

BOOK REVIEW

Review of *Bipolar*, edited by Kathryn Yussof (2008). London: The Arts Catalyst. 128 pp. ISBN 978-0-9534546-6-2.

This is a decidedly unconventional contribution to the literature concerning the International Polar Years (2007–09). It is described as a new interdisciplinary polar archive, featuring essays by the editor and the late Denis Cosgrove, and over “30 ‘archives’ by artists, scholars, scientists and thinkers” (from the back cover). I find this combination strange, perplexing and unsatisfactory. The disparate subjects are treated with little editorial uniformity, and vary from paragraphs on scientific subjects, written concisely, to more lengthy articles mainly representing the conceptions of artists. The use of language in many of the articles is highly metaphorical: indeed, this might be intentional to promote philosophical thought, but appears more to diminish any clarity of understanding. Rhetorical devices assert dubious interpretations, and then demolish them by processes described as decontextualization and deconstruction (perhaps analysis is meant?). Some writers extend sentences into paragraphs, where whatever meaning was intended

becomes uncertain. I find it odd that in a note on the Antarctic Treaty system, no mention of the Scientific Committee on Antarctic Research appears, neither Edward Wilson nor George Marston are mentioned in passages on art history, and that the exploration of the Northwest Passage involved “bearded explorers with a passion for cannibalism” (p. 78). The book has many illustrations, the merits of which are more pictorial than informative; defects include lack of captions and dimensions, which imply that the reader should regard many as impressionistic. Solecisms such as “modular research modules” and “large megafauna” abound. The orthography is irregular (notably in Icelandic), which provides evidence of haste in the production. There are references for some papers, and short biographies of contributors, but no index.

The existence of the gulf between science and art is often realized. One would have hoped that such a work, especially associated with the International Polar Years, would promote a degree of unity. This work does not: *Bipolar* serves more to emphasize the dimensions of the gulf.



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