

'A Vast Scale: Evocations of Antarctica'

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Introduction

Collaboration is an exciting — and instinctual — way to work. To quote evolutionary biologist Lynn Margulis (1938–2011), 'Among the most successful — that is, most abundant — living beings on the planet are ones that have teamed up'.³ In support of the ongoing conversation between Art and Science, we felt motivated to set up a community website that would engender discussion (initially, at least) on the relationship between music and the Antarctic environment. Our intention was to create a welcoming, easy-to-navigate site with a series of short videos featuring Antarctic landscapes overlaid with our choice of music. We would then invite members of a selected audience to interact with these short films, responding in an informal and conversational way to their content and soundtracks.

Setting up the website

After considering various web formats (including blogs — WordPress and Blogger), we concluded that a Ning community site would serve our collective needs most effectively. Ning sites are structured in such a way that they encourage members to post their own material (images, videos, blog posts, web links, etc) and to both initiate and contribute to a range of discussions. While our Ning site 'A Vast Scale — Evocations of Antarctica' was directed and managed by us both (RS and CB), responsibility for the site's success, or otherwise, largely depends on each member's participation.

Along with easy set-up, layout features and functions, Ning's advantage is that it is a secure site — something we considered necessary since it would allow members greater freedom of expression. Ning also allows for comments,

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3 Lynn Margulis and Dorion Sagan (1995) *What is Life?* University of California Press, Berkeley CA, p. 224.

discussion forums and individual members' pages (see Figure 1). Membership was by invitation and members were encouraged to invite other interested people to join the site and contribute to its life.

Our intention was to create a discussion forum rather than set up a formal survey; the logic behind this was to engender lively exchange between people from a wide range of disciplines — rather like gathering informally around a dinner table instead of in a boardroom. We deliberately avoided trying to come to any conclusions; we felt that in a field which has barely been touched, that would be far too premature. Our primary motivation was to establish a network of like-minded people and a venue within which robust and wide-ranging discussion would be welcomed. Nevertheless, we are able to report on some common themes that emerged from the discussions.

During the course of this project 38 people became members of the website 'A Vast Scale'. During the period it was active there were 877 viewings of the 13 videos and 116 comments were posted. Sadly, the site did not become the ongoing discussion site that we hoped it would and it was dismantled in 2013. All the material has been archived and is being held jointly by the authors.



Figure 1. Screen capture of the home page 'A Vast Scale: Evocations of Antarctica'.

Source: Photograph by Rupert Summerson and Claire Beynon.

The videos

The videos are at the heart of 'A Vast Scale' and mostly comprise sets of still photos that were linked to form a movie to which a soundtrack was added. The music in the soundtracks was carefully chosen to represent music that we thought represented the landscapes. It very soon became apparent that our tastes were not universally shared! Table 1 lists the videos, the music that accompanied them and the authors of the videos.

Table 1. Videos, accompanying music and video authors, 'A Vast Scale: Evocations of Antarctica'

| video name | music accompaniment | author |
|--|---|--------|
| <i>Antarctic Sublime</i> | Vaughan Williams: <i>Symphony no. 7</i> | RS |
| <i>A Voyage to Antarctica v1</i> | Westlake: <i>Antarctica (At the pole)</i> | RS |
| <i>A Voyage to Antarctica v2</i> | Rachmaninov: <i>Isle of the Dead</i> | RS |
| <i>Grimly Majestic</i> | Bruckner: <i>Symphony no. 8</i> | RS |
| <i>Heart of Whiteness v1</i> | Kyorei (<i>Traditional Japanese</i>) | RS |
| <i>Heart of Whiteness v2</i> | Kalhor: <i>Night Silence Desert</i> | RS |
| <i>In the Vestfold Hills</i> | Rachmaninov: <i>Prelude no. 9 in Eb minor</i> | RS |
| <i>In this place silence has a voice</i> | David Raphael Katz | CB |
| <i>Lacrimosa</i> | Zbigniew Preisner: 'Lacrimosa' from <i>Requiem for a Friend</i> | CB |
| <i>Rare sounds abound in these places where wind is dressed in white</i> | Arvo Pärt: <i>Fratres (Mother Night)</i> | CB |
| <i>Step out onto white not as a body bearing any weight but as a feather might</i> | Arvo Pärt: <i>Fratres (Fur Alina)</i> | CB |
| <i>Wandering Adélie</i> | Zoe Keating: <i>Optimist</i> | CB |
| <i>Weathered Systems</i> | Andrew Bird: <i>Weather Systems</i> | CB |

