Tara, the hundred-and-twenty-foot ice-breaking yacht that Salgado and the author sailed on from Ushuaia, the southernmost town in
The Amazonas photographic agency is in a neighborhood of rising elegance and property prices in northeastern Paris, in a former coal warehouse on the Saint-Martin canal. Just in front of the building, a steeply arched wrought-iron footbridge extends over the water to the Hôtel du Nord, where Marcel Carné set his melancholy film of the same name. Inside the agency, which features floors of polished hardwood that were imported from Brazil, half a million postcard-size work prints are immaculately arranged in smooth-running drawers. Six people work here, including two full-time photographic printers, each with his own darkroom.

Sebastião Salgado, the Brazilian-born photojournalist known for beautiful black-and-white photographs of people living difficult lives, is the agency’s only photographer. In the world of photojournalism, a place where his fame and magisterial rhythm of work give him a singular status, Salgado has the added distinction of being his own producer: he owns the factory. And although Salgado often works abroad, when he does return to his family in Paris he walks each day to Amazonas, from an apartment fifteen minutes away.

One morning a few weeks ago, Salgado was in the basement of the office, where the sound of continuously running water—prints were being rinsed nearby—gave the room the feel of compulsory calm found in the lobbies of some expensive hotels. On a wall in front of him was a poster-size reproduction of a photograph he had taken in Serra Pelada, a Brazilian gold mine, in 1986. It showed thousands of men—sacrificial and single-minded, each apparently working for himself—covering every surface of a great open pit, hauling dirt-filled sacks on makeshift ladders. A silvery sheen of mud covers the men, making it nearly impossible to tell that they are wearing modern clothes. A contemporary image saturated in the long history of South American gold prospecting and in a longer history of human toil, it comes from a series of extraordinary photographs taken at the same mine which have been described as “evocative of the masterworks of Pieter Brueghel and Cecil B. De Mille.” Fusing fact to myth, past to present, the images helped propel Salgado’s already successful career to something far loftier, much the
way Bono is something more than a pop star. Salgado, a former economist, has become an architect of photojournalistic projects with a global reach, an icon of social conscience, a kind of solo branch of the United Nations.

A broad-shouldered, Picasso-ish man of sixty-one, he was wearing jeans and a V-necked cashmere sweater over a checked shirt. He had a penknife in a leather pouch fixed to his belt, and gold-rimmed half-moon reading glasses on a chain around his neck. His head is shaved bald, and his face is unlined; you can find your gaze skidding off him, or snagging on his bushy eyebrows, which rise and fall in the beseeching way of a conductor squeezing sad and delicate sounds out of an orchestra. Lélia Wanick Salgado, his wife of more than thirty years, consulted with Salgado about a future retrospective in Paris. She is a slim woman with a smoker’s dark-textured voice; she was dressed all in black, and at one point in the conversation her husband spun her slowly around, picking pieces of lint from her clothes; when he was done, she kissed him on the lips.

Lélia went to the office space upstairs, where Sebastião’s photographs are sold to magazines, and where they are collected in vast books and travelling exhibitions, and where the phone calls are about honorary degrees and invitations to sit on panels and accept awards. (“We have two talents and they are complementary,” she later said. “He knows how to take photographs and I know how to exploit them.”) Downstairs, Salgado sat at a table with a long-time colleague, Françoise Piffard. They had boxes of small, freshly printed photographs in front of them—images from his latest long-term, self-assigned project, “Genesis.” For the first time, Salgado is photographing wild animals instead of people, in an enterprise that carries at least a hint of the idea that he is owed a vacation. He is visiting environments unchanged by human progress, after more than thirty years spent photographing miserably changing environments, and people in the middle of economic or political upheaval. Salgado started “Genesis” last year, photographing giant tortoises in the Galápagos Islands, gorillas in central Africa, whales off the Argentinian coast. He expects to finish in 2012.

Salgado had just returned from Antarctica, and before him were dozens of small photographs of penguins feeding their offspring by regurgitation, jamming their beaks down into the throats of their young; there were also glaciers, and icebergs, and albatrosses looking directly into the camera. “Nice, nice pictures. Incredible dignity they had,” Salgado said of the birds. His first language is Portuguese, and he speaks both French and English with an accent that becomes stronger if he gets agitated or excited; in English, “refugees” becomes “refugees,” for example.

The work prints needed to be divided into two piles: yes and no. Such sifting would eventually lead to a final selection of about fifty images, which would be presented to magazines. In an action repeated every minute or so, Salgado held up two photographs with a similar composition, often taken moments apart, and he and Piffard would try to find a weaker print to reject, with Salgado saying, “I wish the sky was a bit more dramatic,” or, “I don’t think that’s too horrible,” or enthusing, “That’s beautiful, no? That is the idea, how close we can be to Genesis, yet in our times!” Piffard wore magnifying goggles, and peered forward with pursed lips, like a jeweller; at times she questioned a composition, or simply said, “I don’t think so.” Salgado decided on rejects only grudgingly, slapping them down like a frustrated poker player. When he put neither print into the reject pile (which was growing more slowly than the other), Piffard said, “Oh, Sebastião,” disapprovingly.

“I’m happy,” Salgado said. He rubbed his hand over his smooth scalp. “I believe we have a story.” In the room next door, the printers were making more penguins, and more albatrosses. Salgado had returned from Antarctica with more than ten thousand negatives.

A few weeks earlier, I had watched Salgado unpack his bags in a cabin on a hundred-and-twenty-foot ice-breaking yacht moored in the harbor of Ushuaia, the southernmost town in Argentina. At mid-evening, the air was cool, but summer sunshine still entered the room through a skylight. “All this is a question of adaptation,” Salgado said, as he arranged his possessions in the small space. “You adapt yourself to any kind of place you find.” He had four identical medium-format cameras, each the size of a brick, and several hundred rolls of black-and-white film, which he lined up on the higher of the two bunk beds as neatly as in a store display. He showed me two pairs of khaki pants into which Lélia had sewn Velcro strips at the knee, on the inside, for attaching little pads that made kneeling on the ground more comfortable; some new snow-proof boots; and tiny elasticized
rain protectors for his cameras’ viewfinders which he had made out of shower caps. He had a ball of wool for damping his sweater, anti-inflammatory drugs for a damaged tendon, Quaker Oats, and Portuguese translations of books by Bruce Chatwin and John Kenneth Galbraith. “And here are fingerless gloves,” he said. “In reality, they are not fingerless. You go like this, now out.” He folded down a flap, and his fingerless gloves became mittens. “To change the films, you put here again, that’s it. That is this.” He refolded the flap, then went back and forth; glove, mitten.

