THE PLACE OF MEMORY and Identity[1]

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CANADA HAS LONG STRUGGLED TO INTEGRATE PEOPLES SEPARATED BY GEOGRAPHY, HISTORY, ETHNICITY, CLASS AND GENDER BY *NURTURING AN IDENTIFICATION WITH A STORIED-PLACE*. THE GEOGRAPHY OF IDENTITY SEEKS TO UNDERSTAND HOW PARTICULAR MATERIAL SETTINGS ARE TRANSFORMED FROM VERNACULAR LIVED-IN SITES INTO PSYCHIC TERRAINS THAT ARE EMOTIVE PROMPTS FOR VALUES AND THAT UNDERLIE A PROJECT OF SOCIAL COHESION.[2] IN OTHER WORDS, THE GEOGRAPHY OF IDENTITY PROMOTES A COLLECTIVE AWARENESS OF BELONGING THROUGH THE POWER OF A GEOGRAPHY OF SYMBOLIC PLACES AND A CHRONOLOGY OF SYMBOLIC TIMES THAT ARE INTEGRAL TO THE POLITICAL RATIONALE OF NATIONAL-STATE FORMATION. BUT TIMES AND PLACES ARE CHANGING. WHILE BESET BY THE FAMILIAR FRACTURES OF "WESTERN ALIENATION" AND "QUEBEC SEPARATISM," CANADA IS ALSO ENCOUNTERING THE COMPLEXITIES OF GLOBALIZATION IN A COSMOPOLITAN WORLD WHERE DIASPORIC CONNECTIONS ADVANCE PLURALISM AND HYBRIDITY RATHER THAN THE COMFORTING, IF ILLUSORY, SECURITY OF MONOLITHIC IDENTITY. THESE HAVE TO BE ACCOMMODATED BY NEW APPROACHES TO CONSTRUCTING NEW GEOGRAPHIES OF IDENTITY.

"CONSTRUCTING" NATIONAL IDENTITY

The diagnostic components of nation-state formation are political independence, the growth of state power, the development of military might and the consolidation of territory.[3] But the formation of a state-nationalism requires the nurturing of ideas that bind people *together*. Such national cohesion requires a sense of collective identity through the promotion of a sense of shared historical experience. This is especially necessary where "*new*" state-nations have had to confront the problems of assimilating diverse peoples into the body-politic and establishing a degree of national homogeneity or common central purpose.

This begs the question of whether these strategies are necessary in a *civil / liberal* national-state.[4] Civil, plural and liberal nationalisms are often thought to be rational and inclusive, whereas ethnic nationalism privileges a more emotional, exclusionary – and, all too often, pernicious – celebration of group identity. Yet, many civil / liberal states have pursued a *nationalizing* agenda by nurturing an emotional attachment to the *idea* of the state. They have attempted to subdue complex realities of plurality and diversity by constructing iconic landscapes and mythic narratives intended to nurture a cohesive collective memory.[5] In this way, the putative values of a particular national formation are rendered as a "symbolic space." This concept is central to Anderson's "imagined community"[6] and has been rendered variously as "representational space,"[7] "patriotic landscapes,"[8] "landscapes of sovereignty,"[9] "discursive landscapes"[10] and "memoryscapes."[11] All of these concepts convey the same meaning – the cultivation of a collective memory of a mythic history, acted out in a symbolically loaded place, reified in the present and projected into the future.[12]

To this end, national mythologies and symbols are manipulated to encourage identification with the state and reinforce its continuity and ubiquity. Through various devices, otherwise detached individuals are encouraged to recognize one another as members of a larger group, sharing a unified political space, and identifying with a common historical narrative of historical development.

PLACE AND IDENTITY

The central premise of the geography of identity is human attachment to particular spaces. People live in places and identify with them, or are alienated by them. Monuments, streets, neighbourhoods, buildings, churches and parks are all material *things*, but they also evoke specific kinds of meanings and serve as spatial coordinates of identity.[13] Material places and their representations are always ideological statements and it follows, therefore, that as society evolves and changes, places become dynamic and reflexive sites of identity formation. That is, there is an ongoing reciprocal relationship between people and the places they inhabit. People produce places, and yet they derive identities from them.

