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## The Polar Bear in *Fortitude*. Affective Aesthetics and Politics of Climate Change

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### Abstract

In the first season of the television Eco Noir crime series *Fortitude* (2015) the polar bear appears as a sticky object that embodies an ambiguous affective charge as an icon of global warming. This article discusses the ways in which the polar bear evokes viewer affect in the series through two discourses. The first one relates to violence, essentially present in crime narratives, and how the human and nonhuman animal are positioned in relation to global warming, violence and each other. It raises questions of place and belonging in a local and global context and examines how the polar bear is constructed in terms of stranger danger and victimization in relation to human animals and the threat of global warming. The second one targets the ways in which the polar bear is rendered sticky as the object of the human gaze and how this process of human animals looking at photographs of bears both constructs and deconstructs the subject-object relation, hierarchy and agency. Methodologically, the article draws on “close looking” and the main theoretical starting points are ecocriticism and affect theory. The article argues that the representation of the polar bear contributes in essential ways to the socially and environmentally critical emphasis essential in contemporary crime narratives including *Fortitude*: the distracting and emotionally charged representation of the polar bear evokes ambiguous affective responses in viewers. Thus, as the article further argues, a representation of this kind is capable of—and liable to— inducing a heightened awareness of the present environmental crisis than a more straightforward, less affectively charged representation.

Keywords: Polar bear, global warming, affect, crime fiction, *Fortitude*.

### Resumen

En la primera temporada de *Fortitude* (2015), la serie policial de televisión Eco Noir, el oso polar aparece como una figura recurrente que representa una carga afectiva ambigua como símbolo del calentamiento global. Este artículo analiza las formas en las que el oso polar provoca el afecto del espectador en la serie, a través de dos discursos. El primero se identifica con la violencia, fundamentalmente presente en las narrativas del crimen, y en cómo se posicionan los seres humanos y no humanos en relación con el calentamiento global, la violencia y entre sí. Suscita cuestiones de lugar y pertenencia en un contexto local y global e identifica cómo se construye la figura del oso polar en términos del peligro del extraño y la victimización en relación con la humanidad y con la amenaza del calentamiento global. El segundo se centra en las formas en las que el oso polar se vuelve complicado como objeto de la mirada humana y cómo este proceso de personas que miran fotos artísticas de osos construye y deconstruye la relación sujeto-objeto, la jerarquía y la agencialidad. Metodológicamente, el artículo se basa en un “análisis detallado” y los principales puntos de partida teóricos son la ecocrítica y la teoría del afecto. El artículo sostiene que la representación del oso polar contribuye de manera esencial al énfasis social y medioambientalmente crítico, esencial en las narrativas criminales contemporáneas, incluida *Fortitude*: la representación del oso polar que distrae y con carga emocional evoca respuestas afectivas ambiguas en los espectadores. Por lo tanto, como se argumenta además en el artículo, una representación de este tipo es capaz —y propensa a— inducir una mayor conciencia de la actual crisis ambiental que una representación más directa y con menos carga afectiva.

*Palabras clave:* Oso polar, calentamiento global, afecto, novela negra, *Fortitude*.

## Introduction

The opening scene of the UK-produced Noir television crime series *Fortitude* (2015) shows a polar bear tearing a man to pieces on the seashore among blocks of ice. The man is screaming in pain, a shot is fired, and a red spot appears on his forehead. The bear disappears from the scene, leaving behind the remains of the half-eaten man. After this violent first encounter, polar bears appear explicitly in the images or spoken discourse more than seventy times during the first season: a motionless stuffed bear greets passengers in the arrivals hall of the airport; a dead bear lies on a dissection table waiting to be cut open by scalpels for scientific purposes; a friendly polar bear talks with other animals in a TV cartoon; a child's drawing of a cute polar bear is pinned to the wall in a house; artistic photos of wild bears are displayed and discussed as well as used as props; moreover, the danger of bear attacks is constantly talked about. The polar bear is omnipresent in *Fortitude*. Dead or alive, it occupies—and haunts—the minds of the inhabitants on the island and enters the minds of the viewers, at the same time calling for affective responses.

