

New words for the cold world: The contribution of Louis-Edmond Hamelin to the understanding of the north, winter and the arctic¹

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Abstract

Louis-Edmond Hamelin must be considered one of the great thinkers of the Quiet Revolution in Québec. Centred on the word “Nordic”, his contribution goes far beyond the borders of Québec and is at the same time institutional, linguistic, and conceptual. Hamelin proposed the French equivalents of words for the cold and ice in a circumpolar context, observing once again the insufficiency of the French language to name the cold world, and thus the incapacity of French speakers to be able to fully grasp the subtlety and complexity of this universe. His main contribution was to create a vocabulary which opened up a vast site for intellectual and identity exploration: “nordicity”. Even if the myth of coldness ran through many representations, it is winterity which brought him to “the myths of the North” in Québécois thought and perceptions.

The research of broad concepts like nordicity and winterity, were accompanied by the conviction, for Hamelin, that complex questions necessarily require examination by multiple disciplines. To reflect on and try to understand the “North” in all its components cannot be separated from a parallel reflection on the notion of “aboriginality.” For him Northern Studies is intimately linked to autochthonism.

Key words: cold, North, winter, Arctic, Louis-Edmond Hamelin

There is no doubt that Louis-Edmond Hamelin must be considered one of the great thinkers of the Quiet Revolution in Québec, along with Fernand Dumont, Pierre Dansereau, Paul-Émile Borduas, and Jacques Rousseau: His contribution, throughout half a century, goes far beyond the

¹ An earlier version of this article was published in French in Daniel Chartier and Jean Désy [eds.], *La nordicité du Québec. Entretiens avec Louis-Edmond Hamelin*, Québec, Presses de l'Université du Québec, 2014, p. 3-19.

borders of Québec and is at the same time institutional, linguistic, and conceptual. His contribution is centred on the word “Nordic.”

Beginning in 1955, inspired by what he had seen at McGill University (the Arctic Institute of North America) and at the University of Cambridge (the Scott Polar Institute), Louis-Edmond Hamelin wanted to give Québec its first centre for the study of the North², “incorporated” and in the French language. He obtained the support of René Lévesque, who will later become Prime Minister of Québec, with whom he visited what is today Nunavik for the first time, as well as that of the Université Laval, and this in spite of the reticence in the francophone intellectual world toward interdisciplinary propositions. In its consistency, he wanted this centre to be identified as “Nordic” in the sense that he intended to defend this term: no longer merely “Arctic,” nor simply “Scandinavian,” but really and truly dedicated to an object with supple borders, delimited by that which one could posit as the *cold world* and in which Québec would have its full place. Accompanied by the diffusion of the concept of “nordicity,” which includes at the same time the winter, the high mountains, and the Arctic, in 1961 Hamelin thus founded a “Centre for Northern Studies,” the institutional and conceptual influence of which would be considerable, in Québec as well as abroad.

In 1966, for a now famous³ publication by the Scott Polar Institute, *Illustrated Glossary of Snow and Ice*, Louis-Edmond Hamelin proposes the French equivalents of words for the cold and ice in a circumpolar context. He observed once again the insufficiency of the French language to name the cold world, and thus the incapacity of French speakers to be able to fully grasp the subtlety and the complexity of this universe. He saw the necessity to propose new words, an act that would not be superfluous, but an addition to knowledge: “At the moment when I realized that my ‘cold’

² In this perspective, the relationships between the “North” and the “South” must be understood as relationships between the cold world (notably, the Arctic) and the rest of the world, more to the “South”. A similar reflection could be inverted in the case of the territories of the extreme South, notably in Argentina where resources and Aboriginal issues are rather inverted, with the “South” (dominated) versus the North (dominant). What’s more, we must distance ourselves here from the usual political relationship of North-South domination, where the “North” represents Europe and North America. Here, the “North” refers to a cold world, sparsely inhabited, often Arctic, often aboriginal, and dominated by the powers of “the South” (United States, Canada, Russia, Denmark, Europe, etc.).

