

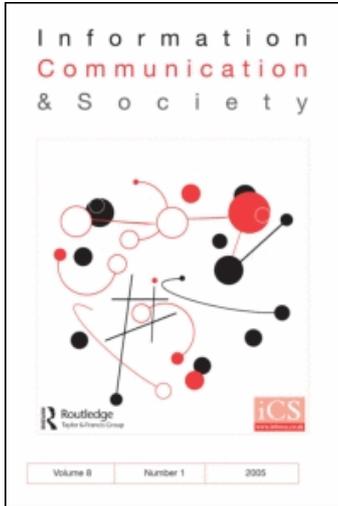
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### POLAR MEDIA

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# Peter Krapp

## POLAR MEDIA

*The sheer inaccessibility of the North and South Pole makes them a crucible for the persistent questions of access and data visualization that characterize the information age. As Robinson's novel Antarctica (1998) grapples with fictions that characterize representations of science, his South Pole exhibits what Jameson calls the properly utopian structure as a kind of world reduction, in which not merely breathable atmosphere but custom, human relationships, and finally political choices are pared down to the essentials. Set in the near future, this social science fiction about dire consequences of global warming addresses complex issues of environmental activism and post-industrial globalization, and illustrates the perils and perks of polar travel in the age of digital media.*

**Keywords** social science fiction; polar exploration; new media activism; eco-terror; post-industrial globalization; Arctic; Antarctic

I have reached these Lands but nearly  
From an ultimate dim Thule –  
From a wild weird clime that lieth, sublime,  
Out of Space – out of Time.

(Edgar Allan Poe, *Dreamland*)

'Everyone has an Antarctic'.

(Thomas Pynchon, *V*)

Polar media, as a title, does not lay claim to a discovery. Rather, it situates representations of the Arctic and Antarctic as a topic in media history. To this day, the attraction of South Pole and North Pole remains one of heroic detection: they have been discovered, inspired myth, literature, science, and art, but nonetheless the polar regions remain inaccessible, unrepresentable, devoid of contrast – to be rediscovered. This pertains to the kind of art history that hews to patterns of the detective novel, reconstructing from traces a grammar of objects and authorship; but it applies equally to film and media in the age of eco-tourism, where discovery remains the motive, following snow-blown trails into nothingness,

even and especially after preceding discoverers had imprinted the landscape with their names and deaths.

This paradoxical structure of belatedness is summarized in Milne's *Winnie the Pooh* (1926), where Christopher Robin sets out to lead a polar expedition of his animals. When Pooh asks him why, he responds blithely that the Pole simply is something that one discovers, by way of dangerous places. This definition motivates them to line up and march merrily, until Roo falls into a brook. Rabbit has the idea to block the brook downstream with something, and Pooh is posted across from Roo's mother, Kanga. Together they hold a stick, or pole, over the water that Roo can grab onto, and having saved the little one, they declare their stick the 'North Pole' and return home victoriously (Milne 1926, chapter 8). Research on polar media, like any armchair adventure, means exposing your pen to their frozen history in order to retrieve a few stories to be retold. Or as Oceanwide Expeditions advertise bi-polar ecotourism, 'Footprints disappear, memories last a lifetime'.<sup>1</sup> Polar media raise questions about exposure: the claims to discovery of the North Pole by Cook and Peary are cast in doubt due to the shadows they cast in their 'North Pole' photographs, which gave away that they were not taken at latitude 90.<sup>2</sup> Owing to this ironic luck of history, subsequent exploration remains possible, since no unique discovery had once and for all achieved the pure retreat that is the pole. The idea of an untouched, unexposed purity must be preserved and protected from expeditions motivated by it, and so polar media exhibit the structure of permanent deferral that is dear both to the scientific mind and to the storyteller.<sup>3</sup>

