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**THE THIRD EYE**

Race, Cinema, and Ethnographic Spectacle

Fatimah Tobing Rony

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This book is dedicated to my parents,  
Mr. Abdul Kohar Rony and Mrs. Minar Tobing Rony,  
and to the memory of my Ompung, Mrs. H. I. Tobing,  
and my late uncle, Mr. R. A. P. L. Tobing

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suggestion that photography can be mad whereas cinema is perhaps only oneiric describes the difference between Curtis's photography at its best and his film.<sup>54</sup> Flaherty and his wife Frances, however, saw and appreciated Curtis's film: they would go on to make films of salvage ethnography which were not only more compelling, but which would come to define an entire genre of ethnographic cinema.<sup>55</sup>

#### *Recontextualizing the Picturesque*

The 1992 exhibition at the American Museum of Natural History "Chiefly Feasts: The Enduring Kwakiutl Potlatch," organized with the collaboration of Kwakwaka'wakw curators including Gloria Cranmer Webster, was a moving tribute to the fact that the Kwakwaka'wakw, one of the most popularly filmed native peoples, did not indeed vanish. Two community museums, the U'mista Cultural Centre (Alert Bay on Cormorant Island) and the Quadra Island Kwagiulth Museum (off the east coast of Vancouver Island), attest to the importance of community representation and the repatriation of sacred objects forcibly appropriated by the white government in the past. Significantly, although many Kwakwaka'wakw historians and activists describe *In the Land of the Head Hunters* (1914) as a white man's myth about vanishing races, footage of the sequence on war canoes was used in the "Chiefly Feasts" exhibition, as a testament to the magnificence of Kwakwaka'wakw culture. In the exhibition, the images are recovered by descendants of the people represented in the film: the Kwakwaka'wakw use of the war canoe footage thus can be thought of as the inverse of the cannibal-mongering overtextualization of the Johnsons.

The way in which photographic and filmic images are inscribed and contextualized conditions the ways in which they are understood. Even as the anthropological museum and early travelogue films were embronzing what they perceived as dead cultures into picturesque tableaux intended for white spectators, Native American cultures like that of the Kwakwaka'wakw remained very much alive, adapting to the pressures of colonialization, and fighting to preserve their own cultures and histories. The gesture of the picturesque is unshielded; the ethnographic detail is reclaimed and reconfigured.

## 4 TAXIDERMY AND ROMANTIC

### ETHNOGRAPHY

Robert Flaherty's *Nanook of the North*

*Nanook of the North* (1922), a film which focuses on the daily activities of a family of Itivimuit, a group of Quebec Inuit, is considered by many to be one of the great works of art of independent cinema. It is seen as a point of origin: it has been called the first documentary film, the first ethnographic film, as well as the first art film. The writings about *Nanook* are inextricably wound up with the image of its director, Robert J. Flaherty. There is an aura around the Flaherty name: he is praised as the father of documentary and ethnographic cinema, as a great storyteller and humanitarian, and as the first maverick independent artist uncorrupted by Hollywood. Unlike other white filmmakers of indigenous peoples, it is claimed that he never exploited his subjects. Flaherty embronzed his own myth when he declared: "First I was an explorer; then I was an artist."<sup>1</sup>

*Nanook* is also an artifact of popular culture. When it was released and distributed by Pathé in 1922 in both the United States and Europe, it fed upon an already established craze in those countries for the Inuit as a kind of cuddly "primitive" man. The writer Joseph E. Senungetuk, an Inupiat from Northwest Alaska, summarized this stereotype: "a people without technology, without a culture, lacking intelligence, living in igloos, and at best, a sort of simplistic 'native boy' type of subhuman arctic being."<sup>2</sup> *Nanook* was extremely popular when it was released worldwide, and spawned what ethnographic filmmaker Asen Balikci has called "Nanookmania."<sup>3</sup> Many writers consider *Nanook* as the high point of the *age d'or* of silent ethnographic cinema, the period from 1922 to 1932 which also saw the release of Flaherty's *Moana* (1926) and his collaboration with F. W. Murnau, *Tabu* (1931).<sup>4</sup> Revived on numerous occasions, *Nanook* remains a staple for high school and university courses in anthropology and ethnographic film.

The academic discourse on *Nanook of the North* centers on questions of authenticity. Some have argued that because the scenes of everyday Quebec Inuit life were reconstructed to enhance the film's visual and narrative



impact, it cannot be considered true science. Other anthropologists contend that cinematic representation can never fully be objective—thus both Flaherty's innovative "flow of life" style, as Siegfried Kracauer termed it, and the purported participation of the Inuit people filmed are hailed as markers of Flaherty's pioneering genius. Still others add that the documentary value of the film lies in its portrayal of essential humanity. Ethnographic filmmaker Luc de Heusch is representative of this last school of thought. De Heusch exclaimed that *Nanook* was "a family portrait . . . the epic of a man, of a society frantically struggling to survive. . . . Family life, the human condition, are conquests from which animals are excluded. Such, in essence, is the theme of the film. *Nanook*, the hero of the first ethnographic film, is also the symbol of all civilization."<sup>5</sup>

The focus of this chapter will be on an overlooked aspect of the film: what the film and the discourse surrounding it can tell us about the nature of anthropological knowledge and the role of visual media in legitimating that knowledge and other regimes of truth. *Nanook* was praised as a film of universal human reality, and Flaherty was held up to be a "real" filmmaker, untainted by commercial concerns. Conversely the Oedipal slaying of this great father figure in recent criticism has focused on Flaherty as forger of the reality of the Quebec Inuit. In both cases, what is ignored is how *Nanook* emerges from a web of discourses which constructed the Inuit as Primitive man, and which considered cinema, and particularly Flaherty's form of cinema, to be a mode of representation which could only be truthful. The concern here will not be with whether or not Flaherty was an artist or a liar, but with ethnographic "taxidermy," and how the discourse of authenticity has created the film.

I take inspiration from the subtitle of Leprohon's fine book on the ethnographic cinema of travel and exploration, *L'exotisme et le cinéma: les "chasseurs d'images" à la conquête du monde* (1945), and examine *Nanook of the North* as the product of a hunt for images, as a kind of taxidermic display. First, I examine the discourse around the Inuit, a discourse which has been largely ignored: Nanookmania was preceded by a historical fascination for Inuit performers in exhibitions, zoos, fairs, museums, and early cinema. Second, I look closely at the film and show how the film represents a paradigm for a mode of representing indigenous peoples which parallels the romantic primitivism of modern anthropology. Finally, I examine the discourse on Flaherty as explorer/artist, a discourse which has painted him as either the great artist, or, like the Wizard of Oz, the Great Humbug or falsifier of reality. There are thus three hunts (and therefore three acts of taxidermy): the history of the hunt for representations of the Inuit for sci-

ence and popular culture, the hunt for cinematic images of the Inuit for the film *Nanook*, and cinema's hunt for Flaherty as great artist and/or great liar.

#### *Taxidermy, Salvage Ethnography, and Slight Narrative*

*Nanook of the North* is often seen as a film without a scripted narrative. As Flaherty himself explained, he did not want to show the Inuit as they were at the time of the making of the film, but as (he thought) they had been. Filmed on location at Inukjuak (formerly Port Harrison), at the Inukjuak River in Quebec, Canada, the family of Quebec Inuit represented in the film consists of the hunter Nanook the Bear (played by Allakariallak), the wife and mother of his children Nyla (played by Alice (?) Nuvalinga) who is always shown caring for and carrying the baby Rainbow, another woman Cunayoo, and various children including Nanook's son Allegoo (played by Phillipoisie).<sup>6</sup> The narrative of Flaherty's film seems to ramble: it begins with the introduction of the family, the repair of kayaks and making of fuel; the family then trades furs at the trading post of the fur company; Nanook fishes and hunts walrus; the family builds an igloo and goes to sleep; they then wake up and go off in their dogsleds, a scene culminating in the famous seal-hunting scene so beloved by film theorist André Bazin.<sup>7</sup> The film ends with the arrival of a storm and the family taking shelter in an abandoned igloo.

