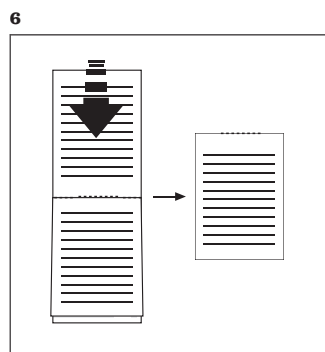
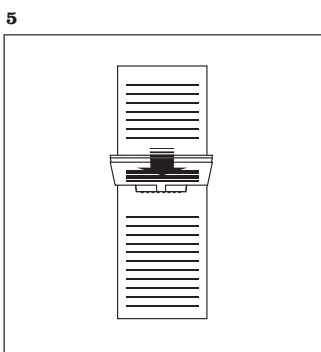
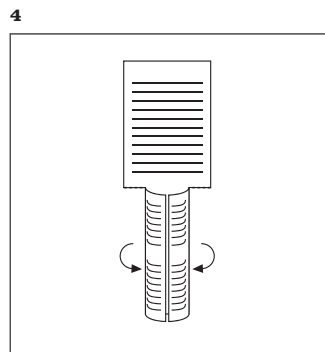
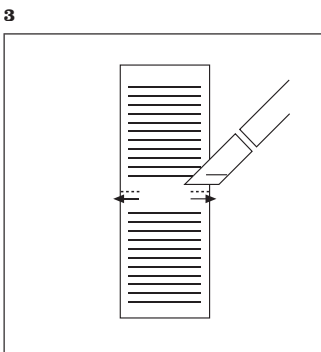
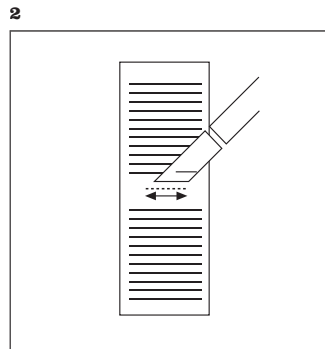
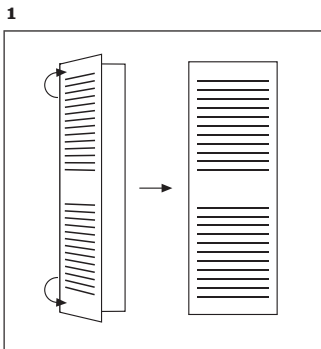


# DIFFUSION



## Construction

- 1** First, fold each A4 sheet in half along the vertical axis.
- 2** Using a craft knife or scalpel, cut a horizontal slot along the centre dotted line of the first A4 sheet. (pages 1/2/13/14)
- 3** Then cut along the dotted lines on all the other sheets. Make sure to cut to the very edges of the paper.
- 4** Stack the folded sheets in ascending order with the even numbers at the top. Curl the bottom half of the second A4 page (pages 3/4/23/24).
- 5** Thread the curled page through the centre slot of the first A4 page. Repeat this process with the third (pages 5/6/21/22), fourth (pages 7/8/19/20), fifth (pages 9/10/17/18), and sixth A4 sheet (pages 11/12/15/16) with the even pages in ascending order.
- 6** When all the pages have been threaded through, check the pagination. Finally, fold the booklets in half along the horizontal axis.

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We might ask, "what could the landscape do with this writing about it?" We know our maps make and remake spaces, but how could the landscape write back into these descriptions? What forms of inscription could landscape, given the chance, contribute to a writing of place? Smithson said, "Writing should generate ideas into matter, and not the other way around ... Language should find itself in the physical world ..."<sup>12</sup> What happens if we reverse these lines of inscription? If writing is a return, an attempt to come towards a place, and if theory is an attempt to process that gap, then how would the landscape come towards a writing about it? How would it process these words of description if the logic of displacement were reversed? What theories would emerge from that writing back?

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spaces where language no longer describes so much as circumscribes its limits. In the desert of the polar plateau, words like sublime and light and austere and beautiful can't stand up. Zephyrs and katabatic winds howl down to uproot such description, and blinding light burns another kind of language into the synapses of vision. If the conditions of place are continuously made by activities in space such as language, practices and performances, then Antarctica continuously unmakes that emergent possibility. Here, the landscape exceeds and erases a language that can stay close to its object. Language can be unbuilt. Crevasses threaten to fissure through the stability of geographic description.

