



A BED.
A FLOW.
A BAND.

A BED. A FLOW. A BAND.

THE GENEALOGY OF STRATA : FROM EXTRACTION TO CONNECTION

Alex Bilodeau

A thesis exhibition presented to OCAD University in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Fine Arts in Interdisciplinary Master's in Art, Media and Design (IAMD)

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Abstract

A Bed. A Flow. A Band. is a research-creation project that explores a multigenerational practice that my family calls *aller aux roches*; picking and archiving rocks as works of art. Using decolonial qualitative research methods (Tuck, McKenzie, McCoy, Goeman, Kitchin), it creates a dialogue between this intergenerational practice and my settler-colonial French-Canadian ancestry spanning 13 generations (1650) marked by land exploitation. By examining my family's rock-picking tradition, A Bed. A Flow. A Band. explores my French-Canadian settler identity and genealogy, my family's connection to exploitation and extraction, and challenges settler-colonial methods of archiving. The thesis exhibition employs experimental techniques and research such as genealogy, documentation, installation, poetry, archiving, mapmaking, data visualization, animation, illustration, music and photography, incorporating them into interdisciplinary works that aim to question, explore and transform a multigenerational tradition into a land-conscious practice that can be passed on to the next generation.

Acknowledgements

As a 13th generation settler on this land (~1650), I recognize that I occupy unceded Indigenous territories. An important part of this research took place in Ktinékétolékouac/Shacewanteku — the land on which I was born and learned about my family's rock-picking practice — the unceded territory of the Abenaki and the Wabenaki peoples. This project emerged and grew at OCADU, in Tkaronto (Treaty 13), territory of the Mississaugas of the Credit, the Anishinabeg, the Chippewa, the Haudenosaunee and the Wendat peoples. I wrote these pages in Tiohtià:ke, situated on the unceded territory of the Kanien'kehà:ka. Finally, I also want to acknowledge the presence, on these lands, of First Nations, Métis and Inuit urban Indigenous peoples.

Merci grand-maman, de m'avoir transmis ton amour des roches et de la terre. L'image de tes mains qui travaillent restera gravée dans ma mémoire, toujours. Merci grand-papa de m'avoir inconsciemment transmis tes recherches. Marcher sur tes pas me remplit de gratitude et de fierté.

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Glossary

Abitibi-Timiskaming

Abitibi-Témiscamingue is a region in Québec. In Anishinaabemowin, Abitibi means “where the waters divide” and Timiskaming means “body of water of a deep lake”.

Colon

The translation of «settler» in French. In French, colon is used as an insult, referring to someone lacking education or manners. This usage tends to overlook the diverse range of colonial identities in Kebeg and perpetuates a binary distinction between the «colonized» and the «colonizer». I use the word colon as a statement of reappropriation.¹

Fleuve

A term used in French to describe a watercourse with significant currents and length that flows into the sea. In English, the word «river» is used for all sizes, while in French, a distinction is made between a fleuve and a rivière.

Île-D'Orléans

This island is situated in front of (now) Québec city. It was unoccupied at the arrival of the French. It was first named Île-de-Bacchus in 1535 by Jacques Cartier inspired by its many vines. The Island was then quickly rebaptized, also by Jacques Cartier in 1536, in honor of the duke d'Orléans. The island was referred as Minigo in Wendat and Windigo in Anishinaabemowin; both translate to “haunted.”

Kanadario

Origin of the word “Ontario”, which means «shimmering water.»²

Kanata

Canada comes from the Haudenosaunee word “Kanata”, which translates to “village” or “settlement”.

Kebeg

Anishinaabemowin for “narrow passage”, also sometimes spelled “Kebec” referring to the fleuve Saint-Laurent. Originally used to name Québec city, the word Québec was then used by the English to name the Province of Québec.

Ktinékétolékouac/Shacewanteku

Where my parents met, where I was born. In Abénaki, Ktinékétolékouac means “big fork”, and Shacewanteku means “where we smoke.” It is now called Sherbrooke after the governor Sir John Coape Sherbrooke., This is where I learned to pick rocks with my grand-maman and papa.

L'intéressant

Translates to «interesting.» Used by my father to identify a unique, affecting and emotion-provoking rock.

Papa, maman, grand-maman, grand-papa

My family members. I use this to honor my family and my language.

Pontiac

Also known as Pondiac or Obwandiyag (circa 1714-1769), a chief of the Anishinaabeg.³ Place of residence of some of my ancestors.

Rigaud

From the seigneurs in place in Rigaud, starting in 1732, the brothers Pierre de Rigaud de Cavagnal and Captain Pierre-François de Rigaud de Vaudreuil.⁴

Rouyn-Noranda

The place where my grandparents met. Named after Sieur Jean-Baptiste de Rouyn.

1 — DENAULT, Alain, Bande de colons, 2020.

2 — RESSOURCES NATURELLES CANADA, Origine des toponymes du Canada ([website](#))

3 — LA REVUE, Notre toponymie, ([website](#)) <https://www.larevue.qc.ca/article/2018/04/24/notre-toponymie---qui-etait-pontiac>

4 — HISTOIRE DU QUEBEC, Rigaud, ([website](#)) <https://histoire-du-quebec.ca/rigaud/>

they all aim & fire

standing up straight against this rock, i catch your fugitive eyes. before
i turn & lay my head down, i'm thinking of Her escaping past stolen,
walking across these rocks, walking over moss. i'm thinking of Her
escaping past stolen, walking across lost, walking over shame, holding
fire in Her heart, like all her descendants so effortlessly do, under your
always light.

LEANNE BETASAMOKE-SIMPSON

INTRODUCTION

ALLER AUX ROCHES

0



Figure 1: Alex Bilodeau, Ancestors: Îles Mingan, Photograph, 8X10, 2022.

Strata are layers of sediment accumulated over time. Like the pages of this thesis, they form a chapter at a time. A bed, a flow, a band. Each stratum embodies change, trauma, elements, people and stories. In their abstract nature, strata hold the essence of this world's story. Geologists divide those layers into epochs: paleocene, eocene, oligocene, miocene, pliocene, pleistocene, holocene, anthropocene. Each embodies drastic change, and transformations of eras of time. They are the concept of lateral continuity, where sediment is deposited over time. This gradually accumulated sediment is much like the pages of a book, where the story unfolds, chapter by chapter. The land encapsulates the interconnectedness and ever-evolving narrative of worlds. Land is in continuous change and construction; it is not a surface — it is multiple⁵ and fluid.

This thesis is stratum.

As is the nature of strata, I add new layers as time progresses. It is subjective, incorporating my own contribution, layered intergenerational memories of settler-colonialism, reflection on my own identity and on my family's involvement with land exploitation.

This research delves into how colonialism and power structures have influenced my family-strata-story (French, Sanchez, Ullom). [T]he absence [and] invisibility of Land [is] a central colonial distortion"⁶ My ancestors' and my own connection to the land has been shaped by colonial exploitation, land acquisition, and ownership. Through these processes, the land became obscured as it was co-opted by capitalism and colonialism. As a 13th generation (~1650) settler, my relationship to the land has been strongly impacted by this disconnection.

Through an autoethnographic approach, I examine how settler-colonial identity, extractionism, and archiving have impacted my family's history. I am looking closely at the origin and significance of an intergenerational family practice; *aller aux roches*, or rock-picking. My goal is to celebrate this multi-generational practice while also grounding it in a more land-conscious approach.



Figure 2: Alex Bilodeau. *Rubbing explorations with charcoal*. Charcoal and stone rubbings on paper. 8X10. 2023.

5 — MASSEY, Doreen. *For space*. P. 9

6 — FRENCH, Kristen B. SANCHEZ, Amy. ULLOM, Eddy. *Composting Settler Colonial Distortions: Cultivating Critical Land-Based Family History*. P. 3.

0.1 L'intéressant

An obsession for rocks has become a tradition in my family, although its exact origin remains unknown. I deduce it developed in my colon ancestry, as they mined the soil of Abitibi-Timiskaming, fostering an interest in geology. My paternal ancestors were relocated there — shortly after the English colonization enticed by the promise of land.

I learned to pick rocks as I learned how to play; with creativity, joy and community. Rocks slowly became objects of collection and fascination. Uncles, cousins and distant relatives all share a peculiar affection for rocks, enough to make it their career. In our homes, rocks become sculptural entities possessing a beauty that serves as a playful means of connecting with a sense of place. We pick rocks sometimes together, sometimes while keeping each other in mind. We exchange, gift, and pass on specimens from one generation to the next.

I learned to pick rocks like you pick a fruit; with patience, care and respect. My papa calls it *aller aux roches*, drawing from the Québécois expression used to pick fruits recreationally (*aller aux pommes, aux fraises* — to go to apples, strawberries). We went to rivers and forests and places to forage specifically to gather rocks, like a field ripe for harvesting. There were seasons for moss rocks, for lichen rocks, for river rocks, for ocean rocks.

I learned to pick rocks for the emotion they evoked beyond their appearance; with heart, empathy and selflessness. My papa calls this feeling *l'intéressant*. *L'intéressant* encompasses a sense of balance; shape, shadows, weight, smell, connections, sounds — and a soul. I see *l'intéressant* as a methodology of gathering. It relies on intuition, muscle memory and raw feelings rather than something objective, tangible or aesthetic. It's about how a rock instantly conveys a story through the way it gazes back at you. It breathes, it lives, it holds memories.



Figure 3: Alex Bilodeau. *First experiments to find the meaning of "l'intéressant"*. Ink, rock, paper. Various sizes. 2021-2022.

In the research for my exhibition, I examined this practice, and considered both through the act of love and the act of extraction it requires. There is a tension between the repetitive act of removal, as a form of muscle memory from working in the mines of Abitibi, and a sense of intergenerational community. And there is also love.

Materiality is always something more than "mere" matter: an excess, force, vitality, relationality, or difference that renders matter active, self-creative, productive, unpredictable.

(COOLE AND FROST, P. 9)

0.2 Colon

I am a descendant of 13 generations of colons français on the unceded territory of the Anishinabeg, Atikamekw Nehirowisiwok, Eeyou and Eenou, Hurons-Wendats, Innu, Inuit, Kanien'kehà:ka, Mi'gmaq, Naskapi, W8banakiak and Wolastoqiyik peoples. My ancestors settled on land that was previously inhabited by Indigenous Nations, which means that as a descendant of this line of settlers, my relationship with the land has been shaped by settler-colonialism. Instead of engaging with and learning from the land, I simply reside upon it.

I was born in 1993. As a child, I learned about the great discovery of America. I learned about war heroes and patriots. I learned about Indigenous Nations using the wrong names — I memorized those inaccurate names by heart. I learned about the “good Indian” and the “bad Indian.”⁷ I learned that reservations are places to quickly drive by, never to stay — I learned that they are dangerous. I learned that land is meant to be conquered, that land is meant to be bought.

Through the process and structuring of settler colonialism, land is remade into property, and human relationships to land are redefined/reduced to the relationship of owner to his property. When land is recast as property, place becomes exchangeable, saleable, and steal-able.

(TUCK & YANG. P. 5)

Upon reflection on my identity, education, and ancestry, I question my role in perpetuating the settler-colonial mindset, particularly in my own practice of rock-picking. Reforming such practices, which seem to have origins in my own family's history as miners, becomes a means to unlearn and redefine my connection to place as a settler. The ways in which I relate to land have been passed from generation to generation. Unlearning these ways of being starts from a place of curiosity, but mostly, it means to be quiet and listen — to the peoples, their stories; and to the land.

Decolonization necessarily involves an interruption of the settler colonial nation-state, and of settler relations to land. Decolonization must mean attending to ghosts, and arresting widespread denial of the violence done to them.

(TUCK & REE. P. 647)

7 — For example, Innu, Anishinaabeg, and Wendat peoples were considered good allies to the French colonies, while Kanien'kehà:ka peoples were considered enemies as they were allies to the English colonies.

This research is, in many ways, a colonial ghost hunt, an attempt to decolonize my settler relationship with the land. I am searching for the ghosts of mining ancestors, the voices that have been forgotten, and a land from which I am not estranged. I am looking to unlearn settler-colonial methods by challenging its methods and its desire for extraction, domination, and power. Rocks are my ancestors, and rocks embody the colonial ghosts I am searching for.

You grew in a place and you had a relationship with a place. This is an epistemological idea... One does not simply learn about land, we learn best from land.

(MAYER, P. 219)

My first paternal ancestor, Jacques Bilodeau, arrived from Poitou (France) around 1650 on the first successful trip to l'Île-d'Orléans. He and his wife Geneviève Longchamps had six children. The parish registers provided me with an rare privilege to discover, in detail, the life of my many ancestors. Through this project, I was able to trace their story.

Colonization and the exploitation of colons in Kebeg led to multiple migrations, significantly influencing the trajectory of my ancestral lineage. The Catholic Church and the colonial agenda rapidly extended from early settlements, like unoccupied Île-d'Orléans, relocating many settlers onto Indigenous land with a focus on assimilation and missionary efforts. As industrialization progressed, the colonial agenda increasingly emphasized land exploitation. Most of my ancestors were proletarians and took part in the first mining or forestry projects in Kebeg and were forced to relocate for work multiple times during their lives.⁸ It is also important to mention the often erased presence of Black people in the early days of French colonized Kebeg. Black slave labour played an important part in "the prosperity of the New England colonies [...] [S]lavery continued in Quebec even after the 1759 Conquest brought Quebec under British control."⁹ Though the analysis of this thesis is centered around white settlers and their occupation on Indigenous lands, I acknowledge the presence of People of Color on this territory.

Colonization in Kebeg is marked by its inherent complexity — what is frequently referred to as the idea of the colonized colonizer. As the first invaders and settlers in occupied Kanata, French-Canadians were also subjected to British colonization. This unique situation, positioning French-Canadians as both the colonizer and the colonized is often cited as the source of the identity crisis among Kebegois. The distinct circumstances of Kebeg's colonization resulted in significant divergences from other descendants of Anglo-Saxon settlers, expressed in important differences in language, culture and values. I will, in this thesis, address the complexity of Kebegois identity by using the term colon, as suggested by Alain Denault, which encompasses the tensions and multiple power dynamics at play within this historical context:

8 — See Appentix A.1 for more details on my paternal ancestors' relocations in relation to the mining and forestry industries.

9 — MENSAH, Joseph. *Black Canadians. History, Experience, Social Conditions*. Second edition. Halifax, Winnipeg : Fernwood Publishing. 2010. p. 45.

[The French settler] is [c]aught between the colonizer who defines the colonial project according to their interests, and the colonized crushed by the plundering enterprise, even extermination, implemented by the former [...] [O]n one hand, the financial, industrial, and political elite; on the other hand, the Indigenous peoples ruined by their presence, the [French] settler appears as the mere agent of the exploitation project.

(DENAULT, P. 86)

The intimate relationship between the colon identity and the exploitation of the land is at the heart of this project. They are deeply interconnected, interdependent, and mutually influenced. Colons were instrumental in the British colonial project (starting from 1763) through the exploitation and ownership of the land. The colon identity — and the idea of the colonized colonizer — is closely tied to the settler extractionism history in Kebeg. As Britain expanded its mining projects in the colony, they employed proletarian colons to carry out the strenuous mining work.



Figure 4: BANQ. *Mines*. Abitibi Témiscamingue. Fonds François Rupp Source: Archives nationales à Rouyn-Noranda. 1970-1979.

0.3 Thesis Statement

This thesis aims to explore the connection between the practice of *aller aux roches* with the historical and colonial desires for land acquisition, while also recognizing its perpetuation as a family tradition and a means of ancestral acknowledgement. Its goal is to shift my own perspective from land-taking to land-loving. This rock-picking practice is at the core of my development as an interdisciplinary artist, but I also wish to honor it as a unique and meta-physical connection to family. Though I keep this ritual very close to my heart, placing it in direct confrontation with fundamental settler-colonial desires to exploit, extract or conquer raises questions and issues about their perpetuation. It also brings up questions about the colonial desires to collect, acquire and archive — in this case — literal pieces of land.

