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What is the Imagined North?

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Abstract:

The North has been imagined and represented for centuries by artists and writers of the Western world, which has led, over time and the accumulation of successive layers of discourses, to the creation of “imagined North” – ranging from the “North” of Scandinavia, Greenland, Russia, to the “Far North” or the poles. Westerners have reached the North Pole only a century ago, which makes the “North” the product of a double perspective: an outside one – made especially of Western images – and an inside one – that of Northern cultures (Inuit, Sami, Cree, etc.). The first are often simplified and the second, ignored. If we wish to understand what the “North” is in an overall perspective, we must ask ourselves two questions: how do images define the North, and which ethical principles should govern how we consider Northern cultures in order to have a complete view (including, in particular, those that have been undervalued by the South)? In this article, the author tries to address these two questions, first by defining what are the imagined North and then by proposing an inclusive program to “recomplexify” the cultural Arctic.

Over the centuries, artists and writers of the Western world have imagined and represented the cold world. Upon closer inspection, these fall into differentiated imaginaries – the “North,” Scandinavia, Greenland, the Arctic, the poles, even the winter – that are presented often as an amalgam supported by a simplification of forms – horizontality – and colours – white, pale blue, pink hues –, on the presence of ice, snow, and the complete range of cold, on moral and ethical values – solidarity –, but also, on its connection with a “beyond” where the Arctic begins, at the end of the European ecumene and the beginning of a “natural,” unknown, empty, uninhabited, and remote world: the Far North. The entirety of these representations forms a system of signs, what I call here out of convenience “the imagined North.”

Like all represented space, the “North” is the product of a dual gaze, from the outside and from the inside; we can distinguish between the “representations” of the North and the works of “Nordic cultures.” The first, fruits of principally the German, French, English, and then US-American imaginary, seldom distinguish the different cultural spaces of the territory and focus their attention up towards the Arctic and the poles, with little consideration for the cultures (Inuit, Sami, Cree, Innu, Scandinavian, etc.) that originate in these territories. The latter sometimes have an extension beyond themselves – this is notably the case of Scandinavian cultures, whose reception in Europe benefits from a clearly ameliorative prejudice. This does not, however, apply to Indigenous cultures, which have long been marginalized, at times with the rhetorical objective of reinforcing the image of an uninhabited and uninhabitable Arctic, often by persistent political and ethnic prejudices. In any case, the “representations of North” created from the outside and the “Nordic cultures” derived from the territories of the “North” have little in common, often placed as differentiated discursive layers, even though they are both connected to the

¹ A previous version of this article was published in French in *Études germaniques* (vol. 71, n° 2, 2016, p. 189-200).

same territory of reference. This distance can be observed for other represented geographic areas, but the imagined “North,” especially the “Far North,” is distinguished in that it has been forged on discourse more than on experience for centuries, which accentuates the autonomy of the discursive layers “from the inside” and “from the outside.” Let us bear in mind that man went to the North pole only a century ago whereas he has been imagining it for millennia. Lastly, it is important to remember two sociopolitical phenomena that had an effect on the representation and the reception of the North and the Arctic. On the one hand, the general context of indigenous colonialism, which reinforced the silencing of cultural and human aspects of cold territories, and on the other hand, the general tendency of the governance of the “North,” dominated by the capitals or the powers of the South, who administrate according to their knowledge (seldom based on experience) and the circumstances of their own needs, with the gaps that can create.

There exist “representations” of the North and the Arctic, often Western, that are easily accessible and of a great (simplified) semiological coherence. There are also “cultures” of the North, some of which are well known (those of Russia, Scandinavia) and others are totally unknown – other circumpolar spaces and the Indigenous. If one wishes to study the “North” in a perspective of the whole and take into account its plurality of unequal visibility, we must thus ask two questions which at first glance seem far removed, but must be articulated in our case: How to define the North by the imagination? According to which ethical principals should we consider Nordic cultures in order to have a complete view, including notably those which have been marginalized by the South?

Defining the North by the Imagination

All of the discourses stated about the North, the winter, and the Arctic, which can be retraced both synchronically – for a given period – or diachronically – for a specific culture –, derived from different cultures and forms, accumulated over the centuries according to a dual principal of synthesis and competition,² form what could be called “the imagined North.” It is a plural and shifting sign system, which functions in a variable manner according to the contexts of enunciation and reception.

