

EPHEMERAL PERMANENCE

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“...But a deeper note is sounding,
heard in the mines,

F. R. Scott,

Laurentian Shield

The scattered camps and the mills, a
language of life,

And what will be written in the full
culture of occupation

Will come, presently, tomorrow,

From millions whose hands can turn
this rock into children.”¹

ABSTRACT

Fermont, Québec is an iron mining town of 2874 people. In 1974, a panel of architects, planners and engineers designed a 1.3 kilometre long community complex which acts as a windscreen to protect the town from the Northeasterly wind and record low climate. Detached housing is protected within its wingspan and residents use the complex to cross through town during the subarctic Canadian winter. Northern Quebec's landscape is freckled with a generous amount of fresh-water lakes. Fermont sits at the elbow of Lac Daviault and is among hills rich with high-grade iron.

Fermont's plan was intended to unite the community and combat the harsh climate. Today, two distinct populations live within the town: those who regularly live and work in Fermont, and the "fly-in/fly-outs" who work for two weeks at a time. Because the mining company provided most of the infrastructure, residents often cannot stay in town once they retire. Fermont is fairly young, so there has only recently been an emerging elderly population, as well as a younger generation of those who were born in the town. Thus, Fermont is in the middle of an important stage in its development and the study of these two population groups, in conjunction with its location among an abundance of hills and lakes, is key to its understanding. The iron embedded in Mont Wright has driven the town's creation and sustained its existence.

Social dynamics of the town are, therefore, intricately woven within its geography, for it is in its remote location that residents have found a pride of place. A sense of community has formed within the walls of the hill-emulating windscreen structure, le Mur Écran, and in the detached houses which are protected within its wingspan. This housing typology is uncommon in mining towns and typically

unsuitable for sub-arctic climates, but providing these was instrumental in securing half of the town's initial population. The windscreen structure was designed to remedy the disparity between Fermont's geography and the residents' desire to live in a town that was like the "South". Houses are situated within the embrace between Lac Daviault's and its mirror image, *le Mur*.

Review of anthropological and urban planning literature supports the connection between location and identity in revealing a set of characteristics common to company and mining towns. These factors speak to a resilience, unity and loyalty in the inhabitants. Residents derive a sense of identity from "surviving" a taxing profession and harsh environment. The remote setting also establishes an identity amongst towns of comparable size and geography. These towns often share similar industries and major geographic forms but tend to be located far from one another (in the case of Fermont's two closest neighbours, Labrador City and Wabush, this relationship requires crossing provincial boundaries).

Unique to a mining town is its ability to tremendously alter its own geography -- a geography on which residents depend for the duration of their stay. Social and geographic transience are deeply rooted in the mindset of residents and play a significant role in the establishment of identity within the community. This article intends to explore connections between identity, transience and geological destiny through the study of geographic form and social dynamics in Fermont, Québec.

COPPER CLIFF

A brief study of Copper Cliff, a division of Sudbury, ON, was performed with the objective of comparing another Canadian mining town with



O thou whose face hath felt the Winter's wind,
Whose eye has seen the snow-clouds hung in mist,
And the black elm tops 'mong the freezing stars!
To thee the spring will be a harvest time.
O thou whose only book has been the light
Of supreme darkness, which thou feddest on
Night after night, when Phœbus was away!
To thee the spring shall be a triple morn.
O fret not after knowledge. I have none,
And yet my song comes native with the warmth.
O fret not after knowledge! I have none.
And yet the evening listens. He who saddens
At thought of idleness cannot be idle,
And he's awake who thinks himself asleep.²

JOHN KEATS

*O thou whose face hath felt the
Winter's wind*

Fermont. Copper Cliff was established in the late 1800s and has since been overgrown by Sudbury, with which it has now been conglomerated. The mines are still in operation and a large part of the population works directly or indirectly for them. In contrast with Fermont, the mines of Copper Cliff are located directly adjacent to the town. The area itself has since increased significantly in population due to the abundance of mineral ore, but industry has diversified in adjacent towns.

The town also smelts its own ore so large tailing ponds and slag deposits take up a greater area than the town itself. Also of note are the town's large smoke stacks from the smelting facilities, one of which is the second largest chimney stack in the world.

Copper Cliff provides an interesting contrast with Fermont in terms of its development, population, dominant industry and location.

IRON ORE

The town of Fermont, QC is located along the Quebec-Labrador border and has a population of roughly 3,000 people. It is the seat of the county of Caniapiscau, which includes only one other official town that is several hundred kilometres away. Fermont is a mining town - and a very young one, having been officially constructed in 1973 by the U.S. Steel Quebec affiliate, Quebec Cartier Mining Company (QCM). As a Northern-Canadian town with a harsh climate (record high of -49.5°C or -57.1°F)³, Fermont was planned to combat a strong North-easterly wind.

A team of architects, engineers and planners were gathered to determine a plan for the town that would meet two objectives: the first being the creation of a fifth generation mining town that would address the needs of individuals who live a transient lifestyle in newly-created mining towns. Operating under U.S.



Red ore. Labrador's gold.
Drew geologists, financiers,
wanting more. Men with plans
to pave the way –
earth open vaults for the rich.

Culverts, tunnels, bridges and tracks,
7000 faces battled the freeze.
Struggled against the ice, the rock,
four cold cutting years. Till fall '54.
The Shirley G. Taylor, loaded with ore,

steamed 2000 tons of it
down St. Lawrence to Dofasco's door...⁴

E. J. PRATT,
Erosion

Steel, QCM had previously constructed two towns in the province of Quebec: Gagnon, also an iron ore mining town, and Port Cartier, a port town for the delivery of iron ore via the St. Lawrence River. Officials had found that the need for a sense of community had not been met. QCM had also found that there were significant issues concerning the administration of Gagnon and Port Cartier that they wished to remedy in the planning of this new town of Fermont.

The plan was also to meet a second need; it had to address life in the Canadian Subarctic. The final design included a 1.3 kilometre (0.8 mile) long windscreen structure, titled the Mur Écran, which houses much of the town's program, including offices, retail and residential. The structure also shields the remaining single- and semi-detached houses from the wind within its wingspan. Additionally, residents of Fermont can use the structure to cut across town during the on-average seven month long winter.


FERMONT TODAY

Having been established just forty years ago, Fermont is now in an interesting stage in its development. While the town still functions within a company-town-like system of frequent influx and departure of workers, there is only just an emerging elderly population and a significant number of people who



have been born and raised in the town. Thus, two vastly different populations are living parallel to one another and, arguably, with a notable difference in needs.

On the one hand, permanent residents have established a sense of community and “pride of place”.⁵ Simultaneously, a large fly-in/fly-out population works in the mines and lives in Fermont for two weeks at a time. This group also has a high turnover rate of only 25% of employees staying on for over two years.⁶ A rapid exchange of workers is ideal for the company's operation but presents an interesting dilemma: though Fermont seems to have successfully allowed for permanent residents to establish connections within the community and form an attachment to the town (a condition which



...It took the sea a thousand years,
A thousand years to trace
The granite features of this cliff,
In crag and scarp and base.

It took the sea an hour one night,
An hour of storm to place
The sculpture of these granite seams
Upon a woman's face.



