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Place with No Dawn
A Town's Evolution and Erskine's
Arctic Utopia

ALAN MARCUS

THE ARCHITECT AND THE HUNTER

In the early 1970s a paradigmatic enterprise was initiated by the government in which a northern-town design by one of the world's leading architects was commissioned in order to spearhead attempts to provide a Modernist architectural and social fabrication above the Arctic Circle. The architect was Ralph Erskine, and the town was Resolute Bay, or Qausuittuq, on Cornwallis Island in the Canadian High Arctic archipelago. In the same year in the early 1990s, I sat in two different living rooms – one in the expansive, Modernist home of Ralph Erskine in Drottningholm, on the island of Lovön outside Stockholm, and the other in the house of Simeonie Amagoalik, an elder in the small Inuit community of Qausuittuq.[1] The architectural spaces around these two rooms and their living circumstances were innately connected.

Amagoalik's home is not an Erskine design, yet its placement was due to Erskine's involvement. It resembles a number of the other older houses in the settlement, now increasingly being replaced by better-insulated, triple-glazed, double-storey box homes. Sitting at his kitchen table, Simeonie paused in conversation to lift his binoculars and look out in the direction of the sea. I asked if he was admiring the distant view, with the sea ice floating in the bay? No, he said, he was trying to see his boat down by the water's edge. The community of

some 250 people is located on the side of a hill, a little over one mile back from the shoreline (Figure 9.1). Since most other Canadian Inuit communities hug the seashore to permit ease of access for marine hunting activities, upon which their diet and livelihood in part depend, the placement of the town on a hillside seems a curious one. Although Erskine's and Amagoalik's communities are located in northern latitudes, Simeonie contends with a far more demanding climatic environment; after all, his town's name, Qausuittuq, means "place with no dawn."

This chapter investigates the origins and evolution of the architectural design of Resolute Bay, and the government's plans for creating a model new community. The new town design proposed by Ralph Erskine is examined in detail and considered in terms of both its intertextual relationship to his other work and the legacy of the project once it went into construction in the mid-1970s (Figure 9.2).[2] Reviewed are issues of social engineering associated with the relocation of the Inuit population in the early 1950s when the original community was established, and again in the 1970s when the site for the settlement was moved to Erskine's new location.[3] The importance of Erskine's design

Figure 9.1 Resolute Bay community, 1997. | Photograph by Ansgar Walk.

Figure 9.2 Drawing for Resolute Bay new town, 1975. | By Ralph Erskine.
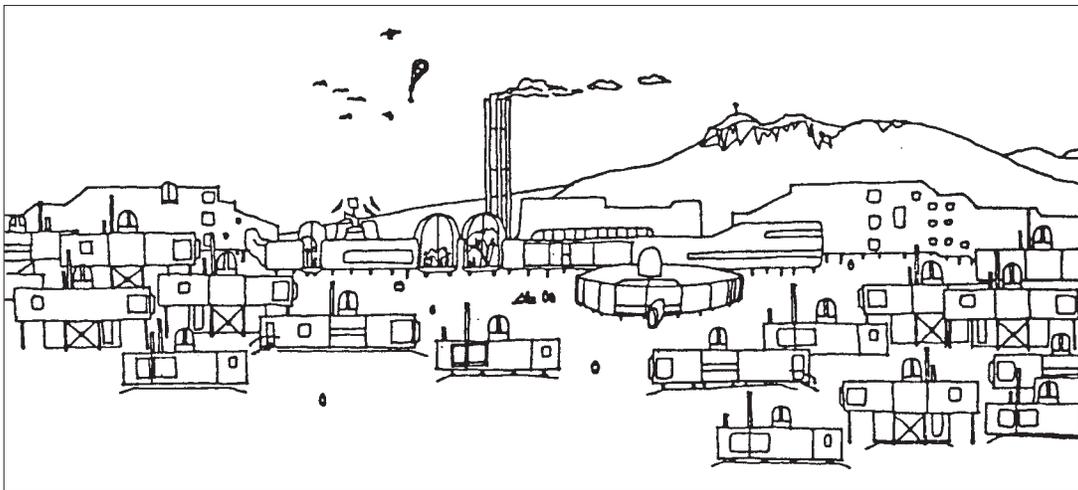
as a prototype for cold-climate architecture is discussed, together with its viability for a northern Canadian context. "My question is," argued Erskine, "do the cities and buildings of the north well serve the needs of their inhabitants? My answer is No."[4]

> Ralph was a true humanist. His buildings radiate optimism, appropriateness and wit, which endear them to many. His philosophy of work accommodated the climate and the context together with the social and humanistic needs of people. He was concerned that the expression of buildings should engage the general public interest, generate a sense of ownership and appeal to genuine participation.[5]

Ralph Erskine, a prominent figure in the Modernist Movement in Sweden and a successful architect on the international stage, died at the age of ninety-one on 16 March 2005. His initial engagement with Canadian architecture transpired at an important time in his career when he was a visiting professor at McGill University in 1967-68. Erskine designed a large number of homes, office buildings, and townscapes, lectured widely, and received numerous honours in recognition of his contributions to the field. He was made an honorary fellow of the American Institute of Architects (1966), a fellow of the Swedish Royal Academy of Arts (1972), and a Commander of the Order of the British Empire (1979), and he was awarded the Canadian Gold Medal from the Royal Architectural Institute of Canada (1983), the Wolf Prize for Architecture (1984), and the Royal Gold Medal for Architecture from the Royal Institute of British Architects (1987).

Born in Mill Hill in North London on 24 February 1914, Erskine was educated at The Friend's School in Saffron Walden. The Fabian socialist ideals of his Scottish father, a Presbyterian minister, and his university-educated mother, coupled with Erskine's Quaker beliefs acquired at Saffron Walden, made a discernable impact on his later approach to architectural design. These beliefs were borne out in statements he made and in the way he engaged with clients and executed his designs. "Architecture and urban planning," he stated, "be it at macro or micro level, a private villa or an office block – must not only be a showpiece of design and technology, but also give expression to those democratic ideals of respect for human dignity, equality and freedom that are fostered in our society."[6] In 1939 Erskine immigrated to Sweden, arriving with just a bicycle, rucksack, and sleeping bag, drawn by the socialist appeal of the country's embryonic welfare state and its influence on new thinking for town planning. Continuing his studies at the Swedish Royal Academy of Art, Erskine was intrigued with the work of leading Swedish architects, including Gunnar Asplund (1885-1940), known for his provocative Modernist design for the Stockholm Public Library, Sigurd Lewerentz (1885-1975), and Sven Markelius (1889-1972),

Figure 9.3 Ralph Erskine, Svappavaara new town, Sweden, 1965. | Courtesy of Ralph Erskine.

fathers of Swedish Functionalism. Following the 1930 Stockholm exhibition, the country became a nexus for experiments in humanistic Functionalist design.

