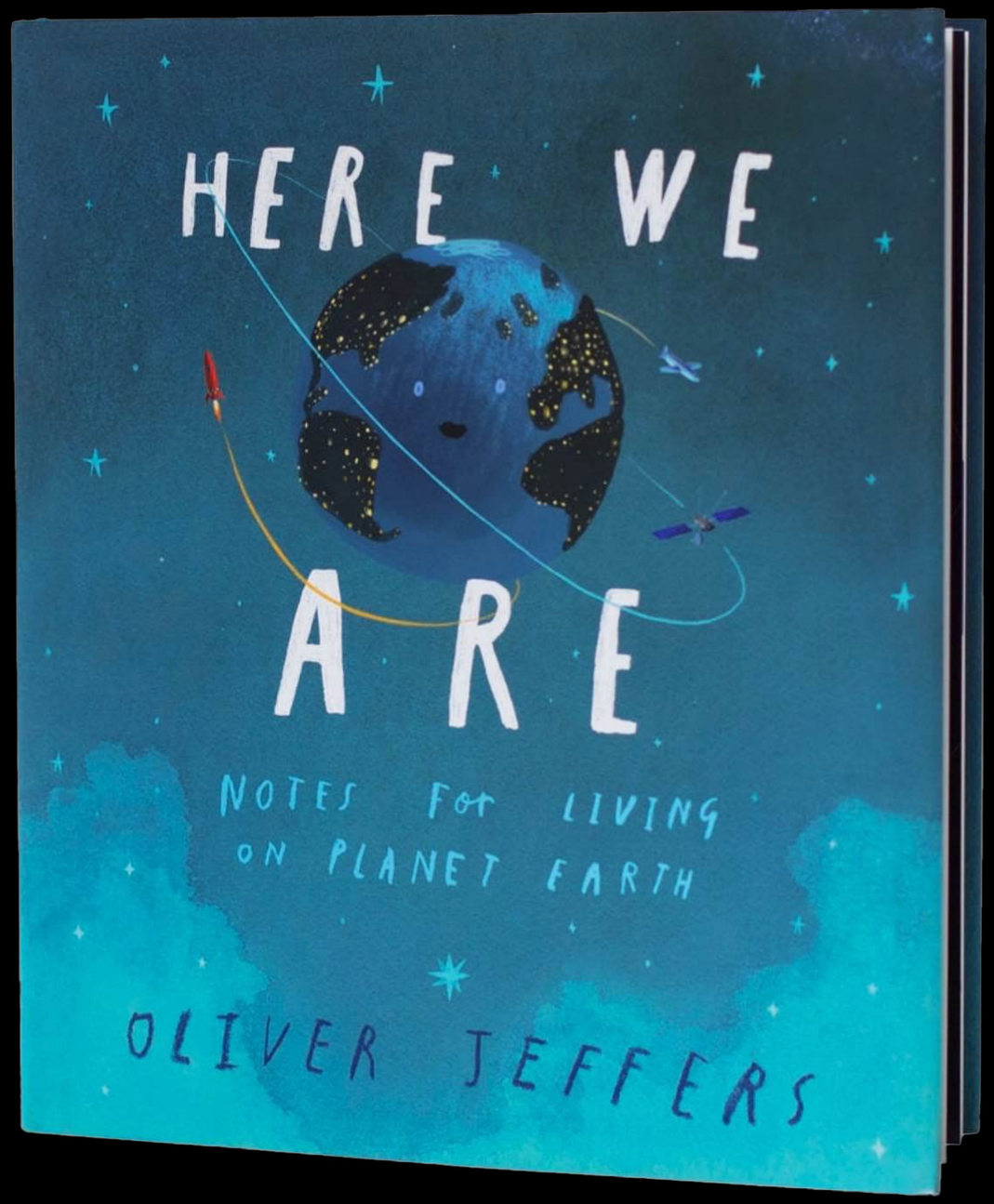
