

*S.O.S. EISBERG VERSUS S.O.S. ICEBERG - TWO NATIONS' VISUALIZATIONS OF
ARCTIC LANDSCAPES*

By

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Abstract

This project is a comparison of the perspectives on Arctic nature that are featured in the 1933 films *S.O.S. Eisberg* and *S.O.S. Iceberg*. I am arguing that the director of each version was influenced by his cultural background in visualizing the relationship between Arctic nature and the white explorers that encounter it in their films. Both Arnold Fanck, who created *S.O.S. Eisberg*, and Tay Garnett, who created *S.O.S. Iceberg*, worked with the same documentary footage that was filmed at Greenland's Arctic shores, but turned it into two different films. *S.O.S. Eisberg* turns the Arctic into a space whose hostile forces have to be confronted with the iron will of a leader who demands utmost loyalty from his followers, thus anticipating the leadership cult of the Nazi era. *S.O.S. Iceberg* portrays the Arctic as an alternative Western frontier that humans have to encounter as a collective who collaborates and facilitates a sense of community, which perpetuates the American self-identification as a frontier nation of explorers. Being aware of the backgrounds of these culture-specific visualizations not only explains the differences between the two films, but, on a larger scale, will teach us to understand the extent of the influence that our cultural background has on our understanding of and interaction with nature.

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“Landschaften sind weder einfache Gegebenheiten, die es gilt durch objektivierende Verfahren einzufangen, noch kodierte Texte, die es interpretierend zu lesen gilt, sondern sozial relevante Prozesse kollektiver und subjektiver Identitätshervorbringung. Ihnen haftet somit etwas Dynamisches, Performatives an.”

“Landscapes are neither givens that are to be captured by objectifying processes, nor are they encoded texts that have to be interpreted - rather, they are socially relevant processes of collective and subjective identity construction. Thus, they bear dynamic and performative features.”

(Guldin 9)

1. Introduction

The Arctic has held a special place in the imaginations of explorers and dreamers for centuries. Situated remotely at the top of the globe and covered in vast layers of ice, yet brimming with life, the Arctic represents an area which was never fully conquered by those who attempted to do so and never incorporated into one nation's territory. Countless expeditions into the icy waters of the Arctic were made from the earliest times until the outlines of the Arctic shores were fully mapped, but even today, the Arctic retains many mysteries. While its Indigenous peoples know well how to navigate the icy territory, the Arctic still represents a region of extreme living conditions. The seasonal coming and going of the ice with its crushing powers and unpredictable movement has made the Arctic Ocean seem more alive to foreigners than other parts of the earth. Jeannette Mirsky even describes it as “almost human in the variety of methods it uses to repel the explorers who would invade the secret places it guards” (7).

Because of the territory's relative emptiness and the enduring blankness it represented on Western world maps, the Arctic has been subject to attempted conquests by a variety of peoples. All of them were confronted by a place that remained elusive, difficult to define, and ever-changing.

Every story about the Arctic varies with the storyteller and their interaction with the place. As Guldin states in the opening quote above, landscapes are never merely existent and ready to be objectified - they interact with the people confronting them and influence the way people define themselves, whether as individuals or as a collective. Simultaneously, how people define themselves also influences the way they interact with the land and everything in it. When encountering a landscape, humans always have to make decisions - how do they traverse the land, how do they survive in it, on what do they choose to focus. Not only their backgrounds and character traits influence these decisions, but also the land itself, since it changes with the seasons, the weather, and the time of day. Humans thus stand in a reciprocal relationship with the local environment, and this relationship is likely to reverberate in what they see and say. Their portrayals of a landscape have the capacity to reflect how humans perceive the land, how they position themselves in it and how they define themselves as a group, and even as a nation.

For Western explorers who encountered the Arctic as something new, returning home from a voyage north always meant returning with a new story about the land and about themselves. Countless tales of the Arctic were published by travellers from abroad during the nineteenth century, always reflecting specific views of the Arctic while revealing aspects of the storytellers' identities. In 1933, two cinematic tales set on the shores of Arctic Greenland were released whose titles would suggest that they only differ in their language. Yet, they turn out to

be not merely translations of the same story, but to consist of very different plots, moods, and representations of the Arctic that depended on two different views of the land.

No one could have known it at the time, but the films *S.O.S. Eisberg* and *S.O.S. Iceberg* scraped a tipping point of world history - they were published at a time in which people who were aware of political developments were beginning to spot the tip of an iceberg that the ship of humanity was to be shattered on: the beginnings of the era of National Socialism were visible on the horizon, but the vast majority of atrocities that were to be committed still lay invisible under the surface of pre-war rhetoric. The relationship between Germany and the United States was still at a functioning stage, which set the foundation for film corporations from the two nations to collaborate on a 'film expedition' to Greenland's Western shore. Funded by the American Universal Studios, Deutsche Universal Film AG sent a film team consisting of film experts and former polar expedition members to Uummannaq in Western Greenland to capture footage of icebergs and an expedition crew during the Arctic summer. The material was to be turned into a novel spectacle of visual and sound material of the Arctic landscape filmed on location. Because of disagreements about the material on hand, two versions of the film were created, the German version by director Arnold Fanck, the English version by director Tay Garnett. They differ in plot and in scenic arrangement and capture two different ideas of the Arctic as a location and an actor; most of all, they reveal how two separate cultures thought of themselves.

Critics have argued that the German version, *S.O.S. Eisberg*, displays a *zeitgeist* that was not only appreciated during Weimar Republic times, but that also foreshadowed the values of the Nazi era. Siegfried Kracauer detects a trajectory between the late-nineteenth-century German film and the Nazi era. He argues that themes which were a part of Nazi propaganda in film were already prevalent in the decades preceding the era of National Socialism. To Kracauer, the

German public was thus at a point at which they did not critically withstand Nazi indoctrination through film; they simply celebrated the themes with which they had been confronted for some time, and they were thus susceptible to Nazi ideology. Taking the German genre of the Bergfilm (mountain film) as an example, Kracauer argues in *From Caligari to Hitler* that “the [genre’s] idolatry of glaciers and rocks was symptomatic of an antirationalism on which the Nazis could capitalize” (111). *S.O.S. Eisberg*, produced by Arnold Fanck, the founder of the mountain film genre, and thus standing in the generic tradition, might therefore feature topics that reveal a *zeitgeist* of pre-Nazi era thinking. Because the way a people portray a landscape and the way they interact with and within it is symptomatic of how they define themselves, investigating the genre of the mountain film and the relationships between the land and the people in *S.O.S. Eisberg* enables us to determine the degree to which Nazi ideology was already foreshadowed in the film.

My analysis will show that, indeed, the portrayal of the connection between the land and the foreign travelers in *S.O.S. Eisberg* bears traces of Nazi ideology and that, as a consequence, the film anticipates the Nazi era thematically. These foreshadowing elements explain why the two versions are so different from each other. While Fanck’s version carried on a series of mountain films that Fanck had produced during Weimar times, Garnett did not work with an audience that had expectations of this genre, since the mountain film never turned into an international genre. Fanck’s version had a foothold in the German public’s expectations of a mountain film foretelling themes of the Nazi era, and his plot catered to these expectations; Garnett was confronted with different expectations by his American audience.

In 1933, the United States could look back on more than a century of conquering a land that the nation had claimed as its own. The Western frontier had been a defining idea for

American culture ever since the first European settlers had set foot on the continent. Westward expansion of the new territories and the conquest and subduing of land that belonged to the Indigenous peoples of America required a mindset that was strong-willed yet oriented toward the benefits of the settlers' communities. Richard Slotkin states that chasing the frontier turned into an all-defining American myth that treated "the concept of pioneering as a defining national mission, a 'Manifest Destiny,' ... a safety valve for metropolitan discontents" (30). When the nation's territory had been fully explored and subdued in the West by the late nineteenth century, the physical frontier was closed, but the myth of the frontier survived (Slotkin 29). America turned toward other territories that could fill the void. With the beginning of Arctic exploration in the second half of the nineteenth century, a different kind of landscape was found that could keep the myth of the frontier and the frontiersman alive. As Michael F. Robinson explains:

[E]xplorers became associated, gloriously and notoriously, with the traits of the nation. In doing so, they gave voice to hopes and fears that seem, at first glance, far removed from the Arctic regions: about the status of the United States as civilized nation, about threats to its manly character and racial purity, about the blessings of science, about the dangers of progress. The Arctic, in other words, presented a faraway stage on which explorers played out dramas that were unfolding very close to home. ... Although the Arctic never wore the colors of a U.S. state on nineteenth-century maps, it became a national landscape nevertheless. (3)

Thus, *S.O.S. Iceberg* portrays Americans in a landscape that was considered a defining one for the country's self-definition, even though it was not part of their national territory. Arctic explorers kept the myth of the frontiersman alive: the myth of the man who navigated a territory hitherto unknown to white settlers, working towards establishing new communities. Examining

more closely the relationship the protagonists of *S.O.S. Iceberg* forge with the land and at the ways this relationship affects the human relationships among them will enable us to determine that the myth of the frontier was a defining aspect for the film. While the relationship of the foreign travelers with the Arctic and each other in *S.O.S. Eisberg* foreshadows ideas of the Nazi era, the way the protagonists navigate the Arctic in *S.O.S. Iceberg* reveals that the myth of the frontier was still relevant for the American self-definition as pioneers and colonizers.

Based on the theory that our self-definition influences how we perceive a landscape and that our portrayal of this landscape, in turn, provides an insight into our self-definition, I am arguing that two very different versions of the film were made because each producer was a member of a distinct culture and producing a film for a different audience. Their cultures of origin and their respective audiences played equal parts in how the two producers situated their human actors in relationship to the land - not only the sense of self shines through in each production, but also the idea they had of their respective audiences. The producers functioned as mouthpieces for two cultural bodies, and the way they portrayed the Arctic in relationship to their own people reveals that they kept their home audiences in mind. A simple translation of the film dialogue would have been inadequate and insufficient, considering that both films were tailored to a national audience by a member of their cultures. Arnold Fanck was influenced by his German cultural background - his portrayal of survival in the Arctic reflects the beginnings of Nazi ideology, in which his German audience was already immersed in 1933. Tay Garnett chose to create a different plot, reflecting his and his audience's cultural background of frontier ideals that survived in Arctic exploration. Looking at the history of Arctic expeditions as well as the motivations behind the Bergfilm genre provides background and positions *S.O.S. Iceberg* and *S.O.S. Eisberg* within their larger cultural contexts. Eventually, the comparison of both films and

their connections to the specific *zeitgeist* of their cultures explains why the two versions differ so significantly. Even though their titles may suggest that the two films are identical, except for being translated in different languages, they are in reality two contrasting films in terms of culture, nature depiction, and *zeitgeist*.

In this paper, I have chosen to focus on these topics under the umbrella of nationalism and national identity depiction, since the films were published at such a crucial point in history. During World War II, ideas of nationalism were going to be carried and employed to extremes. Both films, however, address various topics that can be viewed from other angles as well, such as topics addressing issues of gender, the environment, or science; these issues deserve the space that another paper would give them. My focus on the nationalist views of the Arctic that I see depicted in *S.O.S. Eisberg* and *S.O.S Iceberg* matters not only for understanding the films as communicative instruments of the past. Far beyond that, nationalist ideas about space have renewed importance in the twenty-first century, as debates about refugee resettlement and immigration once more underline that the sentiments of nationalism in *S.O.S. Eisberg/S.O.S. Iceberg* are not only relevant for our understanding of the past, but also of the present, and the future.

2. “The Impossible Comes to the Screen!” - The production of *S.O.S Iceberg/S.O.S. Eisberg*

Nineteen hundred and thirty-three, the year both films were released, was a historically significant year for Germany and the rest of the world. After Adolf Hitler had become German Chancellor in January 1933, it quickly became clear that German society stood at the brink of devastating cultural changes. By the time *S.O.S. Eisberg* premiered at the end of August, books by “un-German” authors had been burned, the first concentration camp had been established, and

the regime had begun persecuting Jewish people and excluding them from many spheres of public life (“Timeline of Events”). *S.O.S. Eisberg* thus was released during a time in which public interest and focus primarily lay with affairs not connected to the Arctic natural environment, which hence offered a thematic space that was still neutral enough for international collaborations. The United States was looking towards Germany with its own worries about the political changes, but Americans were not discouraged from joint cinematic projects with Germany just yet.

