

Identity, Community, and Technology: Reflections on the Facebook Group Inuit Hunting Stories of the Day

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[See table of contents](#)

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Article abstract

In this article I reflect on a particular Inuit use of the social networking site Facebook: the group called Inuit Hunting Stories of the Day. I focus on two main issues. First, I discuss the logic behind current technologies as conceptualized by Albert Borgmann (e.g., 1984), who states that rather than being neutral tools, modern devices foster a particular “taking-up” with the world that leads to disengagement from community and meaningful practices. Arguing against this view, I discuss how Inuit Hunting Stories of the Day is an example of how the internet and Facebook are appropriated and provide meaningful engagement. Second, I follow anthropologist Claudio Aporta’s (2013) notion of ecology of technology and argue that the relationship between technology and Inuit has to be understood within an ecological framework that encompasses the broader context of political, economic, and social change, which are intertwined with the use, appropriation, adoption, and adaptation of technology. Drawing from the ecology of technology perspective, it is my central argument that technology and computer-mediated communication bring proximity to cultural practices, activities, and the land rather than provoking distance and alienation from reality, as commonly expressed in dystopian notions.

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Alexander Castletonⁱ

ABSTRACT

In this article I reflect on a particular Inuit use of the social networking site Facebook: the group called Inuit Hunting Stories of the Day. I focus on two main issues. First, I discuss the logic behind current technologies as conceptualized by Albert Borgmann (e.g., 1984), who states that rather than being neutral tools, modern devices foster a particular “taking-up” with the world that leads to disengagement from community and meaningful practices. Arguing against this view, I discuss how Inuit Hunting Stories of the Day is an example of how the internet and Facebook are appropriated and provide meaningful engagement. Second, I follow anthropologist Claudio Aporta’s (2013) notion of ecology of technology and argue that the relationship between technology and Inuit has to be understood within an ecological framework that encompasses the broader context of political, economic, and social change, which are intertwined with the use, appropriation, adoption, and adaptation of technology. Drawing from the ecology of technology perspective, it is my central argument that technology and computer-mediated communication bring proximity to cultural practices, activities, and the land rather than provoking distance and alienation from reality, as commonly expressed in dystopian notions.

RÉSUMÉ

Identité, communauté et technologie: Réflexions sur le groupe Facebook Inuit Hunting Stories of the Day

Dans cet article, je réfléchis à une utilisation inuit particulière du site de réseautage social Facebook: le groupe Inuit Hunting Stories of the Day. Je me concentre sur deux questions principales. Premièrement, je discute de la logique des technologies actuelles telles que conceptualisées par Albert Borgmann (e.g., 1984), qui affirme qu’au lieu d’être des outils neutres, les dispositifs modernes favorisent une « prise » particulière sur le monde menant au désengagement de la communauté et des pratiques significatives. En argumentant contre ce point de vue, je vais discuter du fait que le groupe Inuit Hunting Stories of the Day est un exemple de la façon dont on s’approprie internet et Facebook en les dotant d’engagements significatifs. Deuxièmement, conformément à la notion d’« écologie de la technologie » de l’anthropologue Claudio Aporta (2013), j’affirme que

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la relation entre la technologie et les Inuit doit être comprise dans un cadre écologique englobant le contexte plus large des changements politiques, économiques et sociaux qui est lié à l'appropriation, à l'adoption et à l'adaptation de la technologie. En partant de la perspective de l'écologie de la technologie, mon argument central est que la technologie et la communication assistée par ordinateur rapprochent les pratiques culturelles, les activités et la terre plutôt que de provoquer la distance et l'aliénation de la réalité telle qu'elle est illustrée couramment par les notions dystopiques.

