## Satellite Sublime

## Nina Wormbs

On 18 August 2019, writers and scientists gathered in Borgarfjörður in the west of Iceland for a memorial ceremony over the death of the glacier Okjökull. In 2014 the volcano has been called Ok and thus deprived of the suffix jökull, meaning glacier, as the glacier was in fact gone. The volcano no longer contained enough ice to move by means of its own weight. This was the first Icelandic glacier to formally die. In the current discourse of climate change, extinction has been confined to biodiversity and species loss. I suggest that there are more things that might go extinct and die, which are to be included in our understanding of the ongoing crisis. Ice is one such thing.

The Arctic Ocean is covered by an icecap that grows during winter to reach its maximum in spring, and then shrinks during summer to reach its annual minimum in fall. This annual variability is one reason why detecting true change in the Arctic is difficult. Another challenge is the scale of the cap. At its maximum it covers an area of approximately 15 million square kilometers, equivalent to the size of Canada and half of China taken together. Finally, much of the sea ice is hard to measure *in situ* as it moves through environments that are dangerous for humans.

Satellite monitoring can help to overcome these difficulties and give comparable technoscientific information on the Arctic sea ice over long periods of time. This arguably unique information captures change that is otherwise hard to measure. Also, the data emerging from satellite monitoring can then be better visualized. Furthermore, satellites function as our witnesses of climate change and an exposed planet. For many complex global climate models, mean temperatures, and CO<sub>2</sub> concentrations are hard to envisage, but with the help of the satellite monitoring we can actually *see* the ice as it disappears.

This project will appear in the form of a monograph with different chapters contributing to the provision of a broader picture of sea ice loss, much like a satellite mosaic. Taken together, the pieces will form a story of climate change along the lines of the disappearing sea ice—not only in terms of science and technology but also in terms of our emotions and intellectual ability to understand.