

Through the ice

On the other side of the two-way mirror



There is neither beginning nor end.

We know this...

Birth and death, departure and arrival do exist, but they are neither the beginning nor the end.

What connects them, even more than what precedes and follows them, is a mystery much thicker and more elastic than time itself.

It is the journey.

It may happen that during the journey, the fog lifts. Stealthily.

For me, it was at the Sabine Islands, in the icy heart of the Melville Bay, on the way to Savissivik.

I

Attention, tension, intention

Echo

During the year, perhaps in March, my head is violently and unprotectedly thrown onto the asphalt. Not enough to extinguish the mind or to cut off my breath definitively, but enough to injure, harm, and blur my bearings. Enough to realize that the brain is an organ, that it has its own life made of blood flow, electrical impulses, and many other things that, in the absence of understanding, we then feel. This disturbed life causes a turmoil that awakens consciousness, affecting and questioning all forms of presence: to the world, to others, to oneself.

Time passes, the symptoms and the turmoil gradually dissipate with a deep relief, but also with the feeling that the fully regained faculties come with a loss. As if the turmoil had taken away something of value.

This summer, in August, during a solo kayaking excursion in the northwest of Greenland, the entire being is projected, not onto the ground but into a space made of multiple distortions: of the horizon, of time, of the elements, of attention, of feelings. A space that, like the fall, will lead to a profound disturbance of bearings, a new awakening of consciousness, the return of questioning about presence.

There are two radically different journeys here: violent, bloody, and endured for the first; beautiful, engaged, and chosen for the second. Both have generated a disturbance of the same rare intensity, but in two distinct forms that harmoniously complement each other, like water filling a glass, like the body slipping into the kayak, ready to take to the sea or to be taken by it.

I have let the turmoil of the fall depart with a part of its secrets; I am determined not to let that of the Arctic journey do the same. I will not let it dissipate without a struggle, having extinguished what it has awakened.

The Map

The map is the screen where dreams and aspirations are projected. It tells a story, not so much the one we are going to live, but the one we are already living, just by thinking about it, wanting it, and then making it possible. First through design, then in its materiality, what we call organization, preparation, both logistical and physical as well as mental and internal.



This map situates the Melville Bay. To someone who knows a bit about this part of Greenland, it conveys the great difficulty of crossing it by kayak: an almost uninterrupted glacial front, a coastal ice pack that struggles to melt, even in the era of climate change, a staggering profusion of ice due to the same warming, the presence of polar bears and walruses, the obligation to navigate far from the shores between tiny and distant islands, a journey of 400 kilometers in an area of over 10,000 square kilometers that is completely uninhabited...

And yet this journey imposes itself as an obvious one, that of a path opened fifteen years ago by a first expedition to Spitsbergen, a path that has continued and renewed itself each year, taking the route to Greenland ten years ago and progressively moving up its west coast towards the north. The obviousness of the journey is also that of a body that ages, which knows that soon the weight of the years will close off the possibility of crossing the Melville Bay.

Yet it is a beautiful possibility, and what is beautiful deserves to be made possible.

Parenthesis

Departure and arrival are two points among others on the same life line. The long path without origin that leads to the threshold of departure is the mirror of an arrival that does not signify the end at all.

These two points are distinguished from the story that contains them by what links them: they form the opening and closing of a parenthesis.

At each moment of this parenthesis, the departure and arrival of the Arctic excursion, an intense and sudden emotion emerges. When the kayak leaves the shore for the first time, when it touches land at the end of the last stage.

An emotion forged in the very idea of the journey: echoing the unknown and fear at the moment of departure, echoing relief and accomplishment upon arrival.

The Melville Bay will reshuffle the cards of this well-established game. It will endow the opening and closing of the parenthesis with a new, common, and unexpected feeling.

Opening

The kayak is almost fully loaded, and departure is imminent. A helicopter dropped me off just two hours ago at the entrance to the Melville Bay, in the village of Kullorsuaq, where 400 inhabitants live. After retrieving my kayak from a container, doing some additional shopping, and loading up, I am ready to depart.

The characteristic emotion of this very particular moment begins to emerge, like a distant shadow that will grow as it approaches. But this inevitable and desired arrival will suddenly be interrupted.

A man calls out to me.

He stands a few meters above me and asks where I am going, in English that allows for communication. I am surprised because it is not common here to interrupt someone in their activity without feeling invited to do so, except for children, who were crowding around the kayak just a few minutes ago. No one in Greenland, at least not the Greenlanders, comes to tell you what you should do, let alone what you should not do!

I approach the man and open up to his questions, inviting him to continue. My answers will allow him to quickly gauge that I am not completely unaware, which was clearly his assumption. He then describes to me the exceptional state of the ice in the region. The eastern part of Kullorsuaq Island is closed to all navigation, and this is just the beginning of the Melville Bay and its glacial fronts. He calmly and confidently expresses his greatest doubts about my ability to reach my destination, specifically Kap Seldom, which is halfway through the journey and surrounded by ice. He will then ruin in a few minutes the hope I had of spending a relatively calm first week before tackling what I thought would be the most difficult and risky part of the journey.

He will then alert me to the main danger of the expedition, which I had overlooked: that of the walrus. This is the major risk because there is not much to do if a walrus attacks, and the young ones, easily recognizable by the size of their tusks, are inclined to do so. The fight, if it occurs at sea, is terribly unequal. Infinitely more so than with a bear, with whom there is often a way to negotiate and, if necessary, defend oneself.

In the unlikely event that I manage to pass the first ice barrier and reach Kap Seldom, he advises me to head towards the Sabine Islands, which have the advantage of their disadvantage: they are very far from the coasts, allowing for navigation free from ice but compensated by the danger of the open sea.

He then concludes our exchange with an act that, while never trivial, takes on a particular significance in this context: he gives me his phone number. We both know very well what this means. It is a permission, and even an invitation to call him in case of distress, using a satellite connection.

That is the meaning of his gesture.

And it is not diminished by the fact that we both know very well that in such a case, help would be both long and complicated to arrange. Finally, he asks for my number and tells me he will inform his few colleagues of my presence in the area.

The man's name is Jorge Adam Fisker; he is a fisherman and hunter in Kullorsuaq.

The prevailing feeling after this brief exchange is not fear, even though Jorge has awakened it, or rather strengthened it, as it had already been present since my arrival by helicopter and the panoramic view offered at the beginning of the Melville Bay and the surprise of seeing so much "white." What dominates is the attention, the concern he showed for me, and the way he expressed it and translated it into action. It is the intense warmth I felt, the strength it gave me, and that I carried with me. A presence that adds to that of my loved ones but with the double particularity of coming from a stranger and from someone who knows better than I do where I am going.

On the very day of my arrival in Savissivik, I will send him the following message: "*Hi Jorge, I am in Savissivik, hard but great! I thank you very much for your concern and for your advice. Take care. Pascal (kayak).*" He will reply: "*It is good you come to Savissivik.*"

Fog's World

On the morning of the second day, suspended particles invade the entire space, signaling the presence of fog. I feel it as soon as I wake up, even before I see it, through the combined perception of high humidity and profound silence. The silence indicates the absence of wind and rain, two elements that could have provided another explanation for the ambient humidity. There's also this smell, fine, light, and fresh that is unmistakable.



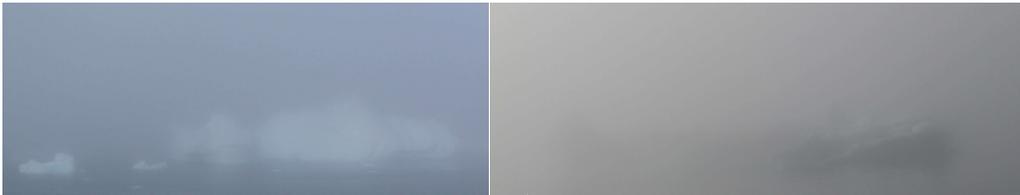
The humidity and cold (it must be -2° upon waking in the tent) combine to firmly and pleasantly support my awakening, allowing me to feel the contours of my body through contact with air rich in stimuli. To fully appreciate its value and flavor, two things are needed, which I am fortunately equipped with: a sleeping bag and coffee, along with the additional know-how to handle the stove and boiling water from within the sleeping bag. A lack of practice will lead to slightly scalding my right hand, just a reminder to be more vigilant and that on the first morning, the routine of actions is not yet established.

If fog has its virtues for the one awakening, it seriously changes the game for the kayaker supposed to cross 200 kilometers of ice. For, in addition to the tent, the fog envelops the water and all the forms of ice present in the lower part of the Melville Bay: massive icebergs, brash ice, floes, coastal pack ice, drifting pack ice... The weakness of the wind is good news, as it reduces the risks of hyper-dense, impassable areas. But the fog limits the ability to read the surroundings. More than in broad daylight, one must feel and extrapolate, deciphering the few clues within sight to find a passage through the ice.



Experience is crucial here, not only for finding and interpreting navigation markers. For fog does not merely alter visibility; combined with ice, it knows how to instill anxiety, especially if navigation occurs far from the coasts, through a succession of long crossings between islands. Experience helps us not to overestimate its effects. It reminds us that fog only deprives us of access to the most distant markers, primarily the coast when it consists of mountains or imposing glacial fronts, as is the case here. Because even in broad daylight, trapped in the ice from a kayak, visibility is extremely limited, simply because we are at sea level and the smallest piece of ice already acts as a barrier, both for the kayak and for sight. Fog or not, the difficulty of finding a path in the ice, amidst the ice, is roughly the same. The difference lies only in defining the course, that is, going in the right direction, but here it is possible to compensate for the lack of distant visibility with other markers, by combining the map and GPS data.

That's the rational side; it's doable, and it must be done. But this rationality does not always suffice to escape the form of unease inherent to fog, to this very particular universe it leads us into, making us feel lost or "in the middle of nowhere," which means nothing. Experience allows us to join and follow another path, one where we resolve to belong to a resolutely different space, to accept its codes and rules, and to surrender to it. A space where, in a certain way, there is neither sea, nor land, nor horizon. Just ice, fog, and a kayaker, all suspended. To tell oneself that it's normal, that it is this way, that it is even beautiful. To become a resident and subject of this kingdom, to relax and concentrate better, to actively devote oneself to reading the ice surrounding us and searching for a passage.



Freed from anxiety, reading the ice becomes an activity of every moment, without true respite, an endless wandering in a giant labyrinth from which one wouldn't even seek to escape, just to reach a more advanced position. A position where it will be possible to rest before continuing the journey and progression through the labyrinth in the morning. One day perhaps it will end, but that is not the concern or thought of the moment. Attention is focused on reaching the next waypoint with the constant threat of being caught in a dead end, with the presence of a Damocles sword following the kayak's progress and regularly whispering in the ear the prospect of the fatality of turning back.

Every day of the first week, several times a day, I will be on the brink of the decision to turn back, confronted with the impossibility of advancing, of finding a passage. And yet each time, the passage will eventually reveal itself. Was this appearance due to a welcome maneuver, a fortunate navigation choice, or has the passage always been there, and the veil that temporarily obscured the view was only in my anxious mind? Impossible to say. The only certainty is the duality of emotions. Like those two-scoop ice creams with two flavors, the threshold of turning back carried within it two emotions. It had the bitter taste of abandonment and renunciation but also, in the background, that of possible relief.



Unforeseen Events

During this indeterminate interlude, I will feel reduced to the strange condition of a being in motion in the fog. Even during the time spent on land, grounded on the ground, the dominant feeling will be one of being suspended in the fog, amidst the ice, in an environment, a space, and a time where attention is heightened and almost permanent, under tension.



And yet, in this contrecte, it is in a surprisingly serene way that I will manage a number of events and unforeseen circumstances: a serious and painful cut on a finger, half of the gas reserves vanishing in one night, a weight loss far too rapid, the window of the tent's vestibule peeling off under the effect of strong wind, a bad cold, sore throats followed by sinusitis and headaches, the deck compass no longer working... All of this is both serious and frankly anecdotal. And I experience it as such. For each situation, there is a response. And for situations without a solution, I remember a saying I heard about thirty years ago while doing my military service as a weapons master in the sports department of the Balard air base:

Chief Warrant Officer **Charrette**: *"Aviator Croset, know that there is not a problem from which one cannot survive the absence of a solution."* Never before hearing him say this had I thought that Chief Warrant Officer Charrette had such depth of insight. And he was absolutely right: we all know that we will die and that the planet will eventually be destroyed, either by man or by the sun, and that does not prevent us from living... and even the most talented among us from living happily.

That's to put things into perspective. Every situation generates its problems, and it's not that serious. Unless it really is, and it's important to know how to distinguish between them.

That said, it's important not to take this saying too far, into an opposite extreme where nothing would matter anymore, where we would lose sight of risk and where all fear would dissipate. There are problems that need to be addressed and for which we must provide answers, regardless of whether a solution exists or not. It is then useful to remember the words of the great Jeff, who refers to himself as the "homeless person of Saqqaq," a small village in Disko Bay where he has come every summer for 40 years to express his gentle madness.

Jeff Olsen: *"When you have a problem here (in Greenland), know that the solution is necessarily and literally within your reach."*

This is a truth that usefully complements all the work that preceded the expedition. When entering a world of the unexpected, preparation is less about avoiding problems than about helping to build solutions, starting from oneself and with the means at hand.

There's nothing particularly unique about this, in fact, because our world is no less subject to the unexpected than the Melville Bay or Disko Bay. It simply feels uncomfortable with it; it doesn't like the unexpected and all the questions they raise. It's such a shame not to like questions, because in addition to elevating, they contain the answers, and dodging them leads to a view reduced to the present, without history or perspective. A short-sighted view that exhausts, like batteries that drain from lack of use. That's why, conversely, for those who love questions, there is nothing more rejuvenating and restful than entering a world of trials and unpredictability!

Judgment



At the heart of this endless period where fog and ice impose their law, I realize that I feel no pleasure, nor can I access any somewhat elaborate thought that can nourish itself from this environment.

Attention is cloaked in a tension that engulfs it.

But what this very singular moment produces, shifts, and allows, I know that now is not the time to seek its meaning, nor even to follow its traces or read its signs. I gained this certainty during my last excursion three years ago. It also began with a long sequence in the fog and with difficult episodes. I experienced it harshly; I resisted, I did not know how to surrender to it, and I made judgments that I later revisited. I know, therefore, that I will only access all the riches being built during this very singular period once I have emerged from it, and probably long after.

The only useful judgment, in the meantime, is the one that comes from analyzing the situation, at sea and on land, and that aims at nothing other than adapting actions, making choices that allow for daily living and ensuring mobility. One must not expect more from the present. Those who trust in the future know that nothing will be lost from all that is here, that just as there is a path through the ice, there is one through time, even in thick fog, and it will allow for a return.

When the Veil Lifts



The fog arrived suddenly, without transition, during the first night, or rather during the first sleep, as there was not yet night at that time of year at such latitudes. The fog will take more than a week to lift definitively, but it will occasionally and briefly suspend its presence.

The first episode occurs at sea. After several hours of paddling amidst the ice, in a progression made all the more difficult by the severely reduced visibility, suddenly the water and air break free from the grip of the ice and fog. In an instant, emptiness emerges, and sight returns.

A shock that does not lead to the feeling of a return to normalcy, but rather to the discovery of a world perceived as new and unknown, that of an ice-free sea and an unobstructed advance. After the initial feeling of surprise comes the sensation of support slipping away, of vertigo. The ice is not just an obstacle or a hindrance; it is also a support and protection against winds and certain dangers of the sea. The disturbance also comes from the regained sight, from the depth of field. It suddenly becomes possible to see several kilometers away. Yet, no coast appears. Visually, I am in the middle of an endless ocean.

Quite quickly – but without any idea of the actual duration – ice and fog reappear and return me to a normalcy that I thought I was enduring and hoped to escape. So it's not as clear as that... There is relief in the return of the fog. No, not the fog... There is relief in the return of the ice, in the protection it offers to the kayaker.

Once reestablished in the markers of the fog, I realize that what I glimpsed is what is promised to me in the second part of the journey: navigation in open sea, freed from ice. The veil has thus briefly and brutally lifted on a vision and a reality to come for which I feel I am not yet ready.

On Rocky Ground



I spend between five to seven hours a day paddling, even though the conditions and sensations of navigating in fog and ice make this measure of time very relative.

This means that a number of hours are spent on land, usually very rocky, not really flat (one can feel that the creator of the place did not concern himself with constraints related to human habitation). Between these two spaces, that of progression at sea and that of being sedentary on land, or on rock, there is a third one, both brief and intense, that of discovering this piece of rock from the sea. A discovery always preceded by a moment of anxiety: “But where the hell is this island?”, “Despite the reduced visibility, it should appear now...”, “What if I messed up the coordinates?”, “What if the GPS is telling me nonsense?”.

Then, inevitably, the island appears. It is then, and every time, like the first time. I am Christopher Columbus discovering America, but with an emotion that has the power to repeat itself every day without ever weakening. An intense emotion but quickly cut short because hardly has this feeling of relief and magic appeared than very prosaic considerations take over: “Is it even possible to land, then to settle, to set up camp, and high enough to escape the tsunami risk related to the risk of large icebergs breaking?”

Once the landing maneuver is completed, a sequence of searching for a place to settle opens up, then comes the installation itself: completely unloading the kayak, setting up camp, high up and often far from the landing point, hoisting the kayak at least 10 meters high. The whole process takes about an hour and a half, being careful with every step: not slipping, not twisting an ankle, also being careful not to lose anything, not to damage anything...

The moment to reach Kap Seldom approaches. This is a return to the coast of Greenland, after having navigated since the beginning of the expedition between islands and about fifteen kilometers from the shore. A return for one night before heading back out to sea, but this time more than 40 kilometers from the coast.

Kap Seldom, a Turning Point

In itself, leaving the world of islands and joining the main coast of Greenland for a night changes almost nothing. Or almost nothing, because there is still the increased risk of bear visits, which invites even more attention to the setup of the electric fence and the fact of leaving no trace of food in the kayak. Conversely, the shape of the cove where I am settled suggests that the tsunami risk is low, allowing me not to set up in the heights, which the fog makes inhospitable.

Aside from these two details, nothing really changes. The lack of visibility does not allow for a full appreciation of being on the continent and not on an island. After all, isn't Greenland itself an island? Essentially, the situation is the same as the previous days: an arrival in the fog on a piece of land with only one way out, which is to return to the sea towards a new island. The real change would have been to finally follow the coast, but that remains impossible due to the resumption of the glacial front beyond Kap Seldom.



And yet, from this moment, from this extreme point of the Tugtulligssuaq Peninsula, everything will change, everything must change, soon and very quickly. It is a certainty, written and inscribed on the map; one just needs to read it.

