

EDUCATING MEMORY

Regarding the Remnants of the Indian Residential School

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Members of the 'Namgis First Nation in Alert Bay are fighting a race against time to preserve St. Michael's Indian Residential School (fig. 1). Andrea Sanborn, executive director of the U'mista Cultural Society, is spearheading the effort to have the school designated as a heritage property or a national historic site. This is another in a series of initiatives to keep the structure operational, coming on the heels of a frustrated bid to convert the school into an Indigenous language centre and museum. For Andrea Sanborn and others in the 'Namgis nation, the retention of St. Michael's will provide a crucial, material reminder of the coordinated effort on the part of government and various churches to assimilate Indigenous communities, not only in Alert Bay but across the entire nation.

For a number of reasons the fate of this notorious institution, whose derelict hulk looms over the bay on Cormorant Island, hangs in the balance (fig. 2). With each delay and each passing year, the 'Namgis must spend approximately sixty thousand dollars to heat, illuminate, patrol, and clean the vacated school. Then there is the prohibitive cost to renovate, which hovers between fifteen and twenty million dollars. Though the foundation remains intact, the building needs extensive structural repair, as well as the removal of asbestos and other toxic building materials. Worse still the social and historical value that these institutions hold remains contested within the Indigenous populations of the region and, more generally, in government agencies and in the critiques of scholars attending to questions of social memory and commemoration.¹



FIG. 1. ST. MICHAEL'S INDIAN RESIDENTIAL SCHOOL, ALERT BAY (BC). | GEOFFREY CARR.



FIG. 2. ST. MICHAEL'S INDIAN RESIDENTIAL SCHOOL. | GEOFFREY CARR.

The move by the 'Namgis to preserve and commemorate St. Michael's is informed by the liberal humanist position that to memorialize painful pasts is to inoculate the present against their convulsive reoccurrence. Critiques of this stance are neither new nor few. The inverted books of Rachel Whiteread's "Nameless Library," located in Vienna's Judenplatz, express scepticism of the capacity of representation to contain and convey the memory of mass social trauma, as well as of the human faculty for reading such evocations (fig. 3). Andreas Huyssen describes the global proliferation of memorial structures as a "hypertrophy of memory," akin to an abnormal and sudden growth of unneeded tissue.² Still others have analyzed the ways in which suffering becomes a commodity consumed by the touristic gaze.³ John Torpey has even suggested that contemporary fixations with social memory indicate the loss of common, progressive goals associated with liberal, democratic states.⁴ While each of these critiques performs a valued intervention, there is also peril at the opposite extreme, in complete oblivion. Bernard Henri Lévy has noted with shock the extent to which the memory of

the disappeared in Darfur does not exist, even in the minds of survivors.⁵ The antipode of hypertrophic memory, it seems, is an utter, dehumanized void, suggesting that some degree of memorialization is needed in a just society.

This question of commemorative balance is apt when considering the current state of the network of residential school sites which dot the country, as it remains a matter of contention how—or if at all—these places will alter the telling of Canada's history. As part of the multibillion dollar Residential School Settlement, the Canadian government has earmarked twenty million dollars for the production of memorials and other commemorative activities.⁶ But a surprising silence accompanies this Commemoration Initiative regarding how the one hundred and thirty-two sites of former residential schools should be acknowledged.⁷ In light of this omission, I examine two former residential schools in British Columbia—St. Michael's in Alert Bay and St. Eugene near Cranbrook—to outline the complexity of issues and challenges facing those who manage the material remnants of this system (fig. 4). To date there has been no

scholarly publications on the architecture of the Indian Residential School system, so what follows is more exploratory than prescriptive, an effort to widen and complicate the discussion of this grim aspect of Canada's history. If there is a central aim, it is to resist reading what in German is known as *Slusstrich*, the final line of text after which the cover of a book may be forever closed.⁸ In the Canadian media, the phrase "turn the page on this painful history" is often heard; yet I suggest that this page is merely the colophon to a long and perplexing text.

INDIAN EDUCATION AND THE TECHNOLOGIES OF POWER

Before examining each of these schools in greater detail, it is necessary to make some general comments about the history and architecture of the Indian Residential School system. The federal government took control over the education of Canada's Indigenous peoples in the 1870s. At that time the government entered into an uneasy partnership with the denominations of various churches, as churches could provide inexpensive teachers and staff to supervise the schools.⁹ In addition, it was widely believed that only Christian conversion could open the way for Indigenous children to enter "the circle of civilization."¹⁰ Small day schools, initially thought most effective, were constructed on or near reserves (fig. 5). For decades they formed the backbone of the Indian education system, but by the 1910s, day schools began to fall out of favour, as the children maintained close ties with their families and communities. The attitude of Hayter Reed, a high-ranking official in the Department of Indian Affairs (DIA), is typical: "the more remote from the Institution and distant from each other are the points from which the pupils are collected, the better for their success."¹¹



FIG. 3. RACHEL WHITEREAD, "NAMELESS LIBRARY," 2000, VIENNA, AUSTRIA. | © CREATIVE COMMONS, SHIFT OPERATIONS (LEFT) AND ROBERT SCARTH (RIGHT).

