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Résumé de l'article

Cet article aborde le concept de positionnement à partir d'une analyse sémiotique des caractéristiques architecturales et ornementales de l'édifice législatif du Manitoba. Les auteurs interprètent les caractéristiques du bâtiment en fonction du contexte de présupposés hégémoniques concernant le pouvoir et l'autorité qui étaient dominants au moment où l'édifice législatif a été construit. En se référant aux concepts développés par Yates, Langer, Schapiro, Barthes, Lévi-Strauss, Derrida et Foucault, les auteurs défient ces revendications à partir de leur propre contexte de sujets appartenant à un monde pluraliste, postcolonial et postmoderne.

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Stone Memories, Sculptured History
Multiple Readings of Manitoba's Legislative Building

George Fulford, Jane Leverick, Kimberley Wilde, Maria Fowler, Kara Peters Unrau, Arden Hill and Barbara Wakshinski
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Introduction
George Fulford

The Manitoba legislature is more than just a turn-of-the-century building where laws are enacted. It is also a grandiose monument commemorating a bygone era of British Imperialism. Through its sculpture, murals, and remarkable design, the legislature articulates multiple statements glorifying imperialism, progress, and conquest. Taken together, these metaphorical statements constitute a British version of the American myth of manifest destiny, rooted firmly in the rich soil of Manitoba's prairie bottom land.

The six sections comprising this paper represent an experiment in multivocality, an effort to capture many aspects of the legislature through diverse perspectives. It began as research project on reading architecture, part of an honours-level class in semiotics that I taught for the Anthropology department at the University of Winnipeg. The course was designed to be interdisciplinary and attracted students from Anthropology, Women's Studies, Philosophy, and English. Seminar discussions provided the opportunity for mutual journeys of intellectual discovery for both the students and myself. We began with close readings of Terence Hawkes' *Structuralism and Semiotics* (1977) and various articles from Robert Innis' *Semiotics: An Introductory Anthology* (1985). We then explored Claude Lévi-Strauss' method of structural analysis, compiling concordances based on key myths from *The Jealous Potter* (1988) and collectively creating a concordance based on published versions of a Cree narrative.

Later, we moved to the poststructural critiques of Derrida (1976, 1978) and Kristeva (1984). Lively debates often ensued between those who were

generally supportive of structuralism and those who might be termed postmodernists. While most saw the value of comparative textual analysis, few accepted Lévi-Strauss' reductionist reading of mythology as an arbitrary and dualistic interplay between mythemes. Diverse perspectives and experiences made consensus impossible. But by the end of term, a general feeling emerged that literature, storytelling and human creativity are far too complex to be reduced to simple formulae.

The diverse backgrounds and voices of the contributors stand out strongly in this work. Nevertheless, certain patterns and themes do recur. Perhaps most obviously, five of the six contributors are women, reflecting the current state of enrolment in social science courses. Most write from a postmodern feminist perspective. They consistently remark on the absence of female representation in the architecture of the Manitoba legislative building and link this to the concomitant general absence of women in government, and the disappearing and silencing of women's perspectives throughout most of this century. They also note, especially in the iconography of statues and painted human figures in the legislature, a linkage of depictions to western stereotypes: women and Aboriginal peoples to nature and men and Europeans to culture. This stylistic tendency provides insights into more general issues of marginalization, disempowerment, and subordination. Finally, many of the contributors take Francis Yates' (1966) insight about how memory can be structured like architecture to develop arguments about how public architecture is positioned to reflect issues of history and collective memory. This insight is echoed in our title, which was suggested by Jane Leverick, whose paper begins the discussion.

Artifice and Memory

Jane Leverick

The urge to leave our mark on the landscape and create monuments which declare our presence is common to human cultures. The Inuit build inukshuks to guide fellow travellers. The pyramids of the ancient Egyptians laud the Pharaohs and display their image of the afterlife. Stonehenge remains as a reminder of the early Celts' fascination with astronomy and natural cycles. Human societies proclaim themselves with edifices which represent their ideology and culture. Susanne Langer suggests that abstractions made from the direct perceptions of the eye and ear are "genuine symbolic materials, media of understanding, by whose office we apprehend a world of *things*,

and of events that are the history of things" (quoted in Innis 1985: 99). The Manitoba legislative building, then, is a statement about the hopes and dreams, history and cultural placement of Manitoba in the early 1900s. Its message is multi-layered. And, like most public statements, interpretations are informed by viewers' locations. "Manitoba Legislators intended the new Legislative building as a symbol of progress. It would be a citadel of courage, wisdom, and justice, adorned with great art, within which elected representatives of the people would decide the matters of the day" (Baker 1986: 7). Judging from newspaper coverage (cited in Baker 1986), white, European, middle-class Manitobans viewed it in ways similar to its legislators and designers.

In the late 1800s, when Winnipeg was declared the capital of Louis Riel's provisional government, it was a prairie town of wooden buildings. Planning of the legislature began in 1911. Manitoba's population had tripled in the 40 years since provincial ratification. The economy was booming, construction was plentiful, and immigrants were streaming in from Europe. Prosperity was seen as the partner of progress, which seemed as unlimited as did the province's resources. (The borders of Manitoba had been extended to Hudson Bay by 1912, opening up more lumber and mining resources.)

Construction would last for seven years. Building began in 1913 and the final dedication ceremony was held on Manitoba's 50th anniversary in July, 1920. By then, World War I had come and gone, imposing budget cuts as Canada poured her energies into the conflict overseas. The related emphasis on idealism, patriotism, fighting for right and democracy influenced the emblature in the design. The inclusion of soldiers and military symbols in the rotunda and assembly hall murals reflect this historical influence. The great strike of 1919 had slowed the final stages of construction. The Conservative government had been turned out of office in a scandal of nepotism and overspending. The Manitoba of 1920 was a less idealistic and optimistic field than that in which the original plans for the legislature were designed and implemented.

