



UNIVERSITY
OF WOLLONGONG
AUSTRALIA

2004

The Proclamation Island moment: making Antarctica Australian

C. Collis

University of Queensland

Follow this and additional works at: <http://ro.uow.edu.au/ltc>

Recommended Citation

Collis, C., The Proclamation Island moment: making Antarctica Australian, *Law Text Culture*, 8, 2004.

Available at: <http://ro.uow.edu.au/ltc/vol8/iss1/3>

The Proclamation Island moment: making Antarctica Australian

Abstract

This article begins with a statement, and with a scene. The statement is a reasonably straightforward one: Australia claims 42 per cent of the distant offshore continent of Antarctica as its national territory. Or, to make this article's governing statement speak directly to the themes of this issue: nearly half of Antarctica is part of the Australian nation; it is Australian space. This statement's validity depends on national perspective: the 1959 Antarctic Treaty, which upholds Australia's claim, also allows other nations to refuse to recognise it. Only four nations — France, Norway, New Zealand, and Britain, all Antarctic claimants themselves — recognise Australia's massive polar claim; to the rest, Antarctica remains non-sovereign, non-national space. Yet whether or not other nations recognise Australia's Antarctic claim is not the focus of this article: the subject of analysis here is the complex set of cultural technologies through which six million square kilometres of Antarctica became Australian. How, exactly, did Antarctica become an Australian territorial possession? What are the cultural processes through which Antarctic land became Australian space? As a means of answering this question, this article focuses on a key moment, or scene, in the history of the Australian Antarctic Territory (AAT). The article then unpacks this moment, examining the ways in which three articulated cultural technologies — representation, international territorial law, and the body of the explorer — together initiated this massive space of Australian national possession.

The Proclamation Island moment: making Antarctica Australian

Christy Collis



Photo: Frank Hurley © Australian Antarctic Division 2002

Introduction

This article begins with a statement, and with a scene. The statement is a reasonably straightforward one: Australia claims 42 per cent of the distant offshore continent of Antarctica as its national territory. Or, to make this article's governing statement speak directly to the themes of this issue: nearly half of Antarctica is part of the Australian nation; it is Australian space. This statement's validity depends on national perspective: the 1959 Antarctic Treaty, which upholds Australia's claim, also allows other nations to refuse to recognise it. Only four nations —

France, Norway, New Zealand, and Britain, all Antarctic claimants themselves — recognise Australia's massive polar claim; to the rest, Antarctica remains non-sovereign, non-national space. Yet whether or not other nations recognise Australia's Antarctic claim is not the focus of this article: the subject of analysis here is the complex set of cultural technologies through which six million square kilometres of Antarctica became Australian. How, exactly, did Antarctica become an Australian territorial possession? What are the cultural processes through which Antarctic land became Australian space? As a means of answering this question, this article focuses on a key moment, or scene, in the history of the Australian Antarctic Territory (AAT). The article then unpacks this moment, examining the ways in which three articulated cultural technologies — representation, international territorial law, and the body of the explorer — together initiated this massive space of Australian national possession.

Two motivations underpin this article's anatomising of a key moment in the history of the AAT. First, Antarctica is far too often represented as a homogenous wilderness — majestic and wild and entirely uniform — but this simplistic vision is far from the case. Antarctica is a complex cultural space, comprised of competing national claims, disparate legal geographies, and entirely distinct national spatial cultures. Chile, for example, bases its Antarctic claim on 15th-century Papal Bulls and on its occupation by Chilean families; for Chile, Antarctica is part of the nation's domestic space (Dodds 1997: 109). Britain, however, whose polar claim overlaps Chile's, bases its Antarctic spatiality on acts of imperial exploration and subsequent scientific occupation. One physical site — the Peninsula in this case — is thus composed of three disparate national and legal spatialities (Argentina also claims a portion of the Peninsula) as well as the overarching spatiality of the international Antarctic Treaty. To assume, then, that Antarctica is simply a homogenous cultural space is to disregard the dynamic realities of Antarctic spatiality, and to reduce the complexities of an entire continent's geopolitical, legal and cultural geographies to a static *tabula rasa*. In a continent governed by international consensus

The Proclamation Island moment: making Antarctica Australian

and cooperation, it is crucial that the specific cultural and spatial histories of Treaty participants be clearly and thoroughly understood. Second, at a more theoretical level, attending to the transformation of Antarctic ice into an Australian national possession usefully points up some of the intersecting cultural technologies involved in spatial production, cultural technologies so potent that they produced nearly half a distant offshore continent as Australian space. It disrupts the stale assumption that representation is simply *about* space, that bodily practices simply occur *in* space, and that territorial law simply *governs* space; and replaces them with the understanding that law, bodies and representation in fact produce spatiality itself.