Here we each (RS and CB) describe very briefly our ideas behind the choice of imagery and music, which are followed by some comments from the other members. It is not possible to provide representative comments, as people generally did not have similar responses, so a range of comments is provided, with anonymity preserved.

Antarctic Sublime: The terror and beauty in Antarctica's landscapes (RS)

This film explores ideas of the sublime rendered into pictures and music. The pictures chosen represent landscapes that are grand, desolate and overwhelming as well as potential dangers such as bad weather. The music chosen, Vaughan Williams' *Symphony no. 7, Sinfonia Antartica*, complements the images well with the rising phrases, crashing chords, austere angelic voices and finally the wind machine.

Comments:

- 'I liked the simple statement in the title. I started out with low expectations (terror on a six-inch screen?!) but was v pleased with the effect of music (with which I was unfamiliar) and images together. Both worked with "beauty and terror" with restraint, somehow. Yes, the imagination needs to be employed but anyone who's been cold or isolated in a landscape has that to bring to the experience.'
- 'Ah, the *Sublime* again! Looks like we're on the same conceptual page. I watched the mountains piece first — couldn't help attaching the Vaughan Williams music to those pictures as well. The choral bits especially. The human voice placed against these wide, harsh, pitiless spaces is potent.'
- 'I find this painful to watch. The strident blue title screen is jarring. The quote from Bourke is displayed so briefly I there is no time to read it. The sound bursts in as if part-way into the recording. The music captures the vast scale and motion of Antarctica, but the images are static. There is also a "dead" spot at the end before the credits.'

A Voyage to Antarctica v1 (RS)

The intention of this film is to portray a voyage to Antarctica by sea, especially the final part through the sea-ice zone. The film opens with encounters with icebergs before penetrating the sea ice. A number of birds and animals are seen. The film ends with ice cliffs representing the coast of Antarctica. The music chosen for this version is *At the Pole*. *Wooden Ships* might have seemed to have been a natural choice but I preferred the excitement implicit in *At the Pole*.

Comments:

- 'Such a lot of tension and anticipated danger in the music, to me it didn't suit the images that well, even though I know it's dangerous to sail through the ice. If the climax had been a killer whale trying to take a bite out of you it might have worked better, but the music wanted a destination and I didn't feel like the slideshow had one.'
- 'There seems a general view that version 2's soundtrack is better suited; however, I like the forward rhythmic drive of the percussion and chords that characterises this one — it evokes a sense of moving forward, journeying, and a sense of anticipation and danger (even if that might be a little too exaggerated in this case). That said, I felt version 2 did fit quite well, although it didn't seem to be going forward to the same extent. You're really just talking about sound and image bites here, so a sense of journey has to be communicated a little more directly than it might otherwise be?'
- 'Music is too pounding and heavy for what are pretty calm iceberg scenes.'

A Voyage to Antarctica v2 (RS)

This film uses the same imagery as version 1 but the music is from *The Isle of the Dead* by Sergei Rachmaninov. The repetitive rhythm sounds like waves and the rather gloomy melody seems to represent the often grey skies and fogs very well.

Comments:

- 'I felt lonely watching this. The images of single creatures by themselves. Almost as if there's no way out. Stuck in a way, except the birds, but it seems like creatures would be wandering a lot, looking for something. Or at least if I were a creature there, that's what I would be doing. I'm sure they are quite content. The aerial image of the ice reminded me of farmland in the midwest (US) or farmland in the US in general. Patches. Sea and ice quilts.'
- 'Some beautiful and compelling images. I liked the simple, subtle beginning portion of the music. Toward the end it was a little too busy and dramatic for my taste as I looked at these very static, austere images. The one slide of the two ice towers reminded me of the old John Wayne westerns directed by John Ford in Monument Valley, Utah with its rock spires thrusting high above the desert landscape.'
- 'At first I wanted the images to move at a quicker pace; however, the music and images captured me and held my attention, even managed to slow me down, thank you!!! Really nice imagery and compositions. I thought the music worked really well although I would have ended the photo sequence a little earlier before the change in the music, also the music finished a little abruptly.'

