

Douglas Cardinal's Circle of Life Thunderbird House: Lessons in Indigenous Planning and
Architecture in Winnipeg's North End

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ABSTRACT

Douglas Cardinal's Circle of Life Thunderbird House: Lessons in Indigenous Planning and Architecture in Winnipeg's North End

Gabrielle Montpetit

This thesis addresses the architecture of Circle of Life Thunderbird House, in relation to the current social and political struggles associated with this architectural and urban planning project. Métis-Blackfoot Elder and architect, Douglas Cardinal, was commissioned to design the building and the surrounding complexes by Neeginan (Cree for 'Our Place'), an Indigenous community-organizing body that started in the 1970s to fight for the rights of the community and implement services to promote the social, educational and entrepreneurial growth of the Indigenous community of Winnipeg. The architecture of this building is important for it is an example of how Cardinal's methodology promotes self-determination, and brings Indigenous approaches to building to communities who are trying to heal and re-learn traditional practices and knowledges according to their values. Circle of Life Thunderbird House was initially part of the larger Winnipeg Development Agreement project, which aimed at revitalizing the North End, Winnipeg's poorest and most segregated neighbourhood. The early history of Circle of Life Thunderbird House is an important one in terms of Indigenous rights and community organizing. Today, Thunderbird House's board of directors is fighting for funding for their programming and urgent repairs. In an era of so-called reconciliation in Canada, with two published Calls to Action/Justice (Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (2015) and National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls (2019)) it is imperative that the federal government support Indigenous healing, which includes supporting infrastructures, spaces and cultural programs necessary to that healing.

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A NOTE ON TERMINOLOGY

I wish to make clear that in the context of my research, when speaking of decolonization, I am specifically referring to the repatriation of Indigenous land and self-determination. The term ‘decolonization’ has recently been used by the humanities and social sciences to refer to diverse social justice projects, ignoring the true goal of decolonization.¹ As Eve Tuck and K. Wayne Yang explain in their essay “Decolonization is Not a Metaphor”: “Decolonize (a verb) and decolonization (a noun) cannot easily be grafted onto pre-existing discourses/frameworks, even if they are critical, even if they are anti-racist, even if they are justice frameworks. The easy absorption, adoption, and transposing of decolonization is yet another form of settler appropriation.”² In other words, using decolonization as a metaphor only further limits the possibility of actual decolonization taking place.

Also, throughout this thesis I often use the term ‘Indigenous’.³ This is not meant to homogenize Indigenous cultures, knowledges and beliefs, but to reflect the diversity and pan-Indigeneity of the urban Indigenous community in Winnipeg. When it is relevant and appropriate to do so, I refer to specific Nations or groups.

¹ Eve Tuck and K. Wayne Yang, “Decolonization is not a Metaphor,” in *Decolonization: Indigeneity, Education & Society* 1, no. 1 (2012): 2.

² *Ibid.*, 3.

³ The use of the term “Indigenous” is itself debated, with conflicting definitions. The Government of Canada states that “‘Indigenous peoples’ is a collective name for the original peoples of North America and their descendants. The Canadian Constitution recognizes three distinct groups of Indigenous (Aboriginal) peoples: Indians (referred to as First Nations), Métis and Inuit.” The United Nations offers another, more detailed, explanation: “Considering the diversity of indigenous peoples, an official definition of ‘indigenous’ has not been adopted by any UN-system body. Instead the system has developed a modern understanding of this term based on the following: Self-identification as indigenous peoples at the individual level and accepted by the community as their member; Historical continuity with pre-colonial and/or pre-settler societies; Strong link to territories and surrounding natural resources; Distinct social, economic or political systems; Distinct language, culture and beliefs; Form non-dominant groups of society; Resolve to maintain and reproduce their ancestral environments and systems as distinctive peoples and communities.” “Indigenous” usually englobes many different nations and groups with each their own cultures, beliefs, languages and socio-political structures. Considering these definitions, I use the term ‘Indigenous’ to refer to people who are Indigenous to North America and who belong to the Indigenous community in Winnipeg, which encompasses people from different cultures. See: “Indigenous Peoples and Human Rights,” Government of Canada, last modified October 25, 2017, <https://www.canada.ca/en/canadian-heritage/services/rights-indigenous-peoples.html>; United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues (UNPFII), *Fact Sheet No.1, Indigenous Peoples, Indigenous Voices: Who Are Indigenous Peoples?*, May 2006, https://www.un.org/esa/socdev/unpfii/documents/5session_factsheet1.pdf.

LAND ACKNOWLEDGMENT

I would like to preface my thesis by acknowledging that all of my research has taken place on Indigenous lands. Concordia University, in Tiohtià:ké/Montréal, is situated on unceded Indigenous territory. The Kanien'kehá:ka Nation is recognized as the custodian of the lands and waters of Tiohtiá:ke. The island is historically known as a gathering place for many First Nations, including, but not limited to, the Kanien'kehá:ka, Huron-Wendat, Abenaki, and Anishinaabeg. Today, it is home to a diverse population of Indigenous and other peoples.⁴

In Winnipeg/Nestawe'ya, my research took place on Treaty 1 territory, the traditional territory of Anishinaabeg, Cree, Oji-Cree, Dakota, and Dene Peoples, and the homeland of the Métis Nation. Today, Winnipeg has the largest Indigenous population in Canada.⁵

I would not be doing my job as an art historian if I did not acknowledge the violent history of colonialism that exists in these two locations, where I have conducted my work. However, it is also important to acknowledge the ongoing resistance and community work undertaken by Indigenous peoples in Canada – and Circle of Life Thunderbird House is a direct example of this work.

I am eternally grateful for the Indigenous knowledge that was shared with me, and for the Indigenous leaders and Elders who took the time to help me with this challenging project.

Niá:wen – Miigwech – Marsee – Thank you

⁴ “Territorial Acknowledgement,” Indigenous Directions, Concordia University, accessed August 15, 2019, <https://www.concordia.ca/about/indigenous/territorial-acknowledgement.html>.

⁵ Canadian Association of University Teachers (CAUT), *Guide to Acknowledging First Peoples & Traditional Territory* (Ottawa: Canadian Association of University Teachers, September 2017), 20, <https://www.caut.ca/sites/default/files/caut-guide-to-acknowledging-first-peoples-and-traditional-territory-2017-09.pdf>.

INTRODUCTION

The mandate of Circle of Life Thunderbird House (TBH) in Winnipeg, Manitoba, reads as follows: “Circle of Life Thunderbird House is the Spiritual Heart for all Elders, Healers, Teachers, and Helpers in the Indigenous community. Thunderbird House is an open Indigenous spiritual gathering place for all people. Teachings of Kindness, Sharing, Honesty and Traditional Beliefs can be found within the circle at Thunderbird House.”⁶ Métis-Blackfoot Elder and architect, Douglas Cardinal, was commissioned to design the building and surrounding complexes by Neeginan (Cree for “Our Place”), an Indigenous community-organizing body that started in the 1970s to fight for the rights of the community and implement services to promote the social, educational and entrepreneurial growth of Winnipeg’s diverse Indigenous population. The consultation period for Thunderbird House began in 1998, and the building was completed in 2001 (fig. 1, 2, 3). During the consultation process, Cardinal met both with the Elder Council and the community that TBH was to serve.

The early history of Circle of Life Thunderbird House is an important one in terms of Indigenous rights and community organizing, a story of the urban Indigenous community of Winnipeg coming together and building a place for learning and healing. However, when one reads today’s news coverage of this cultural and community centre,⁷ it becomes clear that local and federal governments in Canada are still not willing to fully support and protect Indigenous initiatives and cultures within urban centres, despite the Truth and Reconciliation Commission’s (TRC) recommendations and the Calls to Justice from the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls (MMIWG). Today, Thunderbird House’s board of directors are fighting for funding to support their programming and to do urgent repairs (such as the building’s severely damaged copper roof, and vandalism on the outside walls).

The history of Circle of Life Thunderbird House reveals how the colonial structures that are in place within cities, the built environment and the government are systematically preventing Indigenous futurities as well as the government’s professed goal of reconciliation.

⁶ “Home,” Circle of Life Thunderbird House, last modified June 29, 2018, <https://thunderbirdhouse.ca/>.

⁷ See: Niigaan Sinclair, “Unable to Fly,” *Winnipeg Free Press*, July 9, 2018, <https://www.winnipegfreepress.com/opinion/columnists/unable-to-fly-487710461.html>; and Ryan Thorpe, “Thunderbird House Pleas for Help Ignored, Board Co-chair Says,” *Winnipeg Free Press*, July 11, 2018, <https://www.winnipegfreepress.com/local/thunderbird-house-pleas-for-help-ignored-board-co-chair-says-487825571.html>.

This thesis aims to investigate what the government's role is (and should be) in supporting such Indigenous-led healing initiatives in an era of reconciliation, as well as examine the role that architecture and city planning play in a decolonial/healing agenda. To investigate these issues, it is first important to address the erasure of Indigenous architecture and planning methodologies in North American history.

Writing about Indigenous architecture and planning in a Western academic setting has its challenges. The rejection of Indigenous architecture from architectural history began with colonization.⁸ The colonization of North America, which started in the 15th century, was dependent on the idea that the land was “terra nullius,” a Latin expression which means “land that belongs to no one.” However, this was far from the truth, Indigenous peoples have lived and built nations on this continent since time immemorial. Therefore, the colonial project in North America was dependent on the erasure of and subsequent denial that these nations and their structures ever existed.⁹ Professor of Indigenous Architecture, Daniel Millette, explains that the very process of colonizing worked (and continues to work) towards erasing, altering, and reinventing Indigenous collective memories and knowledges, architectural knowledge included.¹⁰ In our colonial society, Indigenous architectures were replaced by European structures, regardless of how these were suited to the landscape. Professor of Global, Urban and Social Studies, Libby Porter, explains the politics of dispossession involved in this:

⁸ Although the global history and scope of settler colonialism and its impact on North America falls outside the focus of this thesis, it is important to note that when talking of “colonization” I am merely describing one aspect of this history as it relates to the built environment and city planning in Winnipeg specifically. As Linda Tuhiwai Smith explains: “Colonialism was, in part, an image of imperialism, a particular realization of the imperial imagination. It was also, in part, an image of the future nation it would become. In this image lie images of the Other, stark contrasts and subtle nuances, of the ways in which the indigenous communities were perceived and dealt with, which make the stories of colonialism part of a grander narrative and yet part also of a very local, very specific experience.” In other words, in this thesis I focus on the local and contemporary ramifications of colonization, which itself is part of a much larger narrative. It is also important to add that settler colonialism and its effects are ongoing to this day, and have affected many aspects of society and how it is structured as well as the livelihood of Indigenous peoples. Linda Tuhiwai Smith, *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples* (London; New York: Zed Books, 2012), 24.

⁹ For example, Cholula in Mexico was the second largest Aztec city in the Puebla region, with 365 temples, which were all destroyed by Spanish conquistador Hernán Cortés in 1519. See: Ted Jojola, “Indigenous Planning: Towards a Seven Generations Model,” in *Reclaiming Indigenous Planning*, ed. Ryan Walker, Ted Jojola, and David Natcher (Montreal; Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2013), 459. In more recent history, in the late nineteenth century, the Tsawwassen longhouses in British Columbia fell into disuse and eventually ruin due to colonial policies that sought to control all aspects of Indigenous life, including land dispossession and the banning of ceremonial practices associated with specific architectural structures such as the longhouse. See: Daniel M. Millette, “Memory, the Architecture of First Nations, and the Problem with History,” in *Architecture and the Canadian Fabric*, ed. Rhodri Windsor Liscombe (Vancouver; Toronto: UBC Press, 2011), 469-471.

¹⁰ Millette, “Memory, the Architecture of First Nations, and the Problem with History,” 468.

Producing space in settler colonies was the enactment of a politics of (dis)possession. Dispossession activities were the work of erasing the lived space of Indigenous peoples. That lived space, and the peoples that occupied them, were the difference Europe encountered in its colonies. As Europe encountered its Others and Othered spaces, peculiarly colonial spatial and social cultures emerged.¹¹

Buildings have specific functions; architecture shapes how we navigate our daily practices and how we live our lives. The erasure of traditional architecture is also the erasure of traditional ways of life.¹² Many of the colonial laws and policies in Canada have directly impacted traditional architectural knowledges and practices. For example, the treaties themselves took away important traditional sites from Indigenous communities across the country, taking with them the architectural knowledges that were left and destroyed on these lands.¹³ Reserves, with their imposed design and structures (or lack thereof), also further contribute to altering the collective memories of Indigenous communities, and with it their relation to traditional architecture.¹⁴ Professor of Indigenous Planning and Design, Ted Jojola, explains how colonialism is responsible for the rejection of Indigenous knowledge from the field of architecture and planning, stating that: “It was the result of colonialism that Indigenous contributions to western civilization had been dismissed as inconsequential to the evolution of ‘great’ building and planning traditions. Often relegated to anthropology and the study of quaint vernacular traditions, accomplishments in Indigenous architecture and planning have been consigned to anonymity and obscurity.”¹⁵ Therefore, it comes as no surprise that no formal analysis of Thunderbird House’s architecture has been published to date. Cardinal’s work for and with Indigenous communities continues to be ignored by Western scholarship, while his projects that are celebrated and published at length about are his large-scale government-funded projects, such as the Museums of Civilization (now the Canadian Museum of History, fig. 4). The analysis and critique of Cardinal’s work has often concentrated on his architecture’s apparent ‘Canadian-

¹¹ Libby Porter, *Unlearning the Colonial Cultures of Planning* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2010), 76.

¹² Millette, “Memory, the Architecture of First Nations, and the Problem with History,” 468. The term “traditional” is used by Daniel M. Millette in this essay. This is a charged term, especially in relation to Indigenous practices and knowledges. I have decided to keep/use this term to designate architecture and other practices that have continuity with pre-contact ways of doing. In other words, the use of the word “traditional” here is not meant to imply that these practices and knowledges are strictly of the past.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 471.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁵ Ted Jojola, “Foreword: It is Time to Crack Open the Square and Move into a Circle,” in *Decolonizing Planning: Experiences with Urban Aboriginal Communities and First Nations*, ed. Ian Skelton (Champaign: Common Ground Publishing, 2014), xii.

ness' or enactment of a mystical/lyrical Indigeneity. His work is either celebrated for the tribute it makes to the mythical Canadian landscape, or criticized for not suiting contemporary requirements.¹⁶ As a result, we need to start looking at how Cardinal's work has real implications on the lives of those who commission his work, and not on how his work fits into Eurocentric norms of design.

Both Circle of Life Thunderbird House's social programs and its architecture are symbols of decolonial resistance within Winnipeg's urban centre. Nevertheless, as this thesis will demonstrate, they continue to be challenged by financial struggles caused by institutional racism and white supremacist ideologies that lie at the heart of Canadian government policies and how these policies influence urban planning outcomes as well as the support offered to community initiatives. The programs and services TBH provides need to be financially supported, but their building and the space they occupy in the city also needs to receive this kind of support. To understand the importance of this building, the first section of this thesis is dedicated to an analysis of Cardinal's philosophy and body of work, and the impact these have had on Indigenous communities. The second section will examine the colonial history of segregation of Winnipeg's Indigenous population to the North End, Winnipeg's numerous urban renewal projects, including the Winnipeg Development Agreement from 1998 and Neeginan, as well as the crucial role of Indigenous women activists in making such projects possible. Finally, the third section will consist of a more in-depth analysis of Circle of Life Thunderbird House, its architecture, symbolism and its history, as well as the government's role in supporting such initiatives based on the TRC and the National Inquiry into MMIWG.

SECTION 1: DOUGLAS CARDINAL

Douglas Cardinal was born in 1934, in Calgary, Alberta. His father, Joseph Cardinal, was a game warden, from whom he acquired land-based knowledge, providing an early introduction to

¹⁶ See: Joan Reid Acland, "The Native Artistic Subject and National Identity: A Cultural Analysis of the Architecture of the Canadian Museum of Civilization, Designed by Douglas Cardinal" (PhD diss., Concordia University, 1994); Peter Hemingway, "Critique: Two Buildings by Douglas Cardinal," *Canadian Architect* 23, no. 2 (1978): 18-23; and Paul M. Sachner, "Collective Memory: A Unique Building Ensemble That Seems Molded by the Forces of Nature, Douglas Cardinal's Canadian Museum of Civilization," *Architectural Record* 178, no. 2 (February 1990): 88-93.

non-Western modes of knowledge before being sent to residential school, which sought to assimilate and erase Indigenous knowledges and cultures.¹⁷ Cardinal's mother, Frances Marguerite Rach, encouraged his interest in the arts from a very young age, introducing him to art and architecture history.¹⁸ Cardinal spent his early education up until grade ten in a residential school,¹⁹ finished his secondary education at a public high school in Red Deer and studied architecture at the University of British Columbia (UBC) from 1952 to 1955.²⁰ Cardinal's parents played a large role in encouraging him to pursue his formal education, his mother being an educated woman herself and a registered nurse, and his father selling the mink ranch they owned and buying the Red Deer motel in order to increase their income to help Cardinal go to university.²¹

Cardinal has a democratic and participatory architectural philosophy, which he delineates in his publications *Of the Spirit* (published in 1977) and *The Native Creative Process* (published in 1991 in collaboration with Jeannette Armstrong). Cardinal is an important Indigenous leader in Canada, and has contributed to the well-being of Indigenous communities across the continent. Cardinal has designed schools to reflect its Indigenous students, such as the First Nations university in Regina (Saskatchewan) (fig. 5), Rossignol Elementary Community School in Île-à-la-Crosse (Saskatchewan) (fig. 6), and Amo Osowan School in Long Point First Nation (Québec) (fig. 7). Cardinal has also designed towns that reflect Indigenous philosophies and lifeways, such as Kehewin village in Alberta (fig. 8), and Oujé-Bougoumou in Québec (fig. 9). Fighting for Indigenous rights and land claims has been another important aspect of Cardinal's work, even within Canada's large urban centres. In 2014, Cardinal filed an appeal to the Ontario

¹⁷ Trevor Boddy, *The Architecture of Douglas Cardinal* (Edmonton: NeWest Press, 1988), 11-13.