I call the mode of representation of the "ethnographic" which emerged from this impulse *taxidermy*. *Taxidermy seeks to make that which is dead look as if it were still living*. In his study of the impact of the taxidermic impulse on the writing of history in the nineteenth century, Stephen Bann quotes British taxidermist Charles Waterton who complained that the unadorned dead beast was "a mere dried specimen, shrunk too much in this part, or too bloated in that; a mummy, a distortion, an hideous spectacle." Waterton explained that in order to reconstruct life, one must accept the fact of death, and use art as well as artifice: "It now depends upon the skill and anatomical knowledge of the operator [perhaps I ought to call him artist at this stage of the process], to do such complete justice to the skin before him, that, when a visitor shall gaze upon it afterwards, he will exclaim, 'That animal is alive!'"<sup>8</sup> As Bann comments, "The restoration of the life-like is itself postulated as a response to a sense of loss. In other words, the Utopia of life-like reproduction depends upon, and reacts to, the fact of death. It is a strenuous attempt to recover, by means which must exceed those of convention, a state which is (and must be) recognized as lost."<sup>9</sup>

By loss, Bann was referring to the sense of loss or lack of wholeness that



brought about a crisis in the nineteenth century: the realization that instead of one history there were many histories. Donna Haraway, in her marvelous article on Carl Akeley's early-twentieth-century dioramas, taxidermy, photography, and film at the American Museum of Natural History, likewise speaks of taxidermy as a means to protect against loss, in order that the body may be transcended: "Taxidermy fulfills the fatal desire to represent, to be whole; it is a politics of reproduction."<sup>10</sup> Thus in order to make a visual representation of indigenous peoples, one must believe that they are dying, as well as use artifice to make a picture which appears more true, more pure. Since indigenous peoples were assumed to be already dying if not dead, the ethnographic "taxidermist" turned to artifice, seeking an image more true to the posited original. When Flaherty stated, "One often has to distort a thing to catch its true spirit," he was not just referring to his own artistry but to the preconditions for the effective, "true" representation of so-called vanishing culture.<sup>11</sup>

It is a paradox of this cinema of romantic preservationism that the re-action—"That person is alive!"—is most easily elicited if the subjects filmed are represented as existing in a former epoch. As Johannes Fabian has pointed out, the specificity of anthropology is that the subjects of its inquiry are represented as existing in an earlier age. Fabian explains the significance of the use in modern anthropology of the "ethnographic present," the practice of writing in the present tense about the people whom the anthropologist studied. The dominant pronoun/verb form is "They are [do, have, etc.]"<sup>12</sup> This form of rhetoric presupposes that the people studied are timeless, and establishes the anthropologist as hidden observer, akin to the natural historian in that he or she stands at the peephole into the distant past.<sup>13</sup> The ethnographic present obfuscates the dialogue and the encounters that took place between the anthropologist and the people studied. In other words, as Fabian writes, "pronouns and verb forms in the third person mark an Other outside the dialogue."<sup>13</sup>

The cinema of Flaherty worked in the same way: Nanook and his family were represented in a cinematic "ethnographic present" in which intertitles establish the camera, and thus the filmmaker, as observer. Furthermore, if the indigenous man, Nanook, is constructed as a being without artifice, as referent, the indigenous woman is there to be uncovered, her body—and this is true of ethnographic cinema in general—to be scopically possessed by the camera/filmmaker and the audience as well. As intended, however, this form of ethnographic film, infused with the notion of death and the idea of vanishing races, is a cinema of archetypal moments endlessly repeated.<sup>14</sup> In



26. Still from *Nanook of the North* (1922), dir. Robert Flaherty.  
(Courtesy of the Museum of Modern Art)

Nanook, the archetypal moment is that of a society ignorant of guns or gramophones: a society of man the hunter, man against nature, man the eater of raw flesh. *Nanook of the North* was a cinema of origins in many ways: its appeal was the myth of authentic first man.

What has been called Flaherty's "sight narrative"<sup>15</sup> thus fits perfectly with a racializing representation of the Inuit, which situates indigenous peoples outside modern history. *Nanook*, however, is structured as a film about the daily life of the Inuit, its novelty deriving from the fact that it was neither a scientific expedition film meant to serve as a positivist record, nor a travelogue of jokey tourism. As mentioned above, Siegfried Kracauer described Flaherty as a filmmaker of the "flow of life." Kracauer writes, "Flaherty's 'slight narratives' portray or resuscitate modes of existence that obtain among primitive peoples. . . . Most Flaherty films are expressive of his romantic desire to summon, and preserve for posterity, the purity and



'majesty' [Flaherty's word] of a way of life not yet spoiled by the advance of civilization."<sup>16</sup>

Flaherty explained this best when he described film as "a very simple form." For Flaherty, the medium made simple was well suited to the subject matter:

[Films] are very well-suited to portraying the lives of primitive people whose lives are simply lived and who feel strongly, but whose activities are external and dramatic rather than internal and complicated. I don't think you can make a good film of the love affairs of the Eskimo . . . because they never show much feeling in their faces, but you can make a very good film of Eskimos spearing a walrus.<sup>17</sup>

The Ethnographic is without intellect: he or she is best represented as merely existing. It is the camera of the explorer/artist who will capture the reality of their "simply lived" lives. Hence the notion (and myth) that the actors in *Nanook* were "non-actors."

The desire of Euro-American audiences and critics to perceive *Nanook* as authentic Primitive man, as an unmediated *referent*, is evident in the fact that until the 1970s, no one bothered to ask members of the Inuit community in which the film was made for their opinions of the film. Only then was it learned that the name of the actor who played *Nanook* was Allakariallak. The same applies to all the other characters in the film. Although it was typical for explorers to "nickname" the Inuit they encountered, Flaherty's innovation was in giving the Inuit nicknames that sounded Inuit. Hence *Nanook* (the Bear) was a better and more easily marketable name than Allakariallak, because of its seeming genuineness and its dual connotations of cuddly like a teddy bear, and wild like a savage beast.

At the end of the film there is a haunting shot of *Nanook* sleeping, a close-up of his head. He appears to be asleep, but his absolute stillness reminds us of a waxwork or a corpse. Taxidermy is also deeply religious: when Bazin writes that the mummy complex is the impulse behind the evolution of technologies of realism—"To preserve, artificially, his bodily appearance is to snatch it from the flow of time, to stow it away neatly, so to speak, in the hold of life"—one is reminded of the image of the sleeping *Nanook*.<sup>18</sup> In ethnographic cinema, the narrative of the film hinges upon the body of the native—plugged into the narrative of evolution and the myth of vanishing races. It is this body, and not that of an Oedipal father or mother, which must be slain and upon which the narrative rests.<sup>19</sup> That Allakariallak died two years after the film was released, of either starvation or disease, only enhanced the film's status as a work of authenticity.

*The Hunt for the Inuit and the Alaskan Eskimo: Explorers, Museums, Fairs, and Films*

The trail of contact between Arctic peoples and whites was already littered with corpses by the time of *Nanook*. The appetite for the Inuit—specifically for images of their bodies—by both scientists and the public began in 1577 when the explorer Martin Frobisher presented Queen Elizabeth I with a man, woman, and child from Baffinland.<sup>20</sup> The representation of the Inuit began with explorers' accounts: the belief that the word "Eskimo" means "eater of raw meat" reveals what the public found most interesting about them. Because of their diet of raw meat, they were described as animal-like, savage, and cannibalistic. They also would be repeatedly compared to their sled dogs, and this canine metaphor was used in *Nanook*.<sup>21</sup>

Arctic explorers brought back more than just maps, furs and ivory. It was common for explorers to bring back Inuit and Alaskan Eskimo. It was also a "tradition" that these Inuit rarely returned to their homelands: they frequently died from diseases for which they had no immunity. Like the West Africans and Malagasy whom Regnault filmed in exhibitions, the Inuit were extremely popular performers in exhibitions, zoos, and museums. They were treated as specimens and objects of curiosity.

Some of the Inuit left behind written records of their experiences as performers. One such account is that of a man named Abraham, one of eight Labrador Inuit brought over by J. Adrian Jacobsen to perform in the Hagenbeck Zoo in Berlin.<sup>22</sup> Abraham kept a diary in which he described how one member of the group was beaten with a dog whip and how they performed at the zoo in freezing conditions. Like the climax of *Nanook*, the climax of these performers' acts at the zoo was a seal hunt. Within three months, however, all had died from smallpox. Their bones immediately were used for anthropological research.

