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14. THE CREATIVE TREATMENT OF ALTERITY: NANOOK AS THE NORTH

Scott MacKenzie

This chapter considers Robert Flaherty's *Nanook of the North* (US, 1922) – probably the most famous Arctic film ever made – and the many, often fraught, reiterations of the film in the cinematic imaginary of the Arctic. Starting with Flaherty's film – typically understood to be, *pace* John Grierson, the first 'documentary' – the chapter examines the ways in which the stories of 'Nanook' (played by Inuit hunter Allakariallak) and Flaherty have been continuously rearticulated throughout cinema history, in works as diverse as realist ethnographic documentaries like *Nanook Revisited* (Claude Massot, France, 1990), narrative feature film retellings of Flaherty's filming in the Arctic such as *Kabloonak* (Claude Massot, Canada/France, 1994), experimental documentaries like Philip Hoffman and Sami van Ingen's *Sweep* (Canada, 1995), to the recent 3D IMAX film *To the Arctic* (Greg MacGillivray, US, 2012), and Inuit film and video retellings of the past, in part as a riposte to Flaherty, such as the *Netsilik* film series (made in conjunction with filmmakers from the National Film Board of Canada) and the *Nunavut* series (made by the Inuit group Isuma).

A key question that is often asked about *Nanook of the North* is: what is the status of Nanook? Is this a documentary portrayal, a fictional creation or some hybrid of the two? To answer this question, we need to reframe it with another one, implicit in all the critiques of *Nanook of the North* but seldom addressed, namely: what is the status of Flaherty? By this, I mean not what is his status as a filmmaker, but what is his status within the imaginary history of the film's production and the myths about *Nanook of the North* that descend from and

circle around it? If one begins to understand the signification of 'Flaherty', one can also begin to unravel the contested and contestatory debates that underlie the film, the reiterations of its history, and the reappropriation of its images in other films.

A secondary question that arises is why have the images from *Nanook of the North* taken such a central role in the conceptualisation of the cinematic image of the Arctic, as if it were a space in time frozen in history. One reason is, of course, the oft-cited remoteness of the region. When there were few images produced in the Arctic, the ones that were widely circulated became invested with a central and over-determined meaning. A recent example of the ubiquity of *Nanook* is seen in *To the Arctic* which uses images from *Nanook of the North* as unproblematic inserts of Inuit life, mobilising them as a constellation of Arctic representation. Here, the images from Flaherty's film stand as transparent and unchallenged images of historical authenticity. The use of this historical black and white stock, framed inside the large IMAX screen, surrounded by sublime images of snowdrifts and ice flows, work in a similar way to snapshots documenting the past in an profoundly unmediated fashion.

NANOOK OF THE NORTH, OR, WHAT ARE WE TALKING ABOUT, REALLY?

Nanook of the North, filmed in Northern Quebec over the period of a year in 1920, was financed by the fur company Révillon Frères, one of the Hudson's Bay Company's key competitors in Canada. Released by the Pathé Exchange, the film quickly became a worldwide success, and the first instantiation of what came to be known as the documentary (Rotha, Road and Griffith 1952: 81–5; Barnouw 1974: 36–48). Flaherty's film contained numerous staged and re-staged scenes: having his Inuit stars engage in hunting practices no longer used (using spears, for instance, instead of guns), and at times propagating the myth of the Inuit as gentle savages (Ruby 1980). The blurring between the 'documentary' impetus of *Nanook of the North* and Flaherty's own life are also present: *Nanook's* 'wives' were not his own and were actually the women who Flaherty was involved with during his time in the Arctic, including 'Nyla' (actually Maggie Nujarluktuk), who later fathered Flaherty's son Josephie, whom Flaherty never acknowledged and was a not-so-well-kept family secret.