The upcoming stages will indeed produce a distance from the coast such that it should take navigation out of the ice, or at least out of the hyper concentration of ice. This anticipated exit should occur at the latest in two stages - I will then be more than forty kilometers from the coast, a configuration that changes everything: Kap Seldom marks the announced end of doubt.

The end of a certain doubt, the daily, almost permanent doubt about the possibility of crossing the ice barrier and continuing the journey. In a way, having arrived at Kap Seldom means having arrived at Savissivik because from there, once the ice has loosened, it will depend only on me and my risk management to take the kayak to the end of the journey, whereas until now I depended at all times on an ice situation that could force me to give up. Because I have a kayak and not an icebreaker, because there are realities that are superior to our capacities and wills. From Kap Seldom, nothing can prevent me from arriving, except for myself and my mistakes, or worse, my faults - I set aside the fatality, which is equally present throughout the journey, of any journey.

Kap Seldom is a turning point beyond which the difficulty and risk will profoundly change in nature and balance: with the disappearance of the ice, the difficulty will be less, but the risk will be increased. The form of attention, the perception of the environment, the way to instruct key decisions will and must change profoundly. The brief glimpse, a few days ago, of navigation in open sea, freed from fog and ice, also indicates that the emotional and sensitive dimension will be deeply impacted.

Having a bit of experience allows one to anticipate this change. Or rather to anticipate that it will happen and that it will create a new instability. In the face of such shifts, it is not about pressing a button to change state, even if one has a small idea of what will happen. One will have to adapt, and adaptation is a process that by definition is lived in situation. But at least I am mentally prepared for it, alert, almost on the lookout, with the certainty that it will require work and effort, and with the dominant feeling of being grateful to experience such a moment.

It is not a new stage of the journey, but a journey towards a new state. In the face of this perspective, there is a mix of fear and desire.

Trust and Doubt

A week earlier, the helicopter dropped me off in Kullorsuaq.

After retrieving the kayak from the bottom of a container, I brought it to the shore near the port and began loading it, transferring about thirty kilos of gear, equipment, and food into the compartments of a cabin that is 5.15 meters long and 56 cm wide, yet offers significant volume for loading, around 300 liters. I am happy to see that my reflexes are still intact. I know exactly where to place everything: the tent at the back, followed by the poles, sleeping bag, Therm-a-Rest, and electrical devices, then the food at the front, the stove, and cooking gear in front of the footrests, all in the sturdiest waterproof bag...

The moment of the first loading is always intense, filled with an emotion that is quite indefinable, at the intersection of the magical and the dramatic, the enchanting and the technical, the fear and the desire. It is, in fact, the first turning point of the journey.

It presents itself prosaically as a challenge: fitting a round object into a smaller square. It is also the stage for a first act where safety choices are made: in the distribution of weight (which affects the stability and maneuverability of the kayak) and in the accessibility to key items (rifle, beacon, satellite phone, GPS, pump, maps, gloves, etc. Not everything can be within easy reach). Thus, it is the first moment where my attention reaches a level that it will occupy for a long time thereafter. An attention that signifies that the journey, this core part of the journey, has just begun.

The tent fabrics are well secured at the bottom of the kayak. It's time for the poles. I look for them in the larger of the two travel bags, as I remember putting them there. I can't find them. I search in the second bag. I don't find them there either. I return to the first bag, then to the second, as the search proves fruitless again. I repeat this cycle a third time, with a frenzy that shows the first signs of panic, as each unsuccessful search brings me closer to a terrible conclusion: I've forgotten the poles! This possibility, which is starting to take shape as a reality, fleetingly raises a question: what to do if the poles are not there? There's no need to think about it for long. There's no chance of finding others here in Kullorsuaq. Would it be possible to go on the expedition without the poles? In theory, yes, I could probably rig something that allows for limited use of the tent. However, the tent space is designed to provide comfort and safety that would be reduced to almost nothing without the poles. It takes me no more than two or three seconds to dismiss this hypothesis. So what to do then? The little recourse possible can only come from Nikolaj, my friend living in Upernavik, a large town of 1,000 inhabitants located 300 kilometers to the south. He could send a new tent, but that would require waiting for the next helicopter, at best a week. It would then no longer be possible to consider the initial route, which was built around a significant safety margin in time to allow navigation only in favorable weather windows, especially when it comes time for the longest crossings. In an instant, therefore, the specter of forced renunciation of the expedition as it was planned appears. The feeling that comes then, after disbelief, is one of deep disarray. A disarray that tells me what I did not know, namely how much I care about this journey, what it represents. On this question, as on many others, the years gone by have left me in deep doubt. I realize at this precise moment that having to give up the journey before I have even committed to it hurts me. *Did I really need it?! To this extent?!*

It is then that I discover the poles, inserted into the two neoprene boots, which was clever as it protected them from transport shocks.

But relief does not come with this happy discovery. Just like those stomach pains after a long car ride on mountain roads, it is not enough to get out of the car for normalcy to return; it takes hours, sometimes a day. Relief does not come, but disarray dissolves as a form of anger rises. Anger against myself, which I name very precisely, without thinking, and which I state almost aloud and in an unkind tone: "But trust yourself, for heaven's sake!" This assertion comes to my mind, not as a slogan, but as a solidly founded truth. Fifteen years you've been organizing such journeys, three years you've been thinking about this project, three months you've been structuring it, three weeks preparing every detail, and three days focusing almost solely on filling two miserable bags! And all this to let disarray overwhelm you at the second rummage through the bags, probably making this search feverish when, on the contrary, it required more rigor, and thus calm. A calm that greater self-confidence would have undoubtedly produced.



Two days later, I am immersed in this vast space where the fog does not just reduce visibility; it opens the door to doubt. Not the fertile doubt that questions in the situation, on the kayak, the possibility of reaching the next island, but a pernicious doubt, clearly unfriendly, that does not directly question the very meaning of my presence but creates a sort of discomfort around me, due to its very indefiniteness. I then formulate, aloud this time, after having thought about it long while paddling, the following statement: *"Trust the one who sent you here; he knew exactly what he was doing, and trust the one who is here; he knows exactly what he has to do."*

This statement, which I will repeat several times in the following days, always aloud, fights against this bad doubt, this indefinable doubt that I know has no virtue. The statement, on the contrary, supports this other doubt, the one I came to seek, which is inherent to exploration, whether geographical, physical, inner, or spiritual. This doubt questions both deep intentions and the relevance of the action, but always with a purpose that leaves no room for doubt: to become better, to do better, to be more just... even if the meaning of these words remains undefined and is itself the subject of an endless quest.

Just as anger had dissolved disarray, this statement about trust will completely and quickly erase the "bad" doubt (I don't know how else to name it). I will then write the following sentence in my notebook, a notebook that had remained quite silent during this part of the journey, feeling that I have found the right words to express an important truth (meaning a personal belief strong enough to guide my choices and actions): *"The most beautiful stories, those worth living, are those that are necessarily forged in the material of doubt."*

II

Sabine Islands

Regaining Sight

At the moment of leaving Kap Seldom towards the small island of Kuperkarfiq, 25 kilometers away, the horizon has returned. The fog has finally lifted during the night.

What the regained sight brings is lightness. The attention remains constant, but it allows for a form of carefreeness, which in turn brings back pleasure and the perception of beauty. However, these emotions are still somewhat restrained. One does not easily emerge from the sequence that has just ended.



This profound change accompanies the entry into a new phase of the journey, where the ice will gradually loosen its grip and the sea will occupy and dominate the space as it moves away from the coast. But for now, the ice is still very present, and the sun's rays sporadically make the tops of the largest icebergs shine brightly. Navigation becomes peaceful even as one still has to search for a passage. The difference from previous days is that there is now almost certainty of finding it.

Kuperkarfik is not yet visible, as the island is not very high. Hidden by the icebergs, it will only reveal itself once the kayak arrives at its shores, but for the first time, as I turn around, I can see the coast and measure the distance traveled. I see where I come from. I am finally beginning to glimpse the contours of the Melville Bay, at least in its southern and eastern parts. The map told me where I was located but not where I was. It is a revelation.



Once on Kuperkarfik, I will climb to the top of the island and observe the panorama for a long, long time. I feel its immense beauty, but the filter of emotions is still present. It seems to restrain my nature, which is nonetheless to let feelings flow freely. Yet I am beginning to doubt this perspective. Is it really a filter, a dampening? Is it not rather a diversion? For the flow of feelings is not reduced in any way, nor is it dried up; it is its course that is diverted, leading to an evolution in the form of feelings and even to new emotions. There is no filter or loss, but an opening to new emotions that need the enrichment of vocabulary to be perceived and grasped.

In the evening, I will receive a visit from an arctic fox. The poor thing will struggle in vain against a stone that I used to crush a can. It still smells of the fish that was in the can. Usually, these visits please me. His is hardly more than a surprise, but it reveals to me how settled I am in a natural and happy solitude that nothing can truly disturb or relieve.

Tomorrow, if the weather permits, I will join the Sabine Islands. Finally. Already.



The Lightning

In fifteen years of excursions, I have weathered quite a few storms, but no thunderstorms. The lightning that struck me three times during this last trip has nothing to do with the rare flashes in the Arctic world. It belongs to another realm, that of emotion, a crushing of consciousness by a wave of completely unpredictable, submersive emotion. In their intensity, these waves come close to, and even surpass, the most intense moments I have ever experienced. I particularly think of the emotions felt at funerals. I love funerals (do I really need to specify that I don't wish for them?!?), precisely for the unique intensity and depth of what one feels there.

Three times, in a completely unexpected and unpredictable way, emotion will surge, disturb the senses, provoke tears, completely muddle thought, and create an incomprehensible space where even time loses its bearings and could be described as violent if it weren't so warm. For unlike funerals, these emotions do not belong to the realm of sadness or grief. They belong to the order of warmth and love. It is difficult to say much more about three events that are so unreal and relatively brief, and that occurred in such different contexts that it is hard to understand what they have in common. Yet it was indeed the same type of phenomenon.

The first strike occurred at Copenhagen Airport. A place I don't particularly like... I am greatly relieved to have retrieved my luggage. I head to Terminal 2 to print the tickets for the flight to Greenland the next day. I am now heading towards the exit. The taxis are on the right. It is then that I feel struck by a growing wave of emotion. The tears are already there, and I don't understand anything. We are in public, and I wonder where all this is coming from and where it will lead. I block everything! And I manage to regain control... I then tell myself that if I feel such things here in Copenhagen, what will it be like tomorrow in Kangerlussuaq? Well, nothing, it will be nothing. Or rather, it will be completely different. But it has nothing to do with what has just emerged. An hour later, settled in at the Go-hotel, I am so disturbed by what just happened that I feel the need to share it with Nathalie, my wife, during a video call. But what I will interpret as a lack of listening will make me keep this sequence to myself, with much frustration. I will eventually tell myself that it is I who did not know how to create the space for listening, being still too disturbed.

The second strike occurred the day before arriving at Kap Seldom. I have been suspended in fog for a week. The day has been difficult in navigation. The supports I had to take for hours in very tight ice lead to tension in my back muscles. But I am now warm in my sleeping bag. I open the satellite phone and receive the messages of the day. A cherished moment. The physical connection with others. The lightning will strike while reading a message sent by one of my sons, Oscar, who was returning from a wonderful solo hike in the Pyrenees. More precisely, it is the reading of a word that will trigger the lightning. One understands that this word brings about an emotion, but not such a detonation. The word serves as a catalyst. It brings about a disturbance that will encompass so many things, in all directions, at such speed... Unlike the episode that occurred at the airport, I will not try to put an end to it. I will let the cycle of washing continue until its end. It will leave me disturbed, exhausted, but reassured. Happy even. I understood that there is nothing to fear, quite the opposite, from these phenomena, despite their sudden, unpredictable, intense, and even violent nature.

The third and final strike will occur on the morning of the ultimate kayaking stage, the one that is supposed to take me to Savissivik, that is to say, the end of the journey, at least this part of the journey (I could not then know everything that would happen after arriving in Savissivik). I am on the shore, on

one of the few pebble beaches here. I have almost finished loading the kayak. I am so happy to be here, in this situation. I think of those two German kayakers, the only ones who attempted this route and who lost their kayaks on this same shore over ten years ago. The sky is blue. The weather is favorable. I see in the distance a long line of icebergs that I will have to cross. A final challenge that presents itself as a last gift. It is then, I don't know how or why, that the idea or image of my mother crosses my mind. This image must act like a lightning rod since it points and brings the lightning directly onto me. Here too, I will do nothing to end an episode that could easily be classified as a crisis, if it weren't a completely happy crisis.

These three events, unpredictable and incomprehensible, will nourish the journey with a mystery that does not need to be solved to deliver its message. A message that alone would be enough to justify the journey: I realize that at my age, I ultimately know almost nothing about the sensitive nature of my humanity, its essence, or the extent of its power.

Sabine (1)

A few weeks before leaving for Greenland, I stand on the beach of the priests, on the northern coast of Brittany, a few hundred meters below our house. I look far away, out to sea, straight north, and I think to myself: "*Can you see yourself leaving this beach with your kayak heading into the open sea, paddling for 40 kilometers in the hope of landing on a small island, invisible from this distance and itself located 35 kilometers from the next one?*" No, I can't see myself doing that because it makes no sense.



And yet here I am on the Sabine Islands. Two small rocks, 500 meters long, less than 100 meters wide, and 20 meters high. At such a distance from the coast, the island is, as I expected, free of ice. Only a few large icebergs, taller than the island itself, stand guard.

I have imagined this island in so many ways.



Three months ago, while plotting the journey on the map, it was an inconceivable solution to a hypothetical situation, that of a coast too cluttered with pack ice to allow navigation. Ten days ago, it was pointed out to me by Jorge (the fisherman from Kullorsuaq) as the only possibility to reach Savissivik in the unlikely event that I had crossed the ice barrier south of the Tugtulligssuaq Peninsula. Every evening last week, it has been a conclusion I have been trying to escape. I analyze the map from every angle, as if, by scrutinizing it enough, another island, less distant, might appear. In vain, and each evening Sabine imposes itself as an inevitable destination, but also as a future starting point for what

should be the two greatest crossings of the journey. Last night, it was my goal for the next day. Two hours ago, it became for the first time a reality in sight, coming with the long-awaited and sudden release of the waters. An hour ago, it appeared to me as a safety element, as a south-southeast wind has just picked up and, while not yet truly dangerous, the sea is becoming difficult. For a few minutes now, Sabine is a certainty, that of a landing that nothing, not even a sudden capsizing, could prevent. It is always a key moment in my crossings, especially when they are long: the moment when doubt, which serves as support, gives way to the certainty of arrival. Sabine is now a stretch of coast that I analyze, looking for the right spot to land, where the swell will be the least strong and where the kayak can settle without bumps.

All of this, all these representations, which I revisit through the magic of writing, have just vanished. In an instant. Only a few meters of navigation remain, a small cove appears, the sun pierces the waters and makes a rocky bottom shine, both close and multicolored. The water's surface is flat while the sea has formed around it. One never asks the coast if one can land there, but at this moment I feel personally and explicitly invited to do so. The kayak gently settles on a flat, smooth rock. The place, the moment, everything is unreal and yet imbued with truth. It is instantly palpable, without needing to name it, the evidence of a living unreality, elusive, devoid of any threat or even discomfort. The welcome in its most complete form, peace in its absolute, softness in all its grace, time in its meanders (for everything merges) and in its infinity (for there is no longer any relevant measure).



One would need to be a poet to account for my encounter with the Sabine Islands, for what will happen there over two days and how it will touch me. My inability to do so is frustrating, but one must not give up on it. Naming is one of the means (perhaps I will find others) not to understand, but to prolong the occurrence, the existence. And without that, without the effort of memory, of seeking this time that is anything but lost, what is the point of living? We are not endowed with a consciousness to ignore it, nor with a memory to erase it.

I will never return to the Sabine Islands. And I will never leave them again.

Sabine (2)

The wind that picked up upon my arrival on the island will continue to strengthen and force me to stay for two more days. "Force"? No! "Allow me," "invite me to stay," because it is a gift I could not have afforded. I cannot interrupt my progress out of pleasure, taste, or curiosity, as I am primarily securing a route. This security dictates the movement, stop or progress, at the daily rhythm of a simple decision: to leave or to stay? To stay in the sleeping bag or to dismantle the camp and load the kayak?

I am acutely aware of the stakes of this decision. The life I lead here has the power and virtue to bring back to earth and into the most literal of daily lives an otherwise theoretical idea, however true: the fact that our life depends on our choices.

This morning, the decision is easy to make. And it will also be the case the following day. Two days where the only activity will consist of moving the tent to protect it from a change in the orientation of increasingly strong winds. The rest of the time is shared between reading, thinking, and walking on the island. These three activities nourish each other. Reading feeds thought, and walking sweeps it all away, saying its insignificance, grounding it, opening it to the four winds.

Walking is looking at the horizon, seeing the Melville bay appear and disappear. It is putting feet on the ground, lowering my eyes, reading the mosses and lichens, reading the stones and rocks. It is opposing the body to the winds, feeling the cold air. It is reading and listening to the sea that gently raises its voice, observing the iceberg impassive and falsely motionless.



It is then feeling that part of oneself that nothing can alter, what is timeless, invulnerable, immortal within oneself. Being in its simplicity, fullness, and obviousness.

I think today that the Sabine Islands have been my own mirror, that of an identity foundation, that grounding which allows, throughout life, through itinerancy, to navigate the borders of exploration, in complete serenity and, whether one likes it or not, in complete safety.

At the moment of leaving the island, as I bring the load towards the kayak and bring everything closer to the shore, I notice that the safest exit route, the one that protects from the residual swell, is obstructed by two large icebergs (upon closer inspection, there is, however, a passage between the ice and the rock).



I laugh heartily! And I thank Sabine for this final attention and this touch of humor. It is fortunate that we parted with a wink and a smile, for the way one leaves a place greatly determines how one returns to it, even in thought.

A Choice

The decision to stay on the Sabine Islands was easy to make. Strong winds, a choppy sea. The choice to leave was less obvious because it required considering the succession of the next two stages. The first is a crossing of about 30 kilometers towards the small island of Thom, and the second is over 45 kilometers, both very far from the coast. At this stage of the journey, I have two weather sources. A so-called professional, whom I hired, and my brother Olivier. Both sources converge to announce a very calm weather forecast in two days, something that has rarely occurred since the beginning of my journey, but also since the beginning of an exceptionally cold and turbulent summer this year. An ideal weather forecast for the second stage, the most difficult part of the expedition, or at least the most exposed to the sea due to the length of the crossing. However, to take advantage of the forecasted calm window in two days, I would need to make the first crossing with somewhat less favorable weather, a remnant of the agitation from the previous days. And here, my two sources diverge. The "professional" predicts a wind of 15 to 20 km/h, which wouldn't pose a real problem, while Olivier warns of the possibility of winds exceeding 30 km/h, coming from the East, meaning crosswinds. At this distance from the coast and with this wind speed, the sea begins to form well. I am at the limit of what I would call comfort. I want to believe the "professional's" forecast, but I know Olivier is right.