Two terms require brief explanation. First, ‘spatiality’ here signals the multiple and dynamic nature of geographical space. As spatial theorists such as Henri Lefebvre assert, a space is never simply physical; rather, any space is always a jostling composite of material, imagined and practised geographies (Lefebvre 1991). The ways in which people behave in a space, and the ways in which a culture perceives, represents and legislates that space are as constitutive of its identity — its spatiality — as the physical topography of the ground itself. Second, cultural tools such as representation and territorial law are here referred to as ‘cultural technologies’, a useful term that acknowledges that power — in this case the power to transform nearly half of Antarctica into an Australian possession — does not function monolithically, but instead comprises what Dixon calls ‘a proliferation of operations’ (2001: 4). Australia’s 1933 *Australian Antarctic Territory Acceptance Act* may have formalised Australia’s polar claim, but it took more than a single governmental Act to make Antarctic space Australian. Derived in part from Foucault’s work on the diffuse operations and heterogeneous constitution of power, ‘cultural technologies’ here usefully shorthands two important points: first, that the production of a spatial possession involves multiple — and sometimes contradictory — procedures, actors and forces. While recent scholarship often focuses on the contradictions and slippages among these, this article directs its critical attention on the way in which heterogeneous cultural technologies can align and

succeed in the creation of a vast and enduring spatial possession. Second, ‘cultural technologies’ signals that space does not exist in some essential form, but is instead created by various cultural techniques and practices. Additionally, in dealing with law, the term ‘cultural technology’ usefully highlights the cultural nature of this potent spatialising force: it reminds us that law, as Blomley states, ‘is not constructed in some ontologically privileged domain; it is necessarily a social and political construct’ (1989: 514). Attending as it does to the ways in which representation, bodies and law together produced Antarctica as Australian space, this article, then, is an investigation of some of the key cultural technologies of Australian Antarctic spatiality.

The scene

The scene takes place in January 1930 as a ship cautiously forces its way through the pack ice towards Eastern Antarctica’s frozen coast. For hundreds of kilometres, this coastline consists entirely of ice: although Antarctica is a continent, only 2 per cent of its surface is exposed rock; the rest lies buried under a vast frozen mantle. There is, however, rock in this coastal scene: silhouetted against the blinding white of the coastal shelf, a barren, black island looms up out of the water. The island isn’t exactly what the men of this expedition are seeking: what they want is a rocky shore where they can land on the continent itself, but the soaring coastal ramparts of ice prohibit this, and the island will have to do (Fletcher 1984: 161). Slowly and carefully, the *Discovery* approaches the island through uncharted waters; the men’s eyes strain in the frigid air as they scour the ocean’s surface for ship-puncturing bergs. Tension burns on the bridge: the expedition leader wants to get closer to the island, but Captain Davis refuses to risk the ship, and brings it to a halt. Ten of the men lower a boat into the dark sea and pull hard at the oars until they ram its bow against the island’s icy littoral. Now, one of the key moments of this acquisitive exploratory expedition — officially titled the British, Australian, and New Zealand Antarctic Research Expedition (BANZARE) — is about to occur; the expedition is about to succeed in its primary spatial mission.

