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New Literary History, Volume 47, Number 1, Winter 2016, pp. 1-26 (Article)

Published by Johns Hopkins University Press



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After the Arctic Sublime

Benjamin Morgan

CAN THE TEMPERATURE BE INTERPRETED? Consider, for a moment, the meteorological tables published in William Scoresby's popular Arctic voyage narrative, *An Account of the Arctic Regions* (1820), which record a minimum temperature of 10 degrees Fahrenheit on April 10, 1810; 15 degrees on the eleventh; 14 on the twelfth—and so on for 1810 through 1818.¹ It might be said that these tables mark a hermeneutic boundary. In the wake of new historicism and cultural studies, literary scholars commonly read maritime voyage narratives like Scoresby's, but we rarely attend to the scientific data they contain. In itself, this is not a surprise. The interpretive challenge presented by such a table is readily apparent: as an index of atmospheric conditions that are not human-made, its meaning seems to lie beyond the realm of humanistic inquiry. Its symbolic register is numerical rather than linguistic, and therefore only minimally explicable in terms of trope, form, rhetoric, or poetics. So, by contrast with Scoresby's eventful narratives of Arctic adventure and depictions of whaling life, which can be readily interpreted as conveying and sustaining ideologies of nationality or gender, a table of weather data gestures toward an extracultural beyond. Exactly insofar as it means what it says, Scoresby's record of the temperature touches upon one limit of symptomatic interpretation.

This essay proposes that features like Scoresby's table, consisting of scientific data, constitute a particularly important site of inquiry within our present critical context and geohistorical moment. Among the questions most widely discussed within environmental history and the environmental humanities is whether the advent of anthropogenic climate change means that longstanding disciplinary distinctions between human history and natural history must be revised: it is now often argued that climate is a phenomenon proper to historical as well as to scientific knowledge.² This line of reasoning has purchase upon historically oriented literary studies in that it invites reconsideration of what we understand "history" to include: if natural and climatological events are historical agents, then the boundary separating Scoresby's record of the temperature from his record of Arctic adventure becomes less

evident. Is it possible to understand our objects of study as inhabiting not only human time and culture, but also the nonhuman space and time of the planet, climate, or weather? If this kind of question first emerged within ecocriticism in the early 1990s, it has been deepened rather than resolved by the complex imbrication of human and geological agency called the Anthropocene. A conventional literary historicism that attributes causal primacy to human culture does not always seem adequate to a new situation in which entanglements of human action with geological and climatological events are understood as motive forces of history.

The interpretive strategy I explore in response to this situation draws upon the American pragmatist philosopher John Dewey's conception of aesthetic experience as originating in the biology of living organisms rather than as a distinctively human capacity. Dewey's *Art as Experience* offers a way of thinking that is especially well suited to capturing the hybridity of human meaning and scientific data because it characterizes the distinction between scientific knowledge and aesthetic experience not as an unbridgeable gulf, but merely as a difference of "emphasis."³ From this perspective, a table like Scoresby's is not uninterpretable scientific data; rather, it is "aesthetic" in the particular sense of invoking a relationship between what is sensed by the body and what is registered by instruments. Placed in dialogue with nineteenth-century voyage narratives, Dewey's imbrication of science and aesthetics challenges the notion that nineteenth-century tropes of the sublime constitute the most relevant formal analytic for the popular genre of the Arctic voyage narrative. Rather than interpreting their aesthetic and political commitments as historically bounded and symptomatic of a past moment, we can understand them as conveying knowledge and experience that is transtemporally persistent: depictions of interactions between human bodies and inhospitable natural environments whose time is biological and relatively permanent rather than historically specific to Romanticism or Victorian culture.

Attending to nonhuman contexts and suprahistorical temporal frames may strike some readers as counterintuitive or even controversial because this practice departs from the strategies that have usually been adopted to examine the political work of aesthetic categories. The "Arctic sublime" in particular has long been understood as an aesthetic category that responds well to a mode of critique that elucidates the political implications of form or aesthetics within the boundaries of a particular historical moment. The Arctic sublime is a well-studied Romantic and Victorian aesthetic of threatening landscapes, terrible creatures, and deadly danger that appeared in well-known works such as Samuel Taylor

Coleridge's *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*, Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*, and Edgar Allan Poe's *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym of Nantucket*, as well as in a wide array of popular culture including spectacular panoramas and tableaux vivants, massive paintings of barren landscapes and wrecked ships, and a tremendous amount of adventure fiction idolizing the Arctic explorer. The Arctic sublime is often understood as having a well-defined rise and fall: it reached its peak in the 1850s, following the disappearance of the British naval hero John Franklin's Arctic expedition, and it is commonly said to have faded by the century's end, when the Arctic was more fully explored.⁴ It is also often understood as an ideologically significant aesthetic category: even as the endeavor of polar exploration was described as scientifically "pure" by writers as diverse as Jules Verne and Joseph Conrad, it generated triumphalist narratives about national character, masculinity, or geopolitics; and it often caricatured or erased the indigenous people of the Arctic.⁵ Often drawing on Mary Louise Pratt's argument that travel narratives, especially those of natural historians, "created a new kind of Eurocentered planetary consciousness," many have shown that unmapped Arctic spaces were inscribed by "colonial fantas[ies]," "national . . . dramas," or "imperial identities."⁶

While these forms of ideology critique are important for pushing back against an uncritical adulation of Arctic heroism, they no longer adequately address the Arctic's place in the Western imagination. Among the many ironies of the present era of climate change is the fact that regions that had for centuries dramatized the fragility of human life have, in a few short decades, been refigured as representing the earth's profound vulnerability to collective human agency. If the Arctic was long imagined as an overpowering environment where human capacities could be tested and masculine national character could be dramatized, it now resonates in a very different register. With Poe, Shelley, and Coleridge, we continue to associate the poles with scientific research, extreme natural environments, and sublime landscapes. But the story that the Arctic now tells us seems to have less to do with ideologies of the nation-state, and more to do with the ways in which extranational networks of humans and nonhumans distributed across the entire planet will be affected, unequally, by the changes that are manifested most evidently at the earth's ice caps. This shift means that the Arctic has begun to do a very different kind of cultural work, and that it may require conceptual frameworks and vocabularies other than gender, nationalism, and imperialism.

It might seem natural to think of our temporal relationship to nineteenth-century Arctic tropes in linear terms: we are "after" the Arctic sublime in the sense that the twenty-first century is after the nineteenth, in

the sense that the global climate warms year after year. But the following pages explore a different kind of afterness, one that can be recovered within certain texts as having been there all along. Resisting the notion that aesthetic categories rise and fall with historical periods, I turn to two important Arctic voyage narratives, Scoresby's *Account* and Elisha Kent Kane's *Arctic Explorations* (1856), in order to excavate modes of aesthetic experience that do not seem to obey the strictures of historical time. In the shadow of the sublime was a richly articulated proto-Deweyan aesthetics of the immediate sensory experience of Arctic space, which becomes visible as aesthetic only if we look beyond Burkean and Kantian accounts of the sublime, which are premised on a strong sense of human distinctiveness. Occurring at the level of the body (the numbness induced by Arctic cold; the edginess engendered by endless daylight), these aesthetic experiences require an expanded sense of the historical in part because they are so intimately linked to a human physiology whose time is in the first instance biological. Taking these sensory descriptions of the Arctic at their word, rather than as symptoms of unspoken values, this essay engages with recent inquiries into how geological and biological models of time and space might be leveraged against anthropocentric periodizing habits, either by extending literary history into deep time (Wai Chee Dimock) or by displacing human maps of the globe with the alien figure of the planet (Gayatri Spivak).⁷ The changing fate of the Arctic sublime reveals that to move outside the linear time of historical periods and human maps of national spaces is not necessarily to resist an older model of historicism that aimed to return political contexts to the surfaces of literary texts; instead, it is to adapt to a new conception of the historical that recognizes as increasingly tenuous the distinction between human and natural history.

