

# Arctic Modernities



# Arctic Modernities:

*The Environmental, the Exotic  
and the Everyday*

Edited by

Heidi Hansson and Anka Ryall

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Arctic Modernities: The Environmental, the Exotic and the Everyday

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Heidi Hansson and Anka Ryall

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INTRODUCTION:  
ENVIRONMENTAL, EXOTIC,  
EVERYDAY ARCTIC

HEIDI HANSSON AND ANKA RYALL

The Finnish artist Marja Helander's short video work *Trambo* (2014) opens with a cliché of the Arctic sublime: an almost naked white landscape, a snow-covered expanse devoid of life apart from some stunted trees in the horizon where snowfield and sky meet. This is the Arctic as the ultimate other of modernity – cold, empty, desolate and unpeopled. For a few seconds the viewer of *Trambo* sees only this landscape, its immobility and stillness broken by almost imperceptibly falling snow and the sound of the wind blowing. Then a scraping sound, accompanied by heavy breathing, precedes the entrance from the right of a woman in a bright red Sami costume adorned with silver brooches, laboriously hauling a large trampoline, an entirely incongruous and manifestly man-made object, across the snowfield. When she has brought it into the centre of the frame, she stops and climbs onto it. After a few seconds of standing still, she starts jumping, and the camera zooms in to show her head and upper body – bands and fringes swinging, jewellery clanking – as it appears over the top of the trampoline. Then it zooms back, and after bouncing straight up and down for a few more seconds her pose freezes. Next we see her on the ground outside the trampoline, before she hauls it towards the left and out of the picture, leaving the white desolation without any visible trace of human activity.

Helander's work is inspired by the contradictions of being caught between the natural and the urban and between a Sami identity and modern Finnish culture. She has called *Trambo* a self-portrait in which "I am dragging a big trampoline, a burden I hope will bring a bit of joy to the monotonous journey and life. The trampoline is a reference to the modern age, but can also be seen as a prison or a wall that is hard to see through" ("Grosses Treffen"). In its playful way, both the video itself and the still we have used on the cover of this book bring together the major concerns of Arctic modernity: the paradoxical amalgamation of exoticized indigenous

tradition and a mundane everyday, as well as the fallacy of an undisturbed Arctic landscape at a time when the anthropogenic impact on it can no longer be denied. Significantly, *Trambo* also turns the conventional gendering of the Arctic on its head. Rather than being a testing ground for conquering male polar explorers, Helander's Arctic is both feminized and deliberately unheroic.

*Trambo* represents a distinctively personal and ironic take on the Arctic. It references and then undermines the common stereotype of the Arctic as one of "the vast 'premodern' spaces, uninhabited by urbanized peoples" (Smith 2001, 31). But if the Arctic is not outside modernity, then what exactly is it? Carina Keskitalo, who prefers putting "the Arctic" in quotation marks, has described the modern Arctic as the result of an international political project of region-building (Keskitalo 2007). As she points out, the Arctic Council, established in 1996, has been instrumental in redefining and enlarging the Arctic. Not only the frozen polar area of traditional Arctic discourse, it is now viewed as a "region" that includes the northern territories of the eight member states, Canada, Denmark (Greenland), Russia, the United States (Alaska), Iceland, Norway, Sweden and Finland, although by natural-science definitions much of this territory is considered subarctic. Although its boundaries have been drawn in various ways, Keskitalo refers to the Arctic Council's Arctic Monitoring and Assessment Programme (AMAP), which has delineated the Arctic on the basis of "simple, latitudinal definitions" (Keskitalo 2007, 193). According to such definitions, the Arctic would encompass up to 15 per cent of the world's land area from the North Pole down to between 60° northern latitude in North America, Greenland, Iceland and eastern Russia and the Arctic Circle (at 66° 33'N) in Norway, Sweden, Finland and northwest Russia – a vast area with a population of about four million, of whom some 13 per cent are indigenous peoples.