Explorers like Robert Peary were dependent on the good will and money of industrialists and museum philanthropists to fund their expeditions. To increase their own fame, and to make some profit, explorers brought back Inuit and Alaskan Eskimo to be exhibited. Peary was notorious for his cruelty and arrogance toward the Inuit who worked for him, often treating them no better than dogs.<sup>23</sup> When they died, often from diseases which his ships inadvertently brought, he would exhume their bodies and sell them to museums. Explorers also made most of their fortunes through the furs and ivory they received from the Inuit.<sup>24</sup>

In 1896, Franz Boas, who was then assistant curator of the American Museum of Natural History, pleaded with Peary to bring back an Inuit for





27. Elisha Kent Kane, Joe, and Hanna, Smithsonian Institution life group, 1873. (Smithsonian Institution photo no. 28321, used by permission of the Smithsonian Institution, National Anthropological Archives)

the museum. It is surprising that Boas, who in 1893 had worked on anthropological exhibits at the World's Columbian Exhibition in Chicago where many performers, including Inuit, had died (their bodies were later used in the Field Museum), apparently did not consider the danger of exposing the Inuit to disease as an obstacle.<sup>25</sup> Of the six Inuit from Smith Sound who were brought back by Peary and housed in the American Museum of Natural History, only one did not immediately die of pneumonia, a little boy known as *Mimik Wallace*. Abandoned by Peary, Boas, and the museum scientists who had brought him to the United States, Wallace was adopted and grew up in New York, only to discover as a teenager that when his father had

died the scientists had staged a fake burial, and that indeed his father's bones were at the museum. As Wallace explained in a letter to a friend:

You can't know the sad feelings I have... No one can know unless they have been taken from their home and had their father die and put on exhibition, and be left to starve in a strange land where the men insult you when you ask for your own dear father's body to bury or to be sent home.

These are the civilized men who steal, and murder, and torture, and pray and say "Science."<sup>26</sup>

Not surprisingly, the Inuit were popular subjects for museum models in dioramas. For example, the first museum models at the Smithsonian Institution's United States National Museum (now the Museum of Natural History), made in 1873, represented two Inuit named "Joe" and "Hanna," flanking the figure of the explorer Dr. Elisha Kent Kane. Museum displays of life groups—depicting cultures in nuclear family units performing rituals or subsistence activities—are another characteristic form of the "taxidermic" mode of salvage ethnography.<sup>27</sup>

In the nineteenth century, the image of the Inuit and the Alaskan Eskimo acquired nuances in addition to that of "wild Savage." As Ann Fienup-Riordan explains, the Eskimo were made into the mirror image of the explorers. Like the explorers, the Eskimo were represented as noble, brave, independent, persevering, and incorruptible. But ideas about the relatively lofty status of the Eskimo did not mean that the Eskimo were perceived as able to undergo their own "independent progress" without white intervention.<sup>28</sup> In a sense, the Eskimo were seen as Primitive success stories of an Arctic "survival of the fittest." Fienup-Riordan explains:

The publicity these arctic representatives received marked the progressive transformation of the image of Eskimos from subhuman to superhuman. Displayed along with their sophisticated hunting tools and wearing polar bear skins, these living specimens came to represent the ultimate survivors, intrepid and courageous individualists who through sheer cunning were able to best their rivals in the free marketplace of the arctic world. Happy, peaceful, hardworking, independent, and adaptable—these were the images most often used to clothe Eskimos in the twentieth century. The nuances of Eskimo reality dimmed in comparison to this dramatically staged representation, an image increasingly acceptable because of its incorporation of traits Westerners valued in themselves.<sup>29</sup>



This notion of the Eskimo as an uncorrupt example of all the values of the West—independence, perseverance, and patriarchy—reached its epitome in the cinematic character of Nanook.<sup>30</sup> In both the United States and Europe, the 1920s were characterized by a pervasive fear of racial mixing: the white was constructed as the Nordic—pale, blond, blue-eyed, from the North. The term “Nordic” was used in popular culture to refer to whites of Northern European descent. The fear was that the Nordic was being annihilated by racial mixing. At best, the Inuit or Alaskan Eskimo was the primitive Nordic, or as Asen Balikci termed it, a “primitive Protestant.”<sup>31</sup> I would like to suggest that the character Nanook was thus something of a mirror for the white audience: he too was from the North, and, as Balikci’s comment suggests, like the Nordic, was seen as embodying the Protestant values of patriarchy, industriousness, independence, and courage. But the character Nanook is still the subject of voyeuristic observation, not acknowledged as coequal of the adventurer/anthropologist.

As I have argued in chapter 1, cinema took over from the world’s fair many of the functions of the native village exhibition. Indeed, one of the earliest cinematic depictions of the Inuit is a body of film by Thomas Edison in 1901 of the “Esquimaux Village” at the Pan-American Exposition in Buffalo. Edison produced footage of the Inuit as happy gamblers in dogsleds amid papier-mâché igloo environments with painted backdrops of snowy mountains and fake ice floes.<sup>32</sup> Edison was not alone: numerous films about Arctic exploration that include footage of or relating to the Inuit and Alaskan Eskimo were made before *Nanook*. In almost all these films, the narrative centers on a whaling expedition or an arctic exploration. Footage of Inuit and Alaskan Eskimo hunting polar bears and paddling in kayaks were “picturesque” details which, as in other films of the period, lent an air of authenticity to the representations.<sup>33</sup>

The use of film to enhance lectures on expeditions and Arctic peoples was also common. In this genre as well, the indigenous people served as “picturesque” elements of the landscape, marking the exotic and primitive past through which the modern white explorers were passing. In William Van Valin’s films of Point Barrow, Alaska (1912–18), for example, there is a noteworthy seal-hunting scene, apparently already a staple of films about the Inuit or Alaskan Eskimo.<sup>34</sup> In an empty landscape, a lone Alaskan Eskimo hunts patiently, the intertitles explaining that “Thought of hungry wife and kiddies urges weary hunter on.” Because this title is followed by a pan of the landscape, it allows the viewer for a moment to see with the hunter’s eyes. Like other expedition filmmaker/lecturers, Van Valin uses catchy, kitschy titles like “Dog eat dog” for a scene in which a dog eats raw

meat. In Van Valin’s films the Alaskan Eskimo are portrayed as carefree, playful, dancing, and instinctive: “Old Eskimo smell whale through twelve feet of ice.” The Alaskan Eskimo filmed tend to line up and stare, laughing at the camera. Even in Van Valin’s film, however, death is lurking: the camera pans the bones of Alaskan Eskimo, skeletons scattered everywhere in an empty landscape, with the accompanying intertitle: “Where solitude now reigns supreme, except when the wind whistles through the eye orbits and nasal cavities of these empties.”<sup>35</sup>

*Nanook* shares several aspects with arctic expedition film predecessors such as the films of van Valin. In both, there is an emphasis on hunting and the eating of raw meat by people and dogs. As I have suggested, the seal hunt scene is all but obligatory. To the extent that Western contact is portrayed, it is as benign, even amusing, trade—the Inuit get novelties and the Europeans get fur. In both *Nanook* and the expedition film, moreover, the Inuit and Alaskan Eskimo are portrayed as playful, and are given nicknames, but in both death is always lurking.<sup>36</sup> The close-ups in *Nanook* also borrow from the expedition genre: the laughing Inuit holds up the fish for the camera; other portraits in Flaherty’s film are infused with the dreamlike pictorialist style characteristic of Edward Sheriff Curtis.<sup>37</sup>

Despite these many similarities, Flaherty’s film stands out. As I argue in the next section, the innovation lies not only in Flaherty’s distinctive film style, but also in the creation of the myth that Flaherty had produced for the first time a form of cinema paralleling participant observation.

#### *The Historical Setting of Nanook of the North*

The image of the Inuit was not always one of a simple, incessantly smiling people struggling heroically against the arctic cold. In the 1880s, Quebec Inuit murdered shipwrecked crews of white men, and were consequently not allowed access to the posts of the Hudson’s Bay Company. Ironically, descendants of these men were among the Inuit who welcomed the firm that sponsored *Nanook*, the French company Revillon Frères (in 1910 Revillon Frères established several posts and became a fierce competitor of the Hudson’s Bay Company), and were also among those Flaherty filmed in 1914.<sup>38</sup>

Because fur prices were at their height in the 1920s, the Inuit in Quebec were introduced to a cash economy, and the Inuit portrayed in *Nanook* thus were using guns, knew about gramophones, wore Western clothing, and, although many had died from Western diseases, certainly were not vanishing. Financial stability proved precarious, however: the fact that the



actor Allakariallak, who played Nanook, died of starvation or disease two years after *Nanook* was made is not surprising. According to Bernard Saladin d'Anglure, the Canadian government during the early part of the twentieth century virtually ignored the Inuit and gave no social aid. D'Anglure writes that Quebec Inuit were dependent on the "good will of the few Euro-Canadian residents (traders, missionaries, and meteorological station employees) or to passing ships whose crews too often exchanged gifts for women's sexual favors."<sup>39</sup>

If Flaherty had not banished history from *Nanook of the North*, he would have had to acknowledge his own role as an agent of change in the lives of the Inuit. Ironically, Flaherty made several expeditions in the Hudson Bay region of northern Canada on behalf of Canadian industrialists. He thus followed in the footsteps of his father, a mining engineer who prospected Canadian areas for minerals for U.S. Steel and other corporations.<sup>40</sup> In 1910, Robert Flaherty went to work for the Canadian Railroad builder and financier Sir William Mackenzie as a prospector and mapmaker looking for mineral deposits, particularly iron ore. Mackenzie was also hoping to establish shipping from Hudson Bay to countries outside of Canada.