Set in the near future of global warming and its dire consequences, *Antarctica* (Robinson 1998) proceeds from the idea that renewal of the international Antarctic Treaty stalled with the discovery of gas and oil.<sup>4</sup> The continent of science becomes a battleground for extraction crews, scientists, extreme tourism in the footsteps of pioneering expeditions, eco-warriors, and a band of Antarctic 'ferals' attempting to live year-round in man-made caves. While the plot revolves around 'ecotage' – radicals undermining of prospecting for oil and gas – the bulk of the writing is devoted to the aesthetic and political landscape of Antarctica.<sup>5</sup> A staffer for a green US Senator is sent down to the American base at McMurdo in order to investigate environmental sabotage, hijackings, and political wranglings.<sup>6</sup> His visit entangles him in skirmishes between multi-national corporations and countries with an official presence in Antarctica, and secretive swarms of radical environmentalists who would preserve the last pure wilderness for scientific research with minimal ecological consequences. Pivotaly concerned with social justice and ecological sustainability, *Antarctica* reiterates the utopian notion of a realm separate from everyday reality 'back in the world' – a notion that is evidently relevant also to technological visions of virtual reality, metaverse, or second life. Having won Hugo and Nebula awards for his science fiction, Robinson here turns to the southern-most

continent on our planet, an approximation of his favored setting on Mars.<sup>7</sup> His work is often labeled social science fiction, to describe a genre concerned less with space-opera than with technology and society.

'Utopian space is an imaginary enclave within real social space', as Jameson argues, 'and its possibility is dependent on the momentary formation of a kind of eddy or self-contained backwater'. Although he addresses Robinson's work mostly through the Mars trilogy, it holds true for this text that a 'pocket of stasis with in the ferment and rushing forces of social change may be thought of as a kind of enclave within which Utopian fantasy can operate' (Jameson 2005, p. 15). But before we jump to the conclusion that Antarctica merely serves as another inhuman setting for utopian science fiction or a portrait of alienation in the information 'revolution', it is important to note that Robinson's *Antarctica* self-consciously reconstitutes a library of polar media in its 650 pages, from maps and photographs to film and live satellite connections; at one point or another, his main characters – whether cynical mountaineer or naïve 'extreme' tourist, wizened feng shui master or weary Washington insider, eccentric scientist or class-warring handyman – are given to reciting tidbits about polar explorers, fact or fiction, and the set pieces recall historical scenes. Thus the opening scene of Robinson's *Antarctica* has one of the protagonists reflect upon living with automatic GPS navigation as the high-tech ennui that encapsulates the everyday experience of the continent of science: 'Like operating a freight elevator that no one ever used, or being stuck in a movie theater showing a dim print of *Scott of the Antarctic* on a continuous loop. There was not even any weather' (Robinson 1998, p. 5). This is no post-modern ploy, but arguably characteristic of polar media in general: a territory traversed only by way of repetition. For while the traces of previous expeditions may not be preserved in the ice, they certainly can be found in libraries and archives; one might say that the perennially renewed tabula rasa of the polar regions and the palimpsest of cultural memory traces are mutually supplemental.<sup>8</sup>

'As polar expeditions attempt to fill in the last blank spaces of cartography by reaching the only territories left on the globe without any traces of human life and history', Menke (2000) succinctly observes, they inevitably play on 'the topos of an original emptiness without a trace'.<sup>9</sup> When we read in Pytheas and Pliny about travel in the margins of the known world, being carried off into the unknown for nine days by a storm, this is no mere speculation for ancient seafarers: their descriptions of nights becoming shorter in the north attest to that. The Western canon is replete with intertextual references, from Homer to Petrarch, from the *Book of Job* to Dante's *Inferno*, from Coleridge's *Ancient Mariner* to Poe's *Pym*, and from Melville's *Moby Dick* to Eliot's *Wasteland*. While traveling on ice, Frankenstein's monster reads Milton's *Paradise Lost*, which also provides a motto to Shelley's book; Borges rewrote the last trip of Ulysses, Verne refictionalized Poe's frame-narrative around Pym, and Nabokov dramatized the last days of Scott's failed expedition in his verse play,

*The Pole*. Extending this network into recent decades, Nadolny (1987) and Ransmayr (1991) juxtapose diaries and memoirs of polar explorers with metafictional narratives.<sup>10</sup> Many publications on polar exploration are amply illustrated, as Wilson's drawings demonstrate (Scott Polar Research Institute 1982). This trend continues, as for instance in a recent book interspersing the author's ten dozen photographs and her narrative about travel on a Russian icebreaker with excerpts from the journal of Nansen who traversed the area a century earlier.<sup>11</sup> The recent IMAX film, *Shackleton's Antarctic Adventure*, combines reenactments with Shackleton's film from 1919. A British surveying team portrays Shackleton's crew; a Super 16 crew shot footage for a Nova documentary alongside the IMAX crew, both going on a book of photographs (*The Endurance: Shackleton's Legendary Antarctic Expedition* by Caroline Alexander) to bring the experience of Antarctica to people in the safety and warmth of the IMAX theater, where the audience can forget the inconvenient fact that science and aesthetics hew to radically opposite traditions regarding the construction of truths.

