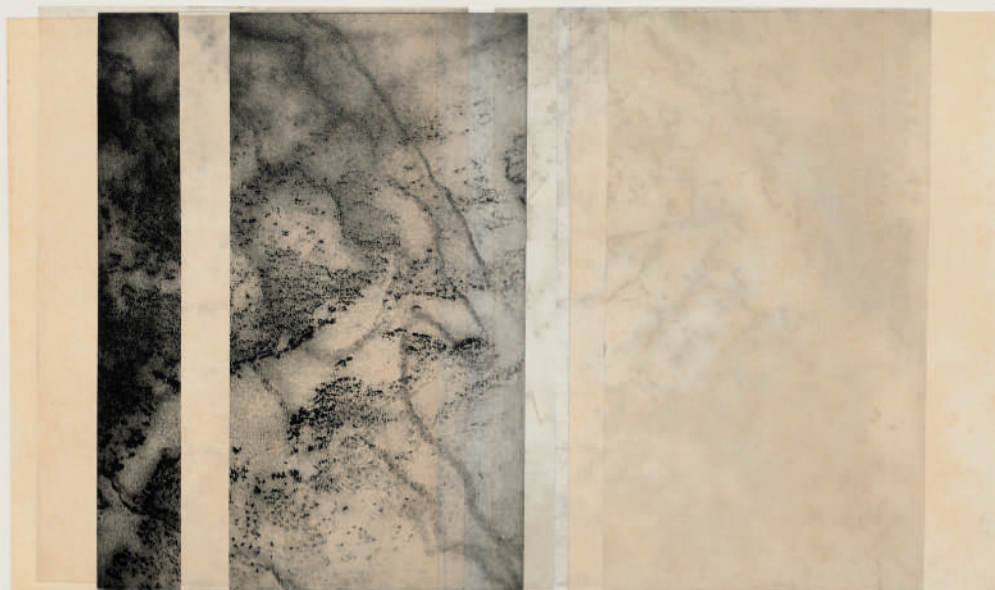


# INTER-NORD

Revue internationale d'études artctiques | *International Journal of Arctic Studies*



# INTER-NORD

Revue internationale d'études arctiques

*International Journal of Arctic Studies*

Publiée par l'Institut de Recherches Arctiques  
Jean Malaurie Monaco-UVSQ (IRAM)

*Published by the Jean Malaurie Institute  
of Arctic Studies Monaco UVSQ (MIARC)*

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INTER-NORD  
Malaurie Institute of Arctic Research Monaco-UVSQ  
55 avenue de Paris  
78000 Versailles  
FRANCE

[redaction@miarctic.org](mailto:redaction@miarctic.org)

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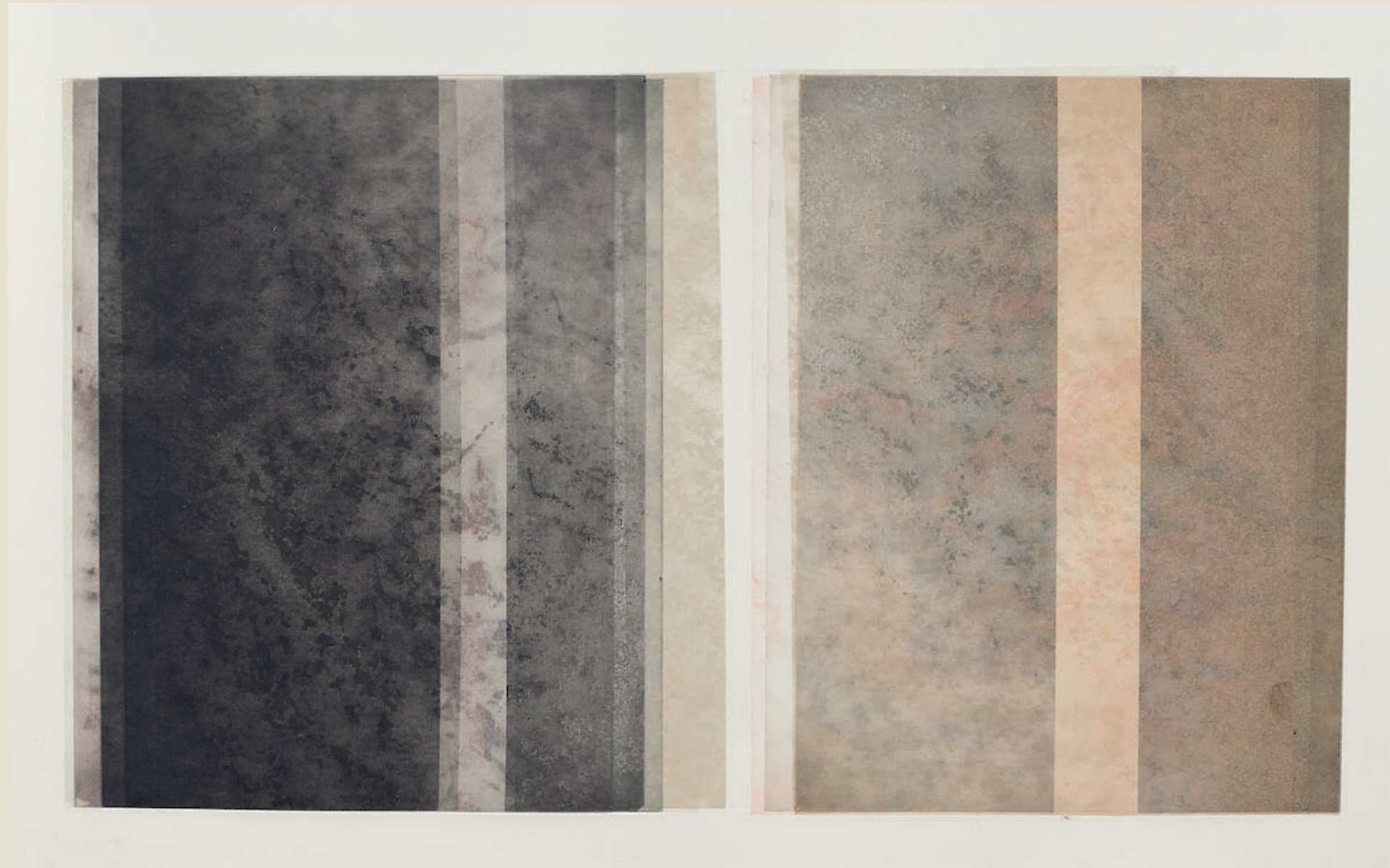
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# ÉDITORIAL / *EDITORIAL*



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ÉDITORIAL

JAN BORM

Professeur des universités en littérature britannique à l’UVSQ / Université Paris-Saclay,  
Directeur de l’Institut de recherches arctiques Jean Malaurie Monaco-UVSQ,  
Chaire UArctic en Humanités arctiques et Rédacteur en chef de la revue *Inter-Nord*

Le professeur Jean Malaurie s'est éteint le 5 février 2024 à son domicile dieppois à l'âge de 101 ans. Ayant refusé d'intégrer le Service du travail obligatoire (STO) de l'occupant nazi en 1943, il s'est caché et a rejoint le mouvement de la Résistance, un acte de récalcitrance qui l'a profondément marqué et qui lui a valu les honneurs militaires lors de ses obsèques. La cérémonie a eu lieu en la cathédrale Saint-Louis-des-Invalides à Paris le 14 février 2024, suivie des honneurs militaires et du discours prononcé par la ministre française de l'Enseignement supérieur et de la Recherche, la professeure Sylvie Retailleau.

C'est avec émotion que le comité de rédaction d'*Inter-Nord* lui fait ses adieux, rendant un dernier hommage au Président d'honneur de notre revue, fondée avec l'historien Fernand Braudel au CNRS au cours des années 1960. Nous publions en français et en anglais l’oraison funèbre du père Geoffroy de la Tousche, le discours de la ministre et le mot de la fin de Guillaume, fils de Jean Malaurie. À ces trois documents, nous joignons le chaleureux hommage paru dans *Le Canard enchaîné* et la lettre de condoléances de Mme Audrey Azoulay, Directrice-générale de l’UNESCO.

Ce numéro 23 d'*Inter-Nord* poursuit dans la veine interdisciplinaire et intersectorielle introduite par Jean Malaurie dès le début, en essayant de proposer des versions bilingues des textes dans la mesure du possible. Le présent numéro contient une section spéciale avec trois articles de recherche sur l'Islande, dont deux ont été présentés au colloque annuel des sciences humaines de l'université d'Islande en 2023. Ces textes sont accompagnés d'œuvres graphiques de l'artiste islandaise Thóra Sigurðardóttir. Nous remercions Thóra de nous avoir permis de publier certaines de ses œuvres d'art aussi mystérieuses que fascinantes, évoquées dans un texte étonnant de la poétesse islandaise Sigurbjörg Thrastardóttir.

Dans la section consacrée à la création littéraire, nous publions également deux textes de l’auteure québécoise Monique Durand sur les îles Féroé en traduction anglaise, ainsi que des entretiens avec l'auteure alaskienne Nancy Lord et la journaliste et réalisatrice Olivera Tornau. Parmi les autres contributions, citons un article d’opinion signé par quatres titulaires d’une Chaire UArctic, un projet de recherche original en français, ainsi que plusieurs recensions.

Bonne lecture !

Jan Borm, au nom du comité de rédaction,  
Versailles, 2 décembre 2024.

EDITORIAL

JAN BORM

*Full Profesor in British Literature at UVSQ/University of Paris-Saclay, France,  
Director of the Malaurie Institute of Arctic Research Monaco-UVSQ,  
UArctic Chair in Arctic Humanities, Chief Editor of the journal* Inter-Nord

On 5 February 2024, Professor Jean Malaurie passed away at his home in Dieppe at the age of 101. Having refused to join the compulsory work service (STO – Service du travail obligatoire) of the Nazi occupant in 1943, he went into hiding, joining the Résistance movement, an act of recalcitrance which characterized him profoundly and which was to entitle him to military honours during his funeral. The ceremony took place at the Saint-Louis-des-Invalides Cathedral in Paris on 14 February 2024, followed by the military honours and eulogy pronounced by the French Minister of Higher Education and Research, Professor Sylvie Retailleau.

It is with emotion that the editorial board of *Inter-Nord* wishes him farewell, paying a last tribute to the President of honour of our journal which he had founded with historian Fernand Braudel at the CNRS in the 1960s. We are publishing in French and English the homily of Father Geoffroy de la Tousche, the final remarks by Jean Malaurie’s son Guillaume and the minister’s speech, as well as a homage published in *Le Canard enchaîné* and a letter of condolences by Mrs Audrey Azoulay, Director-General of UNESCO.

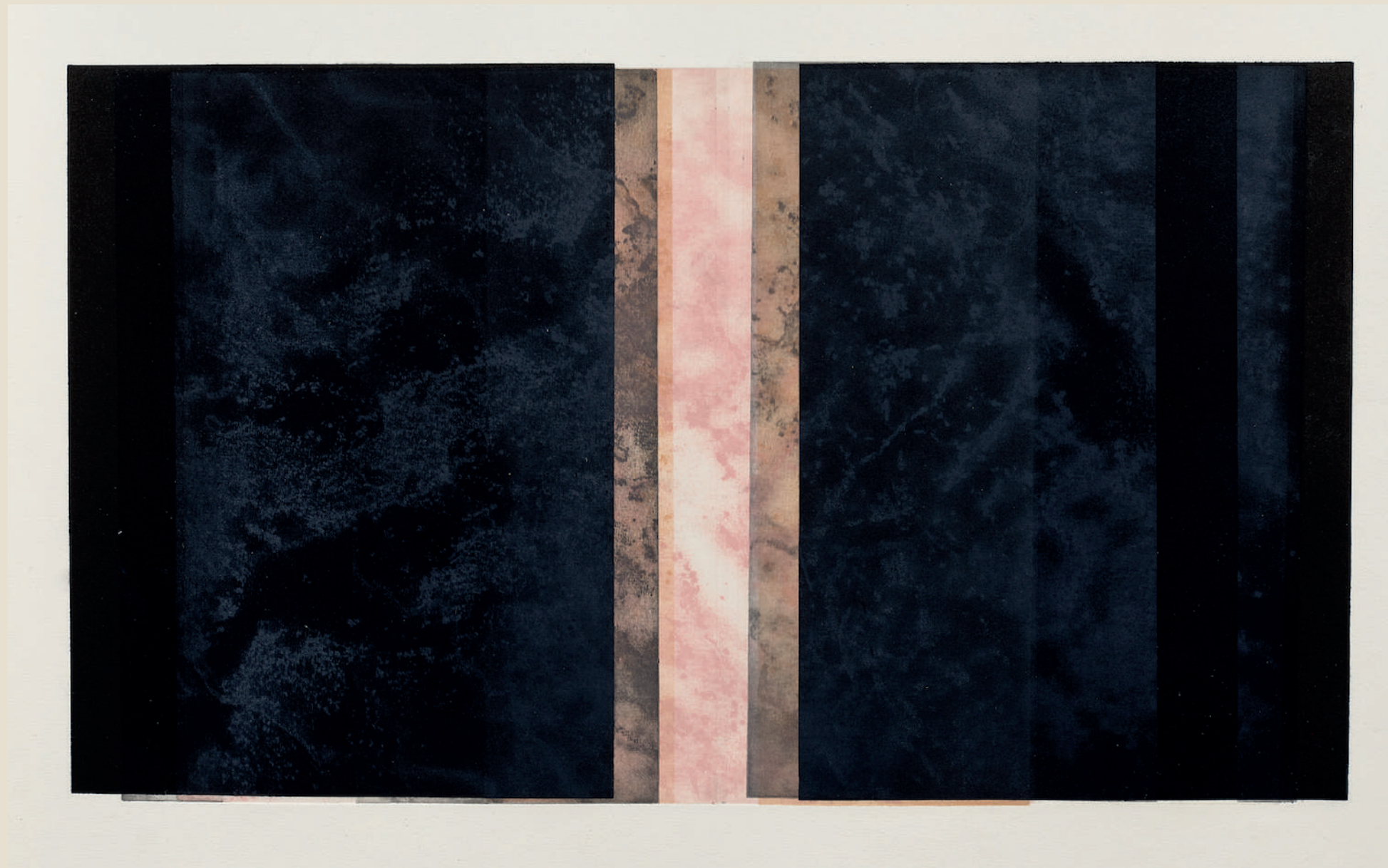
*Inter-Nord* 23 continues in the interdisciplinary and intersectorial vein which has been its imprint introduced by Jean Malaurie right from the start, trying to propose bilingual versions of texts as far as possible. The current issue contains a special section with three scientific research articles on Iceland, two of which were first presented at the annual Humanities conference of the University of Iceland in 2023. These texts are accompanied by graphic works of the Icelandic artist Thóra Sigurðardóttir. Many thanks to Thóra for letting us publish some of her intriguing artwork discussed in a stunning piece by the Icelandic poetess Sigurbjörg Thrastardóttir.

In the creative writing section, we are also publishing two pieces by the Quebecois author Monique Durand about the Faroe Islands and interviews with Alaskan author Nancy Lord and the journalist Olivera Tornau. Other contributions include a viewpoint signed by four UArctic Chairs, an original French research project and some reviews of Malaurie’s and other works.

Bonne lecture !

Jan Borm, on behalf of the editorial board,  
Versailles, Decembre 2, 2024.

DOSSIER SPÉCIAL « ISLANDE » /  
*SPECIAL THEME « ICELAND »*



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# THE RECEPTION IN ICELAND OF THE GAIMARD EXPEDITION IN 1835-1836

## IMAGES AND MEMORIES

SUMARLIÐI R. ÍSLEIFFSSON

Maître de conférences en histoire à l’Université d’Islande et auteur de l’ouvrage *Deux îles aux confins du monde. Islande et Groenland* (Presses de l’Université du Québec, 2019)

Associate Professor in History at the University of Iceland and author of the monograph *Deux îles aux confins du monde. Islande et Groenland* (Presses de l’Université du Québec, 2019)

The subject of this essay is a French research expedition to Iceland in 1835 and 1836 on the ship *La Recherche*. Outside Iceland the expedition has generally been known by the name of the vessel, while in Iceland it has been identified with the leader of the expedition, Joseph Paul Gaimard, and that custom will be upheld here, by referring to the *Gaimard Expedition*. The name of the ship is an indicator of the purpose of the expedition: *recherche* = *search, research*.<sup>1</sup> The main focus of the essay is not the expedition *per se*, but a discussion of the reception in Iceland, and changes in how the expedition and its publications have been evaluated over the years. That change of perspective will be linked to the concept of cultural heritage and discussion of the Icelandic turf house, which features widely in the expedition’s images. This essay is based upon the principle that “heritage is primarily not about the past, but ... about our relationship with the present and future,” as heritage expert Rodney Harrison has proposed.<sup>2</sup> Finally, the question will be addressed whether this ambitious

research expedition should be accorded more importance in Icelandic cultural history than it has had in the past; and the influence of the *Gaimard Expedition* on discourse about Iceland abroad will be considered.

### Exploring and mediating Iceland

The *Gaimard Expedition* arose from the loss of a French ship, *La Lilloise*, off Iceland or Greenland in 1833. The intention was to search for any sign of what had happened to it. *La Lilloise*, due to return to France in the autumn of 1833, failed to appear, and has never been heard of since. The French authorities decided to send out search expeditions, in hopes that some of the ship’s crew might have survived, somewhere. Searches were made in 1834, and in the following year, 1835, the effort was resumed aboard *La Recherche*.<sup>3</sup>

The crew of *La Recherche* were to search the shores of Iceland and Greenland for any traces of the vessel; and aboard the ship were two men who were



Travelling Icelandic country folk. The artist has here striven to depict people’s form of transport and their clothing – both peasants and the more prosperous. The horses are clearly not authentic, small Icelandic horses, however, but based on some other model.

Atlas historique, fig. 13, detail.

appointed to explore conditions in Iceland with regard to nature and the inhabitants. These were the above-mentioned Gaimard, the ship’s doctor, and geologist Eugène Robert; Gaimard had previously circumnavigated the earth as a ship’s doctor and researcher, so he had extensive experience.<sup>4</sup> When the ship arrived at Reykjavík in 1835, Gaimard and Robert disembarked. They were not involved in the search, but travelled around Iceland, mainly in the west and southwest. They carried out a wide range of studies on nature and society, made notes of what they observed, and collected samples of plants and minerals, which they took back to France along with cultural artifacts.

On his return to France in the autumn of 1835, Gaimard was granted leave by the French Ministry of the Navy to return to Iceland. The objective was to continue the search for evidence of the *Lilloise*’s fate, and at the same time to make a research expedition around Iceland. On the second expedition in 1836, a journey around the island was made, though

omitting the West Fjords in the far northwest. The expedition team included a large number of researchers and artists, in addition to Gaimard and Robert. Each had his own assigned role. They were: Victor Lottin (physicist), Raoul Anglès (meteorologist), Eugène Macquet (keeper of the expedition journal), Xavier Marmier (literary scholar, France’s leading expert on Nordic literature), Auguste Mayer (marine artist) and Louis Bévalet (natural-history artist).<sup>5</sup>

Gaimard is said to have been good at persuading people of the value of his ideas, and that may have been a factor in the undertaking of the expedition.<sup>6</sup> Another reason, however, was that in times of peace naval powers needed to provide work for ships and their personnel; and research expeditions were suitable for that purpose. In addition, French authorities had considerable interests at stake in northern *climes* – not least with regard to the French fisheries off the coast of Iceland. No doubt this explains the goodwill of French authorities regarding the expedition.<sup>7</sup>

1 A detailed account of Gaimard and his expeditions to Iceland is presented in Árni Svævarr’s book *Maðurinn sem Ísland elskaði. Paul Gaimard og Íslandsferðir hans 1835-1836*. With regard to the background to the expedition, see pp. 83-91. See also Gisèle Jonsson, *Les relations franco-islandaises au 19e siècle* and Jan Borm, “This Island so Sad and Beautiful.”

2 Harrison goes on to describe the concept of heritage in more detail as follows: “Heritage is not a passive process of simply preserving things from the past that remain, but an active process of assembling a series of objects, places and practices that we choose to hold up as a mirror to the present, associated with a particular set of values that we wish to take with us into the future.” Harrison, *Heritage*, 4.

3 Snævarr, *Maðurinn Sem Ísland elskaði*, 83-91.

4 Knutsen and Posti, *La Recherche*, 19.

5 Björnsson and Björnsson, “Formáli,” 5.

6 Knutsen and Posti, *La Recherche*, 16, 21; Snævarr, *Maðurinn sem Ísland elskaði*.

7 See e.g. Snævarr, *Ísland Babylon*.



It should be mentioned that after the expedition to Iceland, in 1838-40, an even larger expedition was sent to the northernmost regions of Norway, Sweden, Finland and Russia.<sup>8</sup>

When Gaimard's expedition arrived in Iceland, the country was still a little-known and rarely-visited peripheral region. For centuries the view had predominated in European culture that Iceland was first and foremost an arctic island, all but uninhabitable, a chilly exemplar of the merciless forces of nature. The people of Iceland were mostly regarded as cultureless barbarians – in a discourse similar to attitudes to indigenous people in America, Africa and Greenland. From the latter half of the 18th century, interest in exploring the far north was growing in Europe – for clearly various interests were at stake there. Iceland attracted more interest with increasing awareness of the island's remarkable nature – not least its volcanoes and hot springs. Growing knowledge that during the middle ages this remote nation in the far north had produced classic, almost unique, literature also contributed to growing interest in Iceland.

Research expeditions were sent to Iceland in the mid-18th century by the Danish authorities, and British and French expeditions made brief visits. This led to an increase in publications about Iceland. Before his departure for Iceland, Gaimard may well have consulted Niels Horrebow's book on Iceland, first published in Danish in 1752. In 1764 a French translation was published: *Nouvelle description physique-historique, civile et politique de l'Islande*.<sup>9</sup> Gaimard and members of his team also make reference to various publications on Iceland which they had in their keeping. The largest was *Voyage en Islande*, a translation of *Travels in Iceland* by Icelanders Eggert Ólafsson and Bjarni Pálsson, published originally in 1772 in Danish, and in 1801 in French.<sup>10</sup> Also Uno von Troil's book, written after he visited Iceland in 1772 with the Joseph

Banks expedition (originally published in Swedish, 1777, and in French as *Lettres sur l'Islande*, 1781).<sup>11</sup> Finally, members of the expedition make reference to Ebenezer Henderson's *Iceland, or the Journal of a Residence in that Island* (1818, partly published in French 1823).<sup>12</sup> The older works emphasise the need to counteract the misapprehensions about Iceland that the authors felt had been commonly held, and to define more precisely what kind of peripheral region Iceland was. Similar ideas are expressed in the later writings, while at the same time Romantic discourse soon played a bigger part.

Following the expedition to Iceland, Gaimard succeeded in having the expedition's findings, an account of the journey with illustrations, published in a total of 12 volumes from 1837 to 1852: *Voyage en Islande et au Groënland, exécuté pendant les années 1835 et 1836 sur la corvette la Recherche, commandée par Tréhouart, dans le but de découvrir les traces de la Lilloise*. Eight of the volumes had the text in octavo format, and a volume of geological images was in the same format. Three volumes of pictures are in large folio format. Two of these, *Atlas historique*, comprise mainly images of people and landscapes in Iceland, together with seven pictures from Greenland. The two volumes contain 150 images. The third volume of pictures, *Atlas zoologique, médical et géographique*, has 50 images of people and animals, along with several maps, e.g. of Reykjavík. It also includes pictures of leprosy patients.<sup>13</sup> In addition, in 1837 Marmier published *Lettres sur l'Islande*, which was reprinted three times. Part of it had already been published in the French periodical *Revue des Deux Mondes* in 1836; in 1946 part of the book was translated into Icelandic. Only one volume of the *Gaimard expedition* publications has been translated into Icelandic: *Histoire du voyage* by Eugène Robert.<sup>14</sup> Icelandic scholar and author Benedikt Gröndal maintained that “no comparable

8 Knutsen and Posti, *La Recherche*.

9 Horrebow, *Tilforladelige Efterretninger om Island*. The book was later published in four more editions in French, and it formed the basis for a description of Iceland in the *Encyclopédie* of Denis Diderot and Jean le Rond d'Alembert (1781). Diderot and le Rond d'Alembert, *Encyclopédie*, 106 et seq.

10 Vice-Lavmand Eggert Olafsens og Land-Physici Biarne Povelsens Reise igiennem Island, I-II.

11 Bref rörande en resa til Island.

12 Robert, *Saga Íslandsferðanna*, 75, 77; Snævarr, *Maðurinn sem Ísland elskaði*, 268.

13 The volumes were published in this order: Paul Gaimard, *Histoire du voyage*, 1838; Paul Gaimard and Auguste Mayer, *Atlas historique* I-II, 1838-1842; *Atlas zoologique*; Eugène Robert, *Géologie et Minéralogie*, I-II, 1838-1842; Victor Lottin, *Physique*, 1838; Xavier Marmier, *Histoire de l'Islande*, 1840 and *Littérature Islandaise* 1843; Eugène Robert, *Histoire du voyage*, 1850, and *Zoologie et médecine* I-II, 1838 and 1851, and finally Eugène Méquet, *Journal du voyage*, 1852.

14 Robert, *Saga Íslandsferðanna*, 2007.



Reading aloud in an Icelandic home. The image is intended to show the high level of culture among Icelanders. A fire is burning in the hearth, and the members of the household listen with attention. Various household objects are seen, such as an askur (lidded eating bowl) at right. At left is a whale vertebra which would have been used as a stool, here signifying the primitiveness of Icelandic life.

Atlas historique, fig. 21, detail.

work about Iceland has ever been published, and it never will be.”<sup>15</sup> And he was justified in his view: no work of this scale about Iceland has ever been published abroad since. The expedition to Scandinavia and Finland aboard *La Recherche*, however, gave rise to a far more extensive publication: 26 volumes of text and five picture atlases.<sup>16</sup>

The *Atlas Historique* comprised mostly pictures by Auguste Mayer, who was best known in his time as a marine painter, but is now largely forgotten. As stated above, he took part in the 1836 expedition, during which he made sketches, as did other members of the expedition team. He and other artists then developed these drawings further, after which

printers made them into lithographs.<sup>17</sup> The original sketches are unavailable and may be lost.<sup>18</sup>

The print run of *Voyage en Islande et au Groënland* was not large – as it was an expensive project.<sup>19</sup> Yet it is reasonable to assume that the books were accessible in leading libraries around Europe. Many of those who wrote about Iceland made use of the books, and especially the illustrations.<sup>20</sup> These include, for instance, Lord Dufferin, an Irish marquess who visited Iceland in 1856 and published his *Letters from High Latitudes* the following year. Swedish author C.W. Pajkull also did so in his *En Sommer i Island* (1867). Interestingly, Danish artist Emanuel Larsen, who was in Iceland in 1845, made use of

15 Gröndal, *Dægnadöl*, 49.

16 Snævarr, *Maðurinn sem Ísland elskaði*, 347-351; Knutsen and Posti, *La Recherche*, 211-218.

17 Snævarr, *Maðurinn sem Ísland elskaði*, 234.

18 Robert and Bévalet also made sketches, as did Charles Giraud, who visited Iceland in 1840. One of those who took part in developing the sketches into the final images was Emile Lassalle, who is credited as the artist of some of the images. He was not, however, a member of the expedition, so it would be questionable to count him among the authors of the works. Sigurðsson, “Eftirmáli,” unpaginated; Snævarr, *Maðurinn sem Ísland elskaði*, 173-174, 345.

19 Snævarr, *Maðurinn sem Ísland elskaði*, 358.

20 It is probable that illustrator Edouard Riou made use of illustrations in the *Atlas historique* as preparation for his illustrations in Jules Verne's famous novel *Voyage au centre de la terre* *Journey to the Centre of the Earth*; Verne makes reference to Gaimard in the book, and also to other leading travel books about Iceland available in French at the time. See *Voyage au centre de la terre*, 83.





Ten króna banknote. First issued by the Central Bank of Iceland 1981.  
Property of the author.

images from the *Atlas historique*; Larsen was a well-known marine painter in Denmark. Some of his pictures were published *inter alia* in Denmark, an illustrated volume published in 1856 which showed interesting and popular places within the kingdom of Denmark, including Iceland, which at that time was under Danish rule. At least two of Larsen's pictures from Iceland are clearly based upon images in the *Atlas Historique*, with only minor changes. Larsen's pictures – or more accurately his copies of images from the *Atlas historique* – went on to be widely published. They were even used on Icelandic banknotes around 1900, and hence played an important role in shaping Icelanders' own conception of these places.

The illustrations from the *Gaimard Expedition* are of great significance in Icelandic cultural history. In many cases, they are the first visual representation of various aspects of Icelandic life in the first half of the 19th century, and the first major presentation of Iceland and its people in pictorial form published abroad. The subjects of the illustrations in the *Atlas historique* may be classified into a number of themes. Quite a large number of images depict trading towns and

villages, e.g. Reykjavík. Many of the illustrations are landscapes; rural buildings are often pictured, depicting the structure of buildings and their surroundings. Only a few images show household interiors. Some show people at work – at sea and on the land. Clothing is a frequent subject – both garments for special occasions and everyday dress. Also pictured are leisure activities such as reading aloud to the household, and playing musical instruments. Some pictures depict handicrafts and historical objets d'art. The publication also includes some pictures of well-known Icelanders, identified by name, as well as drawings of leprosy patients.

The illustrations have considerable documentary value, e.g. with regard to buildings, clothing, landscapes, the appearance of towns and villages, and means of transport. For example, a picture of the trading village of Djúpivogur in the southeast: the image shows buildings, the jetty and, perhaps most interestingly, a latrine on the jetty. These are said to have been common in towns and villages, but are rarely seen in pictures. But as documents the images are often imprecise.<sup>21</sup> According to art historian Frank Ponzi, the subjects are often

21 Sigurðsson, "Eftirmáli," unpaginated.



A seasonal fishers' hut or home of a fisherman, Reykjavík. The image is intended to indicate the primitive living conditions of the Icelandic peasantry.  
Atlas historique, fig. 19, detail.

"freely interpreted. By placing more emphasis on Gallic concepts of the picturesque than on 19th-century actuality, the lithographers have created an Iceland of their own."<sup>22</sup>

One can only agree. Iceland was presented as untouched nature in the far north, magnificent and *sublime*, and that attitude is manifested in images of mountains, glaciers, lofty crags and waterfalls. The romantic vision manifested in them has been predominant ever since in viewing Iceland from abroad.

Iceland is also presented as a zone on the periphery of the habitable world – where trees, for instance, could hardly thrive. The *Atlas historique* includes an image of "Iceland's only tree" (Atlas historique, 123b), which is said to survive only because it grows in a completely sheltered spot.<sup>23</sup> Another image (Atlas historique, 54) depicts a traveller who has died of exposure; this is presented as evidence of the harshness of life in Iceland, and the difficulty of

travelling there. The members of the expedition did not witness any such event themselves, but Marmier maintains that the country is so hard to traverse that foreigners would perish without Icelandic guides.<sup>24</sup> British literary scholar Carl Thompson has pointed out that discourse of this kind is commonly seen in books by 19th-century men recounting travels in faraway places.<sup>25</sup> The more difficult the territory, and the more remote, the greater was their heroism and manliness.<sup>26</sup> Hence Iceland was a place to conquer and survive in untouched "virgin territory," as Thompson calls it.<sup>27</sup>

In the illustrations, Icelanders appear mainly as impoverished farming folk. Emphasis is placed upon depicting their clothing and homes, and their life is presented as harmonious and caring: they are European "noble savages." Similar ideas are expressed in the writings of Gaimard, Robert and Marmier from their sojourn in Iceland. They often allude to

22 Ponzi, *Ísland*, 57.

23 Marmier, "Gestrisni og fátækt", 148.

24 Marmier, "Gestrisni og fátækt", 46.

25 Sramek, 'Face Him like a Briton', p. 676; Schaumann, *The Emergence of Mountaineering*, p. 3.

26 Thompson, *Travel Writing*, p. 177.

27 Thompson, *Travel Writing*, p. 178.





Milking ewes. A genre image that aims to give an impression of a peaceful, simple life surrounded by nature.  
Atlas historique, fig. 69, detail

the hospitality of the Icelanders, their gentleness and warm-heartedness, and their good education and eagerness to learn, which the authors see as a legacy of Icelandic medieval culture. Marmier was an expert on that subject. According to the French visitors, Icelanders and their way of life resembled those of people outside “civilised” Europe. They frankly acknowledged that they did not see the Icelandic way of life as desirable: people often sat on whalebones or dried horse-heads, and not chairs or benches; most lived lives of poverty, want and filth. Gaimard maintained that conditions in Iceland were perhaps even worse than among “the most barbaric peoples of the Pacific,” while Marmier alleges that when the “primitive” Icelanders got hold of alcohol they could not restrain themselves and became inebriated. He did not find that surprising, in this dismal land.<sup>28</sup>

In this context it may be borne in mind that Gaimard took back to France with him several skulls of Icelanders; he gave no details of how he had acquired them. Casts were also made of the heads of several Icelanders, with the intention of identifying their “race.” These may have

been seen as a contribution to research on phrenology. In the same way, the *La Recherche* expedition to northern Scandinavia and Finland a few years later acquired skulls of Sami. Skulls were much studied at that time with the aim of classifying people into a hierarchy of “races.”<sup>29</sup>

Overall, the material published after the *Gaimard Expedition* may be said to present an evaluation of how far Icelanders resembled “civilised” people, and how far they belonged to a “primitive” exotic world. At the same time, answers were sought about the nature and environment of the country, taking account of its global position – and that evaluation was fitted into the vision of the far north that was predominant at the time.

### Reception and oblivion

The *Gaimard Expedition* received little attention in Iceland until the mid-20th century. The expedition’s publications were, however, accessible, at least at the National Library of Iceland. In addition, some of the

illustrations were offered for sale as individual prints for a time in Reykjavík in the mid-19th century, but nothing is known of which images these were, how many, or how well they sold.<sup>30</sup> The best-known image was a portrait of Gaimard himself, who had presented copies of it to his hosts in Iceland. When author Benedikt Gröndal examined the atlases (*Atlas historique* and *Atlas zoologique*) some time in the late 19th century, the volumes were becoming worn, and certain illustrations were missing – mainly portraits of eminent Icelanders. Perhaps those images were the most interesting to Icelanders, as no other portraits of them existed.<sup>31</sup>

In the early decades of the 20th century, reference was occasionally made to the illustrations from the *Gaimard Expedition*. They were offered for sale, for instance, in a shop in Reykjavík in 1925.<sup>32</sup> They were also displayed from time to time at exhibitions abroad in the early decades of the 20th century, and published in books that featured Iceland.<sup>33</sup> The first major coverage of the *Gaimard Expedition* and the illustrations in the *Atlas historique* was in 1934, when the Swedish-Icelandic Association in Sweden published *Island för hundra år sedan: efter litografier i Recherche-expeditionens Atlas Historique*. The book reproduced 48 illustrations from the *Atlas historique*, accompanied by a text in Swedish. Illustrations were selected of Iceland’s best-known natural phenomena, and those that portrayed Icelandic cultural history in the 19th century: homes, work, clothing, and towns and villages.

The book states that the illustrations provide important information about life in Iceland at that time, which had still been very primitive. The images provided a basis for comparing Iceland in past and present: “Islandia Antiqua et Hodierna.”<sup>34</sup> The works were thus a “mirror” of a kind, in which past and present might be compared, thus observing the great changes that had taken place in Icelandic society since the expedition visited Iceland.

A review of *Island för hundra år sedan* in *Skírnir*, Iceland’s leading cultural periodical of the time, states that “in the eyes of these visitors the state of this country was quite appalling, while they admire the beauty of the country, and the cultural aspirations of its people.”<sup>35</sup> The review was undoubtedly penned by

Guðmundur Finnbogason, editor of *Skírnir*, whose initials appear under the review. One of Iceland’s leading intellectuals of the time, Guðmundur Finnbogason was at this period striving to establish a new Icelandic identity, grounded in radical nationalism. His reference in the review is presumably to Marmier’s writings about Iceland: a summary of *Lettres sur l’Islande* was included in *Island för hundra år sedan*. Guðmundur Finnbogason focusses on the Icelanders’ “appalling” past as manifested in the French visitors’ works – and the inference is that he is not entirely happy that this aspect of Iceland’s history is being recalled. But he also mentions the favourable aspects of their writings. Guðmundur Finnbogason had studied in France, and so he would have been able to read for himself the Gaimard publications, which include many references to the poverty and difficult circumstances of the people of Iceland.

The illustrations in *Atlas historique* were never publicised to any great extent in Iceland until 1948, when *Ísland við aldahvörf/Iceland on the turning point* was published, reproducing 72 of the pictures. The book was published on the initiative of librarian Guðbrandur Jónsson. In the book Auguste Mayer is credited as the illustrator and author of the book itself; this was novel, as Mayer had rarely been named prior to that time. The French ambassador to Iceland, Henri Voillery, wrote a preface to the volume, in which he emphasised the “sympathy” he felt was expressed in the illustrations: in spite of their poverty the Icelanders had met their visitors with warmth and hospitality, and had invariably been well educated despite their unsophisticated surroundings. But the ambassador’s main emphasis was a comparison of past and present, and the extraordinary progress that had taken place: “There is not, to put it frankly, a single page by Auguste Mayer, that does not proclaim this astonishing evolution.”<sup>36</sup> The tone of Guðbrandur Jónsson’s introduction is similar. The emphasis of this publication is thus on the illustrations being a reflection of past times, which demonstrate how far Iceland has progressed in the intervening century.

28 Marmier, “Gestrisni og fátækt,” 139-148; Robert, *Saga Íslandsferðanna*, 46; Snævarr, *Maðurinn sem Ísland elskaði*, 126, 130-131, 212-213; Borm, “This Island so Sad and Beautiful,” 180-186, 189-196.

29 Knutsen and Posti, *La Recherche*, 120-123; Snævarr, *Maðurinn sem Ísland elskaði*, 360-366. Icelandic anthropologist Kristín Loftsdóttir has written about the ambiguous status of Icelanders in light of racial theories, and how efforts were made to classify them from the mid-19th century. See Andlit til sýnis, 169-197.

30 Björnsson, “Formáli,” 6.

31 Gröndal, *Dægradvöl*, 51-52.

32 “Myndir frá Íslandi,” 4.

33 “Ferðapistlar,” 200; Blöndal and Sigtryggsson, *Gammel islandsk kultur*.

34 Bergström, “Indledning,” 7, 5-20.

35 G.F., “*Island för hundra år sedan*,” 222.

36 Voillery, “Formáli,” unpaginated.





Fifty króna banknote, first issued by the Bank of Iceland 1904. At left is King Christian IX of Denmark and Iceland.  
At right is Mt. Hekla, based on a version by Danish artist Emanuel Larsen of fig. 51 in *Atlas historique*.  
Property of the author.

There is little evidence that the book was reviewed in Iceland, with the exception of an article in *Morgunblaðið*, the leading Icelandic newspaper. The publication is welcomed by the reviewer, who observes that the illustrations give a good idea of conditions in Iceland in the first half of the 19th century. The French visitors had seen “little sign of culture or enterprise,” and they had been witness to the backwardness of the country. But the reviewer also mentions that at that time Iceland had been “awakening from its Sleeping-Beauty slumber, that was centuries of oppression.” The images, he states, reflect the state of Iceland before the Icelanders took back control of their own affairs and transformed their society, so that today it was unrecognisable from before. The illustrations were thus of huge value: they showed how Icelanders had benefited from escaping from foreign rule. In addition, the illustrations have a “fairytale ambiance that makes them both appealing and attractive.”<sup>37</sup> So the publication is well received by the reviewer; the illustrations show how the Icelanders have succeeded in transforming their society from the primitive land visited by the Frenchmen in the first half of the 19th century.

Around 1950 the illustrations from the *Gaimard Expedition* appear to have been viewed from various conflicting perspectives: on the one hand they showed a society which many Icelanders still viewed with shame – ways of life that were rapidly disappearing by the mid-20th century. At the same time the images had significance in the comparison of past and present, as evidence of how the nation had advanced after throwing off foreign rule. And the viewpoint is also seen that the old Icelandic society had not been all bad, but “appealing and attractive,” and that the people of that time appeared to have enjoyed good lives despite their primitive conditions.

In this context one should bear in mind the visual material produced by the authorities to represent Iceland and the Icelanders in the early 20th century, such as postage stamps, banknotes and promotional booklets about the country. If we consider this material, it transpires that modernisation is a recurrent theme: trawlers, factories and modern agricultural methods. Writers and artists are also frequent subjects, as are medieval and Viking themes – sculptures and weapons as signifiers for Iceland’s Golden Age. This visual material was part of the nation-building

of that era – a tool for change at a time when Iceland was establishing itself as an autonomous nation. Hence the Gaimard illustrations had little relevance for a society that was striving to forget the past, and to expunge anything that reminded them of olden times.

### Images and turf houses become cultural heritage

The ambivalent attitude to the Gaimard illustrations was dissipated in the late 20th century, and the images from the *Atlas historique* garnered growing interest. In 1964 an exhibition of the illustrations was held at the National Museum of Iceland, in a gallery devoted to Iceland’s most important art shows.<sup>38</sup> The exhibition gave rise to extensive media coverage, and the illustrations were now referred to as treasures, and an important contribution to the national heritage. Four years later the illustrations were the subject of a TV programme, on the occasion of the publication of a facsimile edition of the *Atlas historique* by publisher Asóir. Four years later, in 1972, daily *Morgunblaðið* started to publish the illustrations from the *Atlas historique*, one at a time, two to three times a week. In that way about 50 were published in the newspaper over a period of two to three months, each image being accompanied by a brief text. At the same time the illustrations were on show in the newspaper’s display window. Readers were urged to cut out and keep the pictures, and stick them into special albums, thus emphasising the perceived importance of this material.<sup>39</sup> At that time private collectors also began to collect the prints; some acquired most or all of them, which were framed and displayed in their homes.<sup>40</sup>

In 1986 publisher Örn og Örlygur published the images, in colour, in one volume, in much smaller format than the originals. Few of the originals had been in colour. The colourisation was probably intended to make the book more saleable. At that time, prints of the works were also being produced for sale to the public. Before long they were widely seen on display in people’s homes, and in care homes for the

elderly. In 1980 one of the pictures was featured on a banknote, and two on postage stamps at around the same time. The images were increasingly used in a range of historical publications, e.g. local histories, and all kinds of books on 19th-century Iceland history. By around 1980 the Gaimard illustrations had become ubiquitous, serving the purpose of showing Icelandic society as it had been in the past, before modernisation had changed everything.

One approach to understanding the change of attitude to the images in the *Atlas historique* is by a comparison with attitudes to traditional Icelandic turf houses – in which the majority of the population lived until the early decades of the 20th century. Many of the Gaimard illustrations, indeed, feature that aspect of cultural heritage. Icelandic anthropologists Marta Guðrún Jóhannesdóttir and Sigurjón Baldur Hafsteinsson have addressed the subject of Icelanders’ attitudes to turf houses. Over the centuries, turf buildings had predominated in Iceland; stone buildings were few and far between, as were timber structures – which were mainly located at trading centres, built by foreign merchants. Yet over just a few decades, turf buildings were all but eliminated in Iceland, so that today hardly a single example remains of the homes in which the Icelandic peasantry lived.<sup>41</sup> Marta Guðrún Jóhannesdóttir and Sigurjón Baldur Hafsteinsson reach the conclusion that the turf houses had been seen as signifiers of poverty, deprivation and misery, poor health and “uncivilised” life; yet in the late 20th century people underwent a change of attitude, and efforts gradually began to preserve the remaining turf buildings.<sup>42</sup> When they had all but disappeared, they were rediscovered as an important aspect of cultural heritage – signifying the ability to adapt to a harsh environment, inventive vernacular architecture, fine craftsmanship, a harmonious life surrounded by nature, and a symbol of Icelandic natural culture. Today the Turf House Tradition is under consideration for the UNESCO World Heritage List.<sup>43</sup>

What happened? Near-eradication is one explanation. As anthropologists Valdimar Tryggvi Hafstein and Ólafur Rastrick have written, turf houses did

38 “*Ísland við aldhvörf*. Sýning á myndum frá leiðangri Paul Gaimards 1836,” 8, 15.

39 “Þú stóðst á tindri Heklu hám,” 6.

40 “Í listasafni Svövu og Ludvigs Storr,” 1-3, 15.

41 Hafsteinsson and Jóhannesdóttir, “Moldargreni og menningararfur,” 199-202.

42 Hafsteinsson and Jóhannesdóttir, “Moldargreni og menningararfur, 193-198, 207.

43 Hafsteinsson, and Jóhannesdóttir, “Moldargreni og menningararfur,” 207, 213.

37 S. Bj., “*Ísland við aldhvörf*,” 6.



not become “cultural heritage until people had stopped living in them, and most had been demolished, leaving only ruins.” They also point out that the cultural heritage gives rise to emotions, “some cute and cosy, others uncomfortable.”<sup>44</sup> The same may apply to the Gaimard illustrations. My hypothesis is that the images awakened negative feelings until the late 20th century, by which time attitudes had changed. Instead of being principally a reminder of a heritage regarded as best forgotten, they were seen as evidence of the great advances that Iceland and the Icelanders had made. Thus the illustrations function as a “time machine” providing a view of the old, lost society.<sup>45</sup>

The character of the illustrations also meant that people could reconcile themselves to the society they depicted: a harmonious life surrounded by nature, in which people appeared content with their lives, free from the stress and bustle of modern life. The images thus came, at the same time, to be part of the modern yearning for a lost world of the past – the yearning of one who must deal with constant, rapid change.<sup>46</sup> Such a yearning may, for instance, explain why the Gaimard illustrations were displayed on the walls of care homes for the elderly. We can agree with art historian Æsa Sigurjónsdóttir, who observes that the images had “great influence on Icelanders’ own perception of the country and its people.”<sup>47</sup> That influence was, however, limited until late in the 20th century.

Turf houses and the Gaimard illustrations both became part of the “heritagisation” which has taken place during the past half-century. That process has its roots in huge changes in all aspects of society, an entirely new media environment, mass migration from rural to urban areas, and eradication of the past, as in the case of turf buildings. By the 1970s, the Gaimard illustrations had come to signify the life of past generations who had lived contentedly and frugally in the poverty of an Icelandic Arcadia. At the same time

they become signifiers of the “great leap forward” from penury to affluence, from “mud huts” to modern technology, from past to present. For that reason they became popular, as a window on past times. The images were so widely used, in diverse contexts, that they became commonplace, even clichéd.

### “Not much of a scientist”

It is fair to say that until the second half of the 20th century there was little interest in the *Gaimard Expedition*, or the books and illustrations arising from it. The expedition was remembered for two main reasons: in the first place, Xavier Marmier features as a character in a comic story published by Benedikt Gröndal in 1861, parodying chivalric sagas or *chansons de geste*. Secondly, Icelandic Romantic poet/naturalist Jónas Hallgrímsson penned a tribute in verse, *Til herra Páls Gaimard* (to M. Paul Gaimard), often cited by its opening line: “Þú stóðst á Heklutindi hám” (You stood on Hekla’s lofty peak).<sup>48</sup> When Gaimard visited Copenhagen in 1836 after his Icelandic expedition, the verses were declaimed aloud by the poet, and simultaneously translated for Gaimard, who is said to have “been moved and shed tears.”<sup>49</sup> The poem combines the high-flown with the Romantic in a paean of praise to Iceland with a clear nationalistic tone. It is also a paean of praise to science and learning, reflecting the poet’s scientific background. Last but not least it is a paean of praise for Paul Gaimard, as the leader of research expeditions to Iceland, and for drawing attention to Iceland and the Icelanders.<sup>50</sup>

The poem soon reached Iceland’s shores, and before long it was on everybody’s lips, according to Benedikt Gröndal, who maintains that it contributed much to the “mental invigoration of our nation.”<sup>51</sup> By this he meant that the poem became part of the nationalist awakening that took place in Iceland in the late 19th century. The poem remained popular in the 20th century – as did poet Jónas Hallgrímsson – but



A rowan tree growing by a wooden house in the town of Akureyri, north Iceland. Xavier Marmier maintained that this was the only tree in Iceland, which could only flourish because it grew in a sheltered spot.

Atlas historique, fig. 123b, detail.

Gaimard himself was largely forgotten in Iceland until late in the century.<sup>52</sup>

As mentioned above, the illustrations received great attention in the latter half of the 20th century, gradually coming to be seen as an important element of cultural heritage, and a reflection of the massive changes that had taken place in Icelandic society in the 19th and 20th centuries. The same has not been true of the research findings of the expedition, which have received little attention. The reasons why the *Gaimard Expedition* has been largely forgotten for so long are various: nothing newsworthy occurred during the expeditions in Iceland – no major accidents, nor important discoveries. And Icelanders’ assessment of the expedition’s research was not especially favourable: Icelandic natural scientist Þorvaldur Thoroddsen, for instance, commented that Gaimard had been “not much of a scientist,” and called him “vainglorious.”<sup>53</sup> Overall,

the scientific contribution of the expedition was deemed insignificant: Professor Halldór Hermannsson, an Icelandic scholar at Cornell University, maintained that Gaimard had been “no... scientist.”<sup>54</sup> Þorvaldur Thoroddsen’s and Halldór Hermannsson’s dismissal of Gaimard and his scientific abilities may be presumed to have influenced the general view of the expedition as whole.

That judgement has not been revisited, and a reassessment is probably overdue. As a matter of interest, the group’s later research during their expedition to northern Scandinavia and Finland yielded noteworthy findings, which remain valid today.<sup>55</sup> In addition, it has recently been pointed out that Eugène Robert was the first person to explain the nature of pseudocraters; but Icelandic geologists were long unaware of his findings.<sup>56</sup> It should also be borne in mind that Þorvaldur Thoroddsen’s judgement of the expedition’s research was not all

44 Rastrick and Hafstein, “Gagnrýnin menningararfsfræði,” 9, 14.

45 Björgvinsdóttir 2015, “Þetta var fyrir tvö hundruð árum,” 144.

46 Hafstein, “Menning í öðru veldi,” 22, 24, 32-33, 29.

47 Sigurjónsdóttir, *Ísland í sjónmáli*, 25.

48 Hermannsson, “Xavier Marmier,” 33.

49 Gröndal, *Dægradvöl*, 51; Snævarr, *Maðurinn sem Ísland elskaði*, 312-318.

50 See Valsson, Jónas Hallgrímsson, 222-224.

51 Gröndal, *Dægradvöl*, 52; Valsson, Jónas Hallgrímsson, 100.

52 See *inter alia*: “Myndasýning,” 2.

53 Thoroddsen, *Landfræðissaga Íslands*, III, 182-183.

54 Hermannsson, “Xavier Marmier,” 33.

55 Knutsen and Posti, *La Recherche*, 220-222.

56 Snævarr, *Maðurinn sem Ísland elskaði*.





Icelandic postage stamp, 1950s, highlighting the modernisation of Iceland.  
Property of the author.

negative. He mentions that both Victor Lottin and Robert have carried out “many new and useful studies of the physics and geology of Iceland,” *inter alia* with regard to geomagnetic readings and surveys of the geothermal zone at Geysir, and that Robert’s volume on Icelandic geology is useful.<sup>57</sup> In addition, he mentions that the *Gaimard Expedition* led to the Danish authorities providing more funding than before for research on Icelandic nature, “so that foreign nations should not reap all the glory for scientific discoveries that might be made in little-explored territories subject to the King of Denmark.”<sup>58</sup>

*Vísindin efla alla dād* (Knowledge will further all great deeds), a line from Jónas Hallgrímsson’s poem in praise of Gaimard, would later be chiselled in stone over the entrance to the Aula or Great Hall of the University of Iceland’s main building, which opened in 1940. The phrase was later adopted as the university’s motto. This was reported in the university yearbook for 1940: Jónas Hallgrímsson is said to have composed the poem in honour of “a

foreign scientist who visited our country,” but no reference is made to the title of the poem *Til herra Páls Gaimard*, nor to Gaimard himself, in the article, which states that the words should be “a guiding light” to the university “in years to come.”<sup>59</sup> It is also interesting that no reference is made to the history of the motto in a history of the University of Iceland published in 2011 – although the inscription over the entrance to the Aula appears in a photograph in the book.<sup>60</sup>

It appears that no formal decision was made to adopt the phrase from the poem as the university’s motto, although it is now generally so regarded. A 1961 publication by the Association of University Graduates to mark the 50th anniversary of the foundation of the University of Iceland refers to the university selecting this phrase as its motto “in some manner,” the inference being that no formal decision was made.<sup>61</sup> In brief, there seems to have been little awareness within the university of the origins of the motto. The significance of the

phrase appears to have been attributed mainly to the poet’s contribution to research in the natural sciences – rather than invoking the importance of international collaboration on research, and the stimulus provided by the *Gaimard Expedition*, both for Jónas Hallgrímsson himself and for scientific research in Iceland.<sup>62</sup>

The reputation of the expedition in Iceland may thus be said to have been upheld for many years, not by the expedition’s own achievements, but by its connections with renowned and popular 19th-century Icelandic writers and their works. This changed in the late 20th century, in that the illustrations from the *Atlas historique* attracted widespread attention and were embraced as part of Icelandic culture. The findings of the expedition’s research, however, are still today dismissed as insignificant, to witness the discussion about the University of Iceland’s motto.

## Summary

The time has come to reassess the impact of the *Gaimard Expedition* on Icelandic society, and this essay aims to contribute to that process. That re-evaluation must embrace both the illustrations, which have been the main subject here, and the research carried out by the members of the expedition.

It is arguable that the Gaimard illustrations were not compatible with the process of Icelandic nation-building. Iceland became an autonomous state in 1918, and a republic in 1944, and nationalistic discourse coloured social debate throughout the 20th century. At the same time society was transformed, in a rapid process of modernisation over a few decades. Icelanders migrated from rural to urban areas, away from a past that was deemed to be characterised by degradation and want, and a source of shame.

Many of the illustrations in the *Atlas historique* were simply regarded as reflecting that past too much: poor farmers, turf houses, a primitive way of life. Icelandic society was not prepared to accept the images until it had attained a certain distance from that reality, in the latter half of the 20th century. In the 1960s, 70s and 80s Iceland had undergone such a transformation that it was almost unrecognisable in comparison with the reality of only half a century before. At that point it became possible to be reconciled with the images, display them on the wall, and look kindly on them in view of all the advances that had been achieved.

One reason for the limited interest in the expedition was the matter of language: far fewer Icelanders had command of French than of English or German – and the same is true today. In addition, no major discoveries were attributable to the expedition – though a re-evaluation may yet reveal other truths. And the *Gaimard Expedition* appears to have led to the Danish authorities giving far greater priority than before to research on Icelandic nature; and one consequence was that poet/natural scientist Jónas Hallgrímsson was enabled to pursue his research on Icelandic nature.

A re-evaluation could also take account of the higher profile attained by Iceland and the Icelanders internationally as a consequence of the expedition: Iceland was connected with the outside world, and unprecedented attention was paid to the culture and way of life of a people on the periphery of Europe. The large-scale publications that followed the expeditions to Iceland and later to northern Scandinavia and Finland went on to have a great impact on people’s views on Iceland, Scandinavia and the north, both in France and elsewhere in Europe.<sup>63</sup>

57 Thoroddsen, *Landfræðissaga Íslands*, III, 184-187.

58 Thoroddsen, *Landfræðissaga Íslands*, IV, 7, 32.

59 *Árbók Háskóla Íslands* 1939-1940, 61-62.

60 Guðmundur Hálfðanarson, “Embættismannaskólinn 1911-1961.”

61 *Vísindin efla alla dād*, 357.

62 See Ringler, *Bard of Iceland*, 32.

63 Snævarr, *Maðurinn sem Ísland elskaði*, 355-356



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# FROM EXPLORATION TO REPRESENTATION: THE CULTURAL CONSTRUCTION OF ICELANDICITY IN GAIMARD'S ATLASES

ÆSA SIGURJÓNSDÓTTIR

Professeure des universités en études islandaises et culturelles comparées à l'université d'Islande.