CATHERINE GRAHAM,

Red Gold

had been absent in QCM's previous towns), there now exists a housing crisis in light of a great need for workers, due to a rise in iron ore market prices, yet nowhere to house these workers.

If these two populations have been created simultaneously, what factors led to their creation? More importantly, how has the mindset of a population, comprised largely of a group that had worked and lived previously in Gagnon, QC, another iron mining town, changed from one which accepted transience to one which craved attachment? Perhaps what is most curious is that one is forming an attachment to transience - attachment and transience traditionally being two opposing concepts.

COLD WEATHER, PRESENCE OF SHELTER

Morley Callaghan, a notable Canadian author, is well-known for his love of winter. In a mid 70s interview with the Canadian Broadcasting Company's Michael Enright, Callaghan speaks of how he misses winter when he is away from Canada: "No matter where I've been, I've found that I miss the winter, and you know, this is not... is not so strange, really, ... look, I don't pretend I love dreadful weather and when there's a wind, I hate every moment of it; I shiver terribly."⁸ Callaghan describes this Canadian contrast as what gives Canada its charm, but more importantly, as what gives one the ability to stand

the cold at all:

"It is [an] almost essential pleasure, to come in from the cold to the warmth... you should have a warm place somewhere... you should be capable of being physically warm... winter is wonderful if you are near the warm place. Winter begins to deteriorate aesthetically... the further you get away."⁹

Thus a structure such as the Mur Écran - which provides warmth and shelter from Fermont's sub-arctic climate - is certainly an important component in allowing residents the ability to survive, and even grow fond of, the harsh environment.

COMPANY TOWNS

Urban planning and anthropological literature has been reviewed in order to better understand the factors which might lead to the mindset and actions of people who live in company towns. Studies often touch upon the same few characteristics of company towns and the people with whom they are inhabited. These characteristics have been organized into five groups (though each share commonalities with one another and may appropriately belong to

One must have a mind of winter
To regard the frost and the boughs
Of the pine-trees crusted with snow;

And have been cold a long time
To behold the junipers shagged with ice,
The spruces rough in the distant glitter

Of the January sun; and not to think
Of any misery in the sound of the wind,
In the sound of a few leaves,

Which is the sound of the land
Full of the same wind
That is blowing in the same bare place

For the listener, who listens in the snow,
And, nothing himself, beholds
Nothing that is not there and the nothing
that is.¹⁰

WALLACE STEVENS,
The Snow Man

three groups, or perhaps five).

Similarities can be drawn between the company towns and their sub-category: mining towns. For instance, these towns are often created with similar intent and method, though factory towns are often placed along important transportation routes while mining towns are established where the mineral ore is abundant or worthwhile. Thus, mining towns are usually situated in remote regions with few settled towns nearby, which is certainly the case with Fermont, QC. Transportation routes are often then created to accommodate the frequent movement of people and goods. Like most company towns, however, mining towns house unusual populations and operate within an unspoken agreement between the company and the residents of the town (to be further elaborated upon in later text). For this reason the studies which include information about company towns and similar mining towns will provide a valid understanding of the social and psychological conditions within a mining town such as Fermont.

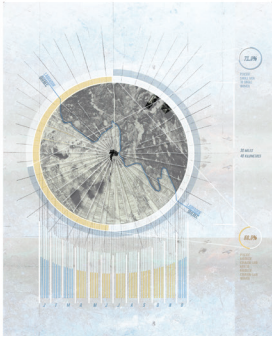
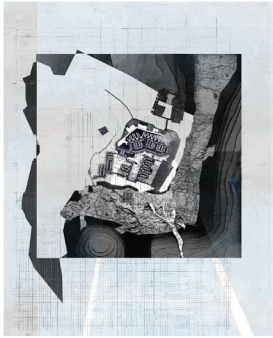
OVERALL FINDINGS:


Findings have been divided into two broader categories which deal with community identity and behaviour and decisions regarding the company by whom the town has been established. Further, these concepts have been realized through a set of cartographic images which display these conditions as well as conditions that are specific to the geological, geographical and social conditions present in Fermont. The cartographic images were created with a mix of hand- and computer-rendering, as well as hand-modelling. As the following categories often overlap and draw upon similar information, the cartographic images will not be presented in an order that correspond with the text.

1. IDENTITY

1.1 SURVIVOR MENTALITY

Mining towns, often geographically isolated, are typically “located relatively far away from larger and more diversified labour markets”.¹¹ Hermalata C. Dandekar describes community identity as derived from residents’ ability to survive and thrive in an unforgiving environment”.¹² In describing the former zinc mining town of picker, Oklahoma, Dandekar states that self-respect was derived from the realization that they were survivors”.¹³





“No one has ever said that life is to
be easy. Only that it is to be lived.”¹⁴



ALISTAIR MACLEOD,
Island, Collected Stories



Mining is certainly taxing and uniform work, and residents must also come to terms with the town's isolated sub-arctic location. As the town had initially received half of its residents from Gagnon, QC, another iron mining town created by QCM, many residents were well-aware of the nature of a remote Quebec mining town upon arriving, yet the challenges they faced - such as the high cost of consumer goods, narrow options for transportation and limited social activity - make for difficult conditions. It should be noted, as well, that during the initial planning stages, future citizens of Fermont did not want the buildings or overall plan of the town to be experimental or outrageous. In fact, they wanted a town that was familiar to them, and similar to towns in the "South": "During the public hearings the voice of the future residents was loud and clear... they feared being stigmatized, or being treated as guinea pigs inhabiting a new radically different environment.¹⁵ Fermont's plan was meant to respond to the "psychological circumstances of living in isolation in a very homogeneous community, and providing ways to help and encourage harmonious and voluntary human interactions".¹⁶

1.2 UNITY

In the planning of Fermont, the panel seemed to "design a human settlement in the form of a physical setting which is conducive to good family and community life. In so doing, it had to address two main concerns: the physical conditions of the place, and the psychosocial realities of the community".¹⁷ According to Britt Dale, mining towns are typically communities with very small populations,¹⁸ which is certainly true of Fermont, with a population of roughly 3000 people - though this figure will likely be increasing as the town's economy is doing very well.

It is often in the "everyday memories of community life and valued home"¹⁹ that the identity of a community is formed. Though this may be more apparent in a well-established community or city, it may be said that early evidence of unity within a community may reinforce future identity within that community. In being a relatively young mining town, the attachments formed between residents is important to note when predicting the degree of current future attitudes, such fondness of or rejection of the town.

Sheppard describes the changes he saw after having returned to Fermont after some years:

"After the normal period of growing pains and some adjustments, one can discern a pride of place, and a willingness on the part of the community to contribute to the life of the town. What began as a large construction camp created to implement a new vision for an urban settlement has become a true community, with families living a normal life, pursuing reasonable social objectives, and finding an equitable balance between nature and their man-made environment. Within years, a sense of identity with the town has become discernible and an acceptance of life-style that addresses the specific environment and climactic circumstances of the North has entered the public consciousness".²⁰

1.3 REPEATED GENERATIONS

Residents of company towns form a strong attachment to the town through memory and tenure and this, in turn, contributes to the overall identity of the community that inhabited a mining town such as Fermont. Dandekar describes the Utopian vision of a company town, which has a mine that is no longer in commission, as often including

“substantial community structures and comfortable homes. What is missing is the social history and the hardships residents faced in the mining era and beyond”²¹. Thus, it seems that the largely positive vision of a mining town is reinforced through repeated generations of miners. Dale describes this condition within Norwegian mining towns: “often long-established communities, where several generations of local miners have been recruited from the same families. The attachment of the local residents to their communities is often strong”²².