As Jo-Anne Birnie Danzker explains, during the period from 1900 to 1910, the territorial boundaries of the possessions of the United States and Canada were still in dispute, and photography became an important tool for establishing claims of possession.<sup>41</sup> In 1913 Mackenzie asked Flaherty to bring a film camera on his explorations. Flaherty brought along a Bell and Howell camera as well as equipment for developing and printing. These early films of 1914 and 1916 are said to have been destroyed in a fire.<sup>42</sup> It is clear that both Robert Flaherty and his wife Frances began to think that their careers might be in cinema, and they hoped to profit from their films, going to various organizations like the Explorer's Club, museums, and movie companies asking for financial backing. (Apparently both Boas and Curtis were consulted for financial advice and were shown the films.) The career of the explorer/artist was already in the mind of Frances Flaherty in 1914 when she wrote that she hoped the films "will attract a great deal of attention, be widely shown and gain recognition for R. [Robert] as an explorer, as an artist and interpreter of the Eskimo people, and consequently bring him greater opportunity."<sup>43</sup>

According to Danzker, the representation of the Eskimo as a type, and the idea of following the daily life of an Eskimo man and his family, was present even in these early films. Peter Pitseolak, an Inuit photographer from Seekooselak (Cape Dorset, Baffin Island), remembers Flaherty coming one winter to film, giving out guns as well as other items. Pitseolak refers to

Flaherty as "the moving picture boss" as well as Koodjuk (swan) because of his white skin; he explains that his close relative Noogooshowetok made many drawings for Flaherty, work which Noogooshowetok found tiring.<sup>44</sup> It was these drawings which Flaherty drew on for inspiration for one part of his 1914 film (a segment about the making of a film from an Inuit drawing). Characteristic of these drawings was an emphasis on the snowy white vastness of the landscape suggested by the white of the page, in which Inuit individuals and dogsleds are rendered small in the overall scheme. Thanks to the vision of the Arctic environment of the artist Noogooshowetok, and of later Inuit camera operators who worked for Flaherty, *Nanook* has some of the most beautiful landscape scenes ever filmed.<sup>45</sup>

#### *The Film Nanook of the North*

The images and the scenes in *Nanook* which have been most written about are the hunting scenes, especially the walrus and the seal-hunting scene. Ethnographic cinema is above all a cinema of the body: the focus is on the anatomy and gestures of the indigenous person, and on the body of the land they inhabit. *Nanook of the North* thus begins by introducing the two main landscapes of the film: the land of Inuit Quebec, and the face of Nanook. The shot which will be the defining image of the film—Nanook at the top of the hill, harpoon in hand—showcases both elements. When he faces the camera, the actor Allakariallak smiles, interpreted by critics to mean that he was childlike, not complex, feeding Flaherty's conception of "primitive Eskimos" as simple people. Until the 1930s, it was unseemly in the United States and Europe to face the camera smiling: smiling was considered to make the subject look foolish and childlike.<sup>46</sup> Recent research has shown that the Inuit found Flaherty and the filmmaking a source of great amusement<sup>47</sup> and this amusement may well account for Nanook's smile. The enigma of Nanook's smile allows the audience to project its own cultural presuppositions: from the point of view of an outsider he is childlike, from the Inuit point of view he may be seen as laughing at the camera.

Nanook's subsequent arrival at the edge of a lake or sea by kayak, after which one-by-one various members of his family appear from within the seemingly diminutive vessel, perhaps appeals to an unconscious association of the Inuit with fairs and circuses. As Barsam has noted, this comic device is similar to the one with which one introduces clowns.<sup>48</sup> The last "member" of Nanook's family to emerge from the kayak is the puppy Comock. Later in the film, puppies will be compared to Inuit babies, and sled dogs to Inuit.





28. Still from *Nanook of the North* (1922), dir. Robert Flaherty.  
(Courtesy of the Museum of Modern Art)

Like a museum display in which sculpted models of family groups perform "traditional activities," Nanook's family adopts a variety of poses for the camera. These scenes of the picturesque always represent a particular view of family or community, usually with the father as hunter and the mother as nurturer, paralleling Western views of the nuclear family.

In the following trading post sequence, Nanook is shown to be ignorant of Western technology. Against a wall of the white fur pelts, Nyla sits in the background rocking her body, with her baby, and Nanook, crouched in the left foreground with the trader at the right in a higher position, gazes at the gramophone in the center. Nanook touches the gramophone; intertitles explain that he does not understand where or how the sound is made. He then is shown biting the record three times while laughing at the camera. This conceit of the indigenous person who does not understand Western technology allows for voyeuristic pleasure and reassures the viewer of the contrast between the Primitive and the Modern: it ingrains the notion that the people are not really acting. Their naïveté—they do not understand this

foreign technology—is another sign of authenticity. This conceit, of course, obscures the Inuit's own appropriation of the new technology, their participation in the production of the film.

In the next scene, intertitles first explain that Nanook's children "are banqueted by the trader—sea biscuit and lard?" The viewer sees two little children laughing contentedly, licking their lips. But Allegoo, the son, "indulged to excess," is given castor oil by the trader, a medicament which immediately cures him. Licking his lips as well, Allegoo smiles at the camera, while Nanook looks on delightedly. The trader is depicted as superior in era, while Nanook looks on delightedly. The trader is depicted as superior in both technology and medicine, in a message covered over by all the furs. It is also a scene of eroticism. Nyla sits on the fur-covered ground, her baby and the puppies playing affectionately, licking and touching. It is a space of pleasure, with music from a gramophone and gorging on biscuits. The eroticism continues in other ways throughout the film, especially in its emphasis on oral contact: Nyla licks her baby clean, Nanook licks his knife, the family lick their lips while eating raw meat. The bottle from which the trader pours cod liver oil to Allegoo, however, also looks like a liquor bottle; the encroachment of whites brought not only influenza, smallpox, and tuberculosis, but alcoholism as well. Eroticism, a lust for the Native body, is here conjoined with an image foreshadowing impending death and destruction: the myth of the vanishing race could be used to make genocide erotic.<sup>49</sup>

And the bodies must be uncovered: in a later scene where the camera serves as a fourth wall, the viewer sees the family getting dressed and undressed. The women are shown half-naked, their breasts displayed for the viewer. (It is difficult to imagine a film by Flaherty about his own life in which his wife Frances would be shown undressing for the camera before she goes to bed.) Because they are not actually in a closed igloo, but in an open igloo set, their bodies are shivering as they dress. Although the intertitles erroneously claims that the igloo has to be below freezing, the family is literally left out in the cold, and their cold is palpable.

The trading sequence, which includes the scenes described above, serves as a nexus for discourses of colonialism, race, and gender. It must be remembered that *Nanook* was sponsored by the French fur company Revillon Frères. The trading scene serves as propaganda for Revillon, who, as I have explained, was a staunch competitor with the Hudson's Bay Company at the time. The complexity of the Inuit/white trader relationship is glossed over by Flaherty's representation of the trading post as a joyful place.

The next sequence begins with Nanook "already on the thin edge of starvation," a surprising turn of events considering that the family has been



"banqueted." Despite the grave intertitle, what follows are lovely outdoor fishing, hunting, and igloo-building scenes. The dramatic tension in many of the scenes is conveyed by intertitles which do not reveal too much too soon, and by the use of long takes and great depth of field. In the walrus scene, Nanook rushes out with the other men in kayaks, they stalk the walrus, and pull it in. Making this particular scene, Flaherty said, was a difficult struggle requiring subterfuge: the men were afraid that they would be pulled out to sea and kept on calling Flaherty to shoot the walrus with his rifle, but Flaherty pretended not to hear them.<sup>50</sup> Flaherty shows a close-up shot of the head of the dead walrus, a common shot in travelogues, and the film explains that the men "cannot restrain the pangs of hunger" as they immediately begin to eat ravenously. The scene in which Nanook and his family build an igloo is built on suspense: the viewer only realizes that Nanook is making a window for the igloo, for example, after he is almost finished installing it. In a subsequent scene, Nanook teaches his little son how to shoot a bow and arrow, while Nyla performs duties which show she is a devoted mother and cook. The Western ideal of the independent father struggling to make a living for his family is implied to be universal. As Richard Barsam points out, "In *Nanook*, [Flaherty] showed primitive man's realization that his destiny lay in his own hands, that it was his obligation to improve his lot on earth by working, and that the members of his family were probably his first and most important helpers."<sup>51</sup>

The climax of the film is the seal hunt, pitting Nanook against a wild animal. The seal hunt was always a big attraction at Inuit performances, and, as described above, was all but obligatory in travelogues which included scenes of Inuit life. This scene, so beloved by Bazin for its use of real time and the stark drama of the solitary struggling Nanook against a bleak landscape, was actually staged: the line at which Nanook pulls strenuously, apparently in a fierce struggle with a seal that has been harpooned beneath the surface of the ice, in fact did not lead to a seal at all but to a group of men, off-camera, who would periodically tug at the line, creating the impression of a great physical struggle.