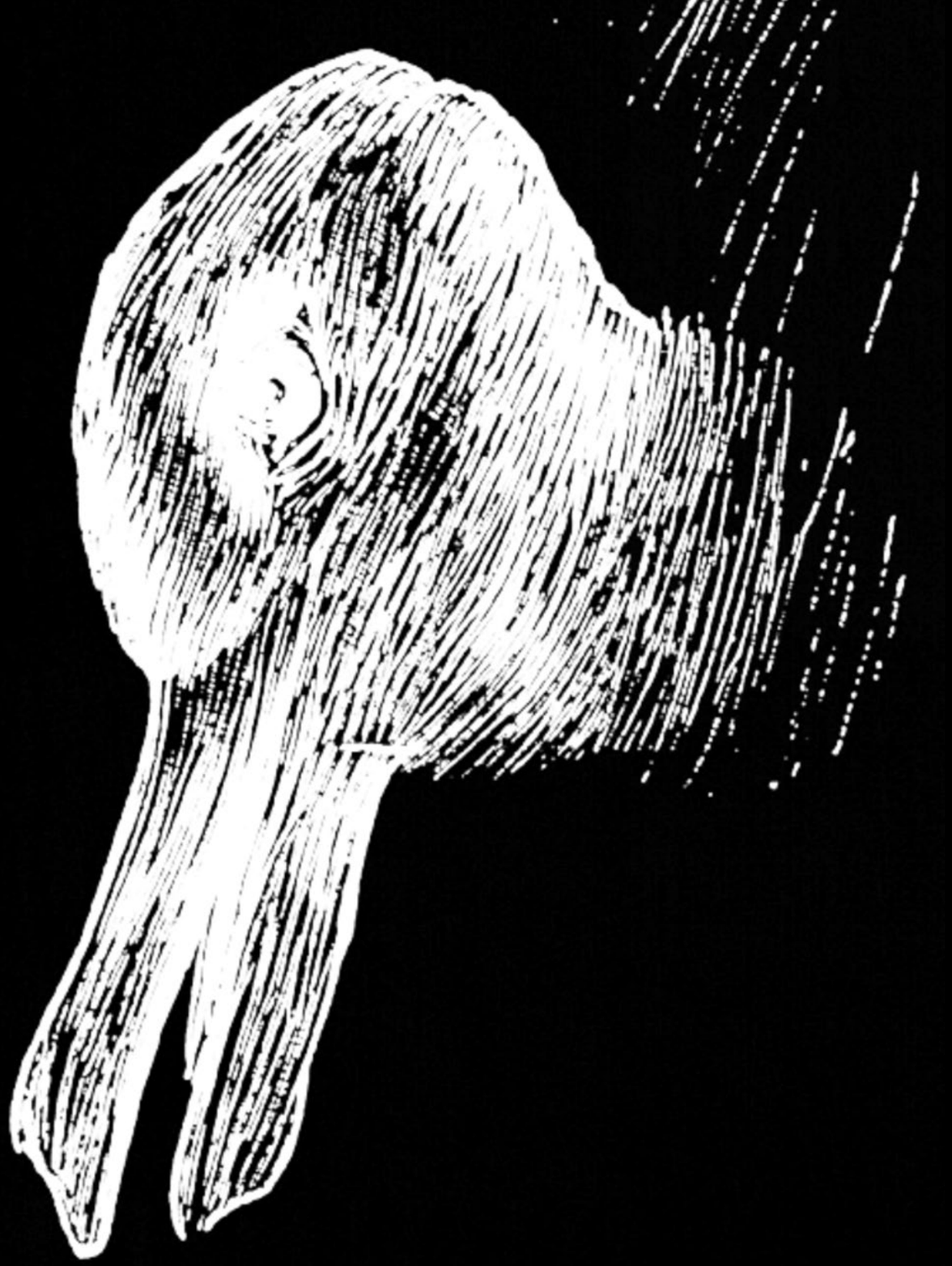
A View From Nowhere