Certainly, we fully appreciate how place is important to non-western, premodern societies in the cultural ecological approach to subsistence strategies, social organization and ideology.[14] The argument may be extended to all societies. Self-knowledge and personal identity cannot be reconstructed without place-worlds. Not merely neutral containers, geography, locale, setting, place – whatever you wish to call them – are complicit in strategies of cultural survival. Places are defined by tangible material realities that can be seen, touched, mapped and located. But places are constituted by more than materiality. While they function as settings for social and economic reproduction, they also provide the stage where group-identity is acted out within the group, with other groups, and with government and other institutions. Through daily living in particular places, the abstraction of space is transformed into experience of place. Both a cognitively derived *knowing* about

place and an intuitive *sense* of place are profoundly integrated into peoples' identity.[15]

But there can be both positive and negative effects from this interaction of place and experience. As situated experiences construct places, human reaction to them can reflect alienation, ambivalence, as well as attraction. Places of natural or social disasters become sites of negative remembrance that make their own contribution to identities through "place-images" that become central to daily life and social practice.[16]

However, it may be argued that modernity has challenged shared identities and attendant social cohesion. Long-standing localisms are being replaced by the insecurities and destabilizing experiences of post-industrialism, late-capitalism and globalization. Perhaps it is not surprising that an array of initiatives referred to as "glocalisation" underscores the need for identification with the familiar and the particular, in a world beset by the dominance of the foreign and the general.[17]

MEMORIES OF STORIED PLACES

From an unitary perspective of the nationalizing-state, national identity is enhanced if the populace comes to constitute an *imagined community* possessing a *collective memory*.[18] From this perspective, the past does not merely evolve into the present, neither is it preserved through some objective process of record keeping. Rather, it is *socially constructed* through archives, museums, school curricula, official histories, monuments and public displays. These produce collective memories in which national history is rendered as a mythic narrative acted out on, bounded by, and bonded with, particular places. To this end, history, memory and identity are constantly being renegotiated to cultivate a people's identification with the nationalizing-state through foundation myths, heroic narratives, the personification of assumed national qualities and the identification with particular places. Ideally, the national metanarrative should reconcile social fragments with representations of order and harmony in the imagined community of the nationalizing-state. A shared narrative is crucial in ensuring that we are all on the page.

Such "narrative poetics" influence identity through the stories communities and individuals tell about how they came to be.[19] Always spatially grounded, they are associated with specific locales that become imbued with historically produced cultural meanings – the *genius loci*, spirit of place.[20] Indeed, perhaps the best container of place-memories are toponyms, the place-names that are so often the rich markers of place-based stories, events and associations. Often only in the inherited mental geography of places, they are prompts to a mental geography that is fundamental to peoples' identities.[21]

LANDSCAPES AND INSCAPES

The term for culturally loaded geographies is "*landscape*." As assemblages of humanly produced material form, they constitute cultural records arranged palimpsest-like through time and space that may be interrogated as artefacts and evidence. From this anthropology-driven perspective of landscapes as assemblages of material culture-traits and complexes, the focus has shifted to a more nuanced decoding of their symbolic meaning.[22]

Others have taken these ideas further by looking at landscape as a memory-system. People, events and their spatial reference points become reinforced in the collective memory by informal and formal acts of commemoration. These "landmarks" provide spatial and temporal co-ordinates for remembering.[23] Similarly, symbolically loaded sites and ideas come to be *lieux de mémoire* which conflate place, memory and history. Of course, all memories are located in places.[24] But rather than geography being merely the stage for the acting out of history, the two are closely imbricated throughout as chronotopes, points at which time and space intersect and blend together.[25]

Because of the emotive power of imagined place in marshalling people's sense of belonging, symbolic landscapes are often personified as homeland, motherland, fatherland and heimat. In this way, a nation's geographical setting is transformed into a visual condensation of political and cultural values and a depository of symbolic space and time.

