

Svalbard Thoughts
18-30th March 2025

20/03

Been meaning to write a little here and there. The trip is divided in rhythm: 1 day on the field, 1 day of nothing (*something*).

As soon as I arrived from the overnight stay at the Oslo airport, instead of checking in at the hostel on the south edge of Longyearbyen, I went straight into a 2-day field activity: snowmobile across the western part of the archipelago, Spitsbergen.

It's funny in itself, so I wanted to make a point that this happened as such: Get off the plane with less than 3 hours of sleep > A guide holds a display with my name on it > We go straight into briefing for the motorbike trip ahead > we ride into the snowy wasteland, riding on the first day to a trapper's cabin in Tempelfjorden, then back to the middle of the Adventdalen valley that flows into the Norwegian town. The night at that cabin was quite lovely, as the trip ended up being a private one with just a Swedish guide: Marcos Antonio. The next day was a trip more to the South, of which I do not remember the name of at this time; a few peaks across from town.

Nevertheless, the first two days were immersed entirely in the wilderness, and so I had no time to familiarize myself with the civilization there. I think that I'm happy to have been late by one day if this ended up being my first experience, and I'm quite thankful to the company that set up this trip, especially since I ended up going alone with a great guide.

Now I am spending my actual first day in town, where I hiked down from the miners' cabins to the coastline with shoes that made me slip quite a few times on the ice, and into one of the museums and the town center. There's a few things I'd like to see still, such as the second museum, and the coffee brewing factory that's down by the port, although that will likely have to wait next week as tomorrow I will be on a long hike to an icecave, south (again) of town.

Anyway, all this was to give some context, but the purpose of this text is not necessarily to simply be a journal. Rather it is meant to be observations of feelings and to seek out answers: that is why I came here, the beautiful views and interesting people are secondary.

My novel "Derelict Hearts" mostly explored existential ideas, but very few if any had answers to questions asked. Merely observations and more questions, and I would assume that this trip will only bring more of these. Still, there's something I want to

know that seem like it can only be found in deserts such as this place.

That is... I'm not exactly sure what I'm looking for either. At least, it's hard to form into words or soulspeak. Perhaps it will come to me eventually, but for now, I am uncertain. Only abstract approximations of what means what come to mind, and of them, none make sense in ink, as they hardly form coherence in my mind. Perhaps that is why I gave a lengthy context, perhaps that is why I justify myself right now. But that is nothing useful to do. Let me at the very least try something:

When out and about, as one can hardly record on paper what is felt as all freezes extremely quickly, and thoughts carry some form of wander over anything else. Yet, that form of wander is what gives me pause: certainly, this kind of landscape has always fascinated a subset of the world population, hence why one of their biggest source of revenue has always been tourism (*and will soon be 70 to 80% of the whole once they close the last coal mine*), but I wonder if people will remember this. It is a one-of-a-kind territory, maybe the only comparison would be inland Antarctica, but even then I am very uncertain as no one really ventures there. Although, I suppose that is true for here too, as most of the archipelago is a no-go zone for everyone except perhaps researchers with express permission from, I would assume, the local governor.

Anyway, all that to say there's something here that feels amiss in this pastel abyss. When the wind blows, temperatures drop heavily, to the point where a -30°C becomes a -45°C. Yet, in these states, as the cold bites harshly and exposed skin is at risk, it is as if a message marks its History across freezing breath and facial hair. As I felt it so far, there is a form of anger carried on the back of these glacial gusts. Not necessarily of contempt, but of something lost. And indeed, there used to be quite a different wildlife way back the longest of times. As the archipelago drifted to where it is now, forests were abundant. Maybe one day they will come back, and a lost ecosystem will find their home again. But until then, all that exists are shallow breaths from reindeer, snow foxes, polar bears and funny chicken-like birds. The summer, more is shown, although I do not have any idea of what this would be like. But most of this place exists in perpetual agony and stillness, and so that where I find myself today.

And... the strangest thing indeed is this, really: the stillness. There are no sounds inland, there are no smells even near the sea. Everything is so far apart, even animals are kilometers away from one another. But so are even manmade creations. Cabins where you would not expect to find, emergency shelter from the Red Cross by a southern valley.

