

EDITORIAL INTRODUCTION

Reassembling Ottawa

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Ottawa is dismissed in scholarship, as in its popular image, as a pretty city of cold, bureaucratic order. Ottawa has been called “Westminster in the Wilderness,” the “Washington of the North” (Laurier in Woods 1980), a snow globe (Ramlochand in Rombout 2001: 83) and a doll house (Hebert in Rombout 2001: 75). These last two images frame Ottawa as static and artificial, akin to tourist kitsch. However, Ottawa’s image conceals many stories of urban conflict: neighbourhoods razed for the development of a ‘capital’, city planning battles between the crown corporation responsible for Ottawa’s ‘beautification’ and the municipal government. Several interrelated questions propel this special issue on *Ottawa Studies*. How do *national* imaginaries, images and identities become entwined in *local* urban space? How do public buildings, city streets and parks reinscribe but also disrupt the production of national space? And what about the faces behind these abstract spatial processes, how do scientists, planners, architects, but also religious congregations, Indigenous communities and cyclists contest and recreate the capital? Finally, where do everyday life and practice disrupt the production of national space and escape the boundaries of its colonial logic and modernist incarnations? In the next sections, we take up these questions before exploring the problem of Ottawa futures.

This special issue interrogates the capital city as a complex production of space (Lefebvre 1991), interconnecting meanings and materials with people and practices. The articles in this issue showcase how particular practices and people rebuild and socially reassemble (Latour 2007) the capital and contest its dominant meanings and myths. Lefebvre describes representations of space as “the space of scientists, planners, urbanists, technocratic subdividers and social engineers, as of a certain type of artist with a scientific bent” (1991: 38). Representations of cities often rely on scientific models with ideological hues that punctuate some aspects of urban life while obscuring others. The meanings attributed to Ottawa through national myths, master plans and local urban imaginaries feature contradictory, multi-scalar representations that clash over time. As Gordon (2015: 319) argues, “the tensions between these “Crown” and “Town” roles are a normal part of capital-city planning around the world, but have proved especially complicated for Canada’s seat of government.” For example, the 1950 Gréber Plan, an ambitious conception of Ottawa as a future capital city, created Ottawa using planning science as an overly centralized and traffic-clogged industrial mess in need of wilderness, slum removal and mass automobility (Gordon 2001). The Gréber Plan’s conception of Ottawa clearly clashes with its contemporary intensification plans and efforts to wean the city off the car (Scott 2010; 2013).

Ottawa’s production of space shows the powerful role of living and inanimate materials—e.g. buildings, rivers, superhighways, automobiles, trees, flowers, canals, bicycles, sidewalks—in the reproduction of place images over time. Put another way, images of Ottawa emerge through material practices of spatialisation. Rob Shields (1991: 31) defines “social spatialisation” as “the ongoing social construction of the spatial at the level of the

1 Both authors contributed equally to the development of this editorial and special issue of the *Canadian Journal of Urban Research*.

social imaginary (collective mythologies, presuppositions) as well as interventions in the landscape.” The social spatialisation of capital cities takes on a specific character as these cities are designed to act as metonyms for their nations. In Ottawa’s landscape, certain materials and their circulating images—the Parliament Buildings, the National War Memorial, the Rideau Canal—work in concert to assemble Ottawa as a mythical, metonymic, national space. Routes throughout the region, in particular the Confederation Boulevard (Gordon 2015), are designed to showcase national treasures. In the context of capital cities, place myths are often actively designed to parallel national myths (Gordon 2006; Sonne 2003).

Alongside myths and materials, the production of Ottawa also includes people who enact the capital through a myriad of practices. The cast of human actors featured in *Ottawa Studies* range from urban Indigenous service providers and cycling planners to corporate sustainability consultants and politicians. Our aim is to feature an eclectic cast that shows how different people, in practice, construct and also disrupt ‘Ottawa’ at multiple scales, with different knowledges and through distributed networks. On the construction side, we see scientists, business owners, political operatives and community leaders working on behalf of the federal government, National Capital Commission, business improvement associations and the Ottawa Aboriginal Coalition. On the disruption side, we find local conservationists, religious entrepreneurs, cycling advocates and the indomitable Chief Theresa Spence upending Ottawa’s colonial logic, profane gentrification, ornamental nature and hegemonic automobility. To give the reader a clear vantage of *Ottawa Studies*, the next sections introduce the articles in this issue through the lens of three broad dualities: centre/margins, science/nature, and remembering pasts/imagining futures.