Ever since sound film had become a realizable innovation for public cinema in the 1920s, the viewer experience was a much more impressive and memorable one than hitherto (MacKenzie and Stenport 6). Sound enabled filmmakers to create an atmosphere that mimicked real life experience in a more holistic way than the simple picture on screen had achieved before. The ability to include spoken dialogue between protagonists opened doors for more complicated plots, which were supported by non-human sounds imitating the experience of being surrounded by nature. The depiction of natural elements such as wind and water was suddenly supported by sound effects that could create haunting atmospheres, triggering deeply emotional reactions in the audience. Roaring storms, waves slapping onshore, and even the deep silence of uninhabited land could not only aid the plot, but these sounds could also bring the audience closer to natural environments that might have been unknown to them. The land was now able to communicate with the protagonists, and the protagonists with each other, enabling film producers to create multi-faceted impressions of the relationship between humans and the landscape. The rise of the Hollywood adventure film that John Andrew Gallagher situates in the 1920s and 1930s and that took film crews around the world to shoot in “exotic locations” must have stood in a not entirely

coincidental relation to the emergence of sound film, since a realistic film experience of those locations was supported significantly by the addition of sound.

S.O.S. Eisberg/Iceberg was one of the many adventure productions that benefited from the potential of sound supporting the plot. The German director Arnold Fanck, who had been successfully producing films in sub-zero settings for Deutsche Universal, was awarded with the assignment by their parent company Universal Studios and was promised their financial support (Gallagher). Universal had previously published the independently produced film *Igloo* with great results at the box office, but *S.O.S. Iceberg/Eisberg* was the first to be filmed in the Arctic at the company's own expense (Gallagher). Greenland as a location was chosen by Fanck because, to him, "there was no better place on earth for capturing the gigantic scale of the natural phenomenon of an iceberg than Greenland" - any other location, like Alaska or Antarctica, would not have provided icebergs of a similar size (Fanck, *S.O.S. Eisberg* 11). Particularly the possibility of including sound for the first time turned the project into an attractive one of unprecedented potential: Fanck and his crew were haunted by the incredible noises of icebergs tumbling and breaking apart in the summer sun - capturing this uncanny movement and sound on film was essential to providing a life-like experience of the Arctic to his audience (Fanck, *S.O.S. Eisberg* 16, 25).

It is likely that Universal planned to release the film in English and in German, since "international co-productions [...] often recorded in different language versions for international distribution" were common during the "transition of silent film to sound" (MacKenzie & Stenport 6). However, the company had not planned to create two versions with very different plots - complications with the script that did not match the actual footage Fanck had would eventually lead to the differences between *S.O.S. Iceberg* and *S.O.S. Eisberg* (Gallagher). Along

with the team that was to film the two versions of *S.O.S. Eisberg*, Universal sent another team that was to shoot a parody of the filming expedition - however, the resulting film *Nord-Pol Ahoi!* remains lost (Körber 152). Universal must have had a premonition that the undertaking of filming in the Arctic region would be worth a parody.

The film crew left for Greenland's west coast on May 25, 1932, but the team was still strikingly unprepared for their undertaking. The memoirs published by Fanck and those published by the actress Leni Riefenstahl, who starred in the film, admit that the team neither knew how to dress for the Arctic climate nor how to handle the difficulties of filming in it (Fanck, *S.O.S. Eisberg* 9; Riefenstahl 80). Once Fanck's team set sail for Greenland, they were on their own, relying on the help of only three members of the 'expedition' that had experience with the Arctic: Dr. Ernst Sorge and Dr. Fritz Löwe, both German glaciologists who had conducted scientific work under Alfred Wegener in Greenland, and Knud Rasmussen, a Danish polar scientist and anthropologist, who functioned as adviser and translator and who met the crew in Ummannaq on Greenland's West Coast (then called Umanak) (Gallagher & Andrew 2; Körber 152). Ummannaq was close to Rasmussen's birthplace, which enabled him to forge quickly a connection to the local Inuit tribe who appeared in scenes of the movie (Gabel-Jorgensen 47, 43). Additionally, the team was accompanied by a polar bear specialist and trainer, who was supposed to handle the two polar bears that had been provided by a German zoo, since the local animals were to be left unbothered. However, the trainer soon fell ill and left the team to deal with the two polar bears by themselves (Fanck, *S.O.S. Eisberg* 29).

Interestingly, the team's lack of experience with Arctic temperatures and Arctic ice conditions mimics the lack of experience early explorers faced in the Arctic (Mirsky). Countless adaptations to their original travel plans had to be made by both Arctic explorers and the film

team, and quick solutions for icy predicaments had to be found. It therefore seems reasonable that the filmic undertaking in itself was referred to as an expedition by the German director Arnold Fanck in the title of his memoirs (Fanck, *S.O.S. Eisberg - Mit Dr. Fanck und Ernst Udet in Grönland. Die Grönland-Expedition des Universal-Films S.O.S. Eisberg*). Usually, the term denotes “a journey undertaken by a group of people with a particular purpose, especially that of exploration, research, or war” (“Expedition”). A journey conducted by the entertainment industry to obtain film material thus does not qualify as an expedition in its classic sense. However, the risks that were taken by the film team and the novelty of filming on icebergs created an experience for the film team that resembled the Arctic expeditions of previous times.

Fanck’s bold but, at times, reckless decision-making in the name of his art also resembles decisions that were made during earlier Arctic expeditions. First and foremost, Fanck wanted to achieve authenticity in his films, so he decided “that all crucial and important scenes unavoidably had to be filmed on top of icebergs if the film as a whole should retain the appearance of being real and allow the audience to develop empathy” (Fanck, *S.O.S. Eisberg* 38). The dangers that the actors had to face were to be genuine.

To honor this principle, Fanck only hired experienced mountaineers as his cast, most of whom had starred in his previous films set in the Alps. Moreover, Ernst Udet, famous World War I pilot and stuntman, was to star as a pilot on a rescue mission. In his later memoirs, Fanck admitted that casting Leni Riefenstahl as a female pilot was Universal’s idea - he would have preferred not to hire her because she was not a pilot, and he wrongly believed that women had never been part of Arctic expeditions (Körber 152).

Even though the crew as well as Rasmussen and the local Inuit tribe voiced concern over the dangers of filming on icebergs multiple times, Fanck persisted and led his cast to climb

icebergs that could crumble any given moment. Afterwards, he admitted that “we were ... very naive about the dangers of icebergs ... and, ultimately, [the] eskimos were right in deeming us completely crazy, since they knew the treacherous and dangerous nature of those ice colossi much better than we did,” but he also laughed at the locals’ concern (Fanck, *S.O.S. Eisberg* 26). After all, worries about the budget and the expensive equipment surpassed Fanck’s worries for the safety of his crew - when an iceberg they were filming on began crumbling and put the crew in danger of falling into the icy sea, he ordered the women that were on top to be evacuated first, followed by the film equipment, and then by the male crew (Fanck, *S.O.S. Eisberg* 36). These priorities surfaced again when Sorge and a small team, who had left the group to explore and film the massive Rink Glacier farther north, did not return for several days and prompted a dramatic rescue mission to find them. When the group was found and had successfully been brought back, Fanck ignored the dangers of the natural surroundings at the Rink Glacier and returned to the location to retrieve the sound equipment that had been left behind.

In addition to disregarding the local Inuit tribe’s voices of concern, the film crew also left them in the dark about their concrete filming plans. The tribe members were surprised by the sudden arrival of the film crew - Riefenstahl explains that upon their arrival the tribe “[didn’t] know yet that we [wanted] to live among them for many months” (81). Rockwell Kent, an American painter who was living in Ummannaq at the time, also reacted with surprise to the arrival of the film team (Lewis 16). He witnessed nights of heavy drinking and sheds a rather critical light on the film expedition (17).

After having spent the summer months at the Western coast of Greenland, alternating filming locations between Ummannaq and the Rink Glacier, the crew escaped the imminent fall storms and returned to Germany at the end of October 1932 with 175,000 feet of film

(Gallagher). When reviewing the material back in Germany, Paul Kohner, the head of Deutsche Universal, realized that much of it was useless for the original script by Edwin H. Knopf, which had been given to Fanck. Kohner persuaded Tay Garnett, a scriptwriter and director with Universal Pictures, to travel to Germany and remodel the script so Fanck's material could be used in a coherent way (Gallagher). Garnett created a new story, which was rejected by Fanck, who had different ideas about how his material should be used (Körber 152). At this point, Universal decided to let Fanck finish his own version of the film. Garnett proceeded to Switzerland with the material he had in order to finish filming *S.O.S. Iceberg* there, thereby closing gaps in the new plot (Gallagher). Rod LaRoque was flown in from the United States to play the part of Dr. Lawrence in the American version. The crew completed the film in Switzerland and Berlin, before dubbing the German actors' voices in the United Kingdom (Gallagher). Simultaneously, the German team working on *S.O.S. Eisberg* also finished filming in Switzerland, and returned to Germany with the material for a version that is roughly ten minutes longer than the American counterpart.

Based on Morton's memory, Gallagher explains that the original story by Knopf revolved around a love triangle between a woman and two men that is resolved after the three of them return from a trip to the Arctic. The new story, however, was based on the audio play *S.O.S. rao rao Foyn* by Friedrich Wolf, a German communist activist, which was first aired on public radio in 1929 ("SOS Eisberg" Murnau Stiftung). The play tells the story of the 1928 rescue mission for the Italian airship *Italia* that was wrecked during an attempt to reach the North Pole. The survivors of the accident were stranded on the ice and could only be rescued because their radio signal was picked up by a Russian amateur radio operator and an international rescue mission ensued ("SOS rao rao Foyn - Krassin rettet Italia' von Friedrich Wolf"). Both the German and

the American version include the basic elements of the story, but Wolf was omitted in the German film credits, since the film premiere followed Hitler's ascent to power and Wolf's membership in the Communist party was not tolerated under the Nazi regime (Körber 149, "SOS Eisberg" Murnau Stiftung).

The German *S.O.S. Eisberg* premiered on August 30, 1933 in Berlin, and the American *S.O.S. Iceberg* opened on September 22, 1933 in New York City (Gallagher, "S.O.S. Eisberg Release Info"). Despite receiving good reviews in the United States, the film did not enjoy lasting success. Gallagher assumes that this failure was because people were more interested in "Depression escapism" at the time of release. However, the existence of advertisement and reviews in different countries proves that the film was successful enough to have been exported internationally. Arnold Fanck himself claimed in his autobiography that the film was a "worldwide success," but he does not provide further details (Fanck, *Er führte Regie mit Gletschern, Stürmen und Lawinen* 313). An Australian review praises the nature scenes in the film, but also judges that "it would have been better to tell a plainer and more probable tale and to let the grandeur of the setting do the rest" ("Film Reviews - S.O.S. Iceberg"). It can therefore be assumed that the film was exported with mixed results, but whether the English or the German version was shown in other countries remains unclear.

Practically speaking, two different versions of *S.O.S. Eisberg/S.O.S. Iceberg* were created because two directors had different ideas about possible plots and use of the film material that had been obtained - Fanck and Garnett finished their respective versions independently and published them in their own countries. Ideologically speaking, the differences between the two stories and the portrayals of the relationship between humans and nature reflect the different meanings the Arctic held for the United States' and Germany's self-understanding.

3. The U.S. Relationship with the Arctic: Expeditions and Frontier Heroes

The ability to introduce the American public to the Arctic through sound film was still an innovation in 1932, but writing about Arctic expeditions had already been in existence since the middle of the previous century, when Arctic exploration gained popularity in the United States. In 1850, the American Congress decided to fund a rescue mission for the British explorer John Franklin, who had not returned from his Arctic voyage for two summers in a row. This rescue mission sparked the United States' own series of journeys to the northernmost regions of the planet (Robinson 26). Officially, the driving motivation for the American exploration of the Arctic was scientific endeavors, but, very soon, Arctic journeys turned into quests for manliness.

From the beginning, rhetoric played a vital role in the United States' Arctic exploration. The journeys most often had to be funded by scientific societies or the government, which first had to be convinced to provide monetary or material support. Thus, "the way explorers talked about science ... often proved critical to the success or failure of their missions. Science's most important function was as a rhetorical tool, as a means of establishing social authority at home." (Robinson 5). In the decades to follow, scientific rhetoric attained a different hue - tales of manliness and noble character traits replaced the focus on scientific reasoning. These tales secured public interest in Arctic voyages and unified various groups of sponsors beyond the scientific elite of the country (Robinson 6). Robinson concludes that,

stories [sic], more than specimens or scientific observations, constituted the real currency of Arctic exploration. The writings and lectures of the explorers opened the wallets of patrons, whetted the appetite of publishers, and excited the interest of audiences at home.