After this scene, there is constant intercutting between shots of dogs and shots of the family. The beginning of these sequences starts with an intertitle, shown immediately after the seal is pulled out of the water:

From the smell of flesh  
and blood comes the  
blood lust of the wolf  
—his forebear.

This last line is ambiguous, implying that the wolf is the forebear of Nanook. The intertitle is followed, however, by a close-up of a snarling dog. The subsequent intercuts of the dogs barking and the family eating raw seal, Nanook licking his knife and the dogs fighting, reinforce the parallel, visually associating Nanook and his family more closely with dogs than to the trader with his Western technology and medicine. Van Valin depicted the idea more bluntly with the intertitle "Dog eat dog"; Flaherty's use of intercutting shots of dogs is metaphorical and more ambiguous.

At the end of the film, there are extremely beautiful, long takes of the snowy landscape. Indeed, the land takes over as a protagonist, the sky becoming as heavy as the snow. The filmed landscape against which the figures of the actors appear small and remote takes on the spare, suggestive aesthetic of the Inuit drawings that Flaherty collected. Since a number of Inuit served as camera operators, one has to attribute much of the beauty of the way the landscape is filmed—great expanses of sky and ground—to an Inuit sensibility.<sup>52</sup> These haunting images of the landscape, moreover, are not present in films about the Arctic made before *Nanook*.

Just as the shots of the dogs show the dogs becoming increasingly sleepy, gradually blanketed by snow, so too the camera shots of the landscape appear to bob in a drowsy manner near the end of the film. The final image is of Nanook sleeping. Italian critic Ricciotto Canudo wrote that the tragedy at the end of the film is that Nanook does not choose to leave: "[Nanook] is Man, in all his truth. His tragedy, in its absolute simplicity, is that of Man, under any climate, despite all the possible complications of that many-shaped, changing outer dress known as civilization. . . . But fate made him master here, in this huge and solitary whiteness, in which his children, like him are destined to live and die."<sup>53</sup>

History is abolished when archetypal moments are repeated. In the end, *Nanook* is a film about hunting and killing, about the desire for death and the desire to defy death. The head of Nanook at the end of the film is shot in a similar fashion to the head of the walrus that we see at the end of the hunt: the walrus is hunted by Nanook, but Nanook is hunted by the explorer Flaherty. The film begins with a close-up of Nanook's face; throughout the film the camera surveys Nanook's face and it becomes a landscape; at the end of the film it is this landscape which is also penetrated. The sleeping body of Nanook, like a corpse, represents the triumph of salvage ethnography: he is captured forever on film, both alive and dead, his death and life to be replayed every time the film is screened.

To show how Allakariallak really dressed, to show his poverty or his so-



phistication with a gun or with a motion picture camera, would have been too brutal, too heavy. It would not have brought about the necessary Samuel Waterton response that taxidermy must evoke—"That man is Alive!" The irony is that in order to look most alive, the "native" must be perceived as always already dead.

#### Nanook of the North and Participant Observation

Those who have praised Flaherty see him as a great artist and observer, or as Calder-Marshall called him, "an innocent eye," a man who filmed out of love not greed. As Richard Corliss said, Flaherty "simply saw the truth and brought it home."<sup>54</sup> Many have complained, however, that *Nanook of the North* did not present a true depiction of Inuit life. Only seven years after *Nanook* was released, the explorer Vilhjalmur Stefansson claimed that *Nanook* was as authentic as Santa Claus.<sup>55</sup> But there were many rebuttals to the critics' denunciations of *Nanook* as staged. Flaherty's statement, "One often has to distort a thing to catch its true spirit," was seen to prove that Flaherty was an artist who portrayed "felt experience," not a mere mechanical recorder.<sup>56</sup>

Forty years after *Nanook*, ethnographic filmmakers Luc de Heusch and Jean Rouch as well as Asen Balikci praised *Nanook* as the first example of participatory cinema. Unlike early ethnographic filmmakers such as Baldwin Spencer and Rudolf Pöch, or later filmmakers such as Boas and Mead, de Heusch and Rouch did not put much stock in the value of using ethnographic film for mere empirical documentation. De Heusch in particular pointed out that films of everyday life in real time are usually quite boring and, at most, of interest only to the anthropologist. The irony—and this irony is at the heart of taxidermy—is that "reality" filmed does not appear real. The filmmaker must use artifice to convey truth. One way he or she can do this is by inviting the indigenous people who are the subjects of the film to act out their lives.<sup>57</sup> De Heusch explained that the Inuit actors in Flaherty's film willingly play-acted for the camera, a technique which he characterized as ethnographically sound, using French anthropologist Marcel Griaule's use of role-play as an example. De Heusch wrote,

The authenticity of this sort of "documentary" ultimately depends entirely on the honesty of the director, who, through his work, asserts that "This is what I saw." In fact he has not seen exactly this or that aspect of what he shows, he has not always seen these things in the way he shows them, since that way is a language which he invents in coop-

eration with actors whose rôles are authentic. The documentary is a work of art imbued with rationality and truth.<sup>58</sup>

De Heusch states later,

Flaherty, more than anyone, had the gift of entering into conversation, *on our behalf*, with the Stranger. Through "Nanook" we "grasp" to the fullest extent, that is emotionally and rationally, the essential condition of Eskimo man left to himself: he is no longer a phantasmal shadow moving across the snow, an anonymous creature whose body and real presence can only be imperfectly imagined from the reading of learned treatises.<sup>59</sup>

In a sense, then, what Flaherty was doing was opposing mere inscription (the objective of early ethnographic footage) to what I term taxidermy, and which Bazin praised as ontological realism. Flaherty's use of long takes, reframing, and depth-of-field cinematography using deep-focus lenses thus constituted a new style, one which Bazin describes as more moving, more realistic than what had gone before:

The camera cannot see everything at once but it makes sure not to lose any part of what it chooses to see. What matters to Flaherty, confronted with *Nanook* hunting the seal, is the relation between *Nanook* and the animal, the actual length of the waiting period. Montage could suggest the time involved. Flaherty however confines himself to showing the actual waiting period; the length of the hunt is the very substance of the image, its true object.<sup>60</sup>

I do not contest the great influence of Flaherty's approach on subsequent documentary and realist forms of filmmaking, but would merely emphasize that Flaherty's reputation as "ontological realist" stems as much from the status of the Ethnographic Other as inherently "authentic," and from Flaherty's self-fashioned image as explorer/artist, as it does from his style.

In the same year that *Nanook* was released, the anthropologist Bronislaw Malinowski wrote his pioneering ethnography *Argonauts of the Western Pacific* (1922) about the inhabitants of the Trobriand Islands, off the coast of what is now Papua New Guinea. If *Nanook* is the archetypal documentary/ethnographic/art film, *Argonauts* is without a doubt the archetypal written ethnography. The many common aspects of Malinowski's new conception of the anthropologist as fieldworker and Flaherty's notion of the filmmaker as "explorer/artist" show that the film and the book were made and received in a similar climate of ideas about indigenous peoples and truthful