Flaherty re-staged the past with the intent of making a film that would be popular in the US and Europe precisely when codification of classical Hollywood narrative was taking shape. At best, this makes *Nanook* into hybrid cinema; at worst, not what it seemed to be at all: a narrative family melodrama using a harsh environment and exotic othering to heighten the melodramatic tension of the film, built around the questions of sustenance and survival. Not for nothing is the original subtitle of the film 'A Story of Life and Love In the Actual Arctic'. As ethnographic filmmaker Timothy Asch

notes: 'Flaherty used Eskimos as actors playing in their roles and in that sense created a prototype for feature narrative films rather than documentary films' (Asch 1992: 196). If in 1920, Flaherty wished to document the practices of the Inuit before their culture, in his words, 'vanished' (a profound form of benevolent colonialism), any re-staged images come to stand in unproblematically for the past, even though they were a re-creation of the past at the time they were made. Re-creation, it should be noted, is not *a priori* a negative thing, and the process has been used by indigenous Inuit documentary and feature filmmaking, from the *Nunavut* video series to the use of older, out-of-use Inuit dialects in *Atanarjuat: The Fast Runner* (Zacharias Kunuk, Canada/Nunavut, 2001). Yet the kind of re-creation that Flaherty engaged in has left behind a frozen image of the Arctic in the popular imaginary.

While the history of ethnographic film is replete with reconstructions and re-creations, what Jacob Gruber first called 'salvage ethnography' (1970), where an imagined past thought to be disappearing or to have disappeared is re-created by the ethnographer, the intent of these works is often quite different from that of Flaherty (Heider 1975: 100–1). Works such as *The Moontrap* (*Pour la suite du monde*, Pierre Perrault and Michel Brault, Canada, 1962) use film as a catalyst for local inhabitants in Ile-aux-courdes to re-stage a half-forgotten means by which to catch a whale in the St Lawrence River, with far more self-reflexivity than one finds in Flaherty's film, including as it does, within the diegesis, the role played by the filmmakers in this process (MacKenzie 2004: 135–8). These works of 'salvage ethnography' speak to the ethnographic dilemma of capturing an image of a culture in a particular moment of (reconstructed) time, like a fly caught in amber, standing as both an ahistorical and profoundly historical document of the past. *Nanook of the North* is in many ways the progenitor of these works, despite subsequent ethnographic films' somewhat different aims.

Therefore, despite the profound gap between what the film 'tells' Southern viewers about the Arctic and the Inuit, and their lived experiences at the time, *Nanook of the North* has come to stand in for the Inuit way of life in the imaginations of generations of film spectators as an account of the 'real' Arctic. Flaherty himself, as Ruby notes (1980), had no interest in documenting the Arctic as it actually was; he was far more concerned with creating a film that captured for Southern viewers a 'native' way of life that he felt was quickly disappearing. The film, then, in his mind, was a document of the past already fading away through the encroachment of white modernity in the North; a testament for Southerners of a way of life that he even felt no longer existed.

Many documentary filmmakers, from activist and indigenous filmmakers to *cinéma vérité* practitioners, have taken issue with Flaherty's approach. For example, activist documentary filmmaker Jill Godmilow addresses the ethical and colonial aspects of documentary filmmaking that are subsumed under the

guise of objectivity, examining *Nanook of the North* in particular because of its status as the founding film of realist documentary cinema:

When the white man who owns the trading post shows a record player to Nanook, Nanook puts the plastic disk in his mouth and bites, to find out what it is and where the music is coming from. This scene impresses on us that Nanook is ‘uncivilized’, technologically backward and undeveloped. How can we admire (and enjoy) Nanook now – we who are civilized? Flaherty dissolves the contradiction: we can love him as our primitive ancestor or forefather. Flaherty’s film presents Nanook as a perfect early version of ourselves, particularly in his role as the father of a nuclear family. (Godmilow 2002: 5)

Godmilow concludes that *Nanook of the North* is an instantiation of supposedly benign imperialism dressed up as objective reality:

This is the ideological underpinning of *imperialism*, and its younger sister, *colonialism*, and its baby sister, *underdevelopment*. And this, in large part, is the history of the documentary film . . . A dishonest relationship has been created in the cinema through a false transaction between Robert Flaherty and ourselves. (Godmilow 2002: 5)

Flaherty, therefore, sets out to portray the Inuit as both timeless and a throw-back to our pre-modern past, engaging in a benevolent colonialism wrapped up in a nostalgia for a world that may never have existed exactly the way he imagines. And the action he scripts for Nanook to engage with the phonograph is telling: whereas the apocryphal first viewers of the cinema ducked when they thought a train was charging towards them, Nanook bites the phonographic disc, demonstrating a sensory disconnect between his experience and his response, also implying that all the Inuit care about is sustenance, a myth Flaherty propagated throughout his life.