(6)

At the turn of the century, the emphasis on heroic battles with the Arctic that proved explorers' manliness had assumed a higher status than scientific speeches and writings. Stories of "conquering" the Arctic had turned into a happy distraction from difficult decision-making over the outcomes of the Mexican-American war in which Northerners and Southerners argued about how the newly conquered Western territories were to be handled (Robinson 12). In battling the cold, men could prove their worth for the greater good of the nation without having to confront the politics surrounding the conquest and integration of new American territories (Robinson 29). The American readership could be entertained with stories of heroic deeds and self-sacrifice without having to fear an impact of actual war on their personal lives at home. Moreover, the Arctic as a setting promised the fulfillment of nostalgic longings for a simpler past in which rugged manliness was the key to solving problems.

As Richard Slotkin points out, American self-definition, which was largely built on the myth of the Western frontier, experienced a crisis with the closing of the frontier at the end of the nineteenth century (29). The American West had been conquered and turned into developed land inhabited by white settlers, which left the American people searching for a new mission that would replace the exploration of the Western frontier. It was the Arctic that could provide them with the same dichotomy of civilization and wilderness that, according to Slotkin, had been left behind at the closing of the Western frontier (14). By crossing the border to the wilderness, "the American ... [could] experience a 'regression' to a more primitive and natural condition of life so that the false values of the 'metropolis' [could] be purged" (14). The Arctic, in its still raw and natural state, provided America with a space that enabled the ones who attempted crossing the line into the wilderness to encounter these 'primitive and natural conditions.' Lisa Bloom uses

the expression *tabula rasa* in describing the function of the Arctic as a space for the United States to define itself as a “great imperial power” (3).

Slotkin explains that control over the resources in the newly established territories at home, as well as shifts in the distributions of power in the agrarian sector could be considered new frontiers at home and were all-consuming tasks that would define America as a nation (31). However, only the Arctic provided a physical frontier between the nation, the wild land, and its Native inhabitants. Classifying Native Americans as “savages,” as the “other,” had enabled Americans to identify themselves through differentiation - everything they were was to be subjugated in the “savage wars,” which required a specific kind of hero to step to the forefront:

The heroes of [these wars] [had to] ... be ... characters whose experiences, sympathies, and even allegiances [fell] on both sides of the Frontier. Because the border between savagery and civilization [ran] through their moral center, the Indian wars [were], for these heroes, a spiritual or psychological struggle which they [won] by learning to discipline or suppress the savage or ‘dark’ side of their own human nature. Thus they [were] mediators of a double kind who [could] teach civilized men how to defeat savagery on its native grounds - the natural wilderness, and the wilderness of the human soul. (Slotkin 14)

Even though the “savage wars” never assumed a vital position in Arctic exploration, because the land was not conquered as the American continent was, Arctic explorers had to navigate the mental border between Native inhabitants and white explorers just as they had to operate under the dichotomy of civilization/wilderness. Encounters with the inhabitants of Arctic regions were inevitable during journeys to the polar region, and every group of explorers had their own way of acknowledging or ignoring them. Robinson states that Elisha Kent Kane, who led the

(unsuccessful) rescue mission for John Franklin in 1850, describes the Eskimos of Etah, who helped his starving expedition crew, as child-like and naive, a common trope also in writing about Native Americans:

In this way he plays down the crucial actions of the Eskimos in keeping him and his crew alive. Denied character in a narrative that is built on it, the Eskimos form a background for Kane and his crew, whose actions play out almost unassisted. ...

The Eskimos of [Kane's narrative] thus became easily identifiable to most Americans as shorter, less threatening equivalents of the American Indians, and in so doing enter a framework of savagery well known to American readers. (47)

In 1862, Charles Hall brought a family of Nugumiut Eskimos home to the United States and showed them off on stage, portraying them as “human curiosities” in order to capture his audience’s interest and secure more expedition funding (74). All family members caught diseases for which their bodies were not prepared, and one of them died in the following months (74). Robert Peary took pride in his collaboration with the Arctic Natives, but appropriated their knowledge and skills to sell himself and his mission as that of a true “Arctic frontiersman” (Robinson 131). Neither one of these men considered the Arctic Native population their equals. Whether they fought them, showed them off like circus animals, or portrayed them as romanticized or condemned as naive, they appropriated Indigenous identities to define themselves as the stronger character. Native inhabitants of the Arctic never had a voice in these white explorers’ writings - instead, they were abused as guides for reckless expedition trips, and controlled in their trade, which Lisa Bloom defines as the very essence of colonialism (XI).

These explorers’ tales of themselves in the Arctic, which were built on their dramatic perils at the outposts of civilization, their agency at the border between civilization and

wilderness, and their confrontations with the Native population of the wild land, resemble the tales of Western heroes. Slotkin explains that the genre of the Western enabled Americans to prolong the celebration of territorial expansion and encounters with the land's 'savage' Indigenous populations through "[a storyform] whose connection to the characteristic images, characters, and references of frontier mythology is observably direct" (25). The Western hero is the frontiersman who forges connections with both settlers and Natives - he fights for the interests of civilization, but often appropriates the techniques and tools of the Natives. "Stretches of untamed nature" between settlements were the source of all dangers, since they hosted Native enemies more familiar with the land than the settlers (Lenihan 12). In his navigation of the frontier, the hero's horse was his best friend in whom he could trust and on whom he could rely (Lenihan 12). In navigating the frontier, the hero established the foundations for newly built communities of white settlers, which ascribed to him a role that was based on trust and collaboration with others of his kind. He alone could not establish a community, but he needed others who would form a brotherhood of frontiersmen with him. Even though the Western hero is often portrayed as one of his kind, his existence was built on communities and collaboration with soldiers, Natives, and settlers. The Western genre had turned into "a widely recognizable fictional formula ... by World War II," and was present in both film and print media (Lenihan 10). The myth of the frontier was thus perpetuated in American media far beyond the closing of the frontier - it turned into a cultural momentum whose influence becomes visible in *S.O.S. Iceberg*. Even though the film is neither classified as a Western nor specifically mentions the myth of the frontier, I am arguing that its representation of the Arctic defines the protagonists as just that - men of the last frontier.

4. The German Relationship with the Arctic: The Wegener Expedition and the Bergfilm Challenge Seekers

In 1932, when *S.O.S. Eisberg/Iceberg* were produced, Greenland was a Danish colony, and could look back on centuries as a destination of polar voyages not only by the Danish, but also Americans and Germans (Mirsky 214). Danish explorers had traveled to Greenland for centuries and had conducted extensive scientific research on the island that surpassed other explorers' work in importance (220). However, one German scientist stands out in the history of Greenland expeditions, and his story turns out as significant for self-identification in *S.O.S. Eisberg* and *S.O.S. Iceberg* alike, albeit for different reasons. In 1906, the "meteorologist and physicist" Alfred Wegener accompanied the Danmark Expedition funded by the Danish government, which successfully mapped the last stretch of the hitherto unknown coast of Greenland. Deeply interested in the vast ice field covering the center of the island, he returned to Greenland in 1929 with the German Expedition that examined the weather conditions above the ice field. Even though his expedition was funded by the Weimar Republic government, the results were published years later under the Nazi regime, and turned out to be relevant for the Nazi's aerial warfare over Europe. Knowing the weather conditions above Greenland enabled scientists to predict weather conditions over Northwestern Europe successfully, since the former affects the latter (Mirsky 235-261).

Wegener did not live to witness the importance of his scientific work. He died in 1930 while attempting to uphold his scientific research station 'Eismitte' at the center of the ice field. Wegener had stationed two researchers at Eismitte: Johannes Georgi and Ernst Sorge, the latter of whom later accompanied the *S.O.S. Eisberg* film crew. He knew that Georgi and Sorge would not have enough provisions for the winter, so he set out at the end of summer 1930 to stock up

their reserves. With him was Fritz Loewe, another scientist who later returned to Greenland with the film team, and the Inuit Rasmus Willemsen. After dropping off their goods, Wegener and Willemsen attempted to return to their main camp at the West coast because the provisions they brought were only sufficient for three people. However, in the spring of 1931, the Eismitte team found out that Wegener and Willemsen never reached the coast, and had not been missed by anyone since no one had expected them. Eventually, Wegener was found buried under the snow on the trail and wrapped in his blankets and coats, the location marked with one of his skis. Presumably he died from exhaustion. Willemsen buried him and tried carrying Wegener's diaries back to the main camp by himself - however, the Inuit remained lost, presumably having perished after falling into one of the treacherous ice crevasses on the way (262).

Both *S.O.S. Iceberg* and *S.O.S. Eisberg* base parts of their plot on this tragic story, probably because Wegener's death and Willemsen's disappearance were fresh in the public's memory. Moreover, taking the Wegener expedition as a topic enabled both the German producers and the American ones to take a stance toward Arctic science and human tragedy alike. The different emphases each plot lays on either one indicates the degree to which the Arctic symbolizes either a place to be explored and understood, or a place that uncovers humans' deepest fears and confronts them with those fears. While *S.O.S. Iceberg* mainly considers the frontier experience of handling and surviving an unknown frontier-like territory, *S.O.S. Eisberg* focuses more on the thrills of conquering fears and emerging as a hero with an iron will.

This iron will did not make its debut in *S.O.S. Eisberg* - it had been a main aspect of the German Bergfilm genre that director Arnold Fanck had founded and popularized in the years between the two world wars, 1919-1932. Kracauer theorizes that the Bergfilm genre had its origin in the uncertainties German society faced during the Weimar Republic. Economic

struggles based on reparations to be paid by Germany after World War I and the general public sense that their country's punishment and blame for World War I was unfair led to political upheaval and made way for right-wing and left-wing extremists (Sturm "Kampf um die Republik"). Particularly, the German middle class striving for moderation felt a "political homelessness," which made them susceptible to believing in promises of a better future and to enjoying escapist themes in films (Sturm "Zwischen Festigung und Gefährdung"). Kracauer detects two strands of themes in popular cinema that became widespread during the Weimar Republic: the plight of the ordinary man under the reign of tyranny and the recourse to deeper instincts and passions (Kracauer 107). To Kracauer, the Bergfilm genre represents "an attempt to cope with the existing plight," by leading the audience focus away from everyday suffering to "lofty heights" that would provide a view from above (110/111). The genre originated in a cult-like trend among German university youth that had begun several years before World War I: the students would climb mountains on the weekend, taking pride in their ascent and looking down on the "valley pigs" (111). Mountain peaks were associated with purity, while the valley represented the naive and meaningless ways of life the others pursued. This general idea remained an attractive topic in film during the Weimar Republic and was perpetuated in Fanck's Bergfilm genre.

Ascending the mountains, more specifically the peaks of the Alps, required of the protagonists of the mountain films an iron will to search for physical and emotional thrills - Kracauer observes that most of Fanck's mountain films revolve around dangerous climbs that originated in "inflated sentiments" (111). The mountains thus lead the protagonists and the film audience away from everyday problems to more basic passions and the challenges of wild natural settings - human reason was subordinated to the laws of nature. Eric Rentschler describes

the “cultish credo” of those who believed in the mountains’ soul-cleansing effects as “one of anti-rationalism, a belief in the laws of a mighty and inscrutable nature, a disdain for the statutes of civilization and the denizens of the city” (139). He agrees with Kracauer that “read symptomatically, the mountain film represents a desire to take flight of the troubled streets of modernity, from anomie and inflation, to escape into a pristine world of snow covered peaks and overpowering elements” (139). In the Bergfilm’s visual elements, Rentschler detects traces of the heritage of “German Romantic landscape paintings” (141). These paintings of the turn of the eighteenth to nineteenth century were part of a period that celebrated nature as awe-inspiring, capable of actively triggering spiritual experiences in those who were standing face to face with it. Fanck used his camera to introduce his audience to a type of Romantic landscape that most of them had not experienced themselves, and thus “[restored] pre-modern wonder and enchantment” (147). He built a bridge between Germany’s past of Romantic ideas about nature and the future of real-life documentary footage by forging a connection between sentimental plots and modern cinematic technology, which made his films accessible for the majority of the population (160).

However, Rentschler agrees with Kracauer that the genre foreshadows “Nazi irrationalism” through advertising “a spirit of surrender” (160). Kracauer perceives “immaturity [in the] mountain enthusiasm” of the Bergfilm, since the protagonists often take on senseless battles against nature and against their own rationality (112). Their ideal male heroes often show extreme loyalty towards their friends and exhibit a readiness to die for them that Roman Giesen reads as symptomatic of Nazi ideology. This extreme and senseless loyalty exemplifies Susan Sontag’s famous observation that “fascist art glorifies surrender [to a glorified leader]; it exalts mindlessness; it glamorizes death” (qt. in Körber 157). However, not only do protagonists follow

their leaders blindly, but they also fight natural threats in “risky, irrational, and even implausible” ways (Körber 157). While the mountain is a peaceful, passive object at first, it turns into the protagonists’ enemy in extreme weather conditions, and becomes an unpredictable agent that decides over life and death (Giesen 23). However, the battle with this agent, according to Lill-Ann Körber, is an artificial one, designed to portray a kind of physical strength that was lauded in the Nazi era as well (157). During the production of *S.O.S. Eisberg*, the protagonists acted out a plot full of risky stunts that mystified the Inuit tribe who was familiar with the local environment; this plot therefore celebrates the same kind of artificial struggle based on exaggerated emotions and the wish to prove the physical strength and youthfulness that were important in the Bergfilm genre and in Nazi ideology as well (Zimmer 419).