Only citizens of the British Empire could compete for tender to design the new building. Canada, still a Dominion, was represented in Europe as the New World, ripe with opportunity for settlers. The French-Métis origins of Manitoba, most strikingly signified by Louis Riel's Red River uprising, were, in the early decades of this century, obscured by the dominance of British citizens. The province's historic connections to Britain were highlighted at the expense of the history of other settlers and the First Nations, in part through

immigration laws and direct solicitation of British immigrants, but in addition, through the ideology of imperialist expansion and colonialism. Now contested, these terms were then viewed as representing positive values which supported progress and the civilising of the Canadian wilderness. Employing these ideals in their design, British architects Frank W. Simon and Henry Boddington won the competition to design the Manitoba legislature. Simon was responsible for the decorative details, including sculpture and murals.

The decoration tells one story of the province's history. It functions to hold the memories of provincial growth and to locate the government in the historical moment of its building. This history is told largely from a colonial, capitalist, middle/upper-class, white European location. It can be read through the sculpture, the architect's plans, the surrounding statuary, and the public scandals that surrounded the construction. Of particular interest for me is the allegorical pediment over the main entrance on the north side of the legislature. This is a site in which contested images of Manitoba, its government, and its history become accessible as a text, an architectural aid to memory, and a synopsis of the field of meaning in which the legislative building resides. Written in sculpture rather than prose, it exemplifies Kristeva's assertion that "no 'text' can ever be completely 'free' of other texts" (quoted in Innis 1985: 144).

Frank W. Simon supervised the sculptors and muralists who worked on the legislature in order to develop his conception of a coherent theme unifying its artwork. He describes the pediments as follows:

> In the centre is a seated symbolical female figure representing Manitoba. In the left-hand corner the figure of Enterprise beckons the workers to the Land of Promise. Next is a finely modelled bull led by Europe, signifying the immigration from Europe and adjoining the central figure is a group of father, mother, and child, the new family in the land. In the right-hand corner are two figures embracing and clasping a jar, whence issues a stream of water. These represent the confluence of the Red and Assiniboine Rivers fertilising the earth. Next is a plough man with his horse, tilling the soil, whilst the male and female figures bring the fruits of the Soil of Manitoba (Baker 1986: 82).

The dominance of Greek forms and architectural styles in the legislature's design identifies what at the time was perceived to be the hallowed roots of democracy. Europeans associate classical Greece with ethics, philosophy, and science; thus, the "golden boy," atop the building personifies enterprise, progress, reason, and knowledge. The pediment mutability of meaning rests in its characteristics as visual form, having "no fixed meaning apart from its

context" (Langer cited in Innis 1985: 101). In this case, the context is political, social, and economic.

The female figure represents Manitoba as the land of promise, embodying the natural resources of ores, lumber, hydro power, and agricultural land. Rivers are also represented by female figures. Woman is the fertilizing, nurturing force, mirroring her familial roles of birthing children and performing domestic labours. Simon's pediment motif of the "new family in the land" refers to the immigration and settlement which were central forces in populating Manitoba. The male and female figures which carry the "fruits of the Soil of Manitoba" could represent the dynamic of family farms, but they can also be read as the land (woman) providing the raw materials and the culture (man) shaping the final product. Connections between the fruits of the soil and of the womb are drawn through the symmetrical placement of the two groups to either side of the central figure.

The Minister of Public Works, Hon. W.R. Clubb, provided his own interpretation of the pediment allegory at the opening of the legislature:

> Albert Hodge, of England has portrayed in stone an allegory of our great Dominion. The Atlantic is represented on the east by a nautical steering wheel and the Pacific on the west, by a hand holding Neptune's trident. In the centre sits regal Manitoba, the Key Province of the West, with a family group at her right hand, indicating that in this province family welfare is the first consideration of the State. On her left is typified in two figures entwined the harmonious co-operation of Labour and Capital, productive of beneficent results as evidenced by the flowing jar of honey at their feet. To the east of the family group is "Europa" leading a bull, representative of virile, European immigration, while the central figure to the west, composed of a powerful team of horses drawing a plow and directed by a stalwart man, indicates that from Mother Earth shall man derive his bounty by the application of Labour and Industry (Baker 1986: 167).

Clubb's interpretation differs from Simon's primarily in the reading of the two entwined female figures. The designer intended the female images to portray Winnipeg's rivers. Clubb moves the allegory into a contemporary political arena, re-inscribing the figures as labour and capital. Since a rising labour movement interrupted construction of the building, a co-operative relationship between labour and capital, symbolised by the flowing jar of honey, speaks to the need for a resolution of the conflict. The allusion to the land of milk and honey (or land of promise) speaks to the opportunities for immigrant workers, which Clubb suggests still abound, despite changing

economic realities in the province. He also sees the wheel and trident as symbols to geographically locate and represent Manitoba as a gateway to the west, historically constructed as the location of opportunity, unified and prosperous. His interpretation of the family shifts emphasis from immigrants on the new land to the government's concern with their welfare. Clubb retains the feminine identity of nature in referring to "Mother Earth."

Capitalist patriarchal discourse supports the Enlightenment paradigm of nature versus culture, female versus male. The colonisation of Canada and Manitoba replaces indigenous culture with western civilised culture. First Nations peoples are indexed as "nature" and the imperialist Europeans as "culture." This notion of the prairies was a common construction in nineteenth and early twentieth century North America. Nature is domesticated under the benign influence of (European) culture both in the extraction of inexhaustible riches of the northwest and in the assimilation of Native peoples. The ugly aspects of colonisation are minimized and the heroic aspects of the victory over nature lionized.

At the legislature, the inclusion of the wild prairie bison is but one example of the conquest of nature. Brass sculptures of these noble beasts, the featured image in the foyer, symbolize greatness, but in so doing they erase the real story of the bison's extinction. Greek images displace the existing cultures and lend authority to the government. The female figure of Manitoba is reminiscent of the Greek goddess Athena. She sprang forth fully armed from the mind of Zeus, just as this sculpture sprang forth from the mind of Gadet, its creator. These circumventions of the mother speak to the patriarchal values which predominated Hellenistic Greek thought, transposed to Manitoba history. Beyond the pediments, images of women are under-represented in the decoration of the legislative building. Even those few who are present remain an icon of the other, deprived of real personhood. Male figures, while often iconographic, can as well be images of particular men recognised for their personal achievements.