When developing, a decade ago, this notion of “imagined North,” I simultaneously suggested the hypothesis that there exists, beyond the diverse and divergent cultures and perceptions *about* the North and *from* the North, a common esthetic foundation that could then be segmented according to the characteristics that, if they are not unique to the “North” in their individuality, compose all the same an ensemble of original and unique signs from a cultural point of view. The ensemble of signs established over the centuries by Western culture to represent the idea of North, a whole constantly reworked by new propositions – today, those of regional and Indigenous cultures are finally considered – that by confirming or modifying certain characteristics, constitute that which is “the imagined North.” It is a living whole, “organic,” that evolves according to historic periods and contexts; like all sign systems, it allows for the opening of an imaginary world by partial evocation of its characteristics, which permits an economy of means for representing the North. The colour pale blue, for example, exercises this function: it suffices to use it to induce the reader or spectator to a universe made of cold, vastness, and ice, which refers to the sign system as a whole.

² This principal of synthesis and of competition between discourses, inspired by Wolfgang Iser’s reader response theory and inscribed in reception theory was referred to in my monograph, Daniel Chartier: *L’Émergence des classiques*, Montréal : Fides, 2000.

Also, like all systems constituted by centuries of discourse, in order to detach from it or to contest the foundations, one must deconstruct it or rework it. For example, this is what the creators of the first feature-length film of Inuit fiction, *Atanarjuat*,³ do intelligently, by taking the Western characteristics of the images of the Arctic one by one to deconstruct them.⁴ They know that the spectator possesses the codes of the sign system that is the imagined North, constructed by Western culture, and they use them to suggest a new perception of this territory, which is then added to the previous ones and shifts the issues and the codes. In the same way the process of the act of reading is described by Wolfgang Iser,⁵ the culture receives, accumulates and orients the imaginary. The latter keeps its coherence while modifying itself along with new cultural propositions, filtered by the processes of accumulation and competition. The success of *Atanarjuat*, for example, permitted this film to play a role in the contemporary orientation of the imagined North; if the film had not been award-winning, it would certainly have contributed to the accumulation of the discourse on this imaginary, but without displacing the codes to such a significant extent.

To suggest that the notion of the “imagined North” thus transforms the manner of conceiving of the territory, so that it at last includes the cultural and human aspects and opens a field of criticism to be able to grasp the esthetic and political nature of the connections between representations, the imaginary, territory, and culture. Talking about the imagined North assumes the existence of a link between cultural representations and territory – which is not a given – and is to suggest that a *real* place can have an impact on the forms of representation that derive from it. At first glance, this seems to go against modernity and postmodernism, which defend the self-defining character of artistic forms, except that if we consider the notion of “place” in a perspective of cultural construction, then it is also governed by its own rules. It remains to be seen what could be the links between a *real* place versus a *represented* place, which permits the notion of the *idea of place* when it is defined as an overlap and a competition of discourses. Indeed, that implies that the materialist does not necessarily bring about an idea of place and that inversely, the discourse cannot be entirely detached from the notion of *reality*. These places form a complex human composition, made of experiences, discourse, materiality, cultural forms, and memory. All of these refer to the real, the human, and to reality, whether the latter is material, discursive, or semiological.

Against the usual discourses, it can be rightly questioned if the North can be considered as a “place” in Western culture. A reading of the history of representations of North convinces, rather, that the “North” was defined as a “space” and not as a “place:” the insistence on its characteristics linked to emptiness, immensity, and whiteness led to the development of a system of representations that sometimes overlooks the human experience of the territory.⁶ Over the centuries, the phenomenological knowledge of the North was not obvious: Westerners preferred to see in the North a territory beyond the ecumene – that they however continued to try to explore, which took time, all the while imagining it in texts – and thus exempt from knowledge.

³ Zacharias Kunuk: *Atanarjuat*, 2001, 172 min.

⁴ For example, none of the characters suffer from hunger or from the cold (in one scene, a man even runs naked on the ice), no one gets lost, certain Inuit are devious and disloyal, the conflicts are complex.

⁵ Wolfgang Iser, *The Act of Reading: A Theory of Aesthetic Response*, Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1978.

⁶ On the relationships between space and place in the North, see the compilation: *Le Lieu du Nord. Vers une cartographie des lieux du Nord*, Québec : Presses de l'Université du Québec, and Stockholm : Université de Stockholm, coll. « Droit au pôle », 2015, 242 p.

