

Lived Reality in the Empty Spaces of Capital: Some Lessons from Video in Northern Canada

Darrell Varga

The image of the Canadian Arctic popularized in mass media representations is that of vast barren tundra occupied by wild animals but otherwise sparsely populated by primitive and/or disenfranchised peoples. This image serves a useful ideological function for capital insofar as the rhetorical emptying-out of this space facilitates its deployment in the interests of Empire — interests not necessarily reflective of either the local communities or of the environment—that is, of the lived reality. Indeed, this so-called empty space has functioned as a key strategic location for the Cold War and destructive neo-liberal intrusions into local communities, notably driven by resource extraction interests, but also, through the familiar exercise of control over people through policies of assimilation, a tactic of control which is at once ideological, social, and spatial.

This article discusses the media image of the north, the political-economic context of these images, and resistances to Empire expressed in independent video production. This term, “independent video,” refers to work produced outside of the media apparatus of finance and distribution. In the case of narrative film, this usually means outside of major studios, and in the case of video it often means outside of the regime of the broadcast industries. However, these terms are not always clear insofar as a production may be independently produced but financed through a broadcast license, among other sources. Broadcasters, in turn, vary considerably with respect to the exercise of control, even among public broadcast entities. The question of independence refers to the degree of autonomy and control on the part of producers, keeping in mind that producers invariably negotiate between competing interests and values that affect the final outcome. What is particularly interesting about the Inuit video work cited here is the way the form and narrative proceed through a self-conscious disavowal of mainstream media conventions. With this in mind, independent video production in this region can be viewed with regard to the articulation of local culture against the intrusions of globalization.¹

In *Empire*, Antonio Negri and Michael Hardt propose the waning of the nation-state as locus of power, locating it instead within the machinations of transnational corporations. Their thesis is that the decentering of power has (to borrow from Deleuze) a deterritorializing function, and that this has important ramifications for the tactics of activism: "In the postmodernization of the global economy, the creation of wealth tends ever more toward what we will call biopolitical production, the production of social life itself, in which the economic, the political, and the cultural increasingly overlap and invest one another."²² As intriguing as this idea is as a means of grasping the relations of power in the contemporary era, it must first be noted that this relation, commonly referred to by the depoliticized name of globalization, is not new. In *Capital*, Marx described globalization as the expansion of capitalism through the inter-continental organization of production and the expansion of markets, is precisely globalization. This process has certainly intensified in the contemporary era, and capital is no longer beholden to the fixed locations of imperial power (arguably, the reverse is now the case). Yet power continues to be exercised in particular places and as much as goods and money can flow across borders with ease, political boundaries remain as a key counterpart to dominant hegemony in the control of people and of spatial practices. The specific uses of mass media, this iconic apparatus of the digital age, by those who are excluded from access to power, an isolation produced through geographic, economic and political inequity, as well as racism, serves as an important lesson in the strategies of resistance in our own era of Empire.

Hardt and Negri make the claim of deterritorialization as postmodernization because the shift of power from the reified space of the nation-state to the more fluid transnational corporation (still no less a dead thing) allows for a process of dehistoricization facilitated by the presentness of media culture. I would suggest that while postmodernism can serve as a useful tool of analysis, it can also function as an aesthetic veil over all-too-familiar concentrations of power. In her review of *Empire*, Jyotsna Kapur makes the important point that the text's lack of historical specificity has negated the continued relevance of the nation-state both for Third

World political activism as well as an apparatus through which capital is continually defended. As she indicates:

While it is true that multinationals have emerged as the new power with annual incomes more than some Third World countries, it is erroneous to assume that their power to make profits is unconnected to the nation-state. Multinationals are predominantly based in the more economically advanced nations and it is possible to identify their national basis from the percentage of stock held by a nation.³

While Hardt and Negri do not deny that the bloody practice of power is carried out through nationally-delineated military conquest, they propose that the contemporary workings of Empire are distinct from the earlier era of inter-imperial rivalry. Subsequently, they call upon activists to reorient to this new context.

