwork was shipped south by collectors and galleries. Sometimes, more recording was done later with artists (but without their artwork) in their home communities, focusing on their practices more generally. In the North, the unusually rapid turnaround from advisory meeting consultation to ArtSpots production often meant that neither the artist nor the producer had time to build their ideas for recording and presenting artwork, but it also enabled profiles to be quickly produced for local consumption in Aboriginal languages. Later, the standard thirty-second items were produced in English for ArtSpots' national distribution, and some of the artists also ended up with English profiles in national television and Internet venues. Although it took two years for the field footage to complete its migration to Halifax to be edited into English media, the Aboriginal-language material went into circulation in the North immediately.

At all ArtSpots meetings, but more evidently in the North, sharing place and artist names to understand artistic lineages was evocative. Repeating someone's name and asking about its spelling became a rhythm of engagement. Often, the spelling would generate a fragment of a story, or a discussion of who was related to whom and how artwork differed from one artist to the next. In the North, the names were often a mix of Western or European and Aboriginal names or Anglicized non-European names. The spelling of the names varied depending on who was providing the information. This is in part due to the way in which names (and later numbers) were assigned to Northern First Nations (Alia 1994). It is also due to the way in which early censuses were conducted, as has been documented elsewhere. For example, Carpenter bemoans the prevalence of census mistakes leading up to the 1950s: "I checked one voluminous Eskimo kinship study and found a 32 percent error in marriages alone: the investigators simply had not known who was who" (Carpenter 1973a: 95).

The ArtSpots naming experiences in Inuvik in 2002, in Yellowknife in 2004 and in Iqaluit in 2006 affirm how colonial narratives are embedded with identity in the North. The fragments of historical Southern inability to comprehend Northern social relations were clearly nested in how names flexed and shifted among families and communities. It is not that people did not understand who individual artists or community members were—quite the opposite. Clearly, each

individual's lineage of networked relationships had to be understood in order to establish who was being discussed and how their work related to other artists' work. Some curators and theorists see this emerging from the tensions embedded in Western perceptions of Aboriginal art production, which impose individual identities on a collective cultural knowledge base: this debate was passionately articulated in mid-20th-century scholarly exchanges between Carpenter and Swinton, mentioned earlier. Indigenous individual identity in relation to art production has since been rearticulated by art historians including Janet Berlo, Ingo Hessel, Christine Lalonde and Charlotte Townsend-Gault (McMaster 2010). Indeed, a deep understanding of the complex relationship between cultural and individual identity may be more pronounced for Northerners, particularly for Inuit (as Hessel and Lalonde point out), than for Southerners (Hessel 2010a: 62–63).

Imaging the Northern Narrative in ArtSpots

Intriguing details and patterns emerge in the ArtSpots produced in the North, in terms of gender, race and genre. Twenty-two self-identified Northern artists were featured on CBC ArtSpots between 2000 and 2008, including artists from the NWT, Yukon, Nunavut and Labrador. Seventeen designate themselves as Aboriginal; five do not. Specific key elements of ArtSpots production processes—including the selection of artists and the recruitment of volunteer advisors—acknowledged race, gender and genre. A later statistical analysis of who was selected for ArtSpots production reveals that by galvanizing these factors in the selection process and prioritizing underrepresented voices, ArtSpots operationalized an understanding of equality of opportunity mandated by the Canadian Broadcast Act of 1991, as discussed earlier (Luka 2013). Something else emerges in interviews and artworks. A keen awareness of colonialism is acknowledged in the narratives generated. This is evident in, for example, the range of artistic practice and discourse present in the ArtSpots productions covering the three Nasagoluak brothers/sculptors. These productions lay claim to each artist's own story in the present, as someone creating works that incorporate history, context, genealogy and the politics of the place and its people.

Much of the work selected would be easily recognized by Southerners as from the North based on its formal elements, such as land-based imagery, specific colour palettes, the predominance of printmaking and sculpture and Northern narratives or mythic personalities. In some cases, the short shooting schedule and the television formats that made up many ArtSpots items confined the artwork to presentations of a discursively exoticized North. The culturally specific narratives evident in the domestic or everyday nature of some artwork, including fashion, beading and dolls, as well as the figurative representation of everyday life, suggest the degree to which artists are aware of and assert their surroundings and lineages.

