Contradictions in the First Filmic Portrayal of the Inuit: A Study of *Nanook of the North*

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Abstract
A genre that worked well to capture the Inuit life was the film, which being a medium of secondary orality, shares a complex relationship with the primary oral culture of the Inuit. The 1922 silent film Nanook of the North by Robert J. Flaherty was the first motion picture on the Inuit. It was made at a time when the motivation for the representations of the native was both economic and aesthetic. Nanook being a silent film, the filmmaker depended on intertitles to convey the message of the moving pictures to its literate audience. The article looks at how an oral community is conceived through the technologies of a chirographic and typographic culture.
Keywords: Ethnography, Orality, Literacy, Documentary, Representation.

Nanook of the North (1922) by Robert J. Flaherty, which attempted to document Inuit lifestyle for the Euro-American audience, is generally considered as the first documentary of the world. Today the film faces charges regarding the authenticity of the scenes depicted in it. Therefore, now terms like 'docudrama' and 'salvage ethnography' are used to describe the film. Also, as Patrica Aufderheide says, "Documentaries are about real life, they are not real life" (qtd. in Nistor, 3). They use real life as raw materials, but it is the artists and technicians who decide as to "what story to tell to whom, and for what purpose" (qtd. in Nistor, 3).

Flaherty uses a medium that uses written words and images to depict a community that was alien to the technology of writing. The film *Nanook of the North*, motivated by the drives of chirography, attempts at recreating the structures of orality with the tools made available by the technology of writing. In this project, the biases and prejudices of chirography and typography interrupt with the representation. Also, longing for the retrieval of one's own culture's orality too finds expression here. Thus, much of what has been called un-authentic in the representation of Inuit was the result of thought patterns aided by a system different from that of the ones represented.

Nanook of the North, which starts with a preface by the director, and illustrates, each sequence with English intertitle, is a creation of the typographic culture. It carries with it the sense of closure and stillness encompassed in writing. Print, according to Walter J. Ong, has "mechanically as well as psychologically locked words into space and they establish a firmer sense of closure" (148). The intertitle is written on still-shots which further enhances the effect. Also, being a silent film, *Nanook of the North* cannot be included under systems of secondary orality. Even when the filmmaker Robert J. Flaherty recognized the potential of images to convey meaning more effectively than words, he could not avoid the chirographic tradition of providing analytical clarity. The intertitle serve the function of anchorage, that is, "to fix the floating chain of signifieds in such a way as to counter the terror of uncertain signs" (Barthes, 39). The linguistic message directs the audience perception of the image through the channel which the filmmaker offers in advance. With words written on the screen, it is more like a printed book which incorporates moving images to it.

Even though *Nanook* is considered an ethnographic film, upon close analysis it resembles an ethnographic written record. Karl G. Heider has differentiated ethnography from ethnographic film. According to him the essential difference between ethnography and ethnographic film is the "words versus image difference" (qtd. in Nistor, 6). Another difference is that what is filmed cannot be changed, whereas what is written can be subjected to reworking and rewriting. A film sequence "may be edited, shortened, manipulated, but the existing footage is the one to work with and it cannot be modified" (Nistor, 6). But the ethnographer can decide on making alterations and re-examine the material after his field work. A third difference is that "when the footage has been shot, someone other than the photographer can (and usually does) edit it into the finished film, but it would be almost impossible to write an ethnography from someone else's field notes" (Nistor, 6). When we analyse *Nanook of the North* we can only conclude that it was more of an ethnographic report written with a camera than an ethnographic film. Flaherty had made some videos on the Inuit during the course of his expedition which he considered "amateur enough" and in the second endeavour "wholly for the purpose of making films," the shots created were mostly staged actions ("How I Filmed," n.p). Thus, the final product that we have got is not just an edited one but a reworked and rewritten one.