In his many national and international projects, Ralph Erskine developed as an integral part of his design philosophy a reputation for working closely with the future inhabitants of his buildings to ensure that the schemes met the needs of the users. Some of his best-known designs were constructed for cold-climate habitation, a subject upon which he published and for which he became well known. An example was the ski hotel at Borgafjäll (1948), which was integrated into the landscape to the extent that guests could ski off the roof and down the slope. He went on to design large-scale complexes comprised of multi-unit dwellings, offices, and shops, such as at Kiruna (1961-66), above the Arctic Circle in northern Sweden. In particular, his designs for the Svappavaara housing and community plan (1963-64) in northern Sweden and for the University of Cambridge's new postgraduate college, Clare Hall (1968-69), together with the massive Byker housing estate with 2,317 dwellings (1969-81)

in Newcastle upon Tyne in northern England, provided precursors for his Canadian project, as will be discussed later (Figure 9.3). Erskine's more recent works have included the Ark (1990) housing design built in Hammersmith, London, and the large-scale Millennium Village in Greenwich, begun in 1998, featuring 1,377 houses and flats, near the London Dome site.

In the early 1970s, Resolute Bay was the major supply airbase for the High Arctic and was being considered for an expansion of resource exploration and extraction operations. Aware of Ralph Erskine's reputation for progressive urban planning tailored for cold climates, the Canadian government commissioned him to design a new town for Resolute Bay. The scheme was intended to racially integrate the Inuit community of some 140 inhabitants consisting of 32 households, with the transient white population housed at the base, which alternated between 250 and 600 persons, depending on the time of the year. The remit called for a new town with housing for 1,200 people and further plans to expand it to accommodate a population of up to 3,000. Following a number of site visits from Stockholm and approval of his design, the project moved to the construction phase.

"I try to base my work on that seasonal rhythm of the north which I find so enthralling, and form communities which encompass all its richness of contrasting experiences," remarked Erskine.[7] "I hope that we architects could give such a dwelling a form, make a space with a potential for contentment. But in the final count it is the inhabitants who will give the same dwelling its meaning and will change our architectural space to place."[8] Erskine's Resolute design called for moving the existing Inuit community from what became known as "the old village" (even though it was created just twenty years earlier) to a new site perched on the rise of a hill five miles away. A principal feature of the new town was a horseshoe-like perimeter "living wall" containing apartments, which would encircle detached family units – some models intriguingly shaped like spaceships, raised off the ground on stilts so as not to adversely affect the permafrost (Figure 9.4). The plan replicates the formation of a medieval walled town, such as those in Britain like Conwy in North Wales, Arundel in West Sussex, and Alnwick in Northumberland. In place of the traditional castle, an enclosed communal area with shops, restaurant, library, a swimming pool, and an indoor botanical garden would be created, attached to the apex of the horseshoe and sealed off from the severe climate by a bubble roof (Figure 9.5). Instead of possible invaders, the foe was the weather. The chief difference between the concepts was that Erskine's town was open at the bottom to reveal the view. With its back to the slope, much like the design for his Borgafjäll hotel, it was intended that the natural contours of the land would provide an element of

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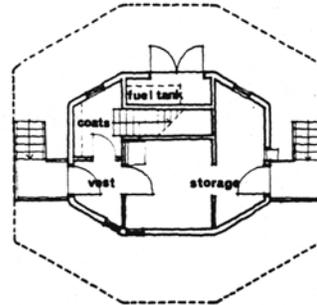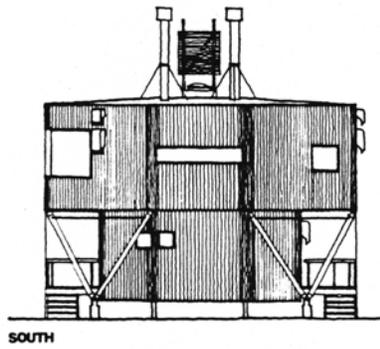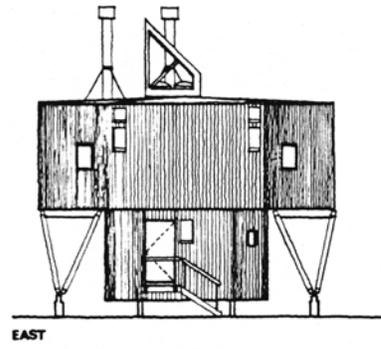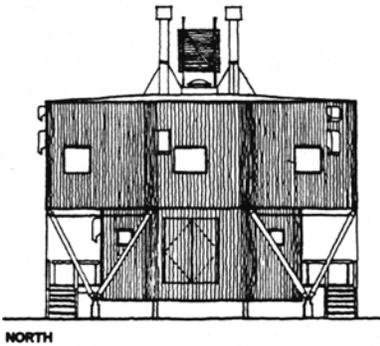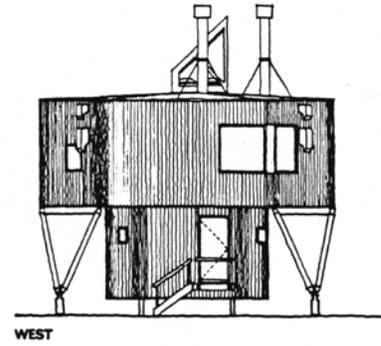
Figure 9.4 Design for Resolute Bay detached house. | By Ralph Erskine.

Figure 9.5 Drawing for Resolute Bay indoor town centre. By Ralph Erskine.

protection from the winds and drifting snow. Five possible sites were tested for microclimate and other conditions before Erskine and his team settled on the final choice.

Although Erskine attached importance to building a dialogue with residents of his urban planning schemes, especially as with the case of the Byker estate and Resolute where they were being rehoused, the issue of the Inuit giving their informed consent is complicated by previous events. This group had been moved once before when in 1953 the Inuit community was first established. The Canadian government selected a collection of families from Inukjuak (then known as Port Harrison) in Arctic Quebec, together with several families from Pond Inlet on Baffin Island, and relocated them to the new colony at Resolute Bay. An additional group was moved at the same time to Grise Fiord on Ellesmere Island, followed by a second relocation of Inuit to both communities

in 1955. Later efforts were made by officials to recruit young women in Inukjuak to move up to Resolute to increase the mating pool, but these were unsuccessful. The background of the 1953-55 moves and the influences it had on the new town resettlement and functions twenty years later are closely interlinked.

