

# THE FLAHERTY

DECADES IN THE CAUSE OF  
INDEPENDENT CINEMA



Patricia R. Zimmermann  
and Scott MacDonald

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# INTRODUCTION

*The Flaherty: Decades in the Cause of Independent Cinema* represents an unusual collaboration between two scholars and two ways of doing history. Throughout the evolution of this project, Patricia R. Zimmermann has focused on writing the institutional history of the annual Robert Flaherty Seminar, while Scott MacDonald has explored the recordings of the discussions that have taken place at the Flaherty during the decades it has operated. The structure of this volume is a braiding together of our distinct but, we hope, synergic efforts in hopes that our strategy might evoke the energy and dynamism of the Flaherty Seminar itself.

## PATRICIA R. ZIMMERMANN: IMAGINING A HISTORY OF THE FLAHERTY SEMINAR

The Robert Flaherty Film Seminar is one of the oldest, continuously functioning organizations in the world dedicated to an exploration of independent cinema. It began in 1955 on the Flaherty farm in Vermont at the height of the civil rights movement, the Cold War, the Eisenhower era, and the Red Scare as a place to think through cinema as an art form rather than as a business. Before the current concept of independent cinema existed and before the development of the nonprofit media arts sector now called public media, before the Sundance Film Festival and the Tribeca Film Festival, before the Ann Arbor Film Festival and the Toronto International Film Festival, before arts funding from entities such as the New York State Council on the Arts and the National Endowment for the Arts, before the proliferation of microcinemas and niche festivals, the Robert Flaherty Film Seminar was grappling with the aesthetics, dimensions, economics, exhibition, forms, politics, and scope of cinema produced outside the confines of the commercial studio system.

The achievement of the Robert Flaherty Film Seminar is singular and significant. For over half a century—and never missing a year despite financial and organizational challenges—the Flaherty Seminar has created an ongoing experience of cinema that is annoying, collective, exasperating, exhilarating, exploratory, immersive, interactive, and urgent. The annual seminar has screened thousands of films central to the histories of independent cinema, particularly documentary and experimental film, and has hosted hundreds of intense discussions about them. Thousands of seminarians from

academia, television, public media, festivals, filmmaking, foundations, microcinemas, museums, and national art cinemas have engaged the aesthetic, intellectual, and political cauldron that is the Flaherty and, as a result of their interactions with colleagues at the seminars, have reshaped international independent cinema. (The theological implications of “seminarian” might surprise most Flaherty attendees, but the seminar has always been more like a spiritual retreat than like a conference or a film festival; usually, all but very special guests stay in rather monastic college dorm rooms.) As International Film Seminars (IFS) now proclaims on its website, the Flaherty is a “one of a kind institution that seeks to encourage filmmakers and other artists to explore the potential of the moving image”—a sentiment first nurtured by Frances Flaherty herself in the early 1950s.

The Flaherty has been criticized both outside and inside the organization for what some have seen as an elitism based in the East Coast arts and intellectual scene, for its psychic destruction of filmmakers, its clique-ish and almost cultish mentality, its obsession with Cold War politics, its fear of avant-garde film, its jargon-ridden academic discussions, its production of reverence and mysticism around the “Flaherty Way,” and its white privilege. For every argument against the Flaherty, however, there are counter-arguments. Indeed, the volatility and lack of resolution about what the Flaherty Seminar actually is may be the best demonstration of its continuing vibrancy as an organization and as an annual, in-depth metaexperience of cinema.

The structure of the Flaherty Seminar has changed little over six decades: each year, films are screened and discussed with the filmmakers, usually with the assistance of a moderator. Many guest filmmakers have been key figures who have defined international independent cinema; they include Moussa Sene Absa, Erik Barnouw, James Benning, Lucien Castaing-Taylor, Shirley Clarke, Edwardo Coutinho, Sergey Dvortsevov, Robert Drew, Péter Forgács, Hollis Frampton, Su Friedrich, Richard Fung, Bahman Ghobadi, Michael Glawogger, William Greaves, Kazuo Hara, DeeDee Halleck, Joris Ivens, Ken Jacobs, Mani Kaul, Richard Leacock, Chris Marker, Louis Malle, Louis Massiah, Albert Maysles, Mira Nair, The Newsreel Collective, Marcel Ophuls, Artavazd Peleshyan, Ed Pincus, Satyajit Ray, Marlon Riggs, Marta Rodriguez, Abderrahmane Sissako, Cheick Oumar Sissoko, George Stoney, Trinh T. Minh-ha, Ulrike Ottinger Johan van der Keuken, Agnes Varda, and Peter Watkins. The Flaherty structure gives equal weight and time to the films and to discussions with their makers. Through the decades, the Flaherty’s exhibition strategy has been to insist that people thinking about films and candidly discussing them in an open forum is as important as the films themselves.

For many years, information about what has taken place at the annual seminar has been passed by word of mouth, and one result has been mythic tales about vociferous, gut-wrenching debates and eye-opening discoveries of new filmmakers and cinemas. As Jack Churchill, a Boston-based filmmaker whose work was screened at the first seminar in 1955, has explained, the Flaherty’s general structure and reputation for volatile discussion was evident from the outset: “For one week, we ate, slept, and dreamed film. Our day consisted of three screening periods interrupted only for meals. After screening a group of films, we would return to a wood-paneled study to discuss the works with the filmmakers responsible. As one of the filmmakers whose work was critiqued, I welcomed the feedback. Although the discussions sometimes became heated, this two-way communication

between filmmaker and audience was, for me, the most important part of the learning process that took place that week.” The seminars take place in an atmosphere simultaneously informal yet intensive, relaxed yet disciplined, unacademic yet searching, critical yet usually constructive. Seminarians are urged to attend all discussions and be an integral part of the group process during discussions and at other times as well. The discussions are audiotaped and the tapes become part of the seminar archives—implicitly, a resource for future scholars. In their emphasis on seeing, their vividness and impact, and their concentrated focus on film to the exclusion of all other concerns, the seminars are unique. The profound experience that participants continually report is not related simply to the films programmed at the seminar but also to the process—in a sense, the “process” of the seminar is its content. The bafflements, illuminations, abrasions, awarenesses, confrontations, and connections—what can feel like the unabating assault on one’s preconceptions—during group discussions and at the many other interactions among seminarians during the seminar week create, for some, a transformative experience. It is the stuff of Flaherty legend that the first Flaherty Seminar one attends is the “best,” but for those who return year after year, the discourse of the seminars is more interesting than any one seminar.

Despite its longevity and endurance; its innovations and impact on filmmakers and film culture; its influence on theoretical debates in the emerging fields of film studies and visual anthropology; and its breakthroughs in providing a platform for new ways of considering the emergence of new forms of cinema—cinéma vérité, compilation documentary, video art—the Flaherty has been curiously absent from histories of American cinema, international cinema, independent film, documentary, and experimental film. The 1995 publication of a special issue of the now-defunct *Wide Angle*, then edited by longtime Flaherty seminarian (and Flaherty programmer) Ruth Bradley, is the one substantial exception.

This special issue of *Wide Angle* (vol. 17, nos. 1–4), entitled “The Flaherty: Four Decades in the Cause of Independent Cinema,” edited by Erik Barnouw and Patricia R. Zimmermann includes reminiscences of Flaherty seminarians from various eras; a range of scholarly and informal essays by Barnouw, Sally Berger, Deirdre Boyle, Faye Ginsburg, Laura U. Marks, Scott MacDonald, Michael Renov, B. Ruby Rich, Thomas Waugh, Zimmermann, and others, plus extensive photography by Bruce Harding and MacDonald’s edited versions of several Flaherty discussions. Ruth Bradley’s willingness to devote a year of *Wide Angle* to the Flaherty demonstrates her sense of the Flaherty’s significance (and her courage as editor). Except for this single publication, however, little information and certainly no detailed history of the Flaherty has been available.

*The Flaherty: Decades in the Cause of Independent Cinema* is an attempt to provide a substantive and detailed (and reasonably up-to-date) chronicle of the Flaherty Seminar. The importance of institutional histories of those organizations that have energized modern film culture has grown in recent years—and the accomplishments and struggles of the Flaherty have much to teach. This book has developed over more than a decade. It has involved two parallel, implicitly collaborative efforts by two longtime Flaherty veterans. My research into Flaherty history has involved burrowing into the Flaherty microfilm collection stored at Columbia University, plunging into disorganized piles of files from the IFS office in New York, including archival evidence from seminar

announcements, memos, letters between Frances and participants, minutes of meetings of the board of trustees, Frances's voluminous published and unpublished writings, and conducting interviews with key Flaherty contributors, trustees, and programmers. My collaborator, Scott MacDonald, has spent many hours working through the recordings of Flaherty discussions. (He describes his process in the second part of this introduction.)

As my research proceeded, it became clear that the history of the Flaherty included several more-or-less distinct eras. Despite its continuing evocation of the original ideas of Frances Flaherty as to the role and function of the seminar, particular periods of the Flaherty Seminar's history have been determined by a variety of cinematic, cultural, and political developments. *The Flaherty: Decades in the Cause of Independent Cinema* is organized into seven chronological sections. Each section combines my analysis of institutional and programming history with one or more key or quintessential discussions from that era. In the chapter essays, I explore Frances Flaherty's ideas on film and filmmaking and on the seminar; I analyze the different periods of the seminar as they evolved and delineate crucial historical collisions at the seminars, including the frequent, decades-long clashes between documentary and experimental film.

It is unusual in the history of cinema to have access to original archival recordings of how films were received and debated; in film history, these data are usually garnered from secondhand reports in newspapers or diaries, or, if they are recorded, lie unexamined by those who might profit from it. The edited transcripts of Flaherty discussions Scott MacDonald has chosen for this volume chronicle how people from different sectors of film culture engaged particular films, as well as cinema in general, at certain moments in time. They provide a sense of how discourse around film culture has changed across six decades—from generalized philosophical meanderings by intellectuals and practitioners trained in other fields to a highly codified academic discipline with its own theories, methodologies, and languages. From the vast repository of discussions, MacDonald chose those discussions where debates fired up and where ruptures and changes in film culture seemed to be working themselves out as a heterogeneous group of seminarians unpacked what disturbed or delighted them.

*The Flaherty: Decades in the Cause of Independent Cinema* is an initial mapping of the expansive territory that the Robert Flaherty Seminar has explored. We have no illusions that our volume is anything like a complete history or even a definitive one. The Flaherty is too complex, labyrinthine, and vast for two historians to do more than to insist on its importance, dig into the historical record, draw what conclusions seem reasonable, and invite further mining. We hope future scholars will use our work as a springboard into the Flaherty and into those other institutions and institutional practices, both for-profit and nonprofit, that have helped to expand our film culture and our understanding of the wide world of cinema.