¹⁸ Stefan Novakovic, "Q&A: Douglas Cardinal," *Canadian Architect*, February 27, 2018. <https://www.canadianarchitect.com/qa-douglas-cardinal/>; and Sean Myers, "Douglas Cardinal Encourages Indigenous Students to Follow Their Own Path to Design Careers," *UToday*, University of Calgary, February 5th, 2018, <https://www.ucalgary.ca/utoday/issue/2018-02-05/douglas-cardinal-encourages-indigenous-students-follow-their-own-path-design>. [Can be accessed here: <https://web.archive.org/web/20190716043326/https://www.ucalgary.ca/utoday/issue/2018-02-05/douglas-cardinal-encourages-indigenous-students-follow-their-own-path-design>].

¹⁹ Residential schools in Canada, in the nineteenth and twentieth century, were Church-led, government sponsored schools that were primarily concerned with assimilating Indigenous (Inuit, First Nations and Métis) children to the dominant Euro-Canadian society. Many horrors were committed in these schools, the effects of which are ongoing. For more information see: Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, *Final Report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, Volume One* (Toronto: James Lorimer & Company Ltd., Publishers, 2015).

²⁰ Boddy, *The Architecture of Douglas Cardinal*, 13.

²¹ Stefan Novakovic, "Q&A: Douglas Cardinal"; Boddy, *The Architecture of Douglas Cardinal*, 13.

Municipal Board over the development of the Albert and Chaudière islands (Ottawa, Ontario) by multi-billion-dollar paper producer Domtar Corporation, on the basis that these islands are sacred to the Algonquin people.²² Cardinal continues to serve Indigenous communities through his activism and architecture, and projects such as Circle of Life Thunderbird House are a clear example of this.

In Western scholarship, there have been two main themes that guide the analysis of Cardinal's work: landscape and biography.²³ The first theme, landscape, looks at harmony with the surrounding environment and how its forms inspire Cardinal's designs. The second theme, personal biography, investigates Cardinal's feelings as an outsider, his struggle with his Native identity, and other events in his life having influenced his work and philosophy.²⁴ It is important to be careful when using this second approach, seeing as many Indigenous artists and other professionals often have their identity and personal lives put in the spotlight, and tied to their work whether or not it is relevant. Cardinal himself has had to struggle with this, and has been accused of "selling out," trading off his Métis-Blackfoot identity in order to receive commissions, namely by fellow architects such as Peter Hemingway.²⁵ In other words, Cardinal's ties to his roots were often being put into question, keeping in line with the colonial binaries that continuously work towards categorizing, and keeping "Native" separate from "success" or "contemporaneity".

In his extensive career, there have been at least two significant shifts in approaches. A first shift happened in the late 1960s, when Cardinal reconnected with his Métis-Blackfoot heritage/culture. Cardinal started integrating this heritage into his designs, and became more involved in Indigenous political causes.²⁶ This coincided with a period in his life when Cardinal also grew increasingly interested in Indigenous spirituality and started attending sweat lodges, not only reconnecting with the design principles of his Native culture but the spiritual aspects as well.²⁷ During this time, an important portion of his work was dedicated to designing schools for

²² "Douglas Cardinal files appeal with OMB over Domtar redevelopment," *CBC News*, December 9, 2014, <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/ottawa/douglas-cardinal-files-appeal-with-omb-over-domtar-redevelopment-1.2866216>; Elizabeth Payne, "Welcome to 'Zibi': Windmill launches Albert, Chaudière islands development," *Ottawa Citizen*, May 8, 2015, <https://ottawacitizen.com/news/local-news/live-windmill-officially-launches-renewal-project>.

²³ Boddy, *The Architecture of Douglas Cardinal*, 9.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Ibid., 80; Hemingway, "Critique," 23.

²⁶ Boddy, *The Architecture of Douglas Cardinal*, 50-52.

²⁷ Ibid., 65.

First Nations.²⁸ However, during this time Cardinal was also receiving less and less commissions and losing clients.²⁹ A second shift happened in the 1980s, when Cardinal started to play the part of a “professional architect,” and ascribing to its accompanying signifiers: wearing suits, sporting cropped hair cuts, going to networking events, and the like. This “retooling” helped Cardinal regain clients, and work the colonial, modernist system from within.³⁰

Despite these different stages in his career, Cardinal always stayed true to a collaborative process, and continued to employ organic forms. In fact, most of Cardinal’s designs are recognizable by their biomorphic forms, the impact of which are not to be undermined. As Boddy explains: “There is no doubt that Cardinal’s curvilinear planning is a reaction to the notions of universal space of mainstream modern architecture. Cardinal promotes a reaction, perhaps an overreaction, to the lack of accommodation to the particular qualities of place and program implicit in the dominant design ideology of the 20th century.”³¹ Cardinal’s architecture, which is designed in harmony with its surroundings, is a statement against the rigidity of modern architecture and Eurocentric norms of design. This aspect of his work has in fact ruffled some feathers in the academy. As mentioned above, Cardinal studied architecture at UBC in the 1950s, where he had many modernist influences such as Le Corbusier, Walter Gropius, and Mies van der Rohe.³² Cardinal’s work challenges the binaries of Western practices of architecture by adapting these modernist influences from his architectural studies at UBC to an Indigenous philosophy, adjusted to regional traditions, landscape and materials.³³ However, this approach to architecture has not always been well received and has been met with a lot of resistance from both the academic institution and the public. Due to systematic racism present in the academy, and UBC’s strict Modernist tendencies, Cardinal had had some difficulties expressing his organic forms within the institution. The program director at the time (1950s), Frederic Lasserre, even stated that Cardinal was from “the wrong family background” to become a professional architect.³⁴

²⁸ Ibid., 70.

²⁹ Ibid., 63.

³⁰ Ibid., 77.

³¹ Ibid., 59.

³² Ibid., 14. On the history of architectural education in North America at this time, see: Joan Ockman and Avigail Sachs, “Modernism Takes Command,” in *Architecture School: Three Centuries of Educating Architects in North America*, ed. Joan Ockman (Cambridge, Mass.: The MIT Press, 2012), 121-159.

³³ Boddy, *The Architecture of Douglas Cardinal*, 14.

³⁴ Ibid., 17.

Cardinal's work is a testament to Indigenous architects envisioning new ways of building with an extensive use of technology. Cardinal has been working with computer technologies to achieve his ambitious designs, and in the 1970s became the first architect to have a fully computerized practice in Canada.³⁵ Cardinal has also played with the norms of the industry by restructuring his construction proposals and designs to allow for as much local labor and expertise as possible, especially when designing for Indigenous communities.³⁶ By supporting Indigenous *main-d'oeuvre* and giving communities the opportunity to take control of their own construction projects, Cardinal returns Indigenous architectural expertise to communities. This is a powerful architectural methodology, for it sets the groundwork for a decolonial use of the land and structuring of a community.

Cardinal's philosophy is also important to consider in the analysis of his work. As mentioned above, Cardinal has published two books outlining his creative process and design philosophy. In *Of the Spirit*, which was first published in 1977, Cardinal speaks of architecture as "art of the environment."³⁷ For Cardinal, architecture has the power to heal, by reflecting the surrounding environment and its beauty, as well as representing the history and roots of a community.³⁸ This is achieved through the use of traditional craft and motifs, and using building materials and construction methods that best utilize the skills of Indigenous peoples.³⁹ By engaging with Cardinal's architectural ideology, one can start to understand why Cardinal's designs take on such unique forms, in order to fit each community he collaborates with. Since most of Indigenous architecture and its memory have been suppressed due to colonialism, Indigenous architects are forced to create new forms based on oral history and traditional knowledge.⁴⁰ Cardinal does this by consulting with the community that the building will serve, and integrating traditional Indigenous worldviews. Cardinal explains the challenges that come with this kind of participatory approach: "It is difficult for an architect to suppress his ego. To really listen and work with people whom you are trying to serve you must often abandon your own concept for a form composed by the people."⁴¹ However, the importance of having

³⁵ Ibid., 99; "Philosophy," Douglas Cardinal Architect, accessed July 14th, 2019, <http://www.djcaarchitect.com/philosophy>.

³⁶ Boddy, *The Architecture of Douglas Cardinal*, 72.

³⁷ Douglas Cardinal, *Of the Spirit*, ed. George Melnyk (Edmonton: NeWest Press, 1977), 97.

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Ibid., 53.

⁴⁰ Millette, "Memory, the Architecture of First Nations, and the Problem with History," 471-472; 477.

⁴¹ Cardinal, *Of the Spirit*, 25.

architecture and planning projects adapted to the specific needs of the people it will serve cannot be undermined: “Solutions coming from the people have far more truth and far more soul to them because they solve their needs.”⁴² In this way, we can start to see how Douglas Cardinal’s philosophy goes against capitalist and colonial structures. He critiques the pre-fabricated and one-size-fits-all mentality of postwar North American modern society, claiming that this philosophy does not take into account the different factors (i.e. culture, climate, customs, environment, etc.) that can affect a project.⁴³ Having Indigenous-led solutions to problems faced by Indigenous peoples is another way in which Cardinal’s work is centered around Indigenous self-determination.

TBH is one of such projects that has been conducted following Cardinal’s community-oriented methodology, as will be explored further in the third section of this thesis. Rossignol Elementary Community School, in Île-à-la-Crosse (Saskatchewan), is comparable to TBH in its methodology and function. The floor plan of this school, which serves the Métis community of Île-à-la-Crosse, resembles three flowers gathered together with their petals radiating outwards (fig. 10). This design was determined by Cardinal through an extensive consultation process with the community, and resulted in a centroidal plan that reflected the community’s need for a communal approach to education and the sharing of resources:

It was important that each space be integrated with the next, and that the rooms be placed in intimate contact with one another, reinforcing the community’s role in the teaching process. For example, four individual classrooms open onto a single resource centre, which in turn opens into the central space (and focal point) of the school: a hexagonal lounge space which serves as a meeting place for all members of the community.⁴⁴

This communal meeting space features a sunken seating arrangement, resembling a fire pit, and a circular skylight above, referencing the smoke holes that would have been part of a traditional Plains structure (fig. 11).⁴⁵ TBH also exemplifies a communal and educational structure determined by and for the Indigenous community, that has a centric floor plan (fig. 12), with

⁴² Ibid., 26.

⁴³ Ibid., 27.

⁴⁴ Rebecca Lemire, “Organic Architecture and Indigenous Design Tenets: Frank Lloyd Wright in Relation to the Work of Douglas Cardinal,” *Journal of the Society for the Study of Architecture in Canada (JSSAC)* 38, no. 2 (2013): 90.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

each room close together and opening onto a central space with a fire pit and a skylight/smoke hole above. These two projects honor the community's values and needs, and structures these in an Indigenous space, referencing traditional building techniques.

Cardinal's philosophy does not just limit itself to architecture, but also expands on urban planning. Cardinal critiques modern urban centres, which revolve around business, exploitation, and waste. Cardinal calls for a new model for town centers which would focus on education, healing, and culture,⁴⁶ similar to the mandate of Circle of Life Thunderbird House. For Cardinal, this new focus would bring a larger understanding of ourselves, the people around us, and the environment, making the city a more human place.⁴⁷ According to Cardinal, the grid-like pattern adopted by most North American cities further promotes waste, pollution and lifelessness: "The growth patterns of most of our present towns and cities have no human oriented motives. Once initiated, they become mindless, cancerous growths which develop in grid-like patterns destroying the natural beauty of the land, competing with nature and polluting the total environment. There is no heart, no mind, no feeling in this grid."⁴⁸ This dominant grid-like pattern and the architecture that fills it respond to the needs of capitalism, not living beings (humans and nature). One of the main reasons that grid-like planning and rigid architecture are detrimental to mankind and nature, is that it is quite simply unnatural: "We have to break through the cubes that cage our minds, our souls, our bodies and develop a new perspective that will allow us to change so that our artificial environment will become compatible with the nature of man and nature itself."⁴⁹ This outlook on urban planning is crucial to understanding the larger Neeginan plan that Thunderbird House was a part of, discussed in the second section of this thesis, as it attempted to directly go against settler-colonial capitalist values inherent in planning in order to bring well-being to Winnipeg's Indigenous population and its degrading neighbourhood. Indigenous peoples are often seen as outsiders and not participants in contemporary society by settler-colonial governments and city planners, and therefore are kept outside capitalist structures,⁵⁰ leading to segregation and further marginalization.

⁴⁶ Cardinal, *Of the Spirit*, 27-28.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 33.

⁴⁸ Ibid., 31.

⁴⁹ Ibid., 125.

⁵⁰ Owen Toews, *Stolen City: Racial Capitalism and the Making of Winnipeg* (Winnipeg: Arbeiter Ring Publishing, 2018), 183.

Cardinal also notes the healing power of architecture, recalling his project for the Bonnyville Indian-Métis Rehabilitation Centre, in Alberta (fig. 13). Through a collaborative approach, Douglas Cardinal and the Indigenous community of Cold Lake developed a plan around the significance of the circle, an important motif in Cardinal's work. The circular/centralized plan in much of Cardinal's architecture evokes the feeling of being in a group, sharing, unity, and ceremony (fig. 14).⁵¹ Decorating the rehabilitation centre with traditional crafts and motifs, such as dreamcatchers and visual art by Indigenous artists, and using building materials and construction methods that best utilize the skills of the Indigenous peoples of the region (i.e. timber construction) is another way that Cardinal attempts to bring cultural healing into his work.⁵² Joy Monice Malnar and Frank Vodvarka, in their book *New Architecture on Indigenous Lands*, note that this "centroidal spatial approach" in Cardinal's work reinforces a sense of community,⁵³ seeing as the circle is "the symbolic base for healing, knowledge, and equality."⁵⁴

In *The Native Creative Process*, Cardinal speaks to the difficulty of living in harmony within Western society, and therefore the importance of creating more space for Native realities within urban centres.⁵⁵ For Cardinal, a decolonial city would also be a more harmonious one. Settler-colonial society's continuous dismissal of Indigenous technologies and contributions is one way that harmony is prevented.⁵⁶ Cardinal claims that Indigenous peoples "have been programmed for self-destruction" according to the settler-colonial script.⁵⁷ Therefore, his work is dedicated to reclaiming Indigenous ways of being in good relation to one another, and (re)building, in a commitment to Indigenous futurity. Cardinal does not only go against the dominant culture through his physical structures, but through his creative process that falls outside of a culture of rigidity and exploitation.⁵⁸

Cardinal's explanation of oneness corresponds with many Indigenous views of time and space. Cardinal explains that a philosophy of oneness helps us understand how the destruction of

⁵¹ Cardinal, *Of the Spirit*, 53.

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ Joy Monice Malnar and Frank Vodvarka, *New Architecture on Indigenous Lands* (Minneapolis; London: University of Minnesota Press, 2013), 90.

⁵⁴ Ibid., 106.

⁵⁵ Douglas Cardinal and Jeannette Armstrong, *The Native Creative Process* (Penticton: Theytus Books, 1991), 44; 49.

⁵⁶ Ibid., 12.

⁵⁷ Ibid., 20.

⁵⁸ Ibid., 69-72.

the land leads to the physical and spiritual destruction of people as well.⁵⁹ Oneness also means that time is not linear, and the past, present and future are all connected and influence each other.⁶⁰ The seven generations model, an important principle of Indigenous planning, is another iteration of this view. Ted Jojola, explains the seven generations model as follows: “The knowledge of the past informs the present and, together, it builds a vision towards the future.”⁶¹ Jojola adds that “It is everybody’s responsibility to make sure that those [seven] generations that preceded or follow him or her continue to maintain the community’s worldview.”⁶² Cardinal’s philosophy overlaps with some of the major tenets of Indigenous planning, which are at the heart of projects such as Neeginan/Circle of Life Thunderbird House that go against the typical five-year urban renewal plans carried out by the city of Winnipeg. Keeping these concepts in mind, it is important to consider the power that architecture holds in embodying, preserving, and passing down culturally specific worldviews. Within a colonial urban centre, which was designed to erase markers of Indigenous presence, Cardinal is reclaiming traditional knowledge and worldviews, and ensuring their survival into the future by reflecting them in his architecture.

SECTION 2: WINNIPEG & URBAN PLANNING

Circle of Life Thunderbird House and its architecture emerged out of an Indigenous planning initiative organized by the Indigenous community of Winnipeg, under the banner of Neeginan. Its history demonstrates the challenges of implementing an Indigenous approach to planning within Canadian cities, as well as the importance of such an approach for the healing of Indigenous communities. The basis of this challenge is to try to introduce decolonial space and break out of the existing colonial structures that are at the foundation of Canadian cities. As Hirini Matunga explains, colonial city patterns have contributed to the erasure of Indigenous materiality and memory by replacing the traces of Indigenous communities with colonial monuments and street names, churches, etc., and abiding by planning strategies that do not

⁵⁹ Cardinal, *Of the Spirit*, 44.

⁶⁰ Ibid., 78.

⁶¹ Ted Jojola, “Indigenous Planning,” 457.