Grimly Majestic (RS)

The title of this movie is a quotation from *The heart of the Antarctic* by Ernest Shackleton:

As the days wore on, and mountain after mountain came into view, grimly majestic, the consciousness of our insignificance seemed to grow on us.

The landscapes are all stills of mountains (Figure 2). I chose part of *Symphony no. 8* by Anton Bruckner. Whilst travelling through the mountains of Alexander Island (west of the Antarctic Peninsula) many years ago I distinctly remember asking myself what sort of music best represented the landscape and thinking that the 'cathedrals of sound' that Bruckner composed seemed, to my mind, to suit it best.

This video was the most viewed and provoked the most comments. A representative selection of the comments is reproduced below.

- 'Awesome photographs. Literally. I think of the Romantic notion of the sublime, of a grandeur so vast and majestic it creates its own terror. This may be what is meant by the "grim" of the title, but to me the only thing grim is the music — by the end, I was fighting off all those 19th-century Germanic swells. I watched again without the sound — not an option — and with the level lower, but the Bruckner was still distracting. Can't help feeling this grand montage would be enhanced by some other music, perhaps something more brooding than booming.'
- 'Big, solid music matches the mountains.'
- 'I found this piece completely overwhelming. It set my ions trembling/got me panicked, so much so I wanted to switch it off and head for the closest crevasse.'
- 'Splendid music but it seemed to be proclaiming: These mountains are getting more magnificent as we go! Yes, a little overbearing.'

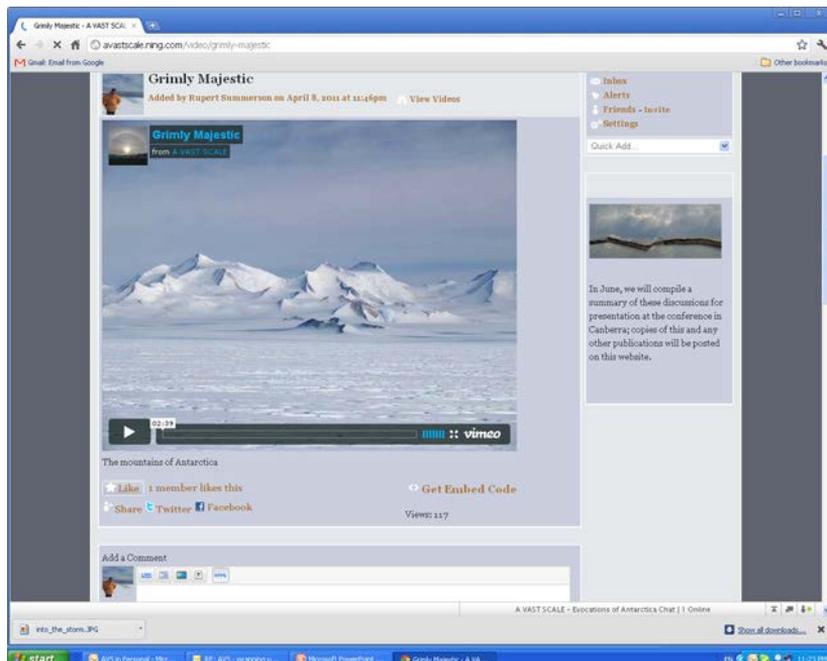


Figure 2. Video page for 'Grimly Majestic' (screen snapshot).

Source: Photograph by Rupert Summerson and Claire Beynon.