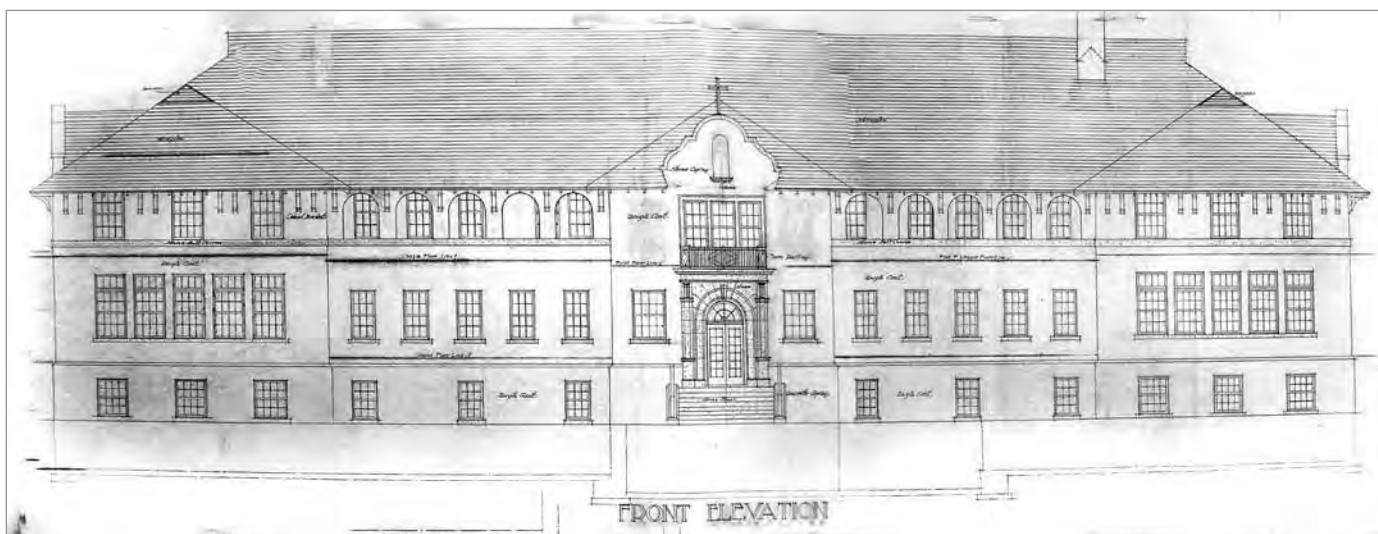


FIG. 4. ARCHITECTURAL PLAN: ST. EUGENE INDIAN RESIDENTIAL SCHOOL, 1911, ALLAN KEEFER, ARCHITECT. FAÇADE ELEVATION. | © INDIAN AND NORTHERN AFFAIRS. REPRODUCED WITH THE PERMISSION OF THE MINISTER OF PUBLIC WORKS AND GOVERNMENT SERVICES CANADA (2009). SOURCE: LIBRARY AND ARCHIVES CANADA / INDIAN AND NORTHERN AFFAIRS / RG22M 77803 / 111 ITEM 1067.

During these early years, the DIA also built a number of industrial schools closer to urban centres, according to the recommendations made by MP Nicholas Flood Davin (fig. 6). In his now infamous *Report on Industrial Schools for Indians and Half Breeds* (1879), Davin touted the American policy of "aggression civilization" that he saw in action while touring US Indian boarding schools.¹² These larger schools were built to provide vocational training and lodging to both girls and boys, to create a new class of skilled labour that could

be assimilated into settler economies with the ultimate aim of dissolving Indigenous identity (fig. 7). The schools failed in this, though, for attendance at the industrial schools was voluntary and, thus, absenteeism proved problematic, as children traveled with parents on seasonal hunting trips and for ceremonies. In addition, the costs of employing qualified teachers proved prohibitive, and, owing to sub-par curricula, the students of the industrial schools were usually unable to compete with Whites for skilled jobs.

In the 1910s, the design of the residential school slowly came into favour, as the government became increasingly frustrated by the resistance of Indigenous peoples to their assimilation into settler society (fig. 8). It was determined within the DIA that it would be more cost-effective to convert Indigenous populations into an agrarian class and sequester their communities on reserves. The new schools were situated closer to reserves than were industrial schools, often serving as collection centres for children from distant

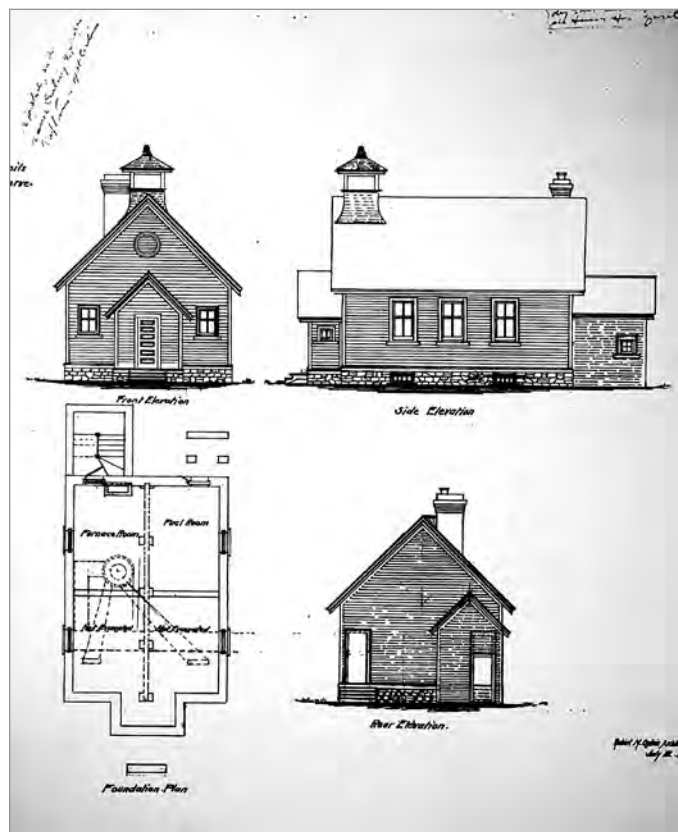


FIG. 5. ARCHITECTURAL PLAN: DAY SCHOOL FOR 50 STUDENTS, 1904, R.M. OGLIVIE, ARCHITECT. ELEVATIONS AND FOUNDATION PLAN. | © INDIAN AND NORTHERN AFFAIRS. REPRODUCED WITH THE PERMISSION OF THE MINISTER OF PUBLIC WORKS AND GOVERNMENT SERVICES CANADA, 2009. SOURCE: LIBRARY AND ARCHIVES CANADA / INDIAN AND NORTHERN AFFAIRS / RG22M 77803 / 111 ITEM 229.



FIG. 6. ARCHITECTURAL PLAN: INDUSTRIAL SCHOOL, N.D., E.E. BLACKMORE, ARCHITECT. FAÇADE ELEVATION. | © INDIAN AND NORTHERN AFFAIRS. REPRODUCED WITH THE PERMISSION OF THE MINISTER OF PUBLIC WORKS AND GOVERNMENT SERVICES CANADA, 2009. SOURCE: LIBRARY AND ARCHIVES CANADA / INDIAN AND NORTHERN AFFAIRS / RG22M 77803 / 111 ITEM 120.

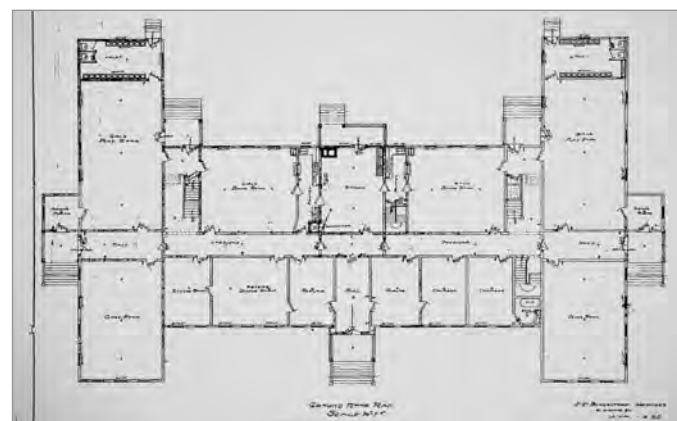


FIG. 7. ARCHITECTURAL PLAN: INDUSTRIAL SCHOOL, N.D., E.E. BLACKMORE, ARCHITECT. GROUND FLOOR. | © INDIAN AND NORTHERN AFFAIRS. REPRODUCED WITH THE PERMISSION OF THE MINISTER OF PUBLIC WORKS AND GOVERNMENT SERVICES CANADA, 2009. SOURCE: LIBRARY AND ARCHIVES CANADA / INDIAN AND NORTHERN AFFAIRS / RG22M 77803 / 111 ITEM 123.