NANOOK REVISITED: ETHNOGRAPHIC REALISM AND THE STATUS OF THE IMAGE

One of the first ‘returns’ to the primal documentary scene of *Nanook of the North* is Claude Massot’s documentary *Nanook Revisited*. The film opens with the image of Massot and his film crew flying into Inukjuak (formerly known as Port Harrison), where Flaherty shot his film sixty-eight years earlier.

Flaherty had shown rushes of his film in 1920 to the inhabitants of Inukjuak; according to him, it was met with much laughter, but did involve indigenous participation. As Ruby notes: ‘The Inuit performed in front of the camera, reviewed and criticized their performance, and were able to offer suggestions

for additional scenes in the film! A way of making films which, when tried today, is thought to be “innovative and original.” Moreover, Flaherty trained some Inuit to be technicians!’ (1980: 450). Despite this participatory element, the rescreening of the film sixty-eight years after it was released, when the film crew arrives in Inukjuak, raises a different series of issues about the status of the film as a documentary, this particular audience’s cultural past and the effects these images had upon them, and their own sense of self-understanding.

Returning to the scene of primordial documentaries to rescreen films is a recent development in ethnographic filmmaking. In a similar vein, *The Prisoners of Buñuel* (*De gevangenen van Buñuel*, Ramón Gieling, The Netherlands, 2000) documents the long-term effects of Buñuel’s *Land Without Bread* (*Tierra Sin Pan*, Spain, 1933) on the Las Hurdes region of Spain. Like the inhabitants of Inukjuak, the people of Las Hurdes have issues with how they have been portrayed on screen. After a screening of the film in the public square, they react with a wide range of emotions. As Gary Crowdus notes: ‘An open-air screening of *Land without Bread* in the town plaza stimulates a . . . spirited debate among local residents, many of whom had never seen the film, revealing how to a great extent the region’s inhabitants remain captive to the its notorious reputation’ (Crowdus 2000: 49). The same holds true for *Nanook Revisited*. The first half of the film documents the French film crew coming to the village and talking to locals about the film and its history. Some do not like the image of the Inuit portrayed (especially that of Nanook with the phonograph); others argue that despite its flaws, it remains the only document of their culture in the 1920s. The screening of the film is enhanced by an exhibition of Flaherty’s photos found in the Révillon Frères archive, where aging locals find photos of themselves as children. The screening itself provokes both laughter and anger on the part of the audience. A key problem in both cases is that these ethnographic films reduce complex societies to one set of images, something both colonial and futile.

If the first half of *Nanook Revisited* addresses the local response to the images made by a white Southerner sixty-eight years earlier, the second half places the contemporary white Southerner at the centre of the narrative. The crew goes to Flaherty Island, named after the filmmaker, and spends most of its time filming in a local school. One of the teachers, Joe Johnson, becomes the on-screen narrator, describing and participating in seal hunts, demonstrating how to eat raw seal, and teaching local Inuit children about the practice. He becomes the conduit of knowledge to the viewers; the Inuit members of the community, who no doubt know far more about these practices and indeed taught them to him, are denied a voice in articulating the importance of these practices. Johnson becomes an on-screen Flaherty, rearticulating and reframing Inuit practices for the white Southern viewers. *Nanook Revisited*, then, is a confused and contradictory text: on the one hand it attempts to document the

impact of Flaherty's film on local culture, and on the other it replicates in detail the act of the white outsider telling the story of the local Inukjuak population.