Heart of Whiteness v1 (RS)

This video is intended to try and represent the heart of Antarctica — the vast areas of featureless snow and icescapes that ironically very few people see or experience. The images chosen for the video are all of this inland ice, including some from the South Pole during winter darkness. The soundtrack for this first version is a traditional Japanese piece called 'Kyorei' which can be translated as 'The Spirit of Nothingness'. 'Kyorei' is part of the shakuhachi (Japanese bamboo flute) honkyoku (original music) repertoire and is characterised by almost extreme austerity and a steadily rising cadence, both of which seem appropriate for the central Antarctic ice sheet.

Comments:

- 'Yearning. The sound reminds me of a call on a Pacific conch shell — with the images it seems as if the sound is reaching out, almost pleading (for someone to hear?), across the expanse. You hold your breath waiting for a reply, but there's none, not even an echo, the sound travels towards infinity (as does the landscape). That outward travelling sound also takes your eye across the surface towards distant light or glimpsed form.'
- 'I thought the two simplicities worked well together. It was hard to tell whether the music expressed what one felt spontaneously about the landscape or was telling you how to feel about it — I suppose that's always the 'danger' of mixing media.'
- 'I think this sound track would have worked better for me with the grimly majestic mountain images. Here it is too broken along with the breaks between slides — when the imagery is all about the longest most continuous eternal wind ... whatever the sound — it needed to not change as often. I am curious about whether the change between slides would be carried better by the actual sound of wind — whether roar or whistle or ... sustained?'

Heart of Whiteness v2 (RS)

The sound track for version 2 of Heart of Whiteness is music from Khorasan in Iran — the CD is titled *Night Silence Desert* with music composed by Kayhan Kalhor. I chose this track to represent a different response to desert scenes and as with version 1 I wanted to use music that I thought would probably be unfamiliar — like the landscapes in the imagery, which are the same as version 1.

Comments:

- 'Ironically I think the stringed instrument conveys the skittering patterns created by the wind better than a wind instrument would. The very fine reverberation of the string seems to mimic the very fine etching of the

surface of the ice, especially the closer views. I agree at first you associate this music with hot places, but that is perhaps our preconception — many of those places also have very cold winters and mountains. It is in the end about precision, pattern on the edge of random, fineness. I liked the fit except at the end with the darker images which seemed to ask for something more sonorous — perhaps a discord of images rather than of the match to music, which otherwise I liked best.'

- 'I really loved this piece, one of my favourites. I thought the music and images worked so well together. I found the music alluring and mysterious which made me pay close attention to what image was coming next. I find this type of sparse, slower paced music works really well, when the music is too intense it seems to overpower the image and something is lost.'
- 'Comparing versions one and two: I had a much more positive and engaged response to v2 because there was more to listen to, less of a vast emptiness as in v1. But I can see how the minimalism of v1 would be more appropriate, more evocative of actually being on the featureless plateau, where one must struggle with the lack of much to pay attention to.'

In the Vestfold Hills (RS)

The Vestfold Hills are an ice-free range of hills in the hinterland of Davis Station in eastern Antarctica. One of the largest coastal ice-free areas in Antarctica, the Vestfold Hills would be familiar to generations of Australian Antarctic expeditioners. One of Rachmaninov's piano preludes (No. 9 in E flat minor) was chosen as the soundtrack for this video in order to experiment with responses to a piece in a minor key. The rolling terrain seems to be represented very well by the music. This was the least viewed of all the videos for reasons unknown.

Comments:

- 'I make a connection between the rolling, up and down piano track and the rolling, uneven landscapes, so a good fit. Maybe the music is a bit too polished and methodical, though.'
- 'I also found the rolling tumbling music suited the rough landscape, the ending was particularly appropriate. But I felt the Rach is too romantic and lush for such barren and harsh images and didn't much like the pairing.'

In this place silence has a voice (CB)

This film incorporates porcelain bell vessels and sculptural pieces created by South African artists Katherine Glenday and Christina Bryer. Both are drawn to this medium for its translucency and fragility, for the way it holds light and sound and offers both back. When struck with a soft-headed drumstick, Katherine's vessels emit a sound like that of a Tibetan gong or cathedral angelis.