⁶² Ibid., 458.

consider Indigenous futurity.⁶³ Therefore, having a space such as TBH that reintroduces Indigenous materiality and architecture (as well as Indigenous spirituality, culture, etc.) into the city, on reclaimed land, directly delegitimizes colonial claims to land and planning strategies. As Libby Porter explains, the very foundation of cities in North America, and other colonized continents, is based on anti-Indigenous military strategies:

Township building had a significance beyond the immediate occupation of space and the performance of a disposition toward space for order out of chaos. Towns were a military strategy in the wars with Indigenous peoples. Townships afforded protection to colonists by the proximity of assistance from neighbours, and allowed easy policing and patrol of town boundaries to restrict the movement of Indigenous people.⁶⁴

Therefore, reclaiming urban space is an important act of resistance against these strategies, which also open up the possibility for decolonial spaces within the city. Julie Nagam, in writing about the power of Indigenous bodies and stories in urban centres, demonstrates that creating places where Indigenous bodies can be present in the cityscape deconstructs white-settler mythologies of the occupation of space, and in turn brings to the forefront Indigenous stories of place and issues of sovereignty.⁶⁵

But what does a decolonial city look like? While decolonization should always be Indigenous-led, and is an ongoing process, Winnipeg's few pockets of decolonial space, such as Circle of Life Thunderbird House, indicate what decolonization in urban centres could look like. As Ryan Walker explains, a decolonial city would recognize Indigenous sovereignty, normalize it, and consider it a central tenet of planning towards good urban life.⁶⁶ In addition, if we are to speak of reconciliation in Canadian cities, Indigenous cultures must circulate through them, and

⁶³ Hirini Matunga, "Theorizing Indigenous Planning," in *Reclaiming Indigenous Planning*, ed. Ryan Walker, Ted Jojola, and David Natcher (Montreal; Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2013), 8.

⁶⁴ Porter, *Unlearning the Colonial Cultures of Planning*, 72.

⁶⁵ Julie Nagam, "(Re)mapping the Colonized Body: The Creative Interventions of Rebecca Belmore in the Cityscape," *American Indian Culture and Research Journal* (2011): 161-163.

⁶⁶ Libby Porter, Hirini Matunga, Leela Viswanathan, Lyana Patrick, Ryan Walker, Leonie Sandercock, Dana Moraes, Jonathan Frantz, Michelle Thompson-Fawcett, Callum Riddle and Theodore (Ted) Jojola, "Indigenous Planning: from Principles to Practice/A Revolutionary Pedagogy of/for Indigenous Planning/Settler-Indigenous Relationships as Liminal Spaces in Planning Education and Practice/Indigenist Planning/What is the Work of Non-Indigenous People in the Service of a Decolonizing Agenda?/Supporting Indigenous Planning in the City/Film as a Catalyst for Indigenous Community Development/Being Ourselves and Seeing Ourselves in the City: Enabling the Conceptual Space for Indigenous Urban Planning/Universities Can Empower the Next Generation of Architects, Planners, and Landscape Architects in Indigenous Design and Planning." *Planning Theory & Practice*, 18:4 (2017): 654-655.

Indigenous worldviews must be considered in the planning processes.⁶⁷ These were part of the guiding principles for the Neeginan village. What the different levels of government must realize is that by failing to support initiatives that place Indigenous culture and sovereignty at the centre of the city, the reproduction of oppressive colonial patterns persists, and reconciliation cannot take place.

In order to demonstrate the importance of TBH and the land claims it has to the centre of Winnipeg, we must start from the beginning. Urban histories on Turtle Island (North America) are often portrayed as recent, starting with European contact, but this is a limiting view of the rich histories that came before colonization. Especially when talking about Indigenous land claims and justice, which are involved in projects such as TBH, we need to challenge the boundaries of urban histories, and commence with Indigenous occupations of the land.⁶⁸ Winnipeg, which is situated on Treaty 1 territory, has always been an Indigenous city.⁶⁹ The region we now know as Winnipeg has been an important site for many Indigenous nations for more than 8,500 years.⁷⁰ Nestawe'ya, later City of Red River, at the junction of the Red and Assiniboine rivers, was a booming economic, political and cultural hub in the North West.⁷¹ This city gained prominence in the 1800s, with Indigenous resistance to the Hudson Bay Company and settler colonial invasions.⁷² The names/words “Winnipeg” and “Manitoba” themselves originate from Anishinaabemowin.⁷³ Winnipeg means “muddy waters” and Manitoba means “where the Creator [Manitou] sits.”⁷⁴ The importance of recognizing these histories lies in recognizing Indigenous stories tied to place, and the land claims that stem from them. Jonathan Hildebrand, a planner based in Winnipeg, explains how this is especially relevant for projects such as Neeginan (and TBH): “This [contextualization] reflects not only Neeginan’s cultural foundation and approach, but also the centrality of land and connection to the natural world inherent in such an approach. It also exemplifies an Indigenous re-appropriation of not only

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ Susan Applegate Krouse and Heather A. Howard, eds., “Introduction,” in *Keeping the Campfires Going: Native Women’s Activism in Urban Communities* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2009), xiii; Porter, *Unlearning the Colonial Cultures of Planning*, 3.

⁶⁹ Toews, *Stolen City*, 125.

⁷⁰ North Main Street Task Force, “Our Place” (Winnipeg: The Task Force, 1997), 6.

⁷¹ Toews, *Stolen City*, 32.

⁷² Ibid.

⁷³ Anishinaabemowin is the Anishinaabe language.

⁷⁴ The Walrus, “Affirming our presence through art | Jaimie Isaac | Walrus Talks,” YouTube video, published on May 27, 2016, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9Uk5-PT-src>.

approaches to planning urban space, but also descriptions and stories told about that space.”⁷⁵ Indigenous land claims to the Main and Higgin intersection and the North End can be backed by these histories, but they are also situated in the urban conditions the Indigenous community has been forced into.

Comparable to the rest of North America, Winnipeg has a tragic history of colonial violence, white supremacy and racism. The conditions for the segregation of the Indigenous community in Winnipeg can be traced back to when the first reserves in this region were created in the 1870s, and the federal government forced the Indigenous population in the Prairies into an unsustainable lifestyle.⁷⁶ Chelsea Vowel sheds some light on this issue in her book *Indigenous Writes*, where she explains that Prairie reserves were highly micromanaged and were not situated on fertile land, creating limited conditions for the First Nations living on these reserves.⁷⁷ Because the production of crops was not deemed satisfactory by the government, an increasing number of settlers were allotted land that was initially given to Indigenous peoples, effectively reducing the land these communities could occupy and breaking treaty promises.⁷⁸ Throughout Canadian history, reservation lands have often been redistributed to benefit the expansion of municipalities and urban centers. The Canadian pass system, which forced First Nations to seek government permission to leave reserves, criminalized Indigenous people as trespassers and forged the idea that Indigenous peoples were out of place beyond the reserve.⁷⁹ Métis people, who were not displaced to reserves, were pushed to the outskirts of Winnipeg, and constantly portrayed as a threat to the settler city.⁸⁰ To this day, the government has failed to provide the 1.4 million acres of land promised to the Métis Nation, and fulfill their treaty with the Anishinaabe (Treaty 1).⁸¹

After a century of settler governments driving Indigenous people out of the city by forced displacement to reserves, land dispossession, residential schools, and burning down communities, Indigenous peoples started to reclaim their place in the city in the 1940s.⁸²

⁷⁵ Jonathan Hildebrand, “‘Our Place, Our Home’: Indigenous Planning, Urban Space, and Decolonization in Winnipeg, Manitoba” (Master’s thesis, University of Manitoba, 2012), 74.

⁷⁶ Chelsea Vowel, *Indigenous Writes: A Guide to First Nations, Métis & Inuit Issues in Canada* (Winnipeg: Highwater Press, 2016), 208.

⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁸ Ibid., 210.

⁷⁹ Toews, *Stolen City*, 51-52.

⁸⁰ Ibid., 113-114.

⁸¹ Ibid., 113; 127.

⁸² Ibid., 212.

However, that does not mean the city's dominantly white population welcomed Indigenous peoples. Urban segregation was created, where Indigenous peoples were not welcome south of Portage Avenue (fig. 15), where racism and white violence was alive and well.⁸³ Signs that read "NO INDIANS" could be found in storefront windows, restaurants, and other public spaces.⁸⁴ Indigenous peoples were denied housing and jobs in these southern parts of the city as well. This racism and violence pushed Indigenous peoples arriving in Winnipeg to the North End, the Main Street strip in particular.⁸⁵

However, it is important to note that the North End (and the Main Street strip especially) became an important hub for Indigenous organizing and cultural production, and that a precedence of Indigenous activism paved the way for Neeginan and Thunderbird House. From the 1960s to the 1980s, the North End was a place where Indigenous organizations could come together and plan for new visions. This includes members of the Red Power Movement, the American Indian Movement (AIM), the Manitoba Indian Brotherhood (MIB), and Indigenous feminist organizers.⁸⁶ Owen Toews outlines the decolonial potential of these efforts: "Postwar Indigenous organizing in Winnipeg took the form of building new Indigenous urban spaces free from settler oppression – in other words, of decolonial urban planning and development. [...] Urban organizers directed their efforts toward the imagination and realization of Indigenous-controlled institutions that would replace, rather than reform, existing settler institutions."⁸⁷ However, an increase in Indigenous organizing also meant an increase of policing from the settler-state.

Today, Winnipeg has the largest Indigenous population in the country, yet one of the most segregated urban Indigenous populations. The North End has historically been a ghettoized neighbourhood, a place where anyone who would not be considered Anglo-Saxon and white would be kept apart from the mainstream population and reside in poor living conditions (including Eastern European immigrants, people of colour and Indigenous peoples). Owen Toews claims that this kind of urban planning is used as "a political strategy to preserve domination and subordination, re-entrench inequality, and silence alternative visions."⁸⁸ Shauna

⁸³ Ibid., 129.

⁸⁴ Ibid.

⁸⁵ Ibid., 213.

⁸⁶ Ibid., 132-138.

⁸⁷ Ibid., 140.

⁸⁸ Ibid., 20.

MacKinnon and Jim Silver provide an intersectional approach in analyzing the cycle that perpetually segregates the Indigenous population of Winnipeg to the North End, claiming that this racial segregation is caused by a system that continuously isolates Indigenous peoples economically, socially, and spatially: “Winnipeg has Canada's largest urban Indigenous population, and colonialism has been an important factor both in producing a city that is economically, socially, and spatially segregated, and in adversely affecting Indigenous peoples' educational outcomes, thereby contributing to the reproduction of segregation and racialized poverty.”⁸⁹ Mishuana Goeman reminds us that the colonial project does not just involve the conquest of Indigenous lands, but also the conquest of bodies and how these are positioned in that colonized space: “As Native bodies are constructed as abnormal and criminal, they, too, become spatialized. Natives occupy certain spaces of the nation and are criminalized or erased if they step outside what are seen as degenerative spaces.”⁹⁰ This kind of colonial spatialization is also at the root of the segregation problem in Winnipeg, the North End being a “degenerative space.” Indigenous-led initiatives in the North End, such as TBH, have the potential to (re)map the urban landscape by rethinking the relationships formed with that land and those who live on it, imagining new possibilities beyond settler models, deconstructing colonial concepts of space, and moving towards decolonized space.⁹¹

There is a certain mythos surrounding Neeginan and what it means for the Indigenous community of Winnipeg. Hildebrand explains that the name ‘Neeginan’

has been used to describe the general drive toward planning and creating an urban Aboriginal ‘hub’ in downtown Winnipeg, as well as the various physical manifestations this has taken – specifically the Aboriginal Centre (and the many organizations housed within it), and Thunderbird House. While these entities are not affiliated in any formal sense, they do represent key components of the initial overall ‘Neeginan’ vision for the area.⁹²

⁸⁹ Shauna MacKinnon and Jim Silver, “Decolonizing for Equity and Inclusion in Winnipeg’s North End,” in *Toward Equity and Inclusion in Canadian Cities*, ed. Fran Klodawsky, Janet Siltanen, and Caroline Andrew (Montreal; Kingston: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2017), 38-39.

⁹⁰ Mishuana Goeman, *Mark My Words: Native Women Mapping Our Nations* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2013), 33.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 37-38.

⁹² Hildebrand, ““Our Place, Our Home,”” 63.

The plans for Neeginan began to take shape in the 1970s, and were published as a feasibility study in 1975.⁹³ These were plans for an Indigenous village in the heart of Winnipeg, at the intersection of Higgins and Main, where Indigenous people could find housing, healthcare, education, recreational facilities, and more.⁹⁴ Indigenous community organizers wanted to take control of the predominantly Indigenous Main Street strip, and uplift it to its potential as an Indigenous cultural, political, and social hub.⁹⁵ This type of planning is holistic in its approach, addressing the various needs of the community.⁹⁶ The choice of location, the intersection of Main and Higgins, is significant according to the history of land claims outlined above, and was perceived as a way to restore “land and self-determination to Indigenous peoples according to present-day social, economic, and geographical – in this case urban – conditions.”⁹⁷ The Neeginan village was a way through which the Indigenous community of Winnipeg could manifest their decolonial visions in the city.⁹⁸

Indigenous planning approaches to the built environment have the potential for both social and spatial transformation: “[...] those Indigenous planning approaches that are rooted in Indigenous values and those that critique Western planning’s colonialist roots, can both offer ways of thinking about space and social relations that encourage and foster social transformation through decolonization and Indigenous autonomy.”⁹⁹ The original plan was drafted in consultation with the area’s Indigenous residents, for a neighbourhood owned, built and run by and for Indigenous peoples. However, the City Council of Winnipeg at the time (1970s) saw the Neeginan plans as a threat to the racial and colonial order and started to heavily police the neighbourhood.¹⁰⁰ The Neeginan vision was never fully realized, with the exception of a few elements such as Circle of Life Thunderbird House, the Aboriginal Centre and the streetscaping surrounding this intersection, most of which were revived as part of the Winnipeg Development Agreement in the 1990s. To understand why this Indigenous planning endeavor was not fully constructed, we must first understand the history of urban renewal projects in Winnipeg.

⁹³ North Main Street Task Force, “Our Place,” 11.

⁹⁴ Toews, *Stolen City*, 216-218.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 216.

⁹⁶ Hildebrand, “Our Place, Our Home,” 66.

⁹⁷ Toews, *Stolen City*, 217.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹⁹ Hildebrand, “Our Place, Our Home,” 10-11.

¹⁰⁰ Toews, *Stolen City*, 220.

The city of Winnipeg has an extensive history of failed urban renewal projects for its ‘problematic’ and ‘unhealthy’ neighbourhood, starting with the two iterations of the Core Area Initiative, the first being in action from 1981 to 1986 and the second from 1986 to 1991.¹⁰¹ After these two urban renewal initiatives failed to address the social issues faced by the residents of the North End, a group of Indigenous organizers under the banner of the Community Inquiry into Inner City Revitalization demanded that the city’s new five-year urban renewal plan – the Winnipeg Development Agreement – sponsor a community-based approach for the North End, Main Street in particular.¹⁰² But why had the previous urban renewal plans failed and how was an Indigenous initiative going to ignite change?

A major shortcoming of Western/colonial planning practices is the illusion of universality. Planning is not universal; it is influenced by local culture. As Porter argues: “[...] planning is a cultural practice, in the sense of being embedded within as well as creating its own meaning. Seeing planning as a cultural practice makes it become specific to particular peoples, life views, times and spaces, even as planning theory tends to mythologize its universal features and norms.”¹⁰³ Therefore, a five-year urban renewal plan that does not take into account cultural differences, the needs of various communities, and the social issues that impact said communities, will inevitably fall short. This is especially true for planning practices that are not critical of the hierarchy of knowledge that has been embedded in planning and architecture practices, and the history of dispossession that comes with both.¹⁰⁴ Whereas Indigenous planning projects such as Neeginan take into account Indigenous values and the needs of the community and translate these in architectural forms, functions, and land use:

Conceptually, Neeginan is based on the Medicine Wheel, which represents the spiritual values of Aboriginal peoples [...] The concept – the Medicine Wheel – is the heart of Neeginan. It involves the structural and architectural transformation of a large geographical area of the North Main Street area into a huge Medicine Wheel that would form the nucleus of the Aboriginal community. This Medicine Wheel would contain a Round House at its centre, a Circle at its outer edge with pathways and arches within it marking the Four Directions, and four inner quadrants containing landscape spaces, and representations and artifacts of the many Aboriginal teachings. Outside and around this Circle, the Aboriginal community would develop a living

¹⁰¹ Ibid., 154.

¹⁰² Ibid., 159.

¹⁰³ Porter, *Unlearning the Colonial Cultures of Planning*, 2.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., 76; 146-147.

community containing all the essential elements: homes, shops, and community services.¹⁰⁵

Neeginan sought to directly address the issues faced by the Indigenous community through an intersectional approach to community development, bringing together spirituality, material culture, cultural values, health needs, economic aid and opportunities, in order to strengthen cultural identity, foster healing, and facilitate self-sufficiency.¹⁰⁶ Unfortunately, the fate of Neeginan largely rested on the Winnipeg Development Agreement.

The Winnipeg Development Agreement was an economic development and urban renewal project launched by the city in 1998, which aimed at promoting industry growth as well as “creating a safe, healthy and environmentally sound community in which to live, work and do business.”¹⁰⁷ Métis community organizer and Elder, Mary Richard was appointed by the mayor Susan Thompson as co-chair of the North Main Street Task Force (a division of the Winnipeg Development agreement). This was an opportunity to revise the original Neeginan plan drafted almost thirty years prior.¹⁰⁸ It is important to note that Neeginan was not intended as an urban reserve, neither was it intended to only represent an Indigenous built presence in the city. Its goal was to develop a supportive network through which the Indigenous community of Winnipeg could access resources for spiritual, economic, cultural and recreational needs, as well as contributing to the larger vision of the Winnipeg Development Agreement.¹⁰⁹ This updated vision for an Indigenous village included Circle of Life Thunderbird House at its centre, surrounded by a youth complex, an art gallery and studios for Indigenous artists, a Medicine Wheel Park, and retail shops. Neeginan Park would have been located across Higgins Avenue, and would have included daycare facilities, a sweat lodge, an Indigenous centre, an Indigenous

¹⁰⁵ North Main Street Task Force, “Our Place,” 12. The Medicine Wheel is an important representation of Indigenous spiritual values in North America, as they relate to healing and nature. The *Native Voices* exhibition on Indigenous healing practices organized by the National Institutes of Health states: “The Medicine Wheel, sometimes known as the Sacred Hoop, has been used by generations of various Native American tribes for health and healing. It embodies the Four Directions, as well as Father Sky, Mother Earth, and Spirit Tree—all of which symbolize dimensions of health and the cycles of life. The Medicine Wheel can take many different forms. It can be an artwork such as artifact or painting, or it can be a physical construction on the land. Hundreds or even thousands of Medicine Wheels have been built on Native lands in North America over the last several centuries.” “The Medicine Wheel and the Four Directions,” Healing Ways, Native Voices: Native Peoples’ Concepts of Health and Illness, accessed July 7, 2019, <https://www.nlm.nih.gov/nativevoices/exhibition/healing-ways/medicine-ways/medicine-wheel.html>.