I read this building, constructed of Italian marble, American stone and Manitoba limestone, as mimetic of the immigrant population and the reification of indigenous culture. The fossils in the limestone are static detritus of the living organisms they signify. Unwittingly, this image speaks to the loss of both natural resources and First Nations' identity. Like the fossils, trapped in time, the Manitoba legislature can be read as a time capsule, framing the values and ideals of its builders. But is it meaningful to contemporary Manitobans?

A Fossil in Time

Kimberley Wilde

The Manitoba legislature is constructed of 400 million-year-old Tyndall limestone quarried from Garson, Manitoba, yet little else in the building reflects local history and culture. It is, in many ways, a building from *away*. Greek, Roman, and Egyptian forms dominate the architectural design. Stone monuments on its grounds are reference points for individuals and groups who contributed in particular ways to the development of Manitoba, or who died in one of the two world wars. One memorial, not visible in winter because it is a garden, marks the murder of fourteen women who were university students in Montreal. Further to the south, facing the river, but still part of the legislature landscape is a statue of Louis Riel, Métis leader and the first person to unite Manitoba as a province.

This building and its architecture stand out from the prairie like a palm tree in aspen woodland. If I were creating a memory system, I would remember this locus with its extraordinary images. Yates' discussion of the artificial memory systems of ancient Greek and Roman orators emphasizes the need for notions that are "striking and unusual...beautiful or hideous, comic or obscene" (1966: 10). Much of the imagery in the legislature's architecture fits this description. The building is encoded with powerful images intended to guide, direct, shape, and inform the lives of the people who live in this province, and sometimes beyond it.

If the Manitoba legislature functions as a storehouse of memories, they are surely structured in the form of a myth. According to Barthes, myth is partly a semiotic system based on forms, and partly ideology; it is a "historical science" (1957: 111). He likens it to language, where social usage turns the mundane parole of everyday common talk into mythic langue, a "type of speech chosen by history" (1957: 11). The process of myth-making draws from the historical to "naturalize" its ideology. Its function is to distort objective reality into subjective ideology through the use of images (Barthes 1957: 129). Myth can become an illusion when the boundary between form and content is blurred. Separating these two, locating myth in its historical context, and in particular identifying the human agency (the addresser and addressee) involved in its making, allows us to "read" its language.

Occupying physical space in proximity to other buildings and landscape features, the Manitoba legislature can be likened to a framed picture. Schapiro

(1985: 212) notes that the frame defines the field within which the images operate. It separates the observer and the image and guides our perception to that which is to be considered. The frame, then, acts as a reference point for the picture. What are the external referents "framing" the legislature?

The buildings surrounding the legislature include the Manitoba Archives, the Law Courts, All Saints United Church, Great West Life Insurance, Government services, banks, and other commercial offices. At the foot of Broadway, near the juncture of the Assiniboine and Red Rivers, lies Winnipeg's remaining train station. Although the railway has less to do with the Prairie economy than it did in the early twentieth century, like the rivers, it represents movement across the Prairies for both commercial and personal purposes. These buildings "frame" the legislature, both physically and ideologically. Material, spiritual, legal, and political power are all here, presumably guided by the democratic process and ideals it represents. In a more subtle way, the power of nature is represented too. When these rivers flood like they did in 1997, 1950, and other points in the past, the illusion of strength being created by human agency becomes as eroded as are the riverbanks.

There is fluidity also in the democratic process that stands in contrast to the legislature's rigid stone structure. The limestone bricks are embedded with fossils, frozen in time like the building itself. Visible in the interior walls, they also symbolize territoriality and permanence. Democracy depends on human agency — one person, one vote. Here there is room for change, for growth, for responding to needs, and for individual as well as collective voices to be heard. This, at least, is the ideal that governs the process. The power of the citizenry becomes symbolized by this building and the framework of those surrounding it, but the fluidity of the process becomes encoded into the architecture, frozen in time. This "myth," as Barthes would surely call it, works as long as all voices are truly heard, all votes carry equal power, and access to the process and benefits of democracy is equal. But are they, do they, is it?

Walk south of the legislature, towards the river. In the grassy and tree-lined park area between the statue of Louis Riel and the Osborne Street bridge just to the west, gay men hang out in order to meet other gay men. Sometimes those who don't like their ways beat them up. Walk back up through the grounds from the southwest to the northeast, past the holocaust memorial, to the garden that commemorates the Montreal massacre. What ideology informed these deaths? Turn again to look at the statue of Louis Riel, and the

people he represents. Riel's statue to the south and the statue of Queen Victoria to the north have their backs to each other, with the grand building in the centre, steeped in the language of imperialism. She faces the lands still to be conquered at the time the legislature was built; he faces the river beside which First Nations peoples lived and on which they travelled. The river is perhaps the most democratic part of the picture; it feeds those who come to it, and when it floods, it touches all who are near, no matter what their background or their lifestyle might be.

Cast your eyes upward to the "golden boy" perched high atop the dome crowning the legislature. This statue, named because he is encased in gold leaf, symbolizing the colour of wheat, shows eternal youth. Poised in flight, he holds a torch and a wheat sheaf, and faces north:

> Holding aloft the torch of progress, he lights the way to future economic development. The sheaf of wheat, cradled in his left arm, represents agriculture. This industry, which drew the first settlers to Manitoba, is now the largest primary industry in the province. Other industries, based on the resources of Northern Manitoba — minerals, lumber, fish and waterpower, have since been brought into production (Government of Manitoba 1969: 5).

In 1912, Manitoba's boundaries were redrawn, expanding the province in all directions to 250,000 square miles (Morton 1967: 325). These new borders opened up the north-south axis of the province at a time when the wheat industry was about to decline, making northern resources very desirable. This peak period of growth in Manitoba's history was soon to be followed by World War I. The "golden boy" was not erected until after the war when the building was finally completed. In fact, the statue spent two years in the hold of a vessel crossing from France to New York, after surviving the bombing of the foundry in which it was cast. The boy's eternal youth contrasts sharply with the monuments on the grounds which commemorate all the men and boys who died fighting in both World Wars. The height at which he is placed, compared to their ground level, suggests an inherent divinity. At a higher plane, eternal youth is possible. Here on earth, all too often, the young are sacrificed in the name of ideology — young men and boys, that is. In spite of the contributions of women during wartime, both at home and on the front lines, no memorial has been erected to observe and honour their efforts and sacrifices. The absence of female representation in the architecture and monuments around the legislature is profound and eloquent.

