

The Drums of Winter (Uksuum Cauyai): An Analysis of Bakhtinian Dialogism and Intersubjectivity

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Three young Yup'ik women are sitting around a wooden table in a room, all of them are facing the interviewer, sometimes switching to face the camera to their right. None of these women are named within the scene, and they all sit on one side of the table. The woman on the left (L) is wearing large glasses and a chevron patterned, multicolor knit sweater. The woman in the center (C) is wearing a black zipper hoodie, with her long hair down. The woman on the right (R) is wearing large glasses and a blue, white, orange, and black plaid button-up shirt. The room is softly lit with wooden walls and a bookcase, flowers are behind the woman in the center. The table has a centerpiece of a small gray clay pot on a straw woven placemat. The director frames this interaction in the larger context of Yup'ik community interlocutors' discussions on the continuance of Yup'ik *kashim* (dance house) dances and songs. The entirety of this interview is in English. R argues that tape recordings may replace what the performances once were, and that those who once witnessed them may serve as vessels for oral knowledge about these events for future generations (Elder and Kamerling 1988, part 2, 40:54-42:11).

The dances and songs in the Alaskan village of Emmonak's *kashim* are not limited to one purpose and the place itself holds many different events. Most commonly, according to the 1988 film *The Drums of Winter*, the *kashim* houses practices for the upcoming potlatch between Emmonak and its neighboring village, Alakanuk.

The kashim (qasigiq) was once the village dance house and spiritual center. It was also the men's sleeping place, workshop, and bath. Today it exists in few villages and has limited use. Since filming, this kashim has been torn down for a new roadway. (Elder and Kamerling 1988, part 1, 27:17)

Yup'ik interlocutors and interactions within the *kashim* make up the majority of the documentary. These interlocutors explicate the uses and beliefs behind certain instruments, dance movements, song lyrics, and gift-giving practices.

The filmmakers Sarah Elder and Leonard Kamerling implore their audience to connect the dots between a history of colonialism to the eradication of these indigenous people's entire way of life. An analysis of this documentary begs the question of what it means that the Yup'ik are consistently placed in context of their history as a colonized people in the eyes of the filmmakers and the threat of disappearance, rather than a rejection of (instead of an existence in) the dichotomous end between acculturation or preservation. In this paper, I utilize Mikhail Bakhtin's theory of dialogism and heteroglossia of language in order to argue that the makers of this film utilize an ultimately monologic narrative of Yup'ik dance despite their intentions to create a collaborative ethnographic film approach. However, the three women in this interview also display moments of resistance to this monologic narrative in the form of reframing and contestation amongst themselves. In order to illuminate this further, I draw from Charles Briggs' critique of the interview as problematized by power relations and communicative hegemony. I also draw from Jane Hill's own use of Bakhtin, translanguistics, and symbolic power in the utterance.

In Mikhail Bakhtin's essay, "Discourse in the Novel," the main unit of meaning is the embedded word within each exchange, where each utterance is always addressable and elicits a response (Bakhtin 1981, 280). Bakhtin argues that the novel is an artistic system created by the novelist but is appropriative, historically contingent, and dialogic--creating a discourse between people and voices--and epitomizes his approach to language's nature as heteroglossic (263). Therefore, within the novel itself there is a multitude of voices and speech types which are

artistically organized, which means literary language is a heteroglot language, and defines the novel as a genre for Bakhtin (262-263, 272). Bakhtin argues language is not neutral, but stresses that in interpretation and understanding, the intention of the author is in actuality overpopulated “with the intentions of others” (294).

Language is a generative process, caught between forces that push towards a centralized form, centripetal or monologic, and the heteroglossic nature of language and its centrifugal force (Bakhtin 1981:272). Bakhtin refuses dichotomies of langue and parole, and society and individual (264, 269, 275). Instead, Bakhtin proposes dialogism as the multiplicity of voice, understanding, and the necessity of response to an utterance. Discourse moves constantly through various perspectives and creates new forms, in turn constructing meaning and interpretation (Bakhtin 1981:337-340). Bakhtin reorients his theory to intersubjectivity, how we create ourselves in dialogue with other people, and one only comes into being dialogically as a self through this process (272).