Arctic Voyage Narratives and the Problem of Transparency

If you wanted to write a scientific voyage narrative in the nineteenth century, you faced a peculiar and vexing problem. Gillian Beer puts it this way: because the "imaginary voyage" was a familiar literary genre, "natural-historians on their travels . . . found themselves writing within rhetorical modes that were both enabling and dangerous to their project: enabling because detailed sensory description was valued in the genre, dangerous because such description was easily melded into fantasy and received as playful exaggeration, not controlled observation."⁸ What Catherine Gallagher has called "the rise of fictionality," in short, threatened the truth value of voyage narratives.⁹ An arsenal of strategies emerged

in response, all of which were immediately susceptible to becoming themselves fictionalized, as any reader of *Moby-Dick* knows: one could assert the truth of the narrative at the outset, include carefully drawn depictions of what one had seen, or even strategically deprecate one's own literary skill. Scholars in maritime, oceanic, and "blue" literary and cultural studies have recently drawn attention to a distinctive repertoire of maritime representational strategies, often oriented toward complex technical accounts of activity aboard ship, that found their way into the novel: these might take the shape of a distinctive epistemology that "stresses the interpenetration of the spheres of manual and intellectual labor" (for Hester Blum); an "adventure poetics," attentive to "action rather than psychology" and oriented toward "performance rather than mimesis" (for Margaret Cohen); or a technical rhetoric that resists our own interpretive habits of looking beyond literal meaning (for Cannon Schmitt).¹⁰

The tension between a claim to transparent description and a poetic evocation of the indescribable was especially pronounced within Arctic voyage narratives, which often told of landscapes, animals, and atmospheric phenomena that had rarely been seen by Europeans (or, indeed, by any humans). Accounts of Arctic voyages became a significant subgenre beginning in the 1820s after the end of the Napoleonic wars, and peaked in the 1850s, as numerous expeditions went in search of Franklin. As was the case for many of the events that coincided with the nineteenth-century expansion of print and the rise of mass culture, a seemingly boundless field of visual and textual representation arose around the Arctic: not only these accounts, but also extended discussions in periodicals, newspapers printed aboard ship and then reprinted to the interest of audiences at home, journals, correspondence, reviews, panoramas, collections of lithographs, and paintings. Accounts of voyages drew specialist and nonspecialist readers alike, were frequently reprinted and widely translated, and were lucrative enough that educated sailors could count on income from their memoirs upon returning home. As Janice Cavell observes in an astute study of the genre, these accounts commonly included prefaces assuring readers of the truthfulness of the narrative, and strove to appear unmediated by authorial intention, "as if they had been created through a natural rather than a cultural process."¹¹

The naturalization of cultural process: this is a serviceable definition of ideology. So it will come as no surprise that Arctic voyage accounts have proven especially responsive to ideology critique: Lisa Bloom has found that "polar exploration narratives played a prominent part in defining the social construction of masculinity"; and, in an especially rich study, Robert G. David traces an eclectic range of meanings that

coalesced around both the Inuit and the British explorer-hero in voyage accounts, advertising, panoramas, and adventure fiction.¹² But what these texts purveyed were not only ideologies; they also took up and transformed a repertoire of aesthetic categories familiar to literate Britons. Even as voyagers claimed to humbly and realistically describe what they saw, they called upon Romantic tropes of danger, darkness, and infinitude that they had learned from reading Shelley and Coleridge, and that has often been characterized by scholars of polar exploration as the “Arctic sublime.” Romantic tropes were animated in new ways by the Arctic: in a study of Arctic visual culture, Russell A. Potter finds a “new sense of sublimity, one more than capable of incorporating death in all its materiality.”¹³ Francis Spufford connects depictions of the Arctic to the gothic novel: both seemed to narrow the distance characteristic of Edmund Burke’s sublime: “Now . . . one could apparently continue to feel the sublimity of the threat while being threatened oneself.”¹⁴ And Chauncey Loomis traces the way in which voyage accounts disseminated an image of the Arctic as “almost unearthly in its sublimity,” the scene of a “cosmic romance” where “Western man would . . . demonstrate his capacity to conquer nature at its most mysterious and intimidating.”¹⁵ In a very real sense, then, explorers could only see these landscapes in ways that were already highly mediated by existing poetic and artistic traditions.¹⁶ The disjuncture between this aesthetic and reality would only become fully apparent with the lost Franklin expedition, which, as Loomis observes, “soured the romance and at least partly subverted the image of the Arctic Sublime.”¹⁷ In short, multiple histories—of science, of the novel, of British visual culture, of imperialism—have allowed us to see that the voyager’s claim to mimetic fidelity was extraordinary complex in its animation and deployment of ideologies, tropes, and poetic techniques.

If we turn our attention to one of the most important and widely read early Arctic narratives, Scoresby’s two-volume *An Account of the Arctic Regions, with a History and Description of the Northern Whale-Fishery* (1820), we will initially find that it bears out these political and aesthetic modes of interpretation extremely well. A prominent explorer and, later, mesmerist, Scoresby wrote over one hundred books and articles on whaling, arctic geography, and magnetism (a topic of crucial importance to polar navigation). He made his first Arctic voyage at the age of ten with his father, and became part of the thriving Edinburgh scientific culture of the early decades of the nineteenth century, studying with Robert Jameson, the president of the Wernerian Society. Later, Scoresby was a founding member of the British Association for the Advancement of Science.¹⁸ Remarking on the consonance between Scoresby’s beliefs in

mesmerism and Evangelical Anglicanism, Alison Winter observes that “for Scoresby, the study of nature was a heroic expression of one’s religious calling.”¹⁹ This speaks to a broader tendency within Scoresby’s writing to emphasize the compatibility of religion and science; in one passage of his *Account*, Scoresby remarks upon how “admirable” it is that God has made infinitely variable and beautiful snowflakes even “in regions the most remote from human observation” (A 1:477). The first volume of Scoresby’s account contains a history of the search for the Northwest Passage, a description of the Svalbard archipelago (located about halfway between Norway and the North Pole), 148 pages describing sea and ice, atmospheric observations and descriptions of wildlife, and tables of data. The second volume contains a history of whale-fisheries, a classification of whales, information about how whales are caught and harvested, a catalog of the uses of whale bones and oil, anecdotes about fishing, descriptions of legal regulations, mathematical models of climate and magnetism, and plates showing arctic maps, landscapes, whaling apparatus, whales, and snowflakes.

One does not have to look far to see that if Scoresby’s volume spoke of the natural environment of the Arctic, it did so in a culturally encoded language of national ambitions and aesthetic tropes. The *Literary and Scientific Repository*, for instance, began its review by observing that “it is a pleasant spectacle to see the spirits of the men who direct the energies of great nations.”²⁰ Across the many reviews of Scoresby’s work, a common theme emerges: while Scoresby’s prose is unrefined, the landscapes he describes are extraordinary. The *Edinburgh Magazine and Literary Miscellany* singled out the “striking phenomena,” and “grand scene[s]” described by Scoresby—the precipices of steep icebergs; the “calving” of ice into the sea; the view of the Arctic from the top of a mountain in Spitzbergen—but the reviewer also observed that “it cannot be expected that one who has spent his life in contending with the storms and monsters of the Northern deep should thoroughly understand the art of writing a book.”²¹ The *Monthly Review* similarly noted that given Scoresby’s “judicious and active observation . . . we may well pardon in a sailor a certain disregard of refinement of style.”²² Among the moments often quoted in reviews were Scoresby’s account of the “glistening or vitreous appearance” of icebergs (A 1:109), “the gloomy shade” of mountains (A 1:109), and “a kind of majesty, not to be conveyed in words, in these extraordinary accumulations of snow and ice” (A 1:110). Moments such as these accord with both what Beer describes as the scientific traveler’s eschewal of rhetoric and what Loomis describes as a Burkean Arctic sublime of “obscurity, solitude, vastness, and magnificence.”²³