places. As a disproportionate number of students were dying from influenza and tuberculosis in the earlier schools, the residential schools were designed to provide better ventilation and more commodious conditions.¹³ They failed on both counts, however, as overcrowding and disease persisted.¹⁴ Coincidentally, at the height of the construction of this new building type, compulsory education for Indigenous children was passed into law (1920), as was already the case for non-Indigenous Canadians. A significant difference, however, for aboriginal families, was the manner in which children were often forcibly removed from their homes and communities, though many students did attend voluntarily.

In these boarding schools, vocational training was substituted for an inadequate mix of instruction, basic language lessons, and daily stints of what can only be described as forced labour. Conditions in the residential schools were generally appalling. Children were malnourished, neglected, and beaten for speaking their native language. Serious diseases continued to infect students. And child molestation was so rampant that a judge in a recent court case referred to the schools as “institutionalized pedophilia.”¹⁵ After revelations of physical and sexual abuse began to surface in the eighties, a protracted legal struggle ensued, and the federal government was forced by the weight of litigation to offer reparations

and, recently, an official apology. The majority of the schools were closed in the seventies, but the last government-run school to close, the Gordon School in Saskatchewan, did so in 1996.

Survivor testimony comprises the most crucial component of the historical record of these schools, ranging from sordid to laudatory.¹⁶ Yet personal accounts, owing to their subjective nature, tend to divert attention away from the role these institutions played as instruments of government policy. Moreover, the fact that some students genuinely praise the schools has lent weight to apologist refutations and to dismissals of the trauma suffered by most in these structures as mere psychodrama,

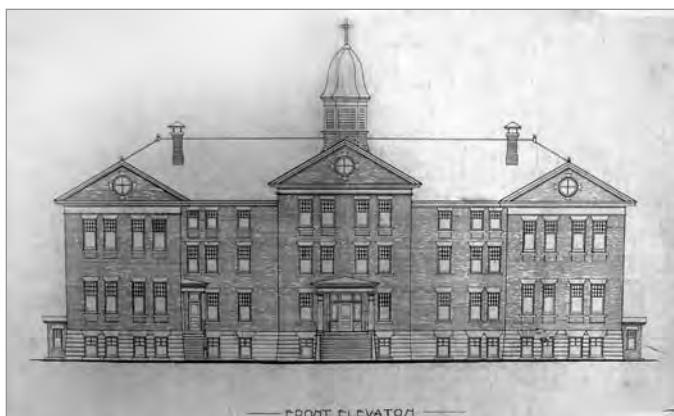


FIG. 8. ARCHITECTURAL PLAN: KUPER ISLAND RESIDENTIAL SCHOOL, C. 1913, R.G. ORR, ARCHITECT. ELEVATION. | © INDIAN AND NORTHERN AFFAIRS. REPRODUCED WITH THE PERMISSION OF THE MINISTER OF PUBLIC WORKS AND GOVERNMENT SERVICES CANADA, 2009. SOURCE: LIBRARY AND ARCHIVES CANADA / INDIAN AND NORTHERN AFFAIRS / RG22M 77803 / 111 ITEM 837.



FIG. 9. KAMLOOPS INDIAN RESIDENTIAL SCHOOL, KAMLOOPS (BC). | GEOFFREY CARR.

something to ‘get over.’ The contention here is that the analysis of the architecture of the Indian Residential School system allows for a shift in critique, to consider matters of personal trauma alongside a set of interrelated biopolitical issues.¹⁷ In this way, the commemorative stakes are raised at Alert Bay and elsewhere, for what is remembered is not an aging school but, instead, a technology of power that circulated discourses still operational in the present moment.

Before tracing these relations, however, it is important to note that I am not portraying the residential school as an institution of total control, as no design can ever impose complete submission over its subjects. As many commentators have shown—even in the most oppressive places—fissures, cracks, and overlooked spaces exist in which the programme of constraint fails, or at least operates less efficiently.¹⁸ Moreover some people will always fare better than others, regardless of surroundings. Thus this ambivalence of institutional space, shifting between authority and agency, between material restraint and subjective retort, resists full definition, though admittedly most of the survivors with whom I speak say little of liberty.

DESIGNING INSTITUTIONS

For nearly one hundred years, various federal departments have produced a bewildering amount of designs meant to manage most aspects of Indigenous life. The residential school represents the ‘apex’ of this venture; other built forms range from community centres, agent’s house, and bungalows, to furniture and even outhouses. The schools, thus, functioned within an extensive network of government architectures, an infrastructural system built to pacify the nation’s Indigenous communities by enforcing changes to land use practices: assigning reserves, parceling and fencing land, abolishing communal structures, building single-family dwellings, constructing roads, wharves, and so on.

Yet it could be argued that each modern subject has, to varying degrees, been constituted through one type of institution or another. Indeed, many of the architects of the residential school system themselves attended boarding schools. Duncan Campell Scott, perhaps the most reviled superintendent of Indian Affairs, argued for residential schools by insisting that “our best men and women were brought up, away from the home influences and

following the example, day and night, of their teachers.”¹⁹ I should add that recently in England much has been made of the trauma inherent in the English public school model, owing to the separation from parents, harsh discipline, hazing, and sexual abuse.²⁰ Institutions clearly have a profound impact on the modern subject, often beneficial but also often the site of repetitive, inherited debasements. Why then should the Indian Residential School system be considered an exceptional case? What fundamental differences exist between this system and the network of other institutions that routinely render injury to modern subjects?