The vessels' relationship to the Antarctic landscape is reinforced by the fact that the clay body used to make these pieces (a percentage of which came from the White Cliffs of Dover) contains fossil remnants of foraminifera ('forams') and coccolithophors, clues to the scientific research that has been carried out in the vicinity of the Explorers Cove site for the past 25 years.

Christina Bryer is a mathematician as well as an artist. Periodicity is the keystone of her work. When we first sent her images of foraminifera — specifically, *Astrammmina triangularis* — she delighted in the mathematical 'blueprints' employed by the forams in the design and construction of their shells and embarked on the creation of a series of exquisite sculptural tributes to the unicellular creatures.

This video features these two artists, placing them and their work purposefully and exquisitely within the Antarctic landscape they have long dreamed of.

Comments:

- 'The ring of resonance on air. The sound of the "bell" and the clarinet, as a wind instrument, seemed a great way to begin this video. There are lovely moments when the harmonics of each instrument merge, cross and linger, just as the nature of object and nature inter-react and intermingle.'
- 'I loved it. These women-made objects belong in this landscape. What an affirmation: "We belong in the landscape. Not gross egoistic intrusions into nature. Instead clear, sleek, joyous insertions into a spiritual conversation." Hurrah! Loved the music that went with the images as well.'
- 'Long notes sound, Long shadows fall. Cracks form in ice and human forms. We journey from surface to depth. Thank you, Claire!'
- 'Against the ice such small objects look like their own mountains. Everything has such delicate features. Sound and life frozen into such beautiful patterns.'

'Lacrimosa' (CB)

The choral piece accompanying this video is a track, the 'Lacrimosa' from Zbigniew Preisner's album *Requiem for My Friend*. It seemed to me to embody weightiness and solemnity in a way that echoes the *gravitas* and desolation of the vast landscapes represented in the movie. There's a keening quality here that I find at once discomfiting and hauntingly coherent. Several members of 'A Vast Scale' made reference to the Christchurch earthquakes; this very likely added an extra layer of breath-holding poignancy to this piece.

Comments:

- 'I really enjoy that, for many, the scale is not immediately decipherable — and yet the music is so huge. I adore the fact that the poor old eyes and head do not know on which scale the next image will resolve. And the music swells and swells as does the swing between visual scales. It was a potent compelling workout. I didn't think I would like it as a union when it started: by the end "yes". And my second-favourite collection of imagery! Stunning.'
- 'Cripes, I think I might burst if I felt an earthquake whilst listening to 'Lacrimosa' and viewing these images... how much sensory tumult can one poor hominid endure? You are of sinewy stuff.'

Rare sounds abound in these places where wind is dressed in white (CB)

For a truly exhilarating and unforgettable experience, stand at the foot of a glacier with your body braced against a mighty wind. Every cell hums, quivers, vibrates. This footage was captured during a Condition 2 storm in front of the Wilson Piedmont Glacier, on the southern rim of the Ferrar Fjord. The opening bars of Arvo Pärt's spine-chilling composition *Mother Night* expresses the tautness and tension of this environment.

Comments:

- 'I've just been watching again, over and over, and this piece just gets more fascinating. Watching that wind sweep the snow is riveting. Never gets tiring. And the music: wonderful, an altogether different mood and pace than the blowing snow. This creates an interesting relationship between the two. The Pärt does not offer commentary on the picture; indeed, to me it has little connection to what's playing before my eyes. The music creates a space to watch the wind, and the footage a space to deeply listen to that violin and shiver-making piano chord at the end. It works beautifully. Rather than being an integrated experience, the two occur side-by-side, each an experience unto itself. I am aware of myself successfully, enjoyably, doing two things at once.'
- 'What picture and music have in common: both busy, relentless, minutely detailed pattern building to a whole. Not a big fan of violins in general, but the high, scratchy sound evokes an imagined idea of the sandy blast of fine grained snow against skin, clothes or tent. The climax of the music reminds me of the deep, resonant whole that is Antarctica, made up of millenia of blowing snow packing into ice enough to sink a whole continent.'

