

Openings and Retrospectives

ARCTICNOISE AND BROADCASTING FUTURES: Geronimo Inuitq Remixes the Igloolik Isuma Archive

KATE HENNESSY

Simon Fraser University

 <http://orcid.org/0000-0002-3303-1669>

TRUDI LYNN SMITH

University of Victoria

 <http://orcid.org/0000-0002-1619-6867>

TARAH HOGUE

Vancouver Art Gallery

 <http://orcid.org/0000-0002-9848-6090>

All that is not information, not redundancy, not form and not restraints—
is noise, the only possible source of new patterns.

—Gregory Bateson

Geronimo Inuitq is an accomplished contemporary artist specializing in digital image and video production, electronic music production, and DJing. He has performed and exhibited in the Museum of Civilization of Quebec, in the acclaimed group exhibition *Beat Nation*, in the transmediale and club transmediale festivals in Berlin, in *Material Experiments* at ImagineNative 2015, and in the Contemporary Native Art Biennial in 2016.

The *ARCTICNOISE* project was catalyzed by the acquisition of the Igloodik Isuma Video Archive by the National Gallery of Canada. This acquisition came about after the production studio that famously produced *Atanarjuat: The Fast Runner* (2001), which won the Cannes Caméra d'Or, and which also facilitated extensive cultural work in Igloodik and other northern communities for twenty years, went into receivership. Supported by a Mobilizing Inuit Heritage grant, the curator Christine Lalonde, who proved central in acquiring the collection for the National Gallery of Canada, invited Geronimo Inutiq to take up a residency at the National Gallery to begin to untangle and assess what Isuma producers had documented over the course of their work in the North. *ARCTICNOISE* was then initiated in 2014, when collaborators and curators Britt Gallpen and Yasmin Nurning-Por further invited Inutiq to remediate elements of the archive as a critical response to Glenn Gould's iconic 1967 contrapuntal radio documentary "The Idea of North." The Igloodik Isuma Video Archive continues to be explored and researched by Geronimo Inutiq, both through the *ARCTICNOISE* exhibition and subsequent publication and through his work at the National Gallery of Canada.



Figure 1. Geronimo Inutiq performing at the opening of *ARCTICNOISE* at grunt gallery, August 2015. Photo courtesy of Reese Muntean.

In 2015, the authors of this essay collaborated with Inutiq, Gallpen, and Nurning-Por to organize the first exhibition of the *ARCTICNOISE* project. We also worked together to develop a parallel program that included an Ethnographic Terminalia workshop called “Terminus: Archives, Ephemera, and Electronic Art,” a collaborative zine publication, and a public dialogue event in coordination with the 2015 International Symposium on Electronic Art. In a month-long installation at Vancouver’s grunt gallery that summer, visitors experienced Inutiq’s reimagining of Gould’s iconic radio documentary and the revisualization of Igloodik Isuma media. The exhibition was subsequently installed in different forms in Saskatoon and Toronto, with an accompanying exhibition catalog (Hogue 2016).

In this essay we highlight the role of the Indigenous media archive in supporting creative practices between Indigenous and settler collaborators. Inutiq’s work both illuminates the potential of cultural institutions like the National Gallery of Canada and artist-run centers like grunt gallery to challenge colonial legacies of representation while inspiring new forms of aesthetic and cultural communication. We present the work of Inutiq and his curatorial partners as an example of the ways in which Indigenous media futures are becoming articulated through digitization, appropriation, remix, and exhibition. We highlight Inutiq’s critical engagement with signal, noise, and glitch to re-present the North—as well as the archive—as an unstable, dynamic idea, instead of a static apparatus of the colonial imagination. Temporal relationships between the past, present, and future are unsettled and resignified as contemporary art activating both fictional and documentary media in the Igloodik Isuma Video Archive. At the same time, we point to the urgent precarity of these archives and the complexities of copyright and ownership in a rapidly shifting media environment. In doing so, we suggest that *ARCTICNOISE* resists colonial legacies of meaning by unsettling conventional expectations of archival Indigenous media and foregrounding noise as a productive force in the communication of knowledge.