My experience of *aller aux roches* — while important and formative for me — has always been disconnected from the land itself. I have been taught to look at the rocks, rather than the land from which they emerge. My settler ancestry has shaped my perception of land as a territory from which I am estranged; a place to inhabit, to capitalize, and to take from. Shifting my perspective on this relation with the land comes with recognizing the significance of gathering thoughtfully, but also acknowledging the importance of the concepts of land and place in my practice of *aller aux roches*.

Through this research, I have and will continue to pursue ways to consciously and meaningfully connect with the land I stand on and the land I gather. By having a better understanding of my ancestry and the settler-colonial constructs of place and archiving,¹⁰ I aim to develop new ways to relate to the land outside of the notions of Western European settler-colonial ideas of ownership. *Aller aux roches* involves not only gathering objects, but more importantly, the gathering of stories, relationships, genealogies, and the connections between space and time. Subsequently, my practice evolves to create novel gatherings, not only of the land itself but also of ancestral narratives and relationships. My practice aspires to engender new and meaningful connections with both the land and my heritage.

My grand-papa Louis dedicated his life to celebrating ancestry and family as the host of *Soirée Canadienne*, a television show where he visited small communities and celebrated folklore in Kebeg. My grand-maman Mae passed on her knowledge of rocks, and the need to attend to their beauty. These values were passed down to my father and, in turn, to me. I aim to apply and celebrate this inherited knowledge to rethink and change the ways in which we — colons — perceive and engage with the concept of place, with the goal of continuing to practice and pass on this precious tradition.

What does it mean to gather land in a meaningful way? This thesis endeavors to develop a reformed method of rock picking that continues cultural traditions while critically examining

10 — Canadian settler-colonialism is known for stealing resources from Indigenous Nations to facilitate the documentation, archiving, and development of anthropological research.

colonial relationships to place. By acknowledging my colon ancestry and its impact on our current relationship to the land, the first chapter aims to develop a practice that recognizes the complexity of my identity while transmitting ancestral knowledge to future generations. It delves into interdisciplinary work engaging with identity, genealogy and memory. Drawing inspiration from Alain Denault's *Bande de colons*,¹¹ I trace my ancestry and how my family's movement was shaped by colonization.

The second chapter focuses on reforming the ways in which I engage with land by decolonizing my gathering methodology. By conceptualizing *aller aux roches* as a mapping process, I draw insights from Eve Tuck and Marcia McKenzie's work in *Place in Research*¹² and Marlene Creates' *The Distance Between Two Points is Measured in Memories* to decolonize my understanding of land. This reformed methodology shifts my perspective from rock-picking on the land (focused on the rock itself) to rock-picking with the land (focused on the experience of place). Developing a sentient, slow research process of picking is vital to the development of this thesis.

Finally, I reconsider the ways in which I gather and archive. Specifically, I question the dislocation of rocks and the necessity of moving them from their original locations, looking at colonial concepts of ownership and property. Instead of automatically displacing and dislocating rocks, I aim to develop on-site interactions, in order to gather memories and stories, rather than necessarily encouraging their accumulation. By engaging in collaborative works with the land, (explorations, walking, photographic experiments, rubbings) the imperative for extraction, as seen in rock-picking, transforms into a search for connection, into story/memory picking. Furthermore, I engage with the idea of the body as an archive, looking at Juliette Singh's work in *No Archive Will Restore You*.¹³

In the end, this thesis extends beyond collection. It is an ongoing, never-ending, multigenerational process of unlearning; it is a re-evaluation of the relation between self and matter.



Figure 5: *Grand-maman Mae sitting on a rock. ~1945.*
Source: Family archives.

11 — DENAULT, Alain. *Bande de colons*. Lettres Libres. 2020.

12 — TUCK, Eve, MCKENZIE, Marcia. *Place in Research: Theory, Methodology and Methods*. Routledge. 2015.

13 — SINGH, Julietta. *No Archive Will Restore You*. Punctum Books. 2018.

0.4 Objectives and Methods

This thesis allows me to establish a meaningful connection with my colonial ancestry while using decolonial and alternative methodologies. Autoethnography provides a means to personally and deeply address my cultural identity as a colon. Through my many years of experience with *aller aux roches*, I can communicate the complexity of my settler-colonial ancestry, through love, guilt, memory and celebration.

Reconnecting with the land through different methodologies is a significant part of this research process. My father's concept of *l'intéressant* serves as a way to gather and establish a connection with the rock itself, embodying a form of engagement with matter, but not with land. Additionally, employing decolonial methods allow me to deconstruct the notion of colonial space and perceive the land as a fluid, multiple entity. Rather than simply collecting and perceiving rocks as individual items, these methods encourage me to connect with the land as a whole. It allows me to attend more meaningfully and question my settler-colonial ways of doing and making. By pushing the boundaries of autoethnography and engaging in a decolonial discourse, I can address the issues surrounding the concept of land through the eyes of a colon in *Kebeg*.

Including intergenerational knowledge as well as Indigenous, decolonial and alternative methodologies allow me to emphasize my process of unlearning colonial ways of being on the land and reform my approach to research by adopting sentient, slow, decolonial research methods. These methodologies prioritize an awareness of place, in contrast to approaches rooted in colonial, academic, and performative traditions. By rejecting conventional research methods, I create space for my body and personal experience to actively engage with, collaborate, sense, and form meaningful connections with the land.

Throughout this research creation, my objective is to develop different ways of interacting with the land. These involve the rocks themselves, but also practices such as rock rubbings, paper sculpting, and burning; techniques that have enabled me to not only connect with the land itself but also explore the various aspects of the concept of extraction. This interdisciplinary approach was developed by employing self-aware and slow methodologies; I walked, touched, rubbed, wrote, smelled and held the land. Direct encounters and unexpected outcomes are essential to the development of this research, allowing me to engage with place in an experimental manner.

THE BED

IDENTITY AND DISPLACEMENTS

1

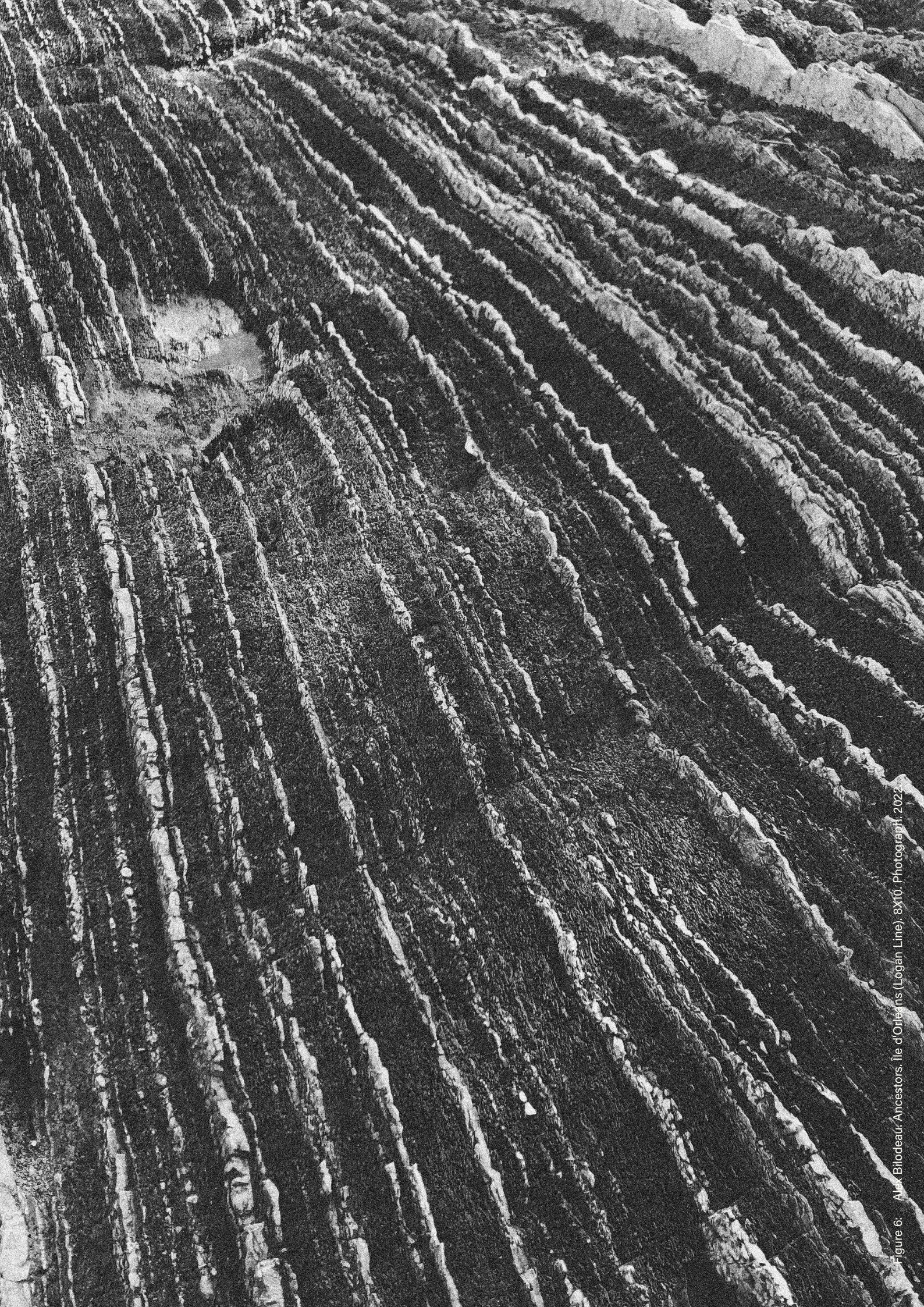


Figure 6: Alex Bilodeau: Ancestors. Île d'Orléans (Logan Line). 8x10. Photograph. 2022

L'Île-D'Orléans I

I went on a research trip to Île-d'Orléans during the summer of 2022 with my friend Ariane, retracing the steps of my grand-papa Louis. My goal was to retrace the trip my grand-papa had taken 40 years earlier in search of a connection to his earliest settling ancestors (1650) as he was working on his genealogy.

Île-d'Orléans is located in the fleuve Saint-Laurent, and is known as one of the earliest French settlements in Kebeg. Ariane and I traveled to research our first settling ancestors — Jean Langlois and Jacques Bilodeau. They both arrived on the island in the 1650s.

We heard they were good friends.

Sitting on the beach in St-François-de-l'Île-d'Orléans, we gazed across the water at Ville de Kebeg on the opposite shore. The tide was low, the ground firm, and we felt a sense of insignificance. This very beach is where our ancestors set foot.

Imagine
Les gros bateaux
Dans la baie



Figure 7: Alex Bilodeau. Ancestors. Île d'Orléans (Logan Line). 8X10. Photograph. 2022.

L'Île-D'Orléans II

We searched for tombstones bearing our names.
The marble surfaces enclosed time in lichen.

Among them, we noticed a fragment of limestone,
detached from its memorial. Its edges greened,
as evidence of its long-forgotten fall.
Its weight exceeded its size — a feather
with the heft of a brick.

Merci madame
Pour le bout de roche
On va en prendre soin

Pas besoin
De nous hanter



Figure 8: *Marble from tombstone*. Cemetery Saint-François-de-l'Île-d'Orléans. 2022. Picked by Alex Bilodeau. Alex Bilodeau collection.

1.1 The Bed

The bed is the foundational component of strata, the deposited sediment its base, its core, its origin. Throughout my research, I have developed methods to better understand and approach the core of my own cultural identity and experiment with data extracted from my genealogy. Understanding the origin of the practice of *aller aux roches* means establishing a connection with my colonial ancestry. This comes with a recognition of the complexity of the *colon français's* journey, intricately entangled with the history of land exploitation. Looking at my ancestors' genealogy means taking a closer look at their stories. Revealing the foundational layers of my genealogy involves an exploration of my relationship to the land, specifically through my perspective as a *colon* descendent.

The land of Kanata being twice colonized — once by the French (1608-1763) and later by the English (1763-1867) — the *colons français* became colonized colonizers, which positioned them as proletarians. This chapter will take a closer look at the identity of the colonized colonizer with the assistance of Alain Denault's research in *Bande de colons* and critical land-based family history research (French, Sachez, Ullom). Specifically, I will delve into the complex power dynamics in the early days of occupied Kanata, as well as looking at the patterns of dislocation of *colons* throughout the Industrial Revolution. Furthermore, I will question the implication of muscle memory in my rock-picking practice in relation to my mining ancestry. Finally, I will present two reflective pieces in response to my ancestry research; *I Am Not The Center*, a collaborative family tree, and *Submemories* which aims to translate settler-colonial gestures and memories into an interdisciplinary piece.

Understanding my *colon* ancestors' role in colonization is crucial to comprehend the power dynamics at play in the context of land exploitation. "Spatial organizations give coherence and rationality to maldistributions of power and resources (McKittrick, 2006), geographic processes that result in [...] accumulation by dispossession. [Settler-colonial concepts of] [c]apitalism and the production of capital has perhaps always required the displacement and perpetual landlessness of some for the accumulation of others."¹⁴ In the colonial-capitalist system, *colons* played a key role in these power dynamics. Taking on the roles of both the colonized and the colonizer, *colons* are simultaneously active participants in the genocide of Indigenous communities and are often descendants of exploited workers used for the British industrial project. Consequently, Kebeg is marked by contradictory sentiments toward its own colonial history.

While both France and Britain had a military agenda during the colonizations, strategy primarily focused on ideological colonization. *Colons* and missionaries were seeking to expand Catholic influence within Indigenous nations. In the early days of French colonization, economic colonization was a secondary agenda. Most economic exchanges were focused on the

14 — TUCK, Eve, MCKENZIE, Marcia. *Place in Research*. P. 36.

fur trade. In contrast to the English colonizers, the French concentrated their colonial efforts on assimilation through the Catholic Church, which had an immense impact on Indigenous communities, particularly with the implementation of Indian Residential Schools and the conversion of Indigenous people to Catholicism. Ideological and economic colonization both play a vital role in perpetuating colonial power dynamics:

But the church, no matter how tall and visible it is on the heights, is a sacred territory where, by definition, the spirit reigns without sharing. It is more a symbol of permanence or the appropriation of time. It catches the eye in the landscape, but it also exploits matter: the mines and their headframes and hills of waste, the large sawmills, the pulp and paper mills along the rivers.¹⁵

(MORRISEAULT & ASSELIN, P. 153)

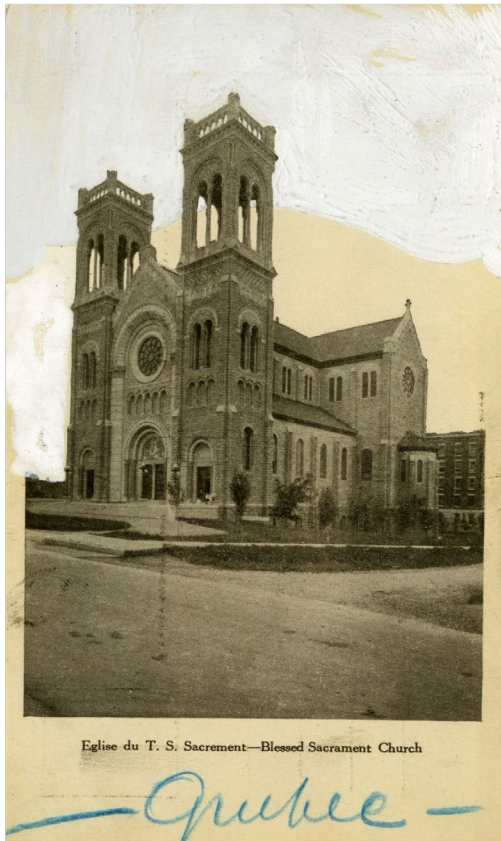


Figure 9: BAnQ Vieux-Montréal. *Église du Très-Saint-Sacrement de Québec*. [1900]. Source: Collection Félix Barrière.