But it is also notable that the political and aesthetic analytical frameworks most often applied to historical representations of the Arctic

tend to overlook a great deal of what constituted accounts of voyages: scientific data and ambivalent aesthetic judgments. In order to depict the Arctic, Scoresby's text turns not only to the poetics of the sublime and the heroic, but also to a wide range of representational strategies that might be said to evade this poetics through their very banality: tables of climatological data, diagrams of ships and instruments, decontextualized images of Arctic fauna. Furthermore, many of Scoresby's descriptions of nature are less attentive to sublime power and immensity than to a rather less grandiose aesthetic that might be said to align with what Sianne Ngai has recently described as the "merely interesting," a placeholder for aesthetic judgment that tends to shuttle between the aesthetic and the scientific and that "marks a tension between wonder and reason."²⁴ Scoresby is repeatedly fascinated by the perceptual effects of high latitudes, observing, for example, that at a distance of twenty miles, one can easily be tricked into thinking one is within a league, or about three and a half miles, of the land: "Persons . . . have not unfrequently imagined, that their ship could not stand an hour towards the land without running aground; and yet, perhaps, the ship has sailed three or four hours directly 'in shore,' and still been remote from danger" (*A* 1:111). This is one of many instances in which Scoresby's Arctic landscapes are less sublime than strange.

If one tracks the cultural reception of Scoresby's writings, one finds that readers were commonly interested in aspects of Arctic narratives that were adjacent to their tendencies to channel national energies or their depictions of powerful nature. In her penultimate novel, *Sylvia's Lovers* (1863), for example, Elizabeth Gaskell drew on Scoresby's writing for whaling anecdotes and technical knowledge about whaling and the town of Whitby.²⁵ Herman Melville, similarly borrowing Scoresby's depictions of whaling, found an aesthetics of the minute rather than the massive. Ishmael opens the famous chapter on cetology by praising Scoresby as the "best existing authority" on the topic; elsewhere, Ishmael ironically laments that Scoresby is not very good at sketching whales, but "with the microscopic diligence of a Leuwenhoeck submits to the inspection of a shivering world ninety-six facsimiles of magnified Arctic snow crystals."²⁶ H. P. Lovecraft, perhaps unsurprisingly, brilliantly captures the Arctic aesthetics of strangeness when he makes reference to Scoresby in his 1931 novel *At the Mountains of Madness*; early in the novel, an Antarctic expedition encounters a "bizarre mirage . . . of a cyclopean city of no architecture known to man. . . . The general type of mirage was not unlike some of the wilder forms observed and drawn by the Arctic whaler Scoresby in 1820; but . . . we all seemed to find in it a taint of latent malignity and infinitely evil portent."²⁷ While this kind of description

participates in what Burke called “delightful horror” occasioned by the contemplation of the infinite, it inflects the Burkean sublime with a subdued, peripheral sense of the evil or malign.²⁸

Even if we turn to some of the Arctic narratives most aware of their political context, such as the American explorer Elisha Kent Kane’s *Arctic Explorations*, the analytics most commonly used to study scientific voyages, travel narratives, and Arctic accounts are bound to leave out much of the text. In many respects, the tenor of Kane’s text is very different from Scoresby’s: whereas Scoresby’s expedition was commercial and scientific, Kane’s detailed the many brushes with death that occurred during his search for the lost British explorer John Franklin. As Michael F. Robinson has observed, Kane was largely responsible for making Arctic exploration an “American enterprise”: Kane’s widely publicized search for Franklin was a watermark media event of the mid-1850s.²⁹ While Scoresby had emphasized the scientific nature of his travel, Kane’s volume opens with the assertion that “this book is not a record of scientific investigation,” and the book’s appeal (it sold over 150,000 copies) lay largely in its thrilling accounts of dangerous adventures and in Kane’s detailed, evocative etchings of Arctic scenery, whose fidelity was emphasized as “sketches made on the spot.”³⁰

As was the case for Scoresby’s Arctic writing, reviewers situated Kane’s text in relation to national aspirations; *The Athenaeum*, for example, noted that “here is a book that will be read with pride by Americans, and pleasure by all who like to see how indomitable energy and determination of purpose triumph over difficulties calculated to appal [sic] the stoutest heart,” and went on to praise Kane’s description of vast glaciers and the book’s engravings, based on Kane’s own sketches.³¹ An American reviewer praised Kane’s aesthetic of transparency; “scenes . . . are described so vividly and so intelligibly, that one seems, for the moment, to be looking at or participating in them.”³² And yet, even Kane’s purportedly unscientific account of adventure went into great detail about its scientific experiments and observations: eighteen appendices stretched to 168 pages, and much of his book described how scientific observations were taken as the ship was stuck in the ice for nearly two years. Robinson describes this as a “riddle”: “For all that Kane discussed Arctic science in his lectures . . . almost no one commented on his specific findings or their significance. . . . Commentaries most often discussed his scientific work as a means by which to understand Kane himself rather than the Arctic regions.”³³ Kane’s Arctic science, in other words, was folded into a narrative about his heroism.

Within the broader field of Arctic narratives, one can readily multiply similar instances of description that only partially overlap with the

sublime. Arctic narratives frequently remarked on remarkable perceptual features of the Arctic environment that were not so much terrible and massive as they were strange or uncanny. Robert McClure's voyage narrative described cliffs that smoked (in fact deposits of lignite, shale, and pyrite that spontaneously combust when exposed to air). John Ross described strangely red snow in Greenland (in fact the bloom of algae). Many others reported on atmospheric effects such as parhelia, phantom suns that appear in the Arctic atmosphere. Alongside the Arctic sublime, with its attendant massive scale and deep terror, there was a more ambivalent aesthetic: one of the strange, weird, or even offputting.

By calling attention to these aspects of voyage narratives, I do not mean to argue, of course, that there was no such thing as an Arctic sublime or that these texts were not sustaining national imaginaries. Rather, I want to suggest that to read them primarily for their dissemination of Western aesthetic and national tropes is a partial reading that tends either to ignore certain aspects of these texts that are assumed to be merely descriptive or technical, and to overlook the obvious sense in which descriptions of the Arctic environment were, literally, descriptions of the Arctic environment. But we should not find this to be a particularly surprising tendency among cultural historians and literary scholars. To become susceptible to interpretation, after all, something must also mean something else. We know how to read Scoresby's snowflakes as expressions of a belief in divine order—but, ironically, it is more challenging to read them simply as snowflakes. Writing about Robert Louis Stevenson's nautical language, Schmitt has recently diagnosed the literary scholar's reflexive assumption that certain kinds of language have no excess meaning: "Technical language is language on its way to the diagrammatic. Elaborated and deployed for its denotative capacity, it is practical with a vengeance, and thus, at least on Shklovsky's and de Man's representation, essentially unliterary."³⁴ Schmitt's project is in sympathy with recent calls for modes of literary and cultural interpretation that would resist what Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick diagnosed as "the monopolistic program of paranoid knowing," including by situating description itself as a form of interpretation.³⁵ How, then, are we to interpret these qualities of voyage accounts that seem recalcitrant to interpretation precisely because they are so transparent? What forms of analysis and interpretation are appropriate to technical or quantitative information on the one hand, and to literal descriptions of the sensory qualities of the Arctic environment on the other? Is the unliterary legible?