There is a plaque inside the building at the back, dedicated to the women who fought for their right to vote in this province, granted on January 27, 1916. Some of the most important social action groups at this time were largely female-run and sponsored — the Temperance Society, the Social Welfare Council, and the League for Political Equality (Morton 1967: 342). But these everyday individuals are absent. Women are represented in idealized roles: Queen Victoria's statue, portraits of Queen Elizabeth and representations of the virtues in the assembly room. The real lives of ordinary women go unheeded unless they have been murdered.

My own memories about the legislature are of politically active women and men trying to effect change. This includes negotiating funding for a social services agency which could provide counselling and housing to women and children leaving abusive relationships; lobbying for abortion rights; and standing in a circle with grieving and resolute women and men in a ceremony dedicating the garden for the Montreal massacre victims. Remembrances of peace festivals are juxtaposed with those of the tent village set up to protest the invasion at Oka and the tired faces of the people of Pukatawagan who walked from their reserve to Winnipeg to protest the abysmal water and sewage facilities that made their children sick every spring. There is nothing permanent to mark these events, except for newspaper articles filed in the Manitoba archives. Any permanence these actions might attain will only be reflected in changes to the laws which are enacted and policies developed within the legislature. Everyday lives and events are not democratically recorded in its structure.

Entering the building from the main (north) entrance, the first monuments a visitor encounters are two bronze male bison, flanking three flights of stairs leading to the main rotunda. These great animals have much significance and multiple meanings. To the Aboriginal people who lived here, they represented abundance, and the assurance that Creator would always look after them as long as they used their gifts wisely. Having witnessed the slaughter of millions of bison by Europeans, the men and women of the buffalo hunt became soldiers in Louis Riel's army (Morton 1967: 141). Today the buffalo can only be found on a few farms, in protected places, at one corner of Manitoba's provincial flag and, of course, in the legislature. The "order of the buffalo hunt" is an honour bestowed by the government upon certain Manitobans for their life achievements. For most of us, however, the life-giving power of the original gift of the bison has been transformed into a symbolic statement about political hegemony.

Walking south from the main entrance, the visitor ascends three flights of stairs to the first floor. Flanked by the two lifeless bronze bison, facing north and posed as if ready to charge, the stairway occupies the centre of a three-story inner courtyard crowned by a skylight. Open corridors encircle it at the second and third floor levels. The head of Athena is carved in the keystone of the arch over the north entrance. On either side of her are lion's heads and above are carvings of the four virtues. A Medusa's head adorns the keystone of the towering southern arch, leading to the huge domed rotunda and legislative chamber. Watch out! There are also evil females.

The room known as the "pool of the black star" (modeled on an ancient Greek sacrificial chamber) is in the basement beneath the rotunda. Located directly beneath the dome upon which the "golden boy" rests, the "pool of the black star" occupies the very bowels of the legislature. This, I think, is the place where divine law is most clearly articulated in the building. The dome is cathedral-like; the pool contains a space for a sacrificial altar. The dome is filled with natural light; the pool is illuminated with artificial light. The contributions of classical Greece to civilization are symbolized by the eight-pointed black star in the centre of the pool and by the "golden boy" whereas the dome symbolizes the contributions of Christianity (Government of Manitoba 1969: 10). In the history of the British Isles, Christianity overcame paganism and subsequently became the justification for much of the expansion of the British Empire over hundreds of years which followed. Converting Aboriginal people to Christianity became an important justification and motivation for both English and French expansion into Canada. But it was in residential schools (modeled on the style of nineteenth century British orphanages), and not in the legislature, that the ideology-driven drama of assimilation was played out, with devastating results. This story, too, finds no reflection in the architecture and monuments in the Manitoba legislature.

One of the unique effects of the architecture of the legislature has to do with its auditory qualities. Sounds from all over the building are caught, distorted, and magnified within the space occupied by the "pool of the black star." Music played in this area during festive occasions is lifted upwards and outwards, echoing off the walls. The impression created is that here is a place where the voice of the people will truly be heard, and perhaps even lifted heavenward. But voices can be silenced here too. I know a woman who used to work in this building. She told me that she was raped one night in her workplace. No charges were pressed, because she knew the abysmal record of

the legal system in dealing with such cases, and she didn't have the emotional resources to fight such a battle. Her voice will never be heard in the legislature, and her story will never be marked in stone.

Behind the rotunda is the legislative assembly, where elected representatives of the people make the laws that govern Manitoba. It is a room steeped in ritual and symbolism, "committed to the expression of a single theme — the origin and majesty of law" (Government of Manitoba 1969: 12). On the south wall of the assembly room is an ornate fresco. In the centre, wisdom and knowledge flank the figure of justice. These virtues, unlike Lorenzetti's presentation of good and bad government discussed by Yates (1966: 92), are unaccompanied by vices, and in this representation, justice is not blind.

Both ancient lawmakers and English civil law are reflected in the frescoes in this chamber. Other virtues represented on the south wall are tolerance, fortitude, temperance, mercy, magnanimity, faith, hope, charity, and understanding (Government of Manitoba 1969: 12). These represent the ethical standards which govern, and presumably have always governed, the making of laws. That vices are not represented here is, I think, significant. Christianity separates heaven and hell, good and evil. They are perceived as opposing forces in eternal battle. In Christian ideology, heaven is found above the earth, and hell is deep within, a relationship reflected architecturally in the "pool of the black star" and the "golden boy" dome. The virtues in the assembly room are without vice, reinforcing the divine aspect of this secular law-making place. Yates' (1966: 36) discussion of Plato's theory that knowledge comes from a divine source, which becomes divine truth, is reflected in this dynamic — a Christianization of the classical virtues. Does this mean that only good can come out of this room; that vice, located elsewhere, is somehow transformed by these virtues? As in Christianity, the idea that we are all sinners is applicable; in the weakness of human beings, vice is manifest.