Many textile, design, painting and printmaking works clearly express a 21st-century perspective without letting go of the histories of the place and peoples of the North, speaking to more nuanced presentations or retextualizations of the North. For example, sculpture such as that of the Pitseolaks, the Nasagoluaks, Piktoukun and Brad Oukpak Carpenter is presented in an exploratory, conceptual manner. Piktoukun learned about traditional carving and its relationship to stories within his community from someone outside his family and community. He observes:

Through stone carving, I learn a lot about my people and the stories; one carving develops into another; it just keeps on expanding.... My personal objective is to explore the world for my people; when I travel [North] I bring back many stories, and in return, I get many stories, so I share the work and the images. (ArtSpots interview 2005)

Most of the carvers make work that is primarily influenced by Aboriginal traditions and stories; almost all are equally knowledgeable about European and Western sculpture traditions, and many

talk about these influences in their art, to some degree. Painter and sculptor Sabourin (Fort Simpson, NWT) comments:

I find the North such a beautiful country, such an inspiration. [He explains the impact of resource exploitation.] Lines [in a painting] represented borders; how the highway in the middle of the [bear] road is interfering with the black bears.... Decisions about oil and gas and exploitation on the land, usually it always affects the animals.... [It is] chaos all around...and human beings create the chaos. (ArtSpots interview 2007)

Printmakers Mary Okheena (Holman, NWT) and Noah Maniapik (Pangnirtung, Nunavut) discuss the use of simple, bold imagery, line and colour that has proven to be attractive to Southern buyers and simultaneously emphasize the importance of showing their own stories and experiences on the land: this is a complex contemporary narrative. Traditional weaver Ann Smith (Tlingit ravenstail weaving, Whitehorse, Yukon) focuses on the importance of teaching young Aboriginal women traditional skills:

When we do this type of weaving, we always keep in mind our ancestors, the past master weavers. So we always say that they're with us all the time, and our thoughts are with them. That's how we show our respect, when we're doing this type of weaving, we're always thinking about them. It was done traditionally by Aboriginal women, especially in the North, among the Tlingit people.... The elders have said in the past that when you have this type of knowledge, this very old, old knowledge, it is our obligation to pass it down to the next generation, and that's part of our responsibility as weavers. I do my best to stick to the traditional techniques of weaving, because I feel that it's important to keep the knowledge here. (ArtSpots interview 2005)

Garmel Rich (Labrador grass weaving, Nain) splits her artistic time between creating works that use traditional shapes and graphic symbols, and works that reference ideas imported from the South, such as the NHL's Stanley Cup, in order to appeal to the younger generation. Rather than performing colonized ethnicities (though some may be doing so), many of the ArtSpots artists mobilize the technology at hand and assert agency to generate relevant, new versions of skills and stories that have been told for years, sometimes centuries, including the impact of contact.

Opinion is divided among artists about how best to connect with other artists and with audiences, but clearly the desire to engage a community of peers and supporters is important in the shaping of work. Sculptor-painter-printmaker Dinah Andersen (Nain, Labrador) notes:

Being an artist up in the North, you have to work twice as hard to get recognition, or to get your work displayed; even marketing is a struggle up here. It takes away from your work when you're worried about what you're going to do with all of this when it's finished.... It's really hard. Sometimes you feel like moving South, just to be within the arts circle. (ArtSpots interview 2004)

For many Northern artists, Exposure to other artists and stories across the continent clearly with is important. John Terriak (Nain, Labrador) notes:

Carving's been good to me. Over the years, it's gotten me...all over the continent. One week, I'm here. Then to Washington, DC, then Vermont, and all over the States. Some day I hope to go to Europe. There's no life like it, for me anyhow. I get to travel, and meet people, meet other artists. But my favourite part is I just take the stone and turn it into something. (ArtSpots interview 2004)

On the other hand, some artists feel the small communities of the North are particularly productive for making art. Brad Oukpak Carpenter (Hay River, NWT) connects the relationship between peer and audience with artistic concerns:

Hanging out with a bunch of artists that I do in Yellowknife, and stuff, I mean, we feed off of each other all the time. Some of the stuff that I do, or techniques that I use, can be attributed to other carvers and other artists. And vice versa. I'm sure that they've taken some stuff that I do and incorporate it into their work too. But as far as the ideas? It's everyday life, and sometimes, just needs, wants, and desires. (ArtSpots interview 2005)