France's position on ideological colonialism influenced the early presence of missionaries as among the first settlers in Kebeg (~1650). French focused on the assimilation of Indigenous groups and maintained relationships for trade. In contrast, British colonization was predominantly industrial, economic, and extractionist. Led by a desire for resource exploitation and territorial acquisition, the English rapidly gained economic and political dominance over the *colons français*. A series of military defeats resulted in the structural proletarianization of the *colons français*, causing them to transition into the role of the colonized colonizer.

15 — Translated from French

1.2 Displacements and Memories

After the second wave of English colonization (The Great Migration: 1815-1850), many colons were forced to relocate. The Great Deportation of Acadians (1755-1763) serves as the most known example of people being displaced in Kanata, coinciding with the arrival of the English as a dominant military force. These acts of forced relocation became common in the 1750s and later in the 19th century. Motivated by land acquisition and military power, the colonizing forces compelled nomadic Indigenous groups to settle. The objective of colonial displacement was to eradicate Indigenous peoples and their culture, establish military and territorial dominance, and appropriate their land. By the beginning of the 20th century, the British empire had taken over resource extraction in Kanata, as it did in its other colonies. The British, in order to expand their extractionist project, offered parcels of land to colons and settlers in exchange for profitable labor.

My grand-maman Mae descends from ancestors who were part of some forced relocation to access employment in the mining and forestry sectors. (See Appendix A.1) I believe those ancestors were the same who established our rock-picking practice. As French proletarians, their chances of owning land were nearly nonexistent. I noticed patterns in my ancestors' movements that indicate a correlation between their relocations and significant industrial labor movements. Among them, the discovery of the Abitibi Gold Belt and the importance of the lumber industry in Abitibi-Timiskaming and the discovery of gold in the Algoma region. Analyzing over 150 years (1814-1976) of generational relocations (see Appendix A.1), by comparing genealogy data, historical facts, and family stories I determined that their movements often relate to extractionism. These relocations had a profound impact on the communities of my settler-colonial ancestors and their understanding of land, place, and home, like suggested by Goeman:

It is not just the individual that feels displacement, but also the community, who has also lost a connection and it is for this reason that we must unmap settler spaces and find new ways to (re)map our communities.

(GOEMAN. P. 178-179)

Currently, several close and distant family members either work or have worked in the mining industry. Generations after the first miners, their careers remain in the industry, ranging from lithotherapy, geology, granite/quartz industry to gold mining in Africa and mine management in Australia. The love of rocks connects family members across generations, despite the constant relocations. Over the years, family members their experiences, expertise, and insights, passing on knowledge and skills to their descendants.

In my family, *aller aux roches* comes from more than a mere desire to collect. It's an urge, a burn, a fascination — a collective memory of extraction.



Figure 10: *My great-grand-father, Art Lafrance (on the left), working as a miner in Rouyn-Noranda. Date unknown. Source: Family archives.*

1.3 I am not the center

Genealogy is gray, meticulous and patiently documentary. It operates on a field of entangled and confused parchments, on documents that have been scratched over and recopied many times.

(FOUCAULT, P. 139)

I am not the center is an installation building upon the genealogy research of my late grand-papa Louis. He dedicated many years to researching his lineage back to the earliest settlements. (See figure 11 bellow) With great emotion, I took up his work over a decade after his passing. Building upon my grand-papa's previous research, I delved into over 12 generations of ancestry. We worked together, as I filled the gaps which remained silent in his family tree and grew my own from shared roots.

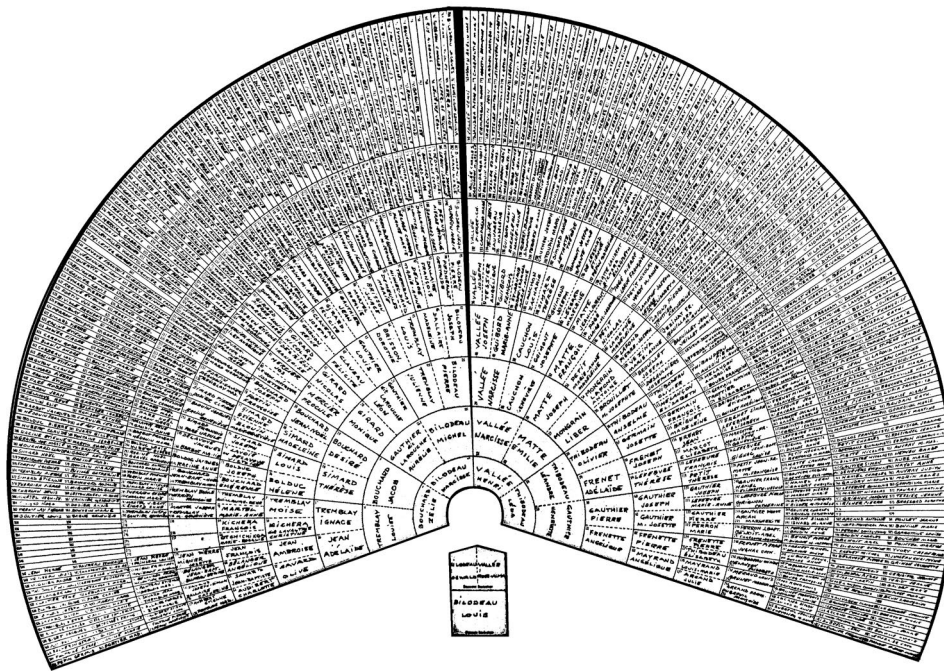


Figure 11: Louis Bilodeau. Genealogy. ~1990. Source: Family archives.

The project utilized multiple databases — including Généalogie Quebec, Mes Aieux, Ancestry, Wikitree, Nos Origines, Family Search — to gather information on my ancestors. I also used the previous work of my grandfather. The data is organized in columns, each representing a different generation. This grid-like structure naturally evokes the concept of strata, where the density of layers fluctuates over time. As we approach the present, the number of ancestors gradually diminishes, reflecting the progression of time and visually expressing genealogical stratification. The strata-like visual representation refers to the interconnectedness between my ancestry and extraction.

The abstract and line-free representation evokes the idea of boundless data, to the extent that it overwhelms the viewer with a staggering number of names, seemingly floating on a scroll of paper. It confronts the viewer with the magnitude of Kebeg's colonial history and the parish collected data. The piece is suspended from the ceiling and curves down to rest on the floor, enhancing a sense of infinite data and furthering the idea of continuity. Additionally, it establishes a distance between the viewer and the artwork, as they instinctively avoid stepping on the bottom of the scroll, which lays on the floor. This distance both allows for a broader and more impressive view of the data, as well as protecting — in some sense — my ancestors. The forced distance creates a barrier which makes the names more difficult to read and access.

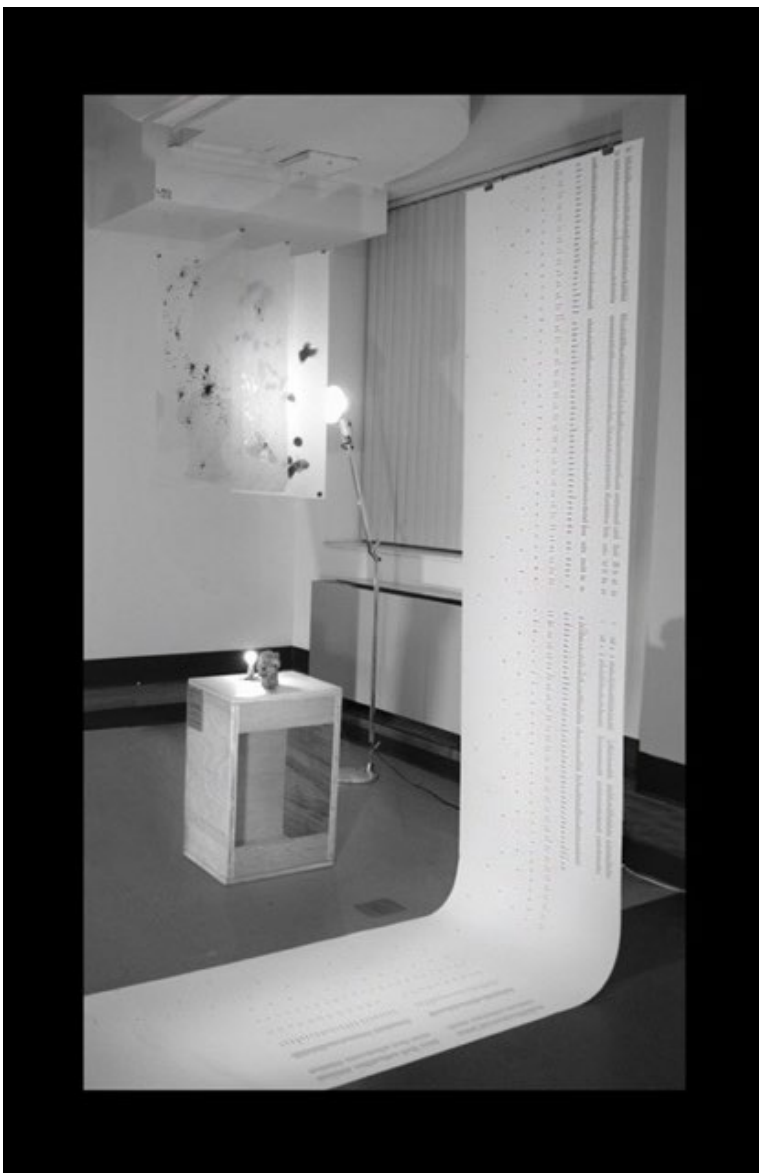


Figure 12: Alex Bilodeau. *I am not the center*. 24X144. Inkjet print on paper. 2022.

Filling the missing gaps in my grand-papa's tree was an incredibly moving period of this research process.

I can remember as a child looking at the gaps in the tree, wondering why they remained blank. The tree is now in my brother's apartment, and I never fail to stop and admire it when passing. Following my grand-papa's steps, both on the island and in the continuity of his research, has been a special way for me to reconnect with him after his passing.

Genealogy is an infinite and continuous process. I hope, with this project, to foster the desire to constantly develop the research, in collaboration with my own descendants.

THE FLOW

PLACE-MAKING

2



Figure 14. Alex Birkhead: Ancestors. Photograph n. 87. D. L. & O. Leans. 2022.

Duck Shoes and Sunscreen

Like every year, we took a drive in the old
Pontiac to the hiking trail where my father
fell in love with my mother.

A river, a wooden bridge, a swamp, a dam.

J'ai appris que

Wet stones dry gray

Rivers carve

And lakes embrace

Seas conceive

And lichen

Always knows

Where to go

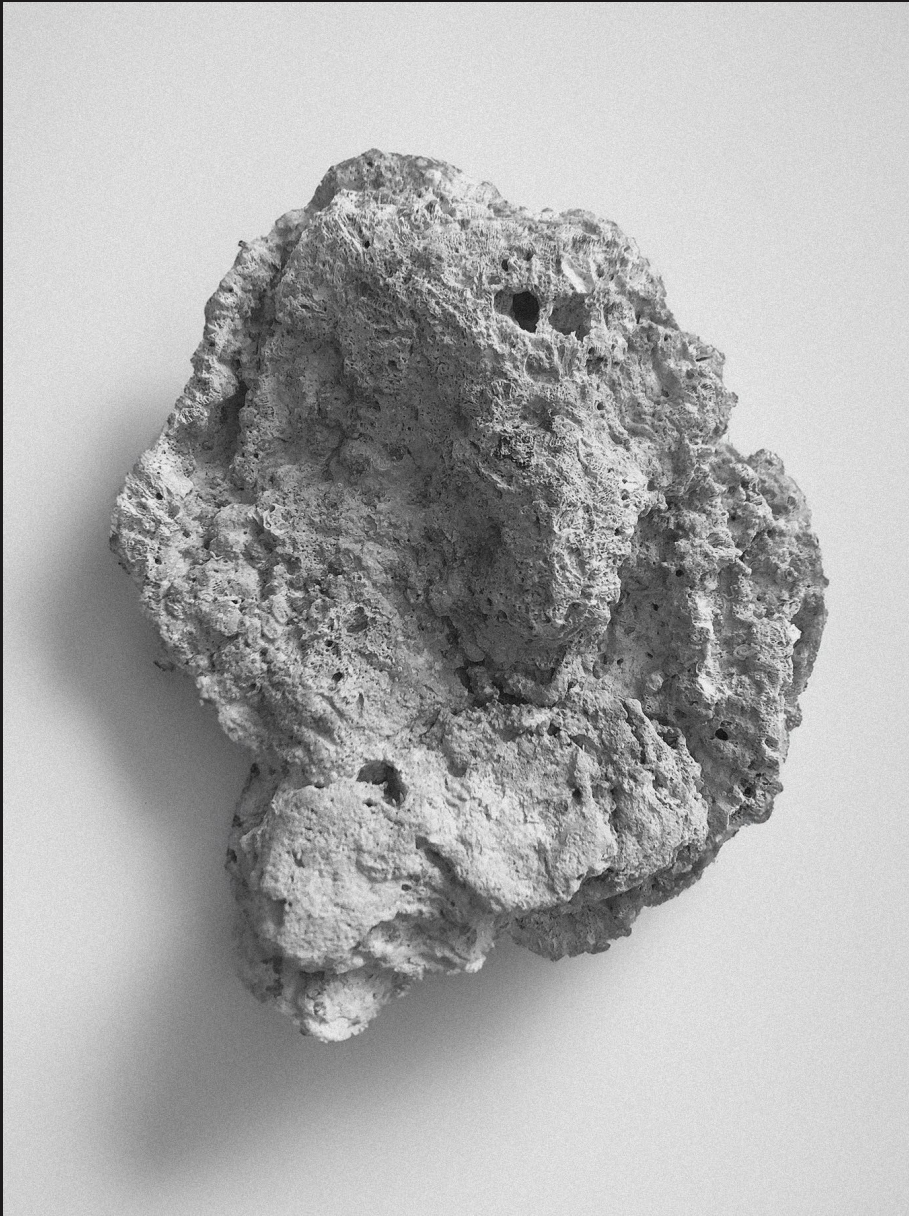


Figure 15: *Coral and stone*, Sanibel Island (Florida) 1993. Picked by Jean Bilodeau. Jean Bilodeau collection.



Figure 16: *My brother Philippe sitting on a rock in Sanibel Island (Florida) 1993*. Photo credits: Jean Bilodeau. Source: Family archives.

Blood Archive

With a 17th century map in our hands, we parked the car in the sand and approached the path giving access to the shore.

Private.

A local and her dog granted us passage and a place to park. We followed the steep path — greeted by wildflowers, cliffs and waterfalls, to the land once owned by Jacques Bilodeau, my first ancestor to settle here in the 1650s. Rock overlaid on the shoreline — nothing else in sight.

At low tide, the muddy seabed had surfaced. We took off our shoes and walked barefoot through the clay, up to our calves. The rocks were embedded in mire, and it appeared as if the tides had left patterns on their surface. With graphite, I marked the fossilized currents on paper, mapping its ripples and crevices.

On the way back, I stepped on a sharp rock, wounding my foot. The clay infused with blood dried on my heel as I sat in the sun.

