



Rød Snø

By Jennifer Teets

In the hamlet at the place of no dawn, a blind woman sat in the corner. Running her fingertips over the face of a man she senses for the first time, she thinks aloud, “I have the feeling that I have touched him before. It is not the first time. I would say he’s close to middle age. What tells me he is not Continental is the shape of his head. He is not exactly Scandinavian either. He is not long skulled but his head is large. His forehead retreats, and he has a flat nose and full lips. He has an almost beardless chin, with whiskers. The peculiarity of his countenance is in his eyes. They are as round as perfect circles. I’m sure they are a lustrous black though obviously I cannot tell. They are clearly the best feature of his visage. I do not feel lines of agony when I touch him. He has no scars like the other men do”.

“Me half Norse, Me quarter Norse”, uttered the man to the blind woman. Reaching for a cigarette, she stopped to stroke the small jar of red liquor that Steinar Vika placed on the table. “What may this be?” she inquired. “Open your mouth”, he said, and he proceeded to dab her tongue with the liquor.

There is a proverb that goes, “If you’re walking along, and you suddenly smell watermelon, stop in your tracks. Look around, and listen for a rattlesnake”. Does a rattlesnake really smell like watermelon? Steinar Vika did mention that the watermelon snow smelt like watermelon and that was another reason why he was so attracted to it.

I can recall that I never saw the watermelon snow fall in Resolute Bay, but I did see large tracts overspread with it. I first made a trip to record the snow in 1975 and to visit Steinar Vika, who at the time worked for a scientific research corps dedicated to sounding rockets at Resolute Bay. You might remember RDTE from their latter-day telecommunications involvement with the Black Brant rocket scare – a Norwegian-American scientific collaboration enabled to study the aurora borealis over Svalbard. That was the second of the two scares. This one incurred 20 years earlier.

Over the years, Steinar Vika would send me letters on his scientific findings from his hamlet-hotel at ᑕᑭᑭᑭᑭᑭᑭ Resolute Bay, place with no dawn. Researchers at Resolute Bay took up activities related to documenting rare weather phenomena and it was common to send data between research units abroad. Steinar Vika would make remarkable descriptions of saturations and suspensions, each of them atmospheric puzzles. But then came the quandary of the snow.

At first look, the colour of the fields of snow was not uniform, but, on the contrary, there were patches or streaks more or less red, and of various depths of tint. The liquor, or dissolved snow, was so dark a red as to resemble port wine. Liquor deposits a sediment. Yet it is not known if the sediment is of an animal or vegetable nature or is frankly something else. It is suggested that the colour is derived from the soil on which the snow falls. But in this case, no red snow can have been seen on the ice. It has been suggested to me that if I drink the snow liquor it could poison me. I'm nonetheless certain that the cells are not toxic.

Steinar Vika first took up consuming the liquor when the Inuit introduced it to him as a potentially consumable body although they hadn't tried it themselves. The Inuit had mistaken the red snow liquor for blood rain. Steinar Vika wrote about his appetite for the snow around the time when the Inuit would hike to the site of blood rain, that mysterious earthly contagion that was unfamiliar to both of them, for the Inuit were new to the area as a consequence of their relocation in 1953. Whether it was an algae formation was up for question. But, when it is was known that the iron that was also found there, lying on the surface, in heaps, and in considerable quantities, was meteoric, the doubt ceased.

When I learned that the watermelon snow was composed of both algae and meteoric nickel, my urge to consume it grew even stronger. A metallic urgency took over me, like the craving to lick an old penny. "Snow pits" or "sun cups" where the liquor gathered, reminded me of picked-out seeds from the fruit. I'd dig at the pits and slurp out the dissolved trails of liquor that convened in the ice crystals of the melting snow. The algae's life and love is attached to the chilly water-filled spaces where resting cells germinate. Gametes unite and zygotic resting cells develop. There is no heat generated by love or sex in these creatures.

One day while staring into the liquor, Steinar Vika proclaimed he'd seen a pool of men and alphabet letters swimming in the cups. He ran to the Inuit to explain the apparition.