³ Even in 2013, the Louisiana Museum of Modern Art in Copenhagen opened its major exhibition, *Arctic*, on a giant-sized reproduction of the pages of this book, one of the first multilingual circumpolar works.

subjects – polar countries, floating ice, Aboriginal peoples, winter, margins of the ecumene, high mountains – were insufficiently covered, I suggested new forms of expression.”⁴ Québec, which serves as Hamelin’s laboratory, is ideal for contributing to this enlargement of the French language.⁵ He hopes that his work will be widely used: “At the same time as wanting to provide a vocabulary better adapted to national issues, I dream that certain propositions might be useful to ‘international French’.”⁶

This desire to create new words is rooted in an observation, made at an early age, of the insufficiency of his own language to describe his immediate environment and account for the world. He tells an anecdote in an interview which is important for understanding the development of his career:

My father woke me up at seven o’clock, taking the little dictionary *Larousse* and asked me to look for words, his words of course, not the words of great literature. One morning, he made me look for the word “rang.”⁷ Anyone can verify: there is no word “rang” in this sense in the *Petit Larousse* of 1935. My father then said to me: “Ok, look for ‘*chemin de rang*.’”⁸ The “rang,” “*le chemin de rang*,”⁹ and “*la route*”¹⁰ are three very different things. I looked for “*chemin de rang*,” which was also absent from the dictionary. So then my father said, “How is it that these words aren’t there? They are French words, not English words! Our family notary writes them. And there’s the parish priest, he does the ‘*messe de rang*.’”¹¹ For my father, the word existed because the educated people, such as land surveyors and the doctor, used the word “rang.” This question

⁴ Louis-Edmond Hamelin, *Écho des pays froids*, Québec, Presses de l’Université Laval, 1996, p. 306.

⁵ In this regard, Hamelin writes of “speaking francophone in Québec”: “It has never stopped being a contact zone: patois/French at the beginning of the colony, French/English in its proximity to the United States and since the British conquest, Québécois/France’s French, Québécois/Aboriginal languages, Québécois/immigrant languages, *joual*/standard French. These contacts create occasions for semantic or formal shifts which cause either enrichments or imprecisions” (*Ibid.*, p. 336).

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 175.

⁷ A rural concession or “line,” a term originally used for a rural road perpendicular to agricultural lots in the Québec seigneurial system. [Translator’s note]

⁸ A back road in a rural village, not as wide as the main road in the village and not usually paved. [Translator’s note]

⁹ First line. [Translator’s note]

¹⁰ The main road in a rural area; a secondary highway. [Translator’s note]

¹¹ Mass for the concession. [Translator’s note]

stayed with me over the years, and maybe, in a subconscious way, I threw myself into the adventure of words to make some belated comments on these fundamental questions.¹²

Louis-Edmond Hamelin's main contribution was to create a vocabulary which opened up a vast site for intellectual and identity exploration: "nordicity".¹³ This neologism, from which many declinations have been developed, germinated around 1960 and was coined in 1965,¹⁴ and it has since been translated into numerous other languages. One could claim that it has surpassed specialized vocabulary and has entered into popular language.¹⁵ In 2005, a report done by Québec's main magazine, *L'Actualité*, revealed that nordicity has even become for the Québécois people one of the key terms to describe their identity.¹⁶ This is surely one of the most important social consecrations for an intellectual: to create a new concept through original research and then see a whole people appropriate it to define themselves and express their situation! The creation of a word, which Louis-Edmond Hamelin compares to the splitting of an atom or the eruption of a volcano, can have consequences that surpass the one who proposed it. Nordicity thus remains "a standard bearer for the ideas and projects which would follow."¹⁷ For understanding the world we live in, this word clearly denotes a before and an after: By the

¹² Chartier and Désy [eds.], 2014, p. 96.

