

*when will the sun set, where will the sun rise*

*It is a surprising and memorable, as well as valuable, experience to be lost in the woods any time. Not till we are completely lost, or turned round—for man needs only to be turned round once with his eyes shut in the world to be lost—do we appreciate the vastness and strangeness of nature. Not till we are lost, in other words, not till we have lost the world, do we begin to find ourselves, and realize where we are and the infinite extent of our relations.*

*(Walden, Henry David Thoreau)*

On an icy, cold day in late November 1974, Werner Herzog walks from Munich to Paris. He has hopes that a dear friend will refrain from dying if she knew that he was coming to her by foot. Armed with a compass and a duffel bag, it just might have been his epic walk—impulsive, deliberate, and seemingly mad, that kept her alive for 9 years after.

In 1927, Oskar Fischinger walks from Munich to Berlin. He tells us that he was *motivated mostly by a longing for freedom*. He travels over the hillsides, through villages and farms, connecting with the inhabitants. In the end, he finds that for the most part, things are relatively the same.

Over in Turin in 1790, Xavier de Maistre was put under house arrest for his antics in a duel and confined to his bedroom. There, he decided that he would transform this experience into a bit of travel. For 42 days he would defy captivity on his own terms—exploring every inch of his room through close observation and a newfound curiosity. He, too, inspired by thoughts of freedom.

I met Magda Biernet five years ago during a residency in Berlin. I remember being immediately struck by the aura surrounding the quiet strength of her presence. Her studio practice is methodical, steady and forward moving and one becomes acutely aware of her relentless tenacity. Her artwork, at the time, was steeped in notions of home and homelessness; displacement and belonging. Thus, I was not surprised when Magda told me that, along with her husband, Ian, she was taking a year off to travel from one end of the earth to the other. *North via South*, she said. Hearing this, I immediately thought about Rebecca Solnit—*Walking is how the body measures itself against the earth*.

In *Adrift*, Magda wanders through a rich territory of contradictions. She once told me that as a Polish immigrant she often finds herself caught between two cultures. She said that she aspired to give voice to the *transformative quality of locations and geographies at a time when subjects are no longer bound to one particular place*. On the one hand, she is an architectural photographer who hunts out and

finds the anatomical grace that informs the habitats we've erected, made solid and embedded into the ground. On the other hand, Magda, like her blue ice glaciers, has been set adrift in this search, floating across the thresholds between east and west, north and south, all the while looking for a place to root, yet craving her personal freedom.

Magda's travels to the south and the north poles were nearly one year apart. During the January summer, the warmest month in Antarctica, she ventures off to the South Shetland Islands—an icy, mountainous cluster just north of the Antarctic Peninsula—during a time of year when the sun never sets. Eleven months later, in the dead of a December winter, she finds herself galaxies away in Barrow, Alaska, home of the Iñupiaq Eskimo, and in a place where the sun never gives rise. Like Fischinger, Magda intuitively searches out and finds the similarities. Her keen sense of form and negative space is what takes shape in her landscape. Her Antarctic glaciers surface as a mirage and begin to echo the Alaskan Iñupiaq huts. It becomes obvious that her longing for home is never too far away from her internal compass.

There is a strong sense of searching (longing) in our wanderings. In his book, *Escapism*, Yi Fu Tuan tells us that human beings are never content with staying put. He thinks that we're restless creatures constantly on the move and that if we don't move, we spend much of our time rearranging our environment as a means to escape. Perhaps the pull to drift away isn't so much a need to escape as it is to find ourselves, as Thoreau might want us to believe. What I find curious in all of this is that we most always will find comfort in the familiar.

Of course Magda takes us along on her imagined axis that's caught between opposing poles and a contradictory state: The Antarctic ice mass is growing as quickly as the Arctic is melting. The dichotomy is overwhelming and has scientists scrambling for answers. How can there be global warming if the South Pole isn't melting along with the North? Standing at the edge of these worlds, Magda observes the polar opposite. The constant and stability of home against the unpredictable landscape of a fleeting nature.

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*essay for the book, Adrift, by Magda Biernet, 2015*