Making matter into landscape requires the conversion of geographical features into a visual and formal language constituted by the building blocks of geographical knowledge. Geography's periodic table – rocks, rivers, hills, mountains, weather – form the stable units of meaning on which descriptions of place, as a landscape, are built. Space is a field of communication. Historically constituted by the units of geographical data, nomenclature and practices. These bits of geographical knowledge – the language of narration and its objects – offer stability. Words are places to dwell. Or as Seamus Heaney puts it in his poem *Fieldwork*, "Vowels ploughed into other: opened ground".<sup>11</sup> His poetic fieldwork articulates how words penetrate, to open space to the possibility of place.

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## Landscape, 3 Acts: Return·Dispersal·Circulation

Kathryn Yusoff

DIFFUSION

*Figural Geography*

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### Return

#### LANDSCAPE

Landscape returns to us. In our thoughts, and in the imaginative materials and practices we carry around with us. Landscape is that medium of exchange with the bodies and knowledges of place – a navigational tool and a media experience. The map of this encounter is a continuous site of change, the topography an ever-shifting terrain. Landscapes are always on the move – restless and dynamic. Making. And unmaking. Landscapes move us. Dynamic earth processes shift tectonic plates to uplift people, cities, oceans, surfaces and the very concept of landscape organises the thought processes of such events. Plot a course. Find a mental path. Take a bearing. Locate. Simultaneously, "every voyage is the unfolding of a poetic", a movement through physical and theoretical geographic space. Landscape moves in us.<sup>1</sup> Writing landscape is a way to return. A series of knotted exchanges, between bodies, vision, language, matter and information. Recall. A formation of thought. A way of conceiving the spatial temporal dimensions of the world. A way of extending out into spaces yet unknown. A way of configuring the spaces of the history. Landscape is a form of reckoning with geography. Travel in this vast space is as if in a multi-dimensional metaphor of matter and time.

## Liquid Geography

**LANDSCAPE, 3 ACTS:  
RETURN • DISPERSAL • CIRCULATION**  
Kathryn Yusoff

Series Editor: Alice Angus  
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### ABOUT LIQUID GEOGRAPHY

This publication is one of the third Liquid Geography series commissioned by Proboscis. This series was commissioned alongside the Topographies & Tales project in 2005 and 2006, which is about perceptions of place and geography, revealing small local stories against the larger picture of how our concept of space and environment is shaped by physical and aural experience. It involved a series of collaborations and includes a short film, an audio CD, a StoryBox of StoryCubes, two series of Diffusion eBooks and a Creative Lab. This series of books explores these issues with a particular emphasis on language, memory, and aural experience.

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the project of landscape knowledge and its limits.

fact and fiction, Antarctica's physical and conceptual geography characterises an exchange between Edgar Allan Poe to Jorge Luis Borges, and Robert Smithson to Tacita Dean. On this threshold of aligned with that cartography of uninhabitable places that has fascinated writers and artists from As life began to flourish in a myriad of forms all over the globe, Antarctica became the environmental fossils found in the Antarctic stand witness to the dislocation and fragmentation of the continents. Nothofagus ferns, and dolphins, and dinosaurs grew, and trampled in Antarctica. These

the force of matter, like tectonic plates, it requires constant imaginative reconstruction to stem the geological tide.

of geological time. As Smithson comments, "When one scans the ruined sites of prehistory one sees a heap of wrecked maps..."<sup>2</sup> History it seems, is fragmentary, it slides, riffs, and submerges under rocks and to assemble the dispersed tectonic fragments, we must become conscious of the epochs left over matter into maps. Plans of time intersect in this geological recreation. In order to read these a hypothetical map of this place. Geological time becomes a conceptual crystallization that orders

## Dispersal

### AN EXCESSIVE TRAVELLING THEORY

Some landscapes have dimensions that name the limits of what we can say about landscape. Antarctica suggests this topography of excess with a rare clarity. As a site at the margin of terrestrial systems, Antarctica reconfigures the usual practices of landscape formation. The ice is our first planet, like a geological fossil left over from some earlier epoch. We are preceded by the formation, dispersal, and fragmentation of Gondwanaland. Slowly, Antarctica shifted southward, shaking off continents over millions of years, in what is called Continental Drift. At the time when the South Pole was located at the top of what was to become the African continent, Antarctica started to rotate from the equator, and gradually began to fall off the temperate map. The last continent, India, detached 127 million years ago. In the late Tertiary period, 23 million years ago, the oceanic circum-polar current was established.