¹³ This word regroups three concepts: winter, the high mountains and the Arctic; it thus directly connects Louis-Edmond Hamelin's personal experiences, from his childhood in the St. Lawrence Valley to his discovery of the Alps, and then the Arctic. "Considered under the general label of coldness, this world encompasses three large niches: the winter or seasonal cold, the high mountains or cold altitude, and especially the Nordic world or cold latitude. In other words, I am interested in physical-human situations which are those of severe thermic climates during a certain number of months in the year" (Hamelin, 1996, p. 211).

¹⁴ "A principal concept fertilized my intellectual and social activities concerning the cold latitude countries, that of 'nordicity.' After preparatory work staggered over a dozen years, the notion took form starting in 1960 and the word arrived in 1965. [...] The development of my Nordic conception was thus done progressively, like the Inuit who installs a network of cairns or inukshuks, orientations for his future travels" (Hamelin, 1996, p. 243).

¹⁵ "The word 'nordicity' is at the same time a scientific term and a common word, and not every word has this elasticity. There are thus several terms for ice which are parallel, each one as good as another because they all explain something that a person understands. It's up to the users and to the Language Offices to decide" (Chartier and Désy [eds.], 2014, p. 112).

¹⁶ *L'Actualité*, vol. 30, number 20, "101 mots pour comprendre le Québec", 15 December 2005, p. 119.

¹⁷ Chartier and Désy [eds.], 2014, p. 40.

terms subsequently created, knowledge and recognition of the environment that was indecipherable beforehand, because it was not able to be named, was revealed.

Originality

When he went to the North for the first time in 1948, Louis-Edmond Hamelin took a singular path, but one that resembles the one taken by Paul-Émile Borduas in Montreal, calling for greater creative freedom. The fact that these two events were taking place at the same time is not trivial in the history of Québec. In his own way, and far from the major cities, Hamelin was preparing a true disruption: “My criticism,” he reveals in interview, “would become like a Nordic *Refus global*, without direct contact with the cultural movement going on at the time in the South.”¹⁸

Independent, disseminated (as is, at its best, his discipline geography¹⁹), conscious of the price to be paid for maintaining his originality, but faithful to his origins, Louis-Edmond Hamelin carved out an intellectual, activist, and institutional path that was both risqué and cautious:

Shifting is an act that comes from the combination of two previously contradictory directions: inertia and acceleration, braking and adventure, the force of gravity and eruption, security and risk. How will the two objectives oppose, tolerate or intermingle with each other? How to reconcile an innovative tendency moving away from each other?²⁰

Although he does not shy away from contact with politicians, he refuses to take sides with any political party (which could discredit him in the eyes of some) and maintains a liberty of thought that does not, however, exclude profound and sincere engagement: “I comport myself like an academic who tries to stay independent from lobbying, trends, and

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 57.

¹⁹ “In fact,” he writes in *Écho des pays froids*, “[my work] is of a disconcerting fragmentation, a spectrum which goes from the real, measurable (sand, marine/wind) to the imaginary (plane hijacking), or from Aboriginal policies to environmental neology” (Hamelin, 1996, p. 2). In fact, this supposed fragmentation is intended throughout his career and is based on the idea of North, which he employs in all its disciplinary possibilities.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 3.

parties.”²¹ By putting value on understanding, interculturalism, and research in and for the North, he rises up in the face of those who only see the North as a reservoir of resources: “I go to the North, not to conquer, but to understand and, at the same time, to serve.”²² Economist on the margin, he also does not advocate an interminable conservation of the North, but a balanced exploitation that can contribute to the common good, or again, as he says, “to the best, to the most efficient, to the greatest benefit for the whole population.”²³

At the same time original, risky, and cautious, this position is, however, not without its price: “What is the price paid by the career of a professor,” he confides after he retired, “who engages the difficult path of unpopular subjects?”²⁴ He could also add that by tackling in a broad manner phenomena often analysed in detail, he situates himself in the long term and in a commitment that must continue over decades to have an impact. In fact, one can trace from 1948 to today the consistency of such an approach for the North: “Like the wolverine trapper,” he writes with humour, “you need to know how to be patient.”²⁵ The impact of his work on society will, however, in a quiet but fundamental way, be more profound: A trend which attains the base even of society’s foundation.

