BANLIEUE NORD: A BRIEF CONTRIBUTION TO HOW WE INHABIT THE NORTH AND HOW THE NORTH INHABITS US

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Enriched graphic version available on https://anarchiveofnorths.com/nordlit

Abstract

Beyond its many simplified representations such as cold, hostile, uninhabited, or unknown, the north reveals itself as a complex and multiple space of interwoven geographical, cultural, social, and conceptual dimensions. Influenced by world views, the power of maps and myths as well as the very relation to the landscape itself as one of extraction or attraction, humans subjectively apprehend these multiple norths. By dwelling in the northern lands through experience or imagination, 'southerners' and 'northerners' alike do not simply inhabit the north; they are in turn inhabited by it. Situated at the 'gates of the north' in subarctic Canada, the mono-industrial company town Fermont fits its town centre entirely under a single roof. Planned and commissioned in the 1970s by a mining company, the town's Utopian purpose was to 'make a society' in an inhospitable climate, while serving the exploitation of the mine. Fermont's case serves here as a laboratory to understand the complexities of the north in more general terms. At the crossroads of image-based practices and the humanities, this contribution engages with the question of how humans inhabit the north and how they are inhabited by it.

Keywords: *Multiple norths*; *Fermont*; *Mapping*; *Extractivism*; *Utopia*; *Inner and outer landscapes*
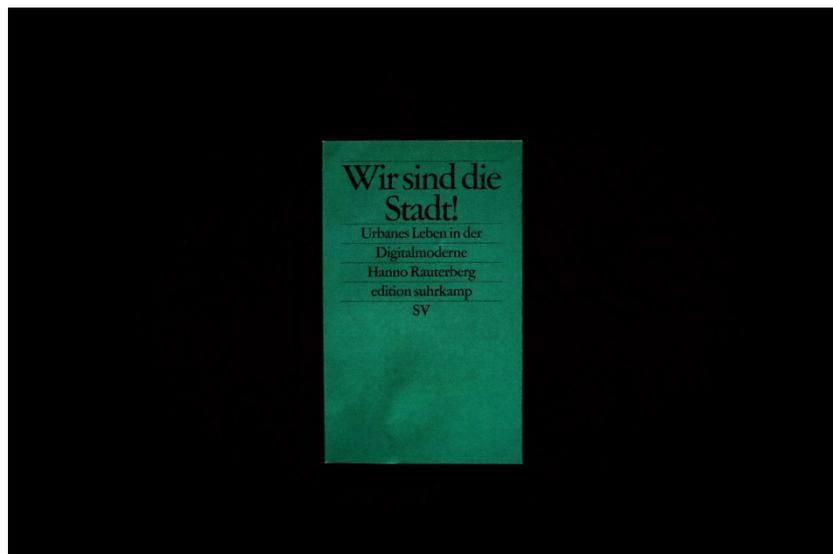
Wir sind die Stadt! Urbanes Leben in der Digitalmoderne (We are the city! Urban life in modern digital times) by Hanno Rauterberg, 2013.
Babel series, 2018.

'The landscapes that we inhabit inevitably shape us,
our vantage determined by the hill on which we stand.'
(Van Herk 1984, 15)

'People do not always agree about what is alive and what is not.'
(Ingold 2006, 10)

Prologue

For a few days, we have been heading to a place where, we understand, people have been living in 'a wall' – whatever that might mean. After the final six hours of wilderness, hydroelectric dams, craters, asphalt, and gravel, our arrival is heralded by crossing the railway tracks for the dozenth time. We make out the infrastructure of the mine before distinguishing the town. When Will and Will drop us off, the night adds to the confusion as we attempt to make sense of this urban giant before which we are now stranded – the Wall, as we will learn soon enough, is a megabuilding, hosting the whole town centre under a single roof. On this snowy October night, we have arrived in the heart of Fermont, situated in northern Québec, Canada, named, after its *raison d'être*, the town of the 'iron mountain'.

Up Norths Dear from many Souths, Following the line
There is no line Up north from many souths, Digging inside
Dear, upside Norths fooling the line From many Norths
Digging Unsouth, Rivers Rivers so many lines

What had been sparked by curiosity quickly turned into a long-term research project that has led us return to Fermont, since our very first stay in 2012, for about three months at a time in 2013, 2015, and 2017. Our experiences in situ have led us to gradually develop a multidisciplinary approach at the crossroads of image-based practices and the humanities, intertwining aesthetic and scientific aspects from fieldwork and its analysis to the final outcomes. Through experimental and participative methods on the ground, our 'sampling' based on 'the image' as process, approach, and philosophy acts here as a tool to connect and collect – a compass to manoeuvre in between visible and invisible spheres, a means to question landscapes and their materiality.

   In the process of analysing our findings, we draw on theories linked to human geography and ecology, the ecological humanities, or once again landscape and northern studies – fields of research concerned with the entanglements of humans and other-than-humans including things, animals, natural phenomena, and other beings. In parallel, a graphic and scenographic vision becomes the binding glue in between layers of different natures, assisting in organising our findings, notably in the form of exhibitions, publications, and performative talks. From our experiences in Fermont, as well as in other polar and circumpolar regions, comes our project 'An Archive of Norths'. By assembling an imaginary space, consisting of multiple norths, it geo-poetically explores how we inhabit the north and how the north inhabits us, as also tackled here in this brief contribution.

In the following, scholarly, aesthetic, and poetic latitudes are intertwined by means of assemblage as a tool to convey knowledge. Acting as beings of their own, the images serve the study on a different level, as does the poetry, by preserving its narration. The resulting meshwork of thoughts, words, and photographs gives birth, dear reader, to this contribution, for you to immerse yourself in and find your own truths. While the 'we' in the title directly concerns you and us, as a mutual commitment, all southerners and northerners alike, the 'we' that pops up elsewhere refers to we the authors, to our involvement and stories.

Introduction

As a company town, Fermont's survival depends on the mono-industry's activities and the possibility of its closure continuously influences local identities. Fermont's inhabitants and their vision of the town's future are equally shaped by the lack of a maternity ward and, until recently, a cemetery, living alongside a growing 'fly-in-fly-out' population, and the awareness of having to leave the place by the end of a work contract. Meanwhile, the vastness of the surrounding white desert with its magnetic attraction also strongly forges this northern experience. Fermont's urbanism has in its brief history always been closely linked to extreme weather conditions as well as an enterprise's understanding of a worker's life and needs.

Left & middle: One-to-one maths class at school and ice-skaters during training in the arena. Right: Both located inside the Wall, seen here from the leeward side. Fermont, Canada, 2013.

The resulting architecture leaves a significant impact on the societal structure, with the town centre fitting entirely into an iconic v-shaped building that is 1.3 km long, five stories high, and designed to protect from the icy north winds. Hosting the town hall, school, hospital, shops, bars, and apartments, the windscreen building, affectively called 'the Wall' by its residents and known as such in Québec's contemporary mythology, was designed in 1974 to be a shelter, mall, and home. It incites a life in its insides, triggering a longing for the outside, while the surrounding immensity simultaneously calls for a profound interiority. Shaping the Fermontois's sense of place, the locality's precarious future induces a rooted impermanence at the same time as it brings about a relentless search for sustainable alternatives to the mono-industry. The community is to be understood in the context of a race for the north's natural resources, as well as a declining interest in keeping whole cities alive in hostile environments, which has already led to the total dismantling of the neighbouring mining town Gagnon Ville – today ironed out to a vast wasteland of memories left on the side of the road leading to Fermont.