The knowledge of the super continent of Gondwanaland that drifted apart to form present day Antarctica, India, Africa, Australia, South America and New Zealand is only possible through its re-assembly: the imaginative recreation of history from the present. Akin to Robert Smithson's *Hypothetical Continent, Iccap of Gondwanaland* (Yucatan, Mexico 1969), we can only ever visit



## Circulation

### CIPHERS OF ICE

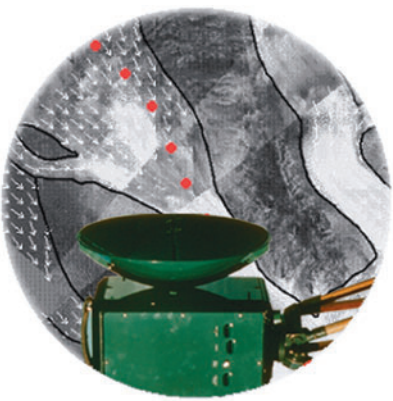
Writing landscape is a restless process, imbued with speculative fiction as much as scrupulously garnered facts. Landscape can be a layout of geographical data or bits of information on the white surface of a page (like the map), but it is also an animated energy in constant transmission. Landscapes transmit in different ways, and our ability to make knowledge from the matter we encounter is a historically constituted process. The explorers of the heroic era were invested in the awe of romantic engagement, and so produced Antarctica in narrative ways incompatible (although surprisingly contemporaneous) with contemporary scientific narratives of Antarctica as a 'Frozen Laboratory'. What unites these historical modes of encounter in the field is the continued problem of processing Antarctic information – whether it be aesthetic, geographical, magnetic, physical, conceptual or geopolitical.

Antarctica is invigorating precisely because the energy and information that is transmitted resists easy configuration – the message is such that it cannot be fully processed, and so persists as a remainder. In Antarctica, the message is like the 'hieroglyphical markings' on Melville's whale Moby Dick, the 'mystic-marked' inscriptions alert us to another language system yet remain 'indecipherable'. The inability to read the messages of the Antarctic landscape holds off the possibility of its passage into

12 SMITHSON: *op.cit.* 1996, p.155.

13 SMITHSON: *ibid.* 1968, pp. 211-213.

14 SMITHSON: *Slideworks Verona*. Carlo Frua, 1997, p.58.



## 5 BLEEP — CIRCULATION OF INFORMATION

The movement may seem motionless, “yet it crushes the landscape of logic under glacial reveries.”<sup>13</sup> As words disperse into landscape, and knowledge returns back into the spaces from which it came, knowledge and landscape create the conditions for a medium of exchange in which time is the differential. As the printed matter leeches into the ice, how would it be tracked? Do we need a parallel system of language to track its journey? The text could send out coded bleep every day (or month, or year?). An infrastructure is necessary to listen for signals. The signal could be sent to a website, to parallel the circulation and dispersal of landscape as information. Would anybody hear the sound of ice moving?

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## Footnotes

- 1 TRINH T. MINH-HA: *Other than myself/my other self*. In: ED. ROBERTSON: *Traveller's Tales*. (Ed.) Mash, Ticker, Bird, Curtis & Putnam. London: Routledge, 1994, p.21.
- 2 ROBERT SMITHSON: *The Collected Writings /* (Ed.) Jack Flam. Berkeley: University of California, 1996, p.110.
- 3 SMITHSON: *ibid.* p.7.
- 4 SMITHSON: *ibid.* p.56.
- 5 SMITHSON: *ibid.* p.332.
- 6 STEPHEN PYNE: *The Ice*. Washington: University of Washington, 1998, pp.203-204.
- 7 PYNE: *ibid.*
- 8 ROBERT SMITHSON: *A Sedimentation of the Mind: Earth Projects*. 1968. In: (Ed.) JEFFREY KASTNER: *Land and Environmental Art*. London: Phaidon, 1998, pp. 211-213.
- 9 SAMUEL BECKETT: *Imagination Dead Imagine*. 1965. In: JOHN CALDER: *Six Residua*. London: 1999, pp. 33-38.
- 10 CALDER: *ibid.* p.35.
- 11 SEAMUS HEANEY: *Fieldwork*. New York: Noonday Press, 1989, p.33.