All this expense, all these expenses, and curious people, animals too; surviving and pretending it's not that. If that's what the Arctic life is like, it does feel oddly like home for me. Well, maybe not "home" per say, but at least it feels familiar enough. Marcos was probably right when he said that there's 70k people overnighing. Less than 3000 permanent residents. Cycling arctic researchers; a school from elementary to basic highschool. Small university. All close yet all far. All harsh yet all kind that smiles are as common as in the countryside from where I'm from. And I would think that, mountaineers would feel even more at ease than someone like me who's from the

meadows not far from swampy lowlands.

As someone who worked a few years in forestry alone, I suspected that the lack of trees would make me feel at a loss, but all it does is make this whole thing unreal. As if living a dream that is there yet not quite, and is neither a dream. There is no sense of scale, and no sense of distance. Things that seem small are much bigger than even if you knew, and things that seem big are... well, I guess they really are.

For now that is all I have to say, and I'm not quite sure what this means yet.

23/03

After an evening and night of heavy wind and snowfall, the trip to the East Coast has been canceled. I'll look into rebooking it later this week, but that gives me proper time to rest and actually write here, as the past few days have been hiking-heavy. Of course, I'll still hike a little today, just not as much as previously.

21st of March was a hike to an icecave at the South of town. Took half a day, from 10 AM to a little after 16 PM (not including the briefing), if my memory serves. I have nothing special to say about it. Frankly, I expected nothing, just wanted to do an uphill hike, the ice cave was the bonus, and I never been in one so I reckon this was welcomed. Still, a cave's a cave at the end of the day. It had pretty places, geological wonders and all of that, but at this point I'd rather look at an infinite emptiness led by dunes dressed in the purest of whites, than lines of blue ice and sediments layered like tree circles on a vertical plane instead of horizontal.

Nevermind that, the hike was the point, and the exercise was decent, however I wanted more. But let me not push this luck in an unknown place, for I am after all merely a filthy tourist, as much as I try to understand and integrate in this archipelago.

The hike was in a group this time around, 8 total including the guide. 4 Norwegians, 2 from the Netherlands, and myself from a place I still hesitate to call home. The guide herself was from Sweden, and I did record her name: Mathilda. It all went without a hitch, and again pretty things were seen, legs were working, and only fit-enough people were present all across this side of the mountain. Perhaps, just for this very thing, I should stop snowmobiling and only use my legs, as I've seen obese folks sadly hover over an ice that probably would not want the added weight on top of it.

The next day was supposed to be a rest day, however all I did really was hike down and up from town on a windy day (*then a very windy evening*), to and from the Coal Miner's Cabins. It's a 30 min walk at a decent pace if following the shortest route, but of course it's more fun to take the less traveled one.

Did as well run for a bit on that long road, wearing ice spikes, and it's a surprisingly comfortable thing to do. However having stopped running years ago now, my asthma picked up for a while after, even with an inhaler to calm it down.

Eventually arriving at the expedition museum right across the coast, I must

have taken a third of the information in. Maybe I wasn't super interested, or maybe it was not very well explained from the get go. Despite this, what was said and understood was nice, and it did give reverence to the actual people. All things considered, this felt more like a memorial than a dedicated expedition museum, but I like to think it's better this way.

So many lives, so many forgotten names. Before the day all forget about them, maybe until then some of their scraps can give some solace into the certainty of emptiness.

The highlights of this day started right after this visit, where I ended up talking with the museum receptionist, a Japanese lady from Hokkaido named Moika. It was a very interesting talk around a cup of coffee, as the museum was having a rather slow day, and lives were shared for a bit. It would be nice if we were to meet again, as I have many more questions and thoughts. I reckon that, were I to go there again however, I would meet her coworker instead, although I'd be curious to hear about their life as well.

Right after exiting this building, the seashore was waiting to be recorded. It was very windy, especially so close to the water, and even with wind protection gear on the mic, quite a bit of it went through. Maybe I'll record here again, but what I have can also be enough for my ambient projects.

Then it was supposed to be a simple trip the coop: food for a bit, then hike back up, maybe the long road again so I can stop by the Huset Restaurant and grab a coffee, chatting with the local cooks and bartenders there. What happened instead was... very unexpected.