Death & The Astronaut



Here We Are, Oliver Jeffers, 2017



Scale is “a systematic accounting for significant shifts in a measured range of observation”

(DiCaglio 2020)

To observe human affairs from above means, at the same time, to see them from the point of view of death...

(Hadot 2017)

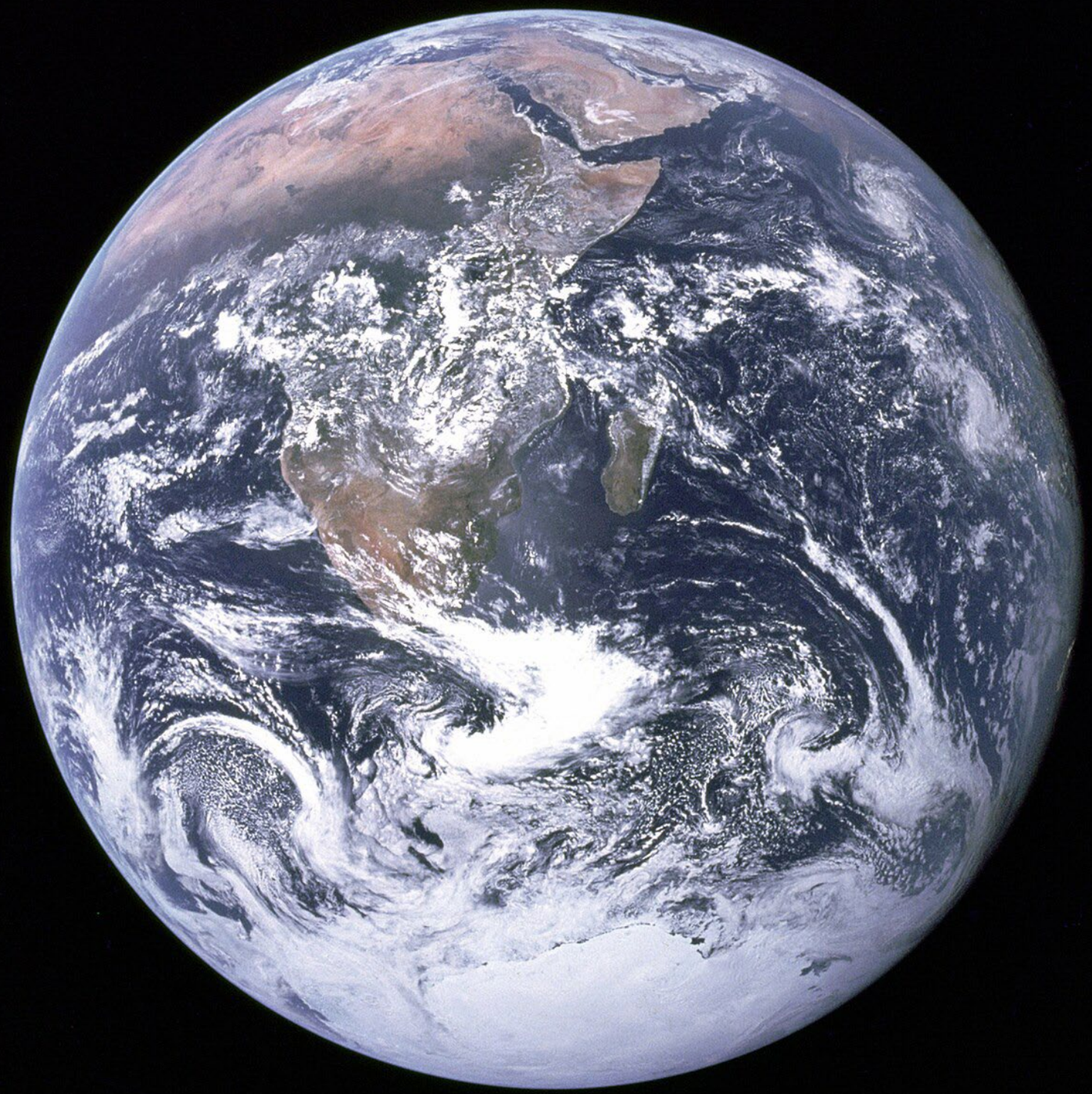
Unknown artist, from ‘A Scientist’s Conception of Judgement Day’, in American Weekly, June 19th, 1938

“There you have human life. All men are bubbles, great or small, inflated with the breath of life. Some are destined to last for a brief space, others perish in the very moment of birth: but all must inevitably burst.”