The Proclamation Island moment: making Antarctica Australian

The men shuffle aside in the crowded boat so that Sir Douglas Mawson, the Australian leader of the expedition, can be the first to put his feet onto the island. Once he has done so, all but two of the men tumble from the boat and ascend through its raucous seabird rookeries to the bleak 245 metre high summit; Howard and Simmers stay behind on the shore and commence mapping (Fletcher 1984: 162). Once at the summit, Mawson and his team assemble a cairn of loose stones and insert into it one of the flagpoles they've carried with them across the ocean. At the stroke of noon, the men line up in a half square around the pole, they raise the Union Jack, Mawson reads an official Proclamation of territorial annexation (see Bush 1982: 118-9), the photographer Hurley shoots the moment on film, and the men take off their hats and sing 'God Save the King'. There is a slight mishap at this vital moment: when he goes to read the Proclamation, Mawson finds that the men have inserted the document into a metal canister and buried it in the cairn prematurely. He thus recites the Proclamation from memory, with some prompting from Hurley and Moyes (Fletcher 1984: 162). Leaving his camera for a moment, Hurley hammers a plaque to the pole: it reads, 'The British Flag was Hoisted and British Sovereignty Asserted on 13th January 1930'. The plaque faces south towards Antarctica: the men of BANZARE may not have been able to land on the continent, but from this island they are staking a continental claim. Mawson affixes names to every landform he can see: the black island becomes Proclamation Island; inland mountains are assigned the names of the men. The view is magnificent, but there is little time to savour the outlook or the feeling of solid ground beneath their cold feet: the wind is mounting and the pack ice is closing in around the unanchored ship. The men descend, collecting potentially exploitable mineral and biological specimens as they go; gunshots shatter the island's stillness as the scientists shoot birds, Mawson's pack groans with geological samples. The men make their way back to the *Discovery*, Mawson returns to his cabin and writes up the event, Hurley unloads his camera and stores the film. By 3.15 pm the ship is steaming away from the island. A crucial moment in Antarctica's spatial history has occurred: Antarctica has been produced as Australian space.

But how, exactly, does this transformation of Antarctic land into an Australian spatial possession work? How does this moment initiate the production of six million square kilometres of Antarctica as Australian space?

Context

Accounts of early 20th-century Antarctica generally centre on the polar performances of four men: Scott, Shackleton, Amundsen, and, at least in Australia, Mawson. In the first 15 years of the 20th century, these men trudged and battled and sledged over the polar plateau, and Antarctica took on a new cultural identity: the continent became the final frontier, the setting for performances of heroic imperial masculinity (Hains 2002), and a last site for the staging of the Romantic sublime (Tang 2000: 187). At the same time, a second, less symbolic, type of Antarctic spatiality began to emerge: for the first time, Antarctica became a potential territorial possession; it became geopolitical space. Geopolitics, as Dodds asserts, actively produces or ‘manufactures’ space (1997: xiv), and in the early 20th century, expansionist geopolitics initiated the manufacturing of Antarctica as a vast area of potential national possessions. Geopolitical thought also began to produce Antarctica as a repository of potential national revenue: the southern whaling industry was flourishing, and explorers such as Mawson repeatedly foregrounded the probability of economic minerals under the ice. In 1908 and 1917, Britain issued Letters Patent declaring its sovereignty over an undefined portion of the continent, in 1923 Britain issued an Order in Council under the *Imperial British Settlements Act* which transferred possession of the Ross Dependency to New Zealand, and in 1924 France pronounced Antarctic space its own. Norway, whose territorial interests concentrated more on Antarctica’s pelagic resources than on continental land itself, declared Antarctic Bouvetoya Island Norwegian in 1928, while in 1927 Argentina attempted to redefine the British-claimed South Orkneys as Argentinian space. The US meanwhile declared its rejection of all national claims to Antarctica, and advanced the possibility of acquiring part of the

The Proclamation Island moment: making Antarctica Australian

polar territory that Britain and Australia saw as their own (Triggs 1986: 105). By the late 1920s, what Agnew and Corbridge (1995) refer to as the nation-state spatial ontology — that is, the belief that land should and must be divided into state-sovereign units — had encompassed Antarctica. What the *Adelaide Advertiser's* 8 April 1929 headline called 'A Scramble for Antarctica' had begun.

The British Imperial Conference of 1926 concluded that the entire continent should become a possession of Britain and its Dominions, New Zealand and Australia; deploying a familiar imperial cartographic metaphor, Britain declared its intention 'to paint the whole Antarctic red' (Campbell in Beck 1986: 29). The Statute of Westminster had not yet invested Australia with full political and legal independence from Britain, yet Britain did not want to bear the financial and administrative burden of owning the entire continent itself. Thus, BANZARE was to take possession of Eastern Antarctica in the name of the British Empire with the understanding that Britain would then give the claimed territory to Australia (Rothwell 1996: 55). Britain did so in 1933. As a direct result of the Imperial Conference, and of the geopolitical desire for Antarctic possession, BANZARE set sail into the brutal Southern Ocean. The expedition included various scientists, but its primary mission was not to observe Antarctic space, but to take possession of it (Beck 1986: 29): as the expedition's instructions from Prime Minister Bruce stated, BANZARE's mission was to produce Antarctica as Empire's — and by extension Australia's — sovereign space (Jacka & Jacka 1988: 251). With the scene with which this article is concerned, along with four other such moments, BANZARE succeeded.