As is obvious in writings about and images of the Arctic, however, the exact demarcations of the area are less important than the cultural notions surrounding it as representing a generalized North. The question, then, is not where the Arctic actually begins, but where we imagine that it begins. Moreover, while Keskitalo writes that the politically motivated extension of the Arctic has taken place mainly since the 1970s (Keskitalo 2007, 188), earlier writings show that the term "Arctic" has for centuries been applied very loosely to any perceived northern periphery (Ryall, Schimanski and Wærp 2010, xii). Indeed, the distinction between "the Arctic" and "the North" were and are fuzzy. Like the cultural ideas surrounding such Arctic facts as cold, snow and ice, their meanings are always "context-dependent and far from stable" (Hansson and Norberg,

2009b, 13). Whereas ice was something to be conquered during the so-called heroic age, it has transformed into something to be preserved in an era of ecological awareness, even into an agent in itself. Even locations shift. Hence, the North Cape was perceived by late nineteenth-century tourists as *both* the boundary between the Arctic and Europe or Norway and as Arctic sublimity itself, as Ulrike Spring shows in her chapter in this volume. Likewise, Lapland represents the Arctic for some, like the British writer Olive Murray Chapman, discussed by Jan Borm, while others simply view it as an area of northern Fennoscandia. Thus, the Arctic is understood as both the exotic other of modernity and the mundane home-place of its inhabitants.

Currently, the area that is generally defined as the Arctic region is undergoing rapid changes in both its physical state and in the way it is perceived, creating imbalances and blind spots in our understanding of the processes involved. In many respects, the Arctic is under threat from modernity, represented by the depletion of natural resources and industrial pollution. Powerful political and commercial interests are closing in on the region in ways that are often both contradictory and simplifying. As Adriana Craciun argues in this volume, the Arctic is again in danger of appearing as an empty waste where opportunism reigns and the indigenous experience is muted. Yet while the melting of the Arctic ice is taken as a warning of ecological crisis, it is also viewed as a harbinger of economic development in terms of transportation, tourism and resource exploitation (cf. Grant 2010). Research on the Arctic has addressed both these aspects. The focus of natural scientists has been on the understanding of climate change, the management of biodiversity, and the mapping and extraction of resources, while social-science research has investigated the political and social implications of climate change, industrial development and technology for the future of the Arctic, as well as the problems in indigenous societies. Much of this research has a short-term perspective, and much is characterized by a simplistic way of thinking that Mike Hulme names “climate reductionism” (Hulme 2011, 264).

The chapters in this volume offer a different and more historically oriented perspective. By turning the attention to the cultural and aesthetic field, they address the very basis of our Arctic decisions, that is, the interaction between environment and people that has contributed to new visions of the Arctic. Even the Arctic sublime has proved susceptible to the changing relationship between humans and nonhuman nature, as Sigfrid Kjeldaas shows in her analysis of the ice and icebergs in Barry Lopez’s *Arctic Dreams*. The Arctic represented in writings, visual images and films is of course less tangible than melting glaciers or the changing

social conditions of Arctic peoples, and therefore to a large extent neglected in scholarship and policy-making. Yet, informed by the historical and cultural knowledge necessary to produce what Clifford Geertz calls “thick description” (Geertz 1983), analyses of such material have the potential for a “de-simplifying” critique exposing the underlying attitudes and grey zones ignored in much present-day decision-making about the Arctic.

For all the contributors to this volume, the Arctic is not only a geographical area, but also a discursive formation. As defined by Michel Foucault, discourse is a network of enunciative functions or statements that combine into a meaning-bearing sign system that regulate how a topic can be talked about (Foucault 1972). For Edward Said, authoritative texts create both the knowledge and the reality they seem to describe (Said 1978). Following these theories, language cannot express any pre-existing knowledge but constitutes what counts as knowledge or truth. By regulating the terms of the conversation, discourse may function as a tool for oppression, but since discursive formations constantly incorporate new enunciations they are also incomplete and inherently contradictory. While discourse exerts control, it also produces opposition, which creates the need to ask whose interests are served by the continued circulation of a particular discursive formation (Grace 2001; Hulan 2002). In the chapters that follow, three major Arctic discourses are interrogated: the Arctic understood as threatened environment, the Arctic perceived as the exotic opposite of modernity and the Arctic described as the everyday, lived reality of its inhabitants.