THE ESTABLISHMENT OF RESOLUTE BAY

At Resolute Bay's airport there was an old sign that read, "Resolute, pronounced Desolate." The community had a reputation in the North of being an environmentally unpleasant place to live, with a paucity of fauna, poor weather conditions, and terminally overcast skies. The United States and Canadian military first established a weather station and airport at Resolute in 1947, and a number of airplane crash-sites eerily litter the area around the airstrip. Resolute Bay was named after the ship HMS *Resolute,* which wintered in the area in 1850-51 while searching for Sir John Franklin's lost expedition of 1845. The circumstances surrounding the establishment of the Inuit settlement at Resolute in 1953 have been the subject of much debate, controversy, and study.[9] To appreciate the context for the town's resettlement during Erskine's involvement in the mid-1970s, it is important to understand the relationship of the Inuit and the government to the community since its origin twenty years earlier. This issue is particularly pertinent in light of the fact that a community that was originally moved to the site without any initial investment in the siting of the community was then subjected to a second move – in both cases the choice of location being the final decision of officials. In addition, key aspects of Ralph Erskine's design for the new town suggest a form of implicit social engineering aimed at creating an ethnically integrated community and arranging the different forms of accommodation to promote a refashioned Canadian architectural fabric. This element closely relates to the original remit for the establishment of the community and to an inherited identity derived from the sense that the inhabitants were part of an ongoing social experiment.

The 1953 relocation, implemented by the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP), was referred to as an "Eskimo Rehabilitation Experiment." The move was also taken by the federal government to demonstrate "effective occupation" of the area. The intention was to use the first settlers as a forerunner for "seeding" the Canadian High Arctic with an Inuit population. Superintendent Henry Larsen, head of the RCMP's operation in the Northwest Territories in the 1950s, had a utopian vision for creating Inuit settlements in the High Arctic. This view embraced an element of history and folklore. When selecting the locations

Figure 9.6 Inuit winter houses, Port Harrison (Inukjuak), 1948. | Richard Harrington/Library and Archives Canada, PA-146917.

for the Resolute and Grise Fiord camps, he chose sites where there was clear archaeological evidence of previous habitation.[10] Both of the new colonies on Cornwallis and Ellesmere Islands were next to the archaeological remains of Thule Eskimo encampments over 500 years old. Detailed knowledge of these sites was published for the first time in the year before the relocation plan was developed.[11]

The site Larsen selected for the relocatees was a raised beach beside a row of nine stone and whale-bone houses, which the Inuit called *qarmartalik,* "old ruins." These were part of the largest collection of permanent house sites on the island. The Thule Inuit had left the area during either the first phase of the Little Ice Age, 1450-1520, or the third phase, 1600 to 1750. Occupation of the region, as elsewhere throughout the Arctic during periods of population expansion and contraction, was influenced by changing climatic conditions. As winters

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became intolerably cold, the caribou, muskox, and other game migrated southward, the people followed, and the land was left uninhabited.[12] Nevertheless, Larsen felt that if their "ancestors" had been able to survive here at one time, perhaps the relocatees could do so as well.

The Inuit to be selected for the relocation in 1953 to establish the new colony came from two communities. The plan was that the smaller group of Pond Inlet Inuit would be able to assist the Port Harrison Inuit in adapting to life in the High Arctic, which was considerably different from what they were used to. The community selected by officials for "rehabilitation" and the move north was one that had featured previously in the best-known film about the Inuit. This community, later given its Inuit name of Inukjuak, first came to international attention when it was the subject of Robert Flaherty's classic feature documentary *Nanook of the North* (1922). When the hunter who played the role of Nanook died of starvation two years after the film was made, his death was mourned as far away as China.[13] In Western popular culture, *Nanook of the North* remains the quintessential iconographic representation of Inuit life. Although the face of Nanook became known and was marketed around the world, the Inukjuamiut continued their lives in much the same way as before Flaherty's visit, with little or no knowledge of their widespread fame (Figure 9.6).

Thirty years after the making of the film, the Inukjuamiut and other Inuit living in northern Quebec were no longer regarded by officials as "happy-go-lucky Eskimos" but rather as an economically depressed people living in an "overpopulated area."[14] It was the transformation of the Eskimo from the "noble savage" of the 1920s, presented in *Nanook of the North,* to the welfare-dependent "white man's burden" of the 1950s that altered the government's essential relationship with the Inuit. By replacing its former policy of minimal social intervention with one of financial provision, Ottawa was no longer responsible to the Inuit but became responsible for them. To claim state aid was to relinquish one's private freedom, allowing the state to exert control over those who had come to depend on its resources for their survival.[15] Within the context of "welfare colonialism," the government now felt it had a prerogative to organize resettlement projects in order to ameliorate the Inuit's standard of living and reduce their dependency on the state.[16] At the 1952 Conference on Eskimo Affairs, it was suggested that the federal Department of Northern Affairs should develop an Inuit relocation policy: "Movements could be initiated from over-populated or depleted districts," the conference concluded, "to areas not presently occupied or where the natural resources could support a greater number of people."[17] That year, Inuit from Arctic Quebec were selected for relocation to the High Arctic.

In a popular magazine article, senior Department of Northern Affairs official Bob Phillips called the Inuit "slum dwellers of the wide-open spaces."[18] Featuring a picture of a small makeshift wooden dwelling, Phillips's article stated: "Except for those who have built shacks like this one from refuse, no Canadian Eskimo owns a home. Most are forced to live in the cold and damp of igloo and tent." Minnie Allakariallak, whose husband Johnnie Echalook was a lay preacher, arrived in Resolute Bay in 1955, feeling that "God has placed us here, and we were imagining a place where there's plenty of vegetation."[19] However, she soon discovered that the area's vegetation was far less than that near Inukjuak. The area chosen for relocation made the "rehabilitation experience" exceptionally difficult, as the climatic differences between Port Harrison and Resolute Bay are pronounced. Port Harrison is at latitude 58°27' north in the southern Arctic, whereas Resolute Bay is at 74°42' north in the High Arctic.

Port Harrison is 900 kilometres south of the Arctic Circle and thus never experiences continual winter darkness, whereas at Resolute Bay there is no daylight from late October until mid-February. During the dark period the snow surface reflects the moonlight and provides limited visibility. The relocatees also had to adjust to four months of continual daylight, from the end of April to the end of August. Temperatures averaging –34°C in February and +5°C in July, with an annual daily temperature of –16°C, are also much colder, and weather conditions are more severe in Resolute Bay and for longer durations than in Port Harrison. Due to ice cover, a supply vessel can enter the bay in front of Resolute only between mid-August and mid-September (Figure 9.7).

Just as Robert Flaherty tried to recapture the character and images of "traditional" Inuit life, so the Department of Northern Affairs in the early 1950s envisaged a relocation project that would rehabilitate and socially transform a group of Inuit so that they could live like the idealized Nanook. Ironically, Robert Flaherty's own illegitimate Inuit son was selected by officials to be relocated to the High Arctic as part of this rehabilitation experiment. Joseph Flaherty and other Quebec families were transported to a land completely foreign to them. Although the officials may have seen the Inuit relocatees as migrants and volunteers, those relocated to the High Arctic in 1953-55 have consistently described themselves as "exiles" (the term of reference also employed by the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples in their investigating report).[20] These contrasting labels indicate the key distinction between Inuit and former official views on the issue and how participants wish to see these events represented.