Stopping by first to the small mall that contains a pub, a pharmacy, a few gift shops, a restaurant, a Thai lunch place, a masseur, a stylist, a tourism agency, and a few outdoors/clothing shops — I go to an outdoors shop I haven't been to yet, and who else is there at the counter but the guide from yesterday's hike. We chat up for quite a while as only one customer went through, I buy some local coffee (*there's part-time coffee roasters up here*) and patchwork for my tent back in France, and... end up somehow inviting Mathilda to, I guess, a date of sorts. I wouldn't call it that personally, but for all intent and purposes it could also be considered one due to the nature of it. While she accepted the invite — To get coffee after work — I still had to grocery shop, and there were two hours before her shift was finished. And so it went, coop and hike up, a little rest and a piece of bread and some licorice (*as I only ate breakfast, and it will be the same today*), to follow with yet another hike down, this time going on the shortest road.

The "date" went fine, although was cut short as she planned a cabin night with her friends outside of town, and the worst thing is that I forgot to gift her a copy of my novel. But since today's activity has been canceled, and I don't want to sit around all day here as there will be much time for that back at "home", I plan on stopping by the mall again and giving it away. Also maybe go to the expedition museum, as there's a few things that got me confused on the exposition. Or maybe tomorrow. Whatever, it matters little.

But these talks I've had with the locals there, and from the little I've read so far

of “The Paradox of Svalbard” by Zdenka Sokolíčková, I’ve been wondering about the nature of this place in relation to humanity settling here. More accurately, I do wonder about the notion of “home” and what it means. I want to start asking people this question to locals and maybe a few fellow travelers (*much better term than tourist*). So far I’ve only asked the question to Moika, and paraphrasing: “home is where you make it, I guess.” It’s a very common answer, and it applies of course, so maybe the framing of it incorrect. What is home and what does it mean, maybe should be a better one. I’ll fiddle around with it, and specificities of it would likely flow down as the conversation on this progresses.

What does this really mean, though? Knowing what people think of the meaning of belonging and identity? I reckon there are perspectives you cannot get anywhere else but this place on Earth, as it is still one that is, for all intent and purpose, a No Man’s Land. Or at the very least, until a forest sprouts again. I doubt I would meet a local that lived here for 10+ years and has seen Longyearbyen, and by extension Spitsbergen changes, but perhaps there’s no need to seek such an individual out.

But again, what does that mean? I suppose it is simply a selfish request of sorts, maybe trying to wave a light in a dark tunnel of sorts, as I have no real answer of what “home” really is. But saying it again like this does indeed feel like it’s the wrong term. “Belonging” and “Identity” would fit more, especially as I’ve never really felt any of that towards my own home country in which I even had a business in; in which I served in (*and part of why I left is because I didn’t feel connected to anything in the end, and disagreed with too many things. A sergeant has no weight to push in such places, and even if I did, it would not be my place to ascertain a strange worldview that may seem naïve on the surface*).

All in all, this is yet another thing to dwell on, another thing that perhaps would be best explored in another way; in another context.

24/03

Senses of familiarity must form quickly here. For how big the archipelago is, it really only is Spitsbergen one is allowed to exist around. Maybe cruise ships and boats can get on the shore of some other places, but as far as I’m aware, this is it. I wonder if there is no sense of resentment within the locals towards these kind of regulations, even if one knows and agrees why they are in place. Maybe it would be a selfish desire; but being here is selfish in itself, so what’s more fuel to add to the fire, really?

Economies of extraction, where nothing can be given back, and everything from the outside has to be carried over from the mainland. What about the education/research field, I wonder? Maybe that’s the same thing. Studying the place, with stricter regulations, and likely some weight to break some rules if “needs be”. But then again, rules tend to be more guidelines to keep things in check. I’m sure on a week-to-week basis (*as opposed to day to day given the number of people*), rules are, at the very least, bent. I did hear seasonal workers that fly in and out also have less respect for the place, so

I wouldn't be surprised if they were the ones that broke the rules the most, although this might be more out of ignorance than mischief or curiosity.