When it comes to visual mediations of the polar regions, the snow-blown tracelessness of these extremes is never really coming into focus – thus literalizing an infinite gliding of intertextual metaphors on a glacial surface. In summer, daylight permeates the last frozen crevice, ice and snow reflect and refract the glare, contours are hard to make out, while the area slinks into darkness for the other half of the year. Robinson's novel follows into gales and white-out conditions a group of tourists who seek to retrace the 1911 walk on Cape Crozier by Wilson, Bowers, and Cherry-Garrard, famously known as 'The Worst Journey in the World'.<sup>12</sup> Polar media articulate our epoch of calculation and visualization, from mapping and Mercator projections to naval navigation technology, from radar screens and satellites to global fiber-optic networks serving a live feed from the polar regions. This is personified here in an Asian tourist, offering feng shui commentary and imagist poetry to a 'fibervideo' audience distorting his signal with after-effects on their receiving end: 'people were trying various computer enhancements to render the images crystalline or kaleidoscoped or van Goghged or Rembrandted, whatever. No doubt many of Ta Shu's audience would be surfing these effects, trying a little of everything. Antarctica as Cézanne or Seurat or Maxfield Parrish, with Ta Shu's voice-over narration' (103). Despite this ironic take on how the Antarctic is consumed 'back in the world', it is the novel's strength to contour the beauty and terror of polar landscapes, which Robinson himself observed with a grant from the National Science Foundation.

As art takes advantage of new visualizations of information beyond the traditional optics of reflection associated with linear perspective, and types of refraction associated with aerial perspective, it grapples with the fictions that characterize representations of science.<sup>13</sup> Media artist Andrea Polli for instance turns meteorological data into sound, installed in combination with prints, sketches, books, or

interactive video. Her audiovisual installation 'N.', a collaboration with British sound artist John Gilmore, examines the isolation and environmental extremes of the North Pole in real time.<sup>14</sup> Using information from the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), it combines time-lapse photography from a polar webcam with sonification software. Darkness or whiteout conditions inevitably occlude the real-time feed. As art seeks to respond to environmental concerns from recycling and deforestation to water pollution and the extinction of species, the landscape category mobilizes a historical dimension of polar media, from Edwin Landseer's Victorian painting 'Man Proposes, God Disposes' to weather stations in the twenty-first century, from Connie Samaras's photographs of the intersection of technology and nature in Antarctica (titled after PK Dick's *Vast Active Living Intelligence System*), to a CD-ROM project of views along *Antarctica's First Highway* issued by the Center for Land Use Interpretation in Los Angeles – a three-mile dirt road from Scott's 'discovery hut' past airport and seaport through McMurdo's industrial waste to New Zealand's Scott Base.<sup>15</sup> Highlighting the vastness of a difficult territory, it illustrates the amassing of technology at the fringes of the inhospitable 'continent of science', the polluting flipside of making a stretch of Antarctica accessible and visible, where photography, aerial imagery, and webcams will inevitably be blinded by a lack of visual contrast that belies the conceptual chasm that connects each pole, along the imaginary global axis, with its counterpart. To write on polar media also means engaging with an extreme enlightenment, with visual and conceptual white-out conditions: as Robinson's (1998) novel demonstrates, this risks the hubris of seeking to see, and to show, a remoteness and inaccessibility that is inhuman. Only the sun does not see any shadows.

The polar landscape is not simply nature untouched, nor the absence of technology's traces. As polar history tilts from seafaring ventures into the unknown toward geological surveys and multinational science, it transitions from an oral tradition to scientific utopia: 'This continent is run by scientists, and mostly for their own benefit' (Robinson 1998, p. 347). The shift toward 'beaker utopia' allegedly impoverished individual experience, in what modern thought, as a departure from bourgeois interiority, identifies as *tabula rasa* – the modernist gesture of 'erasing all traces' (Benjamin 1977, pp. 213–219). Instead of richly layered stories of survival and adventure, we get measurements and extrapolations, prognoses and doomsday scenarios. These differences separate a cinematic milestone such as *Nanook of the North* (1922) from a blockbuster *The Day After Tomorrow* (2004), or Disney's remake of a Japanese film under title *8 Below* (2006) from documents on a meteorite discovery upon which the original was based. Just as the International Polar Year (2007–08) and its precedents rely on massive deployment of equipment, the metaphorical field of polar media deploys an abundance of intertextual traces. Yet technoscience also fully partakes of mythical attractions to the polar region. The return of superstitions is not a proper revival, but a galvanization that masks the poverty of experience.