In this article, I investigate the ways in which the polar bear becomes affectively charged in the first season of *Fortitude* as an indicator of the human-nature relationship and of climate change. Images of polar bears circulate in different media as icons of global warming whose habitat is gradually melting away as temperatures in the polar regions are rising (see Manzo). The more the news of declining populations and shocking images of starving bears circulate, the more directly they are associated with environmental crises and the stronger their affective charge becomes. Further, beautiful images of healthy mother bears nursing their playful cubs surrounded by icebergs in sunshine also provide disturbing reminders that the polar bear is no longer safe in its natural habitat. The affective charge of the bear is ambiguous since all these images evoke affect mixed with both anxiety and pleasure. This ambiguity is also visible at a symbolic level: in the world of melting icebergs, the previous symbol of cold has turned into a symbol of warmth (Garfield) that still carries with it the reminder of the world as it should be and as it was before melting glaciers.

Emphasizing the social and cultural significance of affective engagement, Mike Hulme points out that the “power of the polar bear icon to represent climate change in the minds of the public rests on its emotional appeal” (242). Other scholars have also recently paid attention to the ways in which climate change is communicated in the media and argue that affectively or emotionally engaging narratives, including the ones circulating in the media and popular culture, may actually generate action for combating climate change (Weik von Mossner; Koistinen and Mäntymäki). I firmly believe that speaking through affect may indeed be a more efficient way of raising awareness as opposed to the rationally motivated knowledge of tables and statistics. For example Deborah Gould has

argued that emotions are an important force in activism. Even though Donna Haraway cautions that the sorrow evoked by dystopian visions of the future might not necessarily move people to action (3), psychologist Panu Pihkala has claimed that the complex emotions, including anxiety, raised by the threat of changing climate can serve as catalysts for climate action. Hyvärinen, Koistinen and Koivunen have indeed argued that tackling the pressing questions of climate and the environment requires accepting the difficult affects or emotions that influence the capability to generate the knowledge required to answer those questions. Art or the media are clearly platforms for dealing with these emotions.

In what follows, I discuss two examples from *Fortitude* that highlight the ways in which the representation of the polar bear evokes affective engagement in relation to global warming in the first season of *Fortitude*. In both of these examples, the relationship between the human and nonhuman animal and their vulnerability in the face of the threatening ecological catastrophe is visible through a negotiation of their relationship as inhabitants of the isolated eponymous island up north. In the examples below I first elaborate the relationship between the human and nonhuman animal in the context of violence in which the vulnerability of both is highlighted in the face of global warming. I show how the bear is constructed as a stranger trespassing on the human domain while alive, but occupies the same space with human animals when lying dead on a dissection table. Second, I target the representation of the polar bear by focusing on how the bear's affective "stickiness" (Ahmed *Cultural*) is generated through the gazes of both the human animal looking at the nonhuman animal and the nonhuman animal looking at the human animal in a scene where bear images by photographer Henry Tyson (Michael Gambon) are displayed. While the first discussion thematizes issues such as space, place and belonging and not belonging, the second one challenges questions of hierarchy, subject-object relation and, further, agency. I argue that the representation of the polar bear remains highly ambiguous throughout the first season of the series, and this volatility is precisely the source of the affective charge experienced by viewers.

In their editorial to a special issue of *Green Letters* on crime fiction and ecology, Jo Lindsay Walton and Samantha Walton point out the role of crime fiction as a form of specialist knowledge "with its own distinct contributions to make to cultural understandings of human-nature relations and environmental crisis" (2). While contemporary crime fiction—and particularly contemporary Nordic Noir—has become known for its sociocritical concerns that have also attracted intense scholarly interest (e.g. Arvas and Nestingen; Forshaw; Bergman), it is no surprise that in a time when the climate is warming at an alarming rate, this mobile genre is increasingly tackling questions related to ecology with the same critical grasp. Marta Puxan-Oliva points out "crime fiction's tendency to address conflicts from a global perspective" (363) and, referring to ecocritic Ursula Heise, pays attention to the capability of crime fiction to address global concerns through narratives of local phenomena. Ecological catastrophes do not confine themselves to national borders, and this trend is detectable for example in recent television crime series that address the cross-national connections and impacts of ecology-related crimes from a local vantage point. A number of television series such as

the Swedish-Danish *Bron/Broen* (*The Bridge*, 2011–2018), the Finnish *Tellus* (2014), the Swedish *Jordskott* (2015–2017), the Finnish *Karppi* (2018), the Danish *Bedraeg* (*Follow the Money*, 2016) and the Swedish *Thin Ice* (2020) target ecological crimes with cross-national impacts and address ethical questions in the contexts of ecoterrorism, normative humanity and ruthless profit-seeking in the energy business.