A miner's lunch box. Fermont, Canada, 2017. Babel series, 2018.

Nestled in between the numerous lakes and fir trees of the subarctic taiga, Fermont is situated at the 'carrefour d'ambiance', an intersection between what is without doubt either the south or the north (Hamelin 2002, 25). Without definable borders, the north is arguably at once both a product of experience and of the mind. Beyond its many simplified representations that include, for instance, cold, hostile, uninhabited, or unknown, the north reveals itself as a complex and multiple space of interwoven geographical, cultural, social, and conceptual dimensions. As such, it can be apprehended as a territory or a direction by unfolding its historical layers of conquest and exploration or by looking at indigenous relations to the land. It can also be grasped by its extensions of the Arctic, the Antarctic, the cold world, the winter, and the high mountains. Finally, the north can also be studied as the set of places where man has settled through imagination or experience (Chartier 2015, 1). Existing both in fiction and reality, the north resembles the wolf, who is at once a predator and a mythical creature, in that understanding any debate about it requires taking into account the duality of its character. According to Chartier, the north's white colour acts as semaphore, only covering by illusion the complexity of its history and construction. Once this cover is wiped from the ground, the North seems at the same time pluricultural, multidisciplinary, particular, simplified, universal, and multiple (Chartier 2008, 5–6).

Depends on the landscape Whether or not Whether or not, Dear
Dealing the South, It depends on the landscape, Back or not
Weather inside As we try and try, Dear From many Souths
Rivers Rivers Between your North and mine

If upside Earth If only, now if North beyond healing inside, If upside Earth
Only North, Dear, Little by little Mountain Mountain, All starts restored
All in Above If line by line, Dear if upside Norths and back to South
Mountain Mountain And back to South, Lichens Lichens

The landscapes we inhabit arguably shape us; our vantage is determined by the hill on which we stand. In the following we will thus elaborate on the ways humans inhabit the north, this complex landscape of the mind and the real, and how, in turn, the north inhabits us humans, from within. Entangled in words and images, this essay is structured around four themes with each elaborating on both notions of inhabiting and being inhabited. Fermont acts here as a laboratory in that understanding its complexities might help to understand the complexities of the north in more general terms. Linking the whole, our findings on Fermont surface regularly in the tapestry of argumentation. This contribution thus elaborates on how humans dwell in the north through architectural projects and how these in turn shape the dwellers' inner geography, and then discusses the imaginaries of north from both inside and outside perspectives. Diving into representations of the north through mapping its territories both real and imaginary, we finally delve into the various landscapes of attraction and extraction. A body of analogue and digital photographs by the authors, alongside other illustrations and archive images stemming from different imaginary and geographical norths, together with a poetic investigation, further explore the same themes.

Marcel knows every corner of the Wall, having roamed it every day for thirty years. The caretaker's sweater shows his conviction that although the neighbouring mining towns Schefferville and Gagnon have been closed down, Fermont will not share the same fate: 'In Fermont we'll stay!' Fermont, Canada, 2013.

Dwelling

Contrary to the popular belief of the north as a virgin land, the subarctic and Arctic regions have been inhabited for millennia. However, 'humans do not simply inhabit (and build) space, they are constructed from within it (...). Whatever humans build, be it of the imaginary, culture or physical kind, evolves as a consequence of practical engagement with one's surroundings' (McGeary 2015, 35). It is thus telling to look at the way humans inhabit the north and how they are in turn inhabited by the lands in which they dwell.

Driven by economic interests, Fermont's urbanism is a result of an occidental way to imagine the best quality of life in subarctic conditions. When the town was built in the 1970s, the large post-war reconstruction project coincidently came to an end in Europe. Thus the conception of Fermont occurred at a time when simultaneously, in Europe and in Canada, so called 'new towns' were being erected, giving birth to the Utopia of the suburb. Thus, 'the modern old world' saw itself extended by a 'new world' consisting of geometrical forms and widened proportions (Houlette 2016, 35). Although the wind-screen building has not proved successful enough to be copied, Fermont was seen as the 'subarctic cité radieuse' after Le Corbusier's Utopian architectural concept of a fully functional, city-like building in post-war Europe (Rodrigues 1976, 34).
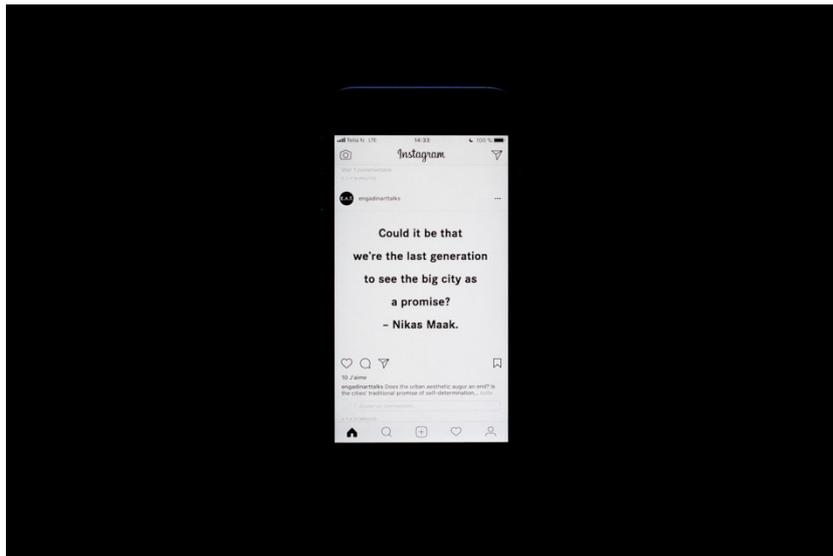
Quote by arts editor and architecture theoretician Niklas Maak at Engadin art talks 2018. Babel series, 2018.

Fermont belongs to the fifth generation of mining towns in Canada, which were planned to be adapted to the northern climate instead of applying a model of a southern city to the north (Sheppard 2011, 6). It was in this context that the Wall was erected in the company town Fermont, inspired by British architect Ralph Erskine's buildings in Kiruna and Svappavaara in Sweden. Simulations of the local winds led the architects Schoenauer and Desnoyers to conceive a wind-screen building that would protect the residential areas from the local climate, densely grouping together public, private, and commercial spaces under one roof.
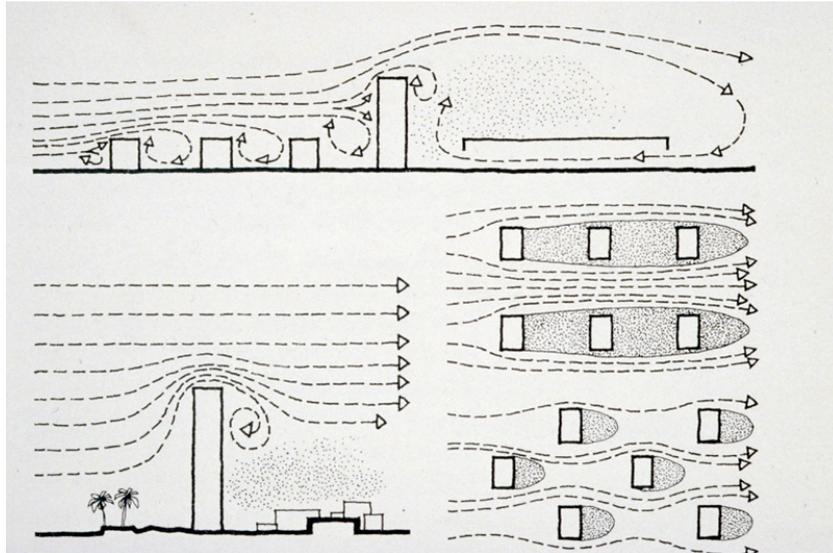
'Wind Shadow Studies', a preliminary study by one of the Wall's architects
Norbert Schoenauer. Schoenauer Collections, McGill University.
Reproduction: Allan Konga, year unknown.

