

NORTH-TRANSNATIONAL



*Underwater Oil and Mineral Resources in the Arctic Sea, Courtesy of Dark Ecologies, 2015*

*What am I doing in this stereoscopic dreamland North?*

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PROJECT OUTLINE

North – an extreme, distant, symbolically charged territory, where myth and “Gestalt“, political ambitions and ecological challenges collide. Its signature is a capacity to operate with large-scale iconographies, iconologies, myths, relentlessly and restlessly, to migrate as a metaphor, to move to a trope, often away from itself. North remains one of the most complex cultural constructs in history and theory of art and architecture. It is a utopian land for human futures, a tabula rasa for architectural fantasies and a battlefield for resources and territorial power. The exploration of North is compared to the exploration of Cosmos. It features eternity, solitude, and frost. North is where the boundaries of the visual apparatus are radically extended: from complete darkness - to blinding light, so blinding that nothing can be seen. North serves as a realization of planetary limit and limit at large: representation of death and abyss, a sub-script of the Sublime. North includes, but also transcends, the duration of anthropogenic climate change. Today new translations of North into visual codes and new modes of representations need to be thought across larger temporal and cultural scales and at different speeds. They pose a set of epistemological challenges that demand thinking simultaneously along aesthetic, historical, political, geological and climatic lines.

## DATA

This contribution engages with three major Northern archives: Archive of the Alpine Museum der Schweiz in Bern, that contains a rich material on snow landscapes, studies of glaciers and comparative studies of frozen waters, the CCA Archive in Montreal with a big corpus of architectural projects to inhabit the North Pole, and the Soviet and late-Imperial medical archive in the Museum of Arctic's and Antarctic's in St. Petersburg. It also establishes a close dialogue with the architectural collections at the Getty Institute in Los Angeles. By and large, these sources show how ideas about a human and environment were framed in very different ways from how we are used to think of them today. These examples deal with the interrelation between the evidentiary of Northern explorations and their representational matter in the colonial and postcolonial age. Together, these case studies can bridge the theoretical space between history and theory of architecture, environmental studies, social imaginaries and visual culture phenomena and may also induce critical reassessments of the very idea of "transnational" itself.

## FRONTIERS

The project is committed to learning from knowledge embedded in images and studies of explorations. However, it expands from these disciplines into the fields of law, governance, science, medicine and economy. Its ambition is to draft a new atlas of Northern archaeologies, to identify the connectedness of different domains of knowledge about North-Transnational by communicating the traditional Northern archives with the new data and examining pictorial practices outside the standard domains of art history. Such poly attention is primarily caused by a unique structure of the Northern archives *per se*. These appear to be a rare mode of the integrated knowledge, where photography is in dialogue with maps of drifting ice, dioramas are placed across the temperature and humidity charts. Remarkably, they also contain the detailed analyses of the most common polar diseases: snow blindness, amnesia and insanity. North therefore, allow for the study of material exchanges between private and public spheres, as well as between Western and non-Western contexts, in order to envision a new ecology of images. These Archives may become the foundation of a new form of media, providing a methodological toolbox for looking at image circulation and radically 'other' territories, namely a politically and ideologically charged global pole. They encapsulate North-bound visual processes and examine their transformations, driven by cosmology, theology, imagination and utopias.

## METHODOLOGY AND COLABORATIONS

Re-thinking the blind spots and blank accounts, bringing together studies on colonial histories, urban transformations, patterns of city growth in relation to changing climatic conditions will be advanced by the collaborations with architectural research groups: at *gta* ETH, as well as the Dark Ecologies (Goldsmith University, London), Arctic Cities (London), Territorial Agencies (London). Methodologically, by looking at the recent aesthetic evidentiary, and environmental challenges art history tends to migrate towards Environmental Humanities and the new dimensions developing together with the scholars at KHI Max Planck Institute in Florence. Indeed, scientific hypotheses such as that of the Anthropocene have brought the natural sciences and the humanities into unprecedented proximities and have begun to articulate the contours of a new “politics of the Earth.”

## READING THE IMAGE

North has generated a large reservoir of tropes and rhetorical as well as mental figurations and spaces. It is the place where you can project your believes – your fears – your inner space, your *polar inertia*, where the invisibility is addressed. Northern landscapes are propelled by abstraction. Here the image gravitates to the new dimensions; it could represent a whole, a composite entity and in virtue of this "Gestalt"- an image could function as a checkpoint for interpretation and understanding.

## THE OUTCOME

The proposed research would be the first complex attempt not only to read the architectural significance of the North on the shared territory of architecture, natural sciences, governance, cultural mapping and future visions, but might allow to establish an experimental, yet solid platform for new modality of thinking. The vibrant dialogue of the ETH Zurich, KHI Max Planck Institute in Florence and the Gerry Research Center in LA and will allow making bridges and analogies in transcultural scale. It's essential goal is to unfold the potentialities of the integrated knowledge. The project would move from archival phase - to analytical, bringing together scholars of different backgrounds conclude with a workshop, an exhibition and a publication. By shifting our understanding of 'location' away from nation states and towards representation and cultural tropes, North–Transnational explores further dynamic relations between human and non-human actors and their spaces of operation.