The View from the River

“Figure 1: Samuel de Champlain points astrolabe at Parliament; a woman nearby eats lunch” (photo, Nicholas Scott)



An ideal place to visually appreciate how the National Capital Region has been designed as a nationally significant space is from the Ottawa River. From the river, standing in the middle of Alexandra Bridge or on a boat tour, one can see the neo-Gothic spires of the Parliament buildings, the glass dome of Moshie Safdie’s National

Gallery, designed as a modern echo of the Library of Parliament, Douglas Cardinal's Museum of History, and greeting all visitors, on the top of Nepean Point is a monument of a solitary Samuel de Champlain (Figure 1). This view, described in tour guide vernacular as a collection of the national 'crown jewels,' is a clear expression of a settler colonial vision. From 1922-1996, Champlain was accompanied by an unnamed Indigenous scout. The scout was removed after Ovide Mercredi led protests, critiquing the scout's subordinate position, inaccurate dress and anonymity as perpetuating colonial racism (see Davidson 2014; Lauzon 2011). The Ottawa River is understood through the narrative of the 19th century, white settler timber trade: a site of 19th century timber slides, the site of folkloric "log driver's waltz"; the river evokes Big Joe Mufferaw who once legendarily fought off a band of 'Shiners' on one of the river's many bridges.

In the middle of the Ottawa River is Victoria Island. Victoria Island lies in the heart of the National Capital Region, between the French city of Gatineau and the English-dominated Ottawa. Victoria Island is geographically central, like Ottawa itself, but symbolically marginal. On this island, in December 2012, Chief Theresa Spence held her hunger strike. This strike "galvanized the Idle No More movement and [mobilized] Indigenous and non-Indigenous people across multiple spatialities and modalities of anti-colonial organizing" (Tomiak, this issue). In the middle of the River, Ottawa becomes unstable.

As Julie Tomiak details in this issue, while many people take 'Ottawa' for granted, the city imposes itself as the centre of political power in the Canadian nation-state on unceded Algonquin territory. As a result, Ottawa constitutes a prolific, multiscalar battleground for reproducing and disrupting colonial constructions of the city. This deep seated tension reflects sharp contrasts between First Nations and modernist conceptions of space and place, for instance in the way Algonquins understand the Ottawa River as a conduit between communities whereas modernist (and many contemporary) engineers conceive of the river as a material obstacle to the flow of cars. However, from the river, it is possible to understand Ottawa as at the heart of national meaning-making processes. The national 'crown jewels' reinforce common national narratives of Canada as a white settler society (see Razack 2002). However, from the river, these narratives are also undercut by the representational and lived space of Victoria Island. The heart of the capital city constitutes a site of disruption, as Indigenous movements, from the margins, unsettle conceived capital space.

A Green Capital

"Figure 2: Hikers cross a brook in Gatineau Park" (photo, Nicholas Scott)



An increasingly prominent version of Ottawa we explore in this special issue animates the city as a ‘green capital’ and place of nature. In Ottawa, nature becomes both a site for the production of symbolic national narratives² and an object to be managed and manipulated through science and engineering. Much of the town/crown tension (Gordon 2015) explored by the essays in this issue can actually be understood as projects by the national capital (NCC in particular) to represent natural landscapes of the Canadian West and the North. In the symbolic space of the capital, this project echoes settler colonialism of the late 19th century. The development of Gatineau Park (see Figure 2) was propelled in part by a desire to extend the national park system east (Lait, this issue). Likewise, the Central Experimental Farm and the Dominion Arboretum were designed to develop hardy plants for developing the West (Anderson, this issue). Settler colonial notions of Ottawa as British, Protestant and vaguely ‘north’ within a ‘dark forest’ are coded into Ottawa’s mediavalizing Parliamentary architecture and its imagined symbolism of Canadian identity (Di Leo Browne, this issue).