Megan Waterman (Dawson City, Yukon), a fashion designer who uses locally sourced materials, reinforces the importance of everyday needs and the relationship of art production to the land:

Designing in the North is an adventure, and that's what I like; I've still got lots to explore and different furs to use, lots to learn about it.... I buy all my furs from trappers in Dawson, and I send them off to be tanned in Whitehorse, and I make the garments in my studio in Dawson. It's a very local product, right from the land to the finished product.... I have to emphasize that it's a renewable resource, it's humanely trapped, trappers are conservationists, and it's in everyone's best interest that the land is maintained for this resource. And I don't think that people really understand the process of trapping, and the whole management scheme, and the fact that only the harvestable surpluses are trapped. That's what I find, working with this collection, is what challenges people's conventional ideas. (ArtSpots interview 2005)

Many artists emphasize the importance of respecting their relationship to the land and its stories in the production of their artwork, including Jurg Hofer (woodturner, Whitehorse, Yukon), Shiela Alexandrovich (mixed media, Whitehorse, Yukon) and Billy Merkosak (carver, Pond Inlet, Nunavut). Merkosak underscores the relationship of carving materials to the stories of the land:

I work in granite, marble, antlers and ivory. But I particularly like whalebone. It gives me the feeling from when whale hunters left a lot of whalebones on our shores and some were washed up—gives me something to do with materials that are laying around. The material persuades me to continue to tell the stories in different ways. This is one of the things that I'm doing, with my carvings and masks: telling the stories in different ways in return. Instead of sitting down and listening to someone talking, if you see a carving or mask, they tell you a story, and gives you an emotion that comes from within. That's what spirituality is. (ArtSpots interview 2005)

Merkosak's activation of creative citizenship through knowledge sharing and ownership over the creative process finds a parallel in the research of Cruikshank (2001, 2005), who places Tlingit and Athapaskan stories of the western Arctic at the centre of her narrative. Like the ArtSpots stories, these storytellers illuminate the values and ethics imbricated in their discussions of distinctly interwoven oral traditions of the western Arctic. Cruikshank makes clear the values and skills learned and shared over centuries of experience through moral, behavioural tales that entertain and address several generations simultaneously. Focusing on stories that connect people to glaciers, Cruikshank aims to address power relations between science and traditional knowledge, and to foreground local, community-based understandings of glaciers from as early as 1550. Oral traditions generate fragments and patterns of long-standing and consistently innovative experience, as well as social and environmental histories. The performance of knowledge-sharing citizenship is crucial:

The performative “working” capacity of oral tradition is crucial here. Stories about glaciers...refer to an external reality that may encompass historical events such as glacial surges. On the other hand, narratives centering on glaciers are also constitutive [with] the power to create or to establish what they signify, in [the] case [of oral traditions], a land that responds to humans in a reciprocal rather than a hostile manner. This constitutive part asserts the ongoing importance of human agency and human responsibility.... In the past, then, things and people were always entangled. In the future, they will be more entangled than ever before. (2001: 391)

Connections between land, people, art and tradition reside in shared, evolving narratives such as those expressed in Cruikshank’s reports of oral histories, or the ArtSpots interviews and art presentations, encompassing the involvement of specific narrowcast audiences.