## Methodological Concerns

Methodologically, I rely on contextualising close reading—or close looking (Paasonen “Disturbing”; Salovaara)—which entails careful and detailed watching of the television series and awareness of how our watching experience combines with the text in the cultural context and frames of interpretation. Although the affects evoked by fiction are always uncertain (Tomkins 74), I assume that the circulation of images and discourses, whether in ecological crime fiction (Eco Noir) such as *Fortitude* or other fiction, mobilizes and calls into question conceptions of collective values. Because representations not only reflect culture but also actively take part in processes of meaning production and the construction of emotions (e.g. Ahmed *Strange; Cultural*; Butler; Helle; Pitkämäki; Koistinen), interpreting them is equally culturally embedded.

Moreover, Cristopher Breu argues that certain genres do “take shape as a specific affective mood or atmosphere” (244) through which their effect is created (see also Isomaa 71; Lyytikäinen 55). Detecting the particular affect of Noir crime fiction, Breu pays attention to how the Noir affect is governed by overall negativity and the discomfort of proximity as a cause of anxiety (247-248; see also Oliver and Trigo). Noir, according to Breu, represents “the artistic engagement with forms of affect and their narrativisation [that] pushes its audience to confront uncomfortable truths about themselves and the world they live in” (249). Global warming undoubtedly is an uncomfortable truth and a source of constantly spreading climate anxiety (or eco-anxiety), a topic regularly taken up in the media (e.g. Taylor and Murray). Moreover, in his discussion of two British noir series, *Hinterland* and *Southcliffe*, Les Roberts pays attention to how “the stories can be said to have grown out of the landscape” (375). Human geographer Tim Cresswell defines landscape in terms of dependence of place (12); in *Fortitude* place, characterized by human presence in the harsh climate, becomes inherently intertwined with the cold, snowy landscape that participates in the mental-emotional processes of meaning construction that form the particular affective mood of the series. Christiana Gregoriu further describes the crime genre as a carnivalesque genre because of the pleasure it assumes in the affective: violence, the marginal and the irrational (100, 101). The violence typically contained in crime fiction, including *Fortitude*, based on disgust and pleasure adds to the volatility of affect produced by the narrative (Bacon 7-11; Koistinen and Mäntymäki).

## Affect and the Polar Bear

The image of the polar bear is what in affect scholar Sara Ahmed's terms can be described as a "sticky object". According to Ahmed, sticky objects are "produced as effects of circulation" within sociocultural and ideological contexts that allow and call for saturation with affect (*Cultural* 8). The more these images circulate in culture, the stickier they grow and the stronger their affective charge becomes. The polar bear is saturated with affect as perhaps the stickiest icon of global warming. This fascination with the large predator stems partly from the special cultural roles of bears—brown, black or white—among the peoples of the northern hemisphere: bears have traditionally been feared and worshipped because of their size (the polar bear is the largest land predator with a weight of up to 700 kilograms), strength and the danger they represent, and stories of them have circulated in cultures for thousands of years, rendering them sticky with mystery, respect and fear (e.g. Ruponen). With the advent of ecological crime fiction, the polar bear enters a new context as part of the socioecological criticism of the genre.

When it comes to the polar bear and affect, it is crucial to take into account the cultural embeddedness of affect. Instead of regarding affect as a precognitive bodily sensation and emotion as a culturally processed, explained or understood phenomenon, I see both affect and emotion, following Ahmed and Paasonen, as referring to a relationship with the world. As Ahmed writes, it is impossible to separate immediate emotional intensities such as fear or loathing from cultural contexts, values or memories, which means that the immediate physical reaction is always already connected to cognitive processes (*Cultural*; Paasonen "Affekti" 42). The recognition of "*somebody* as a stranger" (Ahmed *Cultural* 21; italics in original) and a fearsome object—for example if we encounter a polar bear in our home street—is intertwined and simultaneous with the bodily reactions that indicate fear. Interestingly, Ahmed actually uses the bear as an example while explaining how fear is shaped by "cultural histories and memories" (*Cultural* 7). The circulation of affect in *Fortitude* thus takes part in the formation of affective histories and memories connected to the bear as a fearsome animal—and as a symbol of the present climate crisis. For a viewer of a crime television series also the previous knowledge of the genre forms a part of the affective ambience. Below I use affect as the overall term when discussing viewer affect; I use emotion when I refer to the representations of emotions of single characters thus holding on to the embodiedness of affect as possible only with real, living viewers and the representations of the emotions of the characters on the screen through different markers discernible by the viewers.

## *Fortitude* as Eco Noir Crime Fiction

Season One of *Fortitude* starts off as a crime narrative governed by the basic crime formula: a murder is committed, a detective arrives from the outside and eventually the murder mystery is solved. This, however, is only a starting point for a story with an abundance of subnarratives, murders and fake murders, and several official and unofficial investigators, in which the mysterious deaths are not always causes of personal or social



evil but are tied in various ways to the consequences of melting glaciers and climate change.

