

***Isuma: Inuit Video Art.* By Michael Robert Evans. London & Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2008. xiv + 242 pp. References, index.**

This is a good book. I strongly agree with the author's initial statement: "Just as Inuit art should take its place among the great arts of the world, Inuit videography should take its place among the great Inuit arts" (3).

The work is based on over 400 interviews, mostly using an Inuktitut-speaking interpreter, conducted during nine months of field research in Igloolik in 1999. The author is an experienced journalist-turned-folklorist who pursued his PhD with the famed folklorist Henry Glassie. The weakest section of the book, Chapter 3, considers video as folklore—referencing the narrator-source, the nature and size of the audience, and the methods of transmission and feedback.

The book focuses on three institutions in the Canadian Arctic community of Igloolik (population 1,100) that make videos (movies and TV programs). The first is the local studio of the Inuit Broadcasting Corporation (IBC), a network funded and directed from Ottawa where most local video makers, including Zacharias Kunuk, were trained and have worked. The second, Igloolik Isuma Productions, a video collective started by Kunuk that has produced many famous videos of the Arctic (see below), is the main focus of the book. The third, Tariagsuk Video Centre, is a community video maker, the umbrella organization for the women's video collective Arnait Ikajurtigiit, led by Montrealer Marie-Hélène Cousineau.

The author, following the guiding principles at Isuma, has a strong ideological objective, which one may summarize as the decolonization of Inuit video making. Kunuk, his collaborator and cameraman Norman Cohn, and others believe that IBC, although it initiated and trained Inuit to make films and television programs while pursuing the worthwhile goal of enabling Inuit to make their own television in the Inuktitut language, is a treacherous institution which still works under *Qallunaat* (non-Inuit, especially white) imperatives typified by an Ottawa-controlled budgeting system, rigid deadlines, and the practice of filming pre-scripted stories. Isuma, on the other hand, follows flexible schedules, depending as much on funding as on weather, allows stories to unfold "naturally," and provides semi-scripted guidelines which the actors interpret in their own way. Second, Isuma makes films to present an insider's perspective, countering the long history of films made by outsiders, especially Robert Flaherty's *Nanook of the North* and Asen Balikci's *Netsilik* series. Evans rightly points out that Isuma does not present the Inuit point of view but, rather, a personal and strongly principled one.

The main chapters of the book give accounts of the filmmaking and films made by Isuma. While working for IBC, Kunuk made his non-narrative “collage,” *From Inuk Point of View* (1985), prior to Isuma’s incorporation in 1990. Producer/director Kunuk, working with cameraman Cohn, writer and editor Paul Apak, and cultural narrator Pauloosie Quliktalik, then made a series of videos recreating Inuit life in the 1930s, recalling the Inuit world experienced by their parents, a world dependent on trading with white agents but still nomadic—before schools, wooden housing, compulsory education, and the sedentarization of the 1960s. These films present a viable and admirable Inuit life, one in accord with Kunuk’s desire to capture and represent traditional Inuit knowledge and skills both to younger Inuit and to the outside world. They include *Qaggiq* [Meeting House] (1989), about the community igloo, scenes of rituals and games cementing local solidarity; *Nunaqpa* [Going on the Land] (1991), about co-operative caribou hunting as a necessary and ordinary part of life; and *Saputi* [the Weir] (1993), in which three Inuit families construct a fishing weir to which fish never come, an unexceptional Inuit life experience.

Evans then turns to contemporary documentaries, starting with *Sananguakti* [The Carvers] (1995), which depicts an economically and culturally important Inuit occupation, followed by the opportunistic *Arvik!* [Bowhead Whale] (1998), about an unplanned “illegal” whale hunt by untrained hunters who relied on the knowledge of a few elders. This latter film upholds the Isuma ideal of handing on traditional knowledge while in this case working to secure the Inuit right to hunt a whale every two years. The next film that Evans discusses, *Nipi (Voice)* [Sound] (1999) examines changes in power, wealth, and the transmission of information in 1999, the year that Nunavut was officially created.

Following the completion of these early films, Isuma embarked on its most ambitious project, the production of a full-scale feature film, *Atanarjuat: the Faster Runner* (2001), a story of jealousy, shamanism, murder, and revenge based on a centuries-old Igloodik *unikatuak* [myth-story]. In 2001, *Atanarjuat* won the Camera d’Or Prize at the Cannes Film Festival and brought Isuma worldwide fame. Nevertheless, Isuma has always suffered from funding problems because, unlike IBC or CBC, it is a private entity and because of its unorthodox organization and production methods (128–133). The author witnessed the making of *Atanarjuat* and the publication of his new book on this topic is imminent. Interestingly, he shows that the film has an ending entirely different from the three oral versions of the *unikatuak*, suggesting that Isuma wanted to stress the traditional Inuit value of community order, though personally I think

the benign conclusion reflects half a century of Christianity. Evans goes on to discuss Isuma's next feature film, *The Journals of Knud Rasmussen* (2006), a nostalgic story about the victory of Christianity over the world of animism and shamanism, made after the author left Igloolik. He notes its mixed reception in the South which exemplifies the difficulty Isuma has in pleasing its multiple audiences while sticking to its principles.

Perhaps the most interesting information in the book concerns the personnel of Isuma. Zacharias Kunuk was born in 1957 near Igloolik, and was perhaps reared as a *sipiniq* (a boy raised as a girl, often creative individuals). He took to video as a teenager. Norman Cohn is an American experimental videomaker who met Kunuk at a workshop in Iqaluit, where he also met Marie-Hélène Cousineau, a Montreal artist, with whom he shares a house in Igloolik; they have a son in Montreal. Paul Apak was a writer and editor who died young while making *Atanarjuat*. And Paulossie Qulitalik, also a founder of Isuma who has worked for IBC, is an authority on Inuit culture and wants to promote it through film.

There are two surprising omissions in the book: references to the important Inuit-made film, *Starting Fire With Gunpowder* (1991), about the origins, growth, and programming of IBC itself (and which features Paul Apak), and Saladin d'Anglure's very thorough book *Atanarjuat, la légende de l'homme rapide* (2002). There are also two minor errors of translation. The first (xii) repeats the erroneous belief that "Eskimo" means "eaters of raw flesh," whereas we have long known that it derives from an Algonkian word for 'stranger' or 'enemy'. Secondly, *piujuq* (179) does not mean "pretty face," but merely "good" or "beautiful."

This is an outstanding book, not only for its accounts of Isuma, but for its discussion of rapid changes in the Canadian North and the creation of Nunavut.

**Nelson H. H. Graburn**, Department of Anthropology, University of California, Berkeley