This article examines a particular Inuit use of a Facebook group called Inuit Hunting Stories of the Day (IHS).¹ I assert that the appropriation of a communication technology such as the internet—and Facebook in particular—is part of the larger story of the shifting condition of Inuit identity through technology. In fact, different technologies have been historically incorporated into Inuit practices, acting as co-producers of identity and the ways in which Inuit have related to the world. Clear examples are rifles (Rasing 1994) and snowmobiles (Kemp 1971). In this article I include Facebook in this process.

In an interview for Nunavut's news outlet *Nunatsiaq News* the creator of IHS, Nick Illauq, points out that the group “makes Inuit more proud to go hunting after seeing all those wonderful pictures and videos” (Dawson 2013). In this group, people are invited to share content about hunting or general land-related activities. Fed with different content uploaded by users, such as pictures, videos, or comments, IHS is a repository of Inuit activities across, but not limited to, the Canadian Arctic, Greenland, and Alaska. Anyone interested—Inuit or not (such as the Qallunaat, South American author of this paper)—can join the group and have a chance to comment on pictures, ask questions, engage in conversations, or just observe. For example, after a few brief scrolls down IHS, I can see a user asking for a picture of a harpoon that he used with his uncle in the past, who got a reply after two hours; or someone asking about the translation of a song chanted in Inuktitut by two persons in a video posted there. Pictures of the land, memes, and sporadic off-theme posts, such as non-Inuit praising the group, accompany these sorts of interactions.

Most of the content relates to Inuit practices or issues in different ways, but hunting-related activities dominate. Hunting is a central aspect of Inuit identity (Wenzel 1991; Condon, Collings, and Wenzel 1995; Searles 2016). Inuit have traditionally held respect for the animals they hunt for their subsistence; they

1. For an empirical analysis of Inuit identity and Facebook, see Castleton (2018). There are other groups, such as Nunavut Hunting Stories of the Day, which is a closed group; one has to be approved by the administrators to join. For this reason, I decided to focus on the public group.

would hunt only what they needed and would use every piece of the animal as a sign of respect (Stairs, and Wenzel 1992). Traditionally, food is shared and “no one, whatever their circumstances, need go without food or shelter” (Wenzel 2009: 92).

In this paper I reflect on two main issues. First, I discuss the perspective of certain thinkers who argue that technology, when used excessively, fosters particular ways of disengaging from the world (Borgmann 1984). By contrast, I argue that IHS is an example of how the internet and Facebook can be appropriated and provide meaningful engagement. Second, I contend that the relationship between technology and Inuit has to be understood within an ecological framework, which encompasses the broader social circumstances of political, economic, and social change that are intertwined with the use, appropriation, adoption, and adaptation of technology (Aporta, and Higgs 2005; Aporta 2013). Drawing from the ecology of technology perspective, it is my central argument that technology and computer-mediated communication can bring proximity to cultural practices, activities, and the land, rather than provoking distance and alienation from reality as commonly expressed in dystopian notions (e.g., Borgmann 1984, 1999; Turkle 2011; Dreyfus 2005). Communication technology, such as social networking sites and social media, provides access to a set of resources such as pictures, traditions, and legends.

IHS, technology, and engagement

Anyone who has a computer, internet access, and a Facebook account can access IHS just by typing the name of the group into a Facebook search. As of July 2018, the group has approximately 18,500 members and is constantly increasing. Scrolling down the page, the user encounters a plethora of photos and videos, accompanied by conversations. Caribou, Arctic char, *maaqtaq*, seals, *aakutuk*, all-terrain vehicles, walruses, polar bears, geese, and Arctic birds populate the page. Armed with rifles and cameras or digital devices, people register their hunting experiences and share them for anyone to see—including me, as I sit at my desk in southern Canada. Since it is a public group, anyone has access, can see its members, and read the posts.