Even when we call Flaherty's an ethnographic report, his status as an ethnographer is also prone to criticism. Nistor has argued that Flaherty was not even an ethnographer, though later on his name got included among the prominent ethnographic figures. He was "an explorer who had the opportunity to spend several years among the Inuit people, to understand their customs, to grow fond of their particular lifestyle and to gain their trust in order to be included in their daily routine and be able to record scenes that depict their way of living" (Nistor, 9). Although in later years *Nanook of the North* came to be considered as the first ethnographic documentary, it was "at first destined to be an artistic film made for the large audience that would depict the Eskimo's life through the means of documentary" (Nistor, 9). Flaherty attempted at depicting an Inuk family's life during a year. The subtitle of the film *A Story of Life and Love in the Actual Arctic* justifies Nistor's argument. What Flaherty aimed at was a 'story' set in the 'actual' arctic about his object of fascination: the Native. Based on his observations on them, he formed a script in which the brave, happy, and nomadic hero's odyssey can form a thrilling drama. He selected actors whom he thought would be appropriate for playing his characters. His account is 'true' only to the point that it was shot with real Inuit in the 'actual' arctic. But this story was perceived to be real since it happened to contain some ethnographic detailing. It was also made at a time when documentation could be comfortably done with dramatic elements.

Flaherty's story shows features related to books in another aspect too. Film is most often a group activity, whereas writing is a "solipsistic operation" (Ong, 101). As far as a book is concerned, only

the words reach the reader. The writer is physically unavailable to the one who reads it. Whereas when one talks to a person, the speaker is available to the listener. So the spoken words can be countered and clarifications can be made. This was the mode of oral narratives. Ong explains the attitude of a writer, "I am writing a book which I hope will be read by hundreds of thousands of people, so I must be isolated from everyone. . . so that no one, including persons who will presumably read the book, can interrupt my solitude" (101). Flaherty had set out to frame the Inuk, therefore he needs to stand alone from the audience as well as from the object (or subject) of his study. He is naturally estranged from the proposed audience of the film with his physical distance from them.

The filmmaker stands as a medium of interpreting the Inuk. The audience of the film gets to know the characters only through the third-person narrative of the filmmaker. The film is shot as if, to use an anachronistic comparison, a CCTV was installed there without informing the inhabitants of the place. It is presented as if, the people of the land are left to live their life, to build an igloo, travel by kayak or omiak, and go hunting, without bothering about the presence of the outside eye of the camera. One of the reviewers makes a pointed statement on this: ". . . the wide angle of the lens and the disconnection between the cameraman and his subjects never truly allows for the audience to know Nanook and his family on a fully personal level, and leaves us feeling more voyeuristic than empathetic" (Shapiro, n.p.). Thus, *Nanook of the North*, like a book, is a "solipsistic operation" of its creator.

The reason for the creation of such chirographic representations is also closely linked with the psychodynamics of orality and literacy. In oral societies, what is important is the present. In Ong's words, "oral societies live very much in equilibrium or homeostasis by sloughing of memories which no longer have present relevance" (46). Of course, things change gradually and continuously in oral cultures too. But they do not feel any urgency to record the past. Ong here quotes Henige (1980, p. 255), "oral mode . . . allows for inconvenient parts of the past to be 'forgotten' because of 'the exigencies of the continuing present'" (qtd. in Ong, 49). It is interesting to note that it was the Europeans who came into contact with the native who felt the need to record their lifestyles during the pre-contact era. Anthropologists, painters, artists, photographers – everyone got interested in the depiction of the native in their 'original' costumes and habitat. And some of these representations were based on imagination. Daniel Francis gives a detailed description of such projects in The Imaginary Indian. These artists set out to imagine, on behalf of the white settlers in America and Europe, what aboriginal life was before contact.