While missing from the iconography of the legislature, the vices can be found in the day-to-day doings of the assembly. On May 12, 1915, the Conservative government resigned in the face of accusations of fraud, abuse of public funds, and mismanagement of public works. The political life of the community had been dominated by "blindly partisan elections" (Morton 1967: 346). That justice is represented with open eyes in this room may very well be a reflection of the dual nature of blindness, which does not always ensure equal treatment under the law.

The process of making laws in the assembly room involves an elaborate set of rituals in which the elected members participate. Strict order is maintained over people's entrance into and exit out of the room. The speaker governs talking privileges and the symbol of that power is the mace. Seating arrangements are precise, and include areas for the media and the public. Youthful pages act as initiates, learning the process of law making. The myths encoded within the images adorning the legislative assembly room are enacted through the rituals of law making.

The Manitoba legislature was designed to express the ideology of power, both divine and secular. The architect, Frank Worthington Simon, reached far into the past for materials and images. For the most part, these are not drawn from the lifeways or mythology of the people who lived here first. With the exception of a statue of a seated warrior above the east pediment and the statue of Louis Riel outside the south entrance, there are no images of the Aboriginal people in, on, or around the legislature. Clearly, this is one of many omissions. Reading the building as a historical statement, I am led to wonder how Manitobans managed to reproduce; there are far too few women, and no children. War is glorified and commemorated. These are all death images, powerful in what they obscure as well as in their presence.

Fundamentally, the legislature is meant to enhance control by whomever has gained the power to occupy it. Ruling is done with laws today, but guns are prevalent in the monuments on the lawn, implying another kind of power when virtue fails and vice directs. The architecture is encoded with images that govern conduct in ethical, moral, and spiritual ways. In this place, myth has clear religious foundations, informed by divine truths. The kind of power represented by this architecture, and by the framework of buildings in the surrounding financial district, is different than the power of the individual, and sometimes even the power of the majority, depending on its nature. It is a power that says "what we have brought here is better than what was here before us." It is a power that says "maleness and whiteness and European-ness define who we are." It is a power that claims to speak for all the people, but makes only some visible. It is a power that erects a building marking a few important points in the temporal and spatial landscape of Manitoba, but misses many others.

Perspectives on the Centre

Maria Fowler

The Manitoba legislative building stands as a monument to the centralization of power on the Canadian prairies. Embodying the perspectives of imperial colonizers in its design and decorative art, the legislature allegorically celebrates the province's history through the themes, as indicated in its commemorative plaque, of wisdom, justice, and courage. As Marilyn Baker states, the legislature "stands today as a tribute to the accomplishments of a people who made a city out of a trading post, a province out of a wilderness, and a success out of a challenge that had begun so many years before on the vast prairies of western Canada" (1986: 8). Like a conventional text, the legislature can be read. Its embodied symbolic elements work as mnemonic fields which remind the reader of the legacy Baker describes. By including specific kinds of symbolism, the designers acted as architects of colonial memory. If we view the designers of the legislature as authors of a cultural text, then we must explore their intent and question the range of interpretative agency accessible to the viewer.

Derrida's notion of "spacing" (1976: 69) as the gap separating sign from signifier and text from writing, thereby allowing a multiplicity of possible meanings, may be usefully applied to the significance of symbol in this context. Meaning is articulated in the gap where the text (the building) and the audience (myself) intersect. Thus, my deconstruction of the symbolism of the legislative building is influenced by a myriad of factors positioning me. As Terence Hawkes writes, "a whole world of mediating presuppositions of an economic, social, aesthetic and political order intervenes between us and [words or texts] and shapes our response: to deny this is self deceiving" (1977: 154). Through this interpretive strategy, we can see that power of authorial intent is not absolute. My reading is informed by conventionally accepted interpretations of symbolic imagery, along with an exploration of the semiotic processes which give rise to such fields of meaning, each of which is mediated through the complexities of my own position as a subject.

Upon entering the legislative building, one passes through a wide short front room and then ascends the grand staircase in an ornate inner courtyard to arrive at the rotunda. The rotunda is the interior showpiece of the legislature. In its centre, one encounters an Italian marble balustrade surrounding a circular opening which allows for a view of the floor below. Glancing over the edge reveals a black star, seemingly off-centre and superimposed on taupe marble

flooring. One feels compelled to walk the circumference of the balustrade, intuitively expecting to find a view from which the star occupies a central position. But it always appears off-centre. Hugging the periphery of the circular frame, the star moves with the viewer, providing the illusion of a constant repositioning of its spatial location. The balustrade frames the star and becomes integrated to the image below. In moving around the frame, the viewer is drawn into, and becomes a part of the semantic field. Working as an index for the image below, the balustrade is "part of the sign itself," functioning as "a finding and focusing device placed between the observer and the image" (Schapiro 1985: 212). Viewed from this position the star becomes both everywhere and nowhere, ever present yet always elusive.

The architectural design, which leads to the viewer's circling of the balustrade and subsequent illusion of the movement of the star, is grounded in symbolism where, according to Chevalier and Gheerbrant, "the center should never be thought of as merely one fixed point" but rather "a storehouse from which flow the movements of the one towards the many, the inner towards the outer, the immanent towards the manifest" (1996: 173). This interpretation of the dynamics of centre, coupled with the notion that "god is a sphere whose center is everywhere and circumference is nowhere" (1996: 173) provides a striking metaphor for the ideals of democratic government. The omnipotence of centre relates to the voice of each citizen which permeates the walls of government. The desires of nation culminate in elected representatives who then legislate and make laws both desired by and governing the many.

The semantic field of the "pool of the black star" is analogous to the ideological field of democratic government. As Schapiro notes, "in the bounded field the center is predetermined by the boundaries or frame and the isolated figure is characterized in part by its place in the field" (1985: 214). Just as the frame of the balustrade predetermines the positioning of the star, the frame of democratic ideology predetermines government. Likewise, the isolated figure of the viewer is characterized by her place in the semantic field, just as the voting citizen is characterized by her place in the ideological field of democratic government. Such a system of government espouses its relationship with the voting public as just, and allows within the context of majority politics a level of agency for the individual voter.