Blood returns
Where blood belongs

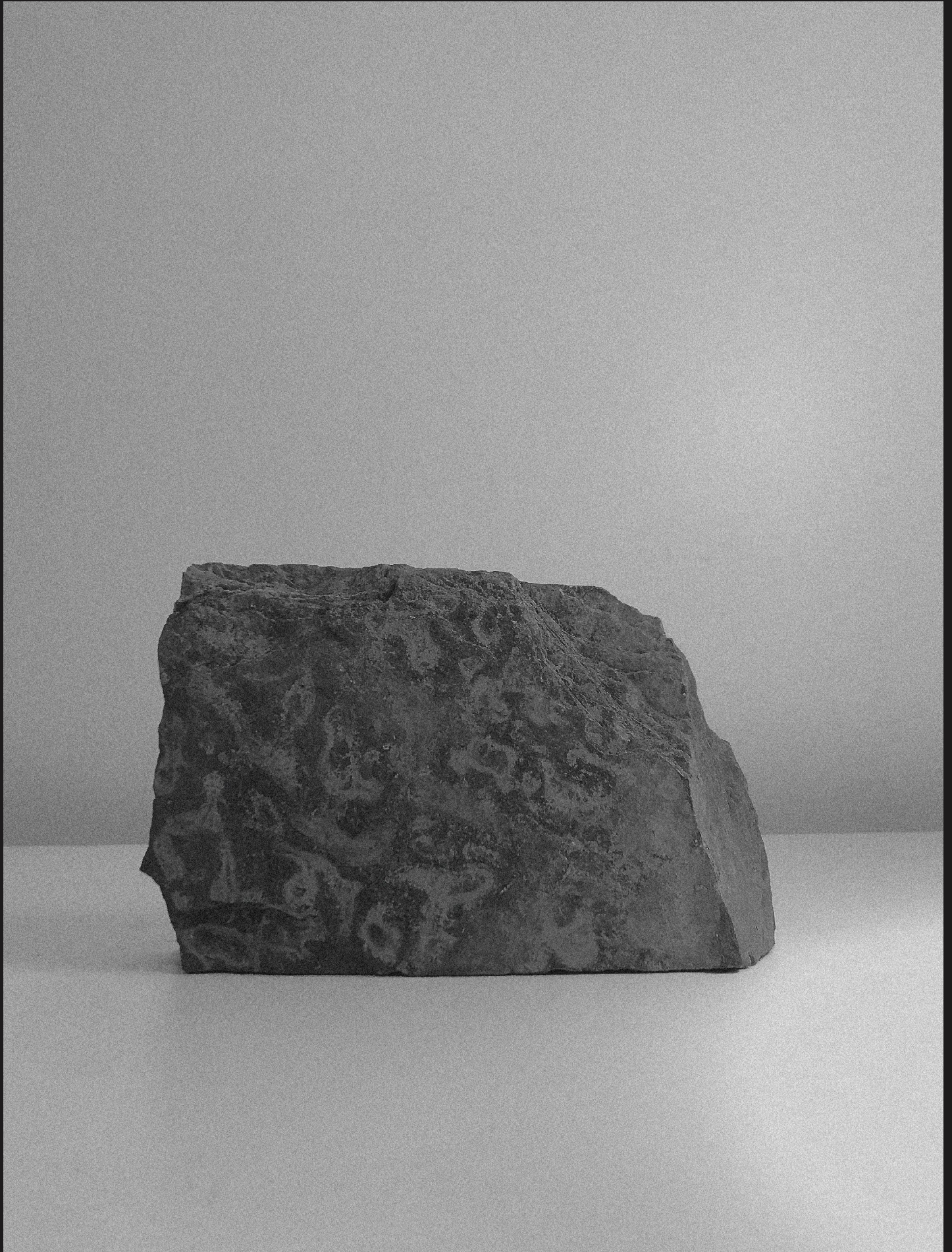


Figure 17: *Mudstone*. Île-d'Orléans Picked on my ancestors' aquired land. 2022.

La Rivière

I dipped a hollowed stone in water. The vessel I had chosen to hold the water suddenly felt inadequate for this ceremonial act. The slow and attentive movements of my hands around the rock reminded me of a mother washing her child's hair. Of a cloth being carefully rinsed before attending a wound.

Its various cavities formed small chambers, typical of a river rock. It was once home to a small tree, and I wondered if their metamorphosis was mutual;

nests for roots, roots for nests.

Lifting the rock, I allowed most of the water to pour down my arm. A strong scent of clay, metal and dust emanated from the stone. The sound of water passing through each crevice created an echo in the chambers filled with lichen.

Une rivière qui coule au creux de la main



Figure 18: *La rivière*. Rock gifted by my father, and tool to make Mapping the Missing Pieces. Picked by Jean Bilodeau. Alex Bilodeau collection.

2.1 The Flow

The flow embodies stratum creation, where air and fluids shape sediment deposition. Flow carves the land, changing its essence, marking its ground. Ripples and fossils, extraction and exploitation.

Colonialism is the decay of its own bed.

Destroyed landscapes, abandoned mine sites, “[e]nvironmental degradation and [their] disproportionate effects on Indigenous land and peoples [are] an extension of the violence and biopolitics of settler colonialism.”¹⁶

Settler-colonial states such as Kanata were created to extract, not to give sense to the lives of its inhabitants. Extraction erases the human experience of place, of home. It shifts the ways in which we – descendants of colons — relate to land. As extraction is at the heart of place-making in Kebeg, it fundamentally shapes how I approach *aller aux roches*. My (dis)connection from place is rooted in the settler-colonial history and entangled with extraction. To reform my approach, it is essential to rethink place outside of the constraints of settler-colonial ways of doing and making.

Settler-colonial representations and perceptions of place are produced by relations of exploitation, resulting in visual representations that depict place as a land to conquer and extract resources from. Kebeg has over 200 active extraction projects today¹⁷. Between 1863 and today it has had 117 gold mines, 90 copper mines, 67 silver mines, 43 nickel mines, 36 iron mines, 32 zinc mines, 28 platinum group elements (PGE) mines, 18 asbestos mines, 4 titanium mines and 13 lead mines¹⁸, but also molybdenum, salt, feldspath, diamond, germanium, graphite, mica, cobalt, diamond, sulfur, bismuth, and niobium – a majority of them are located on Indigenous land. This can be represented in the comparison between a map of the mining sites and a map of the Indigenous communities in Québec.

16 — TUCK, Eve, MCKENZIE, Marcia. *Place in Research*. P. 38.

17 — Ministère des Ressources naturelles et des Forêts du Québec

18 — *The Diggings*



Figure 19: *Core sample*. Drilled by my uncle, Pierre Bilodeau in Duvbreuilville. Date unknown. Alex Bilodeau collection.



Figure 20: *Oncle Pierre (on the right) working in the mine in Duveuilville*. Date unknown (early 1990s). Source: Family archives.

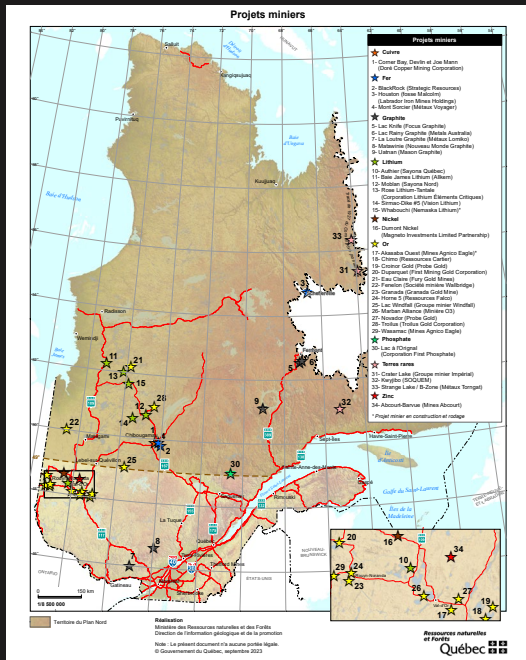


Figure 21: Mining projects. Ministère des Ressources naturelles et Forêts. Gouvernement du Québec.



Figure 22: The 11 Indigenous Nations of Québec. Figure 23: Services Autochtones au Canada. 2021

The development of the mining industry across Indigenous territories was developed following the arrival of the British colonies, which sought resources to export. Soon, colons, who had already been relocated by the mining and forestry industries, found themselves digging the soil – the place they called home — beneath their feet. This paradoxical relationship between home and destruction is explained by Denault:

The Canadian settler distinguishes themselves from the colonized by perceiving themselves in a certain way, still as a European, even if they are not aware of it. The land they stand on is considered like a foreign territory. Carving it up, shearing it, drilling deep holes in it, turning it upside down, draining it of life, selling it off in parcels, extracting all its essence, and killing every spore — these actions represent their only relationship to it.

(DENAULT. P. 21)

Colon descendants built an exploitative relationship with the land because they never saw it as their own. The colon is undeniably disconnected from the space they inhabit. The impact of this dislocation is destructive but also shaped the perspectives of their descendants, generations later.

2.2 Submemories

Submemories is an installation inspired by the contradictions in the colon's relationship with the land and their home, encompassing elements of both love and destruction. Lucy Lippard, in *The Lure of the Local* (1997) reminds us that the concept of home can encompass various meanings, much like the concept of land. She writes that "it transmits the sentimental associations of one scale to all the others [...] Home is at once more intimate and more isolated than place." Our perception of the places we call home is marked by specific intimacy, sentimentality, and community. My ancestors found a home in remote areas where they created communities as much as they destroyed its landscape. What emotions can you experience when you're holding the shovel responsible for the destruction of your own home? How did this experience alter both my ancestors' perspective, but also my own when I return to these places? What is remembered? Lippard says:

The lure of the local is not always about home as an expressive place, a place of origin and return. Sometimes it is about the illusion of home as a memory. If place is defined by memory, but no one who remembers is left to bring these memories to the surface, does a place become noplacé, or only a landscape?

(LIPPARD, P. 23)

Submemories visually depicts the impact of settler-colonial extraction on the colon's perception and memory of land. It is a projection on layers of household materials, including used bed sheets, linens, and curtains. Each layer is cut into abstract shapes, with each successive layer becoming progressively smaller, resembling a multi-layered representation of a mine. The installation aims to trigger a memory of extraction practices in the act of making, destroying, ripping. It speaks of the disfigurements of places and homes brought by those who inhabited and cherished the same land. To convey degradation and the act of removal (digging/ ripping), the interior edges of the cutouts are frayed. The transparency of the panels allows the image to project on each layer and echo through the installation. The projection images feature mining archives, family photographs, as well as rubbings, illustrations and photographs from my research process. The images, distorted by the layers and transparency, become abstract. The soundtrack is an original sound, recorded with the sounds of stones.

By juxtaposing both symbols of love and destruction, this installation aims to start a conversation about the ways colonial-settler perspectives have shaped — and continue to shape — our definitions of concepts like home, place, and land.

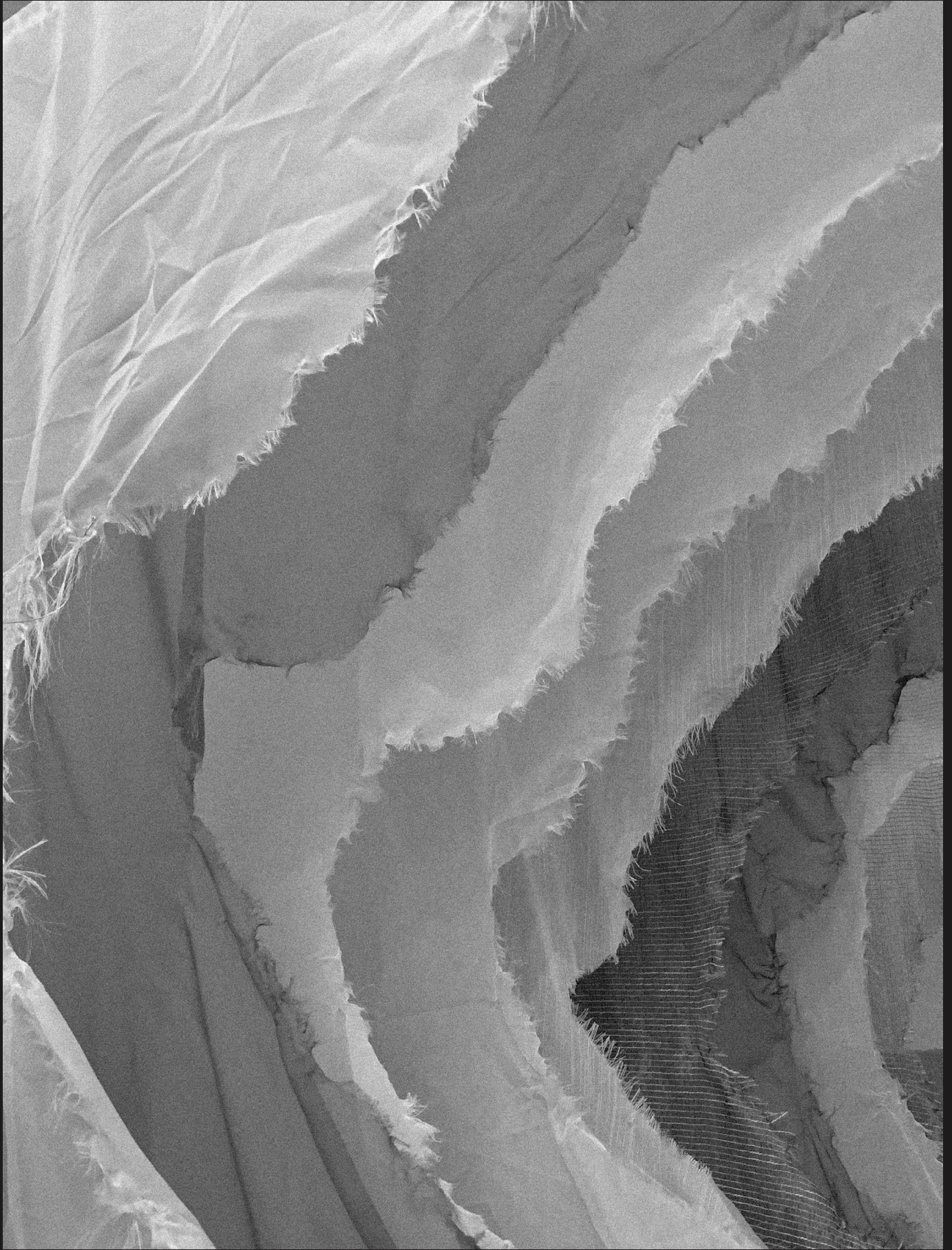


Figure 24: Bilodeau, Alex. *Submemories explorations*. 2023.



Figure 25: Bilodeau, Alex. *Submemories*. 5X6X10. OCADU. 2023.