(Lucian trans. Fowler et al. 1905)

The Hereford Mappa Mundi, circa. 1300

The Blue Marble, taken from Apollo 17, 1972, NASA



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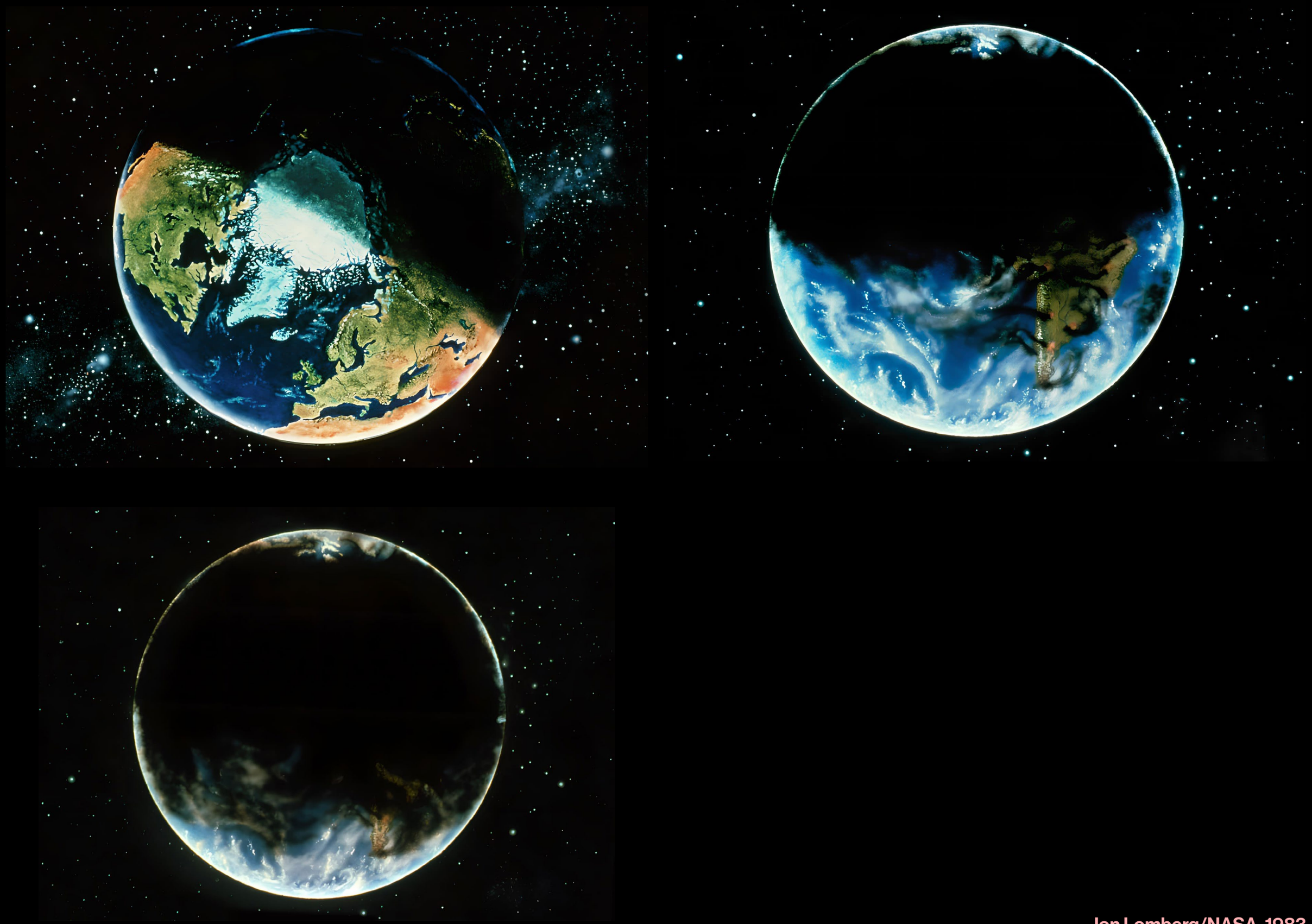
NEW YORK