Cultural technology #1: representation

The Proclamation Island scene teems with acts of representation: Hurlley shoots movies and still images, Mawson writes, Simmers and Howard draw up maps. One of the foundational premises of spatial studies is that the job of imperial explorers is not to locate landforms, but to produce a discursive space. 'The early travelers,' as Carter notes of Australian explorers, 'invented places rather than found them' (1987:

51); as Certeau similarly observes, the primary achievement of imperial exploration is to ‘make space into a language’ (1986: 143). Numerous analyses attend to the discursive power of imperial exploration: in Australia, Carter’s *Road to Botany Bay* (1987), Gibson’s *Diminishing Paradise* (1984), and Hains’s *Ice and the Inland* (2002), to name a few, lay bare the textual strategies through which the imperial annexation of ‘new’ spaces was legitimated and enabled. Discursive territory was certainly a key product of BANZARE: as the scene demonstrates, one of the key missions of BANZARE was not simply to perform rituals of territorial annexation, but to textualise them for popular and governmental consumption. Prime Minister Bruce’s confidential expedition orders to Mawson clearly spell out BANZARE’s spatial tasks: Mawson was to raise the flag wherever possible, to ascertain the potential for ‘future economic exploitation’ of Antarctica, and to generate both written and photographic representations of Australia’s polar claim and its claimants (Bush 1982: 117–8). A crucial part of BANZARE’s job was to travel to Antarctica and to return to Australia with a textual space.

Within 10 months of the expedition’s return, Hurley’s feature-length film *Siege of the South* (1931) was touring Australia. A focus on the film’s Proclamation Island scene usefully points up the discursive work of this moment, and the ways in which it produces Antarctica as a possession. The Proclamation Island scene lies at the narrative heart of the film; the scene was so important that Hurley wished he had been able to shoot two hours of footage of Mawson’s island performance (Ayres 1999: 194).¹ A photo of this scene also features on the cover of crew member Harold Fletcher’s 1984 account of the expedition, the Australian Antarctic Division’s official history of the AAT, and the 2001 Australian Post Office’s Antarctic stamp. This sustained ubiquity signals its importance. In the film, this scene opens with a long shot of the land and sea around the island, a shot which emphasises the emptiness of Antarctic space prior to its ‘discovery’ by Mawson. Nothing is visible besides the island and the water. In this shot, the film visually confirms Antarctica’s status as an available *terra nullius* awaiting cooption into Australian understanding, and into Australian national

The Proclamation Island moment: making Antarctica Australian

space. While textually producing new territorial possessions as empty or at least un-owned is a standard manoeuvre in British imperial exploration discourse, the representation of Antarctica as *terra nullius* held a special attraction for white Australians. Australia itself was created as a British legal and discursive possession on the basis of *terra nullius* (see, for example, Reynolds 1987), but the glaring falsity of white Australia's foundational claim to the continent left the nation permanently ill at ease. The 1928 Coniston massacre, which occurred only a year before BANZARE set sail, amplified this 'unsettlement' of the white settler nation's spatiality by foregrounding not only the undeniable presence of Aboriginal Australians, but also the violence of their dispossession. Antarctica, however, has no indigenous population: it truly was *terra nullius*. Hurley's visual citation of Antarctica as *terra nullius*, then, not only represented Antarctica as morally and legally available for absorption into the Australian nation; it also worked to legitimate the embattled concept of 'the discovery of *terra nullius*' as a valid and a successful practice of spatial possession.

In the film, Hurley's voiceover elevates the moment of the expedition's arrival at the island, signalling to viewers that this will be no ordinary landing: 'our spirits run high,' he says, 'for the glamour of the occasion is with us.' The following shot confirms just why the occasion is 'glamorous': as the film's sonic backdrop suddenly shifts from sea shanties to heraldic trumpet music, the men carry the Union Jack ashore. 'Making Antarctic history,' Hurley's voiceover continues, 'we land on the foreshore of a well-sheltered boat harbour that has waited since creation's dawn for man's coming.' The trope of virgin land passively 'waiting' for annexation by 'man' is of course a tediously familiar one in imperial discourses of exploration (Ryan 1996: 196-206, Schaffer 1988): it at once naturalises the presence of territorial claimants on putatively biological grounds, and shores up the ontological bedrock of *terra nullius*: the idea that unowned land must, and indeed desires, to become a national possession. In the discursive logic of the film, the arrival of Australians in Antarctica and the transformation of the ice into an imperial territorial possession become natural, desirable, historically inevitable events.