Polar media delineate trajectories of evidentiary material left behind by centuries of polar imaginings. This is how the popularity of movies such as *March of the Penguins* (2005) or *Polar Express* (2004) may be understood: from ancient mythology to the drawings and reports of surviving explorers, from early photographs to the International Polar Year sponsoring artists and writers, from early film such as George Melies' *Conquest of the Pole* (1912) to recent fare like *Alien vs Predator* (2005), Arctic and Antarctic hold a peculiar fascination. Attempts to lay claim to the last remaining territory on the globe become legible as grasping for untouched, original emptiness. Tracing the outlines of the unknown, illuminating the previously unexposed, cartography of areas without any traces of human life and history sheds light on differences and connections between the poles. Here is Robinson's take on Amundsen – which, almost as an aside, manages to invert a cliché about science fiction: 'all his life he had been a man of the North', but when Cook and Peary claimed the North Pole, his desire shifted – 'not a hunger for place, but for position. A concentration on time rather than space; a desire to write one's name on history, rather than to occupy a place on Earth' (Robinson 1998, pp. 316–317). Thus Amundsen goes south.

In the nineteenth century, one trajectory in polar media shifts from an emphasis on race to a concern with environmental factors; later, the racial tensions of canonical texts yield to climate consciousness and global politics. Organized around inchoate ideas of purity, racist conspiracy theories culminated where the poles, variously imagined as vortex, void, or whirlpool, become a tunnel into a different realm: the geographical prize here turns into a spiritual prize. Antarctica figured as a southern counterpart to the *Ultima Thule* of occult fantasies about the north; where the imaginary line that would be the Earth's axis exits or enters, Symmes (1818) posited a hole, or rather a tunnel: 'I declare the earth is hollow and habitable within', arguing of the entire globe 'that it is open at the poles'.<sup>16</sup> Finding *Symzonia*, the land of perfect whiteness and 'abode of a race perfect in its kind' was held out in *Harper's* to be a great motivation for Antarctic exploration. In 1873, the *Atlantic Monthly* could still argue the feasibility of this theory; only the Amundsen and Scott expeditions laid it to rest. Edgar Allan Poe was greatly fascinated with the hollow Earth idea of Symmes, and may have projected onto his global fantasy the tensions between North and South in the United States. Poe ends the travel narrative of Pym with a fictive editor's framing note that associates the white-out of the South Pole with the black cavern of the inverted Eden he calls Tsalal, with speculations on black-on-white scribbles that denote darkness in esoteric languages. Beyond *Gulliver's Travels*, darkness is interpolated with and dissolved in snow and ice, reminiscent of the allegorical complications of the whiteness of Melville's whale or of the albatross (or indeed more recently the binary black and white light, and infinite expanses, of cyberpunk fiction). At this intersection of the trajectories of race and ecology we find *Frankenstein* – where the hubris of creating life meets its double by in Walton's desire to

‘sate my curiosity with the sight of a part of the world never before visited’ (Shelley 1963, p. 194). Yet viewers of James Whale’s classic horror films realize that this landscape is by the same token one of eternal darkness, where proximity to one source of magnetism occludes the opposite, balancing pole.<sup>17</sup>