THE DISTANT EARLY WARNING SYSTEM

In an interview about *ARCTICNOISE* (Inutiq and Hennessy 2016), Inutiq reflects on his childhood in Frobisher Bay, Northwest Territories, where the decaying infrastructure of the Distant Early Warning System signaled the existence of a Cold War world and hinted at the possibility of a mutually assured destruction. These systems were eventually appropriated to become the broadcast infrastructure for the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation’s (CBC) Northern Service, transforming a harbinger of terror into an instrument of Canadian colonial nation-

Marshall McLuhan as the title of his loose-leaf publication *The Dew-Line Newsletter* (*A startling, shocking Early Warning System for our era of instant change!*), which he distributed between 1969 and 1970.

McLuhan's articulation of the DEW Line as medium for transformations and potential futures has resonance with histories of communication infrastructures and Indigenous media production in the Arctic. While the influx of Southern media into the North has been identified by some as a destructive force, the infrastructure that facilitated its transmission also augmented the agency of Inuit peoples to represent themselves. As [Faye Ginsburg \(2002, 51\)](#) has written, some Indigenous activists have seen film, video, and television as a sort of neutron bomb that "kills people and leaves inanimate structures intact." At the same time, depending on the time and place in which they arrive, these technologies "also offer possibilities for 'talking back' to and through the categories that have been created to contain indigenous people" ([Ginsburg 2002, 51](#)). The creation of the Inuit Broadcasting Corporation in 1981 became a model for the repurposing of broadcasting technologies for Indigenous peoples around the world; later, in 1999, the Aboriginal Peoples' Television Network "played a dynamic and even revitalizing role for Inuit and First Nations people, as a self-conscious means of cultural preservation and production and form of political motivation" ([Ginsburg 2002, 41](#)). Indigenous broadcasting in the North, according to the communications scholar [Lorna Roth \(2005, 219\)](#), has "opened up frontier audiovisual spaces, improving the information structures, sources, and conditions for the renegotiation of [First Peoples'] power relations in Canadian society."

Geronimo Inuitq grew up in Frobisher Bay, Northwest Territories, a city today known as Iqaluit. Later, he lived in Montreal, Quebec, where his mother worked as an Inuktitut language radio broadcaster for the CBC Northern Service. Broadcast and its infrastructures constituted a part of the everyday, at home in the North and in the south of the country. As a child in Frobisher Bay, Inuitq recalls playing in the ruins of the DEW System, concretizing his sense of connection to geopolitics of broadcast media and the power transformations they created:

The idea of the broadcast systems as early warning is important to the North because I think there was projects going on, experimental projects in terms of military with communications and security like national security for the

United States and Canada during the Cold War. I was very much aware of this dynamic because I grew up in the context where I was made aware of it and I saw it. I could feel it in the world. (Inutiq and Hennessy 2016, 32)

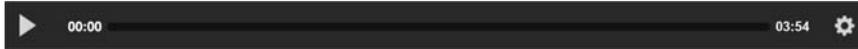
The theme of destruction and recreation, and its sensory dynamic, is complicated by the *ARCTICNOISE* project. First, at the core of Inutiq's remix art and performance practice, the Iglulik Isuma Video Archive represents decades of concerted efforts to counter ongoing colonial projections of northern identities and lifeways, as well as their potential futures. The director Zacharias Kunuk's feature films, such as *Atanarjuat: The Fast Runner* (2001) and *The Journals of Knud Rasmussen* (2006), are masterful cinematic reimaginings of the ancestral lifeways of Inuit peoples and their responses to the beginning of colonial disaster in the eastern Arctic. The less public work of Iglulik Isuma productions in Northern communities to facilitate cultural continuity makes up another large section of its archive (Lalonde 2016).

