Conquest of a Tabular Iceberg

After the Shipwreck

Conquest of Loss

Conquest of a Room House of One's Own

Conquest of Stability

Climbing first, rolling after

Not Having to Be Realistic
Sufficient Internal Resources in a Hostile Environment

A Simple Life

An Ordinary Life

A Privileged Life

The Fake Peak

More, More, More

Conquest Overbooking
FROZEN HEROES
POLES

First it was the tabular icebergs, which appeared floating in the local pool. Narwhals got in through a crack in the tiles at the bottom. In the chlorinated water, I squeezed a bit of white ice in my hand, making a game of sinking it and letting it resurface. A dream. Later, at the Musée d’Orsay in Paris, I saw icecaps in the blue tutus of Degas’s ballerinas.

I began to study. I learned that “arctic” comes from the Greek word ἄρκτικος, “near the bear,” and “Antarctic,” from antáρκτικος, “the place with no bears,” but rather penguins. I learned that compasses are useless at the poles, rotational axes with shifting magnetic fields; north, the quintessential cardinal point, is actually not even an entirely stationary point of reference. At the poles even the ground moves. The early-twentieth-century polar explorers were mystics in search of the Holy Grail. Joseph Conrad said that their aims were as pure as the air at the high latitudes they surveyed. But those explorers were more like regular folks than we think—setting aside the fact that they risked their lives for a mission—because, as their journals show, they were also envious, and made mistakes, and told lies. Many explorers died trying to
The controversy over who discovered the North Pole is a fascinating chapter in polar history; more than just improbable feats taking place at a vague location, it is the story of one man’s word against another’s.

I am also searching for something in my white, unheated iceberg studio. An imaginary point that is completely unknown—and therefore absolutely magnetic. Sometimes I lose my way; I’m-cold-it’s-late-still-waiting-on-a-paycheck.

a) I return home.

b) I return to the anchorage point, the word poles and its range of literal meanings in Catalan:

- **pols, el**, n. masc: the steadiness of hand needed to carry out certain acts, such as writing or holding a weapon.

And then, when you swap the masculine article for the feminine one, you arrive at more meanings of the word, which veer off in an unlikely direction yet could possibly link to my research:

- **pols, la**, n. fem: fine, dry powder consisting of tiny particles of earth or waste matter lying on the ground or on surfaces or carried in the air. Also, a type of snow: powder snow.
In the first few decades of the nineteenth century, Captain John Cleves Symmes defended the theory that the Earth had two holes – one at either end – that went right through it. Like matryoshka dolls, he claimed, the Earth housed the entrance to seven worlds that were nested inside each other. Enough sunlight came in through the holes to sustain some sort of life, something that the captain aspired to demonstrate with complicated calculations and diagrams. If man could reach the pole, he would have an entire inner universe within reach.

This theory was a very fertile one for literature; from Symzonia, a novel by Symmes that recreates an underground world, to The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym of Nantucket by Edgar Allan Poe. Those works inspired An Antarctic Mystery and Journey to the Center of the Earth by Jules Verne. Many people believed that seas of ice at the poles led to Symmes’s inner worlds, until the poles were finally conquered.
It was Sir John Barrow, in the nineteenth century, who awakened interest in the Arctic when he went in search of Sir John Franklin and the members of his expedition, who had disappeared trying to find the Northwest Passage. Following his example, the more ambitious nations embarked on various expeditions to conquer the two most extreme points of the Earth, hidden behind the mystique of storms and ice.

According to polar historian Fergus Fleming, the Arctic furor reached such heights that it was the subject of jokes in Europe and the United States. Was there a pole at the Pole? Was it made of wood? Did it have stripes like a barber’s pole? The Inuit called it the “Great Nail.”

The fact that the conquest of the North Pole entailed a group of individuals confronting the elements was incomprehensible to many. The strategic, economic, and scientific justifications were vague. Great Britain was hesitant, while other world powers had already decided that reaching the poles was a question of national glory.

If only the moral advantage derived from these expeditions be considered, I believe that it would suffice to compensate for the sacrifices they demand. As men who surmount difficulties in their daily struggles feel themselves strengthened for encounters with yet greater difficulties, so should also a nation feel itself encouraged and stimulated by the success won by its sons to persevere in striving for greatness and prosperity.
Brother in Ice

These words were written by the Italian aristocrat Luigi Amedeo Giuseppe Maria Ferdinando Francesco di Savoia-Aosta, Duke of the Abruzzi, leader of the first Italian expedition to the North Pole.