The film then cuts to the island's summit, atop what the voiceover refers to as a 'commanding bluff'. 'The implication of the word "command"', as Ryan observes of imperial exploration narratives, 'is that the view is brought under control by the explorative gaze. But the control of the view is also a kind of ownership' (1996: 89). At this point, *Siege of the South* becomes almost a visual checklist of the required rituals of territorial annexation (see Sharma 1997: 47): the shot of Mawson reading the Proclamation is followed by shots of the flag being raised, a shot of the plaque, a shot of the men taking off their hats while singing the anthem, and a shot of the burial of the Proclamation in the cairn. As the scene ends, the camera once again pans over the surrounding sea and ice scape, but this time with the Union Jack fluttering in the foreground (for further discussion of legal rituals of territorial acquisition, see Seed 1995). As Tang notes of a similar scene in the 1948 film *Scott of the Antarctic*, the foregrounded flag and plaque dramatise the inscription of 'meaning onto the blank screen of whiteness' (2000: 189); the meaning here is national possession. This final shot visually confirms the impact of Mawson's — and the film's — performance: all this, the shot implies, is now made meaningful; all this is now understood, recorded, and, most importantly, all this is now ours. 'The flag fluttering above the cairn holding the official documents of possession,' Hurley concludes, 'are the sole signs we leave behind to show that man has conquered.' But the most important sign of conquest — the film itself — travelled back to Australia.

A textual analysis of this filmic moment could identify numerous other spatial strategies at work: its conflation of Mawson's and the viewer's proprietary gazes, its mobilisation of the gendered categories of passive land and active men, or its deployment of militaristic rhetoric of conquest and triumph (Driver 2000). However, the spatial productivity of this moment far exceeds the discursive. What is at times highly frustrating about discourse analyses of spatiality is that they too often fail to articulate representation to other, equally potent, cultural technologies of spatial production. Wylie notes that 'on the whole, accounts of early twentieth-century Antarctic exploration exhibit a particular tendency to position and interpret exploratory experience in

The Proclamation Island moment: making Antarctica Australian

terms of self-contained discursive ensembles' (2002: 170). Despite the undisputed power of textuality, discourse alone cannot, and does not, produce spatial possessions. 'Discursive and representational practices,' as Jacobs observes, 'are in a mutually constitutive relationship with political and economic forces' (1996: 9); spatiality, in other words, is not simply a matter of representation. In order to understand fully the processes of Antarctic acquisition, it is necessary here to depart from tales of exploration and ships and flags, and to focus on the somewhat less visceral spatiality of international territorial law. Or, more accurately, it is necessary to address the mutual imbrication of these articulated cultural technologies.

Cultural technology #2: law

In his *Law, Space and the Geographies of Power* (1994), Nicholas Blomley asserts that analyses of territorial law largely neglect the spatial dimension of their investigations; rather than seeing the law as a force that produces specific kinds of spaces, they tend to position space as a neutral, universally legible entity which is neatly governed by the equally neutral 'external variable' of territorial law (28). 'In the hegemonic conception of the law,' Pue similarly argues, 'the entire world is transmuted into one vast isotropic surface' (1990: 568) on which law simply acts. But as the emerging field of critical legal geography demonstrates, law is not a neutral organiser of space, but is instead a powerful cultural technology of spatial production. 'Law represents, constitutes, and evaluates spaces in diverse ways' (Hogg 2002: 32). Territorial law, in other words, makes space, and does not simply govern it. This article thus positions international laws of territorial acquisition alongside Mawson's physical performance and Hurley's film as interlocked although distinct cultural ways of transforming Antarctic land into an Australian national possession. A danger of working with several cultural technologies in this way is the assumption that these technologies are tidy epiphenomena of one another: that territorial laws prompt governments to hire men who travel south with possession in their eyes. This, however, is not the case: as Dixon argues in *Prosthetic Gods*, various 'domains of practice' (2001: 3) — be

they geopolitics, travel writing, or law — are not simply reducible to one another, but rather, they intersect in the formation of dynamic power structures, or in this case, in a six million square kilometre territorial claim. When Mawson planted the flag and read the Proclamation, then, he was producing Antarctica as Australian legal, as well as discursive space.