Cree scholar Linda Bull has noted that, unlike most boarding schools that were meant to ensure that children engaged more concretely with their own culture, the residential schools, by displacing language and Indigenous histories, were specifically designed to do the opposite:

Other residential schools did not share the following characteristics: a) Academic programs were not the focus of Indian residential schools: in fact, the schools did not even provide solid academic programs. b) Parents had no say about their children’s

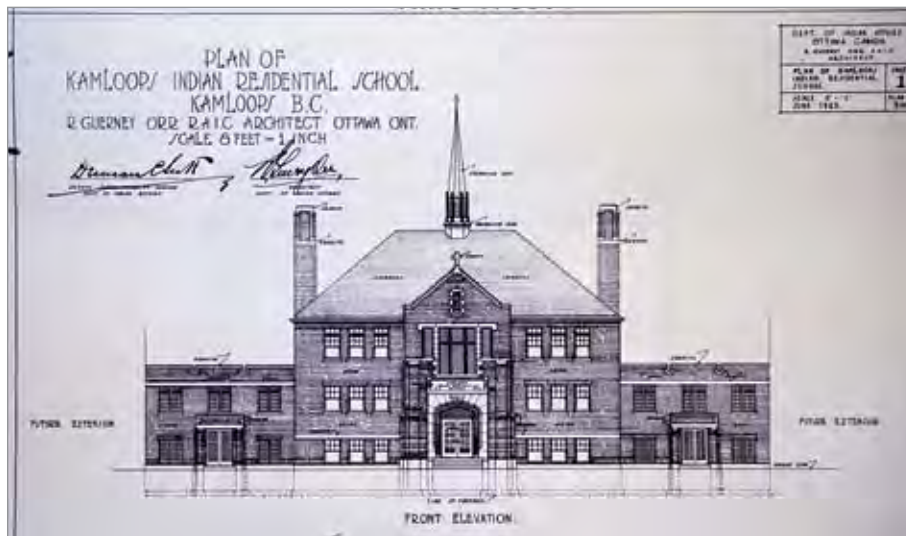


FIG. 10. ARCHITECTURAL PLAN: KAMLOOPS INDIAN RESIDENTIAL SCHOOL, 1923, R.G. ORR, ARCHITECT. FAÇADE ELEVATION AND SECTIONS. | © INDIAN AND NORTHERN AFFAIRS. REPRODUCED WITH THE PERMISSION OF THE MINISTER OF PUBLIC WORKS AND GOVERNMENT SERVICES CANADA, 2009. SOURCE: LIBRARY AND ARCHIVES CANADA / INDIAN AND NORTHERN AFFAIRS / RG22M 912016 ITEM 634.

attendance at Indian residential schools; they had no part in the decision to attend, and could not withdraw their children from them. c) In many cases, children did not speak the language used in the school, and were forbidden to speak the language they knew. The specific aim of this goal was to remove the children from the influence of their parents.²¹

Such fundamental differences between Indian Residential Schools and other boarding schools are evident also in their designs. The vast majority of residential schools built between 1910 and 1930 were drab in appearance, employing a prominent entranceway capped by a spire, highlighting the religious curriculum taught within. Commonly the schools employed an H-shaped design, with a central block flanked by two attached pavilions, one notable exception being the Kamloops School that had detached wings serving as dormitories (figs. 9-10). Floor plans for all of the schools were highly standardized, each institution laid out with a similar series of classes, kitchens, dormitories, bathrooms, infirmaries, staff sleeping quarters, workshops, sewing rooms,

recreation rooms, and so on (fig. 11). The centre block typically housed administrative offices and staff chambers, while flanking pavilions served to cordon off students according to gender, and, within each pavilion, students would be further separated according to age. Student testimonies reveal how painful this compartmentalization proved to be, for often pupils were not allowed to speak to family members or members of their own community, leaving them vulnerable and alone. As a consequence, family ties would often disintegrate, even with sisters, brothers, or cousins living on an adjacent floor.

In delineating key differences in the residential schools, two purpose-built rooms warrant close attention: the “Indians Parlour (or Indians Room)” and the “Monitor Room.” The Indians Parlours, first seen in the plans for industrial schools, were built for the purpose of limiting the visual and actual access of visiting family to the interior of the school (fig. 12). Visitors would enter the parlour directly through an outside doorway, whereas children would enter

via an interior door made accessible to their assigned pavilion by a hallway or adjacent room. Visits in the parlour were closely supervised to ensure that parents and children would not converse in their native tongue.²² Though opinions in the Department of Indian Affairs were divided regarding the influence of parents, the dominant position held that students received maximum possible benefit by separating from families and home communities.²³ A 1912 report from Alert Bay Indian Agent W.M. Halliday, now infamous for his role in seizing and selling Kwakwaka’wakw potlatch paraphernalia, reveals the degree to which the schools were meant to effect this schism between children and their families and elders and, as well, the degree to which such divides had profound political implications:

In my last report, I drew your attention to the fact that the Indians in this agency were so wrapped up in the potlatch customs and system, that they looked with the greatest indifference upon education. Education has a tendency to break up the old customs, and the young men who received more or less education at the industrial or day schools look upon the potlatch as an evil. At present they are in the minority, and there is not one of them strong enough mentally to come out and take the leadership against the potlatch and be able to put up with the opposition of the older men... If one such should arise and throw down the gauntlet, and have the necessary eloquence and leadership, victory would be assured.²⁴

The following year, after noting some dissatisfaction with the stubbornness of the potlatch, W.M. Halliday makes clear his belief that assimilation is inevitable, but that this will only be accomplished by an intergenerational effort and a more intensive school system. “The work of the industrial and boarding schools”, he states, “is more far-reaching than the



FIG. 11. ARCHITECTURAL PLAN: KUPER ISLAND RESIDENTIAL SCHOOL, C. 1913, R.G. ORR, ARCHITECT. GROUND FLOOR. | © INDIAN AND NORTHERN AFFAIRS. REPRODUCED WITH THE PERMISSION OF THE MINISTER OF PUBLIC WORKS AND GOVERNMENT SERVICES CANADA, 2009. SOURCE: LIBRARY AND ARCHIVES CANADA / INDIAN AND NORTHERN AFFAIRS / RG22M 77803 / 111 ITEM 844.

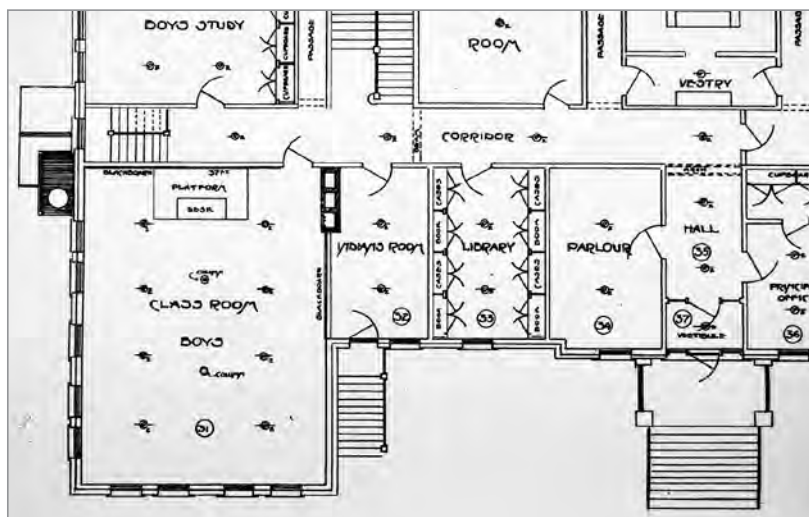


FIG. 12. ARCHITECTURAL PLAN: KUPER ISLAND RESIDENTIAL SCHOOL, C. 1913, R.G. ORR, ARCHITECT. DETAIL, GROUND FLOOR. | © INDIAN AND NORTHERN AFFAIRS. REPRODUCED WITH THE PERMISSION OF THE MINISTER OF PUBLIC WORKS AND GOVERNMENT SERVICES CANADA, 2009. SOURCE: LIBRARY AND ARCHIVES CANADA / INDIAN AND NORTHERN AFFAIRS / RG22M 77803 / 111 ITEM 844.