Moreover, they ignored – by ignorance, later by exclusion – a part of the discourses of those who lived there (Inuit, Sami, Cree, etc.). In many of the Western texts, the “North” thus refers to a neutral matrix on which we can situate a text without taking into account the material or phenomenological reality, as long as they respect a series of criteria and characteristics that are unique to the “North” in the imaginary. From exploration narratives to poetry, from popular culture, filmic and commercial, to visual arts, from the song to the adventure novel, a whole imaginary forged on representations and perceptions refers to a “North” of representations and perceptions which can be considered historically as human and cultural constructions, the whole in a transversal aesthetic coherence that spans eras, genres, techniques, and cultures, all while adapting to the contexts. The cultures that claim it combine a part of the individual and a part of the universal in a synthesis that is their own, that defines them: thus Iceland appropriates in its manner the imagined North by adding it to other identity layers that define it (insularity, belonging to Scandinavia, etc.).

To speak about the imagined North thus imposes a reflection on the idea of place, on the relationships between the material place, lived, imagined, and represented, on the notions of space and place, on the systemic and diachronic constitution of sign systems, on multiculturalism, on the individual and the universal, and on the inclusions and exclusions of certain discourses of the Western definition of North. Therein lies a whole methodological, theoretical, ethical, and political program, still largely being constructed, but which permits at last to include cultural and human aspects in the general research on the North and the Arctic.

This system of signs has the dual feature of having been seldom elaborated by those who live there and having been thought of in large part by others who have never been there. This does not take away its coherence and its power from a discursive and imaginary point of view, but it poses considerable challenges for true knowledge of the cold world, for recognition of the discourses, needs and aspirations of those who live there and for, from a cultural and intellectual point of view, thinking of the North, the Arctic and the cold world *by itself*. This sign system also imposes, due to its historicity – made by discourses from the outside, on territories thought of as spaces rather than as places, and controlled by powers that only see it as a reservoir of resources to assure their vitality – certain ethical constraints and requirements, to be able to extract all the complexity.

An Inclusive Program to “Recomplexify” the Cultural Arctic

To study the imagined North means to analyze, in a multicultural and circumpolar manner, the different representations of North, the winter and the Arctic from an interdisciplinary perspective. By relying on the concepts of cultural “nordicity” and “winterity” and on the definition of North considered as “first and foremost a cultural discourse, applied by convention to a given territory”⁷ one can study the historical evolutions and the variations of this discourse, and consequently the evolution of the idea of the Arctic and the idea of North.

⁷ Daniel Chartier: “Au Nord et au large. Représentation du Nord et formes narratives, in *Problématiques de l’imaginaire du Nord en littérature, cinéma et arts visuels*,” Joë Bouchard, Daniel Chartier et Amélie Nadeau (eds.), Montréal: Université du Québec à Montréal, Département d’études littéraires et Centre de recherche Figura sur le texte et l’imaginaire, 2004, p. 7.

If we consider the North the way that I propose, via cultural representations, this allows for considering all of the aspects mentioned as one. Cultural representations have been a source of motivation and proposition for scientists, they have permitted human and social changes, they are linked and participate in general history and they form, when one considers them as a whole, a historic and coherent suite in the arts. Thus, this perspective allows for an unrivaled meeting, on common ground, of different traditions of knowledge. These converged to try to realise, as the thinkers on the North and the Arctic have long called it, an “interdisciplinary” and “multicultural” approach, the only possible approach to take into consideration the complexity and the fragility – from an environmental, social, and cultural point of view – of this ecosystem.

By defending the idea of a circumpolar and no longer territorial conception of the cold world, the latter is positioned as a whole that calls for solutions, reflections, and common positions, all the while taking into account the different cultures and languages that compose it. In this context, it seems impossible to propose an acceptable vision of the cold world, without articulating it in a multilingual, multicultural, and often conflictual, way.

The research in cultural studies on the North, supported by an examination of cultural representations, aims therefore at a renewal of studies on the relationships of humankind with its imagination, by a discursive analysis of the issues of the North, the Arctic, and the winter, as well as by a multinational, multidisciplinary, and pluralist approach. Consideration of the cultural and human aspects is an integral and necessary part of all research *on* and *in* the North; yet, therein lies a whole chunk of often forgotten or neglected Arctic or Nordic policies, agreements targeting the governance of the cold world, as well as scientific or technical research projects. For example, the historic 1977 agreement made with the Cree and the Inuit of the North of Quebec, the *James Bay and Northern Quebec Agreement*,⁸ often cited as a model of the first contemporary agreements between the State and its Indigenous people, makes absolutely no mention of Indigenous cultures, other than traditional practices that have direct repercussions on the shared or exclusive use of the territory. Ignoring the cultural and human aspects of the North leads to denying the complexity of circumpolar relationships and representations, and can lead to the establishment of policies that are maladapted to the territory. This is why one must reflect on the principals, the methodology, and the practices that set and establish the definition of North and the Arctic in a sociocultural perspective, because they have fundamental political and ethical implications.