Step out onto white not as a body bearing any weight but as a feather might (CB)

The title of this piece is the first line of 'Thin Ice', a two-line poem (Claire Beynon 2007) that reads as follows:

Step
out
onto
white
not
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body
bearing
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When I wanted a little more than the company of silence, Arvo Pärt's album *Fratres* — specifically 'Spiegel Im Spiegel' — was my music of choice while I was living and working at Explorers Cove, New Harbour. My camera was always poised to capture the dynamic intricacies of ice. Each day, the ice drew and re-drew itself — I found its calligraphy eloquent and surprising. When the thaw began to work its magic towards the end of the season, each step across the sea ice had to be made with extra care. Walking and listening became synonymous — almost a meditation.

Comments:

- 'Gorgeous. My only wish is that the pictures moved a bit slower. I want to savour each one. I realise this means either a longer musical selection or fewer images, but so many of the stills are so beautiful — and for their minimalism, not at all simple — I want to gaze at them from edge to edge and corner to corner.'
- 'I'm so literal! The music sounds to me just like the shapes of snow and ice, the plinking of piano and the plops of frozen water are so well matched. I agree with X, I would like more time to look at each image carefully, so I will go back and watch again.'
- 'These two seemed to work so well together I could equally imagine the music being written to the images or vice-versa. Meditative.'

Wandering Adélie (CB)

I was being a little provocative with this piece. These days, with a glut of full-length animated movies featuring penguins in leading roles, it's hard not to think *Happy Feet* when one encounters a penguin. Zoe Keating is one my favourite contemporary musicians — an avant-garde cellist whose compositions are both technologically and architecturally impressive. With our project's 'propensity for intensity', I thought it would be fun — and interesting — to see what happened when a wandering Adélie 'met' with a serious musician.

Comments:

- 'This seems like good penguin music to me. Light and quirky yet respectful of the inherent dignity of the wild animal. Not anthropomorphising, not *Happy Feet*.'
- 'Soulful and yet light. Although the title of the song, "Optimist", adds an ironic twist to the most probable fate of this little one.'
- 'Didn't like beginning as music seemed ominous — too suggestive: impending ... BUT did like rest of music ... parts very in keeping with creature. Would have most enjoyed just the part early on when you dwell on the shadow flapping — the sound track perfect here (with title KNOWN). That was the best bit and I could happily have watched and listen to the same fragment (visual) looped for minutes with the sound track!'

Weathered Systems (CB)

This piece might be considered the 'black sheep' in our 'A Vast Scale' video family; it comes to the continent from a quite different angle. I felt strongly that this aspect of Antarctica — namely, our relationship to her and with her — should be represented here, too. What wrongs we visit upon our planet. In light of these things, Andrew Bird's music seems to me to raise questions and suggest a lament. He achieves this, I think, via a sense of mournfulness, of 'active grieving'.

One of the things I wanted to say through this video was this: no matter how prettily we couch our presence in Antarctica, the impact of our being there and continuing to inhabit and explore the terrain is significant. Some might go so far as to say it is irreversible. In some way, I feel like a contradiction, having visited the continent twice. I find myself questioning my own capacity/incapacity to say 'no' should I ever be offered an opportunity to go again. How does one reconcile these conflicting pulls? When it comes to advocacy on behalf of the continent, can we assume both to go there *and* speak on her behalf? I don't know. It is all too easy to throw a soft blanket over sharp terrain.

Comments:

- 'I went into it thinking, "I am not going to like this. Human debris in the midst of pristine beauty". But the images of "stuff" are exquisite. The elements are the artists creating beauty out of things never intended to be beautiful. Reminds me of how the soul beautifies even when we pretend that we do not know it exists.'
- 'I love the last two shots — contradicting shots of human v. non human elements. I would love to see more overall shots mixed in with the detail shots earlier. It felt too closed in for me, I couldn't get a sense of the place as much. I really wanted to see the buildings; the humans hunkered down in metallic buildings. I wanted to feel small against the mountains. I think that might help the impact of the intimate detail photos if we have sort of grand photos as well.'
- 'How stunning!!! I don't see this as a piece about "waste", Claire, nor do I view it as a statement about human impacts on the environment. Indeed, it evokes just the opposite in me: the Earth system is robust and ever-changing; humanity is still subject to its force and fury, especially when the temporal scale is so gradual that it's barely perceptible (revealed as years of weathering seen in your images).'
- 'There's not much romance or beauty in what contemporary human habitation brings to Antarctica, is there? My ambivalence about going there as an artist or tourist is predicated on this: Antarctica doesn't need another human waste contributor. What is beautiful there is entirely what people haven't touched (though Jane Ussher's photos suggest at least the old huts have a venerable glow). The mournful tone of the song seems a sadness that utility is usually so ugly there.'