In a different sense, Robinson’s protagonist Wade Norton offers his roving senator a ‘true south’ that allows the politician to reorient and, leveraging information from Antarctica, regain influence in Washington. One effect of the imagery of polar magnetism is the abstract model of a force field exerting epistemological influence, structuring chaotic masses like iron filings in the same direction, suggesting energies operating on the social level in the formation of communities: an image of a force field energizing coherence based on energetic tension between two opposed poles. As Shelley wrote, ‘What may not be expected in a country of eternal light? I may there discover the wondrous power which attracts the needle and may regulate a thousand celestial observations that require only this voyage to render their seeming eccentricities consistent forever’ (Shelley 1963, p. 1). North and South Pole are associated with unyielding, incomprehensible power: no days or nights, no directions in the sky, a year rounded in a few steps. The popular imagination also invests polar regions with influence on human nature – for where a magnetic compass no longer aids navigation and orientation, the ‘moral compass’ may also fail: reports of polar explorers, scientists, and tourists often contain anecdotal evidence of uncontrollable behavior. This dystopian anomie is obviously echoed in the loss of inhibitions in virtual communities. But sticking to the canon of polar media, a characteristic example is the random murder Buster Keaton commits in *Frozen North* (1922), where he emerges from a subway in the middle of nowhere under a sign that says ‘North Pole – 3 Miles South’. This silent short is notable for its intertextual references to silent film stars and their mannerisms, somewhat hard to trace after familiarity with these trailblazers of early cinema has waned – a parallel with intertextual allusions in Poe’s *Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym*.

While there are some Inuit and Scandinavians in a few crowd scenes, Robinson’s *Antarctica* all but ignores racial differences, triangulating the novel not around competing love interests of an underpaid grunt, an elitist aide, and a misunderstood mountaineer – three tall, white North Americans – but around the landscape itself. Inheriting our polar imaginary, Robinson’s *Antarctica* is not free from racial tension, but includes themes of alienation and heroic quests we know from the Flying Dutchman of Romantic opera, the restless wanderer of countless stories – personified here in an older Asian man given to impromptu haiku, in a Russian drifter, and a in goofy philosopher supporting his love for the forbidding continent by manual labor. Referring only obliquely to Symmes, Robinson echoes the nineteenth century idea of a warm, liveable space beneath the icecap, where scientists use lasers and abandoned generators to create vast underground caves, waterslides and hot tubs, fruit and vegetables growing in

artificially lit ice-caves, and even a sculpture garden (pp. 280, 287, 291). The utopian vision of establishing sustainable human presence under the ice is attractive enough for one protagonist, tour guide Val, to abandon her unhappy macho profession and join the matriarchy of 'the ferals', even though they seem 'like aliens' (p. 615) to her lover, the labor organizer and handyman – in the end he too builds an ecologically correct abode on Antarctica while continuing work for the National Science Foundation.<sup>18</sup> Emphasizing care of our ecosystem, Robinson's science fiction complicates the predictable topos of scientific hubris and techno-scientific attitude – the coldness of purported objectivity that Nietzsche already saw in the ascetic attitude of science as mere descriptive mirror in his time:

One observes a sad, stern, but resolute glance – an eye that looks far, the way a lonely Arctic explorer looks far (so as not to look within, perhaps? so as not to look back? . . .) Here is snow; life has grown silent; the last crows whose cries are audible here are called 'wherefore?', 'in vain!', 'nada!' – here nothing will grow or prosper any longer.

(Nietzsche 1989, p. 157 [III.26])

In the midst of industrial society, the military embodies 'cold culture' (Lethen 2002, p. 11). Arguably, the same holds for information society: in encouraging the hibernation of ego to guarantee coherence, balance, and continuity, 'cool conduct' enables the quick adaptation to rapidly changing situations, mastering the quick transformations and discontinuities of motion needed by the military. Thus, faithful to another axiom of science fiction – that overcoming gravity equals overcoming the grave, Robinson brings back the Zeppelin. Planes are associated in *Antarctica* with World War II, and other locomotion (from dog-sleds and ski to manned and unmanned ground vehicles) is described mostly in sepulchral tones; the history of Antarctic exploration delivers plenty of grisly frozen remains of failed transport. The utopia of going native in Antarctica is made possible by blimps: going forward by going back. In the all-out effort to conquer the uninhabitable regions of the globe (to exploit their natural resources), we find ourselves forever between two World Wars (Voermans 1999). Thus 'if crisis arrives to force you to live out the deepest scripts in you' (p. 199), the novel evokes the military ethos, and finds it in public school and boy scout ethos as behavioral modifications that make Antarctic travel survivable: 'They made Antarctic culture a military thing' (p. 595). This redeployment pushed polar explorations in historical phases; for millions, war was the site where human behavior was shaped and transformed under the pressure of mortal danger. Our global heritage of two all-out efforts in war and science is clearly inscribed as science fiction mainstay, and thus a lot of science fiction set in Antarctica remains stuck on Nazi flying saucers. Yet a somewhat Germanic set of associations in Robinson's *Antarctica* (from some

allusions to Antarctic novels with Nazi characters, to stump-speech condemnations of the global status quo as ‘Götterdämmerung Capitalism’, to the characters’ names: particularly the tall and strong Val, as in Valkyrie) sits uneasily with the musings of a feng shui expert delivering his live feed from the Antarctic, where X always marks a good spot.