Revisiting Critical Histories of Inuit Art

In contrast to foregrounding the voices of artists and storytellers, consider the well-documented curatorial approach taken to Northern art for most of the 20th century. An important example is found in a beautifully produced art publication, *Eskimo [sic] Realities*, authored by media anthropologist Edmund Carpenter (1973b). Carpenter sets out to demonstrate the close connection between Inuit and traditional Dorset and Thule art, including the way in which such work has been irrevocably changed by contact with the South—the Canadian government and sculptor/exporter James Houston in particular. The book incorporates several professional photographs of small artworks and drawings surrounded by white space. Some photographs include a small amount of text, primarily drawn from field notes published in the same year in *Oh, What a Blow That Phantom Gave Me!* (1973a), a book about the deleterious effects of introducing new forms of media content (for example, film) to isolated communities. [3] In *Eskimo Realities*, Carpenter’s emphasis is on the disruption of what he sees as an unbroken, uninfluenced line of traditional artwork unearthed and uncollected by Western archeological and ethnographic practices until the mid-20th century. Carpenter thinly veils his contempt for the Canadian government’s role in funding the work of James and Alma Houston—although Carpenter neglects to name the latter as a participant—to export and sell artwork created by Inuit artists in the region. Intended for the South in order to stimulate a cash economy and augment an economy of furs, fish and resources extraction, this artwork evolved into a hybridized Inuit/Southern form, including through the Houstons’ influence. Some ancient narrative elements resurface in artworks of more recent vintage that Carpenter presents in *Eskimo Realities*, including maps, prints, carvings and other works. Although Carpenter notes that most of the artists are delighted with the prospect of creating artwork for exchange and discusses how the carvers can translate stories of the North into these new forms, he is saddened by what he sees as the outright loss of Indigenous culture:

That the Eskimo [sic] could move into a new art form with ease and success is significant: clearly old resources combined with new notions of individualism. That the government should promote this art is understandable: such publicity increased Eskimo income, [and] helped certain government agencies and policies. What is less commendable is the acceptance of this propaganda as reliable, and this art as “Eskimo,” by professional anthropologists...Prior to Western influence, Eskimo art had an amazing unity in time and space. The souvenir art exhibits no such unity. (Carpenter 1973b: 192–93)

Carpenter’s dismissal of the Inuit ability to preserve their symbolic and everyday meanings in new genres of artwork (such as drawing on paper) stands at odds with the evidence present in the 21st-century artworks shown on ArtSpots. Mourning the loss of archeological art and castigating the rising production of fine crafts that share some formal elements with Southern art was perhaps a little hasty. Carpenter’s precipitant evaluation is a foundation of his debate with

Swinton: both agree that the quick uptake by Northerners of Houston-style carving in the 1950s helped Inuit navigate the Southern system and contributed to changed understandings of traditional art production. However, Swinton's emphasis on the resulting benefits and innovations are countered by Carpenter's regrets (Hessel 2010a: 62; 2010b: 78). Interestingly, neither asserts the importance of the presentation of more clearly domestic items in exhibitions that Houston and others were responsible for in 1949 and 1959. These two exhibitions reflected themes of functionality and everyday knowledge-sharing that clearly come forward into 21st-century artwork from the North, including the work of several artists studied by Inuit art curators (see, for example, Lalonde 2010: 27–28) and many artists featured in ArtSpots. These themes are also present, as we will see, in the narrative presented in *Before Tomorrow*.

By discussing the formal qualities of older (Thule, Dorset and Inuit) artwork, Carpenter criticizes colonial interventions yet simultaneously asserts responsibility for artifact preservation to non-Aboriginal experts from the South. Further, he depends on the field notes of his colonial predecessors to reveal their understandings of Northern concepts of time, space and social relations embedded in artistic forms such as singing and sculpture. Even through these layers of interpretation, the work markedly embodies core elements of creative citizenship: creative control by the artist, knowledge-sharing and engagement with crucial narrowcast audiences. He suggests: “the [Inuit] are among the very few people in the world about whom it may truly be said, their art and life are interchangeable. For them, art is an ever-present dimension of experience” (1973a: 203). Carpenter's depictions of Inuit art's relationship to life among the Inuit suggest that art makes life a powerful experience but not generally a kind one for the Inuit. For example, a formidable revelatory experience is epitomized for Carpenter in tellings of well-known Sedna stories as motivation for artistic expression. Carpenter conflates earlier anthropological reports of abandoned family members with the Sedna story of abandonment, despite his own field observation of an orphan taken into another family:

Abandonment of people was not purely mythical. The Eskimo did, in fact, abandon old people. Killing new-born girls was common. And the position of orphans was precarious: one's own family always took precedence. These were normal experiences in Eskimo life—cruel necessities forced on them by scarcity. The Sedna myth represented this dilemma as the Eskimo saw it. They never asked that the universe be this way. But—ayornamut (“it cannot be otherwise”)—they accepted life on its own terms. They did more than accept: they took upon themselves the responsibility for the fact that life was the way it was.... In a life where neither reason nor strength prevail, where cunning counts for little and pity least of all, the Eskimo sings of life, for only art avails, and even then, not always. (Carpenter 1973a: 107, 108; Carpenter 1973b: 217)