¹⁰⁶ Hildebrand, “Our Place, Our Home,” 67-68.

¹⁰⁷ Winnipeg, “Winnipeg Development Agreement” (1998): 1, Box CARD-002, Serie 1 – Neeginan Development, Douglas Cardinal fonds, Archives & Research Collections, Carleton University Library.

¹⁰⁸ Toews, *Stolen City*, 225.

¹⁰⁹ North Main Street Task Force, “Our Place,” 12.

veteran's memorial, a unity monument, and a music circle (fig. 16). In addition, Main Street was projected to have low-income housing and shops (fig. 17).

Today, Circle of Life Thunderbird House and its sweat lodge are the sole parts of this project that were built.¹¹⁰ The government of Canada, Manitoba and Winnipeg secured \$75 million over five years for the entirety of the Winnipeg Development Agreement, only \$1.5 million of which was allocated to Neeginan.¹¹¹ Although they approved the Neeginan plan in theory, the city did not secure the land for the project, nor the funds, leaving organizers to scramble for money just to complete Thunderbird House.¹¹²

Indigenous women's activism and leadership was of great importance in reviving the Neeginan vision, building TBH, and developing the recognition of Higgins and Main as an Indigenous hub. During the first iteration of Neeginan in the 1970s, and then the Community Inquiry into Inner City Revitalization in the 1990s, it was Indigenous women who went to present their findings and proposal to the city of Winnipeg.¹¹³ It must be noted that an Indigenous woman, Mary Richard, was at the forefront of planning, conceptualizing, and building TBH. This is in line with a long history of Indigenous women activism in Winnipeg, and in urban centres across Turtle Island. Many of the grassroots organizers in Winnipeg, from the 1970s to the 1980s, were Indigenous women.¹¹⁴ In fact, in the 1980s, Winnipeg became a hub for Indigenous feminist organizing.¹¹⁵ As Krouse and Howard explain:

[Indigenous] Women's activism has been crucial to building Native communities in cities, not only through their direct participation in political and social movements, but also through their roles behind the scenes, as keepers of tradition, educators of children, and pioneers in city life. Native women have adapted traditional ways to the realities of city life. These traditions have provided the strength and foundation for the networks and organizations that are often the backbones of urban Native communities.¹¹⁶

¹¹⁰ The Aboriginal Centre was also created, but it is housed in the historic Canadian Pacific Rail Station, on Higgins Avenue. No new structure was built for this organization.

¹¹¹ North Main Street Task Force, "Our Place," 49.

¹¹² Toews, *Stolen City*, 227.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*, 159. These women were: Dorothy Betz, Marilyn Fontaine Brightstar, Kathy Mallett, Bev Chippeway, Josie Hill, Yvonne Armstrong, and Bev Jones.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 137.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 139.

¹¹⁶ Krouse and Howard, eds., "Introduction," x.

Indigenous women are largely responsible for reclaiming Indigenous space in cities, often spaces that seem marginal such as the intersection of Higgins and Main, and turning them into places central to the urban Indigenous community.¹¹⁷ In fact, the timing of the Winnipeg Development Agreement and the building of TBH in the 1990s coincided with the Indigenous women's movement gaining prominence across Canada, with more Indigenous women being included on citizen advisory and community participation panels.¹¹⁸ Unfortunately, this kind of mobilization is not enough to sustain such projects, and financial support from all levels of government is also necessary.

As demonstrated in this section, colonial governments have created policies and urban plans that have negatively impacted Indigenous communities, and prevented the development of Indigenous-led initiatives for the healing and general improvement of Indigenous neighbourhoods. In the Canadian context of Truth and Reconciliation and the National Inquiry into MMIWG, the reports of which were published respectively in 2015 and 2019, we must examine how the government has failed such Indigenous-led initiatives in the past and hold them accountable to the Calls to Action mandated by the TRC and the Calls to Justice from the National Inquiry into MMIWG. As is explained in the *Aboriginal Law Handbook*, the responsibility to deliver services and programs to Indigenous communities across the country was transferred from the Department of Indian Affairs to Tribal councils during the latter half of the twentieth century.¹¹⁹ Although there are clear benefits to this, such as the ability to tailor programs and services specifically to a community, there are still pitfalls, such as the government denying any financial responsibility.¹²⁰ As Shauna MacKinnon explains, one major way the government has refused to continue to fund such initiatives coming from Indigenous communities, is by evaluating them with methods and criteria that reflect a Eurocentric worldview.¹²¹ That is, criteria that they use to evaluate their own programs and services. In light of the Circle of Life Thunderbird House's financial difficulties, these are important issues to

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*, xvii.

¹¹⁸ Dara Culhane, "Their Spirits Live within Us: Aboriginal Women in Downtown Eastside Vancouver Emerging into Visibility," in *Keeping the Campfires Going: Native Women's Activism in Urban Communities*, eds. Susan Applegate Krouse, and Heather A. Howard (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2009), 83.

¹¹⁹ Olthuis, Kleer, Townshend, ed., *Aboriginal Law Handbook* (Toronto: Carswell, 2012), 274.

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*, 275.

¹²¹ Shauna MacKinnon, "Decolonizing Evaluation in Winnipeg," in *Toward Equity and Inclusion in Canadian Cities*, ed. Fran Klodawsky, Janet Siltanen, and Caroline Andrew (Montreal; Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2017), 213.

consider. Many of these community-based programs are needed in the first-place due to the failure of state policies and the failure of the government to meet the needs of marginalized communities. If the government has already failed Indigenous communities, how is it logical that their funding relies on evaluation methods determined by a colonial state that privileges a Eurocentric worldview?

In light of the 2015 TRC report, which claims that reconciliation must support Indigenous peoples as they heal from the trauma caused by colonialism and that the federal government must take an active role in this,¹²² the denial of responsibility towards community-led healing initiatives such as TBH on the part of both the provincial and federal government is questionable. Within this context, it is important to note other instances where the government denied its responsibility to consistently and reliably support Indigenous-led community healing initiatives. The Aboriginal Healing Foundation (AHF) was an Indigenous-managed not-for-profit dedicated to providing Indigenous communities across the country with resources for healing intergenerational trauma caused by the residential school system, promoting reconciliation, and funding community-based healing initiatives.¹²³ The AHF was founded in 1998, two years after the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples published its report stating that:

The work of healing is not confined to restoring balance and efficacy to Aboriginal individuals and families. Communities and nations are in need of healing too. Aboriginal traditions of mutual aid have been undermined by the loss of economic resources and the intervention of agencies and institutions that ignored the strengths of community systems and the authority of community customs.¹²⁴

The Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples provided many recommendations in favor of the government financially supporting Indigenous initiatives that tackle issues ranging from education to health services, and from spiritual healing to restoring nations.¹²⁵ The AHF was a successful foundation, funding over 130 programs across the country, helping Indigenous nations and communities heal from the intergenerational trauma caused by residential schools and

¹²² Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, *Final Report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada*, 8.

¹²³ “Vision, Mission, Values,” About Us, Aboriginal Healing Foundation, accessed August 21, 2019, <http://www.ahf.ca/about-us/mission>.

¹²⁴ Canada, Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, *Report of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, Vol. 5: Renewal: A Twenty-Year Commitment* (Ottawa: Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, 1996), 12, <http://data2.archives.ca/e/e448/e011188230-05.pdf>.

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*, 11-13.

educating the larger Canadian public.¹²⁶ However, one year after Harper's residential school apology in 2008, the government announced it would cut its funding for the Aboriginal Healing Foundation, which was based in Ottawa. The AHF's mandate ended September 30, 2014, eight months before the publication of the final TRC report, which would have similar recommendations for the Canadian government to those published by the Royal Commission almost twenty years prior. Identifying these reoccurring patterns at the level of the government demonstrates how this kind of systematic oppression and institutional racism makes it challenging for Indigenous-led initiatives to receive the support they need.

The National Inquiry into MMIWG has brought to light that the colonial structures inherent in Canadian government and policies have created the conditions for genocide against Indigenous peoples, mainly Indigenous women, girls and 2SLGBTQQIA peoples, and urges the federal government to act responsibly to redress this crisis and support the healing of Indigenous peoples across the country:

The steps to end and redress this genocide must be no less monumental than the combination of systems and actions that has worked to maintain colonial violence for generations. A permanent commitment to ending the genocide requires addressing the four pathways explored within this report, namely: historical, multigenerational, and intergenerational trauma; social and economic marginalization; maintaining the status quo and institutional lack of will; and ignoring the agency and expertise of Indigenous women, girls, and 2SLGBTQQIA people.¹²⁷

We cannot speak of any kind of reconciliation or justice without reparations,¹²⁸ without supporting the healing of Indigenous communities, especially considering how the government's laws and policies continue to segregate/marginalize Indigenous populations not only racially, but also economically. In other words, the colonial state is in large part responsible for the economic debt and poverty of Indigenous communities. The state is also to blame for the trauma that has been passed down from one generation to the next, and therefore should be held accountable to

¹²⁶ Jane Kirby, "Advocates Speak Out Against the Cutting of the Aboriginal Healing Foundation," *Halifax Media Co-op*, April 22, 2010, <http://halifax.mediacoop.ca/story/3277>.

¹²⁷ National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls, *Reclaiming Power and Place: The Final Report of the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls: Volume 1b*, 2019, 167.

¹²⁸ Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, *Final Report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada*, 184. The TRC report states that reconciliation requires financial reparations, among other things, which the government did provide to survivors following the report. However, I argue that financially supporting Indigenous-led healing initiatives should be included to the reparations to be paid by the government.

provide financial support to the organizations that are working to remediate these issues. TBH has not been receiving such support. As previous co-chair Richelle Scott explains: “There’s been a lot of telephone tag. I don’t even want to name names, but we’ve been trying to kick down doors, and unfortunately we’re not getting a response much of the time. Often (representatives) have a certain constituency that they focus on and Indigenous peoples often aren’t it.”¹²⁹ The ongoing institutional and systemic oppression that exists at the government level continues to hinder their goal of reconciliation, and makes one wonder how committed the government is to this goal in the first place.

SECTION 3: CIRCLE OF LIFE THUNDERBIRD HOUSE

Soon the leaders began to dream of a place where the first people who lived in the city could gather. From the language of the Cree, they chose the word ‘Neeginan’ which means ‘our place,’ to describe their vision. The elders summoned the shaman known as Cardinal to draw two lines on the ground. He drew a circle around a fire at the centre. He made doors where the lines cross the circle. The elders were provided with comfortable seats near the fire. With this built symbol of their rightful place at the centre of the city they did not build, the first people grew confident again of their place on the land.¹³⁰

In the two previous sections, I have outlined the importance of Douglas Cardinal’s work as an Indigenous architect working for Indigenous communities, as well as the specific issues that the Indigenous community of Winnipeg faces systematically and the role of Neeginan in making TBH possible. In this last section I hope to outline the importance of TBH, as a place for all Indigenous peoples to reconnect to their culture and spirituality, to heal and learn together, and reclaim their land in the heart of the city. I also hope to continue to make a case for governmental support, in line with the TRC Calls to Action and the MMIWG Calls to Justice.

The quote above illustrates the powerful place TBH holds in the city, as a marker of Indigenous resistance and self-determination. However, the effects of colonial and genocidal

¹²⁹ Richelle Scott, cited in Ryan Thorpe, “Thunderbird House Pleas for Help Ignored, Board Co-chair Says,” *Winnipeg Free Press*, July 11, 2018. <https://www.winnipegfreepress.com/local/thunderbird-house-pleas-for-help-ignored-board-co-chair-says-487825571.html>.

¹³⁰ Tom Monteyne, “The Legend of Neeginan,” *The Canadian Architect* 44, no. 6 (June 1999): 38, <https://0-search-proquest-com.mercury.concordia.ca/docview/213294316?accountid=10246>.

policies are still felt by the community and much support is needed in order to fight the harms committed against Indigenous peoples.

As I arrived at Thunderbird House last October, I immediately noticed the piles of peoples' belongings staggered around the site, as well as the Salvation Army across Henry Avenue. Across Main Street, is another homeless centre: Our Place/Chez Nous Drop-in Centre.¹³¹ This centre is run by the St-Charles Catholic Church, and displays a large Latin cross on its façade (fig. 18). A little to the south of the same block is the Winnipeg Regional Health Authority, in a new multi-million-dollar office building. Across Higgins Avenue, in the old Canadian Pacific Rail Station, is The Aboriginal Health & Wellness Centre of Winnipeg and The Centre for Aboriginal Human Resource Development Inc. (fig. 19).

At the very same intersection as Circle of Life Thunderbird House is the Youth for Christ Activity Centre (YFC) (fig. 20), built in 2011 and run by Christian missionaries with over \$6 million in grants from the federal government and the city of Winnipeg (under the tenure of mayor Sam Katz).¹³² The YFC complex cost \$10 million to build, and was designed by Raymond SC Wan. YFC had initially promised that it would consult with the Indigenous community of the North End during the planning phases in order to ensure that its programs would respect and serve the community.¹³³ However, the missionary organization has not lived up to these promises. Many Indigenous advocates, governing bodies and organizations have remarked that they have not been included in the planning process.¹³⁴ In turn, YFC has maintained that they are not required to justify how they run their programs, nor do they need to report their activities back to the government.¹³⁵

The plot of land YFC is situated on has for a long time been envisioned as part of the Neeginan village.¹³⁶ What is most disturbing about this, is that Neeginan had at one time envisioned its own youth complex on this very plot. Despite Indigenous organizers' efforts to

¹³¹ Note the use of the translated 'Neeginan' name, 'Our Place,' for this Christian drop-in centre.

¹³² Joanne Levasseur, "Youth for Christ Broke Promises, Not Serving Community, Advocates Say," CBC, May 20, 2014. <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/manitoba/iteam/youth-for-christ-broke-promises-not-serving-community-advocates-say-1.2647662>; Joanne Levasseur, "Youth for Christ Not Obligated to Justify Programs," CBC, May 21, 2014. <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/manitoba/youth-for-christ-not-obligated-to-justify-programs-1.2649045>.

¹³³ Ibid.

¹³⁴ Ibid.

¹³⁵ Joanne Levasseur, "Youth for Christ Not Obligated to Justify Programs," CBC, May 21, 2014. <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/manitoba/youth-for-christ-not-obligated-to-justify-programs-1.2649045>.

¹³⁶ Toews, *Stolen City*, 240.

remind the city of their plans to use this land to improve the social, spiritual and economic well-being of the Indigenous community, the city and CentreVenture (a city-centre redevelopment authority established by the city in 1999, and who was given ownership of the land around the same time) have been convincing in how they have erased this Indigenous reality and replaced it with an *urbs nullius*¹³⁷ narrative – portraying the YFC project as a way to save this “abandoned” and “neglected” piece of land.¹³⁸ This vision of the plot of land was echoed in the media as well. For example, it was written in the *Winnipeg Free Press* on February 22, 2010 that “YFC is building on an unwanted piece of land at Main Street and Higgins Avenue that has been empty for years. No doubt YFC's willingness to occupy land at the most infamous intersection in Winnipeg helped cement this deal [...].”¹³⁹ However, as demonstrated above, it is untrue that this was an unwanted piece of land. In fact, an Indigenous-run credit union had approached CentreVenture to locate on that very site, but their proposal was rejected in favor of YFC.¹⁴⁰ This plays into what Mishuana Goeman explains as colonial geographies: “In relation to settler colonialism imposing colonial geographies must be understood as yet another method to eliminate or eradicate or absorb that which is Native. If applied to geographies, we can come to understand the simultaneous unmarking of the area as Native land with a mapping of it as private corporate property as part of the geographic knowledge regimes.”¹⁴¹ In other words, by privatizing and corporatizing this claimed land through CentreVenture, the city of Winnipeg directly contributes to further erasing Indigenous presence in the city.

Indigenous organizers and community leaders from the neighbourhood have been publicly critiquing this attempt to Christianize the youth of the North End, including Diane Roussin and Tammy Christensen, who have pointed out the colonial logic implicit in this kind of institution: “While the Youth for Christ approach is more subtle than that used in residential schools, it is in essence based on the same model – Christianity is viewed as superior and missionaries from outside the community will teach people a better way.”¹⁴² Co-chair of Thunderbird House, David

¹³⁷ “The idea that cities are empty of Indigenous rights to land and self-determination,” *Ibid.*, 22.

¹³⁸ *Ibid.*, 242.

¹³⁹ Dan Lett, “Youth for Christ: Myth vs. Reality,” *Winnipeg Free Press*, February 22, 2010, <https://www.winnipegfreepress.com/local/youth-for-christ-myth-vs-reality-84939087.html>.

¹⁴⁰ Molly McCracken, “Fast Facts: Decolonizing the Inner City - A Look at Youth for Christ” (Winnipeg: Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives, 2010).

¹⁴¹ Goeman, *Mark My Words*, 30.

¹⁴² Diane Roussin and Tammy Christensen, “Public Funds for Youth for Christ: Have Our Politicians Learned Nothing from Past Mistakes?” (Winnipeg: Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives, 2010).