The group’s creator, Nick Illauq (2018), describes IHS’s goals in a multilingual post:

[As a member, you can] show pictures of your hunts, videos of your hunts, pictures of you camping, pictures of animals, stories of your hunts, stories of your encounters with exotic arctic animals, stories anything to do with the arctic. vise billeder af dine jagter, videoer af dine jagter, billeder af dig camping, billeder af dyr, historier af dine jagter, historier af dine møder med eksotiske arktiske dyr, historier noget at gøre med det arktiske. montrer des photos de vos chasses, des vidéos de vos chasses, des photos de vos

campings, des photos d'animaux, histoires de vos chasses, des histoires de vos rencontres avec les animaux de l'Arctique exotiques, des histoires rien à voir avec l'Arctique.

The group is presented in three different languages: English, French, and Danish, which reflects the official languages of Canada, the United States, and Denmark, whose Arctic territories include Yukon, the Northwest Territories, Nunavut, Alaska, and Greenland. It is interesting to acknowledge, however, that Inuktitut or Innuinaktun are found only occasionally on the group page, scattered throughout the conversations that people establish. Considering that the group is open, one could interpret this language choice as an attempt to reach a wide audience, as English is the lingua franca both in Canada's North and throughout the world. Furthermore, it's important to keep in mind that Indigenous languages in Canada have suffered intergenerational loss through assimilative government policies such as the residential school system (Norris 1998). Thus, even though Inuit languages are relatively strong, especially in the Baffin region, many Inuit, particularly younger people, do not speak them. According to Illauq, "This site brings everybody together and in the future, it will become even more important in fighting Greenpeace and governments." The message is clear: Inuit are to come together and share their stories, as "Inuit are a minority and this makes them stronger by combining forces and being one voice" (Dawson 2013). To be heard, that voice has to be in English, French, or Danish.

Through Facebook, Inuit (and any interested readers) are finding a portal toward fundamental Inuit practices. The site is attached to key principles of Inuit identity. Hunting and living on the land are ways to enact "traditional" identity.² Travelling across the land for Inuit was part and parcel of life itself (Aporta 2009). Hunting, fishing, or gathering have been the most essential cultural practices, which are now negotiated with weekly wage work and the very high costs of going hunting (Wenzel 1991, 2009; Stuckenberg, 2006; McElroy 2008).

In this context, a Facebook group such as IHS provides instantaneous virtual access to the land through collective sharing of content from different parts of the Arctic. But can group members or observers meaningfully understand and engage with Inuit culture just by posting, viewing, and responding to photos and commentary on a screen? Nicholas Negroponte (1995: 165) was one of the first scholars to hype up cyberspace. He writes,

Digital living will include less and less dependence upon being in a specific place at a specific time, and the transmission of place itself will start to become possible. If I could really look out the electronic window of my living

2. For some anthropological research on hunting and Inuit identity, see Searles (2008, 2010) and Stairs and Wenzel (1992).

room in Boston and see the Alps, hear the cowbells, and smell the (digital) manure in summer, in a way I am very much in Switzerland.

It would be fair to argue that online activities cannot be qualitatively compared to actually developing activities on the land. A transmission of place, as Negroponte discusses it, is questionable. It is a stretch of the imagination to suggest that one can intimately relate to the Arctic and its people by looking only at pictures and videos. This point relates to broader philosophical discussions on whether one can actually engage with the world through information and communication technology (ICT)—a discussion that has occupied different philosophers and social critics.

One of those critics is contemporary philosopher of technology Albert Borgmann, who describes the relationship between humans and technology in terms of a device paradigm (1984). For Borgmann, technology is the fundamental component of a paradigm that “inheres in the dominant way in which we in the modern era have been taking-up with the world” (1984: 3). Technology gives humans a commodity (be it fast food or a direction from a GPS) at the same time as it hides the machinery—namely, the process needed to get the commodity. Reality ends up being reified and fetishized. Therefore, Borgmann conceives technology as a cultural force that distances us from the activities that we engage with in order to produce our lives. We end up detached from our community, from others, and from the environment.