Within it, animal icons and a system of numbers guide the dweller through the
corridors, which, however, does not prevent them from getting lost due to the puzzling
fact that all hallways, staircases, and doors look alike. This 'non-lieu' (Augé 2015), not
planned for social interaction, takes on Kafkaesque dimensions when opening a door
and stumbling into the school, opening another and standing in the swimming pool,
while yet another leads to a dance bar, a hair salon, or the hospital. Some staircases lead
to nowhere, and some doors open to walls – a jammed mechanism, far from the original
plans that were redesigned at the very last minute for economical reasons under pressure
from the company. The town's Utopian task was to 'build a society' in an inhospitable
climate, serving with its functionality the exploitation of the mine. Yet its inhabitants
have injected life into the planned city-building, establishing meeting places in the
corridors, using the post office as point of encounter, or gathering smokers at one of the
main doors. As unique as the Wall is, aspects of it can be found in multiple places such
as Longyearbyen on Svalbard, Prora, the four kilometre long vacation home built by the
Nazi regime in northern Germany, or the social housing project Block P in Nuuk,
Greenland.

The 'Townsite of Fermont'. Photographs taken in 1976, 1982, 1976
respectively to document the construction of the Wall by its architects
Norbert Schoenauer and Maurice Desnoyer. Schoenauer Collections,
McGill University.

Before prospecting began where Fermont is embedded today, these lands were reindeer migration areas and hence hunting grounds for local indigenous populations including Innus and Naskapis. Today, these are basically absent in the town; many, however, settled in the former company-town Schefferville, north of Fermont, and stayed after the mine's closure in the 1980s. A general consideration of Canada's indigenous population, including Inuit and Innu, shows how differently the same land can be inhabited and how much architecture is a result of the respective cultures' relations to space. The semi-nomadic lifestyle of the Inuit and Innu, living in kin-based camps, migrating from winter camps to summer hunting grounds, gradually changed when the first settlers appeared on their territory in the 16th century. This change of living habits took new forms when, from the end of the 19th century onwards, the government actively suppressed their cultures and identities, with children sent to boarding schools and families severed. During the sedentarisation period of 1940-1960, indigenous people were forced to relocate to land and people unknown to them, moving into housing chosen by government interests (Kirmayer, Brass and Tait 2000, 607–608). During that time, the quotidian of the Inuit was intended to be systemically restructured through the introduction of Euro-Canadian housing. As a response to an imposed dwelling that did not meet their cultural needs and spatial use, the Inuit appropriated and transformed this accommodation according to their way of life. For instance, the families would spend most of their time at someone else's dwelling than in their own homes. Due to a different conception of individual privacy, a family would rather sleep all together on the floor, mostly in the living room, while repurposing the bedrooms for workshops or storage space (Dawson 2008).

'Isuma', led by Zacharias Kunuk and Norman Cohn, Canada's pavilion, Venice Arts Biennale, 2019

The same development is exemplified in the functional building Block P in Nuuk, Greenland, where the lives of costal Inuit changed drastically in the late 1960s when they moved in. Designed in line with the Danish social housing standards of the Western family ideal of that time, the 'traditional ways of living and social structures were thus written out of the architecture, out of the frames for everyday life that a home provides' (Huse and Aniksdal 2015, 23). Today, there is a heightened awareness of incorporating indigenous thinking into urban planning and architecture. In the part of Sápmi that lies in Norway, for instance, the artist and architect Joar Nango initiated Sámi Arkiteakta Searvi, the Sámi architecture association, as well as the mobile Indigenous Architecture Library, as spaces for dialogue about modern Sámi identity and its place in contemporary architecture. Moreover, for the unprecedented exhibition 'Unceded – Voices of the Land', Canada's first ever indigenous-led entry for the 2018 Venice Architecture Biennale, more than a dozen indigenous architects explored architecture connected to urbanism, indigeneity, resilience, sovereignty, and colonization. This then paved the way for the 'Isuma' project, which in Inuktitut

means 'to think, or a state of thoughtfulness', which was the first Inuit video-based production company and presented in the very same pavilion during the 2019 Arts Biennale.

Compressed into one building, Fermont's town centre directly borders the wilderness, erasing a possible interface between the inside and the outside. The strong contrasts between this dense urban area and the wide open space of the subarctic taiga can evoke feelings of a strong interiority and exteriority, at once too open and too enclosed. It becomes difficult to avoid the landscape when dwelling in the Wall and vice versa, although both constitute two distinct spheres. Michel Foucault could have just as well written about the wind-screen building: 'The boat is a floating piece of space, a place without a place, that exists by itself, that is closed in on itself and at the same time is given over to the infinity of the sea.' (Foucault 1986, 9) Just as the ship, in Foucault's opinion, draws its sense of existence from the ocean, the Wall retrieves its legitimacy from the landscape hosting it. Docked at Quebec's taiga, it seems to have travelled there from afar. With the duality between the natural world and the manmade world becoming evident, the '"hard edges" of the city underscore this drama by allowing the virgin nature to be near and visible from all parts of the town [...] [which] also means eliminating the "pseudo-suburban" belt created around most settlements in the North' (Sheppard 2011, 7).

Architecture in the mining town Fermont and the post-mining town Longyearbyen had the same initial aim, to accommodate their workers. However, the building conditions in both cities are different, with Longyearbyen, situated in the High Arctic, having to cope with permafrost. 1st photo: Fermont, Canada, 2013; 2nd photo: Longyearbyen, Svalbard, 2018.

In that sense, the Wall represents the dominant image of a line between the known and the unknown, a border above which the north appears, connected to 'a "beyond" where the Arctic begins, at the end of the European ecumene and the beginning of a "natural", unknown, empty, uninhabited, and remote world: the Far North' (Chartier 2018, 117–118). Where the far north begins or ends lies in the eye of the beholder; a botanist, geographer, or farmer would give a different answer. Instead of thinking in terms of a clear-cut frontier, accounting for both the tangible landscapes and their ideological representations, Canadian geographer and linguist Louis-Edmond Hamelin developed a set of 'valeurs polaires' (polar values) to define the mental and physical 'nordicity' of a place. Believing that the state of the north is manifested in the spirits, mental nordicity

takes into account psychological and interior factors such as perceptions or a search for meaning, while for physical nordicity there is a set of criteria indicating the northerliness of a place that goes beyond simple delimitation by latitude and takes into account human and natural elements as well as geographical indicators (Hamelin 2002, 30–31, 349). Thus when considering the degree of the perceived as well as the experienced north, Hamelin situates Fermont in the 'moyen nord' or 'medium north', corresponding roughly to the subarctic regions, an area still highly influenced by human presence (ibid.).