The ship was due to sail around Cape Horn, and then south to the Chilean islands of Diego Ramirez, and then the two hundred and fifty or so miles of open sea to the Antarctic Peninsula, an arm on the continent which stretches north toward South America. Salgado would be at sea for six weeks, and I was joining him sea to the Antarctic Peninsula, an arm on the continent which stretches north toward South America. Salgado would be at sea for six weeks, and I was joining him for part of his trip. The ship was strikingly handsome from the outside—with an unpainted hull of reinforced aluminum that had the broad, shallow proportions of a surfboard—but its interior was not luxurious. It felt like an overcrowded beach house whose décor had been neglected since the mid-nineteen-eighties: the fittings were nondescript pale wood, and the bench seats had worn, blue foam cushions. The walls were decorated with framed images of Endurance, the ship captained by the British Antarctic explorer Ernest Shackleton; Endurance was trapped by ice in 1915, and then destroyed by it.

There were eight small cabins, each with two narrow bunk beds. The boat’s owner, Étienne Bourgois, was housed close to Salgado. Bourgois, an amiable, troubled-looking man of forty-four, is the director of Agnès B., the French fashion company founded by his mother, Agnès. Divorced and the father of five, Bourgois has the face of a young man but the tufty baldness of a sixty-year-old, giving the impression of a high-school student playing King Lear. Bourgois bought the ship in 2003 from the estate of Sir Peter Blake, the New Zealand sailing hero and America’s Cup winner. In 2001, Blake sailed the ship—then called the Seamaster—to the Amazon. Near the mouth of the river, armed pirates forced their way on board. Blake was standing at the bottom of the stairs that connect the living quarters to the deck when he opened fire on them with a shotgun that he kept on board. He shot two fingers off a pirate’s hand, but the gun jammed; Blake was shot and killed. Lead from Blake’s cartridge was still embedded in a window at the top of the stairs.

In the last years of his life, Blake was a good-will ambassador for the United Nations Environment Program, UNEP. After Bourgois bought the Seamaster—and renamed it Tara, his family’s traditional name for its boats—he arranged to continue the association with UNEP. UNEP officials also happened to be in conversation with Salgado, and knew of his plans to include Antarctica among the twenty or so stories that would make up the “Genesis” project. Bourgois offered Salgado a ride. For all the obvious appeal of a private yacht exploring the continent on its own timetable, Salgado hesitated. Bourgois’s idea was a shared expedition for poets, painters, and photographers. “I said no,” Salgado told me. “I said, I apologize, I cannot accept to go and look at things in the main living area. Salgado, the old-man, said, ‘In color, this is shit.’”

“Genesis” is mainly funded by Amazonas’s deals with magazines and newspapers, among them, Paris Match, in France; the Guardian, in Britain; Rolling Stone, in the United States; and Visão, in Portugal. (This leaves a financial shortfall that is made up by grants, including three hundred thousand dollars from the Cottens Fund, and by the occasional advertising job—Illy coffee, for example—for which Salgado asks around thirty thousand dollars a day.) Eventually, there is likely to be a “Genesis” book and exhibition. “I’m having the opportunity of my life to be in the most beautiful places in the planet!” he said. “And probably doing my last story in photography. I’ll finish when I’m seventy years old. Not that I’ll stop photography, but I’m not sure if I’ll have strength enough to do another long-term project.”

His two previous projects on a similar scale, “Workers” and “Migrations,” each took more than five years. The latter, a study of people displaced by war and by a globalized world economy, was punishing to produce, physically and mentally, and left Salgado unsure if mankind deserved to survive. The “Genesis” project had its roots in that period of despair, Salgado said. But he is a former Marxist activist and a one-time student of Esperanto, and although he has lost the big mustache of his youth, he has a surviving confidence in doing research for a possible Antarctica documentary. (Salgado was wary. “TV is heavy,” he said. “People are always so impressed. Oh, it’s television.”)

Tara was delayed in Ushuaia for a day. The crew and guests ate lunch and drank wine together squeezed around a table in the main living area. Salgado, the oldest at the table, was friendly, but in a rather formal, fastidious way; a manner that was mirrored in the care with which he used his penknife (rather than the available silverware) to cut up fruit. Asked about his priorities in Antarctica, he said, “I want everything—the animals, the landscapes. I want the planet.” After lunch, when the table became cluttered with the digital cameras and laptop computers of his shipmates (Salgado had neither), he walked into town to buy some Ziploc bags. Sunlight was peeping through gray Scottish skies. “Look at this light, oh boy,” he said, adding, with a black-and-white photographer’s satisfaction, “In color, this is shit.”
Two Kosovar women, among the tens of thousands of refugees who left their homes to flee the conflict with the Serbs, on the road.
between Kukës and the Morini border post, in Albania, in 1999.
FOUR POEMS OF YOUTH

1. THE DREAM

Later
that now long-lost night
in December, beside you, I saw
that the leaves had returned
to the branches
outside my window. Now
that is all it was: leaves, blowing
in the windy sunlight: somehow,
in spite of the chances against it
occurring, in spite of the critic’s wan sneer,
I dreamed this lovely thing.

2. MINNEAPOLIS, 1960

Children in a classroom peer
into microscopes.
Bombsights
it occurs
to the young woman
moving from one
to another, peripherally
mesmerized
by the second hand, trees
flailing
dimly in windows.

Tara motored out of Ushuaia. Later,
the sails were raised. Salgado made
himself weatherproof and took a “king of
the world” spot on the bow. When dol-
phins swam alongside, and his shipmates
dashed from side to side to photograph
them (and while Bourgois leaned over
the railing and slapped Tara’s hull, in what
I took to be a known form of human-
to-dolphin communication), Salgado re-
mained still, and waited for a dolphin to
pass in front of his camera. Rounding
Cape Horn the following day, we took
photographs of one another; Salgado did
not look in anyone’s lens, but instead
gazed down into the water, with the air of
modest contemplation seen on the face of
a Virgin Mary in a Renaissance painting.

We sailed south and lost sight of South
America. The air became colder and the
sea rougher. Most of those on board spent
the afternoon quiescibly in bed—including
Salgado, who listened to his new iPod,
which, as he later showed me, included
Chopin’s Nocturne No. 2 and a Julio Igle-
sias song in its Most Played list.

