

protocols for that specific type of content. The site is designed to frustrate Internet users who function out of an “information wants to be free” paradigm—that is, those who expect that clicking on something or searching for information *should* necessarily result in unrestricted access to the materials they find. Our goal was to use the medium itself as a means of reflecting on the limits of the Internet to value other knowledge systems, and at the same time challenge people to take seriously different types of information distribution and production systems.

Jampin and others imagined site visitors as global and thus narrated the site for an audience unaccustomed to Warumungu cultural protocols. The bulk of the materials on the site are photos, audio and video that I recorded. Once the project was complete we had an extensive database of materials. In addition, the community received thousands of photos back from former missionaries, schoolteachers and researchers. These virtually repatriated digital objects posed a challenge because they

could be reproduced endlessly, accessed easily and distributed without consent or consultation.

Most digital and analog archives share the same paradigm: preservation and access are their first priority, while the social life of the objects is secondary, if considered at all. Search engines such as Google begin with the premise that all information should be open and dissectible into bits and bytes for transmission. What we wanted instead was an archive *and* search engine whose primary goals were not preservation and universal access, but respect for the dynamic social and cultural systems, relationships and cultural protocols within which information is embedded. After two and half years of design, community consultation and technical roadblocks, we produced the Mukurtu Wumpurrarni-kari archive, which enables Warumungu people to dictate the terms of access to and distribution of their cultural materials. Everything in the archive is annotated and linked to a set of cultural protocols defined by the community as significant for circulating and reproducing

cultural materials and knowledge (see “Archival Challenges” in *SAA Archaeological Record* 8[2]).

### Open Anthropology

Digital technologies and web 2.0 applications can aid anthropologists not just in publicizing our work, but also in enlarging debates about openness, access and accountability. Mukurtu and Digital Dynamics show viable intellectual property systems in their own right—systems that function to continue the circulation and production of knowledge by placing value on things other than the market or vague notions of openness and freedom alone. Indigenous knowledge systems make clear other ways to conceptualize how information can and should be shared, how access is constructed, and how expanding our understanding of openness has been limited by our own default notions about the boundaries of information freedom.

The choice is not between an open or closed anthropology. Reorienting our discussion toward the politics of openness within the circulation of visual materials

allows us to emphasize the ethical dimensions of information sharing, not just the monetary ones.

I have been critical of open access in the past because of the ease with which it has been aligned with a progressive notion of a “public good.” Information in the digital age supposedly wants to be free. Corporate greed and legal straight-jacketing have clouded the debate so that any type of access control, sharing protocols or information management looks suspicious. What Digital Dynamics, Mukurtu and similar projects offer is a view of information not as wanting to be “free,” but as already part of ethical systems in which it wants to be responsible.

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## Virtual Repatriation and Digital Cultural Heritage

### The Ethics of Managing Online Collections

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Museums have embraced digital technologies for their ability to make their collections visible on the Internet. Anthropologists are digitizing their ethnographic archives to share them with research communities, and a new wave of anthropologists is exclusively using digital recording technologies in their fieldwork. In what is amounting to a paradigm shift in the ways that institutions and individual anthropologists can display and create access to their collections, digital technologies—paired with innovative programming and design that is responsive to the needs of community stakeholders—are



providing significant possibilities for sharing curatorial and ethnographic authority with originating communities. Material culture in museum collections is being digitally photographed for online collections databases and virtual exhibits, while documentation of intangible cultural expressions is being transformed from analog photographs, film, video and tape recordings into digital files. Significantly, these technologies are allowing members of originating communities to access images of objects, audio and video recordings, and texts documenting their relatives and their material, cultural and linguistic history. Visual access by these communities to their cultural heritage in online museum and ethnographic collections is known as “virtual repatriation.”

As copyright and intellectual property regimes that have

defined the ownership of collections are also made visible, ethical questions about the digitization and circulation of cultural heritage are being raised. Who has the right to determine how digital cultural heritage should be restricted or circulated? How might this change the relationship between descendant commu-

histories of Prophets called *Dane Wajich- Dane-zaa Stories and Songs: Dreamers and the Land* ([www.virtualmuseum.ca/Exhibitions/Danewajich](http://www.virtualmuseum.ca/Exhibitions/Danewajich)). This collaborative web-based project was in large part inspired by anthropologists Robin Ridington and Jillian Ridington’s repatriation of over 40 years of ethnographic docu-

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nities, their digital cultural heritage, and the anthropologists and linguists with whom they work?

#### New Practices, New Relationships

My work since 2004 with the Doig River First Nation has relied heavily on digital technologies. With folklorist Amber Ridington, I taught web design and digital video production to youth, and co-curated a virtual exhibit of Dane-zaa oral traditions and

mentation to the community, in the form of a digital archive and password-protected online database. The Doig River leadership initiated media training projects that would teach community members how to access and utilize these important resources, and these digital projects facilitated relationships between elders and youth, who worked together to record content and