Two members of 'A Vast Scale' added their own videos to the site but discussion of them is beyond the scope of this paper.

The discussion forums

In addition to the videos we instigated four discussion forums. A selection from the discussion follows.

Music and silence: Without resorting to four minutes and 33 seconds of silence (ref. John Cage⁴), how might one represent silence in music?

- 'Having watched/listened to most of the videos here, I can say my preference to accompany Antarctic images is very much for minimalist music. The more different instruments, the more insistent the melody or rhythm, the less I appreciated what the different soundtracks have added. At times I longed for the "silence" of wind, or imagined the sounds of my own body on the ice. Crunching footsteps, whispering waterproof clothing, my own breath condensing, my heart beating hard ... There are some lovely passages in Kim Stanley Robinson's novel *Antarctica* where he describes the ambient sounds of walking across the ice in "silence".'
- 'I think X hits the nail on head for me: my experience of profoundly silent places (cold places — stilled places — whether polar, northern winter or desert night) and the sublimeness of them is they are not so silent: I hear myself. Exactly what X says, my breath, my heart, the blood flow near my ears, the shift of clothing, crunch of ice or sand with slight change in body weight-position... an involuntary sniff becomes horrendously loud and intrusive. On occasion I have let the nose run on down just to avoid such obscene disruptions. So let silence be sound of us, our body, slowly resolving into distinguishable then identifiable sound, or similarly the sound of wind or ice creak-snap-groan-report, but not necessarily constant — let it come and go unexpected. Or something human but atonal — something along the lines of the sustained throat singing of the Sami?'

Is it the music, the landscape or your own experience?: When you view the videos what does the music evoke; feelings for the landscape or memories of your own experiences or both or neither?

- 'I'm afraid I have found the music distracting and have mostly turned it off to enjoy the imagery in silence.'

The ethics of music-making in Antarctica: Given that silence is a key characteristic of Antarctica, is it ethical to make music in the world's last great wilderness?

- 'I think this question presupposes a narrow definition of music. In general, there is no such thing as silence, apart from that space created by an anechoic chamber. Even our own bodies make music, even if we don't necessarily hear it. Every sound is comprised of the harmonics and disharmonics of music, as discovered by Helmholtz. It is not as if bringing music into the landscape is a breach of ethics. Perhaps it is making something heard? Perhaps it is

4 John Cage (first performed 1952) *4' 33"* [*Four minutes, thirty-three seconds*], http://johncage.org/4_33.html.

like bringing in another layer of language. Perhaps it is more a question of respect, or intent?'

- 'What I aim to do with an improvisation is to give the silence a voice, in a way. When people stop their ordinary activities to listen I think it is sometimes helpful if the silence has a few frames around it, especially if they are not used to it.'

Music, the environment and higher understanding: Does the combination of the music and environment together evoke a 'higher' understanding? Would you consider the whole to be greater than the sum of the parts?

- 'If you have sat on the Ross Ice Shelf on your own, miles from the nearest human, held your breath and listened to silence (bugger the heartbeat) and enjoyed the sensation, then music would be pollution. But if you wish to augment a themed set of slides or a movie with music (minor or major key) then choose carefully — getting it right should "evoke a higher understanding".'

And a member of 'A Vast Scale' contributed a fifth forum:

Absolute dance. For me, Antarctica is pure line and movement, with no need to add music.