July 10–23, 2017

The Doomed Earth Catalog

When will the planet be too hot for humans?
Plausibly within our children's lifetimes.
By DAVID WALLACE-WELLS



Jon Lomberg/NASA, 1983

NASA, 1991

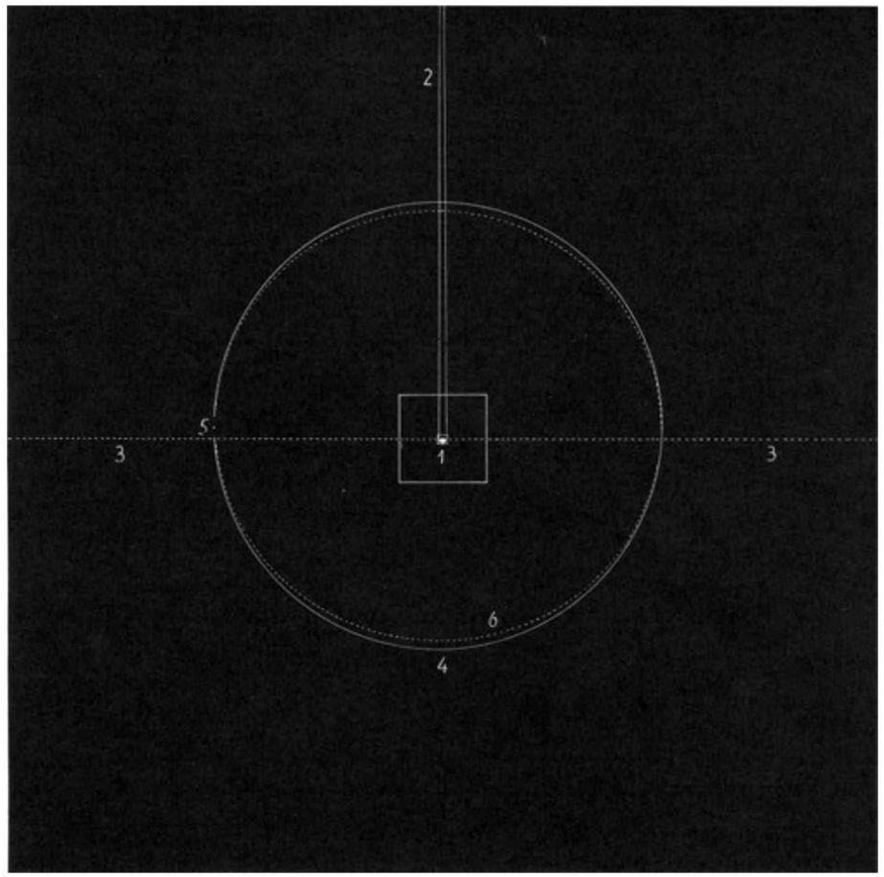
The Earth is the only world known so far to harbor life. There is nowhere else, at least in the near future, to which our species could migrate. It is a lovely, fragile, finite little planet. But its importance lies only, I think, in what we make of it.

It has been said that astronomy is a humbling and character-building experience. There is perhaps no better technological demonstration of the folly of human conceits than this distant image of our tiny world. To me, it underscores our responsibility to preserve and cherish this pale blue dot, the only home we have.