Nevertheless, I choose to leave for Thom. A choice born from the slow infusion of multiple ingredients and a process where intuition will be much more than just a simple advisor to reflection.

At the start, the sea is relatively calm, with a south swell of nearly one meter (on this point, both my sources agreed). It is only halfway through, after three hours of crossing, that Olivier's prediction comes true. The wind picks up quickly, establishing itself at what must be a speed of at least 30 km/h, between force 4 and 5. The navigation becomes engaging. The attention it requires means that every stroke of the paddle must be thought out and mastered. Each stroke must take into account the wave that hits the kayak, and each wave is different. As the wind is crosswise, there is a certain effort needed to compensate for the kayak's natural tendency to head into the wind. At a very regular frequency, about every fifteen minutes, the wind strengthens for about five minutes before returning to its base speed. This behavior is characteristic of wind coming from the Inlandsis, the ice cap. Each gust of wind raises the sea waves, which then become a bit too strong to take sideways, necessitating frequent course changes. This part of the navigation will last more than two hours. I grit my teeth, hold the paddle firmly, but I don't feel overwhelmed. I am in a sea less strong than the one I train in every winter.

This episode can be viewed in many ways, depending on who observes it and from where. One way is to reflect afterward on the decision that was made, which I systematically do when I have had important choices to make during an outing. This approach is motivated by the desire, and even the necessity, to gain experience. But reflecting on a choice is not so simple. The temptation and ease lie in evaluating the choice retrospectively based on the outcome it led to, but this approach teaches nothing that we don't already know. If the sea had swept me away during this crossing, it would not have been enough to disqualify my choice since, like many, it included a degree of risk. Taking a risk necessarily means accepting the idea of its occurrence; this is what makes the examination of such decisions a quest for truth, based on a bit of intelligence but mostly on maximum honesty. Reflecting on a choice involving risk is not about measuring whether one was wrong, but whether one was dishonest.

The retrospective analysis of this crossing to Thom and the choice that led to it revealed nothing of the sort; on the contrary.

I would have preferred Olivier to be wrong, for the wind not to pick up, but I loved being in that sea; I had a profound feeling of belonging to it. The journey in which I am so happily engaged is not limited to getting from one point to another. It is a pretext for the powerful moments that are, among others, the act of leaving, the act of arriving, and that of navigating, being at sea, being on the sea, being in the sea, a privilege of the kayaker. Not just the sea, but this sea, with the wind coming from the Inlandsis, those east waves that mobilize my energy and bond me to my kayak, with the island of Thom in sight, which I approach first from its southwest side, then from the southeast due to the winds and forced course changes, with those groups of icebergs that obscure my view of the island while serving as landmarks, then drifting away, which I find again an hour later from another angle, with the distant coast taking the shape of a glacial front when I cast a quick glance to the east, and which reveals mountains when my gaze leaves the wave to furtively look north.

The choice to leave contained all of this, the contours of a space and time where I felt both alive, present, and belonging to something. A good choice indeed.

Thom, the Lightness of Step

Thom is a place where large icebergs run aground, as is often the case with islands and the coast in general. The depths quickly drop from over 100 or 200 meters to just a few dozen meters, and the icebergs get trapped there, taking the time to shed some weight. Several of them form a majestic welcoming committee upon arrival at Thom from the south, after a somewhat turbulent navigation sequence. Past these guardians, the island presents itself with steep cliffs that plunge into the sea, leaving no possibility for landing. I will have to circle around Thom for two-thirds of its perimeter before discovering the entrance to a small cove and a natural harbor ideal for welcoming and sheltering my vessel. Protected from the winds, shielded from the swell, equipped with a jetty and a dock, this natural harbor conveys a powerful message of welcome. I respond with a deep sense of gratitude towards the island.

The kayak can be emptied in complete tranquility and then placed on the rocks without having to hoist it too high, as the harbor also protects against tsunami risks. However, I will need to climb quite high to find suitable ground for setting up camp, following a path through the rocks and then finding a patch of ground covered with moss and low grass, a rarity at these latitudes, on a few square meters of relatively flat terrain.

The island offers true relief, with a small peak in its center resembling Puy Griou. On the side, the tip of an iceberg slightly protrudes and receives a finishing rainbow.



Thom invites exploration. Behind a ridge, a small lake appears below. Besides the possibility of taking a wash and filling up with fresh water, the lake offers a view of the eastern coast of the Melville Bay. One could almost touch it, even though it is still over twenty-five kilometers away. The view to the north is less deceptive. The coast is over 50 kilometers away, where a few mountains can be distinguished, and the outlines of a coastal ice band can be guessed. The plan for the next day.



The discovery of the island prolongs and amplifies the feeling that was born at its very first sight from the kayak, and then upon entering the harbor. This feeling will then extend and, through a form of contagion, touch upon the sensations related to walking, to the way of walking, and even beyond, to the way of moving across the surface of the island. Gravity holds me to the ground, but an uncommon lightness transforms the sensation attached to each step. Walking is no longer just a functional ability. Walking is a gift, and recognizing it, becoming aware of it, expands the field of perception in a way that is as astonishing as it is warm. And yet, I still pay attention not to take a misstep on ground often composed of unstable stones and rocks.

This particular way of feeling my own movement on the ground will accompany me until the end of the journey. It does not solely depend on this island. I will gradually realize that Sabine has been the matrix of sensations, emotions, and thoughts that will take shape and embody themselves throughout what remains of the journey on Greenlandic land and waters. And contrary to the adage that "*what happens in Greenland stays in Greenland*," a significant part of these sensations and thoughts will make the return journey.

Resentment

The fullness and lightness that blossom from the Sabine islands are like a light that gradually fills and illuminates the space. As the light intensifies over the days, shadows appear. There is only one, which makes it even more visible.

For several days now, the relationship with the weather router has been tense. His forecasts are regularly underestimated, particularly regarding wind strength, but the main concern is not there. He delivers his forecasts in the evening, while it is every morning that I make the key decision, whether to leave or not. However, in 12 hours at these latitudes, conditions can change significantly. Logically, it is closest to the decision that weather information should be produced. And when one knows that it takes the router 5 minutes to produce it—I think my brother spends more time on it—then one cannot understand what prevents him from doing so. Or one understands it all too well.

I had clearly explained to him before departure the stakes of weather information in decision-making, especially at this particular moment in the journey when navigation would take place far from the coasts and involve long crossings.

After finally yielding to my request to send the weather in the morning, he repeats with a nighttime dispatch. I have other reasons for dissatisfaction, which further paint the picture of a professional who is not really one, despite all his references, but this subject is a red line, simply because my safety, my life, depends on it.

I will eventually do without his services entirely, and it will not be due to having Olivier's bulletins, which are otherwise much more reliable. The decision will become evident and effective when I simply establish the fact that I am safer without his information, which disturbs my judgment.

It is much more difficult to fight against the shadow generated and projected by this situation. It is a black tide that gradually spreads in the bay, in this Melville Bay, whose beauty reveals itself day after day. My luck is not to be surprised. I know it is an enemy, and I know its name: resentment. It is a form of soul gangrene, an insidious evil that gnaws from within, far worse than hatred. I do not know what its virtue is; it must have one, I just know that it must be eradicated.

I can recognize resentment when it appears, but it is the contrast of the Melville Bay that has made it unbearable: "*You do as you wish, as you can, but get rid of this filth.*"

I have had the opportunity to train myself in this over the past few years, with a certain success, at least apparent. And I have time on my kayak during the long crossings. This is fortunate because it takes time. One does not make resentment disappear with a simple decision but through work that requires returning to oneself.

The spring of resentment is to let us believe that those who harm us have the power to affect us. However, this is an illusion of which we are the main architects, a tenacious and deadly illusion. Chasing this shadow is a learned skill, and there are surely multiple techniques for it. Mine consists of tracing back through time, following the path of origins to the source of my own responsibility and naming it precisely. This is not an easy task, as one navigates through feelings and encounters autoimmune barriers, but resentment does not withstand it.

Olive

Mail received on April 14, 2022 (4 months before departure)

"40 km offshore... that means navigation by instruments. A problem in these extreme conditions? It's death. There you go, I don't have to judge your desire to tease Hades' mustaches while you're stroking Neptune against the grain. Because for me, that's where you position your getaway. And since the further north you go, the less accurate my poor routing knowledge is, I don't want to be your weather partner and bear the guilt of a potential shipwreck. There are professional weather routers who will serve you best and allow you to enjoy your trip. For example: <http://www.professionnelenbois.fr> I highly recommend you reach out to them. Or to another professional in the field if you want to go on an expedition. Otherwise, it's a trip to suicidal territory, in my opinion. Olivier"

It is with this message, which could be described as frank and direct, and above all superbly well-written, that my brother responds to my request for him to provide weather updates throughout my journey.

Since the end of our adolescence, and that memorable day when he made me understand once and for all that *"that's enough!"*, we have built a mode of communication that allows for much and welcomes what it permits. Like that day when I must have been around 18, when very seriously, with a lot of kindness and goodwill, and already with a sharp sense of phrasing and appropriateness, he told me, *"you are becoming foolish."*

These exchanges, where concern for the other outweighs all other considerations, include a demand for form: to take care, to know when and how to say what, because the sincerity of intent is primary, but not sufficient.

I deeply thank him for his message, which expresses a refusal that I regret but understand and find perfectly legitimate. It is a refusal that speaks of him, speaks of me, and is accompanied by a solution, which I will implement with the success we know. The word "suicidal" does sting a bit. But I quickly see it as a generous invitation to discuss. Either he is right, and then it is vital that I understand, or, as I think, he is wrong, and this is a happy opportunity to discuss and understand each other better.

Feeling relieved of a responsibility he does not want this time, he will still, as he has for the past ten years, produce and send me daily weather forecasts, in addition to those from the "professional" I have hired.

The fact that his weather forecasts turn out to be much more accurate than those of the "professional" is essential, but it is secondary compared to the reality of what he brings me. In the morning and evening, we exchange a few very short messages (less than 120 characters allowed by the Iridium interface) that allow for a real dialogue. He is present, he listens, he is responsive, he is attentive, he understands.

I know the value and richness of this communication and this presence, but I am so focused on what I am experiencing that I do not fully measure it. A particular episode will help me with this.

At one point in the journey, which must be around Thom, that is to say between the most tumultuous stage at sea and the longest crossing of the trip, I feel a kind of tension in the communication: a

question whose answer comes just a little later, responses with one or two fewer words. From the outside, no one would have noticed anything, and probably there is nothing to notice, nothing other than the alteration of my own perception, but for me, it is there and it weakens my entire structure. There lies the sign of a value that I had not measured at its true level.

So I write. I write: "*I feel like I'm bothering you, is there a problem?*" I think I almost wrote "*I'm annoying you*" instead of "*I'm bothering you*." He would have understood and corrected it, but I am happy to have found the strength, in the state of emotional fragility I was in, to adjust my expression. He will respond, "*but no, not at all, why?*" and add, "*it must be because I've gone back to work, I have less time.*" And he adds again, "*how are you?*" picking up the thread of communication in its most generous, demanding, and accomplished form.

This exchange will instantly restore me to the state of fullness that had been emerging since the Sabine Islands. But it will especially give me full awareness, on the one hand, of the value and sensitivity of our communication, of the fundamental place it holds in my entire journey, and on the other hand, and this is the main point, of all that it requires from his side in terms of work, listening, time, and attention to reach this level of accuracy.

The contrast is quite striking between a responsibility from which he is officially relieved and an exercise of this responsibility that reaches a truly extreme level, as it is hardly possible to do more or do better.

I will try to lighten the pressure I put on him, to be less demanding and expectant, but without giving it up. It's too beautiful and too good. That I receive much more than I give is not in itself a concern; those who do not know how to receive do not yet know how to give. It is just necessary to measure its value, to see beyond or beneath what one receives, to recognize the person and their intention.

I realize how this communication with Olivier is not just a support for the journey, even if it is essential to this journey. It is also, and above all, in itself a journey, or rather a singular episode of another journey, which began long ago and is set to continue for an indefinite duration.

Surprise Package

There are two elements that I had been eyeing for months. The Sabine Islands, for their distance from the coast, and the leg that departs from Thom Island, for its length, exceeding 45 kilometers. It was a conversation with Markus, one of the two Germans who attempted the expedition 13 years ago, that revealed this. Because the map is misleading. It mentions an island, Bryant, about thirty kilometers from Thom. But as Markus approached Bryant with his colleague, he had to realize that the island was inaccessible. It presents itself as a massive cliff rising from the sea, soaring nearly 200 meters high. The waters around the island are between 200 and 600 meters deep. The only solution is to push the route to the next island, about 15 kilometers away, resulting in a total crossing of 45 kilometers. I have already done legs at least as long, but along the coast. This is a crossing between two islands and in open sea. There is much to consider.

I find myself thinking about it again during the first week of the expedition. The days spent in the fog crossing the ice are exhausting, and I surprise myself by feeling quite tired from legs that average only 25 kilometers. This alerts me again to the fact that the upcoming 45 kilometers deserve attention.

With this in mind, I will decide to leave Sabine with the prospect of very favorable weather two days later, precisely for this long crossing. I continue to think ahead about this leg, but now taking this weather parameter into account and considering that there is no longer any need to worry about navigation. I settle into the certainty that the leg will unfold without real danger. I confirm the accuracy of my judgment when my gaze falls for a moment on my kayak, turned over on the rock. I see its hull, its size, and I think, "*It's this fragile craft that will find itself tomorrow like a cork floating in open sea, far from any coast and with 500 meters of depth beneath it.*" I capture this image without it raising the slightest concern. It seems natural to me, even enviable.



The only remaining subject is the physical challenge and the state I will be in upon arrival. Objectively, the only risk is being exhausted, which is frankly not a problem, a sensation I have experienced many times, at sea or on land, and that I have learned to love while trying to avoid it.

I will then visualize this long leg several times, a bit like those competitive skiers we see at the top of the slope before launching into their race. What I visualize is roughly the opposite: it's not a succession of high-speed turns over a short time, but a monotonous straight line of 45 kilometers over at least 8 hours. This preparation will leave me at the threshold of the leg with the curiosity of a child in front of a surprise package: "*How will this leg go physically? What state will I be in upon arrival?*" These surprise packages no longer exist, but I knew them well and loved them. They had the gift of always sparking hope, without ever leading to something wonderful, but nothing bad came of them either.

At the start from Thom, the weather is radiant. The sea is perfectly calm, smooth. Combined with a swell of nearly one meter (a rare combination), it gives a unique sensation, that of a wave that is both

strong and gentle and has a long reach. The 30 kilometers that separate me from Bryant pass like a dream. It is neither short nor long; it is timeless. Bryant is indeed inaccessible. I had long held onto the hope of succeeding where the Germans had failed, finding a way to land, but I had eventually killed that option in order to fully settle into the idea of the long crossing and prepare for it.



I still stop for a few minutes near Bryant and look around. Just enough to begin to perceive the magic that will unfold in the coming days. I quickly resume my journey to stay focused on my obsession, which is the crossing. I feel that I must not extract myself from it, nor even deviate from it.

Just after Bryant, contrary winds rise. There are 15 kilometers left. The certainty of arriving and the fact that I do not yet feel the slightest fatigue make me see it as a small distance. Just enough time (nearly three hours, nonetheless) to look closely at these islands in the distance and wonder which one is Leven, my destination. It's not so obvious at these distances, and it will become clearer as I approach.



The winds have died down. Now I am just a few kilometers from Leven. Huge icebergs form a belt around the island. I look at them as if I have never seen icebergs before.



I navigate around them and approach the island. No way to land; I must follow the coast. Another hour, more than five kilometers to add to the previous 45. Still no fatigue, rather a sense of euphoria. Places to land appear. Not easy, due to the swell, but possible. I continue for a few more kilometers to find a better spot before turning back and returning to the previous point. The landing will be technical. One must imagine the swell on a very rocky and quite steep, yet smooth coast. It's almost necessary to jump from the kayak onto the rock—after being stuck in the boat for over eight hours—and at the same time quickly and precisely grab a rope before the swell returns. Letting the kayak drift back into the sea while holding the rope, then finding the right moment to hoist it onto the rock despite its weight. This maneuver, which I love to perform, is part of the leg. I am still in the leg. I will be until I have secured the kayak and identified a spot for the camp.

Only then will two things happen. First, I will notice that I still feel no fatigue and tell myself that it is related to how I prepared and thought about this leg. I see it as a new, happy, and mysterious manifestation of the alliance between a body and its mind.

Then, the surprise package will unveil its mystery and offer me, this time, an extraordinary gift by opening the doors to a truly enchanted interlude.

III

Parenthesis (Enchanted)

The Farandole of Elements

Reflecting this morning on the northern part of Leven Island, I must once again come to terms with the limits of writing, of my writing. As soon as the kayak was secured and the camp set up, I deeply felt that I had just entered a literally wonderful, enchanted world. An obviousness that I feel incapable of grasping and conveying other than with the naïve and overly worn words borrowed from the lexicon of fairy tales. Nevertheless, as frustrating as the result may be, I know it is necessary for me to continue producing this writing. I cannot resign myself to letting this moment fade with time, scatter, and get lost in the meanders of memories. I do not have the tools or the weapons of the poet or the artist, who know how to capture and translate the obviousness, but I know how to trace a path. In this case, that of the origin, the gateway to this new world: the return to the coast.

The map materializes this obviousness. We can follow it almost as one would read a poem.



It clearly shows and states that although the first islands are 7 kilometers away and the coast and glaciers are more than 10, together they form a unit of place that includes Leven. The island does not belong to the sea or the seabed, like Sabine or Thom. It belongs to the northern coast of the Melville Bay.



This return to the coast allows for the rediscovery of the laws of great balances, around the land, the sea, and the sky, now reunited, and the countless combinations of the elements that compose them.

The land: the coast, the islands, the rocks, the mountains, the rivers, the lakes, the glacial fronts, the ice sheet.

The sky: the air, the clouds, the winds, the fog, the rain, the sun, and the shadows.

The sea: in all the variety of products of the winds, from calm to storms, but also the tide, the currents, and the ice, in all its forms.

These elements, once again complete since I joined the coastal space, will combine and interact at will, producing a continuously changing spectacle of which I am both actor and spectator (the few moments of grace are those when I am simultaneously actor and spectator). An uninterrupted sequence of scenes, none of which leaves one indifferent.

A spectacle that I am now fully capable of grasping, a new world in which I have every ability to evolve. I still feel that confidence, mobilized during the first part of the journey, and that sense of fullness encountered on the Sabine Islands. Now, a form of liberation and relief has been added. Certainly, there will still be crossings of 20, 30, and even 40 kilometers. The ice has returned, with compact areas that will need to be crossed. I am still in Greenland, still in the land of bears, where the water is always at zero degrees and where the first inhabitant is still a good hundred kilometers away. This world is still as unknown to me as ever, but I have the keys to it.