The constellation of activities around the *ARCTICNOISE* project at grunt gallery grew out of the context of an artist-run center that regularly invites new forms of engagement through projects like *Ghostkeeper*, a website highlighting the work of the Indigenous theorist, curator, writer, new media practitioner, and performance artist Ahasiw Maskegon-Iskwew. In his essay "For Iktomi" on the *Ghostkeeper* website, Steve Loft (2012) writes that Maskegon-Iskwew

did not conceive of digital art practice as a "new medium" because he understood that its basic premise of connecting thoughts and aesthetics electronically was linked to Aboriginal cosmologies, pedagogies, and epistemologies. Cosmological media ecosystems that can be seen as interrelated and part of a larger Indigenous worldview. Thus they exist as media, as message and form of knowledge transferal.

Inutiq's *ARCTICNOISE* resonates with the intimacy and continuity of Maskegon-Iskwew's conception of and engagement with the digital as a mode and method of representation that flows from Indigenous worldviews and holds the potential to reconstitute how artist-run centres and public galleries envision their archives. *ARCTICNOISE* further amplifies Maskegon-Iskwew's conception of media with its potential to effectively communicate a past, present, and future, a continuity of situated knowledge. This engagement with media in both cases redefines the potential of the archive as simultaneously a record of the past and the location of speculative futures.

ARCTICNOISE



Audio 1. Track 5 from . . . *Variations* (2016). Audio courtesy of Geronimo Inuitq.

ARCTICNOISE was formulated in response to an experimental radio documentary produced by the legendary Canadian pianist Glenn Gould, well known for his interpretations of the work of Johann Sebastian Bach. “The Idea of North” was first broadcast on the CBC Radio program *Ideas* on December 28, 1967. On the CBC website, a page that is no longer available described the documentary in this way:

An anthropologist, sociologist, a nurse, and a surveyor discuss the subjective “idea” and the reality of the North. Montage and voice counterpoint are used to express the antagonism and scope of the country, the loneliness and isolation, the warmth of community living, personal reasons for living there, the fear that human nature will gradually take over from the elements as common enemy number one, and the challenge involved in any decision to live there. During the last eight minutes the voices are heard over music.

Gould’s meticulous arrangements and overlappings of his narrators’ voices represent a Southern fiction in which the North constitutes a place of solitude, devoid of community (Gallpen 2016). Not a single Indigenous voice is presented as counterpoint to colonial reflection on a place that, for the majority of Canadians, remains an open expanse of snow and ice ready for the projection of a colonial imaginary (see turions 2016).

Geronimo Inuitq engages in a generative act of destruction and recreation when he remixes audio and video from Gould’s work with selections from the Igloolik Isuma Video Archive and his own audiovisual content. In August 2015, the first installation of Inuitq’s *ARCTICNOISE* was exhibited at grunt gallery in Vancouver. In the main gallery, three video projections occupied three walls. The central projection reinterpreted footage from the Igloolik Isuma Video Archive. The left channel provided the “noise window,” which remixed materials from Inuitq’s personal archive with pixelated images referencing the introduction of broadcast in the Arctic. The right channel Inuitq called the “travel window,” referencing the way in which Gould traveled on a train with his narrators to record “The Idea of North,” and evoking a sense of movement through space and



Figure 3. Installation view of *ARCTICNOISE* at grunt gallery.
Photo courtesy of Dennis Ha and grunt gallery.

time. In a second room, Inutiq displayed a series of postcards of digital images he created by manipulating stills from the Igloolik Isuma Video Archive, along with another video using text and images to provide additional context for the work.