“Pale Blue Dot” draft, Carl Sagan, 1993

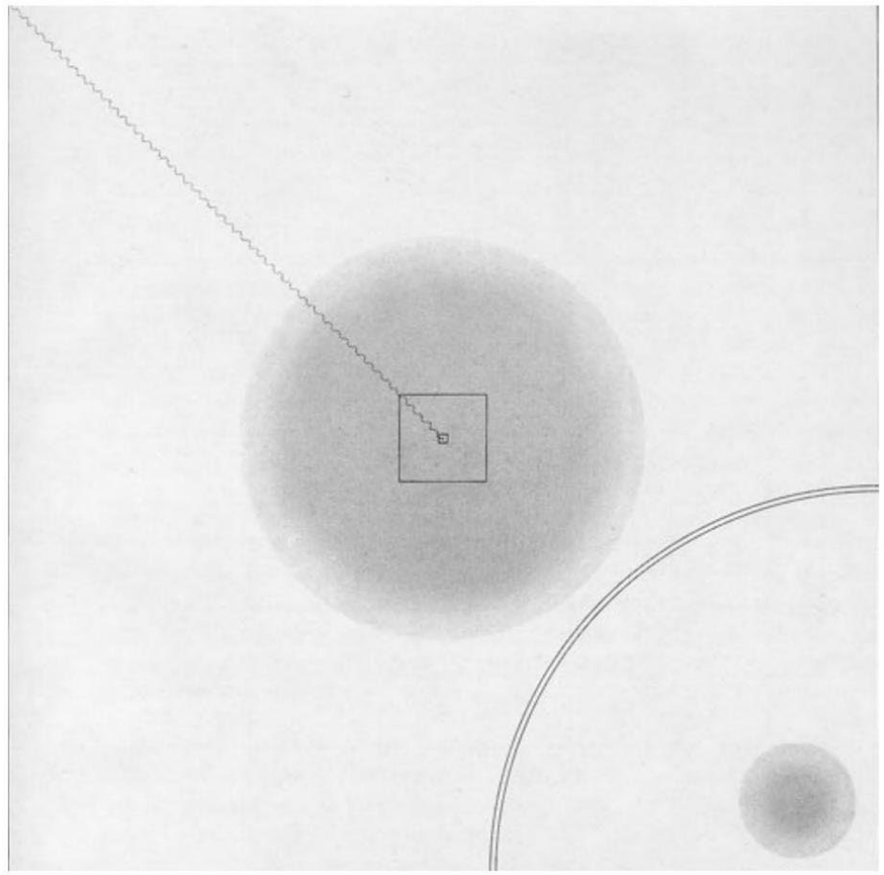
“Some children shared their worries of an imminent apocalypse. Others dreamed of moving to Mars. But neither this problematic hope in ‘humanity’s’ technological proficiencies – to go to Mars! – nor the despair of collective guilt and inaptitude to ‘solve what we have done’ allows my pupils a sense of agency to constructively respond in times of crisis. To what extent are my pupils ‘humanity’ and able to act as such? Should they try to become ‘humanity’? Or are there other ways to respond to, or better, within ecological urgencies?”

(Baan Hofman 2023)



10 It must have struck the reader that in the last two illustrations the shaded part of the earth was not of even darkness, but was clearly lighter on the left hand side. The cause of this becomes clear in this picture. In it we not only see the earth (1), its umbra (2) and the path (3) along which it moves, but we notice around the earth what looks like a circle. This line (4) is the path or orbit of the moon as it moves around the earth. The actual position of the moon (5) on that December 21st when we were supposed to make our celestial jump of exploration is shown. It now is clear that as the moon was there on the left, the night on earth was lit up on that side. As light travels 300,000 kilometers per second (that is, 3 centimeters on this scale), we see that it would need 1.3 seconds to cover the distance from the moon to the earth.