In “The Consciousness of the Grammar and the Grammar of the Consciousness,” Jane Hill explores the ways in which Mexicano usage in Malinche, an area surrounded by Spanish-speaking communities, is a negotiating process with the “symbolic power of the Spanish,” and the ways in which practice is related to the “structural position of individuals in the material sector” (Hill 1998, 307). Hill utilizes a Marxist lens in her analysis of human interaction and the ways in which language is practiced. The use of Mexicano and Spanish is subject to a “power code” in which the use of Spanish is subject to vulnerability as being seen to have “the arrogance and lack of respect thought to be characteristic of Spanish speakers”; however, as Spanish is also associated with the economy and money, the use of Spanish for men in Malinche is an expression of status (Hill 1998, 310). Hill’s use of translanguistics, or a juxtaposition of voices,

and Bakhtin is explored in this paper, where an utterance combines multiple voices as an “intertextual polyphony of dialogue in which both ideology and the language system function as constraints on combination” (Hill 1998, 311-312).

Hill’s use of translinguistics argues that meaning and efficacy is not in words, signs, or language, but in the metalinguistic boundaries and their negotiations which are both politically and socially situated. Thus, meaning for Hill does not exist in the Saussurean language or sign system, but in the negotiating of boundaries (power relations) in discourses between people. In Hill’s work, for instance, Spanish loan words in Mexicano are seen as a symbolic practice of structural position.

From Hill, I utilize conceptions of power and ideology in bilingual communities and the ways in which the use of either or both (i.e. loan words and code-switching) may illuminate some of the complexities within *The Drums of Winter*. More specifically, the ways in which Yup’ik language and English are utilized in the film ambiguously are analyzed, signaling to the intentions of Elder and Kamerling’s ethnographic project as multi-authored, dialogic, yet is in actuality monologic. More specifically, the Yup’ik interlocutor is typified, objectified and thus monologic, because of a lack of identity and relational context within the interview (Hill 1998, 317). However, as delved into further later, I argue that these three Yup’ik women in this interview scene complicate Elder and Kamerling’s vision of a united, yet disappearing, Yup’ik culture as expressed through a homogenous “Yup’ik” discourse. These women, in debating amongst themselves, illustrate varied opinions and intersubjective selves.

Charles Briggs’ chapter, “Interview techniques vis-à-vis native metacommunicative repertoires,” in his 1990 book *Learning How to Ask*, illustrates the methodological and theoretical quagmires of ethnographic studies which utilize the interview as an approach to

gather information from interlocutors. Briggs argues that there is a systematic reason why native discourse rules emerge in the interview (Briggs 1990, 39). The chapter intends to provide a model in order to analyze interviews for ethnographic data, where interviewers must account for not only referential factors, but indexical, in order for questions and responses to be interpreted and made meaningful for both participants and interviewers (Briggs 1990, 42).

Briggs argues that the interviewer has the majority of control within the interaction, but “the respondent’s principal means of subverting this power lies in breaking the frame of the interview” (Briggs 1990, 56). Briggs’ insight into the interview will be further explored within the interaction in *The Drums of Winter* as to illustrate the ways in which Elder and Kamerling have positioned themselves as ethnographers and have ambiguously utilized the interview as a source of Yup’ik knowledge. In this sense, I argue that Elder’s intention, as outlined in her article in the following section, to create a collaborative filmmaking process with the Yup’ik community is overshadowed by ethnographic desire.

Sarah Elder and Leonard Kamerling argue that dance and song are central to the spiritual and social lives of the 500 people in Emmonak, where these ceremonies “bridge the gap between a person’s own power and the greater powers of the unseen world” (Elder and Kamerling 1988, part 1, 1:07). The documentary explores the ways in which dances and songs in the *kashim* (dance house) have transformed through contexts of colonialism, specifically in relation to religious conversion, and questions the future of Yup’ik performance. Elder and Kamerling developed a new approach to ethnographic film in the late 1970s to early 1980s, one which they coined as “community collaborative,” in which the community involved in the filming and research had more sway into what was included than previous ethnographic films.

