

Phase State Earth: Ice at the Ends of Climate Change

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Over the past two decades, water in the Canadian province of Newfoundland and Labrador has become a contentious resource. Icebergs in particular have figured prominently in the province's water-based resource imaginary, progressively emerging as a sought after commodity used in the production of vodka, beer, and luxury-branded waters. On the northernmost tip of the island of Newfoundland, in the once thriving fishing port of St. Anthony, the icebergs that at one time drifted by untouched are currently being harvested for bottling and sale in the global premium water market. Through international trade fairs from Dubai to Shanghai, iceberg water is marketed as the purest water on the planet and as a resource originating from a time before the dire effects of pollution and mass industrialization. The recent use and commodification of natural phenomena such as icebergs highlights the ways in which the Arctic, Subarctic, and Antarctic are becoming regions wherein under- or unutilized and potentially finite ocean resources are emerging, thus signaling the need for an increased understanding of how icebergs are embedded in complex human relations that establish notions of resource value, climate change-derived commoditization practices, and the ethical spectrum that these practices trouble.

Through historical and ethnographic research that merges environmental history, the history of communication media, and media ethnography, the book manuscript that I will aim to complete as a fellow at the Rachel Carson Centre, *Phase State Earth: Ice at the Ends of Climate Change*, has three aims:

(1) to track how ice is an emergent natural resource that signals how a complex ecology of ethical, political, and socioeconomic issues can be raised when conventional forms of water provision reach their limit; with particular emphasis on the contemporary conditions of anthropogenic climate change that are amplified in such regions as Iceberg Alley, wherein water is becoming a “new commodity” for climate-derived forms of entrepreneurship (particularly as it crosses from one phase state to another—here, solid to liquid);

(2) demonstrate the ways in which ices (glaciers, sea ice, etc.) have both historically and in the present day established a host of relationships between practices of resource extraction and geophysical communications technologies, including satellites and climate models, amongst others, and are generating new ways of thinking about how extractive industries rely on processes of communication—from transportation corridors to networks of resource accumulation and distribution to mobile labor pools;

(3) examine how natural phenomena such as ice constitute the central node in a global “media environment” that supports northern extractive resource industries. Increasingly, icebergs and their trade as twenty-first century commodities are produced in and by highly-mediated predictive and virtual environments. I argue that this situation prompts a reconceptualized understanding of “the environment” that extends its boundaries to include the media technologies that represent and mediate its relationships to the political economies of distance and time in commercial forms of extraction. Thus the proposed

research will investigate how the demands of our historical and ongoing engagements with natural resources drive adjacent developments in techniques and media of communication.