Influences

Modest, Louis-Edmond Hamelin voluntarily recognizes the role of those who allowed him to find his originality and prove the relevance of his work, of the discovery of his interest in the North and words and his scientific undertaking pregnant with social utility. Starting in 1948, he received from Jacques Rousseau and Georges-Henri Lévesque the need for what he calls “the risqué utility of knowledge,” at the source of the institutional creation of a Centre in Québec City. “The efforts must lead to the creation of opinions which can contribute to the solution of problems.”²⁶ He thus distances himself from a closed conception of knowledge and joins a boreal activism, which took root during his first

²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 207.

²² *Ibid.*, p. 215.

²³ Chartier and Désy [eds.], 2014, p. 85.

²⁴ Hamelin, 1996, p. 4.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 101.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 218.

academic contact with the North, during a visit to McGill University. There, in 1947, he met the great thinkers of Northern Studies to come, including the deadpan Vilhjalmur Stefansson. He convinced Hamelin that one must take into account intellectual perception to understand the North. “I am seduced by and try to decode,” he writes, “what Stefansson’s humour meant by the statement, ‘There are two kinds of Arctic problems, the imaginary and the real. Of the two, the imaginary are the more real.’”²⁷ He remains equally grateful to the French geographer Raoul Blanchard who, by inviting him to do his doctorate in Grenoble, opened for him a world that would change him forever. There he discovered the high mountains, which would be a second inspiration of coldness, after the winter, and he would also meet there the woman who would become his wife, Colette Lafay, a constant support for him throughout his career. Thanks to her, he thus began to develop an extraordinary network with France. Through his own work on Québec, Blanchard influenced the graduated conception of the North which would be one of Hamelin’s great contributions. It should be noted that this graduated conception is in the order in which Hamelin experienced it: the winter (of his childhood), the high mountains (in France), then the Arctic. His nuanced conception of the cold world would find its inspiration there. His childhood charted for him an experience of winter that made him admire the efforts of his people to adapt to their environment. He remembers also that neither of his parents “had ever left Québec.”²⁸ Rather than closing in on himself or driving him to be disproportionately attracted to foreign countries, this fact made him sensitive to intercultural experience (*vis-à-vis* France,²⁹ English Canada, the Aborigines, the Russians), knowing full well the difficulty of admitting and appreciating difference to ease tensions.

Context

When Louis-Edmond Hamelin started his work on the North in the 1940s, he was located in a global context of emerging northern research, but also in a local mentality that took little interest in these issues. Despite that, he remembers, reality is completely different and “this immense space

²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 57.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 30.

²⁹ Hamelin writes, “The host country [France] offered me a first great intercultural laboratory, curiously situated within the same language” (Hamelin, 1996, p. 64).

is a cold country.”³⁰ Even if the myth of coldness ran through many representations, it is winterity which brought him to “the myths of the North” in Québécois thought and perceptions. In addition, in the 20th century development had progressively reached the Near North and the Middle North, by way of projects in the Laurentian Mountains and the Mauricie region, then the North Shore and Abitibi, and finally James Bay. That being said, he felt among his people a true fear of the North. He tells the story that in the 1960s the Centre for Northern Studies had in vain offered a draw for a trip to Kuujuaq among the attendants of its public classes (those, thus, already sensitized to northern issues): “The first winner of the draw renounced the prize, frightened by the idea of such a voyage.”³¹ Essentially, among politicians and in the media, the perception of the North was utilitarian: electric lines and railways transporting towards the St. Lawrence Valley the resources it needed. The idea that this was colonial exploitation was little shared by politicians and made intercultural negotiations difficult. Also, the recognition of prior Aboriginal rights annoyed people: “It’s difficult for any coloniser, whether he is ferocious or a bit gentler, to have the humility to accept that the people he is threatening were there before him.”³² Thus, whether it wants it or not, northern research has a political aspect, even outside of existing parties.