If a five-year-old child is released in the middle of Paris or in a virgin tropical forest without anyone to help them, they will experience moments of anxiety and may not survive long. But an adult raised in a big city or in the tropics will know how to manage these risks and hopefully discover, to their happiness, the magical attributes of the city or the forest.

I am that adult. I have been initiated and trained throughout the journey that has led me to this place and this moment where the space and time of encounter and discovery are no longer troubled or defined by the issue of safety. Not that it has disappeared, but it is integrated; it is no longer in question, just in attention, at a level still as high, but which has shed all tension. At one point in the journey, tension was able to generate trust; now it is the absence of tension that produces its effects, those of a form of contemplation experienced through the movement of wandering.

I knew that such a moment could arrive, and I hoped that this expedition would produce it. But the tension had been such until now that I didn't even have to give up on it; it was clearly out of the question and irrelevant. Here I am. I now know that I just have to let myself be carried along, including in the decisions I will have to make.

Illulissat (iceberg)

Leven. The tent has just been set up. Everything is in its place. It's no longer discipline; it's a routine. The kayak is empty, the mess is joyfully organized in the tent, the rifle is out of its case, and the bear-proof system is in place. Am I hungry after these 50 kilometers of paddling? Not really. Am I finally tired after the setup work and ready to go to bed? No! I hunger for this view; I thirst to stand on this ground that supports me, facing this coastline rediscovered, all dressed in ice.

For once, I look at the icebergs from above, quite literally! The camp is very high up, and I am thus overlooking a few large icebergs. My gaze, as always, is filled with admiration and respect. There is a mystery in these beings and the fascination they inspire in me that I do not seek to unravel, too happy with the magic that occurs at each encounter.

There is not a single iceberg, and I have crossed thousands, on which I do not cast a gaze that tries to grasp as much as possible its uniqueness. There are fairly obvious morphotypes depending on origin, age, color, size, and weight. But there are also particular signs, a personality, and a shape that express the unique, the selfhood.



For the first time on this journey, I instinctively make this gesture that might make a potential spectator smile or mock. But I am alone; nothing I do is not completely free from the gaze or social judgment. Without deciding it, my arms rise high towards the sky and remain so for a few seconds, my head slightly back, fists closed but gently. The time for a long and deep breath, which is not that of the lungs but of the being in its entirety, its wholeness. No feeling of power, but of unity.

It is then that a whole section of the iceberg just below me collapses and falls vertically into the sea. A deafening noise, but a movement in slow motion. Everything unfolds in slow motion: the fall, then the formation of the wave that follows, then the wave that will propagate and reach the shore.

The iceberg has just lost a significant part of what composed it, but it has also created new ice structures, new beings. It was already in motion due to currents and winds; now it turns on itself with remarkable assurance and slowness. It will then oscillate for a long time before finding a new point of equilibrium and resuming its place in the general movement of the ice.

Every time this scene presents itself, and they are frequent, I feel like I am witnessing, almost as a voyeur, a key moment in the life of the iceberg. A moment that objectively and formally diminishes it, weakens it, brings it closer to its end. But the feeling is quite different. It is that of the movement of life when it accelerates, with an undeniable dramatic dimension, but also and equally a manifestation of creative evolution.

The iceberg is the mirror.

Panoramic

At the moment of leaving Leven, the weather is still as radiant. Sun, no wind, calm waters, the persistence of a swell that makes the departure a moment of attention. Before that, I need to lower the kayak from the top of a very steep but smooth rock. I gently bring it to the edge. Freshwater trickles down the rock, without its origin being discernible. Noticing it, stopping for a few minutes to observe this source-less water, while preparing for a technical departure, confirms the disappearance of any form of tension.

Once in the water, the kayak heads southwest, towards the tip of another island, about ten kilometers away. The day offers multiple stopping possibilities, at 20 or 30 kilometers. Nothing is decided; it will depend on the mood. About twenty minutes after departure, I realize that my phone (the regular mobile, not the satellite one) is not in my life jacket, its usual place. Protected in a waterproof case, I sometimes use it to take photos, but mainly to open a geolocation app when I am lost in the fog. It is not a vital safety element, but its loss would be costly (a precious history of messages and photos). Doubt, the bad doubt, tries to creep in during a parenthesis that has barely opened. In vain, for I will address this question with a serenity that surprises me. I will revisit all the gestures of the morning preparation, hypothesize that the phone is probably in a deck bag, consider stopping at the next island to check this hypothesis, and then decide on the course of action. And until then, I will not think about it, simply trusting myself, and more so, in the future.

A new reason to emerge from the state of tranquility arises. The wind picks up, quite strong. A tailwind that concentrates and tightens the ice, forming a dense space ahead that I will need to cross to reach and surpass the tip of the island. The return of that heavy uncertainty that animated the first week of the expedition? No, just a new opportunity to find myself among the ice and invent a passage. An incomparable sensation. There is no path, but it exists. We do not have the power to create it, only to sense it, to suggest it. It only reveals itself if we go to meet it, if we seek it, if we want it. It is a true dialogue, a relationship that the icebreaker cannot know, for it forces its way through. It does not know what it lacks.

The path will reveal itself, through the dialogue, the relationship, in a pure spirit of play.

This parenthesis within the parenthesis ends with the passage of the tip of the island. The other side is freed from the ice by the same wind that pushes them towards the next cap, Kap Edward Holme. Not quite the same wind, for it has strengthened. What to do? Engage in the crossing? I think it possible. Stop now on this island whose tip I have just passed, after only 10 kilometers? Well, yes. Not for safety reasons, but for... for... I don't know. Because a small cove presents itself, because the view is magnificent, because I hear a call, an invitation, that I feel I will be well there.

Stopping on this island after such a short distance and without being truly compelled creates a particular relationship with the island, another way of living and thinking about the stop. There is no fatigue from a long day of paddling; it is early, the place is idyllic, the sky is clear, and the island protects from the wind. Everything appears to me as a gift. "A gift from heaven, I can't see how to say it otherwise. The shape of the rock has been designed to accommodate the kayak, the fresh water flows with just the right current to do laundry a little later, and one can make out a path (even though no one ever comes here) that leads to flat heights, with soft ground to pitch a tent. So, once settled, I find myself in a panoramic setting that the wind will bring to life.



For the wind, at the mercy of its whims, its fancy, or its will, has the power to make the horizon appear or disappear, to fill or empty the sky of clouds, to push away or bring closer the ice, to smooth or raise the sea. With the sun's course and its light effects as accomplices, it creates a spectacle that is both panoramic and transformative. In just a few hours, sometimes a few minutes, the same view is barely recognizable. A magic that enchants and questions.





Just like on the northern coasts of Brittany, the wind is the main conductor of a choir of elements. When it is absent, we notice it, we pay attention to it, we await its return and its directives. In these spaces, even silence belongs to it. It is the whisper of a wind holding its breath.

Challenge

Objectively, the end of the journey is not far off, just under a hundred kilometers, three stages, three crossings between islands that also form capes. But the telluric force emanating from the western and final part of the Melville Bay has dissolved the very idea of time. The happiness I experience here and now even offers the hope of extending into the world from which I come.

Yet, iconoclastic and recurring thoughts creep into this non-terrestrial paradise. Without managing to extricate myself from them, they occasionally divert me enough to disturb me. It began upon arriving in Leven with this strange idea: I am proud of myself.

I knew upon arriving at the Sabine Islands that the completion of the expedition depended solely on me, but I also knew the risk that would still need to be managed, a risk that kept the arrival at a distance. Since Leven and the end of navigation far from the coasts, there is no longer any real danger, just an attention to maintain at a high level, so no real distance to the arrival, no more doubt that one day soon I will arrive. And now I feel pride. Yet I know I am one of those travelers of the unnecessary, accomplishing nothing that could have a particular contribution to the world. And yet pride is there. I even mentally make a list, and it is long, of all the qualities that had to be developed over the past fifteen years to reach this moment in the journey, a promise of an almost certain arrival, a promise of a challenge successfully met. And this feeling of pride, laced with confidence, is sweet.

This return to myself, in this way and at this moment, questions and disappoints me at first glance. How can what appears to me as a smallness of ego thus intrude before and into so much happiness?

After this initial reaction, I will not condemn this thought nor fight against it, as I did previously with resentment. I will let the questioning it raises develop. I sense that there may be one of the answers I need, that I came to seek while not being able to precisely formulate the source questions. What if, at this moment in the journey, I were both sides of the one-way mirror, with the possibility of a dialogue between two versions of myself, the one who designed the journey and the one who lives it? I feel the possibility of dialogue, I engage it and commit to it. It is calm, non-conflictual; it manipulates perceptions, emotions, and images less than words and concepts.

A light eventually shines on the fact that, if the challenge has never been the purpose of this journey, it is nevertheless one of its obvious and main components. A challenge that has no meaning in itself, but in the place it holds, that it can or could hold, that it must or should hold in my existence, particularly in what remains of it. I glimpse its virtues and creative power. I also see, even more distinctly, its limits, those below which one must absolutely remain. They can be summed up in one word: vanity. I have not escaped it when pride was tinged with words like '*the first*,' '*the only*.' It was so obviously gross and ridiculous that it was easy to chase away those laughable swellings of the ego.

It is much more difficult to find and give the challenge its rightful place. It can only have virtue in its articulation, its balance with other registers and paths of existence. Drawing this balance is in itself... a challenge, which will need to be met upon return. For now, realizing, recognizing, and accepting one's place and value is already a precious conquest for me.

I nonetheless fear that it has a price, that of erasing what the light of recent journeys had managed to reveal: the power of wandering. Are wandering and challenge compatible? Does the challenge not

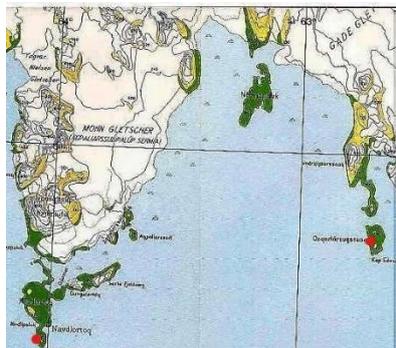
overshadow wandering? The answer will come in the very last meters of the journey. Clear, sharp, unambiguous, like a revelation and a relief."

In the morning, the wind is nothing more than a whisper, the sea is calm, and the sky is rich with a composition of gray and blue. The ice prevents a clear view of Cape Edward Holme, the next destination, but there is nothing to worry about. I had asked Oliver to keep me informed about the ice conditions around this cape because the images I had consulted before departure indicated a very compact band, difficult to cross. It seems that over the days, the concentration of the ice has decreased.

The journey will be peaceful, serene, and short – about twenty kilometers, just over three hours. The island, of which Cape Holme is the southern tip, generates a mixed feeling at first glance. It has an austere relief made of large rocks, barely softened by a few snowfields.



However, the low tide reveals black and gray sand that offers the kayak and its occupant the gentlest landing. It will take more than an hour to traverse this space of stones and rubble to find a square meter or two suitable for setting up the tent. Only once the entire camp is set up and secured will I fully appreciate the place.



Here I am at the edge of a vast, deep bay, bordered at both ends by Cape Holme and Cape Melville, which are 40 kilometers apart. The contours of the bay are formed by vast glacial fronts from which mountain peaks rise, reaching 800 meters, and on which the edge of the Inlandsis, the Greenland ice cap, rests.



This magnificent ensemble then opens onto the sea.



The wind will rise, bringing fog, low clouds, and then rain. An incessant rain for nearly thirty-six hours. With the humidity, a biting cold will settle in.



I instantly knew how essential this moment, this "stuck" day on this island had been to the journey, but it took me a long time to gather the few words to approach the why of it. To understand this, one must return to the day itself, most of which is spent in the sleeping bag.

The cold is a gift when accompanied by the guarantee of warmth. The few outings, lasting a few minutes, provide the opportunity to feel and appreciate the contrast of hot and cold, to leave one with the certainty of returning to the other.

The scenes unfold again; the bay takes on changing appearances, each revealing a part of its beauty and mystery. Each outing is an opportunity to contemplate them.

A slightly longer outing is motivated by the search for water. The snowfields leave little doubt about its presence on the island, but there is no visible stream. It flows somewhere beneath the rocks. As I walk, I hear this sound. I will follow it and trace it back until I find a few meters where water flows on the surface and fill my containers.

The rain on the tent fabric is a music whose rhythm is set by the winds. It harmoniously accompanies moments of reading or reflection. For several years, I have banished human music from my travels to better listen to the music that nature offers us.

Time stretches, without creating the slightest length or languor, as during the two days stuck by the winds on the Sabine Islands. Behind the obvious change of rhythm – due to this pause – a more imperceptible shift occurs in the way of being present in the journey. I feel no constraint, but rather that the journey offers a breath that is defined neither by the origin nor by the next destination, but solely by the fact of being here. This place and this form of presence offer, without it being truly conscious, another view and another access to the journey, while being fully part of it. A perspective that daily stops had not allowed until then due to tension. There is now a way, in the heart of the journey, to extricate oneself from it to ultimately better grasp it or reveal other dimensions.

I am convinced that this is what the whales came to tell me or signify to me.

There are two sounds that make me leap out of the tent, day or night, in calm or storm, without thinking: the cracking of large icebergs and the breath of whales. At the end of the day, despite the music of the rain, I hear this breath. While recognizing it among a thousand without the slightest

hesitation, I have difficulty believing it because it has been nearly three weeks since, apart from a few birds and a fox, I have seen no signs of animal life. After this very brief moment of surprise, I rush out of the tent and see, just outside my window, two whales passing very calmly along the coast.

My expeditions in Greenland almost always lead to multiple encounters with whales, sometimes from land where I can observe them, but often from the sea, giving me the privilege of navigating close to them and several times seeing them pass beneath the kayak. I feel a special bond and attachment to these living beings. Each time I have had the privilege of encountering them, even in difficult weather, it has been moments of profound peace, perhaps the most peaceful moments of my existence.

They will pass by once again in the evening, with the same discretion, the same way of saying, "*If you hadn't stopped at Cape Holme, we wouldn't have seen each other.*"

I am in front of these whales. I face Cape Melville, even if I cannot distinguish it. Caught in the winds, clouds, and residual rain, the bay as a whole does not merely offer an extraordinary view; it tells me that I am part of it. I know that tomorrow's weather will be favorable, that I will be able to cross this bay during a long and beautiful day of navigation, reaching Cape Melville. I then think back to the entire journey, its stages, its adventures, its unfolding and progression, and I see it as an extraordinary story of which I am one of the characters. A thought then crosses my mind. A thought that does not resemble me, that surprises and challenges me, almost disorients me.

A thought that will return several times throughout the journey, reinforced by the series of events that will follow: I tell myself that this whole story is far too perfect, in its construction, in its sequences, even in its details, not to have been previously imagined and written, by I know not who or what."

The Thread

There is a wonderful balance on the thread that connects wandering to drifting, made possible by an extreme lightness, by a near absence of gravity.

The course of action is simple: it connects the two capes, Holme and Melville, from East to West. A route of about forty kilometers, approximately 7 hours of crossing. The weather is favorable, but with such a duration, it is necessary to study fallback positions, alternatives to the straight line. If the situation were to deteriorate in the middle of the crossing (a scenario always interesting to consider because it is generally at the worst moment that the worst things happen), there wouldn't be much to think about; one would have to head straight north into the bay and try to reach an iceberg for shelter. Even fifteen kilometers away, the presence of the coast, even if dressed in ice, is a solid support on which the mind can rely and rest.

I leave Kap Holme on calm seas with a clear horizon (West) revealing in the distance the ice sentinels that enclose and protect Kap Melville. But I observe and feel behind me (East) a sky filling with clouds. To my right (North) is the bay and its ice fronts. To my left (South) is the sea as far as the eye can see (if one were to draw a straight line from this point heading South, it would go all the way to Antarctica without encountering any land).

Gradually, the sky structures itself around this East-West demarcation line, this taut thread between the two capes that my kayak follows without needing to think. A dividing line emerges vertically along the kayak's axis of progression: between a cloudy area to the south and an immaculate sky to the north. At first, I am very attentive, vigilant regarding the movements of the sky, with the risk of seeing the cloudy part take over and bring with it a band of dense fog. But the division of the sky seems to stabilize. It then generates and inspires a rather extraordinary feeling, which goes far beyond the simple perception of beauty.



This division of the world between gray and blue is so perfect that one could or would want to believe in its eternity. But nothing lasts indefinitely, even here, at least in appearance. And the balance will break, giving rise to another composition of the world, even more extraordinary.

The cloudy area will not only invade and occupy the free zone, it will unite with the sea and create a space that could be described as spherical if it had to be given a shape. A space where the kayak no longer knows if it is carried by the sea or by the sky. A space where it does not feel alone because icebergs and birds share its fate. We are the inhabitants of this world that seems to have been designed for us, with the impression of having been born there, at the moment since we are discovering it.



This birth of a particular kind grants no rights but speaks volumes about origins, identity, and what it means to come into the world.

Plays of light whose source is unknown produce variations in color, blending grays and blues, just before this world fades away, the sky restructures itself, and the thread is rewoven around the east-west axis, that of a wandering that resumes its course and destination, Kap Melville. As if nothing had happened, while it is quite the opposite.

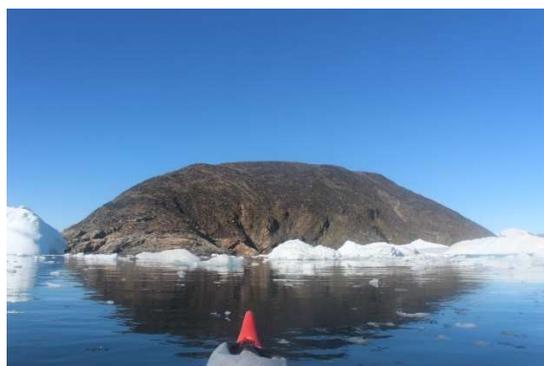


Kap Melville

Kap Melville carries several meanings. It is the namesake of this bay in northwestern Greenland of which it is one of the doors, entry and exit. It is also the place where two Germans mysteriously lost their kayaks thirteen years ago. I think about this regularly over the past few days, momentarily reducing the expedition to a performance that would not be complete if it were to end before Savissivik. It is also the penultimate stage of this journey, the near end of something, and this thought is new. Finally, and perhaps above all, it is a cape, a point that, even though located on an island, is often the scene of some adventure or surprise related to currents, winds, and tides.