Ultimately, *S.O.S. Eisberg* merges sentimental aspects of the historic Wegener expedition with the main features of the Bergfilm to create a feature film that is heavily loaded with emotions. The Wegener expedition carried national importance due to the significance of its scientific findings for Western European airspace and air warfare during World War II. Wegener’s scientific work, unknown to him, brought Arctic Greenland closer to Germany through its predictive qualities concerning the German national weather. His tragic death for the sake of his scientific project and his team may stand as an example for the kind of self-sacrifice that was valued in the years leading up to the era of National Socialism. Moreover, his self-sacrifice resembles the fictitious deaths of the Bergfilm heroes, who are depicted as fighting an irrational battle against nature and against their own reason, often paying the ultimate sacrifice of their lives. *S.O.S. Eisberg*, as a Bergfilm taken out of its regular Alpine setting and relocated to the Arctic, depicts the Arctic as a force that triggers the kind of leadership and heroism that was

valued by the German public at the time and thus foreshadows the subconscious German anticipation of another war to come.

5. The Films

The presentation of “a new star” - no less is promised to the audience in the opening credits of *S.O.S. Iceberg*. However, what might have been expected to be a hitherto unknown actor or actress turns out to be “Nature” (capitalized). Natural elements as constituents of a film were nothing novel, but documentary footage of Arctic nature assumed a crucial position in *S.O.S. Iceberg* and *S.O.S. Eisberg* alike, and had never before been used to such an extent. When comparing both versions of the film, it is evident that the German version makes far more extensive use of documentary scenes, even though only the American version announces the birth of its new star. Both *S.O.S. Iceberg* and *S.O.S. Eisberg* intertwine documentary footage with a plot that portrays the connection between humans and their natural surroundings, but in the German film, documentary outweighs the plot by far, leaving the audience searching for coherence at times. The same footage is used in divergent ways, and functions as a backdrop for plotlines that reveal quite different views of the bond between the white man and Arctic nature.

Consisting mainly of iceberg footage, the opening scene of *S.O.S. Eisberg* actually gives greater validation to the heralding of nature as a star than the opening of *S.O.S. Iceberg*. Here, nature is introduced as an active agent, while it is still a rather passive, merely spoken of, entity in the opening of *S.O.S. Iceberg*. Through this significant difference, the distinct connections of the white man to his Arctic surroundings and his perception of nature already become evident in the first few minutes of both film versions. Hence, the opening scenes provide an efficient introduction to how the American and the German connection to the Arctic differ from each other in these films.

In the opening scene of *S.O.S. Eisberg*, the audience learns that Dr. Lorenz (Gustav Diessl), presumably an Arctic explorer, is stuck at Karajak Glacier waiting for spring to find a

way out of his predicament. Dr. Lorenz is only introduced in fragments: the audience sees his hand writing in his diary, the written words produced by this hand, and his shadow projected onto the icy wall of the cave in which he has found refuge. His face remains hidden from the camera. It is an enigmatic introduction of a single character who will initiate the story. The audience does not yet know how and why Dr. Lorenz reached the glacier but enters the story at one of its most dramatic points. The castaway is surrounded by vast masses of ice, which are shown in impressive ground and aerial footage. When he expresses hopes that spring and the break-up of the ice might enable him to escape, and he even rejoices “Liberation! Liberation!” in his diary, his kayak is buried and swept away by falling ice. On the one hand, the ice thus acts like an agent that traps Lorenz, spoiling his attempts to flee. On the other hand, the Arctic is also portrayed as providing the means for life - sequences of healthy-looking polar bears and seals interrupt the threatening footage of falling chunks of ice. Therefore, the white man is set in contrast to other living beings in the Arctic - while he suffers from the cold, and laments the lack of food and the lack of social ties in his diary entries, other living beings thrive in the cold surroundings. Dr. Lorenz functions as a symbolic figure who could be replaced by any other white man or woman; since the audience does not know who exactly he is, and only meets him through visual and written fragments, he could be anybody. The only known fact is that he bears an academic title, which hints at his supposed deeper knowledge of a specific topic, and leads the audience to assume that he might be a scientific researcher. His title, however, does not aid him in escaping his predicament; whereas other living beings around him can move about freely, he is stuck in his current position. He functions as a passive sufferer, whereas Nature acts as the active, ever-changing, and threatening agent. The relatively long opening scene sets the tone for the remainder of the movie: An educated white man cannot navigate freely his surroundings

which threaten his mobility as well as his physical and his mental health - he requires help from the outside in order to overcome the challenges set by the Arctic. The challenges hereby stand in the foreground, since the nature footage outweighs the sequences that advance the plot, and the audience is left to speculate about the course of events that is to follow.

The American *S.O.S. Iceberg*, in contrast, begins with a scene that takes place at the “International Society for Arctic Research,” whose name plate is the first image the film audience sees. Two older gentlemen dressed in evening suits slowly stroll through a great hall that bears commemorative painted portraits of past Arctic explorers on the walls. They mention their names, some of which would have likely been known by American audiences from their presence in American newspapers and in the collective popular knowledge: the Australian Sir George Hubert Wilkins, the American Robert Peary, the American Richard Byrd, the Danish Knud Rasmussen, and the German Alfred Wegener. The two gentlemen also express their wish to journey to the Arctic again and their realization that Arctic exploration should be left to the youth. Wegener, whom they praise for his outstanding bravery, shall be followed by Dr. Lawrence (Rod La Roque), who appears to be preparing a new expedition to the Arctic. The two men express the hope that Lawrence will redeem Wegener’s death. Here, Nature as the star only appears passively: the foreground of the plot is made up of humans of a higher societal class, who have formed an official international coalition to research the Arctic. Nature is their object, but it has not yet been made visible. Its most important feature at this point appears to be its mysterious qualities, which can be studied by human beings, who will earn renown and a place in the collective memory of their people by doing so. The scene lasts about a minute, and has the audience expect a much quicker pace of the story’s events than the German counterpart, whose opening scene is over six minutes long. As in *S.O.S. Eisberg*, the audience does not yet know

what to expect from the protagonist Dr. Lawrence, but they do know that he will join the ranks of other famous Arctic explorers, since his portrait is already in place. Arctic exploration thus already assumes a central position in the plot, and the audience is prepared for it through the beginning of a coherent story.

Undoubtedly, the relationship of white humans to the Arctic was to be the central topic of the films; the number of documentary scenes focusing on the vast masses of ice with which the expedition members struggle, indicate the producers' fascination with the land and the way white people navigate it. However, the films also provide insightful views of how white humans supposedly interact with each other in Arctic environments. Moreover, assumptions are made about how these people would interact with the human and non-human inhabitants of a land with which they are unfamiliar, and how they would position themselves within their natural surroundings. Interestingly, each version of the film lets the audience draw different conclusions about these relationships. Even though Germany and the United States could both look back on their own history of Arctic exploration and remain both fascinated with and wary of this icy region, the producers of each version laid emphasis on different parts of the white human - Arctic relationship. The different foci reveal an American fascination with celebrating collective endeavors at a frontier versus a German inclination to use film to laud individual heroic adventure. In *S.O.S. Iceberg*, the Arctic functions as a historical backdrop for a plot that tells a tale of frontier navigation through teamwork and loyalty towards each member. In *S.O.S. Eisberg*, it provides scenery exciting enough to take the mountain film onto a new level of adventure and physical challenge, and to perpetuate the tale of the lone hero facing life-threatening natural surroundings. While the American *S.O.S. Iceberg* stands in the tradition of frontier and exploration tales, the German *S.O.S. Eisberg* points ahead towards the closing of the

Weimar Republic and the beginning of an age of leadership cult. In both cases, the Arctic region and its indigenous inhabitants are appropriated to underline certain characteristics of the white travellers and to advance a Western plot. In the extremity of its living conditions, the Arctic forces each character to respond with bravery, be it as a team or as an individual.

5.1 Ties to the Land

Being thrown right into the center of the Arctic and entering the plot at one of its most dramatic points, the audience is confronted with Arctic perils from the beginning of *S.O.S. Eisberg*. However, the audience does not know yet how the protagonist got to his trapped location, and, most importantly, why. The following scene provides clarification: an expedition team, consisting of the leader Dr. Johannes Krafft, as well as Fritz Kuemmel, John Dragan, and Dr. Jan Matushek, is questioned by a board of investigators as to whether they assumed that one of their members, Dr. Lorenz, was dead when they left the Arctic a year before. They are shocked to learn that a broken ski was found on which Dr. Lorenz had scribbled a note, and that he was still alive at the time of their departure. Dr. Lorenz had left the team to venture north to Karajak glacier by himself, disobeying the leader's orders. Krafft consults with Dr. Lorenz's wife Hella, who suggests that finding Dr. Lorenz's diaries might clarify his motivations for leaving the team and/or his personal scientific findings.

The team thus returns to Greenland and finds Lorenz's diaries, which indicate that he is still alive and has attempted crossing the sea of broken ice of the spring-time fjord to seek help in a Native village. The team follows him and finds him, starving and exhausted, in a cave on an iceberg. The current of the ocean pulls the group out into the ocean, away from the mainland, and keeps them from reaching the village. Meanwhile, the German government seeks the help of international radio towers to locate the missing expedition crew. Finally, a young German boy

picks up the expedition's S.O.S. signal and the world knows that the group is stranded on an iceberg. Hella, who has previously been seen taking flying lessons, hears the message on the radio and travels to Greenland, looking for the expedition members from her airplane.

Meanwhile, the team experiences discord and hunger, and Krafft secretly leaves, attempting to swim to shore. Hella spots the remaining group and lands her airplane, but she crashes into the iceberg and destroys her aircraft. She joins the team on the iceberg, and another pilot attempts the rescue mission. While Krafft struggles with swimming in the icy water, that pilot crashes as well, and drowns in the fjord. The tense atmosphere among the group members escalates because Dr. Matushek falls prey to a polar bear he attempts to kill for food; Kuemmel drowns in the icy water after Dragan, who has gone mad, pushes him off the iceberg; Dragan himself falls into the fjord when the iceberg begins turning. Hella and Dr. Lorenz, the only ones left, are found by star pilot Ernst Udet, who flies on to rescue Krafft and to drop him off at the Native village, where Krafft summons the villagers' help. They take their kayaks to the iceberg and rescue Dr. Lorenz and Hella, who are eventually seen departing from Greenland on a ship, together with Dr. Krafft.

The story bears little traces of what the public would have known about Arctic expeditions through diaries and written accounts published by Arctic explorers. It appears incoherent at times, featuring scenes that do not transition smoothly, and actions too naive to be realistic for Arctic scientists. When Udet arrives at the iceberg, he is seen sitting on the water in his airplane smoking a cigarette, but in the following scene, he is still in the air flying. Dr. Matushek tries to kill a hungry polar bear with a spear, when he could hunt for seals that come to the shore, as seen in the opening scene, which seems an odd choice for someone who is supposed to be an experienced Arctic traveler. Even though Alfred Wegener's expedition of 1930 only

happened two years prior to the film shooting and presumably was still a fresh memory in the German collective mind, and even though Dr. Löwe and Dr. Sorge, who accompanied the film team, had been members of the Wegener expedition, Wegener is not mentioned in the film at all (Salewski). The only snippet that may have reminded contemporary audiences of Wegener is the map that Krafft points at when in front of the board of examiners to show the route that the expedition had taken and that is the exact route on which Wegener perished when returning from Eismitte (Salewski). It remains unclear throughout the movie, what kind of research the initial expedition was conducting, and why Lorenz left the group to travel to Karajak Glacier. The Arctic instead is a fairly accessible place to which the team returns from one scene to the next. The group has only one dog and carries little equipment; how they reached the stone hut that they find Lorenz' diaries in remains unclear. During Udet's flight lesson for Hella, he mentions that she flies well enough that "she can come with us to Greenland next time." Taking trips to Greenland thus seems to be a regular habit of Udet's, since there will most definitely be a "next time." The flight scenes that take place in Greenland, especially Hella's and Udet's search flights, are full of stunts and risky maneuvers that last for several minutes. Safe landings seem less achievable than loops and sharp turns, since both Hella and the pilot who follows her, another one of Udet's students, crash their airplanes into icebergs and even merely into the water, both for reasons unknown. The Arctic air space is more an aviation playground than a space of scientific endeavours that, if gone wrong, demands cautious rescue missions. As a whole, the rescue attempts show disorganization, since nothing more is ever seen than a single, not-too-professional pilot searching from their airplane. A newspaper announcement that is briefly shown even speaks of a fourth pilot who attempts to find the lost group with his regular airplane after Hella has failed.