Although I'm not entirely certain what speaking about this brings to the table, but this whole thing is just a stream of consciousness anyway. I think I may be trying to reach some specific topic that's been my desire to cover in my stay here. It's been a week now, and it feels like the end is already here, even if I have around another week left. Part of me doesn't want to leave, even if my time so far hasn't been spent doing much past the last proper hike. There's something in the air most certainly, but what is it really?

In the wilderness, there's something similar to what you can feel in forests when winter gives the foreword to anyone who stays a while in there. What is felt then, from my point of view, is a subtle sense of wistfulness, of loss, a tinge of fearfulness to both the present and future, and some nostalgia. It is either the trees that speak, or it is a space that amplifies one's soul and project itself to be felt whole. And, of course, maybe it is both. I'd like to think it is the first on the list, but it would not surprise me to know that it is the second. Although I would not necessarily count "nostalgia" as part of the inner self (*or I'm lying to myself, which is entirely possible as well*).

And so, in Svalbard, the whole of emptiness creeping in at every corner once you remove yourself from the town and away from having lone cabins in your field of view, what if the purity wastes reflected a collective unconscious of those that used to exist, and those that dream of a place that was, and will never be again? It is a common story everywhere, but long time locals here seem to echo this sentiment much more than anyone else, anywhere else (*barring the very old timers that stayed around a singular place for most of their life*).

Humans aren't known for their long/very long term planning skills or views on the world. Adaptation to change is done on the day-to-day most often, rather than planned for. The comfort of the present moment is all-encompassing, and even with the knowledge that things will be different eventually, there is a stronger want for things to stay the same. Whether the change will be positive, neutral, or negative, it matters not. Positive especially: these days, people still want for more, greater things, movement, motion... even if they were standing at the top of the world in the brightest of golden ages, they would precipitate its end because of this infinite hunger. I would deem this to be the curse of the human condition, and this place and its locals seem to be exactly the poster child of this enumeration.

Coming back from another trip from Nybyen and back up while recording some sounds (*or more specifically non-sounds with how quiet everything is in the long winter, except of course the old snowmobile racing across side slopes around town*), I've been meaning to write more on more abstract things.

There is a permeating feeling emanating from this place, really as soon as you step out of the busy-ish center and to the outskirts; more specifically West of Haugen and Nybyen alongside the lone road. There it feels closest to the wilderness itself, a spot for observers. Maybe that's why the graveyard is there as well. I did not dare to tread upon it,

but a younger version of me would have done so with discreet footing.

But there, once you stepped a little outside of the road and onto an iced-over rock, you had a spot to see Longyearbyen from the sidelines in all of its... oddity. I'll talk about the nature of photos taken here and lived experience after this, but to start off, know that to exist in here and to look at pictures of it are incredibly different conversations.

Turn your head to the left (*North*), and nothing really feels special. Thoughts of lived lives, how it came to be, why and what will it be like. In itself it is a special headspace, but one you can carry alongside yourself anywhere in the world.

Turn your head to the right (*South*), and suddenly something shifts. The heart stirs — Or at least mine does — and held memories come to form as a caress on gentle days. Letting it flow through, one could easily shed tears. I would guess that this is possible only if something happened in this place that gave you reason to hold something other than to be a witness to the landscape (*not to stillness, as this would be something else*).

Now onto the difference between pictures and lived experience:

To take pictures of the Arctic is to take pictures of a form of purity. A white desert in the stillness of a heavy long winter, temperatures that freezes the blood and let carcasses stay intact; them themselves so sparse and covered until summer moss takes over, or an arctic fox gets to it first — there's something that feels almost infinite and beautiful about it.

But to exist therein, the feeling is not the same. The first guide of this travel, Marcos, would likely not say such things. He seem to always be in awe of the landscape here, even after over 6 years. It is easily understandable however, and those that become guides I reckon partly do it because of this unceasing hunger for this feeling. There must also be those curious on how this place changes from year to year, as it carries changes faster and more heavily than even a forest left in many consecutive droughts, but perhaps those that see to this are more in fields of academia rather than guides or mere tourists. Let us not speak of cruise tourism, as those do not count (*the ships should be sunk*).