In opposition to the commodities provided through technology, Borgmann states that certain focal practices demand engagement in communitarian social relations and thus carry intrinsic value. He defines these practices as

something that has a commanding presence, engages your body and mind, and engages you with others. Focal things and the kinds of engagements they foster have the power to center your life, and to arrange all other things around this center in an orderly way because you know what’s important and what’s not. A focal practice results from committed engagement with the focal thing. (Borgmann quoted in Wood 2003: 23)

In other words, a focal thing is an activity that “sponsors discipline and skill which are exercised in a unity of achievement and enjoyment, of mind, body, and the world, of myself and others, and in social union” (Borgmann 1984: 219), and these disciplines and skills are the ones being threatened by devices. As an example of a focal thing, Borgmann uses the culture around the dining table (Borgmann 2000). For example, a family dinner may involve a group of people who have a bond of blood or affection and will sit down to (ideally) share a homemade meal, talk during the meal, exchange conversation about the

day's experiences, and so on. Using this Borgmannian framework, Dreyfus and Spinoza (1997: 167) explain that when

a focal event such as a family meal is working to the point where it has its particular integrity, one feels extraordinarily in tune with all that is happening, a special graceful ease takes over, and events seem to unfold of their own momentum—all combining to make the moment all the more centered and more a gift. A reverential sentiment arises; one feels thankful or grateful for receiving all that is brought out by this particular situation. Such sentiments are frequently manifested in practices such as toasting or in wishing others could be joining in such a moment.

Eating dinner in front of the television or while looking at mobile devices would be the technological intromission that ruins this kind of focal practice; it would be a reflection of the contemporary technological cultural pattern that Borgmann (1984) described. In fact, this philosophy of the device paradigm structures Borgmann's view of ICTs (Borgmann 1999). In his terms, the constant use of a computer or smartphone, as we are currently accustomed, makes people lose touch with the valuable social circumstances of everyday life—namely, focal things and practices. When the use of ICTs is the ubiquitous background of our lives, we end up distancing ourselves from reality and becoming immersed in a superficial hyperrealism. Borgmann has pointed to a way out of this over-encompassing technological world: limit the use of technology and re-evaluate its presence in situations that do not require it. This way out entails the skill of knowing when to use technology and when to put it aside (Dreyfus, 1993).³

One may then ask whether computer-mediated forms of relationships—virtual communities or social networks—become non-authentic, less valuable, or “less real” forms of interaction. In what contexts do they undermine focal activities? Borgmann (1992: 108) takes a somewhat dim view of internet users:

Plugged into the network of communications and computers, they seem to enjoy omniscience and omnipotence; severed from their network, they turn out to be insubstantial and disoriented. They no longer command the world as persons in their own right. Their conversation is without depth and wit; their attention is roving and vacuous; their sense of place is uncertain and fickle.

3. This notion is especially important for Inuit with respect to a technology like GPS. Aporta and Higgs (2005) describe how GPS not only is part of the standard toolkit of Inuit hunters and travellers but also contributes to loss of traditional navigational skills. Furthermore, when travelling over the tundra, a GPS receiver can freeze, which could have deadly consequences for those who rely solely on GPS.

More recently, other scholars have pointed out some of the detrimental aspects of virtual communities and interaction. For instance, Bakardjieva (2014) describes a “McDonaldization” of friendship through social media, given the hyper-rational interaction features available on these sites, where relationships are guided by efficiency and are quantified, calculable, and controllable. Polt (2015) defines our current situation as a “cyberbeing,” where the dominant interpretation of beings is based on information processing. Basing his analysis on Heidegger’s philosophy, he describes some of our daily use of ICTs as inauthentic. In a similar fashion, Dotson (2012) accuses technologies of endangering authentic sociality because they provide us with “virtual” others instead of “real” ones. Moreover, Barney (2004) aligns with Borgmann, saying that virtual communities, rather than creating a common world and thus a community, create a commodity in which people communicate but do not share anything. Dreyfus (2004) sees online communities as a public space that generates empty subjects adrift in an ocean of irresponsible interactions and sharing of atomized opinions. Similarly, Graham (1999) points out that virtual experiences on the internet are poor substitutes for reality and do not demand any real and profound engagement from the user.