Figure 9.7 The CGS *C.D. Howe* rendezvousing with the CGS *d'Iberville* at Craig Harbour, Ellesmere Island, 29 August 1953. | Wilfred Doucette/Library and Archives Canada/National Film Board, PA-176810.

The notion of feeling exiled from one's homeland also complicated later efforts by Ralph Erskine to design a new town – one in which the majority of inhabitants, Inuit and white, would not have an innate sense of ownership, having been permanently or temporarily displaced there from their indigenous homes down south.

Despite newspaper stories of "new homes" for families in the High Arctic, such as appeared in the *Montreal Gazette,* housing remained a serious problem for the Inuit at Resolute.[21] The homes for most relocatees were initially old tents. In his inspection report of the Resolute Bay camp, C.J. Marshall noted that many of the relocatees' tents were in poor condition.[22] In northern Quebec they were able to build an igloo *(illu)* around November, whereas in Resolute Bay the Inukjuamiut discovered that despite colder temperatures, snowfall was sparse and they might not be able to construct igloos until January. During the month

of December, snowfall averages only 1 inch in Resolute Bay, whereas Port Harrison receives an average of 9.3 inches. Elijah Nutaraq recounted his adjustment to the colder climate: "We had to live in tents all winter because there was not enough snow to build a snow house. I remember waking up every morning rolled up like a ball because it was so cold! Today, I am glad I did not have a wife then – it would have been very difficult for a young couple's relationship to survive in that severe climate."[23]

Ross Gibson, the RCMP constable in charge of overseeing the new Inuit camp, admitted that "the cold was something the Quebec Eskimos had never endured the like of."[24] Gibson's observation reflects the notion that a scientific experiment appears to invoke nature as an independent judge.[25] From Gibson's comments and those of the relocatees, one can assume that the environmental conditions in themselves would have caused the relocation experiment to fail. Thus Gibson declared: "I am sure they would have all gone home right then if they could."[26] Shortly before he died, Larsen warned: "I shudder to think of the criticism which will be levelled at us in another fifty years time."[27] No wooden dwellings were built for the relocatees until they started building shacks for themselves in 1954 using packing cases discarded from the annual sealift (Figure 9.8). Not providing houses for the relocatees was consistent with the project's rehabilitation ideology, which discouraged the adoption of nontraditional practices. When in 1959 the RCMP submitted a plan for low-cost housing at Grise Fiord, the administrator of the Arctic, Alex Stevenson, was not supportive and advised that "the existence is marginal here and it may be more practicable to use this settlement for experimental purposes."[28] His decision illustrates the extent to which the laboratory metaphor was being perpetuated, which would have further ramifications when Erskine later implemented his experimental town plan.

RESOLUTE BAY AND SOCIAL INTEGRATION

One aspect of Ralph Erskine's remit for designing a new town at Resolute Bay was to amalgamate the Inuit and transient white populations, who by the 1970s had often worked together at the airbase facilities and in resource-exploration activities but who remained in segregated living accommodation. At that point, the twenty-year history of their interactions and segregation was complex. One of the most important functions of the military airbase at Resolute was to supply the five weather stations (Resolute, Mould Bay, Isachsen, Eureka, and Alert) jointly operated by Canada and the United States. In view of these activities, the Department of Northern Affairs envisaged a growing need at Resolute Bay

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Figure 9.8 Sarah Salluviniq, Jaybeddie Amagoalik, Mawa Iqaluk, Anknowya, George Echalook, and John Amagoalik, Resolute Bay, 1956. | Courtesy of Jaybeddie Amagoalik.

for manual labour. After their initial objections to the project, base officials and government agencies operating out of Resolute soon came to realize the advantages of having a Native labour pool to draw upon. The Inuit could be employed part-time as equipment operators, refuse removers, cleaners, and general handymen. The department proposed the second-stage relocation to Resolute Bay in 1955 to meet a growing demand for casual labour to unload supplies during airlifts and during the summer resupply.[29] The Inuit, however, were still left to find their own shelter and to feed themselves from the land. Gibson concurred that the government had brought the Inuit families to Resolute Bay "hoping they'd kill enough polar bear and seal to keep going. That way, men would be available to load aircraft and do other chores."[30]

The Inuit lived in the original community established for them near the Thule ruins by the beach, and the whites lived on the base. This separation evolved from the origination of the Inuit community. At the outset, Gibson was

instructed by his superiors that the military base was out of bounds for the Inuit, as was the base dump. There was to be complete segregation.

Larsen agreed that such a practice was necessary if they were to keep the Inuit pure; otherwise, "had Gibson allowed everybody to run about as they liked, those Eskimos would have been ruined the first winter."[31] He was particularly concerned about "indiscriminate association" between the whites and the Inuit women. Base personnel were informed that they were not to approach the Inuit camp, and any request to do so had to be approved by the constable.[32] Gibson pinned a note on the bulletin board in the base recreation room stating that he would give guided tours of the Inuit camp so that personnel could take pictures of the relocatees.[33] The Inuit called the base *aupartualuk,* meaning "the big red one," because of its red buildings. Thus Gibson, nicknamed Auparttuq, "Red," lived in quarters at the aupartualuk.

A party of senior officials, including two air commodores and department official Ben Sivertz, visited Resolute Bay a few days after the Inuit arrived on 7 September 1953. In a report on the trip, the arrival of the Inuit was discussed, together with the initial problems associated with their encampment at Resolute: "The reasons for moving this family are grounded in an attempt to keep the Eskimo in his native state and to preserve that culture as primitive as it is. However, by moving the Eskimos to an area where they come into intimate contact with white men destroys the basis of this reasoning while leaving them untrained to cope with the problems presented by this contact."[34] The report's author commented on the view, widely held at the time, that Inuit relations with military and transient civilian personnel should be closely monitored and discouraged. He suggested that by placing Inuit near the Resolute base, the project's objective of preserving "Nativeness" was being jeopardized. The report therefore advised that legislation should be considered to make Inuit settlements out of bounds to non-Inuit. In light of what one might characterize as a "keep the Eskimo an Eskimo" approach to social development at Resolute Bay, it is interesting to note the paradoxical statement by Jean Lesage, minister of the Department of Northern Affairs at the time of the second relocation to the High Arctic in 1955: "the preservation of the Eskimo in his primitive state is not a real alternative ... It would involve segregation and isolation [and] denial of the most humane services."[35] In this case, the social policy that the department was advocating in public did not accord with what it was putting into practice.