Notably, Gatineau Park wedges nature directly into the urban fabric of the capital. Far from the stable bastion of unadulterated wilderness its progenitors had planned, Gatineau Park shows the perils arising from a *lack* of spatial representation, sitting on the verge of wilderness conservation as a quasi-national park, while splintering apart through roads and private development driven by a notion of the park as a place for recreation (Lait, this issue). Nothing illustrates the agency of nonhuman actors or hard infrastructure better, perhaps, than a road built for cars where none had existed before, severing nature’s continuity and ecological integrity and then becoming impossible to unbuild. Alongside these fraught conservation–recreation dynamics, Ottawa’s ‘capital nature’ oscillates between stately, manicured landscapes celebrating international transplants and the emerging disorder in wild gardens of mainly native species championed by restoration ecologists—sometimes both on the same property (Anderson, this issue). Significantly, environmental values also shape Ottawa’s contemporary urban development. Echoing a global mantra, Ottawa aims to become sustainable and include people without cars, in part by importing cycling infrastructures and design principles from European capitals like Copenhagen (Scott, this issue). To intensify urban space, Ottawa, thinking outside of the box, mixes environmental planning with congregation-driven redevelopment (Martin and Ballamingie, this issue).

Parsing colonial projects and political ecology helps elucidate the capital’s urbanity; however, we must also consider the limitations of relying on ‘green,’ ‘settler’ or any other representation of Ottawa for understanding its ongoing production. Gaping disconnects often occur between the best laid plans or conceptions of space and the open-ended, lived reality of what actually unfolds—just look at Gréber’s prescient and ultimately doomed green belt plan to prevent car-oriented suburban sprawl from carpeting the Ontario and Quebec countryside (Gordon 2001).

A Remembering/Imagining City

Ottawa is a city for remembering pasts and imagining futures. As a national capital, it is not surprising that Ottawa is a veritable monument city. This identity was confirmed by recent events. On October 22nd, 2014, Nathan Cirillo, a foot guard, was shot while standing sentry at the National War Memorial in Ottawa’s Confederation Square, a site already deeply saturated with national meanings. Placed in 1939 to commemorate Canada’s involvement in World War I, the National War Memorial has become a conduit for imperial nostalgia; through annual Remembrance Day ceremonies, and rules around official wreath laying protocol, the monument compels persuasive, ritual allegiance to Canada’s imperial past (see Davidson 2016). In summer 2015, local and national media aggressively debated the Harper government’s plan to erect a monument, a “Memorial to the Victims of Communism,” in a prominent location facing the Supreme Court. East of the Court, LeBreton Flats has also seen a burst of newly erected national monuments in the last few years with the building of a Royal Canadian Navy Monument (2012), the Canadian Firefighters Memorial (2012) and the National Holocaust Monument (to be completed in 2017). Ottawa is currently preparing to host celebrations for Canada’s 150 birthday in 2017.

The nationally significant space produced through monuments, rituals and memory can be contrasted by the local memories commemorated in ghost bikes—bikes painted white and placed at the sites of cyclist deaths

2 In his analysis of the landscape design of Cornelia Hahn Oberlander, Paul Hjartarson (2005) details how the lawns of the National Gallery echo the imagery of the Group of Seven; the taiga garden includes excavated rocks and various Arctic grasses and British Columbian plants, was designed to mimic A.Y. Jackson’s painting “Terre Sauvage.”

“Figure 3: A roadside memorial for a victim of traffic in Ottawa on Queen Street” (photo, Nicholas Scott)



(Figure 3). This parallel emerges in Nicholas Scott’s reading (this issue) of the ghost bike placed on Sussex Drive in front of the Department of Foreign Affairs to commemorate the death of Melanie Harris, a monument Scott describes as “almost like a cenotaph.” The National War Memorial, several blocks from this ghost bike, has been understood as our national cenotaph since its placement in 1939. In 2000, the meaning of the National War Memorial as an “empty tomb” (the meaning of cenotaph), shifted when the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier was placed at its base with great Royal Canadian Legion fanfare as a millennial project (Davidson 2016). Both the Tomb and ghost bike mark specific deaths that stand-in for broader systemic violence, yet the local ghost bike sits uneasily alongside the national narrative produced at the National War Memorial. At the former, Melanie Harris’ death works to stand in for all of the violent deaths of cyclists in a city dominated by automobility. The ghost bike arrests viewers with a reminder that everyday violence and death continue to unfold inside Canada.