#### SCOTT MACDONALD: THE LOGISTICS OF TRANSCRIBING AND EDITING FLAHERTY DISCUSSIONS

For many Flaherty seminarians, the discussions with filmmakers immediately after screenings are the heart of the Flaherty experience, the melodrama that energizes the

seminar week and instigates the confrontations of personality and ideology that become the stuff of Flaherty legend. The discussions, which are usually moderated by the year's programmers or seminarians of their choice, generally last around an hour. During the discussions, a single maker may respond to questions and statements—when necessary, with the assistance of a translator. In recent years, several filmmakers sometimes take questions together.

At their best, the discussions elicit interesting and sometimes brilliant insights from the filmmakers, many of whom see a Flaherty invitation as an honor and have clearly readied themselves for the seminar audience. And—again, at their best—the large-group discussions are an open forum that allows attendees to declare themselves about individual works and their makers and to voice their general cinematic concerns of the moment. By and large, seminarians deal with one another with respect and good humor; and as the Flaherty week evolves, the group's interchange reflects the bonding that occurs not only during screenings and large-group discussions but also during smaller-scale interchanges at meals and between events and over drinks at the informal get-togethers that precede dinner and conclude Flaherty evenings.

At their very worst—and this happens rarely, at least in my experience—the large-group discussions function as punishment for makers whose works or whose apparent attitudes offend the shared sensibilities and ideologies of seminarians. Then, “questions” become a way of goading the “guilty” makers. The fact that some invited filmmaker guests spend only a short time at the Flaherty, while attendees are together morning, noon, and night, day after day, can exacerbate an us-versus-them atmosphere. Of course, even within the most “brutal” Flaherty interrogation, there are widely varying attitudes: as I've transcribed legendary “trashings” of makers, I've heard a good many positive comments about the works being discussed. In many cases, seminarians' anger and disapproval is felt rather than enunciated, and as a result, even listening to the tapes of a discussion doesn't necessarily provide a clear sense of the discussion's pervasive mood, a mood felt by attendees and often a subject for conversation after the large-group discussions have concluded.

During various Flaherty eras, different strategies have developed for keeping the discussions efficient and engaging. The fact that the number of attendees at recent seminars has climbed to more than 150 has made discussion a good bit more cumbersome than it was during the early years. Recent programmers have generally met with those they have chosen to be moderators in order to work against the tendency of discussions to become simple Q & As with the makers. Nevertheless, a gathering of 150 cineastes is difficult to control, and the plans of programmers often fall by the wayside, particularly when a film has moved the gathering in a profound way.

The discussions included here are, of course, only the tiniest fragment of the history of seminar interchange, but my hope is that this sampling will serve several functions. First, I have chosen discussions that seem generally representative of the seminar at various moments in its history: the discussions that characterized the seminar in the 1950s are quite different from the discussions of the 1970s or of recent years. Early on, the seminar was divided between attendees and “faculty,” who spoke at greater length than the “students.” In more recent years, democratic interchange has been encouraged; a young

first-time attendee is as likely to speak in a discussion as a longtime Flaherty veteran or even a filmmaker guest. Moderators do prepare questions for filmmaker guests but are also charged with being sure that as many seminarians as want to speak get to speak. The recent tendency to create screenings and discussions featuring more than one filmmaker is an attempt to move discussions toward larger issues in hopes (very rarely realized in fact) that the filmmakers might engage each other in productive ways.

Second, I have included discussions with specific filmmakers whose work has seemed important within the larger history and geography of independent cinema. The discussions included reflect the commitment of Flaherty programmers to both documentary, especially experimental documentary, and what has generally been called avant-garde film (i.e., forms of personally expressive, independent film that often function as challenges to conventional documentary practice). Of course, as will be clear in the discussions, filmmakers from non-Western cultures have often understood cinema practice and history in different ways from how most Western cineastes understand them.

The Flaherty is both a series of discrete, annual events and an ongoing social organism. I have tried to be alert both to the remarkable variety in the filmmaker insights evident during particular discussions at specific seminars and to the ways in which, over long periods, the Flaherty discussions have created an ongoing metadiscourse about what reality-based cinema has been, can be, and should be. During my editing of the discussions, I've also worked to evoke the many networks of personal relationship that are evident among Flaherty veterans over the decades, as well as the ways in which successive seminars reflect the changing interests and concerns of the annual programmers.

One of the unusual dimensions of the Flaherty big-group discussions is that the experiences that individuals remember and the stories they tell about them are often not reflected in the tapes of the discussions. Both D. Marie Grieco and Jay Ruby have told me that the discussion of *David Holzman's Diary* at the 1968 seminar was rather cantankerous (Grieco: "there was a bit of fury in the discussion about the David Holzman diary film" [e-mail to author, January 2010]; Ruby: "I recall a lot of people being pissed off" [e-mail to author February 2010]; and both Grieco and Ruby, as well as others I've spoken to, have remembered Willard Van Dyke claiming that the film could destroy documentary or at least cinéma-vérité documentary).

However, as will be clear in the edited version of the *David Holzman's Diary* discussion, absolutely no anger at the film is evident on the tape (I did not eliminate angry comments in my edit); indeed, this seems to have been a particularly euphoric discussion. What this discrepancy tells us is not that Grieco, Ruby, and the others are incorrect about what happened but that an interchange among a large group of people is seen differently from various angles and from various positions in time. A tape recorder provides only one angle at a single moment, and the seemingly objective evidence of the tape recording must be tempered by a commonsense recognition that what is heard on tape may not conform to what is felt during a discussion or to what people were saying to one another beyond the reach of the tape recorder (or to what was said at other moments during a seminar but is perhaps misremembered as part of the big-group discussion).

Further, a filmmaker's response to a particular seminar experience may seem affable at the seminar but hostile later and vice versa. For example, the 1970 discussion with

Hollis Frampton, included here, seems relatively friendly; however, in a letter dated August 2, 1971, to Sally Dixon, Frampton would wonder, “does this find you returned once more from Fla(gella)herty? If so, cheer up, I understand even Sisyphus has vowed not to go next year. Honestly, I still hurt from that thing, in spots. Though I wonder how much of it was sheer horror at returning to prep-school life (complete!) which I loathed [*sic*] with a hatred that still raises my snarling muscles. . . . Lawder’s inextinguishable cannabis almost made it tolerable at some moments, but this is advice that you will have too late, & anyhow he said he wdn’t [*sic*] go this year either.” Whether Frampton’s experience was as unsatisfactory as this letter would suggest, whether he felt it incumbent as an avant-garde filmmaker to respond negatively to the kind of group experience the Flaherty Seminar provides, or whether other factors were involved is hard to say. What is obvious is that each Flaherty Seminar is a complicated and evanescent process that produces complex and continually evolving responses.

In some instances, I have worked with discussions I was present at or part of; in others, I’ve been entirely dependent on the tape or digital recordings. Generally, I have identified discussants simply as “F” (for Flaherty seminarian); but in some cases, when I have been absolutely clear about the identity of discussants, I have used their names in hopes that knowing who says what will add to the historical interest of the discussion. These identifications are also meant to contribute to the reader’s sense of the complex experience of the seminar. At any given moment during the Flaherty week, attendees are acquainted with only some of their colleagues; however, for those attendees who return to the Flaherty year after year, particular individuals become well-known “characters” in the ongoing metadrama of the seminar discussions.

Much of my research over the years has taken the form of in-depth interviews with independent filmmakers. I have learned that in most cases, a verbatim transcript of a conversation—no matter how coherent the discussion sounded when it was occurring and no matter how precise the transcription—tends to distort the nature of the original conversation. I have transcribed the discussions very carefully but then have treated each transcription as raw material from which to fabricate a “reading” of the original discussion. Especially when attendees are identified as “F,” I have played fast and loose with their comments, combining and condensing what is said, while doing my best to remain true to what has seemed to me the spirit and idea content of the discussion. When the speakers are identified, I have been as true to the particulars of their comments as clarity and fairness allow.

While most of those who find their way to this book and to these edited discussions will probably not read the volume from front to back, I have chosen and ordered the discussions so that if one does read them in the order they are presented here, the reading experience will reflect the variations in Flaherty discussions as well as continuities that develop over time.

Of course, anyone who has attended even a single Flaherty might well have chosen an entirely different set of discussions. There is certainly a wealth of material to choose from (during the 1994 Flaherty, there were twenty formal discussions; during the 1993 seminar, twenty; 1992, twenty-one . . . ). Hopefully, my choices will instigate a more thorough exploration of the Flaherty archives.



Frances Flaherty circa 1968. Photo courtesy of International Film Seminars, Inc./The Flaherty, New York.

## THE FLAHERTY WAY

The Flaherty Seminar is one of the oldest, continuously running gatherings for independent film in the world. Launched by Frances Flaherty in 1955, the seminar explored the “Flaherty Way” of making films, rejecting planning and scripts required by commercial production practices. Frances was the widow of renowned documentary filmmaker Robert Flaherty. Although Robert directed the films and occupies a central, if controversial, place in documentary film history books, it was Frances who developed the Robert Flaherty Film Seminar for community, debate, dialogue, and screenings. The seminar has provided a retreat-like, closed setting for distributors, film librarians, filmmakers, funders, programmers, and scholars for more than sixty years.

Robert Flaherty, who shot films in exotic locations such as the Canadian north and Samoa and then shared production stories to eager acolytes rather than theorizing his practice, did not conceptualize the “Flaherty Way.” Instead, his widow developed the “Flaherty Way” after his death. She advocated for a poetic cinema that surrendered to the materials and the environment. In Frances’s vision, the “Flaherty Way” offered a more artisanal, personal cinema than the formulaic, predictable industrial model based on imposition of commercial norms, planning, and scripts. Resolutely anti-Hollywood, the “Flaherty Way” combined the explorer’s journeys into the unknown, the ethnographer’s observation of cultural patterns, and the Zen mystics’ openness to surroundings.

The Robert Flaherty Foundation and the Robert Flaherty Seminar emerged from Frances’s contention that learning to see in deeper, more complex ways could be acquired through intensive viewing and vigorous discussion. In a 1961 letter to the Guggenheim Foundation in support of a grant application by Frances, George Amberg wrote: “It may be useful to point out that Mrs. Flaherty is not, as would be natural, so much concerned with building a monument in honor of a great filmmaker and a great man, than with promoting and supporting a vital succession, establishing a tradition, making discoveries, and encouraging new talent. Toward this end, she organized the Flaherty Foundation and initiated the Flaherty Seminars, an annual venture devoted to the scholarly and critical study of the motion picture.”<sup>1</sup>

The Flaherty Foundation and the Flaherty Seminar are significant in film history. They show the challenges of the early foundational period in the development of the

nascent nonprofit public media sector in the United States in the post–World War II period. They suggest the importance of institutional histories to delineate the infrastructure bolstering cinematic cultures beyond the commercial systems. The foundation and the seminars occupy a vital interstitial zone between emergent alternative film cultures in the 1950s: 16mm exhibition, art cinemas, educational and industrial films, film festivals, film societies, independent cinema beyond commercial studios, and university film education.