Additionally, QCM had incorporated single-detached houses within the town’s plan. Through this is quite a peculiar choice for a mining town - economically, but also in terms of combatting the harsh wind and climate of a remote Northern region such as that of Vermont - the company included this housing typology in an effort to entice workers to relocate from Gagnon. It may be argued that this significantly contributed to the establishment of multiple generations in connection with the forming of a “family home” in an otherwise transient environment.

2. MINING COMPANY

2.1 CULTURE OF DEPENDENCE

Residents of a mining town often act with a fierce sense of loyalty toward the mining company. In general, mining companies have tended to provide significant infrastructure, which may include policing, community gathering places, housing, electricity and sometimes even worship spaces. Dale explains:

“Social responsibility took the form of a fundamental local paternalism that seems to have been internalized within the companies.

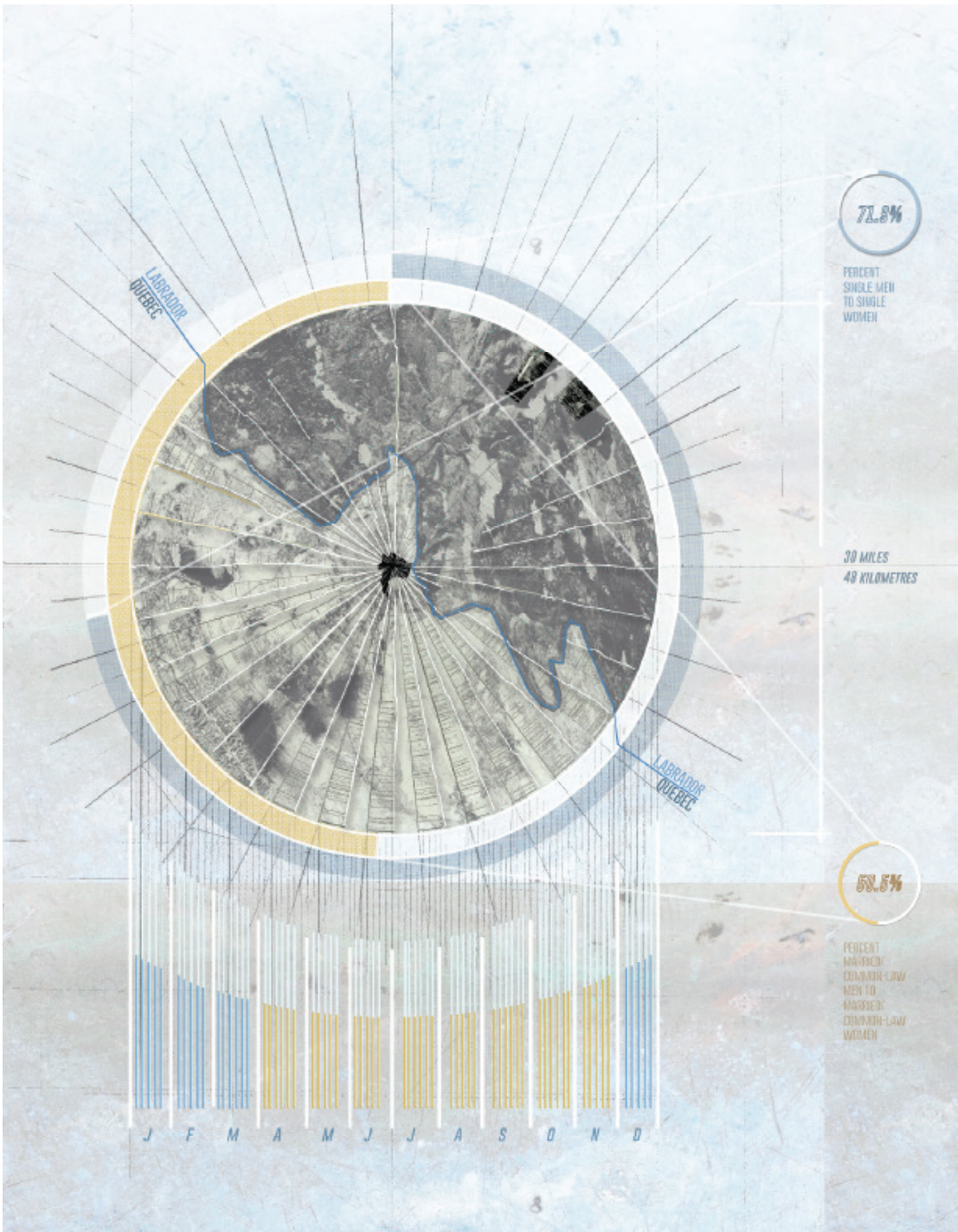
Through this process the companies became deeply oiled and embedded in the local community... [and] local residents were used to and developed strong expectations of being provided for by the company, in respect of well-paid jobs as well as housing and other services... felt loyalty to the company... it was expected that unemployed miners would wait patiently for better times to come. Thus, there existed a tradition of common understanding of each other’s obligations and a sense of common face and mutual dependence that was deeply embedded in the community”²³.

Aware of one another’s obligations, each party acts in accordance yet also expects a level of service from the other. Perhaps a result of this relationship, the town often operates within a set of values and therefore typically within a set of routines - some of which might extend into the social lives of the residents. Sheppard explains how this may be occurring in Vermont:

“Living in Vermont is living in a society of uniformity, regularity, and conformity. The mining community is one where unemployment or underemployment is unknown, where few residents are old or sick, where salaries of nearly everyone are known, and where one employer dictates the condition of life during work and after hours. One resident of Vermont once famously said: ‘the Company controls even my freedom’”²⁴.

Dandekar confirms this, stating that the company’s regulations typically directly or indirectly influence the conduct of the individuals inhabiting a mining town.²⁵ Thus, there is often a paternalistic relationship between the mining company and town residents. It is certainly the case that QCM originally provided a significant amount of infrastructure







VERMONT HAMPSHIRE



PORT PORT

RAIL RAIL

MAG PLANT & SALS

SECONDARY GRIND

FIRST STAGE SPREAD

PRIMARY GRIND

PRIMARY CRUSH

LOAD & RAIL

BLAST BLAST

DRILL DRILL

500 METERS

500 FEET

SYENITE ROCK

QUARTZIC METASANDSTONES

CLAYE IRON FORMATION

CLAYE IRON FORMATION

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within its first planning stages and it is important to not that the residents were included within this stage. It is fair to say, then, that this agreement between the company and individual permeates many parts of the residents' lives but also instills a strong sense of loyalty in both parties.