Today's international territorial laws derive directly from European imperialism: as European empires expanded, they required a spatial system that would protect their newly annexed lands, and thus they developed a set of laws of territorial acquisition and possession (Curtin 1971: 41–2). Undergirding these laws is the ontological premise that space is divisible into state-owned sovereign units. At international law, space can be acquired by its imperial claimants in one of three main ways: through conquest, cession (treaty), or through 'the discovery of *terra nullius*' (see Triggs 1986: 2). Antarctica and Australia remain the globe's only significant spaces to be transformed into possessions through the last of these techniques. In the spatiality of the international law of discovery, explorers are not just government employees or symbolic representatives, but vessels of enormous legal force. According to international territorial law, sovereign title to 'new' territory — land defined (by Europeans) as *terra nullius*, or land belonging to no one — can be established through the eyes, feet, codified ritual performances, and documents of explorers. That is, once an authorised explorer — Mawson carried documents from both the Australian Prime Minister and the British King that invested his body and his texts with the power to transform land into a possession — saw land, put his foot on it, planted a flag, read a proclamation, then documented these acts in words and maps — that land became a national possession.² These rituals and their documentation activate the legal spatiality of territorial acquisition; law here is revealed as a 'bundle of practices' that produce space as a possession (Ford 2001: 202).

BANZARE's textual products — the two films, Mawson's official narrative, the maps, photos, and lists of minerals and animals — similarly activate a legal as well as a discursive spatiality. The combined legal and representative power of cartography is by now axiomatic

The Proclamation Island moment: making Antarctica Australian

(Harley 1989, Ryan 1996: 101-27): ‘cartography,’ as Dodds notes of British Antarctic mapping, ‘was politics by another name’ (2002: 2). Howard and Simmers, busily taking magnetic observations for mapping on Proclamation Island’s shore, were not only visually producing Antarctica as a known, contained space, but were also generating legal evidence for Australia’s polar sovereignty claim. Further, at international territorial law, territorial acquisition needs to be validated by recognition: nations must generate evidence of their territorial claim so that other nations can confirm the claim’s legitimacy. Australia’s Governor-General Casey was clear about the legal power of BANZARE’s texts, stating that ‘we wish to assert British sovereignty in this area ... and to have formal records (with photographs, if possible) of such acts so that we will be in a position to meet any challenge to our right of sovereignty with which we may be faced in the future’ (in Bush 1982: 114). What we witness when we attend to Mawson’s island scene, then, is not merely a symbolic performance, but also the transformation of Antarctica into a legal space of possession. Similarly, the films and documents generated by the expedition are much more than just a representational ‘sign system of human ambition’ (Tang 2000: 190), they are evidence, valid at law, of territorial possession (Triggs 1986: 27). They are key components of Australia’s legal currency of Antarctic spatial purchase.

Cultural technology #3: the explorer’s body

In his influential ‘Walking in the City’, Michel de Certeau insists that spatial practices — what people do physically in a space — are crucial components of spatiality. A focus on bodily spatial practices, as Certeau observes, ‘allows us to move beyond mere study of spatial representations and obvious legibilities’ (1974: 97), and into a more accurate, complete analysis of spatiality’s dynamism. Certeau’s work unfortunately rigidly conflates spatial practice with subversion, but his core point — that bodily practices make place — remains important. As such, this article now turns to the third of the Proclamation Island scene’s cultural technologies, a technology without which Australian Antarctic possession could not have been achieved: Mawson’s body.

It seems somewhat obvious, but the transformation of land into a possession relies on the body: an explorer must travel to the annexed land. Early modes of territorial acquisition did not rely entirely on corporeal contact: the Papal Bulls of the 15th century simply decreed all possible land south of a given point as available to the Spanish or Portuguese (Hussey 1954: 52). Refusing to recognise papal authority, France, Britain and the Netherlands established 'discovery' and 'occupation' — that is, direct physical contact with the claimed space — as the accepted legal and cultural practice of spatial possession (Sharma 1997: 39). The explorer's body thus became a nationally-metonymic vehicle, a physical ligature symbolically binding the claimed land to the nation. For this reason it was crucial for Mawson not only to travel to Antarctica, but also to touch Antarctic land as often as possible. Further, as the scene demonstrates, he had to touch it first: when Mawson jumped out of the boat before his team, his authorised body transformed the land into a possession onto which his men could then occupy. It was for this reason that Mawson was so frustrated that he had to touch Proclamation Island instead of the continent itself, and it is for this reason that Mawson's subsequent BANZARE claim, made from the expedition's open airplane, was both symbolically and legally dubious. When BANZARE arrived at Scullin Monolith on 13 February 1931, the men found the land to be 'too steep and rocky to land upon' (Mawson in Bush 1982: 125); yet they managed to fulfil the imperative of touching Mawson's body to the land by raising the flag in the boat while Mawson reached out and touched the shore.