The Flaherty Foundation, formed by Frances and David Flaherty, Robert's brother, in 1951, and its outgrowth, the Flaherty Seminar, inaugurated in 1955, were initially dedicated to preserving and circulating Flaherty's films. They advocated for an artisanal, independent, poetic cinema immunized from the commercial Hollywood system. Convening a small, intimate group of distributors, editors, filmmakers, scholars, and writers on the family farm in Dummerston, Vermont, for ten days in the summer, the early years of the seminar were characterized by camaraderie, intellectual and artistic intensity, and a hope that cinema go beyond commercial filmmaking with its rules and conventions.

The early seminars focused on the works and practices of Robert Flaherty. Seminar-ians dived into close analysis of Flaherty films, such as *Nanook of the North* (1922) and *Louisiana Story* (1948), listened to lectures by those who worked on Flaherty films, such as Ricky Leacock and Helen van Dongen, and watched experimental and documentary films produced outside the Hollywood system.

Combining the ciné-club and film society models of postscreening discussion and more intellectual models of lectures elaborating cinematic techniques, the seminar did not operate as a film festival, with public screenings of narrative films in theaters. Instead, the Flaherty Seminar was a small gathering on the family farm, seminar-ians applied to attend, and many films were historical rather than current releases. The seminar advanced cinematic practice and conceptual thinking in the loosely defined nontheatrical sector. The early seminars' emphasis on critical viewing, philosophical inquiry, and probing discussion distinguished it from film festivals. Its purpose was educational. It advocated for cinema as an art. Attendees were not an audience but were called participants, implying active engagement rather than passive viewing. As David Flaherty noted in 1960 after mounting five seminars on the Flaherty farm, "Yes, we think 'participants' is a better word to use than 'students.'"<sup>2</sup>

The Flaherty Seminar emerged in the postwar context of the Cold War (1947–91), where the United States and the Soviet Union engaged in a tense global military and strategic conflict between competing ideologies of democracy and communism. David Flaherty's use of the word *participant* rather than *student* aligns with a Cold War ideology promulgating that the United States offered individual freedoms, in contrast to the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR), which was figured as limiting freedom of expression and participation. The Cold War spurred US military buildup, a strategy of containment against the advances of communism around the globe, and the development and expansion of the United States Information Agency, a government organization to promote American culture through public diplomacy.<sup>3</sup> The connection between US Cold War international strategies and practices and the Flaherty Seminar is not one of direct causation as much as it is one of a discursive historical surround that illuminates

interpretation of how to position its politics and practices. The seminar occupied a complicated, somewhat foggy middle ground between the individualism promoted by US Cold War ideology and the communist collectivity of the USSR: it advanced auteurs and their individual artistic vision while it fostered an intense, yet isolated, group experience.

The Flaherty Seminar never openly aligned with entertainment and news industry unions, which had been under scrutiny and attack during the various post-World War II Red Scares. In 1947, the House Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC) attacked Hollywood—almost 100 percent unionized by the postwar period—as a bastion of un-American activities. As historian Reynold Humphries contends, the red-baiting right identified Hollywood, with many of its union members supporting the antifascists in Spain and Franklin Roosevelt’s New Deal in the 1930s, as communists. The Hollywood Ten included Alvah Bessie, Herbert Biberman, Lester Cole, Edward Dmytryk, Ring Lardner Jr., John Howard Lawson, Albert Maltz, Samuel Ornits, Robert Adrian Scott, and Dalton Trumbo, all of whom refused to cooperate and denounced the hearings as violations of their civil rights.<sup>4</sup>

America’s postwar economic success was tied to commercial narrative Hollywood films, which sold the American way of life as consumption.<sup>5</sup> The 1947 HUAC hearings investigated screenwriters and directors from the film industry. According to Lary May, Hollywood embodied “moral experiment, cultural mixing, a militant labor movement, and middle class activism,” all attributes antithetical to the promulgation of the so-called American way of consumerist monopoly capital. The pro-HUAC entertainment industry members “sought to make Hollywood a model of an unprecedented American identity rooted in consensus and consumption.”<sup>6</sup> With its East Coast location, the Flaherty Foundation and the Flaherty Seminar were geographically distant, operating in the milieu of independent, educational, documentary, experimental, and scientific filmmakers who were not unionized and worked outside of mass culture and Hollywood. However, the foundation and seminars were never identified with media industries, unions, or pro-communist ideologies. Instead, the Flaherty Seminar proffered a concoction of art, individualism, and some critical analysis, mostly from scholars. Whether conscious or not, these inclinations insulated the seminar from ideological attacks. For example, Erik Barnouw was a key figure in the early seminars. He had worked as a radio writer in New York for CBS and NBC. By 1957, he was elected chair of the Writers Guild of America East. In his scholarly histories of broadcasting written later in the 1966, he analyzed how the Red Scare produced caution and cowardice in television.<sup>7</sup>

The formation of the Flaherty Foundation and the Flaherty Seminar unfolded in the context of the Truman and Eisenhower presidencies, which intensified the Cold War through military buildup and propaganda. This postwar period witnessed the advancement of expanding consumption, an ideology of consensus, and a suburban domestic revival motored by what historian Warren Sussman dubbed “unprecedented economic growth unfolding after World War II” in the context of affluence and familialism.<sup>8</sup> Frances and David Flaherty channeled this larger discourse of familialism, situating the foundation and the seminar not as a union of independent filmmakers but instead as a family gathering, resonating with dominant domesticating ideologies of the period.

However, the Cold War in the 1950s was not so simply the smooth production of consensus, consumerism, familialism, and homogeneity. It was also a period of social and cultural contradictions with the rise of African American blues, the Beats, the civil rights movement, and rock 'n' roll—cultural movements that challenged conformity, familialism, and suburbia with cultural pluralism and political interventions.<sup>9</sup> Besides showing George Stoney's chronicle of an African American midwife in his sponsored public health film, *All My Babies*, the Flaherty seminar in the 1950s steered a less interventionist and directly confrontational course, positioning itself as an organization dedicated to retrieving cinema from commercial domains and rescuing it as an art.

This orientation toward salvaging cinema as an art form of personal expression aligned more easily with the larger Cold War artistic contexts of abstract expressionism in painting and the New Criticism in literature. As Erika Doss has argued, in the postwar period, abstract expressionism—epitomized in action painter Jackson Pollack—mobilized a concept of individual, apolitical gestural freedom that rendered it a “weapon against totalitarianism.” Both the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA) and the US State Department, which sent exhibitions of this style overseas to promote freedom against the strictures of the USSR's socialist realism, heralded abstract expressionism.<sup>10</sup> Although Frances's writings and Flaherty seminar transcripts never mention abstract expressionism directly, their presentation of the films of Robert Flaherty resonated with similar ideologies of action-based gestures, freedom, and individualism disconnected from larger political and social issues. Even from the beginning, the Flaherty Seminar was deeply embedded with auteurism and individualism, positioning it more in alignment with Cold War ideas than with the collectivities the civil rights movement or unions. The early seminars' emphasis on the formal elements and structures of the Flaherty films also paralleled the school of literary New Criticism, with its emphasis on close reading that figured the text as an aesthetic object outside of historical, political, and social contexts.<sup>11</sup> This exaltation of the auteur, formalistic analysis, the individual, and self-expression would also provoke political critique of the seminar's ideological orientations during the antiwar and women's movements of the 1970s—critiques that would generate tensions and debates for decades in postscreening discussions of critical theory, gender, national identities, internationalism, and race.

The Flaherty Foundation and the Flaherty Seminar condensed a particular strain of cinematic activism in the 1950s that advocated for cinema as an art form against the formulaic structures of American studio genre films and against the propaganda, state-centric intent of John Grierson's British documentary and Pare Lorentz's American state-sponsored documentary. In a letter supporting Frances Flaherty's 1961 Guggenheim Foundation grant application to secure funding to develop the *Louisiana Story* study film with outtakes, George Amberg wrote, “They [the foundation] believe that the films he made can be used to stimulate interest in and gain support for greater freedom for the independent artist.”<sup>12</sup> Frances viewed Robert's films as offering a path beyond industrial filmmaking's strangleholds. She contended that “they go against the current—the mighty Niagara—of commercial cinema as projected by Hollywood and projected likewise as ‘documentary.’”<sup>13</sup>

Frances advocated intellectual engagement with cinema, one that exceeded passive consumption of studio films. However, this particular activism did not offer radical interventions into Cold War political or social structures. Instead, the Flaherty Foundation and the Flaherty Seminar's activism resided in its pedagogical intentions to reframe the Flaherty films as a springboard into thinking about cinema as exploration rather than as scripted scenarios. Instead of radical restructurings of society, the Flaherty Foundation and the subsequent seminars exposed a humanist, less confrontational politics promoting independent cinema. Both the foundation and the seminars created alliances with various arts, cinema, and government institutions connected to the burgeoning 16mm nontheatrical film exhibition movement.

Robert Flaherty died on July 23, 1951. A year later, in 1952, his widow and his brother, David, formed the Robert Flaherty Foundation.<sup>14</sup> The Flaherty Foundation promoted Robert's films, secured distribution rights, and advocated for an independent cinema based on individual vision. It was also formed to "encourage and support the making of film in the Flaherty tradition."<sup>15</sup>

Frances claimed Robert's friends encouraged her to do something with his films in order to continue his legacy of a noncommercial cinema. Although Robert produced only five films in his lifetime—*Nanook of the North* (1922), *Moana* (1926), *Man of Aran* (1934), *The Land* (1941), and *Louisiana Story* (1948)—these films gained notoriety in the international ciné-club and film society circuits as examples of a poetic art cinema and a more intellectual cinematic practice.

The Robert Flaherty Foundation grew out of Frances Flaherty's reactions to and participation in the Sixth International Edinburgh Festival in August and September 1952. At the age of sixty-seven, Frances had been invited to present excerpts from some of Robert's films with commentary as part of a section of the festival called "New Directions in Documentary." Before her presentation, she listened to Sir Compton Mackenzie discuss the achievements of silent film. An audience member queried how one could achieve a visual sensibility. According to Frances, Mackenzie replied that "it would be better if you were born with it." Frances found herself in profound disagreement with this essentialist position. She believed seeing with the camera could be learned, a position derived from observing her husband, Robert, work. She had collaborated with him on the production and marketing of virtually all his films. Robert himself did not make his first film until he was forty years old.<sup>16</sup>

According to Frances, these filmmakers who had known Robert felt that "such a foundation had an obligation to preserve his films and make them available for study anywhere in the world."<sup>17</sup> Several international committees formed. The British committee included luminaries from the British documentary movements of the 1930s, including Edgar Anstey, John Grierson, and Basil Wright. The French committee, headed by Jean Benoît-Lévy, included the Cinémathèque Française, Comité du Film Ethnographique, the Institut des Hautes Études Cinématographiques, and the Musée de l'Homme. The US organizing committee included Frances and David Flaherty, as well as Richard Griffith from MoMA.<sup>18</sup>

In a December 1952 mailing, announcing the inauguration of the Robert Flaherty Foundation, Frances explained her own goals: "his name and spirit can best be

perpetuated—can only be perpetuated as he would wish it—by an institution whose prime purpose is to help new talent to explore further and further into the possibilities of a medium so immense and so unknown.”<sup>19</sup>

For Frances and David, the Flaherty Foundation promoted two intertwined goals: the first was preservation of Robert Flaherty’s films, scattered among many different commercial and educational distributors; the second was to support younger filmmakers to learn a different, nonstudio way to produce films. The task of securing nontheatrical rights for the Flaherty films fell to David, while public speaking and advocacy for a cinema of “nonpreconception” became Frances’s mission.<sup>20</sup> Inspired by Zen Buddhism’s ideas about being present in the moment, Frances’ notion of “nonpreconception” positioned itself in opposition to commercial studio narrative films reliant on scripts, the preplanning blueprints that ceded control to producers. “Nonpreconception” recovered individual, artisanal modes powered by immersion, intuition, and mysticism. It was centered in the self, sensory perception, and poetics, rather than in the dual logics of hierarchical film production organization in the studios and structures of transparent narrative causality.