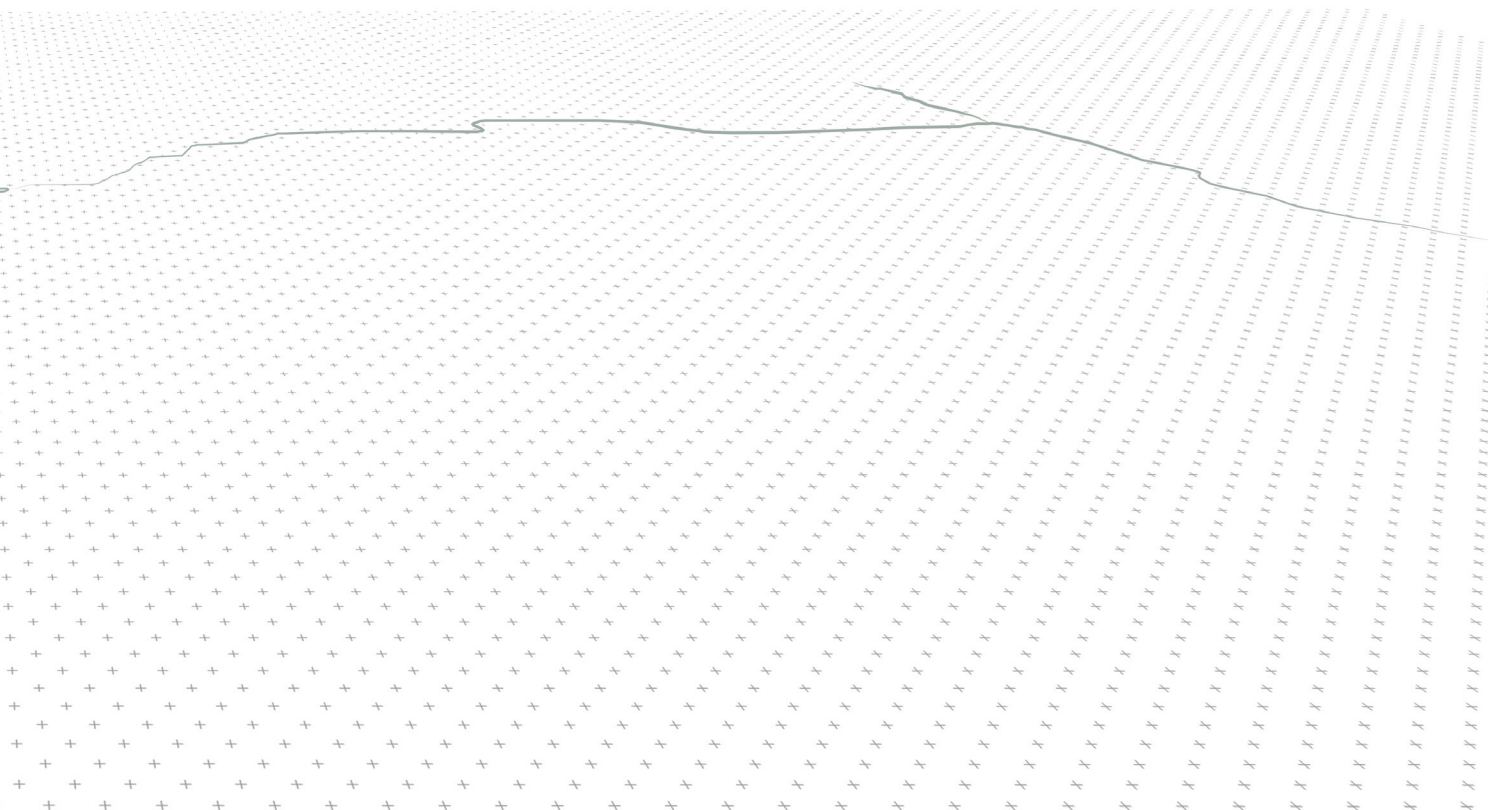
2.2 GLOBAL NATURE

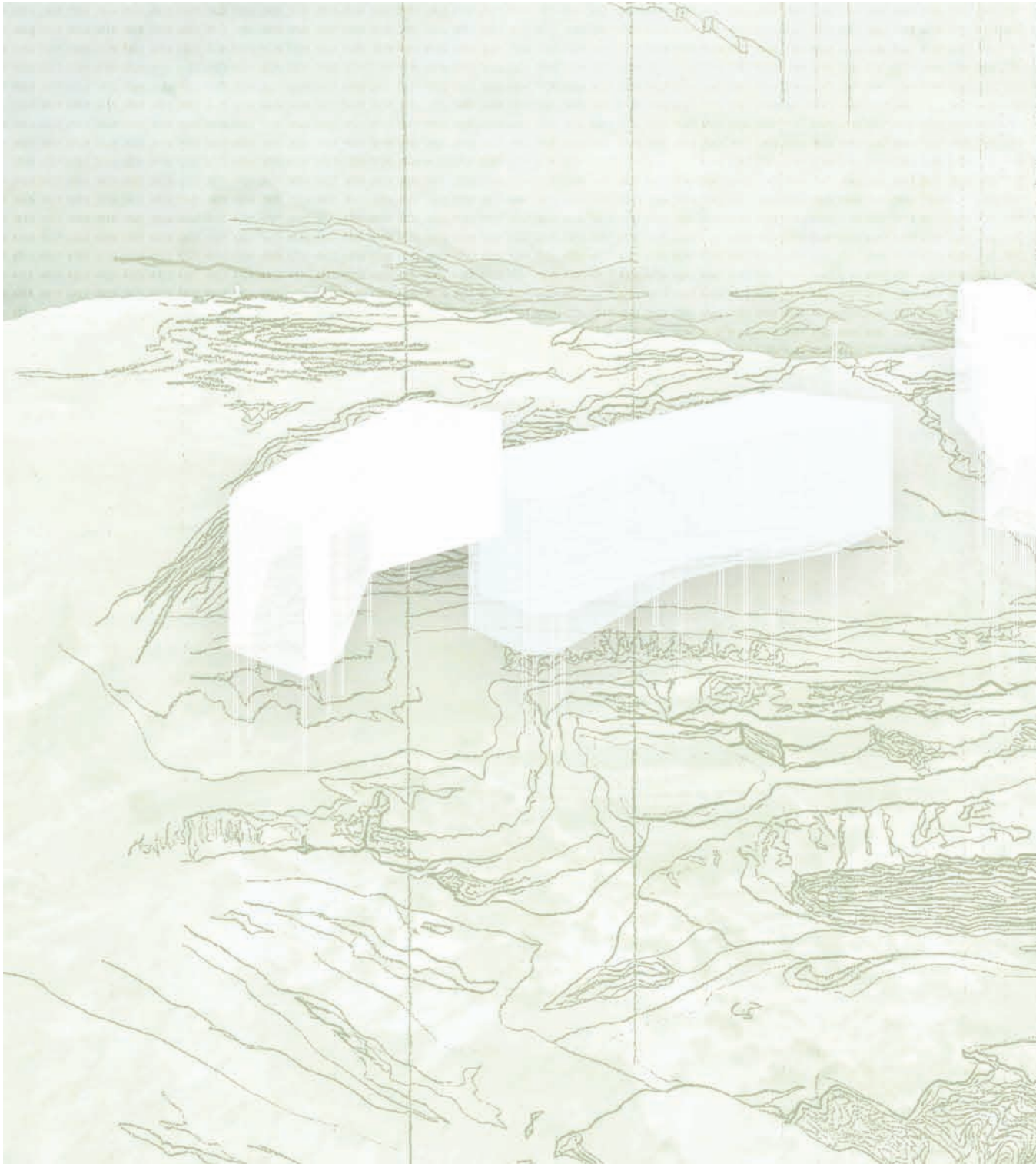
Finally, studies suggest that the mining industry is currently operated by a few large, transnational corporation who react quickly in the opening or closing of mining towns²⁶ and whom are likely to ultimately act in their own interest. The towns themselves are nodes of industrial activity and global importance. Dale further explains that strong protest of a publicly-owned mining town in Norway “may indicate that the moral obligations of the state to save a workplace are perceived as stronger than the moral obligations of a private company”²⁷, suggesting that while the previously discussed relationship of mutual agreement and obligation is certainly felt within these towns, a private company may, at end, make decisions in the running of a company town as one might be fairly expected to make in the running of a company.