However, the same announcement also informs the audience that “the Danish government recalls its ships.” Apparently, Denmark has joined Germany in sending search parties, but those parties never appear on screen. International collaboration assumes a backseat behind the rescue missions by lone heroes that stand in the foreground of the film. Thus, the Arctic functions as a space that is more threatening than the Alps, which hosted the previous Mountain Films; nevertheless, the Arctic resembles the Alpine regions known to Germans, since it is presented as an area that is sufficiently familiar to the travellers to experiment with their own physical stamina. In *S.O.S. Eisberg*, the Arctic is disconnected from its historical meaning for any nation, and portrayed as a fairly accessible, yet exciting and available space to prove one’s capabilities.

The Arctic is both threatening and abundant; icebergs turn unforeseeably, yet the icy water provides the group with fish that Kuemmel catches effortlessly with a simple rod and string. The group’s surroundings thus alternate between displaying the concepts of ‘Arctic fury’ and that of ‘the friendly Arctic,’ which were competing ideas of the Arctic that surfaced in entertainment and educational media in the 20th century: in 1949, the film *Arctic Fury* directed by Norman Dawn was released, which was preceded by the 1922 book *The Friendly Arctic; The Story of Five Years in Polar Regions* by the ethnologist Vilhjalmur Stefansson. Both concepts convey the impression that the Arctic serves as an active agent that can provide and take life; whereas humans, like the ones in *S.O.S. Eisberg*, are the passive counterparts that are only saved through endurance and bravery. Dr. Lorenz illustrates this potential when he calls Karajak Fjord “a monster of a fjord” and thus attributes to the region characteristics of a living being.

These ideas mirror the ideas of the Romantic period in Europe during the nineteenth century, in which nature serves as an active agent that inspires humans and creates a deeper

spirituality and strength in them. Natural surroundings provide sublime experiences that create both awe and terror, which take those that experience them to their sentimental roots. Edmund Burke's keystone definition of the sublime in *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful* points out several principles that instill emotion and passion in human beings and make a deeper impression on them (Burke). Interestingly, both the extremely negative and scary impressions and their positive counterparts are roots of sublime experiences. On the one hand, Burke cites privation, darkness, and solitude as creating a sublime experience, on the other hand, he also mentions magnificence, joy, and light as having the same effect (54, 68, 125, 140, 144). The Arctic provides both kinds of experience, the extremely dangerous and fierce ones that instill terror, and the extremely magnificent ones that inspire awe. Humans entering Arctic premises for the first time find themselves caught in an extremely dangerous, sometimes deadly environment, but their sublime experience of it might encourage them to penetrate deeper into the "barren wasteland" (*S.O.S. Iceberg*). One might assume that a mixture of curiosity and attempting to prolong his sublime experience led Dr. Lorenz to leave the team and venture north by himself. The film certainly includes scenes in which the majestic grandeur of the icebergs around the team fills both the characters and the audience with awe; when Hella stands on top of the iceberg on which they are trapped and looks out for the Inuit who come to their rescue, she seems not filled with fear or suffering from starvation; instead, her body posture reflects the self-confident victory pose after a successful ascent that is seen in Caspar David Friedrich's "Wanderer Über dem Nebelmeer" (see Figure 1) - she is filmed from behind, overlooking the sea of ice and with a walking stick in hand (see Figure 2). Friedrich's painting represents one of the best-known artistic works of the German Romantic period, and the resemblance between the two scenes is striking and seems intended.

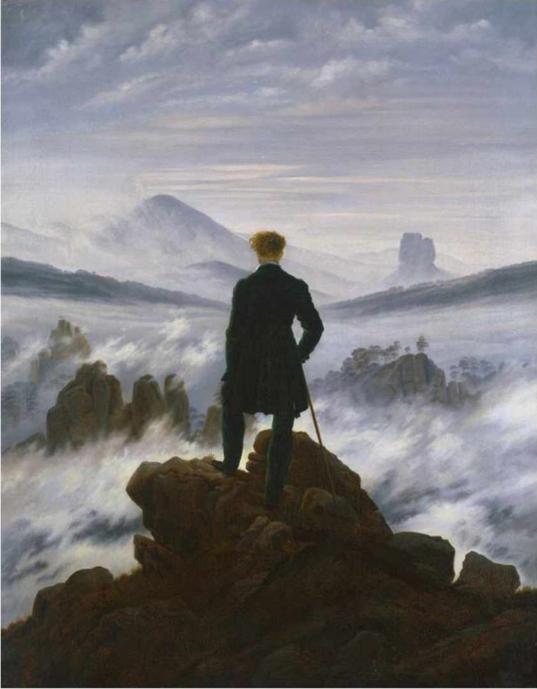


Fig. 1: Friedrich, Caspar David, “Wanderer über dem Nebelmeer,” 1817. Hamburger Kunsthalle, Web, Accessed 25 March 2018.



Fig. 2: Screenshot of Hella awaiting her rescue, taken from: *S.O.S. Eisberg*, Directed by Arnold Fanck, Deutsche Universal, 1933.

Thus, even though the plot of *S.O.S. Eisberg* is not built on the historical background of Arctic exploration, it plays with ideas prevalent during the Romantic era of the nineteenth century and shaped German culture during the time that Arctic exploration first became popular. It reflects ideas and ideals about the Arctic inspired by the Romantic juxtaposition of awe and terror, and thus bears implicit features that speak to German culture despite being ahistorical.

The American *S.O.S. Iceberg*, in contrast, honors American traditions, and the plot resembles real Arctic exploration to a much greater extent. The film begins with a written note by Universal president Carl Laemmle, who thanks the film team for their work: “To the

courageous leaders who guided the expedition past mountainous glaciers where the slightest mis-step meant instant death, I give my admiring appreciation... And to the artists who bravely faced incomparable hardships in the Polar outposts of the world, I extend profound admiration... Sincerely, Carl Laemmle.” Similar to the sponsors of real Arctic expeditions, Laemmle functioned as the sponsor of a daring trip to Greenland, which, as Fanck’s and Riefenstahl’s memoirs hint, was at times a risky undertaking. He hails the film team’s efforts with language that bears traces of the American frontier myth - the “Polar outpost of the world” is just far enough away from the rest of the United States to be ‘out of this world’ and thus new territory that is to be explored. Similar to the sponsors of Arctic expeditions, Laemmle takes credit for his sponsoring role in bringing back not specimens or updated maps, but visual impressions of a region few Americans are likely ever to see themselves. His introduction creates a new level of importance for American culture and its frontier that is missing in the German counterpart.

S.O.S. Iceberg continues to be built on an appreciation of historical facts - following the scene at the ‘International Society for Arctic Research,’ the expedition team led by Dr. Lawrence is introduced during a banquet scene that could have happened in real life, since Arctic expeditions were official and formal undertakings deeply rooted in cultural and scientific institutions. Dr. Lawrence, the praised leader of the expedition, claims they “are setting forth in an effort to carry on [Wegener’s] great work” and turn “his theories of the inland ice” “into [scientific] facts.” As his team members, he introduces Dr. Brand (Sepp Rist, who plays Dr. Krafft, the expedition leader, in the German version), Fritz Kuemmel, and Dr. Matushek, who are scientists and experts of Arctic travelling, as well as John Dragan, who has financed the expedition and decided to join the team “as one of [them], with the courage of a true adventurer,” despite his lack of experience with Arctic travelling. It is thus clear from the beginning that

Dragan is an amateur, and his own remark that “snow is snow, whether it be in Switzerland, or on the Rink Glacier” triggers suspicious looks from the other team members and foreshadows the difficulties they will have to face as a group. Instead of embarking on a hasty rescue mission that seems unorganized, the expedition members of *S.O.S. Iceberg* journey to Greenland on a sailing ship, and begin their land travel with dog sleds that carry supplies and scientific equipment. They set up camp and discuss whether they should continue to the glacier despite unfavorable weather conditions. Sensing that his team is unwilling to press on, Lawrence departs to the glacier while everyone else is asleep.

After some time has passed, a local Native brings one of Lawrence’s skis to the camp. Even though Dragan assumes Lawrence is dead and suggests turning back, the team decides to follow Lawrence and try to find him. During their journey to the open water, most of their equipment and the dog team fall into a crevasse, but the team continues until they reach the shore and spot Wegener’s stone hut in which Lawrence has left a note, informing them he has found “invaluable Wegener data” and will cross the fjord to reach an “eskimo village” on the other side (*S.O.S. Iceberg*). The team follows him, but they eventually get stuck on an iceberg that drifts into the open sea. The only dog that survives the dog teams’ fall has to be protected from a hungry polar bear, which is worth the effort since he is the one finds Lawrence in an icy cave on the iceberg. Together, they finish the remaining food supplies and send out S.O.S. signals, which are finally received by Ellen Lawrence and Ernst Udet. While Ellen is on her way to the “Greenland air base,” Dragan’s hunger leads him to attempt killing the dog. Kuemmel protects the dog, but pays for it with his own life when Dragan pushes him into the icy water. Brand refrains from retaliation when he realizes that Dragan has gone mad. Ellen finds and joins the team but crashes her airplane during the landing. Brand leaves the others when they are sleeping

to attempt swimming to the shore. Udet sets out to find Ellen and the expedition members, while Brand struggles in the icy water. Eventually, Udet finds Brand and takes him to the village to seek help. Meanwhile, Dr. Matushek attempts killing a polar bear, but a second bear kills him while Ellen and Dragan look on. Dragan commits suicide in the icy water. Ellen and Lawrence fall into the water as well, when the iceberg begins to turn and crumble, but the kayak fleet from the village has arrived and they are taken to safety, where they board a sailing ship.

The expedition members in *S.O.S. Iceberg* face the same challenge as the team in *S.O.S. Eisberg* insofar as they are also stuck on a drifting iceberg. However, they traverse the land with more skill and preparation than the rescue mission members in *S.O.S. Eisberg* do. They appear to have a more technical and scientific relationship to the land, since the instruments they carry are visible in various scenes of the film, and the instruments' safety is stressed throughout the film. Even though their mission turns into an effort to rescue their leader, their means of travelling make the plot seem realistic and oriented towards what a real-life Arctic expedition would have looked like. They ski across the ice and let a dog team pull their heavy equipment, which are aspects of Arctic travelling completely omitted in the German version.

Even though the Arctic is still threatening, it is not overwhelmingly so from the beginning, as it is in *S.O.S. Eisberg*. When the team reaches the open water and realizes that they will have to venture out onto the floating pieces of ice, the turning point has been reached in which the ice turns into a realistic threat. The film's most impressive scene of the ice, the calving of a large iceberg, illustrates at this point the danger faced by the team. While the same film footage is placed at the very beginning of *S.O.S. Eisberg*, which leaves little room to build up tension, it is here placed in a position in which the audience has the choice: Either they feel with Dragan, who shies back from the dangerous noise and fears his impending death, or they persist

in their determination that loyalty beats their fear of death, and side with Kuemmel, Matushek and Brand. Apart from the visual experience, the audience is, moreover, informed about the real danger of the calving, since Matushek explains: “When Lawrence stepped on the ice, each step was loaded with dynamite. Those bergs roll over and drown a man in ice water. They can crack wide open and [enclose] him in tons of ice” (*S.O.S. Iceberg*). Matushek here proves his and the team’s knowledge and previous experience, which stand in contrast to Dragan’s assumption that “snow is snow” (*S.O.S. Iceberg*). This assumption is repeated a couple of times throughout the film, when the team wants to stress that the Arctic disproves Dragan’s initial idea; the first time occurs when the dog team perishes in an icy crevasse, and the second time it is repeated during the stressful traverse from ice piece to ice piece. “Snow is snow” turns into an expression that not only mocks the inexperienced Dragan, but also anyone else who assumes that traveling in the Arctic resembles traveling in familiar areas and conditions. The Arctic is new and dangerous territory that has to be encountered with caution.

Even though *S.O.S. Iceberg* bears traces of the Romantic idealization of nature through visual awe-inspiring impressions, Arctic nature does not provide the team with food as it does in *S.O.S. Eisberg*. While Kuemmel has an intuitive knack for subsistence fishing in *S.O.S. Eisberg*, he fails to catch enough to provide for the team in the American film. On the contrary, the team appears to have accepted from the beginning that they will have to rely on their own supplies. When the last can of food is opened and shared among the team members, it is a harrowing moment of impending starvation. Until the end, Arctic nature stays an environment of actual, realistic threats. In *S.O.S. Iceberg*, the iceberg turns when Ellen and Lawrence are still on top, while, in *S.O.S. Eisberg*, the surviving team members watch it turn on their way home, from the safety of the ship.