Martin and Ballamingie’s essay on church redevelopment and Di Leo Browne’s reading of the architectural significance of the Parliament buildings suggest that, like monuments, architecture also requires us to remember and imagine. By virtue of its materiality, architecture almost always ossifies certain ideologies, social practices and values. However, Martin and Ballamingie and Di Leo Browne detail how the values implicit in architecture are not fixed. The redevelopment of churches as community centers and rent-geared-to-income housing demonstrate how social justice values are maintained even as social practices (church going) change. Di Leo Browne’s article demonstrates that while a building may remain constant in its materiality, its symbolic and ideological weight continues to shift, contract, and inspire multiple interpretations.

As much as Ottawa is a city for producing and challenging national and local memories, it is also a city oriented towards visions of the future. The view from the Ottawa River has never been frozen in time. While the view of Ottawa from the vantage point of the river was commemorated (and in essence secured) in the 1974–1989 Canadian one-dollar bill, the view continues to evolve. In recent years, Domtar industries sold lands on Chaudière and Albert islands to Windmill which is in the process of developing formerly industrial lands on the islands into mixed-use communities. The project, named ‘Zibi,’ the Algonquin word for river, has been presented as a job-generator for the local Algonquin people. However, this proposal has been opposed by various groups and individuals including Museum of History architect Douglas Cardinal who argues that the development,

while espousing great opportunities for Indigenous communities, will destroy a site of great significance. Discussing Chaudière Falls, Douglas Cardinal explains, “The falls are like our Mecca or our Jerusalem, or St. Peter’s Square... For 10,000 years, people have come there for spiritual ceremonies, and it was only taken over by force. Now, we don’t do things that way. We are supposed to treat each other with respect” (in Bozikovic 2016, n.p.).

Will Ottawa actually become a green, or ecologically good, capital city? Ottawa scholar, David Gordon, concludes his important article on the Gréber Plan (2001), by way of highlighting the Plan’s strengths, “it is hard to imagine how Ottawa would function without the Queensway.” We respectfully disagree. We can imagine how Ottawa could function without the Queensway, the superhighway that slices the city in two, by looking at Copenhagen, or Vancouver (Gehl 2010). The future of the nonhuman environment in Ottawa, as elsewhere, depends on the expansion of public transit, cycling and walking at the expense of car driving and its overpriced infrastructure. Sustainable Ottawa futures, in which capital-making advances a long view of human flourishing, demands a different way of living together.

Beyond the scripted space for colonialism, cars and condos lurk alternative Ottawas, glimpses of which emerge in the everyday lives of people enacting Ottawa differently. In this issue we watch as the daily struggles and interventions of folks in the Ottawa-Hull chapter of the National and Provincial Parks Association of Canada (Lait, this issue) and the Ottawa Field-Naturalists’ Club (Anderson, this issue) transform how the capital city animates nature. Di Leo Browne (this issue) draws a powerful contrast between “centuries of associative baggage” coded in Parliament and the fluid and urban multicultural life unfolding on a single hot summer afternoon along Bank Street, Ottawa’s ever-twisting spine. Another thread weaving through *Ottawa Studies* shows how Ottawa cannot be determined by experts and specialized knowledge alone. For example, Scott (this issue) juxtaposes the ‘responsible’ and intentional cycling choices the City of Ottawa aims to encourage against the multisensorial and embodied performances that insinuate cyclists into a changing built environment. In fact, each article in this volume illustrates ways in which the production of space itself is bound up with the production of knowledge and power. This politics of space becomes explicit in the case of Algonquin land claims aiming to reconfigure the settler city through an “Indigenous scale of governance” (Tomiak, this issue).

Crucially, dominant representations and practices of space in the capital are neither inevitable nor invincible. They become destabilized by what Lefebvre (1991) calls ‘directly lived’ spaces in which everyday, lived experience undermines the order of hegemonic space, be it through the simple act of a cyclist staking out space on a street full of cars or, with a different kind of suspense, Chief Theresa Spence waging a hunger strike on Victoria Island in the heart of Ottawa to reorder Crown–First Nations relations. It is in this spirit of change that we conclude our introduction to *Ottawa Studies*.

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