After the violent initial encounter with the polar bear, the viewer is introduced to a multinational community living on a fictional secluded island in “a cold climate” (Forshaw) somewhere off the Norwegian coast, populated by 713 people and 3,000 polar bears, as Governor Hildur Odegard (Sofie Gråbøl) states in Episode One of the first season. When an inhabitant of the small town, Dr Stoddart (Christopher Eccleston), is found dead in his home with his rib cage torn open, the first suspect in fact is a polar bear. However, it is soon discovered that the violent attacks on Stoddart and the later victims are committed by human animals invaded and contaminated by parasite wasps, whose procreative behaviour of drilling into the bodies of large animals to lay their eggs is transferred to humans through genome-changing poison that compels them to drill into the bodies of other humans, using any sharp objects at hand. These wasps originate from mammoth carcasses now emerging from under the melting glacier after having been buried in the permafrost for 30,000 years. In addition to the two main narrative strands of solving the initial murder and coping with the wasp threat, the first season of *Fortitude* weaves several other narrative strands into the story. These range from the consequences of unrequited love and adulterous relationships to a glacier hotel project to save the economy of the island when the coal mines are becoming depleted.

*Fortitude* can be described as an Eco Noir crime story faithful to Nordic Noir. The environmental theme is a central constituent of the narrative and, through the incorporation of the threat of global warming into a murder narrative, the critical gaze of the series goes beyond an analysis of injustice and violence in human societies only. Besides the social and societal critique typical of Nordic Noir, the series embodies its ecological critique in the frame of a popular crime narrative. “Gloomy, pensive and pessimistic in tone” (Arvas and Nestingen 2), it features alienated characters in a cold and harsh environment, struggling with social and emotional problems (see Forshaw). Kerstin Bergman has paid attention to the semantic significance of the environment, particularly the rural settings in Swedish crime fiction (*Swedish*); the significance of the northern environment is indeed extremely pronounced in *Fortitude*, because the story is essentially bound within its specific cold and harsh setting. Jacob Stougaard-Nilsen’s characterization of Nordic Noir as featuring “dark, dystopian and excessively violent narratives” (9) is true of *Fortitude*: the series can be read as an environmental dystopia embedded in a crime story format. A narrative like this, with the polar bear emerging as an ambiguous expression of the complexity of the threatening environmental crisis, can only be told where both human and bear inhabitants are rendered vulnerable.

### **Polar Bears in Crime Television Series**

Although Nordic landscapes may play central roles in Nordic Eco Noir narratives, the roles of animals in contemporary crime series seldom go beyond being mere props or, alternatively, animals tend to feature as anthropomorphic references to human characteristics in solving the crime case. We tend to interpret animals in relation to

humanity, human identity and subjectivity (McHugh, “Animal” 24), and animals are often represented as flat prototypes of humans. In the French crime TV series *La forêt* (2017) for example, a white wolf appears in this kind of role as a fleeting metaphor of the female protagonist’s trauma and intuition that leads her to the roots of the murder mystery buried in the fearsome forest. In these cases, “animals are present but the question of the animal is not” (Bolongaro 109). In the above mentioned crime television series *Thin Ice*, the polar bear features as a prop that also embodies metaphorical and referential meanings as an icon of global warming. The big predator is not as omnipresent as in *Fortitude* but its presence is explicitly linked with melting glaciers. However, despite its less prominent role, it embodies an affective charge that draws from both its fearsome and strange otherness (see Ahmed *Strange*) and its victim status which it shares with all inhabitants, human and nonhuman, of the Arctic areas and beyond.