Furthermore, the theme of justice emanates from the "pool of the black star" in the symbolic rendering of the number eight. An octagon forms the centre of the star, from which emanate eight triangular points. Both the number

eight, which is the tarot of justice, and the octagon are symbols of central equilibrium, representing the four cardinal and intermediate points. Eight and the octagon portray cosmic balance and hold a quality of mediation between the square and the circle. The legislative building embodies this quality of mediation between the desires of nation and those of the legislators who make manifest such desires.

The number eight is symbolically tied to the letter H as the eighth symbol in the alphabet. The base of the legislative building forms the letter H, which may be seen to be a symmetrical inversion of the sign of the cross. Thus, the four fundamental symbols of the cross, the centre, the circle, and the square all culminate in the "pool of the black star" which is the architectural centre of the building. By conventional interpretation, the architectural design of the "pool of the black star" becomes a symbolic rendering of the altars of the ancient Egyptians and Greeks. The altar, as an architectural centrepiece, thus reproduces on a small scale the symbolism of the temple as centre of the universe. Circling the balustrade above the altar, the viewer orbits a wobbling polestar, and is drawn into the cosmic sky.

The "pool of the black star" symbolically embodies political notions of justice drawn from a history of Western democratic tradition. Acting as an architectural centrepiece, the star, combined with the balustrade as frame, symbolizes the relationship between voting citizens and a central power which organizes the province. Individuals are characterized by their place in the ideological field of democratic government and as such, have differential access to justice. The democratic Manitoba of the 1920s had only just included women as voting citizens and would wait another three decades before Aboriginal peoples would become universally enfranchised. The designers of the building, as architects of memory, represented perspectives of justice based in the long-standing, and often exclusive tradition of democratic government.

Who or What is Being Sacrificed in the "Pool of the Black Star"?

Kara Peters Unrau

In *The Art of Memory* (1966), Francis Yates discusses a mnemonic technique described by early Roman writers such as Cicero and Quintilian. Although the general principles of this art focus on its utility in the mental realm, this practice can also be applied to physical reality. My discussion of the basic aspects of this tool outlined by Yates shows that they also apply to the Manitoba legislative

building — a monument that contains aspects of our cultural memory concerning government and power.

Mnemonics, the art of memory, is a method used by ancient Greek and Roman orators to increase their capacity to remember key points in long speeches. It was especially useful for orators who could neither read nor write and hence depended on oral recall. Although using words alone is possible, it is much easier to remember images which have messages associated with them. Thus, this system involves placing segments of information within a known space imagined in the mind — a well-known path or feature of the landscape. Greek and Roman orators often used public buildings as memory storehouses. Within them, they could find places or loci in which to store key images or words. To access that information, the orator takes a mental stroll through her image of the building, retrieving the details from the various nooks and crannies in which she placed them. The premier work on the art of memory, the *Ad Herennium*, argues that the images used must be distinct enough that their recollection comes easily (quoted in Yates 1966: 9-10). Yates suggests that memory images need not only be distinct in visual terms, but also in terms of the emotions that are associated with them (quoted in Yates 1966: 16).

If we assume with the ancient orators that buildings can be used to encode memory, then features incorporated in the design and decoration of such buildings might also serve to evoke certain culturally constructed memories. Public edifices hold broad sociocultural implications. Architecture can show the progression and transformation of ideas as our culture changes. Our buildings therefore hold significant aspects of our collective memory. Individual structures can be likened to statements of the predominant values and ideologies of their time. Applying this technique, I will analyse the Manitoba legislature as an expression of the early twentieth century British ideology of power.

My experience with the Manitoba legislative building is recent. As I did not grow up in Winnipeg, I did not have the benefit of participating in public school tours of the legislature. My involvement in politics has taken me there only once, and that was during a protest. Before making an in-depth study of the building in a university semiotics course, it had not occurred to me that the legislature was steeped in mysticism, or that it could be read as a cultural text. These ideas first struck me as I was exploring the building with a tour guide. During that tour I was most struck by the "pool of the black star," located on the ground floor of the rotunda. Although the guide did not discuss its

arcane symbolism, she indicated quite matter-of-factly that the design of the pool had been copied from ancient sacrificial chambers. As I studied other aspects of the design of the legislature, I became more convinced that the central domed rotunda with its sacrificial chamber was modelled on the altars of ancient Greek temples. But who or what is being sacrificed in the "pool of the black star"? And what does the concept of sacrifice say about our cultural memory regarding government and power?

Although the room housing the "pool of the black star" is apparently modeled on an ancient Egyptian sacrifical chamber, many of its decorative features seem to be of ancient Greek origin. First, the egg and dart symbols surrounding the inner dome of the rotunda are copied from ancient Greek temples. These images' placement in re-occurring rows on the railing surrounding the upper viewing level parallels their Greek placement around the altar proper (Hersey 1988: 34-35). Eggs were commonly sacrificed in ancient Greece and were believed to represent the soul in its embryonic form. Second, the columns surrounding the inner dome of the rotunda parallel the columns used in Greek temples signifying boundaries and jurisdiction (Hersey 1988: 44). Third, trophyism — the display of sacrificial elements — was common in Greek temple iconography (Hersey 1988: 20) and also figures prominently in the interior design of the legislature. For example, stone statues of bison skulls in the ceiling above the stairwell leading from the inner courtyard to the rotunda and bronze statues of bison on pedestals to either side of the stairs symbolize a history of greed and sacrifice.

The basic layout of the Manitoba legislature presents other tantalising hints about the sacrificial chamber. Based on the "H" design, two east-west axes comprise the north and south wings of the building. A central axis links these wings, running from the main entrance in the centre of the north wing to the legislative assembly room in the centre of the south wing. The "pool of the black star" is in the middle of the domed rotunda, in the centre of the north-south corridor linking the two wings. In Byzantine and later European churches, domes symbolized the vault of the sky. This architectural feature stems back to that time when church and state were synonymous. I was unable to find any literature about the significance of the "pool of the black star", but the domed ceiling over it, and the "golden boy" who stands outside and on top of it, attest to its classical heritage.