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## Repatriation

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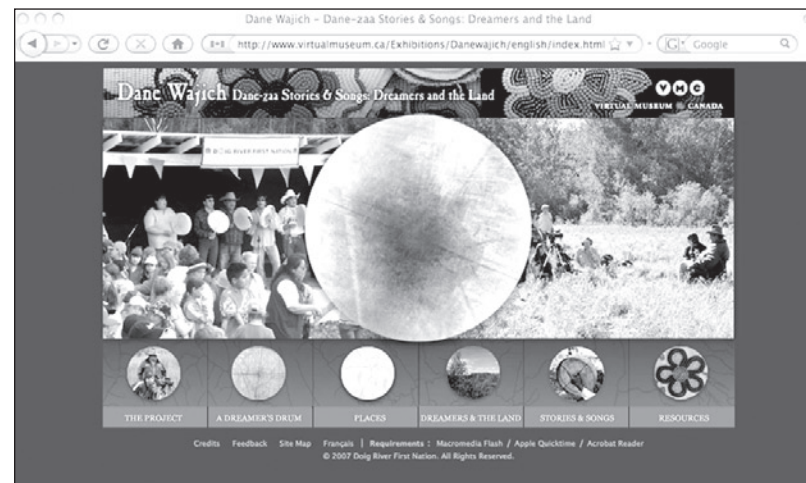
evaluate the websites throughout their production. In this sense, the transformation of cultural heritage from analog into digital form provided opportunities for participation in cultural production and creative engagement with new media. The projects also facilitated a reconnection to cultural heritage documentation that had not always been accessible, despite the circulation of many analog copies, and greater awareness of what had been recorded by anthropologists over the years. Further, through collaboration with a range of ethnographers, linguists and folklorists, the mobilization of repatriated cultural heritage forged new possibilities for participatory research, elicited community research priorities, and strengthened relationships between researchers and the community.

At the same time, it became apparent that these same digital copies have the potential to disrupt the sense of trust and collaboration between anthropologist and research community. Although digital ethnographic materials can be used to build relationships and facilitate self-representation, they can also be uploaded to the Internet for instantaneous distribution, circulation and unrestricted access, making otherwise privately managed tangible and intangible culture public. GPS devices in cameras can encode the precise locations of photographs, which can then be linked to maps in Google Earth or Flickr, potentially revealing politically sensitive information with real consequence for Aboriginal land claims or treaty negotiations. Once uploaded to a website, an image, video or sound recording can be downloaded, appropriated and remixed by any user with sufficient technical knowledge. Despite their promise for forms of repatriation, these digital practices also parallel histories of research, archiving and information dissemination that have not considered local protocols for the circulation of cultural knowledge. Digital technolo-

gies enable users and creators to do many things, but they are also potentially problematic. We must ask: what ethical position should anthropologists facilitating virtual repatriation take in relation to emerging new media practices?

### Negotiating Representation

*Dane Wajich- Dane-zaa Stories and Songs: Dreamers and the Land* integrates interactive maps of tradi-



Homepage for the virtual exhibit *Dane Wajich- Dane-zaa Stories and Songs: Dreamers and the Land* ([www.virtualmuseum.ca/Exhibitions/Danewajich](http://www.virtualmuseum.ca/Exhibitions/Danewajich)).

Screenshot courtesy Doig River First Nation

tional hunting territories with video narratives, archival and contemporary photographs and song recordings, and documentation of the project's participatory process, to teach viewers about the history of Dane-zaa Nááche (Dreamers) and their significance for the present generation. It is available to the world, hosted by the Virtual Museum of Canada. Between 2005 and the project's launch in 2007, Amber Ridington and I worked with the community and an extensive team of linguists, ethnographers and educators to facilitate the production of the exhibit and negotiate its representation of Dane-zaa stories and songs.

Based on a community initiative at the beginning of production, a painted drum, made by the Prophet Gaayęą in the early twentieth century, had become the aesthetic and thematic anchor of the exhibit. But almost two years later, as the final version of the project was being reviewed by the community at Doig River, concerns about photographs of the drum being placed on the Internet began to be voiced. As we discussed the matter more, people used

cultural protocols associated with the traditional care and handing of Dreamer's drums to think through the ways in which photographs of the drum should be restricted or circulated in new media contexts.

With greater awareness of the ability of the Internet to widely distribute information, community members also began to articulate particular intellectual property rights to the material, raising

important questions about control of cultural heritage in digital form. Additionally, members of an adjacent Dane-zaa community began to object to Doig River's use of images that depicted members of their families. The Doig River Chief and Council eventually decided that in addition to gaining copyright permissions from the copyright holder, anthropologist Robin Ridington, use of the archival images would also require intellectual property rights clearance from the families of those depicted in the photographs. When stakeholder families declined to give permission for Doig River to use particular images in the Dane Wajich project, all images of Dreamers' drums were subsequently removed from the exhibit.

The articulation of these restrictions occurred only after community members were actively involved in a participatory new media production process over a period of more than two years. As elders' exposure to the technology increased, so did their understanding of the consequences of using it. As cultural authorities in the community, their advice to the exhibit production team

about what media could be made public, and what should be kept private, was crucially important to the production of a representation of Doig River's history and culture that the community could approve for world-wide distribution.

The emerging ethical paradox, however, is that visual data used in new media contexts, like the Dane Wajich project, can generate articulations of rights, but at the same time they amplify the difficulty of enforcing those rights. Even though the Doig River Chief and Council, the Elders Council, and members of the community came to a consensus over the way that sacred material culture and its digital representations should be restricted, a quick Google search still reveals multiple manifestations of the contested images on several publicly accessible websites that breach both community intellectual property rights and the anthropologist's copyright. The example I have described here emphasizes that if digitization of ethnographic documentation precedes a community's opportunity to assess the collections and possibly apply restrictions, then sensitive cultural information might be distributed without their consent. It also complicates the ability of anthropologists to control how their ethnographic documentation will be used. While many museum curators have taken the requests of originating communities to treat material culture with traditional modes of care and handing very seriously, even restricting visual access to sacred objects in exhibits and visible storage, the nature of the digital medium makes it difficult to control the circulation of ethnographic representation in virtual contexts. As ethnographic practices become increasingly digitally mediated, and the virtual repatriation of cultural heritage depends on new media technologies, these are ethical issues worth considering.

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