KABLOONAK AND THE 'GREAT MAN' OF HISTORY

In the early 1990s, Massot decided to make a docudrama about Flaherty's time in the Arctic while shooting *Nanook*. Filmed in the Siberian town of Provideniya, Russia, and the Canadian Northwest Territories, *Kabloonak* replicates some of the complexity of Flaherty's work: the film shows how much involvement the Inuit had in the production of the film, and the ways in which Flaherty dealt with – at times in an imperial manner – culture conflict. *Kabloonak* can also be seen as a contemporary allegory for the debates about postcolonialism prevalent in the 1990s. As Margaret Dubin notes: '*Kabloonak* is most outstanding for its attention to contemporary intellectual issues. Formally a historical documentary, the film successfully addresses the issues of authenticity, the ethics of ethnographic research, and various modes of exploitation, including colonialism and cultural appropriation' (1997: 70). Yet, the trope of 'filmmaking against all odds' (Dubin 1997: 71) dominates the film and, in the tradition of 'Great Man' historiography, reifies Flaherty: it is his pain and remorse that frames the film's narrative.

The 'Great Man' theory of history was a nineteenth-century concept espoused by, among others, Thomas Carlyle, who stated: 'Universal History, the history of what man has accomplished in this world, is at bottom the History of the Great Men who have worked here' (Carlyle [1840] 1993: 3). In a similar vein, Flaherty in *Kabloonak* can be seen as the embodiment of Hegel's 'world-historical' figure outlined in his *Philosophy of History* ([1840] 1974: 31–3). *Kabloonak* holds up this vision of Flaherty's role in and of history, and therefore the story is Flaherty's and his alone, as can be discerned by the film's framing device: *Kabloonak* begins with Flaherty (Charles Dance) sitting forlorn in a New York bar, drinking heavily, for reasons unknown. The film then flashbacks to his arrival in the Arctic in 1920. *Kabloonak*'s Flaherty shows both affection and respect for the Inuit in the film, but is not too concerned with portraying their lives as they actually are. The Inuit actors agree with Flaherty that the images needed for the film, or 'aggie' as they call it, come before their actual need to hunt. In this way, Allakariallak and others are active participants in the fictionalisation of their lives. Furthermore, many key moments from the Flaherty mythology are re-created in *Kabloonak*: the tug-of-war that is shot to represent pulling a seal out of the water, and the oversized, proscenium stage igloo that is built with only one side, in order for Flaherty to have enough light to film. *Kabloonak* retells the myth behind the making of the film, and demonstrates active involvement by the Inuit community. Nevertheless, it is Flaherty who is the 'hero' of the film, the visionary

who succeeds at his goal. At the conclusion of his Arctic sojourn, Flaherty says goodbye to both Allakariallak and to Nyla. Nyla seems at ease with his departure, despite the fact she is pregnant with his child. Allakariallak, on the other hand, reacts angrily to Flaherty's departure, but in the end forgives him and demonstrates his homosocial love by kayaking after Flaherty's ship and waving goodbye. This melodramatic ending demonstrates that *Kabloonak*, while supposedly deconstructing the myths of *Nanook of the North*, is indeed actively engaging in building new ones about Flaherty, Allakariallak and the meeting of two cultures.

Kabloonak ends by returning to Flaherty in the bar, still drinking his bottle of bourbon. We then see a telegram on the table, telling him that Allakariallak is dead. He leaves the bar and walks down the street, past a cinema marquee advertising his film. This fades to the concluding titles that repeat yet another myth propagated by Flaherty: that Nanook died of starvation while on a hunt. As Robert J. Christopher notes:

Throughout his life, Flaherty maintained that within two years after his departure Nanook had died of starvation while on an inland caribou hunting trip. The story must be apocryphal, since there is no evidence that Allakariallak died in such a way. Bob Stewart kept Flaherty informed about Allakariallak's health, and in a letter of 28 January 1923 he informed him, 'Attata is sick just now. In fact he has been in bed all fall and winter. He is just skin and bones and [I] expect him to die any day. I'm surprised he has survived so long'. (2005: 387)

Massot's repetition of this myth (for a second time: it also appears in *Nanook Revisited*) delineates how hard it is to separate – and how tempting it is not to separate – mythology from the real. *Kabloonak*, despite its gesture towards an analysis of cultural interchange and hegemony, in the end replicates the implicit 'true' story of *Nanook of the North*: that the true story that needs to be told is not that of Nanook/Allakariallak and his fellow Inuit, but of the 'Great Man' Flaherty and his triumphant technological achievement of making a film in such (for the Southerner) a brutal and unrelenting climate.