In Greek mythology, sacrifices appeased deities in times of great tension (Hughes 1991: 73). The courage of the young men or women who gave their

lives to ward off enemies or plague was meant to inspire or placate the populace enduring problems or impending crises. Historically, leaders were responsible for the well-being of their subjects. Frazer's discussion of the symbolism of the golden bough (1935: 10-16) posits that when a ruler failed to live up to the expectations of his followers, he could be ritually sacrificed; eventually this practice was replaced by the sacrifice of a slave in place of royalty to appease dissatisfied constituents.

So who or what are we sacrificing in the legislature? I got a lot of quizzical looks as I posed this question to my friends in hopes of an impromptu brainstorming session. Despite our criticism of the government, I don't think anybody has accused our elected representatives of actually performing ritual killings to appease the gods. What were the architects thinking when they recreated a sacrificial chamber of ancient Egyptian and Greek design in the building which holds our provincial government?

The sacrificial chamber within the Manitoba legislature, then, could symbolize the tension between the vision that Western culture holds for this "promised land" and the reality in which we find ourselves as colonizing newcomers. The sacrificial altar is located along the path to the room in which our government convenes. One must pass around the "pool of the black star" and beneath the dome crowned by the "golden boy" to reach the legislative chamber from the main entrance. This idol, the "golden boy", facing north and symbolizing our ideal of the good life, but residing well out of reach and even past the firmament of the domed ceiling, focuses our vision and hears our request to placate our anxieties.

Our elections become the process whereby we choose a sacrificial victim, deciding which of our ideals (and public servants) we will place upon the altar of hope for the attainment of a higher vision of well being. We cast lots as to which sacrifice we are willing to make in order to achieve our concept of the good life. Some years, we may give up income through taxes; other years, we may renounce our social programs. Rhetorically, we take the vision of the majority to give offerings to our secular deity of democracy. Our sacrifices do not effect each citizen the same way. Some, like the sacrificial lamb, are fatally wounded as their cultural identities are lost. The sick sleep in the hallways of our hospitals; thousands of jobs are downsized. We concur with these sacrifices because of the promise that a greater prize will be achieved in the end. But for too many of us, this reward is as out of reach as the "golden boy", standing past the firmament, high above the altar in the "pool of the black star".

What does this say about our cultural memory, our government, and its power? The sacrifice reminds us that this relationship is not one in which the legislative gods altruistically seek to work in our best interest. Our tribute bargains for the golden boy's favour, as our offerings attempt to placate him. Democratically electing a legislative assembly and giving it power means that we all must give up some of our individual ideals in order to attain our collective vision. The form of governance symbolically encoded in the architecture of the Manitoba legislature demands tribute and homage. There is no element of servitude or philanthropy in the relationship between the government and its constituents. As we walk through the sacrificial altar on the way to the room in which our state makes decisions, we are reminded of the tension between the ideal and the reality.

Our architecture is indeed a vast storehouse of images of cultural memory. As we stroll through the nooks and crannies of the Manitoba legislature, we access the information we have stored there. The iconography of this monument provides sanctuary to mediate the tensions and contradictions between our utopian ideal, and the actual society governance brings.

Lacuna

Arden Hill

Two hundred and fifty feet separate the highest and lowest points of the Manitoba legislature. Structural opposites like high and low keep thinkers of many schools and politics engaged in debate: metaphysics vs. epistemology, nature vs. society, the black star vs. the golden Adonis. The distance between the gold plated sculpture atop this building and the archaic place of worship underneath has been calculated, walked through, breathed in, celebrated with laughter, and filled with the sound of flutes, drums, and voices. It has been engorged, emptied, forgotten, and regulated. Two hundred and fifty feet of near-empty space form the centre of this building. Surrounding and defining this interval are allegorical monuments and frescoes honouring a history of war and peace, of mythic lands populated by hard-working farmers, and of chequered politics. Outside, at the cardinal points of the compass, stand larger-than-life sculptures celebrating other aspects of Manitoba's history. Unlikely stone characters from bygone eras attest to visions of grandeur, wealth, and power. In between is a gap, a missing portion — a lacuna.

In terms of its iconography, the legislature stands alone in Winnipeg. Not just for the single purpose of conducting business, it was designed to

project an illusion of perfection. It serves, in Michel Foucault's terms, "to create a space that is other, another real space, as perfect, as meticulous, as well arranged as ours is messy, ill constructed and jumbled" (1986: 27). As such, the building functions as a designated urban mnemonic (Soja 1995: 18), designed with contradictions that combine to form a heterogeneous account of history in a postmodern space. The legislature, then, neutralizes or inverts the set of relations that it designates, mirrors or reflects.

It is also what Michel Foucault would call "heterotopic" in its juxtaposition in a single real space of several apparently incompatible architectural styles, historical figures, and symbolic elements. (Foucault used public spaces such as libraries, museums, fairs, brothels, and asylums to illustrate this concept.) Benjamin Genocchio states heterotopia is characterized by "the coexistence in an impossible space of a large number of fragmentary, possible, though incommensurable orders or worlds" (1995: 36). Such juxtaposition, he continues, "is so incongruous and disruptive to our normal sense of order that we are unable to realize such perversity within a coherent and familiar domain" (1995: 36).

Heterotopically arranged, like satellites on the landscape surrounding the legislature, are 20 or so allegorical sculptures of various characters in Canadian history, spanning the last 300 years. Certain figures, like James Wolfe (1727-1759), the English general who won the battle of Quebec, and Taras Shevchenko (1814-1861), the celebrated Ukrainian poet, occupy adjacent spaces on the grounds. Wolfe and Shevchenko, who were not contemporaries, are nevertheless comrades in the legislature's constructed world. By the same token, a sculpture of Louis Riel, the Métis intellectual and rebel, is spatially juxtaposed with a monument commemorating victims of the Holocaust. Such anachronistic collocations somehow fit together in the building's surreal sculptural world.

