

Arthur Mason (ed.), *Arctic Abstractive Industry. Assembling the Valuable and Vulnerable North* (Studies in the Circumpolar North 5), New York: Berghahn 2022, ISBN 9781800734685, xiv + 210 pp.

The anthology *Arctic Abstractive Industry. Assembling the Valuable and Vulnerable North*, deals in a series of chapters with the multidimensional challenges following the climate crisis and is edited by political anthropologist Arthur Mason, who has specialised in energy security, extractive industries, ecological vulnerability, and futurity. The volume offers renewing perspectives on important sets of questions, such as “How is the Arctic abstracted and constructed and by which forces?” But let us first delve into what abstraction in the sense forwarded in this volume really entails.

As described on the back of the book, abstraction “refers to the creation of new material substances and cultural values by detaching parts from existing substances and values.” This is of course a process that has been known for a long time, but technology and capital help to conceal and differentiate the abstractive process from the extractive as it focuses on “conceptual resources” and the relations and implications they have with and for hard-core/hardware extractivism. Looking back in history, from my own backyard, the Swedish parts of Sápmi, the concept of abstractive industry seems to be functional for studying the colonial operations of the Swedish state from at least the seventeenth-century mining ventures in the northern areas and the authorities and nobilities talking of these areas as resource frontiers and colonies, and later, during the late nineteenth century, as “the Land of the Future.” Like a *perpetuum mobile*, the resource curse clings to well-established colonies: once they have been declared a resource frontier, they will always be either a resource dump or once again a colony in the making. And of course, this also applies to all other places that are yet to be designated as resource frontiers. Solving this curse for local populations and Indigenous peoples must begin with historical justice, self-determination and fair distributions.

In his introduction, Arthur Mason sketches the relations and timelines in the use of the concept of abstractive industries in the Arctic area as a movement from the material to the symbolic and then back to the material again. In the face of the vulnerable reality of Arctic ecosystems and once frozen places, it seems that capital, but also life, always finds a way, the possibility to extract value from growing knowledge and experience of that specific vulnerability is itself a promising industry. Mason uses the classifications *Arctic decay*, *Arctic imagery* and *Arctic inflection* to describe what characterises the late industrial form of a value-shaping phenomenon he calls the *Arctic abstractive*.

In chapter one, anthropologist Cymene Howe describes how the signs of climatological catastrophes are part of Arctic peoples’ everyday life. From the killed polar bear that had drifted to Iceland, the lost sounds of sea ice, to the rising of the entire island of Iceland resulting from the melting of the ice cap—these processes are happening on different scales that can be seen as extreme asymmetries. Howe calls for a kind of *response-ability*, originally proposed by Donna Haraway, to engage in new ways with the cryosphere as it is retreating and dissolving.

As much as the first chapter gives rise to a sense of hope, chapter two by anthropologist Danielle Dinovelli-Lang and geographer Karen Hébert sends shivers down one's spine. This is partly due to the brilliant depiction of the coming of creatures like the tick plagued "ghost moose," but also of how not-so-old colonial agreements over fish and game as well as other natural resources have present and future repercussions for communities and ecosystems in the Arctic. A more prominent task for rural local and Indigenous expertise is what the authors propose regarding measures to manage or hinder the ecological catastrophe that comes with the capitalist idea to protect life and resources in order to exploit it.

Chapter three deals with environmental monitoring and the transition of this operation into real-time data production with a special focus on Norway's oil and gas industries. Social anthropologist Vidar Hepsø and information technologist Elena Parmiggiani show how the instantaneity of our time—the "realtimeness"—structures the way in which corporations choose to assess the environmental effects of their businesses. Realtime measurements offer greater confirmation capacity than the infrastructures used to depict longer timelines. The authors point at the risks of letting only one so-called timescape be in control, and losing sight of the deep time consequences of extractive industries.

At the centre of chapter four, written by anthropologist Mark Nuttall, is Greenland's resource zones. In a precise way, Nuttall describes how the very plans for an extractive project and the techno-fantasies surrounding them become abstraction, involving anticipation, speculation, hope and imagination. This is one of the many paradoxes and loops of resource zones and frontiers; the remoteness of a place is lost due to accessibility, which in turn reveals its vulnerability, but access is necessary for extraction that is argued (often wrongly) to sustain the livelihoods of local peoples. But as Nuttall points out, remote and unpopulated areas and possible resource zones are constructed when archaeological assessments marginalise human settlements in favour of an extractive project.