Several basic principles and several intellectual positions on the definition of the Arctic should be kept in mind, among them: the variety of the terms that it covers; the necessity of a circumpolar perspective; interdisciplinarity; taking into account Indigenous and non-Indigenous points of view; “natural” and urban aspects; multilingualism; multiculturalism; and finally, the need to propose a new vocabulary to “recomplexify” the Arctic.

A quick inventory of the terms used to designate and circumscribe the cold world reveals an overlap of definitions that intersect with each other and distinguish themselves from each other, and that are sometimes used without discernment. There are of course the terms “Arctic,” “Antarctic,” “Polar Region,” and “Arctic Circle,” which point to regions that are well enough defined, yet the rigidity of the borders is called into question by geographers. Additionally, there is the “North,” the “cold world,” even the

⁸ For more on this important treaty and its aftermath, see for example Alain-G. Gagnon and Guy Rocher (eds.) : *Regard sur la Convention de la Baie-James et du Nord québécois*, Montréal : Québec/Amérique, 2002.

“winter,” that are based on more moveable concepts, variable according to the perspective of the speaker: What is cold? Where is the North, according to whether you are placed in London, Mexico, Buenos Aires, Nuuk, or Yakutsk? Then, there are historico-political entities: Scandinavia, Russia, Siberia, Canada, Nunavik, Alaska. Finally, there are the groupings that superimpose these wholes: the Inuit world, the North Atlantic region, the circumpolar zone, the circumnordic zone, etc. Each term has its own values, an insistence on certain characteristics (geography, politics, language, culture, climate) and neglect others; each term displaces by its use the usage of other notions that define in a general manner the cold, polar, Arctic, Nordic, and winter world. To take note of the existence of these notions permits, at the very least, to specify the object of one’s thinking and one’s Nordic research.

Most of the thinkers of the Arctic world insist that one consider the region as a circumpolar “whole,” as the sum of the different States, nations, cultures, histories, and relationships. The Arctic must be able to define itself as an idea by itself, although it has historically been thought, defined, and governed, especially over the last century, by parallel influences of power from the South. Iqaluit was long determined by Ottawa, Fairbanks by Washington, Nuuk by Copenhagen, and Yakutsk by Moscow. We have seen, from the point of view of the Western imagination, the Arctic as it was positioned by the culture is the combined product of the English, German, and French cultures, to which has been added US-American popular culture. From the point of view of material exploitation, the railroads transport the minerals from the North that the South needs for its development, the electric lines bring electricity to the large cities, the roads allow wood to reach its “markets” of the South. The North is thought of by the “southist” culture and it responds to its material needs. From this point of view, it cannot be surprising to note a simplification of forms and functions when it is a question of cultural representations of the North and the Arctic:⁹ far, empty, pure, “in danger,” “fascinating,” white, cold, and icy, the “North” finds its characteristics outside of itself,¹⁰ in a thinking that circumscribes it in function of the imaginary and material needs of the South. A “circumpolar” vision would impose, on the contrary, considering the North *en soi*, in an ontological and definitive manner, to take into account the links that unite the different parts that compose it, as well as the distinctions between their cultures, their positions, and their historicities.

This vision allows for presenting the “North” simultaneously as a self-defined whole and as a diverse whole that reveals its richness and complexity. Because there is a price, according to the Quebecois linguist and geographer Louis-Edmond Hamelin, for considering the Arctic in a monodisciplinary perspective: “The monodisciplinary approach does not allow for producing enough of the pertinent and necessary knowledge to understand such a complex question.”¹¹ By its fragility, by its climatic exception, by the degree of under-knowledge that characterises it, the “North” must be considered from a multidisciplinary point of view, “holistically” if you like – which joins the Inuit notions of “nuna” and of “sila.” What is true for ever other region is even more so for such a fragile sociocultural ecosystem. This implies a constant dialogue between the sciences and the social sciences, but also between social sciences and cultural studies and between cultural studies and the practices of cultural creation. This multidisciplinary point of

⁹ On the relationships of simplification and complexity, linked to concepts of ecology in the contemporary œuvre, see for example my article on the circumpolar artist Patrick Huse in Daniel Chartier: “Simplification / Complexity of the Arctic: The Work of Norwegian Artist Patrick Huse,” in Patrick Huse: *Northern Imaginary. 3rd Part*, Oslo: Delta Press and Pori Art Museum, 2008, p. 49-53.