Yet, if we look more closely, the North has occupied a privileged place in Québécois intellectual production since the beginning, with the *Relations* of the Jesuits, exploration maps, the Hudson’s Bay Company and Revillon Frères’ reports, the Arctic voyages of Captain J-E Bernier, the testimonies of missionaries, adventurers, and scientists, the mythology surrounding the construction of the Manicouagan dams, the Northern enterprises of Hydro-Québec, etc. These sources seem, however, to be seldom utilised, and in research on Québec, the context and the problematics of the North or the winter are often simply ignored. When he started the institutional northern research initiative, which would lead to the foundation of the Centre for Northern Studies, Louis-Edmond Hamelin received very little interest from his colleagues. However, the 1940s and 1950s were marked by the foundation of the Arctic Institute of North America (1945) at McGill, by the great French polar expeditions (1947), by the creation of the federal Department of Northern Affairs and

³⁰ Chartier and Désy [eds.], 2014, p. 73.

³¹ Hamelin, 1996, p. 214.

³² Chartier and Désy [eds.], 2014, p. 77.

National Resources (1953), and by the Québécois expeditions (Jacques Rousseau, Pierre Gadbois, and Camille Laverdière). In the 1960s and 1970s, huge development projects in the North would lead to an intensification of research, but Northern Studies would remain marginal in the general perspective: “Important reviews, said to be ‘national,’” Hamelin writes, “continued to ignore the North.”³³

Method

The research of broad concepts like nordicity and winterity, were accompanied by the conviction, for Hamelin, that complex questions necessarily require examination by multiple disciplines. There is a cost, he writes, of considering a phenomenon by the bias of one approach only: “The mono-disciplinary approach does not allow one to produce enough relevant and necessary knowledge for the comprehension of a question that is so complex.”³⁴ By *transdisciplinarity*, one can thus use “in an integrated way all of the sciences, knowledge traditions, and relevant languages for maximum understanding of an object/subject, considered in and of itself or in its relationships.”³⁵ The demand for this intellectual method is born out of the double recognition (which could seem contradictory, but is rather complementary) of the fact that, on the one hand, “pure forms are rare”³⁶ and, on the other hand, that one must produce vocabulary, and consequentially, definitions, to grasp and understand these world phenomena. He will rely thus on multidisciplinary approaches (nordicity, interculturalism, sustainable development, Aboriginal studies, regionalism, etc.) and would accompany them with the adventure of creating words. For him, not knowing how to name with precision the world that surrounds us leads to not being able to observe it, to know it, and to understand it. His intellectual method is thus an undertaking at once broad and precise of what I call “the ecology of the real”, which aims to bring humans closer to their environment and produce for both more harmony.

³³ Hamelin, 1996, p. 96.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 86.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 84.

³⁶ Chartier and Désy [eds.], 2014, p. 105.

Winter

As a young child, Louis-Edmond Hamelin experienced the changes that the first cold of winter brought in the St. Lawrence Valley: altered transportation, differentiated sociability, extreme luminosity.³⁷ It is from winter,³⁸ which he likes to call “seasonal nordicity” (during a certain period, we find in it conditions similar to those of the Arctic in a territory situated further South), that he elaborated his entire northern thinking (which would later encompass the high mountains³⁹ and the Far North). He starts from the observation that the winter is often thought about by way of summer, which provokes “shifted opinions and behaviours”⁴⁰ and especially the impression that humans that live in the North were “displaced,” that they should not be there, that they are “voluntarily uprooted,” taken from the “normal” climate. There is a great sadness in this observation,⁴¹ but also a possibility of realigning with reality that permits us to accept, to love, and to recognize the world that surrounds us for what it is: “Winter is not a fantasy, it is a reality, an object, which is there in a recurring manner every year.”⁴² To accept it allows one to be anchored in the world: “It is to accept Québecness.”⁴³ The first step is to no longer consider this season as just a physical phenomenon, but rather by its practices – social, cultural, athletic, psychological – the adaptations that it causes, the behaviours, discourses, representations, and policies that result from it. Winter touches several disciplines and it must be observed

³⁷ “In the winter, even if it was cold,” he said, “we are virtually surrounded by a considerable energetic power, that of the sun” (*Ibid.*, p. 36).