*Full Professor in Icelandic and Comparative Cultural Studies at the University of Iceland.*

**V**oyage en Islande et au Groenland, exécuté pendant les années 1835 et 1836 sur la corvette *La Recherche* is a monumental scientific and cultural research project published by Arthus Bertrand in Paris between 1838 and 1852.<sup>1</sup> Directed by physician and naturalist Paul Gaimard (1793-1858), it consists of eight large octavo text volumes, a volume containing 36 lithographs based on scientific geological drawings by geologist Eugène Robert (1806-1888), and three large folio atlases: *Atlas Historique* I and II, and *Atlas Zoologique, Médical et Géographique* with lithographs based on drawings by naval artist Auguste Mayer (1805-1890) and zoologist and animal painter Louis Bévalet (1808-1887).<sup>2</sup>

The primary goals of the 1835 expedition were to search the Arctic Ocean for traces of the lost ship *La Lilloise*, that had disappeared in the summer of 1833 with explorer Jules Blosseville (1802-1833) and all his crew aboard, as well as gathering information about Iceland's nature and climate for the French Academy of

Sciences. Although no traces of *La Lilloise* were found, the voyage was considered successful. Subsequently, King Louis-Philippe (1773-1850) agreed to fund a new expedition in the summer of 1836 intending to collect information on Icelandic literature and history. The French Academy enlisted writer Xavier Marmier (1808–1892) to assist Gaimard. In addition the team included the meteorologist Raoul Anglès, and Victor Lottin (1795-1858), responsible for cartography and magnetism studies.

The expeditions were distinguished by their extensive visual production. As the first scientific atlases representing these northern regions, the Gaimard Atlases include a wide array of lithographs depicting the vast and largely uncharted Arctic, from volcanic Iceland to the frozen landscapes of Greenland. Here the concept of cold is constructed and represented in various contexts, through images and texts, illustrating the topographic features of Iceland and Greenland while providing cultural description of their inhabitants.<sup>3</sup>

The majority of the 200 lithographs published in the Atlases were based on drawings by Auguste Mayer. The images represent diverse topographies, including expansive vistas and climates, along with detailed renderings of animals and mineral specimens, while also documenting architecture, folklore, historical artifacts, and social life. They portray hunting scenes and the daily life of indigenous peoples, emphasizing their hard labor in these largely unexplored and hostile territories.

While the Atlases share similarities with the popular *Voyages pittoresques*, a well-known genre of the early 19th century, it is crucial to recognize that these atlases occupy a distinct category within the realm of visual culture. Specifically, they are historical, mineralogical, and zoological. The key distinction between these visual forms lies not merely in their aesthetic intention but rather in their contextual and scientific significance. Historical atlases predominantly focus on documenting past societies, architecture, landscape and social customs, while mineralogical and zoological atlases emphasize the diversity of the natural environment and its geological and biological characteristics. Nevertheless, both genres interchange images depicting historical monuments, vistas, and portraits.

## Icelandicity versus Icelandicness

In this paper, I will argue that the images in the Atlases articulate a discursive space, an ideology, and an identity that I have called *Icelandicity*.<sup>4</sup> By examining the interplay between the images and the texts—especially the travelogue written by Marmier—I will demonstrate how these elements converge to construct that form of national ideology I have identified as an *Icelandicity*.

My previous examination of the semiotic, racial, and cultural distinctions between *Icelandicness* and *Icelandicity* began when I came across an unpublished travel journal in the Archives National in Paris. This journal was likely written by Charles Edmond, also

known as Chojecki, who was the author of *Voyage dans les Mers du Nord à bord de la Corvette La Reine Hortense* (1857). It documents a scientific expedition organized by Prince Napoléon Jérôme Bonaparte (1822–1891) during the summer of 1856, which included travel by sea and land to various destinations such as Scotland, Iceland, Greenland, the Faeroe Islands, Shetland, Norway, Sweden, and Denmark.<sup>5</sup>

Examining this mid-19th-century journal, it became clear that the distinction between the specific geographic, cultural, and historical nature of Iceland and the more abstract concept of *Icelandicity* had already been established among scholars and writers in France. Politically, these expeditions and their resulting publications are unambiguously tied to the French imperial gaze and its ambition to gain deeper knowledge of the North. Ultimately, these represent a discourse rich in romantic fantasies expressed by poets, travel writers, painters, and other visual artists even before the 19th century.<sup>6</sup>

More recently, *Icelandicity* has evolved into a crucial asset in the contemporary cultural branding and global marketing of Iceland. In this respect, its discursive construction resonates with Roland Barthes's classic analysis of Italianicity in his essay *Rhetoric of the Image* (1964). Barthes was concerned with the methods and tropes by which, for example, Panzani products could be identified as connotative of culinary Italianicity.<sup>7</sup> Barthes further explored the workings of myth within modern capitalist cultures, emphasizing that myths are historically motivated and contextual constructs offering an illusion of naturalness and transparent truth.<sup>8</sup> Inspired by these insights, I investigated *Icelandicity* as a distinct yet related mythology, constructed by its own history and culture.

In my analysis of the Gaimard Atlases, I discuss how *Icelandicity* draws from various discursive and textual sources, including scientific, ethnographic, literary and aesthetic contexts. Accordingly, I will illustrate how the lithographs in the Atlas are always and already infused with elements of *Icelandicity*,

1 *Le Voyage en Islande et au Groënland exécuté pendant les années 1835 et 1836 sur la corvette la Recherche commandée par M. Tréhouart Lieutenant de Vaisseau dans le but de découvrir les traces de La Lilloise*. Publié par ordre du Roi sous la direction de M. Paul Gaimard Président de la Commission scientifique d'Islande et de Groënland (1838-1852). The edition includes:

Joseph-Paul Gaimard, *Histoire du voyage*, vol. 1, Paris, Arthus Bertrand, 1838; Victor Lottin, *Physique*, 1838; Eugène Robert, *Géologie et minéralogie*. *Atlas*, 1838; *Atlas historique*. *Lithographie d'après les dessins de August Mayer*, vol. 1-2, 1838; *Atlas zoologique*, médical et géographique, 1838; Xavier Marmier, *Histoire de l'Islande*, 1840; Eugène Robert, *Minéralogie et géologie. Avec gravures de M. Himely*, 1840; Xavier Marmier, *Littérature islandaise*, 1843; Eugène Robert, *Zoologie et médecine*, 1851; Eugène Robert, *Histoire du voyage*, vol 2, 1850; Eugène Mequet, *Journal du voyage*, 1852.

2 Joseph Paul Gaimard (1793-1858) participated in several voyages around the world, the first as a surgeon on the *Uranie* commanded by Freycinet (1817-1820), and the next as a physician and naturalist on the *Astrolabe* commanded by Dumont d'Urville (1826-1829). Appointed president of the scientific commission for Iceland and Greenland in 1829, he conducted four successive summer campaigns in this Arctic region (1835, 1836, 1838, and 1839).

3 Voir Jan Borm et Daniel Chartier (eds.), *Le froid. Adaptation, production, représentations, effets*, Québec, Presses de l'Université du Québec, coll. « Droit au pôle », 2018; Gilles Bertrand, Daniel Chartrier, Alain Guyot, Marie Mossé et Anne-Élisabeth Spica (eds.), *Voyages illustrés aux pays froids (XVIe -XIXe siècle)*. *De l'invention de l'imprimerie à celle de la photographie*, Clermont-Ferrand, Presses universitaires Blaise Pascal, 2020.

4 Æsa Sigurjónsdóttir, *Postnational Identities, Icelandicness and Icelandicity*. *Transnational and Environmental Strategies in Contemporary Art in Iceland*, Reykjavík, University of Iceland, 2024.

5 Charles Edmond, *Voyage dans les Mers du Nord à bord de la Corvette La Reine Hortense*, Paris, Michel Lévy Frère, 1857; M. Laumé, "Expédition scientifique du prince Napoléon dans les mers du nord," *L'Illustration*. *Journal universel*, January 10, 1857, 21–22.

6 Sumarliði Ísleifsson, *Ísland framandi land*, Reykjavík, Mál og menning, 1996.

7 Roland Barthes, "Rhétorique de l'image," *Communications* 4, no. 1 (1964): 40–51; Barthes, "Rhetoric of the Image," in *Image, Music, Text*, trans. Stephen Heath, London/New York: Fontana Press /Hill and Wang, 1977, pp. 32–51.

8 Roland Barthes, "Myth Today," in *Mythologies*, ed. and trans. Annette Lavers, New York: The Noonday Press, 1972, 107–64, p. 108. [Original ed.: *Mythologies*, Paris, Éditions du Seuil, 1957].



enhanced by Marmier's textual descriptions in his *Lettres sur l'Islande*. By examining the interplay between image and text, I will show how they converge to construct an ideological field that envelops the myth of *Icelandicity*—a discourse, that among other instrumentalities, positions the actual geographical place of Iceland (and culture) as a commodifiable product.

In this respect, the role of the lithographic Atlases in shaping perceptions of Iceland should not be minimized. They variously function to envisage Iceland as both a mystical -- and hostile destination. On the one hand, the volumes contributed to a romantic visual image of Iceland, anchored in the period's aesthetics and amplified by Marmier's text. On the other hand, they present a more scientific and cartographic perspective of the region's geology and geography that could be qualified as *Icelandicness*, as it refers to certain factual characteristics of the Icelandic landscape, its geology and fauna. Both terms, *Icelandicness* and *Icelandicity*, relate to notions of national identity that were in the making among Icelandic scholars that celebrated Gaimard's publications.<sup>9</sup>

Furthermore, I want to explore why lithography, as a hybrid medium, was the ideal tool for disseminating these concepts within the urban picture market of the early 19th century. Lithography's ability to combine artistic representation with mass reproduction made it an ideal medium for reaching wider audiences. This flexibility allowed for the integration of varied elements—scientific accuracy, ethnographic detail, and aesthetic appeal—into a singular image. This synthesis ensured that lithography resonated with the Romantic sensibilities of the time, capturing the imagination of urban audiences fascinated by distant landscapes and the “otherness” of foreign cultures. The accessibility and reproducibility of lithography thus facilitated the spread of knowledge, establishing *Icelandicity* as both a cultural idea and a consumable product, transforming Iceland's rugged beauty and mystique into a desirable and fascinating commodity within the burgeoning 19th-century French market. Moreover, this romanticized vision of Iceland influenced popular perceptions and prompted intellectual curiosity alongside its commercial opportunities—qualities explored by French literature, particularly in the works of Victor Hugo,

Jules Verne, and Pierre Loti, all of whom included descriptions (and depictions) of Iceland in their novels, drawing from Gaimard's publications and other accounts from various travelers.<sup>10</sup>

However, *Icelandicity* was never a singular cultural signifier. The North has long captivated explorers, naturalists, cartographers, and artists, but the interest in Iceland expanded during the 19th century. Iceland has often been imagined as an unknown land—*terra incognita*—symbolizing a realm of infinite possibilities. The North, as represented in Gaimard's publications, vehicles these associations with ice, snow, light, darkness, purity, and danger—characteristics that underscore its supposed sublimity.

In contrast, while *Icelandicness* has served as a foundational element of national identity, established during the late 19th and early 20th centuries, *Icelandicity* is a dynamic, fluid concept that evolves through a convergence of visual and textual signifiers. This interplay has resulted in an archive of images and tropes interwoven within literature, poetry, and visual culture, subsequently including advertising. This distinction I draw between Iceland and the mythological notion of *Icelandicity* is crucial, and I aim to examine how Gaimard's lithographs contributed to the visual identity of Iceland while clearly differentiating the concepts of *Icelandicness* and *Icelandicity*. Ultimately, I will argue that *Icelandicity* is constituted from diverse discursive spaces, including scientific, ethnographic, literary, and aesthetic contexts all addressed in the Atlases.

### Lithography as a Hybrid Medium

Lithography, a revolutionary printing technique pioneered by the German Johann Alois Senefelder (1771-1834) in 1796, quickly gained traction in France, transforming the commercial, aesthetic, and social dimension of graphic art and illustrated media. Unlike traditional wood or copper engraving, lithography offered a more direct and expanded method of production, enabling artists to draw freely on prepared stones and facilitating large-scale print runs. This innovation marked a crucial evolution in visual culture, allowing for a

greater variety of immediate expression and accessibility in the dissemination of images.<sup>11</sup>

The advent of lithography not only revolutionized the technical aspects of printmaking but also catalyzed a significant collaboration between artists and printers that defined a new hybrid mode of visual representation. The rapid expansion of lithographic workshops in Paris reflected this burgeoning industry, evidenced by a 1839 report on the vitality of lithography in Paris, which identified various specialized occupations within the field.<sup>12</sup> Despite its growth, the role of the artist in the lithographic process was frequently debated. Authorship was challenged consistently since an original sketch could pass through the hands of the draughtsman (or artist) to a professional lithographer—even an individual colorist, and authorship might be legally assigned to the publisher. Although Auguste Mayer traveled with Gaimard, the images published in the Atlases were not created on the spot, even if they give the impression of spontaneously documenting an actual event. They are often constructed combining various sources, not solely based on the now lost drawings made by Meyer.

Artists frequently specialized in particular subjects, with Mayer focusing on naval themes while others excelled in horses, historic and military scenes, such as Adolphe Jean Baptiste Bayot (1810-1866) who is usually credited for the figures and staffage-landscapes, historical depictions, or portraits. He is for instance, credited both for the drawing and the lithography of the image called - *Arrivée à la Station* (Fig. 38. Return to the Base) indicating that some of the images were inspired by the artist's own practice as a genre painter.

Some critics maintained that the artist claimed authorship, relegating the printer to a mechanical role devoid of creative input. In contrast, an increasing number of voices advocated for a more egalitarian view, emphasizing the collaborative nature of the artist-printer relationship. This perspective not only elevated printmaking as a legitimate art form but also encouraged a wide variety of drawing and printing methods. This collaborative spirit culminated in comprehensive monumental projects like Charles Nodier's and Baron Taylor's *Voyages pittoresques et romantiques dans l'ancienne France*, which produced thousands of lithographs that significantly

influenced public perceptions of landscape. This vast project not only created a sense of identity *à la française* but also highlighted local and regional characteristics still celebrated in French culture today. Focusing primarily on the picturesque as well as architecture and artifacts, the *Voyages pittoresques* were suffused with forms of historical nostalgia and local memories—views particularly cultivated among the emerging bourgeois urban class in post-1820 Paris.

### Hybrid Visual Narratives, Aesthetic Implications and Artist Printer Dynamics

The lithographs in the Gaimard album not only encapsulate aesthetic categories like the *sublime* and the picturesque; they also depict anthropologic studies and aspects of natural science. Furthermore, they reflect Gaimard's deliberate promotion of Iceland's unique qualities, emphasizing the qualities of its weather and landscapes. However, these images require careful scrutiny; they cannot be regarded as neutral documentation and must be examined within the broader contexts of imperialism, romantic aesthetics, and 19th-century scientific representation. In discerning the imperial gaze embedded within the lithographs, it is crucial to question the framing of their production. Icelanders have often misinterpreted these lithographs as authentic documentation, yet they convey highly selective narratives that largely obscure social realities such as poverty and marginalization.

The vignette on the frontispiece of Gaimard's first volume of the *Atlas historique* features the Nordic God Þór adorned with a crown and hammer against an imagined landscape composed of a smoking volcano with hot steam rising directly from the earth below. On the next page, the characteristic natural phenomena of Iceland are condensed into a theatrical scene: a burning volcano spewing fire in the background, a large waterfall to the left, a distinctive basalt cliff to the right, and two geysers erupting in the center. Here the weather, the water, the ice and the rock

9 “Fréttabálkurinn II,” *Fjölur* 3, no. 1, 1837, p. 21-27.

10 Gaëlle Reneteaud, “L'Islande et la France. Construction d'un espace rêvé et fantasmé du Grand Nord dans la littérature française au XIX<sup>e</sup> siècle,” in *Études Germaniques* 71 (2016), 215-267.

11 Stephen Bann, *Parallel Lines. Printmakers, Painters and Photographers in Nineteenth-Century France*, Yale University Press, New Haven, London, 2001; Beatrice Farwell, *The Cult of Images. Baudelaire and the 19th-Century Media Explosion*, Santa Barbara, California: UCSB Art Museum, 1977.

12 Gervaise Brouwers, « La lithographie passée en revues : entre controverses politiques et enjeux esthétiques », *Sociétés & Représentations* 2, n° 40 (automne 2015), 183 – 200.



come together as definite markers of *Icelandicity*. Additionally, the past is present in the landscape as described by Marmier:

“All that is serious and poetic in these various regions of Iceland is further enhanced when one recalls the historical memories associated with them; for each of these bays, valleys, and mountains has its marked place in the ancient sagas or in modern annals. Often, this history is sad; it recounts a volcanic eruption, portrays a famine, an epidemic, and all of those plagues that have crossed Iceland in every century.”<sup>13</sup>

The historical Atlas, composed of 150 prints of Iceland and six images from the Greenland journey unfolds like a road movie where landscape, genre scenes, cultural history and great men are interwoven into a unified narrative. Beginning with a striking portrait of Paul Gaimard, the “explorer,” dressed in an impressive fur coat and ceremonial attire accented by three distinct decorations. The visual narrative follows Marmier’s travelogue and begins with views of Reykjavík and its surroundings. Emphasis is placed on the vastness of the landscape and the expressive clouds over the bay. Then follow close-ups, scenic images of people in action, men and women drying fish in front of their houses. All architectural details are meticulously reproduced, as well as the carved, wooden utensils. A clear distinction is made between the working gear worn by the fishermen and the more elaborate costumes worn by some of the women. People communicate in small groups, however, the scenic images are characterised by a certain human absence where only single birds are seen in the distance.

As Silvain Briens has pointed out, Marmier’s text is articulated around a certain idea of the landscape based on the evocation and experience of color

and light and other climatic phenomena.<sup>14</sup> While Marmier focusing on his perception of the melancholic beauty of the landscape<sup>15</sup>, Robert focuses on the mineral, the geologic, the volcanic. Their different approaches are expressed in their description of the clouds, wind and the color: Roberts describes the “magnificent funnels and *immense* clouds of reddish-brown dust suspended high in the atmosphere [...] one might imagine being in the midst of a volcanic eruption.”<sup>16</sup>

Such contrasts between the climatic and the mineral echo not only underscore the divergent descriptions of Iceland by Robert and Marmier, but they also resonate throughout the images. This thematic opposition is further illuminated by the conceptual and literary framework of opposing terrestrial locations, situated between hot and cold geographical areas – a legacy tracing back to antiquity. It became increasingly significant in 19th century art and literature, exemplified in paintings inspired by the lithographs produced for the Gaimard Atlases. This relatively new interest in the North-South dichotomy is manifested, for instance, in the spectacular Arctic paintings by François-Auguste Biard (1799-1882), Mayer, and Eugène Le Poittevin (1806-1870), all of whom created Arctic-themed works during the 1830s and 1840s. Most of these paintings, such as Biard’s *Matelots se défendant contre des ours polaires* (Museum der bildenden Künste, Leipzig) are developed from other images, although Mayer and Biard also painted scenes from Spitsbergen and circumpolar Scandinavia, which they visited in 1839.

However, this dichotomy is also rooted in the cultural history of science, notably introduced by Aristotle in the fourth century BC. For Aristotle, there existed a frigid northern zone in which no human population could survive; *Ultima Thule* (the

end of the world) was this unknown land mass.<sup>17</sup> This historical and political theme of the torrid south and freezing north was dramatically expressed by the French poet Théodore Agrippa d’Aubigné (1552–1630) in his poem *Les Tragiques*, a 16th century epic rediscovered in the late 19th century.<sup>18</sup> In this work, d’Aubigné describes a journey from sweltering Africa to icy Thule [“De l’Afrique brûlée en Thulé froiduleuse”] – an imaginary, conceptual non-place that had an enduring legacy. Needless to say, ice, snow, light, darkness, emptiness, danger, purity, water, cold, the colors white and blue are attributes that continue to signify the North. Indeed, the North is imagined and experienced in terms of the *sublime*, as theorized by the British philosopher Edmund Burke: “Whatever is fitted in any sort to excite the ideas of pain and danger [...] or, [alternatively] operates in a manner analogous to terror, a source of the *sublime*; that is, it is productive of the strongest emotion which the mind is capable of feeling.”<sup>19</sup>

These notions are persistently reiterated in narratives about Iceland.<sup>20</sup> In stark contrast to these conceptualizations pictured in the Atlas, are more picturesque scenes, even close-ups of daily life, showing men and women engaging in traditional practices such as drying fish outside their homes. Architectural and vestimentary details are rendered with meticulous care, emphasizing a clear distinction between the work gear worn by fishermen and the ornate attire of religious celebrations, while others are dressed in simpler clothing suitable for daily tasks. People converse in small groups, infusing the scenes with social harmony, occasionally punctuated by the squawks of birds.

While Marmier’s narrative may evoke a romanticized or idealized vision of Iceland, the actual social dynamics present a more complex and nuanced picture, particularly reflected in the images of fishworkers laboring outdoors in this beautiful landscape. In this context, Marmier candidly describes the repugnant smells that characterize Icelandic habitats. He

writes, “It is the nauseating smell that seizes him the moment he sets foot on the soil of Iceland. This odor follows him everywhere and clings to all the objects he uses; it results from the large quantity of fish that the Icelanders dry in the open air, the filth amidst which these unfortunate people live, and the often rotten materials on which they feed.”<sup>21</sup> This stark contrast between the beauty of the landscape and the harsh realities of daily life underscores the complexities behind his initial impressions.

Interspersed among these descriptive landscapes scenes are portraits of notable Icelanders and detailed drawings of historical objects and artifacts. Such as the important religious embroidery, an altarcloth that originated from the church in Grejaðarstaður depicting the life of St Martin Bishop from Tours, to whom the church was dedicated. St Martin was one of the most popular saints in Iceland during the Catholic ages and the work is one of many that Gaimard brought it to France (Fig. 122 and 122b). The lithographers have skillfully crafted detailed illustrations of certain selected historical artifacts, including the carved interiors of the ancient Hólar Cathedral. Here the images are constructed by using different sources, for instance, the figures representing the bishop and his wife are drawn from a late 17th-century painting of Bishop Gísli Þorláksson (1657-1684) and his wife, Ragnheiður Jónsdóttir. The couple is seamlessly integrated into the interior of the church, their ancient garments providing its historical context. The medieval church relics that adorn the cathedral further enhance the setting, collectively conveying a profound sense of *heritage*. (Fig. 126)

Other scenes have achieved iconic status, especially the one illustrating the traditional evening reading known as *Kvöldvaka*, a cultural ritual described by Marmier.<sup>22</sup> In this event, the entire household congregates around the paterfamilias, who reads in the gentle glow provided by the sole light source in the turf house (Fig. 21). Every detail is rendered, from the whalebone used as a seat for the puppies

13 “Tout ce qu’il y a de grave et de poétique dans ces diverses contrées de l’Islande, s’accroît encore si l’on y passe avec les divers souvenirs historiques qui s’y rattachent ; car chacune de ces baies , de ces vallées , de ces montagnes, a sa place marquée dans les anciennes sagas, ou dans les annales modernes. Souvent cette histoire est triste; c’est le récit d’une éruption de volcan, le tableau d’une famine, d’une épidémie et de tous ces fléaux qui ont traversé l’Islande à chaque siècle.” Marmier, *Lettres sur l’Islande et Poésies*, Paris, Palais Royal, 1844, troisième édition, p. 46.

14 Sylvain Briens, “Mise en perspective boréaliste du travail de Xavier Marmier,” *Deshima. Revue d’histoire globale des Pays du Nord*, no. 12, 2018, 225-233, p. 226. All translations into English in this article are mine.

15 Marmier, *Lettres sur l’Islande*, 70.

16 “Nous admirâmes encore des trombes magnifiques et d’*immenses* nuages de poussière roussâtre tenus en suspension à une grande hauteur dans l’atmosphère [...] Ces nuages ternissent en passant la partie inférieure de la neige qui revêt les montagnes, et, dans ce moment-là, on pourrait se croire au milieu d’une éruption de volcan.” Eugène Robert, *Voyage en Islande et au Groënland exécuté pendant les années 1835 et 1836 sur la corvette « La Recherche » commandée par Mr Tréhouart, lieutenant du vaisseau, dans le but de découvrir les traces de la Lilloise. Publié par ordre du Roi sous la direction de M. Paul Gaimard, Président de la Commission scientifique d’Islande et du Groënland*, Tome VII. Section minéralogie et géologie, 1ère partie, Paris, Arthus Bertrand, 1840, p. 62. See Gaëlle Reneteaud, “L’Islande et la France. Construction d’un espace rêvé et fantasmé du Grand Nord dans la littérature française au XIXe siècle,” in *Études Germaniques* 71 (2016), 215-267, p. 260.

17 Marie Sanderson, “The Classification of Climates from Pythagoras to Koeppen,” *Bulletin of the American Meteorological Society* 80, no. 4 (April 1999): 669–73.

18 Agrippa d’Aubigné, *Les Tragiques*, ed. Jean-Raymond Fanlo (Paris: Honoré Champion, 1995/1616), verses 661–84.

19 Edmund Burke, *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful* (London: J. Dodsley, 1757), 13.

20 Sumarliði Ísleifsson,

21 “C’est l’odeur nauséabonde qui le saisit au moment où il pose le pied sur le sol de l’Islande. Cette odeur le poursuit partout et s’attache à tous les objets dont il se sert ; c’est le résultat de cette quantité de poisson que les Islandais font sécher en plein air , le résultat de la malpropreté au milieu de laquelle vivent ces malheureux , et des matières souvent corrompues dont ils se nourrissent.” Marmier, *Lettres*, 4-5.

22 Marmier, *Lettres sur l’Islande*, 74-75.

nursing from their mother. A similar scene is depicted in another image that figures in volume 2 of the historic Atlas, where the subjects are grouped around a musician playing the ancient Icelandic instrument *langspil*. (Fig. 117). Other images convey a sense of domestic intimacy between children and their parents, challenging the widespread belief that Icelanders generally did not care for their children (Fig. 83). Icelandic animals, including horses and dogs, are portrayed with accuracy, highlighting their distinctive traits. Additionally, all domestic items are meticulously illustrated, including the traditional tools for drying fish and clothing, contributing to the authentic feel of the scenes. (Fig. 17)

In the second volume the thread is picked up on the road and the reader follows a visual journey in South-East Iceland towards the glacier Vatnajökull in the east. Here several images depict the various glaciers. The topographic rendering of the sites is rather inaccurate even though the images are clearly labeled and related to a particular site. The images, however, depict the changes in the landscape due to climate changes and global warming, especially in figure no. 85 showing Breiðamerkurjökul, the source of the river Jökulsá (Glacier-river) where now a glacier lagoon has become one of the most popular tourist destinations in Iceland.

The mysterious qualities of the volcanic landscape are rendered in the images of Surtshellir, a 1600-meter-long lava cave in the interior of Iceland known for its stalagmites and stalactites since the early middle ages. The cave represents a great variety of meanings grounded in archeology, in the Sagas, in mythology, speleology, volcanology and literature. It was explored and documented visually by the Icelandic naturalists Eggert Ólafsson (1726–1768) and Bjarni Pálsson (1719–1779), who were the first to survey the site. Entrusted by the Royal Danish Academy of Sciences with the task of studying the island's topography and mineral deposits, the two naturalists travelled their homeland for several years. In the course of their research, their exploration

of the cave was part of this comprehensive survey of Iceland commissioned by the Danish king.<sup>23</sup>

The cave was of particular interest to scholars at the time, as stalactites collected there had been circulating among scientists since the seventeenth century, stimulating the development of widely differing hypotheses regarding their origins.<sup>24</sup>

In his detailed accounts and illustrations, Ólafsson meticulously focuses on the intricate structure of the cave, highlighting features such as its walls, natural shelves, horizontal benches, and speleothems, as well as the glazed ceramic-like appearance of the walls. These descriptive elements serve not only to provide a vivid imagery of the cave but also to enhance the scientific understanding of such geological formations. This dissemination of knowledge played a crucial role in enriching scientific discourse regarding Iceland and proved to be an invaluable resource for the preparations undertaken by Marmier and his associates during their explorations of the region.

Mayer's pictures of Surtshellir were the first to show the grandeur of the cave and marked as such an important moment in the visual representation of this natural wonder (Fig. 130, 131, 131b, and 132). The floor is iced and a small stalagmite is seen in the middle of the image. The travelers, equipped with torches, illuminate the expansive archway of the cave, effectively creating a dramatic interplay of light and shadow that enhances the otherworldly atmosphere of the space.

At the end of the *Atlas historique*, vol. 2, the images show the departure from Iceland and the setting sail for Greenland. The imagery becomes increasingly desolate, representing the corvette *La Recherche* lost amidst icebergs as large as cathedrals (Figs. 137 and 138). Marmier concludes his introduction with a vivid description of these icy landscapes, emphasizing the heroic nature of this endeavor:

“A certain distance obscures their ruggedness, rendering all the jagged, winding, and irregular lines into what appears to be a flat and continuous surface. However, as one approaches, these ice formations

reveal themselves in the most bizarre and varied shapes. Some rise majestically into the air with their sharp peaks, resembling the spires of cathedrals; others are rounded like towers, crenelated like ramparts.”<sup>25</sup>

Its static attributes—even the forms of the ice, their materiality, the weather, the light, and the sun—all are nevertheless in a constant state of flux. This dynamic interplay gives rise to an aesthetic born from the cold air and shifting climate. Under these conditions, colors take on extraordinary hues: “What further enhanced the effect produced by so many bizarre viewpoints was the admirable color of these glaciers, the transparent blue, the clear and velvety blue that enveloped them. Next to these tones, so pure and so luminous, the azure of the sky appeared pale, and the emerald of the sea looked dull.”<sup>26</sup> These color sensations can of course not be expressed in the black and white lithographs but they are rendered in paintings by Biard such as *Magdalena Bay. Vue prise de la presque île des Tombeaux, au nord du Spitzberg; effet d'aurore boréale*, 1841 (Louvre.)

## Iconography of Contemporaries

The *Atlas historique* adheres to the romantic aesthetics emblematic of Voyage pittoresques, incorporating elements such as ancient architecture, handcrafted artifacts, and representations of individuals attired in traditional clothing. However, it predominantly emphasizes *sublime* landscapes. Marmier articulates this dichotomy by asserting: “Although this Icelandic land almost everywhere carries a mark of desolation, it frequently reveals a sense of greatness and a *sublime* character.”<sup>27</sup> In addition to the anonymous people present in group photographs, the atlas depicts notable individuals, including Pétur Ólafsson, a fisherman clad in traditional waterproof garments made of sheared

sheepskin (Fig. 9 and 10). There is also a rather formal portrait of Málfríður Ólafsdóttir, a young servant in Reykjavík who became Marmier's mistress and the mother of his child. She is depicted wearing a formal dress that, at the time, was already becoming a historical artifact, thereby illustrating the evolving nature of Icelandic cultural attire.

In contrast, the last volume, *Atlas Zoologique, médical et géographique*, adopts a more sectional arrangement. It includes a beautifully delicate and vibrantly colored prints of various fish native to the waters around Iceland, such as *Raja batis*, also known as *La Raie de Gaimard* (Fig. 145). Other illustrations depict Icelandic mammals, including the Icelandic dog and both brown and white Arctic foxes. The drawings meticulously compare the skulls of an Eskimo dog and an Icelandic dog, alongside illustrations of seals and the skeleton and skull of a beaked whale. Following these, readers are greeted with delicate depictions of Modiolaria shells, highlighting the artistic detail typical of zoological illustrations.

Then follows an "Iconography of Contemporaries," kind of a supplementary album inside the Atlas, featuring promising young men, institutionalized Icelandic figures, and “great men” such as the Danish-Icelandic sculptor Bertel Thorvaldsen (1770-1844) and professor Finnur Jónsson (1781-1847). The young promising Icelanders are Guðmundur Sivertsen, introduced as “Jeune Islandais élevé en France seeking a scholarship to become a medical doctor. This section includes depictions of the notable sous la protection de Sa M. Louis Philippe.”<sup>28</sup> Gunnlaugur Briem (1802-1840), Magnús Hákonarson (1812-1875).

The series concludes with striking black-and-white portraits of Ólafur Pálsson (1814-1876) and Sigríður Ólafsdóttir (1822-1879), both lithographs signed by Lassalle and inspired by portraits from Charles Giraud (1819-1892). Sigríður Ólafsdóttir, an Icelandic beauty, is posed in a relaxed and informal position. With manner that contrasts sharply with the

25 “A une certaine distance, on ne distingue pas, il est vrai, leurs aspérités, et toutes ces lignes échancrées, tortueuses, irrégulières, apparaissent comme une surface plate et continue. Mais à mesure qu'on en approche, ces glaces se dessinent sous les formes les plus étranges, les plus variées. Les unes projettent dans les airs leurs pics aigus, comme des flèches de cathédrales; d'autres sont arrondies comme une tour, crénelées comme un rempart.” Marmier, *Lettres sur l'Islande*, XII-XIII.

26 “Ce qui ajoutait encore à l'effet produit par tant de points de vue bizarres, c'est l'admirable couleur de ces glaces, c'est le bleu transparent, le bleu limpide et velouté qui les revêt. À côté de ces tons de couleurs si purs, si lumineux, l'azur du ciel paraissait pâle et l'émeraude de la mer était terne.” Marmier, *Lettres sur l'Islande*, XIX.

27 “Si cette terre islandaise porte presque partout une empreinte de désolation, souvent aussi elle présente un aspect grandiose, un caractère sublime.” Marmier, *Lettres sur l'Islande*, 28-29.

28 Signed by Antoine Maurin d'après Charles Durupt; Arthus-Bertrand éditeur; imp. de Lemercier, Benard et Cie.

23 Eggert Ólafsson et Bjarni Pálsson, *Voyage en Islande fait par ordre de S.M. Danoise* [trad. Fr. Gauthier de Lapeyronie], Paris: Les Frères Levrault, 1802. Eggert Ólafsson et Bjarni Pálsson, *Vice-Lavmand Eggert Olafsens og Land-Physici Bjarne Povelsens Reiser igjennem Island, foranstaltet af Videnskabernes Selskab i Kjøbenhavn og beskrevet af forbermedte Eggert Olafsen. Med dertil hørende 51 Kobberstøkker og et nyt forfættiget kart over Island*, 2 vol.. (Sorøe, Lindgren: 1772).

24 Árni B. Stefánsson and Gunnhildur Stefánsdóttir, “Surtshellir in Hallmundarhraun. Historical overview, exploration, memories, damage, an attempt to reconstruct its glorious past,” in *NSS News* 74, no. 5 (2016), 12-19.



rigid stances of her male contemporaries. Her flowing hair and graceful Greek profile stand out as she poses against a dramatic landscape under a cloudy sky. This section reflects the prevailing themes of the grandeur of Nordic culture, patriarchy, and notions of whiteness, offering a perspective through which to examine the political imperatives of the era.

It remains unclear why this gallery of portraits, which includes six male figures and one female, is positioned alongside seemingly disparate imagery such as animal illustrations and skeletal plates, as well as six portraits of leprosy patients, both men and women. This juxtaposition raises questions about the thematic connections intended by the compiler of the atlas. The final images of the volume depict Icelanders suffering from leprosy, a chronic infectious disease that affects the skin, nerves, mucous membranes, and eyes, often leading to significant physical deformities and pain. These portraits, made in a different style than the others, are colored and composed frontally as anthropological studies. Here, the artist focuses on the visible signs of leprosy, showing such symptoms as plaques on the forehead, ears, nose, and lips, loss of eyebrow hair and eyelashes, diffuse thickening of the facial skin, atrophy and tissue loss, the different skin lesions that cover the bodies of the afflicted, evoking both a sense of empathy and the harsh realities of the disease. But as Marmier notes on this affliction: “Leprosy is a common disease in this country, but the Icelanders do not fear the approach of those affected by it. They view it as a hereditary disease, but not contagious.”<sup>29</sup> In summary, the *Atlas Zoologique, Médical et Géographique* serves not only as a scientific record but also as a cultural commentary, revealing underlying social attitudes and the complexities of class and identity in 19th-century Iceland. Despite Marmier's observations regarding leprosy and the gallery of "heroic" men, alongside the depictions of exceptional Icelanders, there are no indications of phrenological studies in the Atlas. Phrenology was gaining traction among French scientists during this period. Gaimard himself had previously engaged with this field of study a few years earlier while traveling with his colleague and friend Jean-René Constant Quoy (1790-1869), a physician and naturalist who participated in

the large expeditions under the direction of Freycinet and Dumont d'Urville.<sup>30</sup> Gaimard's disinterest in the “scientific” status of phrenology has no particular answer, but it did gain scientific status through much of the 19th-century. Its principles were notably applied during the visit of Prince Napoléon to Iceland in 1856, highlighting its imperial influence and the interest it generated within certain circles of the scientific community at the time.<sup>31</sup>

Thus, while lithography afforded a novel means of visual expression and dissemination, it also contributed to wider currents of knowledge production, demanding an interrogation of the narratives chosen for representation and the contexts from which they arise. The collaborative nature of image creation in the Atlases underscores the complexities of authorship and the interchangeability of roles between artists and printers. In the case of Mayer and other artists involved in these projects, it is essential to recognize that they were not the sole creators of the images. Although individual artists may have specialized in specific subjects, the finalization of many of the lithographs resulted from collaborative efforts, with different artists contributing their expertise to various aspects of the final composition. The roles of artists and lithographers often overlapped; an artist could make a drawing for another artist or could execute both the drawing and the transfer to the stone. This dynamic – or traffic- is reflected in the attribution of certain aspects of the images to specific artists—such as Bayot, who is credited for figures and staffage, —underscoring the collaborative essence of this picture-making.

An element of interchangeability is also notable in views of mountains or icebergs—elements that can be adapted for diverse contexts, thereby demonstrating a form of visual shorthand, or to put it otherwise, the conventionality of much iconography or textual production. This practice allowed artists also to utilize existing images to convey specific ideas or settings. The interchangeability of images and elements in historical works like Gaimard's atlases enabled artists to repurpose scenes or subjects in different contexts. For instance, views of mountains or icebergs might be “recycled” and incorporated into other illustrations within the same atlas, across different

publications, or even into paintings. These practices reflect a visual economy in which artists employed previously created images to represent particular settings, suggesting that many, if not most, images were the result of collective efforts. The collaborative nature of lithography often entailed shared responsibilities for both drawing and printing. Painters would also rely on lithographs as in Biard's painting first exhibited in 1841 under the title *Magdalena Bay*, now in the Louvre. The composition combines elements from Mayer's, *Mont Prihyrningur* in the background. The purpose of the selected iconography in the lithograph was to underline the desolation of Icelandic winter landscapes. In this scene, a lifeless body lies beside its horse, while a dog barks in response (no. 54). However, the image lacks any topographic identity, as it appears as a purely aesthetic invention or genre.

All the depicted topics within the Atlases align with particular aesthetic categories and genres—such as portrait, landscape, customs (genre) and cartography—with the *sublime* and picturesque landscapes being particularly prominent. Gaimard actively engaged these aesthetic principles in his correspondence, promoting Iceland's natural beauty and appealing features, from its blue skies and strong winds to its stormy clouds and the melancholy features of its landscape. The account for its pictorial exoticism, is appealing – then and now – to the urban consumer as was undoubtedly intended. Therefore the lithographs should be understood not as immediate or spontaneous documentation (as is mythically attributed to the camera) but as conventionalized representations drawn from various sources, culminating in collaborative works recognized for their collective contributions.

## Contemporary Relevance and Legacy

While lithography provided a novel means of visual expression and enormous public dissemination, it also participated in broader currents of knowledge production that shaped French perceptions of Iceland and its people. The intricate interplay of artistic contributions and the complex representation of discrete identities is especially apparent in the visual narratives constructed by Mayer and a variety of other artists involved in the production of the Atlases. These narratives resonate with Marmier's descriptions of life in Iceland, creating a compelling yet selective portrayal of the island and its inhabitants.

In her influential book *Imperial Eyes*, Mary-Louise Pratt has identified the “monarch-of-all-I-survey” scene, which she claims is one of the most gendered tropes in *travel writing* during the period of high Imperialism.<sup>32</sup> “In this scene, there exists only one perspective, namely that of the (male) European traveller and explorer (and colonizer) whose perspective is the only one that is 'objectively' valid. His is the one that determines how the virgin landscape [which Pratt equates with the other/female body] and its inhabitants are treated, which steps to take, and not least to map, name and ultimately possess it.”

Moreover, the sites illustrated have undergone a transformation from mere geographical locations to popular tourist destinations, evolving into symbols of national identity that have been celebrated and commodified since the late 19th and early 20th centuries. This influence of images underscores how visual representation can play a pivotal role in the construction of national identity, as iconic representations of authentic culture—such as turf houses, dried fish, women working by fish lamps, flocks of sheep, majestic waterfalls, geysers, volcanoes, and hot springs—have become emblematic of *Icelandicness*. However, the images were not simply visioned as documentary renditions but became signs or intrinsic components of *Icelandicity* – the authentic Icelandic experience, later appealing to tourists seeking a taste of the unique cultural *heritage* that these visuals promise to convey.

The narrative of Icelandic identity, encapsulated in the concepts of *Icelandicity* and *Icelandicness*, is deeply rooted in early travel accounts that laid the groundwork for these and other visual representations. Iconic landscapes like Pingvellir and Snæfellsjökull emerged as staples in the cultural imaginary, illustrating the connection between geographic features and the national narrative discussed by Marmier. The romanticized portrayals of domestic life and folklore represent a constructed or “invented” tradition, highlighting how artists and lithographers adopted the picturesque style favored by their audience, thus shaping perceptions of Icelandic culture in the process. These representations contributed to the mythologization of Iceland, merging reality and fantasy while reinforcing the exotic allure sought by French audiences, a theme epitomized in popular French literature.

In conclusion, the legacy of Gaimard's lithographs is twofold: they serve as artistic expressions inspired

29 Xavier Marmier, *Lettres sur l'Islande*, p. 53.

30 Bronwen Douglas, *Science, Voyages, and Encounters in Oceania, 1511–1850*, New York, Palgrave, 2014; Marc Renneville, “Un terrain phrénologique dans le Grand Océan (autour du voyage de Dumoutier à bord de l'*Astrolabe* en 1837-1840),” in Claude Blanckaert, *Le terrain des sciences humaines (Instructions et enquêtes. XVIIe-XXe siècles)*, Paris, L'Harmattan, 1996, 89-138.

31 Æsa Sigurjónsdóttir, “French Photography in Nineteenth-Century Iceland,” *History of Photography* 23, no. 1 (Spring 1999), 10–17.

32 Mary-Louise Pratt, *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation*, London / New York, Routledge, 1992, 201.

by notions of the *sublime* and the picturesque, and as powerful tools for knowledge production that have influenced cultural narratives. They invite us to critically examine the relationship between visual representation, image production, “authenticity” and identity, urging us to consider how the stories told through visual media continue to influence our understanding of places and cultures, sometimes in ways that obscure the lived realities of their people. As we reflect on these works, we are reminded of the ongoing impact that such representations have on the commodification of culture.

As the *Voyages pittoresques* helped shape a collective

cultural identity in France—showcasing the beauty of landscapes and historical sites while reflecting the values of a rapidly urbanizing society—the Gaimard project similarly contributed to the construction of a romantic ethos among Icelandic poets and intellectuals who celebrated Gaimard for his understanding of Icelandic landscape and culture as expressed in the poem “*Til herra Páls Gaimard*” [To Mr. Paul Gaimard] (1839) written by Jónas Hallgrímsson.<sup>33</sup> In this poem, Hallgrímsson juxtaposes past and present through the synthesizing site of a saga landscape in order to provoke his contemporaries into revitalizing their nation, its language and culture.

33 Dick Ringler, *Bard of Iceland: Jónas Hallgrímsson, Poet and Scientist*, Madison, University of Wisconsin Press, 2002, 163-165.



FLYING THE “OLD VIKING TRAIL”:  
FROM VILHJALMUR STEFANSSON’S  
FORETELLING OF ARCTIC AVIATION  
TO PAN AMERICAN AIRWAYS’ EXPANSION  
IN THE NORTH ATLANTIC.

ALEXANDRE DELANGLE

Doctorant à l’université Paris-Saclay et Attaché temporaire d’enseignement et de recherche à l’université Côte d’Azur

PhD student at the University Paris-Saclay and Assitant Professor in English Studies at the University Côte d’Azur

There are few nowadays who do not agree that the world is round, but there are almost equally few who apply the principle of the world’s roundness consistently when they think about going from place to place. The polar ocean has so long been a barrier that when we consider transport from Europe to America, from America to Asia, we think only in terms of east and west; indeed we speak of the Near and the Far East. Since the days of Magellan it has been a commonplace that you can go east by sailing west. It is about to become an equal commonplace that you can go east by flying north.

Vilhjalmur Stefansson, *The Northward Course of Empire*, 1922, p. 169-170

The successful testing of the first powered aircraft by Wilbur and Orville Wright on 7 December 1903 introduced more than a new way of transportation. This traveling system enabled further liberation from geographical barriers and progressively precipitated American society into an era of technological enthusiasm. Written in 1911 by American explorer Walter E. Wellman (1858-1934), *The Aerial Age* exhibits one of the earliest reflections on aviation’s capacity to crush distance, renewed access to the perilous Arctic, and the integration of the airplane in foreign affairs. Composed as an account of its author’s attempts to reach the North Pole by sea from Spitsbergen in 1894, then Franz Josef Land

in 1898 and 1899, it includes his conversion to air exploration when he sought support at the Arctic Club of New York. There, he introduced an aerial plan that was “morally certain” of success due to its multiplication by ten of the average speed of a sledding party<sup>1</sup>. The book also portrays a new kind of life in northern latitudes where “scurvy is no longer a terror” and “men provide themselves with proper food, bathe occasionally and take a proper amount of exercise”<sup>2</sup>. It equally discloses the vision of air travel as an instrument capable of abolishing natural barriers as the author “Often (..) looked up into the air and wished we had some means of traveling that royal road where

there were no ice hummocks, no leads of open water, no obstacles to rapid progress”<sup>3</sup>. If the four trips over the ice onboard his airship America in 1906, 1909, 1910, and 1911 successfully demonstrated the feasibility of radio communication in Arctic expeditions, they nevertheless failed to reach their target and prove their point to former Navy officer Robert Peary (1856-1920) who still believed in accessing the North Pole from sea ice. Wellman concluded his book with a summary of the ambitious plan he submitted to the American Congress about the establishment of an Aerial Coast Defense Fleet composed of motor-balloons, aerial scouting ships, and aerial battleship destroyers constituting a first line of defense in the Atlantic and Pacific oceans and using the intelligence they collected to fuel a new information age<sup>4</sup>.

In stark contrast to enthusiastic narratives of the air age, American aeronautics fell behind its European counterparts supported by governments and national laboratories<sup>5</sup>. The competitive railway system, the control exerted by Detroit automobile industries over aircraft manufacturers as well as the mental assignment of airplanes to extreme sport all entailed a lack of demand and a moment of artificially slowed innovation in the United States<sup>6</sup>. The American entrance to the Great War jumpstarted the aircraft industry through congressional support, as well as domestic and allied demands<sup>7</sup>. Industrialists produced more than the American market could ever absorb at that time, before congratulating themselves for equaling European aircraft production<sup>8</sup>. After the war, manufacturers faced the challenging end of

public contracts, but air-mail service, map-making, air cargo, business trips, and even taxis were promising leads<sup>9</sup>. Furthermore, a promising expansion of the radius of commercial activities was discussed since inaccessible country was now made practicable, even for mining labor and oil deposits<sup>10</sup>. These anticipations of airplane usage foreshadowed the metamorphosis of American “air-mindedness” from technological enthusiasm to the acknowledgment of the role America could have in a web of intercontinental connections<sup>11</sup>.

Glimpsed shortly before World War I by movie director Georges Méliès (1861-1938) in his film *À la conquête du Pôle* (1912), where international scientists determine the best way to fly to the Pole while battling with suffragettes, trans-Arctic aviation firstly emerged as both a physical and commercial possibility after the conflict. An early German suggestion to cross the Arctic region to connect European capitals to Arkhangelsk, the American West coast, and Japan was made in 1919 but not followed in action, leaving the United Kingdom to take the lead. On 15 June 1919, two British pilots made ocean crossing by air a reality when they linked the American and European parts of the Empire through the first non-stop transatlantic flight, from Newfoundland to Ireland<sup>12</sup>. The momentum they created by carrying a small amount of mail was seized by Sefton Brancker (1877-1930), Director of Civil Aviation for Great Britain, who trumpeted trans-polar mail delivery to Japan in the following ten years in a speech given at Sheffield<sup>13</sup>. Although slower in its maturation, American confidence in aviation gained from its application to the control

3 Ibidem, p. 30.  
4 Ibidem, p. 444-445.  
5 Roger E. Bilstein, *Flight in America: from the Wrights to the astronauts*, Baltimore, Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001, p. 31.  
6 Grover Loening, *Our Wings Grow Faster: In These Personal Episodes of a Lifetime in Aviation May be Found an Historical and Pictorial Record Showing how We So Quickly Stepped Into this Air Age - and Through what Kinds of Difficulties and Developments We Had to Pass to Get There*, New York, Doubleday, Doran & Co., 1935, p. 26. Ronald Edward George Davies, *Airlines of the United States since 1914*, Washington D.C., Smithsonian Inst. Pr., 1982, p. 4.  
7 Roger E. Bilstein, *Flight in America, op. cit*, p. 36.  
8 Earle Remington, « The Future of American Aeronautics », in *The North American Review*, 1919, vol.209, n°758, p. 52-58.  
9 D.W. Douglas, « The Airplane as a Commercial Possibility », in *SAE Transactions*, 1919, vol.14, p. 444-462.  
10 J.W. Smallwood, « Oil in the Frozen North », in *The American Review of Reviews*, 01/1921, vol.63 n°6, p. 639-644.  
11 James C. Scott, « From Jennies to JATO, World War I, Sacramento, and the Ascent of an “Air-Minded” California Community », in *California History*, 01/08/2020, vol.97 n°3, p. 122-158.  
12 David L. Bristow, *Flight to the Top of the World: The Adventures of Walter Wellman. op. cit.*, p. 289.  
13 Elmer Plischke, « Trans-Arctic Aviation », in *Economic Geography*, 1943, vol.19, n°3, p. 283-291.

of their own northern territory. With the approval of the Secretary of War, Captain St. Clair Streett (1893-1970) commanded the first American flight to Nome, Alaska, in July 1920. Departing from New York, the expedition took 45 days to fly over American and Canadian mainlands to reach its destination where it photographed inaccessible parts of the peninsula. Additionally, it placed aerial missions as the natural successor to exploratory campaigns<sup>14</sup>. From April to September 1924, four aviators of the U.S. Army Services set a decisive milestone by completing the first world aerial circumnavigation in 175 days and integrating the circumpolar North into a new travel system through their stops in Alaska, the Faroe Islands, Reykjavik, the Greenlandic town of Ivigtut and Labrador<sup>15</sup>. Military interest in the Arctic progressed further when the U.S. Navy's Chief of the Bureau of Aeronautics, Rear Admiral William A. Moffett (1869-1933), stated in 1924 his trust in polar air routes. Meanwhile, Congress was debating the sending of the *USS Shenandoah*, the first military-equipped dirigible, to the North Pole by summer 1925<sup>16</sup>. Reaching the North Pole by air was eventually accomplished on 12 May 1926 by Norwegian explorer Roald Amundsen (1872-1928) commanding the *Norge* airship and a crew of fifteen that included Italian engineer Umberto Nobile (1885-1978) and American explorer Lincoln Ellsworth (1880-1951). The completion of their trip from Svalbard to Alaska also marked the first trans-Arctic flight in history<sup>17</sup>. Lindbergh (1902-1974), flying alone from New York to Paris in thirty-three and a half hours, openly demonstrated the potential of aviation to

Americans, who developed adoration and violent obsession for the aeronaut. His extraordinarily successful autobiography *We* (1927) set the genre of flight autobiography. It made Americans comprehend a new relationship to the Earth's geography and see the airplane as the instrument that would nullify any natural barriers<sup>18</sup>. As Lindbergh wanted to save distance, he did not fly straight in the mid-Atlantic but chose to fly north to Newfoundland and then south after reaching southern Ireland, reminding his audience of the planet's curvature and how following it reduced gaps between America and Europe<sup>19</sup>.

With Lindbergh's feat, the strategic use of the circumpolar North was leaving its original informed circles where Wellman's legacy prospered. A sonorous echo to the journalist's ideas was found in the officer of the U.S. Army Air Services, William Mitchell (1879-1936), who repeatedly advocated for both the establishment of a distinct Air Force military branch and public consideration for northern territories, starting as early as October 1919 when he expressed his disappointment in the lack of American Arctic policy to a Senate committee<sup>20</sup>. His commitment to Alaska's defense and concern over the rising Japanese empire led him to organize Streett's ambitious flight to Nome, to collect meteorological data and demonstrate that distances between major powers should be measured regarding circumpolar latitudes<sup>21</sup>. His book, *Winged defense, The Development and Possibilities of Modern Air Power* (1925), compiles his personal experience, articles and congressional testimonies in favor of a controversial reorganization of the military,

and reasserts his position in favor of a defense plan for the Yukon river<sup>22</sup>. Mitchell's divisive ideas and criticism of the military led him to be court-martialed in December 1925. His interest in the Arctic had also been castigated by the *New York Times*, as the newspaper called Streett's flight a "waste of time and material"<sup>23</sup>. However, to aircraft manufacturers and chambers of commerce, the Arctic's low temperatures were deemed of particular interest to simulate flights in high altitudes. Companies like Boeing, Leoning, Ford, DeHaviland, saw the circumpolar North as both a testing ground and a corridor to international commerce in Asia and Europe<sup>24</sup>. By the end of the 1920s, all they needed was a commercial airline with enough governmental support to offer trans-oceanic service to open the "blue ribbon trade route" connecting the world's two most important areas of manufacturing, trade, and finance<sup>25</sup>.

The governmental foundation of the U.S. Air Mail Service in 1918 made air mail become a significant component of business communications. The Air Mail Act voted in Congress in February 1925 opened the way for private contractors to be issued mail routes and emerge as the nation's first providers of air transportation<sup>26</sup>. The first airlines started to confidently weigh the possibility of offering passenger transport service as technology progressed and international air routes covering great distances in hours instead of days were identified. While the Air Commerce Act of 1926 encouraged even more the expansion of the private sector, several companies had already been established and even commenced operation by the end of the decade like Delta Air Lines, American, United, Northwest and Trans World Airlines<sup>27</sup>. Among them, the company that illustrated the

most the intricacy of early companies with the United States' interests abroad was Pan American Airways. Firstly co-founded in 1925 by three U.S. Army Air Corps officers and an ex-Navy officer – Henry H. Arnold (commander of all air armed forces during World War II), Carl Spaatz, Jack Jouett, and John Montgomery – the company was originally planned to foil the establishment of a German airline in Columbia. To these officers, the extension of the *Sociedad Columbano Allemana De Transporte Aéreo* to the Panama Canal was unacceptable. Penniless but gifted with an influential idea, they convinced potent backers, some as powerful as the Standard Oil Company, to set up a route operating between Florida, Cuba, and Panama<sup>28</sup>. Further conquest of the market in Latin America happened after the bankruptcy of Florida Airways and the credit granted by industrialist Henry Ford<sup>29</sup>. When young entrepreneur Juan Trippe (1899-1981) took over the company in June 1928, he accentuated the competition between Pan American and European contenders, turning it into America's spearhead in Latin America<sup>30</sup>. In January 1929, Trippe inaugurated the first intercontinental schedules from the United States to South America with planes flying from the Pan American International Airport of Miami to Cuba and Puerto Rico. By August 1929, the company offered connections as far as Lima, in Peru, and delivered mail in Argentina<sup>31</sup>. Conceived as a provider of international flights from its formation, Pan American started to plan the extension of its network to neighboring continents. Until the difficulties it encountered in the 1970s that eventually led to its bankruptcy in 1991, Pan American was a powerful entity with close ties to both the State and Army

14 Roger E. Bilstein, *Flight in America. op. cit.*, p. 67. Two extensive campaigns were held in 1926 and 1929 to survey Alaska by air, perform aerial photography and identify untapped resources. Nancy Fogelson, *Arctic Exploration & International Relations 1900-1932*, Fairbanks, University of Alaska Press, 1992, p. 82.

15 Jenifer Van Vleck, *Empire of the Air. Aviation and the American Ascendancy*, Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 2013, p. 34.

16 D.M. LeBourdais, « The Aerial Attack on the Arctic », *The Nation*, 16/01/1924, vol.118, n°3054, p. 1. Nancy Fogelson, *Arctic Exploration & International Relations 1900-1932, op. cit.*, p. 86-87.

17 Nancy Fogelson, *Arctic Exploration & International Relations 1900-1932, op. cit.*, p. 135.

18 Denice Turner, *Writing the Heavenly Frontier: Metaphor, Geography, and Flight Autobiography in America 1927-1954*, Amsterdam, Rodopi, 2011, p. 192.

19 Charles A. Lindbergh, *We*, New York, G. P. Putnam's sons, 1927, p. 202.

20 Henry H. Arnold, *Global mission*, New York, Harper & Brothers, 1949, p. 92.

21 Nancy Fogelson, *Arctic Exploration & International Relations 1900-1932, op. cit.*, p. 80-81.

22 Galen Roger Perras, *Stepping Stones to Nowhere: The Aleutian Islands, Alaska, and American Military Strategy, 1867-1945*, Vancouver, UBC Press, 2003, p. 14-15. William Mitchell, *Winged Defense. The Development and Possibilities of Modern Air Power*, New York, G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1925, p.xviii.