When they have reached the iceberg on which they know they will be stuck, Matushek proclaims that “this is the end of the trail” (*S.O.S. Iceberg*). This expression evokes frontier imagery and thus perpetuates the traditions of writing about Arctic exploration. When the frontier of the American mainland closed, the American people turned towards the Arctic to seek, in the words of Frederick Jackson Turner, “new ways of challenging its people so as to avoid the slow decay that seemed to be overtaking Europe” (Robinson 123). The only challenge that seemed appropriate was the physical challenges presented by ‘breaking trail’ in new territories. Thus, when the expedition team faces the ‘end of the trail,’ this is a moment devastating for the mission of the expedition, and, on a larger scale, for the American mission of moving forward.

The Arctic environment enables the American expedition team to perpetuate the saga of the last frontier - they encounter their natural environment with skill and preparation in order to obtain scientific, culturally meaningful, information about life. However, the Arctic remains a territory that appears to threaten with extremes for which no white human can be prepared - overcoming the unforeseen obstacles is portrayed as a truly American achievement that stands in the tradition of historical Arctic exploration.

5.2 The Relationships Between the Protagonists

Extreme conditions often take human relationships to the extreme - the physical and mental strains humans have to face affect their ability to communicate and collaborate with one another, sometimes in positive ways, and sometimes in negative ways. *S.O.S. Eisberg* and *S.O.S. Iceberg* convey different approaches to facing the extreme. While *S.O.S. Eisberg* features a lone hero who recklessly leads the team into and out of its predicament, *S.O.S. Iceberg* emphasizes collaboration and community spirit. One major difference between the plots is that Dr. Lorenz in

S.O.S. Eisberg is merely a member of an expedition and is punished with a near-death experience for disobeying the team leader and leaving on his own, while Dr. Lawrence is the team leader in *S.O.S. Iceberg* and entitled to making the decision to leave on his own. The different positions the character of Dr. Lorenz/Lawrence assumes establish the foundation for a plot focused on different values: while strong leadership and the restoration of hierarchies are emphasized in the German version, team loyalty is underlined in the American version.

Dr. Krafft, whose name is an adaptation of the German noun ‘Kraft’, meaning strength or power, states in front of the board of investigation that he is “responsible for everything that happened back then.” He is prepared to take responsibility for his decision to end the team’s search for Lorenz and to head home, but when he hears that Lorenz was still alive at that point, he reacts with anger towards him and tries to find an answer as to why Lorenz went to Karajak Glacier from his wife Hella. First and foremost, he pities himself: “I had to pay for it with my reputation as a partner.” It remains unclear whether Hella’s suggestion “if one could find his diaries...” inspires Krafft to return to Greenland because the diaries would provide a hint as to Lorenz’s motivation to go to Karajak, or because they might save his own reputation as a leader. In any case, it appears to be that finding Lorenz’s diaries takes priority over finding his body. Plus, since the audience already knows through Hella that “Karajak had always been his dream and his ultimate ambition,” it seems obvious that little more needs to be known about Lorenz’s motivation, and Krafft attempts to save his own reputation indeed.

While Krafft stands in the spotlight from the beginning, the other expedition members are never introduced in great detail. They fulfill functions rather than contributing multi-faceted personae to the cast. Dragan is the fearful, inexperienced expedition rookie, Matushek the scientist, and Kuemmel the humorous outdoorsman, and all of them follow Krafft’s decisions,

sometimes against their own better judgment. Krafft leads the team out onto the open water, even though he and Matushek know that the decision will be fatal; Krafft is convinced that they “have no other choice” but to follow Lorenz into death in order to restore his own reputation. Neither Dragan nor Kuemmel are aware of the danger of drifting out into the open sea. While Dragan experiences difficulties in accepting Krafft’s decisions, Kuemmel copes with his fears through positivity, jokes, and work: he mockingly calls the expedition a circus party when it becomes clear to him that they are stranded, and he reminds Dragan that “work makes life sweet. We have to do something or else we will all go crazy.” Interestingly, Dragan has been portrayed as exceedingly lazy and indeed goes crazy eventually.

Even though he just stood next to the Matushek in the previous scene, Krafft is the one who fends off the polar bear by himself when he attacks. He is also the one who traverses the ice first, the other team members connected to him through a rope. However, his tough attitude is at its peak when his fight to survive his swim to the Inuit village in the icy water is directly juxtaposed with the crashing unnamed pilot’s fight to survive in the same water. The scenes switch back and forth between Krafft’s struggles to swim and to pull himself up on ice floats and the pilot’s struggles to cling to his airplane and stay above water. His is a lost cause, since his airplane will inevitably sink, and he does not attempt to get to the shore. Meanwhile, Krafft perseveres and eventually succeeds in crossing the fjord, with the help of Udet. Krafft is thus portrayed as an infallible, lone hero who is stronger and more enduring than others. The only other character who is portrayed similarly is Udet himself, who, in relaxed body postures, smokes cigarettes whenever he is not in the air, oddly reminding the audience of the smoker of a ‘victory cigar.’ Besides the scenes in which Udet is an active character, he can also be seen in other scenes in which he is unimportant, thus creating the impression that his reputation with the

audience might have been a sales factor for *S.O.S. Eisberg*. However, Krafft is the one who gives all the strength he has to save the team - without his being present and showing leadership, the order falls apart and Dragan, who has gone mad, possibly with Arctic hysteria, as Körber suggests, kills Kuemmel and attempts killing Lorenz and Hella as well (149).

In *S.O.S. Iceberg*, on the contrary, Lawrence as the expedition leader does not “feel like waiting” until winter to continue to the glacier, and his ambition leads him to take off by himself. However, before he does so, he clarifies that he is “not asking anyone to go” (*S.O.S. Iceberg*). Unlike Krafft in *S.O.S. Eisberg*, he does not push his team to risk their lives along with him. His position as leader is also less vital to team survival; when he has left, the other team members take over certain tasks and collaborate to continue their journey. Brand, who has shown leadership aspirations before Lawrence’s departure, unsuccessfully attempts to give orders to the others; when they reach the shore, he tells them to “wait here” while he looks out for Lawrence, but they follow him anyway, and they take turns using Brand’s binoculars. Lawrence as the expedition leader has successfully instilled a sense of community and loyalty in his team that proves important for survival at the icy frontier.

S.O.S. Iceberg lays much greater emphasis on scenes in which the team members work together on pulling the equipment, as well as on the dialogue between them. They share enough professional knowledge to accomplish certain tasks as a team - when Brand sends out the S.O.S. signal, even Dragan as expedition layperson knows what it means. The team shows loyalty not only toward their leader, but also toward each other. When Dragan descends further and further into madness, the others forgive him for his verbal and physical attacks. Lawrence only responds with a weak smile when Dragan yells “Oh, why don’t you die!” When Kuemmel prevents Dragan from stabbing the dog, he only tells him, “no, Dragan,” but initially does not use physical

force on him, until Dragan attempts to kill him. Even when Dragan has succeeded and pushed Kuemmel off the iceberg into his death, Brand recognizes in his eyes that Dragan has gone mad, and consoles him by saying, “Hang on, old man. Hang on.” Nobody retaliates against Dragan for killing Kuemmel, since they realize that he is driven by madness that is out of his control. Even when Dragan attacks Ellen, she assures Lawrence that “everything is all right, darling.” Dragan eventually ends his suffering by committing suicide..

Brand leaves the iceberg to seek help, but his heroism is far less reckless and unrealistic than Krafft’s: instead of the twelve kilometers that Krafft has to swim in *S.O.S. Eisberg*, Brand’s distance from the shore is four miles, roughly six kilometers. Considering the lack of food Brand has experienced hitherto, this distance still seems ridiculously high, yet a little more realistic than the distance in *S.O.S. Eisberg*. The scenes depicting Brand’s struggle with the icy water are much shorter than in the German version, thus emphasizing his heroism to a much lesser extent, and lessening the extremity of a self-inflicted battle with nature.

Interestingly, Dragan is portrayed as a foreigner in *S.O.S. Eisberg*, which is frequently shown through grammatical errors in his speech and a heavy accent. He is thus not only ostracized as an insane murderer, but he also differs from the other team members through his language. However, not enough is known about him to be certain of where he is from and who he is. His is a vague character who nevertheless is portrayed as perpetrator of attacks. His laziness and his accent separate Dragan from a group that praises work and speaks accent-free German - whether Dragan cannot survive the battle with the Arctic environment because of his otherness remains unclear. Yet his otherness is oddly reminiscent of the difference made between Germans and Jewish people in the German Alpine clubs that inspired the Bergfilm genre. In *S.O.S. Iceberg*, Dragan differs from the others only through his wealth and his inexperience,

which are both clear to the audience from the moment he is introduced. Scientific knowledge and proficiency in navigating the frontier land are key to survival in *S.O.S. Iceberg* - since Dragan lacks both, he falls prey to the harshness of the land.

Human relationships and leadership play a significant role in both films, since they are the key to navigating unfamiliar land successfully. While the German film lays emphasis on strong leadership, the American version hails teamwork and forgiveness. The rugged individualism that the classic frontier hero of the Western genre displays is present in Lawrence's leadership in *S.O.S. Iceberg*; however, it is not key to survival. Only collaboration works for solving problems and finding a way out of the team's predicament in *S.O.S. Iceberg*. Like a frontier hero, Lawrence has to facilitate a sense of community to ensure the survival of his team. Meanwhile, Krafft as the leader in *S.O.S. Eisberg* who survives an impossible fjord crossing is portrayed as the only force who could possibly have led the surviving team members home. Lives are claimed in both versions because of Arctic madness - however, mercy is an aspect that only appears in the tightly woven friendships of *S.O.S. Iceberg*.

5.3 The Representation of the Marginalized: Indigenous People and Women

Whether or not the expedition members collaborate or depend on the leadership of a single man, both expeditions face certain death until Krafft or Brand, respectively, brave the icy water and seek the help of the Inuit who live on the other side of the fjord. Both expedition teams fulfill their respective missions - they find Wegener's/Lawrence's diaries and retrieve their comrade - but are trapped in the ice, without a means of transportation that would take them to the shore. The fact that the Inuit have kayaks, which enable them to easily cross the icy fjord, represents a stark and almost mocking contrast to the expedition members' helplessness. The

dramatic peaks of Krafft's and Brand's struggles in the water are juxtaposed with a swift ease with which the Natives carry their kayaks to the shore and take off to rescue the couple that is still stranded on the iceberg.

The film productions were praised for their inclusion of the Thule tribe, which was deemed an important breakthrough from an anthropological standpoint (MacKenzie and Stenport 6). Rasmussen, who motivated Universal to include the Thule tribe in the story, gained a reputation as one of the first and most important anthropologists to study the Indigenous tribes of Greenland (Mirsky 242). He gained valuable film experience through the production of *S.O.S. Eisberg/Iceberg* that he was able to use in his own film production of *The Wedding of Palo* in 1934 (MacKenzie and Stenport 7).

However, despite their importance for both plots, neither *S.O.S. Iceberg* nor *S.O.S. Eisberg* gives the Inuit the credit they deserve. The opening credits of both films only list the white cast, but leave out the tribe members who rescue the film couple. Interestingly, the American opening credits even list Nakinak as member of the cast, the only dog that survives the dog team's accident, but not the Thule tribe.

The first time a Native actor is seen on screen in the German film happens nine minutes before the end of *S.O.S. Eisberg*. Before this point, only the village has been mentioned. Instead of the tragic or dramatic theme music that accompanied the film hitherto, the music changes into a new, playful melody, and the movements are fast-forwarded when the Native actors appear on screen. The inhabitants of the village leave their houses and run to the shore, seemingly fascinated by the airplane that circles above them; they look up into the air, their eyes following its movements. Most of them are seen in close-ups that only show their open-mouthed facial expressions. Scenes of the village dogs alternate with these close-ups and the fast-forward

running scenes. The dog scenes mirror the scenes that depict the human inhabitants of the village. The dogs run to the shore as well and are seen looking up to the sky, their eyes following the airplane. Not only do the people's facial expressions create the impression that they are somewhat naive and child-like, but the music, the sped up movements, and the juxtaposition with their dogs also make their reactions almost circus-like.