In this sense, polar media mobilize ancient myth via uneasy repression of the recent past. The ‘galvanization’ Benjamin observed derives its current from the tensions between the polar imaginings, and the concomitant current of images mirrors the most ancient fantasies about distance and visibility, darkness and light, reflection and refraction. McLuhan held that ‘electricity points the way to an extension of the process of consciousness itself, on a world scale, and without any verbalization whatsoever’ (McLuhan 1964, p. 83). On the other hand, the verbalization of the polar regions in myth and story has not stopped with progressive discovery and mastery of polar regions by technoscience, nor have the polar regions ceased to hold a particular attraction for artistic or popular imagination. Robinson punctuates his Antarctic setting with time-zone-wrenching phone calls from the globe-trotting senator, and the only true peril he leads his protagonists into is not exposure to the weather but unexpected sabotage of GPS and phone connections; of course, the first connection to be reestablished is a Pentagon satellite (p. 449). Along the same lines, it is hardly surprising that the very lack of contrast that makes the polar regions so hard to depict has led to a proliferation of images, still or moving, that enter daily into the maelstrom of a global imaginary:

The new media are the leviathan state’s electric fins. Even in extreme situations – in the air bubble of a submarine on the ocean floor, in the cockpit of a crashing fighter plane – the electric media remain connected to the all-encompassing network, with which the individual can break contact only at the threat of being extinguished.

(Lethen 2002, p. 167)

The redeployment at the turn of the twenty-first century is not one of military personnel, as many of the earlier seafaring explorations were, but rather one of communications, whereby the remoteness of Arctic and Antarctic is pictured, broadcast, and webcast. Soviet icebreakers that threatened to become unsupportable on dwindling budgets are turned over to private enterprise as lucrative tourist vessels venturing into extreme regions. The US National Academy of Sciences asserts that ‘Polar regions play key roles in understanding impacts of ever-changing space weather on technologies for modern communication and power distribution’.<sup>19</sup> Howard Hughes’ obsession with the Cold War thriller *Ice Station Zebra* (1968) looms large here, and *The Secret Land* (1948), a documentary on the secretive ‘Operation High Jump’ expedition led by US Navy Admiral Byrd, was the first non-war-related film to win a Documentary Oscar.<sup>20</sup>

Illustrations of vested interests in polar regions range from the Distant Early Warning System, a series of Cold War era radar installations that Canada allowed the United States to build in the Arctic Circle in the 1950s, all the way to contemporary defense contractors retreating to the frozen wasteland of the Antarctic for weapons testing.<sup>21</sup>

Appreciation of the imaginary of polar media as incorporated in Robinson's *Antarctica* also allows us to parse what lurks at the frozen center of Cold War polar cinema as well as in the information society's imaginary. Like adventure tourism to the poles, it illustrates the displacement Robinson describes: 'most people who came to Antarctica to do something hard came precisely because it was so much easier than staying at home and facing whatever they had to face there' (p. 325). Hawk's film, *The Thing from Another World* (1951), exposes scientists and soldiers to a destructive magnetic field after a recent meteor fell into the Arctic near an American early warning installation. They discover a flying saucer, which is destroyed in the attempt to recover it. But they manage to thaw out the alien pilot, and after it goes on a rampage, the military eventually manages to destroy the Thing, although some scientists initially argue for the preservation of alien life. Three decades later, Carpenter's remake of *The Thing* switches the polarity, not only by transferring the setting from the DEW Line near the North Pole to the Antarctic, but also by having only the Thing survive, substituting despair and paranoia for the jingoistic stance of the McCarthy era.<sup>22</sup> Coming after the Korean and Vietnam War, it exploits the collective fear of a beast within man, marking the Antarctic as a profoundly alien space.<sup>23</sup> Here the Thing is a shape-shifter, first encountering the scientists who investigate the fate of their Norwegian colleagues in the guise of a dog. We may do well to remember this twist on the companion animal and emergency protein source for polar explorers – a chilly twist on how science maintains a tenuous hold on the inhospitable terrain. For a while the 'DEW line' was eventually replaced by satellites, there are at least 28 nations that maintain a regular human presence in the Antarctic, and dog patrols or dog-sled expeditions are the norm around the Arctic circle wherever politics and science are in play (Lee 2006). By the same token, cool conduct led to rising temperatures. You may feel it on your cheeks: climate change, if not shame. The year 2004 was the fourth hottest year ever recorded, and the past decade was the warmest since measurements began in 1861. Global surface temperature increased by more than 0.6°C in the past century. The rate of change for the period since 1976 is roughly three times that for the past 100 years as a whole. As Robinson's novel quietly insists, these facts will lead to much starker images than any floods movies may regale us with. Consulting the *RealClimate* website, browsing data compiled by the World Meteorological Organization, or consulting NASA reports, it becomes plain that the ice changes around earth's frozen caps, and that sea levels are rising.<sup>24</sup> UNESCO urges us to consider species extinction, referring to its universal declaration on cultural