23 Nancy Fogelson, *Arctic Exploration & International Relations 1900-1932, op. cit.*, p. 83.

24 *Ibidem*, p. 79-80, p. 83.

25 *The North Atlantic Area – Greenland, Iceland, Scandinavia*, 37p., 09/44, Pan American report Mss 98, 21-26. All indicated archives are taken from the Stefansson collection, located at the Rauner Special Library, in Dartmouth College, New Hampshire.

26 Roger E. Bilstein, *Flight in America, op. cit.*, p. 74.

27 *Ibidem*, p. 51.

28 Henry H. Arnold, *Global Mission, op. cit.*, p. 115.

29 Robert Daley, *An American Saga: Juan Trippe and his Pan Am empire*, New York, Random House, 1980, p. 27-28, p. 30.

30 Roger E. Bilstein, *Flight in America, op. cit.*, p. 79.

31 Robert Daley, *An American Saga, op. cit.*, p. 72.



Departments as it became the United States' exclusive international airlines until 1945<sup>32</sup>.

However, if aviation had initiated an age of disappearance of remoteness, the motors of commercial planes still needed regular stops to refuel as they did not have enough range for transcontinental flights. Two options emerged in the northern and mid-Atlantic routes. While the latter would connect the United States to British Bermuda, the Portuguese Azores, and then Southern Europe, the former advantageously counted shorter over-water flights as it went through Labrador, Newfoundland, Greenland, Iceland, and northern Europe. Yet, meteorological conditions in the North Atlantic as well as appropriate places for airbases in Greenland and Scandinavia were still widely unknown. Even worse, the first half of the 20th century was a tumultuous period for the circumpolar North with changeful sovereignties. On February 1920, a dispute of 25 years involving Germany, the United Kingdom, Norway, Russia, Sweden and the United States was concluded by the Spitsbergen Treaty, attributing the archipelago to freshly independent Norway. In May 1929, Norwegian sovereignty was extended to Jan Meyen Island<sup>33</sup>. Between July 1931 and April 1933, Norway claimed a portion of Eastern Greenland until the Permanent Court of International Justice ruled against it. The claiming of "Erik the Red's Land" inspired abroad, as even former Prime Minister Jon Thorlaksson (1926-1927) introduced a proposal at the *Althing* on 22 July 1931 to lay a claim over the contested Eastern Greenlandic coast<sup>34</sup>. The application of the "sector principle" by the Soviet Union in April 1926 and its aftereffects, opened a phase of active policies of land occupation and development in Arctic countries<sup>35</sup>. Aviation also allowed the intervention of non-Arctic states in the region,

either for exploration or transportation. On that account, the arrival of fascist Italian Air Minister, General Italo Balbo in New York on 1 July 1933 with a squadron of twenty-four airplanes clearly demonstrated that the air route departing from the Netherlands to Ireland, Iceland, Labrador, Montreal, and Chicago was equally opened for war machines designed to carry bombs and torpedoes. When Balbo and his group arrived in Chicago to attend the city's World Fair on 15 July, they exhibited how the world had grown smaller. To the audience, the northern route symbolized a direct connection to Europe and the abolishment of the oceanic barrier<sup>36</sup>. To the informed circles, this feat also represented a rampant menace for the defenseless industrialized Midwest and materialized an important part of air-mindedness: the commercial control of air routes prefigured air superiority in wartime. Consequently, if Trippe wanted to go up the "Old Viking Trail", he needed both aeronauts to survey potential routes, advisors capable of compiling data and negotiators with ties to northern Europe<sup>37</sup>.

In its campaign of acquisition of lesser companies, Pan American acquired in September 1932 the service of former Canadian-born anthropologist Vilhjalmur Stefansson (1879-1962). His three expeditions to the Canadian Arctic where he charted some of the last unknown places on Earth and delineated much of the continental shelf (1906-1907, 1908-1912, 1913-1918) opened the way for a more informed and less ethnocentric view of the Inuit he detailed in *My Life with the Eskimos* (1913), in addition of asserting a theory of adaptation to northern environments he developed in his best-selling book *The Friendly Arctic* (1921). The latter mainly described his third expedition to the islands he claimed for Canada and provided one of the most minute depictions of

Arctic life whose presence was largely unknown, especially on the sea ice<sup>38</sup>. A decorated eminence among polar experts upon his return for surviving the longest expedition, Stefansson settled in the lively neighborhood of Greenwich Village, New York, and became a successful lecturer, always available for journalistic interviews<sup>39</sup>. The controversies that followed him for his ethnological theories about the Copper Inuit he revealed, the separation from his crew in 1914 that proved fatal to 11 men, and the death of four out of the five settlers he sent to Wrangel Island (September 1921-August 1923) – whose presence unfolded diplomatic turmoil – also contributed to the success of any news story that included him<sup>40</sup>. Yet, to the vast majority, Stefansson was the man who abolished the Arctic, in both America and Iceland<sup>41</sup>. His ties with his parents' island mostly consisted of scholarly interest and the exchange of letters rather than visits. As early as his college years, Stefansson realized little was known about Icelanders in the United States. Some testimonies pointed out how easily they were confused with Greenlanders, or treated as if they were "the worst of criminals". The two research trips he made in the summers of 1904 and 1905 were his only visits until his professional tour of August 1936 where he easily met and connected with both the government and representatives of the Socialist, Conservative, and Farmer parties who saw in him an advocate of their nation in America<sup>42</sup>. Unlike other explorers of his time, Stefansson exhibited a rare scientific, if not encyclopedic, approach in his writings that he likely inherited from his Harvard classes, in anthropology, sociology, and geography. His theory of Arctic centrality rephrased as the "Mediterranean of the future", accompanied by polar-centered maps, and regular statements promoting trans-Arctic flying made him one of the most active publicists of polar flights if not the *de-facto* geographer of the air age – where the spherical shape of the Earth would be

used to connect major cities of the Western and Soviet and Asian worlds<sup>43</sup>.

Briefly mentioned in studies detailing the development of aviation in the United States, the Arctic enterprise of Pan American Airways has been limited to the granting of landing rights by the Icelandic *Althing* (parliament) in 1936. *Airlines of the United States since 1914* (1982) and *Flights in America: from the Wrights to the astronauts* (2001) provide an extensive overview of Pan American's relationship with other air companies in the United States and their conflictual interests. Specialized works on the company's policy abroad, *An American Saga: Juan Trippe and his Pan Am empire* (1980), *Empire of the Air* (2013), *Pan Am at War* (2019) respectively investigate the influence and personal ties of the company's director, how it asserted dominance over Latin American air transport and whitewashed American imperialism over the continent, and its progressive integration into the war effort through advantageous positioning in Asia and Africa. Strangely, these approaches focusing on the connivance between the interests of Pan American, Washington, and local governments have not been extended to the North Atlantic as the coverage of the company's commitment to Greenland and Iceland remained limited to Lindbergh's survey flights of 1933 or the competition with the British national airline, Imperial Airways. Nancy Fogelson's concise and innovative work, *Arctic Exploration and International Relations, 1900-1932* (1992), offers the most advanced study of the "Aeroarctic" period of the 1920s. Although short, the book precisely highlights the evolution of American interests in the Arctic as well as the advancement of its assets in the region. However, setting its limit to the Second International Polar Year of 1932 prevented it from discussing the confrontation between American and European commercial and strategic interests in the North Atlantic throughout the decade. It also restricts

32 Jenifer Van Vleck, *Empire of the Air. Aviation and the American Ascendancy*, op. cit., p. 6.

33 Graham B. Grosvenor, « The Northward Course of Aviation », in Vilhjalmur Stefansson, Hans Weigert, *Compass of the World: a symposium on political geography*, New York, Macmillan, 1944, p. 312.

34 A succession of declarations made by the United States, the United Kingdom, France and Japan between 1916-1920 recognized the belonging of Greenland to Denmark. « Revives Iceland's Claims », *The New York Times*. 23/07/1931.

35 P. Whitney Lackenbauer, Peter Kikkert, « The Dog in the Manger—and Letting Sleeping Dogs Lie: The United States, Canada and the Sector Principle, 1924–1955 », in Suzanne LaLonde, Ted L. McDorman, *International Law and Politics of the Arctic Ocean*, Leyden, Brill, 2015, p. 216-239.

36 Robert Daley, *An American Saga*, op. cit., p. 215.

37 Sloan Taylor, « Top of the world flight », *Daily News*, 23/07/1933. *The North Atlantic area – Greenland, Iceland, Scandinavia*, 37p., 09/44, Pan American report Mss 98, 21-26.

38 In total, the Canadian Arctic Expedition claimed Brock, Borden (and Mackenzie), Meighen and Lougheed islands. Roger McCoy, *On the Edge: Mapping North America's Coasts*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2012, p. 219.

39 Gísli Pálsson, *Travelling Passions: the hidden life of Vilhjalmur Stefansson*, Lebanon, Dartmouth College Press, 2005, p. 181.

40 William R. Hunt, *Stef: a biography of Vilhjalmur Stefansson, Canadian Arctic explorer*, Vancouver, University of British Columbia Press, 1986, p. 243.

41 On 9 November 1923, Stefansson concluded his lecture "Abolishing the Arctic" with the sentence "Remember that the Far North is a very ordinary part of this old world". Lectures, Mss 98, 12-25

42 Gísli Pálsson, *Travelling Passions*, op. cit., p. 46, p. 202-208. *Icelandic Trip: Notes*, 14/10/1936, 7p., Mss 98, 19-30

43 D.M. LeBourdais, « The Aerial Attack on the Arctic », op. cit.

the coverage of the early rapprochement between the United States and Iceland – whose diplomacy was still delegated to Copenhagen since its autonomy of 1918 – along with the role played by Stefansson as informal ambassador. Even the explorer’s biographies brought little light to his advising career to Pan American at the benefit of more sensational events despite the presence of several elements indicating that Stefansson’s contribution to the aviation industry connected him to several military-related figures – notably Major Generals George E. Leach (1876-1955) and Oscar M. Westover (1883-1938) – and helped him become an official consultant to the U.S. Army in April 1935 in charge of delivering a handbook on cold-weather and Arctic survival and flight<sup>44</sup>.

This paper discusses both Stefansson’s commitment to Arctic flights, Pan American’s undertaking of a transatlantic route in the circumpolar North, and its involvement in negotiations to open Iceland’s first air communications until the start of World War II. In addition to allowing an investigation of the company’s efforts to assert its presence in Iceland, the mobilization of the explorer’s archives provides an illustrative example of the transition that occurred in polar exploration in the 1930s, where heroic expeditions turned into strategic, organized and state-funded research programs<sup>45</sup>. Through its monitoring of European rival companies and Arctic expeditions, the Stefansson papers also depict how rising global tensions affected the circumpolar North and introduced Arctic islands into unprecedented competition. Additionally, the correspondence they include brings light to the growing normalization of Iceland in America through the action of its own authorities and informal first diplomatic network, seeking economic ties and alliances with American officials, officers, and businessmen.

Surviving the twilight of the  
“Romantic Age of Exploration”.

Stefansson’s revision of Arctic geography,  
from land exploration to commercial  
airlines.

*Magellan changed the earth from a pancake that could not be sailed around at all to a cylinder that we have been able to sail around only east and west. Whoever first crosses the Arctic will convert that cylinder into a sphere equally traversable in all directions by ships of the air. This will round out a beautiful poetical and mathematical conception; it will also have the practical consequence of making neighbors from north to south some of the important countries of the world that have been distant from each other east and west.*

Vilhjalmur Stefansson,  
“Arctic Air Routes to the Orient”, 12/1924<sup>46</sup>.

Although one of the first advocates of Arctic flights, Stefansson never piloted an airplane. During his expeditions, he mostly traveled by foot and dogsleds along Inuit trails, and frequently insisted in his diaries on the distance he accomplished, totaling more than 32,000 kilometers<sup>47</sup>. Yet, increased awareness of the polar regions as well as improved means to reach them gave new momentum to Stefansson’s ideas as he had little trouble modernizing his narrative and preventing it from becoming obsolete as the U.S. Navy considered his experience in case of forced landing as early as May 1924<sup>48</sup>. From exploration and anthropology, the lecturer moved to geography and navigation. The shift is made visible in *The Friendly Arctic* where the author’s former subject of fascination and respect, the Inuit, fades away

44 William R. Hunt, *Stef. op. cit.*, p. 242. Correspondence: United States War Department, 1935, Mss 196, 37-24. By 1935, due to budget restrictions, no non-confidential guide about cold-weather tactics and survival or report on Alaska flights had been published by the U.S. Army, only the Navy had published an outlet on the latter in 1934. Correspondence, Mss 196, 37-24.

45 Ronald E. Doel, Robert Marc Friedman, Julia Lajus, *et alii*, « Strategic Arctic science: national interests in building natural knowledge – interwar era through the Cold War », in *Journal of Historical Geography*. 04/2014, vol.44. p. 60-80.

46 Vilhjalmur Stefansson, « Arctic Air Routes to the Orient », in *The Forum*, 12/1924, p. 721-732.

47 Gísli Pálsson, « Arcticity: Gender, Race, and Geography in the Writings of Vilhjalmur Stefansson », in Michael Bravo, Sverker Sörlin (eds.), *Narrating the Arctic: A Cultural History of Nordic Scientific Practices*, Canton, Science History Publications, 2002, p. 275-310.

48 Paul Dukes, « Vilhjalmur Stefansson, *The Northward Course of Empire*, The Adventure of Wrangel Island, 1922–1925, and “Universal Revolution” », in *Sibirica*. 1/03/2018, vol.17, n°1. p. 122. Fitzhugh Green, « The Navy and the North Pole », in *U.S. Naval Institute Proceedings*, 03/1924, vol.50, n°253, p. 373-386.

in favor of the land, its exploration, and natural resources. Unlike Wellman who looked up and dreamed of future aerial Arctic travels, Stefansson found inspiration in the belugas crossing the Northwest Passage and developed his prime interest in commercial submarines linking Arctic communities<sup>49</sup>. The reading of *The Submarine in War and Peace* (1918) written by engineer Simon Lake equally influenced his vision of future trans-Arctic submarine commerce his publisher considered “too fantastic”<sup>50</sup>. As Stefansson believed the only significant barrier to the integration of the Arctic in world affairs was “misknowledge”, the writer intended to repel it by representing a “University of Unlearning”<sup>51</sup>.

His third book, *The Northward Course of Empire* (1922), aimed to bring a radical portrayal of the circumpolar North and its first industries, far from the author’s original focus on “friendly” environments and individuals. Its characterization as a “pioneer book” connotes an extension of the frontier ideology Stefansson grew up with during his youth in Manitoba and North Dakota<sup>52</sup>. Composed of rewritten articles published in several magazines, the book pictures the diversity of resources found near the Arctic circle, from cotton fields and musk-oxen pastures to timber and oil exploitations, and how these assets could be offered to the world. Its main argument revolves around Canada’s geographical position that makes it a favored nation, set on the path of world power, by its control of a large part of the shoreline of the Arctic ocean, portrayed as a “polar Mediterranean”. Its chapter

“Transpolar Commerce by Air” comprises several references to submarines as auxiliaries to airplanes and dirigibles, but it most importantly introduces one of the earliest reflections on the aftereffects of aerial technology over geography<sup>53</sup>. In prolongation to his previous article “The Arctic as an air route of the future” published in July, the chapter tackles the Mercator map for its representation of a flattened world whose inflated “up” and “down” parts exaggerated distances at the poles<sup>54</sup>. To Stefansson, such a map forced the layman to think of the planet as a cylinder instead of a sphere and commanded minds to interpret the world under an East-West reading grid he deemed unsuited to analyze the future of world politics<sup>55</sup>. Instead, he included in his book an equidistant zenithal projection, centered around the pole, that encouraged another mental geography, adapted to the air age. Such a map revealed ideal to aviators as it mathematically demonstrated the proximity of nations in the Northern Hemispheres with a true scale along the radii and areas properly comparable throughout<sup>56</sup>. This kind of projection grew in popularity after it was further detailed in the *Aerial Map of the World* article radio engineer A.P. Berejkoff published the following year in *Aviation*<sup>57</sup> and became central during the American map fever of World War II that advertised globes and popularized geopolitics<sup>58</sup>. Stefansson’s emphasis on polar maps served his interpretation of the Arctic ocean as the future “great northern Mediterranean” he pursued in his article “Arctic Air Routes to the Orient” (1924) where he confessed his trouble

49 Vilhjalmur Stefansson, *Discovery: the autobiography of Vilhjalmur Stefansson*, New York, McGraw-Hill, 1964, p. 178. Vilhjalmur Stefansson, *The Friendly Arctic, The Story of Five Years in Polar Regions*, New York, The Macmillan co, 1921, p. 208-209.

50 Vilhjalmur Stefansson, *Discovery: the autobiography of Vilhjalmur Stefansson, op. cit.*, p. 245.

51 Vilhjalmur Stefansson, *The Northward Course of Empire*, New York, Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1922, p. 22.

52 Cavell, Janice et Jeff Noakes, « Explorer without a country: the question of Vilhjalmur Stefansson’s citizenship », in *Polar Record*, 2009, vol.45, no°3, p. 237-241.

53 Vilhjalmur Stefansson, *The Northward Course of Empire. op. cit.*, p. 198-200.

54 Vilhjalmur Stefansson, « The Arctic as an air route of the future », in *The National Geographic Magazine*, 08/1922, vol.62, n°2., p. 205-218.

55 The East-West reading grid had recently been promoted by British geographer Halford Mackinder (1861-1947) in his article of April 1904, “The Geographical Pivot of History”.

56 Alan K. Henrikson, « The Map as an “Idea”: The Role of Cartographic Imagery During the Second World War », in *The American Cartographer*, 01/1975, vol.2, n°1, p. 19-53.

57 A.P. Berejkoff, « *Aerial Map of the World* », in *Aviation*, 24/08/1925, n°8.

58 Vincent Capdepu, « The Entry of the United States into the “Global Age”: A geohistorical moment? », in *Monde(s)*, 28/12/2015, no°2, p. 177-196. Nicholas John Spykman, *The Geography of the Peace*, New York, Harcourt, 1944, 88 p.



finding polar-centered maps in London<sup>59</sup>. This awareness was instrumental in his attempt to settle Wrangel Island in the name of the British Empire. Turning it into an unsinkable flying base above the northern Pacific would have granted the ability to deliver mail from London to Tokyo – or monitor a Japanese expansion further north. He detailed this controversial enterprise in his third book, *The Adventure of Wrangel Island* (1925), and extensively related to the press during his trip to London in May 1923 where he attempted to convince the Colonial Office, the Foreign Office, the Admiralty, and the Air Ministry to claim Wrangel Island and send a rescue party<sup>60</sup>. His following work on aviation, a paper entitled “Notes on Arctic Flying”, emphasized the meteorological conditions observed by American aviators during their Arctic and Atlantic flights<sup>61</sup>. His other article, “Some Problems of Arctic Travel: After a Forced Landing”, asserted the usefulness of considering the Arctic as a “friendly” place where even the icepack can sustain the stranded pilot. Instead of severing their ties to the land, air travelers and contractors needed ground knowledge to settle their bases more than ever<sup>62</sup>.

Stefansson’s early books and theory of livability certainly did not end the imaginary of the desolated Arctic barrier as much as aviation, aerial feats, and faith in technological progress did. Yet, the application of modern ways of transport to the Arctic meant an increased presence of settlers, workers, and tourists whose needs could be met by his expertise. His knowledge of the land and its weather became invaluable to those who wanted to make a profit

from the sudden opening of northern regions and accomplish his prophecy stating that there would be “no northern boundary beyond which productive enterprise cannot go till North meets North on the opposite shores of the Arctic Ocean as East has met West on the Pacific”<sup>63</sup>.

Although Stefansson’s friends nicknamed him “Prophet of the North”<sup>64</sup> – as his tombstone in New Hampshire still does – the explorer more accurately converted his thorough interest in a new kind of Arctic expedition into a much-needed air expertise in a critical region while many of his associates were directly involved in aviation. A member of the Explorers’ Club since 1908, Stefansson frequently exchanged ideas with Peary who predicted as early as 1910 the utility of aviation in the Arctic before joining the Aero Club of America in 1913<sup>65</sup>. Even more instrumental to his determination to chart as much land as possible in the Canadian North and demonstrate that even Westerners could endure several consecutive Arctic winters, was Stefansson’s introduction to scientist Alexander Graham Bell (1847-1922) when the explorer was negotiating with sponsors to support his third expedition. When Bell expressed his opinion that aviation would soon come into its own and be used in the Arctic, Stefansson understood he had little time to prove his theories of adaptation before backers started to finance air exploration<sup>66</sup>. Stefansson’s meeting with Orville Wright in Dayton, Ohio in spring 1919, arguably confirmed his instinct that Arctic exploration was to be revolutionized and made him reconsider aviation as of equal

59 Vilhjalmur Stefansson, *The Northward Course of Empire*, op. cit., p. 190. “Last summer I visited every well-known shop in London and was unable to buy a map of the northern hemisphere (...). You will fare almost as badly on a search in New York. The only American map available much larger than a grapefruit has recently been published by the United States Weather Bureau. Such are the results of the simple-looking Mercator’s and of the doctrine that the Arctic is an insurmountable barrier”. Vilhjalmur Stefansson, « Arctic Air Routes to the Orient », op. cit.

60 Richard J. Diubaldo, « Wrangling over Wrangel Island », in *Canadian Historical Review*, 09/1967, vol.48, n°3. p. 201-226. Vilhjalmur Stefansson, *The Adventure of Wrangel Island*, New York, The Macmillan Company, 1925, p. 10, p. 15; « Polar Flying, New Roads for Commerce », *Times*, 26/05/1923.

61 Vilhjalmur Stefansson, « Notes on Arctic Flying », in *The Geographical Journal*, 1928, vol.71, n°2, p. 167-171.

62 By taking the example of aviator Richard Byrd not seeing any cod nor seal during his flights of 1926 and 1927, Stefansson implied that aerial observation could not replace his demonstration related to the consistent presence of Arctic life, even at the Pole. Vilhjalmur Stefansson, « Some Problems of Arctic Travel: After a Forced Landing », in *The Geographical Journal*, 1929, vol.74, n°5, p. 417-431.

63 Vilhjalmur Stefansson, *The Northward Course of Empire*, op. cit., p. 19.

64 Earl Parker Hanson, *Stefansson, prophet of the North*, New York, Harper & bros, 1941, 241 p.

65 Richard J. Diubaldo, *Stefansson and the Canadian Arctic*. Montréal, McGill Queen’s University Press, 1999, p. 132.

66 Vilhjalmur Stefansson, *Discovery; the autobiography of Vilhjalmur Stefansson*. op. cit., p. 146.

importance as submarines<sup>67</sup>. While he estimated that airplanes would bring great commercial value in the coming decades, firstly in Brazil, then Siberia, mainland Canada and the polar regions, the former explorer was surprised to hear Mitchell estimate transpolar air commerce would be of greater dimension<sup>68</sup>. In both his reports to Pan American and his autobiography, he did not fail to recall the proposal he made to Prime Minister Robert Borden in 1917 about an aerial expedition to assert Canadian sovereignty and conclude the exploration of the Arctic archipelago where new lands could still be discovered. With the participation of Orville Wright, a two-year expedition (1921-1923) was discussed in London in spring 1920 where Stefansson exposed to the Royal Geographical Society and the Crown the opportunity of building airbases in northern Canada. The project led to the transition between Borden and his successor, Prime Minister Arthur Meighen, who was recommended by Stefansson in a meeting of October 1920 to assert sovereignty over Wrangel and Ellesmere Islands<sup>69</sup>. The enterprise nevertheless died in deadlock when Meighen’s cabinet split on the matter of the expedition’s leadership with some favoring explorer Ernest Shackleton (1874-1922)<sup>70</sup>.

One of Shackleton’s last companions, aviator Hubert Wilkins (1888-1958), had served as a photographer in the Canadian expedition under Stefansson’s command (from 1913 to 1916). He remained a close friend and advisor and even named a strait in Antarctica after his mentor<sup>71</sup>. The Wrangel Island fiasco was the first serious international tension to arise in the Arctic of the

20th century and certainly discouraged Canadian officials from trusting Stefansson. Another crisis followed. When the American Congress refused to send the *USS Shenandoah* to the Arctic in summer 1924, the Navy still contributed its personnel and planes to an expedition led by Donald MacMillan (1875-1970)<sup>72</sup>. The aviator and his military crew departed from Maine and headquartered at the Greenlandic settlement of Etah, in June 1925, where they conducted the island’s first extensive flying. A strong advocate of annexing lands previously explored by Americans – northern Ellesmere and Axel Heiberg Islands – MacMillan refused to comply with Canadian legislation and strained the relations between the two countries. In response, the Canadian government immediately passed a Northwest Territories Act to further regulate foreign expeditions<sup>73</sup>. On 9 May 1926, a former member of the MacMillan expedition, aviator Richard Byrd (1888-1957), reached the Farthest North three days before the trans-Arctic flight completed by Amundsen and Nobile. He was made a hero in the United States after being credited with having flown over the North Pole<sup>74</sup>. Byrd equally exchanged considerable correspondence with Stefansson<sup>75</sup>. In April 1928, only a year after Lindbergh’s transatlantic flight, Wilkins and bush pilot Carl Ben Eielson (1897-1929) gathered support from businessmen in Detroit to accomplish a trans-Arctic flight from Point Barrow, Alaska, to Spitsbergen, Norway, with a halt in Ellesmere Island<sup>76</sup>. Such a feat, considered an “American triumph” by the press, was inspirational to Stefansson who drew from its success the confirmation of his earlier

67 Paul Dukes, « Vilhjalmur Stefansson, *The Northward Course of Empire*, *The Adventure of Wrangel Island*, 1922–1925, and “Universal Revolution” », op. cit.

68 Nancy Fogelson, *Arctic Exploration & International Relations 1900-1932*, op. cit., p. 165.

69 William R. Hunt, *Stef*, op. cit., p. 164.

70 Vilhjalmur Stefansson, *Discovery; the autobiography of Vilhjalmur Stefansson*, op. cit., p. 240. *History of Transatlantic Air Service*, 12/09/1944, 40p., Mss 98, 21-26.

71 Stuart Edward Jenness, *Making of an Explorer: George Hubert Wilkins and the Canadian Arctic Expedition, 1913-1916*, Montréal, McGill-Queen’s Press - MQUP, 2004, p.xviii.

72 D.M. LeBourdais, « The Aerial Attack on the Arctic », op. cit.

73 Nancy Fogelson, *Arctic Exploration & International Relations 1900-1932*, op. cit., p. 92.

74 *Ibidem*, p. 97. His autobiography, *Skyward* (1928) illustrates how the transatlantic flight of 1919 he co-organized concluded the American commitment to aviation taken during the Great War by demonstrating the potential of a new generation of aircraft conceived in wartime. Richard Evelyn Byrd, *Skyward*, New York, G. P. Putnam’s sons, 1928, p. 78, p. 83.

75 Vilhjalmur. Stefansson, *Discovery; the autobiography of Vilhjalmur Stefansson*. op. cit., p. 398.

76 Nancy Fogelson, *Arctic Exploration & International Relations 1900-1932*, op. cit., p. 128.

theories<sup>77</sup>. Likewise, mining engineer Earl Parker Hanson (1899-1978), whose father Albert Parker Hanson had surveyed Iceland for the establishment of the telegraph line between 1895 and 1898, frequently publicized Stefansson’s ideas in his articles<sup>78</sup>. As he oriented his interest toward the matter of aviation in Iceland, Hanson became an informed specialist. After visiting the island during a summer vacation from the University of Wisconsin, he went back for a second trip in 1927 where he contributed to the island’s electrification campaign and prematurely suggested the opening of a transatlantic air service. However, his local contacts could not take seriously any connections flying over Greenland. The following year, aviators Bert Hassell (1893-1974) and Parker Cramer (1896-1931) both consulted Hanson prior to their planned flight of August 1928 from Rockford, Illinois, to Stockholm, Sweden, with a stop at the Greenlandic Holsteinsborg district. Although strong winds forced them to land and abandon their plane in Greenland after running out of gas, they had managed to fly for more than twenty-four hours in the circumpolar North<sup>79</sup>.

By the late 1920s, American aviators had proven both their skills and willingness to be part of the new wave of modern air travels rushing to the Arctic under European commanders with new scientific or strategic priorities. As Arctic flights became more common, Stefansson ironically wondered in April 1927 in *The American Mercury* if aviation would precipitate the end of the “Romantic Age of Exploration” and speculated if “explorers were about to join the dodo”. As fewer lands were left to discover, the “Columbus family” seemed at risk of extinction. If Stefansson concluded his piece on the facetious note that “The tribe of Great Discoverers will not become extinct till the Age of Advertising has passed”, he nevertheless accurately identified the change

occurring in his former profession<sup>80</sup>. With the disappearance of unknown lands, expeditions combining adventure, scientific inquiry and claims of unexplored lands progressively came to an end. As specialization was required to use new transportation and scientific tools, the Arctic was deemed too important to be left to cumbersome adventurers. If northern regions were to be economically developed, national assets had to be sent in organized fashion<sup>81</sup>. Consequently, the former explorer connected to the aviation industry, gave talks to their associations and directly contributed to their expansion in the “Far North”<sup>82</sup>.

Establishing the  
“Leif Erikson route”

Commercial war in the North Atlantic  
and Pan American Airways’ hazardous  
Icelandic endeavor.

*Our new frontier is on the northern air lanes. If America is flying these lanes first, then, in the emergency it will be best equipped to defend them. Let us capture them peacefully through commercial operations, in order that we may best defend them, if necessity arises.*

Bert Hassell, “Flying North to Europe”,  
*U.S. Air Service*, 08/1935<sup>83</sup>.

The first American company to explore a North Atlantic route, Transamerican Airlines started as a small provider of air services to Cleveland, Detroit, and Chicago after its creation in March 1931. Its parent company, Thompson Aeronautical Corporation, organized in July 1926, had already been recognized as groundbreaking when it offered to Americans the first

domestic air taxi service in August 1927<sup>84</sup>. Although a small company, Transamerican Airlines aggressively expanded and presumably projected to grow into an international player, notably by pioneering carrying services to Europe *via* the North Atlantic<sup>85</sup>. However, the flying conditions over Greenland and Iceland were vastly unknown. With Danish approval, Thompson Aeronautical sent in 1930 a Loening amphibian plane to survey both islands to determine the feasibility of a route linking Detroit to Copenhagen<sup>86</sup>. After seeking for advice at the Explorers Club in New York where he met with Stefansson and Hanson, E.G. Thompson, President of Thompson Aeronautical and Chair of the board of Transamerican, attempted to entice the Danish government to allow operations in Greenland by organizing a promotional flight for aviator Cramer, from the United States to Copenhagen in August 1931<sup>87</sup>. Both his sponsors and the press hoped for a welcome ceremony as important as the one Lindbergh had in Paris. If Stefansson provided Cramer with an aerial map, the advisor disagreed with his flying plan. After an ultimate stop in the Shetland islands, Cramer’s plane disappeared in a storm on its way to Denmark. Although tragic, his failure was not devastating to the company’s project as the aviator had still demonstrated the feasibility of a Great Circle flight from Labrador to Greenland, Iceland, the Faroe Islands and beyond<sup>88</sup>. On 22 September 1931, Transamerican applied to Danish Prime Minister Thorvald Stauning (1924-1926, 1929-1942) for a concession in Iceland. The company planned to fly from Detroit to the Hudson Bay, Baffinland, Holsteinborg district in Greenland, Iceland, the Faroes, Norway, and then Copenhagen. Three weeks later, on 12 October, the Prime Minister received a new petition from Transamerican, this time represented by explorer Peter Freuchen (1886-1957), to build depots in the Faroe Islands and Greenland<sup>89</sup>.

In parallel, an associate of Transamerican and former classmate, Robert Grant Jr., had approached Stefansson in early October and recruited him to assemble and correlate the data needed for the extension of the airline’s network. By 1930, the former explorer had accumulated the largest private polar library with a permanent secretary counting 7,000 references<sup>90</sup>. Stefansson was to supervise discussions with northern Europe and was suggested to directly negotiate in Iceland. He refused. Instead, the advisor recommended sending Judge Gudmundur Grimson (1878-1965) from Rugby, North Dakota, who was born in Iceland and gained popularity after representing his state at the Millennial Celebration of the Icelandic Parliament in June 1930. When arriving in Iceland on 8 February 1932, Grimson met with enthusiastic business figures and political personnel who welcomed the establishment of a Northern Air Route<sup>91</sup>. The context of Grimson’s intervention was particularly favorable to him as he arrived in a moment of economic vacuum where the cooperation between Flugfjelag Islands (the Icelandic Aviation Company reorganized in 1928) and the German company Lufthansa had recently failed. As the first foreign company to establish presence in Iceland, in 1928, Lufthansa had shared its pilots with Flugfjelag, transferred three airplanes, surveyed potential harbors, and assessed the Iceland-Greenland route<sup>92</sup>. However, its attempt to open a northern service to Germany did not survive the economic crisis and was eventually dropped<sup>93</sup>. The skepticism Grimson encountered from officials who sought guarantees from their new partner was rapidly overcome and a law granting Transamerican a 75-year concession (with a 15-year exclusivity in regard to other American companies) was introduced at the *Althing* on 1 March, adopted on 19 March, and signed on 14 April

77 Vilhjalmur Stefansson, « Notes on Arctic Flying », *op. cit.*

78 Earl P. Hanson, « The Far North Route to Europe », in *Airway Age*, 04/1929.

79 Prior to his flight, Hassel also came to Stefansson in the winter 1927-1928 to plan his journey along the Great Circle. *The North Atlantic area – Greenland, Iceland, Scandinavia*, 37p., 09/44, Pan American report Mss 98, 21-26.

80 Vilhjalmur Stefansson, « Are the explorers about to join the dodo? », in *The American Mercury*, 04/1927.

81 Nancy Fogelson, *Arctic Exploration & International Relations 1900-1932*, *op. cit.*, p. 128.

82 For instance, in May 1928, Stefansson gave a talk to the American Aeronautical Society in St. Louis on the suggestion of Orville Wright. Vilhjalmur Stefansson, *Discovery; the autobiography of Vilhjalmur Stefansson*, *op. cit.*, p. 294.

83 Bert Hassell, « Flying North to Europe », in *U.S. Air Service*, 08/1935, vol.20, n°8, p. 14-15.

84 Thompson Aeronautical Corporation derived from Thompson Products Inc., an automotive parts producer founded in 1900 and provider of aircraft engine parts during the Great War. Paul Soprano, *The Early Days of Commercial Aviation in Cleveland II: Thompson Aeronautical Corporation*, 2021, Online :

<https://www.aviationcle.com/post/the-early-days-of-commercial-aviation-in-cleveland-ii-thompson-aeronautical> [consulted on 13/02/2024].

85 Ronald Edward George Davies, *Airlines of the United States since 1914*, *op. cit.*, p. 124.

86 Robert J. Serling, *Eagle: The Story of American Airlines*, New York, St Martin’s Press, 1985, p. 53.

87 *The Transatlantic Airway via Greenland and Iceland*, 7 p., 17/11/1933, PanAm Correspondence Mss 98, 17-4

88 *The North Atlantic area – Greenland, Iceland, Scandinavia*, 37p., 09/44, Pan American report Mss 98, 21-26

89 « Seeks Faroe Isle Airport », *The New York Times*, 13/10/1931.

90 Correspondence: United States War Department, 1935, Mss 196, 37-24.

91 *The North Atlantic area – Greenland, Iceland, Scandinavia*, 37p., 09/44, Pan American report Mss 98, 21-26.

92 Earl P. Hanson, « To Europe via Cochrane », in *MacLean’s Magazine*, 01/09/1929.

93 Graham B. Grosvenor, « *The Northward Course of Aviation* », *op. cit.*



by the Icelandic Prime Minister. The contract still included an important clause conditioning the franchise to the opening of a service between Iceland and other countries by the end of the year 1936. Grimson then headed to Copenhagen to plead with the King of Denmark and Iceland, Christian X, as Prime Minister Stauning had rejected Transamerican's application for the establishment of airbases in Greenland<sup>94</sup>. On his way to Denmark, Grimson was informed that Pan American was gaining further control over Transamerican's Atlantic enterprise, notably by the action of banker Richard Hoyt who worked as a Director in both companies<sup>95</sup>.

On 15 April, Pan American paid \$5,000 to purchase an option on the route. It acquired the complete landing rights for \$50,000 on 11 July<sup>96</sup>. The concession included the right to establish landing fields and radio stations for the company's exclusive use<sup>97</sup>. With the consent of the Icelandic Minister of Industry and Commerce, the franchise was transferred on 13 July 1932. Stefansson's service followed on 30 September. He was to work as Advisor on Northern Operating Conditions to the Foreign Department<sup>98</sup>. Along with other experts, Stefansson's task was to compile wind, weather, flying time, and mileage summaries about the route from New York to Rigolette in Labrador, Ivigtut, Angmagssalik, Reykjavik and Stornoway in Scotland. Additionally, the explorer put his library at Pan American's disposal so fog conditions, distribution of daylight and darkness in the Arctic region, and clothing for aviators could be studied. As for Grimson, his aide and nephew, engineer Steingrímur Jonsson, Director of Reykjavik Hydrolight and Power Works, was appointed Pan American's representative in Iceland and started to plan domestic air service for the summer season with the bankrupt Flugfélag's equipment<sup>99</sup>. In 1933, Pan American chose Captain A. P. Botved,

the first aviator to fly from China to Denmark in 1926, to be its representative in Copenhagen<sup>100</sup>.

With relative easiness, Pan American managed to convince its Icelandic partners of its commitment to a northern transatlantic route. Its interest went back to 1928 when Trippe expressed he did no doubt its feasibility. That same year, he visited air ministries and airline heads in the United Kingdom, France, the Netherlands, and Germany to unsuccessfully request landing rights<sup>101</sup>. The rebuff did not last long as the meetings were followed by the reception of the Chairman of Imperial Airways in Pan American's offices in New York where joint efforts for a transatlantic route were mentioned. The two men met again in London in 1929 to negotiate a mid-Atlantic route to British Bermuda and Portuguese Azores. The monopoly exerted by the French *Compagnie Générale Aéropostale* over the Azores and its financial collapse in March 1931 stalled the route's progress. Nevertheless, Trippe's Arctic aspiration had not been stifled as he saw in the circumpolar North a compelling option for bridging Europe. A first step was accomplished when Pan American was attributed a new contract allowing the opening of the first mail service between Boston and Halifax in August 1931<sup>102</sup>. Yet, the remainder of the route was still deeply clouded by legal, meteorological and environmental uncertainties, especially in Greenland. The dire lack of measurements and maps forbade to determine the feasibility and profitability of a northern route and encouraged Pan American to become one of the most significant American supporters of polar science of the 1930s. While the Great Depression made funds for Arctic exploration harder to raise in Western countries, Pan American seized the momentum of the Second International Polar Year of 1932-1933 to display a threefold research strategy to survey the North Atlantic from land, at sea, and from the air itself.

The obtaining of an interim agreement from Denmark on 26 April 1932, covering rights to fly over and to land in Greenland allowed the support of two simultaneous initiatives to investigate the island's eastern and western coasts, under Stefansson's advice<sup>103</sup>. The first one was the East Greenland Expedition (July 1932 – September 1933), led by British pilot Henry George Watkins (1907-1932) and dedicated to the surveying of an appropriate location for a refueling station – a task he previously undertook during the British Arctic Air Route Expedition of 1930-1931<sup>104</sup>. Pan American covered the major part of the expenses, but the expedition was smaller than its British predecessor with only three additional members: naturalist Frederick Chapman, meteorologist Quintin Riley and Australian pilot John Riddoch Rymill. The group was to explore Tugtilik, north of Angmagssalik, for twelve months by foot and dogsleds, map the area, gather meteorological measurements and reckon alternative sites for an airbase<sup>105</sup>. Due to the additional support provided by the Royal Geographical Society and the British Air Ministry, the results had to be shared with European air companies<sup>106</sup>. Watkins' disappearance on a solitary seal hunt in August 1932 brought impediments to the remainder of the team that limited its survey to a smaller area, but did not end his venture<sup>107</sup>. In parallel, Pan American sponsored the fifth expedition of the University of Michigan to Greenland (June 1932 – May 1933). Led by geologist Ralph Leroy Belknap (1899-1960) who had joined three Greenlandic expeditions, the "Michigan-Pan American Airways Greenland Expedition" first aimed to study glaciation near the

Cornell Glacier in the Upernivik district, an area barely explored in 1896<sup>108</sup>. With geologists Evans S. Schmeling, second in command, Max Demorest, botanist Herbert Gardner and a Greenlandic guide, the expedition pursued its program in a similar fashion to Watkins', with dogsleds and skis, before successfully reporting to Pan American the meteorological conditions they surveyed along the coast<sup>109</sup>.

Two months after their return, the *SS Jelling* Expedition (28 July – 4 September 1933) departed from Philadelphia to Greenland under the command of Canadian aviator Robert Logan to measure water depths, ocean currents and meteorological conditions, and identify locations where flying boats could be harbored. The ship's prime mission was to be used as a base where an aerial expedition led by Lindbergh himself could resupply. Hired as Pan American's official technical adviser in January 1929, Lindbergh had been sent to Latin America by Trippe in February 1929 before being sent to pioneer the northern route<sup>110</sup>. With Pan American's top equipment and Stefansson's reports of all known aspects of the route, Lindbergh left New York on 9 July 1933 on board of the *Tingmissartog* ("the one who flies like a bird") along with his copilot and wife, Anne Morrow (1906-2001), in direction of Newfoundland, before heading to Labrador, Baffin island and then Greenland where they spent three weeks surveying the western, eastern and southern coasts. From there, the couple flew to Iceland's western coast where they stayed for a week, then to the Faroes, the Shetlands, Scandinavia, the Soviet Union, Western Europe, the Azores, the Canary and Verde islands, South America and the Caribbean<sup>111</sup>.

103 *Status of Flying Rights in Iceland and Greenland*, 3p., 11/07/1935, Mss 98, 17-29.

104 The British Arctic Air Route Expedition attempted to assess the possibility of bridging the United-Kingdom to Canada through a route that would have departed from London, then linked Aberdeen to the Faroe Islands, to Reykjavik, Angmagssalik, Disko bay, Cumberland Sound, Southampton, and Fort Churchill before reaching Winnipeg. H.G. Watkins, « The British Arctic Air Route Expedition », in *The Geographical Journal*, 1932, vol.79 n°5, p. 353-367.

105 J.R. Rymill, Quintin Riley, F. Spencer Chapman, « The Tugtilik (Lake Fjord) Country, East Greenland », in *The Geographical Journal*, 1934, vol.83, n°5. p. 364-377. Firstly identified in 1930 as appropriate for an airport, the area was named Lake Fjord by Watkins, unaware of its Greenlandic name, Tugtilik.

106 « Mr Watkins' Expedition to East Greenland, 1932-33 », in *Polar Record*, 1933, vol.1, n°5, p. 28-30.

107 After publishing his accounts of Watkins' first expedition (*Northern Lights: the official account of the British Arctic air-route expedition of 1930-31*, 1932), his companion Chapman dedicated his second book to his memory (*Watkins' Last Expedition*, 1934).

108 « The Fifth Greenland Expedition of the University of Michigan », in *Science*, 08/07/1932, vol.76.

109 Belknap and his team honored his memory by naming their summer post "Camp Watkins". R.L. Belknap, « The Michigan Pan American Airways Greenland Expedition: Preliminary Results », in *Geographical Review*, 1934, vol.24, n°2. p. 205-218.

110 Robert Daley, *An American Saga. op. Cit.*, p. 62, p. 67.

111 *Ibidem*, p. 127-128. Ronald Edward George Davies, *Airlines of the United States since 1914, op. cit.*, p. 244.

94 « Aeronautics: Pan American Pushes On », in *Time*, 25/04/1932, vol.19, n°17. « Denmark: Great Greenland ! », in *Time*, 18/04/1932, vol.19, n°16, 18/04/1932.

95 *The Transatlantic Airway via Greenland and Iceland*, 7 p., 17/11/1933, PanAm Correspondence Mss 98, 17-4.

96 Robert Daley, *An American Saga, op. cit.*, p. 488

97 *Summary of more important provisions*, PanAm Correspondence, Mss 98, 17-11.

98 « Pan-American Lines Get Arctic Air Rights; Transamerican Transfers Concessions for Detroit-Iceland-Denmark Route. », in *The New York Times*, 14/07/1932. Iceland-Greenland Chronology, 4p., 18/10/1944, PanAm Correspondence Mss 98, 19-14.

99 *The North Atlantic Area – Greenland, Iceland, Scandinavia*, 37p., 09/44, Pan American report Mss 98, 21-26.

100 *North Atlantic Expeditions*, 1p., Pan American Correspondence Mss 98, 19-2.

101 Robert Daley, *An American Saga, op. Cit.*, p. 106.

102 *History of Transatlantic Air Service*, 12/09/1944, 40p., Mss 98, 21-26.

The couple's large survey of the North and Central Atlantic revealed instrumental to the company in its need of aerial observations. In the confidential reports Lindbergh started to send to Trippe from August 1933 in Reykjavik to September in Sweden, he expressed his distrust of the foggy Faroe and Shetland Islands and confirmed Stefansson's descriptions of Greenlandic and Icelandic weather. The aviator notably emphasized the importance of building radio stations capable of transmitting weather reports to airplanes, warned that emergency landings would likely be fatal, and encouraged the implementation of air service within Greenland. Overall, he supported the northern transatlantic route he considered satisfactory for at least part of the summer months and estimated it could advantageously compete with the Atlantic steamship schedules<sup>112</sup>. After Lindberg's return, Trippe announced Pan American would cooperate with Imperial Airways, Air France (the successor of the *Aéropostale*), German company Lufthansa, and Dutch company KLM to study conditions over the North Atlantic and pool the information for mutual consultation. In this program, Pan American was attributed Labrador, Greenland, and Iceland<sup>113</sup>. Accordingly, Pan American pursued its accumulation of information on Greenlandic weather by purchasing the aviation reports of explorer Knud Rasmussen (1879-1933) and maintained its support to key figures surveying Greenland like artist Rockwell Kent who spent the winter of 1934 at Igdlorssuit in western Greenland, engineer Paul C. Oscanyan who was financially assisted for his transatlantic flight by way of Greenland and Iceland in summer 1935, aviator Lieutenant Kurt Rudolf Ramberg (1908-1997) whose year of aviation study in Godthaab was sponsored, and Lieutenant Poul Jensen's stay in Scoresby Sound district in 1935-1936<sup>114</sup>.

In the meantime, Pan American had also made preparations in Alaska to determine if routes to Asia could be opened. In July 1931, Charles and Anne Lindbergh had been sent on a surveying mission over the Great Circle route to China,

departing from New York to Northern Canada, Alaska, Siberia, Kurile Islands, and Japan. The following year, Stefansson encompassed their measurements into his report *Intercontinental Trans-Bering Airways* where he established that the route to East Asia was less hazardous than previously assumed<sup>115</sup>. Confident in its plan to eventually integrate Shanghai to its network, Pan American purchased two to its network companies with experience in northern flying, Alaska Airways and Pacific International Airways of Alaska, in September and October 1932 before extending its presence to China in 1933 where it formed the China National Aviation Corporation in cooperation with the Chinese National Government<sup>116</sup>. Service in Alaska was not profitable to Pan American but still fulfilled a crucial need for transportation in the territory and perfected valuable flying techniques for the North Atlantic route. A year later, negotiations started with Amtorg, the Soviet commercial airline, to connect China *via* Alaska and northeastern Siberia, but failed to produce any agreement until 1939 as the Soviet Union was not recognized by the United States<sup>117</sup>. This rebuke was highly concerning as obstacles started to accumulate.

By 1934, the immediate future looked bleak for Pan American and its projected transcontinental routes despite its enthusiastic commitment to build three main radio stations: in East Hampton, Botwood in Newfoundland, and near Foynes in Ireland. Trippe's eagerness to test his brand new M-130 "China Clipper" flying boats, specifically designed for transoceanic flights, was equally crushed when both North and mid-Atlantic were blocked. While the *Aéropostale's* financial collapse had dragged its Portuguese concession into the abyss for several years, the dominion of Newfoundland was reverted to a Crown colony on 16 February 1934, hence losing its ability to govern its airspace<sup>118</sup>. Rumors even said that the British government aimed to extend its air service to Canada with the country's implicit

compliance so it could build its own infrastructure without American participation<sup>119</sup>. As for the wild solution offered by the Armstrong Seadrome Company consisting of floating platforms arranged in the Atlantic to serve as bases for amphibious planes, airlines were quick to repel an installation deemed unsafe that prevented from taking onboard any significant payload or passengers<sup>120</sup>. On the other hand, the commitments of the Greenlandic permit had been met and it was considered that two Sikorsky S-38 would be based at Reykjavik to operate to Isafjordur and Akureyri<sup>121</sup>. Thus, negotiations for the very first step of the route were renewed in January 1935 when Pan American transmitted to the American Bureau of Air Commerce its intent to open a transatlantic air service. On 29 November, the Secretary of State was requested to address the British Air Secretary a demand for operation for fifteen years between America and the United Kingdom *via* Newfoundland or Bermuda. On 12 December, the State Department declared that several countries had agreed to cooperate in transoceanic aviation while the Director-General of Civil Aviation of the United Kingdom promised he would approve a permit request from Pan American. Confidence surged again and the Company's annual report of December 1935 affirmed that the first service between the United States and Europe would be inaugurated during the year 1937<sup>122</sup>. It nevertheless forgot to mention that flights to Iceland had to be organized before the end of 1936 for the Icelandic franchise to be kept and not subjected to competition.

In collaboration with Pan American's Foreign Intelligence service, Stefansson's most important task was to maintain and translate regular exchanges with Pan American's agents dispatched in Greenland, Iceland, and Denmark so information about further operations could circulate freely. He also actively contributed to the company's who's who and represented the company at his meetings either at the Explorers Club or with military officers. Thanks to subscriptions to Russian, Danish, Norwegian, and Icelandic newspapers (the *Morgunbladid* and the *Timinn*), he also provided reports to his hierarchy

about sensitive development in Canada, Greenland, Iceland, Scandinavia and the Soviet Union<sup>123</sup>. Last but not least, he also kept watch over the company's competitors in the North Atlantic, with particular attention to German and British endeavors he detailed in his reports alongside their aviators. Among the most recurrent recipients of his memoranda were the Foreign Department's head, Evan Young, a seasoned diplomat of the State Department who had been heading the service since 1929, as well as Vice-President John Cobb Cooper (1887-1967), who joined the company in 1934 to supervise relations with foreign countries and dedicated particular attention to European ones.

Pan American's competitors were quick to let their interests known. After Iceland had attributed landing rights to Transamerican, Lufthansa attempted to preserve its preferential position on the island by invoking its early agreement of 1928. In its cable, the German company offered to organize a new company in Iceland in exchange for dropping Transamerican's franchise<sup>124</sup>. To the Icelandic government, the lack of investment from the German company in local aviation for domestic flights was considered as an abandonment of its obligations and a breach of contract. The *Althing* still debated the promise of a Reykjavik-Hamburg aerial communication by way of the Faroe Islands made by the very first foreign company to work in Iceland. The Lufthansa company benefited indeed from an authentic German commitment to Arctic research, the latest being the fourth expedition of meteorologist Alfred Wegener (1880-1930) of 1930 to the Greenlandic ice cap. The four weather stations he established and the data they collected were enough to legitimize a commercial organization in a moment of general belief that Greenland's isolation was about to be ended given the growing economic pressure for its potential landing fields, fisheries, coal and cryolite<sup>125</sup>. After heading the Lufthansa seaplane school on the island of Sylt where he contemplated a commercial transatlantic route, German aviator Wolfgang von Gronau (1893-1970) flew over the Faroe islands, Iceland and Greenland three times in August 1930,

112 Mark Cotta Vaz, John H. Hill, *Pan Am at War: How the Airline Secretly Helped America Fight World War II*, New York, Skyhorse, 2019, p. 76.

113 *Ibidem*, p. 70.

114 Graham B. Grosvenor, « *The Northward Course of Aviation* », *op. cit. North Atlantic Expeditions*, 1p., PanAm Correspondence Mss 98, 19-2.

115 Mark Cotta Vaz, *John H. Hill, Pan Am at War. op. cit.*, p. 76.

116 Ronald Edward George Davies, *Airlines of the United States since 1914, op. cit.*, p. 248. Graham B. Grosvenor, « *The Northward Course of Aviation* », *op. cit.*

117 Ronald Edward George Davies, *Airlines of the United States since 1914, op. cit.*, p. 295.

118 Robert Daley, *An American Saga, op. cit.*, p. 135. On 14 April 1937, both Pan American and Imperial Airways were provided landing rights in Portugal and the Azores by the Portuguese government. *History of Transatlantic Air Service*, 12/09/1944, 40p., Mss 98, 21-26.

119 *The North Atlantic area – Greenland, Iceland, Scandinavia*, 09/44, 37p., PanAm Correspondence Mss 98, 21-26.

120 Earl P. Hanson, « *To Europe via Cochrane* », *op. cit.*

121 *The North Atlantic area – Greenland, Iceland, Scandinavia*, 09/44, 37p., PanAm Correspondence Mss 98, 21-26.

122 *History of Transatlantic Air Service*, 12/09/1944, 40p., PanAm Correspondence Mss 98, 21-26.

123 PanAm Correspondence Mss 98, 17-18.

124 *History of Transatlantic Air Service*, 12/09/1944, 40p., PanAm Correspondence Mss 98, 21-26.

125 Graham B. Grosvenor, « *The Northward Course of Aviation* », *op. cit.*



August 1931, and July 1932. His transatlantic flights were met with joy in the United States<sup>126</sup>. KLM, the Royal Dutch Airlines, was another actively interested European company represented in Iceland by Björn Olafsson (1895-1974). The Van Giessen expedition opened an “aerological” station in Reykjavik at the occasion of the Second Polar Year of 1932. Van Giessen had left an innovational impression as he notably favored the use of land planes instead of flying boats<sup>127</sup>. Yet, the most consistent challenger to Pan American was Imperial Airways which informed Pan American in June 1932 that it would make an application to obtain the same Icelandic concession. The announcement was followed in October 1933 by a declaration from Imperial to the Danish press that it intended to open a scheduled transatlantic air service from Liverpool, Reykjavik, and Greenland to Canada. Danish journalists did not fail to point out that no authorization had been given by Greenland’s administration, while “Lindbergh’s company” (*i.e.* Pan American) was the only one that had secured a priority right<sup>128</sup>. As Steingrímur Jonsson related in a letter sent to Stefansson, Imperial made a forceful advance in December 1933 when it requested Iceland a concession to develop its own route to Canada. Jonsson shared the embarrassment of the *Althing* and preferred to plea for cooperation between the two companies to avoid any conflict that would either repel his American partners or offend the British government whose fishery trade was too precious to risk<sup>129</sup>. So far, the United Kingdom had exerted a significant influence over Iceland whose way of life heavily relied on British imports of both natural resources – as the island lacked coal and timber – and manufactured goods. In his confidential memorandum of August 1934, Stefansson pointed out how British capitalists tended to accumulate every Icelandic foreign loan, becoming the first owners of the Icelandic debt. He also highlighted the increasing frequency of visiting battleships and reminded the alleged emergency measure the British considered

during the Great War of including Iceland into their Empire. It was the opinion of Stefansson’s informant that the recently increased cooperation was partly motivated by the perspective of an Icelandic proclamation of independence after the renegotiation of the Act of Union of 1918, which was to take place between 1941 and 1943<sup>130</sup>. As an indirect effect of the presumed independence, Stefansson was told he was considered a potential candidate for the position of Icelandic ambassador to London<sup>131</sup>.