It is difficult to pinpoint exactly what this arctic lived experience is to me, as my experience seem to not be shared as much. Maybe it's because your attention is not focused on what surrounds you, but rather what is affecting you; which would namely be the bitter cold and wind going through your clothes, depending on the weather. But even on the kindest of days, that doesn't seem to change so much. You see the landscapes, and acknowledge them, but then something else manifests: "you shouldn't be here". Longyearbyen should not exist, all these things that allow for a settlement that can only survive through imports and pure extraction seem to be more than just a paradox, as a certain book would title itself *The Paradox of Svalbard, Climate Change and Globalisation in the Arctic* — Zdenka Sokolíčková as. As well, this is not to say that humans should not

exist here specifically, but it is more of a wonder as to how and why this all came to be beyond geopolitical or economical reasons. Because when you speak to the locals there, however long they have stayed, from a year to their entire life, they are here for neither of these things.

But back to existing in this place. There seems to be some parallels to draw between communal interactivity indoors, or just solitude, and the outside itself. Maybe that's why I have been starting to feel less of a longing to thread outside once I acclimated to the hostel (*which was incredibly quick, having lived in community settings in the past*), and/or maybe that's familiarity setting in. The emptiness looks like itself like a mirror folding on details that make it look different, with the essence retaining its entirety. Mountain reliefs, ice caves, avalanche risks, snowflakes, dunes, ice, rocks, coal, iron... whatever else; all covers over an organic fractal of sorts. And perhaps the difference is here: A snapshot of all wonderfully beautiful places, and feet on the ground that say "And it goes on" without much in the way of elegance that you would decipher from the otherwise picturesque setting.

My gut feeling of the archipelago when I spent these first two days way away from the town and in the valleys and ridges, was that something was off. I've described it already, where the wind felt as if it was carrying a forlorn anger of sorts. Maybe this choice of words was more influenced by my visit the following day at the main museum and learning about the geological History, more than the reality of the situation. Today I would still speak of forlornness, however not "anger". Heavy wind on contact has a tendency to feel that way, but after walking through a few heavy windy days through white-outs, this statement of a few days ago is no longer correct. Instead, the word to use would likely not be found in english. The locals may deal with the Portuguese idea of Sodade, and the land may perhaps deal more with the Japanese idea of Mono no Aware. Still, both ideas would be present in the wind, just one is carried more heavily than the other.

27/03

This place is a strange one; I'm re-iterating this point especially now, but the strangeness of it is perhaps more positive in its differentiation. This time, it is about the strangers you meet and talk to.

Certainly the locals are special in a way that only makes you want to smile when interacting with them, but even the other tourists and travelers that are open to discussion have a similar guiding thread as the locals. Perhaps that is due to often times being returning locals that come by for a trip, to meet old friends that stayed there for longer or came back to live there again, and repeat-voyagers of sorts. That, and researchers/PhD students. And if you're lucky, you might even meet someone who owned a business here for some time, and now just comes by every year or so with the same group of friends that were formed during a long expedition in Antarctica.

As the day to departure approach, the desire to not leave grows stronger, but choices were made, words were given, and money is not infinite. Although I have already planned to come back, the why of it has me mystified. Maybe I didn't find exactly what it is that I came to seek out here, and something else is there instead. Due to this, the next trip would ideally be spent for much longer outside of town, sleeping outside under the midnight sun, keeping watch against polar bears. Maybe there are answers to emptiness out there, or maybe it will reinforce this unexpected, strange feeling that was found in this place. Either is fine by me, quite frankly.

To be quite honest, I've even started to inform myself about work possibilities here, relating mainly to guiding, but let me not put a foot where the cliff ends so soon. Time can be taken, and as such, it should be. Life is short, life is long, but may luck be, and the guilt of existence recedes for a bit. It would be nice, but I understand as well this possibility of however long on this island would be as temporary. Everlasting peace is sadly an impossibility, and invitation to smile for long periods of time is what brings about its very end, and leaves place to memories.

Where are you now? Where will you be tomorrow, next week, next month, next year, next decade? When will death occur? How many lives that were encountered will be lost through time before we join them ourselves?

These thoughts would, in the past, bring about subdued negative feelings related to dread and the common fear of the unknown. Today, these thoughts instead bring about the bittersweetness of knowing that what will be, what eventually won't be, and all of what is that will never be again.

