Digital Hula Preservation: Pilot Study
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ABSTRACT

Through this poster, we propose a conceptual and technical investigation into the opportunities and tensions of developing a digital preservation system for engaging with the cultural practice of Hula. While it is likely that Hula will be practiced in the future in some form due to its popularity, the distinct and revered Hula styles and unique ways of being in the world shared through these styles may be lost in the globalization of Hula. Relevant systems for digital preservation and access are studied, and a potential workflow for digital preservation is tested. While this is a pilot study, the overarching aim of this project is to identify digital preservation and access risks in the hope of assisting masters in describing and recording their knowledge, skills, and styles of Hula in a culturally respectful way.

BACKGROUND & MOTIVATION

This digital archiving exercise was based on coursework for LLED 5650: Living Our Indigenous Languages through Performative Arts. The course was taught by Dr. Candace Kaleimamowihainekapu Galla, an assistant professor in the Department of Language, Literacy and Education at UBC. As a native Hawaiian and Hula practitioner, Dr. Galla taught the Hawaiian language through the Hawaiian cultural practice of Hula.

We students learned the Hawaiian language by learning and translating Hawaiian songs, chants, and dances. We also researched the historical backgrounds of Hula works we were assigned to dance at a public event as the conclusion of the course. The course was a chance for us to experience the Indigenous cultural practice as an effective means to perpetuate the Indigenous language and knowledge.

Many facets of the Hawaiian language are embedded in hula (dances), mele (song), and oli (chant). Hula works preserved and perpetuated in a digital format can be a means to revitalize and perpetuate the indigenous language of Hawai‘i as well as to safeguard the Indigenous cultural heritage of Hawai‘i.

Overview

To investigate concrete challenges of digitally archiving and preserving Indigenous knowledge, it was attempted to archive digital materials related to a Hula work “Lei Nani”, which I previously performed with two other students at a public event. This event was part of Dr. Candace Galla’s graduate course LLED 5650: Living Our Indigenous Languages through Performative Arts. In this digital archiving exercise, it was explored which pieces of content and contextual information should be considered and curated for long-term preservation and perpetuation of the Hawaiian cultural practice of Hula. A reflective journal was kept throughout the document challenges encountered in the exercise, and the challenges were analyzed to help refine a workflow for digital preservation and perpetuation of Indigenous knowledge.

Workflows

The digital archiving exercise consisted of the following components:

- Identified and analyzed the policies of a potential depository for the outcome of the exercise: the UBC institutional repository cIRcle
- Identified copyright issues surrounding the use of digital materials in this exercise as well as a process for addressing the copyright issues
- Collected and processed the content and contextual information (including written forms for copyright permissions) related to the Hula work “Lei Nani”
- Dr. Galla was consulted with regard to:
  - Which content and contextual information should be archived
  - How it could be ensured that the content and contextual information are archived in a culturally appropriate and respectful way
- Dr. Lisa Nathan, an assistant professor in the School of Library, Archival and Information Studies at UBC, was consulted with regard to the design and implementation of this digital archiving exercise.

Open Access vs. Knowledge Protection

Based on consultation with the course instructor and Hula practitioner Dr. Galla, it was decided not to deposit the video recording of the Hula practice in the open access repository UBC cIRcle. The distribution of video recordings of Hula practices on the internet may lead to a false impression that Hula can be learned by watching video recordings and imitating movements, without the personal contact with a Hula teacher who can ensure the integrity of Hula. Institutional repositories often have the open access mandate, and are not necessarily the optimal place to deposit a scholarly work involving culturally sensitive information such as representations of Indigenous knowledge.

Digital Preservation Policies

It turned out that institutional repository UBC cIRcle cannot ensure preservation of all the file formats it accepts. If representations of Indigenous knowledge involve file formats other than common document and multimedia formats, then the digital preservation policies of a repository should be studied beforehand.

Copyright Permissions

The advice from the UBC institutional repository and copyright office helped me clear copyright issues surrounding the exercise of digitally archiving materials surrounding a Hula performance. However, getting copyright permissions for Hula-related materials in written form turned out to be time-consuming. Face-to-face communication proved to be more effective than email communication in getting permissions in written form.

It was decided to collect the following digital objects for digital preservation:

- Vидео съемки of the “Lei Nani” performance (originally in video file format MPEG-2 and transformed to MPEG-4, 52.8 MB)
- Flyer for the public event (in document file format PDF, 1.5 MB)
- Documentation of word-for-word and line-by-line translation, choreographic instruction, and background research work related to “Lei Nani” (in document file format PDF, 1.9 MB in total)

The videographer who recorded the public event and the students with whom I completed the LLED 5650 coursework and danced the Hula work “Lei Nani” were contacted, and they gave their consent to have me use their copyrighted materials in the digital archiving exercise.

The virtual-assembly version of the digital preservation system Archivematica and the access system ICA-AtOM were installed for Mac OS X. The digital objects collected for this exercise were archived with Archivematica and uploaded to ICA-AtOM.

CONCLUSIONS

A digital archiving project should be planned ahead of the creation of digital objects, and copyright permissions in written form should be collected as soon as possible.

The technical challenges can be resolved as open-source projects for Indigenous knowledge management such as the Mukurtu content management system (Mukurtu) continue to develop and garner attention.

For further study in digitally perpetuating the cultural practice of Hula, other pieces of content or contextual information could be considered for preservation, such as caption and transcription of the video recording to highlight the language component of the practice in relation to Indigenous language revitalization.

To understand the effect of digital preservation and perpetuation of the cultural practice, it is important to study cases of teaching the cultural practice with digitally archived materials.

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RESULTS

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Technical Challenges

Objects belonging to the same copyright holder(s) were grouped into one transfer package Archivematica transforms a transfer package into a Submission Information Package (SIP) and assigns PREMS rights metadata to each SIP. This way of grouping digital objects into SIPs may not be appropriate in cases where multiple materials are under different rights conditions but are closely related as in this exercise.

Some contextual information such as the process of making floral adornments (le‘i) for the Hula performance did not fit in the metadata schema in Archivematica. While the Description field in the existing schema seems to best accommodate such contextual information, it is worth considering and designing a metadata schema specifically for cultural heritage materials as done in the Mukurtu content management system (Mukurtu).

Well-integrated with Archivematica, ICA-AtOM is capable of displaying the Hula-related materials and streaming the video recording. However, accessibility and visibility of culturally sensitive objects cannot be controlled in ICA-AtOM unless the objects are kept in the draft mode and away from public views (Can).

WORKS CITED


AUTHOR NOTES

I would like to thank my supervisors for their guidance and support.

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