In 1953, Frances explained that “[the foundation’s] other purposes include two [that] I think would be particularly close to Bob’s heart, to help young filmmakers learn how to make ‘films of life’ and to enlarge their freedom to make their films according to their own vision.”<sup>21</sup> However, in repeated attempts to secure tax-exempt status from the US Internal Revenue Service, this emphasis on the legacy of Robert Flaherty proved detrimental. It positioned the Robert Flaherty Foundation as a memorial promoted by family members rather than an educational organization advancing a different form of cinema for emerging makers.<sup>22</sup>

The Robert Flaherty Foundation held its first meeting in January 1953 at MoMA, where Flaherty’s papers were housed. The MoMA connection was established through Richard Griffith, curator of the museum’s film library from 1951 to 1965 and author of *Grierson on Documentary* (1947), *Documentary Films* (1952), and *The World of Robert Flaherty* (1953). For the first year, MoMA also served as the headquarters for the foundation until it moved to Brattleboro, Vermont, in 1954. MoMA received checks for the Flaherty Foundation under its tax-exempt status until 1955.<sup>23</sup> The foundation hoped to establish Flaherty funds across the globe to support films made in the “Flaherty tradition” (defined as independent, poetic, and more artisanal). It also wanted to create festivals of Flaherty films.<sup>24</sup> However, neither Frances nor David controlled rights to the films. This quest for rights would consume them for the next ten years. *Nanook* and *Man of Aran* were distributed by Contemporary Films. *The Land* and *Industrial Britain* (1931), codirected with John Grierson, were distributed by MoMA.<sup>25</sup> Frances wrote: “We do not own the films; therefore, to obtain ownership and control and to insure preservation of the films is our first objective and biggest problem.”<sup>26</sup>

As the Flaherty Foundation encountered setbacks in securing the nontheatrical distribution rights and in establishing a revenue stream to support international emerging artists working in the “Flaherty tradition,” it revised its utopian goals toward more pragmatic pursuits. It created the Robert Flaherty Award and developed the short-lived touring Flaherty Film Festival. Frances traveled the lecture circuit,

presenting the Flaherty films and the “Flaherty Way” to film societies, museums, and universities.

The first Flaherty film festivals ran in Albuquerque and Los Alamos, New Mexico, in October 1953.<sup>27</sup> They did not attract large audiences.<sup>28</sup> Frances and David hoped the Flaherty film festivals would advertise the Flaherty Foundation and generate revenue for its operation.<sup>29</sup> By 1954, they had expanded the festival to include films in the “Flaherty tradition.” That year, Indiana University and the University of Michigan hosted Flaherty film festivals.<sup>30</sup> Organized by Mary Mainwaring, a graduate student writing her dissertation on Robert Flaherty and who later attended the first seminar in 1955,<sup>31</sup> the Indiana University Flaherty Film Festival was a success. As a result of tie-ins with the American Society for Aesthetics and the Midwestern College Art Conference, the theaters were packed.<sup>32</sup>

Through the encouragement of film scholar Jack Ellis, a professor at Northwestern University immersed in the Chicago film society movement, Frances attended the American Film Assembly (AFA) in Chicago in March 1954. Ellis invited Frances to discuss the goals of the Robert Flaherty Foundation at the Film Society Caucus of the AFA. The panel included Margareta Akermark and three vocal advocates for nontheatrical cinema who also later worked with Frances to help mount the seminars: Andries Deinum, who taught cinema at the University of Southern California; Cecile Starr, 16mm film reviewer for the *Saturday Review*; and Amos Vogel, founder of Cinema 16.<sup>33</sup>

The Film Council of America had formed in 1951 in Evanston, Illinois, with the goal of helping producers and distributors of educational, experimental, and art film reach library and college exhibition with a central information service and previews. The non-theatrical field was disparate and disorganized, spread out among libraries, museums, community centers, and film societies. Film societies were interested in procuring 16mm prints of experimental and classic films. The AFA sought to forge unity between the largely disconnected film societies that were growing in number and spreading throughout the United States. Sixty film societies attended the first meeting. Brandon Films, Cinema 16, Contemporary Films, Kinesis, the MoMA Film Library, and the *Saturday Review*—key players in nontheatrical film—supplied mailing lists to assist the Film Council of America survey of film societies. This research discovered 257 film societies. A new organization, the American Federation of Film Societies, emerged from the initial 1954 meeting and the questionnaire results. It subsequently sponsored the second AFA in New York in 1955, the same year of the first Robert Flaherty Film Seminar.<sup>34</sup>

Another Flaherty Foundation revenue stream derived from Frances’s lectures on the “Flaherty Way,” wherein she screened Flaherty films and discussed Robert’s working methods. Her invited talks from 1954 to 1956 included Bennington College, the Cleveland Museum of Art, Columbia University, George Eastman House, the London Ontario Film Society, the New School, the Toronto Film Society, and Yale University.<sup>35</sup> After 1956, she continued lecturing at elite universities such as Bennington College, Cornell University, Northwestern University, University of California, Los Angeles; University of Michigan, and the University of Southern California. She donated her lecture fees to support the Robert Flaherty Film Seminar.<sup>36</sup>

Frances Flaherty's relationship with Amos Vogel, founder and programmer of Cinema 16 in New York City, suggests the interconnections between film societies, film organizations, and the 16mm sector. Cinema 16 was the most successful of the many film societies emerging in the postwar period, according to film historian Scott MacDonald.<sup>37</sup> These various organizations were committed to an activist agenda for cinema separated from commercial constraints, whether artisanal experimental cinema, documentary, or educational and scientific films. They also offered an educational function: they introduced audiences to more complex ways of seeing and thinking about cinema.<sup>38</sup>

Collaboration between the Robert Flaherty Foundation and Cinema 16 extended beyond programming to include awards for achievement in new cinematic forms. In 1954, the Robert Flaherty Foundation, Cinema 16, and the City College of New York announced the Robert J. Flaherty Award. Of the 120 submissions,<sup>39</sup> three films received recognition: *All My Babies: A Midwife's Own Story* (1953) by George Stoney, *Argument in Indianapolis* (1953) by television journalists Edward R. Murrow and Fred Friendly, and *The Conquest of Everest* (1953).<sup>40</sup> *All My Babies* exemplified the emergence of educational films in the postwar period. Produced as a teaching tool for midwives for the Georgia Public Health Department, the fifty-seven-minute film chronicled the delivery of a child by an African American midwife. The judges for the Robert J. Flaherty Award included key figures from the nontheatrical film world of the 1950s: Bosley Crowther of the *New York Times*; David Flaherty; Richard Griffith from MoMA; Lewis Jacobs, film producer and author; and Arthur Knight of the *Saturday Review*.

In 1958, Cinema 16 screened *Man of Aran* with a talk by Frances Flaherty. Vogel coached Frances to focus on Robert's "philosophy of filmmaking, his use of actual locales and non-professionals, the growing out of the scenario from the action situation."<sup>41</sup> She contributed her \$400 honorarium to the scholarship fund for the Robert Flaherty Film Seminar.<sup>42</sup> Vogel had programmed some experimental films for the second seminar in 1956.<sup>43</sup> The 1958 inauguration of the Experimental Production Committee, an organization to fund experimentation in film form, content, and technical areas, indicated these interlocking relationships between documentary and experimental film. The organizing group included Thorold Dickinson, chief of film services at the United Nations; Frances Flaherty; Richard Griffith; Jonas Mekas, the experimental filmmaker; and Amos Vogel.<sup>44</sup>

Erik Barnouw, a former radio writer, directed the Center for Mass Communication (CMC) at Columbia University. In 1957, he proposed a cocktail party to discuss the future of the Flaherty Foundation. He sought to build alliances among members of the noncommercial film culture sector who often gathered at the Coffee House Club in New York City. Robert Flaherty had frequented this club, drinking and sharing stories with acolytes. The invitation list suggests the heterogeneity of the nontheatrical film sector that congealed around the Flaherty organization. The guest list included Thorold Dickinson; Robert Gardner, ethnographic filmmaker; Richard Griffith; Dorothy Oshlag Olson, Barnouw's assistant at the CMC; Rudolph Serkin, pianist and founder of the Marlboro Chamber Music Festival in Vermont; Cecile Starr; George Stoney; and Amos Vogel.<sup>45</sup>

In these formative years of the 1950s, the Flaherty Foundation, Frances Flaherty herself, and later the Robert Flaherty Film Seminar worked to form important alliances with academic institutions and intellectuals as the organization sought to materialize a pedagogical activism to advance a more independent, poetic, and serious cinema. In 1959, Frances, developing a plan for her public speaking tours, wrote, "I would like to go to more universities and colleges, whether or not they have special film departments."<sup>46</sup> In the postwar period, art cinemas, educational and scientific filmmakers, distributors of international cinemas and documentaries, film councils, museums, university and community film societies, and university film programs, formed the core of the emerging nontheatrical film culture. It was not confined to the East and West Coasts but spanned the United States, with activities and organizations in Cleveland, Ohio, and Madison, Wisconsin.<sup>47</sup>

The Flaherty Foundation did not emerge in isolation as a unique invention of one individual perpetuating her husband's legacy. Instead, it developed in the context of other organizations pushing for cinema as an art form that required analysis, discussion, engagement, and organizational infrastructure. In 1952, Frances Flaherty was named honorary president of the Comité du Film Ethnographique in France. She worried that this larger organization would dwarf the Flaherty Foundation and would misclassify the Flaherty films as "anthropological." In a letter to the head of the organization, Frances wrote that the Flaherty films "were something more than anthropological, they were films rather of the spirit of man."<sup>48</sup>

In a 1959 American Federation of Film Societies newsletter, Paul Rotha argued ciné-club and film societies promoted what he termed the "other cinema," which possessed an open attitude to films from the present and reevaluated films from the past, situating them as a critical discourse with discussions and lectures.<sup>49</sup> Frances participated on panels at the American Federation of Film Societies, appearing with Amos Vogel. According to Charles R. Acland, the post-World War II film society movement, dedicated to advancing cinema as artistic expression, developed much more rapidly in the United States than university film education.<sup>50</sup> Acland contended that film councils and film societies differed in context and goals: the former were more community based, while the latter promoted the avant-garde.<sup>51</sup>

An influential figure in both the nontheatrical cinema movement and the early Flaherty seminars, Cecile Starr served as the nontheatrical film editor and reviewer for the *Saturday Review of Literature*. She edited two important books anthologizing articles on exhibiting 16mm film that brought together the community-based organizations and the more experimental societies. Her first book, *Ideas on Film: A Handbook for the 16mm Film User*, was published in 1951.<sup>52</sup> It featured articles about art, documentary film, international cinema, music, and nature, by cinematographer Raymond Spottiswoode, Starr, filmmaker Willard Van Dyke, and Amos Vogel. It included contacts for 16mm film libraries at universities and national distributors such as Brandon Films (New York), Contemporary Films (founded by longtime Flaherty seminar ally Leo Dratfield), Coronet Films (Chicago), Encyclopedia Britannica (Chicago), MoMA, and the National Film Board of Canada. These same names and organizations appear on invitations for the Flaherty Foundation events and rosters for the Flaherty seminars in the 1950s.