- 'These ideas really resonate; thank you. I am inclined to agree with you ... If we think in terms of Antarctica as pure line and movement, then it surely follows that line and movement = music? This then begs the question "what = music in the context of a place like Antarctica?" Does the addition of anything to that landscape become extraneous, intrusive, a form of moral disregard or disrespect? We are so wired towards thinking our response needs to be something tangible, whether this be in an auditory, visual, sensual, textural way, when in reality any attempt to add to that which is already pure, complete — sublime — could be interpreted as a violation of sorts, a subtraction?'
- 'For me, Antarctica is more about surface than line. There is plenty of movement, to be sure, the imperceptible creep of the glaciers and the flexing of the ice shelves with the tides at one end of the movement spectrum to the howling katabatic at the other where the air is travelling so fast it will sweep you off your feet. But it is the surfaces that catch your eye, whether they be the sensual shapes of wind-blown snow or the insidious bow in the surface that hints at a 100-metre drop hidden just below the surface. And beneath the surface is that entrancing and mysterious blue. And anyway, lines are unreliable — is that the horizon, a cloud or a mirage?'

- 'I agree with William Fox (2000)⁵ when he refers to Antarctica as a mirror. Our responses to Antarctica reflect more about our different ways of knowing than about the place. Lines in my mind's eye, drawings and animations, describe flows of energy that I understand from looking at scientific visualisations and that I can reconcile with physical experience.'

Wrap-up survey

In mid-2011 we decided that we should draw the discussion together by asking our members to contribute to a brief survey.

Question 1. Which was your favourite video (i.e., the one where you thought the music best matched the imagery) and which did you like the least?

- "'Weathered Systems" and "Silence Has A Voice" (porcelain vessels) were my favourites. Wonderful meld between images and music.'
- "'A Heart of Whiteness" Version 2, liked best for the match — the fine music with the fine etching of skittering wind patterns over the ice.'

Question 2. Early in this conversation, one of our group members suggested, 'Comments so far indicate a preference for Antarctica simply speaking for herself.' Two months down the track, it seems the continent might not be entirely averse to our attempts to harmonise with her. Do you agree or disagree?

- 'I think Antarctica is just hanging out for a good conversation and I think you are having one of them.'
- 'Agree that it's an interesting project to link them up — we find different ways into understanding and appreciating places, and wherever we find resonances (musical or otherwise) that's no bad thing.'

Question 3. If you were in the heart of Antarctica what instrument do you think would harmonise with your surroundings best?

- 'Wind instruments.'
- 'Possibly a clarinet.'
- 'If I were in the heart of Antarctica, both my bare lips or fingers would freeze before I had a chance to harmonise with anything. If I were a singer, likely I would sing a song to harmonise with my surroundings, assuming I'm not in a whiteout. Since I have a harmonica and it would be more practical to

⁵ William L Fox (2005) *Terra Antarctica: looking into the emptiest continent*. Trinity University Press, San Antonio, Texas.

carry it, I think a lonesome harmonica ode, such as "Home on the Range" or an "Icecap Blues" would do nicely, much as it would on a hot, dry "lone prairie", where "seldom is heard a discouraging word".'

Concluding discussion

The introduction on the home page of the website 'A Vast Scale' reads:

'We invite you to participate in our exploration of music and Antarctica and to respond to the images and sound tracks we have uploaded here.'

This has been exactly that — an exploration of music and Antarctica. The scope has been limited in some ways, indeed we have only scratched the surface of both Antarctica and the infinite number of ways to respond musically to it. Indeed, the project begs the question 'what is music?' A number of themes have, nevertheless, emerged. The first is the very great interest in music and Antarctica and the number of ways those two ideas can be configured: how to respond musically to Antarctica, can one represent Antarctica in music, is it okay to play music in Antarctica, does one instrument capture the spirit of Antarctica better than another, etc. There is, of course, no one answer to any of these questions but the discussion brings out ideas, prompts the expression of opinions and brings vitality to the community. A second theme is that there was a general preference for less rather than more, in other words fewer instruments or possibly only one, and a minimalist (reduced to the minimum), though not necessarily Minimalist (as with composers Philip Glass and Steve Reich) score. The human voice also seemed to be preferred, though again in a minimalist setting. Finally, although never actually expressed, there did seem to be a yearning for something distinctly Antarctic; music that expresses the seventh continent, setting it apart from the other six.

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