That night, Tara reached Diego Ra-
mirez, a group of small islands sixty
miles southwest of Cape Horn, unin-
habited but for a lonely meteorological
station on one of them. Salgado had of-
ficial permission to land, a rare entitle-
ment owing something to the ship’s U.N.
imprimatur—and to the fact that Sal-
gado himself is a good-will ambassador
for UNICEF. After the ship spent a night
at anchor, he went ashore by inflat-
able motorboat with five others. “What a priv-
ilege to be here!” Salgado said, after land-
ing awkwardly on a small rocky beach at
the foot of some grassy cliffs. He put
down his stuff. Photojournalists do not
usually travel with assistants, and Sal-
gado, who would never want to be taken
out of that category, tends to travel alone,
even after having made the switch, for
“Genesis,” from 35-mm. Leicas to heav-
ier, medium-format Pentax cameras. But
he accepts help, and allowed volunteers
to carry some of his equipment. Sal-
gado kept a camera over each shoulder.

“It was cold and the sky was a flat gray.
We began to climb the slope, pulling our-
selves up by tufts of silvery-green grass
four or five feet high. Within moments,
Salgado found himself standing before
a gray-headed albatross—smooth and
polished, with smears of black around its
eyes. At a distance of about six feet, Sal-
gado raised a camera: the shutter made
a surprisingly loud clunk. He moved
closer, and quietly sang a classic bossa-
nova song, “A Felicidade.”

“Where’s my tripod?” he asked. “The
person who’s carrying my stuff needs to be
near me.” (His avuncular manner tight-
ened into something harder when he
began photographing; by the end of the
day, he was holding a hand out behind
him, without turning around, to show that
he needed his tripod.) The others in the
group had already taken their own pic-
tures of the bird and moved on, and had
found another albatross, and then another.
3. ON THE RUN

Winter hours, white
dune grass.
Secret
pinewoods to the ocean—now what?

4. THE BLACKOUT: FIRST ANNIVERSARY

It finds me in Port Authority, penniless,
seated at a bar unable to remember
how I came there (why is obvious).
Do you know this terror—not to remember?
I go to the men’s room and look in the mirror,
look in his aggrieved and music-haunted eyes.
The mouth opens, but there are no words;
there are words, but the mouth will not open.
Tears form but cannot fall, fingers
gradually tightening at my throat . . .
Blood of his blood, flesh of his ghost—
the hand stretched toward me in the flames!
Do you?
I am worn out, I can’t go on.

—Franz Wright

The slope was covered in birds, which had
rarely, if ever, seen humans and had no rea-
son to fear them; they barely moved when
approached, beyond turning their heads
this way and that, like fashion models. It
was hard to think of another environment
as congenial to the novice wildlife pho-
tographer. (As Art Wolfe, one of Amer-
ica’s leading photographers of wildlife,
later explained, without scoffing, it is eas-
ier if the animals are not running away.)

Salgado, unhurried by the activity
above him, retrieved his tripod while keep-
ing his eye on the first albatross as if it were
the last bird on earth. He changed film
with the deliberation of a mime artist.
Each time he took out an exposed film, he
had to lick a paper tag to seal it closed, and
for this he used a big, slow lick that hinted
at the perils of rushed licking. Then, as he
wound in the new film, he sang more
loudly than before. “It’s the only way I get
to hold my concentration,” he later told
me. “When you change the film, you break
your sequence. Changing film is an empty
moment and you fill it with the music.”

Once, years ago, Salgado flew to
Rome to take a portrait of the novelist
Italo Calvino. “I can only give you an
hour,” Calvino said upon opening the
door. Salgado said he needed at least
two or three days. (He got them.) After
forty-five minutes on the island, Salgado
was still just a few feet above the beach.
The day was arranging itself according
to two different appreciations of time
and space: it was the unspoken instinct
of everyone but Salgado to reach the top
of the slope quickly, then make a sur-
vey—to take possession of the pristine
island. Salgado’s instinct was to look only
at the thing in front of him. “Almost no
one in the world has seen this,” he said.
His left hand, cupped under the lens,
made minute movements to focus.

When he finally reached the top of
the slope, he found hundreds of alba-
trosses of a different species, sitting on
mud nests the size and shape of a dog’s
feeding bowl. Salgado inched among
them, as infant albatrosses spilled orange
vomit onto his new boots. When the
sun came out, he shot into the light, as
has always been his preference. (“For me,
the good pictures are against the light.
Against the light, you have shapes, the
forms get a contour. It’s not easy but I
like it.”) He said that he wanted to show
“the equilibrium of the birds and their
environment.” Beyond Salgado’s hear-
ing, one of the party said, in a friendly
enough way, “If it’s like this ev’ryplace,
we’ll be on the island for three months.”

Salgado’s reputation was built on mon-
umental, backlit images of physical
labor and human fortitude, and to watch
him work—to wake up for two weeks
to the soft buzzing of Salgado shaving
his head smooth in the cabin opposite—
was to be shown a shadow of self-
portrait falls across those images. Sal-
gado would not mistake himself for a
steelworker or an underfed migrant, but
what has interested him in others is what
he looks for in himself: a level of imper-
viousness to testing conditions, and toler-
ance of a long working day. For Salgado,
taking pictures is a pleasure but also a dis-
cipline: he is not the kind of photographer
who goes to pick up laundry carrying
a loaded camera. When I spoke to
Robert Pledge, Salgado’s friend and agent
in the U.S., he could not remember a sin-
gle occasion in thirty years when Salgado
had taken his photograph. (Salgado said
that he remembered one.)

At the end of a cold, ten-hour stay
on the island at Diego Ramírez, Salgado
was able to show no less interest in the
day’s last albatross than he had shown in
the first—holding his thumb and fore-
finger together in a gesture of epicurean
while his shipmates slumped
on the springy earth, fully gorged on
birds and sea lions. “I have a few good pic-
tures,” Salgado said. “I don’t think I have
a great picture. The sky was fifty-per-
cent sky, not a hundred-per-cent sky. All
my life was like that—looking and wait-
ning for the combination.”

For three days after leaving Diego Ra-
mirez, Tara sailed across the Drake Pas-
sage, beyond sight of land. Salgado had to
endure a period of enforced inactivity. The
weather was stormy, and the front of the
ship rose up and then came banging down
with the sound of someone dropping a
small car onto the deck. Seawater washed
over the skylights. In the living area, blue
rubber matting was brought out to stop
the plates from sliding off the table. It began to snow. Salgado, restless at times, made slow tours of the main cabin, trying to stay upright while reading and rereading the dishwashing roster and the warnings on packets of seasickness pills.