In chapter five, geographer Mia M. Bennett delves into the trade and import of iron ore of steelmaking China, which, once again, is the world's largest national economy. Using perspectives and ideas from the film *Bladerunner* and the concept "Off-Worlds," this chapter is both informative, analytical and upsetting. It sketches the slow journey of China towards becoming the leading nation in the iron ore and steel commodity chain, how the country has specialised in production of "long products" used in construction and how environmental initiatives create ecological burdens on off-world places or, as we could also call them, sacrifice zones. Intriguingly, Bennett describes how China's unique position is based on state subsidies that enable the construction of gigantic vessels to transport the enormous amounts of iron ore that require the country to expand to new resource frontiers such as the Arctic. However, when the author immerses into the uniqueness of China, I miss the perspective that China is in fact a capitalist yet Communist autocracy. The way in which Bennett ties together China's commodity chains, environmental initiatives (Blue skies for Chinese towns through clean Arctic iron ore from the so-called *off-worlds*), techno-fantasies and futurism that expands from the Arctic through the cryosphere to outer space and prospects for mining other planets makes this chapter very readable.

Social anthropologist Carly Dokis is the author of chapter six, in which she analyses how Indigenous communities have contested the Mackenzie Gas Project in the Northwest territories in Canada. While the opposite temporalities of companies and local Indigenous communities are well known, they are sharply analysed here, e.g. the refusal of authorities to recognise that colonial injustices continue to be perpetuated in the present, and corporate negligence to take history and present into account. Dokis points to the fact that the social and environmental assessments are abstractions which describe, but also inscribe, the future. In the colonial, capitalist and neoliberal construction of negotiationism or consultationism, Indigenous peoples' rights are recognized only if they agree to be partners, which results in the resurgence of capitalist and neoliberal ideas. All the while, Indigenous resistance still stands tall in what seems to be the perpetual machinery of colonialism. After regulatory delays, the Mackenzie Gas Project was eventually approved but never implemented, and finally abandoned due to a decline in profits and growing costs.

Chapter seven is a short but beautifully written text by philosopher Oxana Timofeeva on human understanding of nature as a storehouse or table of resources that might be unlimited or scanty, exemplified by parables of the parasite and by energy and combustion restoring life to dead matter by sacrificial fire—the Phoenix. This is also the very definition of abstraction as a process where something is taken (life) and resurrected (by purifying fire). Today's ultimate capitalization and abstraction is no longer gold, but oil, extracted from the depths of time and the depths of place. Timofeeva revisits the paths of her childhood in Siberia, Greek philosophers, modern thinkers, and literature with a special focus on the Indigenous Surgut Khanty of Siberia and their invisible war against extraction.

In the last chapter, Arthur Mason reflects upon the graph as a tool for abstraction and visualizing the future, and a vessel enabling certain stakeholders to act in energy policy decision-making, resulting in an abstractness that circumscribes political deliberation. It is interesting to follow his lived experience (a non-alienated and non-abstractionist act or method according to Marx, see the afterword p. 192) of deliberative as well as political processes and the evolvment and choreographies of visualisations such as PowerPoints, booklets and graphs. Also, tellingly, how abstractions have the potential to change notions of time, from circular to linear thinking.

Michael J. Watts frames the anthology's keyword nicely in his afterword: abstraction as something that involves direction, includes movement and separation. It's a separation from something, a counterpoint, which in this volume is extraction. Initially, Watts mention an important keyword dependency, but foremost as a marker of individual failure. In vain I find myself waiting for him to return to this keyword, to expand on its meanings in relation to the content of the book. Dependency as a critical concept that can be stretched to something positive, to interdependency and reciprocity, to human and non-human, and the consciousness of a certain interdependency, the hope, care and connectedness of actors, who appears in several of the contributions to this volume. It also seems to me that the constant interplay and relationship, or shall we say dependency, between the symbolic (abstraction) and the material (extraction) that Watts emphasizes is another reason not to define dependency

as a failure, but rather as an irreplaceable part of independence and a humble wish as well as a struggle for a better day.

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