Interestingly, in Carpenter's literal interpretation of a Sedna myth and his romanticizing of Inuit art, he brushes past a significant characteristic evident in other stories from Northern communities that suggests evidence belying anthropological reports of abandonment: taking on (moral) responsibility for one's actions in the world. This idea surfaces strongly in *Before Tomorrow*, the last in the Northern feature film trilogy that started with *Atanarjuat: The Fast Runner*, followed by *The Journals of Knud Rasmussen*. *Before Tomorrow* is a compelling example of how to produce artwork that honours traditional stories and yet speaks directly to the present moment, perhaps even integrating art and life in a way comparable to Carpenter's assessment of pre-contact Inuit culture. With the same visual richness as the two preceding films in the trilogy, *Before Tomorrow* invokes an intimate register of the everyday practices needed to survive. The film is a sophisticated, complicated piece of visual and aural storytelling that draws deeply on the activation of creative citizenship in the North by its producers and directors.

Before Tomorrow subtly portrays the grandmother/elder as the carrier and propagator of cultural histories/stories, and—like Cruickshank—draws on Northern Aboriginal oral histories to deal with death, love, survival, colonialism and the seasons. The descent into melancholy and subsequently into tragedy through exposure to European settlers does not feel as heavy-handed as it could, but strikes a note of practical realism about the function of objects (tools, artworks) and skills decontextualized in Carpenter's accounts. The audience is invited to share in the development of an intergenerational relationship that mourns and reshapes a family's connection to the land without the story becoming melodramatic. Although the film ends on an unresolved note—a distinctly non-Western approach in feature films—it quite thoroughly acknowledges its colonized and oppositional history. In a plot twist that recalls American moviemaking, the shock of losing the entire clan to a horrifying, invisible invader also evokes potent tellings of devastating stories about measles and smallpox spreading among First Nations in North America due to the incursion of colonial settlers. [4] The film is a sensitive and frank exploration of life in the clan's gathering places, showing the importance of individuals taking responsibility for one another and for the land, and acknowledging the power, longevity and gifts of the land itself. It is quite deliberately told by women: "the first feature film written and directed by Igloodik's Arnait Video Productions women's collective, which has been filming Inuit women's stories since 1991 based on cultural authenticity and community involvement" (Isuma TV 2010). Before Tomorrow's feminist, postcolonial, collaborative genealogy is of crucial importance to its structure and how it deals with a specific set of narratives about the North.

In creative citizenship terms, clearly the primary intent of the Igloodik Isuma/Kunuk Cohn trilogy overall is to involve and reflect Northern audiences and stories. The principal narrowcast audiences for Before Tomorrow include elders (especially grandmothers); Inuit and other Northern Aboriginal women and men; and members of the youngest generations. Aboriginal people in general are also addressed, as are those interested in engaging with Northern narratives and storytelling styles. This is the same approach taken to addressing and enabling specific audiences through TEK and oral histories mentioned earlier (Cruikshank 2005; Wachowich 1999). It is similar to the approach learned at ArtSpots, with a collaborative commitment generated from feminist and collective histories, where the first audience was the artist, the second the arts community, and the rest expanded from there. The approach also acknowledges ethnographic and artistic incursions into the North, framed by discussions of archeological and art histories such as those authored by Carpenter. Likewise, the film draws from the relatively long history of Northerners asserting the right to produce and disseminate their own film and television programming, as seen in Roth (2005).

The notion of stewardship for the land and cultural responsibility through knowledge-sharing has surfaced before in ecological discussions concerning the North, including in the writing of Peter C. van Wyck (2010) and the film *Village of Widows* (1999). The idea of taking responsibility is central to these discussions of Sahtu Dene apologizing to the Japanese and Koreans who suffered from the first atomic bombs, made with Canadian-sourced uranium taken from Dene lands. It also comes up in the work of William Cronon in his analysis of settlement narratives, particularly of the colonized western United States. Cronon (1992) analyzes how a story about changes that occur to a place, set in a specific period of time, can be told with what seem to be deviating causes, time periods and points of view, which sometimes contradict other stories about the same events, resulting in radically divergent endings. Cronon's analysis helps draw attention to how diverging endings are generated in Carpenter's own discussions of Aboriginal cultures. Carpenter makes an eloquent case for regretting the unweaving of art from life in Canada's Inuit narratives, and in the same text, presents but does not analyze (and sometimes, even seems to celebrate) the narrative-changing impact of his own introduction of media production tools and cultural perspectives on