Salgado is not an ebullient man: his sociability sometimes seems to come from a portfolio of skills learned with the aim of taking fine photographs; he often allows his sentences to fade away, with a sigh—“And this is that . . .” But when he talks about the Instituto Terra, to which he and his wife have given much of their time and income in recent years, he grows animated. As we thumped through the waves, he told me how fish and birds had reappeared at the site; how his friend Robin Williams (with whom he spent Election Night last year in L.A.) had put thirty thousand dollars into a theatre at the institute; how the institute had become thirty thousand dollars into a theatre at the institute; how the institute had become

Salgado pointed out, he had experience in planning and financing large-scale projects long before the organizational feat of “Workers.” By 1968, the military government that had come to power in a coup four years earlier was evolving into a full-blown dictatorship, and the Salgados became part of a protest movement. The couple gave money to the A.L.N. (Ação Libertadora Nacional), the armed group led by Carlos Marighella, who is now best known as the author of the “Minimanual of the Urban Guerrilla,” a guide to terrorist techniques that influenced the tactics of the Baader-Meinhof group and the I.R.A. At this time, Salgado was a Communist, and a supporter of the Cuban revolution; he was never an A.L.N. member, but he did meet Marighella. (Salgado later regretted having told me about his A.L.N. connection, not for fear of seeming extreme but out of anxiety that he would appear to be dressing himself in radical chic.)

The authorities made no move against Sebastião and Lélia, but friends were arrested, and some of them were tortured. “We could either leave or become clandestine,” Salgado said, and in 1968 the couple moved to Paris, where Sebastião studied for a Ph.D. in economics at the Sorbonne. Photographs taken at the time show him bearded, long-haired, and intense, looking much like the young Björn Borg. The Salgados remained politically active. Later, their Brazilian passports were revoked, and Salgado did not return to that country until 1979. “It was tough for my father,” Salgado said. “When I left Brazil, he was a strong man. When I came back, he was an old man.”

Lélia began a course in architecture, and in 1970 she bought a Pentax camera, to use in her studies. When Salgado first picked the camera up, that summer, he had never taken a photograph before. In his first, taken while on vacation in the southeast of France, Lélia is seen sitting on a window with the light behind her. “I knew when I looked inside this camera, now I had another way to relate with any kind of thing,” Salgado told me. “It was so natural.” After finishing his Ph.D. course work but before writing his thesis, Salgado accepted a well-paid job in London with the International Coffee Organization—coffee’s OPEC—and began to work on a diversification fund designed to raise coffee prices by encouraging growers to move into other crops. He took Lélia’s camera on field trips to Africa. “He was not satisfied with economics,” Lélia remembered. “But he was very happy to take pictures.”

Sebastião set up a darkroom in their apartment. “At first, it was just fun,” Lélia recalled. One summer afternoon in
1972, he and Lélia rented a rowing boat in Hyde Park and went out on the Serpentine to discuss their future. ‘I’d studied many years and I had a very good job—hard to get this job—and I had an invitation to go to the World Bank in Washington,’ Salgado said. But he wanted to be a photographer. Lélia agreed he should try, despite the financial risks. When Salgado resigned from the I.C.O., soon after, his boss was exasperated by his apparent naïveté. ‘Of course you want to be a photographer,’ he said. ‘I want to be a photographer. My wife wants to be a photographer.’

The Salgados moved back to Paris, and Salgado began to find work with trade-union and church magazines: he shot stories about migrant workers and the construction of the Pompidou Center. But, as Robert Pledge recently recalled, “he was lucky that Portuguese-speaking countries were very much in the news. That propelled him onto the circuit.” Salgado was quickly taken on by the Sygma agency, and covered Portugal’s Carnation Revolution, in 1974, and Angola’s war of independence, which led to Portugal’s withdrawal from the country, in 1975. And he did the everyday news stories and golf tournaments of an agency photographer. Pledge, who was then at the Time magazine, was at the Gamma agency, which Salgado joined in 1975, could already detect Salgado’s restlessness. “He quickly said, ‘I don’t want to do this all my life.’ He was talking about not dealing with the news per se but using the news to deal with issues—poverty, injustice. That really struck me. That’s not what young photographers said then.”

Sebastião and Lélia’s first son, Julián, was born in 1974. Rodrigo, their second, was born in 1979. He had Down syndrome, a fact that his parents had not known during the pregnancy. Salgado told me that he cried for three hours after Rodrigo was born. The baby suffered from respiratory problems, and Lélia always kept him in her arms as he slept. “She thought he was going to die,” Salgado told me. “I asked myself if it’s possible to represent that. I don’t know if I can do this. It’s too big. Maybe we mate for life because we’re lazy.”

Late one evening, Tara’s captain called us up to the bridge to see a single green dot on the radar: the first iceberg. When we woke the next morning the ship was passing through a calm, wide channel with white mountains on either side. There was a hint of something sour and eggy in the air that we learned to recognize as the smell of massed penguins. Out of the wind, it barely felt colder than a December day in Central Park; and among the serious sailors there began a silent competition to see who could respond to Antarctica with the most non-specialist wardrobe, at least for a few minutes at a time: T-shirts, baggy cardigans, plaid slippers.

We were near the northern tip of the seven-hundred-mile-long Antarctic Peninsula, on the western side: a landscape of fjords and islands. This strand of Antarctica is relatively close to South America, and, because it is less cold than the mass of the continent, a dozen or so scientific bases have been built by various countries, at the kind of rocky coastal spots also valued by penguins. These few sheds and huts, along with some grander developments, on the other side of Antarctica, and a station at the South Pole, constitute virtually the only man-made environment, and therefore human population, of the continent, which is one and a half times the size of the United States. We dropped anchor close to the Chilean base of Gonzalez Videla. Salgado went on shore dressed in many layers of clothing and walked up a little icy slope, where he put on sunglasses, and said quietly, “I don’t know if I can do this. It’s too big.” He was looking across at a panorama of sea and icebergs. Glaciers slipped straight into the sea, forming ice cliffs where they came to an end in the water. It looked as if a flood had rolled into a Himalayan valley. “I ask myself if it’s possible to represent it by pictures,” he said.

Salgado moved hesitantly off the ice onto dark rocks—you could feel your
Salgado's 1986 image of workers in the open pit of a mine at Serra Pelada, Brazil, a remote site in the Amazon where gold had
been discovered a few years earlier. More than fifty thousand prospectors were at work in Serra Pelada.
pupils snap into dilation—and wandered among a colony of gentoo penguins. It was a world of bleakly reduced diversity: a penguin factory with few plants or insects. Dozens of penguins crouched on nests made of pebbles; above, a few predatory skuas circled, looking for unguarded penguin eggs or chicks. Now and then, a penguin would throw back its head and screech, sending a puff of condensation into the air.