Morrison, adds that YFC has been disrespectful of TBH and its Indigenous values by placing crosses on the fence surrounding the sweat lodge – undeniably an act of spiritual violence.¹⁴³ Morrison adds that there is more “life at Thunderbird House than Youth for Christ,”¹⁴⁴ seeing as the latter does not properly serve the community, providing limited amounts of free drop-in hours, and no programs on the weekend.¹⁴⁵ Douglas Cardinal has also remarked on the negative impact YFC has had on TBH: “Now they built a big Christian centre across the way to, you know, ‘save the Indians,’ when they themselves need to be saved. And its sucking a lot of energy from the people and the building [TBH] itself.”¹⁴⁶ Considering that Youth for Christ’s recreation centre was funded and built after the 2008 residential school apology, and after the Truth and Reconciliation Commission was launched, it calls into question the federal government’s commitment to reconciliation. This demonstrates how colonial violence persists today, in an urban Indigenous neighbourhood, with a history of land claims and urban renewal plans to back them.

It can easily be argued that YFC occupying this space in the city (i.e. Indigenous space), imposing their views on the community, and not including the community in its administration contributes directly to the harmful legacy of violence in residential schools and goes against the calls to action for reconciliation. Church-led residential schools have had a negative impact on numerous aspects of Indigenous life and culture, including spiritual, psychological and physical well-being, the effects of which are ongoing to this day, and which TBH works to address. The TRC Calls to Action explicitly state that “Overcoming the health legacy of the residential schools will require a long-term investment in Aboriginal communities, so that communities can revive their capacity to heal themselves.”¹⁴⁷ To ensure this, the report calls on the federal government to “[...] provide sustainable funding for existing and new Aboriginal healing centres

¹⁴³ David Morrison (Co-chair, Circle of Life Thunderbird House), interviewed by Gabrielle Montpetit, May 09, 2019. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada states that “Spiritual violence occurs when a person is not permitted to follow her or his preferred spiritual or religious tradition; a different spiritual or religious path or practice is forced on a person; a person’s spiritual or religious tradition, beliefs, or practices are demeaned or belittled; or a person is made to feel shame for practicing his or her traditional or family beliefs.” Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, *Final Report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada*, 220.

¹⁴⁴ David Morrison (Co-chair, Circle of Life Thunderbird House), interviewed by Gabrielle Montpetit, May 09, 2019.

¹⁴⁵ Levasseur, “Youth for Christ Not Obligated to Justify Programs.”

¹⁴⁶ Douglas Cardinal (Architect), interviewed by Gabrielle Montpetit, September 10, 2018.

¹⁴⁷ Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, *Final Report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada*, 163.

to address the physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual harms caused by residential schools [...].”¹⁴⁸ In other words, the TRC explicitly recognizes the importance of financially supporting community-controlled healing and cultural organizations such as TBH, within a reconciliation agenda, and the role that Indigenous spiritual practices play in the healing process. YFC is a reminder to the Indigenous community in Winnipeg of the systemic inequalities that exist within our governmental structures, which fund programs that are in line with the dominant society’s societal norms, which are rooted in colonial structures, and continue to enact violence on Indigenous peoples. TBH directly falls under the banner of a community-controlled spiritual and cultural initiative and its programs are essential to the community. It is now the government’s responsibility to follow the reports they commissioned and fund organizations such as TBH.

In particular, I would argue that the federal government also has a responsibility to fund TBH in an effort to rectify the conditions for genocide that it has created itself. In 2015, the same year that the TRC published its report, *MacLean’s* magazine published an article entitled “Welcome to Winnipeg: Where Canada’s Racism Problem is at its Worst.” This article, written by Nancy Macdonald, describes the experiences of Indigenous peoples in Winnipeg, and the institutionalized racism that endangers Indigenous peoples’ lives in this city.¹⁴⁹ The government should fund institutions such as TBH that can directly address the trauma and ongoing injustices caused by genocide in communities in need. According to the National Inquiry into MMIWG: “The objectives of a plan of genocide would include actions aimed at the ‘disintegration of the political and social institutions, of culture, language, national feelings, religion, and the economic existence of national groups, and the destruction of the personal security, liberty, health, dignity, and even the lives of the individuals belonging to such groups.’”¹⁵⁰ In order to rectify the conditions for such injustice within our colonial society, solutions must be “led by Indigenous governments, organizations, and people.”¹⁵¹ TBH has been undertaking this kind of work since its opening in 2001. They have done so by providing a space for the Indigenous community to participate in ceremony, sweats, memorials for MMIWG, workshops, and by

¹⁴⁸ Ibid.

¹⁴⁹ Nancy Macdonald, “Welcome to Winnipeg: Where Canada’s Racism Problem is at its Worst,” *MacLean’s*, January 22, 2015, <https://www.macleans.ca/news/canada/welcome-to-winnipeg-where-canadas-racism-problem-is-at-its-worst/>.

¹⁵⁰ National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls, *Reclaiming Power and Place: Executive Summary*, 2.

¹⁵¹ National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls, *Reclaiming Power and Place: Volume 1b*, 171.

inviting the community at large to learn more about Indigenous cultures, participate in workshops on the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, and attend information sessions on the issues that the community faces. The National Inquiry into MMIWG calls for the government to provide sustainable, long-term and barrier-free funding for Indigenous organizations “to create, deliver, and disseminate prevention programs, education, and awareness campaigns designed for Indigenous communities and families related to violence prevention and combatting lateral violence (Article 1.8);”¹⁵² to offer “language and cultural programs that restore identity, place, and belonging within First Nations, Inuit, and Métis communities (Article 2.4);”¹⁵³ and “to call on Elders, Grandmothers, and other Knowledge Keepers to establish community-based trauma-informed programs for survivors of trauma and violence (Article 3.3).”¹⁵⁴ These are all part of TBH’s programming, mandate, and future goals.

Keeping in mind these calls for action/justice, and the programs at TBH to which these apply, I would now like to analyze how the architecture of Circle of Life Thunderbird House facilitates healing, the strengthening of cultural identity and acts as a marker of Indigenous resistance. As mentioned in previous sections of this thesis, Circle of Life Thunderbird House, previously known as the ‘Round House’ during the planning phases, was the heart of the Neeginan vision for an Indigenous space in the city. As the *Our Place* North Main Street Task Force report states:

The first phase of the development of the Aboriginal community revitalization strategy includes the development of the spiritual centre Round House. [...] The Round House will provide a spiritual and cultural focus for the Aboriginal community. Based on the principles of the Medicine Wheel, it will be a powerful statement both visually and physically for the entire community of Winnipeg, acknowledging symbolically the Aboriginal community as an integral part of Winnipeg’s urban fabric. It will also create the special focal point for the Aboriginal community to rediscover and connect with their spiritual and cultural roots.¹⁵⁵

TBH was meant to be, and is today, a place for the Indigenous community to feel safe, understood, and reconnect to Indigenous cultures and spiritualities. In its essence, TBH was also meant to heal the wounds and trauma of residential schools, and pass on a better future to

¹⁵² Ibid., 178.

¹⁵³ Ibid., 179.

¹⁵⁴ Ibid., 180.

¹⁵⁵ North Main Street Task Force, “Our Place,” 13.

Indigenous children. During the visioning session that the community had with Mary Richard and Douglas Cardinal, one participant states that TBH should be “[a] place where people can come and they can practice their traditional beliefs. [Knowing] That what they are doing is acceptable. That is our responsibility. My children don’t know how to speak the language. It hurts me. [My son] asks me now about where do we come from. A lot of repairing to do. A lot to pass on to our children.”¹⁵⁶ TBH was envisioned as a long-term solution to heal and bring the Indigenous community together by returning to a connection to both culture and spirituality for many generations of Indigenous peoples living in Winnipeg. For many, TBH is a way to bridge the past with the present, adapting tradition to present-day conditions. TBH is diverse in its mission to accommodate the diversity and pan-Indigeneity of the community in Winnipeg. It was noted in the visioning process that not all Indigenous peoples share the same beliefs and attachments to tradition,¹⁵⁷ and this is reflected today in the versatility of programs and physical space at Thunderbird House, as will be explored further. It is also important to note that many of the ceremonies and practices that take place at TBH were at one time outlawed by the federal government.¹⁵⁸ Having a place in the heart of the city where such cultural and spiritual resources are readily offered, and can safely take place, is crucial to the healing process within an urban centre where these resources are far and few.

The guiding concept of TBH, the Medicine Wheel, extends beyond the built structure and onto the intersection of Higgins and Main. The colours of the medicine wheel – white, black, red, and yellow – appear in different places around the intersection, on the sidewalks, as decorative borders on the cement structures separating the North and South lanes on Main St., as well as on sidewalk billboards (fig. 21). This visually represents the reclaiming of urban space by the Indigenous community, and is meant to create a distinct sense of place and identity.¹⁵⁹ This also represents the dual nature of TBH as an inward and outward facing organization, meaning that it is simultaneously focused on strengthening the Indigenous community and cultural identity

¹⁵⁶ “North Main Street & Neeginan Imaging Session,” 1997, Carleton University, CARD 001, Series 1, Neeginan Development, Douglas Cardinal Fonds.

¹⁵⁷ Ibid.

¹⁵⁸ See: Katherine Pettipas, *Severing the Ties that Bind: Government Repression of Indigenous Religious Ceremonies on the Prairies* (Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 1994); James Daschuk, *Clearing the Plains: Disease, Politics of Starvation, and the Loss of Aboriginal Life* (Regina: University of Regina Press, 2013).

¹⁵⁹ North Main Street Task Force, “Our Place,” 15-16.

within the city as well as being open to the community at large, for the Medicine Wheel reminds us how we are all connected.¹⁶⁰

Circle of Life Thunderbird House is a circular-planned building (fig. 10), with four entrance doors, one at each cardinal point. Each door is made of oak, with large, bronze semi-circular handles. However, entrance to the building has been limited to one door – the western door – due to vandalism on the eastern, northern, and southern entrances. The outer perimeter of the building is composed of an alternation of stucco wall panels and blue-tinted floor-to-ceiling windows, held up by aluminum frames. The stucco panels have been painted beige, and have a low relief geometrical pattern that has been accentuated with red paint.

The copper clad roof is the most striking element of Circle of Life Thunderbird House. The roof is designed to emulate a Thunderbird, an important mythical figure who is often portrayed as resembling an eagle, with its wings pointing in each cardinal point (fig. 22). In Anishinaabe and Ojibwe cosmology, the Thunderbird is the Creator's messenger.¹⁶¹ The Thunderbird is a bearer of good news and is a protector of the people.¹⁶² The 'head' and 'wings' of the Thunderbird designed by Douglas Cardinal are mostly covered in copper, with cedar cladding at the extremities of the wings, creating an interesting contrast between the two main materials that imitates the texture of overlapping feathers (fig. 23). Cedar is one of the four sacred medicines, in accordance with Anishinaabe traditions, and has purifying as well as protective qualities.¹⁶³ Copper also has sacred properties for Anishinaabe and Ojibwe, as a purifying substance, and was once one of the most valuable resources for trade.¹⁶⁴ The four beams in each of these four sections of the roof, between the wings, extend beyond the roof's structure, imitating the larger wing shapes. Cardinal explains the powerful symbolism of this unique roof structure: "It's almost like the phoenix is rising from the ashes, you know? People feel a sense of soaring above their problems, you know? And the possibilities of the future, being

¹⁶⁰ Hildebrand, "'Our Place, Our Home,'" 68.

¹⁶¹ "Background on Thunderbirds," Thunderbird, Gibagadinamaagoom, accessed December 4, 2018, <http://ojibwearchive.sas.upenn.edu/thunderbird-cultural-context>.

¹⁶² ojibwedigitalarchive, "Larry Aitken's 'Thunderbird Story' full," YouTube video, posted November 12, 2012, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MY83IPOSAP0>.

¹⁶³ The three other medicines are sage, sweet grass, and tobacco. "Healing," KBIC Health System, accessed December 4, 2018, <https://www.kbichealth.org/ojibwe-medicine>.

¹⁶⁴ Erik M. Redix, "'Our Hope and Our Protection: Misko-biiwaabik (Copper) and Tribal Sovereignty in Michigan,'" *American Indian Quarterly* Vol. 41, No. 3 (Summer 2017): 224-249; "Why Copper Pails Are Used in Water Walks," News, Great Lakes Water Walk, accessed December 4, 2018, <http://greatlakeswaterwalk.ca/2017/09/19/copper-pails-used-water-walks/>.

able to transcend the problems that they are in. I wanted that feeling to be there.”¹⁶⁵ The copper plates on the ‘head’ of the Thunderbird are now starting to rip off of the structure (fig. 24), due to structural damage caused by a wind storm in 2018, which will cost around \$250,000 to repair,¹⁶⁶ and for which the board of directors is fighting for funding.

Five skylights/clerestory windows light up the interior of the Circle of Life Thunderbird House. Four of these windows above are in the ‘wings’, at each cardinal point. These windows are quite narrow, and not immediately evident from the outside, but they provide natural light for the interior. The fifth skylight is on the eastern façade: the ‘face’ of the Thunderbird (fig. 25). This element of the design recalls an aspect of Anishinaabe/Ojibwe cosmology that states that the Thunderbird has lightning coming out from its eyes,¹⁶⁷ allowing light to circulate in and out through this unique vantage point. This skylight has a circular motif, and is motorized, which also allows smoke from the interior fire pit to securely leave the building.

Upon entering the Circle of Life Thunderbird House, there is an immediate sense of warmth, with the oak floors, cedar siding, and natural light emanating from the clerestory (fig. 26). Cardinal explains the kind of welcoming atmosphere he envisioned for TBH: “I wanted the feeling that inside would almost be like a Sundance lodge, in the way that I made it out. So, you know Sundance ceremonies that connect us to our roots and to our mother, the Earth, and celebrate our lives. So, I wanted that to be expressed as well, like a celebration of life.”¹⁶⁸ In other words, Cardinal based the design of the interior on a healing ceremony, further reinforcing the centrality of healing based in culturally relevant ways. The outer perimeter of the interior is occupied with offices, meeting rooms, a men’s and a women’s bathroom. Each of these perimeter rooms is well lit with floor-to-ceiling windows. This explains the need for skylights, to light the central space of the building. This interior configuration also emphasizes the communal nature of the building, each office and meeting space opening into the rotunda, where gatherings and ceremonies can take place. The ceiling of the rotunda mimics the radiating structure of the roof, with beams clearly delineating where the ‘wings’ of the Thunderbird are (fig. 27).

¹⁶⁵ Douglas Cardinal (Architect), interviewed by Gabrielle Montpetit, September 10, 2018.

¹⁶⁶ David Morrison (Co-chair, Circle of Life Thunderbird House), interviewed by Gabrielle Montpetit, October 11, 2018.

¹⁶⁷ ojibwedigitalarchive, “Thunderbirds: A Glimpse of Creator's Powers,” YouTube video, posted October 5, 2012, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hjR32fQgdRE>.

¹⁶⁸ Douglas Cardinal (Architect), interviewed by Gabrielle Montpetit, September 10, 2018.

The central space is a ceremonial space, with a fire pit in the centre. The fire pit is decorated by ceramic tiles, in a star blanket motif, with the four colours of the medicine wheel (fig. 28). Above, in the light well of the motorized window, are two exhaust fans that direct the smoke out. This was a challenging aspect of the design for TBH, as Cardinal explains:

I actually had all sorts of problems with sprinklers, fire protection, and everything else, and make sure that it wouldn't be filled with smoke. Smoke had to go straight out/up, and be vented out in the four directions – traditionally. All of that took a lot of engineering, mechanical engineering to do that. It was a really engineering problem to have the air move in that particular way, and that people wouldn't be breathing smoke. It would come out like a teepee. And smoke comes up to the top, and then goes out.¹⁶⁹

However, the fire pit has not been used in a few years, because the ventilation system needs to be replaced (fig. 29). When it is turned on, it is disruptive to the ongoing activities in the ceremonial space, which usually require a quiet and peaceful atmosphere.¹⁷⁰ This central ceremonial/communal space is versatile and can accommodate various needs. The fire pit is easily concealed with a cover when it does not need to be in use, and the circular floor plan accommodates a variety of ceremonies and other gatherings (fig. 30). This adaptable space is an important feature of the building, for it was meant to be representative of and welcoming to a variety Indigenous cultures and traditions, reflective of the community.¹⁷¹

At regular intervals, surrounding the ceremonial space, are either a door (to an office, meeting room or bathroom), or a plain wood panel that serves for posters or artworks. Some of these panels are painted with sacred imagery, such as the Thunderbird (fig. 31), or Grandmother Moon. One of the panels also has a poster entitled “We Are All Treaty People,” explaining the Numbered Treaties in Canada (fig. 32). Hung beside this poster is a bundle of cedar, and a miniature red dress¹⁷² with the name “Serenity McKay,” a girl who was murdered in Winnipeg in April 2017. Each door and panel surrounding the ceremonial space is topped by a semi-circular light fixture, with cedar wings, echoing the primary motifs of the building. These visual elements

¹⁶⁹ Ibid.

¹⁷⁰ In conversation with a community member who has been attending Thunderbird House's programming for many years, October 9, 2018, Thunderbird house, Winnipeg.

¹⁷¹ Hildebrand, “Our Place, Our Home,” 76.

¹⁷² A symbol usually used to honour Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls.

within TBH are determined by the community and simultaneously represent the social issues that the community is faced with as well as cultural imagery related to healing and spiritual guidance.