day school, as the pupils are entirely away from the home influence of the parents during the greater part of the year." In this way, in his words, each generation of ex-pupils will form a "link in the chain between barbarism and civilization."²⁵ It is important to remember, when considering the overall impacts of this anti-potlatch policy, that potlatch is not merely a cultural practice, but is, as Joseph Masco points out, a "transaction with legal, economic, socio-structural, and religious dimension[s]."²⁶ Here, through the school structures, the biopolitical imperatives of the state are made apparent, by physically limiting familial relations with the hope of producing a comprador class of non-citizens meant to unseat the ancient, socio-political hold of the Kwakwaka'wakw in the Alert Bay region.

As is evident in the design and function of the Indians parlour, close surveillance was an essential tactic used by staff to advance the programme of the institution. This same perceived need to watch students is apparent in the installation in most schools of Monitor Rooms

(fig. 13). This is an especially sophisticated example; other cruder versions of the same (also seen in regular boarding schools), would provide a clear view when supervisors would enter or exit (fig. 14). Yet in this instance the monitor enters unseen through a hallway door and has a tripartite site line (through curtained windows), looking simultaneously outside, into the small boys' dormitory and, also, into the small boys' washroom. What is especially curious about this particular room is the extension of its designed logic, its refinement by the architects at the DIA.²⁷ Why these improvements to the technologies of watching? While it is true that young children typically require the most supervision, not surprisingly, the remoteness of that sort of watching provided no comfort to students. Ktunaxa archivist and survivor, Margaret Teneese relates how it was the youngest who most keenly felt the loss of a loving bond to caregivers upon entering the system, a consequence of a highly-regimented, military-like daily routine.²⁸ This space echoes aspects of Jeremy Bentham's Panopticon, in that the power enabled by the Monitor

Room is both visible and unverifiable. However to equate the Monitor Room with a Panopticon seems inaccurate, for in a Panopticon, the watcher is central and can see the entirety of the inhabitants in one sweep (fig. 15). Instead I ask if this mode of surveillance could be characterized more accurately as something viral, a form of inoculation, a strain of controlled contagion introduced into the very young. Seen this way, the contagion could be settler culture, dispensed in quantities large enough to disrupt Indigenous identity but too small to allow for full-blown admission into "civilized" society.

A third crucial design feature of these institutions, the chapel, also exerted a form of biopolitical rationality, and was similarly reliant upon a subtle form of self-surveillance. The ubiquitous presence of the chapel in each school, regardless of its denomination, underscores the perceived importance of religious training to the moral uplift of Indigenous populations (fig. 16). As early as 1883, Prime Minister John A. MacDonald stated that "secular education is a good thing among white

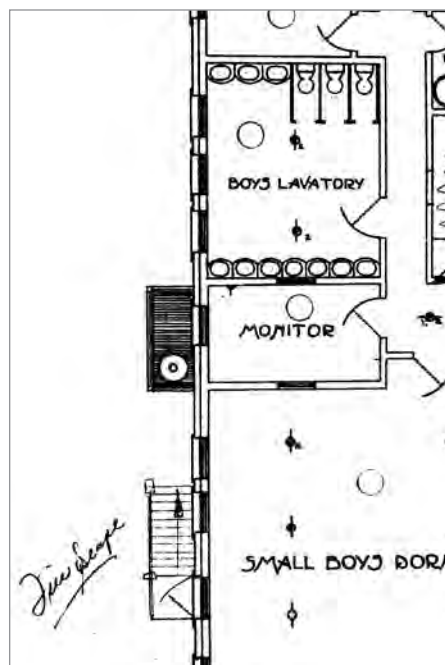


FIG. 13. ARCHITECTURAL PLAN: KUPER ISLAND RESIDENTIAL SCHOOL, C. 1913, R.G. ORR, ARCHITECT. DETAIL, SECOND FLOOR. | © INDIAN AND NORTHERN AFFAIRS. REPRODUCED WITH THE PERMISSION OF THE MINISTER OF PUBLIC WORKS AND GOVERNMENT SERVICES CANADA, 2009. SOURCE: LIBRARY AND ARCHIVES CANADA / INDIAN AND NORTHERN AFFAIRS / RG22M 77803 / 111 ITEM 844.

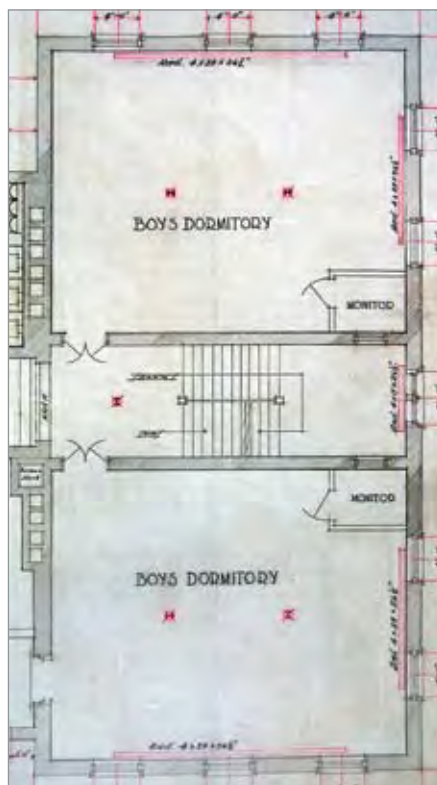


FIG. 14. ARCHITECTURAL PLAN: ST. EUGENE INDIAN RESIDENTIAL SCHOOL, 1911, ALLAN KEEFER, ARCHITECT. DETAIL, SECOND FLOOR. | © INDIAN AND NORTHERN AFFAIRS. REPRODUCED WITH THE PERMISSION OF THE MINISTER OF PUBLIC WORKS AND GOVERNMENT SERVICES CANADA, 2009. SOURCE: LIBRARY AND ARCHIVES CANADA / INDIAN AND NORTHERN AFFAIRS / RG22M 77803 / 111 ITEM 1068.

well-intentioned, caring people, who were accepted in Indigenous communities and fought for better treatment of children at the schools. It is precisely this sort of ambiguity, I suggest, that justifies the sort of analytical shift that I am arguing for. By thinking through the architecture of this educational system, alternate perspectives open on these seemingly intractable questions, providing new material to assist in working through this traumatic history.