Salgado makes frequent use of the word “dignity,” and he gives it four syllables in English: dig-in-i-ty. He has often photographed people looking into his camera with a head-on stare that could be described as dignified reproach. It’s a look that says, We are resourceful people, we can cope, but what you see is not good. (Salgado’s efforts to represent his subjects this way may have inadvertently worked against a larger goal of encouraging social change; he has rarely shown people enraged by, or in revolutionary resistance to, their unhappy circumstances.)

On the beach, Salgado seemed to be searching for a similar look in the wildlife. Freezing his position in the quarter-crouch of someone who has just begun to sit down, he waited for the penguins to look at him, and, when they did, it was hard not to project into their stare a silent plea for the Kyoto Protocol. (Some of the gorillas and tortoises he recently photographed gave him the same look.)

“I didn’t wish this from the beginning,” Salgado said, talking of this preference for eye contact. “But I’m very interested in the animal. I pay attention to him, see what I can get from him—what is his face, what is his eyes, what his mind, what his preoccupation? Probably I can get this in pictures, insballab.”

Salgado stopped in front of a penguin that was feeding two infants by regurgitation, and he became absorbed by the sight. “She’s so proud of them,” he said. He asked for his tripod. He looked and waited, and each time the adult forced its beak down the throat of an infant it took five or six photographs, and his singing became louder. When he moved away, after an hour or so, during which a fearless small white bird had pecked at my boot fifty times, he said, “It was perfect, the head on one side, the tail on the other.” Describing how he had constructed the image, he swept his hands in the air balletically, then drew in my notebook: the adult bird and the infant below it were together curled into the frame, as if into a Matisse collage, forming a low, condensed “S.”

Before we left the beach, Salgado watched a penguin build a nest by carrying pebbles in its beak, one by one. When we were back on the ship, he said, “Photography is this disease, this thing that you fix inside you; you go and you go. We’re like these birds. Get a stone to put there, get another stone to put there, until he has a nest. We do the same.”

“The decisive moment, it’s just a slice.” Salgado said, using a phrase associated with Cartier-Bresson, who was a friend of the Salgados. (A signed Cartier-Bresson print—a tree-lined country road—is one of the few photographs on the walls of their Paris apartment; another is a picture of the soccer legends Franz Beckenbauer and Pelé talking to one another, naked, in a postgame communal shower.) Salgado drew two axes of a graph on a sheet of paper, and then a sine curve (signifying the photographed phenomenon), with a horizontal tangent at the top (the photograph). The economist and the photojournalist were now collaborating. “You have a tangent that’s just touching the most perfect moment of the phenomenon,” he said. “That’s the concept of the decisive moment. But, for me, the most important idea isn’t to have the tangent that’s zero.” (He wrote this out: “∞ = 0.”) “If you’re a smart guy, with a good camera, with a good eye, you come from outside the phenomenon, and—tuk—you get the fabulous image. But long-term stories are composed of a lot of different waves. The most important thing for me is not whether the tangent is zero, or minus one, or plus one, but to work inside the phenomenon. You are living the phenomenon, and each click is one point. You do your click at the strongest moment, of course, when you have the perfect light, the perfect albatross, the perfect mountain—but then this is another, this is another.” He drew more curves, each one bristling with tangents, and then an overarching curve that encompassed them all. (It has sometimes been thought, even by his friends, that Salgado could cut down on the multitude of tangents. “Salgado is a good editor, but sometimes his books are a little too fat,” Robert Pledge said.)

Salgado did not invent the long-term documentary photographic story. As he told me, “Guys like W. Eugene Smith worked for years on projects.” But Smith—to take Salgado’s example—was a Life staff photographer for much of his career, and struggled to finance his later independent projects. Salgado, who took up photography several years before Smith’s death, began working in an era when few, if any, magazines can underwrite multiple tangents from a single photographer. The challenge was to find a way to work as if you had a mid-century Life contract when you did not.

“I found it frustrating to shoot one story and jump to another,” Salgado said. He wanted to work symphonically. (In fact, he has looked for a composer to write music to accompany “Genesis.”) One way to slow the pace was to work in partnership with organizations like the World Council of Churches, as he has done since the beginning of his career. In 1984 and 1985, he took photographs in Africa’s drought-affected Sahel region, in collaboration with Médecins Sans Frontières, which received proceeds from a subsequent book.

Another strategy was to tack personal stories onto commissioned ones. Salgado’s 1986 trip to the Serra Pelada gold mine, for example, was made between assignments in South America for two German magazines. Gold had been discovered at the remote site—Serra Pelada means “bald mountains”—several years earlier, attracting more than fifty thousand prospectors, and, in turn, the attention of the media. Time had compared the mine to an “outlandish biblical epic movie”; the Chilean-born artist Alfredo Jaar had shown photographs of the mine at the 1986 Venice Biennale. “Everybody had shot this story before me,” Salgado said. But, as Robert Pledge remembered it, Salgado said, “I want to do it in black-and-white, for the record. It’s my country, after all.” He went there for three weeks and shot all day. Because the story was hardly breaking news, it was another six months before Salgado took the time to look at the photos he had taken. Even then, he said, “I thought they were O.K. The reaction was a big surprise.”

The photographs were published first in the Sunday Times magazine, in London. “He made his name on that story,” Colin Jacobson, a leading British photo editor, and the founder of the magazine Reportage, recently recalled. "It was phenome-
In 1969, the drive from Minneapolis to St. Louis took twelve hours and was mostly on two-lane roads. My parents woke me up for it at dawn. We had just spent an outstandingly fun week with my Minnesota cousins, but as soon as we pulled out of my uncle’s driveway these cousins evaporated from my mind like the morning dew from the hood of our car. I was alone in the back seat again. I went to sleep, and my mother took out her magazines, and the weight of the long July drive fell squarely on my father.

To get through the day, he made himself into an algorithm, a number cruncher. Our car was the axe with which he attacked the miles listed on road signs, chopping the nearly unbearable 238 down to a still daunting 179, bludgeoning the 150s and 140s and 130s until they yielded the halfway humane 127, which was roundable down to 120, which he could pretend was just two hours of driving time even though, with so many livestock trucks and thoughtless drivers on the road ahead of him, it would probably take closer to three. Through sheer force of will, he mowed down the last twenty miles between him and double digits, and these digits he then reduced by tens and twenties until, finally, he could glimpse it: “Cedar Rapids 34.” Only then, as his sole treat of the day, did he allow himself to remember that 34 was the distance to the city center—that we were, in fact, less than thirty miles now from the oak-shaded park where we liked to stop for a picnic lunch.