Our task is to test this theory of Empire on the ground, through analysis of political action and, in this case, the means through which spaces, places, and communities are represented via cinematic and digital processes. The lack of historicization, that Kapur has identified, as typical of some versions of postmodernism depoliticize history, reducing it to the play of discourses and thus disabling action. Hardt and Negri, however, embrace postmodernism as a means to resist the binary logic of the Enlightenment, its production of the Other via an either/or logic in relation to the centers of power. Nevertheless, just as we cannot talk about marginalization without history, we need not throw out the ideals of humanitarian equality, however unfulfilled, with the dirty bathwater of binary logic. This qualification is especially relevant to indigenous movements that require the logic of the nation-state in the tactics of struggle. In any case, if what Hardt and Negri describe as a new utopian project is to be made real, the amnesiac effect of corporate media must be countered with representations of the interrelations of power, history, and lived reality in the production of community.

In a sustained response to Hardt and Negri, situating the theorization of Imperialism in the trajectory of Marxist thought, Leo Panitch and Sam Ginden make the similar important point that the fashionableness of this text belies

the reality of the present in which global power is not only consolidated by the U.S., but that there is no longer any effort to hide the imperial dimensions of this power, as made evident in explicit policy.⁴ As Panitch and Ginden explain:

The reconstitution of the American empire in this remarkably successful fashion through the last decades of the twentieth century did not mean that global capitalism had reached a new plateau of stability. Indeed it may be said that dynamic instability and contingency are systematically incorporated into the reconstituted form of empire, in good part because the intensified competition characteristic of neoliberalism and the hyper-mobility of financial liberalization aggravate the uneven development and extreme volatility inherent in the global order. Moreover, this instability is dramatically amplified by the fact that the American state can only rule this order through other states, and turning them all into 'effective' states for global capitalism is no easy matter. It is the attempt by the American state to address these problems, especially vis-à-vis what it calls 'rogue states in the 'Third World,' that leads American imperialism today to present itself in an increasingly unconcealed manner.⁵

What they describe as "instability and contingency" can be understood as a more explicitly politicized view of this concept of deterritorialization, and it demonstrates how the contemporary system of global capitalism, whether one calls it Imperialism or Empire, requires a network of nation-states to regulate markets and discipline workers. Panitch and Ginden go on to point out that power is maintained through the cooperation of elites throughout the aligned world, who directly benefit from this set-up but that this exercise of imperial power is carried out without the sustained desire to ensure the popular loyalty of the masses throughout the world to the American state (though arguably Hollywood cinema serves this purpose).

Panitch and Ginden likewise make the point that the present conjuncture is a response to the perceived threats to the dominance of capital by subordinate classes. Yet it is by breaking down hegemonic assumptions through which power and resistance are represented, that we can come to

some understanding of place and culture—an understanding that plays a vital part in progressive transformation. The case of media representation of and by the Inuit provides a useful way of casting place in a way that is at once resistant to the teleology of imperialism while also avoiding the colonial tendency to situate aboriginal culture irrevocably in an ever-vanishing past. This form of resistance is particularly significant in that the present conjuncture does allow for the expression of resistance across borders and, given the waning of the centralization of cultural hegemony (even as military power becomes increasingly authoritarian), in and through the U.S.