Two years after the relocation, Gibson recorded in a report to his superiors: "The native camp at Resolute Bay continues to survive."[36] To survive, the relocatees had to hunt and scavenge, regardless of the weather conditions. John Amagoalik remembers "being very excited when any military airplane arrived

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in Resolute, because we knew that the people on those airplanes had box lunches. We used to rush to the dump five miles away in the middle of winter to go and get those boxes of half-finished sandwiches."[37] Lizzie Amagoalik recalls that they "were always hungry. We had to look through the white man's garbage for food for our children. We had to take clothes that had been thrown away, for our children. When the policemen found out that we were living off their garbage, they got very angry at us and told us to stop. We asked, how are we going to eat?"[38]

Supplementing the Inuit diet of country food with leftovers from the white man's dump became a contentious issue between the RCMP officers and officials at the Department of Northern Affairs. This situation undermined a basic tenet of the rehabilitation project, namely that if relief was abolished the poor would become self-reliant.[39] Gibson was intent on adhering to the guidelines established for the rehabilitation project and insisted that the group should comply with isolation measures. Gibson therefore reported, "strict instructions were given the natives that they were not to carry away any articles found in the dump."[40] Department planner Ben Sivertz cautioned his deputy minister about the implications "of the growing problem of Eskimos scrounging from garbage dumps." He was particularly concerned about the public's perception of such activity since "it is the sort of thing which can give rise to embarrassing publicity ... It is our view that, if Eskimos are really destitute, they must, as a temporary measure, be provided with relief and proper food. We must not be put in the position of providing garbage as relief rations for Canadian citizens, which is exactly what is happening in some places."[41] Yet this was still the situation in 1964, when Constable G.D. Lucko at the Resolute Bay detachment commented on the source of building materials the Inuit were using. As before, they needed to resort to "what they obtained for themselves from the local dump."[42]

COMMUNITY GROWTH, SHAPING SPACE, AND ERSKINE'S PARADIGM

Further colonization of the High Arctic islands was still being considered by the Department of Northern Affairs in the 1960s. Ben Sivertz, who had become commissioner of the Northwest Territories, was interested in establishing new colonies at Mould Bay, Isachsen, Eureka, and Alert. The plan was to use Resolute Bay as a hub community, servicing a number of satellite Inuit colonies throughout the archipelago. Ultimately, the project was not implemented. Perhaps the government realized that the old problem of welfare dependency might recur but in even more distant locations. In the 1960s the cost of providing schools

and facilities, teachers, mechanics, and other necessary personnel for the colonies outweighed the possible advantages of redistributing the Inuit in the High Arctic islands. Resolute Bay developed a symbiotic relationship between the Inuit settlement and the base, with opportunities for menial employment and various forms of ongoing interaction. It underwent a dramatic conversion, however, in the mid-1960s, from model community to what some viewed as a dystopian environment, when RCMP paternalism was moderated and Inuit relations with the airbase changed. Alcoholism and prostitution became commonplace, and Resolute developed a reputation as a town with serious social problems.

By the early 1970s, due to improved economic conditions, a rise in oil revenues, and potential for enhanced opportunities for resource extraction in the Far North, the government decided that Resolute Bay would benefit from a completely new vision. It was at this point that Ralph Erskine was hired to offer this inspiration, and his design for the Resolute Bay new town presented a culmination of his ideas on cold-climate urban design. Reviewing the project in an article in *Canadian Geographic,* Michael Dear and Shirley Clark observe that "the Resolute new town was to have been a significant experiment in physical and social planning, and planners intended to set a precedent for future land-use and social programs throughout the North."[43] The town would also be a prototype for an ethnically integrated Arctic community. When contracted to devise an imaginative new town for Resolute, Erskine's brief included finding a housing solution for amalgamating the permanent Inuit population and the transient white personnel, who worked at the airbase – most of whom were on seasonal contracts engaged in scientific and resource-exploration activities. In photographs and Erskine's own accounts, we also see the architect deeply immersed in conversation with the Inuit inhabitants, discussing the merits of the plan in an effort to assumedly incorporate their suggestions (Figure 9.9). A central query, however, especially given the community's prior history of being relocated, is to what extent the appearance of participation and "empowerment" of consultation becomes in itself another "instrument for managed intervention."[44]

At the heart of his design was a horseshoe-shaped "living wall," which would consist of apartments and townhouses, in which most of the whites would live, encircling the detached Inuit family homes. The master design was an elaboration and refinement of an earlier conceptual idea that Erskine had implemented both in his plans for Svappavaara in northern Sweden and in two British projects, Clare Hall at Cambridge and the Byker housing estate at Newcastle. All four

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Figure 9.9 Ralph Erskine in discussions with Inuit inhabitants of Resolute Bay, c. 1973. | Courtesy of Ralph Erskine.

large-scale plans called for a combination of single-unit and family accommodation and for the overlapping of private and communal spaces. Erskine's intention was to use architecture to create an attractive environment that promoted interaction in a myriad of ways.

In all four designs, the living wall formed a castle-like structure that both provided climatic shelter and created a sense of inner sanctum. At Svappavaara, which was only partially completed, and in the Resolute plan, the wall formed a shoulder against the prevailing wind and snow. In the Newcastle development, what became known as "the Byker Wall" provided insulation for the community from winds off the North Sea and a sound barrier against a planned motorway. At Clare Hall, the outer buildings provided a genuine sense of enclosure and community. The blueprints for the four designs bear a catalogue of strong similarities, particularly in the overall shape of Svappavaara and Byker as forerunners for Resolute, with similar humanizing influences of materials, including wooden porches and suspended balconies. The adaptation of functionalist design principles incorporating an aesthetic use of colour and the presence of prominent design features such as air vents, rain-water chutes, and railings are almost identical in each plan. These elements can also be seen in earlier works, such

Place with No Dawn

Figure 9.10 Drawing for ski hotel at Borgafjäll, Sweden, 1948. | By Ralph Erskine.
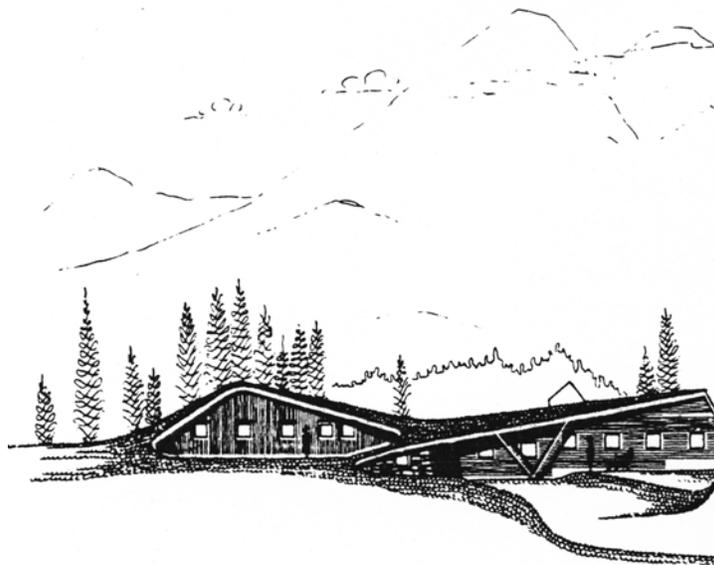
as the use of a curved outer wall and air intakes on a factory he designed for the manufacture of cardboard at Avesta, Sweden (1950-53), and the hanging balconies, which were a feature of his housing development at Brittgården (1959), in Tibro, Sweden.