The three of us ate quietly. My father took the pit of a damson plum out of his mouth and dropped it into a paper bag, fluttering his fingers a little. He was wishing he’d pressed on to Iowa City—Cedar Rapids wasn’t even the halfway point—and I was wishing we were back in the air-conditioned car. Cedar Rapids felt like outer space to me. The warm breeze was someone else’s breeze, not mine, and the sun overhead was a harsh reminder of the day’s relentless waning, and the park’s unfamiliar oak trees all spoke to our deep nowhereess. Even my mother didn’t have much to say.

But the really interminable drive was through southeastern Iowa. My father remarked on the height of the domes of silos white against white sky. A darkness gathering at three in the afternoon. The endless downslope steepening, the tasselled corn tossing, and everything suddenly green—sky green, pavement green, parents green.

My father turned on the radio and sorted through crashes of static to find a station. He had remembered—or maybe never forgotten—that another descent was in progress. There was static on static, crazy assaults on the signal’s integrity, but we could hear men with Texan accents reporting lower and lower elevations, counting the mileage down toward zero. Then a wall of rain hit our windshield with a roar like deep-fry. Lightning everywhere. Static smashing the Texan voices, the rain on our roof louder than the thunder, the car shimmying in lateral gusts.

“Earl, maybe you should pull over,” my mother said. “Earl?”

He had just passed milepost 2, and the Texan voices were getting steadier, as if they’d figured out that the static couldn’t hurt them: that they were going to make it. And, indeed, the wipers were already starting to squeak, the road drying out, the black clouds shearing off into harmless shreds. “The Eagle has landed,” the radio said. We’d crossed the state line. We were back home on the moon.

—Jonathan Franzen
nal. The photographs had that apocalyptic feel—they conveyed a contemporary living hell. They were brilliant photographs. I think they are still his very best work.

The Serra Pelada photographs helped Salgado move ahead with an ambitious idea: to compile a giant almanac of physical labor—tuna fishermen in Sicily, coal miners in India, and many others. The project, whose full title is "Workers: An Archeology of the Industrial Age," took six years. It was shot globally (in twenty-six countries) and distributed globally; the pictures were instantly legible, as sad and catchy and broadly appealing as an Elton John song. "Workers" had the seductive ambition of comprehensiveness: it wanted to show the whole earth, like those first, blue shots of the world seen from space. And by sheer force of composition, it seemed, Salgado was looking to find coherence in a combination of social optimism and social pessimism. These were romantic photographs of what the Marxist economist in Salgado knew to be the exploitation of labor.

"History is above all a succession of challenges, of repetitions, of perseverances," he wrote in the introduction to the book in which the photographs were collected. "It's an endless cycle of oppressions, humiliations, and disasters, but also a testament to man's ability to survive."

"Workers" was a feat of financing as much as it was an achievement in thoroughness, and in sustained seriousness. (Salgado has never taken a photograph that could not be accompanied, in a television documentary, by the sound of a solo cello.) "He really took charge of his own career," Jacobson said. "He became a production person, providing stories on his own terms." Salgado explained to me that he persuaded several magazines to sign up for the stories in "Workers" in advance, "so it was possible to cover my budget and produce my stories, completely free to produce my stories. No one magazine had priority. I organized this. This is economics." It has been said that more people saw "Workers," in its various travelling exhibitions, than any other show in the history of photography.

Salgado has sometimes had an awkward relationship with other photographers. "When you produce a lot, you take a lot of space, and people are afraid of you," he said to me. In the early nineteen-nineties, as Salgado finished "Workers" and began his next project—a study of displaced people, known as "Migrations"—his relationship with Magnum ended. As he remembered it, "Oh boy, a big, big fight." Although the conflict seems to have had its roots in resentment of Salgado's new fame, and his perceived egotism, it took the particular form of a disagreement about internal reforms of Magnum. Salgado had suggested restructuring the agency: dividing the photojournalists from the art photographers; he also wanted each photographer to make a greater financial investment in the cooperative. These ideas were resisted. Despite a moment when Cartier-Bresson, then in his eighties, sought to prevent Salgado from leaving a Magnum meeting by barring the way with his body, Salgado resigned, and formed Amazonas with Lélia. "I knew that if I don't leave Magnum I will die," he told me. "Not that I will die physically, but I will die like many of the old Magnum photographers who were dead—because they were not photographers anymore, they were eating each other, fighting, politics. Because photographers must be out shooting, the planet is there to do incredible stories, and to see these photographers sixty years old, sixty-five years old, you know, become completely bitter—for me, that is death."

Each day on board Tara, Salgado woke up early and photographed all day. He made the claim—it seemed implausible at first—that his mind never wandered. He said that he never day-
Salgado went on shore, he worked long days. For his companions, who could move neither too far ahead nor too far behind, for fear of wandering into Salgado’s frame, the days sometimes seemed even lonelier. It was like being tied to him by a rope. Then, one afternoon, four of us were tied to him by a rope, as we walked up a gently sloping glacier above a small British base called Port Lockroy, our boots breaking through a crust of hard ice to the icy mush beneath. Salgado walked second to last in line. He stopped and started again, as he sought to compensate for the fact that the right side of the view did not quite do justice to the left. (Some dark bare rocks interrupted a white curve of ice.) The four of us were bound to stop and start, too; when he died after falling down a crevasse at the ice cliffs. The four of us were

Salgado complained about the perceived encroachment of the TV show’s agenda. (Bourgeois had given him the impression that he was the only person on board paying for more than living costs, although the French program had, in fact, made a similar contribution.) He also pressed for greater environmental seriousness. “We have to show more respect to the environment,” he said. “This is a UNEP boat, an environmental boat, we can’t be agitating animals. We can’t be making a noise.” Salgado was quiet when others spoke; he examined a little dispenser of colored Post-it tabs being used by the television director, Gil Kebaili, to mark pages in a glossy book on Antarctica. (There were several of these books on board, but Salgado never opened them, being keen to avoid visual preconceptions: “I’m completely open for what comes, I have no organized idea.” He made an exception only for the work of Frank Hurley, the photographer on Shackleton’s expedition.)