SALVAGE ETHNOGRAPHY AND SUBJECTIVE RECONSTRUCTION

The 'fly caught in amber' aspect of Flaherty's film has a long tradition in ethnography. *Nanook of the North* can be understood as an early instantiation of cinematic 'salvage ethnography', described by James Clifford in the following manner: 'Ethnography's disappearing object is, then, in a significant degree, a rhetorical construct legitimating a representational practice: "salvage" ethnography in its widest sense. The other is lost, in disintegrating time and space, but

saved in the text. . . . It is assumed that the other society is weak and “needs” to be represented by an outsider (and that what matters in its life is its past, not present or future’ (Clifford 1986: 112–13). One can see this ethos in the way in which Flaherty himself wrote about his goals:

I am not going to make films about what the white man has made of primitive peoples . . . What I want to show is the former majesty and character of these people, while it is still possible – before the white man has destroyed not only their character, but the people as well. The urge that I had to make *Nanook* came from the way I felt about these people, my admiration for them: I wanted to tell others about them. (Cited in Ruby 1980: 450)

Flaherty, then, like contemporaneous ethnographers such as Bronisław Malinowski, wished to capture for posterity a world already gone, not for the posterity of the Inuit, but for the cultural history and edification of Southern whites.

It would be, of course, reductive to claim that all ‘salvage ethnography’ is pernicious. Indeed, ‘salvage ethnography’ has also taken place in conjunction with and within indigenous cultures, both as a means by which to preserve the past, and as a retort to the ‘salvage ethnography’ of outsiders. For instance, the National Film Board of Canada’s *Netsilik* film series (1963–5, rel. 1967) reveals a different kind of restaging, where Inuit families practise for the camera the traditions of their ancestors, set in the filmic present of 1919. Yet these reconstructions are not as transparently ‘Inuit’ as one might initially think: along with the memories of the past drawn from the local community, the other key source for these re-stagings is Knud Rasmussen’s journals of his visit there in 1923, and the films themselves are directed, or rather ‘facilitated’, by white Southerners (a source also used from the Inuit perspective to different ends in *The Journals of Knud Rasmussen* (Zacharias Kunuk, Canada/Nunavut/Denmark, 2006). As Karl G. Heider notes:

The behavior in the *Netsilik* films is . . . a puzzle. We know that an ethnographic present of 1919 was recreated in the 1960s. It is easy to see how artifacts can be reconstructed from drawings. But how is a complex process like hunting or fishing or housebuilding reconstructed? How much came from the actors’ memories, how much from their parents’ memories, and how much from Rasmussen’s writings? (1975: 57)

The twenty-one half-hour films grant some agency to the Inuit to represent the past in a way that resonates with their own understanding of their oral history outside of the one often placed upon them by outsider filmmakers from

Flaherty onward. Yet, these reconstructions still have Flaherty haunting them as an inter-text.

Other re-creations, made by Inuit videomakers, have reappropriated reconstruction as a political act, most notably in Isuma's *Nunavut* series. Michael Robert Evans notes that: 'Among Inuit videographers, however, the objections to both the Netsilik series and *Nanook* lie less with their accuracy and more with their authorship. In a fundamental sense, the work of Inuit videomakers . . . functions as a reaction to attempts by non-Inuit to define and position the Inuit culturally and historically' (Evans 2008: 142). These reconstructions, then, are not as much about achieving a greater authenticity than Flaherty or the *Netsilik* series; instead, these works speak to the need for peoples to have their own control in the telling of their stories, and the agency to frame these stories as they see fit. No film or video will ever tell a 'complete' story of a culture; the very idea is absurd. Indeed, the claim that one film or video could ever do so belittles the culture in question. The goal of these works of 'salvage ethnography' is not to present a 'complete' picture; instead, it is to present a partial, subjective one, albeit one finally told from an Inuit point of view.