In Elder's 1995 article, "Collaborative Filmmaking," she argues that both ethnographers sought a new type of filmmaker-subject relationship which would create an "open space for dialogue...a moral space where subjects and image makers can mediate their own representation" (94). Elder and Kamerling worked with the Alaska Native Heritage Film Center (ANHFC), the University of Alaska, and the Inupiaq and Yup'ik communities of Alaska (94). Elder argues that the importance of their work and ethnographic approach allowed the communities to assist in the creation of the films in a way that they would cherish and preserve their cultural practices. Kamerling and Elder's Alaska Native Heritage Film Project was founded in 1972 with the goals of allowing for minorities to represent themselves while not "relinquish[ing] our [Elder and Kamerling's] aesthetic and technical control or...ethnographic concerns" (Elder 1995, 97).

Elder and Kamerling's films were also seen as a collaborative process in that the community members could select what and elect who would be filmed, and individuals could also opt out of being recorded. In matters of translation and edits, the community members (unspecified) would translate and review all of the edited versions of the film (Elder 1995, 94). Elder and Kamerling, in turn, would "make aesthetic, technical, contextual and structural choices which [they felt made] the film accessible to western ethnographic and documentary audiences" (Elder 1995, 94). The filmmakers expressly do not make any narration or cultural analyses as they want "film subjects [to] speak themselves" (Elder 1995, 95).

In her article, Elder presents her thought process on the reasons for their film style, stating that she wanted to "make films about Eskimo culture which were more authentic, more intimate, and...more meaningful" (1995, 96). In order to resolve potential ethical or moral quandaries regarding representation, Elder attempted to place herself in an "equal place of power" with the

film's subjects so that they would both have access to what the other could provide (96). Elder states that the issue of representation is with the power dynamics and the filmmaker's ethnic identity; however, overall, Elder argues that the main point of contention lies within the relationship between the subject and filmmaker (96). Thus, the collaborative approach, in her view, resists exploitative tendencies of ethnographic film when it comes to both representation and money, and where accountability to the community is a process within the relationship. This accountability, for Elder and Kamerling, are said to make the filming process and the film more ethical (Elder 1995, 101). Because their film projects are said to be multi-authored, Elder argues that the villagers in the communities being filmed and the filmmakers were "dialogically contributing to the real process of making films," the "dialogical process" being at the center of their approach (Elder 1995, 98).

In *The Drums of Winter* (1988) specifically, Elder expresses her initial discomfort in adding some excerpts from the journal of a Catholic missionary, remarking "that the historical existence of poison did not justify its reiteration," but concluding that the Emmonak audiences felt it should be kept in (Elder 1995, 99). There are multiple other instances given as examples where the villagers wanted scenes included that Elder and Kamerling thought "made ugly seams in the seamless [they] sought" (Elder 1995, 100). Scenes inside the *kashim* (dance house) almost didn't occur, as filming had never been allowed before, however, the elders in charge of the dances allowed their presence as recording of the dances were seen as necessary for future generations (Elder 1995, 100). Significantly in the making of *The Drums of Winter*, the filmmakers "manipulated" more than their other films by "[u]sing the microcosm of music and dance in conjunction with western ethnocentrism" (Elder 1995, 101).

I focus on Brigg's complication of the interview as a genre in this interaction, where Kamerling and Elder's use of this approach is what Briggs precisely argues against. Kamerling and Elder do not name their interlocutors nor do they give any specific context as to what their relationship is to the community, each other, or the filmmakers. I look to this interview as a monologic ethnographic narrative of Yup'ik interlocutors as conveyers of knowledge. This interaction within *The Drums of Winter* illustrates tensions not only within the film itself as a genre, but by community members around views of authenticity and continuity of culture. This tension within the scene is a form of resistance to the interpretive frame projected by Kamerling and Elder, which insists upon an intersubjective view of the Yup'ik self and imagined future.

The woman to the right (R) argues that tape recordings may replace what the performances once were, and those who once witnessed them may serve as vessels for oral knowledge about these events for future generations (see appendix line 1). The first signal of difference in opinion is in line 2 in which C inhales sharply after R's initial statement. C disagrees, stating that the dance and songs will not carry on if they are simply recorded because there will no longer be the physical act of practicing:

But it won't carry on, you know, we won't actually--we won't be dancing, we won't be singing like... (Appendix line 2)

I argue here that Elder and Kamerling's documentary attempts to capture the dire state of the *kashim*, not only using film as a way of preserving the dances, but to make arguments about historical colonial intention and its pervasiveness. The filmmaker's own ideas of Yup'ik personhood, in a structural-functionalist view, is seen as a collectivity where the individual in *kashim* events serves only to reinforce the prevalence of Yup'ik culture itself, without room for variation.