Perhaps the most famous media image of northern people is Robert Flaherty's 1922 film *Nanook of the North*—representing this vast landscape as populated by child-like primitives isolated from each other and from the rest of the world. The film begins with a map of North America which starkly expresses the spatialization of power: we see an arrow pointing to Flaherty's destination on the shore of Hudson Bay within a vast and undifferentiated expanse named Canada, as well as the locations of Chicago, Buffalo, and New York. Sherrill Grace has pointed out that while specific places are not named on Flaherty's map, his role as author as well as the film's sponsor, Revillion Frères, a French fur company, are prominent in the adjacent credits, demonstrating the ideological link between the map and the vested interests of capital, insofar as the mapping of the north is not a neutral scientific activity but is an expression of the needs of resource extraction.⁶ This staple of film studies is typically celebrated for the establishment of the documentary form but while the film strives to veil the use of modern technology on the part of the Inuit, showing for instance the hunt as being carried out by dogsled and harpoon at a time when rifles and snowmobiles were already in use, it deploys the technologies of cinema to represent a romanticized primitivism that has precisely the effect of ideologically framing this place in a way that is useful to Empire—useful in that a space that is represented as being outside of modern culture and history can be viewed as being open and available for exploitation.

Flaherty's map is a precursor to more contemporary mappings of the north that function to declare boundaries and make claims to space (whether as property or as objects

of scientific inquiry) but which marginalize the dynamic flux of social relations. For instance, the Canadian government's Ministry of Natural Resources provides a tour of Rankin Inlet, on the west coast of Hudson Bay, through a series of Landsat images, digital pictures produced from satellite positions, and used to map geographic locations, particularly with respect to climate.⁷ In the false-colour image, bodies of water appear as a solid black mass while the tundra is shown in fiery red, as if we are looking into a post-greenhouse future of the earth on fire. Yet it is also an environment sanitized through digitization, at least from the distant view. In any case, the imagery requires very specific technologies and a base of knowledge through which it can be read.

Our project is, however, to read against the grain of this technologized view from above to consider the interrelation of the form of representation with narrative content and socio-political context. In *Picture of Light* (Peter Mettler, 1994) a poetic documentary film about the northern lights, which evokes the beauty of the Aurora Borealis and draws a relation to the organization of sight through the experience of cinema, the rational view from above is set against experience on the ground. A NASA scientist, circulating in a spacecraft through the Aurora, provides the scientific story, that the northern lights are created by energy generated when solar wind passes through the earth's magnetic field. He notes that this energy far exceeds that of the entire North American power grid. This reference serves to produce the northern sky in relation to a specific southern discursive and technological regime. That this story is provided on the grainy video of a satellite hook-up inserted into an otherwise formally beautiful film suggests something of the technocratic perspective being privileged. Indeed, the spacecraft flies directly through the northern lights but the scientist cannot really express vision in other than strictly rationalist terms. In contrast, the film interviews residents on the ground of the north, offering a variety of contradictory and poetic perspectives on the lights in the sky. Finally, the film gives over to a state of wonder at the play of light, suggesting that representation remains at a distance from experience.

Wonder is replaced by an examination of material reality in another feature documentary released at about the same

time, *In the Reign of Twilight* (Kevin McMahon, 1995). This film deals more directly with the militarization of the north on behalf of Empire and the processes through which space and place are produced. As the title suggests, it is about the negotiation of boundaries: light and dark, north and south, traditional Inuit life and integration into the market economy. The film does not produce a simple dichotomy between nature and tradition on the one hand and modern culture on the other — all these terms are, after all, cultural categories. Instead, the film avoids the Flaherty-like tendency to cast traditional culture as locked into an undialectical historical past. There is evidence of Inuit activity in the Arctic for at least five thousand years. In order to survive and develop a complex culture, the Inuit have obviously adapted to circumstances; that is to say, to have made their own history rather than be passively cast in time. In this regard, the film engages its subject through an examination of two icons of communication: the first related to tradition, the second to the contemporary condition. The opening image is of an Inukshuk, a traditional Inuit anthropoid-shaped marker used to indicate a trail, hunting area, or other significant place — on the tundra it may be the only marker of human passage. It is made out of whatever is at hand, rocks or blocks of snow, in statuesque scale or in smaller form. The material binds this marker of communication to the everyday practices of place, though it also serves as a marker for those who are passing through rather than remaining in place. In the film, the camera zooms out from the Inukshuk and we see that it is a large photograph decorating an upscale mall while the narrator asks, “If we have their icons, what did Inuit get in return.”