Skulsfjord, Norway, 2018

There Dear, Healing inside Mountain Mountain, If side by side
There perhaps, North by North Mountain Mountain How by how
Below zero Rhythm inside, Rivers flooding Dear, All stars all in

Alors only there perhaps, Below the Known, Then perhaps

If only then Back from Perhaps, Dear As North is telling us
Rivers Rivers As North is telling us, If only back, There perhaps
As North is healing us Rivers Rivers As North is healing us,
Talking doubts, Dear Taking stars

Rivers Rivers So many lines

Houses sheltered by the leeward side of the Wall.
Fermont, Canada, 2017.

Inner and outer landscapes

Since the dawn of time, the North Pole, a sacred place and presumed paradise, has been the object of the most singular speculations, including a sea free of ice, an island, or a black boulder (Malaurie 1990, 7). From the ancient Greeks to the Arctic explorers of the 19th century, two contradictory myths were told: the north was on the one hand pictured as 'a place of darkness and dearth' (Davidson, 2006, p. 25) and on the other as Hyperborea, where people were supposed to be live 'behind the North winds' in happiness and unity with the gods (Malaurie and Hoffmann-Dartevelle 2003, 8). Still today, the north evokes images of a hostile, inaccessible, cold, and dark place void of people, whilst simultaneously myths of indigenous peoples living cheerful lives in balance with beautiful, unspoilt white landscapes persist in the modern consciousness. This is how 'the North could turn into a projection space for southern dreams, fantasies, and nightmares' (Rosenthal 2009, 26). This leads to concrete implications, for instance how official policies concerning the northern regions and people are formulated. Although often represented more pragmatically from the inside due to daily experiences connected to the land, the north is also mystified and imagined from within. 'My country is not a country, it is winter', sings Gilles Vigneault in Quebecois collective memory. In his groundbreaking radio documentary of the 1960s, Canadian pianist Glenn Gould fictively sends a group of people on a northbound train to Hudson Bay, interweaving the travellers' monologues like a multi-layered musical composition to an imaginary conversation. (See also Wetters, this volume.) Expressing that north can be more than a geographical location, namely a subjective concept, Gould named his documentary 'The Idea of North' (Gould 1967). The north takes shape in people's minds, forming through myths and artistic works a system of signs that literary scholar Daniel Chartier calls the 'imagined North' (2018, 117).

Left: Creating the trails for the annual dogsled race Défi Taïga Carnaval. Fermont, Canada 2015. Middle & right: A straw fire's smoke hanging in the forest after the dogsled race Défi Taïga Carnaval. Fermont, Canada. 2015.

As early as the 6th century BCE, people sought to answer why the so-called lodestone, today know as magnetite, attracted small pieces of metal. For centuries, legends and myths tried to explain why the stone would seek the north, suggesting that a magnetic iron mountain, situated at the North Pole, was responsible for it (Prothero 2018). Even today, the magnetic north remains a scientific puzzle. While the geographical North Pole, the northern end of the planet's rotation axis, is static, the magnetic north is mobile, currently shifting from Canada towards Siberia at an inexplicably increasing speed – carrying in its migration a complex game of power relations. It not only makes compass needles point in its direction; humans also seem to be attracted to it.

Conceiving of the landscape as an other-than-human person, indigenous scholar Lana Kim McGeary finds that people's inner and outer geographies are affected through immersion. She argues that 'where the physical geography is invested with significance, the relationship becomes one of interdependence, where the outer landscape becomes part of the wayfarers' inner landscape and by extension the inner part of the outer' (McGeary 2015, xii). Geologist Jean Malaurie is a prominent example of an individual feeling this call of the north as he found his mind changed by living with Canada's and Greenland's indigenous populations, experiencing the magnetism of the landscapes and finding an inner space that had a lasting impact on his work (Malaurie 2001, 129). In Fermont, recurring stories are told about people that came for a three-year contract and end up staying for decades. If this is without doubt also due to factors including high wages or the particularities of a tight community, the attraction of the subarctic landscapes, their north, is most often given as the reason they are impossible to leave behind.

> *Take me out Rivers Take me out*
> *Dear, I leave them down*
> *Take me out perhaps I'm Ready now*

With nature as omnipresent rather than humans, the 'white desert' of the Arctic regions is often perceived as a radical terra incognita, the blank spot on the map that attracts explorers and adventurers (Bouvet 2008, 61). Antoine de Saint-Exupéry reveals in *The Little Prince* that although one sees nothing, hears nothing in a desert, something throbs and gleams through the silence. What makes it magnetic is the well that it hides somewhere, like a supposed hidden treasure that casts an enchantment over a house. 'The house, the stars, the desert – what gives them their beauty is something that is invisible!' (de Saint-Exupéry 2000, 52). It is the northern landscapes' immensity that draws in dwellers and travellers, fostering abstraction due to the measureless aspects of these spaces that transcend the imagination. Since immensity arguably remains elusive to the mind, it is impossible to picture it concretely. The white desert's unidimensionality and its sensory abstraction can thus evoke strong mental commitments, which explains why some people display an unlimited fascination for the north, turning it into a genuine landscape of choice (Bouvet 2008, 64) and a land of revelation.

> *No moons no stars Rivers*
> *Dogs flying above Winds blowing inside*
> *Take me out Mountain And leave me now*
> *Where no prayers no church, Dear*

Perspectives on the north diverge greatly, with some focusing for instance more on the geopolitical and others on the imaginary. Yet another view of the north has a spiritual and animist dimension, closely linked to the experience of the land itself. The Innu poets Joséphine Bacon and Natasha Kanapé Fontaine, for instance, write about being inhabited 'from within the lands' (Bacon 2017) and incarnating the spirit of a powerful

woman, inhabited by the north's territory, by the rock that transmits memories through the millennia (La Fabrique Culturelle 2016). Moreover, what Westerners refer to as 'north' is called by the Inuit 'inuit nunangat', the land of the Inuit, which is commonly simply perceived as a good place to live, with plenty of resources of all kinds, that can also turn life difficult without the knowledge necessary to use wisely the natural and paranatural resources (Dorais 2008, 9). The Inuit also call their territory 'nuna', the inhabited earth. Not being restricted to a spatial entity, this term carries a cosmological and ontological meaning, so that 'nuna enriches the palimpsestic "idea of the North" with an indigenous viewpoint' (Pongérard 2017, 38). Nuna refers to a centre that most likely points to 'sila', a word sometimes translated as 'universe', meaning everything that surrounds nuna and of which nuna is itself a part. Sila also designates human intelligence, which is thought of as an air bubble, constituted by a microcosm of the natural environment, that every human receives within themself at their day of birth. Thus, nuna is at the centre of sila, and sila, the intelligence bubble, is at the centre of the human being who is at the centre of nuna, the inhabited land (Pongérard 2017, 11–12). The French word 'milieu' carries a similar meaning, in that it is at the same time that which surrounds a centre and the centre itself (Berque 2010, 53). Anthropologist Tim Ingold conceives of the environment in a similar fashion, arguing that it cannot be a separate entity that literally surrounds us but must rather be a 'zone of interpenetration in which our own and others' lives are comprehensively entangled' (Ingold 2016, 16).

