

In Antarctica

There it is, as a vacuum of colour, a ghost ship drifting across the horizon, the first iceberg, before my eyes, real. I had dreamt of this moment since I was seven years old with the expedition of Captain Scott flickering in my dreams. But I don't plan to die like Scott, not yet.

I am transported to a point of sublimity,¹ cavorting on the 'edge', I can taste the intensity on my tongue. It floats in the air with every breath as an ephemeral phantom of understanding.

There. Ungraspable. A glimmer.

Purity, peace and danger, sucked into one vast block of ice.²

As our boat tugs on south I stand at the bow.³ We drift forwards through a hinterland into a vast unknown, only seen before in my sleep induced hallucinations. Alternate visions of reality appear so clearly, I am looking through a telescope at the horizon, the world is enlarged. All the dots connect and the constellations make sense.⁴ Where am I? Lost in my own mind, in a sea of my own making, I am drowning in awe. I am making maps of the earth and drawing the outline of the continents. My hand pauses, it momentarily hovers over the smooth paper, before slowly marking the edge of this land.

I am lying.

There is no outline to be drawn, just a rippling frontier in motion. We don't like fluidity. We like things to be compartmentalised with categories in neat boxes, sitting in cubicles, staring at blank office walls, cramped in lifts, walking in unison to buy the same sandwich at the same time. A florescent light flickers. I see you creeping in my dear friend. Truth.⁵ The constant twitch of life in a world of continual change and turmoil.

I am staring at an area of ice larger than the United States of America, uninhabited bar a scattering of researchers. Antarctica, the last unknown wilderness. My face is battered by icy sleet which cuts into my warm cheeks with razor sharp precision, but I am not moving. I can't feel the cold. I am alive. I have never felt so brutally mortal, as my heart thumps in my chest, rattling its brittle confines. I am on 'the edge'. This is the furthest I have been from the place of my birth, my umbilical cord is on the verge of snapping, how much further until I am untethered?

¹ 'Suspended life, breath cut off - the beating heart'. Jean-Luc Nancy, *A Finite Thinking 'The Sublime Offering'*.

² 'Everything is small in the face of the sublime' Nancy, *A Finite Thinking 'The Sublime Offering'*.

³ The boat is 'a floating piece of space, a place without a place, that exists by itself, that is closed in on itself and at the same time is given over to the infinity of the sea'. Michel Foucault, *Of Other Spaces*.

⁴ Through 'a wide-angle dream lens, we can apprehend the full constellation of stored information and their diverse combinatorial possibilities, all in creative servitude.' Matthew Walker, *Why We Sleep*.

⁵ 'Truth punctuates, sense enchains.' Jean-Luc Nancy, *The Sense of the World*.

A wild horse set loose to roam open white plains.

My phone lost reception days ago, I will be out of contact with the human world for weeks, but I couldn't be more connected to the earth. Effortless joy. Everything is real. All life should feel like this. No. Life is this, rather than the pale imitation that we have become accustomed to.

That turgid soup.

Cold sick.

A great wave smashes against the side of the boat, shatters the windows and roars through. The upper deck floods, the communications tower comes crashing down. Salted water writhes against the metal walls and cascades down the stairs. Instant rust. Doorways froth at the mouth as I salivate at the undeniable intensity contained within this moment. The chaos is ravishing. What sweet beauty has restored order on this divine planet? We are no match. "To the cabin's below!"

I turn around and walk to the stern, kicking drifts of snow off the side into the ocean. I like to stand here, watch the wake, water churned up, progress. I don't like to inspect my own progress though. Is that all I have achieved? "Better to look forwards, not backwards" they say.⁶ Perhaps 'they' have a point. Best not question who 'they' are, or on what authority that 'they' speak. I don't care anymore, I am addicted to the instant, this feeling right here, euphoria. I want to climb the highest peak with no harness, unshackled, there I shall meet my life. I now understand the desire to walk to the South Pole. Well I think I do. Was this it? An awareness of life itself? Drenched in the understanding of the thin line between life and death?⁷ 'The eternal present'. 'The edge'. Sublime.⁸

A continent in constant flux. Sentient. It creaks and groans as the ice shifts, when the winter draws in, it freezes and when summer opens up, it melts. An undefined being moving through states of consciousness. Unceasing transition. Yet, it is in a state of continual decline. Much like our own lives, the planet's life, the sun and the solar system. All dancing in harmonious orbits with the same end in sight, yet, with every death there is birth.⁹ Look at the stars with me, we are seeing into the past, while witnessing our future. Solar vestiges, travelling through the silent depths of space before slipping into the hollows of our eyes. A fleeting

⁶ 'We live on the future: 'tomorrow, 'later on', 'when you have made your way', 'you will understand when you are old enough'. Albert Camus, *The Myth Of Sisyphus*.