The other icon of communication answers that question. The Distant Early Warning (DEW Line) radar stations were built across the Arctic at the beginning of the cold war to monitor the sky for Soviet invasion, and transformed the north into a space of military contestation. While the Inukshuk, as technology of communication, is materially bound to the earth, this one is made from imported materials and assembled and operated in accordance with a hierarchical regime of technology and power, and its signals are directed at the sky rather than to lived reality on the ground. It was with the start of the cold war that the Canadian government began to take a substantial interest

in the development of the north (in response to evidence of American territorial incursions) and the integration of indigenous people into the market economy. With the cold war, the Inuit were transformed from nomadic hunter-gatherers to waged labourers, while space was transformed from the open place of communal living to more regulated forms of property. A key question the film poses is: To what degree is this instrumentalization of space resisted, and how is the specificity of place articulated in a way that might foster critical understanding?

On the one hand, we see that in spite of modern technologies of communication, young Inuit explain in interviews an inability to speak with elders except through translation, and are unable to read the landscape for navigational or survival purposes. However, the film avoids an easy contrast between a traditional north and a technologized south. Instead, it suggests that the wreckage produced by consumer culture and its attendant alienating effect is the result of exploitation and underdevelopment that Marx identified as central to the spatial practices of capitalism.

Throughout the film, we also see uses of communications technology to reclaim space. For instance, Inuit sculpture, now an expensive commodity, is marketed from the north via video-satellite uplinks. A more powerful case is in the testimony of an Inuit man who describes using a hidden cassette recorder to capture and re-learn his own indigenous language, which had been lost as a consequence of English-based formal education in the ruthlessly assimilationist residential schools. Efforts at resistance are, however, set in dialectical relation with images of abandoned radar stations and heaps of rusting oil barrels — the leakage of toxic waste serves as material referent to the political and economic transformation of space.

The film concludes with a story that contrasts the instrumental with the spiritual imagination. An elder relates his experience of witnessing the broadcast of an American mission to the moon and then describes a medicine man's description of a trip to the moon. While the frame of positivist imperialism situates the medicine man's journey as a flight of fancy, the film strives to demonstrate the contingency of spatial and temporal conceptualization

with respect to prevailing ideological and material uses of space. As the film's narrator indicates in describing the ideological assumptions embedded in technologies of travel: "The map lets you feel you were born to fly and to forget that your viewpoint has concrete manifestations." This text, likewise, points to the need to understand the concrete uses of place from an Inuit point of view, and that the concrete includes both materiality and non-material experience. The point is not simply to preserve a nostalgic recording of traditional life but to deploy video as an extension of the process of adaptation and creativity that mark cultural survival through time (and against the ideological notion of timeless tradition).

Concepts of "place" are social and historical rather than natural even if, in the dominant ideological narrative of Canada, the north is a fantasy space of pure white snow — narrated as barren and thus available for resource extraction. The question here is the degree to which media narratives function to produce or challenge that dominant narrative. The development of television in northern Canada corresponds with this hegemonic narrative, though inflected by the contradictions of the liberal nation-state. In brief, northern broadcasting established in various communities throughout the Canadian Arctic in the 1970s has, on the one hand, facilitated increased self-representation of Inuit experience and contributed significantly to documenting their stories and practices. However, the establishment of this technological apparatus has also fostered a new form of marginalization-via-cultural pluralism, in that this minimal mass media presence, while by no means ensuring that social and economic needs of the Inuit are actually acted upon, has instead served to negate activists' claims that the needs of Inuit are ignored.

The technology brings into the north generic commercial programming. The Inuit Broadcasting Corporation itself has to share satellite time and is given more marginal timeslots that are sometimes pre-empted when, for instance, hockey games go into overtime — the on-ice spectacle being privileged over images of experience on the open tundra. Just as important are the constraints of the broadcast form and format: the regime of a weekly broadcast schedule and the generic time frame and format of current affairs-style serial television.