The sweat lodge on the grounds of TBH, designed by Colin Lount Architect, is a distinct feature of this spiritual and community centre and an important place for healing and reconnecting to cultural and spiritual practices (fig. 33). The sweat lodge is a wooden structure resembling a traditional Plains teepee, with a circular/decagon floor plan. This teepee-like structure houses two bathrooms, changing rooms, and showers that open onto the sweat lodge site at the center, which is faced by a limestone fireplace (fig. 34). The outside/“roof” of this structure is weatherproof with copper flashing, cedar shakes and ceramic tiles, with steel rods extending through the top of the structure, imitating lodge poles (fig. 35). The skylights reflect the smoke flaps that would traditionally be at the top of the teepee. The presence of this structure in the heart of Winnipeg is an example of “culture in built form.”¹⁷³ Having such a distinctively Indigenous sacred space in an urban setting is another way in which TBH shows the decolonial potential of architecture within cities. By reclaiming this urban space for Indigenous spirituality (which was once outlawed), and re-learning/renewing such practices, there is a direct resistance to colonial assimilation policies, as well as a resistance to the notion that such expressions of Indigeneity do not have a place in the city.¹⁷⁴

As mentioned previously, all levels of government, federal, provincial and municipal, have failed to provide stable (if any) funding for Thunderbird House’s programs as well as maintenance costs. In fact, TBH had for a long time been in tax arrears with the city, which then lead to their charitable status being revoked. With much hard work from the board of directors, in the winter of 2018-2019, they were able to pay the city back in full as well as get their charitable status reinstated, which will allow them to receive funds from the Winnipeg Foundation (an important community foundation which states to be committed to the goal of reconciliation),¹⁷⁵ and other funding bodies.¹⁷⁶ However, the Canada Revenue Agency (CRA) froze the organization’s bank accounts in March 2019, which made it even more difficult for TBH to address its financial issues. One of the reasons for this action taken by the CRA was the

¹⁷³ Hildebrand, ““Our Place, Our Home,”” 75.

¹⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 72.

¹⁷⁵ “Who We Are & What We Do,” The Winnipeg Foundation, accessed June 21, 2019, <https://www.wpgfdn.org/AboutUs/WhoWeAreWhatWeDo.aspx>.

¹⁷⁶ David Morrison (Co-chair, Circle of Life Thunderbird House), interviewed by Gabrielle Montpetit, October 11, 2018.

lack of income tax deducted from payments to Elders, as David Morrison explains: “[TBH] had a number of Elders and people who worked here and they never deducted income tax, etc. [...] So, [Canada Revenue would] say ‘Well, you paid \$20,000 to Elders – What are their social insurance numbers?’ Well, good luck on that one. So, then it became a fine. At one point, we could’ve paid it off for \$9,000, but as the penalties keep adding up, it’s \$80,000 now. Not a happy figure.”¹⁷⁷ It is institutional and structural inequalities that make it difficult for TBH to maintain their programming and services, such as the Elder council which has not been in place for many years. Asking for the social insurance numbers of Elder’s who were previously involved with TBH, over a decade ago, is an example of the kind of tone deafness emanating from the government’s requirements for community-led organizations. David Morrison also points out how other funding bodies are not equipped to support Indigenous community organizations:

A small grant we got through a union says you can use the money to buy wood, but you can’t pay the Elder with that money. Well, the money virtually becomes useless, so we have to find it from somewhere else. Because that’s the right thing to do. We then put in another proposal, we got turned down, but we needed to buy tobacco and we needed to buy things like that. “No, you shouldn’t be having tobacco! It’s bad for you.” You know, tobacco is one of the sacred medicines. It’s just not gotten. It’s not gotten at all.¹⁷⁸

These two examples reflect the systemic flaws and inequalities, as Shauna MacKinnon points out (and mentioned in section 2), inherent in the government’s and other funding bodies’ evaluation of such organizations.

TBH has been incredibly resourceful in terms of finding other sources of funding. The office spaces surrounding the ceremonial rotunda have been a source of revenue for the organization as rentals. These offices house other Indigenous-led community organizations such as Oshki-Giizhig Inc., Moon Voices, Bear Clan, and Ogijiita Pimatiswin Kinamatwin (OPK), which all provide essential social services and resources to the Indigenous community. Other sources of revenue for Circle of Life Thunderbird House are the workshops they offer to the community, as well as renting the space for private receptions (e.g. weddings for members of the community, wakes, memorials, etc.).

¹⁷⁷ Ibid.

¹⁷⁸ Ibid.

With additional funding, TBH would like to bring the organization back to what it was meant to be as the Indigenous spiritual and healing centre of Winnipeg, and bring back the Elder council to serve the community.¹⁷⁹ Funding would allow TBH to pay for Elder salaries, as well as relocate current tenants, in order to free-up the office spaces. The place of Elders within TBH is of great importance. During the conception period, Douglas Cardinal wanted first and foremost to honor the vision of the Elders: “[TBH] was to be an expression of the vision of the Elders in the community, which is having a strong cultural and spiritual base within the programs. Because, I firmly believe that the traditions and the ceremonies that the First Nations have in their communities, in general, the First Nations worldview is a very healing worldview.”¹⁸⁰ Cardinal also explains how having such a place in the city and re-centering the teachings of Elders opposes the colonial and genocidal policies of the federal government:

I wanted to bring back the traditional healing and the beautiful position that women had, and that should be reinforced: listening to the teachings of the Elders and the teachings of the grandmothers, that would help the people when they have been disenfranchised and have been the cities with nothing. Because the reserves are all controlled by Indian Affairs and the worse act of communism, apartheid, and genocide. So, I wanted to create a place where people can heal from the government policies of apartheid and genocide perpetrated on the people.¹⁸¹

By providing a space for the community to re-connect with traditional values and teachings, and benefit from the knowledge passed down from Elders in a healing and learning context, TBH contributes to strengthening Indigenous cultural identity in an urban context that was built to prevent it.

Circle of Life Thunderbird House has been having difficulties with the state of the building for multiple years now, mainly caused by vandalism, such as regularly smashed windows and graffiti. However, as previous co-chair Richelle Scott explains, it took the roof to start falling apart for people to start showing interest in helping the non-profit organization.¹⁸² Niigaan Sinclair wrote an article for the *Winnipeg Free Press*, on July 9th, 2018, right after the windstorm wreaked havoc on the Thunderbird, stating that “Ironically, the Thunderbird’s eye now appears

¹⁷⁹ David Morrison (Co-chair, Circle of Life Thunderbird House), interviewed by Gabrielle Montpetit, May 09, 2019.

¹⁸⁰ Douglas Cardinal (Architect), interviewed by Gabrielle Montpetit, September 10, 2018.

¹⁸¹ Ibid.

¹⁸² Richelle Scott (previous Co-chair, Circle of Life Thunderbird House), interviewed by Gabrielle Montpetit, October 9, 2018.

to be crying — a victim of neglect, abuse and paralysis.”¹⁸³ However, there is hope and the community is working hard to “bring the Thunderbird back to health.”¹⁸⁴

CONCLUSION

In May 2018, Cardinal took part in the 2018 Biennale of Architecture in Venice. He was part of an exhibition entitled *UNCEDED: Voices of the Land*, which was commissioned and funded by the Canada Council for the Arts. This exhibition showcased the architectural work and philosophy of eighteen Indigenous architects from Turtle Island and through these, celebrated Indigenous resilience, worldviews and technologies.¹⁸⁵ Canada Council for the Arts director Simon Brault claims that: “*UNCEDED* is not only a brilliant and convincing celebration of Indigenous architecture and design, it is a promise of a way forward towards a shared future.”¹⁸⁶ But what about the architectural projects back in Canada, which are already fighting for this future? As I conducted my research for this project for the past two years, I was often confronted by the contradictions in how the government selectively funds certain projects by Douglas Cardinal and not others. This contradiction is apparent at the Venice Biennale as well. The disparity between the message of reconciliation sent by the Canada Council for the Arts to the rest of the world in the context of the *UNCEDED* exhibition, and the lack of support provided to projects by Cardinal back home, raises significant questions about the government’s intentions in regard to an agenda of reconciliation. As Panos Kompatsiaris explains: “As a prestigious platform of circulation, the biennial authorises, supports and allows objects, performances and discourses to become visible, to circulate and possibly be invested with desire within local and global public spheres.”¹⁸⁷ In addition, Kompatsiaris states that “Dominant political agendas, however, often connected with economic and even geopolitical interests often do play a role in

¹⁸³ Sinclair, “Unable to Fly.”

¹⁸⁴ David Morrison (Co-chair, Circle of Life Thunderbird House), interviewed by Gabrielle Montpetit, Winnipeg, October 11, 2018.

¹⁸⁵ Janet Smith, “Indigenous B.C. Architects Contribute to UNCEDED at Venice Biennale,” *Georgia Straight Vancouver’s News & Entertainment Weekly*, May 25, 2018, <https://www.straight.com/arts/1080516/indigenous-bc-architects-contribute-unceded-venice-biennale>. The architects and designers are: Ryan Gorrie, Patrick Stewart, Jake Chakasim, Brian Porter, Wanda Dalla Costa, Alfred Waugh, Ouri Scott, Ray Gosselin, Matthew Hickey, David Thomas, Harriet Burdett-Moulton, Daniel Glenn, Eladia Smoke, Chris Cornelius, and Tammy Eagle Bull. For more information, see: *Unceded: Voices of the Land*, accessed August 24, 2019, <https://www.unceded.ca/>.

¹⁸⁶ Smith, “Indigenous B.C. Architects Contribute to UNCEDED at Venice Biennale.”

¹⁸⁷ Panos Kompatsiaris, *The Politics of Contemporary Art Biennials: Spectacles of Critique, Theory and Art* (Routledge Advances in Art and Visual Studies. New York: Routledge, 2017), 25-26.

enabling values that can potentially orient public opinion in some desired directions. One such example can be found in attempts to turn the exhibition into a vessel for expressing cultural policy directives attached to larger governmental aims.”¹⁸⁸ In other words, the Biennale is a powerful tool for governments to shape global opinions/views on the success of their policies and agendas, in this case regarding reconciliation, and make these visible internationally. Through the exhibition it funded at the Biennale, the Canada Council for the Arts (and by extension the Canadian Government) portrays a favorable image of Canada actively participating in and celebrating reconciliatory practices.

However, as outlined by this thesis, the government’s actions at home would tend to give an opposing view. Reconciliation has no meaning if it is merely paraded around, on the international stage. By never quite defining what reconciliation means and keeping the course of action vague, Canada engages in a discourse “that [gives] the appearance of change while in fact securing and perpetuating the constitutional status quo, and while simultaneously heading off alternatives geared toward a more fundamental transformation of constitutional relationships.”¹⁸⁹ Reconciliation must be based in concrete and localized actions that have real-life implications, as outlined by the TRC Calls to Action, otherwise it runs the risk of merely being integrated into “settler myths” rather than actually serving Indigenous peoples.¹⁹⁰

In an era in Canadian history where the horrors of residential schools have been well documented and the conditions for the ongoing genocide against Indigenous peoples have been identified, proper measures need to be taken by the government to redress these wrongs. Sustainable and reliable funding is necessary to preserve the health of Indigenous-led organizations such as TBH. The TRC Calls to Action and the National Inquiry into MMIWG Calls to Justice have outlined how the government can do so and why. Providing funds to non-Indigenous led initiatives (such as YFC), who do not take into account the real-life implications and social issues faced by Indigenous peoples, is not a suitable action to take.

In a self-proclaimed era of reconciliation, and after numerous reports recommending this course of action, the government needs to consistently and reliably support Indigenous-led healing initiatives. This includes supporting Indigenous land claims and structures within urban

¹⁸⁸ Ibid., 27.

¹⁸⁹ Hannah Wyile, “Towards a Genealogy of Reconciliation in Canada,” *Journal of Canadian Studies* Vol. 51, No. 3 (Fall 2017): 626.

¹⁹⁰ Goeman, *Mark My Words*, 32.

centres, which have always been Indigenous. The work of Douglas Cardinal and the architecture of Circle of Life Thunderbird House act as markers of Indigenous resistance and facilitate healing and the strengthening of cultural identity. Cardinal's work also deconstructs colonial binaries that try to keep "Indigenous/Traditional" separate from "Modern/Urban," by showing us that traditions can comfortably cohabitate with contemporaneity as well as various technological advances, including the use of modern materials and computer-aided design. Cardinal is an important Indigenous leader and his work contributes to bringing back Indigenous architectural knowledge, giving communities tools towards self-determination and healing, and providing decolonial approaches to architecture and planning.

Through its architecture, programs, and the general place it holds in the heart of Winnipeg, Circle of life Thunderbird House is resisting the systemic discrimination against Indigenous peoples within urban centres, which causes a lack of access to essential health, social and economic services, and is detrimental to spiritual, emotional and physical well-being. Despite what we are encouraged to think, urban space is not neutral. Land based claims in the city are important because they further delegitimize colonial ideas of land ownership, and TBH's architecture is a visual marker of this. As demonstrated throughout this thesis, the history of Circle of Life Thunderbird House and Neeginan reveals how the colonial nature of Canadian cities perpetuates inequality and the oppression of Indigenous communities. By looking at the histories of urban planning, we can see how this has been used as a tool for colonial domination. It is by growing conscious of this power imbalance within planning and architectural practices that we can then turn towards the possibilities of alternative modes of planning/building, for a better, more inclusive future. We can also start to see how an Indigenous, decolonial mode of planning can exist in the city, transforming how we relate to land, and each other.

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Figure 1 - Douglas Cardinal, Circle of Life Thunderbird House in its construction phase (1998-2001), Winnipeg, Manitoba. Image Source: From the files of Circle of Life Thunderbird House, photographer unknown.



Figure 2 – Douglas Cardinal at the inaugural ceremony of Circle of Life Thunderbird House (2001), Winnipeg, Manitoba. Image Source: From the files of Circle of Life Thunderbird House, photographer unknown.



Figure 3 – Douglas Cardinal, Circle of Life Thunderbird House (2001), Winnipeg, Manitoba.
Photo by Gabrielle Montpetit, taken October 9, 2018.



Figure 4 – Douglas Cardinal, Museums of Civilization (now the Canadian Museum of History) (1989), Hull, Québec. Image Source: Douglas Cardinal Architect, Museum of History, accessed June 27, 2019, <http://www.djcarchitect.com/work#/museum-of-history/>.



Figure 5 – Douglas Cardinal, First Nations University of Canada (2003), Regina, Saskatchewan. Image Source: Douglas Cardinal Architect, First Nations University, accessed June 27, 2019, <http://www.djcarchitect.com/work#/first-nations-university/>.



Figure 6 – Douglas Cardinal, Rossignol Elementary Community School (c. 1973-1975), Île à la Crosse, Saskatchewan. Image Source: Douglas Cardinal Architect, Ile a la Crosse Elementary School, accessed June 27, 2019, <http://www.djcarchitect.com/work#/ile-a-la-crosse-elementary-school/>.



Figure 7 – Douglas Cardinal, Amo Osowan School (date unknown), Long Point First Nation, Québec. Image Source: Douglas Cardinal Architect, Long Point First Nation, accessed June 27, 2019, <http://www.djcarchitect.com/work#/long-point-first-nation/>.

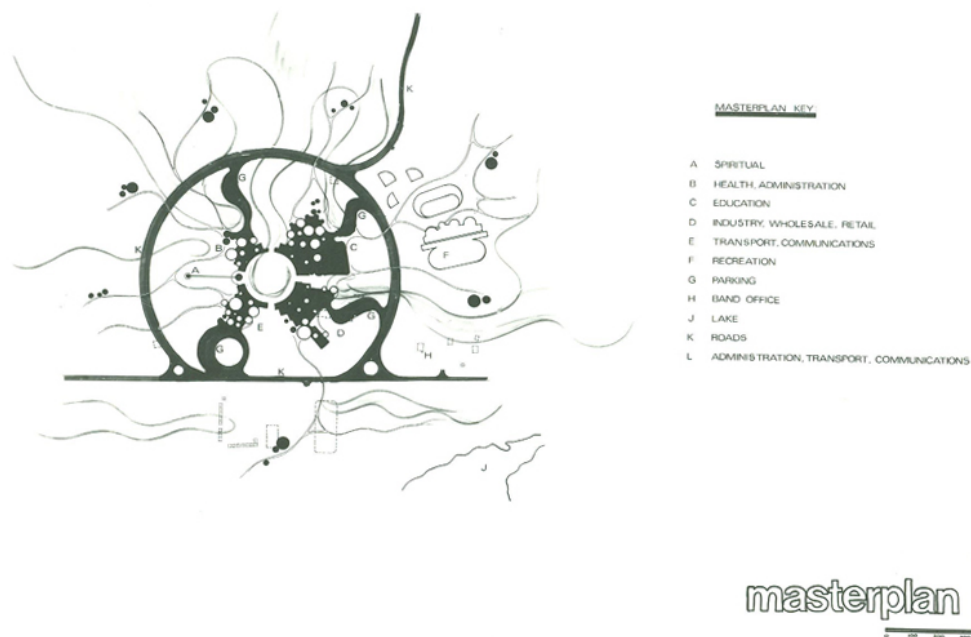


Figure 8 – Douglas Cardinal, Kehewin Village master plan (c. 1975), Alberta. Image Source: Douglas Cardinal, Kehewin Village, accessed June 27, 2019, <http://www.djcarchitect.com/work#/kehewin-village/>.



Figure 9 – Douglas Cardina, Oujé-Bougoumou Village (1990), Québec. Image Source: Douglas Cardinal, Ouje Bougoumou Village, accessed June 27, 2019, <http://www.djcarchitect.com/work#/ouje-bougoumou-village/>.

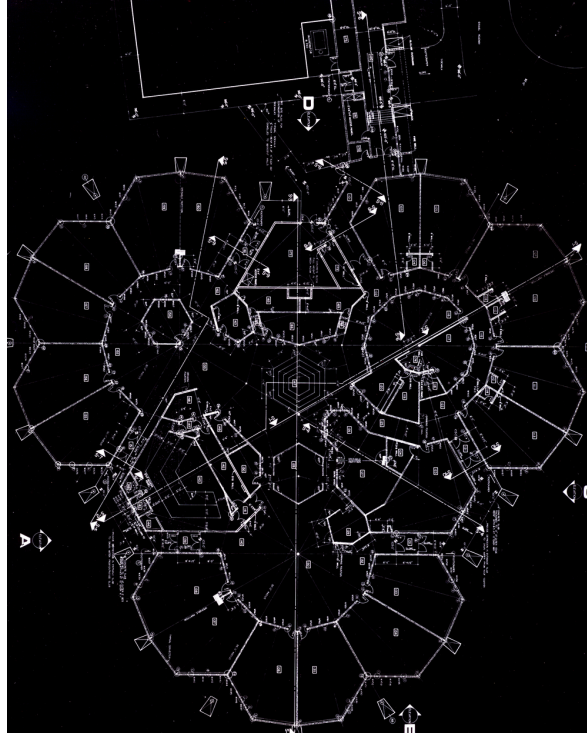


Figure 10 – Douglas Cardinal, Floor plan, Rossignol Elementary Community School (c. 1973-1975), Île à la Crosse, Saskatchewan. Image Source: Douglas Cardinal Architect, Ile a la Crosse Elementary School, accessed June 27, 2019, <http://www.djcarchitect.com/work#/ile-a-la-crosse-elementary-school/>.