The interview as a methodological approach to gaining ethnographic data and information “presupposes a model of social interaction. The interviewer specifies the issues to be covered while the respondent supplies the information” (Briggs 1990, 46).

...[T]he referential function of language lies in its ability to point to persons, events, processes. Reference rests ultimately on a perceived correspondence between the “content” of expressions and some state of affairs in “the real world.” Contrastively, indexical meaning is dependent on some feature(s) of the context in which the expression is uttered (Briggs 1990, 42).

Briggs argues that the social roles of an interview are contextually important, and factors that determine what kinds of information is conveyed, who participates, what is said, and the linguistic forms utilized “play a dominant role in characterizing the verbal structure of a message and in defining the major communicative function of an event” (1990, 41). Interviews for Briggs are indexical because meanings in responses depend upon the questions preceding them (1990, 42).¹ The knowledge that researchers seek inherently presupposes their interlocutor’s ability to draw consciously from “models of social-cultural and linguistic events and processes” (Briggs 1990, 117).

In their disagreement, R and C illustrate the ways in which varied opinion amongst the Yup’ik signals towards an actually heteroglossic, rather than monolithic, community. In addition, these women can be found to be influenced by centripetal forces as well, not just within their own speech community, but in the larger framework of the film itself. In Briggs’ terms, R and C are visibly respondents to an unrecorded question. In this sense, the filmmakers expressly removed themselves from the making of the interview as to assume an “unnarrated” position in

¹ Thus, an individual must have the ability to engage indexically, not just referentially in order to have communicative competence within the interview (Briggs 1990, 43). Indexical functions account for a more intersectional approach than referential ones, which include “class, ethnicity, geography, [and] social situation” (1990, 43). It is also possible for the interviewer and respondent to have same referential meanings of a question or response, but may have different indexical meanings interpreted (Briggs 1990, 50). Briggs also argues that if the participants in the interview and the interviewer do not share the same frame, they will have different interpretations of meaning which affects what is then said (50).

order to portray authentic ethnographic data (see again Elder 1995). The editing of this interview lends an ambiguously authoritative voice to the Yup'ik interlocutors *en masse* without illustrating the stakes or power dynamics at hand. Elder and Kamerling's interlocutors are depicted as conveyers of knowledge, and by the filmmakers' substitution of themselves, Elder and Kamerling ultimately reify their own monologic ethnographic narration rather than engaging in an authentic dialogue.

The interaction is in English, which is contrasted to other interviews within the film that usually only have one interlocutor, and are sometimes shown to be code-switching or using the Yup'ik language. The filmmakers give no explanation or indication as to the demographics and prevalence of Yup'ik language use, and why some of the same interlocutors are shown using Yup'ik in some interviews while using English in others. This is yet another ambiguous feature of the film that does not account for the ways in which power dynamics and positions are not accounted for; more particularly, the ways in which the use of English or Yup'ik may signal structural positions and meanings (Hill 1998).

The second instance of contention within the interaction occurs from lines 5-8, in which C and L interrupt and speak over each other four different times. L argues that because their grandparents and great-grandparents were vessels of oral history, that if the dances and songs disappear, their generation could follow suit and tell future generations about the ways things were in their own times. C questions whether or not L actually believes the dances will disappear, the latter of whom responds that it may but that they "will be there" (lines 6-8). However, C again states her qualms about the difference between remembering and conveying to others versus the actual practice carrying on. R concludes the interview stating that with "the

way things are going now,” it would be no surprise if the dances and songs did disappear after all (line 9).

In this second instance the prompted question may be inferred based upon this scene’s embeddedness with other interviews responding to the same potential fear: cultural loss. I argue that the lack of clarity of the filmmakers’ relationship within these interactions and in the film as a whole not only problematizes the extent to which the film itself has been manipulated to serve the pursuit of displaying authentic ethnographic data, but also typifies Yup’ik interlocutors as a homogenous community, where each interlocutor is depicted as concerned for the preservation of their culture. In Briggs’ terms, this would illustrate *communicative hegemony*, where “rather than learn the natives’ means of acquiring information, we commonly impose our communicative norms on our consultants” (Briggs 1990, 121).