Like the later design for Resolute Bay, the seven-year Brittgården project also had a mix of dwellings, with 85 family houses and 255 flats that ranged from studio to three-bedroom units. As envisaged for Resolute, an emphasis was placed on social integration, with the intention, as seen at Brittgården, of catering to a full range of inhabitants by creating a community whose buildings included old people's houses and homes specially designed for the handicapped. For the late 1950s, the design was considered highly progressive in that it was pedestrian-friendly, keeping roads and car parks at the perimeter of the town site to ensure greater freedom for children to roam. The notion of an egalitarian environment was fundamental even to the University of Cambridge's Clare Hall project, where in collaboration with the future dons, there was no allowance for a high table in the dining room or even a porter's lodge. In this late-1960s design, the intention was to create spaces that broke down social barriers between students and faculty and allowed for communal spaces that invited ease of mixing. Even the college president's house at Clare Hall is carefully folded into the overall design, such that its more spacious interior is undetectable from adjoining buildings.[45]

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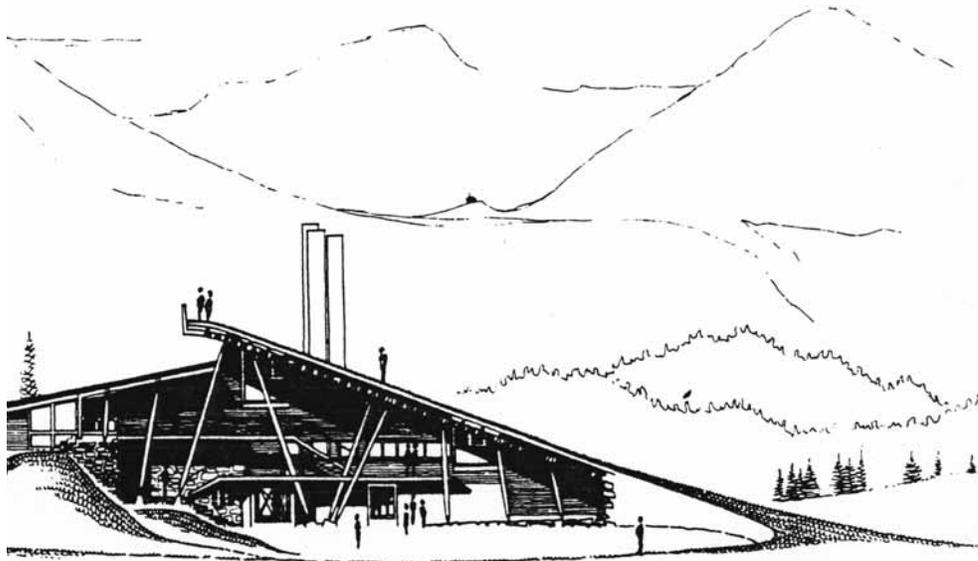
One of the aspects that immediately strikes one about Erskine's hand-drawn rendition of the new town for Resolute is not just the quizzical addition of the hot air balloon (a signature item in his drawings) but also the way the town design relaxes its form into the contours of the landscape. It was Erskine's early association with Gordon Cullen (1914-94), founder of the Townscape Movement, whom he met at the outset of his architectural career in England, who instilled in him the need to strive for a harmonious relationship between buildings and their environment. In Erskine's early Swedish design work – whether the Borgafjäll ski hotel (Figure 9.10); the church at Segato, southern Rhodesia (1960), whose roof mirrored the native fan-shaped trees but was not considered "Swedish-looking" enough for the local priests to be approved; or the Gadelius house (1961) on Lidingö, Sweden, built into the sloping terrain and adorned with a grassed roof – his instinct for integrating the built environment with the natural environment is immediately apparent.

In fact, the earliest precursor for the Resolute new townscape is revealed in a design he drew for a hypothetical Arctic town in 1958, with its characteristic south-facing slope, which he was invited to present to the Congrès Internationaux d'Architecture Moderne in Holland.[46] Many of these designs are helpfully illustrated in Peter Collymore's invaluable *The Architecture of Ralph Erskine*.[47] Further cold-climate experimentations include his whimsical design for an igloo-shaped home built of aluminum: the Engstrom house on Lisö Island in

Sorunda, Sweden (1955-56). Even here, however, he has carefully accommodated the needs of the owner, creating an enormous igloo with four children's bedrooms and the master bedroom radiating like spokes off the core, and still with spacious living and dining rooms, all contained within the dome and set in extensive, well-wooded grounds. Even before getting to the Arctic, in this early design work Erskine betrays his fascination for indigenous forms of cold-climate architecture.

A hallmark of Erskine's approach to urban design methodology, as previously noted, was the involvement of the end user in the conceptualization process. Even within his architectural firm, Erskine developed an ethos for democratic discussion. This approach was based on the informal egalitarian format of a Quaker meeting, which originated from his experiences at the school in Saffron Walden. Upon embarking on initial consultation meetings at Resolute with white personnel at the airbase and with Inuit, Erskine recorded in his diary on 2 September 1973:

> I was impressed by the high level of involved interest and understanding shown both in the Base and in the village. This was (due to language) easiest to assess in the Base, but attendance at meetings was highest in the village ... Common to both was quick assessment of the town plans and models and rejection of all that might lead to segregation of the Eskimo and white communities. There was an immediate and very profound will for integration.[48]

However, in the development of the blueprint for Resolute Bay and in the design discussions involving Inuit and whites, systemic flaws appear to have been overlooked. A reason for moving the Inuit community from its "old village" location next to the shoreline to the new site up on a hill was that in its former position the town was underneath the runway approach to the airport, which was deemed unsafe. In the formal report that Erskine's team prepared, the rationale was further advanced:

> Low clouds forced the aircraft to fly low over the village when landing. The site was noisy and felt to be dangerous. The site collected an abnormal amount of drifting snow, and the access road was regularly drifted in during the 9 or 10 month long winter ... The unions and private companies supported the proposal and all parts wished to avoid racial and social segregation.[49]

A report on the community prepared for the Department of Indian and Northern Affairs also recorded that the selected site offered an improved view

of the coastline.[50] As the majority of the intended residents were to be whites, this aesthetic consideration was viewed as more appealing. All Inuit communities are adjacent to water because of the need for ready access to boats used for hunting and transport. The decision adopted at Resolute reduced Inuit engagement with the natural resources over a period of time, promoting greater reliance on the foodstuffs offered in the new town's stores. Hence, even at this early planning stage, a strategic decision was taken that was inherently at odds with the utilitarian needs and cultural practices of the Inuit community.