Figure 11 – Douglas Cardinal, Inside view of communal area with ‘fire pit’ seating arrangement, Rossignol Elementary Community School (c. 1973-1975), Île à la Crosse, Saskatchewan. Image Source: Douglas Cardinal Architect, Ile a la Crosse Elementary School, accessed June 27, 2019, <http://www.djcarchitect.com/work#/ile-a-la-crosse-elementary-school/>.

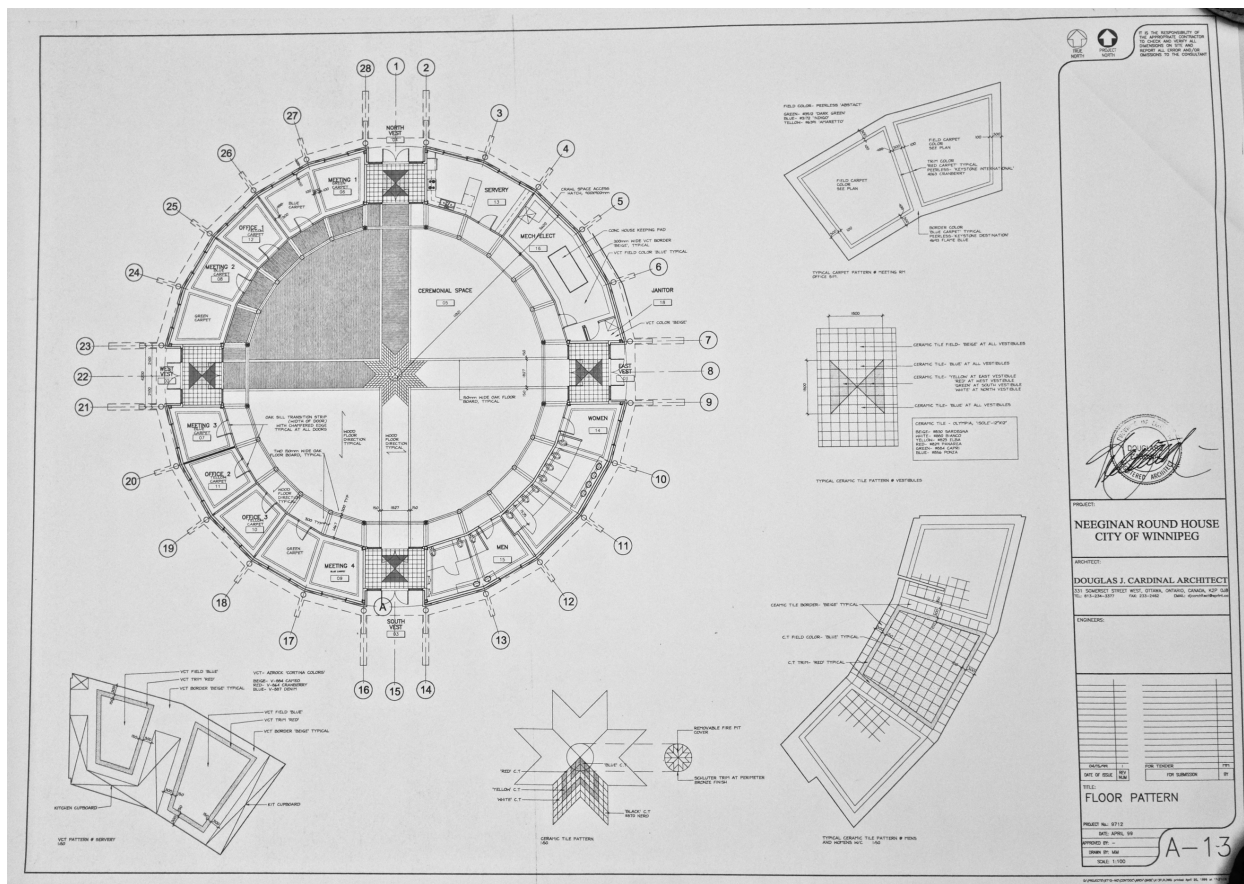


Figure 12 – Douglas Cardinal, Floor plan, showing details of floor pattern, Circle of Life Thunderbird House (2001), Winnipeg, Manitoba. Image Source: “Neeginan Development: Original Plans.” 1999. Archives & Research Collections, Carleton University Library, CARD 1040, Series 1, Neeginan Development, Douglas Cardinal Fonds.



Figure 13 – Douglas Cardinal, Bonnyville Indian-Métis Rehabilitation Centre (c. 1970s), Bonnyville, Alberta. Image Source : Douglas Cardinal, Bonnyville Rehabilitation Centre, accessed June 27, 2019, <http://www.djcarchitect.com/work#/bonneville-rehabilitation-centre/>.



Figure 14 - Douglas Cardinal, 3D model, Bonnyville Indian-Métis Rehabilitation Centre (c. 1970s), Bonnyville, Alberta. Image Source : Douglas Cardinal, Bonnyville Rehabilitation Centre, accessed June 27, 2019, <http://www.djcarchitect.com/work#/bonneville-rehabilitation-centre/>.

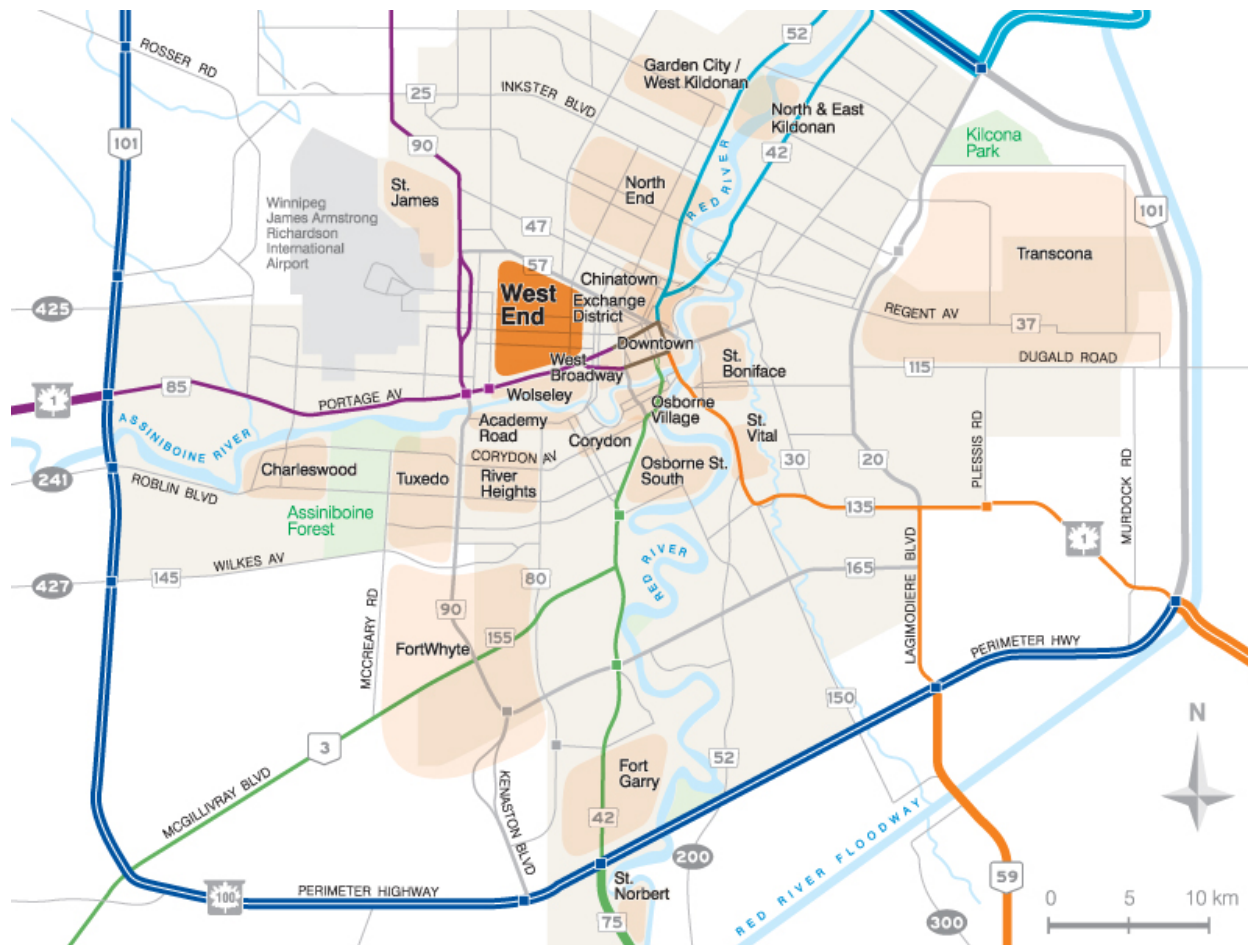


Figure 15 – Winnipeg neighbourhood map, showing the North End next to the Red River, and Portage Ave. in purple going from East to West. Image Source: Tourism Winnipeg, accessed June 27, 2019, <https://www.tourismwinnipeg.com/plan-your-trip/neighbourhoods/display,neighbourhood/22/west-end>.

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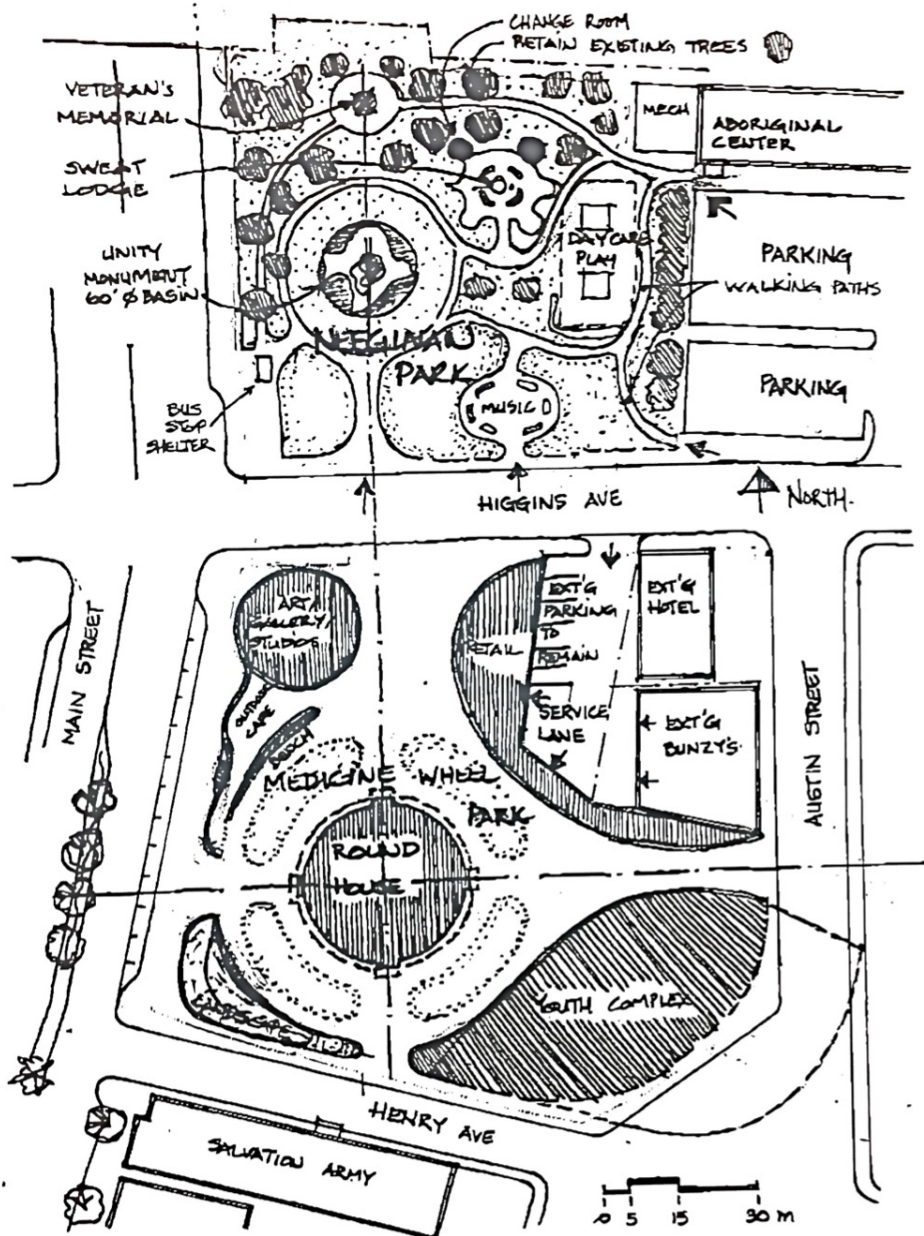


Figure 16 – Cohlmeier Associates Urban Designers & Douglas Cardinal Architect, Neeginan Project Landscape Proposal Plans (1998), Winnipeg, Manitoba. Image Source: Archives & Research Collections, Carleton University Library, CARD-001, Serie 1, Neeginan Development, Douglas Cardinal Fonds.

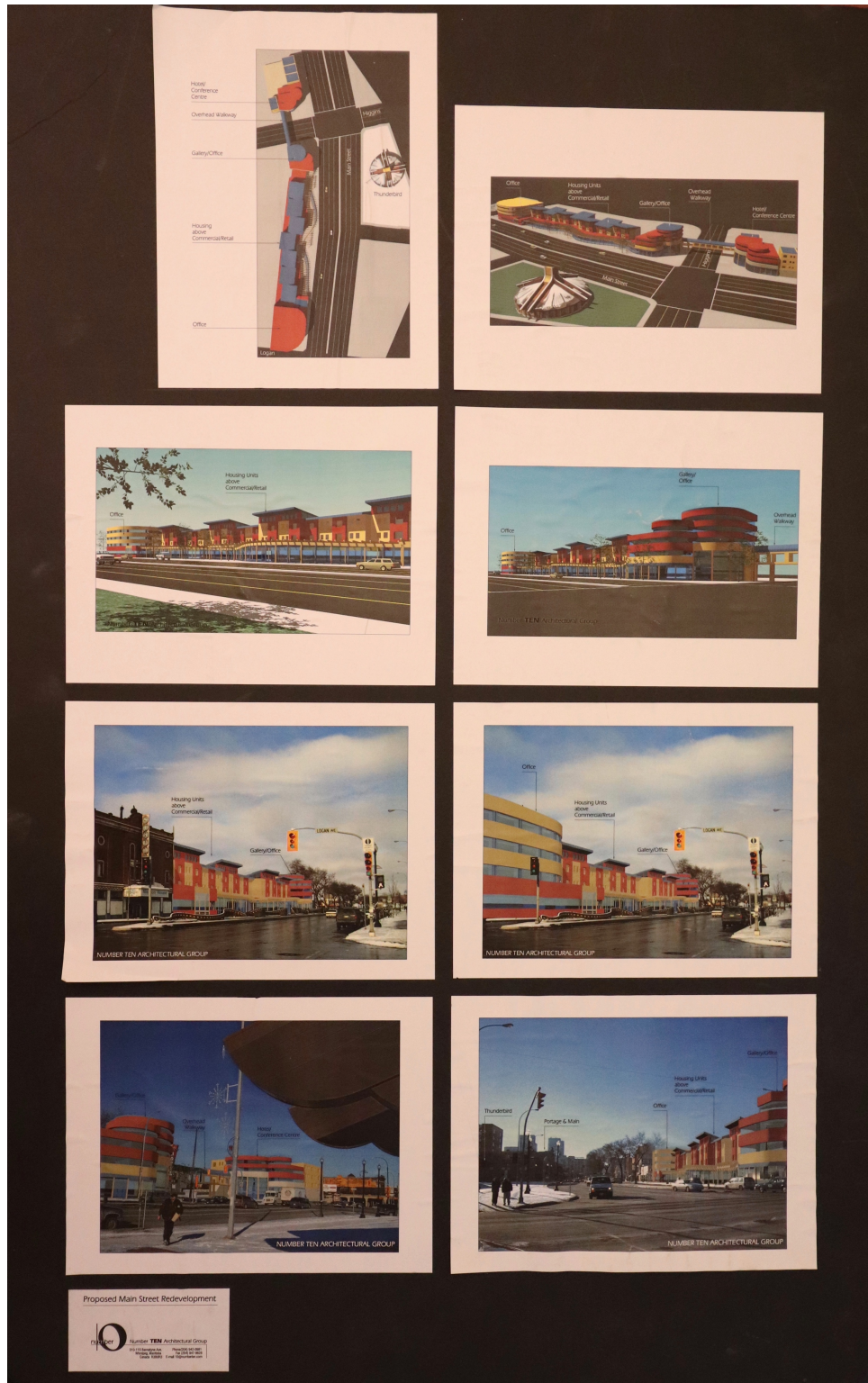


Figure 17 – Number TEN Architectural Group, “Proposal Main Street Redevelopment,” 3D models (c. 1990s), Winnipeg, Manitoba. Image Source: From the files of Circle of Life Thunderbird House.



Figure 18 – View of Main Street, including Our Place/Chez Nous Drop in Centre with a Christian Cross on its façade, Winnipeg Manitoba. Photo by Gabrielle Montpetit, taken October 9, 2018.



Figure 19 – Map of the Higgins and Main intersection, showing the proximity of Circle of Life Thunderbird House to the Salvation Army, the Centre for Aboriginal Human Resource Development, Youth for Christ, Our Place/Chez Nous Drop-in Centre, and the Winnipeg Regional Health Authority, Winnipeg, Manitoba. Image Source: Google Maps.