To this end, it is important to respectfully augment very personal and often fraught issues around the school with the logic of systems and structures. Giorgio's Agamben's work on biopolitics and the concept of exclusion is helpful here, to flesh out what he terms the "inclusions of man's natural life in mechanisms and calculations of natural power."³² Agamben states that "our age is nothing but the implacable and methodological attempt to overcome the division dividing the people."³³ Yet the 'people' are always already divided: people and People; bare life (those exposed to death) and citizen; zoe (minimal biological survival) and *bios* (political life). Thus, within the state, there is a move to inclusive exclusion, where those outside of 'legitimate' life are held apart by their incorporation into the core of ethico-political concerns. Consequently, there appears the paternalism of the Indian Act, the concern for religious welfare, and the wish to educate. Always there will be well-meaning actors, but for the state to exist, this bifurcated unity must also exist. With this in mind, the schools appear more as carceral spaces than schools, a type of factory meant to produce non-citizens, who are inclusively excluded, through new religious beliefs, new work habits, new language, and so on. These structures housed a system of belonging that served to disrupt and ultimately subvert ancestral land use practices, cultural traditions, languages, social networks, and economies.

men but among Indians the first object is to make them good Christian men by applying proper moral restraints."²⁹ This sentiment is echoed repeatedly by church and government officials, most citing the laxness, ineffectiveness, and even satanic dangers of Indigenous religion and philosophical thought. Here again the technique of surveillance factors heavily, in this case as students were repeatedly warned that either God or the devil were watching each action and thought.³⁰ Vivian Ignace describes her understanding of God, while attending Kamloops Indian Residential School:

I never knew a compassionate God. I knew there was a God, but I was always scared of

the devil more than I was of God. Our spirituality, the thing that should have been our strength, was working against us. You know, they played with us that way. I didn't like that. I didn't have words for it then, but I can see it now. That was a way of control.³¹

Yet it bears mentioning that many former students remain Christians and sincerely praise their religious education while attending the residential schools, despite widespread criticism of the church's intervention into Indigenous life. It would be too simple and profoundly insulting to regard this faith as false consciousness. Moreover, not all Whites in the system were evil. A minority of principals, priests, ministers, nuns, teachers, and staff were



FIG. 15. "AMERICAN PANOPTICON." INTERIOR VIEW OF CELL HOUSE, NEW ILLINOIS STATE PENITENTIARY AT STATEVILLE, NEAR JOLIET (IL), N.D. | SOURCE: SCANNED FROM THE POSTCARD COLLECTION OF ALEX WELLERSTEIN (COPYRIGHT EXPIRED).

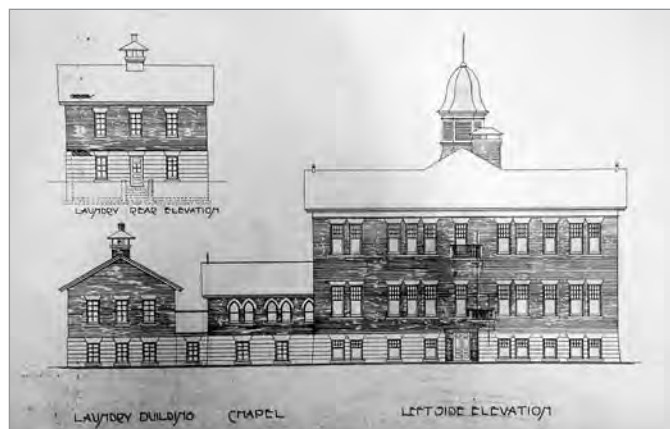


FIG. 16. ARCHITECTURAL PLAN: KUPER ISLAND RESIDENTIAL SCHOOL, C. 1913, R.G. ORR, ARCHITECT. LEFT ELEVATION. | © INDIAN AND NORTHERN AFFAIRS, REPRODUCED WITH THE PERMISSION OF THE MINISTER OF PUBLIC WORKS AND GOVERNMENT SERVICES CANADA, 2009. SOURCE: LIBRARY AND ARCHIVES CANADA / INDIAN AND NORTHERN AFFAIRS / RG22M 77803 / 111 ITEM 839.



FIG. 17. ST. EUGENE GOLF RESORT & CASINO, CRANBROOK (BC). | GEOFFREY CARR.



FIG. 18. SIDE VIEW OF ST. EUGENE AT NIGHT. | GEOFFREY CARR.

THE LUXURY OF COMMEMORATION

In this final section, I will consider how this disturbing history is integrated into perhaps the most high profile adaptive reuse project of any residential school in Canada: St. Eugene in Cranbrook (figs. 17-18). The reasons for this fame and, at times, notoriety, poses a similar slate of divisive and obfuscating issues.

Unlike most residential schools that used brick for the external walls, St. Eugene is built with rock-faced concrete blocks resting on a high concrete foundation. The rhythm of the rusticated blocks is

punctuated by dressed stone window sills and relieving arches, as well as by a string course in the upper floor and granite coping articulating a loosely Mission Revival-styled gable. St. Eugene is also exceptional in that the Department of Indian affairs employed a private architect to design the structure, the prominent Allan Keefer, who also designed, among other buildings, Stornoway, the house of the official opposition in Ottawa. Initially the Ktuxaxa/Kinbasket Tribal Council sought to designate the school as a site of national historic significance under the guidelines specified by the Historic Sites and Monuments Board of Canada (HSMBC) in the belief that it would help

attract outside investment.³⁴ Their application was not approved for a number of reasons, including an intervention by Indian and Northern Affairs of Canada who "strongly urged that any initiatives regarding the possible commemoration of Aboriginal residential schools be delayed until the research studies and report of the RCAP [Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples] have been released to the public."³⁵ According to a HSMBC insider, the general feeling at the time was that "the Board had dodged a bullet." Since that unsuccessful bid, the former residential school has undergone a major renovation, converting the building and grounds into a luxury resort, a golf course, and a casino



FIG. 19. VIEW FROM THIRD FLOOR SUITE LOOKING OVER THE GOLF COURSE. | GEOFFREY CARR.



FIG. 20. ENTRANCE GATES OF THE RESORT. | GEOFFREY CARR.



FIG. 21. RENOVATED CHAPEL INTERIOR, CHIEF DAVID MEETING ROOM. | GEOFFREY CARR.



FIG. 22. REPLICA KTUNAXA TIPI SITUATED BEHIND THE MAIN BUILDING OF THE RESORT. | GEOFFREY CARR.