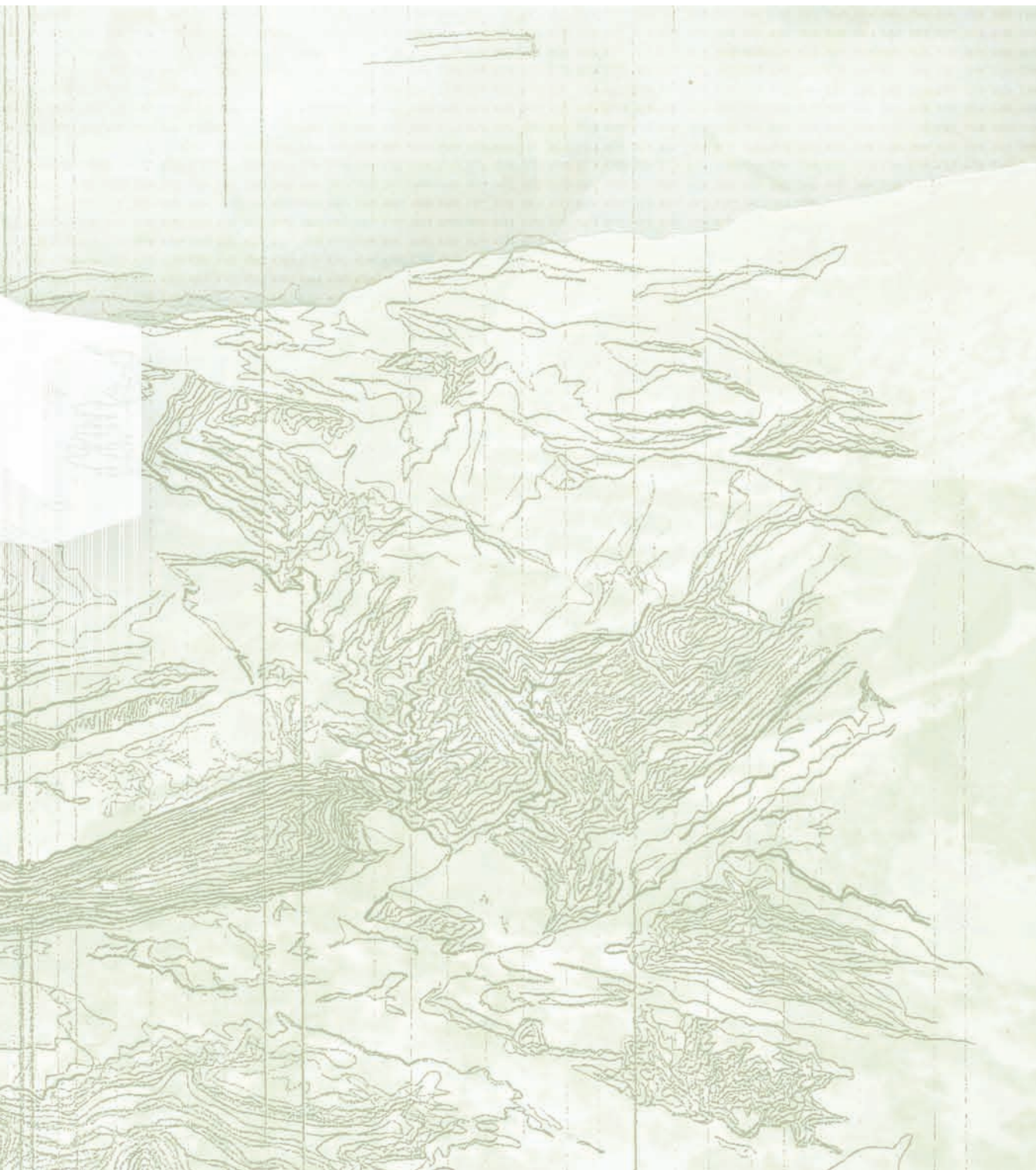
Dandekar suggests that mining towns, often operated as a company might be, are understood by residents to be places of transience and temporality. In the example of Picher, where Dandekar describes a company that did not invest much wealth into the community, “houses were often moved to make way for new or expanding mines, further reducing the incentive to construct substantial housing”²⁸. Though Fermont is located far from its mines, new land has been purchased by an outside company that operates on the opposite side of Lac Daviault. The land, though in close proximity to Fermont, falls within the province of Newfoundland and Labrador. Because of this adjacency, residents of Fermont may have the opportunity to work in these

mines as well, though they will ultimately have little say in the construction of these mines as long as they are residents of the province of Quebec. If any significant moves are made by the company, it would likely affect life for people in Fermont. Further, due to the difference in geography, it is questionable whether or not the residents and administrators of the new mines would operate under any sort of unwritten agreement, as in previous mining towns and as in Fermont.

It is also important to note that ownership of the mines in Fermont has changed hands; previously owned by QCM (under U.S. Steel), the town's mines are now owned by two translational companies: Arcelormittal and Cliffs Natural Resources. QCM had undergone an intense process of planing Fermont in order to avoid the problems that they had previously experienced with two other mining towns that they had created in the province of Quebec (Gagnon and Port Cartier). This plan sought to remedy problems associated with the difficult and costly administration of the previous towns, but also with the mindset often found amongst residents of mining towns.²⁹ A change in ownership, then, might undermine these previous efforts in favour of what is in new companies' best interests - though one must admit that the remedying of problems associated with town life would ultimately be in the company's best interest as well. The issue exists, then, if there is a change in the mutual agreement previously found between the formerly local mining company (QCM) and the residents. This is certainly possible, given the often anonymous profile of transnational corporations.







...Dissolved like salt in water,
not lost? My own history
settles like fine sediment...