### **The Ambiguous Place of the Fearsome Stranger**

A constant negotiation between in- and outsidership is notable in *Fortitude* and links with the ways in which the polar bear is constructed in terms of affect as a sticky object. The inside refers to the town and human presence on the island and the outside to the environment inhabited by the polar bears. Referring to cultural critic Raymond Williams’s classic work *The Country and the City* (1973), Marta Puxan-Oliva pays attention to the ways in which environmental crime fiction constantly renegotiates the previously alleged difference between the country as a rural idyll preserving morality and the city as its opposite, an environment prone to encourage criminality (364). In *Fortitude*, the town is indeed depicted as a place of characters with dodgy backgrounds and suspect intentions. However, the overall setting in the series does not rely on a juxtaposition of town vs. country as a marker of different moral attitudes visible in environmental crime fiction as described by Puxan-Oliva, but is based on a more radical negotiation between the inside, where the small human population resides, and the outside that is constantly infiltrating and questioning its existence; the inside is never constant but continuously fragmented by the wild and disturbing outside, inhabited by dangerous polar bears. As Richard C. Stedman argues, place is a complicated compilation of the physical environment and socially constructed factors, including myths and memories (Urry; Marcus). In Sheriff Dan Anderssen’s (Richard Dormer) speech to a group of miners in the local pub, the town has more or less been swallowed by the outside; the speech constructs the place on the narrative—or myth—of the natural environment: “When people think of this place, they think of the ice, bears, mountains” (Episode 7). How the place accentuates particularly the polar bear is further indicated by a poster on the pub wall with a text that urges people to respect them and leave them alone to roam their natural habitat (Episode 2).

For the inhabitants of the town of Fortitude and the viewer, the polar bear is constructed in terms of difference and outsidership as a dangerous stranger that haunts and scares through its fearsome potential. Sara Ahmed has paid attention to the omnipresence of the stranger and points out how “strangers are read as posing danger



wherever they are” (*Strange* 32). The polar bear carries its fearsomeness as a potential that can be realized at any time; in that sense the bear is always there as a known prospect although it remains to be defined through its belonging to the outside. It is precisely this paradox of proximity and the recognition of “*not belonging, ... being out of place*” that Ahmed further regards as essential in the construction of the stranger (*Strange* 21; emphasis in original). This paradox leads to the question who actually is out of place, the polar bears “in their natural habitat” or the human animals who, ironically, are responsible for destructive potential far more dangerous from the perspective of the global ecosystem.

Sheriff Dan’s line about “this place” as not including the town is descriptive of how the outside has infiltrated what normally would be seen as the human sphere, as home. Stedman’s definition of place as encompassing “the physical setting, as well as human experience and interpretation” (672) is relevant here. When discussing the stranger and the danger it poses, Ahmed points out that defining the stranger as dangerous makes possible the definition of home as a safe place (*Strange* 32). She writes: “Such a recognition of those who are out of place allows both the demarcation and enforcement of the boundaries of ‘this place’, as where ‘we’ dwell. The enforcement of boundaries requires that some-body—here locatable in the dirty figure of the stranger—has already crossed the line, has already come too close” (*Strange* 21-22).

In *Fortitude*, however, the viewer is repeatedly reminded of how the polar bear shatters this feeling of safety by constantly coming emotionally too near and breaking the boundary between in- and outsidership. The police advise Detective Inspector Morton (Stanley Tucci), a newcomer to the town, to carry a large gun in case he meets a polar bear because a small one will not stop it, and shows as evidence images of the savaged body of Billy Pettigrew (Tam Dean Burn), maimed by a polar bear in the beginning (Episode 1). For the viewer, this way of describing the polar bear in terms of its generating extreme fear, as an automaton that attacks with intention to kill whenever met, represents a dichotomous view between human animals and non-human animals. However, in the context of global warming that the series explicitly deals with, the viewer is informed about the reasons why the bears may trespass over the town and hunt what they normally would not hunt. Because of this knowledge, the viewer’s affective response is not only based on the fear caused by the fearsomeness of the great predator but also on sympathy towards the nonhuman animal struggling for its existence in the changing environment.

Moreover, the danger to the bears’ survival caused by global warming and melting glaciers and their occasional trespassing on the human domain are also presented in another light by Governor Odegard who exploits the commercial potential of the exotic animal in her speech to a group of prospective investors in a large-scale hotel project: “Sometimes a bear comes to town and then the police have to carefully usher him out again” (Episode 2). In her description the bear is no longer a fearsome stranger; instead, it has turned into an animal lost in the strange and scary human environment that requires human help to find its way back to its own habitat. However, through a humorous anthropomorphization of the island bears she expresses an inherent stranger fear: referring to the number of bears (3,000) in relation to humans (713), she jokes about what

would happen if the bears were to get organized and thereby resorts to a rhetoric through which the bear is again labelled a fearsome stranger. Here the viewer is moved between empathy and fear.

