

## Journal of Earth Sciences

In the book "Iceland in Saga and Present" I read: "The word 'saga' is here employed according to its original sense of something being said - regardless if that which is being said or told rests on a true foundation or is a product of the imagination." Iceland is located on the border between two continental plates, the European and the North American plate, right above the fissure zone created when two pieces of the earth's crust are moving in different directions. This movement has been going on for the last 65 million years. A thousands metres high mountain range has since then emerged from the bottom of the Atlantic Ocean. In some places the peaks rise above the water forming islands. Iceland is one of them. The entire island is built from lava of different types and time periods. Through the fissures of the earth's crust, lava is erupting from the large magma chambers located underneath the ground. The etymological origin of the word "lava" is not known. It might originate in the latin word "labes", which means to fall, slide, sink or implode.

Sea ice. Drift ice. Glaciers. The weather. Snow into ice. Glacier lakes. Winter snow. Ice-bound water. Rhyolite. Fumaroles. Hot springs. Volcanoes. These are some of the chapters in the book "Ice and Fire" written by Hjalmar Bardarson in 1971. On page three I read: "The country was called Iceland because of the arctic drift ice which down to recent years has occasionally more or less blocked the north-west, north and east coasts. The country could also be named after the glaciers, covering 11 % of its area. But this northerly island, 103.000 square km, just south of the Arctic circle, has got fire below its surface, even below some of its glaciers." I fly over a glacier already before I set foot in the country for the first time, on the first of August 2014. From the airplane, the glacier formally resembles the country itself, seen on a map. A bit frayed or torn at the edges.

Bardarson continues: "Ever since the settlement, the history of the Icelandic people has been a record of ceaseless struggle against the elements, severe weather, ice and fire. When a volcanic eruption occurs under a glacier, the ice above the crater melts rapidly, resulting in floods which sometimes lead to a loss of life." In the summer of 1783, the Icelandic population decreased with 24% due to a famine known as the Haze Famine. An immense release of volcanic gases caused by lava eruptions stunted the grass growth, and a bluish haze could be seen even from other European countries.

I continue reading about ice. "When part of the ice sheet breaks off, an ice-island is born. At first, these ice-islands were actually mistaken for real islands." I could go on reading about ice and glaciers. In a mail you wrote me: "It felt strange to pass by your house today and know that you were not there. I perfectly understand the feeling of an avalanche of lust and deep emotions having been released within you - and then you have to stop it almost immediately... You will have to sublimate that energy and sense of magnetism in your work, if possible." So I continue. "Research on the movement of the sea ice in this region started about 85 years ago, first on board ships drifting with the ice, and later by means of floating research stations on ice floes. The first successful expedition by a ship drifting in the ice was the FRAM expedition in the years 1893-96, headed by Fridtjof Nansen. The ship started from the mouth of the river Lena, and for three years it drifted without any damage, locked in the ice."

When I land in Keflavik the first of August I am struck by two things. First, the different tempo in Iceland. People are more relaxed, but everything takes the double amount of time. For instance: ask a question, buy a ticket, get a coffee. Here, I feel like a stressed alien from the exterior world. I even run inside the Spa area. The next thing is the influence of nature, whose full impact I have began to realize. I told you about the glacier I saw from the airplane, but when I get on the bus to the geothermal baths, I am struck by the beauty of the ground. In my notebook I have written: "We are traveling through an endless lava landscape. The sun is shining and the mountains form an incredible backdrop. The earth is black, and despite a clear sunlight the darkness of the ground lends everything a greenish, subdued light. Who could ever imagine that a place like this would exist on earth?"

I keep reading about hot springs and volcanoes. In the Bardarson book it says that Geysir in eruption might eject a 50 meter jet of boiling water. I read: "It is a volcanic eruption when hot materials break through the earth's crust or when gases explode underneath the surface, resulting in the formation of an explosive crater. In and under the earth's crust is magma. The term magma applies to the molten rock still within the earth. That it is molten is a guess because no one has ever seen magma proper." I love the unmapped areas and the impossibility to know everything. We are not perfect, and there are things left to learn and explore. One of our companions on this trip once wrote: "I do not carry the stone of the totalitarian thought within me - I mean, the definitive one. I have avoided that wound." Innumerable

volcanoes on Iceland are hidden under glaciers. In 2010, the volcano under the glacier Eyjafjallajökull erupted and a huge ash cloud disturbed the air traffic over Western and Northern Europe for weeks. Ten million travellers were affected, in the largest air traffic disruption since the Second World War.