diversity.<sup>25</sup> This concern for life on the planet should not merely extend to huskie heroics, melodrama displaced upon the sacrifice or consumption of man's best friend, or to capturing the humanoid waddling of penguins. Where Coleridge and Poe personified the pole as an animal-lover, inhuman yet selectively protecting life, Robinson's final pages leave us with a decidedly more ambiguous vision – what emerges on the horizon after a synesthetic staging of Sibelius at sunrise performed by a 'thawing orchestra' could be birds, could be blimps. The sheer scale of the polar regions fuses landscape and technological sublime in our mediatic imagination, until it becomes clear that in a world of global positioning and technological constitution of vision and imagination, we can know these forbidding regions only through technology while yet defining them by an absence of technology – out of space, out of time.

## Notes

- 1 [www.oceanwide-expeditions.com](http://www.oceanwide-expeditions.com) [August 28, 2007]
- 2 See Casati (2003, pp. 93–94); and [www.shadowmill.com](http://www.shadowmill.com) [August 28, 2007]. Research shows that the North Magnetic Pole is continually moving northwest.
- 3 A claim to the North Pole staked by Russia after a submarine crossing made news (Associated Press 2007): 'Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov explained the flag-planting with a precedent vividly etched in the modern imagination. "Whenever explorers reach some sort of point that no one else has explored, they plant a flag, he said. "That's how it was on the moon, by the way."'
- 4 In *Red Mars* (1993) Robinson's selection for the Mars Colony takes place in the Dry Valleys of Antarctic, where as in (1999) Robinson uses Wright Valley in Antarctica to prepare people for Mars. A counter-example, denying global warming and vilifying ecological activism is Crichton's *State of Fear* (2004), another thriller about a high-tech environmental liberation front in Antarctica.
- 5 Appleton in *Tom Swift and his Atomic Earth Blaster* (1954) features an expedition to the South Pole to mine iron at the center of the Earth, while Bank's *The Business* (1999) is about the only non-governmental organization to own a base in Antarctica. Environmentalists also battle Antarctic mining in Follett's *Ice* (1978) and Charbonneau's *The Ice* (1991).
- 6 Jameson (2005, p. 216) sees in Robinson 'not the representation of utopia but the conflict of all possible utopias'. One of Robinson's scientists argues, 'First it was capitalism versus socialism, and then capitalism versus democracy, and now science is the only thing left! And science itself is part of the battlefield, and can be corrupted. But in essence, in my heart as a scientist, I say to you that this is a utopian project' (p. 349). Compare Nozick (1974, p. 312): 'Utopia is a framework for utopias'.