MONUMENTS

Whereas landscapes often exist in general categories, monuments focus attention on specific places and events and are central to this endeavour of constructing symbolic landscapes of power.[26] *Statuemania*, the rage for commemorative statues, peaked in 1870-1914 throughout Europe and North America. In an age of increased loss of identity in a rapidly changing world, monuments anchored "collective remembering" in material sites that served as rallying points for a shared common memory and identity. They were the material signifiers of ideas that were intended to be immortalized. Perhaps more importantly, however, they represented the personification of the nation- or nationalizing-state, the transmission of mythic histories, a material and visual connection with the past and the legitimization of authority. Intended to function as visual prompts for the collective memorizing of an official state narrative, monuments depicted the human form in colossal heroic statues that rendered abstract principles in allegorical allusion. If effective, such public monuments were consensus builders and focal points for a visual condensation of an imagined national chronicle rendered in heroic symbolism. Often located in heroic pantheons established in national capitals, they were also carefully sited to underscore the particular symbolic role of particular places: the Statue of Liberty in New York, Vercingétorix at Alesia, King Alfred in Winchester.[27] Thus, portrait sculpture has joined flags, anthems, national chronicles, currency, coins, etc; as symbolic devices for building a sense of community, identity and nationalism.

But how do we interpret the meaning, significance and effectiveness of the monumental landscapes of power that have been constructed around us?[28] Monumental space cannot be approached simply through an interpretation of its iconography; its significance is a product of extensive webs of meaning. Indeed, it is the public reaction to monuments that determines whether or not they serve as passive visual statements contributing to social cohesion, or as active elements in a public discourse of redefinition. Elite groups and political authority have always sought to organize public space to communicate to the public a particular kind of national consciousness, a conformity to a particular

public order. Often, a patriotism is nurtured that is akin to a civil state-religion in which capitals, cemeteries, national monuments and cenotaphs are elevated to sacred spaces. Nevertheless, rather than being sites of consensus building, public spaces and their population of carefully selected monuments and statuary could become contested terrains.[29]

One problem is that monuments last too long. Memorials attempt to freeze ideas in space and time, and bronze, iron, marble and granite ensure forms become archaic and remain as enigmatic elements in the landscape. They are frozen in space while time moves on around them, their rigid materiality ensuring their estrangement from the ever-changing values of the society in which they are located. Ritualized remembrance and performance do ensure the relevance of some monuments, but others receive the ultimate insult of neglect, anonymity and disinterest. Still in others, contemporary events challenge the original values of the site, appropriate it for new causes, and thus revitalize them as visual statements of contemporary, albeit dissonant, values. Desecrating a statue amounts to iconoclasm; eliding it from the landscape is an exercise of power; re-erecting it means a correction and re-appraisal.[30]

Monuments, plaques and other mnemonic things always perform an action that is governed by conventions, contribute to the formation of social relationships, and often involve the sanction of prevailing systems of power. And as such, they are often contested.

CAPITAL / CAPITOL COMPLEX

Another principal site of place-making and remembering is the national capital. The *capital / capitol complex* is a focal point in the national imagination and, consequently, pantheons of heroic figures are incorporated into the public grounds and ceremonial spaces.[31] Not merely the locus of administrative power, the national-state capital consists of three components: the *capital* is the city housing the administration of the state or national government; the *capitol* is the building that houses government's lawmakers; while the *capital / capitol complex* consists not only of the capitol / parliament building itself, but also all the associated structures of government. Thus, capitol / parliament buildings are intended to be imposing, impressive, evocative of the dignity, majesty, power of the state, and also render visibly the symbolic bases of that power through the performance of mass ceremonials in ritual spaces.