Paul Kane, the first artist in Canada to take the Native population as his subject, sought the support of the governors of the Hudson Bay Company (Francis, 17). Needless to say, the traders who established their market among the natives had absolute faith in the marketing of the Native. Some of the artists like Edmund Morris were also sponsored by the federal government. Flaherty himself acknowledged the possibility of such endeavours during that period. He says about his previous attempt at making a film, "As a part of my exploration equipment, on these expeditions, a motion-picture outfit was included. It was hoped to secure films of the North and Eskimo life, which might prove to be of enough value to help in some way to defray some of the costs of the explorations" (Flaherty, "How I Filmed," n.p). The fur trading company, Revillon Freres financed Flaherty's filming expedition of 1920. Faherty too received certain rewards from the Canadian government. The largest Belcher Island got named after him for his expedition during 1914-15. The financial support of the government and the trading companies explains that native portrayals were widely accepted as a necessity and a form of entertainment by the chirographic mainstream community.

A major inspiration for the white settlers to portray the natives was their love for the frontier. The intellectuals attributed many capabilities to the wilderness, which they believed their culture lacked and the 'primitive' culture possessed. It fascinated them to 'go wild.' Those who could not really go to the wild, liked to read and watch fictions on it. This was also the reason why each one pictured or liked to believe oneself as the first to set out to the hitherto unexplored territories. This also explains the cause for the anachronistic depiction of the real or imaginary pre-contact culture. Jannis Essner and Jay Rudy write that Flaherty's "love for a primitive, unsophisticated way of life developed early, as a young man, Flaherty pursued a career as explorer, prospector, and railroader" (354). They identify the recurrent theme of Flaherty's films and state that in his films, "through their struggle with nature, human beings are purified, cleansed, and achieve maturity and dignity" (355). Those watching the film could feel, along with the cinematographer, the adventure, thrill, and fear of hunting, exploration and extreme climate.

Oral societies did not feel the urgency to record their past because changes in such societies occur at a slow pace when left uninterrupted. Their rooting in conventions makes the purely conservative oral communities to be suspicious of strangers. But *Nanook* was shot at a time when as a result of European contact, their lifestyle was changing rapidly that they have overcome doubtfulness. The very fact that they co-operated with a non-native to shoot the film is self-explanatory. This association is closely related to the shift from primary orality to other kinds of orality and literacy. Primary orality inhibits intellectual and ideological experimentation, whereas secondary orality and literacy do not. Ong speaks of the manifestation of the shift:

> Knowledge is hard to come by and precious, and society regards highly those wise old men and women who specialize in conserving it, who know and tell the stories of the days of old. By storing knowledge outside the mind, writing and, even more, print downgrade the figures of the wise old man and the wise old woman, repeaters of the past, in favour of younger discovers of something new (41).

The trading-post scene in *Nanook*, is a clear manifestation of the community's shift from orality to literacy. Even though Flaherty's depiction of Nanook expressing his awe of the gramophone and chewing it while examining it is not only exaggerated but self-contradictory. Flaherty has described in his article on "How I filmed Nanook of the North" that he used to entertain the Inuit by his own gramophone records. However, such an attitude of the native might have possibly occurred, when individuals in the infancy of literacy first encountered the talking-machine. The machine for storing knowledge outside the mind or rather, storing words outside living beings fascinates a person from an oral tradition. Nanook finds the "canning" of white man's voice magical (Flaherty, *Nanook*).

The fact that their traditional patterns of life were undergoing changes made them all the more an interesting study material. The explorers were eager to record those oral people before it was too late. Many artists who ventured into the frontiers lamented at the loss of the 'noble savage.' They believed that due to European contact the 'nobility' and 'savagery' of the native were fast disappearing. So they needed to record them before everything changed irrecoverably. Daniel Francis analyses the notion of the vanishing Indian in his book *The Imaginary Indian*:

> Some believed that it was the Indian's traditional culture that was being eradicated by the spread of white settlement, while others believed the Indians themselves literally to be dying out. Some found the idea appealing; some found it regrettable; some found it desirable. But all agreed that the Indian was doomed. (23)

Though the Inuit are generally not included under the category 'Indian,' being native, the politics in representing both the Indian and the Inuit are more or less the same. Daniel Francis, in *The Imaginary Indian*, the examples of works of many artists and photographers, who catered to

the demands of the mainstream audience for the image of the vanishing Canadian. Francis says regarding the exhibitions conducted during the latter half of the nineteenth century and the first decades of the twentieth century that "Response was enthusiastic. People flocked to the exhibit to see powerful portraits of Native hunters, scenes of the buffalo chase, and depictions of exotic pagan rituals" (20). Francis cites examples of "forgery" these artists had done to enhance the romantic flavour of the scenes depicted. They added clothing and artefacts used by the natives as "exotic curiosities" (Lord, 95). Francis is of the opinion that these artists believed that they were "preserving on canvas, and later on film, a record of a culture before it expired forever" (24).