Especially now, especially here in this place; things change almost as quickly as people change themselves through their individual lives. Perhaps that is partly why this arctic space has been enchanting me in ways I did not see coming when I was planning this whole thing at first. At the very least, this is one that isn't a "perhaps", and instead if a certainty.

Now, I suppose since this is also supposed to be a travel journal, I should speak of some things. Since last time, went on a common hike to Blomsterdalen (*right above Adventfjorden, small peak west of town*) and the seed vault. I'll not comment on the last part, as I believe I've more or less broadly done so to the representative idea of what the seed vault entails in my novel² "Derelict Hearts". Either way, my inner misanthrope didn't want to be here, but alas my curious self was there too.

Michael was our guide, and like every other guide I've met so far, a pretty cool person; at least on the surface.

To the risk of sounding weird, I cannot sense souls (*i.e vibe checking*) very well here, maybe because I am not attuned to the land (*forests in the dead of winter*) as I am used to it back in (*my*) mainland, but this one seemed trustworthy, rugged, if perhaps a little impatient.

Accompanied by 4 UK residents and 1 US, the hike was perhaps one of the shortest one to do on the island, but the elevation gain was a decent workout for the legs.

That same night, or perhaps it was the one before, I met Anna, a Finnish scientist specializing in glaciers and geology. Over dinner we spoke, and it was like having a private lesson on the archipelago from a whimsical old local that loves skiing. The night after that, it was a doctor (another, actually); the person that used to own a business in the first paragraph that I alluded to. As well, a PhD student coming from Australia. As it goes, I have not remembered any of their names, and the only reason there actually are a handful of names here at all is because I wrote them down in front of them. Nevertheless, all of these people have been wonderful to talk to over dinner, and the doctor reminded me somewhat of what my parents used to organize when planning trips to French Guyana every 4 years or so.

Yesterday I went back to the North Pole Expedition Museum for the third time. I'd be lying if I said it was to only get a solid grip of this specific side of History. Moika was there today, and so we talked lengthily around coffee once again. I remember towards the end, stone faced and very matter-of-factly, she said that "You'll come back to Svalbard." While that may very well be true, this certainty made me laugh internally, probably because it seemed to hit it right on the nail of what was going to happen (*'less something keeps me away from it*).

There's something I'm curious about her. At some point, a visitor from Bulgaria talked a little about his home province, and asked Moika where she was from, to which she replied Hokkaido of course, but in such a tone that sounded awfully similar to my stance on my own country when I'm asked the same question. It is difficult to describe, but most certainly "joy" or similar adjectives are words that are not part of it.

What else is there to say for today? Maybe I'll come up with something else this afternoon, but for now, coffee is approaching.

31/03

Now that it's been a day since I came back to the mainland, thoughts have been actively forming in a more detached sense. It is likely not time quite yet for them to flourish fully, but I still have a travel log to finish writing. I do have some thoughts on travel logs as they are, however. Maybe there's genuine interest people tend to have for them, but I would not be among them. It does make me pause to wonder however, why write it? I think, originally, the plan was to write about what happened so that maybe it would help infusing the things I would care to talk about instead, which is spread throughout this document.

The day before departure was another snowmobile trip, this time around with a group however. Driving to the East Coast, but this time with weather permitting it. There isn't much to say about it, maybe something to note is that I got sick the day before. A cold or something along these lines, something light but annoying enough to

lock me in the hostel room for one day, and gasping for air for two more days afterwards (*it was not a hindrance exactly, but I did have to pay attention to my breathing patterns and to clear out my lungs and nose from time to time; with the occasional cough*).

But realistically, the activity itself was probably more fun for the other folks that didn't have to deal with biological warfare inside their body. Besides that, it was still a long day out in the arctic wasteland, and that by itself is worth battling against sickness. The arrival to the East Coast, which is pretty much a large glacier you can ride and stand on, was quite the surreal event.