Antonin's notebooks on Fermont 2012-2017. Babel series 2018.

No church perhaps As I need you now, Friend
Beyond the Wall, Mountain Mountain I'll do my best, Dear
beyond the lines, Friend, Pull me down

As culturally represented space and experienced territory, the north has a force of its own, attracting travellers and making them stay for a lifetime. The inhabited north, according to Hamelin, is a human adventure with each presence of humans illustrating in one way or another a part of fiction (Hamelin 1988, 9).
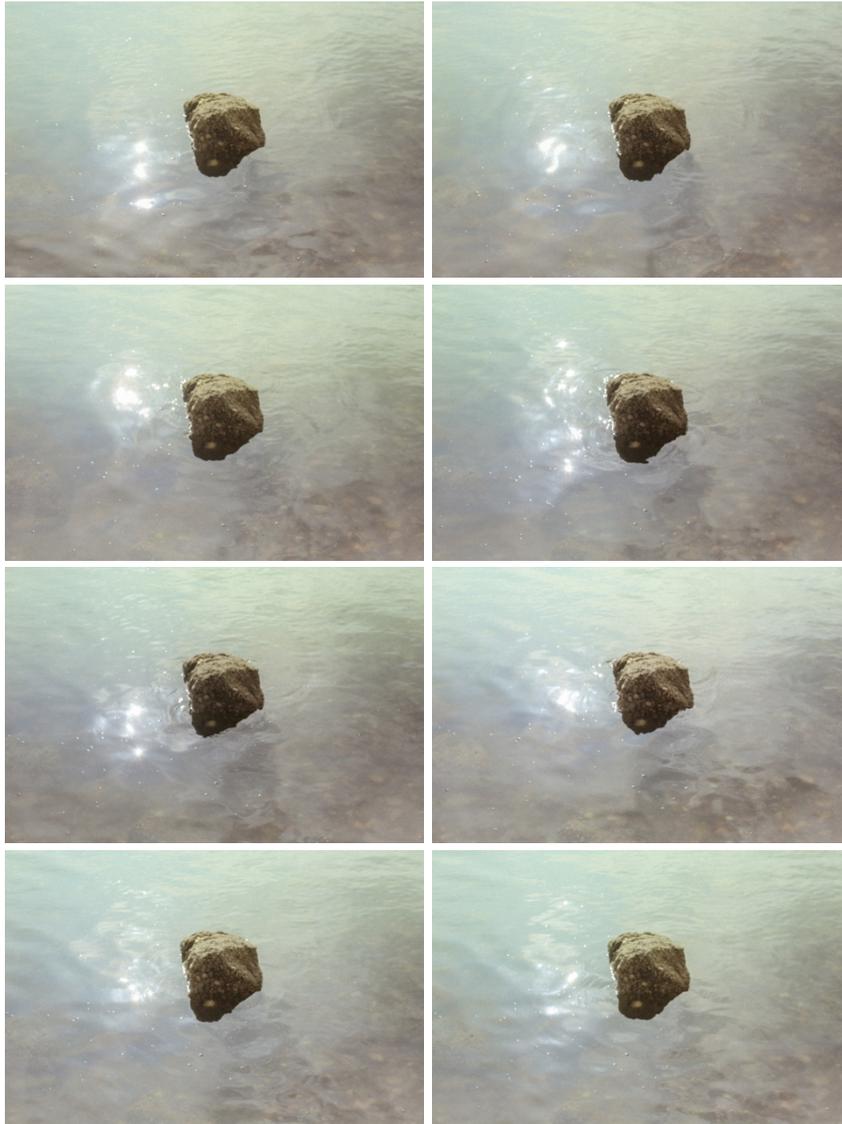
Rock studies in the rising tide. Dinard, France, 2019.

Alors Beyond beyond and only now, Dear
Him There, perhaps Beyond beyond and here perhaps Standing Alone
Flying inside Steering me down From up the Wall
Beyond beyond, From No Church no Lines, Dear Standing above
As He sees He knows Beyond beyond No rope Anchored No rope inside
No Doubts No Doubts Fooling Him down, Dear That's how I know
Rivers Rivers How I stand Rivers Rivers

Crossing the line crossing as He stands, Dear Lichens Lichens
Crossing no line Beyond inside, Passing the Wall Friend
The Dogs the doubts As we are the dogs
Lichens Lichens as we are the doubts Flying Mountain Friend
As we are the Wall, Dear we are the stars

Mapping

Where is north? At the top of the map seems to be a predominant view. The influence of the earth's subjective representation in the form of a standard world map is stronger on our occidental minds than the knowledge that a sphere intrinsically does not possess qualities like up or down. Therefore an underlying notion in many assumptions about the north is its perception as an upwards facing direction. For the French, Paris is situated in the north, for Western Europeans, countries like Greenland or Iceland are thought to be in the far north. When in turn Icelandic schoolchildren were asked, north for them turned out rather to be a direction than a region, always further north, towards a cold and exotic land, of which Iceland was not part (Chartier 2009, 523). North is indeed always further north than where we are, unless standing on the geographical North Pole – whence every direction is south. In this sense, the north stays forever out of reach, with the compass embodying the idea that 'North is always a shifting idea, always relative, always going away from us' (Davidson 2006, 10).

Left: Map of the world created by geographer Muhammad al-Idrisi in 1154 for King Roger of Sicily (oriented with south at the top). Bodleian Library, University of Oxford. Right:'Inuit view to the South' from Rudy Wiebe's *Playing Dead: A Contemplation Concerning the Arctic*, 1989.

Illustrated by the common usage of 'going down south' and 'going up north' in many cultures and languages, the north as represented at the top of the world map largely influences people's mindsets and thus their imagination. Research has shown that the 'north-is-up heuristic' (Brunyé et al. 2012, 2) is so heavily anchored in our occidental mindsets that the geographical north of a given country is associated as hilly while the south is pictured as level (ibid., 1). Moreover, the distortion of the Mercator projection, the standard world map, makes countries closer to the equator appear smaller, whereas Canada, Greenland, Russia, and also Antarctica are shown as much larger than they are. This certainly contributes to the popular image of the north as a large and empty space.

In order to 'find yourself or lose yourself', Gould's characters, travelling to Hudson Bay, are not just retreating in any direction, they are retreating north. Indeed in the occidentally represented north, 'the northwards journey is, as so often, a journey into a

kind of truth' (Davidson 2016, 122). Explorers have set sail to discover a magnetic mountain, the Northwest passage, or lost compatriots whose own quests have failed. A body of literature equally nourishes the imagination of north, where characters often seek enlightenment in the Arctic regions. Jules Verne lets his protagonists descend an Icelandic volcano to reach the centre of the earth, while Smilla sets out on an expedition to Greenland in order to find the last clues to resolve a murder. Lyra Belaqua, the protagonist in Philip Pullman's novel trilogy *His Dark Materials*, receives an alethiometer, a golden compass, that guides her towards a parallel universe to be seen through the Arctic's northern lights. But instead of pointing north, the device with quasi-magnetic properties points to truth (Pullman 1996). However, when looking at indigenous understandings of their territories, it becomes clear that such imaginary norths stem inherently from southern minds that in most cases have never set foot in the real territory of their imagination. According to Louis-Jacques Dorais, the Inuit, for instance, do not have the notion of north as a cardinal direction (or any other direction) in their language, since they orient themselves according to the strongest local winds. In Nunavik, however, people distinguish between 'in the shadow' and 'in the sun', which correspond to the occidental notion of north and south (Dorais 2018, 17).