When the Thule men leave in their kayaks for the iceberg, their paddling is efficient and quick; they are at home in the local waters. Compared with the lack of equipment and expertise that the white expedition members exhibit, the Thule men's proficiency seems extraordinarily impressive. However, when they return with Hella and Lorenz, it is not their actions that stand in the spotlight - instead, someone who has not contributed to the kayak rescue mission receives audience attention: Udet stands in the center of the arrival scene, smoking another cigarette and laughingly gesturing towards the kayak flotilla as if he were its leader. In all probability, he is mocking the sight of Hella being draped across three kayaks and thus transported to the shore. However, he continues laughing when the Natives begin rolling over in the water with their kayaks. This rolling appears to be a sign of joy or celebration of victory, but Udet's open laughter turns it into another circus-like stunt. Immediately after the successful rescue, the expedition survivors leave the Arctic on a sailing ship; no words of thanks or appreciation are exchanged between the white and the Native characters.

S.O.S. Iceberg does not give credit to the Native cast either; however, Native characters appear at two points in the film. The first appearance is made by a Thule traveller who brings Lawrence's broken ski to the remainder of the team. Why he is in the area and what exactly his relationship to the expedition is remains unclear, but the encounter is a friendly one with good intentions. The casual manner in which he approaches the camp and hands over the broken ski,

as well as the shortness of his visit, lets the audience wonder whether visits by white foreigners are supposed to be common for the tribe. The visitor does not seem surprised to find foreigners traversing his land. He converses with Brand, who proves his ability to communicate at least with a few words in the Native tongue. Brand's efforts are repeated during the second appearance of the locals, when he tries to tell them what happened to the team. During this second encounter, the tribe is portrayed in the same way as in the German version - in circus-like, child-like imagery. However, the portrayal omits the peak of ridicule; Udet's laughter combined with kayaks rolling in the water are missing in this version.

Thus, *S.O.S. Iceberg* portrays the local tribe in a slightly more favorable way than *S.O.S. Eisberg* does. Interestingly, although the Natives are also not being offered any form of thanks in this plot, the white travellers at least acknowledge the reality that their presence in the Arctic does not entail any kind of 'discovery.' When Matushek explains the dangers of traversing across calving icebergs to Dragan while they watch an iceberg falling apart, he announces: "You are going to witness something few white men have ever seen - the birth of an iceberg." He thus distinguishes between the novelty of their own presence in Greenland, and the fact that the Indigenous tribes have lived in the area for a long time and are familiar with the natural environment.

During their Arctic expeditions, real-life explorers had to rely on the Indigenous population's knowledge about the land on almost every trip they made. Communication with the Natives was often key to survival at the Arctic frontier - just like the heroes of the American Western, Arctic explorers had to learn from the Natives, but they still denied them a voice and in their expedition writings. *S.O.S. Iceberg* features the kind of frontier heroes able to communicate with the locals and profit from their knowledge. However, none of the locals in either film is

granted a function beyond that of the skilled savior who rescues the team when it has reached a point of utter desperation. Moreover, none of them is introduced in greater depth - their identities are as invisible as they were in Arctic expedition writings.

Women and the Arctic are incompatible in both of the films. Both Hella and Ellen crash their airplanes into the iceberg and fail to rescue the expedition teams. While Ellen in *S.O.S. Iceberg* appears to detect something wrong with the airplane's instruments right before her crash, Hella's crash in *S.O.S. Eisberg* happens surprisingly and despite the praise Udet has for her flying talent during a training session. It is noteworthy that in neither version of the film is the female character reprimanded for ruining the rescue mission. Both teams accept the woman's failure as a matter of fact, and Hella and Ellen are reunited with their respective husbands without further comment. In contrast to Ellen, Hella adds hints of a love triangle to *S.O.S. Eisberg*, since she has a friendly relationship with Krafft as well. Krafft's position as the hero of the *S.O.S. Eisberg* is hereby strengthened - he is not only an idol for the male audience, but he is also presented as a desirable figure for the female audience. The female character's functions in both films are limited to adding romantic aspects and enhancing the success of a male pilot through the failure of a female pilot. Neither version grants emancipation and agency to the female character - science and the Arctic were still male domains in the 1930s.

Both the Thule tribe and the female protagonist function as marginalized characters whose presence in the film heightens the dominance of the white male characters. Collaboration with the Natives is emphasized more in *S.O.S. Iceberg* than in *S.O.S. Eisberg*, mirroring the importance of collaboration with local Native tribes for the Western heroes of the frontier tales. However, the Native cast is omitted from the film credits, and their vital role in saving the white travellers is ignored in the film's closing scenes. Moreover, the Native characters are child-like

and naive, the common tropes employed in the depiction of Native Americans in the Western genre. The ridicule they experience in *S.O.S. Iceberg* is only surpassed by the openly mocking treatment of their role in *S.O.S. Eisberg*. Cultures who differed from the culture of the German film producers clearly already suffered from ostracizing treatment that should only worsen in the years to follow the film's production year.

5.4 Bears and Dogs - The Functions of Wild and Domesticated Animals

Both versions of the film feature encounters and relationships with animals. The teams come upon polar bears, and they each are accompanied by at least one dog, Nakinak. While the dog functions as a friendly member of the expedition, the polar bear turns out to be dangerous to the team. Examining the team's relationships with the wild and the domesticated animal kingdom not only reveals their proficiency regarding Arctic traveling, but also their emotional dependency on an inferior, non-human team member. Moreover, Nakinak's presence not only drives the plot at some points, but it also emphasizes again the differences in leadership that can be found in the films.

In *S.O.S. Eisberg*, Nakinak is the only dog that the team brings along. Since he alone cannot pull all the equipment they have, he does not have a task and merely functions as a friend and companion, which is illogical considering the limited food supplies an Arctic expedition had to reckon with. When he breaks loose as the team crosses the fjord, Krafft returns and rescues him from a small ice floe. Kuemmel is Nakinak's main caretaker and most loyal friend. When Dragan suggests not sharing their limited food supplies with the dog and exclaims in outrage, "You can make five portions out of him," Kuemmel responds, "I'd sooner make ten portions out of you!" This statement highlights not only Kuemmel's loyalty towards the dog, but it also emphasizes that Kuemmel ascribes less importance to Dragan as a team member than to the dog.

Dragan continues to view the dog as a meat supply, and when hunger is at its peak, he attacks Nakinak with a spear. It is Kuemmel again who saves the dog and repels Dragan. His comment, “He is going to be dangerous to us” reveals that he views the dog as one of them - an attack on him might as well be an attack on the human members of the team. Nakinak returns Kuemmel’s loyalty by showing the utmost loyalty towards Krafft. When Krafft leaves to swim across the bay, Nakinak follows him into the water. Since he is unable to pull himself back onto the shore, Nakinak perishes in the fjord. Even he seems to know that Krafft is the main heroic figure of the team and that he is expected to follow him, even if it means his own death. Nakinak’s loyalty and utmost subordination underlines the idea of a strong leader and lone heroic figure that is promoted in *S.O.S. Eisberg*.

The dog’s self-sacrifice stands in contrast to the threat posed by the polar bear. The bear continues to stalk the expedition, and Krafft has to fend him off by throwing ice blocks at him when he attacks. Eventually, attempting to kill a polar bear for food costs Matushek his own life, since the injured bear returns, not only killing Matushek, but also setting in motion a series of events that kills both Kuemmel and Dragan as well. The local fauna is therefore split into the fish prey that the team is able to catch, and the predators that catch them in return. Because humans are superior to predators in the team’s home country, they underestimate the danger predators represent in the Arctic. The laws of domesticated nature do not apply in their new surroundings, so the expedition members are caught by surprise and Matushek pays for the lesson with his life. The Arctic playground that at first enables Krafft to deter a polar bear by throwing ice eventually turns around and puts the inexperienced humans into their place. Fighting the Arctic polar bear is the ultimate subordination of human reason to natural law - Matushek is driven by hunger that

disables his rational fear of such a large predator as the polar bear, who shows his natural superiority within the food chain by claiming Matushek's life.

Nakinak's loss excites no comment. While he is still present, he functions not only as a mute friend who provides warmth and stands as a reminder of home to Kuemmel, but he is also a problem for Dragan, who struggles under the food deprivation and perceives the dog as emergency food supply. Eating their dog teams was a common practice among Arctic explorers who ran out of food, but since the dogs usually had important tasks like pulling sleds with scientific equipment, killing the animals was a last resort. The difference in Kuemmel's and Dragan's attitude toward Nakinak enables the audience to gauge their stamina and qualification to be a member of an expedition. Kuemmel as the nature-loving, positive worker evokes the audience's sympathy and admiration, since he maintains his loyalty towards the dog throughout his suffering. Dragan, on the other hand, the foreign and rather lazy maniac, cannot endure hunger and therefore turns not only into the dog's, but also the entire team's enemy. The presence of Nakinak thus can be viewed as guiding the audience's judgment of human character - and, ultimately, positioning Krafft at the very top of the team's hierarchy.

In *S.O.S. Iceberg*, which lists Nakinak as a member of the cast in the opening credits, the dog is one of the expedition members who survives the ordeal of being stranded. He initially is a part of a dog team that pulls the expedition's equipment, but he is the only one who survives the team's fall into a crevasse. After this accident, he becomes visible as an important, almost human-like character that fulfills emotional and plot-propellent functions. He mourns the death of his dog mates with a howl, just as he eventually mourns Kuemmel's death. Nakinak is also the one who finds Lawrence in his icy cave, and he is the first one to hear the incoming radio response to their S.O.S. message. The expedition team repays his contributions by sharing their

food with Nakinak. In contrast to *S.O.S. Eisberg*, it is not Nakinak who dies for reasons of loyalty, but it is Kuemmel who dies at the hands of Dragan in order to protect Nakinak from Dragan's murderous intent. This sacrifice is remarkable in that it stresses the dog's status as valuable expedition member who it is worth dying for. Moreover, no one retaliates against Dragan for Kuemmel's death. Thus, Kuemmel's sacrifice for the dog does not seem outrageous to the team.

While *S.O.S. Eisberg* sacrifices the dog as a loyal team member, *S.O.S. Iceberg* sacrifices someone else for the dog as a team member. This and the fact that Nakinak survives until the end of *S.O.S. Iceberg* places him at a higher, more valued level than he is at in *S.O.S. Eisberg*. His presence is crucial for the team, since he is the friend and team member who is portrayed as having ultimate worth. In this function, Nakinak might be comparable to the horse that is the frontier hero's most reliable friend in the Western - only alongside the horse can the hero navigate the frontier territories, since it carries him out of dangerous situations and enables him to move fast in a land that poses threats. Nakinak eased traveling for the team at first, but even without that function, the dog remains a team member worth dying for and strengthens the impression that the team operates as a collective.

S.O.S. Iceberg, moreover, directly juxtaposes the dog as a domesticated animal with the polar bear as a wild predator. Initially, instead of attacking the human team members, the polar bear attacks Nakinak in *S.O.S. Iceberg*. The team thus not only has to save Nakinak from icy water, as in *S.O.S. Eisberg*, but they have to protect him from a polar bear, which increases his worth as a team member even more. *S.O.S. Iceberg* positions white hunters as inferior to polar bears just as *S.O.S. Eisberg* does, but not quite as clearly. In fact, Matushek's attack on the polar bear appears successful at first, since the bear is seen cramping and falling into the water to die.

Matushek's confidence in his own hunting skills seems justified at first. However, he is attacked by a second polar bear who has not been injured. Even though he dominates over one bear with his weapon, Matushek falls prey to a second bear when he is unarmed. His initial success heightens the impression that the team in *S.O.S. Iceberg* has skills that better prepare them to survive in the Arctic.

Positioning the white travellers in relationships with wild and domestic animals guides the audience's ability to assess the characters' proficiency in Arctic traveling as well as their self-perception as equal team members or loyal subordinates. Through Nakinak's treatment as a loyal companion who is willing to die for the team leader, *S.O.S. Eisberg* once again conveys the impression that strong leadership and strict obedience are paramount. On the contrary, Nakinak's own value as a team member worth dying for is significantly higher in *S.O.S. Iceberg*, which underscores the strength of a collective in which no one, not even a furry companion, should be left behind.

5.5 The Closing Image

Just as the opening scenes of both films shed light on what is to come, the closing scenes refocus the audience on the most important messages in each film. While the closing scene in *S.O.S. Eisberg* underscores the emphasis on romance, endurance, and battle heroism, *S.O.S. Iceberg* concludes with an outlook to the future, in which the Arctic as a territory will expand its historical significance for the nation. *S.O.S. Eisberg* closes with a view of Hella, Krafft and Lorenz, reunited aboard a sailing ship that will take them home from the Arctic. Hella has placed each hand on Lorenz' and Krafft's shoulders. Even though Krafft still stands out as the leader by smiling benevolently at the couple, his ties with Hella are strong. The placement of her hands lets

the audience continue wondering about the roots and the depth of their relationship to each other. This element of romantic enigma is missing in *S.O.S. Iceberg*, since Ellen's role is less significant. In *S.O.S. Eisberg*, Krafft has saved Lorenz and reunited him with his wife, despite his own potential interest in her. He sacrifices his own desires for his friend, which lets him shine as a tragic hero who not only suffers the loss of his friends to restore his own honor, but who also sacrifices his own love interests for his teammate. The environment they are leaving behind remains threatening and hostile - the film ends with another iceberg turning and nearly crushing Udet's airplane. The audience can sense an overall sentiment of fear and relief about their departure from the characters. The rescue mission in the Arctic has been concluded, but the hostile environment has not only claimed the protagonists' friends' lives, but rather consumed them - their names are not mentioned again, and their bodies remain in the Arctic graves where they have been buried. The team has been unable to forge deeper ties to the land, and the survivors of the expedition will likely not return by their free will.