Nothing too serious this time. The winds of the previous days have gathered the icebergs on the east side of the cape. They are high enough to hide part of the coast and numerous enough to create a maze within which navigation becomes a slalom, embellished with a few dead ends. The cape reveals itself; I stop for a moment to observe it, admire it, greet it, and also savor this moment of the journey that I feel is important. I briefly entertain the idea of trying to pitch my tent there and settle in, for the symbolism, for the strength of the place. But the risks of being surrounded by ice during the night quickly dispel this intention.



I pass the cape and follow the coast of the island, which is its southern tip. Quite quickly, the ridge line lowers to reveal a strip of land that is only about twenty meters high and a few hundred meters wide, allowing easy passage on foot from one coast to the other of the island and especially providing an unobstructed view of its two azimuths: to the east, the bay I just crossed, and to the west, Meteorbugt, a new bay, slightly smaller, which houses Savissivik at its end.

The flat nature of the strip of land and rock gives certainty that I can set up camp comfortably, with this extraordinary double view as a bonus. The welcome itself is warm as it presents itself in the form of a sandy beach and small pebbles. But there is a trap that I failed to decipher, too seduced by the beach's allure. It turns out to be surrounded, on one side by an impassable névé and on the other by cliffs eight to ten meters high that must be climbed to access the flat surface of the island. Climbing with the bags will not be easy; it will prove to be both technically difficult and physically demanding with the kayak, which I must hoist almost vertically. Keeping in mind the fate of the Germans, there is no alternative but to hoist it as high as possible. This task is accomplished in perfect weather conditions but after a crossing of more than seven hours. The magic of the place, along with the fierce idea that nothing must happen to this kayak in these final moments of the journey, carries me and erases all traces of fatigue.

Once these tasks are completed, I will take an unlimited amount of time to choose the spot to set up camp, the last camp. It is not about finding the square meter where it is possible but, given the vastness of the choice, placing the gear, the tent, and its occupant in the most beautiful place in the world, one where the ground will be the softest, and the 360° view will be the most unforgettable. It is there somewhere; this place is offered to me; I just need to recognize it. There it is. I doubt there was ever a happier tent than mine that night.



The view to the East opens up to the infinite beauty of a maze of icebergs, helping me visualize and understand the dead ends I wandered into earlier in the day before finally reaching and surpassing Kap Melville. The West side offers a distant view of the island that hosts Savissivik, though I cannot yet distinguish the village, hidden behind a barrier of icebergs that the winds have gathered.



I also see the kayak, resting a few meters back from the cliff. My first thought upon waking will be of it; I will go check that nothing has taken it away from me. To find it will be a relief, the assurance of completing the expedition, confirming the perhaps excessive importance that this idea holds for me.

The fear of losing the kayak during the night will not prevent me from enjoying every minute spent in this place, at the heart of Kap Melville: the warmth of the sun on my skin and in the tent, the freshness of the air, the cold of the night, the softness of the ground, the clarity of the sky, the presence of ice, so close on one side and distant on the other...

I know where I am, without really thinking about it. I am at the tip of this horn located in the northwest of Greenland, this vast uninhabited space called Melville Bay, which is neither hostile nor wild. And this day is the last, I can feel it. But the last of what? I will still be alive tomorrow, I will still be in Greenland, I will still have a long leg to complete. And yet this day is the last. I then realize that the only difference is that tomorrow I will join the company of humans. I feel so little like I have left them or been alone that I must be on the threshold of this space without them and about to find them to realize it. This probably means that this unconscious, painless but real solitude has shaped the journey.

The end of the journey, the end of the world, or just an ordinary workday?

The kayak is still there! So I will finish and conclude the expedition today! Under a blue sky, with a moderate wind, a final crossing of 35 kilometers. A necessarily short distance since it is the last.

The water is free of ice for at least twenty-five kilometers, allowing my mind to wander. But as soon as the kayak has taken off, it is surprised by the flight of a group of small birds. They come from the right of the kayak, from the depths of Meteorbugt Bay. They fly in a small squadron a few meters high and speed straight south, towards the open sea.

This flight is quickly followed by another, a new squadron made up of about ten birds of the same kind, birds I had not had the chance to observe before, neither on land nor at sea (I would later learn that they are Dovekies). Their speed is such that I cannot distinguish them precisely, just estimate their size and appearance, comparable to that of large sparrows. Then another squadron passes, almost directly above the kayak, still flying straight and fast. Another one just a few meters ahead. It is now an uninterrupted parade taking possession of the bay. The time between two flights of squadrons is barely a few seconds. From minute to minute, the spectacle settles in without having to end. A quick calculation leads me to estimate that nearly ten thousand birds have already passed, and the frequency does not weaken. Nothing seems to be able to stem this flow. For the first time, a feeling of strangeness seizes me. But where are they coming from?

Is there anything in these ice-bound, snow-covered mountains to shelter and feed such a population? What is happening? I cannot remember the last time I saw so many creatures. I seriously entertain the hypothesis that this might be the end of the world, as we know animals are sensitive to signs of impending large-scale disasters. This is just a hypothesis, so there is no reason to start worrying yet. And besides, if that were the case, I tell myself there are worse places to face it. I still look for other, more favorable hypotheses. I exclude, or rather I do not presume to believe it possible that these thousands of young friends have come to bid farewell to the end of my expedition.

So I tell myself that it is morning and that these birds are simply going to work or searching for food in a collectively well-organized manner, and that we are precisely at rush hour. They will probably return this evening, around 5 or 6 PM. A small squadron crosses the others in the opposite direction. There will be at most two or three in this case, not enough to invalidate the initial hypotheses, probably just the forgetting of a tool they will go look for before resuming their work route.

This wonderfully surprising episode will end, without any other sign of an end of the world or any other explanation. More than ever, I feel intrinsically and forever part of the Melville Bay, both native and foreign, a traveler passing through in a breath of eternity, in harmony with the places but ignorant of its secrets.

Labyrinthine

"A slight band of ice to cross." For once, Olivier will have underestimated an element of the scenery. After 25 kilometers of navigation in a monotony that liberates and confuses the mind, the band of ice that appears is anything but light. The icebergs are massive and numerous. As I approach the island and its shallow waters, their submerged parts touch the sea floor and immobilize them, preventing them from colliding with one another and leaving a corridor about ten meters wide between them.



The band of ice then presents itself as a new labyrinth, following the one from the first part of the journey. The principle of the labyrinth is that one cannot discern the exit upon entering. It is no longer the fog that prevents me here, but the size of the icebergs and their arrangement. The new labyrinth stretches over more than ten kilometers in length, but it is in its width, difficult to estimate from the kayak, that I must cross it. It is possible to avoid it by going offshore, where the depth of the sea frees the ice from the grip of the seabed. Therefore, entering the labyrinth is a choice.



But can we really speak of choice? The sea is calm, the sky is blue, and the lover of ice is offered an experience he senses to be unique, at the threshold of his journey. How can one refuse the beauty of the moment, the enormity of a gentle stroll among giants, and the salt of a peace that is always known to be threatened? For this labyrinth is not a human creation; thus, the very fact that there is an exit is

uncertain. Just like the weather. And what if, lost in this maze, the fog were to reappear? What if the wind rose and closed the labyrinth upon itself, just a few meters from the exit? This salt of uncertainty strengthens a tension that the enormity had already established, but without altering the beauty, even revealing it and adorning it with a sense of exception.

Once engaged in the labyrinth, the tension drives one to find the exit, to hope for the exit, while clearly announcing that it will seal the end of the exception.

In two days, from the heights of Savissivik Island, I will see again this labyrinth in which I still wander. I will see the kayaker, very small, tense but happy to be so, knowing exactly where he is without knowing his way, intoxicated by so much surrounding purity, on the way to an exit he aspires to without wanting it. Alive, intensely alive.



Arrived

The exit from the labyrinth is gradual. At certain moments, the contours of the island appear as the space between the icebergs widens, only to close again and resume the thread and meanders of doubt. Then comes the certainty of having exited the labyrinth. One would like to stop, almost to reflect on the unique episode that has just unfolded, on emotions never felt before, this new way of being in motion at the very heart of the ice, with a humility and admiration bordering on fear.

But the kayak cares nothing for the moment; it is now drawn towards its final destination. Without haste, but without pause. To follow the southern coast of the island for a few more kilometers, to weave between smaller icebergs and pass through thin sheets of ice that have formed on the water's surface due to probably very cold nights and which the sun has not yet dissolved. A film not so thin after all, since the paddle cannot break it; it requires the momentum of the kayak, which in these last meters can act as an icebreaker.



One last rock to navigate around, and Savissivik should appear. Savissivik appears, with its colorful houses at the foot of the relief and its large white satellite dish connecting it to the world.



The last meters and the final moments of the expedition will reveal a truth so clear, so sharp, so strong that I will hear and understand it in the moment.

I am arriving in Savissivik. All my mind is focused on the encounter with this village. This thought completely dissolves the expedition. I am not concluding a journey - I am arriving in Savissivik. I am not coming from Kullorsuaq; I have not traveled 400 kilometers alone across the Melville Bay - I am arriving in Savissivik. I am not even coming from Cape Melville - I have just emerged from a labyrinth a few nautical miles from the village of Savissivik.

I have not arrived; I am arriving.

This truth comes to my consciousness like a revelation, like an obviousness that I welcome with a feeling of intense happiness, of deep gratitude as well, for I have no control over how to live and feel this moment of arrival. This emotion contains both the journey and the traveler; it is their mirror, but it imposes itself on me, as if it were placed within me from the outside. And the image revealed by the mirror comforts me and makes me happy: I now know that the expedition has not consumed the excursion but has given it its color, that the challenge has not killed the wandering but has taken it to other shores.

What I do not yet know, even if the revelation opens up the possibility, is that the journey is not finished, that it is different from what I had imagined.

IV
In Balance

The Old Young Man and His Daughter

As I approach the village, from the kayak that shelters me for a few more minutes, I see no movement, no inhabitants. It is only in the last few meters that I spot a man sitting, looking at the sea and perhaps having seen my kayak and its bright colors in the distance. I notice the slope of the beach and I know that I need to gain a strong momentum if I want to avoid tipping and the risk of capsizing, which would not align with my service record. I'm glad I did, as I wouldn't have wanted to present a poor first impression to the one who will turn out to be the elder of the hunters and kayakers of the village.

I quickly remove the deck bags and the elements from the rear compartment to lighten the kayak enough to haul it onto the shore. I then approach the man and greet him. He knows only a few words of English, which are sufficient for our exchange.



The man has bright eyes, a welcoming smile, and there emanates from him, without him even having to move, an astonishing physical strength. I introduce myself as a kayaker from Kullorsuaq, and he shares his identity as a narwhal-hunting kayaker. He is particularly interested in the laminated map located on the deck of my kayak, which presents his island and its surroundings in what seems to be a new and intriguing way.

After a few minutes, I leave him to head to the grocery store, hoping it is still open so I can enhance my evening meal with some dishes different from those of the past few days.

I will see the man one last time that evening when I return to what will become my home after filling a large container with fresh water from the village reservoir. He is accompanied by a younger woman, who is one of his daughters. I join them in observing the sky and the sea. The sun will take a few more hours to set, without taking all the light with it. The woman has the same limited English vocabulary as

her father. She tells me that her brother-in-law should return that night from a several-week narwhal fishing trip far to the north, in the waters of Qaanaaq. She invites me to approach him upon his return, as he is the only one in the village who speaks English well, and I could have more elaborate conversations with him. But for now, I am happy to talk with her and her father, and language is not a barrier. On the contrary, the limited vocabulary encourages us to get to the essence, to stay on the surface, certainly, but to better grasp its envelope in points that make sense. The more elaborate the language, the more it allows for detail and possibly depth, but rushing into detail too quickly at the threshold of a meeting, when we do not know each other, can scatter, mislead, and distract. The apparent and false limit of language will lead us to two subjects that are very inspiring for me.

She will talk to me about Savissivik, the fact that she was born there and returns every summer to recharge, she who works and lives in Nuuk, the capital of Greenland and a metropolis of 14,000 inhabitants. For her, Savissivik is a heart place, more than just nostalgic. She is between 50 and 60 years old, knows every stone on the shore, but she is still there, this evening, sitting on the beach contemplating the horizon as if it were the first time, as if a secret were inscribed there, filling up on a vital energy that she needs. And I am there, nourishing myself in my own way from the same horizon, but also thinking, thanks to her, about what my own Savissiviks are, those places where I know every stone but which have not exhausted their capacity for inspiration. Are there any? Which ones are they? Where are they?

She then tells me about her father, who is right next to her. She tells me that he will turn 80 in a few days. She admires the strength he still exudes, which she partly attributes to the fact that he does not drink or smoke. His gait reveals a hip problem that could be considered disabling at first glance, but what this young man emanates is at the opposite: a vital force, powerfully physical, but one can sense that it is not just physical. An intense presence to life, without harshness, without forcing. During the last narwhal hunting session, he was the only one in the group to have killed an animal, launching his harpoon from his traditional kayak. He certainly needed help getting it out (traditional Greenlandic kayaks are custom-made, very tight, and literally trap the kayaker; it is not easy to extricate oneself from them), but this only reinforces the respect.

This old young man and his daughter have inspired me, immediately and over time, in multiple ways. They will have disappeared the next day; I will not see them again during my stay.

Martha

A few minutes after my arrival and after leaving the old young man, I find myself facing the closed door of the small grocery store (Pilersuissoq) when I hear a voice calling me from the window of a yellow house ("Hey!") inviting me to have a "Kaffé?" at her place. I enter the house timidly, still in a dry suit covered in salt, and wearing neoprene boots that are still damp and not easy to take off. It's warm inside, the table is covered with cakes, and children are playing. Three or four generations are gathered in the room. The hostess is named Martha Ivik. She invites me to have coffee and a piece of cake, and we exchange a few words, fortunately supplemented by sign language. It is mentioned that I arrived from Kullorsuaq by kayak and that I should stay in the village for about ten days. This doesn't take more than five to ten minutes, most of which is filled with silence.

Then, without me seeing it coming, Martha tells me that I will be spending these ten days in a house that belongs to her daughter (I didn't notice that Martha consulted her daughter about this)! Following this announcement that came from who knows where, Martha's daughter and all the children in the house get dressed and start moving. I guess I'm invited to follow them to this hypothetical house. The cheerful group quickly reaches and occupies a blue house surrounded by about fifteen sled dogs firmly tied to their chains.



The house is in the middle of the village. It consists of an entrance kitchen that leads to a living room, which in turn opens into a bedroom. I still don't realize what is happening. In a sort of whirlwind, Martha's daughter and the children busily fill a large garbage bag as a form of cleaning and gather some toys they will take with them.



I stand there, incredulous, in the midst of this commotion.

I wonder if someone is being displaced to allow me to occupy the house. I try to ask the question, but no one seems to pay attention to me, let alone my request. I am shown how to turn on the TV (with its two Danish channels and two Greenlandic channels), the old stove is lit, and then the whirlwind leaves almost as quickly as it carried out its makeshift cleaning. I remain stunned, alone, in "my" house. On

one hand, I still have difficulty believing in such a miracle of hospitality, and on the other, I already savor the prospect. The house is "rustic," but it has everything. A sink (without running water, of course), a fridge, a sofa, a toilet (without drainage, of course), a bed, heating... and then walls and a roof, windows! During the expedition, I wouldn't have traded my tent for a hotel room or my sleeping bag for a bed for anything in the world. Once the kayaking journey was over, I could have easily continued living somewhere under my tent without it costing me anything; in fact, that was the most likely scenario. It would have put me in a sort of in-between that would have had its flavor and value; I would just have had to settle far, very far from the inhabitants due to the young dogs running free. Moving into the house, in total independence, in the heart of the village doesn't take away from my character as a traveler and a stranger, but it makes me, in an instant, a resident, even temporarily, a guest, and a neighbor.

Surely one must be in the position I was in at that time to grasp and feel everything that Martha's gesture contains, the immensity of this gesture. Just a few minutes ago, I was coming out of a labyrinth of icebergs, the ultimate trial before the end of a particularly intense expedition. After 400 kilometers of solo navigation and around a final rocky bar, the village of Savissivik appeared to me, opening onto a last kilometer to cover while asking myself, "How will I be received, not just welcomed?" I expected nothing, was not expecting anything, and what I received was simply unimaginable.

Back in France, I sent the following message to Martha (asking one of her daughters who lives in southern Greenland to translate it):

Dear Martha,

I am back in France. And I still think about you and how you helped me. How you offered me to stay in your daughter's house (I thank her also). You are a very kind and precious person. And you are inspiring: I wonder how I could, how I should be more like you... I am also happy because I know I will see you again: I will come back to Savissivik next year, to take my kayak and finish my trip to Qaanaaq. Meanwhile, if I can be of any help to you and your family, please tell me!

Bye, dear Martha.

Pascal



Neighbors

During my stay in the village, no one will express anything other than the normality of my presence among them. There are no questioning glances, let alone suspicious ones, and no questions either. No one will ask me anything about myself, my origins, or my journey. I will not take this as a sign of indifference, but rather as a mark of respect. I will be invited to certain events, have a few opportunities to talk with the adults, and especially to play with the children.

My first neighbors, however, are not fortunate enough to have a roof over their heads. They are about fifteen sled dogs and bear-hunting dogs. Like every summer, they are tied to a chain about two meters long, which they will only leave when winter arrives and they return to service. A few rare dogs are free; these are the young ones. It is in adolescence that they join the chain, as their behavior then causes too many inconveniences and damages. For a glimmer of hope for food, they are ready to destroy everything. Among my neighbors, two young ones are clearly on the verge of being chained soon due to their mischief!



On the first evening of my arrival, Martha comes to feed the dogs, who are literally starving. Her little girls accompany her. Special attention is given to a female dog who has just had two puppies.

As a result, she is entitled to the protection of a doghouse, right under my window. At one point, one of the young, free dogs rushes into the doghouse where the puppies are. I don't know what crossed its mind, whether it was curiosity or a suicidal urge. No, surely it was just the irrepressible quest for food. The mother then rushes into the doghouse, and we hear a piercing, prolonged scream. She crushes the reckless dog with her body, violently pins its head to the ground with a paw, and leans over it, making it unclear what she is doing. The dog howls in agony for a long time until the mother finally releases it. We then see the young dog's ear bleeding. The price of a lesson that nothing indicates will truly be learned, as hunger drives these animals to all extremes.

Before she leaves, I express my gratitude to Martha again. I feel a gap that I cannot fill – but perhaps it should not be filled; perhaps it should just be understood and accepted – between an act that is perfectly natural for her and the literally extraordinary feeling it gives me. This gap is reinforced by the conviction that this gesture is not so common in the world I come from. There are many rational explanations for this, even justifications. This leads us to forget the power of the welcoming gesture, the human and fraternal attention it carries towards the other, which reflects back on oneself and on everyone.