Certainly, this was true in the late nineteenth century for such capitals as London, Paris, Berlin and Washington, as they embarked on the construction of spaces and landscapes of sovereignty suitable for choreographing the drama of state power. They became assemblages of inspirational monuments, imposing state architecture and theatrical civic display. Intended to be consensus builders, they were the focal points for identifying with the national chronicle.[32]

Like other political regimes, Canada also developed its *capital / capitol complex* as Ottawa was transformed into a symbolic space that reflected national ambitions and annexed other cultural spaces into the national domain.[33] Not simply a matter of vistas and arrangements of public buildings, the capital-complex increasingly came to be loaded with symbolic icons that rendered in allegorical terms the nation's progress from colony, through empire, to state-nation. Three nested-symbolic spaces may be recognized: the Parliament Buildings completed in the civil-Gothic "Canadian National Style;" Parliament Hill was populated by an array of political figures in appropriate poses; and the region beyond the cast-iron fence surrounding the Hill is being gradually transformed into a "ceremonial city," complete with suitable "ritual spaces" for the performance of state power and the celebration of a putative national identity.

These national sacred spaces – capitals, cemeteries, national monuments, cenotaphs – attempt to communicate "privileged narratives" of the national experience and cultivate a national consciousness. Yet, there is rarely consensus on the imagery of public statuary, national heroes and political iconography. Thus, paradoxically, objects, ceremonies and spaces that were intended to be symbolic of public order and to communicate public identification with that order, often become sites of contestation.[34]

PERFORMING IDENTITY

Monumental sculptures in public places relied upon solitary or small group interactions between the object and the individual. Where its location is appropriate, however, a monument may become the focal point of a ceremonial activity where the public may experience mythic-history through orchestrated commemorations and controlled spectacle.[35] Ideally, the involvement of large numbers of people in ritualized performances of remembering at these places reinforces societies' bonding with them, what they represented and with each other. National holidays, political extravaganzas, sporting events and the rites-of-passage of the great are all opportunities for the expression of a state-scripted national solidarity.[36]

With the democratizing of political power, publicly-performed ritual and ceremony became essential elements of the political process. Existing or newly planned *space-containers* became the sites for public ceremonies, public entertainment and public participation in choreographed performances. This practice of large-scale crowd choreography in public spaces may be linked to several contemporary developments: labour demonstrations; modern warfare; stage spectacles; cinema epics and dance reviews; marching bands; commercialized sport; and a general shift to visualization in culture in general. The transition from public sculpture-as-viewed object to public-as-sculpted masses required nation-wide participation in the theatrics of ideology in appropriate spaces: thousands performed as on-site actors; more thousands served as on-site spectators; and millions more were incorporated as distanced participant-voyeurs as listeners and viewers through national and international radio and film.

In this way, totalitarian states applied a whole panoply of devices such as marches, pageants, mass meetings, party rallies and military spectacles in which viewers and participants were reduced to the role of cogs in the collective machine of the state.[37] But non-totalitarian societies also exhibited a growing predilection for spectacle and such "ephemeral" mass-events as coronations, state-funerals and commemorations of significant state anniversaries. Ritualized and repetitive mass-performances were co-opted to cultivate the national imagination through spectacles and displays.

They were intended to prompt, nurture and focus specific recollections of the past and advance particular emotions, beliefs and ideologies. Encoded in metaphorical and symbolic form, carnivalesque rites, ceremonies and popular-festivities link people with a mythic past and reconstruct a present that promises a golden future. In this way, individuals are encouraged to see themselves as part of a collectivity with shared objectives. This combination of monuments, commemorations and performances can become a powerful mnemonic system that produces a mental geography of identity.

Indeed, the orchestration of the festivities and celebrations in landscapes of power has often been a conscious exercise to cultivate political consensus and suppress dissent or difference. They have often been located in times and places where dominant ideologies are being contested. They need to be analyzed, not for what messages are being transmitted and displayed, but also in terms of how they are being received and what reactions they elicit.[38]

COMMODIFICATION OF PLACE

But it's not only the nationalizing-state that turns to the manipulation of place and remembered history. Private enterprise and all levels of government – municipal, provincial and federal – recognize the economic potential of marketing places, stories and heritage as didactic, experiential and escapist enterprises.[39] A growing demand for the consumption of historical-tourism and entertainment has prompted an array of theme parks, ghost tours, romanticised murals and "historical" re-enactments and displays.[40] Perhaps prompted by nostalgia as our lives and place lose their distinctiveness in globalized economic and cultural morphings, the past is being rendered as a place for renewal and pleasure. Paradoxically, the onset of the "global" is prompting the rediscovery of the "local."