Starr's second compendium, *Film Society Primer*, was published in 1956 by the American Federation of Film Societies.<sup>53</sup> Twenty-two articles from organizations such as Cinema 16, the Princeton Film Forum, the Roosevelt University Film Society, the St. Paul Film Society, and the Wisconsin Film Society outlined programming strategies, membership subscriptions, projection, and audience development. The George Eastman House and the MoMA Film Library contributed articles about their collections.

Jack C. Ellis attended the early film seminars. Inspired by such events, he tried to mount one at Northwestern University where he taught. He contributed an article to the *Film Society Primer* entitled "Film Societies and the Film Council of America." He chronicled how the society emerged from the first AFA held in Chicago in April 1954. Ellis contended that Europeans possessed a deeper understanding of cinema as an art form, whereas in the United States, cinema was associated with Hollywood's "preoccupation with dazzle."<sup>54</sup> Frances Flaherty's advocacy for an artisanal cinema of exploration needs to be situated within the context of these larger movements advancing 16mm nontheatrical cinema in the 1950s. With its dual purpose of preserving the Flaherty films and educating the next generation to consider cinema as a complex humanist art form, the Flaherty Foundation operated within the larger context that situated 16mm nontheatrical film as a way to develop better citizens.

The boisterous, bigger-than-life legend of Robert Flaherty—explorer, filmmaker, raconteur, storyteller—often overshadows the historical significance of his wife, Frances Flaherty. She crafted the intellectual infrastructure supporting documentary and independent film at the Flaherty film seminars when few film schools existed.

Robert enjoyed notoriety both in life and in death. He was the subject of articles, *New Yorker* magazine profiles, numerous books about his films that drew upon his diaries, and radio shows. These publications fashioned a myth of the independent explorer fearlessly engaging harsh landscapes beyond urban areas and innovating a more poetic, humanist, artisanal cinema. The Robert Flaherty image countered the industrial models of production of the Hollywood studios and the nationalistic models of state-sponsored propaganda units. His was the story of a mystical artistic genius who could conjure the essence of environments and people.<sup>55</sup>

Frances Flaherty's role as collaborator, photographer, and promoter was often obscured. Her 1955 biography written for the Lecture Bureau in New York City, the organization that booked her university talks, identifies Frances as Robert Flaherty's "active collaborator" who accompanied him with their three young daughters on his filmmaking expeditions to the Aran Islands, India, Louisiana, and Samoa.<sup>56</sup> In an earlier undated, never-published draft manuscript entitled "Autobiography," probably written sometime in the 1940s after the couple procured the farm in Dummerston, Frances described how she urged her husband to write about his experiences, sometimes even starting his writing.<sup>57</sup> In his 1964 *Film Comment* review of Paul Rotha and Basil Wright's book on Flaherty entitled *The Innocent Eye*, George Amberg criticized this volume for omitting all references to Frances Flaherty's important work on the films. He argued her importance in the Flaherty legacy was "manifest in Frances Flaherty's lifelong collaboration with her husband."<sup>58</sup>

After his death in 1951, Frances's role shifted from promoter and business manager of Flaherty films and Flaherty the filmmaker to amateur theorist and revisionist historian of an elaborate, mystical theology of cinema. She advanced the "Flaherty Way," elaborating six principles: an anti-Hollywood and anti-Grierson position, cinema as an art form learned through interaction with masters, form revealing itself through process, nonpreconception, seeing as exploration, and Zen. During his life, Robert Flaherty never expressed these ideas. His published interviews and writing skewed to descriptions of his encounters with Inuit or Samoans, his diaries detailing eating, sleeping, and traveling. Frances developed the "Flaherty Way" in the larger post-World War II context of her invited public speaking. At colleges, festivals, and film societies, she was called upon to explain her husband's concepts and working methods in postscreening sessions. Her immersion in the burgeoning nontheatrical film culture of the 1950s sustained a context for more philosophical thinking about cinema. Frances actively participated in this nontheatrical film culture, promoting Robert's films and legacies for almost two decades until her death in 1972.

Anthropologist Jay Ruby researched Flaherty's papers as well as Frances's diaries. He has debunked many Flaherty myths. In a seminal article, he argued that Flaherty's shooting style, especially on *Nanook of the North*, was less individual genius and instead more of a collaboration with the Inuit. He identified and demystified five persistent "Flaherty myths" emerging in writings about Flaherty: the father of documentary film, the maverick independent film artist, the metaphor of exploration, the nonpreconceiver, and the teller of tales.<sup>59</sup>

Flaherty's production work spanned almost four decades from 1914 to 1951. His five feature films had large gaps of time between each production. Importantly, corporations or studios provided financing for each film. The fur company Revillon Frères funded *Nanook*. Famous Players Lasky produced *Moana*. Gainsborough Pictures, an associate company of the Gaumont British Picture Corporation, underwrote *Man of Aran*. The Agricultural Adjustment Agency of the US Department of Agriculture funded *The Land*. Standard Oil of New Jersey produced *Louisiana Story*. On *Elephant Boy* (1937), produced by Alexander Korda in London, Flaherty contributed location direction in India while Zoltan Korda did studio direction. His shorts included *The Pottery Maker* (1925), produced for the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York; *Industrial Britain*, codirected with Arthur Elton, John Grierson, and Basil Wright, for the Empire Marketing Board Film Unit in London; and *Guernica* (1949), an unfinished film for MoMA.

Conflicts with sponsors generated continual struggle for the Flahertys, whose slow production methods of cultural immersion did not match rigorous production schedules. These experiences of dealing with sponsors whose needs diverged from filmmakers' and shooting around the globe undergirded the Flaherty seminars conceptual structures. As the seminar evolved, it transformed the locations of the Flaherty films in Canada, India, Ireland, and Samoa into a more idealized goal of internationalism. It revised the experience of struggle for autonomy from sponsors into an ethos supporting artistic independent filmmaking.

The Flahertys' union was a stormy marriage of opposites: Bob was from the Midwest, whereas Frances from the East. Bob dropped out of the Michigan School of the Mines,

while Frances was educated at Bryn Mawr College and in Europe. Bob preferred learning through interaction in harsh, demanding physical environments, while Frances read philosophy. Bob loved the intensities of New York City, while Frances loved the tranquility of their Dummerston farm. Bob played the violin; Frances played the piano. They found a common interest in music.<sup>60</sup> They were married in November 1914 in New York City after a long courtship.<sup>61</sup> Frances mused: "I married my husband for several very plain and simple reasons: 1. Because an innate sense for the preservation of his own genius has saved him from all educational institutions or instruction of any kind. 2. Because that genius is for A. exploration (profession: exploration and mining) and B. music and the arts (avocations: playing the violin and portrait photography)."<sup>62</sup>

Despite their differences, Frances and Bob operated as a collaborative team on every film except *Nanook of the North*. In his book *Robert and Frances Flaherty*, based on Robert's and Frances's diaries from the early years of their marriage and Robert's expeditions for MacKenzie, Robert J. Christopher argued that Frances sought to be Bob's collaborator. She served as his archivist, business manager, copyeditor, general editor, librarian, publicist, and secretary. She was a partner in his enterprises.<sup>63</sup>

In his 1953 book, *The World of Robert Flaherty*, Richard Griffiths affirmed their collaboration. He described how Frances operated as a "Cassandra," analyzing impractical approaches, discussing the day's shooting, and photographing locations and people. While Bob operated the camera, Frances took light meter readings and shot still photos. Griffiths argued that Frances's still photographs constituted the scenario. Griffiths wrote, "How they worked together neither could exactly explain, but you could sense a bit of it if you watched a Flaherty scene being filmed, and something of it comes through in 'production shots.'"<sup>64</sup> In 1932, Frances published *Samoa*, a book collecting her 1925 articles and photographs for *Asia Magazine*.<sup>65</sup> In her 1962 Guggenheim Foundation application, Frances contended that "I collaborated with my husband in the making of *Moana*, *Man of Aran*, *Elephant Boy*, and *The Land*."<sup>66</sup>

Frances functioned as Bob's agent and publicist. She shrewdly ascertained he could repurpose his experiences across articles, books, and public talks. Frances pushed Robert to publish articles about his Canadian expeditions, providing outlines and prodding him to write.<sup>67</sup> Robert published four articles about his Hudson Bay and Ungava Peninsula explorations in *Geographical Journal* and *Geographical Review* from 1915 to 1918, before the 1922 release of *Nanook*.<sup>68</sup> Robert's 1924 book, *My Eskimo Friends*, described his experiences with the indigenous people of the Canadian north and featured his Inuit portraits. It identified collaboration with Frances on the title page.<sup>69</sup>

In 1931, Frances published an article called "How I Make My Exhibition Pictures" in *The Amateur Photographer and Cinematographer*. Frances wrote how she employed miniature cameras and different focal lengths in India during the shooting of *Elephant Boy*. Her images of the elephants accompanied the article.<sup>70</sup> In a 1936 article entitled "Converted to the Miniature" published in *The Miniature Camera World*, Frances wrote that on their second film expedition to Samoa, "my husband thrust a still camera into my hands and said 'You've got to take stills. I am too busy.'"<sup>71</sup> Her still photographer role continued through the production of all the subsequent films, where her images served as research for filmmaking, production stills, and publicity. In a 1959 letter to

photographer Minor White, she explained, “My job on the films was still camera, it was entirely subsidiary to the films. Stills were a sketching device during production and afterwards served as usual for publicity.”<sup>72</sup>

Produced by Alexander Korda, *Elephant Boy* was loosely based on Rudyard Kipling’s *Jungle Book* story “Toomai of the Elephants,” which is about a young mahout who witnesses the wild elephant dance in the jungle. Frances later published her own book, *Elephant Dance*, in 1937. The book chronicled her year in Mysore, India, when Bob worked on the production of the narrative film *Elephant Boy*. The Flahertys spent five months in India before any motion picture film was shot. During this time, Frances used her still camera as a sketchbook for the film and as travel documentation.

