

THREE MADE PLACES

Sculptural statements by Peter Clegg and Antony Gormley created during a Cape Farewell expedition to the Arctic.

Extract taken from Peter Clegg's journal

How do we envisage global warming? Do we think about a parched English landscape with dying beech trees? Redundant ski resorts or continuous disastrous floods in Bangladesh? The first major ecological changes are likely to occur in Polar Regions, and with the shrinking of the Arctic ice-cap, the islands of Svalbard are likely to experience dramatic ecological changes which will result in, amongst other things, the loss of habitat for the polar bear that proudly occupies the top of the food chain. The group of artists and scientists on the Cape Farewell trip spent five days there, at what seemed to be the very edge of the world.

We know that the major culprit is man-made carbon dioxide emissions and we are becoming aware of the concept of a kilogram of carbon dioxide as a measurement of global pollution from cars and buildings. But what do we understand by a kilogram of carbon dioxide? How can our minds grasp the weight of a gas? We understand more a gallon of petrol, a pint of beer, a pound of sugar, because we see them as volumes than feel them as weight.

Some time ago it occurred to me that it might be helpful to try to define the kilogram of carbon dioxide as a space rather than mass. One kilogram of carbon dioxide at atmospheric pressure occupies 0.54 of a cubic metre. That is the volume, approximately, taken up by ourselves and the space immediately around us - it is roughly the volume occupied by a coffin, which is perhaps an appropriate symbolic unit when we are talking about the destruction of the planet. Once we have this image in our minds we can then start to relate that 'coffin's worth' of carbon dioxide to the exhaust gases of a two-litre car traveling ten miles, or to the emissions resulting from leaving on a 100 watt tungsten electric light bulb for a day (or

a fluorescent bulb with similar light output for a week). We can look at a pound of strawberries from Israel and recognise that it costs us - and the world - that same coffin's worth of carbon dioxide to bring it to London.

We can also relate this to our current, global, 'earth-share' of man-made carbon dioxide emissions per person - 4,000 of those coffins every year. In the UK, each one of us is responsible for nearly 10,000 coffins and America is responsible for 20,000. In a sustainable future our emissions should be less than 2,000 coffins per year which, with an irony that was discussed at great length amongst the Cape Farewell crew, was roughly the amount of carbon dioxide that we had each expended on our return trip to Svalbard over the course of just one week.

The only preoccupation I brought with me to Svalbard was to use this volume as part of a sculptural statement in snow and ice. Antony Gormley and myself both had an interest in constructing forms using simple blocks that we could cut from the snow, regularized and Euclidean, quarrying a material that had been there for months rather than millennia, and creating space and volume that made simple temporary statements focused around our individual and shared preoccupations.

We discovered that we could saw quite precise blocks with a density somewhere between lightweight concrete and polystyrene, but in our building techniques we had to be very precise because the snow itself, being very dry, did not lend itself to being used as mortar.

Our discussions and reference points over the three-day period ranged from the powerful, primitive architectural forms of Egypt and Peru, Mycenae and Pylos, through to our experiences of the quarries at Bath and Carrara. We created a community of forms - a primitive block cut from the virgin snow, a vertical standing room of similar proportions

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Image: Antony Gormley and Peter Clegg *Three Made Places*, 2005



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again related to the human dimensions, and a snow cave with a significant approach route and threshold, again based on orthogonal cuts into the organic drift of wind-blown frozen snow. We found that we developed a strong relationship with the site, a longing to be out there digging and creating, whilst also absorbing the extraordinary, scaleless, white landscape that surrounded us. We were blessed with brilliant sunshine that provided intensely sharp and long shadows that brought everything that we did into a higher resolution. We were delighted with the experience of what seemed like a ten degree temperature difference between the inside and outside of the snow cave. It was essentially a sensory experience, working hard and playing hard to counteract the experience of being at minus 27 degrees Celsius and producing work that was derived from individual preoccupations and joint collaboration and the inspiration of site and material.

The abstract body form enclosures had a further significance for me. Richard Feilden, my closest friend for 35 years (and partner for 27), was originally to have been a member of the Cape Farewell team and I stood in for him only following his tragic

accidental death over the New Year holiday. So the sarcophagus block, the first volume cut out of the snow, seemed to take on the character of an eloquent memorial to Richard. Intriguingly, the whiter and lighter top layer of snow that was part of the natural formation gave it a natural 'lid'. When Antony and I collaborated on the vertical version of this volume, what emerged was a made place that was much more to do with light and life, rather than death. Standing sentinel over the icebound fjord and bathed in sunlight, this enclosed void seemed even more of an appropriate place for Richard to inhabit. Our three *Made Places - Block, Standing Room and Shelter* are all reflections of the human form that represent a transient statement in what may turn out to be an all too transient landscape.

Extract from Antony Gormley's journal

What we have done in a tiny way is make a construction that conforms (or attempts to conform) to the absolutes of Euclidian geometry. In some sense, this talks about the human animal and the way that the human animal insists on making shelters according to abstract principles. No other animal does that. Here it is a foreign

object, a space ship. For me, being in the snow cave is so powerful because of the relationship between the made human world and the inherited Earth - the Earth out there in that blue light that goes on forever. For me it has been a very precious reinforcement of something for which I feel deeply - how we are a gnat on a nose of a totally indifferent universe.

These three places are all made and do not seek to describe the body but indicate its place in an un-inscribed Arctic environment. Taken individually, the block indicates a relationship between the individual body and a planetary body-mass. The luminous void chamber is a vertical space that indicates consciousness and the shelter establishes the necessity of a collective body. Together, all three constitute a continuum of places that the human needs to dwell in: the physical space of the body, the imaginative space of consciousness and the collective space of fellowship.

Note:

These are edited extracts taken from *Burning Ice*, produced by Cape Farewell to document its work in the Arctic. The book is available at www.capefarewell.com.