It can be deduced from the above that affective circulation of imagery constructs a negotiation through which the relationship between the human and the nonhuman animal is both distanced and brought together. This negotiation is launched from the very first images of Pettigrew's death and continues throughout the first season. Rosi Braidotti has paid attention to how dominant humanity is negotiated in relation to "those who are other-than-human ... along the axes of devalorized difference" (1). For the dominant human subject the other-than-human is a source of anxiety because of its capacities to "illuminate the asymmetry of power relations that work in the constitution of the dominant subject" (Braidotti, *Posthuman* 1) and to fragment the story about dominance on which the subjectivity is based. These questions of dominance become clear in human-bear relations, where both have the potential to cause each other harm. Koistinen and Mäntymäki establish that the killing of scientist Charlie Stoddart in the first episode is an example of how the human/bear boundary is negotiated in the intersection of different forms of violence, including the objectification of both human and nonhuman bodies in scientific examination. Because of the "inhuman savagery" (Episode 6) of the killing, the obvious suspect is a bear who "shouldn't come here" (Episode 1). However, quite soon it becomes evident that the victim's wounds cannot have been inflicted by a bear, and when the killing is revealed to be committed by a 10-year-old boy, detective Eugene Morton from Scotland Yard, originally sent to investigate the death of Billy Pettigrew, begins to wonder about the source of this "savagery" (Episode 6). The moment when the killing turns into murder highlights the animal and human animal distinction. Christoffer Pittard's point that "The animal cannot be murdered (only killed)" (8) also applies when turned around: the nonhuman animal cannot murder because the moral code on non-violence is traditionally only applicable to human animals (e.g. Aaltola 16-19). However, when it is later found out that the murderers' violent behaviour actually originates from parasite wasps released from under the melting permafrost, the critique of the anthropocentric notions of traditional humanism that associate responsibility, guilt and moral consciousness essentially with humanity becomes relevant. By claiming that in the end, all of the killings either by polar bears or human animals come down to humanity's destructive activity that has caused the permafrost to melt with inconceivable consequences, the series delivers a political argument: human agency on the planet is in stark contrast with the idea of morality as the guiding principle of human animals. Delivered effectively through many scenes of graphic violence that connect to and emphasize the yet unknown dangers of global warming, this argument invites emotional responses that engage the viewer affectively.

In addition, the violence of the murders brings human and nonhuman violence together in another way, namely by showing that human and nonhuman animals are on a par when it comes to gruesome violence. The moment when the viewers are forced to acknowledge that the violent acts have been committed not by a polar bear but by a human being, cultural histories and memories that produce the viewer's emotional

response to the polar bear as a fearsome other are displaced and relocated in the human, in the viewers themselves, in “us.” This further resonates with the undertone of human violence towards what is outside humanity, including polar bears, that pervades the series.

Yet another example of the blurring of the dichotomy between human and nonhuman takes place later in the series (Episode 9), when the carcass of a polar bear that had behaved abnormally is examined by two biologists, Vincent Rattrey (Luke Treadaway) and Natalie Yelburton (Sienna Guillory), at the Fortitude Arctic Research Center. The scene opens with an image of a large polar bear in a fridge, covered with plastic. The next image shows the bear lying on its side on the dissection table with its front covered with blood from having attacked, killed and eaten another full-grown male. The high camera angle shows Vincent on his knees on the table next to the bear and Natalie standing behind it, both admiring the magnificent animal. The whole bear is visible and its size is further emphasized with the camera angle, showing all three from the front. Later, Vincent cuts off the bear’s head and begins to examine its brain. In the following scene the two biologists, Sheriff Dan and Governor Odegard are gathered around the same dissection table with the headless bear still lying on it. Because of the similarities between the bear and the human killer’s behaviour, Vincent wants to run the same tests on the brain of the now dead murderer Shirley Allerdycy (Jessica Gunning) in order to find out whether both were affected by the same toxins because, like the bear, “Shirley Allerdycy was an apex predator [...] at the top of the food chain” (Episode 9). Dan and Hildur look very concerned when the biologists explain that if the toxins are identical, the island is too dangerous “for any animal” (Episode 9). The camera pans from the dead bear to the worried faces of Dan, Hildur, Vincent and Natalie, making explicit the connection between “any animal” and their shared vulnerability. This becomes even more explicit when Shirley’s lover Markus Huseklepp (Darren Boyd) later arrives to see her at the Arctic Research Center to which she has been moved from the morgue to be tested (Episode 10). Devastated by the move, Markus’ comment “This place is for animals,” introduces a hierarchy based on the difference between human and nonhuman animals. The viewer is here caught in an emotional swing. At one end, a realization of what could be described as Rosi Braidotti’s idea of *zoe* as life itself, an inclusive and “generative power that flows across all species” (103) and makes them equally vulnerable in life and death. That is juxtaposed at the other end with the belief in human specificity built on separation, estrangement, and the denial of interconnectedness in traditional humanism that is criticized by Braidotti. At the end of the scene yet another reminder of the common vulnerability of human and nonhuman animals is presented to the viewer through an emphatic concluding image: the bear, covered in plastic, and back in the fridge next to Shirley’s body, reminds the viewer of how they both are victims that end up on the operating table for autopsy.