Certainly, the role of "heritage" is now being discussed in the context of marketing place in placeless times, and repackaged as an economic resource as cultural capital that is integral to plans for regional development. But it is also an exercise in identity-formation. Places are reinventing themselves as they reconstruct their heritage for representation to others. Heritage formation is also part of a dynamic process in which the past is being introduced into present definitions of local identity in the context of Late-Capitalism, the resolution being arbitrated, not by the muse of history, but by the *real-politik* of economics and community continuity.

CONCLUSION: DÉJÀ VU ALL OVER AGAIN

Clearly, identity and sense of belonging in the modern world are complex concepts and most people are effected by plural connections. Class, gender, religion and ethnicity compete with local, regional and national associations. Finally, globalization, migration and trans-national identities are challenging the liberal, nation-bound concept of citizenship and sovereignty. It follows, therefore, that any theorizing on the construction of Canadian identity has to embrace the challenge posed by peoples' nested sets of identities in a multinational Canada and a globalizing world.

For some, the preferred model for this Canada is a civil-nationalism based upon a rational adherence to liberal principles, rather than an ethnic nationalism characterized by emotional links to "blood and soil." And yet, despite this increasingly inclusive liberal agenda, internal divisions remain. For some, a persistent hybridity manifests itself in fundamental alienation, contention and antagonistic cultural differences that deny a putative social cohesion. It also challenges the dominant culture and advances counter-narratives for the future nationalizing-state.

Given these issues, what are the strategies for history-making, place-making, monumentalism and commemoration in a forward-looking Canada of the 21st century?

- Is there a need for new meta-narratives to be rendered in future strategies of commemoration and remembrance? These should nurture a civil / liberal nationalism based on an adherence to appropriate values to accompany the established initiatives of distinctive place, people and story.
- How can unity be achieved through the celebration of diversity? Identity, even plural identity, requires some degree of shared values, and a nationalizing-state must advocate a set of cohesive core values and celebrate them.
- How do we define new heroes, new historic events and new historic sites? It follows from revisiting former meta-narratives where peoples and events that were once silenced or sidelined could now be fore-grounded and highlighted. Others need to be discovered and to become the subjects of new monuments, commemorations or narratives.
- Do we need to revisit and edit the commemorative texts that dominate our mnemonic landscapes? As social values change, certain structures and places may need to be re-evaluated in terms of their contribution to the new Canada. Indeed, some of the existing representations may be regarded as offensive and hurtful and should be elided.
- Is there a need for a new paradigm of heritage commemoration? Rather than being declarative sites of conceptual closure, perhaps they should be ambiguous sites of individually negotiated memory at which there is a public construction of identity through an engagement with ambiguity, complexity and pluralism.
- Are there too many visual interventions in the landscape? The innovative concept of didactic commemorative plaques of the late nineteenth century is now so numerous in some places that it is close to becoming heritage pollution, while its effectiveness is also questionable.
- Can we unclutter valued heritage space by better use of "virtual realities?" New generations of Canadians may be more inclined to visit websites than heritage sites, and participate in all of the diverse means of information dissemination and virtual reality that that medium has to offer.
- And certainly at this particular juncture in our national journey, should we be thinking outside of the "national box" with its well-worn tools of patriotism? Is there not a need, more than ever, to continue to nurture a national culture that celebrates its place in the global system of diversity, with all the opportunities that that entails?
- All of these initiatives must be directed to the mission of achieving a social cohesion in what some have called the "first postmodern state." What are needed are initiatives that bind us together in a polity that is sensitive to

difference, while still pursuing commonly agreed upon goals and national priorities.

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