Figure 20 - Raymond SC Wan Architects, Youth for Christ (2011), Winnipeg, Manitoba. Image Source: Raymond SC Wan Architects, Youth for Christ, accessed June 27, 2019, <http://raymondswanarchitect.com/youth-for-christ/>.



Figure 21 – View of Main Street, with Circle of Life Thunderbird House and streetscaping elements, Winnipeg, Manitoba. Photo by Gabrielle Montpetit, taken October 9, 2018.

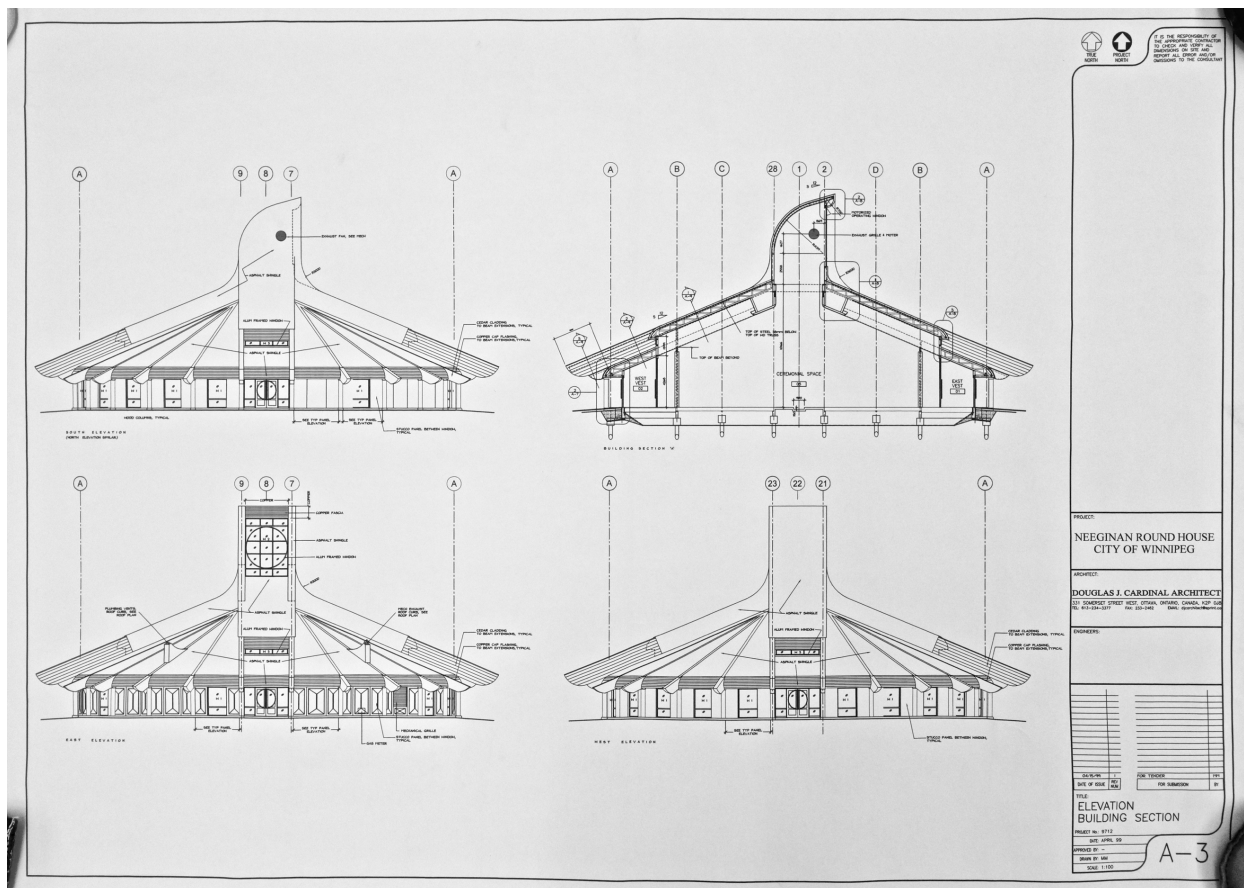


Figure 22 – Douglas Cardinal, Elevation Building Section, showing different views of the roof, Circle of Life Thunderbird House (2001), Winnipeg, Manitoba. Image Source: “Neeginan Development: Original Plans.” 1999. Carleton University, CARD 1040, Series 1, Neeginan Development, Douglas Cardinal Fonds.



Figure 23 – Douglas Cardinal, Roof detail, Circle of Life Thunderbird House (2001), Winnipeg, Manitoba. Photo by Gabrielle Montpetit, taken October 9, 2018.



Figure 24 – Richelle Scott, former co-chair of Circle of Life Thunderbird House Board of Directors, standing in front of Circle of Life Thunderbird House and the copper plates falling off the roof. Photo by Mikaela Mackenzie. Image Source: Ryan Thorpe. “Thunderbird House Pleas for Help Ignored, Board Co-chair Says.” *Winnipeg Free Press*, July 11, 2018. <https://www.winnipegfreepress.com/local/thunderbird-house-pleas-for-help-ignored-board-co-chair-says-487825571.html>.



Figure 25 – Douglas Cardinal, Roof detail, showing skylight, Circle of Life Thunderbird House (2001), Winnipeg, Manitoba. Photo by Gabrielle Montpetit, taken October 9, 2018.



Figure 26 – Douglas Cardinal, Interior view, Circle of Life Thunderbird House (2001), Winnipeg, Manitoba. Photo by Gabrielle Montpetit, taken October 9, 2018.



Figure 27 – Douglas Cardinal, Interior view, showing radiating ceiling and skylight, Circle of Life Thunderbird House (2001), Winnipeg, Manitoba. Photo by Gabrielle Montpetit, taken October 9, 2018.



Figure 28 – Douglas Cardinal, Star blanket motif fire pit detail, Circle of Life Thunderbird House (2001), Winnipeg, Manitoba. Photo by Gabrielle Montpetit, taken October 9, 2018.



Figure 29 – Douglas Cardinal, Motorized window and ventilation system, interior view, Circle of Life Thunderbird House (2001), Winnipeg, Manitoba. Photo by Gabrielle Montpetit, taken October 9, 2018.



Figure 30 – Inaugural ceremony, Circle of Life Thunderbird House (2001), Winnipeg, Manitoba.
Image Source: From the files of Circle of Life Thunderbird House, photographer unknown.

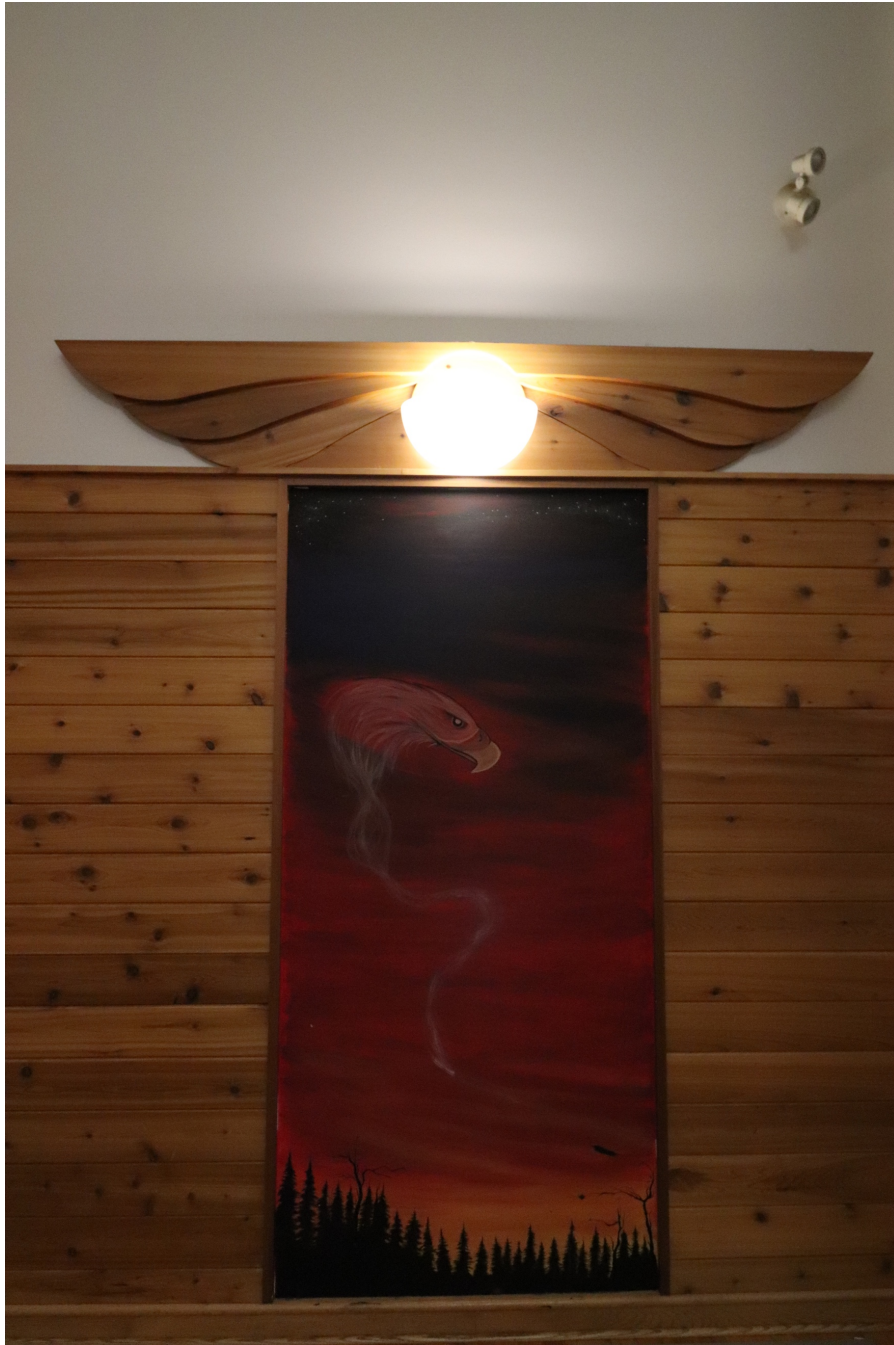


Figure 31 – Interior detail, Thunderbird panel, Circle of Life Thunderbird House (2001), Winnipeg, Manitoba. Photo by Gabrielle Montpetit, taken October 9, 2018.



Figure 32 – Interior detail, panel with “We Are All Treaty People” poster, cedar bundle, and little red dress with the name “Serenity McKay”, Circle of Life Thunderbird House (2001), Winnipeg, Manitoba. Photo by Gabrielle Montpetit, taken October 9, 2018.



Figure 33 – Artist unknown, Drawing of Circle of Life Thunderbird House's sweatlodge, Winnipeg, Manitoba, c. 2001. Image Source: From the files of Circle of Life Thunderbird House.

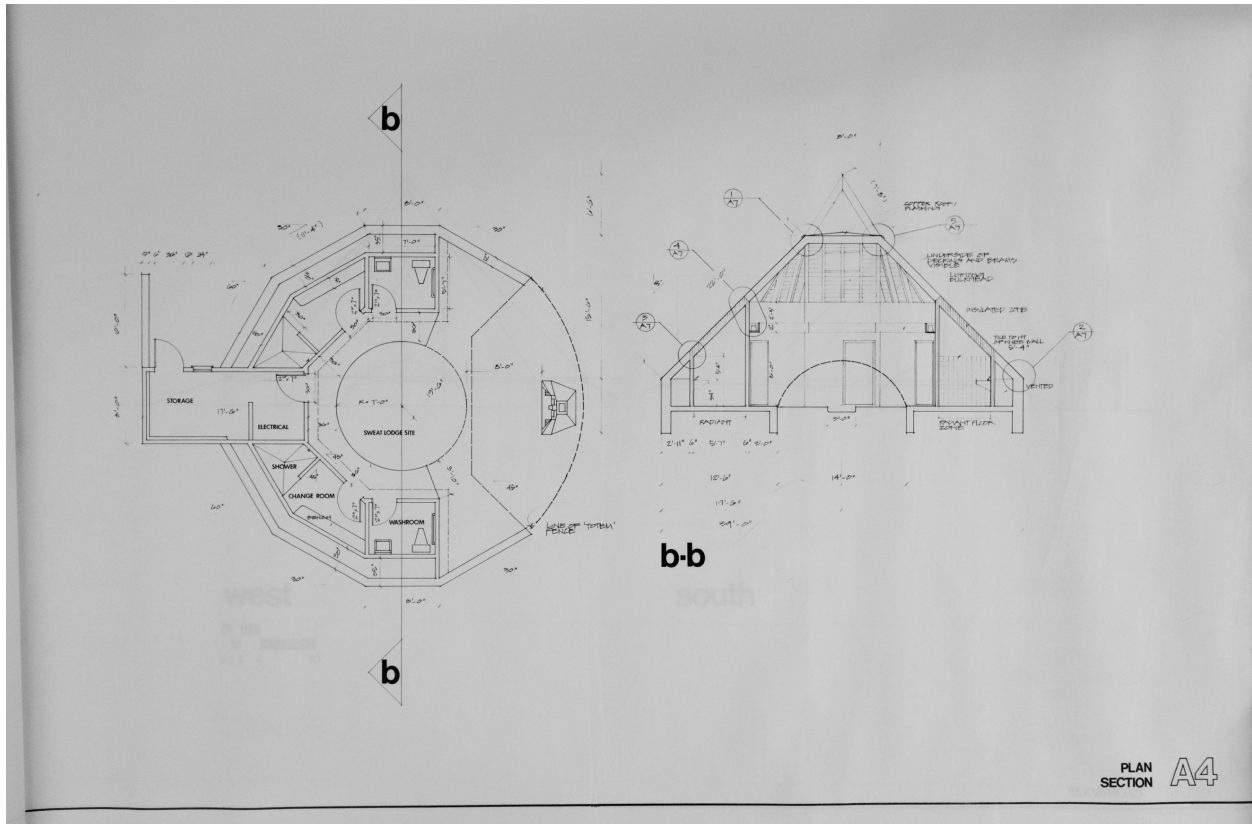


Figure 34 – Colin Lount Architect, Sweat lodge floor plan and section plan, Circle of Life Thunderbird House (2001), Winnipeg, Manitoba. Image Source: From the files of Circle of Life Thunderbird House.

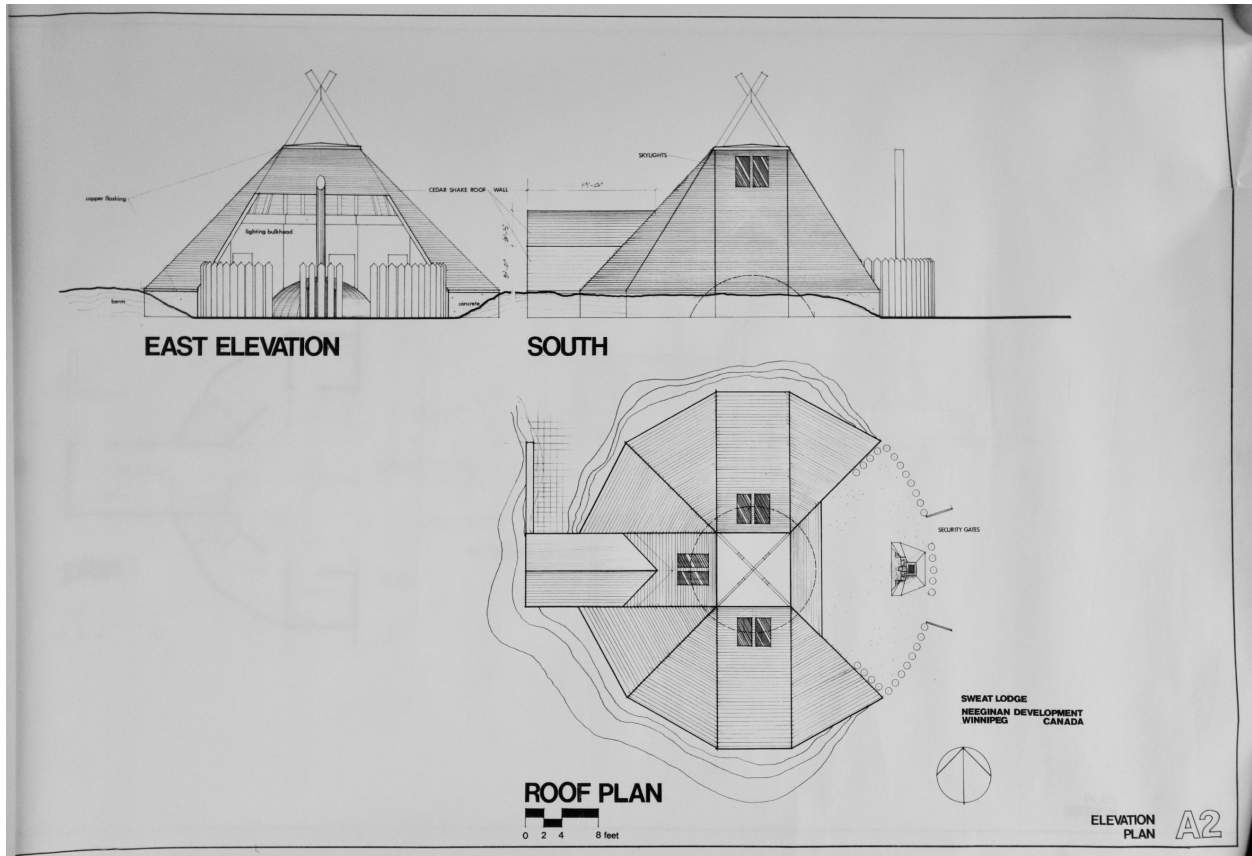


Figure 35 – Colin Lount Architect, Sweat lodge roof plan and East and South elevations, Circle of Life Thunderbird House (2001), Winnipeg, Manitoba. Image Source: From the files of Circle of Life Thunderbird House.