## The Polar Bear as the Object of the Gaze and the One Who Looks Back

A visual—filmic or photographic—representation of a polar bear is not a mirror image of the original but constructed through complex processes of meaning-making dependent on viewer and culture (Lehtonen 107–127). The photographs of polar bears discussed here are embedded in an audiovisual crime narrative, which means that more than one representational layer is added to the meaning-making process, as the narrative and the narrative context provide a frame within which the photographs are to be interpreted. Photographer Henry Tyson’s art photos of polar bears, embedded in an audiovisual narrative discussing ecological themes, embody the potential to highlight the ways in which the relationship between the human and nonhuman animal is constructed and deconstructed.

The prominent themes in the series, such as global warming and anxiety before inexplicable violence “set in a landscape that humans cannot possibly take on and win” because of the “hulking presence of nature” (Bramley qtd. in Saunders 215), are constituents that govern the way in which the polar bear is made the object of the gazes of the characters in the narrative and the viewers and represented as a fearsome other also in Tyson’s artistic photos. These photos are looked at and talked about by Governor Odegard and DI Morton when they visit Tyson’s studio. Both Odegard and Morton visit Tyson in order to threaten him; in the intimidating atmosphere of the confrontations, the photographs question and set in motion violence and agency while the bear appropriates a role as a product of culture and an ironic comment on power assumed by humans.

John Berger emphasizes how people’s ways of looking at artistic images are “affected by ... learnt assumptions about art” (*Ways* 11) regarding for example beauty, truth, genius and civilization, many of which are distanced from the everyday world. Odegard comments on Tyson’s photos as artwork, emphasizing their cultural significance without which “... this place would be just a nameless block of ice in the middle of nowhere...” (Episode 3). However, since the polar bear is “the most *salient*, the most eye-catching element” (Kress and van Leeuwen 176, italics in original) in the images, not only because of its size but also because the way in which the gaze of the polar bear as a represented participant “directly addresses the viewer and establishes a relationship between them” (89), the bear becomes accentuated in Odegard’s comment. She transforms the polar bear into an art object of aesthetic pleasure achieved through the artist’s ingenious work whereby the relationship between the object of the gaze and the viewer is constructed on distancing; seeing the bear as an aesthetic object strips the bear of its actuality, its “bearness,” and translates it into a work of art filtered through culture. Although Odegard does not mention the fearsome potential of polar bears, it is immanent in the representation and evokes viewer affect based on anticipation and uncertainty. John Berger writes that “images were first made to conjure up the appearance of something that was absent” (*Ways* 10). The absence of explicit threat notwithstanding, the fearsomeness of the polar bear finds expression in this scene through the cultural embeddedness of affect: viewers are affected by fear, while simultaneously knowing that the images merely represent danger in the absence of the actual threat.

The question of distance and fearsomeness is returned to by DI Morton when he is looking at one of Tyson's images already familiar to the viewer, the one of the bears eating a seal carcass (this is never confirmed; it could be a human victim). The camera angle on Morton is from back left, and what the viewer sees of the photo is only a corner with red fleshy mush. Morton asks explicitly: "How close do you have to be to take something like that?" Tyson's answer "I used a camera with a very long lens" confirms Morton's assumption of potential danger and marks the bear as a fearful object. When writing about the affective politics of fear, Sara Ahmed emphasizes the repetition of stereotypes as a constituent of fear. Bodies become fearsome when they are repeatedly constructed as such through selection and simplification in cultural processes (*Cultural* 63). It is true that polar bears are predators who kill other animals for their food, and typically in Western representation, polar bears, other bears and particularly wolves have through centuries been depicted primarily through their predatory habits of hunting and killing their prey, often emphasizing graphic and grotesque elements. The trope of killing is accentuated in stories of predators even today, and predators appear as emblems of fearsomeness in cultural discourses. So the production of the polar bear primarily as an object of fear, like any other object of fear, depends on "past histories of association" (Ahmed, *Cultural* 66) with fearsomeness. In addition to pre-knowledge, fear, according to Ahmed, is linked to the "passing by" of an object; fear is "*being produced by the object's approach*" (*Cultural* 64-66; emphasis in original). This means that in order for the polar bear to be fearsome, it must not be present but rather dwell in futurity because fear according to Ahmed is anticipation of pain some time in future (*Cultural* 64-65). This anticipation, I argue, is experienced by the viewer when the camera places Odegard and later Morton in the same frame with a photo of a polar bear.