Nanook of the North too, with the use of native clothing, traditional hunting equipment and housing materials, uses the Inuit as exotic curiosities. Flaherty was highly criticised for ignoring reality in favour of romance. In fact, as in all instances of salvage ethnography, the project was to document tradition before it was too late. The most common accusations are that Flaherty made the characters wear traditional clothes (although they had adopted western outfits by the time), to use harpoons instead of rifles and to build igloos (even though they had started using southern building materials by then). Another criticism is that the actors in the film were not related. The kayak scene, where Nanook, his whole family and a dog get out of the kayak, is highly criticised for its exaggeration. The kayak was "basically a one-man vessel" (Matthiasson, 86) used for seal hunting at the sea. Such factual distortions often occurred in the representations of the native. The film did not alter one's opinions, but it did confirm the existing notions regarding the romantic image of the mysterious and dramatically strange native.

In the scenes that questioned the authenticity of his representation, Flaherty has employed what Barthes called "trick effect" in his work *Image Music Text* (21). Because of trick effect the connotation of image assumes the mask of denotation and 'objectivity.' According to Barthes, these manipulations "utilize the special credibility of the photograph" (in this case, of the film) to play a trick on the audience. Flaherty employs the trickery by choosing the objects and arranging them to be filmed. In Barthes's words, "objects no longer perhaps possess a 'power' but they certainly possess meaning" (23). Here, the objects like natives in traditional costumes, kayaks, omiak, spears, harpoons, igloos when subjected to be posed in particular patterns, have the potential to imply desired meanings.

A strategy used in the anachronistic representation of the native is the use of the "ethnographic present" (Matthiasson, 83). According to Matthiasson, it is the use of the present tense by the social and cultural anthropologists, whereby "their accounts read as if people still lived as they had before encountering colonialism" (83). He says how the use of ethnographic present misleads the readers.

> [R]eaders may forget that the ethnographic present being represented is a life that is no longer lived. In addition it is a construction created by the anthropologist, who has attempted to depict a society and culture, but has to do this in a language and with description and analytic categories may not be real for the people being represented. Use of the ethnographic present also may lead the reader to assume that the people lived in some sort of isolation from other human societies, with real socio-cultural markers setting them off. (83)

Nanook of the North, being a piece of salvage ethnography, used ethnographic present in its portrayal of the Inuit life. During the early decades of the twentieth century, the Inuit had already started to use rifles and other European technologies in hunting and housing. But the film shows the Inuit using traditional tools. Flaherty's depiction complicates the issue more because it cannot claim to have depicted a pre-contact era because it includes a scene where Nanook and his family visiting the trading post and buying foreign materials. But at the same time, it avoids changes brought about by the foreign influence in the lifestyle of the Inuit.

Flaherty's portrayal of the Inuit was highly attacked for its anachronism. Even though the trading post scene shows the Inuit people's dependence on the trading post, the reality was more than that. Matthiasson says how trading posts have become the nucleus of settlements for the Inuit:

> . . . they were dependent on traders for rifles and ammunition, kerosene for primus stoves, foodstuffs such as sugar and tea, materials for clothing and tents, and other trade goods. In return they gave seal and fox skins. One consequence of this new dependency was a change in residential patterns, as people established camps near the trading posts and hunters restricted their activities to travel within limited parameters. (103)