In contrast, *S.O.S. Iceberg* leaves an impression of newly forged ties to the Arctic land in its closing scenes. Lawrence, Ellen, and Brand are seen aboard the departing ship, but they stand next to each other, facing the icebergs without hints of love triangles. As the camera zooms in to Lawrence's face, he looks into the distance and pays verbal tribute to his lost team members: "Kuemmel...Matushek...Dragan. Wherever they are, I hope they know that they have not died in vain." Not only does he acknowledge the sacrifices his team members made for the team, but he also confirms that their deaths have been meaningful. Even though they were unable to save their teammates through their deaths, they have contributed to a mission that retrieved the "invaluable" information of Wegener's diaries. Thus, they have found their position in their nation's history of Arctic exploration, and they have contributed to the increase of scientific

knowledge about the Arctic. Even though Arctic nature is not portrayed as thoroughly friendly in *S.O.S. Iceberg*, the final impression that the audience gains of it is not repellent and threatening. Rather, the teammates who have perished are portrayed as forever entwined with the Arctic - the scene following Lawrence's tribute shows the images of Matushek, Kuemmel and Dragan superimposed on a view of the hills at the icy shore. Their images coalesce with the Arctic environment in an almost spiritual effect - their memories will remain with the ice, at least for the surviving team members. Interestingly, the scene is reminiscent of a view of Mount Rushmore, an American national landmark in South Dakota, which Gutzon Borglum had begun working on five years prior to the *S.O.S. Iceberg's* release in 1927 ("Sculptor Gutzon Borglum"). The faces of George Washington, Thomas Jefferson, Theodore Roosevelt, and Abraham Lincoln were carved into the front of Mount Rushmore to commemorate "the most important events in the history of the United States" ("Why These Four Presidents?"). Their memory is thus forever intertwined with the landscape, which represents the way in which land is commonly attributed to people, e.g. through naming landmarks after people who are valued by a culture. Looking at the front of the mountain itself changed forever with the establishment of the monument, since it did not mean merely looking at a rocky landscape anymore, but at the history of the country instead. Likewise, to Lawrence, looking at the shore of the fjord means looking at the memory of his perished teammates when he leaves the Arctic. He inscribes what is meaningful to the American expedition into the landscape, and thus appropriates the Arctic for his own purposes. In the end, his vision is what is being depicted and what guides the audience's perception of the Arctic and its historical meaning for the United States. This last image ensures that the memory of three white men who died in Greenland will outlast the memory of both the land and its Native inhabitants for the audience of *S.O.S. Iceberg*.

Through telling their story, the film contributes to a culture that values any Arctic explorer who died while conducting scientific research, and attributes meaning to the land by commemorating members of its own people that have traversed it. Thus, the ties between the protagonists of *S.O.S. Iceberg* and the Arctic will not be severed with the departure of the expedition crew - it seems likely that they will return to conduct further scientific research in the future, and potentially add to the gallery of Arctic explorers that the audience was introduced to in the beginning of the film.

5. Conclusion

At the top of the globe, far removed from the political affairs of the time, the Arctic provided a space that was neutral enough for a binational film co-production in 1933, yet even in the remote setting, the films that were produced are loaded with ideas that each director has about their own and their nation's identity. Large portions of the films comprise Arctic scenery that functions as a major contributor to the plot instead of being a silent backdrop. This scenery confronts the protagonists of both plots with an environment that challenges their physical skills and triggers emotional responses. At first sight, the Arctic's role appears identical in both films - as the unfamiliar, unforgivingly harsh territory made of ice and water, it appears as threatening agent. However, upon taking a closer look, the Arctic guides not only the protagonists' path across the ice, but it also influences the protagonists' stance toward nature and toward each other. *S.O.S. Eisberg* and *S.O.S. Iceberg* incorporate the Arctic as defining how protagonists act and interact; however, these portrayals of nature and foreign travelers differ from each other despite being created out of the same film footage. Tay Garnett and Arnold Fanck interpret the interconnection between the Arctic and the protagonists under the influence of their personal cultural backgrounds. The differences between the films reveal Germany's and the United States' ideas of the placement of Western peoples in the Arctic during a crucial time of historical change.

S.O.S. Iceberg displays a continuation of the United States' self-identification as a frontier nation seeking the conquest of new territories to perpetuate its self-image as a community that celebrates loyalty and overcomes struggles with the land. The film tells a story of Arctic expedition that carries on decades of writing by Arctic explorers returning with tales of a faraway land that challenges travelers from outside to prove their manliness and worthiness as

frontier heroes. The expedition team that travels to Greenland's shores in *S.O.S. Iceberg* sees itself confronted with a landscape that demands the use of the knowledge about the Arctic and expertise in traversing it that has been accumulated in the nation's history of Arctic exploration. Attempting to retrieve important scientific information believed to be lost, the team seamlessly joins the ranks of historical Arctic explorers, telling a tale that resembles closely those published during the preceding decades in the United States. As the opening scene foreshadows, the film is more concerned with a society looking back on its accomplishments and underlining their significance for the present than with portraying the Arctic as a vicious force. Not knowing each other closely in the beginning, the team members forge connections to each other in the Arctic environment. These connections enable them to function as a team, to share knowledge and responsibilities, and to show mercy towards Dragan, who cannot find his place in the team or in the harsh environment and falls prey to insanity. The Arctic claims not only Dragan's life, but two other characters' lives as well - Kuemmel dies at Dragan's hands in order to save Nakinak's life, and Matushek is killed by a polar bear after having killed another bear to save the team from starving. The two die out of loyalty towards each other - presumably a loyalty that the Arctic environment has brought about. Dragan is not suited for Arctic exploration or frontier traveling due to his inexperience and higher social status, which are characteristics of a frontier hero's antagonist, but not of the hero himself. City dwellers were those who Arctic and Western frontier heroes could not identify themselves with and were attempting to distinguish themselves from.

In *S.O.S. Iceberg*, the Arctic encourages those who encounter it to collaborate and to persist against natural counterforces. The team reacts to the Arctic's harsh environment by showing solidarity towards each other and relying on historical knowledge of the land, defining itself as a frontier people that looks back on centuries of conquering unfamiliar environments.

The contact the team has with the Native people also stands in the nation's historical traditions - the explorers interact with the Inuit tribe in the same imperialist way Americans interacted with Native Americans on the Western frontier. On the one hand, they rely on Native knowledge of the territory and they accept Lorenz' ski as well as the tribe's help in rescuing Lawrence, Ellen and Nakinak with their kayaks, but on the other hand, they do not attempt to understand the tribe, let alone give them any credit as the true heroes of the tale. Eventually, the survivors leave the Arctic, but the audience gains the impression that the expedition has had an impact on it. The superimposed images of the three perished team members function as the team's 'footprint' that turn the Arctic into theirs. Through their memories and their tale, the land will be integrated into the nation's history of Arctic journeys, and added to the American people's self-definition as pioneers and conquerors. *S.O.S. Iceberg* reflects the ideas the people had of the Arctic, which shape the way the land is viewed and portrayed in the film - in triggering acts of loyalty, the Arctic contributes to and strengthens the audience's pre-understanding of the land.

S.O.S. Eisberg portrays the Arctic's interaction with the expedition team in a different way that reflects and enhances the German *zeitgeist* of 1933. The film stands in the tradition of the Bergfilm genre; even though it takes the genre to a new location that provides less spectacular heights than the Alps, it nevertheless functions in a similar way. Like the peaks in other mountain films, the Arctic landscape in *S.O.S. Eisberg* was unknown to most of the audience, and it was situated far enough from the scenery of everyday life that the audience could indulge in the extremes of physical challenges and sublime nature footage without being reminded of their own realities of economic and identity struggles during the Weimar Republic. Arctic nature is portrayed as hostile, but the battles that the expedition team fights in *S.O.S. Eisberg* originate in senseless attempts to prove loyalty and strength. They provided the Weimar

Republic audience with an experience of the kind of heroism that should soon be relevant again in the propaganda for another World War. In his memoirs, Arnold Fanck himself associates the noise of calving icebergs that the film crew encountered in Greenland with the rolling thunder of gunfire that millions of German men experienced at the Western front, thus evoking war scenery where merely the seasons have their effects on the ice, and nature takes its course (Fanck “S.O.S. Eisberg” 16). The ice of the Arctic is therefore meant to be not only a natural force that is unpredictable, but an enemy who actively seeks to destroy the entire nation and who requires a war hero to be conquered.

S.O.S. Eisberg's plot conveys sentimental ideas about self-sacrifice and a lone hero who is celebrated for his physical stamina and his almost un-human endurance. The hero is surrounded by a team that shows extreme loyalty and follows him even when he risks everyone's death in making the entire expedition team cross the fjord. Picking Ernst Udet as the pilot who eventually succeeds in rescuing the team was a choice that enhances the film's celebration of lone heroism even more. Ernst Udet was familiar to the German audience from his prized participation and leadership in the German air force during World War I. His presence in the film creates memories of a time in which flying was an instrument of war against other nations, not against the unpredictable weather conditions of the Arctic. Udet's reaction to the flotilla of Inuit kayakers who rescue Hella and Lorenz shows an arrogance and racism that would gain significance under the Nazi era that was visible at the horizon. When *S.O.S. Eisberg* was published, German film productions were already infiltrated by National Socialists, who ensured their conformance with Nazi ideology (Welch 11). At several points in the film Nazi ideology shines through - Dragan is being ostracized for his lack of heroism, which coincides with his being the only non-German team member. Because of his laziness and his readiness to kill

Nakinak and Matushek, he is also the least likeable character. The Russian amateur radio operator who picks up the S.O.S. signal in the original story *S.O.S. rao rao Foyn* is replaced by a young German boy in *S.O.S. Eisberg*, who fulfills all criteria to fit into the Nazi profile of ideal boyhood - smart, blonde-haired, and quick to help.

In *S.O.S. Eisberg*, the Arctic is accessed as a location available to anyone wanting to prove their physical strength and build or restore a personal reputation. While the Arctic is not claimed as a nation's own like in *S.O.S. Iceberg*, it is nevertheless appropriated and regarded as empty ground that can be turned into a vicious antagonist during a self-created battle. Since the land is viewed and portrayed as an enemy, the German audience experiences the feeling of a battle that foreshadows the era to come, and identifies itself as fighters against the antagonist and 'star' of the film, Arctic nature.

Both films appropriate the Arctic location to make it fit the specific needs of their intended plots, but the Arctic is not merely a passive object. The land interacts with the foreign visitors, sometimes in threatening, and sometimes in providing ways. Human character traits crystallize when individuals in both films confront the Arctic, and each team has to take the land into account as an additional active agent when making decisions as a group. In each film, the Arctic affects the relationships between the protagonists and their surroundings differently, whether it makes them unite as a community or blindly follow a leader like members of a cult. Based on the culture each film was published in, the Arctic unites a people or lets individuals shine, each of which illustrates a nation's self-identification during a time heavily influenced by the myths of the past and the dark clouds of the future.

The nationalist perceptions of the Arctic that I see at work in *S.O.S. Eisberg* and *S.O.S. Iceberg* are not only relevant for understanding the films' connections between humans and the

land they are in. Far beyond that, being aware of a storyteller's cultural roots and nationalist ideas is essential to understanding tales of connections between humans and places, since self-definition heavily influences our perceptions of the world. As the differences between *S.O.S. Iceberg* and *S.O.S. Eisberg* prove, a landscape can assume different meanings for different cultures, and will be understood from unique perspectives rooted in a culture's past and present. The current global discussions about migration, refuge, and the question of land ownership prove that our perception of the land often clashes with the perception of others, and that nationalist ideas can prevent us from empathizing with people whose relationship to the land in question differs from our own. Finding a balance between keeping our own relationship with the land that we derive meaning from and honoring other cultures' understanding of it has been difficult for humanity in the past, and will continue to be a challenge in the future. All the more important is sharpening our senses and trying to understand differences in perception and meaning where we encounter them.

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