The Aesthetics of Data

To address these questions, it is necessary to think more carefully about the intersections of the lyrical and the technical in the Arctic voyage narrative. The close relationship between observation and aesthetic judgment in nineteenth-century natural history has often been remarked upon by historians of science, but it was given a particular inflection within the Arctic, which placed extreme demands upon the body of the scientific observer.³⁶ Like many voyage narratives, Scoresby's *Account* was conceived partly as a scientific report on Arctic meteorology, marine life, geology, and oceanography. In numerous tables, Scoresby records data such as the results of observations and experiments regarding the specific gravity of ice, the relationship between temperature and latitude, the correlation between weather and the aurora borealis, and the processes by which ice is formed. Notably, Scoresby often frames this data with narrative accounts of how it was procured. Immediately before offering a table of "remarkable changes of temperature," for instance, Scoresby describes the effect of atmosphere on his mood: "An Arctic winter consists of the accumulation of almost every thing among atmospheric phenomena, that is disagreeable to the feelings, together with the privation of those bounties of Heaven, with which other parts of the earth, in happier climates, are so plentifully endowed. Here, during the whole of the winter months, the cheering rays of the sun are neither seen nor felt, but considerable darkness perpetually prevails; this, with . . . a degree of cold calculated to benumb the faculties of man, give a character to those regions most repugnant to human feeling" (*A* 1:324).

Here, data is cold not only metaphorically: while temperature can be registered quantitatively by instruments, it interferes with ("benumbs") the human faculty of perception. Similarly, when Scoresby discusses the aurora borealis in his chapter on "Atmospherology," he tabulates twelve years of observations of barometric pressure, temperature, wind direction, and descriptions of the lights. Again, the table is framed by an account of some of the circumstances in which they were observed; in one instance, Scoresby reports, "one of the most tremendous storms I was ever exposed to, succeeded a splendid exhibition of the northern lights" (*A* 1:417–18). And when Scoresby turns his attention to snowflakes, he devises multiple strategies: he constructs a table of observations listing weather conditions that is cross-referenced with depictions of snowflakes in the appendix. To these mimetic and quantitative representations, Scoresby appends a narrative account of his observations. Here we find some of the volume's most lyrical passages, which reflect on "the extreme beauty and endless variety" of snow crystals (*A* 1:426).

For Scoresby, in short, there is a close relationship between judgments of beauty and observations of nature; in accordance with traditions within natural theology, Scoresby views the regularity of nature as a sign at once of beauty and of its designed nature: to do science is to make this regularity visible for readers.

In these instances, one begins to sense that the aesthetic qualities of voyage narratives might be found not only in descriptions of the formal perfection of snowflakes or the stunning appearance of the aurora borealis, but, more deeply, in the way in which these texts record sensory dispositions toward surrounding environments—not only through words, but also through tables and numbers. This is even more clearly the case in Kane's writing, which, like Scoresby's account, often turns attention to intersections of moods or affects with scientific observation. Perhaps because Kane's volumes are directed toward an audience interested in tales of adventure in the wake of Franklin's disappearance, Kane tends to highlight not only aesthetic experiences oriented toward pleasure, but negative aesthetic judgments as well, often induced by the extremes of Arctic weather. Kane observes in an 1854 voyage narrative that "the perpetual light, garish and unfluctuating, disturbed me. I became gradually aware of an unknown excitant, a stimulus, acting constantly, like the diminutive of a cup of strong coffee. My sleep was curtailed and irregular; my meal hours trod upon each other's heels; and but for stringent regulations of my own imposing, my routine would have been completely broken up."³⁷ A similar logic guides his accounts of the bodily feats demanded by practices of scientific observation in the Arctic. In one striking extract from his diary, Kane details the physical endurance required in making magnetic observations, implicitly comparing the way in which the human body registers the Arctic cold with the way in which it is recorded by scientific instruments:

One hand holds a chronometer, and is left bare to warm it: the other luxuriates in a fox-skin mitten . . . Perched on a pedestal of frozen gravel is a magnetometer; stretching out from it, a telescope: and, bending down to this, an abject human eye. Every six minutes, said eye takes cognizance of a finely-divided arc, and notes the result in a cold memorandum-book. This process continues for twenty-four hours, two sets of eyes taking it by turns . . . I have been engaged in this way when the thermometer gave 20° above zero at the instrument, 20° below at two feet above the floor . . . : on my person, facing the little lobster-red fury of a stove, 94° above; on my person, away from the stove, 10° below zero. "A grateful country" will of course appreciate the value of these labors, and, as it cons over hereafter the four hundred and eighty results which go to make up our record for each week, will never think of asking "*Cui bono* all this?" (*AE* 166–67)

If Kane's repeated synecdoche of eye for observer ironically deplores a situation in which the "abject" human body has become an instrument that must obey a rigid regime of magnetic observations every six minutes around the clock, it also flattens distinctions between body and magnetometer, rendering both as entities that register the effects of a surrounding atmosphere.³⁸ Kane simultaneously ironizes nationalist justifications for heroic feats of scientific observation, envisioning the unlikely scenario in which these tables of data will be read by anyone at all. What this passage brings into view, then, are complex affective orientations toward scientific observation: affects that manifest both as an ambivalence toward the larger aims of scientific endeavor ("Kane obviously asked himself what the point was, time and again," observes the historian Trevor H. Levere), and as the more immediate bodily experience of extreme heat and cold.³⁹ Kane's diary frequently makes explicit the ways in which scientific observation demands physical feats; in order to get to the astronomical observatory, for instance, the crew had to navigate a treacherous path in the dark, occasionally falling into snowbanks or through the ice, leading Kane to joke that "Astronomy, as it draws close under the pole-star, cannot lavish all its powers of observation on things above" (*AE* 168).

What are we to make of these scenes of observation? One might say that Kane and Scoresby alike dramatize how the Arctic posed profound challenges to the nineteenth-century aspiration to efface individual human subjectivity in the service of scientific observation. In the frigid Arctic, one's body was unavoidably in the way. Kane vividly describes the challenge of moving between a phenomenological level of immediate sensory and affective experience (heat, cold, ambivalence) and what Lorraine Daston and Peter Galison have described as an emerging scientific ideal of "structural objectivity," in which objectivity is understood to characterize that which is "communicable everywhere and always among all human beings."⁴⁰ On the one hand, both Kane and Scoresby record the ways in which the human frame registers the effects of an environment. These effects might be experienced, for instance, as hindrances to a desire (the "treacherous path"); as a mood or disposition (the feeling of overcaffeination provoked by Arctic light); or as the sense of being at the extremity of one's capacities (the heat and cold on either side of the stove). But many of these somatic experiences, especially for the Arctic scientific explorer, are endured in the service of a second, apparently separate mode of representation: that of quantification, numbers, and data that are structurally and mathematically universal. The voyage narrative often registers this distinction formally: bodily states are described in narrative portions of the voyage account, while data is conveyed in

accompanying tables and appendices. If the body's knowledge is narrative, it seems, then scientific information is tabulated, grid-like, calculable. But these two modes are not always kept rigidly separate: a numerical rendering of temperature is folded into Kane's metaphorical description of "the little lobster-red fury of a stove, 94 above," for example (*AE* 167). By the time a reader encounters the tables at the end of Kane's text, then, he or she would be primed to understand this data less as an abstraction than as the residue of interactions between particular human bodies and particular atmospheric conditions that have been described in the preceding pages.

With Daston and Galison, we most often read these aspects of nineteenth-century scientific texts within period-based narratives about scientific epistemology, particularly with regards to the ever-present problem of how an observer can efface the contingencies of personal experience in the service of universally communicable knowledge: a problem that George Levine has described as a "dying to know" narrative that characterized the ethos of the Victorian scientist.⁴¹ But I want to suggest that these scenes of scientific observation can also be read as scenes of aesthetic judgment. They begin to reveal an aesthetics of the Arctic that came "after" the sublime not in order of time but in order of prominence. After one grappled with the threats of icebergs, polar bears, and endless nights, one set about the taxing work of observing and notating—but perhaps this did not entail leaving behind one's aesthetic sensibilities. It is often observed that the roots of "aesthetic" are the Greek *aesthesis*, "to sense or perceive," an etymological inheritance that has been richly elucidated by critical theorists and historians including Susan Buck-Morss, Terry Eagleton, and Daniel Heller-Roazen, and that has recently animated Jacques Rancière's conception of the aesthetic not as the artistic but as "the sensible fabric of experience within which [works of art] are produced."⁴² By extending this line of reasoning about the relationship between aesthetics and sense perception, we can arrive at a yet more precise account of what is to be gained by locating the aesthetics of the voyage account in these moments when the bodily and instrumental registrations of atmosphere intersect by contrasting Kant's or Burke's conception of the sublime with what the American pragmatist philosopher Dewey called aesthetic "tendencies."