The horseshoe design of the apartment complex actually meant that the Inuit's detached homes would be placed in the centre, clustered around a freestanding church and school, with the whites occupying the encircling apartments, inadvertently looking down on the Inuit's homes in a panoptic surveillance configuration. In an attempt to encourage racial integration, the risk was that the communities would still be largely segregated, except in public areas, but the metaphorical layout of a white circle with the Inuit in the middle could potentially create an even more problematic dynamic. With the whites staring out of their windows at the Inuit in the inner courtyard, the sense of being watched from above might have been untenable and exacerbated cultural difference. Animals in a zoo is another uncomfortable analogy. Erskine's intention, however, as with those he consulted, was to achieve the opposite with this town plan, as he records: "Much interest was shown in this factor i.e. that the town should not sub-divide into white and Eskimo township and that there should be no obvious 'snob hill' situation."[51] Erskine's design had created a paradox. What was the alternative to this shaping of space? Keeping the detached homes separated from the horseshoe and placing them on their own in a quasi suburb of the main town would have defeated the basic premise of providing a protective wall against the winds and promoting an integrated community.

With regards to the wall, one report observed that "the Eskimos were unanimously more interested in reducing the snow clearing problems (i.e., allowing the wind to penetrate the development), than in creating a wind shelter. 'Wind is part of Arctic life.' The whites were, on the other hand, very eager to get wind shelter."[52] If Erskine had placed the Inuit community down by the shore and the whites up on the hillside where the view was more favourable for them and where they were closer to the base, the Inuit would have remained a ghettoized community. His remit was to try to accommodate both groups' wishes (although, of course, those whites included in the consultation would have left the area by the time the new town had been built), while realizing his own longstanding design ambitions for creating an Arctic urban paradigm.

Although the Inuit were an important component of the new community, their small numbers meant that they would have been dwarfed by the white population, especially as transient workers' numbers were expected to expand. Unlike most other communities in the Canadian Arctic, where Inuit substantially outnumber whites, in Resolute the process would have been inverted at a ratio of anything from 5:1 to 20:1 if resource-development activities in the High Arctic ballooned as projected. Erskine's ultimate decision to site the town not on the seashore but on the side of the hill was therefore potentially prompted more by the ideals and needs of the white community than by those of the Inuit. This balance echoed the colonial paradigm, which in the past had resulted in marginalized living conditions for Inuit who gathered near white sites of habitation, such as military facilities – although in this instance the wish was to ameliorate their previous circumstances. Even at an early stage in the process, immediately prior to his consultation meeting with inhabitants, Erskine recorded in his diary on 21 August 1973: "I suggest that this study should include a siting nearer the hill than the site already tested."[53]

In an effort to accelerate the building program for the new town and to manage costs, a decision was made to move the old Inuit homes to the new location once the town site was levelled rather than to construct new homes. Work was also commenced on the periphery apartment building. Only one end section of the horseshoe townhouses was actually completed when the government decided in 1978 to abandon the project. The reason given was a change in the market for natural resources, which meant that the expected substantial influx of transient workers would now not materialize. In his diary, Erskine noted the Inuit's prophetic observation when they met with him in the summer of 1973 at the outset of the project: "Great interest in central facilities and, as in the Base, emphasis on their importance. Question in both places: Will it really happen?"[54]

The apartment block, finished inside in a high-design Swedish style, was nonetheless uninhabitable without necessary plumbing and was soon boarded up (see Figure 9.11). Few communal facilities were initially provided, and most whites remained in accommodation at the airbase, which meant that the much-discussed plans for social integration did not come to fruition. Further underscoring the tenuousness of the town's existence, when Erskine returned to Sweden and reflected on the project in December 1973, still in the early part of the design process, he noted, "we would try to avoid the risk of creating in the future another 'throw away' ghost town [and] should a reduction or moving of the township become essential, there might at least be the chance that (as with

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Figure 9.11   Uncompleted townhouses designed by Ralph Erskine, Resolute Bay, 1991. | Photograph by author.

the present Eskimo village?) people who have to move might be able to take with them some familiar furnishings, buildings and social institutions."[55]

A number of the Inuit presently living in Resolute Bay were young children at the time of the initial relocations or were born in the High Arctic. In 1988 the Department of Indian and Northern Affairs finally acknowledged that thirty-five years earlier it had made a two-year promise of return and agreed to pay the transportation costs of those people who wanted to move back to Inukjuak. By the 1990s most of the original elders had returned to Inukjuak. The three who remained have stayed primarily because their children live there. Yet, fifty years since its inception, the town of Qausuittuq remains one of the two northernmost communities in North America. Its existence and strategic

position provided Erskine with an opportunity, made complex by the somewhat unusual history of the community and policy reversals of the government, to put his philosophy of integrated town planning and Arctic architecture to the test.

When reviewing the legacy of the project and the image of the forlorn boarded-up townhouses in 2002, Erskine expressed dismay that the current inhabitants of the community should have realized few of the benefits of his original design. Instead, their lives were made more complicated by their premature movement to the hill, which was missing the necessary infrastructure and modern dwellings promised them by the government. "Neither in Canada, Alaska, Scandinavia nor Siberia will I find communities intelligently and inventively built to give pleasing and effective comfort and protection in the specific conditions of the north," recorded Erskine in 1967 while a visiting professor at McGill University.[56] Industrial economic fluctuations undermined the construction of both Svappavaara and Resolute Bay, but the promise his design held out may still one day be achieved as world climate continues to change and as populations expand into new regions.

NOTES

1 The author interviewed Simeonie Amagoalik and other Inuit at Resolute Bay in 1991 and interviewed Ralph Erskine twice at his home in Drottningholm, in 1992 and 2002.

2 See also Rhodri Windsor Liscombe, "Modernist Ultimate Thule," *RACAR (Revue d'art Canadienne/ Canadian Art Review)* 31, 1-2 (2006): 64-80.

3 Passages detailing the 1953-55 relocations initially appeared in Alan Marcus, *Relocating Eden: The Images and Politics of Inuit Exile in the Canadian Arctic* (Hanover: University Press of New England, 1995).

4 Ralph Erskine, "Architecture and Town Planning in the North," *Polar Record* 14, 89 (1968): 165.

5 Ralph Erskine website, http://www.erskine.se/e_biografi.htm.

6 Architecture Week Great Buildings Collection, http://www.greatbuildings.com/cgi-bin/glk?http:// www.timesonline.co.uk/article/0,,60-1531757_1,00.html.