Shapiro speaks of the illogical treatment of Flaherty's depiction of the exchanges made in the trading posts: ". . . would a people who are depicted as on the brink of starvation, who are bringing in huge stocks of highly-valued pelts to trade with the European settlers, really give away such a valuable commodity for nothing more than "knives and beads and bright-coloured candy"" (n.p.). Flaherty depicted them as trading for such petty curiosities. Had he showed them buying ammunition or using rifles for hunting it would not have been as dramatic and appealing as when he said, "Nanook's hunt for the year, apart from fox, seal and walrus, numbered seven great polar bears, which in hand to hand encounters he killed with nothing more formidable than his harpoon" (*Nanook*). Flaherty writes in the article on the film: "I began to believe that a good film depicting the Eskimo and his fight for existence in the dramatically barren North might be well worth while" (How I Filmed," n.p.). Thus it was the scope for dramatic representation that determined the worth of the Native for getting depicted.

In his article on the film "How I Filmed Nanook of the North," Flaherty speaks of his journey through "the hitherto unexplored" (n.p.) territories in the North. Flaherty himself contradicts his claim when says later in the same article that the company which financed his project had "vast system of fur posts which lie scattered through Northern Canada" (n.p.). He also talks of how his early expedition culminated in the "discovery of the Belcher Island archipelago" (n.p.). Flaherty is here repeating an age-old mistake because it is obvious that even before the European invasion, there existed cultures which had 'discovered' and explored the land and established themselves there.

While studying the chirographic nature of the film *Nanook of the North*, it is the intertitle which needs special mention. The intertitle of the film which illustrates the scenes enhances the connotative power of the images. It is designed, as in the case of words that describe a press photograph, "to connote the image, to 'quicken' it with one or more second-order signifieds" (Barthes, 25). These captions aim at defining the images for the audience, who are unfamiliar with the life depicted on the screen. The amalgamation of the two structures, one graphic and the other iconic, determines the 'meaning.' In some cases, the text functions in "amplifying a set of connotations, already given in photograph" (or in this case, scenes) by "making explicit" or "providing a stress" (27). In other cases, the text may produce new signifieds, which the image alone would have been incapable of producing.

The preface and the introductory shot enhance the chirographic features of the film. This convention of showing the written title on the screen before the beginning of the film is an inheritance from the print culture. Ong has explained in *Orality and Literacy*, how the title page inculcates a feeling for the book as an object and the title as its label (125). The media of secondary orality continues this tradition. Films, television broadcasts, and internet sites – all begin with written titles. Radio broadcast which cannot show the title, announces it before the commencement of the programme. The title 'page' of *Nannok* shows the title, subtitle, and an image of Nanook teaching his little son to use bows and arrows. This image is an implication of a never-changing tradition, where the elders help their children in acquiring the basic skills for living.

The next shot says: "The mysterious Barren Lands – desolate, boulder-strewn, wind-swept – illimitable spaces which top the world." The still shows the landscape and polar dogs in the background. It is of course this aura of the mysterious that fascinated all explorers. Another notable thing about the still image in the background is the image of the ice-covered landscape with two polar dogs in the background. This image and images like man rowing a kayak, a dog in front of an igloo and a man with a spear recur throughout the film. All these images create a typified overall image of the Inuit life. Flaherty gives a visual image to locate the place when he says: "spaces which top the world" (*Nanook*). It is the literate culture's tradition of giving visual analogue to every detail.

In the next sequence, Flaherty locates his characters in the landscape of his interest and makes his own judgement about them: "The sterility of the soil and the rigor of the climate no other race could survive, yet here, utterly dependent upon animal life, which is their sole source of food, live the most cheerful people in all the world – the fearless, lovable, happy-go-lucky Eskimo."