¹⁰ On some characteristics of the North as discourse, see Daniel Chartier: “Au Nord et au large. Représentation du Nord et formes narratives” (n. 6), p. 9-26.

¹¹ Louis-Edmond Hamelin: *Écho des pays froids*, Sainte-Foy : Les Presses de l’Université Laval, 1996, p. 86.

view is not a luxury of the mind: it is a requirement that must be imposed on any research, intervention, and Nordic exploration project.

Some geographers have compared the Arctic to the Mediterranean, not because of its climate of course, but because populations live around the pole stemming from a rich variety of origins, simultaneously Indigenous (Inuit, Cree, Sami, Innu, etc.) and non-Indigenous (Icelandic, Finnish, Russian, US-American, etc.). Research on the North that only considers one or the other of the Indigenous or non-Indigenous perspectives will necessarily lead to a misinterpretation of the region. The exclusion of the one or the other does not allow for considering the ensemble of the relationships that are at stake in the North.

There is an important requirement from the ethical point of view of research: as Indigenous voices have historically been ignored and few of them are preserved in cultural institutions, they require particular attention today. I submit here the example of the village of Hebron, on the coast of Labrador. This village, occupied by Inuit, administered by Moravian missionaries in the name of the government of Newfoundland, and supplied by the Hudson's Bay Company, was savagely closed by an administrative decision in 1959. Today, if one wishes to reconstruct the events that led to this tragedy – several Inuit, forcibly removed, died in the years following the closure of their village – one can read the government archives in Newfoundland; one could also easily find the reports and records of the Hudson's Bay Company, which have been the subject of publications and heritage protection; one could also easily consult the meticulous correspondence of the Moravian missionaries, which have all been digitized and are available in the archives of the congregation. But what is missing? The reactions, the opinions, and the voices of the Inuit who, not disposing of any institutional instruments to conserve their memory, have disappeared. The Indigenous point of view necessitates a special attention on the part of the researcher to emerge; sometimes, if it cannot be found, a space must be left for a "history of silence," significant of the issues and relationships of force in the North, for ethically and honestly recounting certain historical events. The history of Hebron, that Carol Brice-Bennett describes as "dispossession,"¹² is a clear case of it, but certainly not unique in the Arctic world.

Popular representations of the Arctic present it often as a white, cold, distant, uninhabited and uninhabitable, frozen, and empty world. It goes without saying that the Arctic is seen in this sense as nonurban and "natural:" beyond the ecumene, it symbolizes for the culture a space of emptiness and desolation. One has to admit that the Arctic region is sparsely populated, if we compare it to more temperate zones. The demographic disposition of the Earth clearly shows a concentration of the human population, in the broad periphery of the equatorial zones. However, the cold world also counts villages, cities, and even metropolises, which face considerable human, social, technical, cultural, and energy challenges, as well as a pronounced alternation between the summer and winter seasons, which oblige the construction of dual architectural structures. Montreal, for example, with its 3.5 million inhabitants, can be considered – not for its latitude at 45 degrees, but in regards to the severity and length of its winter season – as the coldest large city (of more than a million inhabitants) in the world. What does it mean, beyond the direct climatic constraints, to live in a city with an alternating subtropical and subarctic climate, if we evaluate it from a social and cultural point of view? The impact of Nordic conditions on the

¹² Carol Brice-Bennett's essay retraces the history and the consequences of an involuntary movement of the Indigenous population of Labrador; this case is not unique, and other forced movements (in Alaska, in Greenland, in Russia) had equally tragic repercussions. Carol Brice-Bennett: *Dispossessed: The Eviction of Inuit from Hebron, Labrador*, Montréal: Imaginaire | Nord, coll. "Droit au pôle," forthcoming 2016.

built environment, urban planning, the management of resources, and collective and individual adaptation of lifestyle has been little studied up until now, notably because the popular image of the North refers rather to a sparsely inhabited region, desolate, and of low population. Yet, this is not always the case. Here again, the images make a way to grasp the complexity of the North and the Arctic. To understand the circumpolar world well, it is thus necessary to take into consideration the urban and non-urban problems that characterize it.