(fig. 19). This forty million dollar project did receive federal funding, in excess of three million dollars, and promises to generate a projected thirteen to fifteen million dollars a year for a consortium of bands across the country. But not under the aegis of HSMBC designation.

The redevelopment of St. Eugene, however, came at a significant cost to its mnemonic program. Very little of the original structures remains intact, notable exceptions include the entrance gate to the grounds and the beam work and rosette window inside the old chapel, now the “Chief David Meeting Room” (figs. 20-21). More importantly, it was clear during my visit that many of the guests had no interest in the building’s history; indeed it appeared that many were completely oblivious.³⁶ The interpretive centre located in the basement of the resort is open most days to inform visitors of the intergenerational impact of the residential school and also more broadly of Ktunaxa culture—though it was relatively quiet during various visits. This same space also houses the Ktunaxa Language Initiative, charged with the urgent task of reviving Ktunaxa, a language isolate with only approximately twenty fluent speakers.³⁷ Understaffed and underfunded, the exigencies faced by the language initiative tend to overshadow the educational program of the interpretive centre. Moreover, the modest confines do not allow for the display of full-size artefacts, including a full-sized sturgeon nosed canoe that cannot be repatriated from the museum at Fort Steele until it can be stored properly. The Ktunaxa have applied for funding to the federal government to construct a two million dollar museum to be installed on the second floor of what once was the school barn (now the pro shop). It is hoped by some Ktunaxa staff that the inclusion of the museum will draw

sufficient attention to a history that is often overlooked and downplayed. There have been some programmatic shifts since the opening of the resort, however. Initially there was resistance to calling attention to Ktunaxa culture, but since, management has displayed poignant historical photographs in the lobby, plant species important in Ktunaxa life, and as well has staged a *Legends Night*, where guests and locals gather to hear legends shared by an elder inside a tipi (fig. 22). Clearly this sort of cultural commodification has its critics, as does the commodification of misery.

Yet, lacking substantial and sustained government investment to develop a more typical site of memory, the Ktunaxa were left with few options. Like the ‘Namgis at Alert Bay, they faced untenable maintenance bills to preserve an empty building. Moreover there was a widespread wish to convert this site of social trauma to the economic good of the local community. The long-term Ktunaxa plan, if the resort manages to weather the current economic downturn, is to buy out their partners and again retain sole possession of the property. It remains to be seen if this plan will bear fruit in the long term, however, as the resort has already once been forced to enter bankruptcy protection³⁸ The inclusion of a casino in the plan is likewise not without significant controversy, but, without this revenue stream, the resort likely would not have survived restructuring.³⁹

The only non-commercial space at the resort is a small, active cemetery tucked to the side of the golf course, in which rest the remains of former students and staff. At the request of Ktunaxa elders, the cemetery was not photographed, but its marginal presence reveals the extent to which this sort of development remains problematic. It bears mentioning that a research

group with the Truth and Reconciliation Commission will conduct forensic investigations at residential school graveyards, owing to allegations of burials of children and newborns in unmarked graves. The question that keeps surfacing then is what is the nature of this heritage, this patrimony, this material inheritance? Not surprisingly, the federal government and the churches continually speak of page turning, while shying away from the burning questions raised by the hideous spectre of the schools: how to prosecute offenders, determine if an instrument of genocide have occurred, or reassess sovereign legitimacy if indeed such crimes have occurred. Many Indigenous thinkers and others regard the school system as a crime against humanity, owing to the policy of forcible relocation of children and to the high mortality rates at some schools.⁴⁰ With some sympathy, I question if the sheer geographic and temporal scope of this traumatic history could ever be managed by official bodies, such as the Monument Board, and yet we are confronted by the material fabric of this brutal national memory. If this ambivalent and conflicted social memory—and its dwelling places—are indeed like bullets from the past, too lethal to our national myths to face, it suggests that Canada has only entered the initial stages of denial and will need to struggle for many years to work through this troubled chapter of its colonial history.

For Andrea Sanborn, her resolve to preserve St. Michael’s as a site of memory crystallized during a UNESCO conference in Athens in 2008. After speaking to the assembly about the history of the Indian Residential School system, she was surprised at the reactions, most expressing disbelief that Canada could be ever implicated in such a violation of human rights. To what degree the federal government will fund the preservation of

this dissonant piece of our built heritage remains to be seen. What also remains unclear is how to effect such a costly venture without a commercially viable tourist business and without erasing most of the actual, historical traces of the school. Despite the epistemological uncertainties of representing mass social traumata, I believe that more needs to be done to recognize, commemorate, and salvage some of the material remnants of the residential schools. It remains significant that the original logic of the schools dictated their construction far from public view. They operated in a near-vacuum, apart not only from settlers but also from the communities of Indigenous peoples. Not surprisingly, even in instances where the development of cities and towns has encircled these once isolated structures, most living in their vicinity know little or anything of them. In a sense, then, refusing to spend adequate funds, denying applications for designation as heritage or national historic sites, and excluding these material remnants from educational curricula K-12 and up is to extend the foundational logic and culture of silence upon which these places were erected.