ERIC PANKEY,
Permanence

... Don't you believe
a thing they say, he warned. What
you take away is still there...³⁰

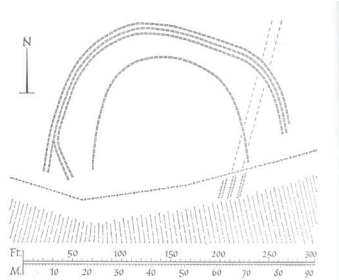
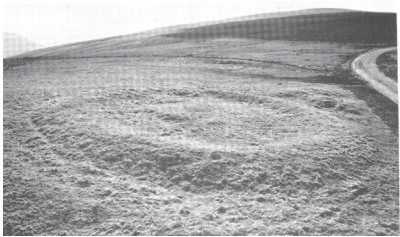
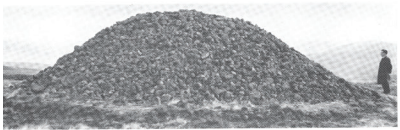


Fig. 20. Palisaded enclosure (probable), Hogbridge (No. 201)

PERMANENCE

Lewis Mumford has extensively studied the dichotomy between human settlement and human movement. In *The City in History*, Mumford describes the significance of sacred structures in the study of the first civic institutions. Further, he attributes the establishment of sacred or cultural meeting places to be a sign of the establishment of permanent gathering places. These sites are man's first understanding of architectural space.

There is also evidence that ancient persons established common habitats for practical purposes; these "drew family groups and tribes together seasonally in a common habitat, a series of camp sites, even in a collecting or a hunting economy",³¹ with sites often chosen for their abundance of some resource. A particularly poetic example, in relation to the study of Fermont, can be found in Mumford's mention of evidence of the harvesting of fish and shellfish "on sites whose permanence is witnessed by huge mounds of opened shells."³² One can easily draw a connection between the vast open pit mines which are left from extensive excavation of a particular site and the mounds of opened shells found from mesolithic use. For however long Fermont thrives as a mining town, extensive scarification of the earth is likely to remain.

The establishment of sites which serve a sacred purpose are of particular interest in the study of ancient civilizations but also proves helpful in the discussion of transient settlements - and particularly of Fermont, which is evidently progressing into a more permanent stage in its development:

"Sacred things, not just with physical survival: they relate to a more valuable and meaningful kind of life, with a consciousness that entertains

past and future... and the ultimate mystery of death and what may lie beyond death... Thus, even before the city is a place of fixed residence, it begins as a meeting place to which people periodically return: the magnet comes before the container, and this ability to attract non-residents to it for intercourse and spiritual stimulus no less than trade remains one of the essential criteria of the city, a witness to its inherent dynamism, as opposed to the more fixed and indrawn form of the village, hostile to the outsider."³³

Fermont has become such a place; it is certainly a place for discourse and trade of goods (in this case, the primary resource is perhaps the workers), yet it has also become a place of return. The residents of Fermont, who, as Sheppard³⁴ and Nakonechny³⁵ have stated, originally did not want to stay, have now grown attached to the town and attached to the community. A fondness of place is apparent. There is now a desire to denote a place for the departed and, thus, a permanent place for return long after the extraction of iron ore from Mont Wright has reached its limit.

The first scheme illustrates the despoiting of remains into containing devices which are to be fixed to the bed of Lac Daviault. With Fermont's low population (currently), the ritual of depositing and return would occur in a way that is slow and subtle. The accumulation of these pieces along the lake's edge would take many years, but allow for a collective ritual to be practiced by residents of Fermont, seasonally, as these containing devices would need to be lifted out of the water during the winter months when the lake is frozen.

Placing the containers in the water, so that the top of each might only skim the surface of the water, is intentional. While these burial devices are not meant to specifically address the practices of only one religion, it may be said that water, for many cultures





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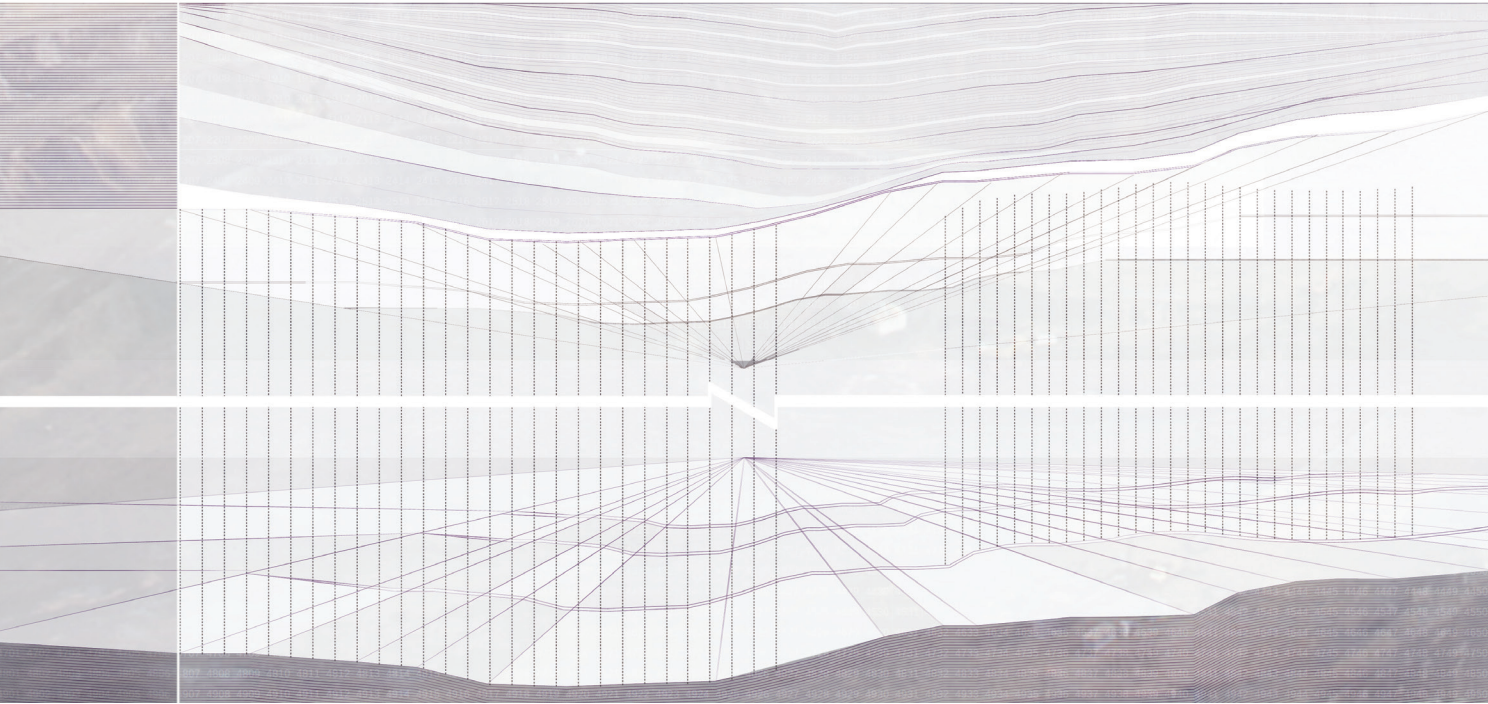
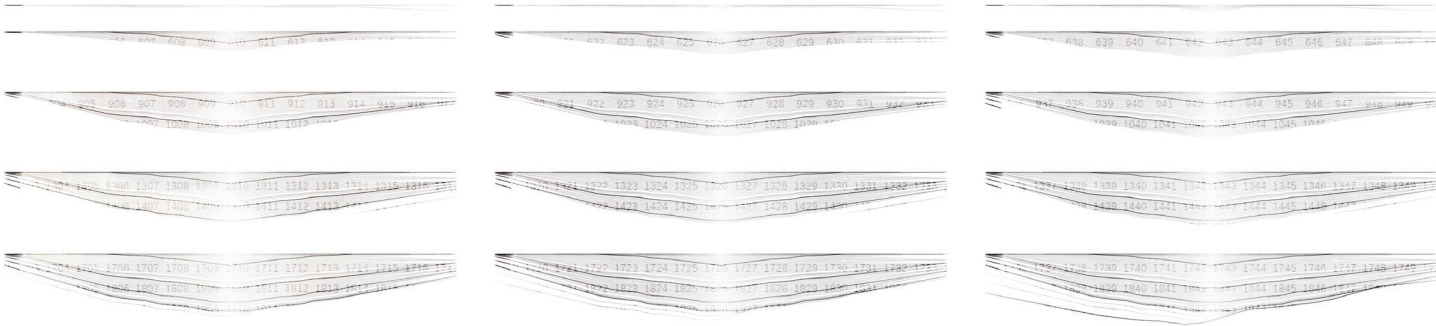


