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Deterritorializing the Future

Heritage in, of and after the Anthropocene

Edited by Rodney Harrison and Colin Sterling



Deterritorializing the Future



Critical Climate Change

SERIES EDITORS: TOM COHEN AND CLAIRE COLEBROOK

The era of climate change involves the mutation of systems beyond 20th century anthropomorphic models and has stood, until recently, outside representation or address. Understood in a broad and critical sense, climate change concerns material agencies that impact on biomass and energy, erased borders and microbial invention, geological and nanographic time, and extinction events. The possibility of extinction has always been a latent figure in textual production and archives; but the current sense of depletion, decay, mutation and exhaustion calls for new modes of address, new styles of publishing and authoring, and new formats and speeds of distribution. As the pressures and realignments of this re-arrangement occur, so must the critical languages and conceptual templates, political premises and definitions of 'life.' There is a particular need to publish in timely fashion experimental monographs that redefine the boundaries of disciplinary fields, rhetorical invasions, the interface of conceptual and scientific languages, and geomorphic and geopolitical interventions. Critical Climate Change is oriented, in this general manner, toward the epistemo-political mutations that correspond to the temporalities of terrestrial mutation.

Deterritorializing the Future
Heritage in, of and after the Anthropocene

Edited by Rodney Harrison and Colin Sterling



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Cover Image: Still from Tuguldur Yondonjants, *An Artificial Nest Captures a King*, 2016, artist film, 25:09 min.

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Chapter 11

Extracted Frontiers: A Call from the North

ANATOLIJS VENOVCEVS

From microchips to smartphones to electric cars, humanity's dreams of techno-salvation are built on the crude materiality of extracted metals and minerals. This extraction conveniently avoids large population centres in affluent Western democracies and instead clusters around the world's social peripheries. This slam poem, first presented as a spoken performance at the 8th Winter School of the Estonian Graduate School of Culture Studies and Arts in Tallinn, represents a call from the north – one of the largest frontiers for modern mining activities. By drawing on a few examples of past and present extractive landscapes, it aims to highlight the Arctic's physical, environmental and social costs for our technological transcendence. New ways of understanding humanity need to be rooted in the real material costs and consequences of our new and future technologies.

Hello everyone and thanks for your time,
For my part I will be slamming in rhyme.
I'm Anatolijs from UiT;
I am here to tell you some history.

My work is in Canada, Labrador –
And its tiny towns that mine iron ore.
They were assembled in order to feed
The hunger for steel and industry greed.

It was the fifties and we won the war
But in so doing we ran out of ore.
The new query as we raced for the stars –
“Where to get stuff for tanks, buildings and cars?”

Labrador, Canada, cold and remote,
A tundra traversed by foot or by boat.
Snubbing the Innu who lived there before,
A railroad was built in this quest for ore.

The valleys were filled and mountains were moved,
An engineering feat the railway proved.
Into the forests from north shore Quebec,
For four hundred miles the path made its trek.

Forest fires were started, chemicals spilt,
Rivers poisoned as this marvel was built;
But at the railroad ends, new towns emerged,
Car-based suburbs where no highways converged.

And mine ore they did in open-pit mines,
Blasting vast craters in thin northern pines.
Thus millions of tons was pulled from the north
By folks who came to the Labrador Trough.

As a colony this venture was seen –
Mines for settlement as farming had been.
Some people got rich and goods were attained.
Material gains, material drained.

Despite hard work, the glories were fleeting.
A crash in the price left the towns bleeding.
Some mines were closed while the rest were downsized;
In a free market, precarity's prized.

However the mining heritage stays,
The past continues in multiple ways:
The paths, the craters, the buildings remain,
The waters polluted, the caribou slain.

Yet memories of wealth and small town pride
Make some past transgressions easy to hide,
And it could be good news that prices rebound
And more land is set as extractive ground.

There's new mines now too, not just iron ore –
 There's nickel and cobalt in Labrador.
 Rare-earth elements can also be found,
 With new technology demands abound.

But now things are different, Labrador's changed,
 Towns barely survive by new work arranged.
 No settlements grow, the future's in doubt.
 Most workers fly in, most workers fly out.

How this relates to the things we explore –
 New futures, Anthropocene and much more?
 My point is simple and comes from the north –
 Remember the waste as we venture forth.

For instance energy, how green can it be,
 When there's only waste for people like me?
 In lands that get flooded, mined out and burned,
 For carbon-free life so desperately yearned.

Or take something that we all have at hand,
 Smart gadgets that meet our every demand.
 But what can be said on this conception
 When my friends do not have cell reception?

Thus gets constructed Anthropocene's dream
 Through outpouring waste from central regime.
 To build and sustain a tech-future charm
 While outsourcing the material harm.

We get all the waste and reap few rewards.
 Material culture outlasts all words.
 And in far futures when we are all gone,
 Our toxic legacies will linger on.

Thus to build the new post-humanities
 We can't just ignore externalities.
 I am talking pollution, destruction,
 Suicide, drugs and social dysfunction,

Violence, poverty, the boom and the bust,
Resettled, removed towns turning to rust,
Waste in the north for the southern demand,
Wealth built on stolen Indigenous land.

This is a call and my message to you –
Heed the material legacies too!
Waste is unequal, our lives aren't alike,
Tech-futures are suspect, so drop the mic.



Figure 11.1 — Map of Labrador showing its relationship to Canada along with related towns and infrastructure. (Map by Anatolijs Venovcevs).



Figure 11.2 — Trailer home subdivision, Labrador City, Labrador, an example of fast-built modernity. (Photograph by Anatolijs Venovcevs).



Figure 11.3 — Carol Lake mine, Labrador City, Labrador. The trucks in the photo are 7.7 metres high and typically carry 30 tons of rock per load. (Photograph by Anatolijs Venovcevs).



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