Human-wise, a group is a group, and more often than not things happen. Beyond the uncommon rowdy tourist — this time it was just a couple of french citydwellers thinking they were being clever little pricks by slowing down and speeding to get “fun time” bursts of speed (*meanwhile mouthing off the guides trying not to get them endangered, so maybe they should have thrown them off to the polar bears instead. Citydwellers really don't seem to understand the meaning of safety and the why of it, given the conversations I was able to eavesdrop on*) — there was a very unfortunate event for one of the guests:

A man from the Netherlands that had his bag jump from the snowmobile's backseat after a snow bump; it latched under the belt and broke a six thousand euros camera, a lens, and ripped his passport in half (*only keeping the bottom half, the other is lost somewhere*).

Now the passport can be dealt with, it is only bureaucracy and some wait time after an accident like that, without much worries to be had, ultimately. The lost material was incredibly expensive however, but that person seemingly took it rather graciously, even if by the end, when we dropped him off at his hotel near the center of Longyearbyen, one last talk between him and me told me he was still rattled fairly by this large loss.

Sure, “it's just money, materials are replaced”, and sure, this man has the disposable income to lose an object that is of a leisurely utility in nature, however I couldn't help but draw parallels between this and when I had my car accident, as I believe the car did cost around the same amount of money, even if the nature of this object was different and very much of vital necessity to my work back then. Maybe it's more the comment he made about it just being something that can be replaced. When someone told me this very same thing on the day of the accident, it rattled me off in a self-destructive way, where my thoughts all implied that this car had more importance in worth to me than my life as it stood; and perhaps still, in some ways, as it stands today; although I won't think of it more for now.

Right, another happening of that day: One of the guide's snowmobile broke down. Easy diagnostic made by the man from earlier, funnily enough: the alternator died. I'm personally familiar with this as well, as my car had this happen. Had to recharge the battery manually from time to time, until I had the money to pay for the repair (*or more accurately, until I remembered to call the garage as winter was starting to make going to work in forests a very difficult task; sometimes making it impossible to clock in enough time for a day to get paid*).

This event during the trip had me quite glad to see the guides are well equipped to deal with things like this as well. Now that I think about it, maybe I should have asked more of their equipment, as they are always geared up in ways that make me not register the amount of things they have near or on them. All that I know is (*more or less*) that if someone falls 50m down a snow-bridge, they're ready to rescue. And that using a flare gun on a bear is a 50/50 chance to scare it off, and as the years go and this is more and more used (and, I would assume, as they get hungrier), its effectiveness lessens.

Now that is about it for the travel log. To mention, on the bus trip from Nybyen to the airport, there was a sun eclipse happening. It's funny and quite lovely to think about it as a sign of sorts, so I take it that way, just not really giving it meaning beyond that.

Today then, after a long way "home" (*relative to today's standards in modern transportation, which would be about 25 hours from boarding the plane to arriving to the house*), I am on my final day of rest before physicality takes back its usual course, although I am keen on adding more to it from now on to prepare for a trip back to Svalbard in summer. I've already made up my mind it seems, so I suppose it's happening, as I've already started to go ways to achieve this outcome.

Perhaps the biggest challenge now is making sure I get a weighted vest I could keep using for the longest of times, without making the post office hate my guts for making them carry heavy things, as I would assume this isn't the sort of thing you'd find in a very large radius around Nowhere-Hamlet in Nowhere-Region (*names that are now demoted after visiting Nowherestest-Wasteland in the Arctic*).

In any event, travel logs aside, let me speak of other things: The idea of "home". I've tried translating it in my mother tongue, but I've come up empty-handed on this. Maybe it is due to the nature of the English language, as it is comprised of many things yet of few things, and so words and sentences often hold many meanings at once — often more than others, and of course, sometimes less. Certain complex concepts such as the Portuguese *Sodade*, and the Japanese concept of *Mono no Aware* come to mind.

For "home", people on average seem to come to very similar conclusions. Or maybe, given the familiarity of the word, maybe it is not thought of much in the first place, and so 'most people' come to define it as they were implicitly taught through abstract action during their childhood. Feeling of safety, feeling of belonging, people themselves... one or multiple conditionals that make this a familiar word you would really only be able to nod at.

However, I find myself unable to agree with these. Not because I have arguments against them, but because of the feeling of unfamiliarity from such concepts. In reality, "familiarity" is the only attribution I would have originally given it, but after spending time in Svalbard, not so much anymore.