The arrival of former Prime Minister Asgeir Asgeirsson (1894-1975) to the United States on 8 October 1935 for a lecture tour was another opportunity to measure Icelandic support for an American-Icelandic partnership. His meetings with Stefansson and Cooper reassured Pan American in its favored position among the Icelandic government as the most experienced and equipped company committed to the northern airway. However, he doubted that the franchise of 1932 could be extended without making it a political issue at the *Althing*. The parties would certainly relieve Pan American from its privileged position and put its application, or presence, in direct competition with European bidders. Asgeirsson advised them to act fast<sup>132</sup>. Yet, by January 1936, Stefansson faced the evidence that Pan American would not open a service between Iceland and the United States before the end of the year as it had been convened. In fact, Trippe had indicated to Cooper he preferred to seek an extension<sup>133</sup>. Stefansson had been left ignorant of the discussions with Imperial Airways to open a Newfoundland-Ireland route that abandoned Greenland and expressed his concerns about the ongoing association with Norway that would certainly infuriate Denmark and condemn the Greenlandic route<sup>134</sup>. The company was indeed offering agreements to both the Danish and Norwegian airlines (*Det Danske Luftfartselskab* and *Det Norske Luftfartselskap*). To entice Denmark, it funded the Ramberg and Jensen expeditions in Greenland and proceeded to the building of a radio

station in Iceland by Oscanyan in May 1936 to study transmissions and observe weather conditions near Reykjavik up to 10 hours a day<sup>135</sup>. To the Norwegians, represented by explorer Bernt Balchen (1899-1973), Pan American drew up an agreement of flights from Iceland to Norway in November 1935 and discussed it in March 1936. The document was to remain in force until 1 May 1951 and provided that each party inaugurate a service per week by 31 October 1939. Despite the pursuance of negotiations, the document was never ratified. Testing flights between Denmark, Iceland and Norway were delayed due to construction troubles, and the scandal provoked in Denmark by the Norwegian participation halted the process<sup>136</sup>.

Unable to conform to its obligations regarding Iceland’s chief interests – a connection to Europe, then the scheduling of domestic flights and lastly a transatlantic airway – Pan American decided to renegotiate its franchise before it lapsed<sup>137</sup>. Stefansson was asked for a second time to go to Iceland. This time he accepted. He sailed from New York on 8 August, stayed in London and arrived in Reykjavik by the end of the month. His objective was to secure an extension of time of the original concession, or in case of failure, a Parliamentary act granting a new franchise for three additional years<sup>138</sup>. Although he had not visited Iceland since 1905, he was welcomed with open arms. During his visits, he was told by the Minister of Industries that Parliament could vote a new concession if significant work was accomplished in 1937. The Minister left vague his assertion that other European companies said they could open the route within the next two years. From him, Stefansson received the government’s conditions to propose a new law to the *Althing*: a summer service had to be maintained between Reykjavik, Akureyri, and Sigufjörður up to four times a week between mid-June and September, starting in 1937; by 1939, four flights a month to Europe were to be made;

and by 1942, the transatlantic route from America to Europe *via* Iceland had to be opened<sup>139</sup>. Cooper agreed to both second and third points but rejected the possibility of domestic service<sup>140</sup>. Having transmitted the company’s counterproposal, Stefansson left on 23 September to London with the promise of both the Cabinet and all three major parties that a 50-year concession would be voted in February 1937. The new law was passed on 3 April 1937 to allow the Minister of Trade to grant Pan American a second franchise by the end of December if the airline committed to the requested domestic flights. Lack of appropriate planes and internal troubles prevented Pan American to fulfill its commitment and the law eventually lapsed<sup>141</sup>. The difficulties to secure suitable equipment by Pan American were multiple and equally impeded the Greenlandic Interim Agreement of 1932. Already extended on 23 May 1935 by the Director of the Greenlandic administration, Daugaard-Jensen, the agreement was granted another extension on 22 February 1936 but lapsed as the airline could not conduct its flying tests during summer 1937<sup>142</sup>.

The loss of Pan American positions in Greenland and Iceland was palliated by the agreement made in February 1937 with the Director of Civil Aviation. The British official finally authorized civil transportation in Nova Scotia, Newfoundland, Bermuda, and Ireland for 15 years, with two British and two American flights per week<sup>143</sup>. The agreement not only opened the route to Pan American but also eliminated competition from other airlines. However, the British insistence on reciprocity had made its way into a specific clause establishing that any opened route had to be simultaneously inaugurated by both Pan American and Imperial Airways. The American head start was hence nullified by a measure forcing Pan American to wait for its concurrent to modernize its fleet of flying boats so it could offer a

126 « German Fliers Get City Greeting Today », in *The New York Times*, 28/08/1930.

127 *Interviews with Asgeir Asgeirsson, former Prime Minister of Iceland*, 17/10/1935, 5p., PanAm Correspondence Mss 98, 17-33.

128 Translated article from the *Berlingske Tidende*, 1p., 09/10/1933, PanAm Correspondence Mss 98, 17-4.

129 Letter from Steingrímur Jonsson of 08/01/1934, PanAm Correspondence Mss 98, 17-8.

130 *Icelandic-British relations*, 1p., 06/08/1934, PanAm Correspondence Mss 98, 17-15.

131 Letter to Eggert, 1p., PanAm Correspondence, Mss 98, 17-20.

132 *Interviews with Asgeir Asgeirsson, former Prime Minister of Iceland*, 17/10/1935, 5p., PanAm Correspondence Mss 98, 17-33.

133 *Telephone conversation with Cooper*, 17/01/1935, 1p., PanAm Correspondence Mss 98, 18-3.

134 *Letter to John Cooper*, 15/08/1936, 5p., PanAm Correspondence Mss 98, 18-8.

135 Pan American operated the observatory for 14 months, between 1936 and 1937. *North Atlantic Expeditions*, 1p., PanAm Correspondence Mss 98, 19-2.

136 *Northern Transatlantic Airway*, 30p., PanAm Correspondence Mss 98, 19-2.

137 *Letter to John Cooper*, 27/08/1936, 5p., PanAm Correspondence Mss 98, 18-8.

138 *The Iceland Franchise*, 5p., 31/07/1935, PanAm Correspondence Mss 98, 17-30.

139 *Letter from H. Gudmundsson*, 10/09/1936, 3p., PanAm Correspondence Mss 98, 18-9.

140 *Memo for talk with Ministers*, 09/1936, 2p., PanAm Correspondence Mss 98, 18-9.

141 *Northern Transatlantic Airway*, 30p., PanAm Correspondence Mss 98, 19-2.

142 *Northern Transatlantic Airway*, 24/03/1939, 2p., PanAm Correspondence Mss 98, 19-2.

143 John C. Cooper, *The Right to Fly, A Study in Air Power*, New York, Henry Holt & Co., 1947, p. 146-147.

similar service<sup>144</sup>. Pan American’s failure in the North Atlantic was blatant in contrast to the dominance it exerted in Latin America – where it exaggerated the “German threat” and benefited from the lack of local aircraft industries<sup>145</sup>. Nevertheless, the strategy of delay operated by its British competitor still highlights Pan American’s role as a driving-force in the opening of a transatlantic airway when compared to its European counterparts.

Such an advance was also visible in Iceland’s attachment to maintain cooperation with its American partner, as another non-negligible advantage of Pan American in its transatlantic endeavor was the historical symbol of the American-Icelandic partnership. Although their officials certainly coveted the support of a world power that backed independent Norway and whose association would solicit much less jealousies than a European one, many Icelanders and Norwegians publicized the Greenland-Iceland connection as the “Leif Erikson route”<sup>146</sup>. Icelanders in particular kept a sentimental attitude towards air communication with North America where many had fled<sup>147</sup>. A comparable fervor was found in the United States where the establishment of Leif Erikson Day on 9 October 1935 was voted by Congress and approved by the Presidency. To celebrate its first federal iteration, a half-hour broadcast from the United States to the Scandinavian countries was organized and replied to by a half-hour broadcast from the Prime Minister of Norway<sup>148</sup>. Friendship between Iceland and the United States was further cultivated at the occasion of the New York World’s Fair of April 1939 – October 1940 where the very first

Icelandic pavilion was to be opened in collaboration between an Icelandic committee and an American one partly composed of Stefansson and Grimson<sup>149</sup>. In preparation for the event, the General Manager of Iceland’s National Bank, Vilhjalmur Thor (1899-1972), arrived in New York in April 1938. He came as Commissioner of the Icelandic pavilion – the first to be ever opened in a World Fair – but aside from this official status, Thor also presided Flugfjelag Akureyrar, the Akureyri Flying Company, incorporated on 3 June 1937. The Icelandic businessman hence visited officers of Pan American and discussed how the two airlines could establish a domestic service in Iceland. As it was foretold that Thor’s company would become a national company, he solicited potential participation in its capitalization<sup>150</sup>. A small WACO aircraft was purchased and flights to Reykjavik and other cities began. Upon his return to Iceland in May, he conferred with the Minister of Trade to obtain a governmental concession. His new trip to New York in September allowed him to pursue negotiations with Pan American<sup>151</sup>. After its inauguration on 30 April 1939, the Icelandic pavilion was publicly celebrated on 17 June 1939, or “Iceland Day”, where guests and fairgoers witnessed the main attraction of the pavilion: a giant animated map of the North Atlantic depicting both the paths used by the Norse traveling to North America and Lindbergh’s survey flights in northern Europe<sup>152</sup>. With Iceland occupying the middle of the scene, the island’s position as a crossroad of air and ship routes between two continents was blatant. To the Icelanders, the event represented an ultimate attempt

144 Jenifer Van Vleck, *Empire of the Air. Aviation and the American Ascendancy*, op. cit., p. 98.

145 Gabrielle Durepos, Jean Helms Mills, Albert J. Mills, « Flights of fancy: myth, monopoly and the making of Pan American Airways », in *Journal of Management History*, 2008, vol.14 no 2. p. 116-127.

146 Roald Berg, « Norway, Spitsbergen, and America, 1905-1920 », in *Diplomacy & Statecraft*, 02/01/2017, vol.28, n°1, p. 20-38.

147 Between the late 1870s and 1914, 14,000 to 20,000 Icelanders emigrated to North America, representing a quarter of the Icelandic population. Jonas Thor, *Icelanders in North America*, Winnipeg, University of Manitoba Press, 2002, p. 263. *Northern Route to Europe – The Sentimental Angle*, 27/09/1935, 1p., Pan American correspondence Mss 98, 17-32.

148 After Secretary of State Cordell Hull, Stefansson was attributed a four-minute speech. *Northern Route to Europe – The Sentimental Angle*, 27/09/1935, 1p., Pan American correspondence Mss 98, 17-32.

149 Correspondence: Iceland: World’s Fair, 1938, Mss 196, 43-25.

150 On 13 March 1940, Flugfjelag Akureyrar was renamed into Flugfjelag Islands (the third airline to bear this name) and continued to acquire its aircraft from American manufacturers. The first Icelandic international flight to Scotland was inaugurated on 11 July 1945. Scheduled flights began the following year between Iceland, the United Kingdom and Denmark with Scottish Airlines. Icelandic Aviation Museum, *Flugsagan*, 2018, Online : <https://www.flugsafn.is/is/flugsagan> [consulted on 8/08/2024].

151 *The North Atlantic area – Greenland, Iceland, Scandinavia*, 37p., 09/44, Pan American correspondence Mss 98, 21-26.

152 The planners considered 9 October as an alternative since several American states already celebrated it as “Leif Erikson day”. Correspondence: Iceland: World’s Fair: New York Office with "Rules and Regulations", 1938, Mss 196, 43-28.

to nudge the Fair towards peace negotiations. Its representation of the proximity of Iceland to America symbolized the intricacy of the organizers’ intents to secure further commercial interests, revive the figure of Leif Erikson, prepare the diplomatic network of potential Icelandic independence, and most importantly obtain an American guarantee of Icelandic neutrality<sup>153</sup>.

The informal diplomatic work accomplished by Thor and Stefansson can be interpreted as an after-effect of rising tensions as a Nazi delegation had arrived in Iceland in March 1939. In virtue of the cooperation between Lufthansa and Flugfjelag between 1928 and 1931, it demanded an advantageous position in the island’s aviation system. Invoking the refunding of Lufthansa, the delegates claimed the Icelandic government owed them the application of any rights attributed to other companies until April 1940. Their demand was made even more pressing by the stationing of the *Emden* cruiser, missioned as a “fishery protection vessel”<sup>154</sup>. Furthermore, the economic situation was also cause for concern. Having already repelled a protest from Lufthansa, Icelanders had still increased their transactions with Germany through the 1930s, making it their second trade partner by the end of the decade after the United Kingdom<sup>155</sup>. With Nazism and the publication of *The Myth of the Twentieth Century* (1930) by theorist Alfred Rosenberg (1893-1946), former economic interests in Iceland had taken a cultural if not religious turn. So far, Berlin had encouraged joint gliding programs, tourism and academic exchanges with the University of Iceland<sup>156</sup>. In his letters to Stefansson, Thor reported that a single-engine German monoplane had been sold to the Icelandic glider club and flew regularly from Reykjavik to Akureyri. He added that building fields for land planes in Iceland would be unwise as they could be used by Germany in case of a world war and included in his angst the

German groups visiting Iceland – youth movements, football teams, and gliding enthusiasts – he all called spies<sup>157</sup>. In Reykjavik, officials were aware that a Nazi foothold in Iceland meant considerable repercussions over the United Kingdom and America, as the island was both the former’s backdoor and the latter’s steppingstone. In order to preserve their neutrality, they announced that no agreement would be made with any foreign airlines until 1 April 1940<sup>158</sup>.

The halt of all official negotiations annoyed Thor who lost the potential creation of a domestic company in which Pan American would have had a 49% participation. His informal discussions also displeased him. By September 1939, he could hardly hide his disappointment in his meetings with Cooper he considered to be “just talk back and forth”<sup>159</sup>. With the war raging on, cooperation with Pan American seemed to wither as the equipment of the radio station was dismantled and brought back to the United States<sup>160</sup>. However, in early January 1940, Thor was appointed by his government to represent Iceland in a Pan-Sacandinavian Committee dedicated to the negotiation of a transatlantic airway to be opened in spring 1941. In addition to Thor, the committee included Per Norlin (Swedish Airlines), Captain Dahl (Norwegian Airlines), Arne Krog (Danish Postal Administration), and Knud Lybye (Danish Air Traffic Company). Most of the group arrived in New York on 23 January. Invoking the delivery of diplomatic mail to Washington, several postponed the luncheon organized by Pan American. Suspicious at first, Thor learned from Stefansson the other four representatives were secretly isolating him as they hoped to exclude Iceland from the northern airway and directly connect America to Stavanger in Norway. In their plans, Iceland was to be served by a local airline of another Scandinavian country. Norlin notably argued that Iceland did not have the appropriate landing field for its plane. He did not

153 Correspondence: Iceland: World’s Fair: Scandinavian Day, 1939, Mss 196, 47-2.

154 Paul Olberg, « Scandinavia and the Nazis », in *The Contemporary Review*, 07/1939, n°156, p. 27-34.

155 Earl Parker Hanson, « Hitler over Iceland », in *This Week*, 1939.

156 « Iceland Is Called German Holy Land », in *The New York Times*, 09/12/1934. Earl Parker Hanson, « Hitler over Iceland », op. cit.

157 *Letter to John Cooper*, 07/10/1938, 3p., Pan American correspondence Mss 98, 18-25.

158 *The North Atlantic area – Greenland, Iceland, Scandinavia*, 37p., 09/44, PanAm correspondence Mss 98, 21-26.

159 *PAA Memo: Vilhjalmur Thor*, 14/09/1939, 1p., Pan American correspondence Mss 98, 19-1. Letter to Cooper, 09/10/1944, 2p., PanAm correspondence Mss 98, 19-14.

160 Oscanayan advised selling the building and even found a potential client, yet Stefansson estimated it should not be sold. Pan American correspondence Mss 98, 19-1.



want to hear about the Icelandic project of opening an airport 90km southeast of Reykjavik<sup>161</sup>. Thor’s endeavors eventually became fruitful in March when he secured a \$1,000,000 loan (\$22,5 million in today’s value) from the Export-Import Bank. He was made Consul General in New York on 24 April 1940 and became Iceland’s Foreign Minister in 1942<sup>162</sup>.

After almost a decade of preparations, surveys, and negotiations, Pan American declared that by 1940, the expenses linked to the northern and southern transatlantic route amounted to \$1,500,000 (or \$26,800,000 in today’s value): from its initial support to the Jelling-Lindbergh expedition, to the building of radio stations, visits of representatives to Iceland and Scandinavia, experimental services between Boston and Halifax, to the cost of legal counsels<sup>163</sup>. In early 1939, Pan American obtained its certificate of convenience and necessity to operate a transatlantic commercial air service in a moment of extreme world tensions where Americans were growing accustomed to air travel<sup>164</sup>. The development of aircraft with longer ranges allowed simpler courses with less hops. Although slightly more expensive, the practicality of a more direct route was considered more attractive to the customers. Land planes also threatened the trend of flying boats where privileged clients seeking adventure enjoyed the comfort of sophisticated cuisine<sup>165</sup>. On the twelfth anniversary of Lindbergh’s flight, 20 May 1939, the *Yankee Clipper*, a brand new Boeing 314, inaugurated the mid-Atlantic route by performing the first commercial mail flight through the Azores to Lisbon and Marseilles in 29 hours<sup>166</sup>. The same aircraft opened the northern Great Circle route on 24 June, carrying mail and 20 guests, from New York to Southampton *via* Shediac and Botwood in Canada, and Foynes in

Ireland<sup>167</sup>. On 28 June, the first transatlantic passenger service through the southern airway was inaugurated while the northern service opened on 8 July, carrying both passengers and mail every week. Conceived as a summer-only service, the route was shortened to Foynes by Pan American in September after the invasion of Poland and terminated on 4 October<sup>168</sup>. The war precipitated a new era for Pan American where its quasi-monopolistic dominance was officially asserted as it became the largest air transport contractor to the War Department and the only contractor of the U.S. Navy<sup>169</sup>. Profitability was not high but its exposure was unparalleled as the airline flew twice the total of kilometers flown by all other American airlines. During the conflict, the company made 15,000 ocean crossings, including 3,800 transatlantic flights<sup>170</sup>. As early as 22 July 1940, the Air Corps wrote to Juan Trippe to request his company’s descriptive material of the northern airway. He replied he would delightedly share Pan American reports concerning flying conditions, from both Stefansson and the sponsored explorers<sup>171</sup>. His position in Iceland was frozen nonetheless as the State Department considered Scandinavia as a combat area on 10 April 1940. After the invasion of Denmark, applications for additional international routes were not accepted by the Civil Aeronautic Board. Pan American waited until 28 July 1944 to apply for an airway from New York to Moscow *via* Iceland. Such a wait did not prevent Stefansson from actively alerting Pan American of the changes occurring in Iceland regarding its independence and the organization of meetings in the United States with companies interested in the transatlantic route by the potent Eimskip, the Icelandic Steamship Company. By November 1944, it had

161 PanAm correspondence Mss 98, 19-4.  
162 *U.S.-Iceland Diplomatic Relations*, 1p., 25/04/1940, Pan American correspondence Mss 98, 19-5.  
163 *History of Transatlantic Air Service*, 12/09/1944, 40p., PanAm Correspondence MSS 98, 21-26.  
164 From 475,000 passengers in 1932, American air traffic grew up to over 4 million in 194. Roger E. Bilstein, *Flight in America, op. cit.*, p. 100.  
165 Roger E. Bilstein, *Flight in America, op. cit.*, p. 93.  
166 Robert Daley, *An American Saga, op. cit.*, p. 242.  
167 Ronald Edward George Davies, *Airlines of the United States since 1914, op. cit.*, p. 263.  
168 Graham B. Grosvenor, « *The Northward Course of Aviation* », *op. cit.*  
169 « Flying Clippers Celebrate their Thirtieth Birthday », in *World Airways Teacher*, 10/1957, vol.14, n°1, p. 16.  
170 Ronald Edward George Davies, *Airlines of the United States since 1914, op. cit.*, p. 275.  
171 Letter Juan Trippe to Major J.C. Taylor, Chief Intelligence Section, 05/09/1940, 2p., Pan American correspondence Mss 98, 19-5. Stefansson also sent reports on Greenland and Iceland to the State Department in 1939. PanAm Correspondence Mss 98, 21-26.

Conclusion

An airbase named desire,  
from inviting American forces to  
asserting a symbol of independence

We did not establish our republic in order  
to become less independent.  
We intend to own our country, all of it, and  
without any foreign interference.

Foreign Minister Vilhjalmur Thor  
in Washington, 26/08/1944.

The causes of the downfall of Pan American’s northern airway were manifold, from British obstruction and Nazi pressure to the development of more efficient aircraft. However, beyond the airline’s economic failure, its consistent efforts to maintain American interests in the North Atlantic not only turned into a potent support of Arctic exploration in a period of financial turmoil, but it also repelled European competitors and shaped the battle for the Atlantic of World War II. The focus on polar meteorological data in the 1930s was equally found in the conflict and its low-intensity “weather war” held in hidden stations established in northern lands, from Newfoundland to Novaya Zemlya, through Greenland and Svalbard, that sent data to armed forces on the continent<sup>176</sup>. Moreover, the acquired flying experience also laid the groundwork for what had been called the Arctic “lifelines” supplying British and Soviet war efforts<sup>177</sup>. Pan American’s role was publicly recognized by the press, calling it an “instrument of U.S. policy and a weapon of global war”<sup>178</sup>. The cultural work accomplished alongside the company’s interest, whether the Icelandic exhibit at the New York World’s Fair or the publication of *Iceland, The First American Republic*

172 In December 1944, Ambassador to the United States Thor Thors attended the air conference held in Chicago. PanAm correspondence Mss 98, 19-13, *PAA Office Memo: Iceland*, 04/01/1945, 2p., PanAm Correspondence Mss 98, 19-4.  
173 Ronald Edward George Davies, *Airlines of the United States since 1914, op. cit.*, p. 274, p. 367. Robert Daley, *An American Saga, op. cit.*, p. 274, p. 344.  
174 Ronald Edward George Davies, *Airlines of the United States since 1914, op. cit.*, p. 367.  
175 Letter from Cooper, 09/11/1945, 1p., PanAm Correspondence Mss 98, 19-15.  
176 Ronald E. Doel, Robert Marc Friedman, Julia Lajus, *et alii*, « Strategic Arctic Science », *op. cit.*  
177 William S. Carlson, « The Usefulness of Greenland, Then and Now: Settled for Centuries, It Offers Strategic Landing Fields Today, Says Stefansson », in *New York Herald Tribune*, 29/11/1942. William S. Carlson, *Lifelines through the Arctic*, New York, Duell, Sloan and Pearce, 1962, 271 p.  
178 « AVIATION: Pan Am at War », in *Time*, 18/05/1942.

by Stefansson in 1939, were other steps toward a better comprehension of the island as a strategic asset<sup>179</sup>.

On 10 April 1940, the following day of Denmark's invasion, the Danish ambassador to the United States, Henrik Kauffman (1888-1963), discussed with President Roosevelt (1882-1945) the matter of colonial Greenland and autonomous Iceland whose ties to Denmark were severed. The meeting ended with the conclusion that both islands belonged to the Western Hemisphere and were thus covered by the Monroe Doctrine guaranteeing their territorial inviolability<sup>180</sup>. This position had been held by both Stefansson and Icelandic officials<sup>181</sup>. Preferring to maintain its neutrality, Reykjavik officially rejected the British offer of assistance and cooperation on 11 April. A month later, on 10 May, a British warship arrived at Reykjavik where its battalion seized the city before being progressively reinforced up to 20,000 men by July, including Canadian forces<sup>182</sup>. Icelandic diplomacy was pessimistic about the United Kingdom's chances of victory and disgruntled by the control of the island's exports to the point of seeking an official expansion of the Monroe Doctrine that could forestall the presence of foreign troops. The issue was pressed again in September and December with the Icelandic consul general offering this time to open American air and naval bases in exchange for economic and commercial advantages. After much debate over breaking the island's neutrality and defense policy, American troops were formally invited on 1 July – as asked by Washington – and eventually relieved the British garrison on 8 July 1941 to the condition of being withdrawn immediately after the conflict's end<sup>183</sup>.

By the end of the war, the message sent by the first enthusiasts of Arctic aviation, Pan American's work, or even the Icelandic representation in New York

had become prevalent among American authorities. To them, a presence in Iceland was further deemed invaluable for its useful position at safe distance from continental Europe, as stated by an internal memorandum of the State Department in 1942: "If the *Pax Britannica*, such as it was, was kept largely by the British Navy, the *Pax Americana* will be kept by air power in the world"<sup>184</sup>. Political scientist Nicholas Spykman (1893-1943) illustrated this new consciousness by echoing Stefansson's perspective on the northern hemisphere, now that most of the 1920s technical troubles had been overcome<sup>185</sup>. In *The Geography of Peace* (1944), he stated that "the establishment of naval and air power on Greenland, Iceland and Dakar" would give Washington the means to "make possible an equilibrium of power" with the Soviet Union and the United Kingdom<sup>186</sup>. Bringing American military power closer to the areas where it may be exerted, identified as the "rimlands", was inseparable from the maintenance and construction of air infrastructures in Europe and Asia. In this logic, future spheres of influence would no longer be made of imperialistic annexations and puppet governments but of leased airfields in geopolitical key-stones, from Greenland to Iran. Political geographer Hans Weigert shared the same view: "Neither in the realm of military strategy nor that of commercial aviation will Iceland become some sort of an American dependency. (...) the peoples of certain pivotal areas cannot survive in independent isolation, yet these areas are too important (...) for any one powerful neighbor to treat them as its dependencies"<sup>187</sup>.

On 26 August 1944, at a news conference held in Washington, both President Sveinn Bjornsson (1944-1952) and Foreign Minister Vilhjalmur Thor clearly expressed that their country had no intention to

grant permanent military bases to the United States. Coming back from an official visit to President Roosevelt where they reminded the American commitment to withdraw stationed troops once the international emergency had ended, the Icelandic officials declared they did not receive any request for an extension. In apparent contrast to the Icelandic demands of inclusion into the Monroe Doctrine – either expressed at New York's World Fair in 1939, on 9 May 1940 by Thor Thors at the *Althing*, or by Stefan Johan Stefansson, "Minister of Foreign affairs" on 18 December 1940 – the matter of the airbase had become the first test of the newly acquired Icelandic sovereignty<sup>188</sup>. If Reykjavik airport, built by the British in 1940, was transferred to local authorities, Keflavik airport – built in 1942 by the American forces in the Reykjanes peninsula as a refueling point for cargo flights to Europe – became a subject of intense discussions. As an "anti-U.S." sentiment grew in Iceland, American officials wanted to establish a 99-year lease of the airbase among other naval facilities<sup>189</sup>. The Icelandic government, however, preferred to reclaim the airport and let an American contractor manage some of its functions given the American insistence to maintain at least a foothold on the is

land. The Keflavik agreement of 1946 organized this future cooperation. The airbase was turned into a civilian airport with a refueling station for warplanes sent to occupied Germany and all American troops left the island by 1947<sup>190</sup>. Followed by the North Atlantic Pact of 1949, the Keflavik agreement became the bedrock of the defense agreement of 5 May 1951 that reactivated the Keflavik military airbase. A favored nation in the Marshall Plan with growing economic ties to the United States, Iceland maintained a relationship flustered by controversies with its American protector. Above all, the question of the airbase crystallized the recalcitrance of actively contributing to the North Atlantic Alliance – rather than adhering to it. On 28 March 1956, the *Althing* adopted a resolution demanding the withdrawal of all NATO forces from the island's four radar stations and the Keflavik airbase. While reaffirming the nation's adherence to the North Atlantic Treaty, the Parliament also called for a revision of the defense agreement of 1951. Although the resolution was more consequential to Iceland's internal politics than international affairs, some observers in Washington still noted that Iceland had become "the reluctant ally"<sup>191</sup>.

179 Vilhjalmur Stefansson, *Iceland, the first American republic*, New York, Doubleday, Doran & Co., 1939, 272 p.

180 « Greenland Raises Hemisphere Issue; Monroe Doctrine to Be Applied If It Is Necessary--Danish Envoy Sees Roosevelt », in *The New York Times*, 11/04/1940.

181 Stetson Conn, Rose C. Engelman, Byron Fairchild, « Planning the Iceland Operation », in Byron Fairchild, *The Western Hemisphere, Guarding the U.S. and its outposts*, Washington, Center of Military History, United States Army, 2000, p. 616. Jay Sexton, *The Monroe Doctrine: Empire and Nation in Nineteenth-Century America*, New York, Hill and Wang, 2011, p. 4. Vilhjalmur Stefansson, « What is the Western Hemisphere? », in *Foreign Affairs*, 01/1941, vol.19, n°2, p. 343-346.

182 Sólrun B. Jensdóttir Hardarson, « The "Republic of Iceland" 1940-44: Anglo-American Attitudes and Influences », in *Journal of Contemporary History*, 1974, vol.9, n°4, p. 27-56.

183 Stetson Conn, Rose C. Engelman, Byron Fairchild, « Planning the Iceland Operation », *op. cit.*, p. 481.

184 Jenifer Van Vleck, *Empire of the Air. Aviation and the American Ascendancy*, *op. cit.*, p. 125.

185 Trevor Lloyd, « Arctic Air Transport », in *Air Affairs*, 1946, vol.1, n°2, 19-46.

186 Nicholas John Spykman, *The Geography of the Peace*, *op. cit.*, p. 67

187 Hans W. Weigert, « Iceland, Greenland and the United States », in *Foreign Affairs*, 1944, vol.23, n°1, p. 112-122.

188 « Iceland demands return of bases », in *The New York Times*, 26/08/1944. John L. Zimmerman, « A Note on the Occupation of Iceland by American Forces », in *Political Science Quarterly*, 1947, vol.62, n°1, p. 103-106.

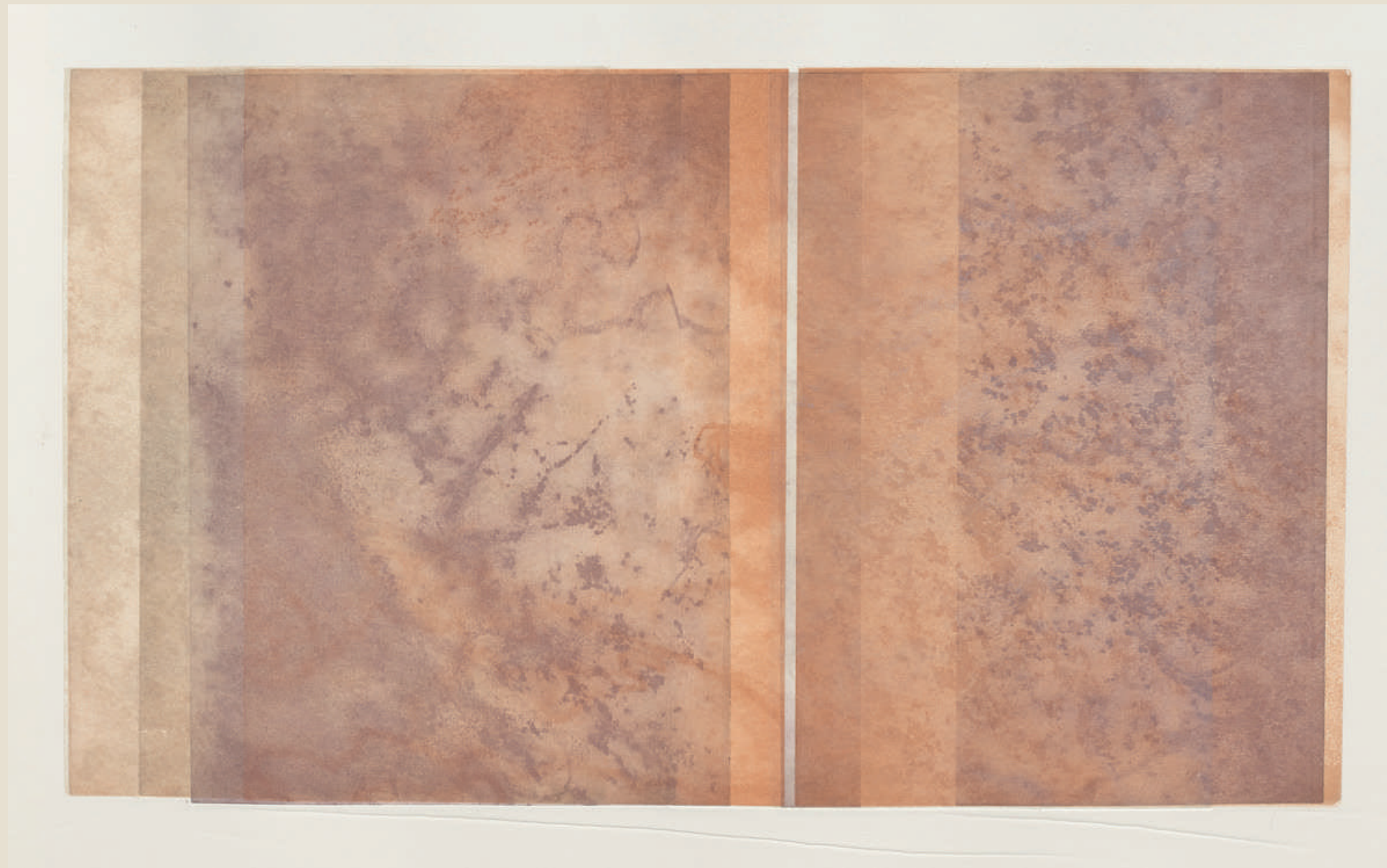
189 *Iceland Relations*, 3p., 31/08/1944, Pan American correspondence Mss 98, 19-14.

190 Thor Whitehead, *The Ally Who Came in from the Cold: A Survey of Icelandic Foreign Policy 1946-1956*, Reykjavik, Haskolautgafan, 1998, p. 18-20. Gudni Th. Jóhannesson, « TO THE EDGE OF NOWHERE?: U.S.-Icelandic Defense Relations during and after the Cold War », in *Naval War College Review*, 2004, vol.57, n°3/4, p. 115-137.

191 G.L., « Iceland: Reluctant Ally », *The World Today*, 1956, vol.12, n°8, p. 321-330.



**HOMMAGE À JEAN MALAURIE (1922-2024) /**  
***TRIBUTE TO JEAN MALAURIE (1922-2024)***



# FUNÉRAILLES CHRÉTIENNES DE JEAN-NOËL MALAURIE

13 FÉVRIER 2024

CATHÉDRALE SAINT-LOUIS DES INVALIDES

GEOFFROY DE LA TOUSCHE, CURÉ DE ROUEN

Quel est le mystère de la terre d’Inglefield ? Quel vent a poussé Jean-Noël Malaurie chez les Hyperboréens ? Pourquoi le grand maître Uutaaq lui déclara- t-il à lui, l’enfant qui marcha sur le Rhin gelé, « je t’attendais » ?

L’humanité plongée dans l’obscurité de ses conflits perd aujourd’hui l’*immense* défenseur du Royaume de Thulé qui veillait depuis le pôle Nord à l’équilibre si fragile de notre terre.

C’est dans son appartement du Boulevard de Verdun à Dieppe que Jean m’accueillit, me faisant alors vivre moi aussi cette étrange expérience d’être attendu. Le vieil homme avait décidé d’évoquer ses tourments. Le passionné des pierres se libérait des passions de son âme. L’homme toujours ému par l’intensité de la vie continuait de chercher le sens. Face à moi, dans ce fauteuil incapable de le contenir, vivait un être libre que seul un pays comme la France est capable de définir comme anarchiste. Peu importe à l’homme libre ces cases dans lesquelles on imagine le circonscrire ! C’est précisément par cette liberté que la France lui a permis d’entreprendre ces expéditions.

Alors, comme les femmes de Jérusalem au matin de Pâques, dans le silence d’un monde qui dort après une nuit de fête, Jean est parti avec bien peu de bagages : qui découvre la vie, découvre l’humilité. L’obscurité du Vendredi Saint n’est pas définitive. L’aube de Pâques a ouvert l’homme au mystère du tombeau vide : Dieu n’a pas fait la mort. Il ne laisse personne prisonnier des pierres roulées sur son existence, des histoires qui le maudissent, des agressions qui le tuent, des obscurantismes qui l’éblouissent.

Dieu se révèle par le risque de la crèche. Jean-Noël en portait depuis le jour de sa naissance la marque par son prénom. Ses parents en l’appelant ainsi allaient lui donner de partir à la recherche de l’isolé, du mis-à-part. Ce n’était donc pas plus fort que lui, c’était en lui, c’était lui. Travailler sur des roches de 500 millions d’années revenait donc à interpréter son propre cœur. Jean-Noël ne pouvait ignorer les prophéties de Jérémie et d’Ezéchiel :

« Je mettrai ma Loi au plus profond d’eux-mêmes ; je l’inscrirai sur leur cœur. Je serai leur Dieu, et ils seront mon peuple » (Jérémie 31, 33).

« J’ôterai de votre chair le cœur de pierre, je vous donnerai un cœur de chair » (Ez 36, 26)  
Que se passe-t-il dans le cœur d’un homme quand son intelligence travaille sur les terres de Washington et sur l’île d’Yttygran ? Fallait-il l’*immense* stature – même *physique* – d’un Professeur, Directeur, Fondateur, Chercheur, Ambassadeur pour rappeler au monde que nous ne sommes que poussière ?

Mais que cette poussière est belle ! Dieu l’aime ! La poussière Jean-Noël, dans la douleur de perdre sa bien-aimée, Monique, le 27 octobre dernier, ne pouvait rester seule au monde. Chers Guillaume et Eléonore, avec Bach visité par Glenn Gould, avec Dostoïevski exilé en Sibérie mais y lisant Hegel, avec Lévi- Strauss développant l’idée de la civilisation à partir des Bororos du Brésil, avec tous les souvenirs qui marquent vos existences, vos

chers parents vous ont transmis, ainsi qu’à nous tous, émus et honorés de les avoir connus, une intensité qui nous oblige.

Cette intensité a une origine. Nous croyons, dans cette cathédrale, qu’elle a été révélée. Cette révélation divine n’est pas un acquis, c’est un appel. Entendre cet appel est une invitation à répondre, en travaillant avec intensité. Pour tous, face à l’immensité de l’univers, nous sentons bien l’appel intérieur qui nous pose les questions du bonheur et de la liberté. La vie de Jean-Noël est une vie de recherche mais surtout de rencontres. Nous aussi, nous faisons nôtre cet axiome décisif. Les chrétiens reçoivent cette force du Christ Jésus, l’envoyé de Dieu, qui vient à la rencontre des hommes pour leur rendre leur dignité de fils de Dieu, les élever par la puissance de l’Esprit et les engager à construire une civilisation qui promeut la vie. Jean-Noël souffrait intensément, comme en sa chair, de l’ethnocide des Inuits, ses frères choisissant la mort volontaire face au rouleau compresseur des anthropophages contemporains. Comment parler encore d’éducation à nos enfants s’ils ne sont pas invités dans la famille, la cour de récréation et en classe, à la compassion du petit, au risque de l’amitié décalée, à l’aventure de l’intelligence rigoureuse ? Où sont aujourd’hui les héritiers du Christ qui touche le lépreux, après Mère Teresa qui prend par la main l’Intouchable, après Jean Malaurie frère des derniers hommes du Grand Nord déplacés de leurs terres ancestrales pour le profit de bases militaires ?

Face à l’immensité de ces défis, nous pouvons abandonner le combat, tellement il est agressif au sommet de notre monde et dans tant de nos relations. Le Christ Jésus n’a pas abandonné l’homme blessé. Le Christ Jésus n’a pas quitté la croix. Au matin de Pâques, « Marie Madeleine, Marie, mère de Jacques, et Salomé » qui l’avaient entendu hurler « Mon Dieu, mon Dieu, pourquoi m’as-tu abandonné ? » pendant que les hommes continuaient de l’humilier, ces femmes allèrent au tombeau. Encore et toujours les femmes, toujours courageuses pour promouvoir la vie. Dieu fit d’elles les premiers témoins de la résurrection du Christ. Deux mille ans plus tard, Natuk et Patdloq furent les premières femmes à partir avec Jean dans cette expédition qui allait révéler au monde l’urgence *écologique* pour notre terre depuis les Pôles et leurs populations belles et fragiles. Le Pape François a invité les chrétiens à louer Dieu pour la beauté de la création, les invitant à sauvegarder la Maison Commune. C’est un même chemin prophétique qui unit les femmes de la Résurrection, celles des expéditions et ceux d’entre nous qui entreprenons dans nos Etats, écoles, fondations et associations, Eglises, laboratoires et centres de recherche, des programmes qui proclament l’espérance.

Comme Jean parlait de ces « harmonies invisibles » révélées par ces expéditions, nous aussi aujourd’hui avons bien conscience que bon nombre de nos relations sont de cet ordre. A vue humaine, Jean et Natuk n’avaient pas de raisons de se rencontrer. A vue humaine, nos mondes semblent ne pas faits pour s’unir. A vue humaine aussi, la résurrection du Christ était impossible et impensable. Or c’est précisément sur cette proclamation du Vivant depuis 2000 ans que nous croyons que nos vies sont reçues pour l’éternité. Alors au cœur de chacun de nos engagements, nous œuvrons de manière rigoureuse pour que l’humanité soit libre et heureuse, et que tout soit marqué par le souffle qui ouvre de nouveaux horizons.

Dans le tourment de sa pensée vive, fort de ce siècle vécu en rencontres, expéditions, fondations et conférences, Jean-Noël ne voulait pas désespérer de l’homme et ne disait pas qu’il était athée. Me permettez-vous de penser qu’en l’accueillant, Dieu lui aura dit : « je t’attendais » ? Permettez-moi d’imaginer la joie profonde de Jean si nous parvenions lors de chacune de nos rencontres quotidiennes à dire à nos interlocuteurs : « je t’attendais ».

Permettez-moi de croire que cette joie humaine est la joie de l’Evangile.



# CHRISTIAN FUNERAL SERVICE OF JEAN-NOËL MALAURIE

13 FEBRUARY 2024

SAINT-LOUIS DES INVALIDES CATHEDRAL, PARIS

GEOFFROY DE LA TOUSCHE, PARISH PRIEST IN ROUEN

What is the mystery of Inglefield Land? Which wind drove Jean Malaurie to the Hyperboreans? Why did the great master Uutaaq say to him who had walked on the frozen Rhine as a child “I was expecting you.”?

Humanity drawn into the darkness of its conflicts has lost the *immense* defender of the Kingdom of Thule who had been watching the balance of our planet which is so fragile.

It was in his flat on Boulevard Verdun in Dieppe that Jean received me, making me also experience that strange sensation to have been expected. The old man had decided to talk about what was tormenting him. The person who was passionate about stones wanted to liberate himself from the passion of his soul. The man still moved by the intensity of life continued to look for meaning. Sitting opposite me in that armchair hardly suited to hold him back was a free being whom only a country like France could call an anarchist. But what do such categories mean to a free person into which one wants to make them fit! It was exactly thanks to this freedom that France allowed him to go on those expeditions.

So, just like the women of Jerusalem on Easter morning, when the world was silent and at rest after a night of feasting, Jean left with hardly any luggage: discovering life and humility. The darkness of Good Friday is not everlasting. The dawn of Easter has made man discover the mystery of the empty tomb: God has not made death. He does not let people be imprisoned by stones rolled over their life, stories cursing them, aggression killing them or obscurantism that dazzles them.

God manifests himself through the risk represented by the cradle, the insignia of which Jean-Noël had inscribed in his Christian name the day he was born. By having chosen this name for him, his parents had sent him in quest of what is isolated and apart. It was therefore not stronger than him, but a part of him, it was he himself. To work with rocks that are 500 million years old meant interpreting one’s own soul. Jean-Noël could not ignore the prophecies of Jeremiah and Ezekiel:

“I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts; and will be their God, and they shall be my people.” (Jeremiah 31:33, King James Bible)

“I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you an heart of flesh.” (Ezekiel 36-26, King James Bible)

What happens in the heart of a man when his intelligence makes him work in Washington Land and on Yttygran Island? Did it take the *immense* stature – even physical – of a Professor, Director, Founder, Researcher and Ambassador to remind us that we are only made from dust? But how beautiful that dust is? God loves it! The dust called Jean-Noël, having lost his beloved Monique on Octobre 27, last year, could not remain in this world on his own. Dear Guillaume and Eléonore, through Bach visited by Glenn Gould, with Dostoevsky exiled in Siberia but reading Hegel, Lévi-Strauss developing his ideas about civilization by starting from the

Bororos of Brazil and with all the memories your lives have been shaped by, your dear parents have transmitted to you and all of us who are honoured and moved by the thought that we have known them, an intensity that we are obliged to.

This intensity has its origin. We believe, in this cathedral, that it has been revealed. This divine revelation can never be taken for granted, it is a call. To hear this call is an invitation to reply, to work with intensity. Facing the immensity of the universe, we all hear this inner call making us reflect on happiness and freedom. Jean-Noël’s life was one of investigations but above all encounters. We also wish to adapt this decisive axiom. Christians receive their force from Jesus Christ, God’s envoy who has come to meet humans to give them back their dignity of sons of God, to raise them by the might of the Spirit to engaging themselves in building a civilization that promotes life. Jean-Noël was hurting intensely, as though in his own flesh, from the ethnocide of the Inuit, his brothers preferring to end their lives rather than to be crushed by the cannibals of our times. How can we continue to talk about education to our young ones if they are not invited into the family, to the playground, classroom and compassion of children at the risk of offsetting friendship and facing the adventure of rigorous intelligence? Where are today’s heirs of Christ who are touching lepers, after Mother Teresa who was taking the Untouchables by the hand, after Jean Malaurie, brother of the last humans of the Far North, relocated from their ancestral land to make space for an air base?

Faced with the immensity of these challenges, we might give up the fight since it is so aggressive at the top of our world and in our relations. Jesus Christ never gave up wounded people. Jesus Christ did not abandon the cross. Early on Easter, “Maria Magdalena, Mary, mother of James, and Salome” who had heard him cry out loud “My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?” while people continued to humiliate him, these women went to the tomb. It is always the women, and more women still, who have the courage to promote life. God made them be the first witnesses of the resurrection of Christ. Two thousand years later, Natuk and Patdloq were the first women to go with Jean on the expedition which was going to reveal to the world the state of ecological emergency of our Earth seen from the North with its wonderful and fragile population. Pope Francis has invited Christians to praise God for the beauty of creation and to preserve our common home. The women of the Resurrection and those who went on that expedition as well as all of those amongst us who proclaim hope in our countries, schools, foundations and associations, churches, research centres and programmes are on the same prophetic path.

Like Jean speaking about those “invisible harmonies” revealed to him during those expeditions, we are also perfectly conscious today that many of our relations are of this kind. Seen from a human perspective, Jean and Natuk had no reason to meet. Seen with the same eyes, the Resurrection of Christ was impossible and unthinkable. But it is exactly thanks to this proclamation of life made 2000 years ago that we believe that our lives will be received for ever after. Thus, at the core of all of our engagements, we are employed rigorously to make humanity free and happy and that everything will be moved by the breath opening new horizons.

In midst the turmoil of his vivid mind carried by a century of encounters, expeditions, foundations and lectures, Jean-Noël never wanted to fall into despair about man and never called himself atheist.

Would you allow me to think that God will have told him on welcoming him: “I was expecting you.”? Please allow me to imagine the sheer joy of Jean if we would manage to say “I was expecting you” to all the people we meet in our daily lives.

Please allow me to believe that such human joy is the joy of the Gospel.

# DISCOURS DE MADAME SYLVIE RETAILLEAU, MINISTRE DE L’ENSEIGNEMENT SUPÉRIEUR ET DE LA RECHERCHE

## CÉRÉMONIE D’HONNEURS FUNÈBRES MILITAIRES RENDUS À M. JEAN MALAURIE HÔTEL NATIONAL DES INVALIDES, PARIS MARDI 13 FÉVRIER 2024

### SYLVIE RETAILLEAU

La semaine dernière, nous avons perdu un géant.

Nous sommes réunis aujourd’hui pour l’honorer.  
Explorateur, ethnologue, géomorphologue, éditeur et écrivain.

Orphelin de père à 17 ans et de mère à 21 ans, orphelin aussi d’une certaine idée de la France après la défaite de 40, Jean Malaurie choisit, après la guerre, d’étudier la géographie.

La géographie, cette discipline dont Saint-Exupéry disait, je le cite, « c’est très utile, si l'on est égaré pendant la nuit. » Peut-être était-ce donc une évidence de choisir, au sortir de la guerre, *après la nuit*, cette belle matière, qui nous aide à comprendre le monde.

C’est ce statut de géographe qui lui vaut d’être recruté par Les Expéditions polaires françaises, dirigées par Paul-Emile Victor. C’est sa première mission, au Groenland, en 1948.  
En 1950-1951 il mène, en solitaire, une expédition au nord de Thulé. C’est là sa première rencontre avec le peuple Inuit. « Là commence ma vie », avait-il l’habitude de dire.

Et le 29 mai 1951, il est le premier homme, avec l’Inuit Kutsikitsok, à atteindre le pôle Nord géomagnétique, avec deux traîneaux à chiens.

En 1979, il devient directeur de recherche. Géomorphologue de formation, ses travaux se réclament de la triple tradition d'Emmanuel de Martonne et de Fernand Braudel, l'un géographe, l'autre historien, et de Gaston Bachelard qui s'est interrogé sur le pouvoir de l’imaginaire et des forces de la nature. Ses travaux scientifiques portent sur le Nord du Groenland, l'Arctique central canadien, les îles du Détroit de Béring, les côtes alaskiennes et la Tchoukotka, région du Nord-Est de la Russie, mais ses travaux portent aussi sur les rapports de l'homme avec la nature.

Chez les Inuits dont il a partagé intimement la vie jusque dans des iglous de neige, il s’attache au dynamisme social qui a sans cesse restructuré ces groupes, inspirés sensoriellement des écosystèmes *physiques*, et qu'il décrit parfaitement dans ses ouvrages *Ultima Thulé. De la découverte à l'invasion* publié en 1990 et *L'Appel du Nord*, paru en 2001.

Il était également président de 15 congrès internationaux arctiques et l'auteur de neuf films sur l'Arctique, dont *La Saga des Inuits*, série de 4 films pour France 5, produite par l'Institut national de l'audiovisuel.

Passé de la géographie physique à l’ethnologie il fonde, en 1955, la collection « Terre humaine » aux éditions Plon.

Sa méthode interdisciplinaire a fait de cette collection un phénomène d’édition unique au monde dont le cinquantenaire, fêté en 2005, a été l'occasion de la publication de « Terre humaine, cinquante ans d'une collection, hommages ».

De la science des roches à la science des hommes, c’est aussi ce voyage intérieur que résume le titre qu’il avait choisi pour ses *mémoires, De la pierre à l’âme*.

Dans le prolongement de ses nombreuses missions d'exploration et activités d'écriture, Jean Malaurie a fondé en 1957 le Centre d'études arctiques à l'École Pratique des Hautes Études. Il a également présidé diverses associations et fondations, telles la Fondation française d'études nordiques, la Société arctique française ou le Fonds polaire Jean Malaurie du Muséum national d'Histoire naturelle de Paris.

Cet *immense* explorateur, qui a mené une trentaine d'expéditions polaires, a reçu de multiples distinctions et décorations, et la France n’était pas le seul pays à ainsi honorer son œuvre.  
Je ne les citerai pas toutes mais l’on peut mentionner le Prix de l'Académie des sciences, la Médaille d'Or de la Société arctique française, la Grande Médaille de la Société de géographie, la Patron's Gold Medal, avec la signature de Sa Majesté la Reine Elizabeth II, la Distinction Nersornaat dont il était si fier, ou encore la Distinction de l'Ours polaire, décernée personnellement par le Premier ministre du Groenland à Paris.

Des titres, il en possédait des dizaines. Grand Officier de la Légion d’honneur, Commandeur des Arts et des Lettres, commandeur de l’Ordre national du Mérite, Sage des peuples du Nord.

C’est cette sagesse, qui va nous manquer. Et qui déjà nous manque.

Cette cérémonie nous permet de manifester notre reconnaissance, et notre infinie gratitude.

Jean Malaurie partait sans carte. C’est lui qui les dressait.

Il faisait partie d’une génération marquée par la Guerre. Une génération animée par l’envie furieuse de vivre et de refonder, de reconstruire. Et la semaine dernière, nous avons perdu un géant.

Peut-être peut-on trouver un peu de réconfort dans l’*immense* héritage scientifique, humain, sensible, que Jean Malaurie nous a légué, et dans l’idée d’une vie remplie de découvertes, de sagesse, et d’amitiés.  
Peut-être peut-on trouver un peu de réconfort aussi dans le fait que peu de temps avant son départ, Jean Malaurie a vécu une semaine spéciale. Car en l’espace d’une semaine, alors que ses pastels, ses « Crépuscules arctiques », étaient exposés à l’UNESCO, il a reçu le prix spécial du jury Roger Caillois.

Homme entier, Jean Malaurie suscitait des amitiés fidèles. En témoigne la présence de son Altesse sérénissime le Prince de Monaco présent aujourd’hui pour honorer la mémoire de ce loyal ami.

Jean Malaurie, dresseur de cartes, amoureux de la liberté, et de l’altérité. Jean Malaurie, « explorateur et indéfectible ami des Inuits ».

A ce géant qui nous a tant appris, je tiens à dire merci.

A ses proches et sa famille, je tiens à exprimer mes profondes et sincères condoléances.



***SPEECH OF MRS SYLVIE RETAILLEAU,  
MINISTER OF HIGHER EDUCATION  
AND RESEARCH***

***CEREMONY OF FUNERAL SERVICE WITH MILITARY  
HONOURS OF MR JEAN MALAURIE  
HÔTEL NATIONAL DES INVALIDES, PARIS  
TUESDAY 13 FEBRUARY 2024***

**SYLVIE RETAILLEAU**

Last week, we lost a giant.

We are gathered here to pay homage to him.

Explorer, ethnographer, geomorphologist, editor and writer.

Having lost his father at the age of 17 and his mother when he was 21, as well as his ideals about a certain France after the defeat in 1940, Jean Malaurie decided to study geography after the war.

Geography is the discipline which Saint-Exupéry said about: “it’s very useful, if you lose your way at nighttime.” Perhaps it appeared obvious to choose geography at the end of the war, once the darkness was over, - this beautiful subject which helps us to understand the world.

He was recruited as a geographer by the French Polar Expeditions conducted by Paul-Emile Victor. It was his first expedition to Greenland, in 1948. In 1950-1951, he went on an expedition to Thule, on his own. It was his first meeting with the Inuit. “This is where my life really began,” he used to say.

And on 29 May 1951, he was the first human, together with the Inuit Kutsikitsiq, to reach the geomagnetic North Pole, with two dog sleds.

In 1979, he was appointed Director of Research. Geomorphologist by training, his research was based on the threefold tradition of Emmanuel de Martonne and Fernand Braudel, the former a geographer, the latter a historian, and Gaston Bachelard who reflected on the power of imagination and the forces of nature. His scientific work was dedicated to Northern Greenland, the central Canadian Arctic, the islands in Bering Strait, as well as the coasts of Alaska and Tchoukotka, a region in North-Eastern Russia, but also the relations between humans and nature.

Concerning the Inuit, whose life he shared even inside snow houses called igloos, he was interested in their social dynamics which have continuously restructured their groups, inspired through their senses by the physical ecosystems which he describes perfectly in his books *Ultima Thule: Explorers and Natives in the Polar North* and *Call of the North*, published in 1990 and 2001, respectively.

He presided over fifteen international Arctic congresses and authored nine films about the Arctic, including the “Saga of the Inuit”, a series of four films for France 5 produced by the National Audiovisual Institute.

Moving from physical geography to ethnography, he created the book series “Terre Humaine” at Plon publishers in 1955.

The interdisciplinary approach of the series is a unique phenomenon in publishing worldwide. Its fiftieth anniversary was celebrated in 2005 and occasioned the publication of the collective volume “Terre Humaine, 50 years of a book series, a homage”.

From rock science to the Humanities, this interior journey was also summed up by the title he chose for his autobiography, *De la pierre à l’âme* (From Stones to the Soul).

As an extension of his numerous expeditions and writing activities, Jean Malaurie founded the Centre of Arctic Studies in 1957 at the École Pratiques des Hautes Études. He was also president of various associations and foundations, like the French Foundation of Northern Studies, the French Arctic Society or the Jean Malaurie Polar Documentation at the National Museum of Natural History in Paris.

This *immense* explorer who conducted more than thirty expeditions in the Arctic, received multiple distinctions and France was far from being the only country to honour his work.

I cannot refer to all of them but let me mention the Prize of the Academy of Science, the Gold Medal of the French Arctic Society, the Gold Medal of the Society of Geography, the Patron’s Medal with the signature of Queen Elizabeth II, the Nersornaat gold medal he was so proud of or the Distinction of the Polar Bear medal given to him in person by Greenland’s Prime Minister in Paris.

He had dozens of titles. Great Officer of the Legion of Honour, Commander of the Arts and Letters, Commander of the National Order of Merit, Wise Man of the Peoples of the North.

It is his wisdom we will be missing and are already missing.

This ceremony allows us to manifest our infinite gratitude.

Jean Malaurie started off without maps. It was him who drew them.

He was part of a generation shaped by the War, a generation driven by a wild desire to live and start all over again, to rebuild.

And last week, we lost a giant.