³⁸ Louis-Edmond Hamelin defines winter as a “cold and snowy period of the air-earth-water interface, variable according to the weather, physical terrain, the year, the attitudes of people, and technical levels” or more simply as the “socio-climatic period that is the most dissimilar of the year” (Hamelin, 1996, p. 221).

³⁹ Of the “mountainous,” the second cold space discovered by Hamelin (in the Alps) after the winterity of his childhood, he writes: “It must also be noted that the elevated levels of the massifs of temperate countries remind me of Nordic zones, by their remoteness, their isolation, the grip of nature, snow difficulties, low human occupancy, and by underdevelopment” (*Ibid.*, p. 231). This phenomenon is universal: altitude boosts nordicity just as latitude does. “Any increase in altitude, even weak, accentuates winter and Nordic conditions and, consequentially, their effects on all of life” (*Ibid.*, p. 229).

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 227.

⁴¹ “Any excessive differentiation in environment-behaviour,” as Hamelin writes, “makes the country less happy, less creative, more expensive, and more stressed” (*Ibid.*, p. 271).

⁴² Chartier and Désy [eds.], 2014, p. 36.

⁴³ *Ibidem.*

from a multidisciplinary perspective. One senses that in Hamelin's remarks about winter that this topic is not neutral for him: In fact, reconciliation with this season touches the heart of his vast project, that is, to bring about by the acceptance of the real more harmony between man and the world.

Aboriginals

To reflect on and try to understand the "North" in all its components cannot be separated from a parallel – and distinct – reflection on the notion of "aboriginality."⁴⁴ "Northern Studies," he writes, "is intimately linked to autochthonism."⁴⁵ Since 1965, in the midst of the feverish development of the North, he argued that the elaboration of Northern policies could not be done without the consultation of the first inhabitants of the regions in question. He was not much listened to in the enthusiastic brouhaha of energy development, but his claims would be revisited in the 1970s when legal experts remembered bitterly the rights that accompany the notion of "anteriority" that they had wanted to ignore.

Because of the principals of the Aboriginal worldview, the question of territory – or *property*, if one places it in a western context – has always been at the heart of conflicts and misunderstandings. From a purely theoretical point of view, the question seems to be irreconcilable: the one considers land to be a good that can be exchanged, ceded, acquired, bought or sold; the other defends the idea that man is inseparable from his environment and that, consequently, there cannot be a division between him, the earth, the sea, the water, as well as between social, cultural, or survival practices. What's more, as most of the Aboriginal peoples are partially nomadic their presence on the land is discreet: their territories are ecumene in light habitation, since the rarity of resources leads to low population density. By way of example, let us recall that a traditional extended Cree family needs a territory of around 3000 km² to ensure its multi-year subsistence.⁴⁶

⁴⁴ On the different historical definitions of "Aboriginal" (p. 275) and its derivatives, such as "Aboriginalness" ("the fact of, the state of, the conscience of," p. 277) see Hamelin, 1996.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 212.

⁴⁶ According to Tony Ianzelo and Boyce Richardson, who followed an extended Cree family from Mistassini in the 1970s, the territory of a master hunter was 1200 square miles, that is, around 3100 square kilometres. This territory is necessary to allow for a rotation of hunting and trapping zones and permits the extended family of the master hunter to

Also, despite the recognition that “the first ‘Americanness’ is that of the American Indians”⁴⁷ and that one can conceive of the Aborigines “as the first Québécois,”⁴⁸ a malaise remains, more broadly than that which echoes periodically in the press during periods of tension (which undermine both valid development projects for non-Aborigines and, for Aborigines, legitimate concerns about cultural and social flourishing). For some, this has developed over the centuries into an annoyance which feeds racism.⁴⁹ Yet, a reflection on the notion of multicultural “territoriality” could help to find consensual developments.