Noise was encountered throughout the gallery. First, it is sonic—the sound of Inuktitut and Cree language in the Igloolik Isuma films. These are entangled with electronic music that, on the night of the opening at grunt gallery, Geronimo performed in live sets. The videos themselves are marked by visual noise, glitch, and interference. Glitch is an unexpected digital malfunction. For the media theorist [Laura Marks \(2014, 251\)](#), glitch “interrupts the intended message with a more urgent one.” These videos, and the postcards shared with gallery visitors, aestheticize digital distortion as an unsettling move that defies interpretation and understanding of the content in its original form. Noise in this space both refuses and complicates past ethnographic experimentation with soundscape that has tried, for example, to represent “a synesthetic blend of ideas and experiences from actualities” ([Ridington 1983, 19](#)). Rather, embodying [Steven Feld and Donald Brenneis’s \(2004\)](#) challenge to make sound as primary rather than marginal in ethnographic theorization, and moving beyond an anthropology preoccupied



Figure 4. Installation view of *ARCTICNOISE* at grunt gallery. Elements of the image have been redacted to comply with copyright restrictions. Photo courtesy of Dennis Ha and grunt gallery.

with the visual at the expense of the sonic (Samuels et al. 2010), Inutiq’s work places sound and its potential to disrupt at the center of the exhibition.

At grunt gallery and in subsequent installations of *ARCTICNOISE* in Toronto and Saskatoon, Inutiq altered the content and presentation of media in such a way that no singular experience of *ARCTICNOISE* could be claimed (Nurming-Por 2016; turions 2016). The randomized combination of audio and video further disrupts Inutiq himself as an authorial Inuit voice. As such, the work represents the creation of a subjective, unstable experience of the North, a refusal of singular meaning and understanding. Inutiq’s response to Gould’s radio documentary also references a history of Indigenous media production that appropriated the infrastructures of communication technologies originally created to serve colonial, national, and international Cold War political agendas. Inutiq’s use of the concept of noise is a productive force for “talking back” (Ginsburg 2002, 51) to media power, and *ARCTICNOISE* is a creative intervention into the legacies of colonial misrepresentation of the North and Inuit peoples.

***ARCTICNOISE* IN DIALOGUE**

The Ethnographic Terminalia Collective and grunt gallery copresented an *ARCTICNOISE* public dialogue event at the Native Education College in Vancouver, inviting the Haida/Québécois artist Raymond Boisjoly to comment on Inu-

tiq's work. Boisjoly reminded the audience that there is no communication without noise. Drawing on an example given by the media theorist Friedrich Kittler, Boisjoly insisted that

a phonographic record plays noises that were never recorded. Thus [noise] somehow encompasses this larger realm that is somehow beyond our own ability to articulate what it is. It is a sound that simply exists, even though it is not a meaning for us. . . . In fact, it is something reproduced and is somehow at odds with what we thought we were doing in the first place.

Noise is not only productive and creative but is also a block that can prove important in resisting certain meaning. For Boisjoly, the *ARCTICNOISE* installation holds promise in the same way that noise does not adhere to a single point. Inutiq's work productively resists the symbolic and associated colonial legacies of meaning by using the form of noise as the primary element. To Boisjoly, noise constitutes a means of resisting the all-too-frequent associations between a work of art by an Indigenous person and the symbolism, subjectivities, and temporalities of ethnographic pasts. Boisjoly expressed frustration about this kind of meaning-making by audiences of his own artwork. In noise, Boisjoly recognizes a counterstrategy for Indigenous artworks that hope to exclude ethnographic meaning from their readings.

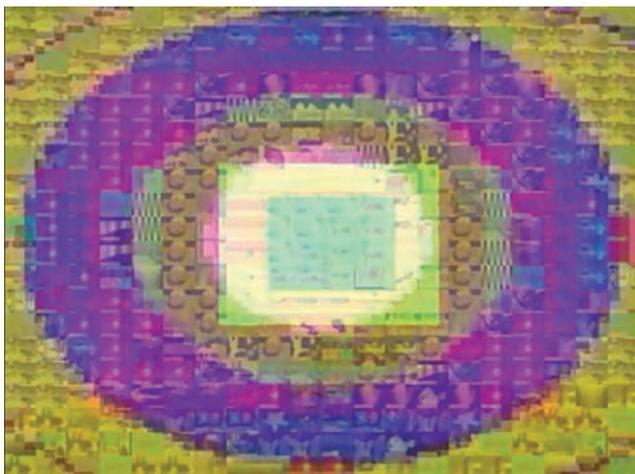


Figure 5. Detail from *ARCTICNOISE*. Image courtesy of Geronimo Inutiq.