There emerges a question that I will only articulate precisely a few days later, after having long discussions with one of the greatest hunters in northern Greenland: *what must the world learn from Savissivik?*

Void

I learned from my expedition leader (Pascal Lièvre) the importance of allowing time upon arrival to begin digesting what has just happened, not to rush back the day after the end of the excursion. This time is indeed precious; it is even indispensable, irreplaceable. Ideally, two days. But here, I have 10 days! Because I have hardly consumed the leeway intended to secure my crossings (waiting for favorable weather). And I do not have the option, as I did one year, to shorten this time. There's no way to take an earlier return flight.

Where does this urge to return as quickly as possible come from? Where does this feeling of being stuck in this country, where I so wanted to go, where I have just lived extraordinary, irreplaceable days, come from? I know it's not the need to see my loved ones because I haven't missed them; they were so present in my thoughts and through daily messages. Moreover, as soon as I arrived in Savissivik, we resumed oral communication, which was strictly forbidden during the expedition. So if it's not my loved ones, what could it be? Where could this desire to return quickly come from?

I then realize that the fullness I have just experienced in multiple forms over the past weeks has been associated with my identity as a kayaker crossing the Melville Bay. It's a small thing, but it contains everything I need: an identity, a purpose, modalities, all in conditions of constant stimulation of attention and senses. But from the moment I set foot on the beach of Savissivik, I am none of that anymore. I am certainly infinitely richer for all this experience, which will take me a long time to digest, but I am no longer any of that. Just a stranger, far from home and far from my loved ones, who would return in two days if he could but is stuck on this piece of rock at the top of the Earth.

Initially, I will cling to what remains of this identity: my kayak. And after a first night in the house, I will return to the sea for a day trip. Circumnavigating Savissivik, a long crossing, a glacier, navigation, seemingly regaining everything that made up my daily life during the expedition.



It's still incredibly beautiful, but there's something false about it, something that doesn't measure up to what I've experienced over the past three weeks, not in terms of truth. I can feel that I am trying to escape something, to artificially fill a void, and this feeling is intolerable to me.

But take this void! Accept it, accept what it makes of you just as you accepted being reduced to a particle suspended in fog, a cork bobbing on the sea, a newborn in a gray and blue sphere, an element of an

enchanted parenthesis, or even a spectator of the elements' dance. Acknowledge and accept what has been given to you since your arrival: the smile of the old young man, the words of his daughter, Martha's gift that made you a resident, the children's invitation to play, the company of the dogs, the view of the horizon. Accept having nothing to do, letting the course of things fill this welcome void that contains the promise of your journey. Do not let old reflexes regain control and the reins. Don't you see that the parenthesis is still open and that you have the possibility to extend it until your return, and then, who knows, to keep it open permanently? You have never been so close. Your journey is there, entirely in this void that Savissivik offers you; do not pass it by, embrace it.

Story Without Words

This emptiness, I will let it invade me. I will then spend the majority of my days intensely doing nothing. A little walk along the mountainside, two or three trips a day to the water reserve, a daily visit to the grocery store—the smallest I have ever seen, a few phone exchanges. This is how I will occupy the five days spent in this village (I was able to exchange my ticket and take a helicopter a bit earlier than planned to go to Qaanaaq, where I will have to spend the remaining six days). Aside from these few activities, I spend most of my time lying on a couch or walking, strolling along the shore or around the village.

I realize, using these words, that it sounds like the description of a prisoner's life: often alone, nowhere to go, not much to do, most of the time spent in the small perimeter of an apartment or in the slightly larger one of the village courtyard, and there is indeed a form of constraint since if I had had the option, I would have left after two days. But it is a constraint that I do not endure; rather, it opens me up and places me in a rather curious state. A physical state of rest that contrasts with the hyperactivity of the past weeks and a state of mind more inclined to wandering than to meditation or reflection.

This strange cocktail ultimately re-establishes me in some of the fundamentals of my journey: freeing myself from the relationship with time and being in hyper-attention. It is no longer attention to the fog, the sea, navigation, the winds, and more generally the elements, but attention to others, to the beings that populate this tiny planet, humans and dogs. I feed off the slightest crumb (like observing every person who passes under my windows or who strolls through the village, or my neighbors, the dogs at the end of their chains) and I appreciate without limit the few direct interactions that are offered to me.

These are mostly encounters with children. They make up a good third of the inhabitants, and I often cross paths with them as they spend a large part of their time outside playing, and unlike the adults, they seem to seek my company. This is particularly true for Naja-Nuka, a young girl of about ten, her little sister, and a little boy under six with whom I quickly became friends. The first time I saw him, he was sitting outside carving a piece of wood with a knife. This piece of wood turned out to be a harpoon that he spent hours throwing, always with the same ritual, tirelessly perfecting his gesture. I came once to sit next to him and moved the stone that served as his target. I would move it several times, gradually increasing the difficulty of his exercise. He played along, hitting the target almost every time with a gesture of purity and elegance that forced my admiration.



It was this little guy who, on the third day, came knocking at my door in the early afternoon saying, “kaffé?!” Clearly an invitation to join one of the villagers. I thought it was his grandfather who lived right next to me, so I started to follow him, not really covering up, thinking I only had a few meters to go. I quickly realized that my young friend was taking me in the opposite direction. His pace was very slow, and sometimes he would stop, look at me, then look around before resuming his walk. I then wondered if I had misinterpreted his message and if we were indeed going somewhere. The wind was strong and cold, and I was starting to freeze. At each of my little companion’s pauses, I looked at him questioningly, to which he responded by turning his head and continuing his slow walk. We were almost at one end of the village, not far from the open-air dump. But then he climbed the stairs of a small house where we entered. I had just been invited to join a more or less impromptu gathering of the entire village. The house belongs to a young couple with a baby. There were already a good fifteen people in the house when I arrived (almost half the village), and people gradually began to arrive or start to leave. I was invited to sit down, to have coffee and cake placed on the table.



Martha was there, her daughter too, as well as my little friends who came to greet me with laughter. My young guide had gone back outside to throw his harpoon. A little boy even younger, perhaps three years old, came to sit on my lap. He would keep climbing up and down during the two or three hours I would stay, occasionally playing with my nose and ears. There was music, singing. A group was playing cards on the floor. The mess in the house was indescribable! I would remain there, without speaking, watching, listening, playing with the children. From the baby to an elderly person, all generations and ages were present. I was attentive to how they spoke to each other, looked at each other, interacted. Yet I produced no analysis, let alone conclusions. Observing and listening was just my way of being present. Again, apart from the children, no one paid particular attention to me, nor did they act as if I weren’t there. There was a rather unique way of being together.

As I was about to leave, I crossed paths in the entrance with a young hunter I had met the day before. He was sitting on the floor with two friends around a spread of seal, walrus, and narwhal meat. Raw meat that they were relishing. There were also fish that had been marinating under stones for two months, giving the flesh a taste and smell that could wake a bear from hibernation. I wouldn’t have the courage to accept the piece they offered me.

Back in my house, I was happy to find that I had been just as comfortable with the people as I had been in the past weeks with the icebergs, the fog, and the sea. And in a somewhat similar way: by attuning myself to a very singular encounter, without seeking what the codes to use or follow might be. A harmony made of presence and attention.

The long-awaited and upcoming meeting with the bear hunter would be, in some ways, much more classic, as it would follow the well-known codes of language. It would be one of the strongest moments of my journey, but when I think back to that afternoon among the villagers in that little house, I tell myself it was a warm and enchanted moment whose meaning I have yet to fully exhaust and whose value I have yet to grasp.

So Far, So Close (Olinguaq)

From my window, I watch for the arrival of the hunter his sister-in-law, the daughter of the old young man, told me about. But on the morning of the second day, there is still no sign of a new boat's arrival. It is in the evening, as I return from a walk, that I see it moored about ten meters from the shore. A motorboat, five to six meters long, with a traditional Greenlandic kayak laid across it, extending out at the back due to its length. A man is busy on the boat. He is loading his dinghy with large pieces of meat wrapped in clear plastic film. I observe him from the shore. Once the dinghy is loaded, he brings it ashore, unloads it, and then returns to the boat to repeat the process. The hunt must have been good.

While he goes to fetch his new load from inside the boat, a strong wind dislodges the dinghy, causing it to drift out to sea. The man doesn't notice it right away. By the time his wife and son, who stayed on the shore, point it out to him, the dinghy has already drifted away. I then jump into my kayak, which is resting on the shore, being careful not to capsize in the choppy sea since I have neither a dry suit nor a spray skirt. I paddle vigorously towards the dinghy, retrieve it, tie it to my kayak, and bring it back to its owner. A nice way to get acquainted, I think to myself.

He finishes unloading. I will then help his son carry the pieces of meat to their house, which is located about a hundred meters higher up. Each piece is heavy, very heavy. I sense that they still have work to do regarding the preparation and preservation of all this meat, and I do not wish to burden them. So, I leave them be. The man's name is Olinguaq, and he invites me to come back later so we can have the leisure to talk.

The next day, I go to his house. I find his wife, who points me to another house down the hill where Olinguaq is. He is just finishing packing the meat that is to be sent to southern Greenland with the next helicopter. We then go to his home, where we will spend long hours over coffee.

I feel welcomed, simply, warmly. I feel a connection with this man, at ease, as if with someone I have known well for a long time, with whom I can be fully myself without any other game or stakes than that of the encounter and the moment. The house is in a disorder that seems to be the normal state, making it no longer disorder. His wife is making a necklace at a table, one of his daughters is still sleeping in one of the beds – it is early afternoon. My little harpoon-throwing buddy is there; he happens to be Olinguaq's grandson.



I no longer remember how the exchange began, except for a few humorous remarks, but I know it quickly turned to his profession and his life as a hunter, more specifically about hunting bears and narwhals (a type of hunting that involves the use of a kayak). I know that people love to talk when someone truly listens, but I have rarely felt such a harmony, such a correspondence between my thirst for knowledge and learning on one side and my interlocutor's desire to speak and share on the other. This gave the exchange an intensity that makes me wonder what its measure was.

During the discussion, I will ask two really inappropriate questions. I almost realize it as soon as I formulate them, but it is Olinguaq's answers that confirm it and thus make me a bit uncomfortable. I am disappointed, I disappoint myself, because I am usually a bit more refined in this art of being interested in others, an art that involves, besides listening, the accuracy of a questioning that follows the thread of the exchange and nourishes it. To the first of these questions, I ask him what his feelings are when he kills a bear, and a little later if he dreads the upcoming arrival of winter and the polar night.

He seems not to hold it against me for having listened so poorly and understood so little, and he answers me simply and directly.

Killing a bear is about providing food for his family and generating a bit of money, always with the concern of supporting his family. There is in this way of bringing an entire art of living back to a primary truth a lucidity and strength that resonate within me.

As for winter, it is one of the seasons in a place he has chosen to live, a place from which he is not imprisoned. Such a choice entails an acceptance of everything it implies. Nothing is truly endured for someone who takes responsibility for their choices. It must be understood that nature is not hostile; it is the backdrop, the framework, the substrate in which he lives and has chosen to live and evolve, in every sense of the word. And each change of scenery, each season offers a renewed living ground with its own attractions and benefits.

These answers not only reveal my prior lack of listening. They also reveal to me, and this is ultimately their primary interest, a closeness, a correspondence, common points or shared experiences with my interlocutor, with Olinguaq. Recognizing these deep points will greatly enhance my ability to enrich myself from the continuation of our exchange, of which the bear and the kayak were only the introduction. Many other topics will follow, seemingly anecdotal but which will generate powerful echoes within me: his settling in Savissivik for the love of his wife, their seven children and five grandchildren, his father suffering from a neurodegenerative disease and who is in a facility in Upernavik, their recently purchased house, the eldest son training as an Arctic guide in Kangerlussuaq, a younger son already an independent hunter at twenty with his own boat, an even younger one who killed his first bear this year at 14, the organization of the village and the place of family within this organization, the central and identity dimension of hunting, modern tools, the annual cycle where different types of animals succeed one another, regulations and notably quotas, species regulation over time, the impact of climate change, the relationship with the Americans at Thule Air Base, that with the hunters of Qaanaaq, and the unique culture of this small town of 600 inhabitants, the northernmost in the country (and on the planet), ...

All these subjects formed in my mind a sort of kaleidoscope from which two images emerged and at one point separated during our discussion.

The first was clear and sharp, and I immediately shared it with him: *"You are a hunter, but when I listen to you, I can't help but see a researcher-teacher, a professor, and even a school or university director!"* I could have added *"a university like the ones I love and dream of."* He had just spoken to me at length about how he develops and transmits a whole set of

knowledge related to his profession, a profession that is both an art and a way of life, including the risk of death, which significantly opens and stimulates the field of knowledge and questions. His concern for transmission even crosses species barriers, as Olinguaq puts his best dogs in situations to train the most promising young ones for bear hunting.

It's not just about learning and passing on ancestral knowledge and practices. There is material, opportunity, and even necessity to continuously develop new knowledge, as a significant part of the conditions of practice and life evolve: whether they are technical (like the motorization of boats, communication tools), regulatory (quotas, protected areas), environmental (the reduction of the ice cover period), local (the evolution of the village population and infrastructure), or animal (the evolution of species behavior). Whether with his colleagues or with his family, Olinguaq seems primarily guided by this momentum around knowledge, learning, and transmission, at the intersection of ancient and new knowledge, constantly engaged with the reality of people, things, and the environment. A knowledge and understanding that are continually tested by daily life.

He smiled at my remark and did not dismiss it.

The second image that emerged from the kaleidoscope remained blurrier, with indeterminate outlines but with a solid background that I felt. I also shared it with him, in the state of imprecision it was in. I then expressed my feeling of having in front of me a man, and beyond him a family and a community, at the opposite end of the traditional "*hunter or traditional village*" image, conveyed by a mythology of the great north and its inhabitants, particularly in this extreme part of northwestern Greenland, the furthest from urban life. A persistent imagery that is also contributed to by the few reports one can see on Savissivik and on Olinguaq himself (he is the subject of a few documentaries like "National Geographic"). In contrast, I see through him a society (his family, perhaps the village) in deep evolution, fully adapting, with no apparent fear or massive rejection, grounded in a lived and incredibly advanced knowledge of its environment, in its multiple forms and at its multiple scales.

The major changes they face, as individuals, families, and a village, ultimately have origins similar to ours: communication means (everyone has a smartphone), production technologies, ecological and climatic changes. What strikes me in our exchange and in my observations is the agility and balance with which he navigates through these mutations, uncertainties, and challenges. An agility symbolized by the hunt for narwhals. A traditional hunt, even mythical, that Olinguaq and his colleagues practice at the intersection of the most modern tools (boat, rifle) and ancient ones (kayak, harpoon), in a regulatory space to which they adapt, integrated into an economic and commercial activity while maintaining traditional forms of sharing the hunting yield, and continuing to gather people of all generations around the activity.

He recognizes himself well in this second image, which is very much linked to the first. More precisely, he validates that I have understood what he wanted to express. He seems just surprised when I briefly add that there is something here that we need the most.

I eventually take my leave. We plan to meet again to continue the discussion. I will also have an important favor to ask him. I had it in mind when entering his home, but the moment has not yet come.

Back home, I grab my travel notebook, still so little filled, and I note some of the valuable knowledge that Olinguaq was kind enough to share regarding bears and kayaks. This information will be even more useful to me as he confirmed the high probability of encountering the animal during my next expedition to Qaanaaq. I also note this question, which sounds like a vibrant call to deepen the paths and

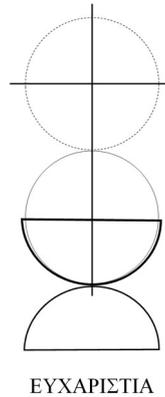
perspectives that our exchange has just opened for me: "*I absolutely need to work, reflect, and answer the question: what can and should the world learn from Savissivik?*"

Its inhabitants face, like us, the fundamental questions of our time, and I feel that the way they formulate these questions and how they respond to them can guide and inspire us in developing our own answers. When I see and hear what I see and hear, stronger every day since my return to France, I feel the necessity and urgency of it.

We are in December, more than three months after the meeting with Olinguaq. Renaud, my eldest son, and his friend Claire have come to spend a week here in Brittany, while I struggle with writing this episode 35. A happy week spent sharing moments of life and listening to the projects that inspire them. The collective they are part of is in the running for a significant purchase of agricultural land, forest, and buildings in a sparsely populated valley in Ariège at the foot of the mountains, a place called Biscarerre. A project too complex for me to fully understand in detail, but I grasp, or believe I grasp, some of its ingredients: an articulation between individual projects and a collective project with a certain idea of interdependence and mutual aid, an inscription in a territory, in its characteristics, in its history and dynamics, a production function linked to genuinely weighed needs and a concern for protection, or rather listening and respect for the environment, a balanced overall economy between subsistence and commercial, thought out according to the seasons, a reasoned and peaceful inscription in a world that is strongly out of sync with their project, a certain idea of time as well and how to inscribe a utopia in it, that is, a life project...

I found connections and common points with Olinguaq, but there is much more than that between these two young future mountain farmers and the hunter of the great north.

Late at night, on the eve of their departure from Brittany, Claire and Renaud will receive the news of the owners' agreement to sell the property to their collective."



In March 2014, Nathalie organized a long family weekend in Barcelona for us. Visiting the Sagrada Familia is a must. For me, it was a shock. An intense visual shock, with an undeniable spiritual dimension. It's not surprising, as this must be the effect sought by the creative genius of Gaudi. What is most surprising is the visual impact that a several-meter-high image, engraved or printed on glass, positioned inside the southern façade (known as the "Glory façade") above a monumental bronze door where the "Our Father" prayer is sculpted in 49 languages, has on me. I quickly sketch this very geometric figure on paper, taking great care to respect the proportions. I then reproduce it on a digital platform. Only afterward do I look into its title: Eucaristia. My Greek-French dictionary, the famous "Bailly," gives me the key to its meaning ("an act of thanksgiving" or "recognition," in the sense of being grateful).

A few months later, it is quite naturally this word that I will use to name my kayak.

I only name the kayaks that belong to me and that I have taken to the Arctic (not those I rent on-site or those I keep and use daily in Brittany). My very first kayak, used during the second expedition to Spitsbergen, was named "Happy Sisyphus" in reference to the last words of Camus's *Myth of Sisyphus*. My second kayak, used during the fourth expedition, the last to Spitsbergen, was named "*Bill's Wake*" in memory and tribute to Pascal Beal, that friend of Olivier before he became mine, whom we loved so much. He had amazed me with his stories of kayaking expeditions, one in Nunavut, the other at Cape Horn. His premature death deeply inscribed what he had to tell us in each of us. The day I decided to apply for what would be the first step of an adventure that continues to this day, it was his image, it was he who guided me.