Inside, the visitor finds many other historical anachronisms. Sculptures, bas-reliefs, and frescoes depicting Egyptian, Greek, Roman, and medieval Christian icons compete for space on the interior walls. Ostentatious materials such as brass, gold, marble, and limestone create an overbearing and heterogeneous presence. On walking through the front door, visitors are greeted by a security island. Looking to the right is a gift shop. A few steps further into the interior are two gigantic brass buffalo guarding the romanesque staircase leading up to the central lacuna. Around the staircase are sculptures of Athena, the virtues, Medusa heads, and — just below the ceiling skylight

— bison skulls. Woven into the building, these icons signify the mythic history of this heterotopic edifice.

The interior and exterior design of the legislature is outrageous, yet its embodied contradictions are muted unless one consciously deconstructs the iconography. The silence inside is equally outrageous, given the building's purpose as a public forum for debate. Not built on a sound metaphysics, the legislature is an ideological impossibility, with a lacuna or space in its centre. Yet by design, this space is ideologically and conceptually sound and possible. What are the consequences of eliminating the impossibility in this heterotopia?

The legislative lacuna is reminiscent of the fissure between Saussure's "signified" and "signifier" (1959: 67), of Lacan's "I" and its reflection the "ego" (1977: 2), of Peirce's sunflower and the sun (in Innis 1985: 6). It encapsulates Derrida's concept of "*différence*," the simultaneous deferring and differing that constitutes identity (1997). The lacuna is a reified representation of the space between the structural oppositions of society (represented by the "golden boy") to nature (represented by the black star). It is the natural hiatus between the mental concept (*langue*) and the individual expression (*parole*). As Terence Hawkes observes, "The true nature of things may be said to lie not in things themselves but in the relationships, which we construct, then perceive, between them" (1977: 17).

Derrida's deconstruction of the concept of centrality evokes the central lacuna of the Manitoba legislature: "It was necessary to begin thinking that there was no centre, that the centre could not be thought in the form of a present-being, that the centre had no natural site, that it was not a fixed locus but a function, a sort of non-locus in which an infinite number of sign-substitutions came into play" (1978: 280). What function can I give to the lacuna, as a non-locus of an infinite number of sign substitutions? Is it simply an empty space or silent gap? The legislature's centrality is more than this; it is a heterotopic space intertwined in a network of contradicting ideological relations, which are realized in the form of a blank or floating signifier. The signifier that is not a signified itself breaks the continuity of signification. This dialectical model requires a continuous sign-substitution where the elements are themselves dialectics. A blank signifier in this process temporizes the dialectic. The result of a relation with a blank element is a representation of the initial sign or a neutralization of the dialectic. The signification ends.

The legislature reifies this discontinuous signification and celebrates it. The blank is the lacuna, a space that is neither a signified nor a signifier.

Visitors to the rotunda in the legislature have used their individual voices or the sound of drums and flutes subjectively to en-signify the lacuna, but only temporarily. Most of the time, the regulation of the legislature as a type of panopticon (see Foucault 1979: 205) maintains the rotunda as a blank or a silent space — an impossible one. Yet truly silent spaces are also impossible. According to John Cage (1961: 61), something always happens to create sound. Can this also be true of signification? Is this the function of a heterotopia — to signify non-objectively?

The character of Manitoba's legislative building encourages the public to celebrate ideological impossibility. Guides offer informative tours illustrating the contradictions and the current state of heterotopology. They will go as far as to suggest and even point out the influences of the legislative building's central contradiction (society and nature) in other contradictions (public and private, politics and art). Although the lacuna appears mute, this deafening silence defines and maintains it. The Manitoba legislative building is ideologically impossible. And yet it is a conceptual space that should not be ignored. For people in Winnipeg, the "leg" is our city's centre, so despite its ideological and structural contradictions, it represents possibility. But possibility for what? For whatever the security guards do not see or hear.

The Final Word: Birthing a New Legislature

Barbara Wakshinski

> Architecture is the art that so disposes and adorns the edifices raised by man for what-so-ever use, that the sight of them contributes to his mental health, power, and pleasure. Therefore, when we build, let us think that we build forever. Let it not be for present delight nor for present use alone. Let it be such work as our descendants will thank us for; and let us think, as we lay stone on stone, that a time is come when these stones will be held sacred because our hands have touched that and that men will say as they look upon the labour wrought substance of them, "See, this our fathers did for us" (John Ruskin, cited in Baker 1986:5).

Ruskin represents the sentiments held by Manitoba legislators responsible for constructing what they deemed a structure of grandiose splendour. This building was also described as a citadel of courage, wisdom, and justice in which elected representatives of the people would decide matters of the day.

The Manitoba legislature was built by men for men. When construction began in 1913, women were, in the eyes of the law, nonpersons, and were not

permitted to vote. In the social division between men and women, women led lives largely excluded from the public realm and were relegated to the private domain of the domestic household. This exclusion is reflected in the lack of female images in and around the legislature. Nearly all the statues project the worldview of real men in glorified positions. Maleness is extolled and immortalized in statues of La Verendrye, Lord Selkirk, General Wolfe, and the Marquis of Dufferin. Other masculine imagery includes the "golden boy" who adorns the very top of the legislative building, the two male bison who stand guard inside the building, and an unidentified Aboriginal man sitting alongside an unidentified white man over the east pediment. The architect may have thought that by gazing at these statues, all men would be inspired towards greatness, thereby legitimating and perpetuating masculine domination in the public sphere.

With the exception of Queen Victoria's statue, real women are absent. Feminine imagery exists in the pediment above the main entrance, but in all cases women are depicted as symbols of fecundity, thereby perpetuating male appropriation of female physiology. However, deep within the legislature there is a symbol of womanhood far more powerful than the representations adorning the exterior of the building. In a circular room known as the legislative chamber, murals painted by Augustus Vincent Tack depict the virtues. These are male images that have been re-inscribed by our patriarchal value system to reinforce male myths of dominance. Female physiology is manipulated into personifying the ideals of tolerance, fortitude, prudence, temperance, faith, hope, and charity. In this chamber, which is the birthplace of provincial laws, male values penetrate the female physiology symbolized by the virtues, thereby beginning a process of conception and gestation. A successful conception sees a bill debated through three readings — trimesters — before being born as a new law. Female physiology is once again manipulated by predominantly male legislators, who in violating the figurative womb of the chamber begin a process culminating in the extrusion of their newborn child through the vaginal canal. It's a boy!

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