*Elephant Dance* followed the marketing pattern the Flahertys deployed throughout their lives of recycling diaries, photographs, stories, and writing for different constituencies. As an early exposition of Frances’s thinking about cinema, the book elaborates concepts that later surface in her writing and public speaking after Robert’s death. First, it emphasizes detailed empirical observation rather than a deeper historical or social understanding of India with its minute descriptions of animals, food, and locations. Second, it suggests that interaction with cultural and topographic difference can elevate one’s consciousness from the mundane to the mystical. An orientalism fetishizing difference as a racialized mechanism to propel a more intense state of consciousness wound through this book.

*Elephant Dance* featured photographs Frances shot while Robert worked on the film and edited versions of letters Frances penned to her daughters, Barbara, Frances, and Monica. Barbara lived in India with her parents, while Frances and Monica attended boarding school in England for part of the period the Flahertys resided in India.<sup>73</sup> *Elephant Dance* described Frances and Bob’s daily living in South India: casting for a young mahout, eating curry, enduring monsoons, looking for elephants in the jungle, and meeting the maharajah. The letters revealed more fascination with animals and landscapes than with South Indian people. Writing about her travel from Bangalore to Mysore, Frances wrote, “the country changed from the desert red, growing greener and greener and more and more jungly; palm trees, coconut, date, and toddy—seas of them now and again.”<sup>74</sup>

The letters focused on bullocks, cobras, elephants, monkeys, scorpions, and tigers, revealing a colonialist imagination where difference propels intense imaginative experience. Describing an elephant called Irawatha, Frances wrote, “I love the big fellow. I had a ride, clambered up over his tail end and sat on a pad, hanging on for dear life on to the pad ropes. . . . I haven’t had such a thrill.”<sup>75</sup> Frances’s letters in *Elephant Dance* show how the Flahertys’ India mapped a spectacular projection of the dramatic and the exotic, supported by maharajahs and servants. Out in the jungle with mahouts who rounded up animals, Frances wrote, “Now we had in our captured tusker, of course, an extraordinary film property. And we hastened to make the most of it, while the poor creature was still rebellious and fierce.”<sup>76</sup> Her photographs in the book divided between close-ups of different Indian people she met and medium long shots of elephants.

Many of the letters detailed the casting of the young mahout, Toomai, the elephant trainer. Flaherty’s camera operator found a young boy living in the elephant stables

named Sabu, whom Robert cast in the title role. Frances outlined Sabu's expression of gratitude for the role, writing he was not afraid to leave the stables and work with the Flahertys: "I am not afraid of anything in the world. I am here to serve the masters."<sup>77</sup>

The letters culminated in the keddah, the elephant drive in the jungle of South India in Karapur. The last half of the book focuses on the behaviors of the elephants, Flaherty, jungle camps, and the mahouts' work with the elephants. Frances explained, "Now we came to that part of our Indian experience we had been waiting for, dreaming of since we dreamed of India at all, as all people do—of that strange, exotic, perhaps terrible, always exciting place they think of as the Indian jungle."<sup>78</sup> The letters explained how the mahouts tracked and herded elephants in the jungle, where Bob's movie camera and Frances's still camera were camouflaged under specially constructed scaffolding. "Never a time do we start out on a jungle adventure that we are not regaled with the most awful tales of danger and ferocity of the elephant in its wild state," Frances wrote.<sup>79</sup> Her letters related difficult jungle treks, endless waiting in huts, and her awe of the elephants' physical presence. The letters exhibited Frances's excitement about the unknown.

Theatrical screenings presented a constant struggle for each of the major films. In the 1950s, Frances found herself immersed in a quite different world of educational and non-theatrical settings where ideas mattered more than box office. Film festivals, film societies, and universities demanded more than a screening. In advancing cinema as an art, they sought explanations and production background of Flaherty's working methods to create a less commercial, more poetic cinema. A 1954 letter to writer Malcolm Brinnin, who suggested she write Robert's biography, hinted at how Frances transformed Flaherty the adventurer into Flaherty the poet: "I know now that what I most want is a book about Bob as a poet, about his 'method' as a poet's way, his philosophy of the camera as the beginning of a tradition of poetry in the film medium."<sup>80</sup>

George Amberg pointed out that Robert "made no pronouncements and left no written record concerning the one thing he knew best. He worked intuitively, in the sense that no conscious rationale determined his choice of content or treatment."<sup>81</sup> After her husband's death, Frances used their production diaries, letters, and stories as a springboard for a cinematic theory that promoted cinema as an art form and filmmaking as a mystical encounter offering deeper knowledge of the world.

Robert Flaherty kept copious diaries of his expeditions in the Canadian north. They detail the hardships of travel, sleep, and food. His two books, *My Eskimo Friends* (1924) and *The Captain's Chair* (1938), relate stories of adventure, encounters with indigenous people, expeditions, and survival in harsh environments.<sup>82</sup> Flaherty told stories about the Inuit in different interviews and broadcasts, the most famous of which was *The Story of Comock the Eskimo* (1968) published as a book by Edmund Carpenter, with Flaherty's collections of Inuit drawings deposited in the Royal Ontario Museum as illustration.<sup>83</sup>

Frances Flaherty wrote two published texts outlining Robert Flaherty's process: a short magazine column in 1952 and a short chapbook in 1960. These writings bookended the early period of the Flaherty Foundation and seminars. These two publications were key to understanding Frances's arguments for a poetic cinema of intuition and nonpre-conception. By 1955, she reasoned that due to the institution of the first Robert Flaherty

Film Seminar and numerous public speaking invitations, she would need to become “more intellectual about cinema.”<sup>84</sup>

The first piece mentioned above was a short seminal article in Cecile Starr’s *Saturday Review* column called “The Flaherty Way.” Frances advanced Robert’s filmmaking process, expounding on exploration, magical revelations through seeing, relying on intuition and discovery rather than scripts and preplanning, and training the eye through immersion in material. Frances offered her insights into Robert’s process in mystical terminology, inferring a religious epiphany through cinema production: “I wish I could convey the deep excitement of making pictures this way—the seemingly hopeless bafflement, and then the breaking of the light, one could never tell when or how or even why—the intuitive way, taking quite a lot of faith to follow, considerable inner conviction.”<sup>85</sup> As she received more invitations to deliver university lectures and to present the Flaherty films throughout the 1950s, she penned scripts for her public presentations. These scripts included her observations about the production of the films. Outlines rather than formal lectures, they deployed clips from the four films Frances promoted as Robert’s primary oeuvre: *Louisiana Story*, *Man of Aran*, *Moana*, and *Nanook of the North*. The Robert Flaherty Foundation had procured minimal nontheatrical rights for these films. The “Flaherty Way” revolved around Frances’s interpretations about how Robert entered environments, engaged people, and rendered practical creative decisions. Throughout, she emphasized the collaborations necessary between Flaherty and his subjects given extreme conditions, lack of familiarity about location, and small crews.

By 1960, Frances’s lectures and scripts had progressed into more developed explications about Robert’s creative process and working methods in a sixty-one-page chapbook entitled *The Odyssey of a Film-Maker*. Beta Phi Mu, the international library and information studies honor society, invited Frances to revise her lectures on the Flaherty methods. Frances wrote the book at the Flaherty farm. The book launched at a party held at the Coffee House Club, one of Robert’s favorite New York City drinking haunts, on March 17, 1960.<sup>86</sup> *Odyssey of a Film-Maker* was reprinted in 1984 as part of the Robert Flaherty Centennial Project, with copyright held by the Robert and Frances Flaherty Study Center at Claremont College in California, where Frances had deposited many of her and Bob’s papers and photographs.<sup>87</sup>

Frances Flaherty’s loose, ill-defined positions on cinema revolved around her antagonism toward codified systems of filmmaking. She criticized Hollywood for its business practices and scripts. She fought against documentary dedicated to civic education and political purpose promoted by John Grierson, with whom Robert had worked on *Industrial Britain* in the early 1930s. Frances notoriously dubbed Grierson “a teacher and a preacher,” and she worked for two decades to distance the more artisanal, poetic style of Flaherty from the more institutionally driven, outcome-directed British documentary movement of the 1930s, which she considered propaganda.<sup>88</sup>

Frances’s positioning of the Flaherty filmmaking process as a mystical spirit of independence in opposition to Hollywood had commenced decades before the postwar nontheatrical movement. In 1926, after confronting the theatrical distribution challenges of *Nanook* and *Moana*, Frances compared the motion picture industry to the

steel industry with its vast private fortunes and worldwide reach.<sup>89</sup> In a 1936 article for *Miniature Camera World*, she noted that since *Nanook*, “we have not used their studios, actors or even their laboratories.”<sup>90</sup>

In 1954, she argued that the Flaherty films were misunderstood “simply because they go against the current—the mighty Niagara—of the commercial cinema as projected by Hollywood.”<sup>91</sup> Frances assessed Hollywood as a cinema stifled by preconception of material through scenarios and shooting schedules. She called this Hollywood style “the making or creating way, with its discipline of doing” and offered instead “the discovering or releasing way, with its discipline of letting be.”<sup>92</sup> In “The Flaherty Way,” she argued the accepted way of producing a motion picture was to “first write or find a story, then to turn the story into a shooting script, and then only is one ready to begin by thinking—by writing and arranging by far as possible the story, the script.”<sup>93</sup>

Frances viewed theatrical exhibition and Hollywood as promoting formulas constraining creativity and insight. She claimed Hollywood production systems and scenario writing operated as “a slot through which every film had to pass and to which it had to be shaped like a button to a mold.”<sup>94</sup> By 1962, she elaborated the differences between a “Flaherty film” and Hollywood in much more lofty, ill-defined terms, contending that Hollywood films pushed audiences to identify with stars while *Nanook* motored a special spectator identification with “life itself, with that universal life of which we and these people are a part. . . . [W]e become genuine and true. They are completely themselves; we in turn become ourselves and everything that might separate us from these people falls away from us.”<sup>95</sup> Shooting without constraints can be read two ways. While it rejected Hollywood’s rationalized production methods, it constituted an expensive, romanticized, self-indulgent view of filmmaking.