⁷ 'The only way to ease our fear and be truly happy is to acknowledge our fear and look deeply at its source. Instead of trying to escape from our fear we can invite it up to our awareness and look at it clearly and deeply'. Thich Nhat Hanh, *Fear*.

⁸ 'Sublime presentation is the feeling of this striving at the instant of rupture, the imagination still for an instant sensible to itself although no longer itself, in extreme tension and distension ("overflowing" or "abyss") in reference to the 'limit' and that the 'striving' is the 'limit' stretched to breaking point'. Nancy, *A Finite Thinking 'The Sublime Offering'*.

⁹ 'Stars, like people, have biographies. They are born, they live, they change, and they die.' 'The most important single feature of stars is their size, or rather the size of the initial cloud of material from which they form. This determines many features of a star, including its brightness, temperature, color, and life span.' David Christian, *Maps of Time*.

tomb. Can the mind comprehend the universe expanding infinitely?^{10 11} As the world heats up, at 90° S, 45° E, the ice is melting. My thoughts turn to our own star. Our life giver.

I stare into its blinding rays. Solar flare.

The Sun. It has been shining for 4.6 billion years and has 5 billion left.¹² Midlife crisis. Humans are 200,000 years old, what a fleeting note in history we are under its soothing rays. I remember those paper and plastic glasses I wore when watching the moon block the sun as a child, I bet they are still there, buried in the ground. Discarded without hesitation, set for landfill. I am the problem, if only for 450 years, still a problem.

What sense or non-sense can I make of this world? How can I create meaning or understand no meaning? The sense of the world flows through me, so I do not make sense of the world, it presents its sense to me. Through this I become aware of meaning and the lack of meaning. I become aware of the world, I cannot impose my sense making on the world. Through the world I am and I become, I am aware through my state of oblivion. I enter into a continual state of being and becoming.

The boat chugs on, up ahead are fragments of the Larsen B ice shelf. Frozen embers. A dread of spectres rising from a mass grave, beyond anything I thought my eyes would ever see. Figures of epic proportions. Cliffs of ice tower above our small boat while intense sadness swells in the sullen ocean below. This was humankind's doing and as a result, our own fate sealed by our continuous unfettered consumption.

Behold, sculptures of destruction. Glory.

The ice starts to sweat in the midday sun, small trickles cut into the cliff face, slowly turning into vast scars which flood water into the sea. One by one, as sinking ships, the white monuments of the hope disappear into the lapping water below. Goodbye my friend. You shall now remain a cenotaph enshrined in my memory, cast in white stone and adorned with white flags and white wreaths.

Pristine.

When the last of the ice melts, will we say goodbye? Will we have time to whisper sweet utterances in the places we hold dear? Perhaps, there will be no time for wistful moments in the face of the unrelenting tide. Encroachment with no remorse. Will there be millions of wretched souls having their roots yanked up? I was made to believe that the future would consist of gleaming cities and hovering cars. Future time has arrived, but it is gripped by a different path. Perhaps our current trajectory is already here, temporary camps that

¹⁰ 'Each thing is, as it were, in a space of possible states of affairs. This space I can imagine empty, but I cannot imagine the thing without the space.' Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*.

¹¹ 'The infinite nature of the work, seen thus, is just the mind's infiniteness.' Maurice Blanchot, *The Space of Literature*.

¹² 'For a star like the Sun, the so-called evolutionary track involves a doubling of luminosity over the star's 10 billion-year main-sequence lifetime. As the Sun was significantly dimmer in its youth, so too will it be considerably brighter in a few billion years. The effect on Earth will be severe. The Earth's surface will continue to heat up until the oceans boil away and life as we know it becomes impossible'. William H. Waller, *The Milky Way: An Insider's Guide*.

exist in a state of purgatory, created from the ashes of bombs and the shells of spent bullets. Perpetual. Transitory. What will become of the word 'refugee', will the references of war dissipate and in their place haunting visions of environmental change? Inferno. Will our folly and false notions of immortality be uncovered as we sift through rubble? A reflection of the future present.¹³

Silence.