mostly Aboriginal cultures (1973a). Cronon's efforts to elicit understandings of deep relationships between the land and historical cultural knowledge are helpful for validating the historically aware nature of the stories told by artists featured on ArtSpots and in the narrative of *Before Tomorrow*. Cronon seeks plain talk in a complex field informed by the past. As in Cruikshank (2005), Cronon's emphasis on the land as a participant in the telling of stories opens up opportunities for analyzing the longevity of values and narratives:

On the one hand, a fundamental premise of my field [environmental history] is that human acts occur within a network of relationships, processes, and systems that are as ecological as they are cultural. To such basic historical categories as gender, class, and race, environmental historians would add a theoretical vocabulary in which plants, animals, soils, climates and other non-human entities become the coactors and codeterminants of a history not just of people but of the earth itself. (1992: 1349)

Cronon explores the moral implications of unpacking overlapping stories about how humans have intersected with particular lands, suggesting that actuating narrative constructs experience, a Heideggerian notion that narrative "is fundamental to the way we humans organize our experience" (1992: 1368–69). He argues that grounded historical specificity is critical, including understandings of the genealogy of deliberate erasures and recuperated stories, and an emphasis on ethics and values as driving organizers for effective social and ecological storytelling. What Cronon doesn't explicitly foreground is the way in which artwork from different eras can evoke a conversation as well, which is a contribution Carpenter does make. However, Carpenter inadvertently contributes to narrative erasures by privileging only a few narratives taken up by those who caused the erasures. For example, the exquisite details he provides about ancient artwork and traditional creation stories from the North (as documented by Southerners) take precedence over oral histories and efforts made by Northern people to reconcile these eras and stories.

Conversations across the Centuries

This brings me to the 2010 "Magnetic Norths" exhibition in Montreal. Curator and artist Charles Stankieveh brought together what he described in the catalogue and his curatorial talk as a "constellation of concepts" and objects addressing the Canadian North from 1595 to the present. Each piece had inspired him, some exhorting him to go North, and others to stay in Dawson City, where he now resides. A central zone of the exhibition was a series of conceptual works from the late 1960s and early 1970s, critical of Canadian, British and American colonization of the North. On September 25 and 26, 1969, feminist art critic Lucy Lippard, artists Harry Savage and Lawrence Weiner, N.E. Thing Co. members Elaine and Iain Baxter, and Bill Kirby, the director of the Edmonton Art Gallery, made *Art within the Arctic Circle* while visiting Inuvik, NWT. On September 26, they performed several gestures in the landscape, which were documented in photographs by N.E. Thing Co., and came up with ideas for others. Notably, Lippard has critiqued the socioeconomic situation as much as the art practices undertaken:

We were in Inuvik 39 1/2 hours. Long enough to get mad. "Why Go North? It's Mostly Because of the Money" reads a headline in the September *McLean's Magazine*. The money is not going to the natives. Canada has done as badly in many respects by her native population as we have. (1969–70: 666)

In the 2010 "Magnetic Norths" exhibition, only a trace remained of the active political engagement of this work, crowded out by a larger collection of visual, aural and three-dimensional works. A 16th-century Mercator map acknowledging the "Magnetic Norths" of the show's title was an older anomaly in the exhibition, marking at least a half-millennium of encounters by Europeans

with Aboriginal cultures. There were traces of the narrative of Aboriginal erasure in works by Joyce Wieland, including the Arctic Passion Cake sketch and the True Patriot Love catalogue. Similarly, N.E. Thing Co.'s Territorial Claim—Urination and Lucy Lippard Walking Toward True North and Michael Snow's The Last LP (invented recordings of the last living speakers of languages) spoke to erasures. R. Murray Schafer's North/White more ambiguously appropriated a critique of the colonizing technology of the snowmobile as an instrument for musical performance.