During the age of polar exploration, the Arctic was typically represented in atemporal terms, as a battling ground for the superhuman struggles of a few exceptional men against the forces of nature – in which the values and masculine virtues of the hero figures were usually seen to symbolize those of the nation. While remnants of this masculinist rhetoric survive in many contemporary narratives of technology-supported polar adventures, it has been deconstructed in several studies of nineteenth- and early twentieth-century polar exploration (e.g. Bloom 1993; Spufford 1996; Moss 2006). We have also seen the publication of studies of the Arctic in national cultures, usually connected to specific geographical locations, Canada in particular (Atwood 1995; Grace 2001; Hulan 2002). The militarization of the Arctic during and after the Cold War is another topic that has been thoroughly documented in recent years (e.g. Tamnes 1991; Grant 2010; Sale and Potapov 2010; Williams 2010). Several collections of articles encompassing Arctic discourses from the whole circumpolar area are also evidence of an expanding field (Bravo and Sörlin 2002; Hansson and Norberg 2009a; Ryall, Schimanski and Wærp

2010; Schimanski, Theodorsen and Wærp 2011; Kjeldaas and Ryall 2015). While some of this work deals with recent or contemporary Arctic discourses, the focus has rarely been on the Arctic as a site of discourses of modernity. Likewise, with a few exceptions (e.g. Bloom 1993; Thisted 2002; Ryall 2007; Hansson 2009; Ryall 2009; Aarekol 2016; Høvik 2016; Thisted 2016; Thisted 2017), there has been little extended emphasis on gender and indigeneity in studies of Arctic discourses.

In terms of Arctic exploration, 1930 – the year the famous Norwegian explorer Fridtjof Nansen died – marks a symbolic end of the masculinist heroic age. But for over half a century, at least since the 1870s, the Arctic had increasingly been placed under the sign of the modern, and even the famous polar explorers had made themselves increasingly dependent on modern technologies of transportation, as when Roald Amundsen, Lincoln Ellsworth and Umberto Nobile concluded the quest for the North Pole in 1926 by flying over it in an airship (Fleming 2001). During the past century the Arctic has gradually become a space of scientific investigation, tourism and industrial developments rather than geographical discovery and “firsts”. As Renée Hulan points out in this volume, Goose Bay in Labrador was the world’s largest airport in 1923, greatly adding to the accessibility of Arctic Canada and symbolizing what Zygmunt Bauman has called “liquid modernity”, in which remoteness is no longer an obstacle to human mastery. Susi K. Frank, in her chapter, notes a parallel development in Soviet literature and film of the 1930s. There a central idea is that polar and transpolar flights integrate the Arctic into Soviet space by transforming it from an alien, threatening space to a friendly, inhabited one (see also Frank 2010). In this way technologies of transportation go hand in hand with technologies of representation, as Roswitha Skare shows in her discussion of the film *The Romance of the Far Fur Country* (1920), where the trade activities of the Hudson Bay Company are portrayed and romanticized. As Bauman discusses, modern technical developments like aviation and film collapse time and space and create a sense of availability that paves the way for national expansion, exploitation of the region’s natural resources and a budding tourist industry, to name but a few (Bauman 2000).

In fact, if tourism is a defining feature of modernity, as Dean MacCannell has claimed (MacCannell 1989), it may be argued that the Arctic became part of modernity through its discovery as a tourist destination from the late nineteenth century onwards. Ulrike Spring’s study of early mass tourism at the North Cape shows that these processes of modernization are not only related to the development of infrastructure, but also, in complex ways, to changes in the practices and conceptions of

gender. The impact of such factors as air travel, industry, tourism, urgent environmental concerns and changing gender norms on discourses of Arctic modernity has until recently remained largely unexamined. It is a central theme, however, in several chapters in this volume.

If the exact delimitation of the Arctic is contested, the same could with even more justification be said about the terms “modern”, “modernization”, “modernity” and “modernism”. It has often been taken for granted that modernity, in the words of Anthony Giddens, is “distinctively a Western project” with roots in European history and radiating to other parts of the world (e.g. Giddens 1990; Giddens 1991; Punter 2007). Models of power relations based on a centre/periphery binary still sometimes form an unexamined framework of studies of modernity/modernism. However, many theorists now argue in favour of a polycentric view in which every location represents distinct forms of modernity (e.g. Felski 1995; Eisenstadt and Schluchter 1998; Wittrock 1998; Booth and Rigby 2000; Eisenstadt 2000; Felski 2000; Friedman 2006). In these respects, preservation discourses, which are in many ways part of a modern, environmental project, occasionally reject modern, social developments in peripheral regions, as discussed by Kirsten Thisted in relation to Greenlandic modernity.