To understand the different points of view that oppose each other and interact in the circumpolar world, one must recognize at what point several languages, whether they are Indigenous, non-indigenous, and foreign, have constructed the idea and the paradigms of it. Languages that are little-spoken in the world but are spoken in the North (for example, Danish and Norwegian) have had a great influence on the definition of the Arctic, notably by the explorers originating from these countries who published numerous narratives of their travels. Foreign languages, for example German, have few ties with the colonial exploration or expansion of the North, but play an essential role in understanding it. Finally, the circumpolar region is one where the Indigenous languages remain the liveliest in the world: Cree, Inuktitut, Greenlandic, Yakut, although their knowledge outside of their primary zones is limited, remain the usual languages, and the languages of cultural creation and transmission. It is therefore necessary to presume a multilingual dimension in all research projects on the North and the Arctic and recognize that monolingualism and even bilingualism lead to a biased or incomplete vision of the North. The solutions, though heavy, are multiple: personal knowledge of several languages, translation, as well as multilingual teams, which can iron out misconceptions of the issues.

The North constitutes an “intercultural laboratory.” Out of habit, we see the cities of the twentieth century as the first hotbeds of intercultural exchanges. However, the isolated posts of the Arctic were often, since their foundation, places of convergence for men and women from different cultures, in a contact and trading situation: this is the same in the case of missions, then the mines, sites of dam construction, perhaps places of confinement, which relied on a population of varied cultures, coming both from different regions of the countries concerned and, by immigration, from overseas. Furthermore, each circumpolar culture is the product of a synthesis of two or more cultures, from the South and from the North. Multicultural interactions are thus definitive of the North and the Arctic. Depending on the place, there is more or less diversity, more or less harmonious, between those of Indigenous and non-Indigenous origins. The Greenlandic identity, for example, is today a synthesis of several centuries-old Inuit cultures combined with those of the missionaries, the Danish colonizers, and recent immigration.

The circumpolarity, multidisciplinary, Indigeneity, urbanity, multilingualism and interculturalism each impose methodological precautions on research on the North and the Arctic, and they are prerequisites without which the circumpolar region finds itself once again “simplified” and robbed of its capacity to think for itself. Furthermore, as Louis-Edmond Hamelin has shown in his work, the “North” calls for the creation of new terms and its own vocabulary to appreciate its specificity and its originality.¹³ These neologisms, among which we count terms that have become part of common speech in French today, like “nordicité,” “hivernité,” and “glissité,” invented for the French language, but widely translated into several other circumpolar languages, allow for the opening of a new field of research on the North, at the

¹³ By Louis-Edmond Hamelin, in addition to *La Nordicité du Québec* (Québec : Presses de l'Université du Québec, 2014), see: *Écho des pays froids* (n.10); *Discours du Nord*, Quebec: GÉTIC, Université Laval, 2002; *Le Québec par des mots. Partie II : L'hiver et le Nord*, Sherbrooke: Presses de l'Université de Sherbrooke, 2002.

same time respectful of the differences that compose the region and the convergences that make it different from the rest of the world.

Conclusion

In all research on the North and the Arctic, the cultural and human aspects must be considered, even though these have been marginalized by Western tradition that projects on the cold world its “Arctic dreams” – to borrow Barry Lopez’s expression¹⁴ – by a rich imaginary, a fascinating system of signs, constructed over centuries of discourse, but from which the considerations of those who live there have been precisely excluded, as well as a part of the geographic reality of the region. We must propose and defend the idea of “recomplexifying” the North, the winter, and the Arctic, to re-establish an “ecology of the real” that takes into account the richness and the variety of the circumpolar world. To achieve this, the following hypotheses must be defended, according to which a) the North and the Arctic are composed of places in constant interaction; b) the cultural and human aspects predetermine the relationship to the territory; c) the North and the Arctic must be envisaged in a multicultural and circumpolar manner, according to an interdisciplinary perspective; d) a circumpolar conception presents the North as a whole which calls for solutions, reflections, and common positions, all while taking into account the different cultures and languages which compose it, in a multinational, multilingual, multicultural, and often conflictual manner.

Without this double effort, first, of understanding and questioning the sign system that is the imagined North, from both a multicultural and historic point of view, and second, of establishing ethical principals to achieve research that is multidisciplinary, multilingual, and in agreement with the object studied, the North, the winter, and the Arctic will remain spaces considered empty and devoid of their cultural richness. We will thus also renew commonly held ideas about the Arctic and concerning the people who live there.

¹⁴ Barry Lopez: *Arctic Dreams. Imagination and Desire in a Northern Landscape*, New York: Scribner, 1986.