Perhaps we can find solace in the fact that shortly before his passing away, Jean Malaurie witnessed a special week. It was during the same week that his pastels were shown in the exhibition entitled “Arctic Twilight” at UNESCO and that he was attributed the Roger Caillois prize.

An unwavering man, Jean Malaurie had faithful friends. To witness the presence here today of His Serene Highness Prince Albert II of Monaco to honour the memory of a loyal friend.

Jean Malaurie, the man who drew maps, lover of liberty and alterity.

Jean Malaurie, “explorer and unfailing friend of the Inuit”.  
I would like to say thank you to this giant who has taught us so much.

I would like to present my most sincere and profoundest condolences to his family and close friends.

# ATAK, MON PÈRE

## GUILLAUME MALAURIE

Son histoire est centenaire.

Mais elle s’origine tout entière dans les deux petits mois d’été de ses dix-sept ans.

L’été de ses dix-sept ans, c’était l’été 1940.

Ce sont ces quelques semaines des mois de juin puis de juillet, quand la société française qui a façonné sa génération est parti en miettes.

À commencer par la première armée du monde qui se décomposait sous ses yeux en quelques heures.

Dévastateur pour l’enfant qui naît en zone d’occupation rhénane en 1922 à Mayence où on père, officier français, avait ses services et la maison familiale.

Dévastateur encore, le délitement des élites qui se divisaient et pour beaucoup se couchaient à Bordeaux puis à Vichy.

Dévastateur enfin à 17 ans de voir la République qui avait gagné une Guerre mondiale, surmonté l’affaire Dreyfus, apaisé les guerres scolaires, s’autodétruire.

C’était le monde de cette génération qui devenait le temps d’un été, un monde révolu. Le Monde d’Hier : perdant et perdu.

Tous les jeunes hommes et jeunes femmes de France ont été marqué ou parfois détruits à des titres divers par cette défaite des armes et des consciences.

Croyez en les souvenirs familiaux : il fut marqué au fer rouge.

Il n’a cessé d’en parler, de vouloir comprendre, refaire l’histoire. Près de son lit, il y avait autant de livres, si ce n’est plus, sur Churchill, Roosevelt, De Gaulle que sur les héros des découvertes nordiques – Robert Peary, ou Knud Rasmussen.

La seule et unique fois où je l’ai vu pleurer, c’est à l’annonce de la mort de De Gaulle.

## Refractaire

De cette dislocation du monde d’hier, il a conçu une méfiance radicale, quasi instinctive, pour les arguments d’autorité et les garde-à-vous hiérarchiques.

Ça commence par sa première décision d’homme. Celle prise à vingt ans : le refus du STO (le Service du travail obligatoire) imposé par les Allemands et Vichy en 1942.

Il devient réfractaire.

Réfractaire, c’est certainement le mot qui le définira le mieux :

Réfractaire à l’occupant et au nouvel ordre européen de 1942 en passant dans la clandestinité ;  
Réfractaire à son milieu d’origine conservateur ;  
Réfractaire à l’esprit de système ce qui ne lui facilita pas toujours la tâche dans les labyrinthes universitaires ;  
Réfractaire aux études classiques, la khâgne qu’il avait dû abandonner ;  
Réfractaire, enfin, à ses propres idées reçues.

Ceux qui le connaissent bien auront pu noter son évolution sur bien des sujets.

Jan Borm, qui lui succède comme Directeur à l’Institut de recherches arctiques sous l’autorité de l’Université de Versailles et de la principauté de Monaco, rappelait cette locution latine tranchante dont j’ignorais qu’il en avait fait la devise :

« *Etiam si Omnes, Ego Non* »

*Traduction* : « *Même si tous, pas moi !* »

Autrement dit : « Même si tous y vont, pas moi »

Pour ceux ou celles qui l’ont connu et qui ne savaient pas bien d’où procédait son caractère, disons, « entier » et paradoxal, parfois difficile, reconnaissons-le, vous avez la clef.

## Construire une vie hors de l’histoire demolie

Restait le plus compliqué : construire une vie qui mette le passif de l’Histoire de côté. À distance. Cette histoire éteinte de l’entre-deux-guerres qui le laissait en outre à la libération orphelin de père et de mère.

Son choix, ce n’est pas la philo, par les systèmes d’explication conceptuels du monde, ce sera une histoire au temps long.

Pas celle de Fernand Braudel, qu’il a bien connue et qui compte le temps par siècle. Mais l’histoire qui se décompte par millions et centaines de millions d’années : l’histoire géologique.

Sa spécialité, ce sont les éboulis, la roche travaillée par le gel et les glaces. En somme, le temps hors norme humaine qui fait de la roche une matière changeante, animée, vivante. Celle qui fait des silex durs avec de l’argile mou sous les chaleurs extrêmes.

Celle qu’on voit dans ses pastels réalisés à Dieppe à partir de ses souvenirs et exposés à l’Unesco depuis un mois :

Une nature comme une mâchoire où un ciel boréal agité de couleurs violentes surplombe et semble ensemercer une terre minérale, poudreuse, inerte.

Une terre encore sans homme. Ou de nouveau sans homme.

Cette réinitialisation de lui-même que mon père a entreprise à Thulé ressemble beaucoup à l’expérience dont parle Marguerite Yourcenar dans un texte que j’ai découvert il y a quelques semaines. Comme j’ai découvert l’admiration de mon père pour Marguerite Yourcenar.



C’est en 1942 que l’auteur des « *Mémoires* d’Hadrien » découvre pour la première fois ce choc des éléments bruts en abordant « l’île des Monts-Déserts » dans le Nord des États-Unis. L’île où elle décida d’attendre la mort en 1987.

Une conversion panthéiste ou écologiste, comme on veut.

« *Ici, écrit-elle ; j’ai trouvé le silence naturel, et parfois les cris des oiseaux nocturnes, le bruit de sirène d’un caboteur qui aborde dans le brouillard. Voilà qui marque le moment où la géologie, pour moi, a pris le pas sur l’histoire* »

C’est cette même nature panthéiste que mon père convoque dans *De la pierre à l’âme*, son dernier livre. Et qui le situe, il me semble, dans l’univers de Philippe Descola, auteur de « Terre humaine », et aujourd’hui porte-étendard des relations entre « non-humains et humains » qui donnent leur densité à la perspective écologique.

Héros singuliers

Pour entrer dans ce temps long, très long, du minéral et de la matière, Il y a eu le plus connu : la fréquentation et la médiatisation des Inuits. Il aimait expliquer que ceux-ci l’avaient « dressé ».

Comprenez que ces chamans l’avaient émancipé de l’Hisoire défaite de son adolescence. Émancipé de son histoire familiale. En se faisant médiateur de ses compagnons de traîneau, il apprenait sa vocation de médiateur. D’éditeur des paroles sans écrit. De culture sans bibliothèque.

Ce dont je peux témoigner, c’est qu’il a servi avec passion chacun des peuples premiers ou des héros singuliers qui ont investi sa collection « Terre Humaine ».

À chaque nouveau manuscrit, chacun d’entre eux semblait s’installer à la maison. C’est avec eux qu’il nous a élevés, moi et ma sœur.

Il en parlait tant, des Bororos de Claude Lévi-Strauss, de l’instituteur paysan d’Anatolie, des terribles indiens Guayaki de Pierre Clastres, du Père Alexandre et de ses envoûteurs du Pays de Caux, des survivants villageois de Pascal Dibie, des Juifs polonais de *La Flamme du Shabbath*, de Josef Erlich, ou encore des SDF naufragés de Patrick Declerck.

Il en parlait tant et tant qu’on avait presque déjà tout lu en l’écoutant.

La vie, à ses yeux, c’était toujours plus de vies à embrasser. Plus de vies singulières à questionner. Jamais des abstractions statistiques.

Chaque vie, chaque mythe, chaque secret d’humanité, arraché à l’oubli par un nouvel auteur renforçait encore un peu plus son appétit pour la vie.

C’est si vrai qu’il y a une semaine, quand je l’ai vu pour la dernière fois, un jour avant sa mort : il m’a dit ceci :

« *Donne-moi de la vie* ». *Et il répétait comme s’adressant à d’autres : « Donnez-moi de la vie ».*

Il était très fatigué mais lucide. Il ne souffrait pas. Il n’était pas malade. Il savait parfaitement ce qu’il disait.

Je ne sais pas si en « demandant de la vie », il en appelait d’abord à une transfusion de forces pour affronter les prochains jours. Et les dernière heures.

Ou si c’était pour affronter l’Après avec un A majuscule. Soit les temps obscurs des longs lendemains.

En étant présents, ce matin, si nombreux ici aux Invalides, à côté de lui, je suis sûr que vous répondez à votre tour à cette supplique de rechange vitale pour le Grand Après.

Alors, en son nom, et à ses côtés, je vous en remercie tous et toutes.

# ATAK, MY FATHER.

## GUILLAUME MALAURIE

His story is centenary.

But it takes its origin in two short summer months when he was 17.

The summer when he was 17 is the summer of 1940.

It was during those few weeks in June and July 1940 that French society which had shaped his generation went up in smoke.

Starting with the world’s foremost army which he saw disintegrate in a few hours.

The impact was devastating for a child born in 1922 at Mainz, in the Rhineland, then occupied by France, where his father, a French officer, was doing service and where the family was living.

Devastating impact also of the French élite infighting and falling apart, accepting submission totally in the eyes of some at Bordeaux and later Vichy.

Devastating impact, finally, for a 17-year-old to see the Republic, which had been victorious during World War I and managed to overcome the Dreyfus affair as well as appeasing clashes in schools, to destroy itself. It was the world of a generation which had become over one summer a world gone by. The world of yesterday: losing and being lost.

All young French women and men were deeply impressed and sometimes flabbergasted in different ways by this defeat of the armed forces and consciousness.

Believe in family memories: they were branded with a hot iron.

He never stopped talking about this, trying to understand and to remake history. Next to his bed, he had just as many, if not more, books about Churchill, Roosevelt, De Gaulle than he did about the heroes of Arctic exploration such as Robert Peary or Knud Rasmussen.

The only time I saw him cry was when De Gaulle’s death was announced.

### Recalcitrant

The disintegration of yesterday’s s world left him radically in doubt, almost instinctively, as far as arguments based on authority and hierarchical intimidations are concerned.

Starting with his first decision as a grown-up man, taken at the age of 20: his refusal to take up the compulsory work service (STO – Service du travail obligatoire) imposed by the Germans and Vichy in 1942. He chose to be recalcitrant. Recalcitrant is no doubt the best word to define him:

Recalcitrant to occupation and the new European order of 1942 by going underground;  
Recalcitrant to his own conservative family origins;  
Recalcitrant to classical education, crammer schools to prepare entrance exams which he had to give up;  
Recalcitrant about his own preconceived ideas.

Those who knew him well can witness his own evolution on many topics.

Jan Borm who succeeds him as Director of the Institute of Arctic Research under the banner of the University of Versailles and the Principality of Monaco tells us that my father had adopted the peremp-tory Latin saying “*etiam si omnes, ego non*” – “*even if all others do, I never will.*”

To those who knew him and who did not understand where he got his character from which was “of its own kind” and paradoxical, sometimes difficult to stand let’s face it, you have the key there.

### Construct one’s life outside demolished history

The most difficult thing remained to be done: to lead a life that puts aside the shortcomings of history. At distance. This extinguished history between the two wars which incidentally left him orphan at the moment of liberation, having lost both his father and mother.

He did not choose philosophy, those systems of accounting for the world in conceptual terms, but history seen in the long run.

Not history according to Fernand Braudel, whom he knew very well, and which is counted in centuries, but history counted in millions and hundreds of millions of years: geological history.

His specialty was fallen rock, stones worked by freezing and ice. Time beyond human norms, as it were, which turns rocks into changing, animated matter that comes to life.

The one that produces hard silex out of soft clay in extreme heat.

The one you can see in the pastels he did in Dieppe based on his memory and exhibited at UNESCO last month. Nature like a jaw or a Northern sky lit up by harsh colours which hovers over and appears to sew mineral, dusty and inert earth.

An earth without humans for the time being. Or without humans once more.

This way of reinitiating his own itinerary that my father undertook by going to Thule rather resembles the experience Marguerite Yourcenar relates in a text I discovered some weeks ago, as I did the esteem my father had for her.

The year is 1942. The author of *Memoirs of Hadrian* first discovered the shock of raw materials on Mountain Desert Island in Maine, the island she decided to wait for her death on in 1987.

A pantheist or ecologist conversion, as you prefer.

“*Here,*” she writes, “*I found natural silence and sometimes the cry of nightbirds, or the sound of a coaster’s horn ap-proaching in the fog. This is the moment when geology took precedence over history for me.*”

This is the pantheist nature that my father also talks about in his last book, , which places him, I believe, wit-hin the universe of Philippe Descola, an author he published in his “Terre Humaine” book series, holding up



the banner of “analogism” between “the human and non-human” which renders the ecologist perspective so meaningful.

Singular heroes

To seize the long-term, very long-term perspective of minerals and matter, this is what he is best known for: meeting the Inuit and mediatizing them. He was fond of saying that they had “taught” him, meaning that the shamans had allowed him to emancipate from the wrecked history of his adolescence. By becoming the mediator of his dog-sledge riding companions, he put into practice his vocation as a mediator, as an editor of oral literature, of a culture without libraries.

I can witness that he served passionately all those first nations or singular heroes who took part in his book series Terre Humaine.

With each new manuscript, they seemed to move into our home. He brought us up, me and my sister, by talking about them.

He spoke so much about the Bororos of Claude Lévi-Strauss, a peasant primary school teacher from Anatolia, those terrible Guayaki of Pierre Clastres, of Father Alexandre and his sorcerers from the Pays de Caux in Normandy, of the village survivors of Pascal Dibie in Burgundy, Jewish Poles in Joseph Ehrlich’s book about Sabbath or those homeless wrecks in Patrick Declerck’s account.

He spoke about them time and again, so much so that one had almost read them while listening to him. Life was about taking in forever more lives, according to him. More singular lives to question. Never about abstract statistics.

Each and every life, myth, secret of humanity saved from oblivion by a new author invigorated his thirst for life even further.

Up to the point that he told me a week ago, when I saw him for the last time before his death: *“Give me some life.” And he repeated himself as though he were talking to others: “Give me some life.”* He was very tired but lucid. He was not suffering. He was not ill. He knew exactly what he was saying. I do not know if “give me some life” meant calling for the transfusion of strength to face the next few days or last hours. Or if this was about mustering strength for what comes Ever After, spelt with capital letters, the dark times of long tomorrows.

By being present here so numerously at the Invalides, next to him, I am certain that you will also reply to this vital call for renewal in view of the Great Ever After.

May I therefore thank you, all of you, in his name and standing by his side.

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# LETTRE À MONSIEUR GUILLAUME MALAURIE ET LA FAMILLE DE MONSIEUR JEAN MALAURIE

8 FÉVRIER 2024

AUDREY AZOULAY, DIRECTRICE GÉNÉRALE DE L’UNESCO

Cher Monsieur,

J’ai appris avec une très grande peine la disparition de votre père le Professeur Jean Malaurie, un immense chercheur et explorateur, à la fois géomorphologue et anthropologue, ou « ethno-historien » comme il aimait se définir lui-même, qui a su mettre la science au service de la défense des peuples autochtones du Grand Nord.

Au nom de l’UNESCO, je tiens à vous présenter mes plus sincères condoléances dans ce moment douloureux, ainsi qu’à rendre hommage à celui que notre Organisation avait l’honneur de compter parmi ses Ambassadeurs de bonne volonté.

En janvier dernier, à l’occasion du 101<sup>e</sup> anniversaire de Jean Malaurie et de la parution de ses *Mémoires*, l’UNESCO a été honorée d’accueillir, à son Siège, l’exposition « Crépuscules arctiques » qui réunissait une sélection de ses pastels, un aspect méconnu de son œuvre, fruit de ses nombreuses expositions polaires, rappelant au public à quel point l’environnement arctique était aussi précieux que précaire.

L’inauguration de cette exposition fut un moment de célébrations, mais aussi de réflexion, en présence d’une centaine de diplomates, de collègues chercheurs de Jean Malaurie, d’étudiants de l’Institut de recherches Jean Malaurie – Monaco – UVSQ, de vous-même et de vos enfants.

Il nous revient désormais de poursuivre les engagements menés sans relâche par Jean Malaurie pour la sauvegarde de l’environnement, des cultures et savoirs des peuples polaires – dont il disait que l’humanité devait les écouter pour connaître « un deuxième souffle ». En faisant avancer nos causes communes, en continuant à veiller sur « les Derniers rois de Thulé » et notre « Terre humaine », c’est aussi son héritage que nous continuerons de faire vivre.

En vous renouvelant nos condoléances les plus sincères, je vous prie d’agréer, cher Monsieur, l’assurance de ma considération distinguée.



SALUT, JEAN MALAURIE !

ARTICLE PARU DANS *LE CANARD ENCHAÎNÉ*  
LE 14 FÉVRIER 2024

JEAN-LUC PORQUET

Comme il habitait à deux pas du « Canard », il nous arrivait parfois de le croiser. Cet immense gaillard qu’on imaginait toujours vêtu de peaux de renne nous saluait alors d’un grand geste théâtral : « *Bonjour Messieurs !* » L’ethnologue Jean Malaurie vient de mourir à l’âge de 101 ans. Nous avons longuement salué son chef d’oeuvre, *Hummoks* (*Le Canard enchaîné* du 6/10/99). A sa demande, l’ami Pancho lui avait confié le dessin qui illustrait l’article. Il l’avait affiché chez lui en bonne place.

« Je t’attendais, lui avait dit le chaman Utaaq, lorsqu’il débarqua à Thulé en 1951 pour une mission scientifique au Groenland. *Je ne dors plus ; un malheur va frapper les Inuits, nous allons être envahis par les Blancs (...)* Nous attendions un défenseur et je le sentais intérieurement, ce sera toi. » (*Oser, résister*, CNRS Éditions, 290 pages). Cette « *prescience sauvage* » du chaman bouleversa le jeune Malaurie. Il lui resta fidèle sa vie durant.

Un mois plus tard, il découvre dans la plaine de Thulé une base nucléaire américaine ultra-secrète, avec une longue piste d’envol pour des avions porteurs de bombes nucléaires vers la Chine. Malaurie dénonça cette monstruosité dans *Les Derniers Rois de Thulé*, premier des 110 ouvrages qu’il publia dans « Terre Humaine ». Cette collection, qu’il créa « *contre les académies, contre les universités* », reste un des sommets et un des honneurs de l’édition française. Lévi-Strauss, Ragon, Galeano, Hélias, Agee, Clastres, Ramuz, Roupnel, et tant d’autres... il y donna la parole à tous ceux qui savaient se mettre à l’écoute des écorchés, des méconnus, des oubliés. « *Je n’ai jamais cédé sur le plan du respect du plus faible.* »

Son obsession : les peuples premiers. Ces « *peuples racines, comme disent élégamment nos amis russes* », l’Occident les voit comme de simples minorités « *pittoresques* », alors qu’ils sont « *appelés à jouer un rôle capital* » : « *ils sont peut-être le deuxième souffle de l’humanité qui ne cesse de se construire* ». Les protéger et méditer leur enseignement est vital : « *Sinon, nous deviendrons, dans les mégapoles qui s’agrandissent toujours davantage, un peuple de fourmis, manipulé par le verbe et l’image.* »

Jean Malaurie prenait très au sérieux l’animisme panthéiste, « *expression d’une très fine lecture de l’environnement* ». Il croyait à la fois à l’esprit des Lumières et à l’indicible. Il ne désespérait jamais : « *Il faut le dire* urbi et orbi : *il y a un espoir pour cet univers qui a en lui des forces puissantes de rééquilibrer.* »

Il se méfiait des intellectuels et des maîtres à penser : « *Lire et écrire, c’est bien, mais quand on découvre que l’écriture est au service d’une philosophie de destruction de la nature, il vaut mieux réfléchir à deux fois.* » Il disait : « *Toute ma vie, j’ai cherché à faire comprendre que la pensée sauvage des Inuits est complexe, tout comme celle du peuple, illettré mais réfléchi.* »

Une de ses devises préférées : « *Même si tous, moi non.* »

FAREWELL, JEAN MALAURIE!

ARTICLE PUBLISHED IN LE CANARD ENCHAÎNÉ  
ON 14 FEBRUARY 2024

JEAN-LUC PORQUET

As he was living close to the “Canard”, we sometimes happened to run into each other. This colossal figure that one always imagined dressed up in reindeer skins who would greet us with a sweeping theatrical gesture: “*Good afternoon, gentlemen!*” The ethnographer Jean Malaurie has just died at the age of 101. We had praised his masterpiece *Hummocks* in a longer paper (*Le Canard enchaîné*, 6.10.99). He had asked our friend Pancho to do a drawing as an illustration for the article. It was to receive a prominent place in his flat.

“*I was expecting you,*” the shaman Utaaq told him when he arrived in Thule in 1950 for his solitary scientific expedition to Greenland. “*I cannot sleep anymore. Some evil will befall the Inuit, we will be invaded by the White Man (...).* We were waiting for a defender and I could feel it inside that you are the one.” (*Oser, resister*, CNRS Editions). This “indigenous premonition” of the shaman struck Jean Malaurie deeply. He was to remain faithful to it throughout his life.

A month later, he discovered the American ultrasecret nuclear US air base in Thule with its long runway for jets capable of carrying nuclear bombs towards China. Malaurie spoke out against this monstrosity in *The Last Kings of Thule*, the first of the 110 books he published in “Terre Humaine”, the book series he founded “against academies and universities”. It remains one of the highlights and great honours of French publishing. Lévi-Strauss, Ragon, Galeano, Hélias, Agee, Clastres, Ramuz, Rupnel and many more... he handed the floor to those who knew how to listen to the flayed, those who have been forgotten or who are unknown. “*I never gave up an inch on my respect for the weakest.*”

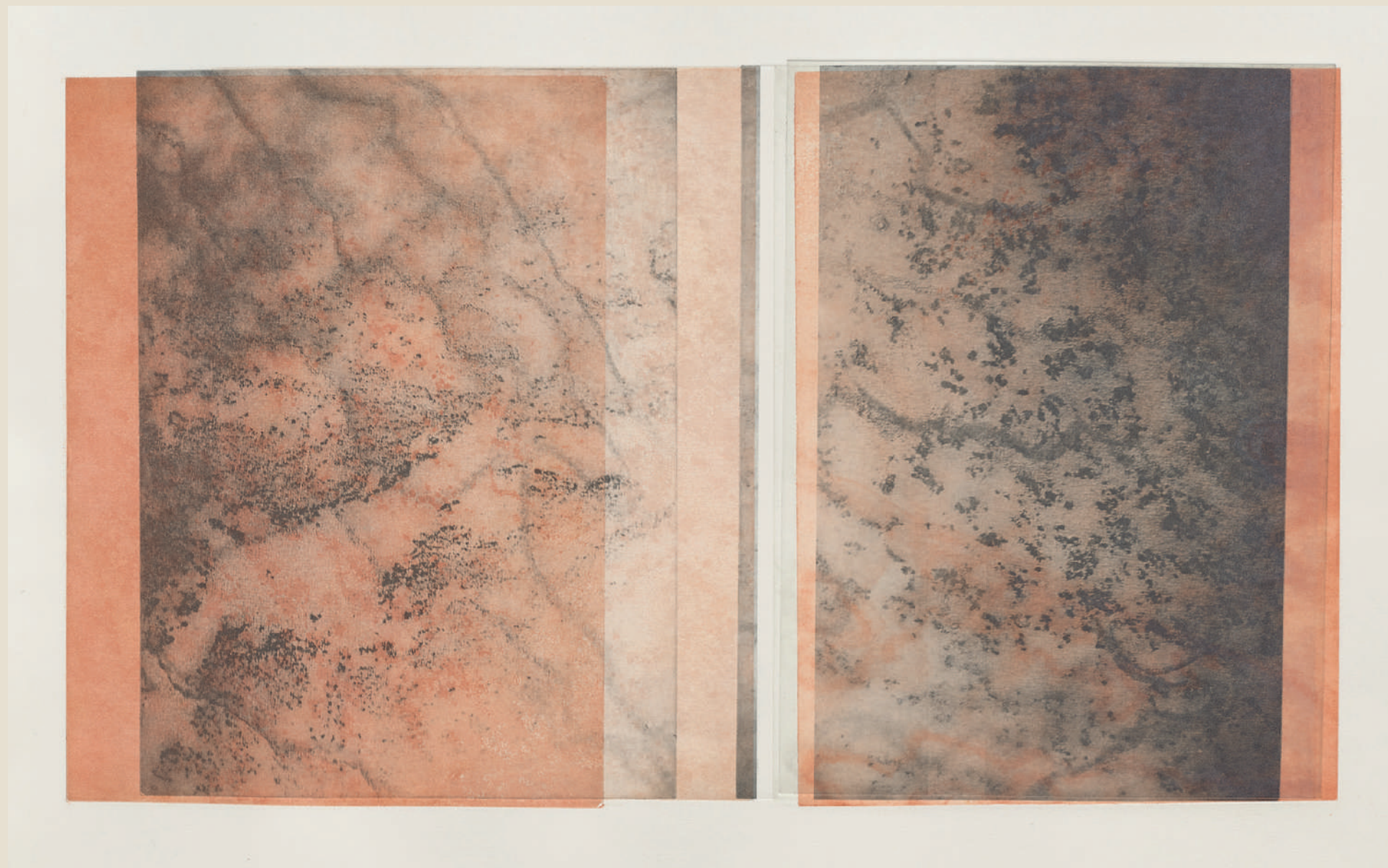
His obsession: First Nations. These “*root nations, as our Russian friends call them elegantly,*” are seen by the West as mere “picturesque” minorities although they are “*destined to play a capital role*”: “*they will perhaps represent a second breathing of humanity which keeps on reconstituting itself.*” To protect them and to meditate on their teachings is vital: “*Otherwise, all of us in those megacities that keep on growing will become a people of ants, manipulated by words and images.*”

He believed both in the spirit of the Enlightenment and what cannot be told, never falling into despair: “*it must be told* urbi et orbi: *there is hope for the universe which contains powerful forces to redress things*”.

He was wary about intellectuals and masterminds: “*To read and write is all well, but when you discover that writing may be used to serve a philosophy intending to destroy nature, it’s time to think twice.*” He used to say: “*Throughout my life, I have tried to make people understand that the savage mind of the Inuit is complex, just like people are who may be illiterate but thoughtful at the same time.*”

One of his favorite mottos: “*Even if all others do, I will not.*”

## ENTRETIENS / *INTERVIEWS*



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*SALMON, BELUGA, AND THE COOK INLET:  
NANCY LORD DISCUSSES A LIFE  
OF WRITING ABOUT ALASKA*

*INTERVIEW WITH NANCY LORD*

NANCY LORD

*A former Alaska State Writer Laureate (2008-2010), is the author of three short story collections, five books of literary nonfiction including Beluga Days: Tracking a White Whale's Truths (2004) and Early Warming: Crisis and Response in the Climate-changed North (2011), as well as the novel pH (2017). She also edited the anthology Made of Salmon (2016). Her work, which focuses mainly on environmental and marine issues, has appeared widely in journals and anthologies and has been honored with fellowships and awards. She taught in the University of Alaska system for many years and currently teaches science writing for Johns Hopkins University. She lives in Homer, Alaska. Her website is [www.writernancylord.com](http://www.writernancylord.com).*

BENJAMIN FERGUSON

Professeur adjoint d'anglais invité au Wofford College à Spartanburg, en Caroline du Sud, membre de l'IRAM

*Visiting Assistant Professor of English at Wofford College in Spartanburg, South Carolina, and member of MIARC*

**BF:** I am writing to you now while you are in Corris, Wales, thinking about your ancestry, your sense of place, and, you mentioned, your ideas about the wild. On a few occasions you have written about your family from New Hampshire ("Two Lakes") and your move to Alaska, particularly after a college trip to the Brooks Range ("In the Giant's Hand"). In a way, it seems self-explanatory that you felt called by a "wilder" life than what you had experienced in New England, like so many others who come to Alaska, but, looking back, do you think you could articulate what it is that gave you such a clear sense of place? Would your answer be any different than the stifling feeling of your youth described in "Two Lakes"? Similarly, though the Interior of Alaska is as wild as the coast, what was it that drew you to Homer, as opposed to a town like Fairbanks? Was it purely aesthetics and a sense that fishing was a

feasible vocation ("Putting up Boat"), or was there something else?

**NL:** Thanks for mentioning some of what I've written and for your questions. Can I articulate what gave me such a clear sense of place? I don't know that I can. Place is something I continue to explore in my thinking and writing; it's what I so strongly respond to in my life. Yes, I'm in Wales this month. My grandmother's people came from here, and when I first visited four years ago (just before the pandemic) I was interested not in "finding my roots" but in simply seeing how I might respond to the landscape. I tried to write something then ("On the Dark Forest Road," on my website) to think about that. I want to believe that we have some kind of genetic connection to place, although there's not yet much scientific support for that. Still, Wales feels very comfortable

to me, despite its domesticity being radically different from Alaska. It rains a lot. It's green--although the greens are mostly plantation trees and sheep pastures. The homes are built of local rock and slate. I see a lot of men who remind me of my father.

But that's not answering your question about my attraction to Alaska. As a child, I was drawn to adventure and pioneer stories, and I wanted to strike out for territory less confining and conventional than New England. After my first exposure to Alaska, on a college trip to the Brooks Range, I vowed to return to live. My college boyfriend (now my long-time partner) and I chose Homer off a road map. It was the dot at the end of a road as far as we could drive to the north and west before we'd come to a stop at the ocean's edge. On my own, I might have chosen somewhere farther north (like Fairbanks, where I'd been drawn to the university library's tremendous collection of books about the North), but Ken wanted to fish commercially. (We did fish salmon together for more than 20 years.) It turned out that Homer was the right place for us. Who's to say that there couldn't have been another "right place?" When you're 21 and wanting to establish a life, everything and everywhere is formative, and so it was for us and the place we landed and chose to stay. (Ken is now our mayor.)

**BF:** I find it interesting how you approach a sense of place. I'm sure when you were 21 a sense of adventure and awe made it easy to get wrapped up in Alaska, but what has often drawn me to your literature is the next layer beyond that awe. You consistently integrate yourself into the community, both the geography and the people. I was recently teaching Robin Wall Kimmerer's Braiding Sweetgrass, and her emphasis on "becoming native to your place" stuck out to me. For her, as a botanist, learning the names of the plants and animals, learning how they react, learning her way around an area, and listening to how people talk and what they talk about are of the utmost importance to understanding a place. Barry Lopez said similar things about learning from the unsung genius of local people in their own places. This is what I have always seen in your writing, from your tireless work trying to understand Dena'ina perspectives in Beluga Days (along with the perspectives of so many other communities), to your grounding with the local geography in Fishcamp, to the sense of community you created over a shared appreciation of fish with your introduction and editing of Made of Salmon. The same thing comes to

mind when reading "On the Dark Forest Road." You are trying to make sense of the land itself and, in a way, communicate with it. You are listening to the local people and how they view their own relationships with the land. In fact, your discussion of the "Conservation" v. "Rewilding" debate in Wales somewhat reminds me of the starting point for your interest in why the beluga were disappearing from the Cook Inlet. And, in these approaches, a common theme is that you always seem to be very aware of, and respectful toward, multiple perspectives, be they fishermen, Alaska Natives, environmental lawyers, etc. This cannot be easy in situations that are so fraught with social and political conflict. It seems like the easier route would be to pick a side and run with it, but you tend to avoid that temptation, choosing nuance. My question then is: how aware are you of openly approaching different communities in ways that are respectful to each of their perspectives while simultaneously accomplishing this grounding in place that you so consistently accomplish? And, is that a constant struggle, or is it something that comes naturally to you as a writer?

**NL:** To your question of how open I am to different communities etc. I know that when I was younger I was much more opinionated and less tolerant of other perspectives. We needed to save the whales, fossil fuels were destroying the world, lands should be protected as wilderness. I think my attitude just naturally changed as I matured and learned more about the world and the experiences of others. I still want to protect whales and wild places and to address climate change by transitioning quickly to renewable energies, but I understand that other people have other interests and needs and that nothing about choices and change is simple. Setting up oppositional camps is not very helpful in reaching solutions. (Note American politics at the moment.)

I'm glad you mentioned Kimmerer and Lopez. Both have been highly influential for my thinking and writing. In fact, I quoted both in a short talk I gave a couple of weeks ago, just before I left Alaska. I was on a panel with the poet Jane Hirshfield, about "ways of knowing." I spoke about Kimmerer's experience as a botanist, how she was nearly driven away from studying science because academics were so removed from having relationships with plants, and I said that something I heard Lopez say years ago has always been a particular touchstone: "You don't have to BE a people to learn from them."

I'm troubled these days by the strict application of "cultural appropriation" to too often mean that a writer (or any artist) can't speak about or build on anything outside of his or her own culture. It's always seemed obvious to me that to live in a place one has an obligation to learn about that place, especially from those who are native to it. When I first came to Alaska I immediately took classes in Alaska Native cultures and Alaska history, and I continue to be a student of both.

Now that I'm visiting Wales for the second time (which is quite different from actually living here) I'm trying to learn as much as I can about its history and natural history. I certainly can't (and wouldn't) speak as any kind of authority, but I can share my questions and thinking about what I encounter. I've become friends with the woman who runs the local post office. She's a bird and wildlife enthusiast and a student of history, and she can go on and on about it all. Just minutes ago in the town cafe, by a fire in the cozy back room, she did go on and on, about the doormice and polecats (similar to ferrets) in this area, how and why they disappeared, why they're returning. She said as we parted that she was glad to have someone to talk to (at?), as no one else is interested.

The topic of rewilding is in fact a major interest of mine. The return of species is certainly good for the ecosystem and its biodiversity, but I'm also sympathetic to the farmers who may be affected economically or in other ways. Polecats, for example, are famous for killing chickens, and my new friend told me of someone who lost several chickens before live-trapping the villainous polecat and removing it to another area.

**BF:** The postmaster in Wales seems like exactly the type of local genius that is just waiting to be tapped by a curious person. You seem to have a gift for unearthing this type of knowledge. For some writers, it's openly a matter of sitting in a bar and talking to people or seeking out experts in an expert setting. I know you have mentioned actively attending pertinent meetings, classes, etc., but do you have a method as a writer of keeping your proverbial antennae open to those with interesting stories to tell about their place? Also, with regard to learning from a people, how has living near Dena'ina culture and remaining receptive to it affected your life? I may be leading you a bit here, because you have mentioned an appreciation of "Native Time" in both "Beach Time" and Beluga Days, in which you liken the idea

to the Greek word *kairós*, but you may have other thoughts at the moment as well.

**NL:** Re: rewilding, just this evening I visited with a local couple I met hiking, both of whom work in conservation, and they reinforced what I'd already learned about controversies surrounding the rewilding effort. Its proponents in Wales backed off after a great deal of resistance. (After all, it was English people pushing it, and the history of English control and exploitation of the Welsh is long and painful.) The new language now is "restoration." One successful example is peat bogs. Previously drained and turned into farmland, now drains are being blocked so the land again stays wet, and banks built around the bogs also help hold the water. A proposal to reintroduce beavers, with their dams and ponds, has been blocked so far as maybe going too far.

I think you've asked two questions here. The first is about learning stories of a place from its people. Well, I'm curious about a lot of things and just ask people. Like the couple tonight. They invited me to their home to look at some maps and learn new trails, and then we just talked. I'm not the best person for soliciting information from people. I'm pretty reserved, not like some I know who talk to everyone and make instant friends wherever they go. But I know that people like to talk about their work or expertise (or themselves), so when I have questions I usually find that people are glad to talk with me. This is easier to do in person than over the phone, so it's good to find ways to meet in physical places. I'm not much of a bar person, so that's not usually a good venue for me. Although last time I was here in Wales I met a couple in the local pub who owned an old slate mine, and when they learned of my interest in slate and slate mining they offered to take me into the mine, which was an adventure I worked into an essay. (The mountains here are largely hollowed out of their slate, mined from the inside as opposed to quarries that cut away from the outside.) And then someone told me about one of the last slate miners and where he lived, and I went and knocked on his door and had a wonderful conversation with him in his kitchen. He was thrilled that someone was interested in the slate mining process. (I did have trouble understanding his strong Welsh accent.) So I guess I'd have to say that if I have a "method" it's just being curious and expressing genuine interest in learning not only what others know but about their lives.

Regarding your second question, about how learning from others has affected my own life--that's harder to answer. I have a lot of respect for indigenous knowledge generally and find resonance from it in my own life. There are certain beliefs among Alaska Native systems and in spiritual practices like Buddhism that just make sense to me. "Everything is alive" (in the broadest sense.) "Everything connects." "Take care of the earth and the earth will take care of you." When the traditional Dena'ina people of my area harvested plants, they followed the practice of taking just what they needed and leaving the rest. They also believed that a plant that was used would spread and grow stronger, but a plant not used would weaken and even disappear. I don't know that science supports that last part, but it's certainly good practice to leave some of what you take. Leave some berries on the bush, not just for the bush and the dispersal of seeds but for the birds and bears that need to share in them. I try to follow that practice.

**BF:** These last things you mentioned were discussed by Kimmerer about the Potawatomi in New York. I believe she and a student did some botanical experiments on the TEK belief that sweetgrass is strengthened through use, and the results surprised many in the scientific community by coming out positive. As you proved with the Cook Inlet, different knowledge systems can get in the way of each other. Do you see any similarities between the "rewilding" or "restoration" efforts in Wales and the research you did for Beluga Days? Or with any of your other works focused on conservation, such as pH or Made of Salmon.

**NL:** The striking difference between Alaska and Wales is that we still have so many functioning ecosystems with relatively healthy populations of their native species, and Wales has almost nothing left of what was native to it and has been transformed, over centuries, into a pastoral landscape of introduced species and very small pockets of anything you might consider "wild." My experience with beluga whales in Alaska showed me how quickly a population like that of Cook Inlet can be diminished to an endangered level, and how hard it is to recover a population once it's in a fall. As my state is increasingly populated by humans and exploited for its resources, the risk of losing what we have increases. Alaska is known for having "well-managed fisheries," but we're currently experiencing sharp declines in some salmon runs, particularly those of king salmon. It seems that the greatest threat to king salmon may

lie in ocean conditions--but that just points up that everything is globally connected. We need to solve (or at least mitigate) the Earth's heating problem or the disruptions and losses will be everywhere. We need everyone, everywhere, to share both traditional and scientific knowledge to fully understand our problems and seek solutions.

**BF:** If I might switch gears slightly, could you explain to our readers the concept for the book *Made of Salmon* and how you got involved with editing it? As a researcher in *travel writing*, I am interested in this idea of empowering voices along the way. John McPhee has stated a few times that if he could get away with it, he would just let his characters speak for themselves all the way through his works. *Made of Salmon* essentially does just that, allowing for numerous voices to express their relationships with salmon, which brings disparate communities together in Alaska's constant fight to protect fish runs.

Your introduction to this work is particularly powerful, and I'll just leave an excerpt here: "This is the way of Alaskans and salmon. We share with one another; the fisherman divides his one or many fish among others, who cook or smoke or can and feed others, the circles widening through our communities...Follow the circles out, and it's easy to see that Alaska itself, our home place, is to a great degree made of salmon."

**NL:** The *Made of Salmon* anthology was a surprising pleasure for me. There was a funded project (unfortunately short-term and ended some years ago now) called The Salmon Project. The idea behind the project was not outright advocacy but to try to change the culture in a way that would benefit salmon conservation. The desire was to find commonalities among "salmon love" that would help bridge the divides between users, who were generally in conflict over allocation issues. The program director called me one day and told me what they had in mind--and asked if I'd consider editing such a book. I assumed I was being asked to volunteer, as writers are always asked to volunteer for projects like that, but it turned out that they wanted to pay me! So I was hired to solicit essays from Alaska's top essayists. The essayists too would be paid! So I worked up a list, as diverse as I could make it, and contacted a dozen. Oh--this first round was for publication in an Alaska newspaper called The Alaska Dispatch (sadly also now gone). Later we pitched it as a book to the University of Alaska Press, asked more essayists,



and added the shorter, more anecdotal pieces from a variety of Alaskans. There was also a hired photographer. The whole project went very smoothly from my point of view. I hadn't really worked as an editor before, but I'd taught writing for years. We had minimal backs-and-forths for editing; the writers turned in polished pieces that needed little from me. I love that book and think it continues to serve salmon, writers, and especially readers--maybe even policy makers--well.

**BF:** I did not realize that the essays were originally slated for serial publication in *The Alaska Dispatch*. That seems like an interesting way to reach a targeted audience. It's funny how certain works find their way into the public conversation, and even reach policy makers. *Beluga Days* really seems to have had that effect. It has become a mainstay in bookshops across the state. Do you think *Made of Salmon* has done something similar? Its mixture of professional essays and amateur stories is fascinating, and the various writings mix so well with the photography you mentioned. I don't think I've ever read a book that more broadly encompasses various demographics of Alaska.

**NL:** I don't know that *Beluga Days* is anything like a mainstay. My royalty statements show almost no sales, but I know it makes its way in and out of used bookstores quite a bit. And I like to think that it's been useful for policymaking and played a small role in helping the conservation of the Cook Inlet belugas. (I'd also served on the volunteer panel that developed its ESA recovery plan, though the plan was never implemented for lack of money and political will.) I intended the book to be a sort of case study of marine mammal (mis)management, so that its lessons could be applied elsewhere--that it not be just a story specific to the whales of Cook Inlet.

Thanks for your kind words about *Made of Salmon*. I really have no idea how broadly it's been read and whether it's had any effect on what people think about salmon. The royalties from that book went to The Salmon Project and, after that dissolved, to another conservation organization--I don't remember which--so I have no idea if it sold many copies. As a university press book, at least it stays in print. I do really value the broad mix of "professional essays and amateur stories," as you put it, and I know that the authors of the latter felt honored and "heard" to be included, I think we succeeded in capturing a good range of how Alaskans relate to salmon and just how

culturally valuable that one fish is. If that translates into greater awareness and care, that's a success.

**BF:** Your early works are much different than your more recent works. A lot of your early writings were short stories and memoir-style writings. In fact, I have taught your short story "Survival" alongside *Into the Wild* and compared the two. Just about everything you have done since *Beluga Days*, with the exception of *Rock, Water, Wild*, has had a specific environmental issue in mind. Was this a conscious decision?

Also, pH was your latest work, and that was your first full-length novel. In that book, you use the pteropod and its dissolving shell as a symbol for climate change. What made you decide that it was time to write a novel, and that the pteropod should be its focus?

**NL:** My earliest Alaska writings, which I did to finish up college, were essays (mercifully lost to the world, although I'd be curious to see them now.) I recall that they were full of enthusiasm for Alaska and what I was learning about the place. I started writing short stories because I thought they were more "creative" and thus more significant as "art" than nonfiction was. And when I went for an MFA degree, the only two tracks were fiction and poetry--creative nonfiction had yet to be "invented" as a genre, although I was certainly reading plenty of it (Annie Dillard, John McPhee, Edward Hoagland, etc.) So yes, my first two books were short stories. I don't know if I told you that I recently prepared a "new and selected" short fiction collection gathering stories from my three early collections and adding newer ones. It was fun to reread the old stories and see how certain interests or themes made their way through time. I think it will be coming out from the University of Alaska Press. (It's in the review process now.) My story "Survival" will be in that book, and my friend Eric Heyne, who taught it along with *Into the Wild* at the University of Alaska Fairbanks, discusses it in an afterword. I'm pleased to know that you also taught them together.

*Beluga Days* had a particular origin, aside from my interest in the whales I observed at my fish-camp. I'd been nominated for a conservation-related fellowship and had to propose a project. I didn't get the fellowship, but since I'd already proposed the book I went ahead and wrote it.

The environment has always been a strong interest for me, so I was repeatedly drawn to related subjects. Early Warming was proposed by my agent; she thought I should write a climate book. I was cool to the idea until I figured out that maybe I could show how people in the north were responding and adapting--and that might provide some lessons for the rest of the world. That was the idea, anyway. That book got me an invitation to participate in an oceanographic cruise, and I decided to use that experience as the basis for the novel pH. I'd learned about ocean acidification and pteropods when I wrote *Early Warming* and I wanted to do more with them. It seems as though, like much in life, one thing led to the next.

pH was not the first novel I'd written, only the first (and only) one published. I wrote at least three previous ones that were not publishable, although one came close. I know that I'm not a natural novelist, and I'm unlikely to try again. I'm not particularly plot-oriented, and I like projects of a size that I can hold in my head and construct piece by piece. Novels are too loose and baggy for me (although I like to read them.)

**BF:** It's interesting to see how these opportunities and perspectives build upon one another over the years, and how certain themes continue to resonate.

As for your short story "Survival," did you first read *Into the Wild* and immediately see the connection? There is an uncanny similarity between the two stories, and it is interesting to analyze your story from a female point of view and Krakauer's work from the male point of view. I would imagine that this is also a kind of universal theme that bubbles up from time to time in Alaska, where young people struggling with their mental health feel some sort of relief in the sudden grandeur of nature they experience upon arrival, before ending up over their heads. John McPhee ends *Coming into the Country* with the slightly comedic take on this stereotype of people who come through the interior and try to make it, listing someone named "River Wind" whom he never sees again. Though, of course they don't all end up deceased.

**NL:** I was way ahead of Krakauer. Here's the paragraph I wrote in my introduction to my new and selected story collection:

Two especially dark stories that I've included come from real events that alarmed me--and alarm me still. The first, "Survival," is based on the true, tragic story of a young woman who headed into wilderness for spiritual reasons and never returned. After reading an account in our local newspaper, I briefly thought of writing something factual (akin to what would appear five years later as Jon Krakauer's "Into the Wild" magazine story, later developed into a book and movie), but I couldn't imagine myself imposing on the girl's family or otherwise investigating as a journalist. I instead tried to imagine the girl herself. I wrote a first version, published in a literary magazine, but I wasn't satisfied with it; I didn't know the girl's mind--or the mind of someone who might have been more than the careless romantic I could imagine. I rewrote the story from the point of view of another character--the older woman in "Survival," whose life and feelings I could better imagine and whose concerns and questions I could share.

By the way, Krakauer and I slightly overlapped at Hampshire College and we were both mentored by the same writing and climbing teacher, David Roberts. I consider Jon a friend although I haven't been in direct touch with him for a long time. He showed up at one of my readings in Seattle when he lived there, and he wrote a blurb for one of my books. I greatly admire *Into the Wild*, which most Alaskans dismiss as glorification of a clueless idiot.

**BF:** You seemed to hone in on the lived experience of women in Alaska on a few occasions during that period of your career. "Marks" is another example of this, where you focused on the story of multiple women being dropped off in the interior of the state and hunted down like wild game. Were these just coincidences of news stories you came across, or were you interested in some specific themes at the time?

**NL:** Missing and murdered women seem to be an interest of mine, still. "Marks" is based on the murderous career of an Anchorage man who killed perhaps two dozen women in the 1970s and early 80s before finally being caught. I wrote an entire novel based on his story, which I researched deeply--and I lived in that world for several years while imagining it. That manuscript made the rounds with an agent and had a lot of interest but was never taken. The tragedy of the situation was that the killing went on for so long, with nobody seeming to care about the disappearances of women who were transient, sex workers, or otherwise not valued. There have been

far too many books about serial killers and women as victims, so I'm just as glad that book was never published. I think that today it could seem exploitative or sensational or cliché, not something we need for addressing what's certainly an on-going tragedy.

But I've continued to write related short stories. I have in fact three unpublished stories related to missing women. One, again, is based on a news article in which DNA identified one of that killer's victims, who'd been buried as Jane Doe forty years ago. It upset me that nobody had ever even reported that young woman missing, and so I wrote what I imagined her story to be, how she came to be so lost. Then, a woman in my town went missing and was found, much later, to have been brutally murdered at the time of her disappearance, so I wrote a story from the POV of townspeople speculating on her disappearance, getting more and more conspiratorial and far-fetched as time went on; this is actually the opposite of what happened in my town, with its outpouring of love and support, but I wanted to write a sort of (political) parable about trauma and belief and the lengths that some people can go to believe what they want and to place blame. Then, the final story, also based on a news account, is about an older woman who simply walked away from her stuck car and was never seen again. Interestingly, she was driving on the old Stampede Road, the same one Chris McCandless (Krakauer's subject) took into the wild. In that story, I tried to imagine the confused mind of a woman with dementia. (I know nothing about the state of mind of the actual woman.) Two of those three stories will be in my new and selected volume. (Not the middle one, which was a bit experimental and could be misunderstood—but I would still like to publish it somewhere.)

**BF:** Missing and murdered women seem to be a theme elsewhere, such as the recent example of the Gilgo Beach murders that went unsolved for years, but that theme is particularly notable in Alaska and, even more notable in Alaska Native communities dealing with generations of trauma. Alice Qannik Glenn, of the podcast *Coffee and Quaq*, recently did a series spotlighting this issue as well. Having spent so much time thinking about the subject, have you come to any conclusions in your mind as to what might be at the heart of the problem in Alaska compared to other places? And have you attempted any sort of activist mindset in those three stories, or have you just let them speak for themselves? Your insight into sensationalism is also quite thought-provoking. You seem to be very aware of

what is appropriate to discuss as a writer and how to portray it. This is one of the things that really attracts me as a reader to your work. I can tell there is a kind of fire burning inside you with regard to so many issues, but you have always remained measured about the most appropriate and effective approach. Though you may not benefit from the commercial success that sensationalism can offer, I have seen how your approach has led you to good relations with so many disparate communities, and people.

**NL:** I think three things might distinguish Alaska from other places in this regard. First, it's a big state, and it's easy for people to disappear. Dangers abound, so people die in the outdoors all the time from natural causes and may not be found; murdered people are easy to hide. Second, we have a large transient population, and those people don't necessarily have family or friends looking out for them; we also have a large population of young males, who sometimes seek or find themselves in trouble, and another large population of "end-of-the-landers," people who've fled other places for legal or social issues and are sometimes desperate and dangerous. Third, we have a large population of Indigenous people, who sometimes have suffered personal or cultural trauma and are vulnerable; some of these people, especially from villages, tend to be too trusting of others, not on guard in dangerous situations. There was a short-lived television program last year called *Alaska Daily* (on ABC), built on the premise of a newspaper investigating missing Native women, and conceived and written largely by Alaskans. I was totally behind the concept and eagerly watched, but it never caught on sufficiently with the public, although I'm sure it did a service in educating at least some people.

Activist in this regard? Not in my writing, although I'm remembering just now that in *Survival*, there's a story called "A True Story." (That was my experiment with metafiction and not actually a true story, although it was based on some personal experience.) In that story, the narrator meets a vulnerable girl who asks for help—but the narrator fails to respond, and then fails again to respond later in life. This story makes me very uncomfortable (for multiple reasons including the racial angle) and I wouldn't want to see it reprinted—but perhaps it makes a sort of "statement" about why some people turn away from difficult situations.

I think that "measured" is probably a good word to describe my approach to subjects. I tend to see most

things as nuanced, in shades of gray, and I try to treat my subjects fairly. My writing has been called "quiet" and "too quiet." I'm OK with that. I'm sure that's all a product of who I am. I sometimes attribute my character to being originally from New England, where emotions weren't put on display.

**BF:** I would like to end on this note, because I find it so important. Your writings in *Fishcamp* really do for the Cook Inlet what Rick Bass's writings do for Yaak Valley, Montana, and they should be considered in Alaska alongside John Haines' *The Stars, The Snow, The Fire*. Furthermore, when you go into the Dena'ina community of Tyonek in *Beluga Days*, the questions the elders ask you in order to verify that you are a trustworthy enough person to move through their land respectfully are exactly the type of questions that you already expounded upon in *Fishcamp*. They want to know your relationship to the land. They want to know about your fishcamp. They want to know the history of those waters and who fished them before you; all pre-empted.

Your work naturally resonates with Alaska Native communities, it resonates with fishermen, and it resonates with the broader populace of Alaska. In the prologue to *Beluga Days*, you say, "I kill fish for a living. I'm not generally given to sentiment, don't gush over animals, have no desire to pat whales on their heads. But I did like beluga whales, and I did appreciate living in a time and place that sustained fish, whales, and fishermen—all of us together." This, to me, is a perfect example of you being "measured." The business of getting people to understand the plight of an animal, or a place, or an issue such as missing and murdered women, or even a people, is a messy business, and the nuance of getting communities to a common table (or a common book) is so important. *Beluga Days* is a perfect example of this. As is *Made of Salmon*.

I hope that your work will continue to grow in influence outside of Alaska as circumpolar conversations blossom in the coming years, and that budding writers inside and outside of the state will learn from you. Thanks so much for taking the time to correspond with me over the past few weeks. I would like to give you an opportunity here to say a few last words to close out the interview.

**NL:** I've truly enjoyed this interview and the time we've spent together over email. Honestly, I have never known anyone more familiar with my writing and

so thoughtful and admiring! I really appreciate that. And I've appreciated the opportunity to revisit some of my own work and think about its course over time and what it might mean in a context of larger themes, other writers, and changing times.

At this point in my life, I find that I'm less interested in writing new things than I am in helping other writers. Thus, I spend most of my days in teacher-mode, specifically working with science writing students to help them write well and convincingly about the big science and medical issues of our day. We need more science literacy, and that's something I can help with. Right now I'm working on developing (or refreshing) a course in communicating climate change, with emphasis less on the doom-and-gloom and apathy we're all too familiar with and more on solutions-based reporting and how we might work towards a future of adaptation, cooperation, and finding beauty in our troubled world. The heating of the planet and all the terrible results of that are the most important crises of our time and need us all to do what we can—as writers, teachers, activists, engineers, lawyers, or in whatever ways our skills and passions offer. The other writing I'm putting considerable time into is book reviewing—particularly reviewing books related to Alaska or the North. That's a niche for my interest and expertise, and it gives me pleasure to bring writers and readers together in that way. Naturally, I'm drawn to books related to the environment, so reviews can be a way for me to continue to share my thoughts about relationships with the natural world. My reviews of fiction and memoir tend to emphasize what learning about the lives of others can teach us about empathy and compassion, and my poetry reviews try to bring that underappreciated genre to more readers and hearts.

Since you mentioned John Haines, did I tell you that he was a friend and mentor? His poetry and essays were among the first I discovered to represent the North as I was experiencing it, and, while he could be gruff and opinionated, he was always kind to me and supportive of my work. I didn't see him often, but we stayed in touch by letter—he was a great correspondent with many other writers—and he offered blurbs for a couple of my books. It's a fierce day outside today, with whitecaps on the water and freezing slush whipping through the air...



# RESTER AUTONOME EN LAPONIE

## ENTRETIEN AVEC OLIVERA TORNAU

### PHILIPPE GRUCA

Philosophe, Directeur de la Rédaction d'*Inter-Nord* et membre de l'IRAM et l'IHPST  
*Philosopher, Director of the Editorial Board of Inter-Nord and member of MIARC and IHPST*

### OLIVERA TORNAU

Anthropologue, journaliste indépendante allemande réalisant régulièrement des reportages pour *ARTE Journal*  
*Anthropologist, German freelance journalist regularly contributing reports to ARTE Journal*

Olivera Tornau a récemment réalisé le magnifique reportage « Séniors, le bonheur à la finlandaise » pour l'émission *360° Reportage* (production : MedienKontor). Tourné dans le Grand Nord finlandais, ce reportage suit le quotidien de retraités samis tels que Niilo (84 ans) ou Laila (plus de 90 ans), aidés dans leurs tâches quotidiennes par des « auxiliaires de village », dont Janne Aikio – pionnier de ce modèle. Disponible sur le site internet d'ARTE à partir du 27 décembre 2024, il sera diffusé à la télévision le 3 janvier 2025 à 9h25.

**PG :** Comment l'idée de ce reportage vous est-elle venue ?

**OT :** Une amie artiste a organisé une action consistant à planter des milliers d'arbres en Finlande, ce qui m'a rapprochée de la culture sami. C'est à cette occasion que j'ai découvert les « auxiliaires de village » (*Dorfhelfer*, en allemand). Leur rôle m'a beaucoup touchée, notamment parce que, en tant que fille unique d'origine croate, j'ai été très tôt confrontée à cette problématique : comment prendre soin aujourd'hui de nos anciens tout en respectant leurs habitudes culturelles ? En Laponie comme dans les Balkans, il est fascinant d'observer quelles réponses locales sont apportées à cette problématique véritablement universelle.