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*“The ice has already filtered and reduced the landscape to the simplest environment on Earth. So minimal is the information content of the ice sheet that the very notion of information as structure, as negative entropy, becomes difficult (...) the polar Plateau, a study in inert uniformity, the absolute disinformation of absolute zero.”*<sup>6</sup>

argues: Stephen Pyne

of its object through a kind of excessive minimalism. Antarctic landscape information, it has been argued, presents a special kind of aesthetic problem that risks the destruction cannot be made into a stable representation? A formless thing defies the boundaries of objecthood and thus out his novel Moby Dick: “How can the form of something that appears formless be grasped? And how can mobile or visible in the same ways) or it is characterised by the questions that Melville asked through- Antarctic matter is an information explosion on the senses. Geographical information (light, temperature, perceptual space) is excessive, because it either resists current knowledge systems (it is not into a non-existent presence.”<sup>5</sup> This double perspective of past and future is sited in Antarctica.

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## DIAPYCNOMATTER

an easy representation. As an adequate aesthetic system of description from which to make a language (and thus meaning) is removed in the Antarctic, there exists the possibility of getting lost, and finding oneself upon Mistake Peak. The insufficiency of the explorer’s language to negotiate their object can be witnessed in Antarctic nomenclature of geographical features; Mistake Peak, Shapeless Mountain, Purgatory Peak, Portal Mountain, Inaccessible Island, Inexpressible Island. The lack of easily discernible geographical information manifests as a lack of directional information or orientation.

07

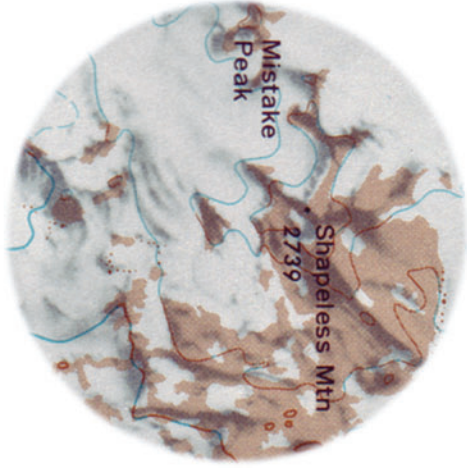
Land artist Robert Smithson suggested that, “Ice is the medium most alien to organic life.”<sup>3</sup> The indecipherability of the ice as a medium offers the possibilities of witnessing other kinds of exchanges. He wrote, “Remote places such as (...) the frozen wastes of the North and South Poles could be coordinated by art forms that use the actual land as a medium.”<sup>4</sup> Landscape as medium clarifies the dynamic, shifting continuum of information and matter between porous bodies and fields. According to the Second Law of Thermodynamics, which features frequently in Smithson’s works, at zero degrees Kelvin, entropy ceases and “all matter may well be converted into a sludge of energy in the far-distant future.” In Smithson’s essay *The Shape of the Future and Memory*, written in 1966 the same year as his *Proposal for a Monument at Antarctica*, a time traveller who “advances deep into the future discovers a decrease in movement, the mind enters a state of ‘slow motion’.” The time traveller “sees,

4 MAP OF TIMESCALES  
 The text maps out timescales. Information becomes subject to the time of ice. The text would be gradually buried and advectioned through the ice shelf. This will take some time. The rate of burial would be around half a metre per year. It would take many years for the pressure to build sufficiently to modify it. The medium of ice requires the mind to enter a state of slow motion. Thoughts are weathered by another kind of history.