SWEEP, ETHNOGRAPHIC SURREALISM AND PROCESS CINEMA

Sweep is . . . sweeping the road clean, trying to start over again, sweeping away Flaherty' – Philip Hoffman (Hoolboom 2001: 218)

If 'salvage ethnography' has dominated *Nanook of the North* and its various retellings, other ethnographic forms have also been put to use to understand Flaherty's film and its legacy. Perhaps the most effective return to the primordial documentary scene can be found in Philip Hoffman and Sami van Ingen's *Sweep* (Canada, 1995). Hoffman, a Canadian experimental filmmaker and van Ingen, a Finnish one, set off to Fort George, on the shores of James Bay, where Flaherty, van Ingen's great-grandfather, shot parts of *Nanook of the North*. Part experimental documentary, part road movie, *Sweep*, unlike many of the journeys back to Flaherty's stomping grounds, foregrounds both the inability to return to the scene in order to capture and understand it, and the legacy that these Northern journeys have nevertheless left on the region and on documentary cinematic imaginations. The ethnographic dilemma lies at the heart of *Sweep*, as does the profound tension between the awareness of the way in which documentary always falls short of capturing the real and the concomitant need to use the camera as a documentary tool nonetheless. The film exists at the heart of this tension, exploring the ethical issues that surround the very practice of documentary filmmaking and the need to find new, inclusive, partial and tentative ways to document the world. As Tom McSorley notes:

What is clear from *Sweep* is that memory, as a mode of constructing forms of individual and shared knowledge, cannot be adequately expressed or preserved within the documentary . . . Of course, what *Sweep* also makes clear is that it cannot be adequately expressed or preserved *without* them, either. (2008: 37)

To this end, one can understand *Sweep* as an instantiation of what James Clifford has called ‘ethnographic surrealism’:

An ethnographic surrealist practice . . . attacks the familiar, provoking the irruption of otherness – the unexpected. . . . This process – a permanent ironic play of similarity and difference, the familiar and the strange, the here and the elsewhere is . . . characteristic of global modernity. (Clifford 1988: 145–6)

Sweep opens with images of archival polar exploration films from the 1910s and 1920s. Setting the stage for the journey North as it is typically represented, Hoffman, in a voice-over, addresses his family history in the North, and that of van Ingen’s, whose great grandfather was Flaherty. The film uses still images, fragments from explorer films, family photos, and the footage shot by Hoffman and van Ingen to create a collage of the trip to the North, the family histories and ties they both have to the area, foregrounding the fragmentary nature of both memory and the cinema’s ability to represent it. Much akin to *Sans soleil* (Chris Marker, France, 1983), *Sweep* is a surrealist ethnography based on the principle of collage, antithetical to the kind of realist documentary practice



Figure 14.1 Van Ingen and Hoffman in *Sweep*. Courtesy of Philip Hoffman.

found in Flaherty's film. The principle of collage is what guides the aesthetic of *Sweep*: bringing together different realities, as constructed through a variety of forms of cinematic and still image representation, to create a fragmentary text. *Sweep* is far more about radically challenging totalising views of the Arctic, especially those made by outsiders, than it is about creating a new, authoritative 'vision' of the region. Van Ingen and Hoffman question their ability to tell their own family stories, as filtered through memory and subjectivity, and in so doing put face to the lie that anyone can create a totalising text that transparently offers an account of the past, from the inside or out. *Sweep*, then, like *Sans soleil*, is about the incessant need to document while at the same time calling into question what these processes of documentation can offer the viewer as knowledge.

This fragmentary, collage structure allows for different realities to exist side-by-side with one not obliterating the other: meaning itself is constructed through juxtaposition and not transparent representation: in *Sweep*'s most heartening scene, which concludes the film, van Ingen and Hoffman turn their cameras over to the locals, letting them film what they want and film images of themselves (they choose to film Hoffman and van Ingen eating, along with an outdoor shot that the filmmakers only discover when they process the film). Here, Hoffman and van Ingen succeed where many of the other filmmakers discussed previously fail: they disavow the need to document the local culture as they see it and instead give up their own agency in making images. While



Figure 14.2 Van Ingen and Hoffman filmed by local inhabitants, reversing the camera, in *Sweep*. Courtesy of Philip Hoffman.