A nonhierarchical entity, Inutiq's *ARCTICNOISE* resists reductive dualisms like past and present, and challenges efforts to relegate Indigenous experience

and culture to the past. Inspired by Marilyn Strathern, Donna Haraway (2016, 12) writes: “It matters what matters we use to think other matters with; it matters what stories we tell to tell other stories with; it matters what knots knot knots, what thoughts think thoughts. . . . It matters what stories make worlds, what worlds makes stories.” To this, we add: it matters what *noise makes noise*.

REFERENCES

- Feld, Steven, and Donald Brenneis
 2004 “Doing Anthropology in Sound.” *American Ethnologist* 31, no. 4: 461–74. <https://doi.org/10.1525/ae.2004.31.4.461>.
- Gallpen, Britt
 2016 “Testing, Testing, Do You Copy?” In *ARCTICNOISE: Geronimo Inuitiq*, edited by Tarah Hogue, 18–22. Vancouver: grunt gallery.
- Ginsburg, Faye D.
 2002 “Screen Memories: Resignifying the Traditional in Indigenous Media.” In *Media Worlds: Anthropology on New Terrain*, edited by Faye D. Ginsburg, Lila Abu-Lughod, and Brian Larkin, 39–57. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Haraway, Donna J.
 2016 *Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene*. Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press.
- Hogue, Tarah, ed.
 2016 *ARCTICNOISE: Geronimo Inuitiq*. Exhibition catalog. Vancouver: grunt gallery.
- Inuitiq, Geronimo, with Kate Hennessy
 2016 “Interview.” In *ARCTICNOISE: Geronimo Inuitiq*, edited by Tara Hogue, 24–35. Vancouver: grunt gallery.
- Lalonde, Christine
 2016 “Can Inuit Bring Storytelling into the New Millennium? The Igloolik Isuma Video Archive at the National Gallery of Canada.” In *ARCTICNOISE: Geronimo Inuitiq*, edited by Tarah Hogue, 38–42. Vancouver: grunt gallery.
- Loft, Steve
 2012 “For Iktomi.” Essay, *Ghostkeeper*. <http://ghostkeeper.gruntarchives.org/essay-for-iktomi-steve-loft.html>.
- Marks, Laura U.
 2014 “Arab Glitch.” In *Uncommon Grounds: New Media and Critical Practice in North Africa and the Middle East*, edited by Anthony Downey, 257–71. New York: I. B. Tauris.
- Nurming-Por, Yasmin
 2016 “Please Wait.” In *ARCTICNOISE: Geronimo Inuitiq*, edited by Tarah Hogue, 44–48. Vancouver: grunt gallery.
- Ridington, Robin
 1983 “In Doig People’s Ears: Portrait of a Changing Community in Sound.” *Anthropologica* 25, no. 1: 9–21. <https://doi.org/10.2307/25605106>.
- Roth, Lorna
 2005 *Something New in the Air: The Story of First Peoples Television Broadcasting in Canada*. Montreal: McGill-Queen’s Press.
- Samuels, David W., Louise Meintjes, Ana Maria Ochoa, and Thomas Porcello
 2010 “Soundscapes: Toward a Sounded Anthropology.” *Annual Review of Anthropology* 39: 329–45. <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-anthro-022510-132230>.
- turions, cheyanne
 2016 “Being Local.” In *ARCTICNOISE: Geronimo Inuitiq*, edited by Tara Hogue, 50–54. Vancouver: grunt gallery.