**PG :** Quels ont été les plus grands défis lors du tournage ?  
**OT :** Les conditions météorologiques ont été le premier grand défi : en Laponie, il fait jusqu'à - 40 degrés en hiver,

et les tempêtes de neige imprévisibles peuvent rendre les déplacements périlleux. Mais au-delà des éléments naturels, le plus difficile a été de gagner la confiance des Samis. Leur sphère privée est sacrée, ils n'ouvrent pas facilement leur porte aux étrangers. Si j'ai pu avoir temporairement accès à leur monde, c'est grâce à la confiance qu'ils accordent à ces auxiliaires de village, qui ont donc plaidé ma cause pour venir avec une caméra.

**PG :** Dans le reportage, Janne Aikio, auxiliaire de village, utilise le terme « clients » au sujet des vieux Samis auxquels il vient en aide. Pourquoi ce terme ?

**OT :** Le mot « client » reflète la structure officielle du programme des auxiliaires de village. Bien que Janne soit financé par l'État, les personnes qu'il aide contribuent symboliquement (à hauteur de 5 euros de l'heure) à financer cette aide. Par ailleurs, ces personnes décident elles-mêmes des activités pour lesquelles elles reçoivent



Janne et Niilo à la chasse aux lagopèdes, près de la frontière norvégienne  
© Marco Berger / MedienKontor



Rennes de la région d'Enontekiö  
© Marco Berger / MedienKontor



l'assistance des auxiliaires de village. Ce modèle combine donc le soutien institutionnel avec une responsabilisation individuelle, créant un équilibre unique entre service public et entraide personnelle.

**PG :** Qu'avez-vous appris sur l'importance de la sphère privée chez les Samis ?

**OT :** La sphère privée est un pilier de la culture sami. Cela s'explique en partie par leur histoire : les politiques d'assimilation ont souvent ignoré leur identité culturelle, imposant des restrictions sur leur langue et leurs traditions. Ce besoin de protection se traduit par une grande discrétion et une certaine méfiance face à l'extérieur. Dans le reportage, les moments intimes, comme les souvenirs partagés par Pinar avec ses photos d'enfance, sont empreints de cette sensibilité.

**PG :** Comment les jeunes Samis perçoivent-ils leur culture aujourd'hui ?

**OT :** Comme dans toutes les sociétés modernes, le mode de vie a changé. Les plus jeunes sont attirés par les villes à la recherche d'un emploi, de sorte

qu'allumer un feu en plein air ne fait plus vraiment partie de leur quotidien... Cependant, les jeunes Samis sont de plus en plus nombreux à se tourner vers l'élevage de rennes. Il existe un regain d'intérêt pour ces savoir-faire, notamment grâce aux formations pour auxiliaires de village qui réintroduisent ces compétences dans un contexte contemporain. Toutefois, en tant qu'ethnologue s'inscrivant dans l'école de l'anthropologue sociale et culturelle, je reste prudente avec des termes comme « traditionnel » et « moderne », parce que les vieux Samis sont aussi modernes, eux aussi, avec leurs motoneiges !

**PG :** Quelles différences avez-vous observées entre Janne et Piipari, deux auxiliaires de village de générations différentes ?

**OT :** Janne est un vétéran de cette profession, il a dédié une grande partie de sa vie à ce travail. Lorsqu'il a commencé, il n'existait encore aucune formation pour faire ce métier, qu'il a donc dû inventer localement, avec son propre savoir-faire et sa créativité. Piipari, quant à lui, représente une nouvelle génération, plus sensibilisée aux enjeux modernes. Il apporte un regard différent et une



Janne (à gauche) et Niilo (à droite) en route pour aller chasser  
© Marco Berger / MedienKontor



Niilo, retraité de 85 ans  
© Marco Berger / MedienKontor



La retraitée et éleveuse de rennes Pinar (à gauche) avec l'auxiliaire de village Piipari en train de décrocher des peaux de rennes  
© Marco Berger / MedienKontor





Piipari nourrissant les rennes  
© Marco Berger / MedienKontor



Janne est l'un des sept auxiliaires de village de Laponie  
© Marco Berger / MedienKontor



Maiju est la première femme auxiliaire de village en Laponie  
© Marco Berger / MedienKontor

volonté d'évolution, tout en respectant les pratiques du passé.

**PG :** La venue de femmes dans ce métier, comme Maiju, change-t-elle la dynamique de ce programme ?

**OT :** Absolument. Maiju apporte une sensibilité unique et des compétences médicales acquises dans son travail précédent. En tant que femme, elle bouscule les codes d'un domaine désormais historiquement masculin. Sa capacité à naviguer entre différentes cultures, notamment grâce à l'apprentissage de la langue sami, contribue aussi grandement à l'accueil positif des habitants.

**PG :** Quel rôle jouent les activités telles que la chasse aux lagopèdes (perdrix des neiges) pour les personnes aidées ?

**OT :** La poursuite de ces pratiques est vitale dans le maintien de leur identité culturelle et de leur bien-être mental. Pour Niilo, par exemple, poser des pièges à lagopèdes n'est pas seulement une activité pratique : c'est une passerelle vivante vers son enfance et sa culture. Mais cette passerelle n'est pas à sens unique, puisque grâce à Niilo – l'un des rares anciens à maîtriser encore l'art de poser des pièges à lagopèdes –, ces savoirs-faires sont transmis aux

auxiliaires de villages, qui se trouvent ainsi être les nouveaux garants de leur pérennité.

**PG :** Quels enseignements le modèle des auxiliaires de village offre-t-il à d'autres régions ?

**OT :** Ce modèle montre qu'il est possible de préserver les connaissances culturelles tout en résolvant les problèmes complexes d'une société vieillissante. Y compris dans un pays comme la Croatie, par exemple, où les traditions agricoles comme la culture des olives ou la pêche se perdent, j'ai le sentiment que ce type de programme pourrait revitaliser les liens communautaires tout en créant des emplois.

**PG :** L'autonomie est très valorisée dans ce reportage. Pourquoi est-ce si important ?

**OT :** L'autonomie permet aux personnes âgées de conserver un rôle dans la communauté et un sentiment d'utilité sociale. Pour beaucoup, comme Laila, continuer à vivre chez soi dans un environnement familial est essentiel à leur bien-être. Les auxiliaires de village ne se contentent pas d'aider : ils encouragent leurs clients à sortir et à maintenir leurs routines autant que possible. Leur but n'est pas de faire à leur place et à les rendre passifs



mais, au contraire, de les aider à rester le plus longtemps actifs !

**PG :** Qu'avez-vous retenu personnellement de cette expérience ?

**OT :** Ce reportage m'a rappelé l'importance de la solidarité et des liens humains, surtout dans un monde de plus en plus individualiste. J'ai été touchée par la façon dont ces auxiliaires de village transcendent leurs fonctions professionnelles pour créer de véritables relations avec leurs clients. Cela m'a également permis de mieux comprendre et apprécier la richesse de la culture sami.

**PG :** Que souhaitez-vous que les spectateurs retiennent de votre film ?

**OT :** D'une certaine manière, ce film est un plaidoyer pour la création de liens, qu'ils soient intergénérationnels ou interculturels. Je souhaitais donner à voir la beauté, faire sentir la fragilité d'une culture minoritaire – celle des Samis. Peut-être un tel documentaire peut-il donner une impulsion pour une réflexion collective sur l'importance de l'entraide et des modèles communautaires dans nos sociétés modernes.

*Traduit de l'allemand par Philippe Gruca*



Niilo au Laavu  
© Marco Berger / MedienKontor



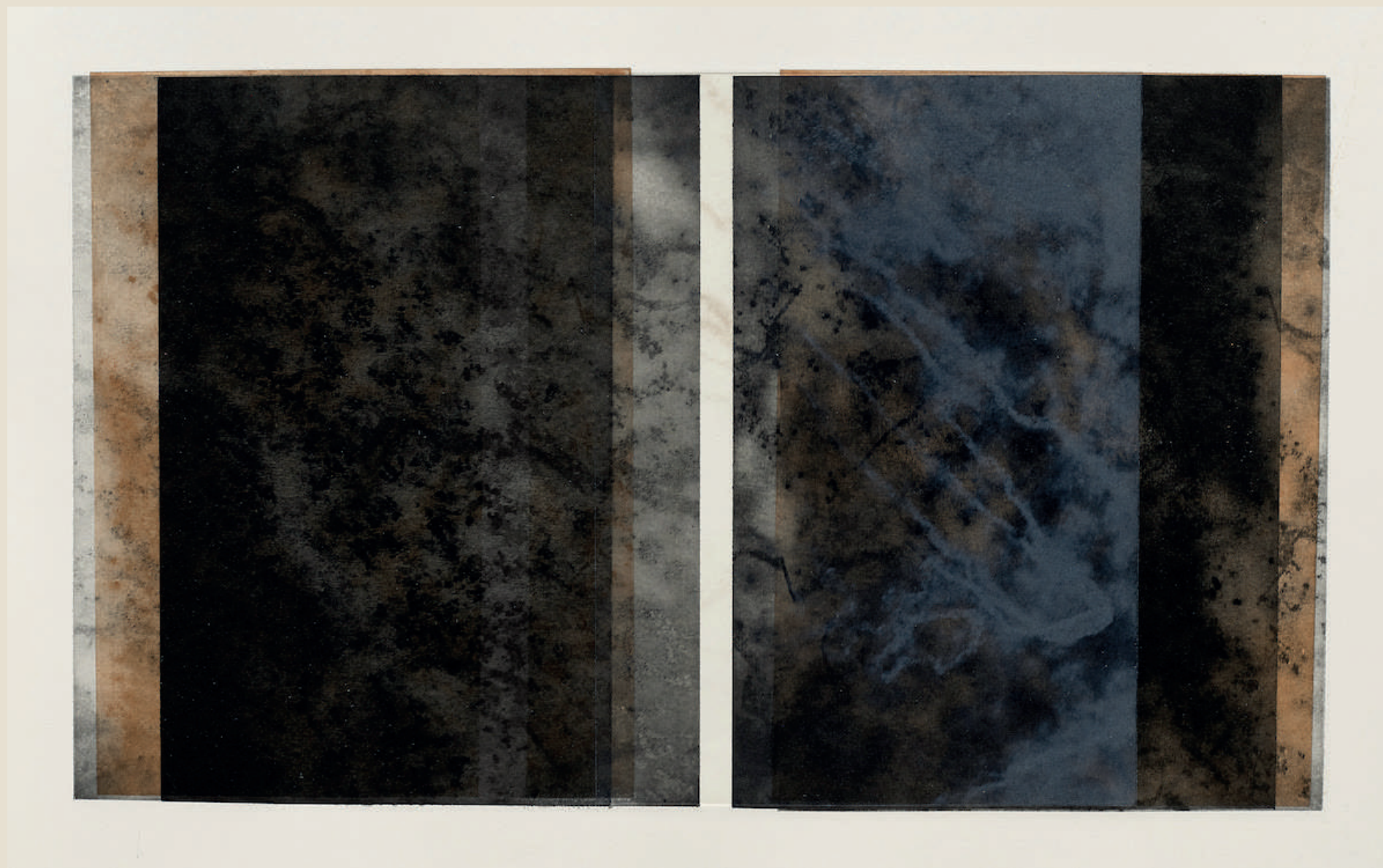
Un lagopède tombé dans un piège  
© Marco Berger / MedienKontor



Janne (à gauche) et Niilo (à droite) en train de réparer des pièges  
© Marco Berger / MedienKontor



# ÉCRITS CRÉATIFS / *CREATIVE WRITINGS*



© Þóra Sigurðardóttir

# MY EARDRUM ITCHES

## ON ÞÓRA SIGURDARDÓTTIR'S WORK IN ASÍ ART GALLERY & MUSEUM 2009

### SIGURBJÖRG ÞRASTARDÓTTIR

Poétesse et écrivaine islandaise

*Icelandic poet and writer*

Fear of the material fascinates me. We're all material. My task is to notice how material develops and is transformed, to read the material. The beauty is hidden in the process, in what gets the story started.

She shrugs. An incitement, a relief, to not be afraid of the material.

A line is a remarkable thing, it marks off an area, it's a border, it's never straight, it follows the ground that it's marked out on, it tells the story of the land, the sod, the wall, the surface.

Writing is close kin to drawing, no less in these times when everyone has stopped writing longhand. Are the lines in letters and drawing an elongation of our lifelines, our veins, our sinews? If so we may well be able to read veins.

The skin. Who am I, where do I come from – My skin tells where I've been, what has happened to me, but nowadays so many people need to smooth things over, stretch the plotline so taut that it conveys no message.

All the cosmetic surgeries, the walls of peeling paint, the worship of youth, the beauty aids, senior-citizen sex-lives, the absence of the dead, don't walk on the grass, the bathroom scales, don't touch, don't pick your nose. Fear of the material is fascinating.

There's much beauty when hair goes gray, when concrete cracks.

Writing: each letter connects to the next letter as each person connects to the next, that's how you get the whole context, maybe a meaning, maybe not, an inkling of a meaning –yet each of us is a body enclosed by skin, by material borders, outlines that are not gladly breached. Except in sex. Except in birth.

The forming of letters is the letters' symbiosis and out come conclusions, expression, tales. Sometimes something new is born, something that has never before been thought, felt.

It's a powerful experience to meet up with a house; you have to run up against it somewhere and don't necessarily get to decide where it will happen.

Houses are local and often reflect people's unbelievable sensitivity toward their environment. Look at Röðull, Sun Ridge, the old meeting house at Skarðsströnd that sheltered the people of a desolate fjord in a way that opened the door to beauty. Instead of hunkering down at the end of the world, the house opens its arms to the world without end.

Or should we really get rid of our old kitchen cabinets, the knobs grasped by the people before us and the people before them, and the rock-candy scent of the cupboards? Every inhabitant must make up his own history; there must be no history exerting influence, shaping the ground.

That's how many people think. Fair enough.

This wall in Röðull, the seventy-year-old meeting house at Skarðsströnd, is so rough-surfaced that last summer when a certain meticulous woman wrote on it the drawing/handwriting was almost unintelligible. People said: Who wrote that, anyway? As if it had been some old man from the countryside. The man who'd built the place. As if the writing were coming through time.

It's an odd word, script, like scrimp – and doesn't writing demand physical expenditure? People bear down in different ways, twist themselves up, and you can see that in reading manuscripts from olden times.

A look at drawings and manuscripts from the Royal Library in Copenhagen, for example, clearly reveals when the person bore down, hesitated, whether he or she clenched up or drew/wrote freely. Almost like standing face to face and shaking the person's hand. A person who was around five hundred years ago.

Are there fewer stories in new construction; is it at all possible to read new buildings? Oh yes. The architect's thought, the thinking of the person who had the house built, show so many things, there's their feeling for the place, the influence of zeitgeist, are they strong, do they take over completely, you can answer those questions. You can sense feelings for the natural surroundings, directions, views. Everything is legible. And delectable.

To read materiality: it comes with practice. Children can do it beautifully, they sense and discern every aberration, every wavelength. Then – after going to school, the monitor screens, the calculations – most of us need to learn it all over again. How to read materiality.

It's a powerful experience to meet up with a house. The floor we stand on with all our heaviness is pulling for me. The body with all its weight and stature meets the floor with its texture and hardness, and the earth draws lines on the soles of our feet – lifelines, just as in the palms of our hands, a friendly and bold drawing. The cleft of our asses is a line.

Sure it is. There is a geography within us and on our outsides. You can map land, you can map internal organs, you can map the skin. Where are the membranes, the atmospheres?

Drawing is a way of exploring the world; it's not a tool for making a beautiful picture.

Copper is a glowing *folio*, copper is remarkably resistant, you need to dig in, it's an insight/ inroad into the material. Like the difference between drawing on yourself with a felt pen and getting a tattoo: there's resistance, grooves are cut, there's an appreciable change in the material overlay.

It's also reading when you see a wire coming out of the wall, how it curves – as if someone had meant to form letters but not quite had the mastery.

Excuse me, I can't let her out of my sight, she might be trying to make a copperplate of herself, might slop concrete on her feet and run off barefoot and blindfolded and start drawing on the walls – We are in public! It's not civil disobedience because woman is born to research the material world, it's in her blood, no coincidence, that choice of words, born, blood, let's not let her out of our sight, she might draw blood, her own, and make an imprint, in public, in bold.

You are guarding the line. I say. She shrugs, nods.

*English translation: Sarah Brownsberger*



# THE DRIPPING MYSTERIES OF THE FAROE ISLANDS

MONIQUE DURAND

Écrivaine et journaliste ainsi que membre du groupe de recherche sur l'écriture nord-côtière GRÉNOC, Cégep de Sept-Îles, Québec, Canada

*Writer and journalist, member of the research group on writing from and about the North Coast in Quebec GRÉNOC, Cégep at Sept-Iles, Quebec, Canada*

I am enjoying this moment, a bit misty after a night that was too short. It is 6.20 am, gate 23, Terminal 2 of Copenhagen's Kastrup airport. Lying on a bench, holding on to my espresso in front of those electronic screens scrolling down their schedules, I feel happy for no particular reason and all of them at once.

There we go, we are up in the air. Everything is in a haze, including my mind which I allow to wander gently. You can see the lights on down below of silk cities getting up early. Countryside after countryside, forests. Plains, valleys. And then and then, at last, the sea.

On board the plane, a boy, fair-haired like wheat. Two stewardesses daydreaming. They know almost everyone among the passengers including Julius, the person on the window seat next to mine. A hulk of a man going home after seven weeks of wandering the oceans as a deck hand. He is going back to his home in the Faroe Islands.

Faroe in English? Not to be mistaken with Fårö in the Baltic, the island on which Ingmar Bergman lived and where he shot some of his films. The Faroes? Some stones scattered across the Northern Atlantic. An archipelago made of 18 islands and islets, between Iceland and Norway, Scotland and the Shetland Islands being closest in the way of land.

Integrated into cruise ship circuits, these islands are visited by increasing numbers of tourists, adventurers and lovers of hiking and northern lights, in search of temperate climates in summer and winter. America and Europe are baking hot; not so the Faroe Islands softened by the Gulf Stream they are bathing in, and the rain that they are shrouded in almost all

year long, some "notable efforts of the sun to shine" excepted, as the guidebook Le Routard notes.

The archipelago has been an independent province of the Kingdom of Denmark since 1948. It has its own government with authority in all fields except some like defence. On board the plane, instructions like "fasten your seatbelt" are given in Faroese and English but not in Danish though the latter is the second official language in the Faroes, considered by a part of the population as the coloniser's language. "English is currently superseding Danish, especially among youth," the Faroese academic Malan Marnersdóttir affirms.

Irish monks are supposed to have been the first inhabitants in the 8th century. They were looking for new hermitages to withdraw to and more solitude compared to green Erin. The Irish are said to have been expelled in the 9th century by the Vikings who came from Norway in search of land to till and raise cattle on. Besides, Julius, the man sitting next to me, with his fresh airs like newly baked bread has a look of the Viking about him.

The country of winds, gales and turbulence. Julius judges the proximity of the isles by the jumping of the plane in the air. My face is glued to the window, Julius having kindly given up his seat. To land in the Faroes is like landing in Pakuashipi-Saint-Augustin on the lower Côte-Nord in Quebec, half landing on the water half landing on land. Spectacular. To fly over the whitewash of waves and sumptuous cliffs to land between two mountain ranges. One has the impression that the pilot must be sweating blood to keep the plane level and up in the air in midst these gusts. We are trying to help by balancing out our

shoulders. Phew, quite happy to touch the green floor of the cows!

We are disembarking in a golden and ochre-coloured ray of sunshine which just broke loose to welcome us. First image of the Faroes, a crow whose ebony-coloured wings light up in this bright instant. I am not going to see the sun again during my stay in the Faroes, but I will see crows.

## A country of harbours, bridges and tunnels

The country has streams pouring out of it everywhere, streaks of veins and veinlets all over the mountains from where the waters of the heavens are emptied out into the sea again, unless the sea is swallowed up by the sky? Droplets like tiny bridges laid out vertically.

Bridges, underwater and mountain tunnels, ferries and helicopters allow you to cross from island to island. An underwater round-about, the first one worldwide, was opened in 2020. The network of tunnels has modified the landscape. It has changed life in this small country of 53,000 inhabitants, a bit like road 138 extended to Natashquan and Kegaska: improved communication, daily life easier, social ties shaken up.

The principal town of the Faroes is called Tórshavn, a Viking name. It boasts of being the smallest capital in the world. Population: 14,000. The old part of town is very pretty, surrounded by the sea. In fact, everything here is surrounded by the sea. Typically Scandinavian sobriety. A place that does not appear to have been hit too much by hyper consumerism. A big shopping centre all in black, no rhinestones nor frills. Still not too much hit by mass tourism either. Yet. Various ongoing projects of building hotels. And the farmers are already complaining about tourists invading their pasturage.

My hotel is facing the harbour. No trees, but a forest of masts. There are no trees on these isles, lunar-like stretches of land. Rainfall is continuous. I sleep in a monk's cell. I can hear the wind from the Northern Atlantic and pearls of raindrops bouncing off the rooftops of Tórshavn. Beneath my mattress, I feel the muddle of the oceans and the Earth's inner fire. "To enjoy the rain," Bernard de Saint-Pierre wrote in 1784, quoted by French historian Alain Corbin, "the soul has to travel and our body to rest."

I am dissolving, thinking of that wonderful title of the Faroese poetess Liv Marie Róadóttir Jaeger's

collection "I am writing to you on wet paper" published by Le Noroît in cooperation with the research centre Imaginaire/Nord at the University of Quebec in Montreal (UQAM).

## Free and prosperous

1812. The Faroe Islands become Danish after having been Norwegian, just like Iceland did. The idea of a national community emerges slowly but gradually. Thus, the Faroese language receives orthographic support, having only been a spoken language before. 1892. The first book ever written in Faroese is published. 1938. End of the ban on teaching in Faroese. 1948. The Faroe Islands are granted far-reaching autonomy.

"A small nation which is free and prosperous." This is how François Alfonsi has described them, member of the Commission for Regional Development of the European Union (EU). The Faroe Islands' GDP is higher than Denmark's and one of the highest in Europe. They have a university, theatres, publishing houses and even an airline, Atlantic Airways!

A nation fiercely attached to its freedom. They refused to adhere to the EU when Denmark joined in 1973. Refusal to apply the European sanctions against Russia because of the war in Ukraine: 25% of the Faroese economy depends on the export of fish to the Russians. A nation also fiercely attached to its language the erosion of which it is trying to prevent, and which represents the cornerstone of their identity. Together with the rain.

The rain reaches even inside the National Museum of the Faroe Islands, thanks to the ventilator racks put up here and there and under which I am standing. Are they part of the aesthetics of the place? "I am the Poem of Earth, said the voice of the rain," a famous line by the American poet Walt Whitman.

End of the visit to the museum. I'm putting the small notebook bought at the museum shop in my bag. To protect it from the Poem of Earth.

## To lean against the wind

On that evening, the cry of one single gull brought in the whole sea for me.

Last December. In the Faroe Islands, a conglomerate of stones lost in the North Atlantic. Thick fog. One cannot see a thing. The world is nothing but smoke and steam. One cannot see a thing. All you can do is make hear. Visual deficiency amplifies the weakest of sounds. Everything becomes more

perceptible. Our ears can see better, it appears, than our eyes. This cry of a gull, unforgettable amidst the surf.

A sudden reminder, no meditation other than sensorial memory: our arrival at Old Orchard. One could only make her to be heard, the sea, the object of our longing. I can remember the babbling of the waves breaking in the distance, rollers lit by the moon. Overexcited, we were getting out of the car after an endless drive, trembling with impatience. Let morning come at last to see the fabulous crashing waves which made us freeze on going in.

The sea, that was Old Orchard. But mostly, the sea, was... the sea. The very word made us dream, and it still does.

It took me some time to realize that the sea could manifest itself differently from Old Orchard. To me, “our” waves looked like mere ripples, not standing any comparison. Smaller, quieter, hardly a replacement for those in Maine. I did not know then that I was going to spend a part of my life pickled in saline air on both sides of the Gulf of St. Lawrence with its waves which were either weaklings or feisty, my daily pittance I cherished so much.

Back to the Faroes. The heady smell of the sea can be taken in here since it is not too cold. That’s impossible back home at this time of the year since all scents are frozen, like everything else. I have to smile, thinking about François Rabelais, writer from temperate Touraine who describes the North in his Fourth Book as being so cold that words freeze when one opens one’s month. This humorous observation is reported by the researcher Daniel Chartier of the international research centre Imaginaire/Nord at UQAM.

### Sheep, salmon and elbow-to-elbow

In the midst of this mess of pea mash from where I can hear the sea, I have trouble finding the entrance door. Joannes Patursson has invited us for a meal. I am groping my way forward. Night has fallen. In fact, one no longer knows if it is nighttime or the fog. We are at the historical farm in Kirkjubøur, a stone’s throw from Tórshavn, the capital. The farmstead’s main house has been owned by Joannes’ family for generations. It is one of the oldest in this part of the world to be still inhabited. It was put together in 1557 from logs shipped over from Norway because there were no trees in the Faroe Islands which are made up of rugged moorland.

Local food is served at a long table at which some twenty of us are sitting starved, in the middle of this

cozy gingerbread house. Smoked salmon for starters. Farmed salmon has replaced cod which had been THE source of income for centuries in the Faroes. The salmon is now exported worldwide. To be followed by a mutton dish. Joannes owns three hundred of these animals.

Is this location full of souls? We do not know each other and probably will never meet again. There are guests from Sweden, Norway, the United Kingdom, Denmark, Quebec and the Faroes. People take to each other in no time. “There is no purer joy than public joy,” Jean-Jacques Rousseau claimed, the kind of joy that unites humans everywhere for “the temporary albeit necessary transgression” that a feast represents, according to the sociologist Edgar Morin, aged 102, quoted by the newspaper Le Monde. “To laugh means to live so profoundly,” the late Annie Leclerc wrote.

Still the same mess of pea mash in the middle of the Faroese night. Once the feasting is over, we reach the climax of our visit to Joannes’ home: “to see”, or at least try to do so, the unfinished cathedral next to his house, Saint-Magnus Cathedral.

### Journey into substance

We are making progress in the fog as though blindfold, moving forward step by step, leaning against the wind. We follow each other in single file across this milky darkness into the enclosure of cut stones, one of the chief historical and cultural sites and most visited places in the Faroes. The only lighting available, the torch of a phone. Incongruous return seven centuries back, from the 14th to the 21st century. Inside the roofless sanctuary, the rain splashes on the age-old slabs.

Construction work for Saint-Magnus Cathedral started around 1300 but hardly went beyond the planning stage because the archipelago, which had been Catholic for centuries, turned Protestant. After the famous Reformation of 1537, the Catholic diocese of the Faroes was abolished. Northwest Europe, led on by Luther’s Germany, was spurred by the progress of the printing press and adhered to Protestantism by breaking loose from the Roman Church, rejecting worship of the Virgin and “protesting”, notably, against the idea of buying your salvation by paying up for your sins with indulgences, a sort of remission of your sentence.

The schism led to endless wars of religion, especially the Thirty Years War, the impact of which could be felt as far away as our country, then

called La Nouvelle-France. Ships sailing from La Rochelle, one of the strongholds of French Protestantism, to Tadoussac and Québec, took Catholics and Huguenots – Protestants from the French Kingdom – on board, forcing them to eye each other throughout the voyage. Samuel de Champlain was a Protestant born in Brouage, very close to La Rochelle. Other well-known characters of our history such as Roberval, Chauvin and Dugua de Mons were also Huguenots.

We are “visiting” the unfinished cathedral in this milky blindness, lit up by a beam of light from a telephone. On the other side of the walls, crashing waves. “A journey into substance”, as the art historian Barbara Maria Stafford writes, quoted by Alain Corbin in his history of rain off the beaten track (*Histoire buissonnière de la pluie*). I have rarely felt the elements more intensely than during the non-viewing of this cut-out temple.

The day after I am asking Jonley, the cab driver, if she can take me simply to some beautiful spot. According to her and as she sees fit. It is still raining but the fog has lifted. Each winding road

we drive on offers almost unreal panoramic views. Black or white sheep, roaming about freely, can be made out against the backdrop of the sea and moors everywhere. I’d love to become a shepherdess in these places. Jonley smiles about my outbreaks. It is crazy to think how much humans love their own backlash. And love to show it to others!

And then, surprise, surprise. She has driven me to Kirkjubøur and Joannes’ farmstead!

I suddenly retrieve yesterday’s dreams but enacted, discovering with amazement Joannes’ house for real, the real, unfinished cathedral, as well as real waves and gulls.

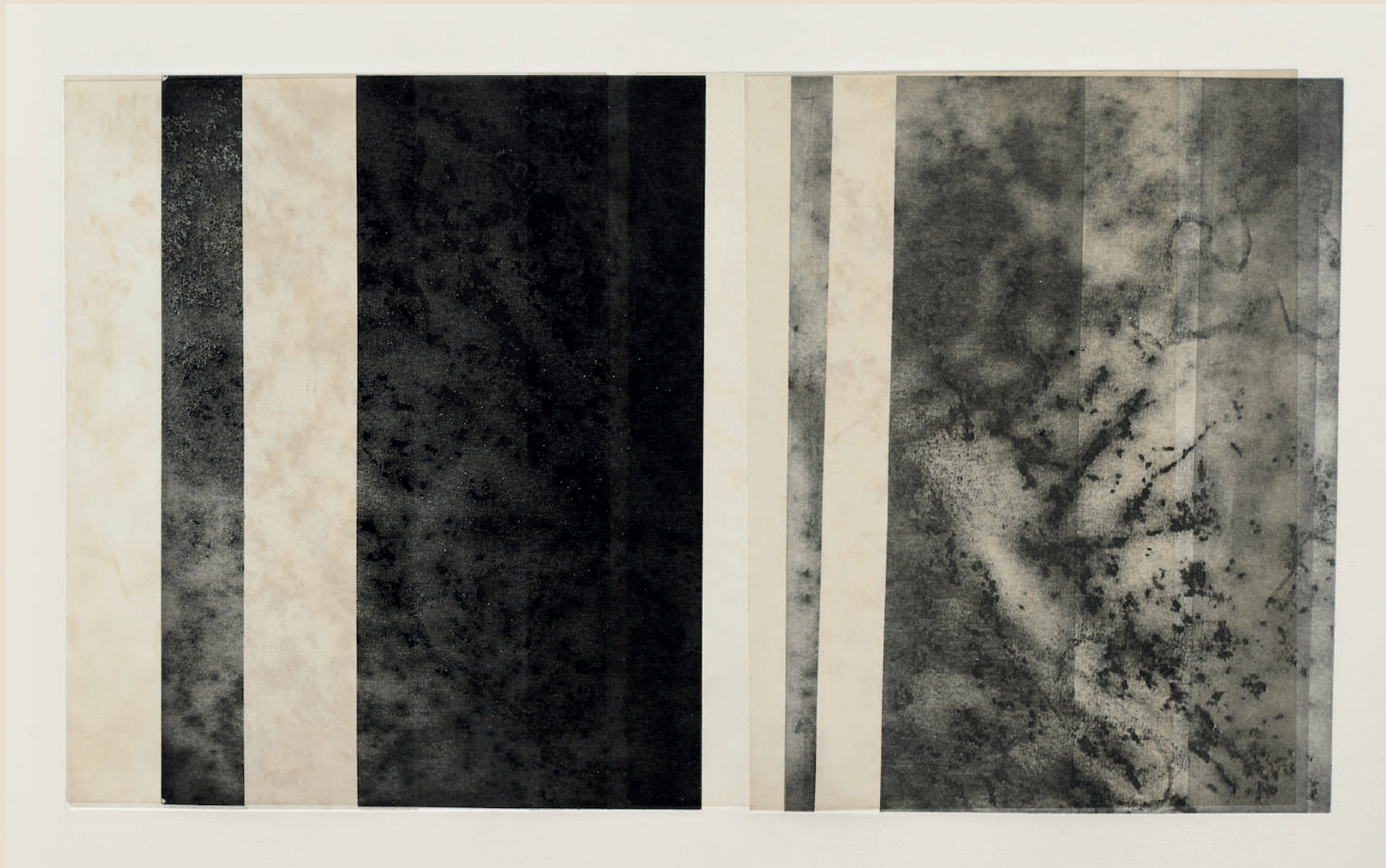
But nothing surpasses what I saw last night in beauty.

Still today, the Faroes appear to me as though wrapped in tulle, clouds of spray and fog which remain a mystery.

*Previously published in French in the Quebec daily Le Devoir as two separate texts: "Au pays ruisse-lant", 29 July 2023, and "S'appuyer contre le vent", 5 August 2023*



# VARIA / *VARIA*



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# COSMOGRAPHIES BORÉALES:

## ESSAI ETHNO-ARTISTIQUE SUR LES CÔTES DE LA MER DU LABRADOR

### ANATOLE DANTO

Anthropologue, Centre d’études arctiques, Département d’anthropologie, Université de Tartu, Estonie ; Centre de recherches Europe-Eurasie, Inalco, Paris, France

### JULES DANTO

Halieute, European Sustainability Center, Saint-Nazaire, France ; Nord Kollektiv, Saint-Nazaire, France

### LÉA PERTEL

Anthropologue et artiste, European Sustainability Center, Saint-Nazaire, France

### SYLVIE ALLAIS

Artiste, Nord Kollektiv, Saint-Nazaire, France

### CANDICE QUEDEC

Artiste, M.I.N.U.I.T., Brest, France

### RENÉE LERAY

Artiste, Nord Kollektiv, Saint-Nazaire, France

En 2022-2023, le projet *Immatérialités des connaissances et pratiques des communautés côtières boréales concernant l’environnement marin*<sup>1</sup> a permis une expérimentation méthodologique et conceptuelle entre arts, sciences et designs, sur deux terrains arctique et subarctique. Axé sur la compréhension du Patrimoine culturel immatériel porté par les communautés côtières de l’Atlantique Nord-Ouest<sup>2</sup>, et mené *via* une recherche-action comparative entre deux territoires, il porte sur l’archipel de Saint-Pierre et Miquelon

1   Projet porté par la Plateforme Interdisciplinaire et Internationale de Recherche et d’Enseignement Supérieur en zone Subarctique de Saint-Pierre et Miquelon (PIIRESS SPM), co-financé par le projet pilote *Archipel.eu* (Parlement européen), dans le cadre de son fonds pour la Sauvegarde et la Promotion du Patrimoine culturel immatériel des Régions ultrapériphériques de l’UE et pays et territoires d’outre-mer géré par l’Institut français. Voir : Anatole Danto, Jules Danto, Léa Pertel, *Les relations Hommes-Mers au sein des communautés côtières boréales : Ethnographies sensibles des immatérialités des connaissances et pratiques concernant l’environnement marin*, Institut français ; OCTA ; APCA ; UE ; PIIRESS, 2023, p. 52.

2   Le projet s’est inscrit dans l’axe 1 du programme *Archipel.eu* et s’est spécifiquement intéressé à la sous-catégorie du PCI définie par l’UNESCO comme les « Connaissances et pratiques concernant la nature et l’univers ». Il a cherché à interroger les connaissances et pratiques portées par les deux communautés côtières de Saint-Pierre-et-Miquelon et des fjords du Sud Groenland concernant leur environnement marin et côtier proche.



*Cosmolgraphier la complexité des socio-écosystèmes côtiers boréaux*  
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(France)<sup>3</sup> et sur une portion de la commune groenlandaise de Kujalleq (*Kommune Kujalleq*)<sup>4</sup>. Embarquant ethnologues, halieute, géographes et artistes, les expéditions inhérentes au projet ont permis d’appréhender de manières déductives, sur le terrain, des modalités de collectages, puis d’analyses, entre ethnographies, arts et designs, que nous déployons par ailleurs sur d’autres terrains<sup>5</sup>. Nous avons ainsi réalisé, sur les côtes et îles de cette Mer du Labrador, des prémices de cartographies des cosmos communautaires (ou cosmographies) multidimensionnelles.

3   Anatole Danto, Jules Danto, Léa Pertel, *Saint-Pierre et Miquelon (France). Un Patrimoine culturel immatériel halieutique du local au global*, Institut français ; OCTA ; APCA ; UE ; PIIRESS, 2023, p. 51.

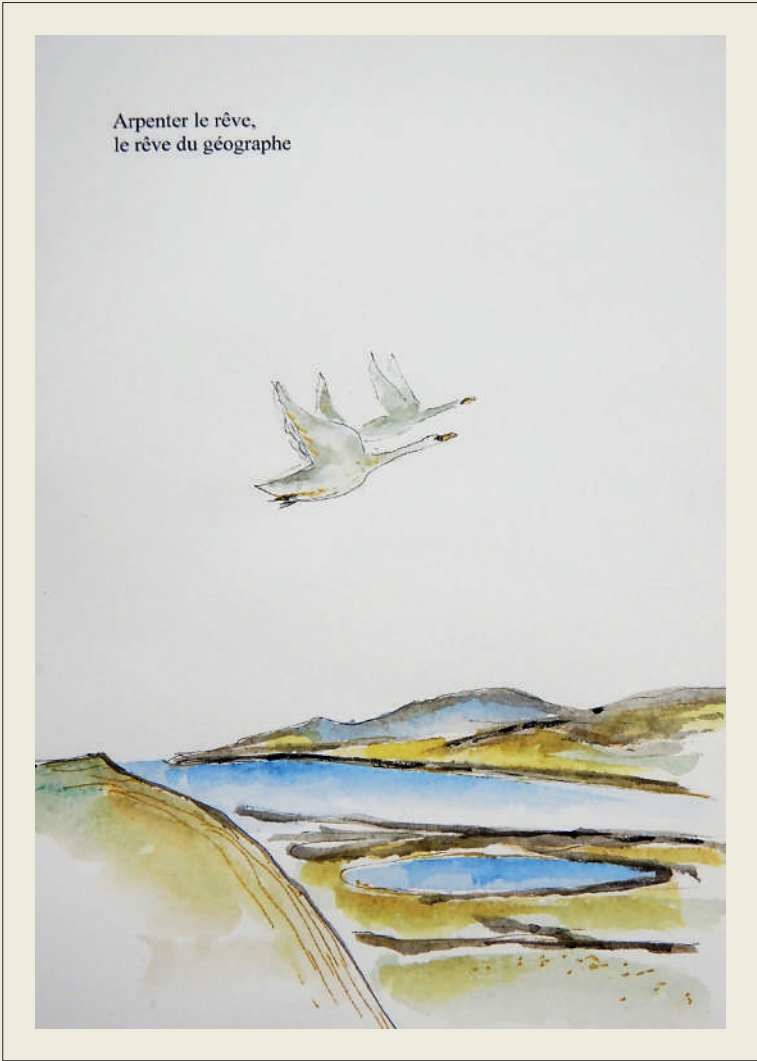
4   Anatole Danto, Jules Danto, Léa Pertel, *Les fjords du Sud (Groenland). Une maritimité intrinsèque au patrimoine des communautés*, Institut français ; OCTA ; APCA ; UE ; PIIRESS, 2023, p. 64.

5   Voir par exemple : Anatole Danto, « “Winterreise” . Sci-Arts Winter Season Journey Through the Human-Nature Relationships of the Land-Sea Continuum, from North Sea to Baltic Sea », in *Lagoonscapes*, vol. 4, n°1, Epic, Ecocriticism, and Aesthetic Anthropology: New Approaches to the Environmental Challenges, 2024, pp. 219-229, ou Anatole Danto, Jules Danto, « Projet de recherche " *Vestfirðir*" : Ethnographier les adaptations et transformations des chasses et pêches face aux changements socio-écosystémiques à l’œuvre en Islande du nord-ouest », *Rapport de mission 2023*, European Sustainability Center ; Arctic Lab, 2023, p. 30.



Γράφειν : pour une socio-écosystématique sensible

Notre approche terrain a été scindée en trois phases conduites en synchronicité. Concomitamment, nous avons déployé, collectivement, un travail d’identification des sources, permettant la constitution d’un corpus d’archives pluriel, couplé à une enquête ethnographique et artistique multisite<sup>6</sup>, en immersion, pour entrer en profondeur<sup>7</sup> dans nos terrains, puis à des analyses et réflexions *a posteriori*, à froid, permettant également de dessiner et designer nos architectures ethnologiques. Cet aspect synchronique triaxial nous a permis de conduire une *cosmolgraphie* : nous avons souhaité (*d*)écrire, le plus finement possible, les relations à la mer, quel que soit son état<sup>8</sup>, qu’entretiennent les communautés enquêtées, dans leurs complexités<sup>9</sup>. Pour (*d*)écrire, nous avons



Océan de septembre  
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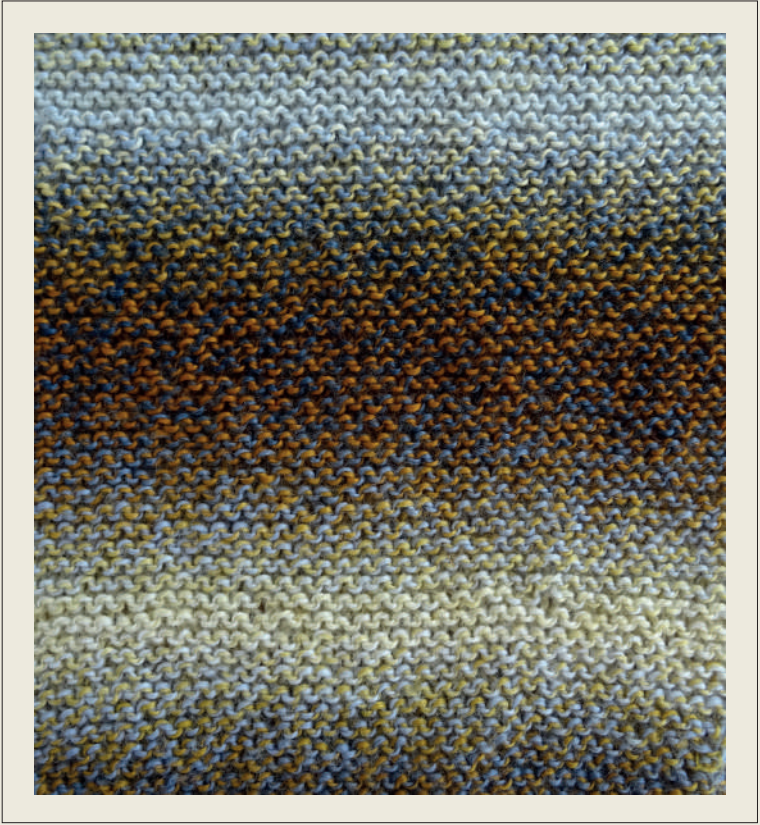
6 George E. Marcus, « Ethnography in/of the world system: The emergence of multi-sited ethnography », in *Annual Review of Anthropology*, vol. 24, n°1, pp. 95-117.  
7 Clifford Geertz, « Thick Description: Toward an Interpretive Theory of Culture », in *The Interpretation of Cultures*, New York: BasicBooks, Inc., 1973, pp. 3-30.  
8 Jaana Kouri, Kirsi Sonck-Rautio, « The voice of ice in the Turku archipelago: narrating icegraphy with environmental ethnography », in *Cold Waters: Tangible and Symbolic Seascapes of the North*, Cham, Springer, 2022, pp. 69-87.  
9 Émir Mahieddin, « Penser l’anthropologie de la Baltique », in *L’Homme. Revue française d’anthropologie*, n°226, 2018, pp. 67-102.

ainsi employé différents media et modes de collecte, de production, et de transmission des savoirs et pratiques, dans une vision alternative des écritures en sciences sociales, parfois a-lettrée, souvent iconographisée, et mobilisant toute une palette d’outils et méthodes pluriels, alliant arts, sciences et designs<sup>10</sup>, pris dans un continuum a-catégoriel, dans une incarnation *in fine* sémiotique, visant à poser les bases sensibles d’une socio-écosystématique locale.

Réanimation d’un patrimoine « mort-vivant » :  
réinsuffler le βίος aux archives

Pour saisir l’historicité des pratiques et des savoirs et leurs diachronies, rien de tel qu’une plongée au cœur des archives, qu’elles soient publiques ou privées, artistiques, scientifiques ou administratives, civiles ou militaires, modernes ou contemporaines, professionnelles ou amatrices : on y trouve de petites pépites, enfouies dans des kilomètres de fonds, ou au milieu de quelques feuilles volantes. Nous avons ainsi souhaité rendre aux terrains enquêtés leurs profondeurs historiques en mobilisant des matériaux collectés historiquement sur ces terrains. La première réflexion qui nous a amenés à aborder notre projet de cette manière était la complexité du phénomène colonial, puis décolonial sur ces territoires. Saint-Pierre et Miquelon et le Groenland n’y dérogent pas, et cette réflexion nous a permis d’exhumer un grand nombre d’archives, aujourd’hui déconnectées (physiquement, mais aussi bien évidemment symboliquement) de leurs lieux de genèse.

Cet aspect essentiel des matériaux d’archives conduit à réaliser une véritable enquête pour identifier leur localisation, mais également décrypter leur contexte productif, et ainsi re-traduire les savoirs qui y sont consignés dans une perspective contemporaine, en les réanimant par le biais de la remobilisation et de la relecture. Si cela peut ainsi sembler contre-intuitif, travailler sur archives permet finalement d’appréhender par un certain angle le patrimoine vivant. Et cette méthode, que nous avons mise à l’épreuve, s’est révélée utile, et mérite d’être amplifiée sur d’autres terrains. Nous avons ainsi dépouillé, compilé, traité, décortiqué plusieurs dizaines de mètres linéaires d’archives papier, mais également iconographiques, orales ou vidéo-graphiques. De nombreuses fonds ont été sondés, plusieurs institutions visitées, quelques corpus entièrement dépouillés. Cela nous a conduit à Copenhague, à Paris, à Nuuk, à Qaqortoq, à Brest ou à Étables-sur-Mer, à la recherche puis à la découverte de nombreux fonds, tous parcellaires, mais qui, mis bout à bout, forment un socio-écosystème archivistique riche, dense, épais, vivant, mais aussi complexe dans ses diversités (de fonds, de formes, de contextes de productions, d’auteurs, de conservations, de droits, d’accès, de remobilisations potentielles, etc.). Nous avons particulièrement engagé nos recherches en archives sur des typologies de fonds relativement méconnues, retraçant les histoires tant sociales qu’environnementales : les fonds



Ecailles  
© R.Leray

10 Stefanie Hessler, (ed.), *Tidalectics. Imagining an oceanic worldview through art and science*, London, TBA21-Academy, 2018.



d’archives scientifiques, par exemple, produits par des scientifiques en expéditions. Ils peuvent être considérés comme des fonds publics, mais n’ont pas toujours été versés aux services réglementairement compétents<sup>11</sup>, ou l’ont été *a posteriori*, ne facilitant par leur classement et leur accès. Ce patchwork d’archives compilé, nous avons pu nous en saisir pour l’emmener *in situ*, sur le terrain, et le ramener, symboliquement, sur ses terres et mers natales, pour lui redonner vie<sup>12</sup>.

Enquêtes : immersions et suivis des traces

Les archives, transplantées pour nombre d’entre elles, nous ont amenés, comme le rêve peut-être inavoué des marins, à chercher à nous ancrer. A nous ancrer au plus profond de nos terrains, grâce à une enquête ethnographique. Cette enquête multisite permet une comparaison bi-territoriale, mais est également une enquête de profondeur, pour reprendre l’invitation à la *thick description* de l’anthropologue Clifford Geertz. La philosophie centrale de l’approche est celle d’une ethnographie ouverte et contemporaine, résolument multidisciplinaire par l’intermédiaire des personnes qui la conduisent, des sujets abordés, des outils employés et des cadres d’analyses projetés. Cette enquête a cependant mobilisé les outils classiques de l’ethnographie, et en premier lieu l’entretien semi-directif (qui a parfois pu verser dans le récit de vie), l’observation participante (voire parfois la participation observante), l’observation flottante et la déambulation. Nous avons beaucoup noté et croqué dans nos carnets de terrain, enregistré et photographié parfois, plus rarement filmé. Nous avons également mobilisé les méthodes de la carte mentale et du calendrier mental, dans une approche complémentaire conduisant à territorialiser les savoirs et pratiques<sup>13</sup>, *via* une vision topographique, d’attachement aux lieux des communautés<sup>14</sup>, mais



Arpenter le rêve  
© S.Allais

11 Dans une perspective décoloniale, certains services occidentaux peuvent finalement apparaître comme « compétents » du point de vue réglementaire...mais « incompetents » du point de vue éthique et moral. Au-delà, en termes d’anthropologies juridiques, voir par exemple : Natalia Novikova, « Vivre au rythme du renne : règles coutumières et règles étatiques », in *Droit et cultures. Revue internationale interdisciplinaire*, vol. 50, 2005, pp. 65-78.

12 Nous nous inscrivons ici dans les théories de l’anthropologie des techniques enrobant les notions de biographies des objets, en identifiant les archives à des objets complexes dont on cherche à retracer le cycle de vie.

13 Scott Heyes, *Inuit and scientific ways of knowing and seeing the Arctic landscape*, mémoire de master, Université d’Adélaïde, 2002, p. 184.

14 Thomas F. Thornton, *Being and Place among the Tlingit*, Seattle, University of Washington Press, 2011.

également diachronique, d’attachement aux temps<sup>15</sup>. L’arpentage était permanent dans notre méthode, à la recherche des signes et des traces<sup>16</sup>.

L’épaisseur artistique : un continuum arts-designs-sciences fécond

Nous nous sommes également appuyés sur une active collaboration avec les arts et les designs dans une pluralité certaine. Les dichotomies arts/designs/sciences nous apparaissent comme occidentales et contemporaines, au même titre que d’autres dichotomies plus analysées, et nous avons souhaité les déconstruire, dans un format pluridisciplinaire d’ouverture. En effet, jusqu’à une époque récente, les arts étaient mobilisés comme outils et disciplines scientifiques : dessin ethnographique, planches anatomiques, carnets de bord, etc. Pour ce projet, les arts et les designs ont été mobilisés de différentes manières<sup>17</sup>. En premier lieu, des œuvres passées ont fourni d’intéressants éléments permettant d’étayer nos corpus pluriels. Nous avons ainsi pu travailler sur certains fonds artistiques modernes et contemporains, qui transcrivent certains éléments ethnographiques à leur manière. Nous avons également étudié les productions artistiques actuelles, notamment de fresques ou sculptures murales dans les villes et villages groenlandais, saint-pierrais et miquelonnais que nous avons arpentés, pour comprendre leurs symboliques<sup>18</sup> et les messages dont ces œuvres sont porteuses<sup>19</sup>, dans des « arts en train



Grand vent  
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15 Scott Bremer, Arjan Wardekker (eds.), *Changing Seasonality: how communities are revising their seasons*, Walter de Gruyter GmbH & Co KG, 2024.

16 Tim Ingold, *The Life of Lines*, Abington & New York, Routledge, 2015, p. 172.

17 İdil Gaziulusoy, Elif Erdoğan Öztekin, « Design for sustainability transitions: Origins, attitudes and future directions », in *Sustainability*, vol. 11, n°13, 2019, 3601.

18 Birgitte Sonne, « Inuit symbolism of the bearded seal », in *Études/inuit/studies*, vol. 41, n°1-2, 2017, pp. 29-50.

19 Timo Jokela, Maria Huhmarniemi, « Stories transmitted through art for the revitalization and decolonization of the Arctic », in *Stories of Change and Sustainability in the Arctic Regions*, Abington & New York, Routledge, 2021, pp. 57-71.



de se faire »<sup>20</sup>. Par ailleurs, nous avons souhaité mobiliser différentes techniques artistiques et de design pour co-construire notre enquête de terrain<sup>21</sup>, et rendre compte de ce que nous avons collecté<sup>22</sup>. Nous avons également soumis nos comptes-rendus de terrain à des artistes<sup>23</sup>, qui en ont extrait certaines essences, tout en associant les outils ethnographiques à d’autres outils issus des arts et des designs : dessins, peintures, photographies, ateliers, performances, travaux plastiques, productions de formes. Nous avons ainsi intégré directement les approches artistiques et de design durant notre enquête<sup>24</sup>, en mobilisant des artistes et designeuses pour organiser des ateliers de co-production artistico-scientifiques. Cette approche s’est avérée particulièrement pertinente, puisqu’elle a permis aux personnes présentes de transmettre leurs<sup>25</sup> relations à la mer dans un format tout à fait différent de celui d’un entretien semi-directif (format sur lequel certains enquêtés peuvent être mal à l’aise). L’attachement aux espaces-temps, les relations aux non-humains et aux non-vivants<sup>26</sup>, les connaissances personnelles liées au littoral, à l’estran, à la grève, à l’intertidal, ont ainsi été également sondés par ce moyen, mais également discutés, dans des perspectives de co-design des diagnostics et des trajectoires socio-écosystémiques<sup>27</sup>. Nous nous sommes rendu compte que cela a apporté une véritable épaisseur supplémentaire aux données collectées : une épaisseur artistique permettant ainsi une incarnation de nos terrains, mais aussi une interrelation équitable entre enquêtrices/enquêteurs/artistes et enquêtés/enquêtées<sup>28</sup>. Cela nous a conforté dans notre approche méthodologique axée sur un continuum arts/designs/sciences, mobilisable sur différents contextes, et conduisant à dépasser une navigation à vue, trop restrictive.

Les ancêtres en appui : immatérialités transgénérationnelles et transmissions des savoirs

Dans le patrimoine vivant, et tout particulièrement au sein des communautés humaines de l’Arctique et du sub-Arctique, les « ancêtres » revêtent un rôle particulier : celui de courroi de transmission intergénérationnelle, assurance de la perpétuation d’un ensemble de savoirs et pratiques. Il en est de même en ethnographie : nous mobilisons fréquemment des travaux antérieurs, notamment pour assurer un suivi longitudinal, avec moult précautions méthodologiques, mais aussi pour tenter des formes, finalement, d’ethnographies diachroniques. Nous nous sommes donc attachés à nous référer à quelques « ancêtres », qui nous ont précédés sur ces terrains, et qui nous y ont spirituellement accompagnés. Parmi elles et eux, quelques noms, des gens connus et reconnus, d’autres méconnus, qui ont œuvré durant tout ou partie de leur vie professionnelle et/ou personnelle à décrypter ces mondes maritimes arctiques et sub-arctiques. Certains d’entre elles et eux nous ont formés, il y a parfois déjà

20 Telle une fabrique. Voir : Charissa von Harringa, « Movement and the living surface: Greenlandic modernism, Pia Arke, and the decolonial legacy of women artists in Greenland », in *Modern Women Artists in the Nordic Countries, 1900–1960*, Abington & New York, Routledge, 2021, pp. 51-62.

21 Kristin Bergaust, Rasa Smite, Daina Silina, « Oslofjord Ecologies–Artistic Research on Environmental and Social Sustainability », in *Renewable Futures*, vol. 3, n°18, 2020, 11-21.

22 Geraint Rhys Whittaker, « Creatively connecting science, society and the sea: a mini-review of academic literature focusing on art-science collaborations and the ocean », in *Frontiers in Marine Science*, Volume 10, 2023 | <https://doi.org/10.3389/fmars.2023.1234776>

23 Boel Christensen-Scheel, Venke Aure, Kristin Bergaust, « Artistic and Art-Based Research Methods: The Mutual Developments of Theory and Practice in Contemporary Art Research », in *Nordic Journal of Art & Research*, vol. 11, n°1, 2022.

24 Rasa Smite, Kerstin Mey, Raitis Smits, « Art as Research », in *Acoustic Space*, vol. 9, 2011.

25 Martin Döring, Beate Ratter, « “I show you *my* coast...”—a relational study of coastscapes in the North Frisian Wadden Sea », in *Maritime Studies*, vol. 20, n°3, 2021, pp. 317-327.

26 Zoe Todd, « Fish pluralities: Human-animal relations and sites of engagement in Paulatuq, Arctic Canada », in *Études/inuit/studies*, vol. 38, n°1, 2014, pp. 217-238.

27 Cosma Cazé, Camille Mazé, Anatole Danto, Hanieh Saeedi, Dan Lear, Saara Suominen, Joape Ginigin, Gilianne Brodie, Isoa Korovulavula, Isabel Sousa Pinto, « Co-designing marine science beyond good intentions: support stakeholders’ empowerment in transformative pathways », in *ICES Journal of Marine Science*, vol. 80, n°2, 2023, pp. 374–377.

28 Leena Cho, Matthew Burtner, Howard Epstein, Claire Griffin, Matthew Jull, « Bridging science, art, and community in the new Arctic », in *The Polar Journal*, vol. 10, n°1, 2020, pp. 195-200.

plusieurs années. D’autres nous ont éclairés de manière indirecte, grâce à la lecture lumineuse de leurs travaux. Enfin, nous avons, dans le cadre de ce projet, tâché d’en rencontrer d’autres, qui nous ont transmis beaucoup<sup>29</sup>.