1 cm. in picture = 10^{10} cm. = 100,000 km. Scale = 1:10,000,000,000 =1:10^{10}



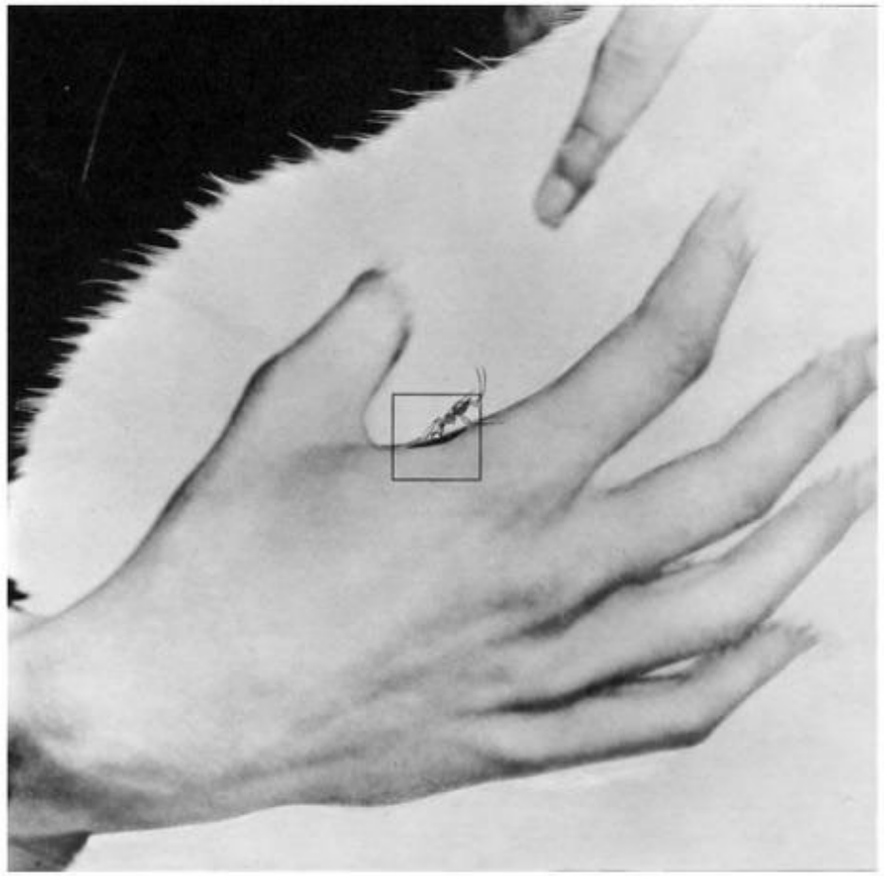
—13 In this final picture we see the nucleus of the sodium atom. We cannot even guess how the 12 protons and 11 neutrons in it are placed. This nucleus is not painted an even grey; its edge is of a somewhat lighter tone which gradually merges into the darker hue in the center. The meaning of this difference of tone is again different from that in drawings —7 to —11. Here a darker grey denotes greater density of electric charge. As a new element there is a gamma ray, full of astonishingly penetrating power, coming in from the left. Its wave length is only a millionth of an angstrom unit, which itself is a hundred millionth of a centimeter! Looking back on the whole series of 40 pictures we find that in only 10 of them (3 to —6) is life known to exist. In other scales there may, however, be forms of life we do not yet know.

1 cm. in picture = 10^{-13} cm. = 0.00001 Å. Scale = 10 million million:1 = 10^{13}

Cosmic View, The Universe in 40 Jumps”, **Kees Boeke, 1957**

1 The first picture, from which we start, is as we said already one of a child sitting in front of the school, with a cat on her lap. It is drawn on a scale of 1 to 10. This means that a centimeter on the drawing is in reality 10 centimeters. A centimeter (abbreviated "cm.") is the hundredth part of a meter, which corresponds to the yard as a unit of length. To be precise, a meter is 3.37 inches longer than 1 yard. One centimeter is therefore nearly 0.4 inch. In both length and height, the picture measures 15 centimeters, or nearly 6 inches. An arrow shows the direction of north.