Tattoo of a Svalbard map. Part of a photographic study investigating the identity of carriers of Svalbard map tattoos on intimate body zones. Longyearbyen, 2018.

No fears Above
Beyond the rope

As interpretations of human environments, maps mirror the predominant worldview. The 'land itself, of course, has no desires as to how it should be represented. It is indifferent to its pictures and to its picturers. But maps [...] create forceful biases in the ways a landscape is perceived and treated' (Macfarlane 2007, 10–11). However, since they 'proclaim truth, neutrality and objectivity and consequently invoke authority and gravitas' (Halder and Michel 2018, 12), humans have a tendency not to question the

maps that are used in the Western world, not seeing beyond their representational function. Grace (2002, 84) argues that 'all maps, even the most fantastic or speculative, must obey the rules of reference and representation, which makes them inescapably available to an archaeology of geography, and here part of the discursive formation of North'. The map 'An Inuit View to the South' turns the familiar occidental perspective of the world upside down. Nunavut and the Northwest Territories are shown in great detail while the rest of Canada is depicted as a white empty space. It is a great visual reminder of the fact that the understanding of 'north' is a matter of perception and subject to interpretation. What further strikes the view of this map are the place names. Only selected names are shown, some in native languages, some in English, hinting at 'the polyphony of the North by dialogizing its text' (Grace 2002, 87). One example of claiming back a territory and its original names is a series of maps drawn by the Sámi artist Hans Ragnar Mathisen (Keviselie) that played an important role in the revitalization of the Sámi culture in the 1970s. His '"cartography of connectedness" is an [...] example of indigenous counter-mapping that turns a critical searchlight on the lack of Sámi place-names in official maps of the region' (Uhre 2015, 82). Mathisen's probably most famous map shows Sápmi, the Sámi nation, without nation-state borders but with place names in Sámi, depicting the extent of his culture in Scandinavia and Russia (OCA Video).

Naming as claiming was mainly practiced by Western explorers, naming places they thought they had discovered and often named in their own honour, such as Gjøa Haven, Franklin Bay, Baffin Bay, Barents Sea, or Bering Strait, to mention only a few. Fermont's street names continue this legacy and show a belonging to northern landscapes inherited by conquest, exploitation, and landscape: Rue des Glaces (Ice Street), Rue Boréale (Boreal Street), Rue du Sommet (Summit Street), Rue du Fer (Iron Street), Rue du Graphite (Graphite Street), Rue Comeau (Comeau Street), or Rue Franklin (Franklin Street).

Crossing Iceland, 2014.

With the retreating sea ice making resource extraction and commercial shipping easier, the Arctic regions are still of extreme geopolitical interest today. The far north is currently witness to the power struggles of the Arctic states, mainly Canada, Norway, Russia, the USA, and Denmark via Greenland, who all dispute the limits of their Arctic zones as determined in the UN convention on the law of the sea – while, despite a different geopolitical context, similar quarrels occur in Antarctica. In 2017, Russia went so far as to set up its flag at the geographical North Pole, at the bottom of the sea, an action that was compared by Canada to a colonial land grab of the 15th century (Parfitt 2007). Moreover, China as a non-Arctic state has established itself as a significant

player in the region, showing a great interest in economic possibilities primarily in the shipping sector and in natural resource extraction (Lanteigne 2019). This feudal theatre takes place against the backdrop of a drastically changing region with sea ice melting faster than scientists predicted and species vanishing.

In the winter, when the numerous lakes surrounding Fermont are frozen, a whole network of snowmobile tracks extends like fungus mycelium, some visible, others only used once and immediately snowed over. No map could ever account for all of these paths, except for the map of knowledge that the locals carry within themselves. It is a network that expands slowly with the winter as it builds up, and diminishes when the snow melts and the landscape becomes visible again. 'A map, after all, answers an enduring human question that is as much existential as it is directional: where are we?' (Brotton 2013) North is not per se 'up there', though the West has collectively put it 'up there' where it has become a geographical projection forging a particular view both of and on the world.

> *Pulling Us down Pulling Us down Friend*
> *As we see no line No dogs no doubts Steering Us now*
> *Cutting the cord Leaving Behind No fears Above Friend*
> *Far from the Wall No fears Alone as He stands inside*

Eldorado and Utopia

We think of Gould's fictive train ride to the north when, after one long period of fieldwork in Fermont, we take the train Tshiuetin, the 'North Wind', operated by the First Nations Innu Takuaikan Uashat mak Mani Utenam, the Naskapi Nation of Kawawachikamach, and the Innu Matimekush-Lac-John. More than merely travelling, the passengers inhabit this moving space, constructing temporary shelters or moving through the corridors to visit families and friends. This train connecting Schefferville with Sept-Îles stops not far from Fermont, next to a container turned into a station. Travelling to and from Fermont is part of its myth, passing through or over a horizonless subarctic wilderness, an experience that fosters the popular image of the town as being far away and isolated. The fact that it is only a stone's throw from Labrador City seems to be largely ignored in the self-perception of Fermont's inhabitants, due to the sometimes tense relations between the largely French-speaking Québec and the predominantly English-speaking rest of Canada. Far from being isolated, the Fermontois are hyper-connected to the rest of the world through the internet and an intense use of social media.

Gould's gold digger believes that the north is like the gold rush: 'It is not about the gold, it is about finding the gold. The north is process, is finding.' He thus believes that 'in the north we see the final playing-out of two great dreams of man: Eldorado or Utopia' (Gould, 1967). In the north, as the land of the possible, Fermont indeed incarnates both notions, an Eldorado to the occidental mind for its natural recourses, and a Utopian town planning. The Wall acts as metaphor of the Utopian idea of a hypermodern urbanism thought to create a comfortable and privileged society in a subarctic environment. As the first town in the Canadian north with modern facilities

and infrastructure, Fermont was indeed the exemplary model for urban planning in a modern world, just as Le Corbusier's architecture was in Europe. About one hundred years earlier, Jules Vernes again drew the portrait of two imagined cities, one a dream, one a nightmare, in his 1879 novel *The Begum's Fortune* that questioned the relation of humans to urban space. At times when the impact of economical, social, and environmental transformations worried Western societies, the Utopian France-Ville is depicted as a sustainable city while Stahlstadt, a mining town extracting iron ore, appears as a dystopia – the golden city versus the steel city, only able to coexist in their duality (Dupuy 2012, 23–24).