Now, what can we say about IHS as a way of relating to culture and interacting on the platform of a technical device such as the internet and on a commercial website such as Facebook? Could it be argued that through its “technological aspect,” Inuit reality is rendered into a disengaged commodity? It may be true that the internet is not the most appropriate place to establish deep and meaningful relationships. The focal part of them may be lost to some extent. Looking at the screen of a laptop we cannot share the place, the feelings, the smells, the temperature, or any other sensorial aspect of an environment that is experienced through the mediation of pixels. We are not fully immersed in a focal practice that demands a commanding presence. For example, by looking at an Inuk hunter with his prey on Facebook, be it a caribou, a seal, or a polar bear, we cannot access all of the preparation it took to get the hunting gear together and to set up the snowmobile or the rifle. We cannot access information about how the trails that Inuit have used since time immemorial are recalled by the Inuk traveller, or the conversation that father and son, or grandfather and grandson, establish on the way to the hunting ground. We cannot access the patience of the hunter waiting over the seals’ breathing hole and waiting to pull the trigger when the bubbles show on the water’s surface. It is true that looking at images on a screen denies access to the focal aspect of hunting as an activity that determines what it means to be Inuk. David Strong (2016) would define this mediated way of accessing the practice of hunting as lacking “correlation” with its place, time, community, and hunting skills. But what about an Inuk who actually looks at those pictures and recalls home? Nick Illauq suggests, “This is the only way for some young people or people without equipment to see caribou and wildlife, or for elders who can’t go out anymore, it can provide something

for them to reminisce upon” (Worden 2013). In IHS, Inuit have created a community through a device that provides access to something that encompasses them all as dwellers of the North. As Michelfelder (2000) states, if devices can support focal practices to some extent, then the ways in which technology can assume a supporting role in our lives are enhanced, the same as with our experiences; it would be like wearing the right kind of boots for a hike in the woods. A young Inuk may have never gone hunting given the social changes that have occurred in the Arctic or given the high cost of the necessary materials. On Facebook, the same Inuk has a virtual community that may provoke a certain distance from real-life experiences, but nonetheless acts as a repository of Inuit culture for anyone to access.

Shared practices are deployed in the pictures of animals, butchering, hunting equipment, and snowmobiles, and in the conversations that sometimes mix Inuktitut and English. Technology may dissolve focal activities for commodities, but the use of new communication tools such as social media can convey identities enacted within a globalized world (Csonka and Schweitzer 2004). In their history, Inuit have appropriated technologies for their own uses, and the internet and social media are no exception. Technology carries a democratic potential in so far as it can be appropriated for different and novel uses (MacKenzie and Wajcman 1999) that people engage with even in focal activities, as Michelfelder (2000) points out. In this sense, a communication technology such as Facebook is appropriated collectively to create something like IHS in which the land is made somehow accessible and present.

Following this line of reasoning, the next section examines the relationship of IHS to Inuit identity. Here I will stress that identity needs to be scrutinized as something in constant shift and actualization where technology is of great relevance, even more now, given the pervasiveness of information and communication technologies. Thus far I have argued that accessing sites such as IHS may indeed provide a mediated access to focal activities that relate to Inuit identity.⁴ My next step in the analysis is to place the relationship between Inuit and IHS within what Aporta (2013) and Aporta and Higgs (2005) have defined as the ecology of technology. In other words, technology has to be understood “in the context of use, appropriation, adoption, and adaptation” (Aporta 2013: 195).