My seventh expedition, the third to Greenland, departs from Ilulissat and aims to arrive 600 kilometers away in Uummannaq. An adventure for which I buy and send a new kayak to Greenland, this time made of polyethylene and no longer canvas on a removable wooden frame. We are a few weeks after the visit to the Sagrada Familia, and the name of the kayak imposes itself as an obvious choice, as the dominant feeling within me is one of gratitude—without quite knowing towards whom or what. I am profoundly grateful for the opportunity to undertake such a journey. I wanted it, designed it, built it, prepared for it, and worked for it, but I feel that the adventure I am about to experience is a privilege and a gift bestowed upon me. Because it is above all a meeting, the journey does not belong to us.

The kayak left France by boat, passed through Aalborg in Denmark, and was delivered to Ilulissat. I had given the address of a sort of youth hostel that never received it. I will find the kayak somewhat by

chance, behind a house and in the makeshift packaging I had hastily prepared at the suggestion of some dockworkers in a large empty warehouse at the port of Le Havre. It is with this kayak, Εὐχαριστία, that I will gradually ascend the western façade of Greenland, always further north. Together, we arrived a few days ago in Savissivik.

Under the Shadow of Bear Skins

What happens with a kayak is quite singular. I cannot say that it is a friend, that I miss it when we are apart. What may be missed is kayaking, not a particular kayak, even if this idea can be conceived since it is common to become attached to things, to objects. This is not the case. There is no attachment but an extremely powerful bond. What is this magic?

The bond is first and foremost physical. We are not passively seated in a kayak; we slip inside it and maintain ourselves by pressing our thighs and knees against the sides. This bond allows for movement, but that is not the main point. The physical bond is what allows us to feel the marine element, the kayak enabling us to be both on and in the sea. It is through its contact surface with the kayak that the sea speaks to us. The bond we have with it allows us to translate and try to understand what the sea expresses, and through it, all the elements—air and earth—since the behavior of the sea is a product of them. The ability to perceive this environment, and not just to move within it, depends on the degree of mastery we have over the kayak. But this is only a first step; mastering a language is not enough to communicate. I have always known that learning to kayak was not an end in itself but a passport to deepen the original encounter, that of the very first expedition in the Arctic.

The kayak is an inanimate object, certainly, but what movement for a lifeless being! It is caught between those of the sea and those of the kayaker. The whole game, sometimes the challenge, is to harmonize the whole, to maintain balance. To do this, one must understand the behavior of the most rigid of the three elements. For yes, the kayak, each kayak reacts in its own way to the movements of both the sea and the kayaker. To hope to find harmony in the most tumultuous situations, one must know the behavior of one's kayak, to know it to a point where, regardless of the circumstances, one is not surprised. Is there a close friend whom we know well enough to say this?

Εὐχαριστία is a good kayak. Over the kilometers, thousands of kilometers, I have learned to know it. I do not trust it, since it is inanimate, but I trust the knowledge I have of it because I have listened, with acute attention, and I have engraved in me its unique way of reacting to the sea, the winds, and the ice. It is this knowledge, and perhaps a bit of luck, that has allowed us to experience extraordinary moments, and I am not only talking about moments of danger. Regularly, and often, with my eyes wide open, my mind revisits and nourishes itself anew from these moments and places where together we have found ourselves at the edge of what is known to us. In these journeys of the mind, which are other and more than memories, it is not the image that dominates, nor the sound, but the sensation of the sea transmitted by the kayak that restores the entire surrounding environment.

When an expedition comes to an end, I need to find a haven for the kayak; some would say a storage place. It is important to me that the conditions are good, the best possible. In 2014, upon arriving in Uummannaq, I had three days to find a solution. Very quickly, a storage option in a container appeared, safe and at a very reasonable price. However, for reasons I couldn't grasp, I was not satisfied with it. It was on the eve of my departure that my steps led me to a place that cares for abused children. A true institution, whose director is known worldwide. She uses her networks to raise funds and put them to the service of the children. Entering this place for the first time, I instantly and deeply felt an atmosphere filled with warmth, care, and attention.

One of the latest activities designed to support the children involved training them in sea kayaking, starting with modern, more stable kayaks before moving on to traditional Greenlandic kayaks. The idea

was to connect the children with a part of their origins. It was these kayaks that I had seen outside, which had attracted me and led me to this place. I asked the director if I could leave mine with the others, that is, outside, without any special protection, inviting her to use it as needed. She agreed, but specified that she could not take responsibility for whether the kayak would still be there when I returned, in one or several years. I could leave with the certainty that it would be where it needed to be.

Here I am today in Savissivik, on the eve of my departure for Qaanaaq. Naturally, I turned to Olinguaq and asked him if he saw a place to leave Εὐχαριστία for a year. He replied, without even thinking about it, as it seemed so obvious to him, that he had an ideal place for that. It was a kind of enclosed shed, about ten meters on each side and three to four meters high. He uses it to dry the skins of the bears he has killed. There are also small pieces of narwhal meat inside. A bit rubbery, but excellent. Before taking me there, Olinguaq showed me the kayak he had just built and explained some of its features and behaviors in hunting situations. Different materials and uses, but certainly related to the one we were going to store in his shed.



I will soon be going home. Knowing my kayak is in that shed, the best possible place, is important. It is part of the story. Mine, but also his. Because while it may not have a life, this inanimate non-friend whose behavior I know better than anyone, cannot be stripped of its own history! I like to think it's a beautiful story. The one we share is not yet finished.

Leaving Savissivik

I leave one morning. The bags are already packed because the departure was supposed to happen the day before, a day's delay due to the weather, of course. Olinguaq had warned me as I said goodbye after dropping off the kayak in his barn. The weather was bright, yet he said, "*I don't think the helicopter will come tomorrow.*" Indeed, a strong wind rose during the night, the clouds descended very low, as they know how to do here. The cold intensified, and the rain turned into a first snow that did not stick. One more day, but it does not change the length of the stay. The weather has reached a sort of astonishing elasticity.

The air is fresh upon waking. The sky offers a clear view of the horizon, particularly of Kap York, the direction I will have to take in a year when I return to Savissivik, retrieve my kayak, and undertake the final leg towards the north of Greenland. Looking at Kap York, I can already see myself back in Savissivik.

I ask a local who owns a quad to help me drop off my large bag at the Pilersuisoq (the grocery store). That's where Martha's daughter, in addition to running the store, weighs and records the luggage for the weekly helicopter flight from Air Greenland to Thule and Qaanaaq. I place the bag on a small scale, adding the pouch that contains the rifle. The excess weight is obvious, as is the extra cost. She looks at her colleague, turns to me, and says, "OK, good." I take and drop off my things where, in one to two hours, the helicopter should land, on a few square meters of gravel, by the sea, near the fuel reserves.

I then stroll through the village, with the confident step of someone about to leave. A slowed step, which has regained a form of gravity, sinking a little deeper into the ground. I look at the houses, especially those that are destroyed or on the verge of being so, seeing not a sign of the village's collapse but rather that of the normal cycle of life, made of growth and decline, of birth, death, and rebirth. Signs that here are not hidden. The bones of animals, the residual fat of seals, the abandoned houses coexist with new constructions and the living.

I set out to visit Martha to say goodbye, to thank her again. But it is not yet time for farewells; it is time for school. I join the small group that eagerly precedes Martha to return to classes. The five students are all familiar to me, although two of them have particularly marked me. Naya-Nuka, for her kindness, her welcome, her mischievous gaze, which even the class cannot and will not tame. And my little friend with the harpoon, whom he had to leave outside this time. It turns out that my last day in Savissivik coincides with his very first day of school.

Martha sets up different workshops, different exercises according to her students' ages, then she dedicates herself patiently and gently to the harpoon thrower, teaching him to hold and use a much smaller piece of wood. The pencil and the harpoon, the two sticks of a promising path.



The helicopter can be heard in the distance, the moment for me to take my leave. Not really, not yet, since the class will accompany me to the departure. Again, if I had had to write the scenario, I could not have done better.



I feel no sadness. None of the people I have met, none of those who accompany me to the threshold of departure will be missed, no more than the village or the Melville Bay. And for the same reason that none of my loved ones missed me during the solitude of the journey: I have developed and acquired the ability to take them with me. And I feel deeply, with an assurance I have never had before, that this will be the case for Savissivik and its inhabitants, for the Melville Bay as a whole."

Further North

The helicopter gently rises, then accelerates, initially heading east, revealing from the air what was the last stage of the expedition, the final crossing through a labyrinth that is still present. The helicopter makes a turn and is now heading towards the future, Kap York, the West Coast. I watch with the attention of someone scouting for their next excursion, looking for potential traps, imagining the best route, searching from the air for camping spots between the glaciers. I quickly abandon this gaze in favor of observing the simple beauty of a world reduced to ice, water, and rock.



Then the helicopter settles on its final heading, northwest, towards Qaanaaq, without the planned stop at the American base of Thule, due to a lack of passengers to drop off or pick up. The landscape will further reduce to the sole presence of the Inlandsis, the Greenland ice sheet.

If it had taken place yesterday, as planned, this flight would have marked the beginning of the return, and Qaanaaq would have been just a one-hour stop before continuing to Upernavik, over 600 kilometers to the southeast. I would have spent a week there with my friends Nikolaj and Zen and their little girl Siéna, before continuing the return journey in stages (Illulissat, Kangerlussuaq, then Copenhagen). Due to the 24-hour delay and the loss of connections, Qaanaaq has become a destination in itself, always further north, and even the northernmost of destinations, a terminus for planes as well as boats (except for the small village of Siorapaluk, 30 kilometers from Qaanaaq). I will have to stay there for six days.

The helicopter is now entering this zone where the only view available is that of the Inlandsis.



I feel suspended again in the ice. I can no longer hear the noise of the helicopter. My mind begins to merge into this vastness. Nothing holds it back. I have no reason to worry about my loved ones, and I am no longer a source of concern for them. I carry within me the entirety of my journey, from crossing the Melville Bay to my stay in the village of Savissivik. The chill I feel in the cabin tells me that my body is in optimal condition, unaltered by any pain. The deeper the helicopter plunges into the ice, the more I regain that soothing sensation of gradual dilution, where intensity and lightness meet, converse, and mutually reinforce each other.

A full but thoughtless mind, wandering and happy.

It is the view, first of the cliffs and then of the returning sea, that will refocus the mind on more classic functions. An awakening that does not completely dissolve the dream. And Qaanaaq appears.

Qaanaaq (1) Hans Jansen – "Quiet and Peaceful"

The helicopter lands about 5 kilometers from Qaanaaq, in a world of stones. With the five rooms of the only hotel in town occupied, I don't know where to stay. The issue is quickly resolved by the Air Greenland counter employee who informs me that I will have free accommodation for the entire week in a home rented by the company from a local resident, Mrs. Kista. Another airport employee drives me into town in a pickup truck. The road is unpaved, just like the landing strip. A world of stones. During the short journey to Qaanaaq, I feel that call to explore the area by sea and by kayak, independently. It's not about fleeing a place before even encountering it, but about responding to the invitation of the topography: Qaanaaq is situated at the foot of a mountain, at the intersection of the Inglefield fjord and two bays, themselves bordered by large islands with high cliffs. Discovering Qaanaaq also means grasping this space. The eye captures the volumes, the paddle the depths.



I ask the driver if he thinks it's possible to borrow or rent a non-traditional kayak. He replies that if someone has one, it's Hans Jansen. This name sounds familiar to me. It belongs to the owner of the hotel I had spoken to from Savissivik, who told me he was fully booked. Before dropping me off, the driver points out where the hotel is located. Barely settled into my new home, I set out for the "Qaanaaq Hotel," which is only a 5-minute walk from where I am staying. Just before arriving, I see half a dozen kayaks lying on the ground by the roadside. A sign?

From the outside, nothing really differentiates the hotel from the surrounding houses, but as soon as you cross the threshold, you are struck by the atmosphere unique to such places. After a certain size, every town in the far north has one. Longyearbyen (Spitsbergen), Narsarsuaq (southern Greenland), Uummannaq, Ilulissat, Upernavik... I have loved each of these places! A kind of youth hostel where, however, the majority of guests are "older" people over forty who travel the world with a backpack, budget-conscious TV crews coming to report on the "end of the world," expeditions that are at the beginning or end of their journey, and still a few young people who have heard a kind of call. These places have the soul of their owner, in contrast to most hotels, which are the commercial version of an embassy, a sort of "home" in a foreign land.

At the "Qaanaaq Hotel," you are in Qaanaaq, no doubt about it! And you are at Hans and Birgit's home.

I step through the front door and take off my shoes. To the right of the small entrance hall is an open door leading to what seems to be both a reception area, with display cases and various traditional

items for sale, and the office of the person who runs the place, with papers scattered everywhere, books, a printer, and a computer in front of which sits an older man. He turns his head and looks up at me as I enter the room. I am there under the pretext of a question about the kayaks, but upon meeting his gaze, I instantly understand that my presence has a completely different purpose. It is about getting to know each other and building a relationship with him. It is immediately clear that he enjoys playing; for him, play is a way to get acquainted. His gaze invites this, a look that reads, that scrutinizes his interlocutor in a subtle and discreet manner. You can sense that he knows very well and very quickly who he is dealing with and to what extent the door can be opened. If this mischievous gaze invites play, it does not initiate it. I perceive what I take as a permission and use the pretext of the kayaks to start a conversation on a tone that I want to be light and humorous, teasing.

Playing does not prevent sharing information. Hans tells me that he indeed has the kayaks I saw on my way but that he cannot decide to rent them to me without the owner's consent, from whom he has not heard in several years. The owner is Ramon Larramendi, a Spanish explorer, undoubtedly the greatest traveler, connoisseur, and lover of the two poles still active. I know him and tell Hans that I will contact him about the kayaks (his warm and positive response will, however, reach me too late to take advantage of it).

Then Hans shows me around his house, introduces me to his wife Birgit and his sister-in-law, both of whom are having coffee in the room that serves as a kitchen and dining room. We chat until I eventually take my leave. I have no particular reason to return, but we still say see you soon, knowing it will be tomorrow.

Back in the comfort of my new home, I think about Hans, about what he started to tell me about his hotel, his life, and his town. I then decide to see him again the next day and ask him very directly if he would be willing to spend some time with me to extend the exchange we had, to answer my questions, to quench my curiosity and my growing thirst to know more, and why not to better understand what emanates from this part of the world. Because there is undeniably and mysteriously a different air blowing here. It is not without reason that this region from Savissivik to Qaanaaq has a name, Avangersuaq, and that its few hundred inhabitants form a distinct community, the Inughuits, within Greenland and the Inuit people of the Arctic.

The next morning, I go to his place and make this request for a sort of interview, which he gladly accepts. An appointment is set for the evening. I learn incidentally that Birgit and he serve dinner, within the limits of the few places in the main room, without it being necessary to stay at the hotel. I sign up for dinner for that evening and for every evening until my departure.

When I return, both for the interview and for dinner, Hans invites me into the living room, adorned with mythical objects from Inughuit culture. I have so many topics to discuss, so many questions to ask him! colonization, the creation of Qaanaaq, climate, youth, evolution, economy, relations with the Danes and Americans, ...

And yet the exchange will be relatively short. I am somewhat surprised at the moment. Hans does not evade my questions, but he only gives me what I am ready to receive in light of the journey I have made, the little journey I have made. This discussion can be compared to those I had with Olinguaq a few days ago in Savissivik. When I spoke about hunting, bears, the ice pack, and the sea with him, he knew where I was coming from, what my background was, that of the Melville Bay, but also that of the last fifteen years, thousands of kilometers along the coasts, stopping in every village. It was a journey of initiation, with the commitment of body and spirit at the heart of the Arctic nature. He knew, or he sensed, that I had encountered Sedna, the mother of the oceans, and Sila, the master of spaces and

time. It is this experience, combined with a thirst for knowledge and a desire for connection, that allowed for the density, depth, and warmth of our exchanges.

But when it comes to talking about Qaanaaq and the lives of its inhabitants with Hans, it is about something else, about the history and life of a people. And I am still far, far too far to receive more than surface-level answers. They are accurate, strong, enlightening, but I do not have the means, the background to bounce back, dig deeper, pull the thread, make connections, open doors, dismantle partitions. Curiosity, even the most sincere, even filled with the best intentions, is not enough to open a man's heart and bring two hearts into unison. If I understand this now, it is because I have made part of this journey since my return, through numerous readings and encounters that have enriched the sensitive knowledge I could have of places and people after so many years of travel.

With this journey behind me, I now understand why it was not possible for Hans to go further with me that evening, to go where I would have wished. The history of the Inughuits, and more particularly that of the inhabitants of Qaanaaq, is not only extraordinary; it is intimate. It is not only alive; it is vivid. And I was facing one of its most engaged actors and one of its most emblematic witnesses without knowing it.

Hans Jensen had indeed told me that evening, in his living room, that he was older than his own city, that he had seen it born, having been only three years old when the population of the village of Ummannaq was "relocated" 150 kilometers north to create the city of Qaanaaq from scratch. But he did not dwell on the circumstances. He did not tell me that he had been one of the two founders and leaders of the "Hingitaq 53" association, which fought for decades in front of Danish and then European courts (European Court of Human Rights) to have the events of 1953 recognized, their horrific modalities, and their terrible consequences. Facts that cannot be appreciated without a historical perspective, on the scale of centuries and even millennia.

I have thus embarked on this fascinating journey, this dive into the history of the settlement of the Far North, the advent of Thule civilization, the first encounters with the European world in the 19th century, the arrival of Knud Rasmussen at the beginning of the 20th century, this "friend who means well" (a gentle annexation, but an annexation nonetheless!), the first currency, the first laws, then colonization, forced exile, up to the path towards autonomy... And at the heart of this movement, the trauma of 1953, at the intersection of history and geography, the brutal end of 2000 years of presence in the part of Avanersuaq most favorable to man and his survival. Because before becoming ideal for building an airstrip and placing one, then two American military bases there, to drop four atomic bombs during a plane crash (bombs that miraculously did not explode but polluted the ice), before these wonderful forms of progress, this place, nestled between a mountain, mountains, a fjord, a plain, and a glacier, protected from the winds and rich in wildlife, both terrestrial and marine, was ideal for simply living.

Those who dive into this horrific history will find the classic and recurring ingredients, the levers, and the illustration of the destructive power of man against his neighbor and against nature.

Those who have developed a particular interest and connection with the spaces and populations of the Far North will find reasons not to resign themselves to it, to find it neither normal nor inevitable, to draw certain conclusions for themselves.

As for Hans, who lived through this period, who fights against forgetfulness, who fights for the recognition of the violence committed and suffered, he is also the one who tirelessly, alongside his people, cultivates and perpetuates the art of living of the Inughuits, in a world that has indeed radically

changed, except for some of its fundamentals. The two words he gives me that evening to describe life in Qaanaaq leave no room for resentment and echo the origins: "*quiet and peaceful.*"

That evening, in the living room of the Qaanaaq hotel with Hans, my investment and understanding were insufficient to engage in the discussion, but sufficient to understand that this "quiet and peaceful" expressed much more than a remarkable capacity for resilience. When our discussion ended, I had an immense appetite for learning, but also the confirmation of the relevance of the questioning born in Savissivik. I was reinforced in my conviction that it was essential for me, I dare say for us, to understand how and why "*we have so much to learn from Savissivik.*" How and why "*we need Qaanaaq, Avanersuaq, the Inughuits.*" Because they have elements of answers to questions we do not even know how to ask correctly yet.