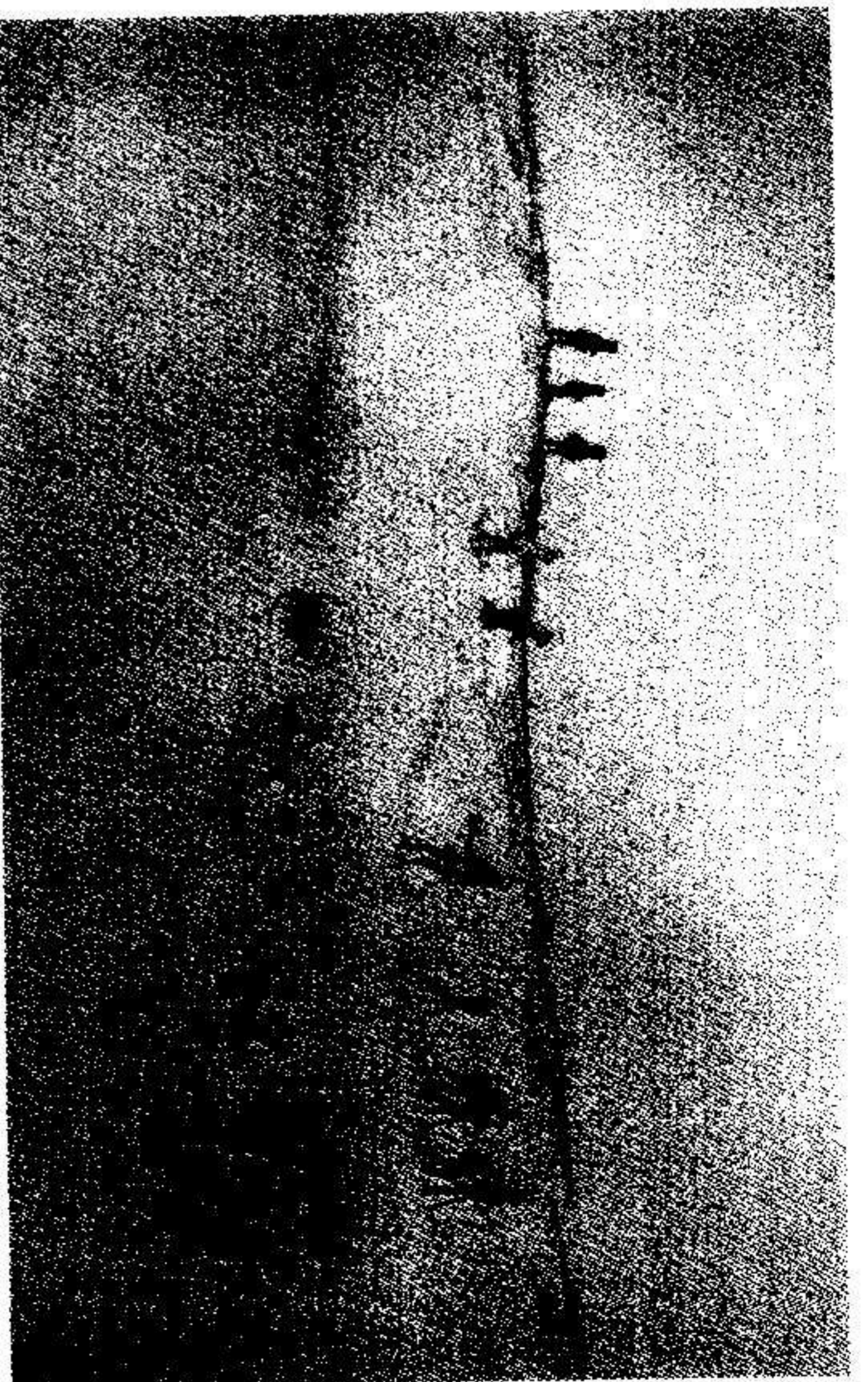


representation. Malinowski wrote, "The final goal, of which an Ethnographer should never lose sight . . . is, briefly, to grasp the natives' point of view, his relation to life, to realize his vision of his world."<sup>61</sup> The product of this ideal of the anthropologist entering the "field" as a solitary observer was to be a written ethnography, a cultural description of "a people," rather than a historical account of an encounter, a description meant to convince the reader that the anthropologist "had been there" as both all-knowing insider and as scrupulously objective observer.

Such "participant observation," notes Fabian, "was not canonized to promote participation but to improve observation." Like the time machine of cinema, anthropology as participant observation involved an oscillation between the positions of distance and closeness, subject and object. Anthropology's visualism, its "ideological bias toward vision," meant that knowledge was "based upon, and validated by, observation."<sup>62</sup>

Part of the appeal of participant observation is that it purportedly enables the Ethnographer to show not how the anthropologist sees the native, but how the native sees himself. Flaherty encouraged the belief that he was doing just that. He explained, "I wanted to show the Innuits [sic]. And I wanted to show them, not from the civilized point of view, but as they saw themselves, as 'we the people.'"<sup>63</sup> *Nanook* is perhaps the first example in film of a mode of representation which incorporates the participant observation ideal. Flaherty claimed to be a long-time explorer in the area, and his admirers even said that he had been adopted by Nanook and his family (this was never proved). Because Flaherty showed rushes to his Inuit crew, and because Inuit contributed to all aspects of filmmaking (from acting, to the repair of his cameras, to the printing and developing of the film, to the suggestion of scenes to film), critics from the art world as well as anthropology have claimed that *Nanook* represents true collaboration, the native acting out his or her own self-conception.

As James Clifford and Clifford Geertz have pointed out, the myth of "participant observation" was fashioned out of rhetorical devices creating the impression of "Being There." Although Flaherty wanted to create the impression that his film grew out of his intimate knowledge of Inuit culture, however, it would be hasty to take his account at face value (his writings boast of an intimacy which Inuit eyewitnesses do not seem to recall). Thus although Inuit undoubtedly assisted in the filmmaking, there are no existing Inuit accounts of the process, suggesting the film was not as "collaborative" as Flaherty would have one believe. Similarly, because we do not know whether Flaherty asked people to play themselves, and because we do not have an indigenous point of view against which to compare the film, it



29. Original drawing on paper, most likely by Wetalitok, from the Belcher Islands, 1916, of Flaherty and Inuit camera crew. (Courtesy of the Museum of Modern Art)

is more fruitful to view the claims of collaboration as evidence of the "romantic" ideal of the ethnographer/artist than as an essential aspect of the film.<sup>64</sup>

In *Nanook of the North*, as in the work of Dixon and Curtis, participant observation is achieved by the erasure of almost all signs of white contact. Thus the spectator views the landscape with Nanook; but he also views Nanook. The spectator becomes both participant (seeing with the eyes of Nanook) and observer (an omnipotent eye viewing Nanook). The viewers of *Nanook* thus become participant observers themselves: the audience participates in the hunt for the seal and the walrus along with Nanook. A white viewer may identify with the Nordic qualities of Nanook, but still participate in the "hunt" for the body of Nanook, as vanishing race, as First Man. The issue then is not "whether Flaherty was a legitimate anthropologist," but how the public was led to believe that they were *seeing anthropology* in a manner that allowed them to play with the boundary between viewer and viewed as vicarious participant observers, while reaffirming the boundaries between representation and reality. Intrinsic to this coding of *Nanook* as a work of Truth, a work of great art, was the construction of the image of Flaherty as Explorer/Artist, an image which Flaherty himself helped to construct through his various writings.



*Flaherty as Explorer: Heart of Whiteness*

Ethnographic filmmaker Asen Balikci has summed up the image of the explorer/ethnographic filmmaker from the time of *Nanook*:

The ethnographer from Paris, London or New York, had usually gone to an extremely remote and exotic place where he studied the people and wrote books about them. The literature of exploration in exotic regions had further contributed to the popular perception of the ethnographer as hero. Building upon this reputation, the ethnocinematographer had the added advantage of showing to a large audience a film about strange and fascinating peoples—this was a demonstration that he was actually there, that the strange people liked him and that he liked them, otherwise how could the film have been made? His was a lonely and daring adventure, an exploration into the unknown, and so on.<sup>65</sup>

Because of the idea that the ethnographic filmmaker must have been friends with the natives—the film being the proof of the relationship—Flaherty's image as authentic communicator of the life of the natives remained intact even as critics complained of inaccuracies in the film.

Like Malinowski, who constructed "the Ethnographer" through rhetorical devices such as the ethnographic present, Flaherty contributed to the notion that his film was authentic through his own writings. In his autobiographical *My Eskimo Friends*: "*Nanook of the North*" (1924), the treasures Flaherty describes include his mineral discoveries and maps, as well as the film and photographs he took.<sup>66</sup> *My Eskimo Friends* is an account of Flaherty's career as explorer and filmmaker in the Arctic. Like all great explorers, he attributes the "discovery" of an island archipelago to himself. The Inuit he meets are depicted as grateful natives, although foul-smelling, and often "primitive looking"; he, on the other hand, a kind of explorer Santa Claus, gives them tobacco, needles, and candy at Christmas. Tellingly, he claims the Inuit call him Angarooka, "the white master,"<sup>67</sup> and at times he uses animal metaphors to describe them.<sup>68</sup>