As well as functioning symbolically and metonymically, the explorer's body also performs a legal role in territorial possession (Triggs 1986: 16), yet this aspect of exploration corporeality is rarely acknowledged. When he travelled to Antarctica in 1911 as the leader of the Australasian Antarctic Expedition (AAE), Mawson performed the usual rituals: he trekked, he read proclamations, he raised the flag. Yet these acts failed to transform Antarctic space legally: Mawson had not been formally invested with the legal power to produce Antarctic land as a possession by either the King, the British Colonial Office, or the Australian government (see Bush 1982: 92). Mawson's body, in other words,

The Proclamation Island moment: making Antarctica Australian

had not been infused with the power of the law.³ BANZARE, however, was different. In order to guarantee the legal potency of his body, Mawson carried with him a document titled, ‘Royal Commission in Favour of Sir Douglas Mawson to Take Possession of Certain Antarctic Territory’ (see Bush 1982: 116–7). This ponderously worded text transformed Mawson’s body into a legal vessel: his footsteps radiated the spatiality of legal possession across the land. With his body thus invested with the power of legal spatiality, Mawson’s Proclamation Island ascent became more than just a physical feat: from the moment his feet touched the island’s shoreline, he was walking Antarctica into an Australian possession; his invested body legally sutured Antarctica to the Australian nation.

Conclusion

The Proclamation Island scene is of central importance because it is a moment in which the dryly legal, the densely textual, and the bluntly physical so clearly intersect in the creation of geographical space as a national possession. Australia did not take possession of 42 per cent of Antarctica after BANZARE by law, by exploration, or by representation alone. The Australian government built its Antarctic space with the 1933 *Act* and by sending notices of possession to France and Norway. The men of BANZARE produced Australia’s polar possession by travelling across the Southern Ocean and performing rituals of flag-planting and proclamation-reading. BANZARE produced maps, journals, films, photos representing Antarctica as Australian space. The international territorial law of the ‘discovery of *terra nullius*’ coalesced these spaces into territory legally designated Australian. It is crucial to recognise here that the transformation of nearly half of Antarctica into Australian space was, and is not a product of discourse, of physical performance, or of law alone. Rather, these three cultural technologies of spatial production are mutually imbricated; none can function without the others, nor is one reducible to an epiphenomenon of another. Focusing only on the textual products of BANZARE without attending to the expedition’s legal work not only downplays the significance of

Mawson's achievement, but also blinds us to the role that law plays in the production of space. Mawson's Proclamation Island scene points to the unique nature of Australia's Antarctic spatiality: unlike all of the nations that construct Antarctica as an entirely non-sovereign, non-nationalised space, Australian Antarctic space is a spatiality of possession, founded on a bedrock of imperial exploration, representation and law. Seventy-four years ago, the camera whirred as a man stuck a flagpole into the bleak summit rocks of a small Antarctic island: six million square kilometres of Antarctica became, and remain, Australian space.

Notes

- 1 The scene was in fact so important that Hurley re-shot it during the two-year expedition's second year. The scene in *Siege of the South* is a re-enactment of the original.
- 2 Whether or not 'symbolic activities' such as flag-raising and Proclamation-reading by explorers can themselves entirely transform Antarctic land into a full legal possession of its claimants was, and continues to be, a topic of legal debate (Joyner 1992: 50). The 1885 Berlin Congress declared that the rituals of imperial discovery only generated 'inchoate title', which prohibited other nations from claiming the same space; inchoate title could only be 'consummated', and the land made into a full legal possession, through colonisation (Sharma 1997: 47). However, cases such as *Clipperton Island* (France v Mexico) (1931) 26 AJIL 390, *Isla das Palma* (1928) 22 AJIL 867, and *Eastern Greenland* (Denmark v Norway) (1933) PCIJ Ser A/B, No 53 determined that in the case of lands judged uninhabitable, acts of 'symbolic annexation' could stand in for colonisation, and could themselves produce the land as a full sovereign possession. Just to be sure, in 1954 Australia colonised the territory annexed by Mawson during BANZARE.
- 3 The British government reserved the right, however, to invest Mawson's body retrospectively and thus to transform his symbolic AAE claims into legal ones (Bush 1982: 95).