Before we get to see the people, the filmmaker introduces us to the landscape. He first locates the land: "The picture concerns the life of one Nanook (The Bear), his family and little band of followers, 'Itivimuits' of Hopewell Sound, Northern Ungava . . ." He further goes on to give an estimate of the area and its population density: "The hunting ground of Nanook and his followers is a little kingdom in size – nearly as large as England, yet occupied by less than three hundred souls." The audience thus gets a visual clarity regarding the place and its location. For this process, he also employs two maps. Maps and print are closely related as both evolved together during the Renaissance and share a parallel relationship. Ong explains:

> [F]or oral culture, the cosmos is an ongoing event with man at its centre . . . Only after print and the extensive experience with maps that print implemented would human beings, when they thought about the cosmos or universe or 'world,' think primarily of something laid out before his eyes, as in a modern atlas, a vast surface or assemblage of surfaces (vision presents surfaces) ready to be 'explored.' (73)

Flaherty's career as a filmmaker is closely related to his chirographic and typographic activities of cartography and exploration. His career ranges from "making maps of Hudson Bay and searching for ore deposits for the Canadian railways and mining companies to making a silent film for Revillion Freres that became Nanook of the North" (Silver, n.p.). The film itself is in the form of an exploration and the audience too, joins the filmmaker in the process of his exploration. Oral cultures are least interested in such intellectual pleasures unless practical needs press them. Ong reminds us that, oral cultures "knew few statistics or facts divorced from human or quasi-human activity" (43).

The film then lists down the names of each character before we get to see each one. In the beginning, the central character is introduced: "Chief of the 'Itivimuits' and as a great hunter famous through all Ungava – Nanook, The Bear." Then we see a smiling Nanook. Then we are introduced to "Nyla, the smiling one." Others are introduced in the kayak scene where a series of names appear on the screen when each person gets out of the kayak. The exception here is the little child who is not named (this, by the way is a tradition of the Inuit, where the child becomes human only after it is named [Matthiasson, 100]). Here, the names are given as tags on the objects they signify. This is purely an attitude created by writing. Ong explains that listing is purely a feature of literacy and the oral alternatives to list is transferred through narratives (Ong, 99). Ong says, "Orality knows no lists or charts or figures" (98).

Flaherty's process of naming is also in line with the typographic culture that nurtured him. Ong says how differently names are perceived in oral and literate culures:

> [C]hirographic and typographic folk tend to think of names as labels, written or printed tags

> imaginatively affixed to an object named. Oral folk have no sense of a name as a tag, for they have no idea of a name as something that can be seen. Written or printed representations of words can be labels, real, spoken words cannot be. (33)

Apart from being a tag or label, the process of naming has another undertone in a colonial setting. To name is to have power. It is a historical fact that the colonizers named certain places and modified some of the existing names in the colonies. Today, as a means of decolonizing, the natives have started renaming the places with the original names. In the context of the film Nanook of the North, the names of the characters too have raised criticism. Nistor includes Fatimah T. Rony's analysis of the pointed criticism in Nanook Revisited while speaking of the credibility of the characters as they were depicted in the film:

> Fatimah T. Rony speaks in her book *The Third Eye: Race, Cinema, and Ethnographic Spectacle* about the 1988 documentary *Nanook Revisited*, in which the Inuit people from the Belcher Islands (where Nanook of the North was shot) are being interviewed in regard with the memories they have about the film made in 1922 and its maker, Robert Flaherty. One of them, Charles Nayoumealuk clarifies that Allakariallak, not Nanook was the real name of the main character, and that he was renamed because Nanook just "seemed to suit the whites better." Also, "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." (11)

Thus the filmmaker has given his own name for his characters. Perhaps Nanook's real name was too difficult for him and he might have thought it would be so for his audience. In fact it was the reason for the colonizer's renaming of the colonised in most cases. As regarding Alice, it might have sounded non-native. Thus, it would not be an exaggeration to say that the audience named the characters.

Even though *Nanook of the North* is purely a literary work, it was able to capture some of the features of orality. Education in the oral community is mentioned in the film. We get a glimpse of oral education in the scene where Nanook teaches his son to use bows and arrows. The adult teaching the young to use bows and arrows occur in another film too - *At the Spring Ice-Camp-Part 1*. In Nanook, we also see a scene where the little boy plays with a toy-sledge tied to a puppy. In these scenes, what we get is a glimpse of education in oral cultures. Orality situates knowledge as skills or practical wisdom to live life. The process of learning is different in oral and literate cultures. Walter J. Ong says: "For an oral culture learning or knowing means achieving close, empathetic, communal identification with the known, 'getting with it.' Writing separates the knower from the known and thus sets up conditions for 'objectivity,' in the sense of personal disengagement or distancing" (45-46).