It seems that my original, subconscious accepted definition of home was more

about safe havens. Which translates to any dwelling that is comfortable enough for you to sleep and leave things in. Some people are comfortable with doing so outside, even if by many variables it would not be a safe place to do so. At least, it has more variable that would indicate it would not be a person's first instinct compared to four walls.

In my past, I used to — and still do (*albeit now it feels lesser, although it could simply be a temporary fluctuation in preferences after travel*) — go back to such a safe haven, to rest and spend time leisurely while maintaining a minimum cleanliness and clearance of my immediate surroundings (*this is a specific point for myself as I live in a large tent now, and have a little bit of land to take care of*). Reasons for simple things like this, to leave a lot of materialism behind and find contentment in kinder, more rustic situations; was and still is to find long-lasting inner peace.

In anyone's life, there is a natural proclivity to chase after philosophies akin to Epicurianism or simply just hedonism in a general sense. Of course, this is truer in this era than it perhaps used to be when life was not so easy and comfortable in a survival and entertainment sense (*for most, insofar as we speak of places allowing this kind of life*), but people being people, there still exists the capacity for change if, in my eyes, a person's core is capable. That is, I want to believe (*perhaps naïvily*) a process possible for the majority of folks. But a majority really means "above 50.0%", so you could see this as more of a cynical view of things than expected.

In any event, hedonism does not necessarily stay the end goal of human beings after enough time, experiences, and reflections. There is definitely something to be said, however, about those that find a different way of life and stick to it until their death, as if it was the final answer, thus missing some core aspects of what human life seems to be: change, adaptability, unknowns.

None of what's been said so far really is anything new, but reiterating points made eons ago and yesterday both from whomever then and there, just makes the thread of life an unbroken chain reaction of a common collective consciousness that spurs out (*often, universally understood, in art — especially music*).

All this to say that the idea of "home" is a translucent aspect of human life to me. It would be safe for me to say that I never exactly experienced, and instead only "safe havens" (*which in itself may be more than many can claim to possess*).

If "home" isn't people, if it isn't a safe haven, if it isn't belonging, is there something that is missing?

I could not wrap my head around it. My heart was never really at peace, especially after I made personal philosophical discoveries and enacted them to reality. Of course, none of it is really special, as ultimately, it is only the pursuit of what existence really is and what it means.

I've written multiple essays on this in the past, and an entire novel to try to find answers (*which, unsurprisingly, ended up being more questions by the end of it*). And this search brought me to heed with an old want: Traveling to a desert. Svalbard is one, too, only an arctic one. More to the joy of it for me, as I can stand heavy heat less and less as time passes by. Luckily in this day and age, places exist that still have mild and colder summers, with the North Pole being the most obvious example.

Maybe the idea of “home” was more implicitly defined in abstractions rather than in the clarity of worded Sunday philosophy. And I could not describe such a thing in poetry either, but that could be due to its unknown.

For the first time in my life, or at least the furthest I can remember and feel such a thing, my heart felt at peace in this desert. Old life roams in the inert down glaciers and grounded History. Fossils that did not record the wail of life, but only proof of its existence. Up there, the forests have left their breath, subjugating themselves to stillness, and up still in the air: carrying the solace of their release.

You know, when I was up there out in the wild, the wind felt kind. Even when it screamed, it did not feel as if it were crying out in pain. The snowflakes and white-outs felt more like phantoms were out dancing, while the living were in hiding.

So maybe this is the idea of “home” for me: where the soul feels at ease once the surrounding ghosts are felt, and where even the threat of being taken by the cold sounds like grace. In such a case, if Death has a face that is not worn by polar bears, then it is the warmest and kindest one I have seen. The biting cold that burns the skin does not make me necessarily want to take my hand off the freezing gust, but instead invites it, as if wanting to be marked by the purity of this dust, carrier of memories long gone to dream in their hopeful eternities.

I love it, I think, and I teared up when I understood, and of bittersweetness when it was time to leave: vows to come back, and those that found their own “home” in this place urging me or affirmatively saying that I will come back. I miss it dearly; I miss my heart, and my soul aches to cradle it under the midnight sun and the polar night’s moon.