After trying to promote films like *Nanook of the North* and *Moana* theatrically, Frances viewed Hollywood as a monopolist unwilling to open up to independents. As the 16mm, art cinema, and film society movements developed, Frances’s antagonisms toward industrial modes of production changed into a support for an artisanal cinema derived from mystical relationships with landscapes and people. After the 1948 breakup of the Hollywood studios’ vertical integration controlling production, distribution, and exhibition, art cinemas emerged in postwar America in urban centers, screening works from other countries and not just studio fare—congruent with Frances’s utopian goals for cinema.<sup>96</sup>

Frances’s advocacy for a noncommercial cinematic practice continually invoked exploration and learning to see. She leveraged the biographical fact of Robert Flaherty’s early work as an explorer of the Canadian north before he became a filmmaker and transformed it into a metaphor for a style of cinema bathed in a romantic notion of the artist as a conduit for visionary revelations. The “Flaherty Way” was linked to exploration, which moved from colonialist imagination of conquering new lands to a neocolonialist strategy of exploring the unknown beyond modernity to reveal deeper meaning.

Frances frequently quoted Robert Flaherty’s famous adage: “All art is a kind of exploring. To discover and reveal is the way every artist sets about his business.”<sup>97</sup> She insisted Robert’s filmmaking method was based on continual interaction with filmic material and subjects, rather than a formula. Frances described how Robert shot enormous

amounts of footage, only to find the film's style and structure through screening rushes and analyzing what the camera had discovered. In her view, Robert shot first and discovered ideas later.<sup>98</sup> The camera possessed revelatory powers based on seeing. The movie camera propelled "a new dimension of seeing, on a new level of consciousness" through discovery.<sup>99</sup> Frances wrote that filming was designed "to give the camera its chance, to find, in the moment-to-moment unfolding of life, that one high moment of seeing, that moment which is both recognition and revelation. . . . Words had nothing to do with it; it went beyond words."<sup>100</sup> To support the "exploratory" method, she frequently quoted Robert's famous line, "I was an explorer first, and a film-maker a long way after."<sup>101</sup>

Inflected with Zen Buddhism, nonpreconception was a key foundation underpinning Frances Flaherty's cinematic cosmology. Frances launched this concept in the early 1950s to differentiate the Flaherty style of artisanally produced, humanist, poetic documentary from the Griersonian style of a preplanned, purposeful documentary promoting nationalist agendas. She claimed she sought a word to describe "the explorer's mind" Robert Flaherty brought to cinema. Robert frequently used the word *exploring*. After his death, Frances translated this word into "nonpreconception." Frances elaborated "preconception" in "The Flaherty Way." Any preconception—scripts, scenarios, planning—was to be eradicated. The filmmaker's mind needed to be emptied so that new, unexpected stimuli could enter: "letting all thoughts of your own go in order to let what will come in."<sup>102</sup> She discussed "wiping our minds clean . . . like unexposed film" in order to absorb the world.<sup>103</sup> Frances referred to this practice as "the creative void," the "fertile state of no mind," a state of "nonpreconception."<sup>104</sup> She reflected, "as I find myself called upon to distinguish our teaching from documentary, I find myself using the word 'revelation' and saying simply that the films are films of revelation."<sup>105</sup>

By 1957, Frances was reading Zen Buddhism. It propelled her toward linking Flaherty's endless shooting with a philosophical, spiritual system he himself never embraced. "In Zen, Robert Flaherty's approach to the motion picture medium finds its history, its traditions, its school, its practice," wrote Frances.<sup>106</sup> By 1962, Frances had discovered Japanese haiku. She admired its sparseness. She claimed haiku masters "were practicing pure cinema."<sup>107</sup>

In her writing, Frances promoted nonpreconception as the most important tenet of documentary filmmaking. Robert never spoke about this concept. Frances developed her ideas about nonpreconception from disparate sources: her memories of the production process involving long nights watching rushes; her need to provide more than anecdotes to university audiences; and her quest to differentiate documentary from its state-sponsored and educational formations.

Frances sought out intellectuals with whom she could form alliances. In the iconoclastic anthropologist Edmund Carpenter, she found a kindred spirit, someone who had worked extensively among the indigenous peoples of the Canadian north and who sought to understand how they saw the world. Throughout the 1950s, Frances and the Flaherty Foundation migrated in and out of ethnographic circles in the United States and France through organizations such as the International Congress of Ethnological and Anthropological Sciences. Ethnographers saw the postwar semiprofessionalization of 16mm film as an asset to advance research documentation. The Flaherty Foundation,

the Flaherty seminars, and Frances interacted continuously with anthropologists, even though Frances fought to prevent the classification of the Flaherty films as ethnographies. Instead, she argued for their “method” and their “way” of seeing, a more mystical and poetic position than ethnographic observational techniques.

Carpenter defied traditional social scientific method. He was a maverick thinker and researcher. He published three highly influential texts contributing to the development of critical ethnography: *They Became What They Beheld* (1970), *Oh, What a Blow That Phantom Gave Me* (1973), and *Eskimo Realities* (1973).<sup>108</sup> His writing moved beyond social scientific principles of distance and objectivity, advancing participant observation to find deeper cultural patterns. The letters between Frances and Carpenter in the late 1950s trace how Frances’s statements about learning to see from the “Eskimo” were actually her rudimentary translations of Carpenter’s more immersive, anthropological research in the Canadian Arctic. Carpenter initially wrote to Frances in 1958, describing a book he was developing using Flaherty’s collection of Inuit carvings. He reasoned that “their primary spatial models are not visual as with Western man, but acoustic and that among them space is defined by the ear more than the eye.” He explained that like Robert, he had also lived for extended periods with the Inuit.<sup>109</sup>

In the 1950s, Carpenter taught at the University of Toronto. He was a close friend of media theorist Marshall McLuhan. Carpenter had worked with the Flaherty collections of Inuit art, artifacts, and photographs archived at the Royal Ontario Museum as part of his ongoing research into the peoples of the Canadian north. Sir William Mackenzie had donated 360 pieces from Robert Flaherty’s collection to the museum in 1914.<sup>110</sup> In 1959, Carpenter published a book entitled *Eskimo*, coauthored with Frederick Varley and Robert Flaherty.<sup>111</sup> Although the book used the word *Eskimo* in its title, Carpenter refers to his subjects as Aivilik. The book collected three sources from three different time periods to map Aivilik epistemologies, showing how three different people from three different perspectives—artist, explorer, and anthropologist—saw the same Eskimo worldview. The charcoal and pencil sketches of the Arctic landscapes and Eskimo had been rendered by Varley in 1938. The photographic images were of Eskimo carvings Robert Flaherty collected in 1910–16 and 1920–22. Carpenter wrote the text, with short sections describing Inuit ways of navigating the world: acoustic space, acuteness of observation, art, the igloo, mechanical aptitude, and orientation.

The book featured an unusual design of Varley’s drawings rendered as full-page images, a visual design with large amounts of white space around images and text. Carpenter’s text eschewed an academic style with footnotes and scientific distance. Instead, the text was written in a first-person point of view combining observations of Aivilik behaviors in art, building, and navigation with Aivilik stories. The book was not paginated, suggesting the Aivilik nonlinear sense of time and the expansive white spaces in the Arctic regions.

When Carpenter contacted Frances, she was drafting *The Odyssey of a Film-Maker*, expanding her scripts and talks about the Flaherty films written over eight years. Frances became enamored with one story from *Eskimo* that resonated with “nonpreconception.” In a section elaborating that the Aivilik did not see distinctions between decorative and utilitarian objects, Carpenter related a story of the Aivilik carver who holds up an

unworked piece of ivory and asks, “Who are you? Who hides there?” Carpenter noticed the carver did not consciously set out to render a particular animal but worked the ivory until its form was revealed: “Then he brings it out: Seal, hidden, emerges. It was always there: he didn’t create it; he released it.”<sup>112</sup> Frances also liked Carpenter’s observation that the Aivilik language did not have any equivalents for the words *create* or *make*, words Frances linked to Grierson and Hollywood. Carpenter observed the carver responds to the material rather than forcing a form on it.

Contra Flaherty Seminar mythology that attributes this story to either Frances or Robert, it is important to recognize that although Frances was thinking and writing along similar lines to Carpenter, the actual story of the ivory carver and the seal derived from Carpenter’s research and writing. In 1958, Frances wrote to Carpenter after reading a draft of *Eskimo*. She requested permission to incorporate this story into *The Odyssey of a Film-Maker*.<sup>113</sup> Carpenter agreed.<sup>114</sup>

In 1959, Carpenter had edited a book of poems entitled *Anerca*, the Inuit word for *soul*. The poems transcribed chants, drum songs, and incantations. Carpenter donated all book royalties to the newly formed International Film Seminars, the organization created to mount the annual Flaherty seminar. Frances wanted to “provoke a discussion of seeing” based on Carpenter’s research analyzing how the Aivilik viewed the Arctic landscape.<sup>115</sup>

By the late 1950s and early 1960s, Frances’s advocacy for the “Flaherty Way” of nonpre-conception had changed. She moved from rejecting the preplanning of Hollywood and the state agendas of Grierson toward a mystical, religious ecstasy through filmmaking. Her writing expanded the metaphor of exploring into a Zen acquisition of knowledge through letting go combined with a vague humanist universalism. Undeveloped, spiritually inflected words such as *consciousness*, *oneness*, *the participation mystique*, *timelessness*, and *universal* appeared in her scripts. In a 1959 lecture at the Charlotte Selver Institute in New York, Frances contended that the Flaherty films were “timeless in the sense of the Mohammedan prayer.” Later, she claimed that Flaherty’s filmmaking was a “quest for the spirit.” In an oft-repeated passage, Frances wrote: “And all that might separate us from these people falls away from us. In spite of our differences, indeed perhaps the more BECAUSE of them, we are one with them. And this feeling of oneness can deepen and become that profound and profoundly liberating experience we call ‘participation mystique.’”<sup>116</sup> In other talks, this “participation mystique” of connection with material and the dissolution of borders emerged as an argument that cinema could bring together different cultures around the world to foster better understanding.<sup>117</sup> In one script, Frances even asserted that after the devastations and separations of World War I, *Nanook of the North* offered a way to bring the people of the world together for better understanding and international relations.<sup>118</sup>

The closing pages of *The Odyssey of a Film-Maker* appended filmmaking to spirituality, arguing the camera could liberate the spirit to generate profound experiences. The freedom to produce film independent of nation-states or studios now amplified into a religious calling for Zen enlightenment through the camera. Frances claimed, “Robert Flaherty was a mystic of the modern age,” coming to the “mystic’s energy and delight” by means of his surrender to the camera itself and to the material environment.<sup>119</sup>

The film librarian D. Marie Grieco, who participated in the New York experimental and nontheatrical film scene of the 1960s, contributed to the promulgation of the “Flaherty Way” through her film programming for the seminar and for libraries, her International Film Seminars board contributions, her invocation of Frances’s ideas of nonpreconception during seminar discussions, and her writings on Frances Flaherty. She and Frances had become friends at the seminar, where Grieco admired her clear thinking, forceful presence, and intellect. At Columbia University, Grieco taught the first nonprint course focusing on film at a library school. Librarians were central to the economic sustainability of the nontheatrical sector in the 1960s because they bought and showed films. Grieco attended her first Flaherty seminar in 1966 at the urging of another audiovisual librarian. There, she witnessed Frances’s charisma in postscreening discussions.