The story constitutive of the relationship between Nanook (never referred to by his real name) and Flaherty is that of Nanook's devotion to the "aggie" (film). In *My Eskimo Friends*, Flaherty explains that he had asked Nanook if he understood that in filming the walrus hunt, the film was more important than the hunt. Nanook replied, "Yes, yes, the aggie will come first. . . . Not a man will stir, not a harpoon will be thrown until you give the sign. It is my word. We shook hands and agreed to start the next day."<sup>69</sup> It is this anecdote that is so treasured by the critics, for it meant the film was a

real ethnographic film, without voyeurism, the product of complete collaboration. The image of the devoted native is underlined by another anecdote in which Flaherty explains that the Inuit who worked for him gave up food so that he could eat. This prepares us for Flaherty's final words of reminiscence on Nanook's death. According to Flaherty, on his departure from Inukjuak, Nanook was sad to see him go and begged him to stay: "The kablunak's [white man's] movie igloo, into which thousands came, was utterly beyond his comprehension. They were many, I used to say, like the little stones along the shore. 'And will all these kablunaks see our 'big aggie'?' he would ask. There was never need to answer, for incredulity was written large upon his face."<sup>70</sup>

*My Eskimo Friends* was a celebration of Flaherty as great humanist Explorer, beloved by the natives, privy to the essence of native life. The book is dedicated to Flaherty's father, also an explorer. Flaherty's later novel *The Captain's Chair* (1938) provides further evidence of what being an explorer meant to him. Told in the first person, it is the story of a young man who, like Flaherty, goes to look for minerals in the Hudson Bay area of Canada, but who throughout his years of travels in Northern Canada is searching above all for the great explorer and trader Captain Grant, the first man to trade with the Inuit. The narrator explains that it is a story of a captain and a ship penetrating into the heart of the Hudson's Bay Company's domain on Hudson Bay. It is also a search for a "father" hero by a young explorer.<sup>71</sup> During his expeditions the narrator learns of the "terrible disaster that had befallen Grant. He had left England on top of the world. The Company had given him all the means in their power to let him go ahead and open up the north. . . rich not only in furs but perhaps in gold, silver, copper, and who knew what other ores? They had given him also this wonderful new ship."<sup>72</sup>

The book is thus an Arctic *Heart of Darkness*—or perhaps *Heart of Whiteness* is the better term. For where Joseph Conrad revealed the dark and evil side of colonialism, Flaherty writes only about its good side. Like Marlow in *Heart of Darkness* who hears stories of Kurtz's exploits, the narrator in Flaherty's novel hears stories of Grant's hardships, his noble sacrifices, how he had to lash himself to the ship's crew's nest to fight storms. Like Kurtz in *Heart of Darkness*, Grant has confronted "the horror." The narrator muses, "I thought of the hardship, the horror, the strain of it."<sup>73</sup> The horror here, however, is not the heart of darkness within, but the horror of Nature's tide rips, blinding squalls, and burning cold.

Much has been written about how the anthropologist Malinowski identified with Kurtz, the mad company officer in *Heart of Darkness*, who the narrator Marlow sets out to find. In one section of his diary, Malinowski



explicitly invokes Kurtz when he describes his anger at the people he is studying—the Trobrianders—for not posing long enough for adequate time exposures for his photographs, even after his bribe of tobacco: "On the whole my feelings toward the natives are decidedly tending to 'Exterminate the brutes.'"<sup>74</sup> When Malinowski's diary was published, it unsettled cherished conceptions of the empathetic, value-neutral anthropologist.<sup>75</sup> In *The Captain's Chair*, by contrast, Grant remains a hero explorer who "penetrates" and opens up the North for the good of the company. Both the Inuit, faithful guides, and Indians of the region, crafty interlopers, are in awe of the great Explorer: "To the Indians . . . Captain Grant was a fabulous figure—chief of the biggest canoe that surely was ever in the world. Among the Eskimos in the north, too, he was a legend, he with his monster omiak [boat] with its long black tail and a voice that re-echoed among the hills."<sup>76</sup>

Like Kurtz, Grant's nerves are frayed after his harrowing experience aboard his ship (named the "Eskimo"), but he is no Kurtz, for the novel ends when the narrator finally meets Grant in person and discovers that he "looked more like a scholar than a seaman."<sup>77</sup> As Frances Flaherty commented, those who decry Flaherty's films as being overly romantic do not realize how much Flaherty was interested in the emergence of the machine.<sup>78</sup> In *The Captain's Chair*, the young explorer is not really looking for adventure and material treasure but for a mirror of his own masculine self in Grant, the Great White Explorer, his father surrogate. In similar fashion, ethnographic filmmakers like Rouch and de Heusch would find the mirror of their own selves in the myth of the father figure Flaherty. In the history of documentary and ethnographic film, Flaherty is kept reverently alive, the mode of taxidermy here serving the filmmaker, through the aura preserved around his name.

#### *Nanook Revisited*

In Claude Massot's documentary film *Nanook Revisited* (1988), a few of the Inuit residents of Inukjuak and of the Belcher Islands—including descendants of one of the Inuit sons fathered and left behind by Flaherty—are interviewed about their memories of Flaherty and the making of *Nanook*.<sup>79</sup> The interviews reveal a remarkable tension between the Western reception of the film as a great work of art, and the desire of the local Inuit to see records of their ancestors and their land, and their recognition of the fictional quality of many of the scenes, a number of which they find ludicrous. At a screening of *Nanook*, members of the Inukjuak community are shown

convulsed with laughter over the famous seal-hunting scene so beloved by Bazin and usually received with solemnity by Western audiences.

The inaccuracies in the film are pointed out by Moses Nowkawkalk, the manager of the local television station, and Charles Nayoumealuk, whose father was a friend of Allakariallak's. Flaherty, explained Nowkawkalk, "documented" scenes, including costuming the Inuit actors in polar bear skins, using an igloo set, and falsifying to a ridiculous extent (in the locals' eyes) the seal hunt, "so that the image would fit the Southern [i.e., non-Inuit or white] imagination." The scene with the gramophone was staged. As Nowkawkalk succinctly phrases his reaction as he watches the gramophone scene, "This scene here is sort of . . . I'm not so crazy about this scene."

Explaining that Nanook's real name was Allakariallak, Nayoumealuk comments, "Nanook seemed to suit the whites better." He also points out that the two women in *Nanook*—Nyla (Alice?) Nuvalinga) and Cunayoo (whose real name we do not know)—were not Allakariallak's wives, but were in fact common-law wives of Flaherty. The intended audience, as Nayoumealuk explains, was meant to be white. Nayoumealuk declares, "It was a film for white people, Inuit customs alone were to be shown. It was forbidden to see white men's tools. Flaherty wanted only Inuit objects."

The reception of a film as "authentic" is dependent upon the preconceptions of the audience. The smile of Allakariallak/Nanook is almost an icon of ethnographic cinema, and it is frequently described as unforgettable, yet Nayoumealuk explains that part of the reason for the smile is that Allakariallak simply found what he was told to do in front of the camera funny: "Each time a scene was shot, as soon as the camera was starting to shoot, he would burst out laughing. He couldn't help it. Flaherty would tell him—'Be serious.' He couldn't do it. He laughed each time."