Inuit identity and the ecology of technology

In his study of the seal hunt controversy, George Wenzel (1991) states that Westerners have defined the parameters for analysis of Inuit culture. The anti-sealers have argued that Inuit “are now just like us,” because “the artifacts that made Inuit what they were are no longer part of the visible present” (Wenzel

4. For an empirical account of this access, see Castleton (2018).

1991: 6). Goehring and Stager (1991: 671), for instance, cited the example of an Elder who

was born in an igloo, learned to craft stone tools as a youth, and can remember meeting his first Kablunak as an adult ... He now lives in a suburban-style centrally-heated bungalow in a permanent settlement, and spends part of his retirement avidly playing Nintendo games, zapping electronic bugs on a television screen.

This kind of concern over social change and loss of tradition ignores the fact that “adaptation to new technologies and social features have also been a part of the Inuit cultural dynamic for at least one thousand years” (Wenzel 1991: 27). It also ignores the forces of a globalized world, and establishes Inuit as frozen in time and as living museum pieces in order for them to be “authentic.” In reality, Inuit culture has proven to be extremely resilient. Western perspectives often fail to understand what culture is, and idealize Indigenous peoples as simple, primitive, and stuck in time. This is a projection of ideologies. As Salzman (1980: 6) points out, social change is “much less a society becoming something quite different than a society manifesting its fluidity and variability by reordering its parts, stressing some parts at the expense of others, and in this fashion, achieving flexibility and adaptability in both form and substance.” Social change means cultural adaptation to technical changes, which has been the subsistence pattern of Inuit across time (Wenzel 1991). Inuit did not become “less Inuit” when they began to hunt with rifles rather than with spears, bows, and arrows, or when snowmobiles became their principal means of transportation. Appropriation of technology has to be understood in the broader social context, a context of change that goes all the way back to the first contacts.

Aporta (2013) and Aporta and Higgs’s (2005) concept of *ecology of technology* grasps this interaction between technology, identity, and cultural practices in its multiple dimensions. This concept starts from the premise that in order to understand the impact or the socio-cultural significance of the introduction of technology in its full complexity it is necessary to look at the larger picture of the social relations into which the technology is introduced. Aporta and Higgs (2005: 739) illustrate this concept with the snowmobile, which shows how technology can resolve the tension between the process of sedentarization fostered by the Canadian government—with the establishment of settlements across the Arctic—and seasonal outpost camps from which Inuit hunt. The snowmobile allows for great speed of transportation across the tundra, thus making it possible to reconcile town life and hunting activities. At the same time, appropriation of snowmobiles prompted Inuit to seek wage employment so that they could afford them for hunting. This way, “the snowmobile was a facilitator in the new cultural setting of the Inuit” (Aporta and Higgs 2005: 740). The idea of an ecology of technology means that technologies do not have a

deterministic relationship with social organization and cultural patterns; rather, technical devices are introduced into the pre-existing social conditions, where technology gets entangled within the social fabric, and where its adaptation and outcome are negotiated.

With the introduction of ICTs such as the internet, the ecology is one of globalization (Csonka and Schweitzer 2004). This global ecology has ushered in shifting notions of place and space, where identity is established in relation to a global network (Castells 1996), and where symbols and ideas flow mostly unattached from their circumstances of origin (Rahimi 2000). It is in this context where Inuit identity is played out, including negotiation of traditions, legends, practices, or language, with heavy metal and hip-hop aesthetics (Marsh 2009). Identity is constructed in this tension—a tension where technology has played and plays a major role.⁵ In this sense, Aporta (2013), who focuses on the use of GPS, states that such a device should be understood in connection to its broader technological context. He explains that snowmobiles have changed the nature of travelling by making it very hard to carefully observe the land and wind. Snowmobiles also separate drivers and passengers, so that it is difficult to talk and share knowledge while travelling, which was the “traditional” way of learning about wayfinding (Aporta 2009). Therefore, snowmobiles and GPS receivers are connected, just as snowmobiles are connected to gas, to spare parts, and so on. Technology is more than just concrete artifacts. It involves an intrinsically ecological system (Aporta 2013: 196).

