Honoring Protocol: Design by, for and with Aboriginal Peoples

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Abstract

The demand for interactive systems that meet the needs of a global market threatens designers' ability to honor, support and enrich the diversity of human experience. Aboriginal communities across Canada are striving to sustain their communities by strengthening their cultures, languages, spiritual practices, political process, and local ecosystems, rejecting countless political attempts to dissolve them. Interactive systems play an increasingly critical role in these efforts. Through this panel we will hear from designers and practitioners, those crafting and using interactive systems created by, with and for British Columbia's vibrant and diverse Aboriginal communities.

Author Keywords

Aboriginal; Indigenous; Metis; First Nations; design methods; critical studies

ACM Classification Keywords

H.5.m. Information interfaces and presentation (e.g., HCI): Miscellaneous.

Introduction

Professionals engaged in interactive system design gain a deep appreciation for the ways that their work may support or confound the daily practices of people around the world. The demand for interactive systems

that meet the needs of a global market threatens designers' ability to honor, support and enrich the diversity of human experience. Aboriginal communities across Canada are striving to sustain their communities by strengthening their cultures, languages, spiritual practices, political process and local ecosystems, rejecting countless political attempts to dissolve them. Interactive systems play an increasingly critical role in these efforts.

In the DIS community there is a growing interest in culturally and politically situated approaches to interactive system design. One prominent voice whose work focuses on the unique design concerns of Indigenous peoples is Nicole Bidwell. Her scholarship details her reflections on working with rural communities in South Africa and "aim[s] to inspire new paths to design and deploy technologies for those inhabiting the periphery of technology production" (p. 68)[1]. She narrates her experiences of walking in rural southern Africa to highlight specific examples of how dominant technological approaches conflict with local knowledge and communication practices in remote areas that are far from wired urban centres. Her overarching goal is to highlight how these points of conflict or "mismatch" serve to further embed infrastructures that continue to marginalize and dominate oppressed individuals from non-dominant groups [2].

In North America, Aboriginal peoples are similarly challenged to negotiate and respond to the embedded infrastructures of dominant interactive systems. For both those populating remote communities, and those who live in densely populated, wired urban areas with access to these products, the mass-market tools often do not mesh well their cultural and spiritual perspectives. Often these systems have no way of supporting crucial community protocols, practices that outline the who, how and when details of information access and sharing [3] [4].

Across the large expanse of land currently labeled British Columbia, Canada, there are over 200 First Nations communities. In addition, there is an ever-growing population of urban Aboriginal peoples who may live far from their community's land base. The diversity of these communities, whether urban or rural, cannot be overstated. Some may reject the othering language of settler society, stepping away from the labels of marginalized or oppressed. Others may leverage this language for different purposes. What can be stated about these diverse communities is that they are crafting systems that better support the protocols and practices of their community.

Goals of the Panel
Through this panel we will learn from designers and practitioners, those crafting and using interactive systems created by, with and for British Columbia's vibrant and diverse Aboriginal communities. We will discuss systems built at a range of scales and with diverse methods, from community-based collections, to gallery-based archives of performance art, to large-scale institutional portals facilitating access to northwest coast ethnographic objects. In doing so we aim to further critical exploration of the potential of culturally responsive design and related processes, and promote awareness of the locally situated responses to, and engagements with, interactive system design.

Approach

This panel will explore contexts of interactive system design from the perspective of system designers and system users who are engaging the potential for interactive systems to reflect the needs of diverse cultural stakeholders. Both system designers and system users will be asked to: foreground the nature of their collaborative work; discuss its role in decision making processes; and to articulate the way their system supports the kinds of engagements that are important in their practice.

Provocateurs

Kate Hennessy and Lisa Nathan will facilitate the discussion, crafting generative questions for the panelists based on input from the audience (collected via paper, email and Twitter).

Possible questions include:

- How is collaboration between Aboriginal communities and designers reflected in your interactive system?

- How are Aboriginal protocols for the circulation of knowledge inspiring alternative design strategies for interactive systems?

- How are defaults toward openness and sharing challenged or supported by systems that have been built to accommodate Aboriginal cultural heritage and art?

- How can design research methods intersect with Indigenous research methods (for example, as articulated in Smith's 2012 *Decolonizing Methodologies* [5].

Acknowledgements

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