La maison aux esprits  
© L.Pertel

Une vision holistique du Patrimoine culturel immatériel

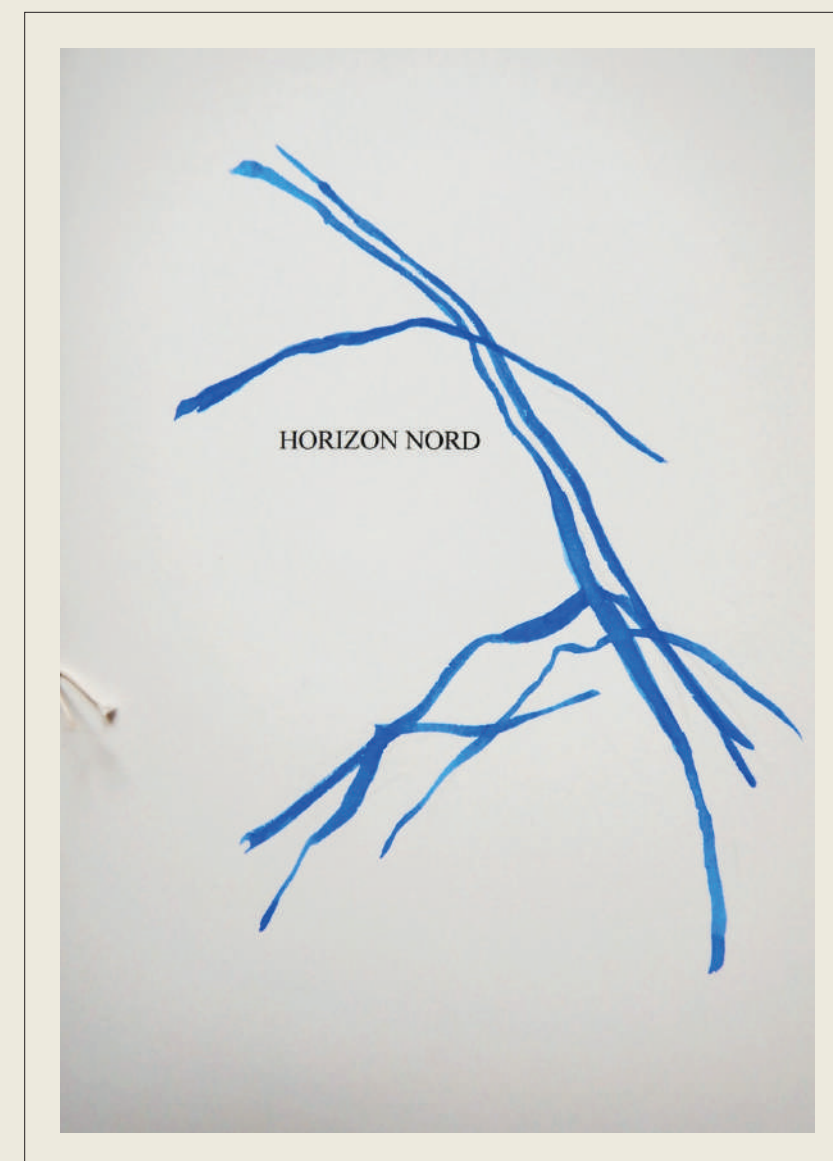
Venons-en désormais au Patrimoine culturel immatériel (PCI). Catégorie patrimoniale relativement contemporaine, elle est consacrée par une Convention sur la Sauvegarde du PCI par l’Unesco en 2003. Cette convention a révolutionné, le terme n’est pas trop fort, les réflexions, tant réglementaires que scientifiques, éthiques ou culturelles, sur cette catégorie, également qualifiée par le groupe substantivé « patrimoine vivant ». Vingt ans d’existence, c’est beaucoup, et c’est peu en même temps. Et certaines marges de cette catégorie peuvent demeurer, encore aujourd’hui, relativement floues, comme des *limes* à explorer plus en avant, dotées d’une labilité certaine<sup>30</sup>. C’est ce que nous avons choisi de faire. Sans nous cantonner à une définition restrictive,

29 Pêle-mêle, citons quelques noms de ces illustres ancêtres : René-Yves Creston (ethnologue maritime, Peintre officiel de la Marine, artiste, polymathe), Aliette Geistdoerfer (anthropologue maritime), Brigitte Sonne (anthropologue des mondes inuits), Maria Znamierowska-Prüfferowa (anthropologue des pêches, muséologue), Christiane Morisset-Andersen (anthropologue des communautés de pêcheurs), Marin-Marie (Peintre officiel de la Marine), Anita Conti (océanographe), Jean-Baptiste Charcot (marin, polymathe), Edouard Le Danois (halieute), Odette du Puigauveau (ethnologue maritime), Charles Bénard (marin, polymathe), ...

30 Martin Döring, Beate Ratter, « ‘Heimat’ as a boundary object? Exploring the potentialities of a boundary object to instigate productive science-stakeholder interaction in North Frisia (Germany) », in *Environmental Science & Policy*, vol. 54, 2015, pp. 448-455.



Le cimetière de Narsaq  
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Un monde secret s'ouvre  
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étriquée, du PCI, nous avons plutôt préféré une définition volontairement ample, souple, qui dépasse parfois les frontières au sein desquelles certains et certaines souhaiteraient peut-être l'y cantonner. Nous avons observé une forme de recouvrement (sans accaparement) de certaines autres catégories patrimoniales, tant naturelles que culturelles<sup>31</sup> et, surtout, le caractère totalement transcendantal des catégories et sous-catégories liées au PCI<sup>32</sup>. Notre point d'entrée a été la sous-catégorie « Connaissances et pratiques concernant la nature et l'univers » qui, rapidement, nous a ouvert de nombreuses portes.

31 Birgitte Sonne, The acculturative role of Sea Woman, Museum Tusculanum Press, 1990.

32 Méritant ici une analyse *écologique* de l'οἶκος. Voir : in Frank Sowa (ed.), « Inuit-Repräsentationen in Grönland: Zur asymmetrischen Konstruktion von Indigenität im ökologischen Diskurs », in *Grönland: Kontinuitäten und Brüche im Leben der Menschen in der Arktis*, Opladen, Budrich Academic press GmbH, 2022, pp. 209-232.



Spécificités & homogénéités des relations  
Humain-Mer au sein des communautés côtières boréales

L'un des objectifs du projet consistait à évaluer l'existence d'un faisceau minimal de patrimoine culturel immatériel lié à la nature et l'univers commun aux groupes sociaux côtiers boréaux de la région de la Mer du Labrador, en s'appuyant sur les deux démonstrateurs : Saint-Pierre et Miquelon et les fjords du sud Groenland.



Horizon Nord 1  
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L'enquête de terrain a permis d'observer la présence, frappante, d'un PCI côtier collectif, partagé, propre à ces communautés et aux territoires qu'elles habitent. Bien sûr, de très nombreux particularismes locaux, régionaux, nationaux ou sub-continentaux ne permettent pas de déclarer ce PCI comme seul et unique, et nous avons veillé à ne pas l'essentialiser à outrance : chaque communauté a ses cosmologies, son histoire, sa géographie, mais certaines sont chevauchantes<sup>33</sup>. L'historicisation, à travers les archives, les ancêtres et les collectages, permettent bien de ne pas l'omettre. Mais il existe toutefois un noyau de PCI commun, traduction de relations entre les sociétés humaines et cette nature côtière boréale, véritable archipel de micro-socio-écosystèmes d'un terre-mer nordique, pris à intervalles réguliers, dans les glaces de l'hiver arctique et sub-arctique<sup>34</sup>. Reprenant les définitions que propose l'anthropologue Tim Ingold au sujet du « Nord »<sup>35</sup>, parfois « orientalisé »<sup>36</sup>, nous avons nous aussi questionné l'existence de ce noyau de PCI, constitué d'un ensemble de faisceaux de savoirs, pratiques, savoir-faire et coutumes, tous plus ou moins corrélés à cette côte, son large proche, sa mer côtière, ses estuaires et deltas à la géomorphologie si particulière, à leurs vallées en auge, à leurs glaciers ou leurs landes et tourbières arctiques, à leurs toundras et leur forêt boréale<sup>37</sup>. Nous pouvons constater l'existence d'une forme de spécificité de ce PCI littoral, relativement homogène malgré des contextes identitaires

33 Aliette Geistdoerfer, *Pêcheurs acadiens, pêcheurs madelinots : ethnologie d'une communauté de pêcheurs*, Québec, Presses de l'Université Laval, 1987.  
34 Klaus Dodds, Sverker Sörlin, (eds.), *Ice Humanities: Living, working, and thinking in a melting world*, Manchester, Manchester University Press, 2022.  
35 Tim Ingold, « The North is everywhere », in *Knowing from the Indigenous North*, London, Routledge, 2018, pp. 108-120. Il avait originellement écrit son texte pour la revue *Entropia* : Tim Ingold, « Le Nord est partout », in *Entropia*, n°15 : *L'Histoire désorientée* (dir. Jean-Baptiste Fressoz, Philippe Gruca et Philippe Lena), automne 2013, pp. 37-48.  
36 Cédric Gras, *Le nord, c'est l'est*, Phébus, 2013.  
37 Markku Lehtimäki, Arja Rosenholm, Elena Trubina, Nina Tynkkynen (eds.), *Cold Waters: Tangible and Symbolic Seascapes of the North*, Cham, Springer, 2022.



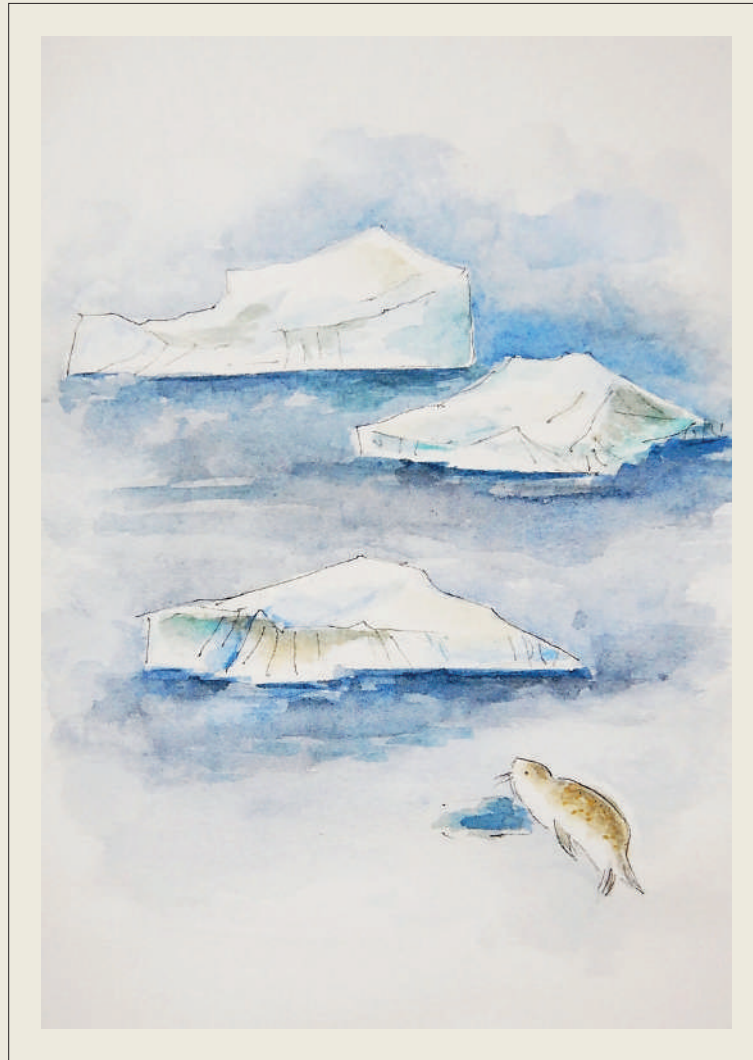
Horizon Nord 2  
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locaux variés, dont l'architecture centrale repose, telle une clef de voûte, sur les interrelations entre l'humain et son environnement côtier et aux constituants de ce derniers : non-humains et non-vivants, le tout dans une bioculturalité<sup>38</sup> partiellement partagée

### Saint-Pierre et Miquelon : archipel halieutique d'une francophonie nord-américaine

Saint-Pierre et Miquelon. Deux îles. 6 000 habitants. « Reliquat » d'une présence française nord-américaine bien plus imposante. Cailloux dans la chaussure canadienne voisine. Mais surtout, lieu central de la pêche banquière, depuis un demi-millénaire. Archipel nord-atlantique au milieu de l'archipel sub-arctique global, Saint-Pierre et Miquelon a depuis tout temps, constitué un lieu pivot dans la région. De très nombreuses traces archéologiques attestent d'une succession, parfois synchronique, de présences humaines, venues chercher ici ce qu'elles ne trouvaient pas ailleurs en ces quantités et qualités : une alimentation riche, abondante et diversifiée. Des Paléo-Inuits aux Amérindiens, le territoire a longtemps constitué un campement estival ou un point de passage récurrent pour les communautés des actuelles provinces atlantiques du Canada. Après la découverte (mais ne devrait-on pas plutôt parler de re-découverte ?) de l'archipel par les colons européens, les îles sont peuplées de chasseurs basques, et de pêcheurs bretons et normands. Des comptoirs de pêche, des baleineries, des phoqueries, s'établissent sur ce qui devient alors le French shore, sur les côtes de Terre-Neuve. Saint-Pierre et Miquelon change dix-sept fois de puissance tutélaire, tantôt française, tantôt anglaise, avant de rester définitivement française, il y a plus de deux cents ans. Localement, les racines basques, normandes et bretonnes sont les ferments d'une identité particulière, intergénérationnelle, influencée, logiquement, par les échanges avec les communautés voisines, mais aussi, bien-sûr, par les relations avec les pêcheurs étrangers des navires banquiers, qui venaient faire relâche localement jusqu'au moratoire de la pêche à la morue en 1992. Saint-Pierre et Miquelon s'établit donc très rapidement comme une périphérie extractive européenne<sup>39</sup> et française qui plus est, véritable plaque tournante d'une halieutique qui se globalise durant plusieurs siècles. Mais la vie des habitants, très attachés à leur territoire, n'est pas faite que de pêche sur les Grands Bancs. Elle est aussi faite d'une pêche côtière, artisanale, dont les pratiquants sont administrativement qualifiés de « petits pêcheurs saint-pierrais et miquelonnais ». Le PCI



Traversée Atlantique  
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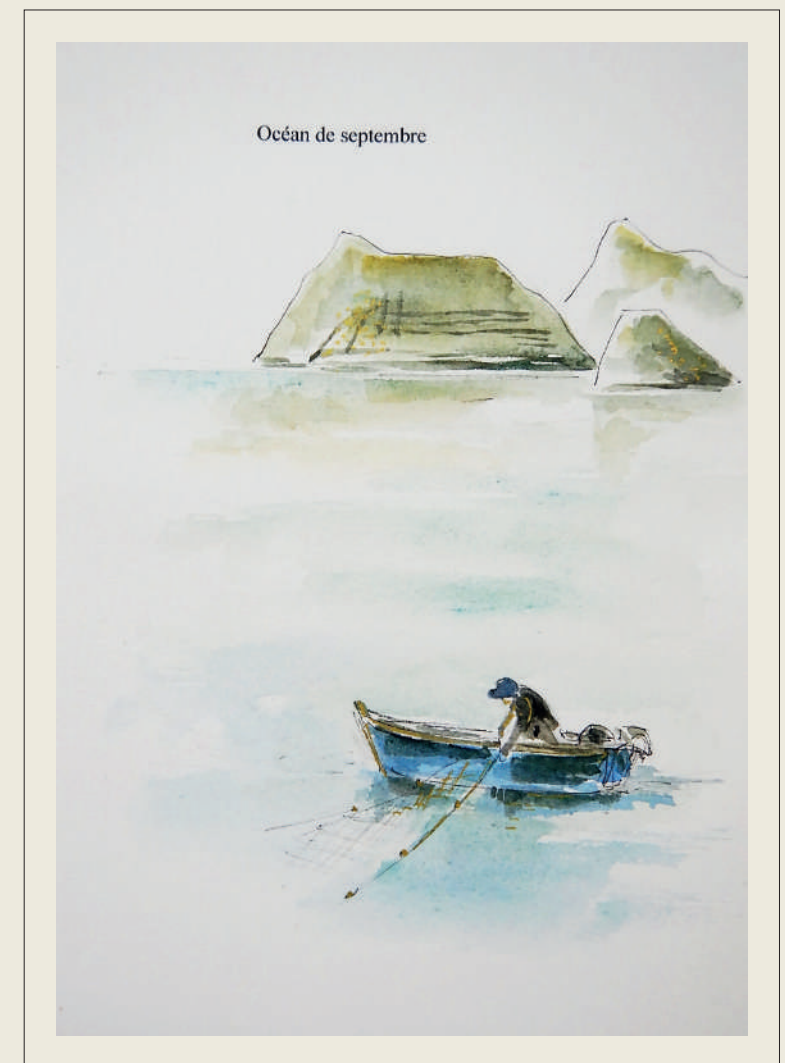
38 Peter Bridgewater, Ian D. Rotherham, « A critical perspective on the concept of biocultural diversity and its emerging role in nature and heritage conservation », in *People and Nature*, vol. 1, n°3, 2019, pp. 291-304.

39 Une périphérie tout à fait centrale. Au sujet des périphéries extractives, voir : Jawad Daheur, « Extractive Peripheries in Europe: Quest for Resources and Changing Environments (Fifteenth-Twentieth Centuries)-Introduction », in *Global Environment*, vol. 15, n°1, 2022, pp. 7-31.

local est particulièrement riche, teinté d'influences basques, bretonnes et normandes, de relations lointaines à la métropole, des cousinages avec les Acadiens, les Madelinots, Terre-Neuviens (les « Nioufs » comme les appellent familièrement les Saint-Pierrais). Sur l'archipel, il y a un bateau pour 10 habitants, et 10% de ces habitants pêchent, et autant chassent (et pratiquent souvent les deux concomitamment). Ces pratiques connectées aux natures locales permettent de s'échapper des deux centres urbains, mais aussi de pratiquer un usage vivrier, ancestral, de l'environnement, finalement éloigné des chalutiers usines. Toutefois, ces navires armés à la grande pêche ont également rythmé les ports de Saint-Pierre et de Miquelon, amenant eux aussi des métissages et des hybridations patrimoniales, contribuant à l'émergence d'un PCI relativement unique, mais aussi menacé, faute d'une communauté perpétuant ces savoirs et pratiques de grande envergure. Enfin, une discrète mais historique présence d'une communauté Mik'maq, qui fréquente l'île de Miquelon depuis plusieurs siècles, permet également la présence d'un PCI distinct sur certains points, partagé sur d'autres.

### Les fjords du sud Groenland : (non)-hybridations norso-inuites

Les fjords du sud Groenland. Plus précisément, la commune de Kujalleq, l'une des quatre communes de l'immense territoire groenlandais. En son sein, notre enquête s'est déroulée autour des fjords de Tunulliarfik (ex-fjord Erik le Rouge) et d'Igaliku (ex-fjord d'Einar). Ces fjords, parsemés d'îles et d'îlots, sont habités de manière réticulaire, sans connexion routière entre les peuplements, exceptés certaines urbanisations. Deux principales villes occupent l'espace : celles de Qaqortoq (cinquième ville du pays), et celle de Narsaq, plus modeste. Avec Nanortalik, un peu plus au sud, ces agglomérations forment un pôle relativement identifiable dans cette côte sud-ouest du Groenland, complété par de nombreux villages, et de fréquentes fermes ovines isolées. Ce territoire est particulier au sein du Groenland : il a été l'un des premiers lieux danisé par les norois, et a contribué à asseoir leur domination sur cette « terre verte ». La région a constitué la tête de pont de l'évangélisation, l'alphabétisation (scandinave), mais aussi, et cela a son importance, de l'agriculture arctique. C'est en effet au cœur de ces longs fjords, de plusieurs dizaines de kilomètres, que les colons danois ont importé des arbres fruitiers, ainsi que l'élevage, de chevaux, mais surtout, de moutons. Une forme d'ambivalence, sans clivage cependant, règne ainsi encore aujourd'hui, entre un amont de fjords relativement rural, tourné vers l'élevage et sa domestication, l'accaparement foncier par enclosure, et la viande, aux origines danoises affirmées ; et un aval, où, plus près de la mer, demeurent des communautés plus inuites dans leurs âmes, tournées vers les communs maritimes et côtiers, la prédation du sauvage, les mammifères marins, les oiseaux et le poisson. Il est certain que de nombreuses hybridations, résultantes d'une sédimentation sur



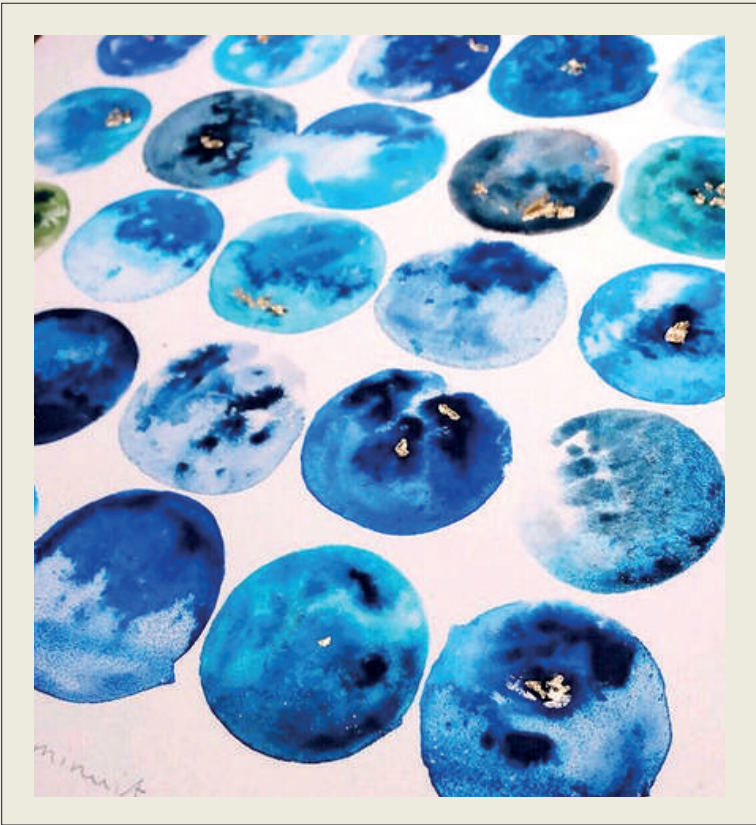
Icebergs  
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le temps long, ont été observées, mais certains invariants semblaient presque parfois persister. Un véritable renouveau des cultures inuites s’observe dans la région, poussé par les revendications contre un projet de mine sur un gisement uranifère, qui a renforcé, bien malgré lui, les ressentiments identitaires. Cela n’empêche en aucun cas une ouverture vers d’autres formes de savoirs et pratiques, sans sclérose, et l’innovation, ou du moins les mutations patrimoniales contemporaines, qui ne sont jamais loin, face à une région également en première ligne du réchauffement climatique. Là encore, un PCI particulier, spécifique à ce territoire et aux communautés qui l’occupent a pu être décelé. Non sans rappeler, dans bien des cas, celui de Saint-Pierre et Miquelon et de ses habitants.

Des PCI côtiers et marins boréaux en recomposition face aux changements

Ces deux terrains nous servent de démonstrateurs pour désigner les côtes des régions arctiques et sub-arctiques de la Mer du Labrador comme des territoires porteurs d’un PCI spécifique, connaissant d’importantes variations locales, mais également une armature commune, axée sur une exploitation locale raisonnée (mais aussi exogène déraisonnée) des environnements marins et côtiers locaux. Toutefois, ces territoires font face à de très nombreux changements, qui se sont vivement accentués tout au long du XXème siècle, et qui demeurent aujourd’hui à un niveau élevé de mutations<sup>40</sup>. Ces changements sont pluriels et engendrent des effets « cocktail ». Ils sont d’origines tant anthropiques que naturelles, voire le plus souvent, d’origines mixtes. Ces changements, partagés par les « autres Nords » sont d’ordres politiques, économiques, sociaux, ou environnementaux, et perturbent, selon différents degrés, différentes échelles et différentes chronologies, les communautés locales et leurs environnements, dans une incertitude globale<sup>41</sup>. Les modes d’exploitation traditionnels, soutenables<sup>42</sup>, des ressources offertes par les natures maritimes et côtières de ces régions, pourtant socle des PCI communautaires locaux, sont remis en question par une multitude de facteurs déséquilibrants<sup>43</sup>. Mais en parallèle, ces mêmes communautés font preuve d’adaptations, voire de transformations, faisant



Eaux  
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40 Mibu Fischer, Kimberley Maxwell, Nuunoq, Halfdan Pedersen, Dean Greeno, Nang Jingwas, Blair Jamie Graham, Sutej Hugu, Tero Mustonen, Eero Murtomäki, Kaisu Mustonen, « Empowering her guardians to nurture our Ocean’s future », in *Reviews in Fish Biology and Fisheries*, vol. 32, n°1, 2022, pp. 271-296.

41 Émilie Mariat-Roy, « Composer avec un environnement incertain. Reconfiguration des pêches côtières en Islande dans le cadre du régime des Quotas Individuels Transférables (QIT) (1991-2011) », in Kévin de la Croix, Véronica Mitroï (eds.), *Écologie politique de la pêche. Temporalités, crises, résistances et résiliences dans le monde de la pêche*, Nanterre, Presses universitaires de Paris Nanterre, 2020, p. 272.

42 Pirjo Kristiina Virtanen, Laura Siragusa, Hanna Guttorm, « Introduction: Toward more inclusive definitions of sustainability », in *Current Opinion in Environmental Sustainability* n°43, 2020, pp. 77-82.

43 Nous pouvons mobiliser le concept d’ « ontologies altérées » proposé par Plaan : Joonas Plaan, « Altered ontologies of the seascape: local knowledge, environmental change and conservation in Kihnu, Estonia », in *Journal of Political Ecology*, vol. 25, n°1, 2018, pp. 569-586.



Bateau de pêche pris dans la glace  
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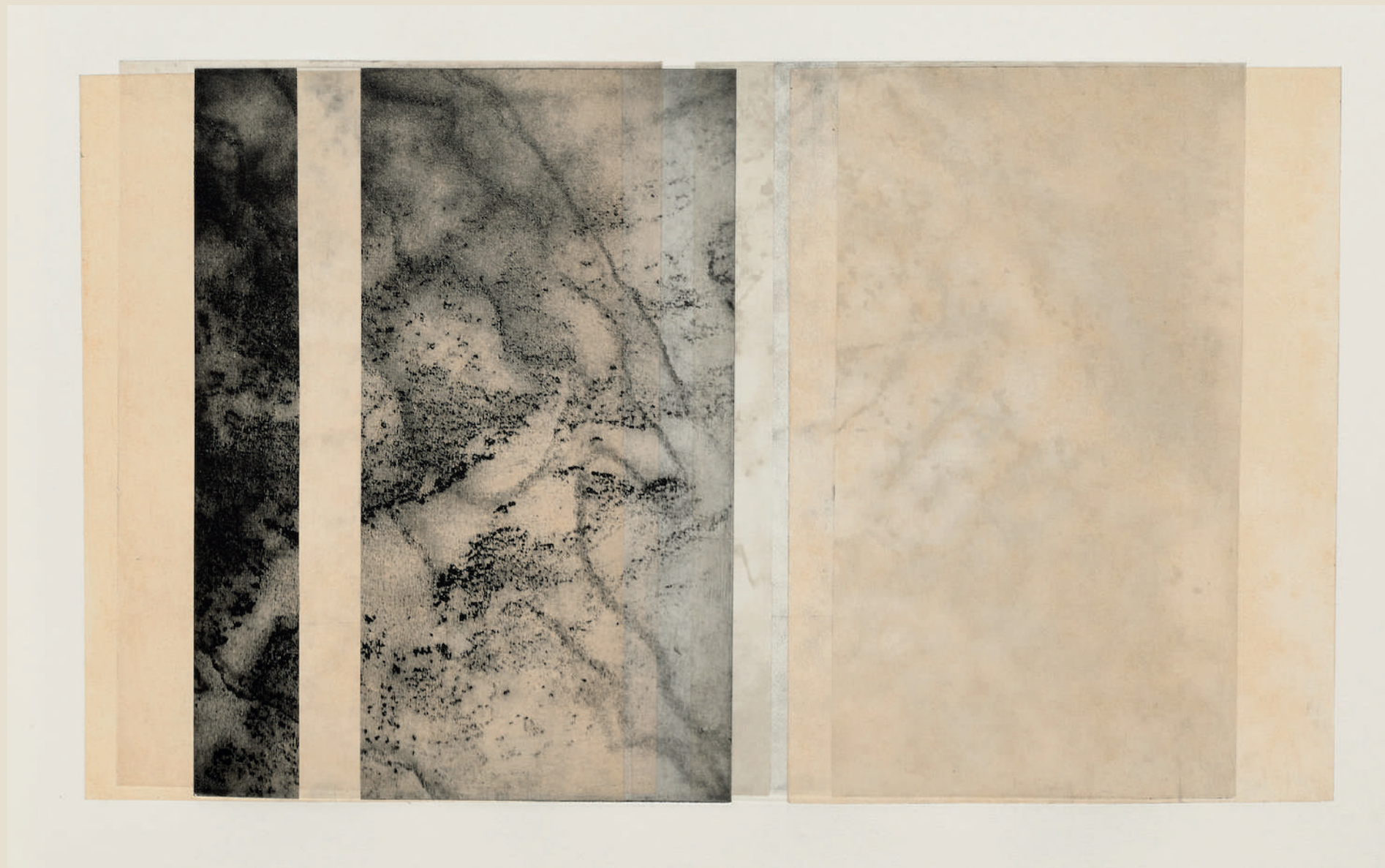
évoluer leurs PCI dans de nombreuses voies. Nous ne souhaitons pas ici tomber dans l’écueil de la nostalgie, mais, au contraire, rendre compte de l’extrême volonté des porteurs de PCI rencontrés, tous vivement engagés à assurer la perpétuation de leurs savoirs et pratiques aux générations futures, malgré ce contexte de changements forts, rapides et brutaux. Les pressions et forçages exercés sur ces PCI permettent également l’éclosion de nouvelles formes patrimoniales, et, *in fine*, nous avons pu observer une fabrique en cours, un véritable design patrimonial à l’œuvre au sein de ces communautés<sup>44</sup>, gage d’une certaine sauvegarde de ces PCI face aux risques et menaces contemporains. Les littoraux de l’Arctique et du sub-arctique constituent de véritables laboratoires, aux avant-postes de ces évolutions majeures. Ils invitent, convient et obligent à étendre ces enquêtes cosmo/graphiques en leur cœur<sup>45</sup>.

44 Maria Huhmarniemi, Timo Jokela, « Arctic art and material culture: Northern knowledge and cultural resilience in the northernmost Europe », in *Arctic Yearbook*, 2020, pp. 242-259.

45 Art Leete, « Finno-Ugric Indigenous Knowledge, Hybridity and Co-Creation in Research: The Komi Case », in *Journal of Ethnology and Folkloristics*, vol. 16, n°2, 2022, pp. 86-103.



## POINT DE VUE / *VIEWPOINT*



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# CREATING NEW SYNERGIES IN RESEARCH ON ARCTIC WELL-BEING LINKING THE NATURAL, SOCIAL AND HUMAN SCIENCES WITH INDIGENOUS AND LOCAL KNOWLEDGE

## JAN BORM

UVSQ/University Paris-Saclay, France; UArctic Chair in Arctic Humanities

## HANNE H. CHRISTIANSEN

UNIS, the University Centre in Svalbard, Norway; UArctic Chair in Permafrost Physical Processes

## ROLAND KALLENBORN

NMBU, Norwegian University of Life Sciences, Norway; UArctic Chair in Arctic Environmental Pollution Research

## ARJA RAUTIO

University of Oulu, Finland; UArctic Emerita Chair in Arctic Health

The impact of climate change in the Arctic is estimated to be on average four times higher than elsewhere in the world. The ongoing major changes in the Far North triggered by this process raise numerous questions about the health of the people and the quality of the environment as well as living conditions in the circumpolar regions. At the same time there are other large political and societal changes impacting the Arctic, notably geopolitical challenges due to the ongoing war in Ukraine affecting also the Arctic region and its population. All of these factors contribute to the heightened international awareness about the need for decolonization and full recognition of equal rights of Indigenous people, as well as serious concern about environmental issues and the impact of natural resources exploitation, as well as rapid tourism growth in the Arctic. The combination of these elements is clearly more complex than anything experienced in the Arctic before. The circumpolar regions have certainly been subjected to earlier large

transformations and developments associated with colonization, wars and climatic changes, but never at the same time, never in such multitude, never so evidently at full Arctic scale, and never impacting so many people living in the Arctic with such a variety of backgrounds. Presently modern migration is ongoing to fulfill the need for working capacity in many Arctic communities, often with these new inhabitants coming from much further away or far more distant countries and regions than during earlier periods of settlement or colonization.

Such developments have brought the Arctic both closer to the attention of the global consciousness, but also revealed the urgent need to preserve its unique cultures and ways of living, essential aspects of what Arctic societies consider to be well-being and a good quality of life. Many studies have been undertaken on diverse aspects of these changes and there has been a large focus on multidisciplinary studies within the traditional scientific domains. However,

these problems have not been dealt with in fully inter-, transdisciplinary and intersectoral ways. We are convinced that only such a comprehensive combination of inter-, transdisciplinary and intersectoral approaches across all major domains, associating the natural sciences with Humanities expertise, i.e. the natural, social and human sciences, together with Indigenous and local knowledge, will lead to new, sustainable and responsible solutions for these more and more pressing issues. Only through such broad, combined disciplinary and intersectoral strategies the complete spectrum of scientific challenges can be tackled together with Indigenous and local people for the benefit of these societies and stakeholders at large.

We therefore request to put into practice an integrated natural, social and human sciences-based approach including also Indigenous and local knowledge. Such a strategy will allow new detailed truly synergetic field studies approaching today's intertwined major societal, social and environmental issues at stake in Arctic change. Such a fully integrated approach will permit us to obtain a new level of understanding regarding the connectedness of the multiple serious challenges that Arctic communities experience and thus to participate in the effort of developing responsible solutions for future Arctic well-being.

We consider this vision to be the only path forward to grasp those issues comprehensively in view of co-developing with Indigenous and local communities sustainable solutions for a good quality of life in the Arctic in the future, based on broad societal and scientific acceptance, acknowledging the Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage (<https://ich.unesco.org/en/convention>), notably Article 1, paragraphs 1 and 2:

*1. The “intangible cultural heritage” means the practices, representations, expressions, knowledge, skills – as well as the instruments, objects, artefacts and cultural spaces associated therewith – that communities, groups and, in some cases, individuals recognize as part of their cultural heritage. This intangible cultural heritage, transmitted from generation to generation, is constantly recreated by communities and groups in response to their environment, their*

*interaction with nature and their history, and provides them with a sense of identity and continuity, thus promoting respect for cultural diversity and human creativity. For the purposes of this Convention, consideration will be given solely to such intangible cultural heritage as is compatible with existing international human rights instruments, as well as with the requirements of mutual respect among communities, groups and individuals, and of sustainable development.*

*2. The “intangible cultural heritage”, as defined in paragraph 1 above, is manifested inter alia in the following domains:*

- (a) oral traditions and expressions, including language as a vehicle of the intangible cultural heritage;*
- (b) performing arts;*
- (c) social practices, rituals and festive events;*
- (d) knowledge and practices concerning nature and the universe;*
- (e) traditional craftsmanship.*

Such strategies must be applied in a circumpolar context. Among others, as a first step towards an integration of locally based research activities, the Greenland Self-Government has implemented a Research strategy requesting that all scientific activities “must be anchored” and related to Greenland research infrastructures; hence, we fully acknowledge these principal goals of Greenland's research strategy 2022-30. As stated in the strategy, such an approach “must support sustainable social development” and “be easily accessible to all”<sup>1</sup>. Similarly, the “Ethical Guidelines for Research Involving the Sámi People in Finland” state that “responsible conduct in research involving the Sámi is based on community orientation and the significance of the research for the community”<sup>2</sup>. It is therefore indispensable to recognize - and we fully acknowledge - the principles of the code conduct of ethical research outlined in the guidelines: “reciprocal communication and engagement”, “assessment of the benefits and risks of

1 Naalakkersuisut/Government of Greenland, “Research – the road to progress. Greenland's National Research Strategy, 2022-2030”, Ministry for Education, Culture, Sports and Church, December 2022. Online publication available at: <https://nis.gl/wp-content/uploads/2023/01/english-book.pdf> (last accessed August 17, 2024).

2 “Ethical Guidelines for Research Involving the Sámi People in Finland”, 2024, p. 32. Online publication available at: <https://oulurepo.oulu.fi/bitstream/handle/10024/50115/nbnfioulu-202405294076.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y> (last accessed August 17, 2024).

the research and the positionality of the researcher and their research”, “appreciation of and respect for Sámi society and knowledge”, “obligation to return and share information”.

As a recently developed approach to implement the interlinkage of health and environmental aspects not only in the Arctic, the concept of ONE HEALTH has been initiated as a major research paradigm, studying the interconnection between humans, animals and their environment. As an important part of sustainable ONE HEALTH studies in and about the Arctic, research priorities have to be co-constructed with Indigenous and local communities. Such a research concept fully integrates local and indigenous knowledge into ongoing research priorities, in line with the Greenland research strategy and the “Ethical Guidelines for Research Involving the Sámi People in Finland”.

However, the synergetic association of the natural, social *and* human sciences with traditional Indigenous and local knowledge is still not recognized as the new and promising way forward. Nonetheless, Arctic scientific experts have been recently turning towards this research concept due to the awareness that conventional scientific approaches are not efficient any more for solving the current complex challenges the Arctic people and environment are facing. This new approach we are promoting here integrates the fundamental role of history, traditions, as well as social and cultural development, including identity issues. Indeed, as Adams *et al.* (2022) concluded, “*there is an urgent need to address persistent health disparities in Arctic Indigenous communities*” since they “*reflect the destructive legacy of colonialism, forced displacement, inadequate health systems, systemic racism, and infrastructure deficits*”<sup>3</sup>. When it comes to apprehending what notions of well-being may depend on in the Arctic, the weight of this legacy must be fully acknowledged. This becomes crucial in the Arctic where ongoing climate change does not only provoke potentially disastrous effects on infrastructure and living conditions, ecosystems and

environmental health (thawing permafrost, extreme weather events, environmental pollution impacting food and water security etc.). Climate change has also opened new economic opportunities that have notably led to extended exploitation of natural resources and large-scale tourism that are increasingly threatening the quality of life of local communities and their environment. This interconnected cluster of challenges has led communities and scientists in the Arctic and elsewhere to raise the question of 1) What is a satisfactory quality of life? 2) What internal and external factors does it depend on? and 3) What must be done in the future to guarantee “good” life conditions for the people in the Arctic? – a good quality of life, which Arctic societies are obviously entitled to, just like any other human society elsewhere in the world.

In this context, it should be born in mind that the Arctic is far from being the empty space many groups and industries with economic interest in the region have repeatedly claimed it to be. About 5 million people live on permafrost in the Arctic (Ramage, 2021)<sup>4</sup>.

As a scientific point of departure of our transdisciplinary scientific strategy, we need to initially turn our attention to the past, to understand what a good quality of life in the Arctic may have meant in previous times and how this is expressed notably in Arctic Indigenous worldviews<sup>5</sup>. Such knowledge is considered as a baseline for the comprehensive understanding of what has changed and what could be done to mitigate and remove negative development for the benefit of a sustainable future of Arctic communities and the environment alike.

In view of this objective, it is vital to acknowledge and utilize the fundamental link between language, culture and the traditional interaction of Indigenous communities with the Arctic environment, since this threefold relation constitutes their sense of identity.<sup>6</sup>

This parameter has been accepted in some recent, ground-breaking trials where the role of Indigenous

rights was an issue<sup>7</sup>. In this context, it is also essential to recognize the pivotal role of culture, highlighted by Karetak *et al.*: “*Iliqqusituqat* is to lay out a philosophy for a good life, recognizing the role of culture in having a good life<sup>8</sup>.”

We do acknowledge the profound value of the intertwined human and environmental rights. We strongly believe that ONE HEALTH is a holistic concept for balancing this complex relationship in a scientific context. However, we are also convinced that only by adding studies of the paleo- and historical environment, environmental history and the history and culture of Arctic First Nations, a sustainable scientific base can be established for developing balanced holistic strategies in view of responsible economic development fully integrating the crucial objective of maintaining bio-, geo- and cultural diversity, preserving the Arctic environment, cultures and traditions.

As documented in various recent studies, many research projects associate the natural and social sciences, but the human sciences as well as Indigenous and traditional knowledge are far from being systematically included. This is also evidenced by existing research structures and educational institutions. If we want to find comprehensive solutions to complex intertwined challenges in a changing Arctic, we must leave the conventional scientific strategies and find new ways by creating transdisciplinary and intersectoral interactions

between all these domains and Indigenous as well as local knowledge. This will provide a reliable platform to develop future balanced interactions between economic, social, cultural and environmental interests in the region.

We believe that there is a need for research innovation allowing for the construction of fully integrated interdisciplinary teams with experts from all major scientific domains - including the human sciences – performing research together based on transdisciplinary and intersectoral collaboration with Arctic communities. We are convinced that this is the way forward to obtain new significant results enhancing a sense of equity which is undoubtedly one of the key components of our notion of a good quality of life for people and balanced ecosystems.

Indigenous worldviews are based on a holistic understanding of the integrated relation between all living beings and their environment. There is no opposition between nature and culture. In our opinion, studies of the quality of life in the Arctic should be conceived of holistically, integrating all scientific domains as well as Indigenous and traditional knowledge. This is the only way to include systematically diachronic and synchronic approaches indispensable to envisage the future.

The very way in which calls for projects are designed needs to evolve accordingly, just like research structures, when it comes to studying circumpolar health and the Arctic holistically, at last.

3 Adams LV, Dorrough DS, and the Executive Committee of the Lancet Commission on Arctic and Northern Health Accelerating Indigenous health and wellbeing: the Lancet Commission on Arctic and Northern Health. *The Lancet*, 2022; 399, 613-4. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0140-6736\(22\)00153-2](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0140-6736(22)00153-2) (last accessed July 5, 2024).

4 Ramage, J., Jungsberg, L., Wang, S. *et al.* Population living on permafrost in the Arctic. *Popul Environ* 43, 22–38 (2021). <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11111-020-00370-6> (last accessed August 17, 2024).

5 See notably Joe Karetak, Frank Tester and Shirley Tagalik (eds.), *Inuit Qaujimajatuqangit. What Inuit Have Always Known to Be True*, Winnipeg, Fernwood Publishing, 2017.

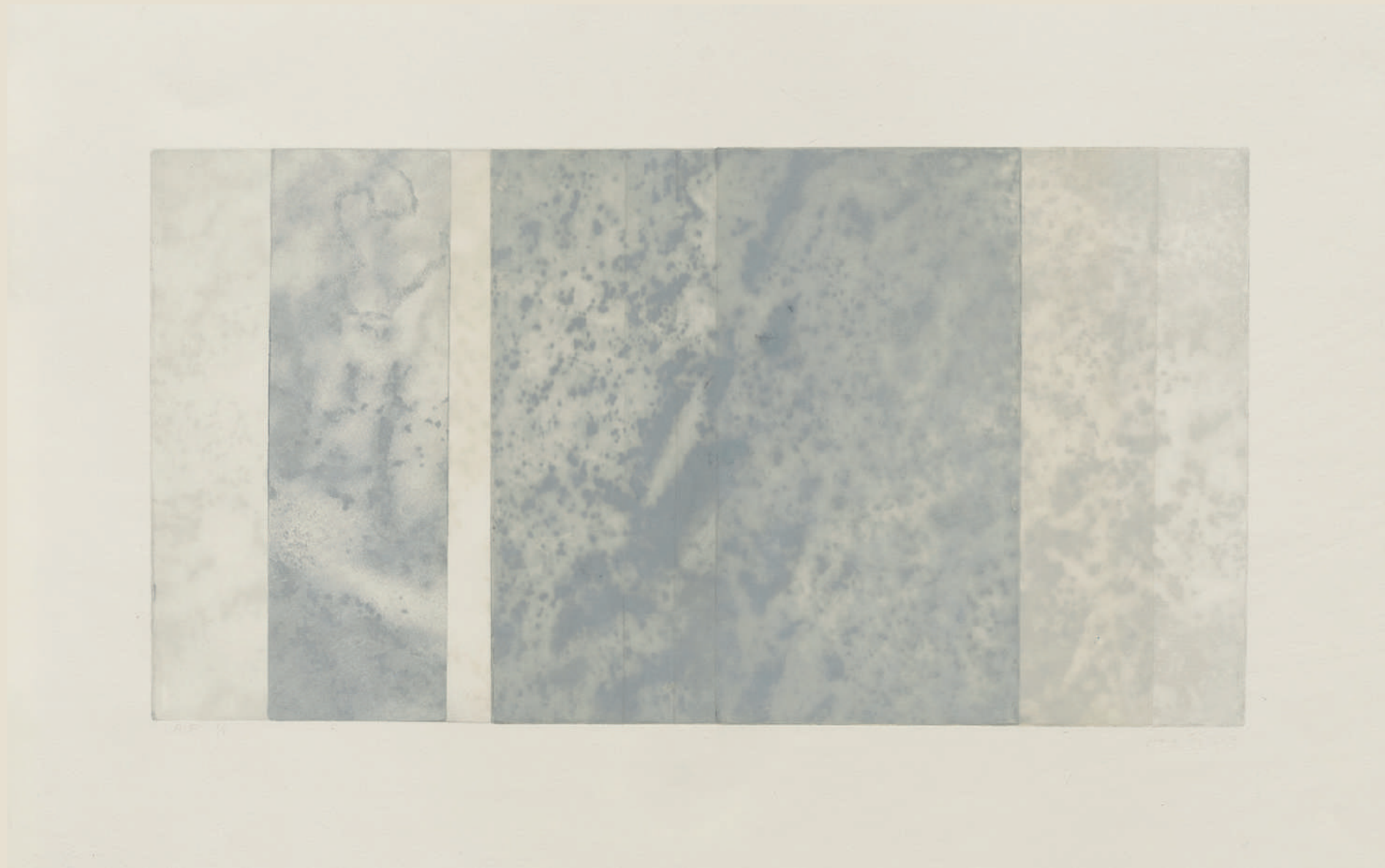
6 On the notion of the territory seen as a cultural, rather than geographical space by Indigenous authors, see Jean-François Létourneau's essay *Le territoire dans les veines (The Territory in the Veins)*, Montréal, Mémoire d'encrier, 2017.

7 See also the forthcoming volume *L'autochtonie comparée des Amériques. Territorialité, Ressources, Droit, Littérature et Culture* (Jan Borm, Daniel Chartier *et al.*, eds.), Montréal, Presses de l'Université du Québec.

8 Joe Karetak *et al.*, *op. cit.*



# LECTURES POLAIRES / *POLAR REVIEWS*



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# QUAND LA BANDE DESSINÉE REGARDE VERS LE GRAND NORD

## MURIEL BROT

Docteure ès lettres et membre du Centre d'étude de la langue et de la littérature françaises des XVIIe et XVIIIe siècles (UMR 8599) au CNRS

*Muriel Brot holds a PhD in French literature and is a member of the Centre for the study of French language and literature in the 17th and 18th century at the French National Centre for Scientific Research*

- Jean Malaurie, Pierre Makyo, Frédéric Bihel, *Malaurie. L'appel de Thulé*, Éditions Delcourt, 2019.

Consacré au jeune chercheur, *Malaurie. L'appel de Thulé* retrace sa première aventure arctique en solitaire, décrit la mission géomorphologique et géocryologique qu'il effectua en 1950-1951, et présente sa rencontre avec les Inuits. Confié au célèbre scénariste Pierre Fournier, dit Makyo, la bande dessinée suit les étapes fondamentales de cette mission, commence en février 1950 au Sahara où Malaurie reçoit l'autorisation de se rendre au Groenland, montre le voyage et l'arrivée à Siorapaluk, met en scène les premiers contacts, puis la rencontre déterminante avec Utaaq puis avec son fils Kutsikitsq. Elle souligne l'ampleur de son dépaysement, voire du choc qu'il éprouva. Face à des Inuits mutiques ou sarcastiques, Jean Malaurie fait l'expérience de la grande solitude, de la rigueur des éléments, de l'étrangeté, traverse ce qu'il qualifiera lui-même plus tard de « profonde dépression » jusqu'à ce qu'il achète des chiens de traîneau, s'attelle à sa mission de recherche et, ce faisant, s'intègre parmi les Inuits. À plusieurs égards, *Malaurie. L'appel de Thulé* s'inscrit dans une longue tradition poétique et philosophique qui touche maintenant la bande dessinée, elle prend place dans une lignée de textes où le Grand Nord est un lieu propice à l'initiation, la révélation de soi, la métamorphose. Publiée chez Futuropolis en 2017, une autre bande dessinée de Mathilde Ramadier et de Laurent Bonneau, intitulée *Et il foula la terre avec légèreté*, raconte l'itinéraire intellectuel, moral et politique d'un jeune ingénieur envoyé en mission d'exploration par son entreprise pour déterminer s'il est ou non possible d'implanter une nouvelle plateforme pétrolière au large des Îles Lofoten. Passionné par la recherche scientifique, les

avancées technologiques et le progrès, convaincu au départ de la nécessité de cette nouvelle installation, Ethan, impressionné par la pureté du paysage et la sérénité de ses habitants, va progressivement douter du bien-fondé de sa mission.

Extrait des œuvres de Jean Malaurie, tout particulièrement des *Derniers rois de Thulé* ou de ses *Mémoires. De la pierre à l'âme*, reprenant à la lettre les mots du chercheur, le texte de *Malaurie. L'appel de Thulé* restitue les événements et les conversations, les perceptions et les émotions du jeune chercheur, tels qu'il les a lui-même décrits, renouvelant ainsi le récit personnel, rétrospectif, autobiographique, qu'affectionne Jean Malaurie lorsqu'il veut jouer le plus efficacement possible son rôle de lanceur d'alerte. Différente de ses *Mémoires* qui décrivent l'ensemble de sa vie personnelle et publique en s'attachant au contexte international, historique et politique de la recherche arctique, la bande dessinée se concentre sur son ressenti, son intimité, la manière douloureuse puis épanouissante dont il vécut son implantation en cet étrange milieu jusqu'à ce qu'il le perçoive comme un « haut lieu de ressourcement apollinien ».

Fidèle à ses sources textuelles, transcrivant les propres mots du chercheur, *Malaurie. L'appel de Thulé* conserve la narration en « je » qu'utilise généralement Jean Malaurie. On pourrait penser que l'élagage de la parole malaurienne, bien qu'il ne modifie pas le mode d'énonciation du narrateur, appauvrisse plus ou moins le récit de son expérience ; déperdition que ne compenserait pas, ou pas suffisamment, l'adjonction d'images au discours. La bande dessinée ouvre au contraire une nouvelle

perspective qui accentue davantage certaines lignes fondamentales du texte initial, montrant par exemple que, tel Élisée Reclus et quelques autres grands noms de la géographie, Jean Malaurie n'était pas un savant de cabinet mais un véritable géologue-ethnologue de terrain. N'étant plus uniquement décrit par ses propres mots mais représenté par son dessinateur, au même titre que Kutsikitsq, Utaaq, Imina et quelques autres Inuits, étant montré, vu avant d'être entendu comme le sont également les autres protagonistes de cette aventure, le narrateur Jean Malaurie perd une partie de sa suprématie auctoriale et subit une forme d'objectivation. En le campant au milieu de ce climat et de cette culture totalement inconnue de lui, la bande dessinée souligne, impose, plus encore que le récit original de Jean Malaurie, sa totale et difficile immersion en milieu polaire suivie de sa radicale transformation. Ce changement de représentation engendrant un nouveau point de vue, le passage de la parole omnipotente au discours illustré rejaillit également sur la nature du texte-source repris dans les bulles : le récit autobiographique relatant en première personne du singulier une expérience singulière, intime, devient dans la bande dessinée, par le biais des images qui représentent tous les personnages et leur donnent la parole, la partie d'un personnage parmi d'autres, fût-il – ce qui n'est pas toujours certain – l'acteur le plus important de cette histoire. Égalisant le statut des protagonistes tous sujets des dessins, la bande dessinée permet de passer du monologue au dialogue, de la tirade à la réplique, elle opère une sorte de translation qui donne la mesure de la rencontre déterminante qui orienta toute la vie de Jean Malaurie.

Reprenant les mots de Jean Malaurie, et par conséquent les références intellectuelles et artistiques que lui inspira le paysage polaire, Nietzsche, Hölderlin, Wagner, la bande dessinée reconstitue l'imaginaire intime et le regard du jeune chercheur. Elle expose les philosophies et les formes au prisme desquelles il perçut cet espace nouveau, entremêlant, comme John Ruskin le fit avant lui, l'art et la science, la peinture et la géologie, car ce savant naturaliste, cartographe spécialiste des éboulis, était aussi un grand amateur d'art et un peintre. Imaginant de Tamanrasset les glaces polaires qui se dresseraient bientôt devant lui, Jean Malaurie voit les grandes lignes d'un iceberg, représentation anticipée qui n'est pas sans évoquer la structure du tableau de Caspar Friedrich Friedrich intitulé *La Mer de glace*.

Transcrire en bande dessinée le récit personnel de Jean Malaurie est une démarche d'autant plus

intéressante et féconde qu'elle honore son goût prononcé pour les images et pour les couleurs, qu'elle concrétise son inclination pour ce mode de communication. N'écrit-il pas que le « but » recherché dans ses *Mémoires* est « d'aller, sans jargonner, au plus profond », de « laisser *une profusion d'images* ». Confiées au dessinateur Frédéric Bihel qui a déjà produit plusieurs albums traitant des sujets historiques de manière réaliste, qui aime aussi les biographies et les récits d'exploration, les illustrations, dont il faut souligner la grande qualité, actualisent la propension de Malaurie à produire des images, à jouer des couleurs, pour accéder à « l'anthropologie du sensible » qui organisait sa vie polaire. Les dessins de Bihel nous introduisent dans le ressenti de Jean Malaurie, dans son désir d'immersion totale, lui qui voulait « sentir en images et ne pas penser ». L'âge venu, lorsqu'il se tourne vers le pastel pour peindre le paysage arctique, l'objectif de Jean Malaurie est de « faire comprendre la majesté, le mystère surnaturel de ce jeu de couleurs », de « représenter sur une petite feuille blanche, tramée, les teintes changeantes de la mer, de l'iceberg et du ciel et fixer leurs singulières variations selon l'heure et l'espace environnant ». Comme en témoignent de nombreux passages de ses œuvres, ainsi que l'intérêt qu'il porte aux travaux de Michel Pastoureau, Jean Malaurie accordait une grande importance à la couleur. Ses *Mémoires* ne cessent de décrire les coloris de la région, d'en présenter les infimes nuances, d'évoquer sa perception émotionnelle : « Je me sentais d'abord comme drapé de couleurs et d'images sonores. Ici, à la mi-pente, c'est un vert adolescent, réservé aux espaces tôt libérés des neiges ; un vert masculin, très vite apaisé, en une à deux semaines, par des teintes ici et là d'un jaune automnal. Il contrastait avec le jaune clair des sables de versants sans végétation. » Décrivant « un noir aristocratique », « un rose cendre ; apaisant, mais sadique », sa perception et sa description des couleurs montrent combien il s'est immergé dans le paysage arctique. Grand coloriste, Bihel a parfaitement rendu les teintes naturelles de la région, mais aussi les émotions du jeune chercheur, la peur et la joie, les craintes et les désirs de tous les protagonistes, sans oublier le rayonnement du paysage et des hommes, l'entrelacement des lumières externes et intimes. C'est un très bel album qui plonge son lecteur dans le vécu des personnages, qui l'aide à se représenter et à comprendre cette aventure exceptionnelle que fut la mission polaire de 1950-1951.

Centrée sur l'itinéraire du jeune Malaurie rencontrant les Inuits, cette bande dessinée retrace



aussi, par élargissement et réfraction, la manière dont les Inuits découvrirent les Européens. Racontant l’histoire de Jean Malaurie, elle montre également une histoire qui le dépasse largement car il est aussi, tout à la fois un jalon de l’histoire des Inuit et une étape essentielle de notre histoire de la connaissance, aussi bien scientifique que culturelle, Jean Malaurie ayant communiqué sur le milieu naturel et la population de Thulé comme peu de chercheurs l’avaient fait avant lui. Relatant

le parcours de celui qui se voulait « témoin et historien », cette bande dessinée présente un événement commun à l’histoire de plusieurs publics, un épisode fondateur aussi bien pour les Inuits que pour les scientifiques et les artistes mondiaux spécialistes de l’Arctique, un événement essentiel pour tous les passionnés du Grand Nord lecteurs friands de nouvelles ouvertures sur le monde. C’est peu de dire qu’elle mériterait d’être traduite en groenlandais, ou, pour le moins, en anglais.