The format privileges monologue over dialogue and typically leads the viewer toward conclusions already pre-determined at the outset. In this way, it is fundamentally at odds with the structure of communication within Inuit culture. One of the most successful Canadian aboriginal media production companies, Igloodik Isuma Productions, understands its function explicitly as a counterforce to this regimentation of culture. As founding partner Norman Cohn states:

We are fighting a guerrilla battle over a process of production that we think is politically much more progressive than the conventional process of production. Either in conventional film making, which is extremely hard — as military as the military — or conventional television, which is as corporate-controlled as is Wall Street, or the pharmaceutical or the chemical industry. So our “process competitors” are essentially the military and the oil and gas industry.⁸

Igloodik Isuma is most well known for the recent feature-film success, *Atanarjuat: The Fast Runner* (Zach Kunuk, 2001). While the film did exceptionally well globally it did so despite the marginal support it got financially within Canada where aboriginal media continue to be under-funded. The primary state-supported equity investor for Canadian film and television — Telefilm Canada — has both a feature film fund as well as an aboriginal production fund, the latter having significantly less funds available to producers. While such a funding envelope does encourage diversity, it also marginalizes more experienced producers seeking to make more expensive longer-running complex work that can be exhibited in the broader media marketplace. A key achievement of this film, alongside its on-screen success, has been the producer’s successful challenge to this structure of financing marginalization. Yet, after the film was completed on digital video, the state agency would not invest in the 35mm blow-up for theatrical release, demonstrating the token nature of their initial investment which was predicated on production but not wide distribution — this is the reality of what appears to be a progressive public funding system. The film has, however, gone on to substantial international critical and audience acclaim at Cannes (2001) and elsewhere, crossing-over from art-house to the mainstream.

This film is a substantial counterforce to the romanticization of northern peoples in mainstream media whereby Inuit are fixed in time rather than understood as active agents of history. Briefly, the film's process includes collective authorship drawing on a thousand year old traditional story. That story is not a quaint folk-tale set in the distant past; rather it serves to tell us about the limits of individualism as something that is at odds with the interests of the community. One characteristic of traditional storytelling at work here is the alteration of the story in order to fit the needs of present circumstances. In this way, a modernist "aura" does not contain the story; rather it is produced by the contingencies of community and the community becomes an active agent of history. In this case, the ending of the original Inuit legend is significantly altered.

In the legend, the character Atanarjuat returns to his community to seek revenge for the murder of his brother and the attempted murder of himself. In the original version, his return is marked by brutal and violent revenge. In the film, the character demonstrates his ability to murder his opponents and then, at the last moment, resists the urge to violence. The cycle of violence is disrupted and the community is able to reconstitute itself. The cinematic transformation of the legend makes use of southern-based systems of representation to reclaim culture as distinct from the experience of colonization through which Inuit are produced as victims — turning the axis of Empire, and history, on its head.

This brief account does not begin to do justice to the complexity of the film, but does demonstrate resistance to Empire articulated both in the narrative and in the context out of which it emerges. I shall now discuss a lesser-known production that likewise emerges both within and against the dominant media apparatus, and that is about the dialectical relation between past and present, of tradition and modernity. *Amarok's Song* (Martin Kreelak and Ole Gjerstad, 1999) was made just prior to the establishment of the new Canadian territory of Nunavut, a significant redrawing of political boundaries in the north which provided the Inuit with a limited degree of governmental autonomy. The video articulates the presence of tradition in the face of the establishment of this new political use of

space. This territorialism on the one hand further entrenches the regime of settlement against the mobility of nomadic tradition, but the film's representational strategies resist a singular position of authorship fixed in time and place. One can understand Inuit use of video as an extension of the traditional storytelling of oral culture, and like that form of expression, there is adaptation of the particular narrative to circumstances, as in the ending of *Atanarjuat* cited above. Here, the mobile video technology offsets the monopolization of power and the control of space by making permanent recordings of oral storytelling, thereby integrating tradition with the new.