Theorists of both culture and literature therefore call for a new geography of modernity in which modernity/modernism is seen as transnational breaks with tradition (Appadurai 1996; Doyle and Winkiel 2005; Friedman 2006; Ramazani 2009). Such spatialization of modernities, emphasising “the temporal rupture of before/after wherever and whenever such ruptures might occur in time and space” (Friedman 2006), has necessarily had a crucial effect on historical periodization. Although this new work on plural modernities has usually focused on southern postcolonial discourses, its findings encourage investigations of discourses of Arctic modernity outside the framework of a conventional centre/periphery perspective. A case in point is Audun J. Mørch’s reading of the Chukchi writer Yuri Rytkeu, whose work spans the transition from primordiality via modernity to postmodernity but in ways that make it necessary to fundamentally rethink those concepts.

The move from a temporal to a spatialized view of modernity has sparked a reconsideration of the meaning of the term itself. In her influential provisional definition of modernity Susan Stanford Friedman rejects “nominal” (noun-based) definitions of modernity that connect it to a particular historical moment in Western history and argues instead in favour of a strategic “relational” (adjective-based) definition (Friedman 2001). In this view the term “modernity”, like its correlates “modern”,

“modernization” and “modernism”, acquires its meaning through negation, as a rebellion – often figured as a “new”, emancipated and secularized, woman – against a presumed past (Felski 1995; Friedman 2001; Friedman 2006). While modernity is conceived as a global, shifting and unstable category, it can only be understood in terms of a geographically specific comparative “modern”/“traditional” binary (Subrahmanyam 1998). Across the circumpolar Arctic, too, there are many “alternative modernities” (Gaonkar 1999) that each requires a different contextualization.

Some theorists, most notably Bruno Latour, have argued against definitions of modernity that rely on the assumption that there is a rupture between modernity and tradition (Latour 1993). Modernity in Latour’s definition depends on the work of “purification”, that is, the creation of two distinct ontological zones, that of humans/culture on the one hand and nonhumans/nature on the other. However, he also argues that the practices of purification are always concomitant with practices of “translation” and “hybridization”. The proliferation of hybrids between nonhuman and human creates mixed categories, while modernity is dependent on keeping the two sets apart. Global warming is a good example of this; another is the militarization of the Arctic, where the pristine-looking ice cap conceals an arsenal of far-reaching nuclear submarines. Latour’s attempt to find a position beyond the either/or of modernity via an emphasis on the non-separability of the common productions of societies and natures holds great promise for the study of Arctic modernities. Susi K. Frank’s deconstruction of Soviet modernity, as well as Fredrik Chr. Brøgger’s study of Helge Ingstad’s anti-modernist project of entering a pristine and pre-modern wilderness while at the same time re-enacting pioneering and conquering modernity, illustrate the non-separability of these processes.

The image of the circumpolar Arctic as a cold, empty, dangerous region imbued with notions of heroic masculinity and frontier rhetoric still persists. Although the Arctic has been incorporated into modernity in an array of locally specific ways and is home to some four million people, many of whom live in modern cities and urban areas, it remains a place apart. Hence, the two chapters by Anka Ryall and Elin Haugdal that deal with emergent modernity in the Norwegian Svalbard archipelago, show how the harsh High-Arctic environment endows even everyday family life and mundane chores with a sense of drama and adventure. Like the other chapters in this volume, they examine to what extent the processes of modernization have changed the discursive signification of the modern Arctic.

In terms of “a new geography of modernity” the chapters investigate some *specificities* of Arctic modernity. In general, however, the modern

Arctic seems to have a double discursive signification. On the one hand it signifies something accessible, everyday and mundane; on the other it is a never-never land of romance and adventure. While some of the exploration narratives of Arctic explorers like Fridtjof Nansen, Knud Rasmussen and Helge Ingstad may be viewed as quests for a pastoral sanctuary from modernity, as Henning Howlid Wærp's chapter shows, much recent writing on the Arctic has made it synonymous with modernity itself. Earlier versions of this view are found in representations of the Nordic North as exemplary of progressive gender politics in women's travel writings from around 1900 (Ryall 2009; Hansson 2011). As a utopian space the Arctic points to a different future (Smith 2012). At the same time it often seems to have become an expression of the continued survival – within modernity – of the past as nostalgia, longing, dream and myth. In the words of Sherrill Grace, “unlike the permafrost and ice, myths are less amenable to climate change” (Grace 2010). Like other marginal places, the Arctic often appears as an exotic counter-modernity “at once threateningly strange and reassuringly familiar” (Huggan 2001, 22), embodying a mythic or romantic dimension existing beyond the modern everyday world while remaining thoroughly imbricated in modernity.