Discussions of the Arctic sublime commonly turn to Burke and Kant; while their accounts of the sublime are in many ways philosophically incompatible, each tells a story in which some form of distance from danger provides the necessary condition for converting painful sensations into pleasurable contemplation.⁴³ For Burke, it was the safe distance between spectator and spectacle that was capable of converting terror into

pleasure. In a well-known passage, Burke observes that “when danger or pain press too nearly, they are incapable of giving any delight, and are simply terrible; but at certain distances . . . they may be . . . delightful”; this dynamic “is a source of the *sublime*, that is, it is productive of the strongest emotion which the mind is capable of feeling.”⁴⁴ For Kant, the pleasure comes not from the physical distance itself, but from a further effect: however vast is the power of nature, it is nothing compared to the power of the human mind. For Kant, witnessing the sublime “gives us the courage to measure ourselves against the apparent all-powerfulness of nature.”⁴⁵ Without eliding the distinction between Burke’s empiricism and Kant’s transcendental psychology, one can observe that in both cases, the judgment of the sublime depends upon distance: either the literal distance between one’s own body and the witnessed event (Burke), or the conceptual distance between human cognition and of natural force (Kant). To ground the interpretation of Arctic narratives upon these accounts of the aesthetic, then, will tend to emphasize images and episodes that highlight that the human capacity to make moral determinations or to make rational calculations is of infinitely greater worth than the merely physical power of nature. From such a perspective, portrayals of the extreme natural environments of the Arctic will betoken a strong distinction between human and nature, between our capacities for self-reflection and the natural forces of sea and ice.

But to grasp the sense in which scientific observation might have an aesthetic dimension requires a different model of the aesthetic, one that is more fully elaborated by Dewey. In a key passage of *Art as Experience* (1934), Dewey questioned whether we should organize our inquiries into art around aesthetic categories such as the sublime, insofar as these tend to reify the complex texture of human experience. When aesthetic theory gave us concepts like “the sublime, grotesque, tragic, comic, poetic,” he observes, it mistakenly “erected adjectives into nouns substantive.”⁴⁶ Instead, Dewey argues, we should think in terms of aesthetic “*tendencies*” rather than categories; a passage of prose—he quotes a weather report—might tend toward poetry.⁴⁷ He goes so far as to speculate about the aesthetic value of the symbolic language of science: “I suppose that even equations composed of chemical symbols may under certain circumstances . . . have for some persons a poetic value.”⁴⁸ For Dewey, this more dynamic model becomes a basis from which one can reconsider the opposition of scientific knowledge and aesthetic experience itself, as it had been formulated by earlier philosophers: “The difference between the esthetic and the intellectual is . . . one of the place where emphasis falls in the constant rhythm that marks the interaction of the live creature with his surroundings.”⁴⁹

This position clearly contrasts with that of Kant, who had identified a clear distinction between scientific knowledge and aesthetic judgment, offering the example of a botanist who contemplates a flower: "Flowers are free natural beauties. Hardly anyone other than the botanist knows what sort of thing a flower is supposed to be; and even the botanist, who recognizes in it the reproductive organ of the plant, pays no attention to this natural end if he judges the flower by means of taste."⁵⁰ Aesthetic judgment must be entirely free from conceptual determination, and so a barrier must be erected between scientific knowledge and aesthetic judgment. Similarly, the strange pleasure of the sublime derives from the mind's oscillation across the two sides of this barrier: the pain of not being able to fully sense or perceive something becomes the pleasure of recognizing that anything one ever senses is "small in comparison with ideas of reason."⁵¹ For Dewey, by contrast, this is not a barrier but a matter of "emphasis" within the "rhythm" of experience. Instead of opposing the lyrical and technical, the aesthetic and the scientific, Dewey's proto-ecological account situates both of these as modes of response that exist within a larger web of interactions between a living organism and its environment.

I highlight this contrast between Dewey's dynamic "tendencies" and Kant's or Burke's sublime because it gives us a productive language for describing the intimacy of quantitative description and aesthetic experience that we see in Arctic voyage narratives. It is this kind of Deweyan aesthetic, in which emphasis might be constantly shifting between the aesthetic and the intellectual, that Kane, Scoresby, and many other Arctic voyagers elaborated as they simultaneously felt the effects of endless nights and cold winds, and recorded temperatures, magnetic readings, and many other forms of data. While these accounts may have appealed to audiences primarily for their depictions of heroic adventure, in which human capacities are tested against environmental extremes, along the way they also reflected upon the complex phenomenology of scientific observation. By contrast with an interpretive mode that would emphasize the ways in which, for instance, Kane's account of the arduous process of taking magnetic observations might work as a coded appeal to US nationalism or the ways in which his drawings and descriptions of arctic scenery drew upon well-worn tropes of the sublime, I would emphasize that it can also be read as what it claims to be: the record of an interaction between a human being, as a biological creature, and a physical environment. Such an interaction is enabled by but not reducible to the imaginary structure and material apparatus of nationalist or imperial endeavor. *Art as Experience* brings this aspect of the voyage narrative distinctly into view because Dewey understands aesthetic experience

to be an extension of the biological substrate of all human experience rather than an escape from it.

Turning to Dewey may seem to accord with lines of thought within ecocriticism and the environmental humanities that have argued for an ecological aesthetics of ambience and human embeddedness in nature, or for reading literary texts as situated within environmental as well as human contexts. Jonathan Bate makes a version of this latter claim in a prescient 1996 article when he proposes that new historicism might be displaced by “New Geographism” or “Global Warming Criticism”: “Our understanding of [Keats’s] ‘To Autumn,’” Bate argues, “should begin with the knowledge that the weather was clear and sunny on 38 out of the 47 days from 7 August to 22 September 1819.”⁵² Drawing upon the thought of Bruno Latour and Michel Serres, Bate calls attention to the insufficiency of contextualizing moves that limit themselves to human contexts. What I wish to emphasize by approaching the voyage narrative through Dewey differs, however, from Bate’s claim and much of the ecocritical work that has followed: it is not only that we must continue to think carefully about what it means for literary texts to inhabit geo-historical contexts. More specifically, Dewey’s emphasis on the close relationship between scientific and aesthetic knowledge can shift our conception of the historical, bringing into view the diachronic persistence of the information and experiences recorded within accounts such as Scoresby’s or Kane’s. Dewey not only reinscribes nature and the senses into the aesthetic domain; he also highlights the strange and often incommensurable relationship between human history and biological time.

One effect of this line of reasoning is to raise a question about how we understand chronology: what happens if we detemporalize aesthetic categories, loosening their attachments to human-historical designations such as “Victorian” or “Romantic”? Is it possible to recover a more permanent or universal substrate of aesthetic experience whose coordinates are not particular cultures or societies, but geology, biology, atmosphere, climate, and planetary space? To locate the aesthetic here is to go against the grain of a sociological perspective that has exposed the ways in which aesthetic judgments are always determined by something in excess of the individual body; and for this reason, such a move might provoke resistance. It might seem to disregard the ways in which seemingly disinterested aesthetic judgments in fact express contingent cultural values. But in the final section of this essay I want to suggest, instead, that it brings into view a different political dimension of the aesthetic, a politics that becomes especially urgent at the advent of human geological agency, when it is no longer possible to see geology, data, science, or climate as apolitical, or to neatly divide human culture

from geology and biology. Having amply exposed the hidden sociological dimensions of aesthetic judgment, perhaps our new task is to reattach the aesthetic to biology and climate.