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SHAPELESS MOUNTAINS



09

10  
 Pyne concludes that The Ice is the sum of its negations, because meaning is always constructed in relation to other landscapes and other meaning systems. In the case of the Polar Plateau, he argues that information is so lean as to almost be a mirror – the more information that is brought to the surface the more it radiates back in a “dialectic between idea and ice.”<sup>7</sup> He calls the ice an information sink, akin to Smithson’s ideas about Antarctica as an entropic pole. But is this conclusion, to an otherwise brilliant journeying through The Ice a negation in itself? Smithson’s practice perhaps offers more a creative exploration to that “mine of information” between mind and matter that suggests that we inhabit the dialectical movement between site and nonsite (or sight and non-sight) as a double path, rather than a reductive sink. The polar plateau radiates more information than can ever be accounted for. The matter of the plateau is not a zero of information – it is just not directionally adherent to practised forms of orientation. Assertive in its absence of directional information, the Antarctic is an uninterrupted density of other kinds of landscape messages.

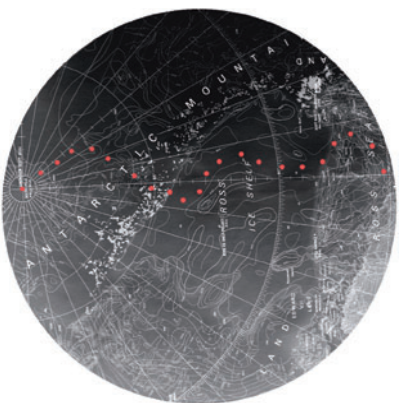
Rather than conceived of as a sink or mirror, Antarctica can be seen as a challenge – not to compulsively try and find newer systems for extracting information, or to overlay existing ones to read its hieroglyphic markings – but to accept the possibility of exploring the limits and fictions within those systems we indiscriminately use to conjure place. This is a creative opportunity. As a disruption in the net of rational abstract meaning, Antarctica problematises the extension – from the Enlightenment quest to

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3 TRANSFORMATION OF ENERGY

The energy of the text is transformed. Energy is defined in scientific terms as either kinetic or potential. The text has a large amount of potential energy stored in it while it is above the ice. That potential energy is partially turned into kinetic energy as it is hurled into the ice and is finally converted completely to kinetic energy once it stops moving. That final unload of energy from the text’s velocity and mass will be transferred to the ice shelf and surrounding atmosphere as force and heat.



**1 MAP OF ICE FLOW**

*The text maps out the direction of the flow of the ice shelf. As the text becomes illegible in one system it becomes a legible mark in another system.*

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**2 MEDIA REVERSAL**

*In a media reversal, the text circulates in the medium that it has written. A historical text of landscape is made to reckon with the geography it writes. Language is compressed and returns to its media. Matter takes on printed matter. The idea of ice is replaced by the dynamics of ice. In a conceptual crystallization, the dynamic of ice is 'read' by unreading the text.*

Ice cores taken from a depth of 3,270 metres provide a look back to the landscapes of nearly 900,000 years ago. The actual air from nearly a million years ago bubbles to the surface of our understanding under chemical analysis. The information is unsettling. Contemporary levels of CO<sub>2</sub> and methane in the atmosphere are higher than at any time in the past 650,000 years. The 'look back' that Antarctica provides to nearly one million years of earth climate change offer the possibilities of time travel into the archeology of atmosphere. History is inscribed in the ice. Our present future will be another such sedimentation, as carbon is dispersed through the atmosphere to circulate through the ice. Whereas

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contemporary extrapolations of meaning – of non-relational meaning systems. In this slippery seam of landscape aesthetics, there is a creative space within which to arrest the dislocation of located objects, and return once more to the landscape for other kinds of exploration.

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**CLIMATIC CHANGE, WEATHERED HISTORIES**

Today, Antarctica still persists as the most unruly of geographic entities. The dynamic nature of the ice sheet disrupts a stable physical geography of the continent. Seasonally, Antarctica has a cartographic double, as the mass of ice created by the frozen seas during the Antarctic winter doubles its size. Topographic maps of the region need to be revised on a frequency and scale more often than anywhere else on the planet. Cartographically, Antarctica demonstrates the appearance of an exhausted logic. It falls off the Mercator projection. Presently, the geological-like scale of human induced climatic change are accelerating this redundancy. The break up of the Larsen and Prince Gustav ice shelves and the carving of giant icebergs has meant that even recently published maps have been rendered inaccurate. Antarctica's restless glacial movement, and recent climate changes have erased contemporary attempts to still the continent into geographical form. In that refusal of form we are forced to realise the geographic excess in the maps we make. And to consider how our excesses in the use of fossil fuels are changing the very possibilities of those maps to have a coherent duration.