One hypothesis linking many of the chapters in this volume is that the Arctic may be seen as a stark embodiment of the paradoxes of modernity. Unsurprisingly, this is most obvious in Arctic popular fiction, exemplified in Cathrine Bjerknæs' chapter on Melanie McGrath's crime novel *White Heat* (2011). In that sense, they show that the discursive significations of the modern Arctic throw light on general processes of modernization. In different ways they illuminate both how discourses of the Arctic have been inflected by various kinds of modernization and how earlier Arctic images – whether they are affirmed, contested or repudiated – have shaped, influenced and informed a wide range of modern discourses of the Arctic. The geographical span of the material is equally wide. The perspectives on the Arctic in the selected material are both external/touristic, as exemplified by travelogues, expedition narratives and sociological reports, and internal/indigenous and based on intimate local knowledges. Although six of the book's fourteen chapters deal specifically with Canadian Arctic discourses, reflecting the central role Canada has played in articulating the Arctic as a region (Keskitalo 2009), they are thrown into relief by the very different discourses of Northern Russia, Greenland and Svalbard. As Kirsten Thisted emphasizes in her chapter, Greenlandic experiences cannot be understood when viewed through a Canadian lens.

The chapters of this book have been written within a three-year international research project, *Arctic Modernities*, located at UiT – The Arctic University of Norway (UiT). Completed in July 2016, the project was financed by the Polar Research Programme of the Research Council of Norway, with additional funding from the Faculty of Humanities, Social Sciences and Education at UiT. Over twenty researchers from seven countries and many disciplines were involved. Several articles by project members were published in a special *Arctic Modernities* issue of the open-access journal *Nordlit* (Kjeldaas and Ryall 2015), while another four were published in a special issue of *Acta Borealia: A Nordic Journal of Circumpolar Societies* guest-edited by Anka Ryall (issue 2, 2016). Further contributions will be published in a volume on Arctic children’s literature. Because the different studies vary widely in scope and approach, as a whole they demonstrate not only that Arctic modernity is a multifarious phenomenon constituted by different transnational variants with strong local roots and geographical specificity, but also that research on the Arctic from a humanities perspective is a vital, burgeoning and necessary field.

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# **ENVIRONMENTAL ARCTIC**

# ICE AS A LITERARY MOTIF IN SOVIET ARCTIC MODERNITIES

SUSI K. FRANK

To think of nature and humankind as completely separate, “purified” of each other, to understand humans’ correlation towards nature as appropriation and empowerment, as a “relationship of mastery and possession” (Serres 1995, 39), and to see nature as an object under humans’ sovereign control, are undisputed aspects of modernism. The narrative of humans’ emancipation from nature and of human mastery over nature is one of the main narratives of this era. “Mastery and possession: These are the master words launched by Descartes at the dawn of the scientific and technological age, when our Western reason went off to conquer the universe,” writes Michel Serres. “Our fundamental relationship with objects comes down to war and property” (1995, 32).<sup>1</sup> Horkheimer and Adorno on the one hand and Bruno Latour on the other were two of the most important critical voices to criticize this project, each in his/their own way, as a fatal utopia. Whereas Horkheimer and Adorno in their *Dialectic of Enlightenment* warned that this attitude will come at a price: “World domination of Nature turns against the thinking subject itself” (Horkheimer and Adorno 2002, 20)<sup>2</sup>, Latour elaborated on its illusionism, stating that the strict distinctions – e.g. between human and nature – that are at the core of modernism’s thinking are thoroughly false: we have never been modern (Latour 1993, 9ff.).

Climate is one essential field where independence from nature had to be won. As the geographer Ellsworth Huntington phrased it in 1915, “If we’ll be able to master climate, the whole world will become stronger and nobler” (1915/2001, 294). Or take “the anthropology of climate”, which developed from geodeterminism (environmentalism) into a (utopian) understanding of climate as man-made. The Arctic – the geographical zone where environmental conditions are harshest and most hostile towards humans – has for centuries been one of the most significant image-reservoirs for a narrative “vocabulary” of this concept of a human-nature correlation. Images of men’s heroic and victory-bound fight against nature, of their power to overcome all limits set by nature, could not be

better visualized and/or narratively developed than in an Arctic setting. Another reason for the attractiveness of this setting was certainly the fact that, up to the 1930s, the Arctic was one of the last white spots on Earth that European colonial exploration had not yet managed to conquer and transform into a zone of culture.