Amarok's Song weaves together three generations of Inuit experience mapped onto the twentieth century. These include elders who have direct experience as nomadic hunters, adults who have some memory of traditional life but were subjected to the assimilationist tyranny of residential schools, and Inuit teenagers who have grown up entirely in settlements and with regular exposure to media culture. In each narrative strand "place" is both fixed and fluid in relation to social contingency. The elder hunter Amarok describes the specificity of place in the present as understood in relation to the felt presence of his ancestral spirits. At the end of the film, he suggests, with a sly grin, that he too will live forever thanks to this film — signaling the function of video as providing continuity through time and space, what was once the function of oral storytelling. For the filmmaker Martin Kreelak, speaking as a member of that generation caught in between tradition and southern influence (influence that includes hockey, economic obligations, and also the brutal memory of physical abuse at residential school) life in the north is spatially defined by settlement, by having a mortgage, and by his own wage labour as a media producer. For youth in this film, video technology serves an expressive and cathartic function that both marks their environment as shaped by mass media and consumer culture, but also posits identity as formed by multiple avenues of influence and expression. Included in *Amarok's Song* are several short videos produced by high school students, demonstrating the producer's disavowal of a singular position of authorship. These multiple stories exist relationally rather than in a hierarchy. There is not,

for example, a lament for wayward youth exposed to media culture. Instead, the mass media are understood as part of this environment and to describe them simply as a southern intrusion is to position oneself as victim rather than as active agent in the production of culture.

One important aspect of this video is the inclusion of archive material, a use that demonstrates the spin of Empire while also undermining the prevailing power relationship. Keep in mind that this documentary is produced in part with the assistance of the National Film Board, an agency that on the one hand has been involved with numerous productions that articulate a resistance to dominant power, and has fostered significant innovations in documentary production practice. It is also a government supported agency initially founded with the mission of producing propaganda for the Allied war effort during World War II and, more generally, with the hegemonic purpose of communicating the ideals of the nation-state in the increasingly globalized post-WWII context. We can understand the NFB as representing the contradictions of liberal democracy, both facilitating the hegemonic containment of dissent, while also providing a means of expressing opposition to dominant culture in a form accessible to a mass audience. One could also argue that this kind of outlet for opposition serves to defuse that which may be mobilized in more direct confrontations with the nation-state. In any case, along with its more famous productions, the NFB has, in its early decades, functioned as the in-house producer for the government, creating short films on nationalist-oriented subjects for theatrical and non-theatrical exhibition. It is this material that more clearly reveals the thrust of dominant ideology over that of the more sophisticated productions undertaken by the NFB.

Two such short films are excerpted in *Amarok's Song* in such a way as to turn dominant culture on its head. The first is called *People of the Rock*, produced in 1961 about mining development in the area of Rankin Inlet and the employment of Inuit workers. The narration describes the Inuit in characteristically infantilized terms, stating that they do not really understand what is going on, but that they make good (docile) workers even if local cultural practices are at odds with the regime of organized labour (as if survival through hunting does not require sophisticated

knowledge, organization, and teamwork). Following this condescending mythologization is testimony relating the brutal material conditions of work in the north. Morris Kreelak, older brother of one of the video's producers, relates the experience of mining as one filled with many dangers and accidents, including his own collapse due to exposure to carbon monoxide during a warehouse fire. When his unconscious body was found he was assumed to be dead and wrapped in a tarpaulin — no one bothering to seek emergency medical attention. He survived to report that none of the company managers ever spoke of this incident or offered so much as an apology. Angry and bitter, he quit and returned to the work of hunting (which he continues to practice, at the time of production, as one of the few remaining full-time self-sustaining hunters in the region). He moved from the spatial internment of underground labour where he was literally confined as a corpse to the free movement of nomadic experience.