Among the most powerful recurring oral histories told in the Arctic concerning the relationship between the land and the people is that of Uvavnuuk the medicine woman. I do not invoke Uvavnuuk lightly. Her unadulterated joy in being alive is reverently reported in lyrical form in Wiebe (2003), Carpenter (1973a, 1973b), Wieland (1971) and other non-Aboriginal artists through at least three degrees of translation. This imbues these works with additional layers of meaning and absences, written across cultures and spoken across decades. I draw attention to this oral history here because of the reverberation between Wiebe's invocation of how Uvavnuuk gained her medicine and one of the artworks in Stankevich's exhibition. The documented gesture of "making water" in Territorial Claim—Urination by N.E. Thing Co. in Inuvik in 1969 resonates not only with Uvavnuuk's mischievous marking of territory, but also with her authority, reported in Wiebe, quoting Rasmussen:

[Exiting her] hut one winter evening to make water...a glowing ball of fire appeared in the sky and...came rushing down to earth straight toward her... [B]efore she could pull up her breeches, the ball of fire struck her and entered into her. At the same moment she perceived that all within her grew light, and she lost consciousness. But from that moment also she became a great shaman. (Rasmussen in Wiebe 2003: 87)

Of course, the members of N.E. Thing Co. never became shamans. Equally, their gesture of making water to mark territory had little impact on Northern narratives even though it reappears as a kind of "weak force" in Stankievich's configuration of the "Magnetic Norths" exhibition. [5] Though Wiebe connects the creation event of Uvavnuuk as shaman with the potent, widespread Aboriginal story of Nuliajuk, or Sedna, neither N.E. Thing Co. in 1969 nor Stankievich in 2010 makes such a connection. The Sedna story invoked by Carpenter, Rasmussen and others, as discussed earlier, elucidates a wide range of experiences, practices and beliefs. This is the Sedna whose soul or spirit (as European Judeo-Christian traditions might express it) or Inuit "sauniq" passes to Uvavnuuk when she becomes a shaman (Alia 1994: 14). Uvavnuuk is not Sedna reincarnated or even re-embodied through the practice of invoking sauniq names—that is, calling out names at birth in the Inuit manner (Alia 1994). Uvavnuuk is recomposed at the most fundamental level (fire and water) as an embodiment of the history, knowledge, cultural identity and expression, and access to medicine of First Peoples. Uvavnuuk is always herself, but also always becoming a powerful, lyric shaman. She might elsewhere be described as "Mother Earth" or creation. No wonder her immense power reaches through the decades to insist on acknowledgement and celebration in multivalenced presentations of what we call today the North of Canada. The "Magnetic Norths" exhibition was a missed opportunity to address explicitly a vital Northern narrative and the long history of Southern attempts to integrate or erase this narrative in "hybrid" works.

Stankievich's own work in the exhibition riffs on American technological and military expansion into the Canadian Arctic in the 1950s, in its visual homage to the Buckminster Fuller Radome. Through this project, installed first in the Arctic landscape and subsequently in galleries, Stankievich visually acknowledges his debt to the critical agenda of conceptual and site-specific art of the 1960s, only obliquely addressing the political implications of that criticality. This was echoed in his selection of several other visually rich, slightly abstruse installations and works,

many of which incorporate aural elements. Several of these works reflect empty (possibly conquered and definitely unpeopled Northern) landscapes generated by Stankieveh's contemporaries, such as Laurent Grasso, Kevin Schmidt, Emily Miranda and Lance Blomgren. The power issues more clearly foregrounded by the intentionally discomfiting (and often humorous) works from the 1960s and 1970s that Stankieveh presented seem to dissipate in his own and his contemporaries' work. Criticality in the exhibition relied on the juxtaposition of fragments tenuously connected to one another by physical proximity among the exhibition's five zones. Moreover, Aboriginal culture clearly existed in the exhibition, but in its absence rather than its presence. There was one map of the western Arctic showing land claims, with input from Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in First Nation, and one film by Zacharias Kunuk and Norman Cohen embedded with Aboriginal storytelling scheduled as an adjunct activity. It is not that Stankieveh intentionally reproduced colonialism. Perhaps First Nations narratives don't come to bear directly on his story as a resident artist and curator in the Yukon, though his placement of these narratives at the margins and in fragments of the constellated works suggests they could. Consequently, the exhibition seemed to become an unintended present-day example of erasures of Aboriginal accounts of the North.