1 cm. in picture = 10 cm. in actuality. Scale of picture therefore = 1:10



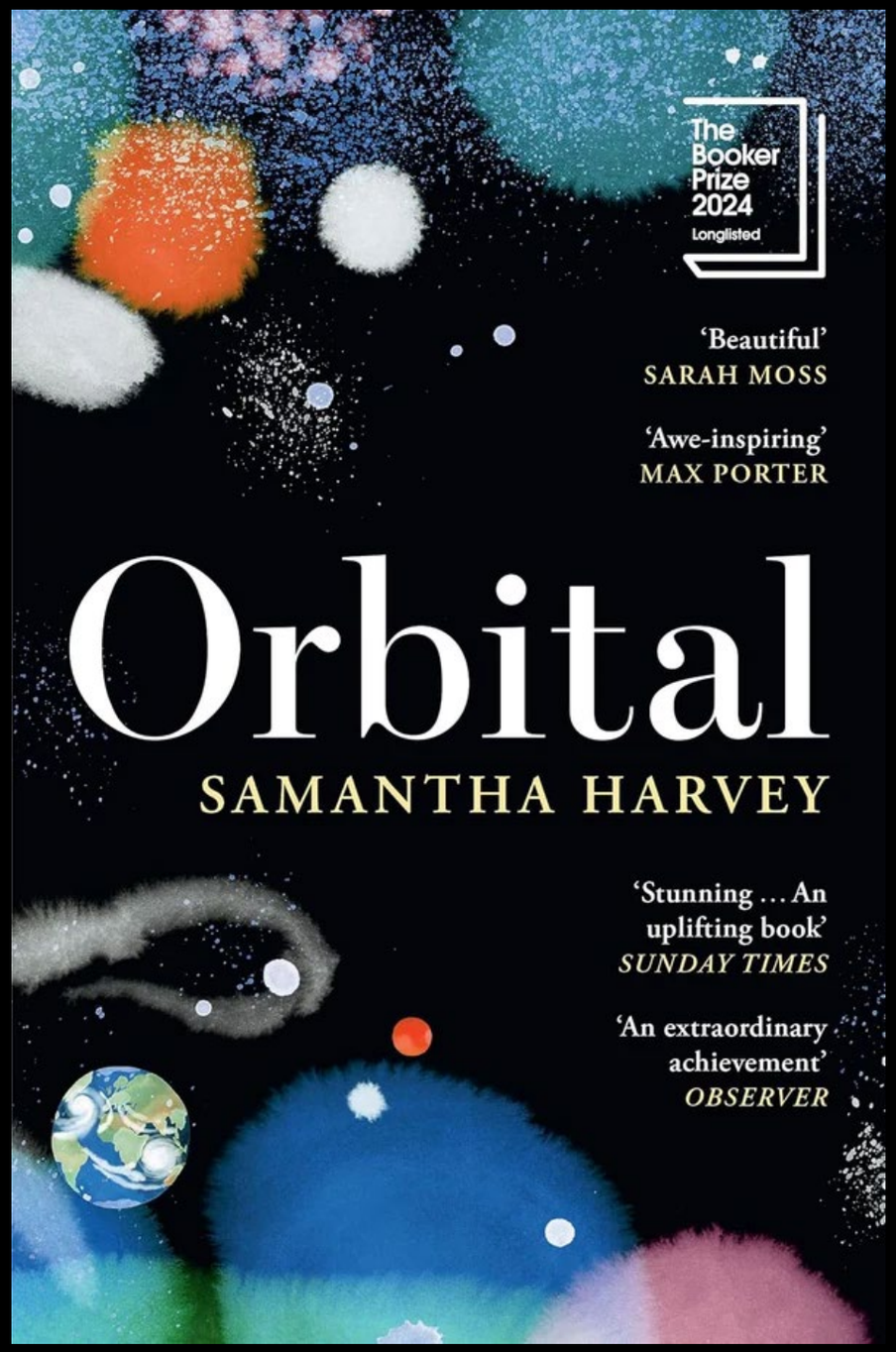
1 The living creature portrayed in this drawing is a mosquito, to be exact an anopheles, or malaria mosquito. We can see this from the way it sticks up its hind legs. This is the first strange coincidence, for from the first series of pictures we know that it was in December that the scene occurred, and this insect is rather rare in Holland in winter. We notice that there is a little cut in the girl's finger. Right in the center of the tiny square in the middle is a minute white spot. It is a grain of salt which stuck to the girl's hand, having been left there, we may assume, after she ate her lunch. As it is not exactly the thing we would most expect to find there, it will be evident that there is a special reason for choosing it. That reason will appear later.

1 cm. in picture = 1 cm. in actuality. Scale: "life size" = 1:1 = 1:100

Cosmic View, The Universe in 40 Jumps", Kees Boeke, 1957

“In order to see two bodies then the single worldwide perspective won’t do. The view is homogenous when you look down from the outside - the Earthrise is no good, if you are trying to see your two bodies at the same time. If you look out the window you will not fit the whole world in your eyeline. To see a body on a global scale, reaching from Germany to Syria, or from France to Bangladesh, means that you lose sight of the individual flirting, arguing, or eating his gnocchi.”

(Hildyard 2017)



"She comes from a line that slipped through the crack, the fissure of history, found a way out while the whole thing came down."

(Harvey 2023)