NOTES

1. The 'Namgis are one of seventeen communities that belong to the Kwakwaka'wakw Nation. Most 'Namgis children did not attend St. Michael's, whereas children from those communities that did send children there, such as the Kwagu'l, would prefer to have the school demolished.
2. Huyssen, Andreas, 2003, *Present Pasts: Urban Palimpsests and the Politics of Memory*, Stanford (CA), Stanford University Press, p. 5.
3. Lennon, John and Malcolm Foley, 2004, *Dark Tourism: The Attraction of Death and Disaster*, London, Thomson Learning; Heller, Dana A., 2005, *The Selling of 9/11: How a National Tragedy Became a Commodity*, New York, Palgrave MacMillan; Strange, Carolyn and Michael Kempa, 2003, "Shades of Dark Tourism: Alcatraz and Robben Island," *Annals of Tourism Research*, vol. 30, no. 2, p. 386-405.
4. Torpey, John, 2006, *Making the Whole What Has Been Smashed: On Reparation Politics*, Cambridge (MA), Harvard University Press.
5. Levy, 2008, "Genocide and the Games," *The Georgia Straight*, August 7-14, p. 35.
6. The official court notice detailing the settlement can be read at: [http://www.residentialschoolsettlement.ca/english_index.html], accessed August 10, 2009.
7. The total number of schools is a matter of debate, and various Indigenous communities around the country continue to struggle to have local schools formally recognized as Indian Residential Schools, without which they are entitled neither to apology nor compensation.
8. *Slusstrich* also denotes the falling of a stage curtain or the final note of a piece of music.
9. Four denominations managed residential schools. The Roman Catholic Church was the most heavily involved, followed by the Church of England, the United Church, and the Presbyterian Church.
10. As Harold Cardinal points out in his seminal text, *The Unjust Society* (1999, Vancouver, Douglas and McIntyre, p. 36), this was a violation of an early treaty agreement which stated that education would be bound by the policy of non-interference with religion.
11. Milloy, John S., 1999, *A National Crime: the Canadian Government and the Residential School System, 1879 to 1986*, Winnipeg, University of Manitoba Press, p. 30.
12. Miller, J.R., 1996, *Shingwauk's Vision: A History of Native Residential Schools*, Toronto, University of Toronto Press, p. 101.
13. Kuper Island Residential School presents the bleakest statistics in this regard: in 1915, in the survey of students who had attended the school over the past twenty-five years, it is mentioned that in the total of two hundred and sixty-four known students, one hundred and seven had died. (See Milloy, p. 93.)
14. In 1930, a special inspector labelled St. Eugene as a "veritable tubercular institution," a crisis that nearly caused the closing of the school. (Library and Archives Canada (LAC), RG10, vol. 6453, file 884-5, p. 3.)
15. Supreme Court Justice Douglas Hogarth used this term to describe Alberni Residential School during his sentencing of Arthur Henry Plint.
16. For a small sample of autobiographical accounts from residential school survivors, see: Furniss, Elizabeth, 1995, *Victims of Benevolence: The Dark Legacy of Williams Lake Residential School*, Vancouver, Arsenal Pulp Press; Graham, Elizabeth, 1997, *The Mush Hole: Life at Two Indian Residential Schools*, Waterloo (ON), Heffle Publishers; Jack, Agnes (ed.), 2000, *Behind Closed Doors: Stories from the Kamloops Indian Residential School*, Kamloops (BC), Secwepemc Cultural Education Society; Johnston, Basil, 1988, *Indian School Days*, Toronto, Key Porter Books; Knockwood, Isabelle, 1992, *Out of the Depths: The Experiences of Mi'kmaw Children at the Indian Residential School at Shubenacadie, Nova Scotia*, Lockeport (NS), Roseway; Olsen, Sylvia, 2001, *No Time to Say Goodbye: Children's Stories of Kuper Island Residential School*, Victoria (BC), Sono Nis Press; and Sterling, Shirley, 1992, *My Name is Seepeetza*, Toronto, Douglas & McIntyre.
17. The term biopolitics appears first in Michel Foucault's *The History of Sexuality* (v. 1), where it describes the growing interest of the modern state in the biological condition of its population. Beginning in the eighteenth century, the capitalist state enacted programs of disease prevention, hygiene, sanitation, water supply, and education. In the process, the exercise of power and government moves from the close control of the sovereign to be dispersed more widely through a number of technologies of power, including institutions such as hospitals, insane asylums, prisons, and schools. In this way, the biopolitical state begins to regulate its citizens and non-citizens according to new, scientific categories of age, race, gender, sexuality, and so on. (See Foucault, Michel, 1990, *The History of Sexuality*, New York, Vintage Books.)
18. See: Levi, Primo, 1986, *Moments of Reprieve*, New York, Summit Books; Rabinow, Paul, 1997, "Space, Knowledge, Power: Interview with Michel Foucault," in Neil Leach (ed.), *Rethinking Architecture: A Reader in Cultural Theory*, New York, Routledge, p. 367-379; Lefebvre, Henri, 1991, *The Production of Space*, Cambridge (MA), Blackwell; and Casella, Eleanor Conlin, 2007, "Why Incarcerate," *The Archaeology of Institutional Confinement*, Gainesville (FL), The University of Florida Press, p. 57-83.
19. DIA Annual Report, 1913, p. 409.
20. Duffel, Nick, 2000, *The Making of Them: The British Attitude to Children and the Boarding School System*, London, Lone Arrow Press.

21. Bull, Linda, 1991, "Indian Residential Schooling: The Native Perspective," *Canadian Journal of Native Education*, vol. 18 suppl., p. 1-63.
22. Ktunaxa survivor Gordon Sebastian shared this during an interview, August 12, 2009.
23. One typical example of dissenting view of this is found in the 1911 DIA Annual Report, in which an Indian Agent notes: "My experience has taught me that the co-operative influence of the parent is one of the strongest and, best forces in the work of uplifting the children."
24. DIA Annual Report, 1912, p. 336.
25. *Id.*, 1913.
26. "It Is a Strict Law That Bids Us Dance: Cosmologies, Colonialism, Death, and Ritual Authority in the Kwakwaka'wakw Potlatch, 1849 to 1922," *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, vol. 37, no. 1, p. 41-75.
27. It is telling that the only other schools designed and constructed by the federal government during this period were military colleges.
28. Personal interview, August 10, 2009; survivors routinely note the general fear of the Monitor Rooms, for often child-abuse would be perpetrated at nighttime in the dormitories by supervisors stationed in these rooms.
29. Milloy, p. 36.
30. The severity of religious instruction eased as schools went through reforms in the sixties. Many of the students from this era knew little of the suffering of their parents and grandparents, as few survivors were prepared to divulge their suffering and an era cloaked in secrecy.
31. Jack, p. 161.
32. Agamben, Giorgio, 1998, *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*, Stanford (CA), Stanford University Press, p. 119.
33. *Id.*, p. 179.
34. HSMBC policy for designating schools can be found at: [http://www.pc.gc.ca/clmhc-hsmbc/crit/crit3_E.asp#schools], accessed August 17, 2009.
35. Historic Sites and Monuments Board, 1996, "Issue Analysis: St. Eugene Indian Residential School, Cranbrook (BC)," p. 577.
36. This I can personally attest to, as my parents have dined at the resort and were surprised when I informed them of its previous use as a residential school.
37. Despite the critically endangered status of Ktunaxa, federal government has allotted only five thousand dollars to fund the Language Initiative charged with reviving this threatened language.
38. Pierre, Sophie, 2009, "Nee Eustace: The Little Girl Who Would Be Chief," *Response, Responsibility, and Renewal*, Canada's Truth and Reconciliation Journey, p. 44.
39. For opposing views on the Indigenous casino debate see Alfred, Taiaiake, 2005, *Wasa'se: Indigenous Pathways of Action and Freedom*, Peterborough (ON), Broadview Press; and Darian-Smith, Eve, 2003, *New Capitalists: Law, Politics, and Identity Surrounding Casino Gaming on Native American Land*, Belmont (CA), Wadsworth Publishing.
40. Such critics among others include Roland Chrisjohn, 1997, *The Circle Game: Shadows and Substance in the Residential School Experience in Canada*, Penticton (BC), Theytus Books; Agnes Grant, 1996, *No End of Grief: Indian Residential Schools and Canada*, Winnipeg (MN), Pemmican Press; Ward Churchill, 2004, *Kill the Indian, Save the Men: The Genocidal Impact of the American Indian Residential Schools*, San Francisco, City Lights.