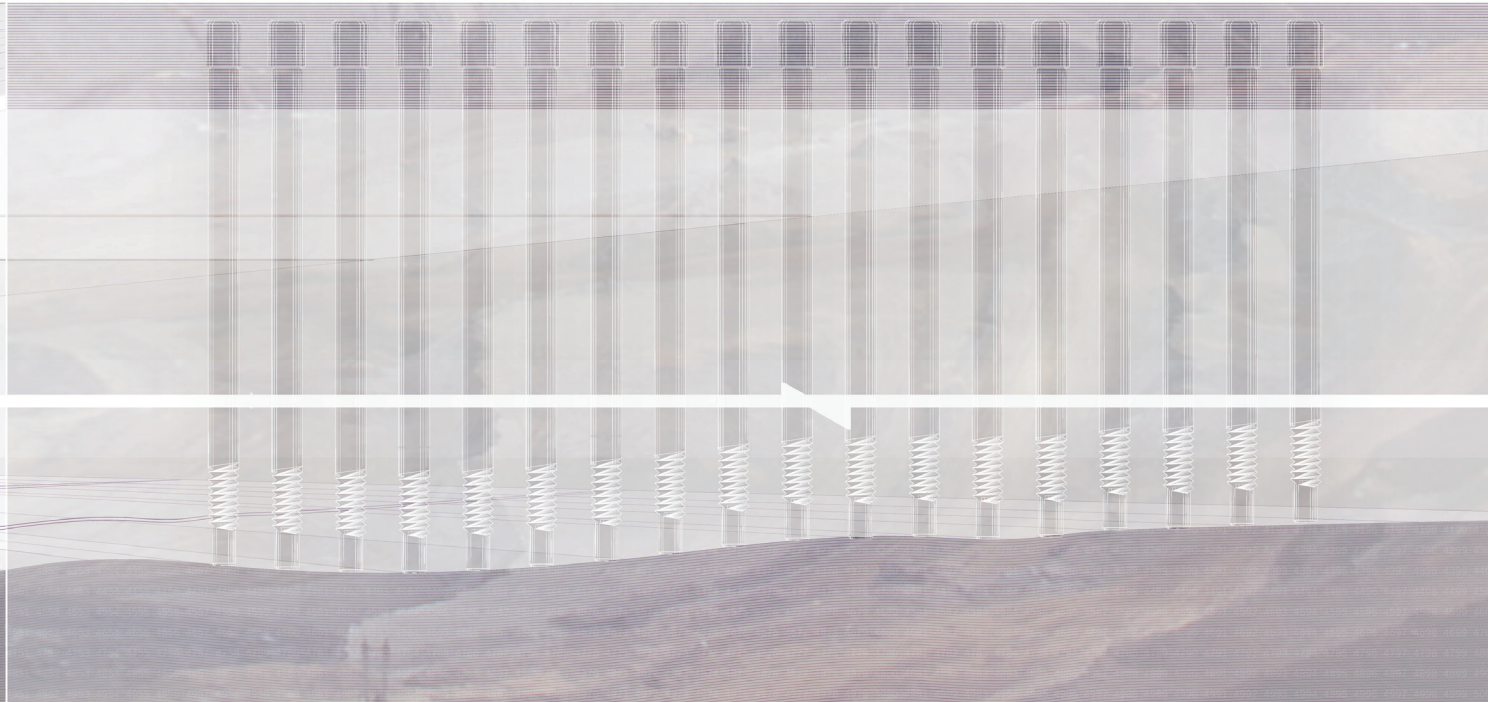
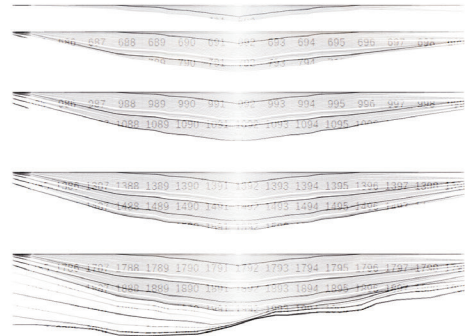
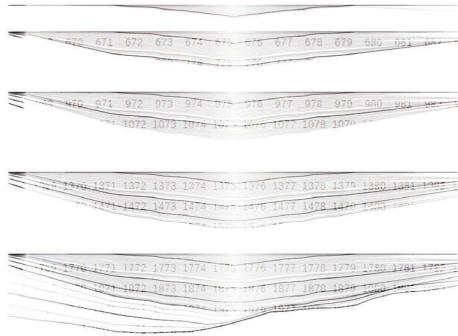
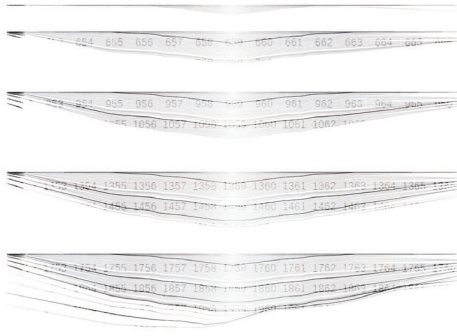


18 Slowly above the world Orion wheels
19 His glittering square, while on the
shadowy hill
20 And throbbing like a sea-light
through the dusk,
21 Great Sirius rises in his flashing blue.
22 Lord of the winter night, august and
pure,
23 Returning year on year untouched by
time,
24 To hearten faith with thine unfaltering
fire,
25 There are no hurts that beauty cannot
ease,
26 No ills that love cannot at last repair,
27 In the victorious progress of the
soul.³⁶

BLISS CARMAN,

The Winter Scene





and in many religious ceremonies, is oft perceived to be a symbol of life, death, or -- most commonly -- a device by which one might transition between life and death.

In John 3, for instance, Jesus speaks of a divine maternity and of water as the only way for man to transition into the Kingdom of God:

“Nicodemus said to him, ‘How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter a second time into his mother’s womb, and be born?’