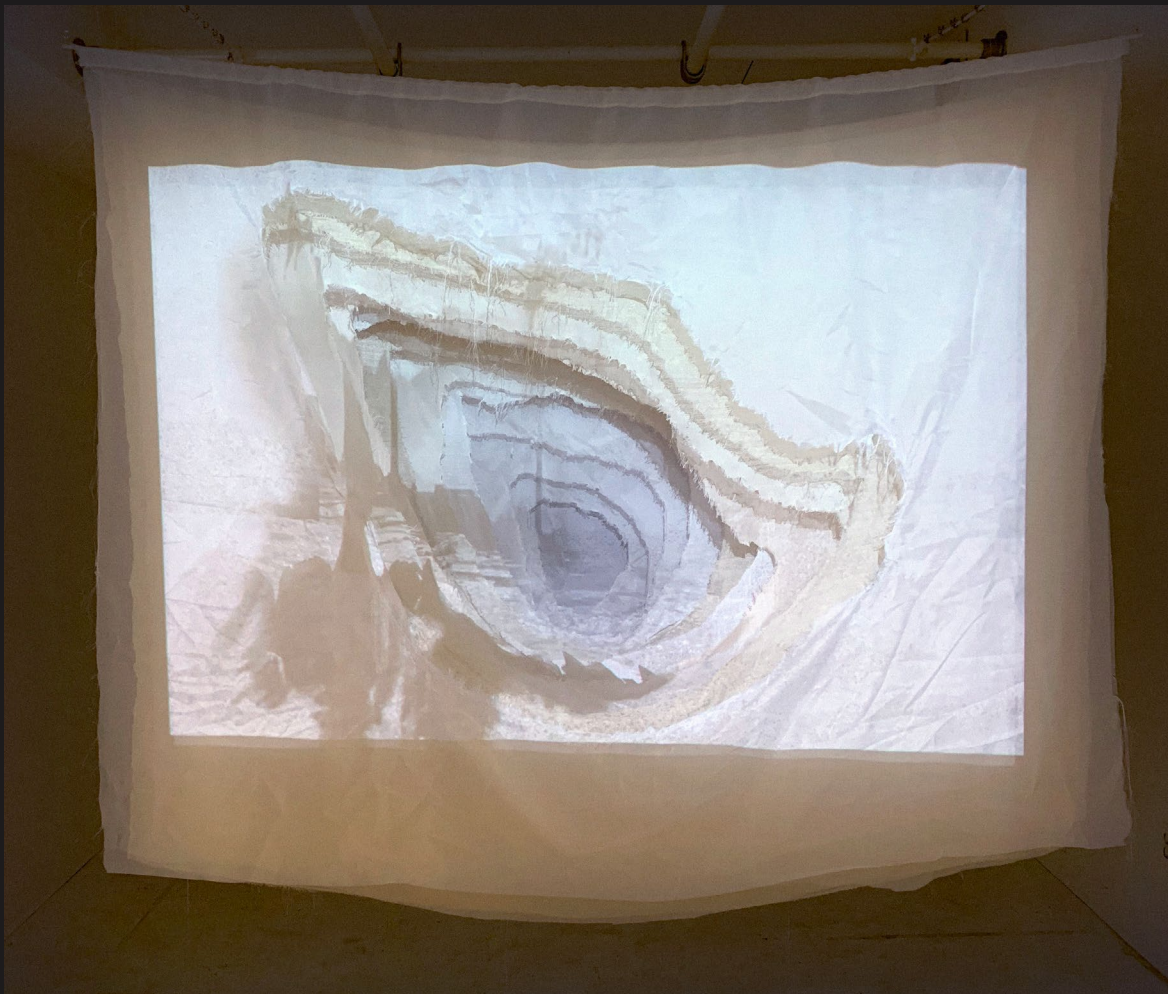


Figure 26: Bilodeau, Alex. *Submemories*. 5X6X10. OCADU. 2023.

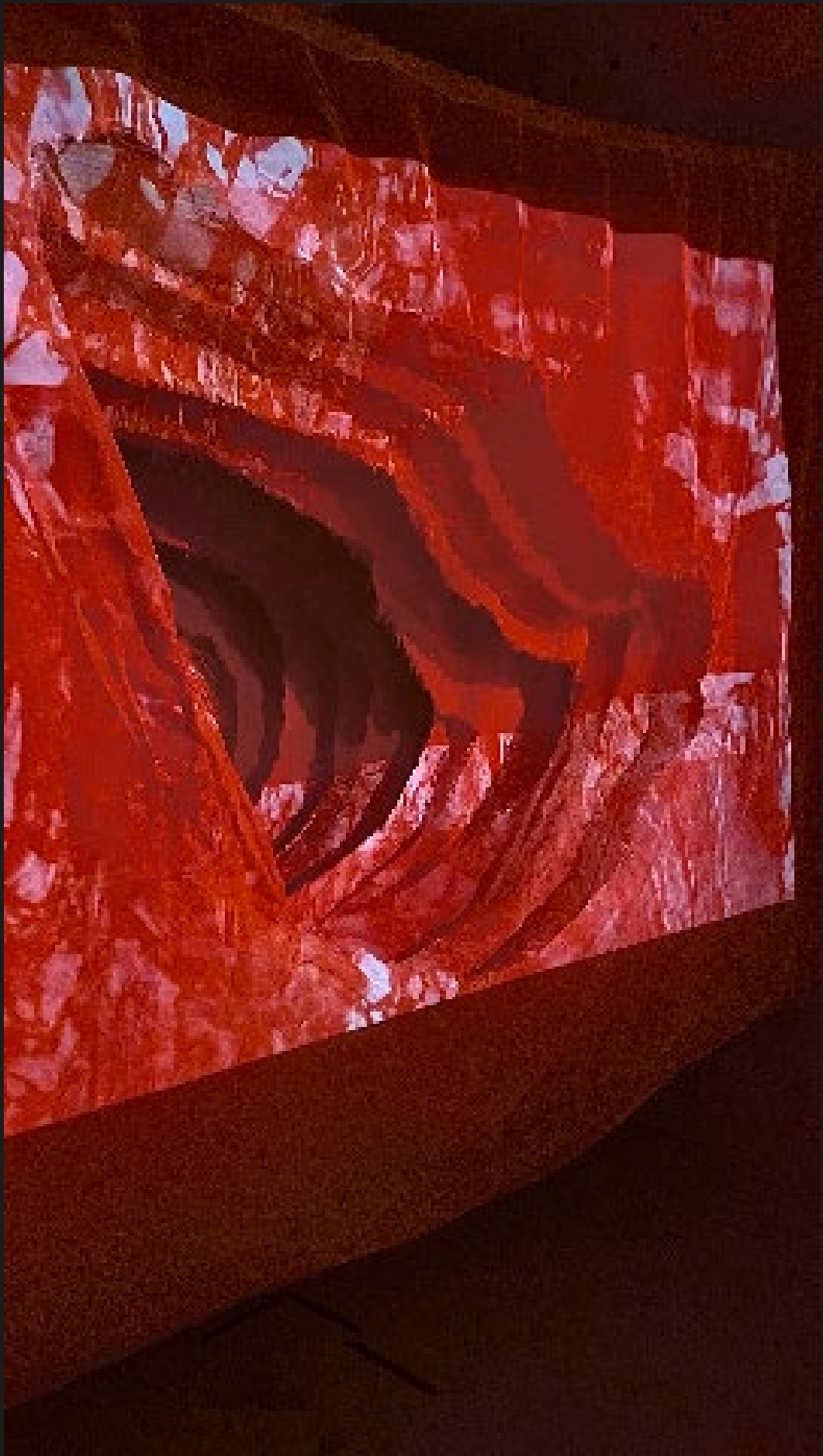


Figure 27: Bilodeau, Alex. *Submemories*. 5X6X10. OCADU. 2023.

2.3 (Re)mapping

The Distance Between Two Points is Measured in Memories (1988) is an artwork by Marlene Creates, offering a particularly inspiring representation of sensory experience of place and history through mapping. Through this project, collected rocks, moss and pieces of wood became objects representing narratives and peoples. During my experiments with mapping and walking on the site of my ancestors, I used a similar approach which allows for a deeper understanding of space and a more profound connection to the land and its stories. It also changes the traditional mapping perspective: from above (viewed from the sky: godly, capitalist, colonial perception) to inside (viewed from experience: touch, smell, narrative etc.), relating to peoples' history and recognizing the importance of the human and non-human experience in the context of place.



Figure 28: Creates, Marlene. Jim Voisey, *Labrador 1988* from the series *The Distance Between Two Points is Measured in Memories*, photo: Roger Smith

Like Creates, I am developing a method of (re)mapping by incorporating stories, images, explorations and collected objects. The relationship to space gains significance through people's narratives and the act of collecting.

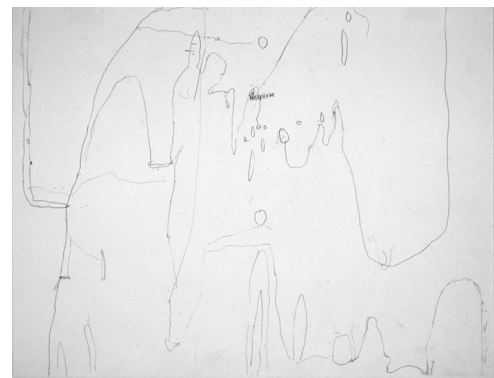


Figure 29: Creates, Marlene. excerpt: *memory map of Voisey's Bay* drawn by Jim Voisey.

The concept of (re)mapping, or mapping with stories specifically rejects settler-colonial ways of conceptualizing place. This Western notion of territory and the act of mapping are influenced by settler-colonial resource extractionism through mining, forestry and trade industries. By colonizing space physically, ideologically and economically, colons and settlers developed a new way to understand and record space. Indigenous scholar Linda Tuhiwai Smith writes: "The establishment of military, missionary or trading stations, the building of roads, ports, and bridges, the clearing and the mining of minerals all involved processes of marking, defining and controlling space."¹⁹ Excavating, marking, constructing, and monetizing, new territories are delineated, resulting in a redefinition of the concept of land. The representation and naming of space enforces territory, conquest and ownership. The first French seigneuries divided land into parcels — perfect rectangles — mapping out settlements and ownership, assuming that place is meant to be taken as property. This type of map is a planted flag, proof of ownership, a contract. This transactional perspective also shaped the European colonizer's perception, even from a distance, of the colonized land. Bruno Latour (1987) argues that the development of mapping and navigating technologies was specifically created to record and report data during the colonial invasions. Settler-colonial mapping was always about colonizing the land:

The immutability, combinability and mobility of maps allowed exploration, trade and ultimately colonialism to develop by allowing control to be exerted from afar and knowledge about new territories to be effectively transported globally. Maps became a vital part in the cycle of knowledge accumulation that allowed explorers to "bring the lands back with them"

(KITCHIN & PERKINS. P. 15)

In this settler-colonial representation of space, the meaning of land or place becomes its utilization — the location of the mine, the construction of the bridge, and the transportation of goods — rather than the actual experience of it: where things are, rather than where/how things happen. "Space [...] became conceived as a container with an explicit geometry that was filled with people and things and cartography sought to represent that geometry."²⁰ Yet, place — in all its abstraction and complexity — is impossible to contain. Place — unlike its representation in settler-colonial maps — transcends space, geometry, and people; it is a temporal experience in constant flux. The borders we delineate — between now and then, between water and land — are of human creation, just like the borders between territories (and the territories themselves). The fence, the invisible line — the printed one — all are a construct.

To counter this process of settler-colonial and capitalist mapping, I developed methodologies of mapping to follow stories rather than specific locations. I retraced my ancestors' footsteps on Île-d'Orléans and conducted experiments using various collection methods (photographs, rubbings etc.). Inspired my Marlene Creates' *The Distance Between Two Points is Measured in*

19 — SMITH, Linda Tuhiwai. *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples*. Zed Books. 2021. p. 10.

20 — KITCHIN, Rob, PERKINS, Chris. "Thinking About Maps". *Rethinking Maps*, 2009. p. 5.

Memories, I chose to concentrate my research and gathering activities in significant locations; the land of my ancestors and their burial site, places I used to go as a child to pick, mining sites. I created a series of experiments involving soil data graphics, stone rubbings, soil and rock collection, close-up strata photography, manipulation of photographs (lichen extractions), creative writing, paper burning and journal illustrations. These were elaborated to engage and define my experience of place.

Despite associating these methods with "felt" and "slow" research, it's crucial to acknowledge that a medium like photography is far from objective, as it "participate[s] in the construction of the ideologies of colonialism and contribute[s], just as much as scientific facts and military conquests, to the building of a 'colonial culture.'" In my research, photography served as a tool for documentation, mapping, and collection, providing a means to sense the landscape through textures, colors, and patterns.

The importance of collected objects deepens when they are connected to their places of origin. This shift in the approach to *aller aux roches* represents an essential milestone in developing a new and more slow, attentive and conscious method of collecting and archiving. It successfully engages with place outside of the settler-colonial ways of making and doing. It informs both my experience of disconnection and reconnection to place, by developing site-specific creation.

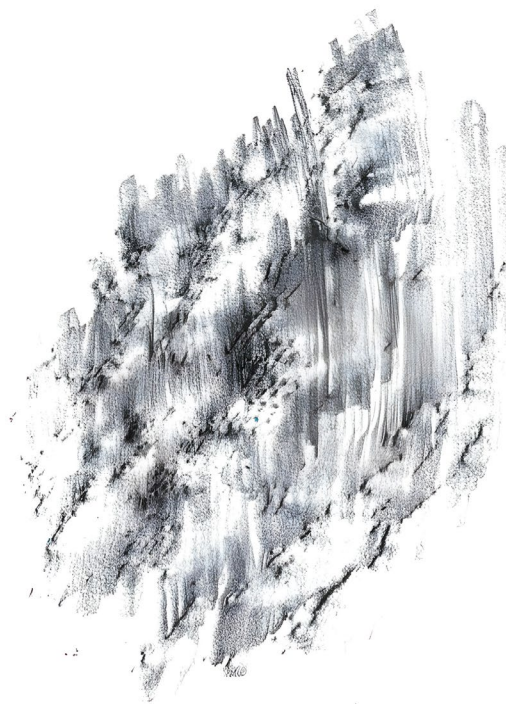


Figure 30: Alex Bilodeau. *Memories*. Graphite, stone, paper. 8X10. Île d'Orléans. 2022.

2.4 Place as Performance

By exploring *aller aux roches* using my own site-specific strategies, I experienced a return to my father's teachings of *l'intéressant*. This approach allowed me to engage with stories and places in a manner that acknowledged and paid homage to my family's traditions and ancestry. By becoming more attuned to narratives, history, meaning, and the significance of place, I developed a heightened sensitivity when encountering stones. Attuning to my senses played an important part in how I embodied my experience of place, as suggested by Nayak and Jeffrey:

[Non-representational theories] remind us that landscapes are not simply cultural texts but that their materiality must be understood through the body as we encounter these environments through sights, sounds, smells, tastes, touch and other sensual experiences.

(NAYAK & JEFFREY, P. 293)

Revisiting and walking through meaningful places (in relation to my ancestry and experience) allowed me to re-establish a physical and spiritual bond with the land. Through connecting with both my heritage and my family's practices, I enter the process of unlearning my preconceived notions about place and how I relate to it. This experience broadened my understanding of the interplay between the past and present and opened up new avenues for engaging with land and objects that carry profound cultural and personal significance. Acknowledging my previous experience of place while allowing myself to rediscover it through new techniques helped to comprehend its multiplicity and fluidity, as explained in *Place in Research* (2014):

[...] places can be understood as both influencing social practices from ceremony to design, as well as being performed and (re)shaped through practices and movements such as walking, protesting or institutionalization [...] power and place are coproduced, indeed are co-constructive.

(TUCK & MCKENZIE, P. 36)

Rock-picking is a performance of space. By learning to adapt, listen, experiment, and follow, there is potential to reset and rethink relationships with more care — not only between humans, but also between humans and rocks, lichens, water, and all other interconnected lives. This means new ways of learning, making and collaborating; such as through walking, attending to how I encounter the place itself, and experimenting with matter and techniques.

2.5 Mapping the Missing Pieces

Mapping the Missing Pieces is a three-layered experimental map and installation that incorporates my genealogy research and reflection on place, inspired by *Place in Research* by Tuck and McKenzie. It seeks to visually represent data in an expressive, evocative, and decolonial way. I collected information on three important components of my relation to space: (1) the first settlements of my ancestors, (2) the places in which my family has picked rocks and (3) the locations of mines in Kegeg. This abstract interpretation of mapping involves layering three maps that correspond to the three different areas of research viewed in Chapter I and II: settler colonialism, rock-picking, and mining.