Left: Emeril Junction, the train station closest to Fermont, served by the First Nations-owned train Tshiuetin. Emeril Junction, Canada, 2017. Middle & right: On board the First Nations-owned train Tshiuetin, the 'North Wind', connecting Schefferville with Sept-Îles. Canada, 2017

Fermont's construction was a third attempt to build a company town in that region, after two predecessors did not withstand the economic and political forces at play. The cities of Gagnon and Schefferville were the first two company towns commissioned by the mining corporation Québec Cartier, not long before plans were laid for Fermont. Each was situated a few hundred kilometres to the south or north, and each proved to be a failed Utopia. When the mines were no longer profitable, first Schefferville (1982) and then Gagnon (1985) closed. Michel Rivard sings in 'Schefferville, le dernier train' (Schefferville, the last train):

> En novembre passé ils ont fermé la mine
> J'ai vu pleuré mon père sur la table d'la cuisine
> C'était pas tant de perdre une job assurée
> Que de voir s'évanouir le rêve de trente années
> Quand je suis venu au monde ils étaient jeunes mariés
> Venus trouver l'amour et la prospérité
> Dans une ville inventée par une grosse compagnie
> En plein nord en plein froid et en plein paradis.[1] (Rivard 1983)

Because indigenous people had moved into the remains of Schefferville and services legally had to be kept up by the State, Gagnon was completely eradicated from the map.

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[1] Last November they closed the mine / I saw my father crying at the kitchen table / It was not so much about losing a secure job / Than seeing his thiry-year dream vanish before his eyes / When I came into the world they were newlyweds / They had come to find love and prosperity / In a town invented by a big company / In the far north, in the deep cold, and in the heights of paradise.

The fact that one part of the hospital was renovated while the other was demolished shows how arbitrary this decision was (Dion-Ortega and Blin 2014). Today, the only remains of Gagnon that have not been dismantled and buried, are the pavements along route 389, the airport runway, a cemetery, as well as a sign stating 'Site de l'ancienne ville de Gagnon' (site of the former town of Gagnon). This ghost town haunts Fermont, brutally exemplifying what its own future could hold. Many other company towns, built to be functional, shared a similar fate, a similar dependency on a productivist's arbitrariness and Utopian thinking in extending a company into a fully-fledged town. Kiruna in Sweden, for instance, is in the process of being moved since the effects of decades of iron ore extraction under the town would otherwise result in the its partial collapse. The task of moving and rebuilding it anew, maintaining Kiruna's sense of place, history, and traditions, is an 'ideological fantasy' (Nilsson, 2010). These towns embody Wilde's claim that 'a map of the world that does not include Utopia is not worth even glancing at, for it leaves out the one country at which Humanity is always landing. And when Humanity lands there, it looks out, and, seeing a better country, sets sail' (Wilde 1891, 40).
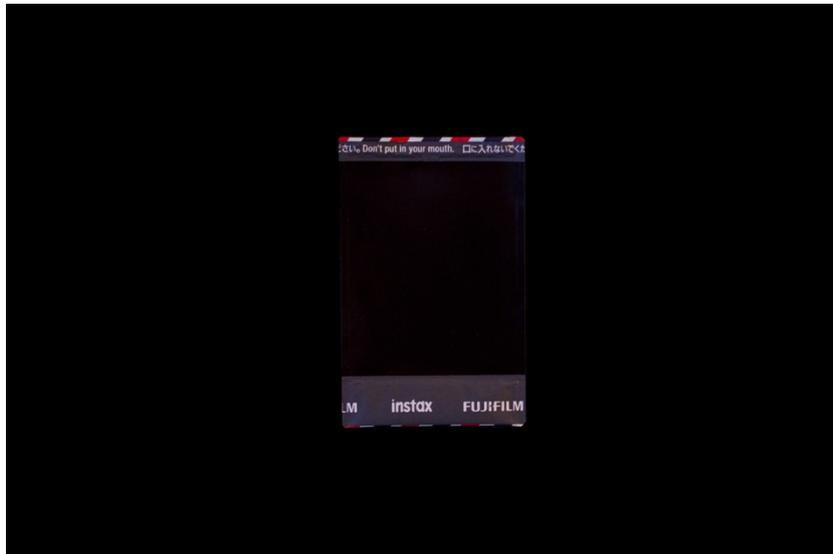
Back of a polaroid. Instant photographs taken by an inhabitant of Svalbard
as part of a series capturing people at the moment of leaving the archipelago.
Babel series 2018.

The myth of El Dorado fuelled the imagination of numerous conquistadores that set out to discover the lost city of gold, situated in South America, and became a main drive for exploiting these lands in multiple ways. Four hundred years later, the promise of gold and thus wealth in the Klondike region, in Yukon, Canada, led thousands of prospectors to travel the hazardous route towards the north in order to take their share in this prosperous adventure. Since then, the north has been imagined by the 'southist' culture and it responds to its material needs (Chartier 2018, 129). The northern landscapes continue to be exploited for their natural resources but also for their beauty, as the high numbers of tourists show, who come to see the northern lights, polar bears, glaciers, or the cultures of Arctic towns. Thus as well as consisting of indigenous, agricultural, industrial, or modern urban landscapes, the north can also be divided into a '"viewing landscape", defined by the tourists, and an "extraction landscape", defined by trade

cycles and world mineral markets: one above ground and one below ground' (Kampevold Larsen and Hemmersam 2018, 3). In this sense the north reveals itself as an occidental territory of consumption and extraction – just as the south in times of colonization, orientalism, or contemporary exploitation. In an often traditional indigenous world view, all beings are interconnected: the land and the tree and the people; the earth is holy and cannot be owned or dug into. More than that, the impact of mining frequently poses challenges to traditional ways of life. For instance, contaminated soils or railways and gas pipelines, running through the migration territory, are a threat to Sámi reindeer herding in northern Scandinavia or Russia. In the USA, the plan to build a gas pipeline through the Standing Rock Reservation has mobilized thousands of people to protest against the unlawful use of the indigenous population's holy lands and possible contamination of drinking water supplies.
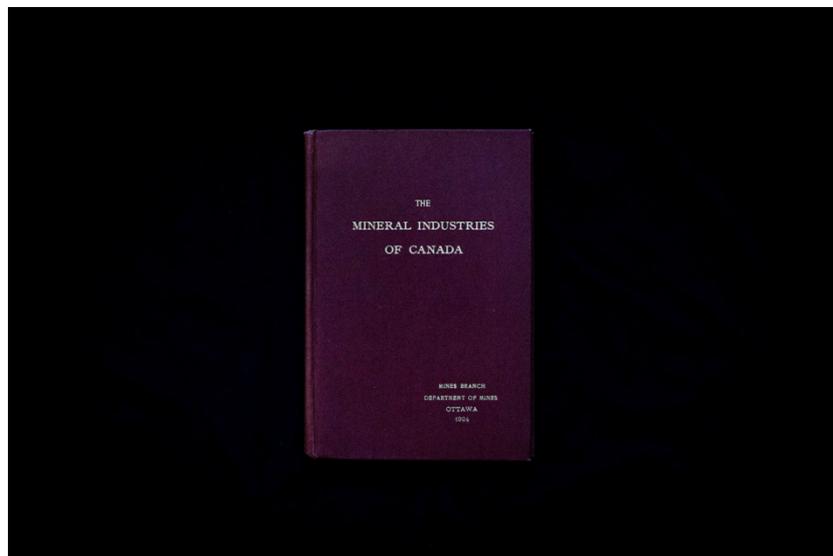
The Mineral Industries of Canada. Mines Branch Department of Mines, Ottawa, 1924. Babel Series, 2018.