Hoffman and van Ingen maintain the final cut of the film, they embrace the practice that Hoffman often calls ‘process cinema’, where the film itself is discovered in the process of the shooting.

Hoffman describes *Nanook of the North* in the following manner: ‘It offered a particularly white view on native practices, and was made in a time when white meant “objective”’ (Hoolboom 2001: 217). In Hoffman’s telling, then, *Nanook of the North* is the primordial documentary version of what Clifford calls ‘anthropological humanism’. To this end, the images of the polar explorer on film also play a prominent role in *Sweep*, as Hoffman notes: ‘We used archival home movies showing white men’s journeys to appropriate the north. Sami’s great-grandfather was just the most famous person who went up there’ (Hoolboom 2001: 217). *Sweep*, then, is a move away from Flaherty’s hegemonic and totalising views of the Arctic and the Inuit, foregrounding not only the way in which local narratives are elided by the explorer film, but also the way in which these films dissolve difference under the guise of universalised and transparent understanding. In contradistinction to the work of Flaherty and those that followed, Hoffman notes: ‘Throughout the trip many of the native people we met asked us to film them . . . We always refused, saying we don’t want to tell your story, this is up to you, and it always has been. So the film’s critique of ethnographic filmmaking shows the failure of white culture to integrate, proposing a movement alongside instead of the usual pictures of control’ (Hoolboom 2001: 217). *Sweep* instead points to the effect that Flaherty and others have left on this Arctic community by commenting on the way in which travellers always want to take and make their own images of the region, with locals acculturated to play a starring role in these outside imaginaries. *Sweep* instead engages in what Clifford calls ‘ethnographic surrealism’, offering a fragmentary picture of the North, foregrounding the traveller’s journey as an undeniable part of the process, and the profoundly incomplete document of the North that these journeys inevitably create.

CONCLUSION

The many iterations of *Nanook of the North* are historiographic documents not only of the figure and figuration of ‘Flaherty’, but also of a specific and particular rendition of ‘Life and Love in the Actual Arctic’ (as the film was marketed), which have become emblematic of the ways in which documentary filmmaking has been conceived, interpreted, analysed and reconsidered during nearly a century of filmmaking (scenes from *Nanook* indeed appear in the final chapter of Jean-Luc Godard’s *Histoire(s) du cinéma: Les signes parmi nous* (France, 1998)). *Nanook of the North* and the many subsequent echoes of it put into relief the contested and contestatory status not only of ‘insider’ and ‘outsider’ in Arctic imagemaking. For Hoffman and van Ingen, the way in

which the past is understood from the outside is a key component of *Sweep*, and of Flaherty's own journey to the Arctic. Hoffman highlights that when he and van Ingen were making *Sweep*, 'a feature length, France-Canada-produced drama was released about Robert Flaherty, which reveals a love affair he had with a native woman. Everything was suddenly out in the open. Sami and his family already knew this, but no one dared to speak about it. They were keepers of the legend, the great genius, the family name' (Hoolboom 2001: 217). This film was *Kabloonak*. Similarly, a film of global reach like few other re-enactments of citations of the 'Flaherty' legend and the *Nanook* artifact, the recent *To the Arctic*, uses the historiographic document of a 1922 black and white film – completely ahistoricised – for contemporary audiences seeking entertainment and enlightenment by narrating climate change as a story of, *pace* Flaherty, 'Life and Love in the Actual Arctic', though in the latter instance as a polar bear family melodrama in which the threat to the majestic and photogenic superfauna is only implicitly about global warming, whereas the more palpable threat is from interspecies fighting. The invocation of the 'Flaherty' approach to documenting the Arctic in this recent film, by proxy, makes a similar gesture toward the Earth's northernmost indigenous populations. As that film proclaims, humans can 'adapt', but wildlife cannot.

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