Mapping the Missing Pieces was a first attempt to connect histories of colonialism and exploitation, and my interest in collecting rocks. It strives to deconstruct traditional data visualization and settler-colonial mapping methods and transform them into something that is anchored in emotions and expression.

... Maps ... are tactile, olfactory, sensed objects/subjects mediated by the multiplicity of knowledges we bring to and take from them through our everyday interactions and representational and discursive practices.

(KITCHIN & PERKINS, P. 20)

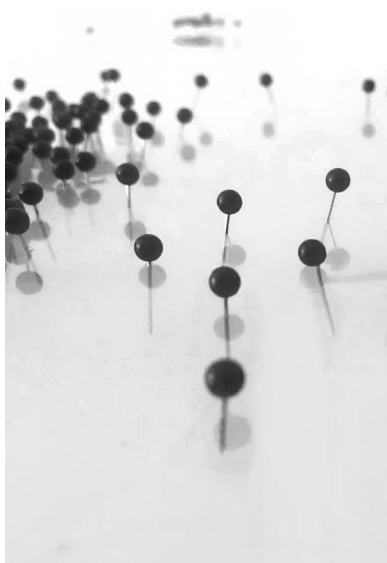


Figure 33: Alex Bilodeau, *Mapping the Missing Pieces*. 1/3 (Details). 2023.



Figure 32: Alex Bilodeau, *Mapping the Missing Pieces*. 2/3 (Details). 2023.

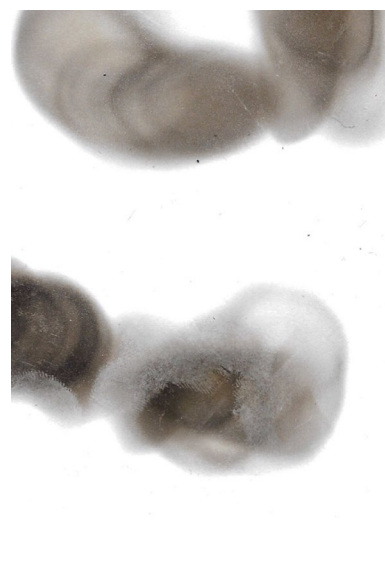


Figure 31: Alex Bilodeau, *Mapping the Missing Pieces*. 3/3 (Details). 2023.



Figure 34: Alex Bilodeau. *Mapping the Missing Pieces. 1/3 (Peoples)*. Push-pins on dura-lar. 24X36. 2022.

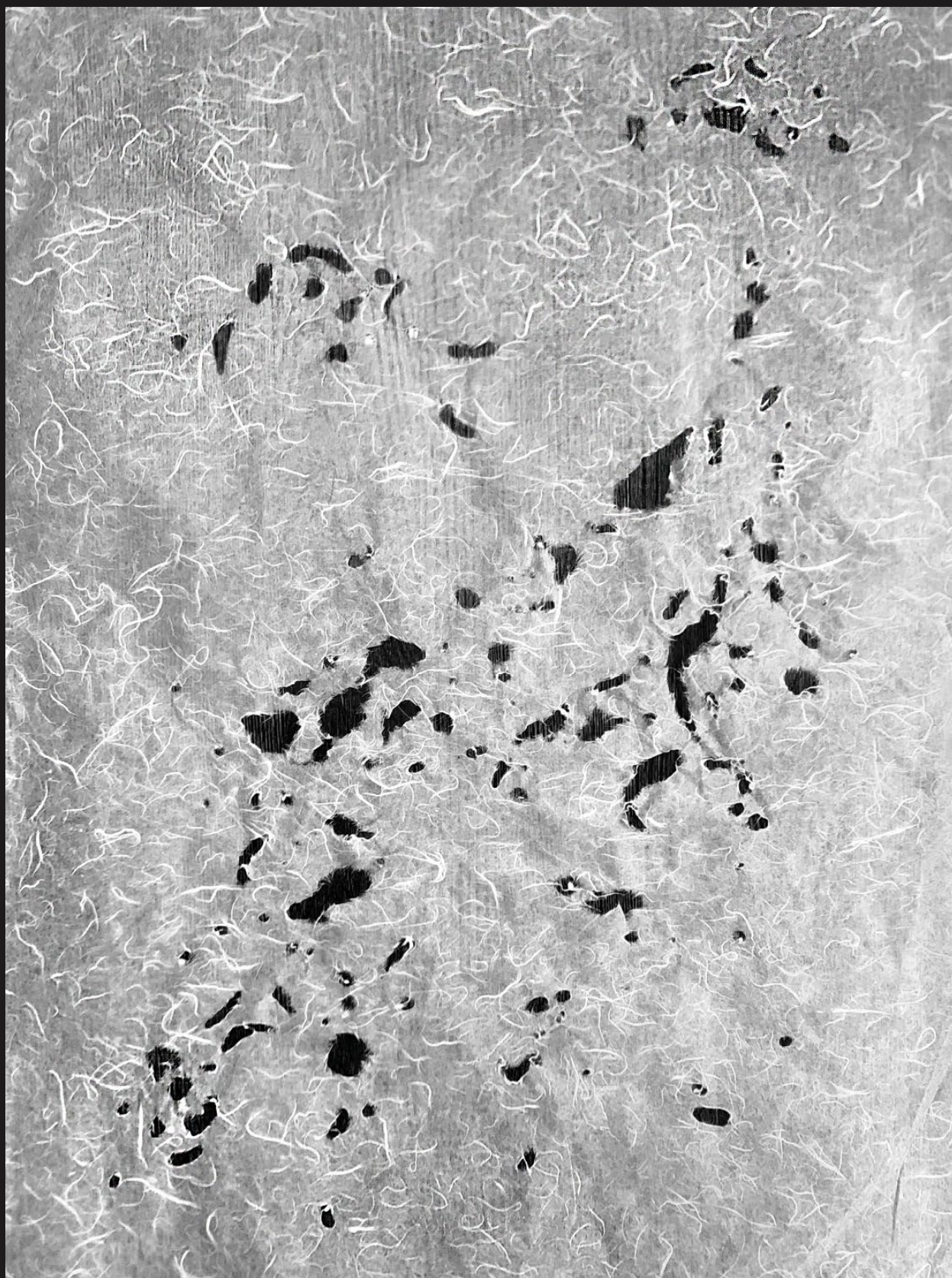


Figure 35: Alex Bilodeau. *Mapping the Missing Pieces. 2/3 (Rocks)*. Wet stone on japanese fiber. 24X36. 2022.



Figure 36: Alex Bilodeau. *Mapping the Missing Pieces. 3/3 (Mines)*. Fire and smoke on paper. 24X36. 2022.

The first layer of the map represents the original settlements of my ancestors in Kebeg, based on the data I gathered from my genealogy. To create this map of my colon ancestors, I aimed to move away from using simple lines and instead focused on capturing movement. My inspiration came from childhood memories of maps I saw in my papa's office, where push-pins were used to mark sales he had made. Push-pin were a symbol of victory, of acquisition.

Where we go, we mark.

To visualize colonial movement, I envisioned these settlements as implantations, as holes in the land. The gesture of piercing was a meaningful ritual, individually inserting 500 push-pins in the dura-lar panel. This ritual must be made on-site. The dura-lar allows the pins to appear as if floating in space, lost in immateriality, reflecting on the disconnection between colon/settler and space.

The second layer of the map represents the rock-picking locations my family visited over the years. To create this map, I used Japanese fiber paper, carefully tracing the water stains with a rock (La Rivière), allowing the fiber to dissolve, leaving behind the picking locations as voids. The process creates absences, using a rock as a tool. Japanese fiber being extremely fragile, I proceeded with care, similarly to how I learned to pick.

The map's third layer depicts Kebeg's mining sites using fire, smoke, and paper. I created different shades by positioning the flame near the paper, much like charcoal. The intensity of the smoke varied with the distance from the flame. This technique conveys both concentration and bruising, symbolizing the damage inflicted on the land by extraction.

Though this first attempt to unlearn place remained anchored in colonialist, superior and godly representations of space (from above), my subsequent exploration of place as a line-free and abstract concept allowed me to reorient myself toward it, in a felt way.

Through acts of reconnection such as collecting tracing, drawing, walking, I am finding new ways to unmake colonial mapmaking. By seeing place as flow, a performance, my family's traditional rock picking methodology is not only respected but also redefined as a means of acknowledging the history and significance of place, and the stories it holds. It is an embodied experience.

THE BAND

ARCHIVING METHODS

3



Figure 37: Alex Bilodeau. Ancestors. Photograph. 8X10. Île d'Orléans. 2022.

Ethereal Boulder

In the backyard
Lies a boulder
Which weighs nothing

A peculiar relic
My father uses
To confuse guests



Archives de la Ville de Montréal

Figure 38: *The Beginning of the Montreal Biodome*. (fiber glass stones) Source: Archives de la Ville de Montréal. 1992-1993.

The Garden Of Self-Absorption

Every year, my grand-maman Mae would gaze at an empty space in her garden, and place a fresh rock.

Little did she know that the soft soil had absorbed the previous one.

We moved in while my grand-papa was passing away.

My maman was working on the garden — hoping to make the space her own after inheriting the home.

In turn, my maman gazed at the empty space in the garden, and decided to plant flowers. As she dug into the soil, she found small boulders.

One after the other.

Days passed, and over 50 rocks were found, buried in a single corner.

The garden of self-absorption had reclaimed its belongings
in secret.



Figure 39: *Grand-maman Mae placing rocks in the garden.* Early 2000s. Source: Family archives.

Moving Rocks

The mover picked up a box labeled roches.
My maman, in jest, asked if he had ever
moved rocks before.

Of course, he said.
J'viens de l'Abitibi



Figure 40: *Coming back from Île-d'Orléans. 2022.*

Ghosts

Des histoires de peur
Autour du feu

Colonial Ghosts
And memories

Des ancêtres
Décrits en lichen
Comme lecture d'été
Sur pierre tombale

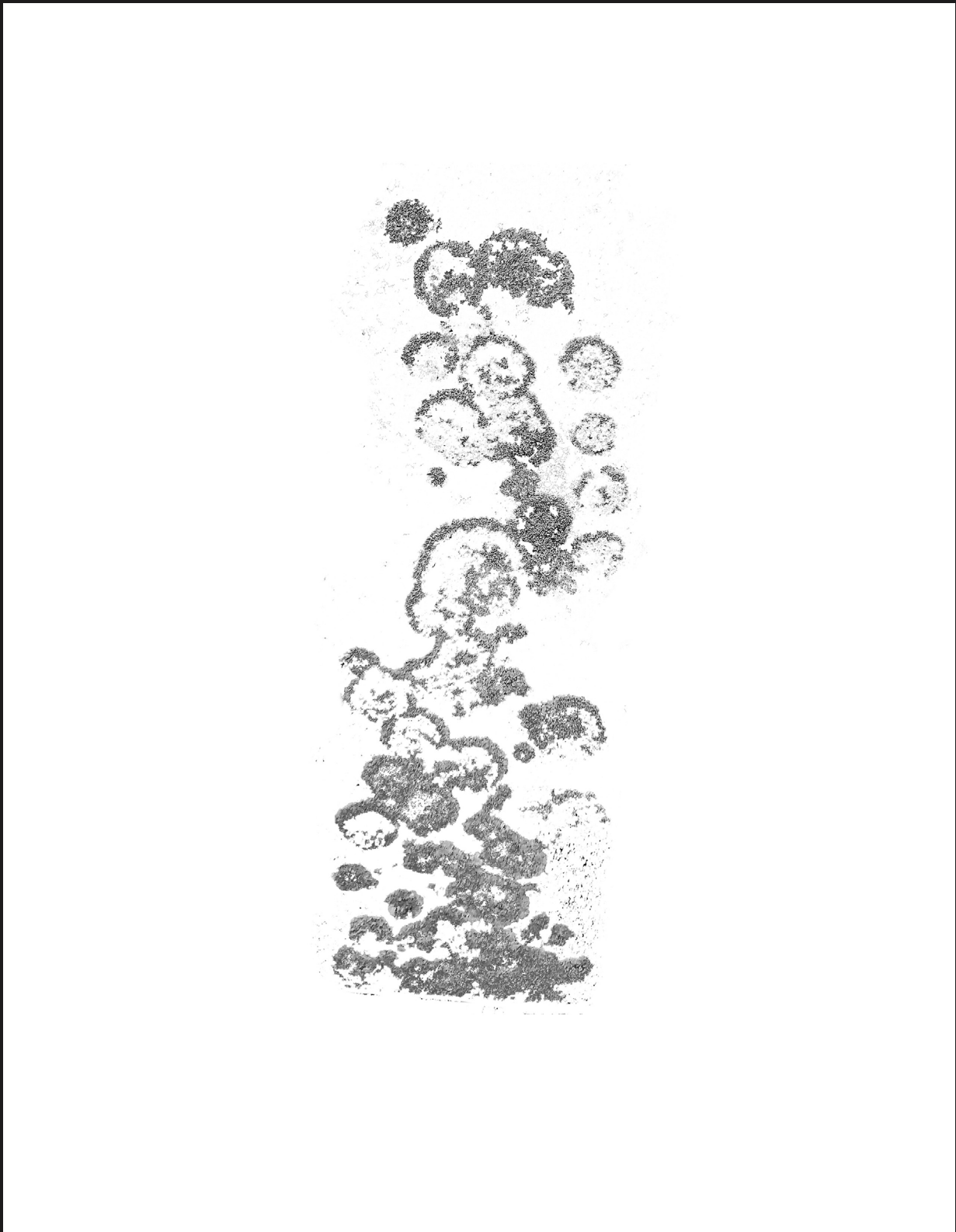


Figure 41: Alex Bilodeau. *Colonial Ghosts I*. Photographic extraction on ancestors' tombstones. 8X10. Île d'Orléans. 2022.

3.1 The Band

The band is an impostor, a layer of strata that contrasts within its bed. It's an irregularity, a surprising turn of events in the development of strata — a drastic change during formation, an unexpected turn to a new eon, a displacement of matter.

“When things are not where they belong, they cannot truly be themselves”²¹

So then, what do they become?

Collecting or documenting objects for archival preservation often relies on theft and can centre one perspective of colonial history. After questioning how I relate to extraction and colonial histories, I want to look at the ways I collect and archive objects. I will explore *No Archive Will Restore You* by Julietta Singh and the concept of “felt theory” through the work of Dian Million, as two ways to contest and reform the idea of archiving. Subsequently, I elaborate on the ways in which I experimented with archiving concepts through passive collection and collaboration with the land/rocks.