Old Weather

To approach the voyage narrative through Dewey is to encounter a further question: what if Arctic voyage narratives are not, in fact, narratives? What if they are more properly understood as something like data sets masquerading as stories? To characterize them as data sets would at first seem to undermine the very logic that makes them available to literary analysis. One of the innovations of new historicism was to expose the legibility of wide swathes of cultural production that had previously been treated as mere context; thus far my method, insofar as it seeks to uncover an “unanticipated aesthetic dimension in objects without pretensions to the aesthetic,” is closely aligned with this aspect of historicism.⁵³ What would it look like to go a step further, to read yet more literally, to treat these narratives as information rather than as plots, as numbers rather than as language? Would this practice take us to the very limits of historicist literary or cultural analysis?

Perhaps the best way to take up this question is to consider, for a moment, how scientists read. In recent years, climate scientists have increasingly turned their attention to nineteenth-century shipboard observations as an untapped archive of data about historical weather conditions. A 2005 article in *Climatic Change* observes that “because they predate other elements of the modern global ocean observing system, [ships’ logs] provide a key input for international assessments of climate and global change.”⁵⁴ While climate scientists had long been aware of this rich archive of data, they had often remarked upon the high barriers to using it, since it was written longhand and therefore not scannable with optical character recognition tools used on printed books.⁵⁵ That challenge has been recently addressed by a major initiative called Old Weather, hosted on the website Zooniverse.org, where users read data from scanned pages of ships’ logs and key it in, transforming over a century’s worth of observations into a usable data set. Many of the logbooks are drawn from US Arctic expeditions between 1850 and 1950 that have been scanned by the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA).

Old Weather is a fascinating instance both of “gamification” (users compete to scan the most pages and thus become “captains” of virtual ships) and of “citizen science” (projects on Zooniverse crowdsource

scientific research to publics beyond the university or the laboratory). My interest here, though, is in how such a project invites us to rethink the kind of temporality inhabited by nineteenth-century Arctic voyage narratives, and whether we might even understand *Old Weather* as exemplifying a new kind of reading or interpretation that emerges in the context of present concerns about human effects on climate—one that challenges us to reconsider what it means to read a text as historically situated. This massive digital project reveals a new lens through which the print culture of the Arctic can be viewed, a lens that is sensitive to the ever-shifting temporal scales that mediate our relationship not only to past weather, but to past cultural objects. *Old Weather* reveals the urgency of reading the print culture of the Arctic not only as an expression of ideology or as a set of tropes, but also *at face value*: it has been newly animated as “input” that transparently records and reflects information about the Arctic climate, the state of sea ice, and the animal population.

By disaggregating narrative into data, *Old Weather* bears out a central point that I have been arguing in this essay. In *Imperial Eyes*, Pratt brilliantly traces the ways in which mere descriptions of specimens within scientific voyage narratives were in fact elements of a narrative about European global power. “With the founding of the global classificatory project” of flora and fauna, Pratt writes, “the observing and cataloguing of nature itself became narratable”; the shape of this narrative, she argues, is “‘anti-conquest,’ in which the naturalist naturalizes the bourgeois European’s own global presence and authority.”⁵⁶ The work of this mode of historicism is to show how seemingly value-free data in fact operated in the service of particular regimes of cultural value. To the literary scholar, a whale is never just a whale, and the space opened up by the slippage between signifier and signified is the domain of interpretation. But now, at a moment when the data collected by these same scientific travelers seem to have come loose from such narratives—when an observation of a whale is, very importantly, an observation of a whale—we can begin to see that scientific explorers were not only exporting stories that naturalized European dominance. They were also importing data about climate and the biosphere that now provide a baseline for measuring the extent of anthropogenic climate change. Insofar as it takes this data literally, *Old Weather* might be said to represent the exact inverse of interpretive methods such as Pratt’s that focus on cultural meaning and *human* “contact zones.” It mostly shears human context from data: although ships’ logs contain narrative descriptions of the weather, *Old Weather* is primarily geared toward transcribing numerical observations. One page I was given to digitize mixes descriptions of events and of the weather in a way that calls to mind Dewey’s aestheticized weather report: “Dull

weather, with moderate breeze. . . . The two floes came together astern of ship and collided very heavily. . . . Lowered all [the ship's] boats . . . in case the ship should get crushed. Weather clearing up last hour."⁵⁷ Evocative moments such as these are not explicitly excluded by the interface—users are instructed that “anything that you find interesting can be included” in a box labeled “events”—but the aim of Old Weather is to digitize massive amounts of data rather than to unearth the hidden contexts and lived texture of Arctic scientific endeavors.⁵⁸

And yet, to describe Old Weather as oriented toward collecting data risks overlooking the aesthetic dimensions of data collection that we have seen emerge within the writings of Arctic voyagers themselves. The website invites users to take up affective relationships to the data that they are recording, both by recognizing them as collaborators in scientific research and by affording imaginative connections to nineteenth-century Arctic explorers. Forums associated with the project reveal that users are deeply interested in the social context of the data they are collecting. One of the most popular forums is devoted to “Riveting log entries”: over 2,200 posts discussing events including mutinies, comets and eclipses, stolen rations, and dogs falling overboard. Old Weather, remarkably, has created a new readership for nineteenth-century voyage narratives—readers who, in their spare time, pore over thousands of pages of writing that, unlike those of published narratives, were never meant to reach a broad audience. If for Kane or Scoresby, the aesthetics of scientific observation had to do with the corporeal demands made upon the body of the scientific observer, then perhaps for modern citizen scientists who peer at digitized logs on glowing computer screens, it has to do with the way in which digital interfaces afford new ways of relating both to the past and to scientific research in the present.

To consider what this new kind of reading-as-digitizing means for our usual accounts of historicism, it is useful to recall that Jamesonian historicism emerged as an imperative to “restor[e] to the surface of the text” the repressed plot of capital.⁵⁹ In recent years, many critics have argued for alternatives to an interpretive model in which texts are treated as symptomatic expressions of a repressed historical plot, espousing, in various instances, a turn to Heather Love’s “documentation and description”; Stephen Best and Sharon Marcus’s attention to “what is evident, perceptible, apprehensible in texts; what is neither hidden nor hiding”; or an account of Rita Felski’s “transtemporal movement and affective resonance.”⁶⁰ Perhaps most directly relevant to my argument are Schmitt’s recent “literal” readings of maritime terminology in Stevenson and Conrad, which return attention to technical language that has usually been ignored as unliterary and merely referential. This

postcritical or posthistoricist turn has been challenged for depoliticizing or aestheticizing cultural objects: Carolyn Lesjak argues that we must return to rather than abandon dialectical thought, especially because “surface reading entails a form of fetishistic disavowal in its insistence on the real surface of texts”; John Kucich similarly defends a hermeneutics of suspicion, linking the new attention to surface and form to an ill-fated belle-lettrism.⁶¹

It might look as though what I have begun to unfold in this essay, by drawing attention to both the biological entanglements of the aesthetic and the transhistorical purchase of the data collected by Arctic voyagers, is an antihistoricist approach to voyage narratives that would similarly interpret these historical objects literally, technically, or at the surface: I have suggested that it is important to read descriptions of climate as descriptions of climate, and I have tried to suspend the impulse to see these texts as expressions of a political unconscious. But perhaps this is not a move beyond or against historicism but a redirection, inflection, or even deformation of the historical. Dipesh Chakrabarty describes a sort of dramatic irony that has become apparent in the new era of global human agency often described as the Anthropocene: “In no discussion of freedom in the period since the Enlightenment [including Marx’s] was there ever any awareness of the geological agency that human beings were acquiring at the same time as and through processes closely linked to their acquisition of freedom.”⁶² If this is true, then we now find ourselves in the grip of a new story: not only of capital, but of the climate change arguably driven by capitalism, of biodiversity collapse, of the intentional and unintentional human remaking of the planet. To narrate this history we must turn not only to old novels but also to old weather; not only to words, but also to numbers. This plot is one that Latour has recently described as “geostory” rather than history, in which “the Earth has now taken back all the characteristics of a full-fledged *actor*.”⁶³ If we attempt to historicize from within “geostory,” we begin to see a surprising alignment between the recent aspiration toward “descriptive,” “technical,” or “denotative” reading and the very historicist modes of interpretation focused on politics and ideology from which these practices distance themselves. In the era of climate change, description is political.