Salgado had the deck to himself that afternoon, and a new authority. Tara had evolved into a taxi. When Kebaili came up on deck, he did not carry his camera.

Paging through the “Migrations” book at Tara’s dining table one morning, Salgado commented on a double-page photograph of Rwandan refugees in makeshift tents in Tanzania in 1994, Salgado, the rest of us took photographs that seemed to be a kind of defense against the unease that can creep into our response to the sublime—a shield against the guilt attached to not knowing how to fix one’s gaze on something spectacular that one will never see again.

Salgado’s shipmates wanted to meet goals—to get as high above Antarctica as possible, or as far below, or as far south as the ice would allow. But they could not lose themselves inside the landscape as he could. The alpine guide flew low over the boat in an engine-powered paraglider that he had carried from France. The sailor with the trumpet played “La Vie en Rose” loudly on the deck, the sound bouncing off the icebergs around us. We drank cocktails, listened to reggae, and watched Bourgeois take pleasure in the task of nosing Tara through the slabs of ice that were becoming denser as we moved south. Salgado was puzzled by the hurry and noise. “We’re not here to go on an autoroute,” he said. “So maybe we won’t see three things, but we will see this one thing.” In what seemed a warning about the easygoing mood on board the boat, one day we heard an unnerving exchange over the open channel on the radio—a doctor giving instructions in English to people nearby who were evidently caring for someone very seriously injured. We later learned that a British man, a successful businessman sailing his own yacht, had died after falling down a crevasse at the glacier where we had been roped together.

Salgado also became frustrated by the influence that the two men from the French TV show were having on Tara’s movements. Salgado liked them personally, but their hunger for footage aggravated him. One morning, after the ship had sailed as far down the peninsula as possible before being stopped by ice, and had then turned around, we came to a sudden stop at the sight of a leopard seal on a low-riding iceberg. One of the TV men took an inflatable boat to film it. (In the rush to get the dinghy launched, Bourgeois’s cousin fell into the water; after a moment, he was back on deck.) At the time, Salgado was standing at the bow, studying the way that the light was falling on the ice cliffs. “I was concentrating,” he later said. “With all this ice breaking in the water, completely different shapes were forming, and I started to see a huge megalopolis, a huge town, incredible city, with vertical shapes, with round shapes—all geometric forms. I was organizing my mind inside this space, and the light was so nice, so beautiful, because we had some shafts going inside the ice, and made volume. Then they break for the poêque, and they destroyed me!” (For “seal,” Salgado switched to French, and seemed to enjoy spitting out the word.) “It broke completely my concentration,” he said.

Salgado went down into the main cabin. “We must talk about this,” he told Bourgeois politely. Later that day, at a meeting around the ship’s dining table, Salgado complained about the perceived encroachment of the TV show’s agenda. (Bourgeois had given him the impression that he was the only person on board paying for more than living costs, although the French program had, in fact, made a similar contribution.) He also pressed for greater environmental seriousness. “We have to show more respect to the environment,” he said. “This is a UNEP boat, an environmental boat, we can’t be agitating animals. We can’t be making a noise.” Salgado was quiet when others spoke; he examined a little dispenser of colored Post-it tabs being used by the television director, Gil Kebaili, to mark pages in a glossy book on Antarctica. (There were several of these books on board, but Salgado never opened them, being keen to avoid visual preconceptions: “I’m completely open for what comes, I have no organized idea.” He made an exception only for the work of Frank Hurley, the photographer on Shackleton’s expedition.)

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dreamed about his family, his taxes, or Brazilian soccer, which he still follows. He was able to look, and do nothing but look. He said that he saw the world in black-and-white. (“The lettuce, that’s gray,” he told me during lunch one day. “The pie is pale gray. The wine is black.”)
under a sky that looked almost black in some areas, and almost white in others.

“The situation is unbelievable, and the light is unbelievable,” he said, softly, and the adjective had to make a sudden change in complexion between its two appearances.

It is often said that photographers like Salgado run a risk when they turn poverty and discomfort into well-composed images. According to this line of criticism, the beauty of a Salgado photograph can smother, or cheapen, the human woe represented. (Salgado finds this response maddening, and once considered hiring a lawyer after such an attack was published.) A related argument takes issue with such photographs migrating from their traditional places of distribution—that is, magazines and newspapers with such photographs migrating from limited editions, with the exception of a TNY OR THE EXPLOITATION OF COMPASSION. (Salgado run a risk when they turn poverty into social projects.)

Salgado—does sell prints, but in unlimited editions, with the exception of a planned edition of “Genesis” prints, and who has always aimed for as wide a distribution of his images as possible—suggested to me that his Brazilian birth protects him from some of the issues of conscience that may trouble photojournalists from First World countries. By contrast, he said, a British photojournalist such as Don McCullin, whom Salgado admires, must take into account that “he comes from a country that went to India, went to Africa, and the British owe a debt, for what they did around the world.” He continued, “When I was young and part of the Communist Party, we worked very close to the part of the society that was less privileged in Brazil. I come from this. And when I show these pictures I'm showing a problem that I am inside. And I never made money with these things. The money went back into photography, or into social projects.” (Salgado appears to be far less materialistic than his earning power could permit, beyond showing a warm appreciation of well-made things that allow him to function more efficiently in his work. When I asked him to tell me about the extravagances in his life, he thought for a while and then said, “I have about twenty penknives.”)

The afternoon after the chastening of the TV crew, Tara was cruising on still water when Salgado looked down a side channel that ended in a glacier and asked that the ship be turned into it. There were, in fact, glaciers in every direction, but Salgado was struck by something in the combination of the ice, the mountains that framed it, the clouds hanging onto the mountains, and the dark gray of the sea directly in front of the ice cliffs. Given the clarity of the dry air, and the absence of people (we saw perhaps a single boat a day) and almost all plant and animal life, it was difficult to judge distances; it seemed possible that the photograph Salgado envisaged could be taken at a spot a few miles away.

As we moved toward the glacier, the temperature fell and the wind rose from nothing to forty knots. The sea turned choppy. What had felt like a bracing day at the top of a ski lift took on a threatening texture. Salgado was thrilled. “The light was flat, flat, but now we’re in orbit,” he said, after taking a picture.

The cold became extreme; the wind screamed off the glacier. “Oh, what a magnificent thing!” Salgado said, guiding the captain, who was standing seventy feet behind him, with mittened hands, like an airport worker guiding a jet to a gate. The sea in front had turned almost black. The wind cut through a dozen layers of clothes. Salgado’s nose ran, and he could barely move his fingers when he changed films; the cold cracked the skin around his fingernails.