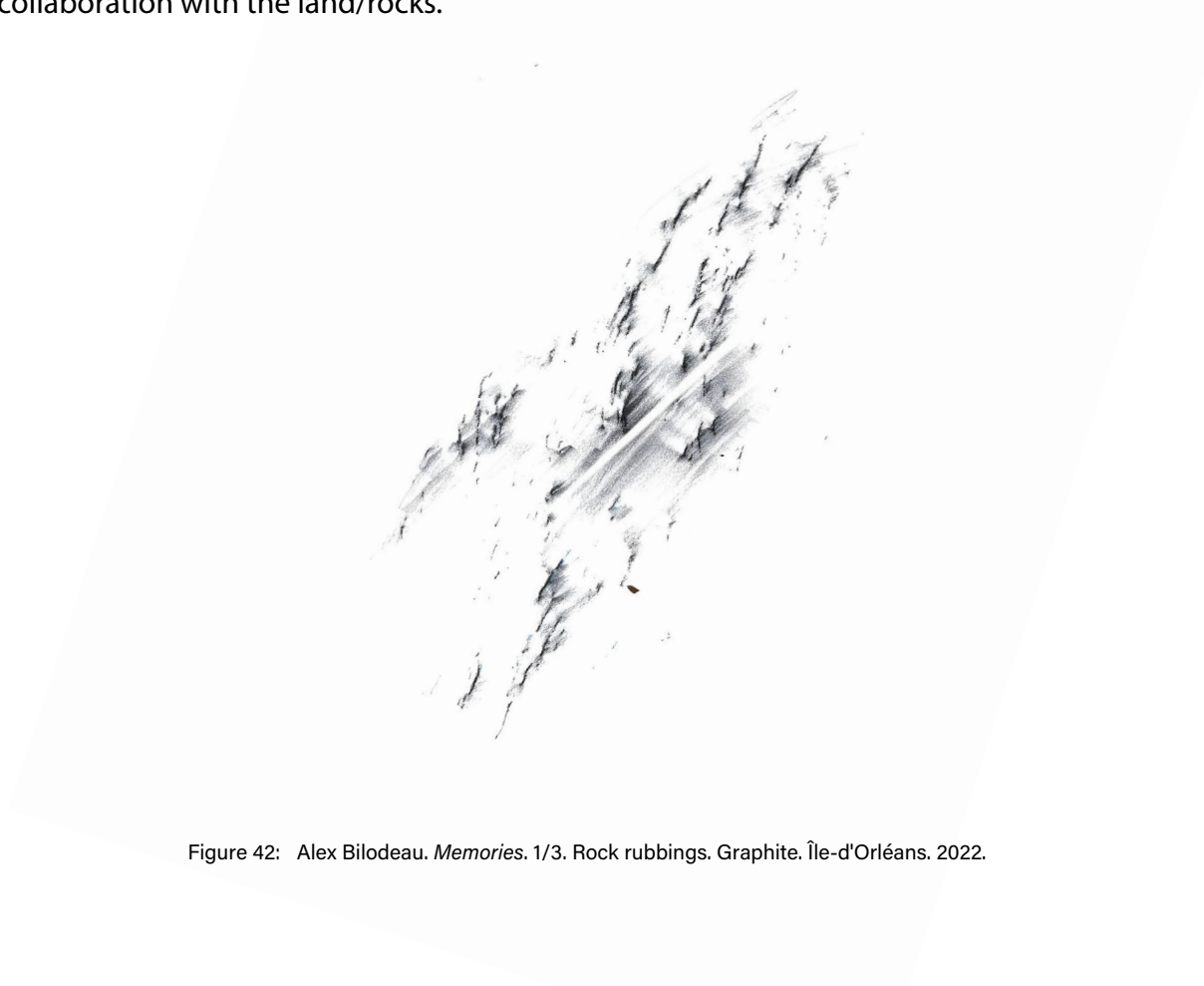


Figure 42: Alex Bilodeau. *Memories*. 1/3. Rock rubbings. Graphite. Île-d'Orléans. 2022.

21 — CURRY, Michael R. *Digital Places: Living with geographic information technologies*. London: Routledge. 1998. p. 48.

3.2 Thoughts on Archives

I always loved a good archive — the ones kept in secret, the ones which you access by accident or by chance, giving the sensation of immersing oneself in someone’s mind, memories and obsession. There’s something intriguing and unique about exploring a collection of carefully collected objects. I always loved to spend hours over family archives filled with rocks and photographs, even more through the research process of this project. I asked my papa questions, looking at faces that felt so familiar, even though they existed before my time. Yet, I question the true significance of these relics as they lay on a shelf, or within a box. What purpose do they serve beyond our pursuit of acquisition? As I continue this reflective journey, I want to look at how archiving methods have impacted my ways of collecting.

[...] [A]rchival activity tends to remain more an extractive than ethnographic one. [...] [M]ining of the content of government commissions, reports, and other archival sources rarely pays attention to their peculiar placement and form. Scholars need to move from archive-as-source to archive-as-subject.

(STOLER, P. 87)

Ann Laura Stoler refers to archives as mines, as modes of extraction. When taken out of their context, anthropological documents and artifacts lose their original meaning. They are extracted and used for production — such as capital, knowledge or academic production. It is in this process of history production that colonial archives became biased and self-centered. The accumulation of historical documentation often erases the experiences of peoples to whom history happened, prioritizing those for whom history was produced. Then, archives become estranged from telling their own story.

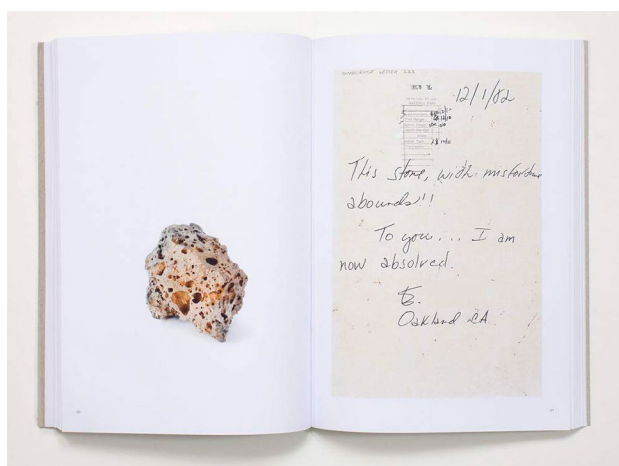
Some might argue that anthropology’s engagement with history over the last two decades unlike the recent “turn” in other disciplines, has not been a turn at all, but rather a return to its founding principles: inquiry into cumulative processes of cultural production.

(STOLER, P. 88)

Aller aux roches, in many ways, stems from a desire for acquisition and accumulation, but also from a place of narrative development. I have come to consider how I can make my practice anchored into the story-archive, rather than the matter-archive.



Bad Luck, Hot Rocks is an intriguing example of archives that stem from stories. It establishes a relationship between two types of archiving methods while also serving as both an agent and a critique of archiving methods. Bad Luck, Hot Rocks is a collaborative book project by artists Ryan Thompson and Phill Orr, jointly with the Petrified Forest National Park located in the Painted Desert of Northeast Arizona.



While the forest has been well preserved, over the years people have stolen pieces of petrified wood. Starting from as early as 1934, some of these stolen rocks began to reappear along with apology letters. In these letters, the thieves mentioned that they had encountered an incredible amount of bad luck ever since they collected the rocks. In response, the National Park initiated an exhibition, showcasing some of the letters and the returned pieces of petrified wood. They archived more than 1200 of these apology letters and placed the rocks that were returned in a designated "conscience pile". Thompson and Orr assembled both the letters and the pieces of petrified wood into a book project.

Figure 43: Ryan Thompson, Phill Orr. *Bad Luck, Hot Rocks*. 2014. (Book)

The story of the Petrified Forest revolves around two contrasting archives: the preserved and the displaced. When artifacts are preserved within the forest, they retain their context and meaning, existing within their designated space. In the Petrified Forest, each piece of wood must remain untouched to maintain the integrity and order of the preserved environment. When moved or returned, artifacts are automatically placed in what is referred to as the "conscience pile". This act of taking/displacing is driven by a strong desire to possess a piece of rare rock. The "conscience pile" is a collective project on guilt and desire. It embodies the remorse of those who took the artifacts and had to return them, acknowledging the consequences of their actions. These returned rocks became haunted objects, tangled with collection stories. One could question which holds the most meaning — the displaced or the preserved.



The collection of *Plastiglomerates* (2013) by the artist Kelly Jazvac, presents a different type of archive-story. These artifacts are the result of plastic becoming fused with minerals in a fossilization process.



Figure 44: Kelly Jazvac. *Plastiglomerates*. 2013. Photo credits: Jeff Elstone.



Figure 45: Kelly Jazvac. *Rock Record*. (Installation from *Plastiglomerates*) FIERMAN, New York, 2017.

In this case, the rocks themselves embody a narrative of human impact on the environment. Visually striking, these pieces of plastic embedded in rocks evoke environmental anxiety, reflecting industrial changes visible in the geological record, marking an era now referred to as the Anthropocene.

3.2 Body-Archives And Alternative Collections

Archives are often perceived as truthful and reliable representations of history, but they are subjective and can be biased. Archives should be navigated as subjects, and not as sources.²²

Julietta Singh suggests that we are archive. She sees “the body as both archive and archivist — in a crucial sense, it gathers its own materials.”²³ Building on concepts of acquired memory, Singh’s work reminds us that bodies accumulate emotions, experiences, narratives, but also physical matter. She also refers to the mother’s body as a specific archive, as giving birth can be a representation of a passed-on archive through an intergenerational consciousness. I find myself revisiting this idea while contemplating the future generations and the importance of continuity in this project. I find myself analyzing my own body-archive, inherited memory, and land-based practice as performances connected to the concept of the “ghost archive,” a concept connected to the body-archive.

I call this wishing-wanting desire “the ghost archive.” Everything we need to know but cannot know as we keep circling and sniffing around the edges. Everything that keeps affecting us and affecting others through us. Everything that remains right there, but just out of reach.

(SINGH, P. 96)

My ghost archive is the missing parts, the never-ending multigenerational work. It embodies the deep desire to collect and revisit the practice of collecting rocks, its history, and its legacies that span generations. The impossibility of fully knowing makes research and continuous exploration even more crucial. My goal, in this sense, is to persistently pass-on, rethink, and expand this perpetual archive that defies understanding.

As my body is an archive, so is the land its own archive. Rocks hold memories, through processes of mineralization, fossilization, destruction, stratification, extraction. In this fluidity and transformation, land — and rocks — has the potential, in relation to our own stories and memories, to convey feelings, emotions and narratives.

22 — STOLER, Ann Laura. "Colonial Archives and the Arts of Governance" *Archival Science* 2: 87-109, 2002.

23 — SINGH, Julietta. *No Archive Will Restore You*. Punctum Books. 2018. p. 48.

As I sat on the shore of my ancestors and inaugurated the process of transferring rock-to-paper, it felt as if I had acquired a new language, a way of reading between the lines and finding hidden meanings. This brought a whole new significance to this research-creation thesis, as the archive came to include story-writing, rather than matter-collecting. I became obsessed with this new way of perceiving rocks – the way they translate in transfers and mark making, as if the repetitive movements and collaboration between me and them would finally grant me this long-awaited understanding of this captivation.

Dian Millon's "felt theory" shows a refusal to conform to the conventional notion of settler-colonial archives. This theory aims to represent "colonialism as it is felt by those whose experience it is."²⁴ Instead of representing history through the accumulation of artifacts and document collection, she argues for collecting narratives and emotions through experiences. Context, in many instances, holds more significance than the outcomes or matter it produces. Narrative inquiry and other alternative research methods facilitate a deeper comprehension of the impacts of colonial history.

Like felt theory, mapping, writing, photographing, transferring, and translating these rock's stories onto paper is, in many ways, a form of a story-archive. It accentuates the interconnected relationship between the self and the rock. The interaction allows for new stories, dynamic encounters, connections and new understandings. Though the archive retains an elusive quality, it is embodied, interdependent, and takes on a holistic form.

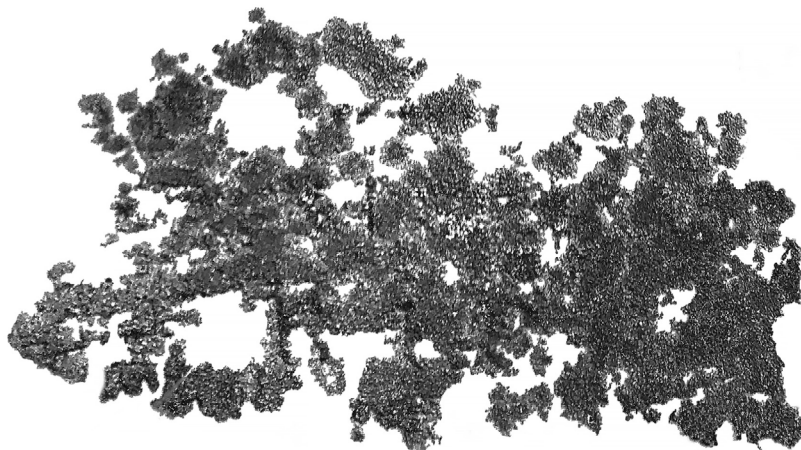


Figure 46: Alex Bilodeau. *Colonial Ghosts II*. 2/3. photographic extractions from tombstones. 2022.

24 — MILLON, Dian. "Felt Theory: An Indigenous Feminist Approach to Affect and History." *Wicazo Sa Review*, Volume 24, Number 2, Fall 2009, pp. 53-76. p. 272.

3.3 The Genealogy Of Strata

The Genealogy of Strata is a rock installation bringing together concepts of ancestry, space, and archive. Utilizing rock specimens gathered by various family members, I constructed an installation suspended in space. Each stone was meticulously chosen by a relative for the story it held, embodying its unique concept of *l'intéressant*.

The piece was conceived around genealogical and identity research processes. The rocks appear to be part of an interrupted extractive process—a portrayal that casts them as ghosts and ancestors suspended in time. I used metal elements (hose clamps, mooring shackles, cables) to physically suspend the rocks, but also to highlight the contrast between the extractive process and the loving act of rock-picking. Every rock encapsulates and personifies its collector, representing our identity and our connection to the act of extraction. Moreover, it incorporated fragments of rocks sourced from mining extraction sites.

Beyond serving as a material exploration of archiving and collection, this piece serves as a collaborative endeavor with my family, utilizing their individual archives. I sought to honor their role in nurturing my understanding of rock-picking and extended an invitation to join me in crafting this final distorted family portrait. By putting the archival process in conversation with the extractive process, I allow the rock themselves to tell the story – to be the subject.

Embracing the concept of the archive as a subject rather than a source provides a profound insight into the act of collecting (with) matter. Critical writing on colonial archives by Singh, Million and Stoler has allowed me to approach my collecting practice with care and understanding of the meaning(s) of archiving. Archives are preserved, gathered, protected, displaced, stolen, but can they be narrative, abstract, missing. By focusing on the narratives of rocks and places, I have cultivated a more intricate approach to gathering and engaging with my collectibles, but also my ancestry and the concept of place. Through my own body as a living archive, I carry, as my papa and grand-maman before me, collective and personal stories to be shared with the generations that follow as a practice anchored in narratives. Each rock I've touched and every piece of land I've stood upon can be transmitted as a form of teaching through my own body-archive, as a never-ending collaboration with my ancestors and descendants. Then, the band – in its essence of displacement – becomes a way to remember who we are.



Figure 48: Bilodeau, Alex. *Genealogy of Strata*: 66.5209940028597, -86.21844512952906. (details) Graduate Gallery OCADU. 2023.



Figure 47: Bilodeau, Alex. *Genealogy of Strata*: 66.5209940028597, -86.21844512952906. Graduate Gallery OCADU. 2023.