Yet by no means is this story a romanticization of the life of the hunter. The point is made several times that success is shadowed by the experience of starvation, as Morris states: "We hunt with all our might. Hunters will freeze to death on the tundra; it's a hard life. You take nothing for granted." This description is quite unlike the fantasy of the north formulated in southern-produced nature films (beginning with Flaherty's *Nanook*), where the heroic hunter or explorer typically succeeds in accordance with the conventions of the dramatic narrative and an ideology determined by privilege and hierarchy. In contrast, the lived reality for the Inuit hunter, however skilled, cannot simply dominate this space, nor is the animal abstracted from the process since death is directly connected with the immediate needs of food consumption without the mediation of the commodity-fetish.

The other archival element used here is called *Sister Pelagie*, produced in 1951 about the first Inuit woman to become a Catholic nun. In this footage, the apparatus of power is visualized in a single shot which includes an RCMP police officer, an Oblate priest, and capitalist enterprise in the body of the manager of the Hudson's Bay Trading Post monopoly. Pelagie herself is infantilized in the clip, shown frolicking in the snow with young children, and her later break with the church is suggested as being related to a long

history of sexual and physical abuse. The use of the archival footage here is to articulate a resistance to the power of Empire while suggesting the legacy of destruction. Pelagie describes to the filmmaker the loneliness of living in a world of strict rules, denial, and suffering, and the explicit isolation from traditional language and practices. Her story indicates how control over territory is bound together with the systematized and hierarchical control over systems of belief, as well as the interconnection of this control with the state's own apparatus of representation — images which are then distributed in the south as the naturalized image of social relations in the north. My point is that the use of these archival media images serves to reveal the ideological underpinnings of Empire while also expressing resistance, precisely through a dialectical engagement with power that is the basis of historical understanding.

My account here is by no means a comprehensive survey of media production in and about the north; rather, it is a sketch of how a few specific films and videos have expressed multiple positions of authorship and thus articulated the complex experience of community, culture, and resistance.⁹ These texts are united by a strong emphasis on the material reality of life lived on the land in contrast with the abstractions of space produced by the ideological regimes of Empire. My point is to highlight the complexity of culture as represented in these works and also to integrate this understanding within a broader context of contemporary debates on Imperialism and Empire. I am in agreement with Julia Emberley who warns us: "An ideology of cultural difference which insists on reading First Nations stories as belonging to a radically other dimension of self-contained cultural life presupposes that these stories constitute an aesthetic practice removed from political, social and economic questions."¹⁰ We must avoid the tendency to homogenize the particularities of culture, or to primitivize its functionality, and instead understand space, place, and culture to be vitally produced through specific understandings of power.

One final image needs mention, as it returns us to the beginning of my discussion on how Empire maps space for capitalist expansion while emptying it of the lived reality on the ground. On Christmas Eve, a branch of NORAD is dedicated to the tracking of Santa Claus's flight through

the sky.¹¹ Children are invited to log on to the website and experience the thrill of inter-continental surveillance. This website is surely well-intentioned as location of play and projection of fantasy. However, it also serves to naturalize this cold-war era military-surveillance institution — filling this space with the knowledge of who has been naughty and who has been nice, and keeping Empire safe for the distractions of consumerism.