A “Nordist⁵⁰” Project

The North is thought of as a reservoir of resources for the needs of the South. This utilitarian vision limits understanding and limits the use of the largest part of the territory of Québec to specific and targeted activities: military protection, political nationalism, extraction of resources, delegated administration. In sum, we can say that “the North is not understood in and of itself,”⁵¹ which leads to a vast and damaging missed opportunity to fill up the whole territory as much in the imagination, worldview, research, and identity as in development and political fullness.

This state of affairs also leads to a deficit in dialogue between the populations of the South and the North, which corresponds with an absence of fertile intercultural exchanges between non-Aborigines and Aborigines. Several steps seem to be necessary, according to Hamelin, to get out of this situation for the good of everyone: First, it is necessary to accept difference. There exist, Hamelin reminds, “fundamental cultural differences between Aborigines and non-Aborigines.”⁵² These touch not only traditional activities and language, but also the approach to land, the

survive, meanwhile assuring the regeneration of the territory’s resources (*Chasseurs cris de Mistassini*, National Film Board of Canada, 1974, 57 min 57 s).

⁴⁷ Chartier and Désy [eds.], 2014, p. 66.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 67.

⁴⁹ “The reading of Aboriginal issues is thus profoundly obscure, misunderstood, biased, and betrayed. Prejudices bury a thousand-year-old reality. Mental obstacles block access to strongly rooted cultures. Modern civilization is blind.” (Hamelin, 1996, p. 275)

⁵⁰ “Nordist” in the activist sense of the word, the *nordist* worldview meaning here an idealistic political perspective, inscribed over a long period and proposing general, long-term objectives, as does, for example, the *feminist* worldview.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, p. 217.

⁵² Chartier and Désy [eds.], 2014, p. 58.

relationship of man with his environment and thus the organisation and the negotiations that ensue. In the second place, we must multiply the occasions for contact: few non-Aboriginals and few Aboriginals have social relationships with one another, which leads to misunderstandings and misinterpretation of situations. When he arrived in Cree territory for the first time in 1948, Louis-Edmond Hamelin noted a basic fact: “The Aboriginals were absent from the principal structures,”⁵³ which collided with the pacifism defended by his people. “There was a violence in that that shocked me, but I didn’t really understand all the issues yet.”⁵⁴ Thirdly, the historic evolution of Québec must be considered in a longer perspective (which will also guarantee it a longer survival), which necessitates recognizing the fundamental anteriority of the presence of other peoples and the intercultural cohesion which followed. “This anteriority is an absolute value,” even though often, autochthonism is “a denied myth.”⁵⁵ Fourthly, we must assume the consequences of this situation and seek to come to the best result for all, which presupposes favouring forms of associationism, “which would be the practice of the philosophy of coexistence,”⁵⁶ abandoning that of dominance. Finally and fifthly, we must aim for a “consensual *métissage*,” which is not a means of negotiating a weakening of differences, but on the contrary a way of organizing them in a whole where they will be maintained while combining with each other. This is the rather audacious ideal of Louis-Edmond Hamelin’s worldview: a better social and political organisation for Québec, which would reinforce it while fully taking advantage of the strengths of its territory, conceived of as a whole.

And depending on this *métissage*, yet to be defined, the Québec of the South, the Québec of the North, and the entirety of Québec would probably take a better chosen and a lot more thoughtful direction of development, more appropriate and more respectful of the cultures, both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal. It would probably lead to more beauty, to betterment, to more efficiency, and to a greater happiness for the whole population.⁵⁷

⁵³ *Ibidem*.

⁵⁴ *Ibidem*.

⁵⁵ Chartier and Désy [eds.], 2014, p. 75.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 82.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 85.