Following this line of reasoning, I would like to apply this idea of an ecology of technology to cellphones, cameras, satellites, the internet, and Facebook. Identity is a fluid thing; it shifts according to the material world (Haraway 1988). Inuit identity involves all technologies from snowmobiles to rifles, which were integrated for hunting (see Whitridge, 2004b). Inuit have shown that if a technology is useful, it will be used. As Kemp (1971: 115) writes, “if a snowmobile is perceived to have greater utility than a dog sled, then the ownership of a snowmobile will become one of the criteria defining the traditional Eskimo hunter.”

In this sense, other researchers have noticed the widespread use of digital technologies and social networking sites such as Bebo, previously, and Facebook, nowadays (Hot 2010). In fact, Louis-Jacques Dorais (2010), in his study on identity in Quaqtaq, Nunavik, observed the frequent use of Bebo and MSN messenger. Dorais (2010: 63) writes, “what appears as ‘modern’ might, in several cases, just be a new manifestation of traditional ways of behaving. The Inuit have always been very sociable, and chatting on the internet—which mostly involves other Inuit surfers— may be considered an extension of traditional networking.” In this ecology, communication technology also plays an important role for promoting and articulating Inuit concerns. Facebook and Twitter have been used

5. For a recent discussion on Arctic identities, see Schweitzer, Sköld, and Ulturgasheva (2015).

by Inuit to attend to their problems. Facebook is constantly used to get Inuit feedback on proposed resource-extraction projects (Scobie and Rodgers 2013), for example. Twitter has been recently employed to challenge Western ideas and colonization with the “sealfie” campaign (Rodgers and Scobie 2015).⁶

In these cases it is clear how communication technology is appropriated as part of being Inuit in a globalized world. As the above examples show, it is hardly arguable that having an internet presence is essential to fighting colonial perspectives that do not understand Inuit culture and its subsistence patterns (see Duarte, 2017). Wachowich (2006: 137) argues, “subsistence, it is surmised, must extend beyond concepts of the ecological and the material to incorporate the social exchanges, values, and actions that are part of modern hunting communities.” Technology is fundamental in this ecology, whereby the internet is a primordial setting for claiming rights, influencing representations, education, economic activities, and so on. Appropriation of such technology means that Inuit identity has to be understood amidst technologies that are part of a complex network of elements that configure it. Indeed, social media and networking sites are very useful tools for building and affirming Indigenous identities in the twenty-first century, which many scholars have indicated. For instance, research has shown how ICTs are used to increase cultural resilience in the face of traumatic historical events (Molyneaux et al. 2012), or to achieve cultural revitalization (Alexander et al. 2009; Alexander 2011; McMahon, 2013). Recent research from Australia has also pointed out that Aboriginal Australians use Facebook as a way to communicate over a vast territory, to establish networks, for social support, and to assert identities (Lumby 2010; Carlson 2013).

IHS involves a myriad of interrelated technologies as a collective resource in which the experience of being Inuit is constructed. In his ethnography of Inuit websites, Christensen (2003, 2006) observes how the content posted by Inuit online, while being an invitation for everybody to see, establishes a boundary by referring to content and symbols that are specifically Inuit. In the case of the Web 2.0, as with IHS, people contribute with their hunting pictures and talk to each other in a way that relates to them as Inuit. We are all invited to look at those pictures and gain access to a little bit of what being Inuit means. Everybody is invited but at the same time a cultural boundary is established. If someone is against seal hunting or disgusted by hunting practices, it is highly advisable not

6. At the 2014 Oscar awards ceremony, TV star Ellen DeGeneres took a selfie with famous movie stars. DeGeneres had pre-negotiated a deal with Samsung—whose smartphone she used to take the picture—that stipulated that the company would give her \$3 million to distribute to charities of her choice. Among them was the Humane Society of the United States (HSUS), which is a fierce adversary of sealing. Indeed, DeGeneres has referred to the Canadian seal hunt as “one of the most atrocious and inhumane acts against animals allowed by any government” (as quoted in Rodgers and Scobie, 2015). Consequently, Inuit responded by coordinating a sort of ad hoc social movement where people shared pictures of their sealskin clothes. This campaign was known as the “sealfie” campaign.

to go to IHS because Inuit are seen there harvesting animals, practising their traditions, and being themselves while using their rifles, snowmobiles, cellphones, and digital cameras.