- 7 'When we first arrived, and for 20 years after that, Mars was like Antarctica but even purer', Robinson (1993, pp. 309–310) writes of the 'utopia for primitives and scientists, which is to say everybody'. The Mars trilogy also features the 'appearance of a feral community of intentionally primitive hunters' – compare Jameson (2005, pp. 17 and 408).
- 8 Antarctic fiction began in 1605 with publication of *Mundus Alter Et Idem* by Mercurio Brittanico (Bishop Joseph Hall). Chavanne, Karpf, Monnier 1881, and Biblioteca Polare, <http://www.polarnet.cnr.it/php/riviste/biblio.html> [August 27, 2007]
- 9 See Menke (2000) and Menke (2001).
- 10 Pynchon (1963) reports a journey to the South Pole in winter 1898. Polar fictions often make reference to Burroughs (1918).
- 11 Brown (2005) worked with Robert Headland, archivist at the Scott Polar Research Center, Cambridge. Compare Johnson (2005).
- 12 Cherry-Garrard (1923). See Robinson (1998, p. 14, pp. 245–251).
- 13 Jameson (2005, p. 171): 'all possible images of utopia will always be ideological and distorted by a point of view which cannot be corrected or even accounted for'.
- 14 'N.', 2005 Lovebytes Festival Commission. See <http://www.andreapolli.com/n-point/> [August 28, 2007].
- 15 'Antarctic 1', [http://www.clui.org/clui\\_4\\_1/lotl/v24/index.html](http://www.clui.org/clui_4_1/lotl/v24/index.html), and 'Ultima Thule', [http://www.clui.org/clui\\_4\\_1/ondisplay/thule/index.html](http://www.clui.org/clui_4_1/ondisplay/thule/index.html) [August 28, 2007]. See Pringle (1991); Robinson wrote his PhD on PK Dick, advised by Jameson.
- 16 Symmes (1818), McBride (1828). This hypothesis was astonishingly persistent: Beale (1899) has two brothers fly through the hollow earth in a home-made airship, entering through the North Pole, exiting from the South Pole. The same journey is made in Emerson (1907). In Cooper (1835), the Earth explodes at the Poles, resulting in a steamy climate. In Rucker (1990), EA Poe falls into the hollow earth after the South Pole collapses. Compare McCaughrean (2005).
- 17 In 2002, New Zealand TV produced a DVD on Vaughan Williams' *Sinfonia Antarctica*, the score for *Scott of the Antarctic* (1948); the British Antarctic Survey commissioned Peter Maxwell Davies' 8th symphony to mark its fiftieth anniversary: <http://www.maxopus.com> [August 28, 2007]. See Robinson (1998, p. 103).
- 18 See Bloom (1993), Arthur (1995), LeGuin (1982), and Glasberg (2002).
- 19 'Rationale', US Committee to the International Polar Year 2007–2008, <http://dels.nas.edu/us-ipy/rationale.shtml> [August 28, 2007].
- 20 McLean (1963), Sturges (1968), on satellite espionage: 'The Russians put our camera made by our German scientists and your film made by your German scientists into their satellite made by their German scientists'. US Department of Defense objections over the screenplay delayed production for several years. In Barrett (1965), an American spacecraft carrying a

secret weapon crash-lands in Antarctica, and a British Intelligence officer is sent to retrieve the weapon.

- 21 Binder (1939) sends its protagonist five millennia back in time, where he meets Antarkans. It is unusual for pre-World War II stories to discuss atomic bombs; the US government ignored this science fiction for the Manhattan Project to continue in secrecy.
- 22 Right after Carpenter's movie, Antarctic ice released the bodies of three members of an 1845 expedition. . . Compare Brankic (2007): a Rutgers University team extracted DNA from a glacier in Antarctica. This scenario (a mark of science fiction going back at least to Kurd Lasswitz' *On Two Planets* (1897), which influenced Walter Hohmann and Wernher von Braun) is also exploited in the *Transformers* movie and game (2007).
- 23 See Leane (2005), referring to Campbell (1980). Lovecraft (1936) locates an ancient Antarctic megalopolis at 23,570 feet.
- 24 The Center for Astrophysical Research in Antarctica offers a virtual tour of the South Pole at <http://astro.uchicago.edu/cara/vtour/pole> [August 28, 2007].
- 25 Arctic Climate Impact Assessment (ACIA <http://www.acia.uaf.edu>, October 2004), as well as <http://realclimate.org>, <http://www.nasa.gov/vision/earth/lookingatearth/icecover.html>, [http://www.iucn.org/themes/ssc/red\\_list\\_2004/Extinction\\_media\\_brief\\_2004.pdf](http://www.iucn.org/themes/ssc/red_list_2004/Extinction_media_brief_2004.pdf), <http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0012/001271/127160m.pdf>, <http://www.eia.doe.gov/oiaf/kyoto/kyotorpt.html>, <http://www.newscientist.com/article.ns?id=dn6816> [August 28, 2007].

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