Qaanaaq (2): Risk

Right after the gift that Hans just gave me, leaving me wanting more, providence will continue to place on my path, the one that leads from the living room to the dining room, its invaluable benefits. All I had to do to seize it was not to sit at the empty table, but to impose my presence on a man dining quietly, alone, at another table. While the hotel is filled with French speakers (4 out of the 5 rooms are occupied by French speakers of different nationalities), I sit facing the one who resists the occupation, a true Dane from Denmark (unlike my friend Nikolaj, who is Danish but lives in Greenland).

It was through his gaze that Hans invited me to connect, and it is through his humor that Peter will do the same. A humor that is both subtle and caustic, direct, yet never forgets to remain funny. An invitation to go quite fast and quite far in what we allow ourselves to share and question. This is because we have the intuition that there is much to exchange, that this exchange will create wealth, the first of which is the relationship itself, and its first measure is pleasure.

Peter is not here by chance.

He is here for work. He has one of the professions most capable of approaching the discovery of a territory, a place, and how its inhabitants live there. Yet he is neither a geographer, nor a historian, nor an anthropologist, nor an explorer, let alone a journalist. He is an expert in... risk management! He is currently working for the Greenlandic government, producing an analysis of the main risks facing the small localities of the country. When we know that each city or village is structurally isolated due to geography and climate, we understand the stakes involved in assessing the quality of operation, reliability, durability, and redundancy of the main systems necessary for life: health systems, telecommunications, transportation, waste management, energy and water production and supply, food preservation... In Greenland, more than in most places in the world, each of these systems is vital and problematic in itself, each presents a challenge that is technical, logistical, economic, and political, and all are more or less interconnected.

Practiced in such a context, Peter's job is very exciting! And not so easy to carry out, as long as one does not simply hand over a report to their client, to the authorities. The situation of Greenlandic communities is so unique that delivering a diagnosis without questioning, or at least putting into perspective, a framework of understanding and judgment that comes from our societies would make no sense. It would even be an insult to a people for whom the question of risks and their management is paramount. It has been posed to them constantly and acutely since the origins, for millennia, making them experts and masters in the art of naming, reading, understanding, judging risks, and facing them. Modernity raises new questions, hence the interest in a genuine dialogue with Peter and his analyses. A disturbing dialogue for the Greenlandic authorities, as it undermines some of their benchmarks.

A dialogue from which we ourselves have so much to learn. For this, we would need to have the same capacity for self-questioning. We would need to return to the fertile discomfort of risk thinking, which we have traded for the falsely soothing and truly blinding ideas of safety and security. Climate upheavals gently lead us to perceive certain limits of our approaches and models. We then realize how weak and helpless we are in the way we think about them, because we are not ready for fundamental questioning, and even less ready to draw inspiration from "primitive" peoples whose folklore we perceive at best.

This is exactly what a figure as eminent as Jean Malaurie (who has passed since the writing of these lines) says. He receives honors from the world's greatest universities, tirelessly carrying his message before the most prestigious institutions. He is applauded, celebrated, made an honorary doctor... All this to better not hear him, to better stifle with applause the content of his words, which is too direct, too subtle, and too disturbing.

Beyond this discussion on risks, we will find with Peter many common points of thought, character, history, even in the figures and personalities of our mothers and what inspires us about them. However, we will carefully preserve these fundamental differences without which the relationship is of no interest: I am terribly French and he remains terribly Danish.

The prospect of our evening discussions and a long hike together on the Inlandsis during his day off has given my stay in Qaanaaq a new tone. In talking with Peter, I began to return home, and in the best way, without leaving Qaanaaq and Greenland. We spoke of this country, of what it stirred in us, each with our experience, whether it was lived in Greenland or forged on our lands of origin. We conducted these discussions as individuals and Europeans who deeply question themselves, who draw from the wonder and challenge of Greenland and Greenlanders sources and reasons to read our lives and societies differently, to question or reinforce some of our choices. For this, it takes a bit more than an open and adventurous spirit. A spirit of "quest," as my kayaking instructor once told me. In the same sentence and before many witnesses, this instructor also announced that I was going to die because "my guardian angel would not protect me indefinitely." In doing so, with a pedagogy that belongs to him, he decisively contributed to my learning journey and reappropriation of the very idea of risk and risk management, linking it to the idea of quest. A long journey through the years and the ice, but also through the streets and forests. A path that naturally led me to the Melville Bay, then to Qaanaaq, and now on the way back.

Primitive – in balance – Primordial

The path of return, yes, marked by a profound disturbance of feelings, an impression of elements and events felt on the skin. And for the first time, in the luggage, a question, precise, already worked on, chiseled: "*What must we absolutely learn from Savissivik?*" The formulation clearly indicates that the Inughuits have nothing to teach us (perhaps this is linked to their lack of a spirit of conquest). It is up to us to make the journey.

Fortunately, the question came without the slightest answer, but with a clue, an intuition paving the way for research and exploration: "*balance*." The keyword appeared in its English sense. The French word is "équilibre", but the English word is more subtle and, above all, conveys an image, that of the "balance" (in French this time !), much less static, evoking more the search for "équilibre" than "équilibre" itself, the journey more than the destination or the result (the use of the English word is all the more natural as it comes from Old French, "balance," which itself means "the two plates").

Since I left Olinguaq's house with this question, all the threads I pull wrap around the balance; I feel in every subject I perceive and name the trace of a balance between seemingly antagonistic forces. To go beyond intuition and find keys for tracing, it was necessary to revisit fifteen years of travel and encounters with this territory and its inhabitants. It was especially necessary to enrich this perception with historical knowledge. They revealed to me how the course of this people's history shifted at the beginning of the twentieth century with the arrival of Knud Rasmussen. The beginning of a process that saw the Inughuits of Avanersuaq, like other peoples before them, confronted with what some would call modernity and what others would rather qualify as a civilizational shock. It began for the Inughuits in a relatively gentle form, prolonged by coercion, subjugation, and then violence, leading today to something more balanced, a somewhat more peaceful but still fragile state.

A historical process of about a century during which three forces have acted upon them, three forces that are well known to us: those of money, the State, and science. Three forces that seem obvious to us, necessary for collective life and development, but without which they lived for about 2,000 years! A fairly long period, during which they managed to exchange without money, live together without a State, and develop and transmit an astonishing field of knowledge without formal science. This means they developed other modalities of exchange (with a completely different relationship to property), other forms of exercising power (without hierarchy or institutional authority), and other relationships to knowledge and transmission (without the support of writing).

The source of what our learning could be does not lie in this bygone time that will never return, but in the way the most primitive elements of their culture, that is, those most rooted in history, most based on origins, have prevented them, at least until today, from being completely deconstructed and consumed by the power of these new forces. They have transformed their daily lives, but they have managed to escape, at least partially, which is already an achievement, their drifts.

The drifts of money, already so clearly announced by Aristotle in his description of chrematistics, those of the State, when the pact signed with Hobbes' Leviathan becomes that of Faust, and the drifts of scientificity that some great scientists alert us to, often having in common the transcendence of their discipline and a deep connection with human realities.

This resistance to drifts is very concretely expressed among the Inughuits by a multitude of surprising individual and collective behaviors and attitudes, but possibly enlightening if we escape the first-level judgment emitted from our representations. Those very representations that make us find, for example, normal the fact of exchanging one's work for money in a framework of subordination, that is to say, very formally, in the acceptance of receiving orders, being controlled, and being punished. Finding normal the fact of prohibiting and repressing a mode of expression, whether oral or vestimentary. Finding normal the fact that an authority, whether moral, political, or religious, can impose a truth or make it very difficult to escape it. The list is long, endless, of what we find normal and which has nevertheless led us to multiple dead ends, or to endless loops, deadly cycles that repeat without us being able to escape them, in the economy (poverty, for example), the social (exploitation, among others), the political game (war), and of course today in relation to the environment (climate disruption and resource scarcity).

We will not find among the Inughuits clear-cut ways out, but perhaps ways to pose and approach some of these subjects differently, ways to instruct them from other representations, inspired by those, primitive and powerful, that have allowed them to escape the drifts. A way to keep the three great forces at a sufficient distance so that they do not undermine the foundations of freedom and solidarity, cooperation and sharing, responsibility and transmission, and, let us not forget... peace. "Quiet and peaceful." 2,000 years without war, not even civil war; who can say better (certainly not our country, in almost permanent war since its own origins)? 2,000 years also without causing damage and without distorting the balances of natural living spaces.

It is not about renouncing "progress," nor about returning to an ancient way of life, but about seeking another way to think about our daily lives, our life in society in light of the challenges and threats that confront us, drawing inspiration from a people that has managed to remain itself, not to lose the essential in meeting us.

To access this source of inspiration, this possibility of thinking differently, there is a prerequisite. We must rid ourselves of the gaze of the rich, the strong, the great, the knowledgeable, towards the small, the weak, the poor, and the ignorant. If we manage to take this step aside, and it is not simple, then we will have escaped the trap that confines the mind in its certainties; we will escape hubris. A trap into which the people of Avanersuaq could not fall as they have always lived in the awareness of their fragility. Even their spirituality, a source of transcendence, places and maintains them in listening to and respecting the power and mystery of the forces of nature and its elements. And in the constant search for a form of agreement and balance, always evolving but not to be broken, in balance, without losing sight of and even guided by the sense of the primordial. It is not a coincidence of language that "primitive" and "primordial" are two sides of the same idea. There are primordial elements in the primitive, in the early times, that neither money, nor the State, nor organized knowledge should dominate. The Inughuits have managed not to forget them. Perhaps we can, by drawing inspiration from them, rediscover them and (re)place them at the forefront.

This sense of the primordial leads them today to strange behaviors. For example, saying 'no' during a national vote to the opening of a mine that would put this people on the path to the long-desired independence, through the revenues it would generate, but at the cost of a severe impact on the environment (a very small part of the environment, however, affecting only a few hundred inhabitants). Or not going to work because the weather allows for seal hunting or because a friend needs help on a construction site. Or resolving a very serious issue of aggression in a village without resorting to police and judicial authorities. These are just a few examples among countless others that often lead to judgments like: 'it's too easy to rely on Denmark's assistance' or 'there's no reliability in the work,' but the shift in perspective should lead us to read these situations differently.

This change of perspective, if we manage to achieve it, is a gift made to no one but ourselves. We gain the ability to see and think differently about situations of which we are voluntary prisoners. If we can take this step aside, then not only do we open ourselves to inspiration, but we also make possible the idea of interdependence, including with those who may have falsely appeared poor, small, weak, and ignorant, or simply picturesque, remnants of the past. Our initial question is then ready to evolve into: *'What does the world urgently need from Savissivik?'* (beyond what it can 'learn' from it). A questioning that can be further extended and brought a little closer to us: *'What does Denmark urgently need from Greenland (or France from Polynesia)?'*, *'What does the capital need from the suburbs, the urban from the countryside, the contractor from the subcontractor, the boss from the employee, the intellectual from the manual worker, ...'*. And vice versa...

Moving away from the univocal, the standard, and the power dynamics, forging balances, in balance, and in respect of the primordial."

(on)

The other Side

The true moment of return is not the crossing of the border or the passage through customs. It is not even the moment of reunion. It occurs a little later, at the first awakening in the land rediscovered.

An awakening that is not yet a full awakening. Far from it.

It is already dark.

We do not sufficiently measure the power of darkness, its reach, its depth, its ability to illuminate and reveal us.

The darkness of awakening opens and maintains for a few more moments the path of return. A path taken without leaving the bed. Snuggled in the duvet, with a presence beside you, a double sensation of warmth that is no longer that of the down or the tent. The feeling of absolute security, physical, ontological, a harmony, a fullness.

At that precise moment, in this darkness of a starless sky, one no longer knows where one is. To the point where one no longer knows exactly who one is.

One is then both at the peak and on the threshold of the journey, in balance between everything that has happened and the awakening of a new day.

The awakening of consciousness to this new day signifies the return. Here I am back.

Rocks in the Suitcase

Back, yes. It seems to be a reality. A new reality that presents itself in a very simple form: a state of mind and a suitcase, with some rocks inside.

The state of mind, which is just as much the state of the body that embodies it, is exactly the same as it was three days ago, at the moment of leaving Qaanaaq. If there is continuity in this world without reference points, it is expressed in this state of mind that has landed at Roissy without losing anything, neither in flight nor at customs, of its lightness, of the regained confidence, in oneself and in the future, of joy, of the desire to undertake...

Thus, the return is not a return backward. Thank God!

And there is this suitcase. With inside some rocks, which seem to be each a rough piece of the journey.

There is this Hans, as pleasant as he is mysterious. This Peter, with whom I dined just two days ago in Ilulissat on the way back, following the impossibility of our plane to drop him off in Upernavik. There is this city, Qaanaaq, which did not inspire me at all on paper and which seems to be, in fact, the capital, the capital place, of a story that I am just beginning to discover and that I sense is enlightening. There is this village, Savissivik, which was supposed to be the end of the expedition and which turned out to be a kind of revealer, the beginning of another adventure, another journey, without me yet knowing exactly which one. Oh! And there is the ice, of course! So much ice. And the fog! Damn fog... The doubt... There is the immensity of the sea, these incredible crossings. There are these islands whose names I have not forgotten: the Sabine Islands. I feel that something profoundly significant happened there. There are my friends from Upernavik, their little girl Siena, this Welshman, a figure in kayaking and climbing, who decides to end decades of distant travels with a bitterness that troubles me. And Martha! There is Martha, of course! And this old young man on the shore of Savissivik, upon my arrival. This other man, Jorge, between oracle and guardian angel, who appeared on that other shore, that of Kullorsuaq at the very beginning of the journey. And Olinguaq, the bear and narwhal hunter, the new guardian of my kayak. He is the one who set me on the path of a question I must not let go: *"What does the world absolutely need from Savissivik, from Avanersuaq, and from the Inughuits?"*

There are so many rocks. When I pick one up, I see two others appear, hidden or attached to the previous one. They all seem more or less connected. I then feel that the rock I hold in my hand begins to crumble, to transform into sand. I quickly put it back in the suitcase, but nothing tells me it will still be there next time.

These rocks are my journey. Not only do I not want to lose them, but I must make them speak, or rather I must put them to my ear and listen to them. I feel that I cannot do this from here; for that, I need to return to the other side. This journey is made on foot, with the two sticks of the walker, that of thought, which I fully regained upon leaving the Melville Bay, and that of writing, which continues to elude me and to be lacking.

Post-Dedication

Just between us

(to those who participated in the writing process)

Throughout the journey, writing has only eluded me. Almost. A few pages, a few phrases, a few words. Important landmarks, but in much smaller quantities than usual. This surprised me more than it worried or disappointed me. I knew the time would come, and if it didn't, it meant that neither the usefulness, nor the need, nor the necessity had been felt, and then there would be no loss to lament.

It was two weeks after my return that the breakthrough would occur, unexpectedly. I am at home, in Brittany, in the lower house. I have re-pinned the four maps to the wall, which, placed side by side, allow for a comprehensive understanding of the journey in its geographical dimension. I sit at the table, turn on the computer, open a "new file," and I begin. And curiously, I find myself propelled six months earlier, to that moment when "my head is violently and unprotectedly thrown onto the pavement. This will lead to a hundred pages, produced with a certain regularity, even during the few pauses that ultimately corresponded to the main turning points of the journey itself.

The writing process immediately took on an unusual, unusual, adventurous, and even supernatural turn. From the very first words, I was no longer recounting, reporting, but reliving, living again, living differently, rediscovering, revealing, sometimes understanding, and naming as much as possible. Writing became a bridge to the journey, through time, retracing spaces, moments, revisiting people, emotions. A disconcerting and exhilarating sensation of passing through the one-way mirror, finding that other self and what made up its life for a month in that elsewhere, questioning alongside it.

If this crossing of the mirror is undoubtedly the most unusual aspect of the writing journey, it is ultimately not the most important. The essence came from elsewhere, from an initial choice of purely formal nature: that of writing short, even very short episodes. For this choice allowed and led to another, that of sharing the episodes as they were written with a close circle of readers, Nathalie and the children. The circle quickly opened up to parents, and later to two precious proofreaders. It was then that the most important aspect of the journey began, with the feedback from those who shared the writing process, participated in it, and became true actors in it. The echoes of a son, the courageous and generous critiques of a friend, the guiding questions of a wife, the debates with a father, the passion and expertise of writing from a sister-in-law, and finally the shared emotion and unwavering support of a mother. These responses are so many new bridges, allowing for new crossings, expanding the time and horizon of the journey, revealing its true destination.

For that, thank you...

There remains a mystery, of little importance, born at the heart of the journey to the Sabine Islands: who could be the author of such a scenario?

Echo

I. Intention, Tension, Attention

- 1 - The Map
- 2 - Parenthesis of Attention
- 3 - Opening
- 4 - Fog's World
- 5 - Unforeseen Events
- 6 - Judgment
- 7 - When the Veil Lifts
- 8 - On Rocky Ground
- 9 - Kap Seldom, Turning Point
- 10 - Trust and Doubt

II. Sabine Islands

- 11 - Regaining Sight
- 12 - The Lightning
- 13 - Sabine (1)
- 14 - Sabine (2)
- 15 - A Choice
- 16 - Thom, the Lightness of Step
- 17 - Resentment
- 18 - Olive
- 19 - Surprise Package

III. Parenthesis (Enchanted)

- 20 - The Farandole of Elements
- 21 - Ilulissat (Iceberg)
- 22 - Panoramic
- 23 - Challenge
- 24 -
- 25 - The Thread
- 26 - Kap Melville
- 27 - The End of the Journey, the End of the World, or an Ordinary Workday?
- 28 - Labyrinthine
- 29 - Arrived

IV. In Balance

- 30 - The Old Young Man and His Daughter
- 31 - Martha
- 32 - Neighbors
- 33 - Void
- 34 - Wordless Story
- 35 - So Far, So Close (Olinguaq)
- 36 - Eucaristia
- 37 - In the Shadow of Bear Skins
- 38 - Leaving Savissivik
- 39 - Always Further North
- 40 - Qaanaaq (1) Hans Jansen – “Quiet and Peaceful”
- 41 - Qaanaaq (2): Risk
- 42 - Primitive – In Balance -- Primordial (From) the Other Side
- 43 -
- 44 - Pebbles in the Suitcase

Post-Dedication

(Just Between Us)