# CHARLES WEINSTEIN PASSEUR DE LA LANGUE ET DE LA LITTÉRATURE TCHOUKCHTES

MURIEL BROT

- Charles Weinstein, *Éléments du fonctionnement de la langue tchouktche*, Paris, L'Harmattan, 2023, 482 p.

Aggré de russe, traducteur d’Alexandre Pouchkine, Charles Weinstein connaît bien la Tchoukotka, région située à l’extrême nord-est du continent asiatique, séparée de l’Alaska par le détroit de Béring, investie par les Russes depuis le milieu du XVIIe siècle. C’est l’un des rares spécialistes mondiaux de la langue et de la littérature tchoukhtes, spécialiste d’autant mieux informé qu’il séjourna en Tchoukotka une grande partie des années 1993-2002 et que son épouse Zoia Weinstein-Tagrina est une artiste tchouktche qui collabore à certaines de ses publications. Des années 1990 à 2024, Charles Weinstein a donné un si grand nombre d’ouvrages de synthèse, de traductions littéraires et d’articles linguistiques qu’il serait trop long d’en dresser ici la liste. Citons à titre d’exemples *Les Tchoukhtes du détroit de Béring* (Éditions Autrement, 1999), *La Tchoukotka : la terre et les hommes* (Bulletin de la Société de Géographie de Toulouse, n° 285, 2005). Pour la littérature citons les *Poésies tchoukhtes* (Voix d’encre, 1996), les traductions des grands textes d’auteurs tels *Éleveurs de rennes* d’Ivan Omrouvié et *Peaux de phoque* de Valentina Veget (Éditions Autrement, 1999, rééd. 2020). L’anthologie qu’il publie en 2010 aux éditions L’Harmattan, *Récits et nouvelles du Grand Nord traduits du tchouktche*, montre combien cette littérature est originale, variée, universelle par son étude du rapport de l’homme et de la nature, regard qui serait bien utile à notre réflexion contemporaine sur le climat.

Les *Éléments du fonctionnement de la langue tchouktche* que Charles Weinstein publie à présent aux Éditions L’Harmattan s’inscrit naturellement dans le sillage de son *Dictionnaire tchouktche-français-anglais-russe* (Anadyr, 2015, rééd. 2019). Cette étude, qui complète son ouvrage *Parlons Tchouktche. Une langue de Sibérie* (L’Harmattan, 2011), est également

nourrie des recherches effectuées pour plusieurs articles que cet éminent linguiste consacra à la langue tchouktche de 2005 à 2023, articles souvent publiés dans la revue *Questions d’histoire et de culture des pays et territoires nordiques*. La dernière publication de Charles Weinstein et Zoia Weinstein-Tagrina s’intitule « À propos de la terminologie de l’alimentation en tchouktche » (*Matériaux de la Conférence d’Anadyr*, Mai 2023).

Ces travaux sont d’autant plus importants que la langue tchouktche, pratiquée oralement depuis des siècles, ne devient une langue écrite qu’au XXe siècle. Linguiste exilé sur la Kolyma en 1890, Vladimir Bogoraz en publie en 1932 le premier abécédaire. Les premiers articles rédigés en tchouktche paraissent en 1933 dans le journal *Tchoukotka Soviétique*. Les premières œuvres littéraires apparaissent dans les années 1950, écrites par Youri Rytkhéou (1930-2008), Ivan Omrouvié (1940-2020), Valentina Veget (1934-). S’inspirant des contes et des légendes de leur peuple, ces écrivains créent une véritable langue littéraire en même temps qu’ils tentent de la célébrer et de la préserver. Certaines œuvres montrent l’état de la société avant l’arrivée des Russes, puis des Européens venus mettre en valeur les richesses minières de la Tchoukotka. D’autres, telle la nouvelle « Les hommes sont différents » de Youri Rytkhéou où le narrateur « souhaite en son for intérieur que son livre soit traduit en russe » car, dit-il, « j’écris pour mes proches de la terre tchouktche et, si ma parole est entendue, je parlerai de notre petit peuple à tout le pays », montrent que les Tchoukhtes n’ont pas d’emblée rejeté les Russes, qu’ils n’ont pas rechigné à parler leur langue. Ils en paient aujourd’hui le prix fort, leur hospitalité et leur ouverture ayant contribué, parmi d’autres éléments, à l’effacement progressif de leur langue.

Comme le montre Charles Weinstein dans un article intitulé « Jean Malaurie rend leur dignité aux Tchoukhtes » et publié en 2021 dans le supplément numérique *Malaurie. L’Herne*, la langue tchouktche, de moins en moins utilisée, est en effet menacée, en voie d’extinction. La diminution du nombre de ses locuteurs et le rétrécissement de sa sphère d’utilisation engendrant une réduction de son vocabulaire actif, le parler tchouktche est en voie de disparition, se diluant dans une société principalement russophone. Constatant en octobre 2013 que les jeunes Tchoukhtes ne comprennent plus leur langue maternelle, qu’ils doivent l’apprendre comme une langue étrangère, le gouverneur de la Tchoukotka élabora un projet de loi susceptible de freiner cet effacement, inutilement, car cette initiative resta lettre morte. Cette situation est inquiétante, non seulement sur le principe car, comme le disait Jean Malaurie, toutes les langues autochtones sont une richesse à protéger, mais elle est également regrettable car cette langue, riche en vocables techniques portant sur des domaines très spécialisés tels que l’élevage du renne et la chasse aux mammifères marins, est un véritable document ethnologique. Perdre ce vocabulaire reviendrait à perdre des savoir-faire et des mœurs spécifiques, des croyances et des valeurs originales, toute une culture boréale unique. L’ouvrage que lui consacre aujourd’hui Charles Weinstein est donc tout à la fois linguistique, historique et politique. Il s’inscrit dans le sillage de son étude « Chronologie des rapports russo-tchoukhtes. Période pré-soviétique, soviétique et post-soviétique » que Jean Malaurie a intégrée en bonne place dans son *Arctica. Œuvres II. Tchoukotka 1990. De Lénine*

à la *Pérestroïka* (CNRS Éditions, 2019). *Éléments du fonctionnement de la langue tchouktche* propose une description si riche et si précise de cet idiome, traitant aussi bien de la formation des mots que de la construction des énoncés, sans négliger le lexique présenté dans plusieurs glossaires spécialisés, que le titre de cet ouvrage semble bien modeste au regard de sa réelle envergure. Il s’agit en réalité d’une grammaire complète et méthodique du tchouktche, alliant phonologie, morphologie, syntaxe et sémantique, ne négligeant aucun aspect de cette langue peu connue pour proposer l’ouvrage de référence en la matière. Cette description est encore précieuse car l’insertion systématique d’exemples permet de cerner les très nombreuses et très grandes différences entre les langues européennes et le tchouktche, la clarté de la présentation mettant sous les yeux du lecteur à la fois les principes fondateurs et les fragments concrets de la langue. Présenté en édition bilingue, phrase à phrase, la traduction française placée sous chaque énoncé tchouktche, un conte intitulé « La jeune Qasap » est tout à la fois une pépite culturelle et un excellent moyen de s’exercer à la pratique de la langue. L’ouvrage présente également des « Esquisses tchoukhtes » recueillies par V. Bogoraz au XIXe siècle, des dessins très expressifs qui montrent comment les Tchoukhtes percevaient et représentaient le monde à une époque où ils n’avaient pas d’écriture. D’une très grande richesse, témoignant de la grande intelligence de l’auteur et de la profonde affinité entre lui et la Tchoukotka, *Éléments du fonctionnement de la langue tchouktche* est un ouvrage majeur, une étude de référence qui ne pourra de longtemps être dépassée.



# DE LA PIERRE À L'ÂME, DE L'ÂME À LA PLUME : UN COMPTE RENDU DES MÉMOIRES DE JEAN MALAURIE

FLORALIE DUPRÉ

Élève fonctionnaire stagiaire à l'École Normale Supérieure de Lyon et ancienne stagiaire à l'Institut de recherches arctiques Jean Malaurie Monaco-UVSQ

- Jean Malaurie, *De la pierre à l'âme. Mémoires*, Plon, collection « Terre humaine », 672 p., 2022.

Avec ses 31 explorations circumpolaires, Jean Malaurie fut le plus grand spécialiste français de l'Arctique de son époque. Géomorphologue de formation, il a dédié sa vie à l'exploration du nord-ouest du Groenland et à la protection des groupes minoritaires circumpolaires du Grand Nord, auxquels il a consacré des études ethno-historiques capitales. Il est également le premier homme, accompagné de l'Inuit Kutsikitsiq, à avoir atteint le pôle Nord géomagnétique par traîneau à chiens le 29 mai 1951. Entre autres fondateur du Centre d'études arctiques de l'EHESS/CNRS à Paris qu'il a dirigé de 1957 à 2007, et fondateur de la collection « Terre Humaine » chez Plon qu'il inaugure en 1955 avec *Les Derniers Rois de Thulé*, Jean Malaurie a été nommé en 2007 Ambassadeur de Bonne Volonté par l'UNESCO.

Publié chez Plon en 2022, soit pour les 100 ans de l'auteur, *De la pierre à l'âme. Mémoires* est le dernier ouvrage de l'explorateur. Sur la couverture, un portrait de l'auteur sur fond d'une carte du cercle polaire, et un chien loup hurlant à la Lune. L'homme et le chien, figure centrale de la mythologie inuite et de la vie de Jean Malaurie. L'homme et l'animal. L'ouvrage de 600 pages se veut mémoires. Mais l'auteur rappelle cependant dès les premiers mots que « la mémoire ne peut se diriger ; elle peut affleurer, comme si c'était hier, des faits très anciens » (p. 1). Aussi le lecteur ne doit-il pas s'attendre à un simple récit chronologique de sa vie et de ses 31 expéditions. Au contraire, l'ouvrage progresse à coup de va-et-vient dans le passé et le présent de sa propre vie, de celle de la Terre, et de ses peuples.

Des peuples jugés primitifs de l'Arctique, l'Amazonie, l'Afrique, et l'Océanie, Jean Malaurie affirme

qu'ils « sont nos éclaireurs. À mieux dire, ce sont des hommes racines. » (p. 11). Et c'est à la racine de l'univers que l'auteur cherche à remonter. Dans cette quête, il finit par remonter jusqu'à la racine de son être. La rencontre avec le peuple inuit est vécue par le jeune géographe comme des retrouvailles et source d'une véritable paix intérieure. Pourtant, l'auteur ne cache pas la difficulté de sa quête, parfois profondément marquée par la solitude, en tant que chercheur mais encore plus en tant qu'homme. Il s'agit ainsi de rendre compte en un unique ouvrage de l'évolution de la pensée d'un homme, de toutes ses contradictions et de toutes ses vérités. Jean Malaurie parle ainsi d'une « pensée de Blanc inuitisé [...] devenue métisse » (p. 11). Ce métissage est l'aboutissement d'une recherche permanente d'équilibre, entre la théorie et la pratique, le concret et l'invisible, et surtout la raison et la sensation. Ces mémoires doivent peut-être avant tout se comprendre comme l'adoption, par un homme élevé par l'Occident, du chamanisme, de l'animisme, de tout l'esprit du peuple inuit.

## Des origines de l'homme aux origines du monde

Au cœur de la quête métaphysique qui a guidé la vie de l'auteur se trouve le mythe. Comment celui que les Inuits ont nommé « l'homme qui parle avec les pierres » a-t-il compris toute son importance et sa signification ? Dans son enfance à Mayence, Jean Malaurie n'a cessé d'être entouré des mythologies aussi bien germaniques que françaises et gréco-latines. Ces légendes et récits ont nourri chez lui une attention particulière à

l'invisible, voire au surnaturel. S'il a quitté l'Allemagne pour la France à sept ans, Jean Malaurie a conscience du rôle joué par ses origines et son enfance rhénane dans la construction de son imaginaire. Il décrit ses parents comme bourgeois, catholiques, exemplaires. Toutefois, dans la froideur de sa mère, il voit le souffle glacial des Highlands écossais dont elle est originaire. Au-delà de cette froideur, il perçoit tout de même un amour infini, et se trouve béni d'un attrait instinctif pour la poésie romantique de Coleridge et de Yeats. Par son père si autoritaire, il est introduit aux épopées germaniques caractérisées par une certaine virilité et barbarie nourries par un chaos de pierres, de feux, de géants, de nains ou encore de loups-garous.

Ses premières années passées à Mayence ont ainsi nourri une grande sensibilité à l'esprit de la nature, le *Naturgeist*. Marqué par la *romantische Naturforschung*, il est déjà attiré enfant par les espaces infinis qu'il ressent chez les grands compositeurs allemands que sont Bach, Beethoven et Brahms. Il se perd dans la plume des transcendentalistes et se plaît à découvrir cette philosophie de l'expérience affective de la Nature que promeuvent Ralph Waldo Emerson, John Muir ou John Burroughs. Après tout, le souffle du chant des Nibelungen est porté par le vent, et les plus mauvais des hommes sont transformés en pierre par Thor, ce que Jean Malaurie perçoit comme « la première expression dans son enfance de la fonction directive de la pierre » (p. 112). Développant ainsi sa sensibilité animiste, il entend déjà les premiers appels du Grand Nord dans le *Faust* de Goethe, où il entend le nom de Thulé pour la première fois. Dans les eaux du Rhin, ce fleuve majestueux qui coule vers le Nord et qu'il traverse gelé, fait exceptionnel, pour aller vers l'est en février 1929. D'une certaine façon, il s'agit de sa première expédition et du commencement de sa quête vers les origines des hommes et de l'univers.

## Le géographe, le scientifique et l'humaniste

Au fil de ses mémoires, Jean Malaurie cherche donc à répondre à la question suivante : pourquoi ressent-il si intensément cet appel du Grand Nord, et comment répondre à celui-ci ?

La première réponse sera le choix de la géomorphologie, bien évidemment dans les espaces froids. Jean Malaurie n'a jamais abandonné cette discipline, et en fait le sujet de sa thèse d'État en

1968 *Thèmes de recherche géomorphologique dans le nord-ouest du Groenland*. L'étude de la pierre lui permet de s'interroger sur les origines de la vie de Terre, sa morphogenèse, mais également sa fin. Partir de l'énergie inhérente à la nature telle qu'étudiée par la géocryologie et arriver à l'usure, l'érosion, la désagrégation finale. La discipline et la question originelle qu'elle pose devient une obsession, et l'intimité du minéral devient l'un de ses premiers guides dans sa quête de spiritualité. Mais cette dernière ne peut être correctement poursuivie dans la société française d'après-guerre. Revenant assez brièvement sur son expérience traumatisante de la Résistance, il se dit poussé par une envie, et peut-être plus encore par un besoin vital, de quitter après la guerre cette société cruelle qu'il juge « décadente, avilie par le climat de délation et ses compromissions avec les autorités nazies » (p. 145). Il cherche alors à poursuivre son éducation humaniste « non pas dans les livres, mais dans la réalité de la glace » (p. 145).

Sa toute première expédition fut ainsi la « Première mission polaire française Paul-Emile Victor » en juin/octobre 1948. Cette expédition bipolaire avait pour objectif de bâtir une station météorologie et de géophysique au centre et au sommet du glacier du Groenland, soit à plus de 3000 mètres d'altitude. Son travail en tant que géomorphologue était de « mathématiser les processus d'érosion et de sédimentation » d'une montagne groenlandaise (p. 183).

Jean Malaurie explique également comment il a œuvré pour former un véritable travail d'équipe pluridisciplinaire, entremêlant des chercheuses et chercheurs d'origines et d'horizons différents. Malheureusement, il souligne également l'échec de ces tentatives confrontées aux tensions que soulèvent des oppositions de pensée trop catégoriques. L'expédition, exclusivement centrée autour de la recherche glaciologique et des sciences dites dures, se révèle être une grande déception pour Jean Malaurie qui se dresse déjà comme fervent partisan d'une géographie humaine. Selon lui, « l'homme doit être au cœur de la pensée géographique » (p. 170). Ce refus, voire cette peur, de l'interdisciplinarité liée à un manque affligeant de respect et d'amour de l'humanité fut l'un des terreaux les plus fertiles de « Terre Humaine ». Défendre l'Homme et combattre une intolérance obtuse contre ceux qui ont le malheur de sortir du système aussi bien universitaire qu'occidental, voilà la bannière de ce projet original et par-dessus tout humaniste.

La création d'une anthropologie narrative et réflexive

Au fil de ses mémoires, Jean Malaurie revient à plusieurs reprises sur l'aventure et le succès éditorial qu'est « Terre Humaine ». Lorsqu'il crée la collection en 1954, l'explorateur a une ambition majeure : donner ses lettres de noblesse à la pensée dite « primitive » menacée de disparition, et en dévoiler l'absolue nécessité pour la pensée occidentale dite « civilisée ». Il lui faut donc « sortir des sentiers battus » car « jusqu'alors, une collection, par définition, n'accueillait que des "semblables", intellectuellement, culturellement ou socialement » (p. 85). Il s'agit aussi de saper toute une histoire de la recherche qui, au XIXème siècle, a fait de l'évolution la justification scientifique des inégalités sociales et du racisme qui en découlerait alors logiquement. Pour son directeur, « Terre Humaine » est donc « une collection de résistance et de combat » (p. 87). La collection doit mettre en avant une anthropologie narrative et réflexive, pour contrer un structuralisme grandissant où l'homme pourtant acteur de l'Histoire est effacé. L'humain est donc mis au cœur de l'écriture qui exprime la réalité d'un homme, celui qui écrit, et celle de son peuple. « Ici, ce n'est pas le talent qui compte, mais le noyau dur de la personnalité du témoin et l'intensité de son regard » (p. 87). À travers une telle réunion de regards hétéroclites exprimant chacun la vie d'une société en crise, c'est la réalité de l'humanité elle aussi en crise qui est transmise et partagée sous un angle nouveau et plus authentique.

La « Mission Malaurie Thulé »

À l'origine de la collection « Terre Humaine » : une mission, celle que Jean Malaurie réalise alors âgé de 27 ans au sein du territoire le plus septentrional de la planète. En mars 1950, alors qu'il est en mission au cœur du Sahara, il reçoit ainsi un télégramme de Copenhague : la Mission Malaurie Thulé a été acceptée par le gouvernement danois. Ce dernier avait strictement fermé le territoire des Hyperboréaux pendant plus de quarante ans à tout étranger. Sans aucun crédit ni équipement ou connaissance de la langue locale, Jean Malaurie décide de partir pour un an au sommet du monde dès juin 1950, soit 6 mois en avance. L'Appel du Nord est déjà trop puissant.

La posture de l'enquêteur

L'auteur rappelle que sa mission s'inscrit dans une histoire de la recherche, une histoire des

sciences, aussi bien « dures » que sociales, mais surtout dans une histoire coloniale qui reste « à sens unique » et dont les traces sont « indélébiles » (p. 73), encore plus en l'absence de relecture critique des relations et récits coloniaux s'indignant de la soi-disant sauvagerie des Hyperboréaux. Jean Malaurie rend ainsi compte de la peur qu'ont les Inuits de voir leurs pensées et mythes traduits par les Blancs à travers le prisme du préjugé de la pensée biblique occidentale. L'explorateur insiste par ailleurs grandement sur la nécessité absolue de distinguer « l'avant » et « l'après » du contact avec la civilisation occidentale colonisatrice qui, sur son passage, tend à effacer ce qui l'a précédée. Ce qui a précédé la base nucléaire US Air Force en 1951 à Thulé, mais aussi la politique de regroupement et de sédentarisation en 1970 en Arctique central, les accords du 18 décembre 1971 mettant en place les corporations en Alaska, ou encore la dissolution de l'URSS et la fin de l'autonomie de la Tchoukotka. Un autre « avant » en péril qu'il décrit au fil de ses mémoires, c'est celui des Utkuhihalingmiut (UTK). Ce peuple de l'Arctique central canadien qu'il a étudié en avril-mai 1963 était le peuple le plus primitif du cercle polaire. S'ils avaient réussi à survivre dans l'estuaire de la rivière Back de 1880 à 1970, après la disparition catastrophique des caribous dans leur territoire ancestral, ils n'ont pas survécu à la politique de regroupement avec les Netsilik catholiques à Gjoa Haven. Cette politique du gouvernement d'Ottawa fut mise en œuvre à travers l'intervention d'une jeune anthropologue américaine. Cette dernière était assistée dans ses travaux de recherches par la mission anglicane qui finit par décourager les élites résignées. C'est avec une certaine tristesse et colère que Jean Malaurie fait le récit de ces événements, concluant que « peut-être en tant qu'individus ils furent physiquement protégés ; mais en tant que peuple, avec leur patrimoine, leur identité et leur fierté, ils ont été anéantis » (p. 530).

Cette posture coloniale, l'auteur la refuse catégoriquement. Selon lui, il faut impérativement « distinguer l'enquêteur qui vient là enquêter comme un officier colonial et l'enquête qui se déroule sans que l'indigène ait le sentiment qu'il fait l'objet d'une recherche » (p. 20). Dans les pas de Knud Rasmussen dont les extraits de récits rythment les mémoires de Jean Malaurie, ce dernier exprime aux Inuits sa volonté de s'immerger dans leur communauté, de faire ses preuves auprès d'eux jusqu'à être accepté

ou non comme un semblable. Cette quête, qui provoque d'abord l'incompréhension au sein de la communauté, n'est pas sans mise à l'épreuve, mais au fil du temps le géographe parvient à gagner la confiance et l'estime de ses compagnons avec qui il échange des confidences en tête à tête, comme le veut leur culture. En leur présence et par leur enseignement, il apprend que la vérité ne se possède jamais vraiment et n'est pas unique. La vérité, toujours mouvante, ne dure qu'un instant, tout comme l'homme est « une addition de petits secrets qu'il faut progressivement dévoiler en tant qu'observateur » (p. 93). Ainsi, l'homme inuit est « double, triple » (p. 306). Il vit en paix avec les contradictions, et s'est ainsi laissé convertir par les missionnaires dans une passivité globale surprenante. Mais cette acculturation n'est qu'un pan de leur identité, et leurs croyances originelles, leur prudence animiste naturelle, restent en réalité au cœur de leur pensée en perpétuelle adaptation technique, économique et spirituelle. *Tassa*. « C'est comme ça. »

L'isolat esquimau de Thulé

Lorsque Jean Malaurie réalise sa première mission à Thulé, cette paix est troublée par une certaine inquiétude quant à la fertilité des femmes de la communauté qui trouble les autorités inuites. Jean Malaurie demande alors de dresser famille par famille une généalogie qui se veut la plus complète possible, devenant ainsi leur secrétaire dans l'espoir de réussir à les conseiller. Malgré les difficultés liées au tabou qui entoure le nom des morts dans la croyance inuite, le nom *atik* étant l'âme d'un mort « en attente dans les limbes du ciel » (p. 299), Jean Malaurie parvient à dresser un tableau généalogique qui « démontre qu'un isolat risque de disparaître, par dégénérescence, sous l'effet d'une forte consanguinité. Aussi peut-on conclure que l'histoire de l'humanité n'a été possible qu'avec des isolats supérieurs à vingt ou vingt-cinq familles. Ce tableau pose donc de vastes problèmes sur le plan des débuts de l'histoire de l'Homme ; il récuse d'abord le créationnisme biblique » (p. 294). Thulé devient alors également un exemple de conscience innée des dangers des parentés proches pouvant mener à l'extinction. Cette même conscience sociale de survie a poussé la communauté à s'imposer des règles démographiques strictes. Chez les Inughuits, l'union de couples consanguins en-dessous du 5ème degré était donc interdite jusqu'en 1951. Ainsi, « ce

sont évidemment les leviers successifs de la liberté et de la régulation génésique, le recours ou non à l'infanticide des bébés de sexe féminin jusqu'à l'âge de deux-trois ans, l'euthanasie des vieillards, l'évitement de l'inceste qui seraient des éléments d'explication de l'histoire démographique » (p. 324) au sein de cet isolat polaire ayant vécu plus de deux siècles de solitude, de 1600 à 1818. À ces faits doit s'ajouter le sevrage tardif après deux, trois, voire quatre années, et qui serait une autre raison clé de l'infécondité grandissante au sein de l'isolat.

Épouses, mères, piblokto : les femmes dans la communauté Inuit

Si cette étude démographique de l'isolat est l'étude majeure sur laquelle Jean Malaurie revient en détails, ce dernier s'attache également à livrer au lecteur de ses mémoires de nombreuses informations sur le rôle et la vie des femmes au sein de la communauté inuite. Il explique ainsi que si, au sein du couple, la femme se comporte comme si physiquement inférieure à son mari, elle le domine en réalité psychologiquement. Au sein de la communauté, les femmes, parce qu'elles forment les enfants et ouvrent leur vision, ont de fait un rôle essentiel d'éclaireuses. Ce sont elles qui font la tribu et qui, plus que les hommes, ont accès à l'imaginaire.

Cet accès se révèle particulièrement sensible lors de la nuit polaire (*kapirlak*) durant lesquelles les femmes *piblokto* (grandes inspirées, nerveuses) subissent des crises d'hystérie dite polaire. Cette crise, exclusivement réservée aux femmes, se caractérise par sa soudaineté, une force surnaturelle chez la victime, et des cris d'accompagnement. De telles tensions psychiques seraient attribuées à la peur de la nuit hivernale qui débute en octobre, ainsi qu'à la force des courants électromagnétiques qui s'exercent à cette très haute latitude. Mais au-delà de la pression exercée par l'environnement, la pression communautaire serait le facteur déterminant. « Lesdites hystériques seraient lasses du pouvoir carcéral exercé par le groupe, se sentant prisonnières de l'autorité coercitive des hommes au cours de conflits constamment refoulés » (p. 440). Ce refoulement aurait donc pour effet d'amplifier une violence intérieure nourrie par la nostalgie des temps d'hybridations animales et d'extrême liberté, tels qu'elles se les rappellent à travers les mythes racontés à



leurs enfants en tant que mères. Il n'en est encore que ce phénomène d'hystérie polaire reste aujourd'hui très peu connu et étudié. Jean Malaurie y voit avant tout l'illustration de « notre ignorance du psychisme et de la pathologie profonde d'hommes et de femmes et surtout de l'enfant, qui dans l'Arctique, sont une expression de ce qu'ont vécu les trois quarts de l'humanité » (p. 455).

Le récit d'une renaissance

« L'homme de raison, hélas, a perdu sa force de dialogue avec la nature. L'histoire avance parfois à reculons. Ainsi se justifie le titre et sous-titre de ce livre : De la pierre à l'âme, La prescience sauvage. Prescience salvatrice » (p. 361).

Au cœur de sa quête des origines et des mystères de l'univers, Jean Malaurie place ainsi l'homme primitif du Grand Nord. En leur compagnie et dans leur environnement, il cherche à comprendre la force qui a fondé les peuples du Grand Nord et leur hypersensibilité confrontée aux odeurs, aux couleurs et à l'immatériel. Avec l'aide des Hyperboréaux, Jean Malaurie souhaite résoudre le mystère de l'évolution. Pour le géomorphologue, « la logique de la création se révèle dans ce dynamisme de l'énergie de la matière » (p. 115). C'est le temps long des roches qui permet de donner une profondeur au temps de construction de l'homme social. Au cours de telles réflexions sur l'évolution de l'homme, très vite se pose la question de l'animal, de sa nature, et de sa relation à l'homme.

Animisme et éveil spirituel

Au gré de ses 31 missions, Jean Malaurie est introduit à la pensée animiste, et l'adopte avec enthousiasme. Pour les Inuits, le chien est le géniteur de l'homme et « les mythes lui rappellent ce temps heureux d'un paradis perdu, quand il vivait en hybride avec l'animal » (p. 186). Jean Malaurie affirme ainsi que l'évolution des espèces est pensée depuis longtemps par les Inuits, et ce bien avant Darwin. L'Umma est l'énergie qui détermine la sélection naturelle. L'animal doit être domestiqué ou tué pour survivre, mais toujours dans le respect naturel dû à la parenté qui unit les êtres. « L'homme n'est pas un animal supérieur aux autres ; il est différent » (p. 379). Jean Malaurie nous le rappelle, 98,5% des gènes du chimpanzé sont identiques à ceux de l'homme.

Ainsi, l'ours apprend aux hommes à chasser le phoque à force de patience face à l'*aglou* (trou dans la banquise). Le corbeau (*tulugaq*), qui serait le premier être né de la nuit du chaos, a également une relation étroite avec l'homme. Lui aussi vit dans une société structurée par des règles dont le mauvais respect mène inévitablement à l'ostracisme. Jean Malaurie raconte ainsi sa rencontre avec un *tulugaq* lors de sa première mission à Thulé. L'oiseau l'a repéré alors qu'il était occupé à cartographier le terrain. L'auteur nous raconte comment, par le regard et les gestes, le corbeau a pris possession de lui avant de s'envoler en silence au-dessus de lui. De cette rencontre est restée une plume qu'il n'a cessé de porter comme amulette depuis.

Mais plus que tout, l'homme est proche du chien, son ancêtre le plus proche. Jean Malaurie évoque leur mémoire, leur intelligence, leur affection pour l'homme après plus de 2000 ans de collaboration. Ce sont ses plus fidèles alliés au cours de ses missions sur la banquise, face aux montées périlleuses, aux falaises, crevasses et descentes incertaines. De son attelage de 7 chiens, il dit ainsi : « Nous sommes un couple qui se découvre » (p. 263). Parmi les peuples premiers, l'animal est tout à fait capable de déchiffrer les émotions humaines, et inversement. Après tout, l'homme fait partie d'un tout. « Il n'y a pas de rupture d'identité de la pierre, de l'animal, de la fleur de coton à l'homme ; il y a une circulation entre lui et le monde » (p. 546). L'animal, la plante et la roche portent tous une énergie, une parole, une mémoire particulière. Ce sont ces forces d'une si vive intensité que ressent Jean Malaurie dans ses études géomorphologiques. Et c'est le refus occidental de concevoir une réalité panthéiste qui pousse l'homme à « précipiter la fin du monde » (p. 551). Devant une telle menace, une prise de conscience de l'unité du vivant devient donc vitale.

La renaissance chamanique

Pour guider cette prise de conscience, le chamanisme est une évidence pour l'auteur. « Je t'attendais » (p. 226), lui dit Uutaaq, son maître spirituel, lors de leur première rencontre. Le chamanisme n'est pas une affaire de rencontre pour Jean Malaurie, mais de retrouvailles. Celui qui devient le protégé des « propulseurs de rêves » (p. 367) commence alors un éveil spirituel qui le mène à vivre des états de grâce intenses au cours

des hivers polaires. Face à un Occident effrayé par l'illogique et face à une recherche scientifique principalement athée ou agnostique, Jean Malaurie s'est fait l'avocat d'un chamanisme qui l'a transcendé en cet hiver 1961. Selon l'auteur, « une science nouvelle avec ces chamans est en train de naître » (p. 140). Cette science pourrait bien être celle offrant la clé des mystères de la création, car en cherchant « à se mettre en consonance avec cette énergie qui construit le monde et qui rassemble les constituants de la matière » (p. 140), le chaman « vise à rendre transparent l'univers » (p. 367). Cependant, pour que le chamanisme puisse mener à terme sa quête métaphysique, il faut redonner toute sa place à une pensée confuse et obscure, basée sur l'expérience et les émotions, et non la raison. Passer de la sensation à la pensée, tel est l'apprentissage d'une vie en quête de sagesse trouvée dans la pensée inuite.

Conclusion

C'est avec un regard à la fois affectueux et tourmenté mais toujours humain que Jean Malaurie retrace le parcours de sa vie, de la pierre à l'âme, de l'âme à la plume. À l'image de son auteur, l'ouvrage croise les regards des sciences, de l'histoire, des hommes et de leurs cultures. C'est toujours avec une grande sagesse qu'il s'adresse au lecteur dans la plus grande bienveillance, cherchant à l'initier à une sagesse acquise au cours de sa vie. Mais ses mémoires sont avant tout un hommage à ces peuples premiers connaissant aujourd'hui peut-être un ultime danger. Il y rend hommage à ses amis des terres de pierre et de glace, à sa famille d'élection, ses semblables qui l'ont reconnu et qui l'ont fait renaître. L'auteur l'admet, « Toute ma vie, j'ai eu le souci de les défendre parce que je défendais une partie de moi-même » (p. 605).

Défendre l'Homme par-dessus tout, telle semble avoir toujours été la conviction première du

géographe. Aujourd'hui plus que jamais, le danger qui menace l'homme et sa Terre originelle est imminent. Les cinq grandes crises de l'histoire géologique ont réduit la biodiversité de 90%, mais le taux d'extinction n'a jamais été aussi élevé que depuis le début du XXème siècle. Pour Jean Malaurie, l'Occident a désespérément besoin d'un droit naturel qui cesse de penser l'homme comme le maître et possesseur cartésien de la nature. Face à la philosophie matérialiste d'une « science sans conscience » (p. 608), la pensée animiste inuite est au contraire présentée comme « salvatrice » (p. 89), poussant l'homme à se déconstruire et se réapprendre, jusqu'à enfin « rétablir cette unité de l'homme avec sa Terre » (p. 132).

Une telle vie d'exploration, de rencontres, d'écriture ne pourra jamais se résumer à ces 672 pages. Ces dernières ne restent qu'une invitation à relire les ouvrages plus anciens auxquels l'auteur se reporte à de nombreuses reprises, notamment *Les Derniers Rois de Thulé* (1955) et *L'Allée des Baleines* (2003). Car Jean Malaurie offre bel et bien au lecteur ses mémoires comme son ultime écrit. Ces derniers temps, c'était par ses pastels que son esprit qu'il disait tourmenté s'exprimait. Cet art, qu'il expérimente pour la première fois à 65 ans sur une plage de sa seconde terre natale, Thulé, lui permet de « représenter les forces de la nature, leurs contradictions, cette énergie interne faite d'une tension compulsive entre la lumière solaire, la nuit lunaire et l'environnement minéral et glaciaire avec la banquise et le glacier continental qui paraissent se compléter » (p. 589). Jean Malaurie passa ses dernières années à Dieppe, le regard tourné vers la mer. Il n'y cessa de persévérer et de renouer avec la pensée de ce peuple premier, suivant les conseils de son second maître chaman Sakaeunnguaq : « Tu progresses, mais abandonne-toi. Laisse donc tes maudits carnets et ton écriture. Prends ton envol ! Nous, les Inuits, on est là » (p. 540).

# FROM STONES TO THE SOUL, FROM THE SOUL TO THE PEN: READING JEAN MALAURIE'S MEMOIRS *DE LA PIERRE À L'HOMME* (*FROM STONES TO THE SOUL*, 2022)

FLORALIE DUPRÉ

*Fellow and Intern at the École Normale Supérieure de Lyon and a former intern of the Malaurie Institute of Arctic Research Monaco-UVSQ*

## Introduction

Thanks to his 31 expeditions to the Arctic, Jean Malaurie, born in Mainz, Germany, in 1922, was considered the greatest French specialist of the region in his day. After studying geography, specialising in geomorphology, Jean Malaurie devoted his life to exploring northwestern Greenland and other regions of the Arctic, protecting the culture of circumpolar minority groups in the Far North to which he has devoted major ethno-historical studies. He was also the first man, accompanied by his Inuit friend Kutsikitsiq, to reach the geomagnetic North Pole by dogsled on 29 May 1951. Among other achievements, one can mention his founding of the Centre for Arctic studies at the École des Hautes Études (EHESS) in Paris, which he directed from 1957 to 2007, and the creation of the renowned “Terre Humaine” book series at Plon Publishers in Paris, which he inaugurated in 1955 with his own classic account *The Last Kings of Thule* (translated twice into English: London: Allen & Unwin, 1956; New York: Dutton, 1982). In 2007, Jean Malaurie was appointed UNESCO Goodwill Ambassador in charge of Arctic and polar issues.

Published in 2022, on the occasion of the author’s 100th birthday, *De la pierre à l'âme : la prescience sauvage. Mémoires (From Stones to the Soul: Of Savage Prescience. Memoirs)* is the explorer's last work. On the cover, one can see a portrait of the author against the background of a map featuring the Arctic circle, and a wolf dog howling at the Moon : Man and dogs - key figures in Inuit mythology and the life of Jean Malaurie. Man and

animals. The 600-page book is presented as Jean Malaurie’s memoirs, but as the author observes straight away: “Memory cannot be directed; it can make reemerge very old facts, as if it were yesterday” (p. 1). The reader should therefore not expect a simple chronological account of the life of the anthropo-geographer and his 31 expeditions. On the contrary, Malaurie moves back and forth in his book, between the past and the present of his own existence, that of the Earth and its human societies.

Of primitive peoples of the Arctic, the Amazon, Africa, and Oceania, Jean Malaurie asserts that they “are our scouts. Even more than that, they are *root nations*.” (p. 11). And it is the roots of the universe that Jean Malaurie seeks to reach. In this quest, he ends up going back to his own roots. His encounter with the Inuit is lived by the young geographer as a reunion, bringing him real inner peace. However, the author does not hide the difficulties he had to go through, notably the first weeks of deep solitude, both as a researcher and a resident in the Far North. The task Malaurie set himself in this book therefore consists of providing in a single work an account of the evolution of a man’s thoughts, of all his insights and contradictory truths. Jean Malaurie thus speaks of his “inuitized white mind [...] that has turned crossbreed” (p. 11). Such “crossbreeding” is the result of a constant search for balance, between theory and practice, the concrete and the invisible, and above all reason and sensation. Perhaps

these memoirs are to be understood above all as the adoption by a man raised in Western traditions of shamanism, animism and the spirit of the Inuit people.

## From the origins of the man to the origins of the world

At the heart of his quest are myths and how the Frenchman whom the Inuit called “the man who speaks with stones” learned all about their importance and meaning. During his childhood, Malaurie bathed constantly in German, French and Greco-Latin *mythologies*. These legends and stories nourished in him a special interest in what is invisible and even supernatural. Although he left Germany for France at the age of 7, Jean Malaurie is aware of the important role played by his origins and early German childhood in the development of his imagination. He describes his parents as bourgeois, Catholic, and exemplary. Yet, in the coldness of his mother, he detects the icy winds of the Scottish Highlands where she came from. But apart from such cold restraint, he can perceive infinite love, and he finds himself blessed with an instinctive attraction for the romantic poetry of Coleridge and Yeats. As to his authoritarian father, he introduced him to German epics that ooze of virility and barbarity fed by a chaos of stones, fire, giants, dwarves and werewolves.

His first years in Mainz thus nourished a great sensitivity to the spirit of nature, the *Naturgeist*. Marked by the *romantische Naturforschung*, he was drawn in as a child by the infinite spaces he sensed in the great German composers Bach, Beethoven and Brahms. He then immersed himself in the writing of the Transcendentalists and enjoyed discovering this philosophy of emotionally experiencing nature promoted by Ralph Waldo Emerson, John Muir or John Burroughs. After all, the breath of the Nibelungen song is carried by the wind, and the worst of men are transformed into stone by Thor, which Jean Malaurie understands as “the first expression in his childhood of the directive function of stones” (p. 112). Developing his animistic sensibility thus, he hears calls of the Far North for the first time in Goethe’s *Faust* where the name of Thule appears and while crossing the frozen Rhine over to the north with his father, a rare spectacle of this majestic river, in February 1929, his first expedition, as it were,

and the beginning of his quest for the origins of man and the universe.

## The geographer, the scientist, the humanist

Throughout his memoirs, Jean Malaurie thus tries to answer the following question: why does he feel this call of the North so intensely and how to react?

His first response will consist in choosing to dedicate himself to geomorphology, especially in cold places. Jean Malaurie never gave up the discipline, making it the subject of his doctoral thesis, published in 1968 (*Themes of Geomorphological Research in North-Western Greenland*). Studying stones allows him to reflect on the origins of the Earth, its morphogenesis, but also its end, starting from the energy inherent to nature in cold climates, as studied by geocryology, to eventually explore questions of stone wear, erosion, and ultimate disintegration. The discipline and the original questions it raises become an obsession and the intimacy of the mineral world one of Jean Malaurie's first guides in his quest for spirituality. But he feels that he cannot engage in the latter properly in post-war French society. Reflecting rather briefly on his traumatic experience in the French Resistance movement, he writes that he was driven by a desire and perhaps even more a need to leave this cruel society that he judged “decadent, degraded by the climate of denunciation and its compromises with the Nazi authorities” (p. 145) after the war. He then sought to pursue his humanist education “not in books, but out in the reality of ice” (p. 145).

Thanks to the recommendation of Emmanuel de Martonne (1873-1955), the distinguished geographer whose student Malaurie was, he was able to join the “First French polar mission Paul-Émile Victor” conducted by the French explorer and anthropologist Paul-Émile Victor (1907-1995) in June/October 1948. The purpose of this bipolar expedition was to build a meteorological and geophysical station at the centre and top of the Greenland Glacier, more than 3000m above sea level. His work as a geomorphologist was to “mathematize the erosion and sedimentation processes” of a Greenlandic hill (p. 183). Jean Malaurie goes back on his efforts to to be part of a truly multidisciplinary team, bringing together specialists from different backgrounds and



horizons. But he also witnessed what he perceived as the failure of such attempts given the tensions raised by adamant oppositions of thought. The expedition, focused exclusively on glaciological research and the natural sciences, proved to be a great disappointment for Jean Malaurie affirming himself as a fervent advocate of human geography. According to him, “man must be at the heart of geographical thought” (p. 170). This refusal of, or distrust in transdisciplinarity, linked to a distressing lack of respect and love for humanity, was one of the most fertile grounds for Malaurie’s wish to create the “Terre Humaine” book series. To defend man and to fight against an obtuse intolerance against those who have the misfortune not to fit within the academic as well as the Western systems: this is the banner of this original and above all humanist project.

### The creation of a narrative and reflexive anthropology

Jean Malaurie comes back several times in his memoirs on the adventure and publishing success that “Terre Humaine” has been since the 1950s. When he created the collection in 1954, the explorer had one major ambition: to give its badge of honour to the so-called “primitive mind” threatened by disappearance, and to reveal its absolute necessity for so-called “civilized” Western thought. He must therefore “think outside the box” because “until then, a collection, by definition, only welcomed ‘fellows’, intellectually, culturally or socially similar” (p. 85). It is also a matter of undermining a whole history of research that, in the 19th century, made evolution the scientific justification for social inequalities and racism that is then said to logically follow. For its director, “Terre Humaine” therefore stands as “a collection of resistance and combat” (p. 87). The collection must be the privileged vehicle of narrative and reflexive anthropology, to counter the growing influence of structuralism which tends to erase humans as actors of History, according to Malaurie. Humans are thus placed at the heart of the narratives, expressing the reality of a human being, that-is-to-say the author who is writing, and that of his or her people. “Here, it is not talent that counts, but the very essence of the witness’s personality and intensity of the gaze” (p. 87). Through such a meeting of disparate views expressing the life of one society in

crisis, it is the reality of humanity also in crisis that is transmitted and shared in a new and more authentic/accurate way.

### The "Malaurie Thule Mission"

At the origin of the “Terre Humaine” series, there is Jean Malaurie’s solitary mission at the age of 27 to the northernmost inhabited territory of the planet. In March 1950, while on a mission in the heart of the Sahara, he received a telegram from Copenhagen: “Malaurie Thule Mission” accepted by the Danish government. The latter had strictly closed the territory of the Hyperboreans for more than forty years to any foreigner. Without any money, equipment or knowledge of the local language, Jean Malaurie decided to spend a year at the top of the world in June 1950, *i.e.* six months ahead of schedule. The Call of the North was already too powerful.

### The researcher's stance

The author stresses that his mission is part of a more general history of research, a history of both “hard” (natural) and social sciences, but mostly of a colonial history that operates “one-way” and whose traces are “indelible” (p. 73), even more so in the absence of a critical rereading of colonial relations and accounts taking offense at the so-called savagery of the Hyperboreans. Jean Malaurie thus conveys the Inuit fear of seeing their thoughts and myths translated by White people through the prism of the prejudice of western biblical thought. The explorer also places great emphasis on the absolute necessity of distinguishing the “before” and “after” of contacts with the colonising Western civilization which tends to annihilate whatever preceded it wherever it tries to establish its rule ; for instance, what preceded the US Air Force nuclear base in 1951 in Thulé, the policy of gathering and settlement in 1970 in the Central Arctic, the agreements of 18 December 1971 establishing the corporations in Alaska, or the dissolution of the USSR and the end of the autonomy of Chukotka.

Another “before” that Malaurie describes in his memoirs is that of the Utkuhikhalingmiut (UTK). This people of the Canadian Central Arctic that he spent time with in April-May 1963 were the most “primitive” people of the Arctic Circle. Although they had managed to survive in the estuary of Back River from 1880 to 1970, after the catastrophic disappearance of caribous in their ancestral territory, they did not survive the policy of regrouping with the Catholic

Netsilik in Gjoa Haven. This policy of the Canadian government was implemented because of the intervention of a young American anthropologist. The latter was assisted in her research by the Anglican mission which eventually discouraged the resigned elites. Jean Malaurie recounts these events with a certain degree of sadness and anger, concluding that “perhaps as individuals they were physically protected; but as a people, with its *heritage*, identity and pride, they were annihilated.” (p. 530).

The author categorically refuses to adopt any colonial stance, profoundly loathing such attitudes. According to him, it is imperative to “distinguish the investigator who comes to investigate as a colonial officer and the investigation that takes place without the indigenous feeling that he is the subject of a study” (p. 20). Following in the footsteps of Knud Rasmussen whose accounts Malaurie frequently refers to in his memoirs, Jean Malaurie expressed to the Inuit his desire to immerse himself in their community, to prove his worth until being accepted - or not - as a peer. His quest, which had led to some misunderstandings within the community at first, was to put him to the test repeatedly. But over time, the geographer managed to win the confidence and esteem of his companions with whom he would exchange one-to-one confidences, according to their traditional ways. In their presence and through their teaching, he learns that truth can never really be possessed, contrary to colonial beliefs. Truth, ever moving, lasts only for a single moment, just as a person is “made up of small secrets which must be gradually revealed by the observer” (p. 93). Thus, an Inuit is “double, triple” (p. 306). His mind is not troubled by contradictions, and he has thus allowed himself to be converted by missionaries in a surprising overall passivity. But this acculturation is only one part of their identity. Their traditional beliefs, their natural animistic prudence, remain in reality at the heart of their thinking which is forever adapting in technical, economic and spiritual terms. *Tassa*. “That’s the way it is.”

### The Thule Inuit isolate

When Jean Malaurie carried out his first mission in Thule, the peace of mind of the Inghuit of the Thule region was troubled by a certain anxiety about the fertility of the women in the community. Jean Malaurie proposed to draw a genealogy tree family by family, offering to work as their secretary in the hope of eventually becoming their advisor. Despite the difficulties associated with the taboo surrounding the names of the dead in Inuit belief (the name *atik*

is the soul of a deceased person “waiting in the limbo of heavens”, p. 299), Malaurie managed to collect the data to later draw a genealogical table in the form of circles which “shows that an isolate is at risk of disappearing, by degeneration, due to strong inbreeding. It can therefore be concluded that the history of humanity was only possible thanks to isolates of more than twenty or twenty-five families. This table therefore raises major questions about the beginnings of human history, rejecting biblical creationism to begin with” (p. 294). Thule then also becomes an example of an innate awareness of the dangers of too close unions in terms of kinship that can lead to extinction. This same social consciousness of survival pushed the community to impose itself strict demographic rules. Therefore, among the Inuit, the union of consanguine pairs below the 5th degree was forbidden until 1951, Malaurie concluding : “these are obviously the successive levers of freedom and reproductive regulation, whether or not to resort to infanticide of babies of the female sex until the age of two-three, euthanasia of the elderly, the avoidance of incest which would be elements of explanation of demographic history” (p. 324) within this polar isolate of over 200 years, from 1600 to 1818. To these facts must be added the belated weaning at the age of two, three or even four which could be a key reason for the growing infertility within the isolate.

### Wives, mothers, piblokto: women in the Inuit community

His reminiscences about this major demographic study lead Malaurie on to discuss the life of women in the Inuit community. For instance, he explains that a wife behaves as if physically inferior to her husband, although she actually dominates him psychologically. Furthermore, within the community, women actually play an essential role as scouts since they train children and open up their vision. It is the women who are actually constituting the tribe, and them who have access to the imagination, rather than the men.

This is particularly manifest during the polar night (*kapirlak*) when the *piblokto* (highly nervous, great visionaries) experience episodes of so-called polar hysteria. These attacks, solely concerning women, are characterized by their suddenness, the victim's supernatural force, and accompanying cries. Such psychic tensions are attributed to the fear of the winter night that begins in October as well as to the force of electromagnetic currents that are exerted at

this very high latitude. But beyond the impact of the environment, community pressure may in fact be the actual determining factor : “The so-called hysterics would be weary of the prison power exercised by the group, feeling imprisoned by the coercive authority of men during conflicts constantly repressed” (p. 440). This repression would consequently amplify an inner violence nourished by nostalgia for times of hybridization and extreme freedom, as the mothers recall in the myths told to their children. Little is known about this phenomenon even today. Jean Malaurie sees it above all as an illustration of “our ignorance of the psyche and deep pathology of men and women and especially the children of the Arctic who are an expression of what three-quarters of humanity have experienced” (p. 455).

### A tale of rebirth

“Men of reason, alas, have lost their power of dialogue with nature. History sometimes moves forwards by going backwards. Hence the title and subtitle of this book: From Stones to the Soul, Of Savage Prescience. Salvatory prescience.” (p. 361)

At the heart of his quest for origins, Jean Malaurie places the First Nations of the Far North. In the company of the Inuit and their environment, he seeks to understand the driving forces of the First Nations of the Far North and their hypersensitivity to smell, colours and the intangible. With the help of the Hyperboreans, Jean Malaurie hopes to move closer to the mystery of evolution. For the geomorphologist, “the logic of creation is revealed in the dynamics of the energy of matter” (p. 115). The long duration of stones lends depth to the time of construction of human societies. In the course of such reflections on the evolution of man, the question of animals, their nature and relationship with humans arises very quickly.

### Animism and spiritual awakening

During his 31 missions, Jean Malaurie was introduced to animist thought which he has adopted enthusiastically. For the Inuit, dogs are man’s genitor and “myths remind him of that happy time of a lost paradise, when he led a hybrid life with animals” (p. 186). Jean Malaurie believes that the Inuit had been reflecting on the evolution of species long before Darwin. According to him, *Umma* is the energy that determines natural selection. The animal must therefore be domesticated or killed to survive, but always with due respect to the natural ties that unite living

beings. “Man is not a superior animal; he is different” (p. 379), he observes, reminding us at the same time that 98.5% of the chimpanzee’s genes are identical to those of humans.

Polar bears thus teach humans to hunt seals with great patience, waiting in front of the *aglou* (hole in the ice). The raven (*tulugaq*), who is said to be the first being born from the night of chaos, also has a close relationship with man. He too lives in a society structured by rules the disrespect of which inevitably leads to ostracism. Jean Malaurie recounts his meeting with a *tulugaq* during his first mission to Thule. The bird spotted him while he was busy mapping the land. The author tells us how the raven took possession of him by means of gestures and his eyes before flying silently above him. The author keeps a feather that remains from this encounter which he has been wearing as an amulet ever since. But more than any other animal, humans are close to dogs, their most immediate ancestors. Jean Malaurie evokes their memory, intelligence and affection for human beings after more than 2000 years of collaboration. They were the explorer’s closest allies during his missions on the ice, facing dangerous climbs, cliffs, crevices and uncertain descents. Of his seven-dog team, he remarks : “We are like a couple discovering itself” (p. 263). Among First Nations, dogs are capable of deciphering human emotions, and vice versa. After all, man is part of a whole : “There is no disruption in the identity of stones, animals and cotton flowers to man; there is a circulation between him and the world” (p. 546). Rocks, plants and animals all contain forms of energy, languages or expressions and special memories. Those are the intense forces that Jean Malaurie is led to observe and reflect on in his anthropo-geographic studies. It is the Western refusal to conceive of such a pantheist reality that drives humans to “rush the world to its end” (p. 551). To avoid such a fatal outcome, it is vital to be aware of the unity of life.

### Shamanistic rebirth

To guide this awareness, shamanism stands as evidence for the author. “I was waiting for you,” Uutaaq, Malaurie’s spiritual master, said to him when they first met in Thule (p. 226). To the latter, shamanism did not appear to be a new encounter, but seemed more like a reunion. The man who became the *protégé* of “dream propellers” (p. 367) was then to enter a spiritual awakening that led him to experience intense states of grace during the polar winters. Faced with a West frightened of illogicality and rejecting

atheistic or agnostic trends in academia, Malaurie became the advocate of shamanism as it transcended him notably in winter 1961. According to the author, “a new science is born thanks to these shamans” (p. 140). This science could well be the one offering the key to the mysteries of creation, because by seeking “to put itself in consonance with the energy that builds the world and gathers the constituents of matter,” (p. 140), the shaman “aims to make the universe transparent” (p. 367). However, for shamanism to be able to carry out its metaphysical quest, it is necessary to restore to its rightful place seemingly confused and obscure thought, based on experience and emotions, rather than reasoning. Moving from sensations to thinking is the lesson of a life spent in pursuit of wisdom ultimately found in Inuit thought.

### Conclusion

It is with an affectionate and tormented but always profoundly human approach that Jean Malaurie retraces the course of his life, from stones to the soul and from the soul to the pen. The book wittily mingles views about science, history, human societies and their cultures, and it is with great wisdom that the author addresses the reader in the greatest benevolence. But his memoirs are above all a tribute to these First Nations who are nowadays perhaps facing their final threat. He pays tribute to his friends from the lands of stone and ice, to his chosen family, to his peers who recognized him and brought him once more to life. As Malaurie admits, “Throughtout my life, I have been engaged in defending them because I defended a part of myself” (p. 605).

To defend humanity above all, this seems to have always been the anthropo-geographer’s foremost conviction. Today more than ever, the danger that threatens man and his original Earth is impending. The five major crises in geological history have reduced biodiversity by 90%, but the extinction rate

has never been as high as it has been since the beginning of the 20th century. For Jean Malaurie, the West desperately needs to adopt a form of natural law that stops thinking of men as the Cartesian masters and possessors of Nature. In the face of the materialistic philosophy of an “unconscious science” (p. 608), Inuit animist thought is presented as “salvatory” (p. 89), conducing humans to deconstruct and educate themselves in such ways as to retrieve “ their unity with the Earth” (p. 132).

A life of exploration, encounters and writing can hardly be summed up in 644 pages. The book is an invitation to re-read his older works to which the author refers time and again, especially *The Last Kings of Thule* (1955; 2 English translations, see above), *Hummocks* (1999; only one of the four parts translated to date: *Hummocks: Journeys and Enquiries Among the Canadian Inuit*, Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2007) and *The Whale Bone Alley* (2003). Jean Malaurie offers his memoirs to the reader as his ultimate written piece. It was through his pastels that he then expressed his mind, which he called tormented. This art form, which he experimented for the first time at the age of 65, sitting on a beach of his second homeland Thule, allows him to “represent the forces of nature, their contradictions, this internal energy made of a compulsive tension between the solar light, the lunar night and the mineral and glacial environment made up of pack ice and continental glaciers seeming to complement each other” (p. 589). Living in Dieppe, in Normandy, in his last years, with his eyes turned to the sea, Jean Malaurie never ceased to persevere and reconnect with the First nation that had adopted him as it were, following the advice of his second Inuit master, shaman Sakaeunnguaq: “You’re making progress, but you must abandon yourself. Leave your cursed notebooks and your writing behind. Take off! We, the Inuit, are here.” (p. 540)





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Illustrations en 1ère et 4ème de couverture :

Deux créations de l'artiste islandaise Þóra Sigurðardóttir. Le lecteur pourra en trouver d'autres tout au long du présent numéro, ainsi qu'un texte en l'honneur de l'artiste signé par Sigurbjörg Þrastardóttir.

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Dessin de l'artiste hongroise Vera Makina. Il accompagnait l'article de Jean-Luc Porquet intitulé « Salut, Jean Malaurie ! », paru le 14 février 2024 dans *Le Canard enchaîné*.

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*Illustrations on the front and back cover:*

*Two works by the Icelandic artist Þóra Sigurðardóttir. The reader will find other works by her inside this issue, as well as a text written as a homage to the artist by Þóra Sigurðardóttir.*

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*Drawing by the Hungarian artist Vera Makina which accompanied the article by Jean-Muc Porquet entitled "Salut, Jean Malaurie !" published in the Canard enchaîné on 14 February 2024.*

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