Conclusion

This paper presents a reflection on the Facebook group Inuit Hunting Stories of the Day. The group is understood here as a virtual community in which Inuit identity is displayed and collectively constructed. Hunters armed with their guns and cameras show what they harvest across the land. With over 18,000 members, it is a virtual place in which Inuit interact; they talk to each other and comment on pictures. From a socio-technical perspective, it should be understood as an appropriation of communication technology in keeping with the history of Inuit subsistence (Wenzel 1991). Inuit have been characterized by the adoption and adaptation of foreign technologies, and social media such as Facebook are no exception. Such appropriation is part of an ecology of technology (Aporta and Higgs 2005) in which communication tools such as the internet are appropriated for their own ends. In this case, IHS displays the core of traditional Inuit identity: living on the land and hunting. This Facebook group is open to anyone to join or peruse if they are simply curious. The themes are hunting activities, the land, traditional clothing, snowmobiles, polar bears, caribou, Arctic char, rifles, digital cameras, and Facebook.

It is true, though, as many critics of technology and of virtual communities have argued, that there is a technological mediation through which the experiences are only distantly perceived on a screen, and this mediation prevents a proper engagement with meaningful experiences. But for Inuit, such a community seems to be a gateway to what being Inuit means (Castleton 2018), and those who are Inuit can relate to it despite the technological mediation. While it is true that something is lost, the land is nonetheless experienced through the cameras of other Inuit. Therefore, IHS offers something very valuable as a pocket of Inuit identity that is shared and collectively constructed on the internet.

One question remains to be answered: What are the qualitative differences between those closed Facebook groups that are very similar to IHS and the open ones such as this one? What is the meaning of the boundary being established (Christensen 2003, 2006)? Maybe it is to allow only Inuit into the group, or to keep away people or groups who are against Inuit hunting practices. This is an issue that I can only hypothesize about for now. It demands further exploration by talking to the creators, administrators, and participants of such groups.

I would like to finish this reflection by pointing out a gap in the literature on Inuit and ICTs. Despite a vast amount of research on Indigenous peoples and technology in Canada and other countries such as Australia and New Zealand, there are not many approaches involving tools from science and technology

studies, such as from the social construction of technology (MacKenzie and Wajcman 1999) or actor-network theory (ANT) (Latour 2005; Law 2009).⁷ One example I can think of would be to study the associations (Latour 1984) formed between an Inuk, hunting gear, and selling meat via the internet (Searles 2016). Some of the research I build on has discussed similar issues, but I believe that a science and technology studies approach would bring conceptual clarity to future studies by setting the framework for looking at the “heterogenous network” (Law 1987) made of human and non-human actors in Inuit life. In addition, more recent approaches on human–technology relations such as post-phenomenology could also be useful for examining the relationship between Inuit identity and technology. Post-phenomenology establishes that technologies are not neutral intermediaries but rather actively co-shape people’s experiences and perceptions of the world (Verbeek 2005; Rosenberger and Verbeek 2015). Therefore, this framework could provide interesting tools to conceptualize the role of ICT in Inuit practices.

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7. An exception is Whitridge’s work (2004a) where he challenges the dichotomy between Inuit “place” and Western “space” from an ANT framework. Whitridge also uses ANT quite illustratively to show how Thule whale hunting evolved according to the enrolment of different elements into the hunting network, where he treats human and non-human elements symmetrically thus showing the implications that changes in harpoon heads had in the configuration of hunting procedures and of life in the settlement (2004b).

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