CONCLUSION

MAKING WITH(OUT)

4

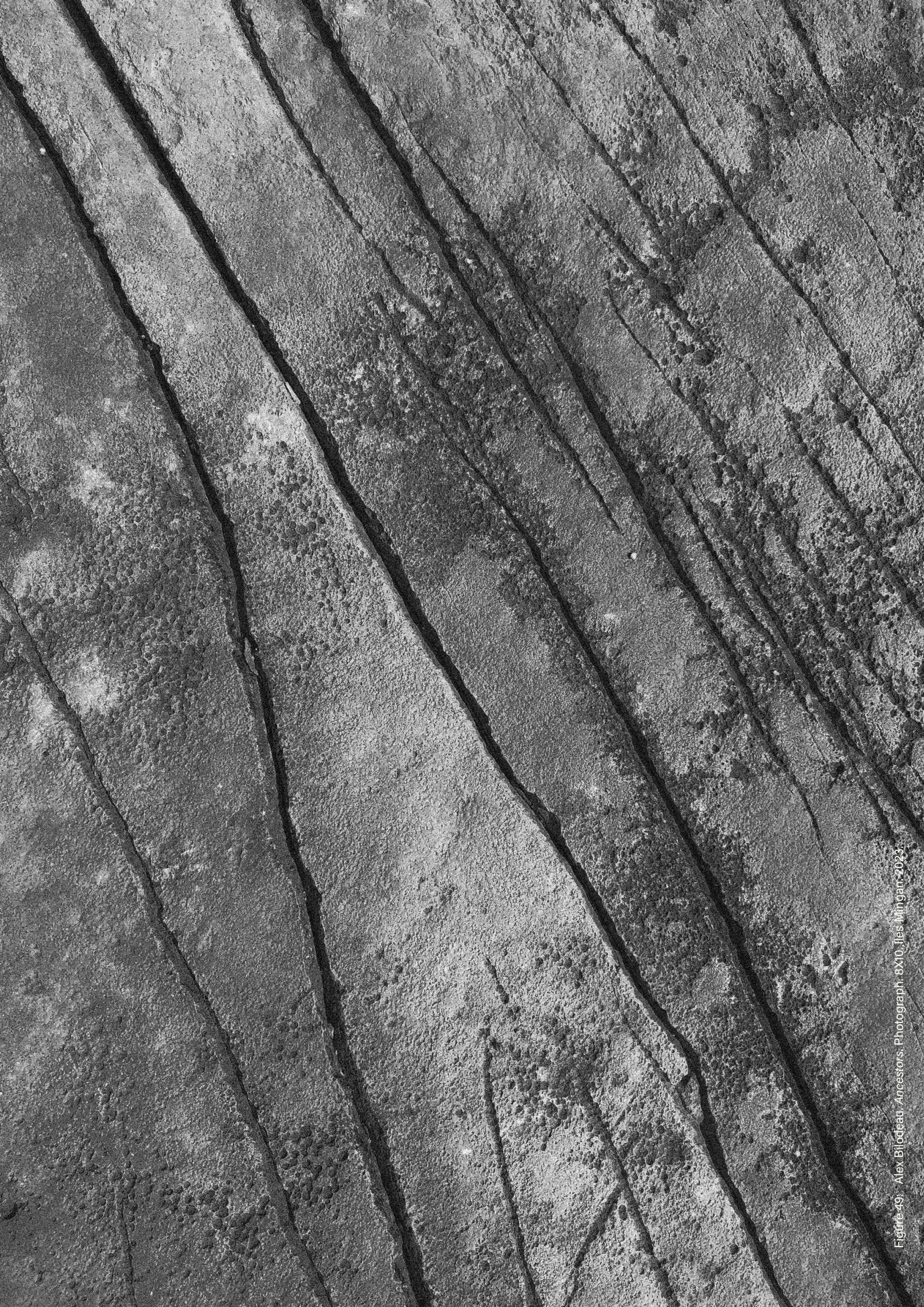


Figure 49: Alex Bilodeau, *Ancestors*, Photograph, 8x10, files.wingam, 2023.

Noranda Inc.

As I was writing these pages, ma papa called.

He was driving through Abitibi after attending my great-uncle's funeral.

Je pensais à toi pis tes roches.
Comment ça va l'école?
Je peux voir la mine d'ici.

He was driving by the mines where my great-grand-father, Art, had worked.

He stopped the car, put me on FaceTime and passed the phone to my maman. She flipped the camera:

There was my dad
Among the red clay dust and fences
Walking towards the mine

Pour ton expo, he said.



Figure 50: *Rocks brought back by my father from the mines in Abitibi, 2023.*

4.1 Continuity

Collaborating with the knowledge and experiences of my ancestors has allowed me to construct a complex genealogy of my family and their relationship with rocks. Tapping into the fields of memory, acquired data, and intergenerational knowledge, I hope to not only discover new methods of rock-picking but also to collaborate more harmoniously with the non-human lands. This means attending rather than accumulating, feeling rather than thinking. This endeavor is driven by a desire to rethink space outside of my settler-colonial influenced knowledge and forge a deeper, nonhierarchical and more meaningful relation with the practice and the land.

This paper began with my thoughts on this thesis as strata, as an accumulation and layering of (hi)stories. As I close this thesis, each layer-strata-chapter appears to retain, still, many cracks, details and elements remaining to be transferred on paper. And, as I predicted, this research is one which never ends.

This project will go on, generation after generation, as I share, tell, show, care and love as my ancestors did. I am thinking of what is to come for us — within the boundaries of colonial space which I am trying to escape, or bend. Donna Haraway explores geological stratification in *Staying with the Trouble*, repositioning pejorative concepts of the world's eras, such as Anthropocene (human effect on planetary changes) and Capitalocene (effect of capitalism on planetary changes), and reorient our thoughts on the future with the Chthulucene, or towards a making-with (Haraway) era that emphasizes community and collaboration. Haraway proposes that despite the incoming trouble, we still possess the agency to determine the duration and depth of each era – be it thick or thin. “Our task is to make trouble, to stir up potent response to devastating events, as well as to settle troubled waters and rebuild quiet places.”

I am turning to this concept of making-with, which she calls sympoiesis. This includes interdisciplinary research and collaborations between entities, including both human and non-human. This practice not only defines this thesis but, as Haraway suggests, also sets a path toward resolution :

It matters what matters we use to think other matters with; it matters what stories we tell to tell other stories with; it matters what knots knot knots, what thoughts think thoughts, what descriptions describe descriptions, what ties tie ties. It matters what stories make worlds, what worlds make stories.

(HARRAWAY. P. 12)

What remains here is the outcome of this research; a desire to share, to pass-on, to collaborate, and to tell stories. In the end, rocks are my ancestors. They teach me to make with, but also without. Through the holes in my family tree, through the rocks that I leave behind, and the things I will never know — but will always feel. By creating and gathering things-to-happen instead of collecting physical objects, I allow a deeper engagement with place and identity. And I create my genealogy of strata.



Figure 51: *Note:* My great-grand-father, Art posing at the river, my grand-mother Mae posing with a rock, and my father and his brother Paul picking rocks at the beach. Source: Family archives.

APPENDIX

A

A.1 Ancestor's Migrations And Exploitation

Generation 1	→ Generation 2	→ Generation 3	→ Generation 4	→ Generation 5	→ Generation 6	→ Generation 7
1814-1909	1839-1927	1872-1953	1901-1973	1928-	1962-	1993-
Paul Daragon dit Lafrance	Xavier Daragon dit Lafrance	Napoléon Lafrance	Achille "Art" Lafrance	Mae Lafrance	Jean Bilodeau	Alex Bilodeau

1st Generation: Paul Daragon dit Lafrance (1814-1909)

Paul Daragon dit Lafrance — my great-great-great-great-grandfather — worked as a farmer. Throughout his life, records indicate that he moved multiple times, from Manitoba, to Belcourt, in the Abitibi-Timiskaming region of Kebeg, and eventually settled in Maryville, United States. The circumstances, for proletarians like Paul Daragon, were challenging during the early stages of industrialization:

Paul LaFrance, Sr. of Maryville, died at his home in Maryville of lagrippe on Wednesday, March 7, aged ninety-two years and nine months.

The deceased was born in the province of Quebec in 1813 and resided there until 1878 when he moved to Manitoba, after living there five years he came to Belcourt and later filed on a homestead in Maryville township. He was married while in Quebec and was the father of fourteen children, eleven of whom survive him. His wife died in 1891 and was buried at Belcourt. The children are Moses, Sr., Prespere, Napoleon, Canute, Sr., and Mrs. O. Delorme, who live in Maryville; Precute, who resides in Alberta; Xavier, Emile, and Mrs. L. Poquette, of Pembroke, Ontario; Mrs. Jos. Foltse, of Indianapolis, and Mrs. F. Bertrand, of the province of Quebec. The deceased was a man of powerful physique, one of the hardy and industrious pioneers of our country. His sight failed him during the past few months, but he was still comparatively strong up to the day of his death. Farming had been his life-long occupation. During the last few days of his illness he grew very anxious for the return of his sons, Moses and Canute, who were expected home from a visit to Pembroke, Ontario, but he died about three hours before their arrival. The funeral took place at Maryville church and the interment was made in the cemetery there. The services were conducted by Rev. J. E. Ouellet and were attended by a large concourse of relatives and friends.

HERALD MARCH 15, 1906

Figure 52: Ancestry. Paul Daragon's obituary. 1906.

A French Canadian who wanted to be a farmer had to go to a distant colonization zone in Québec where the soil was typically poor and living conditions were difficult. [...] The colonist was isolated and the deficiencies of his marginal farm forced him to work in the forest as a lumberjack to make ends meet. Few rural Québécois were attracted by the new colonization regions, and most, regarding even the long hours of factory work as preferable to the life of a colonist, went to urban areas instead.²⁵

The discovery of gold in Abitibi-Timiskaming in 1868 could be a plausible explanation for Paul Daragon dit Lafrance's relocation to Belcourt. He moved to Maryville after the Civil War, coinciding with the construction of the first railways in Maryville in 1869. He allegedly started using the name Lafrance after moving to Kanadario, probably for easier pronunciation, or even to refer to him as "the French".

2nd Generation: François-Xavier Daragon dit Lafrance (1839-1927)

Figure 53: Portrait of François-Xavier Daragon. Source: Ancestry

François-Xavier Daragon dit Lafrance, son of Paul Daragon dit Lafrance, was born in Rigaud, Kebeg. He moved to Pontiac, Kebeg, which was known as an Anglo-Québécois agricultural center. He later relocated to Renfrew, Kanadario.

Records indicate that he married Angélique Bruyère in Kanadario, in 1864. Renfrew was established as an important logging port for the lumber industry in 1848, suggesting that François-Xavier might have moved there to work as a lumberjack. Although he passed away in Pembroke, Kanadario, his obituary was written in French.

3rd Generation: Napoleon Lafrance (1872-1953)

Napoléon Lafrance, son of François-Xavier Daragon dit Lafrance, was born in Pembroke, Kanadario. During his life, he moved several times between Pembroke and Pontiac. A significant gold mining boom was reported in the region of Algoma, Kanadario, where Pembroke is located, in 1883.



Figure 55: Portrait of Napoléon Lafrance. Date unknown. Source: Family archives.



Figure 54: My grand-maman Mae in her grand-father's arms (Napoléon Lafrance) ~1929. Source: Family archives.

It is likely that Napoléon specifically relocated for mining extraction and opportunities. His father, François-Xavier Daragon dit Lafrance, also relocated to the region prior to the mining boom.

4th Generation: Achille Lafrance (1901-1973)

Achille “Art” Lafrance was born in Chapleau, Kanadario. He moved to the United States as a child and returned to Kanata without the ability to speak French. He made attempts to speak French later on, but was met with laughter. He never verbally communicated in French again, although he maintained a clear understanding of the language. He married a québécoise, they had 4 children.

My grandmother was born in Hearst. Shortly after her birth in 1926, the family moved to Rouyn-Noranda to work at Noranda Mines Limited 371, which stands as one of the most significant copper and nickel extraction projects in Québec’s history. Art Lafrance played a significant role in the mining industry, being among the first workers ever employed at the mine. I heard his name remains engraved in a memorial at the mine entrance, though I never found proof of it.



Figure 56: Art Lafrance smoking his pipe and fishing. Source: Family archives.



Figure 57: My grand-maman Mae and her father, Art Lafrance. Source: Family archives.



Figure 58: My father with his grand-parents, Art Lafrance and Jeanette Tremblay. ~ 1965. Source: Family archives.

A.2 Exhibition Documentation

A Bed. A Flow. A Band. was held at the Graduate Gallery of OCAD University from November 28th to December 1st 2023. It was divided in two rooms; the main gallery and a media room.





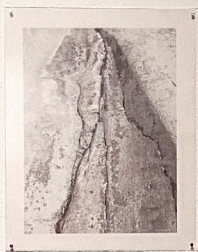
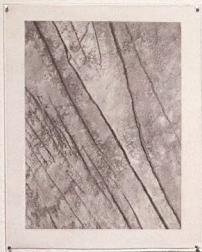










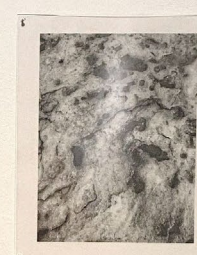
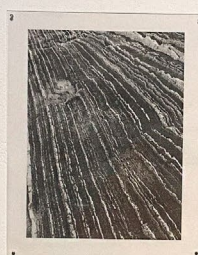
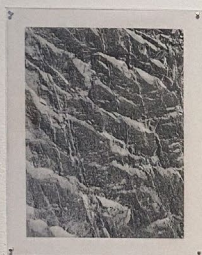


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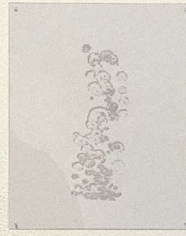


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Colony (Sheet 1)







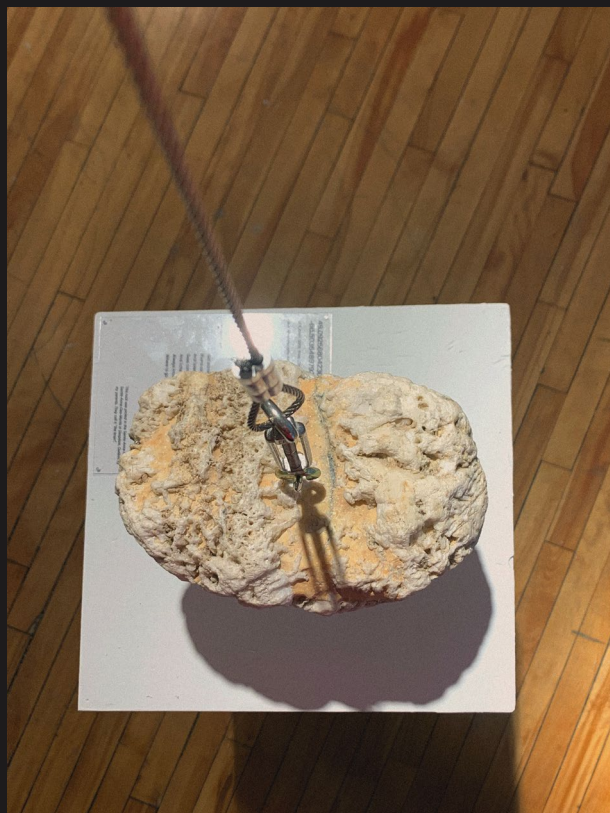
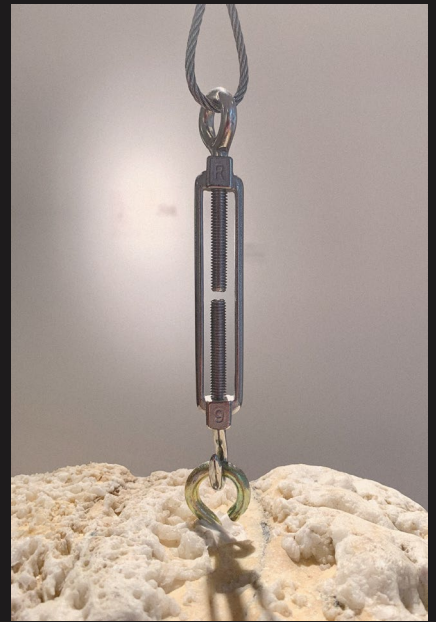




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Figure 57: My grand-maman Mae and her father, Art. Lafrance Source: Family archives.

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A BED. A FLOW. A BAND.
Alex Bilodeau

Tkaronto/Toronto, Ontario, Canada, 2023