I hold my hand out to catch the gently falling snow, unique crystals forming and unforming.¹⁴ I turn my hand to the side and they slowly drift through the air as my boot crunches the white powder on the ground. I love the sound of snow beneath my feet, it's clean and pure, yet, with every step I can see raw primordial energy rising up, staining the ground with the carcasses of penguins, while seals languish in post feast and coital stupors.¹⁵ I taste the bloodstained snow, it mixes in my veins, bonded, while the stench of animal faeces and decomposition burns my nostrils. I carry on. I walk without direction but I am focused. The lamentable voices in my head turn to a whisper and I can hear my heart beat in blissful silence. I arrive at the top of a ridge, a lookout. I turn around to see how far I have come and before me stretches a white blanket, spoilt only by my heavy tracks, which in the distance merges with a black sheet of shattering glass. The ocean. Wind whips particles off the surface catching the sunlight as they fly. I surrender myself to this moment, to the world, to nature, to the unstoppable force of time. I see the constant melt and the freeze before my eyes, death and rebirth, the sun and the moon, the continual cycle of life. I am part of it. I am the seal, the penguin and the orca. I am the sea, the ice and the wind. I want to scream at the top of my lungs to make my breath part of the world but I dare not break the triumphant silence.¹⁶

I stand now on 'the edge', shivering. I have shed my layers and am now bare. I jump into deathly ink and fall as a lead weight with arms trailing above my head. My skull rocks back and I glimpse shafts of sunlight breaking through the surface of the water. Time has stopped. I have baptised myself in this freezing liquid, to be submerged in truth. Levitation. I am in suspended animation, circling in perpetual motion in this brutal fluid. Within this cold womb I dare not think of the honourable beasts that exist in the depths below. I want

¹³ 'A world where people are born in the clinic and die in hospital, where transit points and temporary abodes are proliferating under luxurious or inhuman conditions (hotel chains and squats, holiday clubs and refugee camps, shantytowns threatened with demolition or doomed to festering longevity); where a dense network of means of transport which are also inhabited spaces is developing; where the habitué of supermarkets, slot machines and credit cards communicates wordlessly, through gestures, with an abstract, unmediated commerce; a world thus surrendered to solitary individuality, to the fleeting, the temporary and ephemeral'. Marc Auge, *Non-places: Introduction to an Anthropology of Supermodernity*.

¹⁴ The 'diagram folds together abstract relations of forces, and the unfolds them in another system'. Jakub Zdebik, *Deleuze and the Diagram: Threads in Visual Organization*.

¹⁵ 'The primitive hostility of the world rises up to face us across millennia.' 'The world evades us because it becomes itself again.' Camus, *The Myth Of Sisyphus*.

¹⁶ 'When we understand that we are more than our physical bodies, that we didn't come from nothingness and will not disappear into nothingness, we are liberated' Nhat Hanh, *Fear*.

to savour this moment in its fullest purity. I am released from this mortal coil.¹⁷ Through the water I am a convector of constant flows of the Earth from the beginning of its life, from the boiling core to the cool crust, I feel the earth forming and simultaneously its death. Inevitability echoes through the bound atoms of hydrogen and oxygen that envelope me. I feel the Earth's totality as a pure being with not a trace of fear. Fear does not exist within this planet. Fear does not exist.¹⁸ But fear suddenly rushes through my body, I need to breathe. Urgency. Impulse. Time collapses as I rise to the surface, gasping for air, I am already nostalgic for moments past. As I heave myself out from the lapping waves I throw a towel over my back, I can't speak, my mouth won't let me, not yet. My body is weak but I am awake and strong. I'm on fire. Blood heats my skin from the inside, yet I can't slow the thaw. Yes. Alive. This place is of a time before humans, here, life and death melt on the tongue in exquisite harmony, but, the Sapient induced decay that now consumes this place contains no beauty.¹⁹

¹⁷

To die, to sleep –
To sleep, perchance to dream: ay, there's the rub,
For in that sleep of death what dreams may come
When we have shuffled off this mortal coil
Must give us pause. There's the respect

William Shakespeare, *The Tragedy of Hamlet, The Prince of Denmark*.

¹⁸ 'To really be free of fear, we must look deeply into the ultimate dimension to see our true nature of no-birth and no-death' Nhat Hanh, *Fear*.

¹⁹ 'At the heart of all beauty lies something inhuman, and these hills, the softness of the sky, the outline of these trees at this very minute lose the illusory meaning with which we had clothed them, henceforth more remote than a lost paradise'. Camus, *The Myth Of Sisyphus*.