The glacier was, in fact, many miles away. We sailed until we were directly under jagged hundred-and-fifty-foot ice cliffs. Then Salgado shouted, “Stop, stop.” The wind dropped suddenly—we were now sheltered by the cliffs—and Salgado raised his hands above his head, and formed the “T” of a time-out. He was done. “This is the best photograph I’ve taken so far,” he said. “Here I’ll see what I was looking for when I came here. One picture I have. Now I only need forty-nine.”

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Eugene Smith, the Life photographer, once acknowledged that he was “always torn between the attitude of the journalist, who is a recorder of facts, and the artist, who is often necessarily at odds with the facts.” Salgado makes no similar acknowledgment. “I’m not an artist,” he told me. “An artist makes an object. Me, it’s not an object, I work in history, I’m a storyteller.”

We were walking through freezing drizzle on Deception Island, a horseshoe of volcanic rock and ice, a last stopping point on our way north toward a rendezvous at the peninsula’s sole, gravel airstrip, on King George Island, where a plane was due to pick up Bourgeois and a few others, including myself. “I can be an artist a posteriori, not a priori,” Salgado said. “If my pictures tell the story, our story, human story, then in a hundred years, then they can be considered an art reference, but now they are not made as art. I’m a journalist. My life’s on the road, my studio is the planet.” He recalled a carved pot for grain storage that he had recently seen in an exhibition of African art. “It was so well carved, so well done. It was not built as art, it was built for their life, and became art. I believe the pictures that I do are the same thing. They have a function. I tell a story. I’m telling about the shit of this planet, or we will not survive as a people.”

When Salgado, who is forever in search of beauty, insists on being understood only as a reporter, he risks sounding like Keats claiming no more than an anthropological interest in nightingales—and perhaps he should not be taken too seriously. But while there is a kind of modesty in the stance, there is also a hint of immodesty in imagining that one’s singular vision of the world will be accepted as transparent and purely practical—although Salgado has always been helped in that claim by his audience’s knowledge that he is a former economist who takes his politics seriously. (For example, the critic David Levi Strauss has written that Salgado’s work is substantially different from “most social documentary work,” owing to “his background in Brazil and his understand-
ing, as an economist, of the social and political background of the people and situations he photographs.)

Just as “Workers” and “Migrations” did not have explicit political messages but, rather, seemed to have bold compendiousness as their governing principles, the agenda of “Genesis” is somewhat opaque. Salgado is ecologically serious, as the Instituto Terra suggests, but it would worry some environmentalists to hear him take encouragement from the sheer abundance of glaciers in Antarctica. (Where others see shrinking ice, Salgado saw a ton of ice.) Salgado has said that “Genesis” will include photographs not just of animals but of people living technologically simple lives in the Amazon basin and elsewhere. He told me that he was aiming to show the earth as it was some four thousand years ago—although it was not clear why he had chosen that date rather than, say, forty thousand years ago. It’s not yet obvious what “Genesis” is, and how it will not be “Planète Cousteau”; and it seems significant that when the Guardian, for example, has run these new photographs the accompanying story has been about Salgado’s visit to the place. Travelling to the ends of the earth, he becomes the center of attention.

The truth, of course, is that Salgado’s work has an emotional impact—not least in its underlying argument for a sense of common humanity, or common animality—that is separate from its informational load. (This fact is acknowledged when Salgado publishes captions at the back of his books, rather than against each image.) One can know the Serra Pelada photographs well but still be surprised when Salgado talks about the actual daily routine, and the social background, of those miners. And it’s interesting to see the contact sheets from that story, neatly filed among the others in Paris. The most famous Serra Pelada photograph—perhaps the best-known Salgado photograph—is one that is referred to in his office as “The Hand.” A miner has reached the top of a ladder, with a sack of dirt on his back, and the pit below him. He is pulling himself up the last step. The hand of another man is reaching into the frame, apparently in the direction of the straining miner, in a way that echoes an older composition, on the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel. (“A hand, open, reaches out from nowhere to

the miner struggling up the slope, flattened by his burden,” Eduardo Galeano wrote in an essay for a 1990 Salgado retrospective.) But it’s odd to learn from the comic strip of before-and-after provided by the contact sheet that the stray hand is not actually reaching; it’s the hand of someone walking ahead of the subject, caught mid-swing.

As we walked on Deception Island, through the mist, Salgado talked about Serra Pelada—a fairly large group of those miners were raising money for sex changes, he said—and then, in a relaxed, pre-photograph mood, he led the group in “Cucurrucucú Paloma,” the traditional Mexican song performed by Caetano Veloso in the Pedro Almodóvar film “Talk to Her.” (Veloso is a friend.) At midday, he did an interview with French radio via the satellite telephone, which he otherwise used to call Léia each evening. When he finished, we turned a corner to find that we were looking along a ridge that curved up and around in the shape of a Nike swoosh flipped upside down; one side of the ridge rose gently from a long, broad valley, and the other swept steeply down to a beach of black sand. All across the valley, and along the ridge, chinstrap penguins were standing on pebble nests evenly spaced a foot or so from each other, in colonies of a hundred or five hundred or a thousand, like subdivisions in a suburban sprawl. We could see perhaps two hundred and fifty thousand birds. “Amazing,” said Salgado, more excited than I’d seen him before.

Part of the appeal of penguins is that they choose to live where people would live if they colonized the same space, and they live on the ground, and they walk at a human pace. Looking over the valley, we could see countless birds making their way down paths to the sea; small paths led to wider ones, and these emptied into a main thoroughfare that took the birds down to the beach, where they dived into the surf to fish, becoming as agile as dolphins. Each wave slung onto the sand a dozen or so penguins that had finished feeding; as they came out of the water they immediately lost their marine grace, and then began struggling up the same paths to return to their nests. Thousands were moving in each direction. The noise of their screeching echoed across the valley—the sound of a hall with a high ceiling packed with people shouting. “The Serra Pelada of penguins,” Salgado said, making the unavoidable comparison, even at the slight moral risk of connecting Brazilian laborers with flightless seabirds. “Never in my life have I seen something so beautiful. Incredibly, incredible, incredible.” He raised his arms in front of the view, and said something I didn’t catch, and then explained, “It was a voodoo word. I’m asking for light. I’m asking for this mist to open, asking nature to open for me, because I need the light. It will come.” When it did, he said, “Thank you, God.”

“You’ll be a perfect addition to our expendable workforce.”