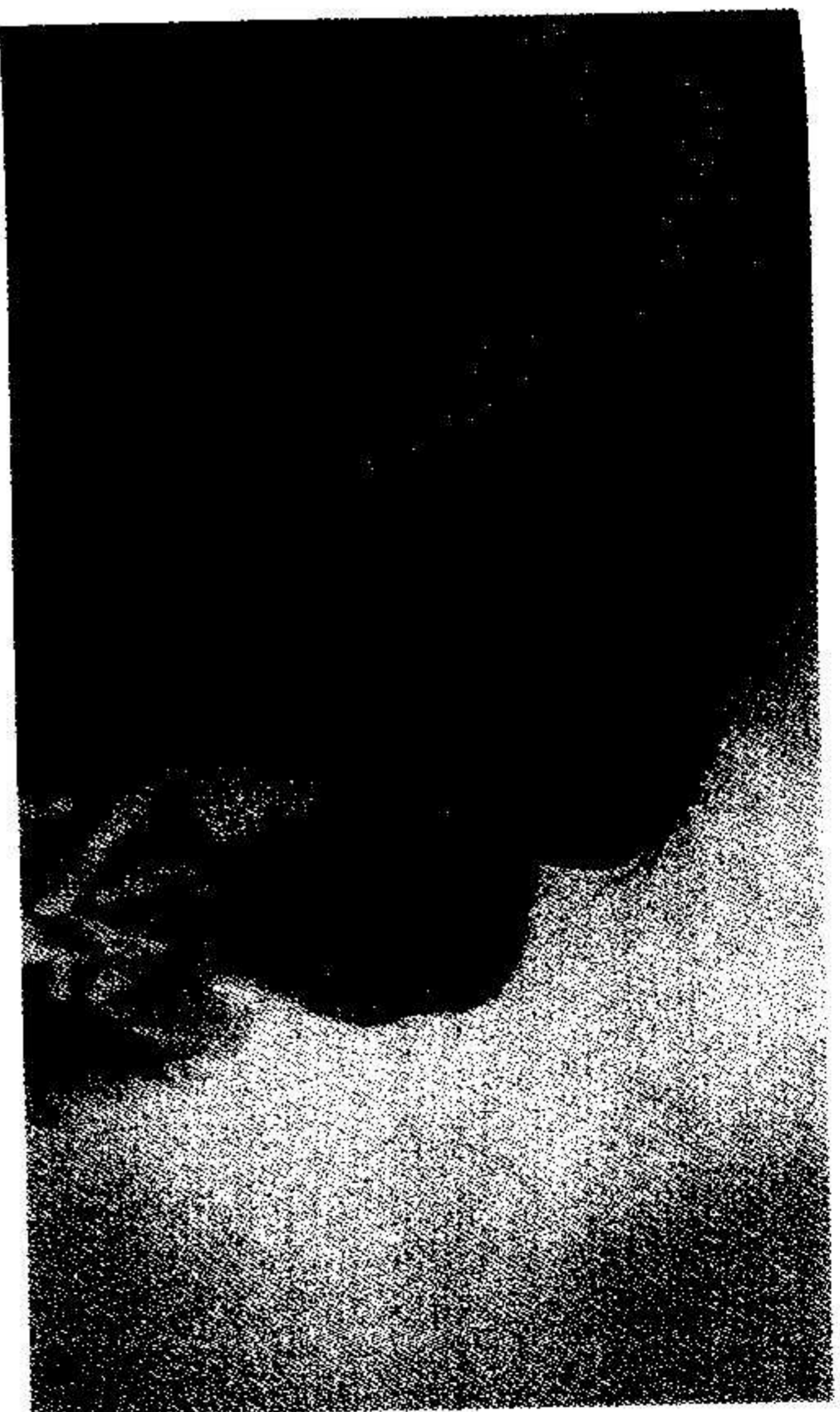
If the Inuit who Flaherty encountered were interested in and soon became adept at filmmaking, so too their descendants have a passion and a command of visual media. Like other indigenous peoples in Australia, the Pacific Islands, and the Americas,<sup>80</sup> contemporary Inuit have embraced video, realizing that the power of white media can only be combatted with Native-produced media. Robert Flaherty's own grandson, Charlie Adams, took over Nowkawkalk's position as manager of the local Inukjuak television station, Taqramiut Nipingat, Incorporated (Voices of the North). Adams is, as he puts it, "a one-man crew," as producer, director, cameraperson, and editor: his programs include coverage of local weekly events as well as shows about hunting with elders.<sup>81</sup> In 1981, a group of Inuit began the Inuit Broadcasting Corporation, the first indigenous broadcasting corporation in North Amer-



ica.<sup>82</sup> Inuit media producers believe that knowing the history of how they were represented by whites and understanding the image-making processes themselves will serve to empower their own communities. As the Inukjuak television station manager, Nowkawkalk, said about *Nanook*, "Despite all the faults that I pointed out about this film this movie is a very important movie and the photographs that Robert [Flaherty] took, because they're . . . these pictures and the still shots are the only pictures of that time in this region. . . 'Cause it's everybody else proclaiming it as a great film." Both Nowkawkalk's and Nayoumealuk's comments reveal how early ethnographic cinema is not always received by the indigenous audience in the same manner as it is received by a Western audience. Neither art, nor empirical document, it is nevertheless of value because it evokes history and memory.

*Starting Fire with Gunpowder* (1991), a film about the Inuit Broadcasting Corporation made by the Inuit filmmaker David Poisey and the British filmmaker William Hansen, opens with a shot of a young Inuit woman who states, "This is not me. This is my picture." Then we see a longer shot of the woman in front of the previous image of herself on a television screen, saying "And here it's not me. It's my picture." The *mise-en-abyme* continues, and we realize that Hansen and Poisey are deconstructing the notion of the Inuit on film as "real." By using a female narrator, Poisey and Hansen also move away from the image of the Inuit typified by the male hunter Nanook. In the film, the narrator Ann Mikijuk Hansen, a producer at IBC, speaks of the lack of written Inuit history, and explains that Inuit video can help ameliorate the problem of documenting history. Furthermore, she clarifies that Inuit television is necessary to counteract the hegemony of white television, to preserve Inuit culture, and to promote Inuktiput language. Several television shows on IBC are adaptations of American shows such as Super Shamou (Superman), but there are also specials on specific Inuit problems such as PCB pollution, substance abuse, the need for midwifery, and Inuit politics.

Video, as Canadian Inuit videomaker Zacharias Kunuk has pointed out, is closer to Inuit culture which remembers history orally.<sup>83</sup> Although on the surface similar to Flaherty's, Kunuk uses reconstruction practices which are not used to further the kind of redemptive narrative, or taxidermic impulse present in the work of Flaherty.<sup>84</sup> In *Nunaqpa/Going Inland* (1991), Kunuk and his actors—all part of the community of Igloodlik—collaborated to make a video reconstruction of Inuit life before World War II. Kunuk shot on location, with the actors wearing traditional seal-skin clothes. However, unlike Allakariallak in *Nanook of the North*, these Inuit actors are shown



30. Still from *Qaggiq/The Gathering Place* (1989), dir. Zacharias Kunuk. (Courtesy of Zacharias Kunuk and Norman Cohn)

hunting with guns and using teakettles. It is clear that *Nunaqpa* is about remembering a recent past: older actors recount the games they used to play, and chide younger actors on their clumsiness in performing tasks. *Nunaqpa* depicts a hunt, which culminates when the younger hunters, wives, and children return to a tent where the older people are waiting. The Inuit actors return to the past, but in order to share it with the future, with the children, and with those who in the future will view the video.

*Nunaqpa* is a collaboration, made from an insider's point of view, without the conceit of any "ethnographic present": there is no subtitle, no voice-over narrative, just the voices of the people themselves, and their laughter at their own rustiness in trying to use old equipment. Outsiders to the culture are given no taxonomic devices such as a map with which to situate the events portrayed in the video: many culturally specific details are only comprehensible to members of the community themselves. Instead of introducing the viewer to the characters, the viewer is plunged immediately into the scene.

In *Qaggiq/The Gathering Place* (1989), Kunuk again uses historical reconstruction techniques. *Qaggiq* is a video about the communal quality of Igloodlik life: the story centers on the building of a *qaggiq* or community gathering place, with a side story about the courting of a young woman by a young man. *Qaggiq* stresses the importance of communal activities such as



joint hunting ventures and communal rituals and dances in Inuit life. As one woman sings at the end of *Qaggiq*, "Let's help one another. White people are coming." As in *Nunaqqa*, the importance of language is emphasized in the use of Inuktiput. Kunuk allows his actors to act out scenes from the recent past of their own culture, demonstrating that he views film and video as a means of expressing history and exploring memory. For Kunuk, as for many contemporary Inuit, a film about the community should be made in the same spirit that one builds a *qaggiq*. As Kunuk declared, "We are saying that we are recording history because it has never been recorded. It's been recorded by southern film makers from Toronto, but we want our input, to show history from our point of view. We know it best because we live it."<sup>85</sup>

The Inuit live history, according to Kunuk. Flaherty removed signs of history, such as the Inuit encounter with whites, in order to sustain the signs of the Ethnographic: the myth of the Inuit as archetypal Primitive man. My purpose has not been to prove whether or not *Nanook* was a truthful document of Quebec Inuit life in the 1920s, or whether Flaherty staged scenes. Instead, my goal has been to excavate the levels of discourse around the notion of authenticity, salvage ethnography, the history of the media cannibalism of the Inuit, the film's historical and intellectual context, and the style and content of the film. I have also attempted to show how a reading of the film is inextricably connected with the cult of the Ethnographic filmmaker in ways that other film genres are not. Flaherty's awe for the figure of the great explorer, and his own similar self-fashioning, reveals the underlying narrative around his persona: Flaherty is the father of a men's club of explorer/artists. Like his fictional character Grant, Flaherty was the first to "penetrate" and open up ethnographic cinema for other *chasseurs d'images*; those many independent U.S. and European filmmakers like Jean Rouch and Richard Leacock who admire him. The awe that he is granted emerges from the myth of his relationship with Nanook: it is an ideal perfect relationship between ethnographer and his faithful, loyal, simple subject. Unlike the Trobrianders who were resistant at times to Malinowski's image-making, the Inuit who worked for Flaherty did so out of love, so the myth goes.

This is why *Nanook of the North* is seen as a point of origin for art film, documentary film, and ethnographic film: it represents the Garden of Eden, the perfect relationship between filmmaker and subject, the "innocent eye," a search for realism that was not just inscription, but which made the dead look alive and the living look dead.

### III TERATOLOGY