- 1 Scholarship on mass media and the north is extensive, a very selective list of useful references includes: Debbie Brisebois, "Whiteout Warning: Courtesy of the Federal Government," in Nancy Thede and Alain Ambrosi, eds., *Video the Changing World* (Montreal: Black Rose Books, 1991); Kathleen Fleming, "Iglolik Video: An Organic Response from a Culturally Sound Community," *Inuit Art Quarterly* 11:1 (Spring 1996): 26-34; Peter Kulchyski, "The Postmodern and the Paleolithic," *Canadian Journal of Social and Political Thought* 13:3 (1989): 49-62; Laura U. Marks, "Reconfiguring Nationhood: A Partisan History of the Inuit Broadcasting Corporation," *Afterimage* (March 1994): 4-8; Lorna Roth and Gail Guthrie Valaskakis, "Aboriginal Broadcasting in Canada: A Case Study in Democratization," in Marc Raboy and Peter A. Bruck, eds., *Communication For and Against Democracy* (Montreal: Black Rose Books, 1989), 221-233; Lorna Roth, *Something New in the Air: The Story of First Peoples Television Broadcasting in Canada* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2005); Gail Valaskakis, "Communication, Culture and Technology: Satellites and Northern Native Broadcasting in Canada," in Stephen Harold Riggins, ed., *Ethnic Minority Media: An International Perspective* (Newbury Park, CA: Sage, 1992).
- 2 Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Empire* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2000), xiii.
- 3 Jyotsna Kapur, "Book Review: Empire." *Democratic Communiqué* 18 (Summer 2002): 117.
- 4 As is by now well known, the authors of the imperialist manifesto *Project for the New American Century* (www.newamericancentury.org) have taken up central roles in formulating U.S. foreign policy.
- 5 Leo Panitch and Sam Ginden, "Global Capitalism and American Empire," *Socialist Register 2004: The New Imperial Challenge* (London: Merlin, 2003): 23.
- 6 Sherrill Grace, "Exploration as Construction: Robert Flaherty and *Nanook of the North*," *Essays in Canadian Writing* 59 (Fall 1996): 132.
- 7 http://www.ccrs.nrcan.gc.ca/ccrs/learn/tour/13/13scene2_e.html

- 8 Michael Robert Evans, "Frozen Light and Fluid Time: The Folklore, Politics, and Performance of Inuit Video," PhD Dissertation, Indiana University (September 1999), p. 125.
- 9 Laura Marks has pointed out some important limits to how the discourse of Inuit video is typically organized among southern-based academics and programmers. She indicates the tendency among communication scholars, to focus on infrastructure and social relations while either shying away from interpretation (to avoid cultural imperialism), or within Film Studies, to insert selected works into an art-world canonical framework of authorship. See: Laura Marks, "Inuit Auteurs and Arctic Airwaves: Questions of Southern Reception," *Fuse* 21:4 (Fall 1998): 13-17.
- 10 Julia V. Emberley, *The Cultural Politics of Fur* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1997), 187.
- 11 www.noradsanta.org

Works Cited

- Emberley, Julia V. *The Cultural Politics of Fur*. Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1997.
- Evans, Michael Robert. "Frozen Light and Fluid Time: The Folklore, Politics, and Performance of Inuit Video." Ph. D. Dissertation, Indiana University, 1999.
- Flaherty, Robert. *Nanook of the North*. Distributor: Criterion. 1922.
- Grace, Sherrill. "Exploration as Construction: Robert Flaherty and *Nanook of the North*." *Essays in Canadian Writing* 59 (Fall 1996): 123-46.
- Hardt, Michael and Antonio Negri. *Empire*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2000.
- Kapur, Jyotsna. "Book Review: *Empire*." *Democratic Communiqué* 18 (Summer 2002): 115-123.
- Kreelak, Martin and Ole Gjerstad. *Amarok's Song*. Distributor: The National Film Board of Canada www.nfb.ca. 1999.
- Kunuk, Zach. *Atanarjuat: The Fast Runner*. 2001. Distributor, in Canada: Odeon/Alliance-Atlantis; in U.S.: Lot 47 Films www.atanarjuat.com. 2001.
- McMahon, Kevin. *In the Reign of Twilight*. Distributor: Bullfrog Films www.bullfrogfilms.com. 1995.
- Marks, Laura. "Inuit Auteurs and Arctic Airwaves: Questions of Southern Reception." *Fuse* 21:4 (Fall 1998): 13-17.
- Mettler, Peter. *Picture of Light*. Distributor: Grimthorpe Films. grimfilm@ca.inter.net. 1994.
- Panitch, Leo and Sam Ginden, eds. *Socialist Register 2004: The New Imperial Challenge*. London: Merlin, 2003.

This page intentionally left blank.