I thought about many things these days in Iceland – the different time perception that seems to prevail here. It sometimes feels like traveling back in time. I mean, I have been living in a cabin along a country road with a river and mountains in the background. Not as green as the river in front of me as I'm writing, but in the fjord I was listening to a local radio station where they spoke slowly in Icelandic, this impenetrable language. The house earlier belonged to an Icelandic artist, Birgir Andr sson, born in the Westman Islands in 1955. Andr sson represented Iceland in the Venice Biennial in 1995, and everyone I meet in Seydisfjordur have known or worked with him. Unfortunately he passed away in 2007, at the age of 52. He was an alcoholic. Before I know who he was, I find his portrait in the cabin strangely familiar. The disease very traceable: wild and restless eyes, a gaze present and absent at the same time.

Andr sson worked with language, systems, signs. He grew up with a blind mother, and in his work he continuously appropriated Icelandic objects and phenomena: flags, stamps, maps, turf houses and building structures. For example, in the 1993 work "Big House / Poem" from the series "Nearness, Knowledge, Reading". His work dealt with questions of identity and culture: with definitions and naming, with how we are shaped as individuals and how we learn to interpret the world. In Eva Heisler's text "Birgir Andr sson: Acts of Reading" she writes: "Growing up sighted in a blind community, Andr sson was immediately sensitive to the significance of language. The trajectory of his career as an artist is threaded with issues of image and text, and acts of reading. By "reading", I mean not only the process of deciphering words on a page, but the larger experience of making sense of "the horizons of possibilities" which constitute one's world. His works place pressure on the viewer's assumptions of what it means to read – to read the landscape, to read character, to read color, to read the past, to read the present."

I discover similarities between Andr ssons life and work, and my own. In the book "Practicalities", Marguerite Duras writes: "Alcohol causes the loneliness to reverberate, and finally it makes you prefer it to everything else. To drink is not necessarily to want to die. But you cannot drink without thinking that you're killing yourself. To live with alcohol is to live within reach of death. She continues: Alcohol makes one speak. It is spirituality driven to the insanity of logic, it is reason driven to the limits of insanity, which tries to understand the meaning of this society, the meaning of this Kingdom of Injustice – and which always ends up in the same despair." Why do I mention this? If we are not ourselves excessive drinkers, we have friends, colleagues, family members. It is complex - most alcoholics won't acknowledge their situation, neither will the closely related. It is like having an elephant in the room and pretend it's not there.

I'd like this passage to be about blindness. In my notebook the seventh of August I've written: "Today I filmed some waterfalls in the rain above the fjord. I went up to the large waterfall visible from the village." Unfortunately, I later lost the recorded material. Materials are lost, computers crash, technology fails us when we least need it. Just as our brains and memories can fail – colours are washed-out, events and faces go away. "Thank God for that", you wrote me in a mail, "that time is our friend... and however sad it might be that things fade away – when all you want is to keep them vibrant and alive – it is also rather forgiving."

I want to write about the advance and retreat of glaciers, measurements made by tape or a string of known length. I want to write about outlet glaciers, cirque glaciers, glacier tongues, branches and streams. Summit craters, proglacial lakes, calderas, table mountains and pre-historic moraines. I want to write about oblique aerial photographs, maps and geological evidence, just because of the beauty of the words. The relationship to nature and the word is profound in Icelandic culture. It is traceable in the artists' work, the book stores open late, the behaviour of the tour guide who doesn't stop speaking for six consecutive hours. In the book "Iceland in Saga and Present" I read: "The art of writing – this 'peculiar ability to, by small characters, transmit ones thoughts long distances to other people and to immortalize strange events'."

Returning to parallel streams, I traveled over these last months. How can I share these experiences with you? Many things take place below the surface. Outside the coast of Iceland the cold Polar Current from the north meets the warm Atlantic Current from the south. I read about it in the Journal of Earth Sciences.