Historical evidences prove the difficulty of the oral society in adopting to literary systems. When formal education was implemented by the government in northern regions during the 1950s, many students failed the course. The curriculum adopted was the same as that of the southern schools. The result was high dropout rates and low grades. Matthiasson says:

> Monolingual Inuktitut-speaking children were enrolled in school, where their non-Inuit teachers, who were monolingual English speakers, spent most of their time in language instruction using teaching materials designed for southern schools and largely irrelevant in an Inuit cultural context. (106)

What the Inuit found difficult to adapt was the transformation from contextual knowledge of orality to bookish knowledge of literacy. Perhaps it is this difficulty to adapt to the systems of literacy which caused the delay for the Inuit to adapt to the secondary orality systems because secondary orality is based in writing.

The reason for the high demand for the portrayal and recording of orality might be the frustrations of high literacy. During the early decades of the twentieth century, the western world

witnessed literature of meaninglessness, purposelessness, absurdity and trauma. The characters were of ordinary stature and they did nothing extraordinary. Probably it was the nostalgia for the old exciting narratives that drove the European and American audience towards the representation of the native. They longed to see figures like those from the oral epics, where there is more action and excitement instead of psychological conflicts. In representations like Nanook they saw more action and struggle:

"A wandering ice field drifts in from sea and locks up a hundred miles of coast. Though Nanook's band, already on the thin edge of starvation, is unable to move, Nanook, great hunter that he is, saves the day" (*Nanook*).

Nanook has no time to think of existential dilemma, when engaged in the fight for survival. Therefore, the Euro-Americans could only call him "happy-go-lucky" (*Nanook*). It pleased them to see Nanook and Nyla smiling in the face of hardships.

Towards the end of the film Flaherty sums up his 'story' by stating what he thinks is typical of life in the north: "The shrill piping of the wind, the rasp and hiss of driving snow, the mournful wolf howls of Nanook's master dog typify the melancholy spirit of the North" (*Nanook*). Perhaps the melancholy spirit of the surrounding enhances the contrasting smile of the characters. Flaherty writes in the article on the film: "I began to believe that a good film depicting the Eskimo and his fight for existence in the dramatically barren North might be well worth while" (n.p.).

While studying Inuit films, technical difficulties in filming in the Arctic also need to be considered. *Nanook* was a remarkable endeavour because in those years, Flaherty had actually dragged a camera to the extreme climate. The brilliance of Flaherty's depiction lies not in the authenticity but in the project itself. Flaherty made a film shot in the Arctic a possibility at a time when the motion picture was in its infancy. In his article "How I Filmed Nanook of the North," Flaherty has written of the practical difficulties involved in filming a motion picture in the Arctic. There were high chances of the film to be rendered brittle due to the cold; the iced-over condensation over the lenses had to be wiped each night to make it ready to face the cold again; and running water, which was necessary for washing the films, was bought to the land with great difficulty during the winter. All these made *Nanook of the North* a difficulty-made-possible. But in spite of the difficulties, Inuit cinematography was always in motion. Now, with the advent of digital cameras in which films are no longer required, filmmaking has become easier.

Mathew Dessem writes of the basic intention of Flaherty in making the film: "Imagine seeing this movie for the first time in New York or Paris in 1922 and being taken to a part of the landscape like those above [the landscape shown in the film]. It might as well have been another planet. I think bringing back these images is one of film's highest callings: Show me something I have never seen before" (n.p.). "[A]ll the fakery and false romanticism" were for achieving this basic purpose (Dessem, n.p.). For the English-speaking world of Europe and America, *Nanook of the North* was a book that offered fascinating pictures of the adventures of the 'other.' Thus, in the typographic culture, the native was a product for consumption.

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