According to him, it is by *territoriality* that one can find a way to account for these differences: *nordicity* and *winterity* are forged from a view of the whole (manifesting the suffix *ity*), which is linked to the Inuit concept of “*nuna*” or those of “*Innu Aitun*” and “*Innu As?*” among the Innu. In all of these cases, what is at stake is the relationship between the individual and his environment, the possibility of taking possession of the environment, or on the contrary to agree on that which we are intimately a part of. He reminds that Greek thought made reference to a gradation between the immediate place where we live and the vaster whole in which we exist. Also, “holistic” thought links these concepts by suggesting that the individual is not separable from the world which surrounds him and that all reflection concerning it must be supported by the fluidity of the links between the whole and its parts. Nevertheless, the Civil Code remains the basis of a large part of western organisational thought – in Québec as elsewhere in the world – fundamentally separating “goods” and “persons,” requiring an update to understand the forced relationships between them. It is thus inevitable, according to Hamelin, that concerning the subject of land, “a philosophical difficulty” will arise “when it comes time for discussions, because the Aborigines understand one thing and the non-Aborigines, the opposite.”⁵⁸ The political pitfalls that follow would not find a solution but at least more clarification if those who undertake the negotiations understand this fact: “*nuna*” constitutes the basic organisational notion that makes the separation of land and human aspects (life, sociability, culture, language, health) incomprehensible.

The *Nordist* worldview is thus a *political* worldview in the noblest sense that we can conceive of: it aims to elaborate new forms of development and organisation based on a better recognition of cultural differences, without passing by way of domination, blockages, or the impasses that were known to the 20th century. It is certainly idealistic and demanding, because it is a social project that takes into account notions often abandoned in social discourse, that of happiness and mutual gain:

My model is demanding; it is a model for eight million individuals that allows for a little more mutual acceptance between the North and the South; that they love one another more, which will lead to greater rapprochements.⁵⁹

⁵⁸ Chartier and Désy [eds.], 2014, p. 62.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 81.

This is admittedly a cultural, political, and social program for a whole century to come. It requires, however, a vision of the whole which is systematically lacking today; that which Louis-Edmond Hamelin refers to by “total Québec,” “the peninsula of Québec,” or again with “the totality of Québec.” It “takes into account the entire territory and not just the St. Lawrence Valley.”⁶⁰ Geographical, political, imaginary, representational, and developmental maps should thus not all be uniformly applied, but routinely considered in relation to each of the aspects of territoriality. This attention demands, however, an effort and “a strong feeling of the population towards the whole territory of Québec.”⁶¹ Once again, this “fullness” is not a fantasy, but a fundamental requirement: “All countries possess this foundation, this essential material bedrock. Québec is asking, has asked, and will ask itself this question.”⁶²

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We owe to Louis-Edmond Hamelin the invention of a vocabulary specific to the snow and to the cold, which has enriched the French language and augmented our possibility of knowing and loving the North. We also to owe him the shift in meaning of certain words – such as “Nordic,” henceforth circumpolar rather than just Scandinavian in the dictionaries, which permits the inclusion of other territories, including Québec.⁶³ We also owe to him what I call the “word-programs,” such as “nordicity,” “winterity,” and “altitudinality,” which have not only opened vast, new, and fertile fields of research, but have also modified the way in which the peoples of the North represent themselves with a vocabulary of their own. In Québec, Hamelin’s “Nordist” worldview was and remains a slow, but persistent battle to accept notions of the intercultural, autochthonism, and territoriality, to attain a political fullness that includes as much the environment, the land, the public good, wealth, and relationships of happiness and harmony between individuals. This struggle is not one of a decade, but of several. Despite the continuation of his activities, the interview that we are delivering to you here is an intellectual

⁶⁰ Chartier and Désy [eds.], 2014, p. 31.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, p. 82.

⁶² *Ibid.*, p. 79.

⁶³ “The word ‘Nordic’ comes from this: I traveled the world to create a word broad enough so that Québec could have its place within it” (Chartier and Désy [eds.], 2014, p. 39).

will and testament in the sense that it contains the sum of his commitments and his proposals – profound and refreshing at the beginning of the 21st century which has so few of them – that this intellectual, certainly one of the greatest in circumpolar thought, delivers to us with a discreet humour and modesty.

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