The ice erases. "It crushes the landscape of logic under glacial reveries." It ablates. Katabatic winds scour the surface. The volume of ice extends to arbitrary erasures of perceptual distance and conceptual measurement. There are no footholds in this system of time to validate the necessity of human inhabitation, no circa of the day, just endless day (in the summer) and endless night (in the winter). There is no reassuring accommodation to provide validity to existence. More than any place, Antarctica offers an environmental existentialism. It is an extreme point of conceptual inhabitation. The ice

*"One's mind and the earth are in a constant state of erosion, mental rivers wear away abstract banks, brain waves undermine cliffs of thoughts, ideas decompose into stones of unknowing and conceptual crystallizations break apart into deposits of gritty reason. Vast moving faculties occur in this geological miasma, and they move in the most physical way. The movement seems motionless, yet it crushes the landscape of logic under glacial reveries."*<sup>8</sup>

#### RETURN / CIRCULATION / DISPERSAL

in the 18th and 19th Century, the ice communicated a sense of frigid arrest, today the ice tells us a different history, of erasure and inscription.

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of ideas, another cryptic marker in a long forgotten language. Parallel to the ice core, the text offers another residue of 'time future': As the history of climatic change is characterised by the dispersal, circulation and return of atmospheres of excess, in this sedimentation between ideas, matter and language, the text becomes an irresolvable cipher of exchange, between an internal and external perceptual field of landscape, coded with the architecture of time.

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plateau is like the scene from a Beckett play, *Imagination Dead Imagine*.<sup>9</sup> Beckett begins his description of this place of impossibility with an exercise in erasure – a landscape of white and cold;

*"No trace anywhere of life, you say, pah, no difficulty there, imagination not dead yet, yes, dead, good, imagination dead imagine. Islands, waters, azure, verdure, one glimpse and vanished, endlessly omit. Till all white in the whiteness the rotunda (...). At the same time the temperature goes down, to reach its minimum, say freezing point (...)"*<sup>10</sup>

Distance dissolves. The possibilities of a landscape of description falter, and language reveals its chasms. To write, we must imagine a space of inscription; the blank page doubling as a space in which we can write towards a particular material and conceptual place. The place of the page must be erased. The optical and conceptual act of making landscape through representation instigates a conversion whereby printed matter slips into landscape matter. Words build place. In the slippage of media, language holds the emergent possibility of landscape. It is the bridge with which we write towards place.

Language shores up this relationship to place, it offers the possibility of thinking places that are absent. The Antarctic landscape is cryptic, in so much as it contains crevasses, voids, and entopic holes,

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## A Proposal for Erasure / A Proposal for Inscription

### TO RETURN A LANDSCAPE TEXT TO ANTARCTICA AND OBSERVE ITS CIRCULATION THROUGH THE ICE UNTIL THE TEXT DISPERSES

The ice, in this proposal, is an active point of transmission, open to both the inscription and erasure of landscape information. The Antarctic landscape offers this double perspective of erasure and inscription to generate a set of conditions for thinking about reciprocal landscape acts – acts that involve returns, dispersal and circulations. At this margin of ice and language, matter and words combine to form a kind of hieroglyphics. As language wrestles with matter, and its own 'printed matter' erodes into crystalline formations, the text becomes a different kind of cipher in the landscape. The language of material effaces the language of ideas to become the dominant order. Matter wrestles with bodies and ideas, and language become the debris of thoughts scattered through place. In the ruin of one form of language, the language of the ice as medium emerges through this act of dispersal.

As an absurd monument to the medium of ice, the text abandons its logic to take on the slow motion of glacial flow. Language shrinks into what Smithson calls, a "carboniferous state of thought"<sup>14</sup> Time bleeds through this exchange. In some distant time future, the text becomes a curious sedimentation

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