The documentary, the transtemporal, the evident: all of these qualities have recently been called upon to provide new points of entry into literary and cultural objects. But once these qualities are situated in relation to a seemingly distinct conversation about the collapse of human history into the history of the planet, a new possibility comes into view: paying attention to the merely evident may be precisely the kind

of interpretation that is capable of addressing a new conception of the historical that includes nonhuman history. If this is the case, then apprehending what climate change might mean for historicist interpretive practices will require expanded and renewed engagements with technical dimensions of texts that a historicism oriented toward ideology critique has habitually read not as transparent expressions of themselves, but as symptoms of something hidden. In order to understand, as Ian Baucom puts it, how we might periodize “not only in dates but in degrees Celsius,” we need to think more broadly about the kinds of practices that count as interpretation or periodization: not only the restoration of economic or social contexts to the surface of the text, but of geological and climatic contexts as well.⁶⁴ Such interpretive possibilities might be discovered in unlikely places: the appendices of Arctic voyage narratives or the world of Zooniverse citizen scientists. We must look for those forms of interpretation and models of the aesthetic, like Dewey’s, whose language is adequate to the messy entanglements of geological and human measurements, of human culture and the human species. Such interpretations, I have argued, are on display not only in a contemporary big data project like Old Weather, whose users shuttle between collecting data and reconstructing narratives; they are equally to be found within historical texts that narrate modes of aesthetic experience that seem to resolve neither to a plane of human meaning (tropes of the sublime) or to a plane of pure information (the quantification of meteorology and climate). To faithfully read these texts as data—to locate their aesthetic force not in their sublimity but in their constant modulation between information and sensation—is not to depoliticize or aestheticize them, but to recognize that they have political dimensions that are only now beginning to come into view.

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NOTES

1 William Scoresby, *An Account of the Arctic Regions: With a History and Description of the Northern Whale-Fishery* (Edinburgh: Printed for Constable and Co., 1820), n.p. (vol. 1, appendix 1) (hereafter cited as *A*).

2 The most influential instance of this claim is Dipesh Chakrabarty’s proposal that “anthropogenic explanations of climate change spell the collapse of the age-old humanist distinction between natural history and human history,” in Chakrabarty, “The Climate of History: Four Theses,” *Critical Inquiry* 35, no. 2 (2009): 201. Chakrabarty’s argument scales up Aldo Leopold’s 1949 claim that “many historical events, hitherto explained solely in terms of human enterprise, were actually biotic interactions between people and land”; see Leopold, *A Sand County Almanac: With Essays on Conservation* (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 2001), 171. A wide range of recent work in environmental history has engaged with the relationship between human and natural causes; see, in particular, Geoffrey Parker,

Global Crisis: War, Climate Change and Catastrophe in the Seventeenth Century (New Haven, CT: Yale Univ. Press, 2013), and the overview of the current state of the field in Mark Carey et al., "Forum: Climate Change and Environmental History," *Environmental History* 19, no. 2 (2014): 281–364.

3 John Dewey, *Art as Experience* (New York: Perigee, 1980), 14.

4 Chauncey C. Loomis accounts for the end of the Arctic sublime with the often-quoted claim that "the sublime cannot be mapped." Loomis, "The Arctic Sublime," in *Nature and the Victorian Imagination*, ed. U. C. Knoepfelmacher and G. B. Tennyson (Berkeley and Los Angeles: Univ. of California Press, 1977), 112.

5 Joseph Conrad praised "polar explorers whose aims were certainly as pure as the air of those high latitudes where not a few of them laid down their lives for the advancement of Geography"; Jules Verne similarly wrote that "after the martyrs of the faith, the most admirable are the martyrs of science, and among them, the most heroic [are] the navigators of the polar seas." Conrad, "Geography and Some Explorers," in *Last Essays* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2010), 9. Verne is quoted in Herbert R. Lottman, *Jules Verne: An Exploratory Biography* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1996), 62.

6 Mary Louise Pratt, *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation* (New York: Routledge, 1992), 38; Lisa Bloom, *Gender on Ice: American Ideologies of Polar Expeditions* (Minneapolis: Univ. of Minnesota Press, 1993), 3; Michael F. Robinson, *The Coldest Crucible: Arctic Exploration and American Culture* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 2006), 3; Jen Hill, *White Horizon: The Arctic in the Nineteenth-Century British Imagination* (Albany: SUNY Press, 2009), 6.

7 Wai Chee Dimock proposes a much-expanded scale of time, oriented by geology or astronomy, that would be "at once projective and recessional, with input going both ways, and binding continents and millenia in many loops of relations." In a related argument, Gayatri Spivak resists the homogenous figure of the globe for the defamiliarizing figure of the planet, whose astronomical resonances reveal human dwelling space to be "on loan" or "unheimlich." Dimock, *Through Other Continents American Literature across Deep Time* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton Univ. Press, 2006), 3; Spivak, *Death of a Discipline* (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 2003), 72, 73.

8 Gillian Beer, "Travelling the Other Way: Travel Narratives and Truth Claims," in *Open Fields: Science in Cultural Encounter* (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1999), 56.

9 Catherine Gallagher, "The Rise of Fictionality," in *The Novel*, vol. 1, *History, Geography, and Culture*, ed. Franco Moretti (Princeton, NJ: Princeton Univ. Press, 2006), 336.

10 Hester Blum, *The View from the Masthead: Maritime Imagination and Antebellum American Sea Narratives* (Chapel Hill: Univ. of North Carolina Press, 2008), 2–3; Margaret Cohen, *The Novel and the Sea* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton Univ. Press, 2010), 8, 11. See Cannon Schmitt, "Technical Maturity in Robert Louis Stevenson," *Representations* 125, no. 1 (2014): 54–79; and Schmitt, "Tidal Conrad (Literally)," *Victorian Studies* 55, no. 1 (2012): 7–29.

11 Janice Cavell, *Tracing the Connected Narrative: Arctic Exploration in British Print Culture 1818–1860* (Toronto: Univ. of Toronto Press, 2008), 48.

12 Bloom, *Gender on Ice*, 6. See Robert G. David, *The Arctic in the British Imagination 1818–1914* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000), 13–21.

13 Russell A. Potter, *Arctic Spectacles: The Frozen North in Visual Culture, 1818–1875* (Seattle: Univ. of Washington Press, 2007), 160.

14 Francis Spufford, *I May Be Some Time: Ice and the English Imagination* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1997), 36.

15 Loomis, "The Arctic Sublime," 102, 110, 106.

16 On the relation between the sublime and the picturesque in Arctic representation, see Ian S. MacLaren, "The Aesthetic Map of the North, 1845–1859," *Arctic* 38, no. 2 (1985): 89–103.