7 Erskine, "Architecture and Town Planning," 165.

8 Ibid.

9 See Alan Marcus, "Out in the Cold: Canada's Experimental Inuit Relocation to Grise Fiord and Resolute Bay," *Polar Record* 27, 163 (1991): 285-96; Frank J. Tester and Peter Kulchyski, *Tammarniit (Mistakes): Inuit Relocation in the Eastern Arctic* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 1994); Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, *The High Arctic Relocation,* 3 vols. (Ottawa: Ministry of Supply and Services, 1994); Alan Marcus, *Relocating Eden: The Images and Politics of Inuit Exile in the Canadian Arctic* (Hanover, NH: University Press of New England, 1995).

10 Henry Larsen, *Memoirs,* unpublished manuscript in the private collection of Doreen Riedel (n.d.); M. Maxwell, *Prehistory of the Eastern Arctic* (New York: Academic Press, 1985).

11 H. Collins, "Excavations of Thule and Dorset Culture Sites at Resolute Bay, Cornwallis Island, NWT," in *Annual Report of the National Museum of Canada for the Fiscal Year 1953-54,* Bulletin No. 136 (Ottawa: Department of Resources and Development, 1955), 22.

12   Guy Mary-Rousselière, *Qitdlarssuaq: The Story of a Polar Migration* (Winnipeg: Wuerz, 1991), 160.

13   Hugh Brody, *Living Arctic* (London: Faber and Faber, 1987), 21.

14   "Summary of the Proceedings at a Meeting on Eskimo Affairs Held 19 and 20 May 1952, in the Board Room of the Confederation Building, Ottawa" (1952), RCMP Information Access Directorate, D1512-2-4-Q-27.

15   Francis Piven and Richard Cloward, *Regulating the Poor* (London: Tavistock, 1972), 22; D. Garland, *Punishment and Welfare* (Aldershot: Gower, 1985), 48.

16   Robert Paine, *The White Arctic,* Newfoundland Social and Economic Papers No. 7 (St. John's: Institute of Social and Economic Research, Memorial University of Newfoundland, 1977).

17   "Summary of the Proceedings," 4.

18   Robert Phillips, "Slum Dwellers of the Wide-Open Spaces," *Weekend Magazine* 9, 15 (1959): 20.

19   "Transcripts of a Public Hearing Held in Ottawa by the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples on the High Arctic Exiles," 5-8 April 1993, 39. Available from the commission, Ottawa.

20   Ibid.

21   "New Homes for Eskimos Said Success," *Montreal Gazette,* 26 October 1954.

22   C.J. Marshall, "Report to Graham Rowley, Secretary, Advisory Committee on Northern Development, DRD," 9 November 1953, National Archives of Canada, RG22/254/40-8-1/4.

23   "Interviews with High Arctic Exiles," *Makivik News* 15 (1989): 15.

24   F. Ross Gibson, letter to Bob Pilot, 24 September 1983, author's personal collection.

25   David Gooding et al., *The Uses of Experiment* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1989), xv.

26   F. Ross Gibson, letter to Bob Pilot, 24 September 1983, author's personal collection.

27   Larsen, *Memoirs,* 1004.

28   Alex Stevenson, memorandum to Mr. Bolger, "Eskimo Loan," 4 February 1959, National Archives of Canada, RG85/1474-251-2/8.

29   "Agenda for the fourth meeting of the Committee on Eskimo Affairs to be held in room 304, Langevin Block, Ottawa, on Monday, May 10, 1954 at 10:00 A.M.," 1954, National Archives of Canada, RG22/298/40-8-1/5.

30   A.H. Brown, "Weather from the White North," *National Geographic,* April 1955, 543-72.

31   Larsen, *Memoirs,* 48.

32   F. Ross Gibson, personal communication with the author, 1991.

33   Larsen, *Memoirs,* 47.

34   G.W. Stead, "Report on Tour of the Arctic Islands, September 8-12," 1953, 6, National Archives of Canada, RG22/176/40-2-20/3.

35   Jean Lesage, "Obligations of the White Race to the Eskimos," *Ottawa Journal,* 23 March 1955.

36   F. Ross Gibson, "Conditions amongst Eskimos – Resolute Bay, NWT," RCMP Resolute Bay detachment report, 22 March 1955, National Archives of Canada, RG18, acc. no. 8586-048, box 55, TA-500-8-1-14.

37   "Evidence given at a hearing before the House of Commons committee on Aboriginal Affairs, Ottawa," 19 March 1990. Available from the House of Commons, Ottawa.

38   "Interviews with High Arctic Exiles," *Makivik News* 13 (1989): 9.

39   Hugh Johnston, *British Emigration Policy, 1815-1830: 'Shovelling out Paupers'* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1972), 11.

40   Gibson, "Conditions amongst Eskimos – Resolute Bay, NWT," RCMP Resolute Bay detachment report, 26 March 1954, National Archives of Canada, RG18, acc. no. 8586-048, box 55, TA-500-8-1-14.

41   Ben Sivertz, memorandum to the deputy minister, "Garbage Dumps," 19 May 1958, National Archives of Canada, RG22/485/40-8-1/9.

42   G.D. Lucko, "Conditions amongst Eskimos generally – annual report – year ending 31 Dec. 1964," RCMP Resolute Bay detachment report, 1964, National Archives of Canada, RG18, acc. no. 8586-048, box 55, TA-500-8-1-14.

43   Michael Dear and Shirley Clark, "Planning a New Arctic Town at Resolute," *Canadian Geographic* 97, 3 (1979): 46.

44   Andrea Cornwall, *Making Spaces, Changing Places: Situating Participation in Development,* IDS Working Paper No. 170 (Brighton, UK: Institute of Development Studies, University of Sussex, 2002), 3.

45   One of my former tutors at Cambridge University, Dr. Terrence Armstrong, was one of the first fellows at Clare Hall and provided useful information about his discussions with Erskine during the design and early-use periods. I was also a visiting fellow at Clare Hall in 2001 and while living in the college had the opportunity to explore and experience its egalitarian and communal design features firsthand.

46   Peter Collymore, *The Architecture of Ralph Erskine* (London: Granada, 1982), 22.

47   Ibid.

48   Ralph Erskine, unpublished diary, 19 August to 1 November 1973 (Drottningholm: Ralph Erskine's Arkitektkontor AD), 7.

49   Ralph Erskine, "Resolute Bay New Town," unpublished report, c. 1978, 7.

50   Underwood McLellan and Associates, *General Development Plan Resolute Bay, NWT,* Escom Report No. AI-33 (Ottawa: Department of Indian and Northern Affairs, 1980), 14.

51   Ibid., 8.

52   Boris Culjat, *Climate and the Built Environment in the North* (Stockholm: Avdelningen för Arkitektur, 1975), 92.

53   Ibid., 1.

54   Ibid., 9.

55   Ibid., 33.

56   Erskine, "Architecture and Town Planning," 166.