When Odegard comes to visit Tyson in his studio, the camera shows her standing under the photo of the polar bear eating the carcass. The photo is sticky with affect because of the familiarity of similar images from other sources. Wearing a parka with a sizeable arctic fox collar that provides an immediate association with a utilitarian attitude towards animals, Odegard walks over to another photo of a bear standing in the red light of the setting sun that the viewer associates with the blood in the previous photo, the blood-stained bear eating Pettigrew at the beginning of the series, and the bear carcass earlier on the dissection table. Having praised Tyson's art, Odegard is again placed in the same frame with the first photo of the feeding bear. The allusion to what is not present but an object possibly approaching is made concrete through these images. To the viewer, the images evoke the anticipation of future pain and they do so via visual means without words. However, in this representation the polar bear's stickiness derives from ambiguity for not only is the polar bear a dangerous animal other, it is, at the same time, in an alliance with human animals as victims of global warming.

The polar bear's ambiguous charge becomes stronger in the scene in which DI Morton visits Tyson's studio and, acting like the detective he is as he walks from image to image, he makes observations and asks analytical questions. The menace in his probing questions about the murder case alternate with his comments on associations with violence in the photos hanging on the walls. Morton enters into a dialogue with the images



where the human animal's moral agency is juxtaposed with the nonhuman animal's ironic reply, delivered through the gaze of the animals depicted in the images. Despite being observers, human animals may also be observed by nonhuman animals (Berger, *Why*; Derrida, *Animal*). This is what the bear in the photo with the red sunset seems to do; the image is not visible to the viewer when Morton stops before it and states simply: "This bear was in a fight" (Episode 3). Having placed the bear in the context of aggression, Morton turns towards Tyson (and the viewer); the photo is now behind him with the mouth of the bear right above his head as if the bear were about to eat him. From the viewer's perspective, the image points towards imminent danger although it is also ironic in humorously pointing out that Morton, too, can be targeted despite his job as a detective. It is also noteworthy that all of the photos in the room are looked at from a low angle by the characters, thus placing the bear in a position of power from the perspective of both the characters in the narrative and the viewer (cf. Kress and van Leeuwen 140). When discussing the nonhuman and human animal seeing each other, Berger emphasises the power "comparable with human power" of the nonhuman animal, but stresses also a difference in their qualities (*Why* 5).

The power constructed through the gazes of the human and nonhuman animal do not *coincide* (the verb used by Berger) in this scene because the ambiguity and irony contained in the representations of both the human and nonhuman animal set in motion meaning and blur the viewers' recognition of the bear as a dangerous stranger or an animal in danger. The animal manifests its presence in a disconcerting way (Berger, *About* 19) and when the bear becomes ambiguous, a creature constructed on fear, irony, power and myth, the viewers are brought to the fringe of truth about "bearness". Ecocritic Timothy Morton underlines how ambiguity is in fact the only possible certainty ("All"). The representation of the polar bear in terms of ambiguity also seems to undermine DI Morton's self-conscious definitions of the bears. The photo that DI Morton looks at last in the scene is not shown to the viewer, and his generalizing comment on the photo, "They're very big, polar bears," leaves the viewer in uncertainty as to what he is looking at. The only certainty communicated to the viewer is an ambiguity that leaves the viewer emotionally in midair.

## Conclusions

I have argued above that in *Fortitude* the polar bear assumes a central position as an ambiguous locus of the threat of global warming. *Fortitude* associates the polar bear explicitly with violence in contexts where both violence and its perpetrators are not univocal. In a speculative narrative asking the question What if? and promoting an "expanded concept of generic identity" (Gill 82) beyond the normative anticipation of the readers' and viewers' awareness of the contemporary sociocritical, realism-based crime narrative, the polar bear embodies fears and expectations in the face of environmental change. *Fortitude*, like crime narratives in general, draws on violence but instead of pointing out a single case of murder or assault in a setting limited by social, national, geographical or temporal constraints, the series engages the viewers in an affective



vicious circle of fear, anxiety and anticipation based on uncertainty and indefinability: the ambiguity of the representation of the polar bear calls for a renegotiation of the dichotomies of perpetrator, victim, agent and object. In addition, because of the ubiquitousness of the presence of the polar bear in contexts of global warming as a sticky object, the series links with dystopic cautionary discourse that draws on the viewers' recognizing and re-experiencing the affect associated with the representation of the polar bear.

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