Conclusion

The performative, generative, sometimes teasingly joyful character of responsibility that becomes embedded in Northern narratives—as reported by Cruikshank (2005), Wachowich (1999) and Nungak and Arima (1988)—reverberates in the ArtSpots interviews and *Before Tomorrow*. This parallels and echoes other analyses and bodies of work created in feminist art (for example, Coco Fusco's intercultural performance (2010 [1994]) and collaborative media, reinstating agency and an awareness of the political and social relations involved in the process of art creation and reception. More recently, Jason Lewis and Skawennati Fragnito (2012) discuss this in relation to Mohawk history and culture, while Igloliorte analyses it in relation to today's Inuit art (2010). [6] Such commitments to feminist and race discourses compel an awareness of how cultural and personal experience inflects the production of meaning in media through creative citizenship. My examples come from presentations of art that strive for sensitivity in cultural reflection and seek to engage specific narrowcast audiences. Formal considerations complement the possibility of multiple interpretive formats in popular culture presentations (for example, television, the Internet, filmmaking) as well as narrowcast audience spaces (for example, art galleries). Art is not emptied of culturally specific meaning: the works I discuss contain many precise historical and potential meanings generated by artists, curators, programmers and viewers. They have intent and context, whether obvious or not. The artworks offer the responsibility of paying attention to facets of meaning that start out with the work, or are attached along the way, including meanings wished upon them in their making in particular places and times, a historical specificity often studied under the lens of cultural studies, in particular the legacy of Raymond Williams (1977). These works and their meanings are in dialogue with other works that came before them, and with past and present curators', artists' and storytellers' voices themselves.

To put it another way, exploring a modern-day commitment to creative citizenship can open up spaces among artists and viewers of art, in which dialogue can take place. I wonder if this draws on meaning that may reside in works of art as a kind of radioactive power that will eventually decay. Implicated in the idea of electromagnetic force taken up by Stankieveh and implicit in Carpenter's language concerning the integrations of art and life in the North, it appears that a much stronger "weak force" of community values and cultural heritage is present in the artist-driven media narratives of ArtSpots and *Before Tomorrow*. The register of this force may vary over time with retellings, translations and reinterpretations. Not to push a metaphor too far, it may pulse with meaning like the Northern Lights pulse with electricity and colour. The debates implicit

in the historical specificity of these projects mark moments in time when colonial power and approaches wane but are still significantly embedded, waiting to be unpacked and addressed.

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NOTES

1. “Word on the Street” is a five-city Canadian festival celebrating the spoken and written word (<http://www.thewordonthestreet.ca/>).
2. Notes from the 2002 to 2006 ArtSpots sessions come from the author’s personal notebooks from the period. The earlier visit to Whitehorse had been as a workshop leader and fund development director for the Women’s Legal Education and Action Fund in January 1986.
3. Ironically, the involvement of recording technology is not seen as disruptive to cultures, evidenced by the alacrity with which Carpenter and his wife, Florence Carpenter, introduce it as an integrated part of their anthropological fieldwork around the world (1973a).
4. This resonates with the story of the Great Flu of 1902 at Kittigaziut, reflecting Felix Nuyviak’s memories of that event quoted in Wiebe (2003), when families arriving at the gathering place of centuries were devastated in one season of European disease.
5. According to Encyclopædia Britannica, “In radioactive decays, the strength of the weak force is about 100,000 times less than the strength of the electromagnetic force. However, it is now known that the weak force has intrinsically the same strength as the electromagnetic force, and these two apparently distinct forces are believed to be different manifestations of a unified electroweak force” (Encyclopædia Britannica Online 2014).
6. It is also evident in Maria Victoria Guglietti’s discussions of Internet experiments by Aboriginal people in Canada, exploring cyberspace as a new territory open for reclamation by Aboriginal people, from the “open communal information aggregation” envisioned at Drumbytes.org and CyberPowWow to the collaborative nature of web sites and virtual galleries rethinking libertarian and anarcho-utopian discourse in order to assert a specifically Aboriginal identity (2010, 138–41). Though both pilot projects ended, they are examples of how creative control over the modern Aboriginal story is being expanded, including by Lewis and Fragnito (2012).

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