References

- Agnew J and Corbridge S 1995 *Mastering Space: Hegemony, Territory, and International Political Economy* Routledge London
- Ayres P 1999 *Mawson: A Life* Melbourne University Press Melbourne
- Beck P 1986 *The International Politics of Antarctica* Croom Helm London & Sydney
- Bush W 1982 *Antarctica and International Law: A Collection of Inter-state and National Documents* Vol 2 Oceana London
- Blomley N 1989 'Text and Context: Rethinking the Law-Space Nexus' *Progress in Human Geography* 13/4: 512–34
- 1994 *Law, Space and the Geographies of Power* Guilford New York
- Blunt A and McEwan C 2002 *Postcolonial Geographies* Continuum London
- Carter P 1987 *The Road to Botany Bay: An Essay in Spatial History* Faber London
- Curtin P 1971 *Imperialism* Macmillan London
- De Certeau M 1974 *The Practice of Everyday Life* University of California Press Berkeley
- 1986 *Heterologies: Discourse on the Other* University of Minnesota Press Minneapolis
- Dixon R 2001 *Prosthetic Gods: Travel, Representation, and Colonial Governance* University of Queensland Press Brisbane
- Dodds K 1997 *Geopolitics in Antarctica: Views from the Southern Ocean Rim* Wiley Chichester
- 2002 'Screening Antarctica: Britain, the Falkland Islands Dependency Survey, and *Scott of the Antarctic* (1948)' *Polar Record* 38/204: 1–10
- Driver F 2000 *Geography Militant: Cultures of Exploration and Empire* Blackwell Oxford
- Fletcher H 1984 *Antarctic Days with Mawson: A Personal Account of the British, Australian, and New Zealand Antarctic Research Expedition of 1929–31* Angus & Robertson Sydney
- Ford R 2001 'Law's Territory (A History of Jurisdiction)' in Ford & Blomley 2001: 200–17

Collis

- Ford R and Blomley N 2001 *The Legal Geographies Reader* Blackwell Oxford
- Gibson R 1984 *The Diminishing Paradise: Changing Literary Perceptions of Australia* Sirius Sydney
- Hains B 2002 *The Ice and the Inland: Mawson, Flynn, and the Myth of the Frontier* Melbourne University Press Melbourne
- Harley J 1989 'Deconstructing the Map' *Cartographica* 26/2: 1–20
- Hogg R 2002 'Law's Other Spaces' *Law Text Culture* 6: 29–40
- Hussey W 1954 *Discovery, Expansion, and Empire* Cambridge University Press Cambridge
- Jacka F and Jacka E eds 1988 *Mawson's Antarctic Diaries* Allen & Unwin Sydney
- Jacobs J 1996 *Edge of Empire: Postcolonialism and the City* Routledge London
- Joyner C 1992 *Antarctica and the Law of the Sea* Martinus Nijhoff Dordrecht
- Lefebvre H 1991 *The Production of Space* Blackwell Oxford
- Pue W 1990 'Wrestling with Law: (Geographical) Specificity versus (Legal) Abstraction' *Urban Geography* 11/6: 566–85
- Reynolds H 1987 *The Law of the Land* Penguin Sydney
- Rothwell D 1996 *The Polar Regions and the Development of International Law* Cambridge University Press Cambridge
- Ryan S 1996 *The Cartographic Eye: How the Explorers Saw Australia* Cambridge University Press Cambridge
- Schaffer K 1988 *Women and the Bush: Forces of Desire in the Australian Cultural Tradition* Cambridge University Press Cambridge
- Seed P 1995 *Ceremonies of Possession in Europe's Conquest of the New World 1492-1690* Cambridge University Press, Cambridge
- Sharma S 1997 *Territorial Acquisition, Disputes, and International Law* Martinus Nijhoff The Hague
- Siege of the South* 1931 Hurley F (dir)
- Tang D 2000 'Writing on Antarctica' *Room 5* 1: 185–95
- Triggs G 1986 *International Law and Australian Sovereignty in Antarctica* Legal Books Sydney
- Wylie J 2002 'Earthly Poles: The Antarctic Voyages of Scott and Amundsen' in Blunt & McEwan 2002: 169–83