A concern for preservation mystifies the relationship between the filmmakers and the Yup’ik community as well, as can be seen in Elder’s article, as a self-justifying reason for filming. I argue that although these sentiments would be plausibly true for the populace in Emmonak, Elder and Kamerling utilize edits and framings that serve to reaffirm their own presuppositions (see Briggs 1990, 123). Elder and Kammerling monologize the narrative form of the film through centripetal forces, placing the Yup’ik in juxtaposition to their idealized historic cultural pasts (Bakhtin 1981, 272; Hill 1998, 311-312). The filmmakers only present acculturation and preservation as future options for Yup’ik dance and song; however, what these Yup’ik women accomplish is a re-framing of the filmmakers’ concern with disappearance of practices by explicating the ways in which dance and songs could take new forms.

Appendix

The Interaction (after Gumperz and Berenz 1993)

The interaction is 2 minutes and 18 seconds long (*The Drums of Winter* 1988, part 2, 40:54-42:11).

Woman in center (C); Woman to left (L); Woman to right (R)

1. R: {looking to her left} some {(shrugs) nights}, you know, when they are having an Eskimo dance, {(shrugs and turns head slightly to the right) some} young people go up and they record the {(lo) songs::/} and then... {(lo) like if it disappears, you know}, we can just listen to it. when we want, {[f]*when *we feel like *listening to it} to {(looks down) our people singing}, {(gaze moves from looking down, up to the right) we can just} take that tape {(lo)and listen to it}... and... {(breathes in deeply and shrugs)} i guess we will remember it like that, too.
2. R: [Looks to her right]
C: [inhales sharply to begin speaking] {(off screen) but it won't carry on, you know, we won't actually--we won't be dancing, {(looks to her right) we won't be} singing {(looks down) like...}
3. R: {(off screen)} yeah...
4. C: {(looks at L)}
L: {(f) ~we'll be there} {(ac) to tell the story::/} like {(camera zooms out to all three women) our, you know, great *grandparents, our **grandparents,} they were there to tell ~us {(uses left hand to gesture) stories of their *times::/ (hang wavers down to table)} {(Looks at C)}
5. C: {(looking at L)} {(lo) and you're saying, you're saying you}...you {(looks to camera) think} {(looks back to L) it will} fade away--i mean=
L: =no::, *i=
6. C:=it will disappear=
L:=it's=
C: =i mean=/
7. L: it ~might disappear but {(left hand gesture again) (looking at interviewer?) (f) **we are *going to *be *there/} to, um, {(hand moves up and down, palm up= "+") tell+ the+ story+}
8. C: =i mean= {(f) (left hand on table) the *dancing, the *dancing itself} {(lo) will not be, will not be... (p) there, right?}
L: = {(shrugs) you know}
9. R: {(L and C look to R, both of their left hands on the table still) yeah}, the way it's going right {(looks down) now}... {(shakes head) 'cause}... [(each woman fiddles with her hands) {(hi) young people they're// not ~interested in dancing::}], mostly {(puts hand in lap)} the young men {(scratches back with right arm)}. so {(looks down)}... the *dancing *part will {(looks to interviewer?) disappear} {(lo) (looks down and right) for sure/} the way it's {(p) going right now}.

Transcription Key

{Norm [ac]}
 {High [hi]}
 {Low [lo]}
 prominence *
 extra prominence **
 single word prominence ~
 volume [f]loud [p]soft
 :: lengthening
 overlays (non-lexical) {[pounding on table = “+”]} asd +asfg/
 {[nod] sure/}

Explanation for use of Diacritics

In this interaction, I noticed lots of variation in stress of words when each woman spoke, and also variations between soft and louder parts of their sentences. Also, the interruption between C and L was trickier to transcribe the overlaps between words, however, I utilized latching in order to indicate where this interruption occurred. Lastly, the last three lines uses non-lexical overlays in order to follow the hand motions in particular.

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