There, in the liquor trails, tiny men dance with alphabet letters. If you proceed to dab your finger into the cups, attempting to collect the liquor, the men grow in size and step out of the cell. One man stepping out described an aurora over Svalbard, a premonition of what was to occur 20 years later. He described it as a diffusing and glowing curtain-like set of arcs. A bulge growing out of a deformation. He began to wave his arms about, mimicking it, as to imitate the acceleration of precipitating particles. In his description there was emphasis on speed and form. One small detail I did catch was newspaper headlines under the night's sky. He also described an array of spirals, curls and folds, a man and a lawn chair. The newspaper headlines read "The world at the cusp of nuclear war" and "Yeltsin activates his nuclear keys".

The prophecy was clearly indicative of Steinar Vika's research troupe in Canada associated with the Norwegian-American squad, a group he would be associated with 20 years later, in 1995, who were involved in the Black Brant rocket scare. The rocket, which carried scientific equipment to study the aurora borealis over Svalbard, flew on a high northbound trajectory, which included an air corridor that stretches from Minuteman III nuclear missile silos in North Dakota to the Russian capital city of Moscow. It was confused by the Russians as nuclear foreplay by the Americans. The scare resulted in a full alert being passed up through the military chain of command all the way to President Boris Yeltsin. Yeltsin for the first time in history activated his "cheget" and a nuclear counterattack was deemed to happen *ensuite*. No warning was issued to the Russian populace of any incident.

Russia in orange

In other news, Steinar Vika reported on his trips through Russia.

In Russia once it fell, orange. Its liquor was malodorous, oily to the touch and reported to contain four times the normal level of iron. Some of the snow was also recorded to be red or yellow. It resembled blood orange syrup. Unfortunately, I didn't have the opportunity to taste it. It was originally speculated that it was caused by industrial pollution, a rocket launch or even a nuclear accident. It was later determined that the snow was non-toxic. However, people in the region were advised not to use the snow or allow animals to feed upon it. Coloured snow is uncommon in Russia but not unheard of, as there have been many cases of black, blue, green and red snowfall. Women standing next to the orange snow have been known to garner an appetite or 'sweet tooth' when approaching it whereas others a sore throat upon consuming it.

The orange snow was most likely caused by a heavy sandstorm. Tests on the snow revealed numerous sand and clay dust particles, which were blown into Russia in the upper stratosphere. The speculation that the colouration was caused by a rocket launch from Baikonur in Kazakhstan was later dismissed, as the last launch before the event took place on 18 January.

The watermelon snow obviously had a capacity for producing political vertigo when being consumed. The Inuit took to ingesting it following Steinar Vika's instructions. It was not known if the conscious act of consuming the liquor would lead to the visions or if it were a combination of the two (the thought of a potential event or the actual event itself to come). Though, various acts of struggle could be traced.

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Blue snow minute

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LONG LIFE BLUE
BUSY SENTRY BLUE
BUSY SURVEY II BLUE
BUSY USHER BLUE
BUTTON UP BLUE
DUST HARDNESS BLUE
GIANT PATRIOT BLUE
GIANT PLOW BLUE
GIANT PROFIT BLUE
GIGANTIC CHARGE BLUE
GIN PLAYER BLUE
HAVE LEAP BLUE
MIDDLE GUST BLUE
OLD FOX BLUE
OLYMPIC ARENA III BLUE
OLYMPIC EVENT BLUE
OLYMPIC PLAY BLUE
OLYMPIC TRIALS BLUE
PACER GALAXY BLUE
PAVE PEPPER BLUE
RIVET ADD BLUE
RIVET MILE BLUE
RIVET SAVE BLUE
SABER SAFE BLUE
SABER SECURE BLUE
SENTINEL ALLOY BLUE
UPGRADE SILO BLUE

Jennifer Teets is a researcher, curator and performer based in Paris. She is known for her research on cheese, mud and terra sigillata – their transitioning towards materiality and their ability to become something else when put in an exhibition or an essay.

Marnie Slater is an artist who grew up in 1980s New Zealand. During 2015, she is commissioning a series of texts by women, of which this one is the fifth, to be read in parallel to the exhibition programme at P/////AKT, Amsterdam.