A former trustee of the International Film Seminars who programmed the 1968, 1969, and 1984 gatherings, Grieco was a key figure in the seminars’ history. She was also one of the strongest advocates for Frances’s notion of nonpreconception. Grieco learned about Robert and Frances Flaherty’s differing intellectual styles, arguing that Robert was a poet and Frances was the intellect. As a trustee, Grieco identified herself as the historian of International Film Seminars, garnering anecdotes from Frances and working with what Frances called her “core library,” a selection of anthropological, philosophical, and spiritual books that augmented her thinking. Grieco frequently made trips to the Flaherty farm to develop a bibliography. Frances’s core library was interdisciplinary. It included books on anthropology, Daoism, drugs, haiku, history, music, mysticism, sociology, and Zen, as well as writings by Carl Jung and Alan Watts.<sup>120</sup> Grieco was an indefatigable advocate for Frances’s vision. She argued that because the seminars were named for her husband, Frances’s role in the documentary and nontheatrical world was marginalized.

At the 18th Annual Robert Flaherty Film Seminar in 1972, Grieco presented a memorial tribute entitled “Frances Hubbard Flaherty: A True Seer.” One of the first coherent expositions of Frances’s post-Robert concepts and experiences, the pamphlet drew heavily from documents deposited in the Butler Special Collections at Columbia University. The pamphlet worked with Frances’s core library, analyzing what had been underlined. Grieco noted that the quotations Frances pulled from the books fell into three areas: the creative process, the educational process as an exploratory way, and responsibility to society<sup>121</sup>

Grieco identified Frances’s quest for a seminar that expanded beyond the Flaherty films into a more educational mission to nurture the spirit. At the time of her death, Frances was involved in plans for the Robert and Frances Flaherty Study Center at the School of Theology at Claremont College, through her relationship with faculty member Jack Coogan. Grieco concluded her monograph with one of Frances’s favorite quotes from French philosopher and Jesuit priest Teilhard de Chardin, a quote Frances paraphrased at many seminars to underscore the spiritual quest of the “Flaherty Way”: “to see more is to become more. Fuller being is closer union . . . to see or to perish is man’s condition.”<sup>122</sup> In a 1995 tribute to the Flaherty seminars, Grieco honored Frances’s conceptual models that eventually morphed into programming and discussion practices.

She wrote, “During the seminar, the bafflements, illuminations, abrasions, awarenesses, confrontations, connections . . . the continual probing of one’s conceptions, misconceptions, and preconceptions—simulate the exploratory process Frances so wished to share as a way of learning to see.”<sup>123</sup>

Inspired by Frances’s intellect and by her own transformative seminar experiences, Grieco worked to revise the pervasive mythologies surrounding Robert Flaherty. She sought to prove that Frances initiated the Robert Flaherty Seminar. Grieco also promoted the idea that Frances—not Robert—constructed the “Flaherty Way.”

#### 1959 FRANCES FLAHERTY—OPENING REMARKS AT THE SEMINAR

This year, we are delighted to have guests from Canada, again from Puerto Rico, and we have another country represented this year: Korea. And of course, we’re all looking forward enormously to welcoming a very special guest from India next week [Satyajit Ray]. I only want to say that I hope you’ll be as happy to be members of the seminar as we are to have you.

We all have the very great privilege of having Hugh Gray with us this year. But before I ask him to open the seminar, I thought I might, just for a minute, go back to the beginnings of the seminars, and explain how they came to be. The beginning actually was my belated appreciation of the fact that the reason why my experience of working with Bob Flaherty was so profound was because of all the little things that went into the making of the films, this thing and that thing and this other thing—all things that only we who had worked very closely with Bob could possibly know, could possibly begin to understand, or could even try to explain. Bob’s process of filmmaking was something that he developed, gradually, out of himself, out of the situations he found himself in; it was, so to speak, his own invention.

I remember that once Sir Carol Reed said to me, “When I look at other people’s films, I can usually tell exactly how they have arrived at their effects, but when I look at your husband’s films I cannot tell at all.” I think he expected me then and there to explain the mystery, shot by shot. As a matter of fact, all I could do was smile because I hadn’t worked this out in my own mind; at that point the films just seemed to have happened.

But after that, I thought a great deal about the process that produced the films, and I came to feel that there was something there that people who are in filmmaking would want to know, that knowing something about Bob’s process might throw light on *their* filmmaking; and further, that *their* filmmaking would then in turn throw light on the experiences that *I* had had working with Bob, which I wanted to explain more deeply to myself all the time. And *that* was the beginning of the seminar.

#### Notes

1. George Amberg to the Guggenheim Foundation to support grant application from Frances Flaherty, 1961, The Robert J. Flaherty Papers, Butler Library, Columbia University Libraries (hereafter cited as Flaherty Papers).
2. David Flaherty to John Adair, March 22, 1960, Flaherty Papers.
3. Laura A. Belmonte, *Selling the American Way: US Propaganda and the Cold War* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008), 3–94.
4. Barnard F. Dick, *Radical Innocence: A Critical Study of the Hollywood Ten* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1989).

5. Reynold Humphries, *Hollywood's Blacklists: A Political and Cultural History* (Edinburgh, UK: University of Edinburgh Press, 2009), 77–106.
6. Lary May, "Movie Star Politics: The Screen Actor's Guild, Cultural Conversion, and the Hollywood Red Scare," in *Recasting America: Culture and Politics in the Age of Cold War*, ed. Lary May (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989), 143, 148.
7. See, for example, Erik Barnouw, *The Golden Web* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1968) and *Tube of Plenty* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1976).
8. Warren Sussman, "Did Success Spoil the United States? Dual Representations in Postwar America," in *Recasting America*, 21, 22–25.
9. See Bruce Cook, *The Beat Generation: The Tumultuous '50s Movement and Its Impact on Today* (New York: Quill Publishing, 1994); Glenn C. Altschuler, *All Shook Up: How Rock 'n' Roll Changed America* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2004); Aldon D. Morris, *The Origins of the Civil Rights Movement: Black Communities Organizing for Change* (New York: Free Press, 1986).
10. Erika Doss, "The Art of Cultural Politics: From Regionalism to Abstract Expressionism," in *Recasting America*, 198–216; Serge Guilbaut, *How New York Stole the Idea of Modern Art: Abstract Expressionism, Freedom, and the Cold War* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983).
11. Gerald Graff, *Professing Literature* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1987).
12. George Amberg to the Guggenheim Foundation to support grant application from Frances Flaherty, 1961, Flaherty Papers.
13. Frances Flaherty to Armine Wilson, November 9, 1954, 1, Flaherty Papers.
14. David Flaherty to Henry Starr, June 3, 1961, 1, Flaherty Papers.
15. Announcement of France Flaherty Lecture at the Carnegie Museum, February 1954, 1, Flaherty Papers.
16. D. Marie Grieco, "Frances Hubbard Flaherty: A True Seer," memorial tribute to Frances Flaherty, August 29, 1972, 4–5. International Film Seminars Private Collection, International Film Seminars/The Flaherty, New York, New York (hereafter cited as IFS Collection).
17. Paul Olson, Tax Exemption Claim on behalf of the Robert Flaherty Foundation, April 15, 1956, 3, Flaherty Papers.
18. Grieco, "Frances Hubbard Flaherty: A True Seer," 6, IFS Collection.
19. Robert Flaherty Associates, Press release announcing the Robert Flaherty Foundation, December 1952, Flaherty Papers.
20. David Flaherty to Russell Lord, December 10, 1958, Flaherty Papers.
21. Frances Flaherty to Monsieur Heron of Revillon Frères, November 10, 1953, Flaherty Papers.
22. Paul Olson to the Commissioner of the Internal Revenue Service, March 15, 1956, 1; Minutes of the Directors of the Flaherty Foundation at MoMA, January 8, 1960, Flaherty Papers.
23. David Flaherty to Floria Lasky, November 31, 1955, 1, Flaherty Papers.
24. Grieco, "Frances Hubbard Flaherty: A True Seer," 6–7, Flaherty Papers.
25. Frances Flaherty to Cosette Stern, in response to a request for booking the Flaherty films, April 8, 1954, Flaherty Papers.
26. Frances Flaherty to Armine Wilson, November 9, 1954, 1, Flaherty Papers.
27. Frances Flaherty to Barbara Chapin, American Association of University Women, August 14, 1953, Flaherty Papers.
28. "New Mexico for the First Robert Flaherty Film Festival," *Albuquerque Journal*, October 25, 1953, Flaherty Papers.
29. David Flaherty to Peggy Clifford, November 24, 1953, Flaherty Papers.
30. David Flaherty to J. A. B. Gibbs, Quebec, May 17, 1954; David Flaherty to David Allen, Maryland, January 7, 1954, Flaherty Papers.

31. Mainwaring went on to serve as associate director for Encyclopedia Britannica Films, a major nontheatrical distributor.
32. "A Report on the Activities of the Robert Flaherty Foundation since July 1, 1954–March 31, 1956," 10, IFS Collection.
33. Jack Ellis to Frances Flaherty, March 25, 1954, Flaherty Papers.
34. Jack C. Ellis, "Film Societies and the Film Council of America," in *Film Society Primer*, ed. Cecile Starr (Forest Hills, NY: American Federation of Film Societies, 1956), 65–67.
35. "Report on the Activities of the Robert Flaherty Foundation, Inc., July 1, 1954–March 31, 1956, 1–3, IFS Collection.
36. "List of Lectures 1956–1958," Flaherty Papers.
37. For a thorough history of Cinema 16 and a compendium of primary documents related to its operation, see Scott MacDonald, *Cinema 16: Documents Towards a History of the Film Society* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2002).
38. For an example of the diversity of programming with experimental, documentary, features, and classic art cinema in the film society sector, see Starr, *Film Society Primer*.
39. Press release from the City College of New York and Cinema 16, "Announcing the Robert J. Flaherty Award," January 23, 1954, Flaherty Papers.
40. Trained as a journalist, Stoney would later screen this same work at the Flaherty seminars in the 1950s.
41. Amos Vogel to Frances Flaherty, March 31, 1958, Flaherty Papers.
42. David Flaherty to Amos Vogel, June 2, 1955; Amos Vogel to Frances Flaherty, March 9, 1957; Frances Flaherty to Amos Vogel, November 29, 1957; Amos Vogel to Frances Flaherty, March 31, 1958; Frances Flaherty to Amos Vogel, July 16, 1958, Flaherty Papers.
43. "Works Screened at the Flaherty: 1955–1994," in "The Flaherty: Four Decades in the Cause of Independent Cinema," ed. Erik Barnouw and Patricia Zimmermann, Special Issue, *Wide Angle* 17, no.1–4 (1995): 431.
44. Memo from the organizing group for the Experimental Production Committee, May 14, 1958, Flaherty Papers.
45. Erik Barnouw to Frances Flaherty, April 2, 1957, Flaherty Papers.
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