Jesus answered .. ., ‘Unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God.’”³⁷

This calls to mind the establishment of permanent resting places and subsequent use of containing devices for surplus and shelter, as described by Mumford. Containers, says Mumford³⁸, are inherently feminine, as they mimic a mother’s embrace with arms or womb, thus the settlement of ancient cities (and Vermont’s colonization of the North, by extension) is linked to the notion of the container. The womb is particularly appropriate, as well, because water is used by many cultures in the description of water as something that is inherently feminine and fluid:

“The return to the womb of the Mother Earth ... often fuses with the return to childhood and to mother’s womb in general”.³⁹

Water, then, functions as a vessel for rebirth:

“Symbolization that construes spiritual transformation as a form of rebirth is virtually universal. In the case of Christianity such a ‘conversion’ is often characterized as a partial

or preliminary death from an old, unregenerate life into a new state of being that prefigures an eternal afterlife in another world. For Buddhism, however, in which each sentient being has a number of lives and deaths that give way one to the next in an almost unending cycle (the attainment of nirvana being considered a rare event), the symbolic ramifications of birth, death, and spiritual transformation take on forms that would not be expected in a Western setting.”⁴⁰

In the cemetery, one buries their loved one in a vessel which is fixed to the lake bed. The top of this vessel remains somewhat invisible, lightly skimming the surface of Lac Daviault, and only to be made apparent with the water’s disruption -- this the changing of seasons, the raising and lowering of the water level, and the startling arrival and departure of material goods and perhaps Vermont’s primary good: people.

INCREMENT

Inhabitants of a single-industry town -- particularly of one that is as young as Vermont -- often abide by very strict (if unofficial) routines. This sense of obligation, in some cases, may seep into the social lives of such abiders, but is most-apparent in functions most closely-related to the industry in question.

The iron mining industry of Vermont is, by accounts, felt very much within the town’s core, and is perhaps most striking when one enters the town. Simon Nakonechny described the flurry of activity, exchange of people, and transport of goods make present the act of mining⁴¹ in a town which (unlike many other mining towns, such as Copper Cliff since conglomerated with Sudbury) has not yet



grown to envelope -- or even reach -- its mines (for reasons of time and available resources, I will not be touching on very recent developments concerning the Kami Ore project, which will bring construction, blasting, processing of ore and other such functions closer than ever to Fermont, as the project is set to be located directly across Lac Daviault).

In a recent meeting with Adrian Sheppard,⁴² Professor Emeritus at McGill University's School of Architecture in Montreal, QC, I was made aware that in the planning of Fermont, the space in front of *le Mur* was meant to be used as a large, open place for public gathering. In Sheppard's opinion, this space has never been used in this way, nor has it been perceived to be there for this purpose. "Increments" is meant to make more legible places for public gathering in Fermont. This is certainly a need that has been voiced by residents in many articles, online posts, and comments that I have read in my research of Fermont, and it seems that a public space would need to function much like Fermont's "public" might.

The need for a public gathering space is appropriate; Alistair Macloed, in *No Great Mischief*, describes a scene where Alexander's sister explains why she is compelled to visit the airport:

"I have no real reason for going except that I want to be in the presence of those people..."⁴³

-- "those people" being people of her hometown. There exists, therein, the desire to be with others, and it is in the gathering of people that public activities (perhaps community events, trade, or even dissent) may take place.

According to some reports, the mining blasts are heard, but also -- interestingly -- felt within Fermont, though the mines themselves are located roughly fifteen to twenty kilometres away. "Increments", thus, is activated by the act of blasting -- heard,

and felt within the town, but only seen a year after the scheme has been installed. Every day when the blasts are executed at noon, the installment shifts just one small increment, downward. After three hundred and sixty-five incremental shifts, the public gathering space reaches its full articulation, one which mimics the level of bedrock below. This perpetually shifting public space makes for a gathering space that changes everyday, but which may not fully be understood until many shifts have taken place, as each change occurs in such a small increment.

In this way, public space is articulated subtly, and serves to visually describe a phenomenon which has typically only been felt and heard, until this point. Thus, these changes act as a bell tower might, in cities that the reader has come to know, in that they make legible the inner-workings of a functioning iron-mining town in the Canadian sub-arctic. In *Survival*, Margaret Atwood describes a passage which illustrates this very notion in Canadian literature:

"perhaps the stranger has been given a revelation but has not been able to recognize it... since the traveller is looking where he has been taught to look, up towards the sky, and since he is demanding that any revelation shall arrive in his terms -- terms he has learned in Europe -- he misses the real revelation which is there on the ground, and which takes a shape appropriate to the landscape itself, not to his ideas of what it ought to be. Because the mythic figure, 'the manitou,' is not a 'golden-haired Archangel' it is dismissed as clumsy and perhaps even rejected as impure or dangerous... The real point of the manitou may be that, whatever it is, it is here, it is actual and possible, whereas the traveller's 'Wordsworthian and European Christian fantasies are only wishful

thinking, and of a destructive kind: they prevent him from making meaningful contact with his actual environment”⁴⁴

In it, the stranger clings to what he knows of European towns and familiar components which are contained in these towns, such as a plaza or a bell tower and which make, for him, a place’s “civilization” recognizable and present.:

“Perhaps this is why he remains a stranger: he’s looking for the wrong thing in the wrong place.”⁴⁵

“Increments” is to be placed in three areas, in order to make apparent what is not easily recognizable, at first, but what is perhaps specifically Canadian, or acutely *Fermontois*:

- » Door. 33, where workers line up to be bused to the mines;
- » the point of entry into Fermont, from neighboring Labrador City and Wabush, Labrador;
- » and the hills used for recreation and which provide an advantageous view of Fermont, across Lac Daviault.

These installations will marry a place of gathering with time -- as it exists within Fermont as a measure of transition (from acceptance of transience to a vocal desire for places of permanence; from a town of single-industry to perhaps one of a number of industries; etc.) and as a repetition of cycles that are found within routines and behaviors of the people of Fermont.

CONCLUSION

The initial planning stages of the remote northern mining town of Fermont, QC was meant to address the town’s subarctic location yet also meet the needs of a population living in a remote, uniform mining town that is largely comprised of a single industry. Due to the destiny folded within its geology, further mining and, therefore, further development in the region is inevitable. Yet with towns such as this, one must always consider the — sometimes duelling — notions of transience and permanence. Antoine Danchin states:

“The ability to adapt is the most unmistakably original characteristic of living organisms; adaptation is the manifestation of the ability to subsist in a changing environment, the manifestation of a given individual’s capacity for minor change in the interest of preserving its identity.”⁴⁶

If, as Danchin suggests, adaptation is not only common, but is to be expected, then study of Fermont and other such “new colonies” of otherwise uncolonized parts of Canada, is imperative if one is to understand Canadian settlement.

Further, specific consideration of Fermont’s future must address this flux with sensitivity. As the same factors and conditions have produced two very different population groups, the interest is timely. The mindset that is found in the people of Fermont (and in similarly geographically- or economically-situated towns) must be acknowledged, for it is not solely unique to mining towns — or even company towns in general — and may have great impact on the understanding of human movement and settlement.

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