- 17 Loomis, "The Arctic Sublime," 110.
- 18 On Scoresby's magnetic experiments, see Alison Winter, "'Compasses All Awry': The Iron Ship and the Ambiguities of Cultural Authority in Victorian Britain," *Victorian Studies* 38, no. 1 (1994): 69–98. Winter argues that Scoresby's authority came in large part not from scientific institutions but from his status as a respected Anglican. Biographies of Scoresby include Robert Edmund Scoresby-Jackson, *The Life of William Scoresby* (London: T. Nelson and Sons, 1861); and Tom Stamp and Cordelia Stamp, *William Scoresby, Arctic Scientist* (Whitby: Caedmon, 1976).
- 19 Winter, *Mesmerized: Powers of Mind in Victorian Britain* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1998), 254.
- 20 Review of *An Account of the Arctic Regions*, by William Scoresby, *The Literary and Scientific Repository, and Critical Review* 3, no. 5 (July 1, 1821): 1.
- 21 Review of *An Account of the Arctic Regions*, by William Scoresby, *The Edinburgh Magazine and Literary Miscellany* 6 (May 1820): 411, 412, 409.
- 22 Review of *An Account of the Arctic Regions*, by William Scoresby, *The Monthly Review, Or, Literary Journal* 43 (November 1820): 230, 369.
- 23 Loomis, "The Arctic Sublime," 103.
- 24 Sianne Ngai, *Our Aesthetic Categories: Zany, Cute, Interesting* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard Univ. Press, 2012), 129.
- 25 On Elizabeth Gaskell's use of Scoresby, see Frances Elizabeth Twinn, "Navigational Pitfalls and Topographical Constraints in *Sylvia's Lovers*," *The Gaskell Society Journal* 15 (2001): 38–52.
- 26 Herman Melville, *Moby-Dick, Or, The Whale*, ed. Harrison Hayford, Hershel Parker, and G. Thomas Tanselle (Evanston and Chicago: Northwestern Univ. Press and the Newberry Library, 1988), 134, 267.
- 27 H. P. Lovecraft, *At the Mountains of Madness* (New York: Modern Library, 2005), 29.
- 28 Edmund Burke, *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful*, ed. Adam Phillips (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1990), 123.
- 29 Robinson, *The Coldest Crucible*, 53.
- 30 Elisha Kent Kane, *Arctic Explorations: The Second Grinnell Expedition in Search of Sir John Franklin 1853, '54, '55* (Philadelphia: Childs and Peterson, 1856), 5, 6 (hereafter cited as *AE*).
- 31 Review of *Arctic Explorations: The Second Grinnell Expedition in Search of Sir John Franklin in 1853–55*, by Kane, *The Athenaeum*, no. 1514 (November 1, 1856): 1333.
- 32 "New Books," *The Albion, A Journal of News, Politics and Literature* 15, no. 41 (October 11, 1856): 489.
- 33 Robinson, *The Coldest Crucible*, 41.
- 34 Schmitt, "Technical Maturity," 54–55.
- 35 Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Touching Feeling: Affect, Pedagogy, Performativity* (Durham, NC: Duke Univ. Press, 2003), 144.
- 36 Discussions of the aesthetic dimensions of nineteenth-century scientific observation include Jonathan Smith, *Charles Darwin And Victorian Visual Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2006); Phillip Prodger, *Darwin's Camera: Art and Photography in the Theory of Evolution* (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 2009); and George Levine, "The Epistemology of Science and Art: Pearson and Pater," in *Dying to Know: Scientific Epistemology and Narrative in Victorian England* (Chicago: Univ. Of Chicago Press, 2002).
- 37 Kane, *The United States Grinnell Expedition in Search of Sir John Franklin: A Personal Narrative* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1854), 150.
- 38 Kane's observatory and instruments were in fact high-quality compared to those of other expeditions. See Trevor H. Levere, *Science and the Canadian Arctic: A Century of Exploration, 1818–1918* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2004), 221–22.

- 39 Levere, *Science and the Canadian Arctic*, 222.
- 40 Lorraine Daston and Peter Galison, *Objectivity* (New York: Zone Books, 2007), 46, 45–46.
- 41 Levine, *Dying to Know*, 2.
- 42 Jacques Rancière, *Aisthesis: Scenes from the Aesthetic Regime of Art*, trans. Zakir Paul (London: Verso, 2013), x. “Aesthetics is born as a discourse of the body” is the opening claim of Terry Eagleton, *The Ideology of the Aesthetic* (Cambridge: Blackwell, 1990), 13. Susan Buck-Morss emphasizes that “the original field of aesthetics is not art but reality—corporeal, material, nature”; see Buck-Morss, “Aesthetics and Anaesthetics: Walter Benjamin’s Artwork Essay Reconsidered,” *October* 62 (October 1992): 3–41. Daniel Heller-Roazen goes yet further, tracing Greek uses of *aisthesis* to mean animation broadly conceived, including “the effects of the wind on lifeless things”; see Heller-Roazen, *The Inner Touch: Archaeology of a Sensation* (New York: Zone Books, 2007), 23.
- 43 As Frances Ferguson argues, Burke’s sublime foregrounds the affects while Kant’s diminishes them; see Ferguson, *Solitude and the Sublime: Romanticism and the Aesthetics of Individuation* (New York: Routledge, 1992), 2–3.
- 44 Burke, *A Philosophical Enquiry*, 124.
- 45 Immanuel Kant, *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, trans. Paul Guyer (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2000), 145.
- 46 Dewey, *Art as Experience*, 232.
- 47 Dewey, *Art as Experience*, 232.
- 48 Dewey, *Art as Experience*, 224–25.
- 49 Dewey, *Art as Experience*, 14.
- 50 Kant, *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, 114.
- 51 Kant, *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, 141.
- 52 Jonathan Bate, “Living with the Weather,” *Studies in Romanticism* 35, no. 3 (1996): 436, 440. On the debate surrounding mimesis and antirepresentationality in ecocriticism, see, in particular, Dana Phillips, *The Truth of Ecology: Nature, Culture, and Literature in America* (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 2003), 3–41; and Timothy Morton, *Ecology without Nature: Rethinking Environmental Aesthetics* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard Univ. Press, 2009), 29–78.
- 53 Catherine Gallagher and Stephen Jay Greenblatt, *Practicing New Historicism* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 2000), 10.
- 54 Scott D. Woodruff et al., “Early Ship Observational Data and ICOADS,” *Climatic Change* 73, no. 1–2 (2005): 169–94.
- 55 On the challenge of digitizing ships’ logs, see Clive Wilkinson et al., “Recovery of Logbooks and International Marine Data: The RECLAIM Project,” *International Journal of Climatology* 31, no. 7 (2011): 968–79.
- 56 Pratt, *Imperial Eyes*, 28.
- 57 This quotation comes from a digitized image of a ship’s log from the U.S.S. Bear, recorded on Thursday June 29, 1884. The image is part of a digitizing initiative and was provided by the Old Weather Website. This particular log is no longer available; however, the Old Weather archive can be found at <https://www.oldweather.org/#/ships>.
- 58 “Guides for US Logs: Drawing Entry Boxes, Transcribing and Editing,” accessed September 20, 2014, <http://forum.oldweather.org/index.php?topic=3078.msg49657#msg49657>.
- 59 Fredric Jameson, *The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell Univ. Press, 1981), 4.
- 60 Heather Love, “Close but Not Deep: Literary Ethics and the Descriptive Turn,” *New Literary History* 41, no. 2 (2010): 375; Stephen Best and Sharon Marcus, “Surface Reading: An Introduction,” *Representations* 108, no. 1 (2009): 9; Rita Felski, “Context Stinks!” *New Literary History* 42, no. 4 (2011): 574.

- 61 Carolyn Lesjak, "Reading Dialectically," *Criticism* 55, no. 2 (2013): 247; John Kucich, "The Unfinished Historicist Project: In Praise of Suspicion," *Victoriographies* 1, no. 1 (2011): 74–75. See also Julie Orlemanski's call for renewed hermeneutics in Orlemanski, "Scales of Reading," *Exemplaria* 26, no. 2–3 (2014): 215–33.
- 62 Chakrabarty, "The Climate of History," 208.
- 63 Bruno Latour, "Agency at the Time of the Anthropocene," *New Literary History* 45, no. 1 (2014): 3.
- 64 Ian Baucom, "History 4°: Postcolonial Method and Anthropocene Time," *The Cambridge Journal of Postcolonial Literary Inquiry* 1, no. 1 (2014): 125.