This is true of the anthropological imaginary of modernism in general and of Russia and the Soviet Union in particular. In this respect, a certain continuity between pre-Soviet, so-called “cosmism” and Soviet and even Stalinist anthropology must be emphasized. Cosmists like Nikolai Federov (1828–1903) and Konstatin Ciolkovskii (1857–1935) had already at the very beginning of the twentieth century developed ideas of transcending the supposedly natural limitations of human life, such as mortality or human confinedness to the earth, and thereby paved the way for the Soviet world view. By the 1930s, nature – along with capitalism – was declared to be the ultimate enemy that humans had to defeat. The understanding of humans as subject and nature as object could not be clearer than at this time. One of the main arenas to symbolically enact and implement this human–nature relationship was the Soviet Arctic.

The best demonstration of the entanglement between these historical directions of thinking and the topic of the Arctic can be found in the reflections of Vladimir Vernadsky (1863–1945), himself a cosmist, founding father of bio-, geo-, and cosmochemistry and also precursor of environmentalism and the earth-system approach. In an article published not long before his death, Vernadsky developed his suggestion that, with humankind in the age of modernism, a new epoch of earth’s and cosmic history had begun, the “noosphere”: “Mankind taken as a whole is becoming a mighty geological force,” he claims (2005, 19). For the first time in human history, Vernadsky emphasizes:

man [...] knew and embraced the whole biosphere, completed the geographic map of the planet Earth, and colonized its whole surface. Mankind became a single totality in the life of the Earth. There is no spot on Earth where man cannot live if he so desires. Our [i.e. Soviet] people’s sojourn on the floating ice of the North Pole in 1937–1938 has proved this clearly. (2005, 19)

Continuing with these reflections, Vernadsky enthusiastically predicts that “new species and races of animals and plants are being created by man. Fairytale dreams appear possible in the future: man is striving to emerge beyond the boundaries of his planet into cosmic space” (2005, 21). His conclusion is that “historians and political leaders are only beginning to

approach a comprehension of the phenomena of nature from this point of view” (2005, 21).

In the present day, Paul Crutzen, the coiner of the term “Anthropocene”, who refers to Vernadsky’s “noosphere”, can be seen as the ultimate vocalizer of this point of view. Even though Crutzen admits that, again and again, human interventions cause unexpected, unintended and unforeseeable environmental changes, he does not call human force itself into question. On the contrary, he claims that it should be consolidated. Mankind, according to Crutzen, “will remain a major environmental force for many millennia” (2002, 23). As he puts it, “A daunting task lies ahead for scientists and engineers to guide society towards environmentally sustainable management during the era of the Anthropocene. This [...] may well involve internationally accepted, large-scale geo-engineering projects, for instance to ‘optimize’ climate” (Crutzen 2002, 23). I will return to Vernadsky and Crutzen at the end of this chapter.

Modernism has brought forward at least three strategies for handling the Arctic climate: firstly, technological devices that have helped to handle climate conditions like permafrost soil; secondly, climate capsules aimed at guaranteeing independence from the outside climate; thirdly – and most utopian – strategies for transforming the Arctic into a tropical garden of Eden; for instance, by heating it and thereby totally transforming the region’s climate. This is a vision that first found expression in Charles Fourier’s “Théories des Quatre mouvement” [The theory of the four movements, 1808], can be traced in Soviet thinking from the 1930s through to the 1950s, and has found a gloomy reflection in Michel Houellebecq’s 2005 novel *La possibilité d'une île* (translated as *The possibility of an island*).

In this context, the Soviet anthropology of modernism and the concrete attempts to realize the project of man’s final victory over nature appear most radical. Countless efforts were made to create fertile soil out of dry steppes or to grow tropical fruit anywhere. Soviet strategies to settle in the Arctic North, to transform the Polar region into the frontline of the Soviet world, and in the long run into an ordinary settled and civilized region, can be seen as the most consistent manifestation of this project.

Elaborating on some significant examples from different periods of the twentieth and beginning of the twenty-first century, I first outline how the anthropology of modernism, by which I mean the conceptualization of humans in relation to nature, developed and changed. I consider the significance that the motif of ice had in this context. This is important because, as I see it, the way the motif of ice is developed in (Russian) literature indicates a shift from a classical (first) modernism to positions