*Up Norths from many Souths Crossing Above and Back to Norths, Dear
Rivers my Friends From many Souths Mountain Mountain
Between your fears and mine as He stands aside as He stands aside
Horses Horses my Friends as You fear inside*

Fermont owes its existence to the exploitation of the open-cast iron mine, once owned by Québec Cartier, today owned by Arcelor Mittal, that every day inverts Mount Wright a little more. The development of the north of Québec has a particular flavour to that it is essentially driven by the economical and geopolitical interests of the state of Québec, that wants to get hold of the territory and use its resources in order to create wealth in the south and increase its influence among neighbouring provinces and states (Simard 2012, 110). The so-called 'Plan nord' officially aims at sustainably developing the territory north of 49° latitude by exploiting the north's natural resources, protecting the biodiversity and ecosystems, and improving the living conditions of local and indigenous communities (Action Plan 2017, 2). This political instrument, defended on

television by prime minister Stephen Harper in Fermont, is polemic due to its two-sided views on development, on the one hand economical and promoting the exploitation of natural resources, and on the other cultural and social (Rivard and Desbiens 2011, 83). A rhetoric of 'opening the north', as the Plan nord promotes, would mean following old geographical chimeras, conveying the idea of north as being void of people and culture, just waiting for the visions of the south to blanket its virgin territory (ibid., 88).


Mushers from different parts of Canada preparing for the local dogsled race Défi Taïga Carnaval. Fermont, Canada, 2015.

Every day at noon, the daily blast marks the extension of Fermont's open-cast iron mine. It is a Jurassic Park-like territory with giant trucks whose wheels are over four meters high transporting 200 to 400 tonnes of iron ore in one load up and down the crater 24/7. As Fermont's *raison d'être*, the mine was the main driving force behind the town's urban planning: it forges social life and generates the inhabitants' almost exclusive source of income. Fermont is thus an example of how economic interests create and accommodate a society from scratch. However, the town's inhabitants have developed their own sense of belonging over the decades, with many accepting a Gagnon-like scenario for their town's future, and others actively searching for alternatives to the mono-industry through, for instance, attracting tourists and organizing an annual dogsledding race, the Défi Taiga Carnaval that has grown continually since 2013 and is today the largest of its kind in North East America. The stories of Fermont exemplify how the north has been and is systematically exploited for its various resources. It becomes evident that:

> The journey into the North in search of treasures and marvels comes round in a circle: a movement from the unaffected rapacity of the Renaissance, harvesting amber, fur and the horns of unicorns to the complex appropriations of our own time, seeking both oil and shamanic enlightenment, while at the same time longing to believe that the Arctic can remain a reservoir of peoples undamaged by civilization, a natural world, unexploited, pure.' (Davidson 2006, 73)

The north's territories are manifested in their complexity: next to being agricultural, urban, or indigenous, contemporary northern landscapes are also predominantly marked by tourists and by the extraction industry. The case of Fermont exemplifies how extraction turns indigenous hunting grounds into a fully fledged urban area, creating a society from scratch that searches in turn for alternatives to the mono-industry, turning towards tourism which again seeks and exploits the authenticity and wildness of the land itself. The world we inhabit inevitably inhabits us. Complex and multidimensional,

the north reveals itself through imagination and experience in northerners and southerners alike. Exerting a transformative and magnetizing influence on people's inner geography, the landscapes of the north arguably cause humans to both preserve and exploit them, depending on how one dwells in them or is made to dwell. Climate change and globalization make rapid change in the region possible and viable. The presence of a considerable amount of micro plastics in the Arctic Ocean and strong impact on weather in the southern hemisphere due to the melting of the polar ice caps exemplifies how interconnected the whole world is. In that sense, the north is not unique as such and many of our findings hold true for other regions as well. While this work has focused on the north's contemporary aspects, it is vital to take a look into what its future might look like and to help shape it accordingly. How might we humans inhabit a future north with a future past, living with post-industrial ruins and remains, things as traces of modernity? How will we be inhabited by this very heritage and how will we take care of it? Þora Pétursdóttir's work on the 'ruins of modernity' (2013, 44) might give some clues on how post-industrial landscapes could turn into heritage sites. Fermont's fate is yet to be determined, either by extractivists' interests, by people's engagement with the place, or by the forces of nature itself.
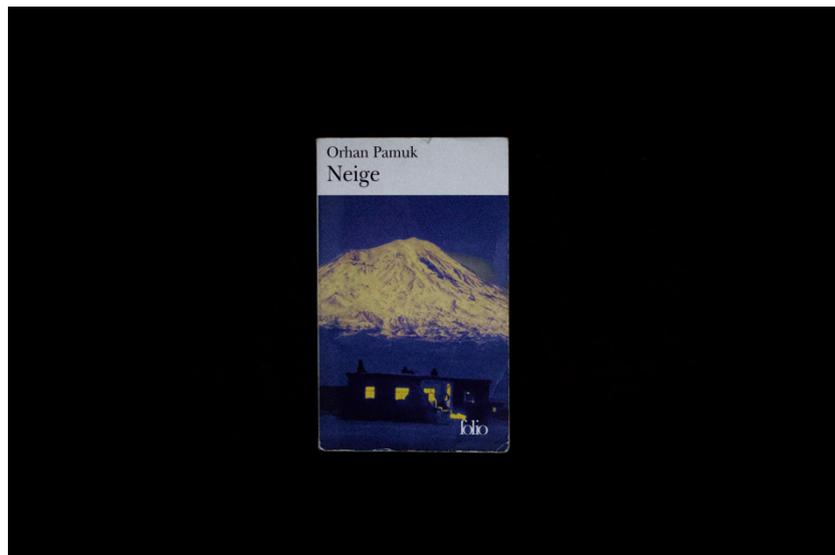
Neige (Snow) by Orhan Pamuk, 2005. Babel series 2018.

A hundred and two days walking now
Lichens Lichens and no more tears inside
The Wall way back Old Friend as He stands behind
Far from Now A hundred and two days anchored
Lichens Lichens Along the Rivers down

Epilogue

The north is like a drug. We are inhabited by it ourselves. We have to admit, for us too, the north has revealed itself as a magical place that we stumbled into like Alice fell into Wonderland. Feeling a longing for the wide open spaces that open up hearts and minds, our north became our adopted home, our land of revelation, as well as a place inhabiting our imagination. Helplessly we fall for the north, for what is north for us, reproducing probably what thousands of other southerners before us have felt and accordingly represented in images and texts – but yet contributing specifically with who we are to this organic idea of north. Participating in a better understanding of this place of the real and of the mind is the main driving force behind studying how we inhabit the north and the north inhabits us. This brief contribution can thus also be read as a call for more holistic research on this subject by breaking down boundaries between disciplines and provoking multiple ways of knowing, taking into account the whole and all of its parts.

Sahara expedition. Morocco, 2011.

As we the Horses, Friend, we the fears And no more map
Lichens Lichens Beyond the stars A hundred and two days
walking now Lichens Lichens between you Friends and I

All in Now All in Friends No Rope, Dear No Eyes, Told you
No Blood Inside You knew Above above Cutting Beyond Now
We are the Map Fooling the Wall A hundred and two Dear
Now You North Freeing the Dogs Between your hand and mine
Following Lichens Lichens From many Souths

Rivers And no more Back, Dear Mountain standing
Horses Horses Friends From many Souths, as You Lichens Lichens
As We Dear are the North inside

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