

Design Studies in Canada (and Beyond): The State of the Field

Keith Bresnahan

This special issue of *RACAR* provides a snapshot of design studies in Canada today, revealing both progress and the continuing challenges facing design studies as a discipline. As design studio programs continue to grow and multiply, the slow but upward development of design studies—encompassing historical and theoretical research on design and material culture—elicits a moment of reflection. The articles assembled here compose an initial, if partial, picture of the state of the field, combining historical works on important and overlooked figures and works with reflections on disciplinary formation, on pedagogy, on theory, and on design's critical function and social role, alongside provocations that call explicitly for action on curricular development, collection and exhibition, and design scholarship.

The past few years have seen a growing number of design-related sessions and talks at the annual *UAAC* meetings, whether independently or under the auspices of the *UAAC*-affiliated Canadian Design Studies Network. Drawing on this development, the guest editors for this issue have sought contributions from design scholars and researchers for a stocktaking of current issues and debates, seeking to initiate a larger conversation on design scholarship in this country. This issue bears the results of that call. The diversity of approaches points to the breadth of concerns in design studies, and to the impossibility of defining this field in terms of a particular methodology or theoretical position; indeed, the multi- or inter-disciplinarity of the field is an explicit theme in many of the contributions. As diverse as are the texts gathered here, one may identify a number of common themes, as well as certain lacunae or

absences. A characteristic shared by almost all of the articles is a recognition of the nascent status of the field, frequently accompanied by questions concerning its nature and scope, as well as calls for an elevated status, new programs, collaborations, and so forth. In essence, these are questions of disciplinary standing (and of disciplinary boundaries) that, as a number of the articles attest, have accompanied design disciplines and design studies over the past half-century.

What becomes clear from a number of the articles here is that there is a need for a specialized approach to design history and theory that would not merely replicate art historical approaches but would be capable of treating the specific issues raised by design, from its imbrication in material and economic networks to questions of sustainability and environmental impact, determinations of use, the designer-corporation-client matrix, and so on. Concerns around disciplinary formation and disciplinary boundaries in design studies include not only the longstanding and often contentious relationship of design studies to its contiguous fields of art/craft history and to design practice, however, but also the various sub-fields that constitute the object of design studies, from graphic design to industrial design, illustration, typography, advertising, interior design, fashion design, and the better-established field of architectural studies.

Design studies globally is still in a state of infancy, a situation that is particularly stark in Canada: despite the astonishing rise in design studio programs in recent decades, and despite design's standing in popular consciousness, there is only one dedicated program in the country for

design studies (at Edmonton's MacEwan University), and there are no stand-alone design history programs at either the undergraduate or graduate level. Museum collections and archives of design-related materials are similarly scarce, or entirely absent; and the scholarly literature on Canadian design history in Canada is scant, with many sub-fields of design and many key figures still lacking even introductory treatment. While good historical surveys exist for some genres and contexts, these are all of recent vintage and lack competition, a single text standing in many cases for an entire field.¹ Given this situation, a number of the articles in this issue make explicit calls for the elevation of design studies programs, of collections and archives, and of scholarly research.

The major figures in the history of Canadian design are still little known even among members of the educated and interested public; with the exception of a few high-profile architects (Arthur Erikson, Douglas Cardinal, the expatriate Frank Gehry), key individuals are almost wholly unrecognized, even if their works are sometimes familiar. Stuart Ash, Douglas Ball, Marian Bantjes, Sigrun Bülow-Hübe, Robin Bush, Oscar Cahén, Michel Dallaire, Carl Dair, Allan Fleming, Jacques Guillon, Julien Hébert, Bruce Mau, Geoff McFetridge, Karim Rashid, Rex Woods: all these and more have almost entirely escaped not only public knowledge but scholarly treatment or institutional collection in this country, with some actually being much better known outside of Canada than within it.² All this points to the need for further work on the part of scholars and institutions. Jaleen Grove's article "Drawing Out Illustration History in Canada" surveys the neglected fate of Canadian illustration history and its ideological underpinnings, from the denigration of illustration by historians focused on "fine" art to disciplinary gatekeeping and to an endemic anti-Americanism on the part of Canadian cultural critics prejudiced against those illustrators who made their careers in US magazines. Grove also launches a well-justified call for the development of a permanent home for print collections and archives of Canadian illustration, in the absence of which future research in this area will be further impeded, if not made impossible.

Both Grove and Sarah McLean Knapp call for stronger institutional initiatives in the collecting and teaching of design, while many other articles in this issue remind us of older (mostly unrealized) calls for professional, educational, and institutional development of design and design studies in this country. Martin Racine's article on Julien Hébert explores the activist work of this celebrated Quebec designer, specifically considering his two proposals (in 1961 and 1971) for a Design Institute in Montreal and for a "Projet de réinsertion" that would see design education as a tool for the social reintegration of disadvantaged members of Quebec society. Margaret Hodges shows the complex interplay among designers, corporations, cultural institutions, media outlets, and the general public in the promotion of "Scandinavian" design as a means to shape public taste and develop a homegrown Canadian design industry in the 1950s and 1960s.

It becomes evident in this collection of articles that Canadian designers' engagement with international modernism in the decades following World War II constitutes an especially fertile site of historical inquiry. This reflects a concern with origins that owes as much to the nascent status of the field as to its interest in issues of disciplinary formation, professional status, and institutional support. Certain key figures and agencies play prominent roles here—the seminal National Industrial Design Committee (NIDC), established in 1948 under the direction of the National Gallery's Donald Buchanan, is mentioned in several articles—while other stories, from Cheryl Dipede's narrative of professionalization in Toronto graphic design circles in these same years, to Margaret Hodges's analysis of the work of the Montreal designer Sigrun Bülow-Hübe, Martin Racine's discussion of Julien Hébert, and Dustin Valen's look at Hazen Sise's architectural history course at McGill in the 1950s, reveal little-known aspects of this rich period.

As already noted, a concern with pedagogy is another shared theme of the articles assembled here, from historical accounts of educational initiatives to the more frankly activist intentions of McLean Knapp, Wayne Williams and Janice Rieger, and Laureline Chiapello. McLean Knapp's

“Design Studies in Canada?” briefly surveys the history of design education in this country in relation to the rise of design studies/design history programs in the UK over the past four decades, to pointedly make the case for new Canadian programs in design studies in order to strengthen studio education and to retain young scholars. Williams and Rieger, for their part, are no less polemical, arguing strenuously not only for framing design studies using a material culture lens but also for a renewed conception of the first-year design history survey to reflect the multidisciplinary and open-endedness of this field.

In some sense, these calls might be seen to echo what Valen sees as Sise’s “operative” mode of teaching modern architectural history at McGill, which used a historical survey to convince students of the rightness of the modern, thereby “to transform Canadian architecture through its future practitioners.” While contemporary approaches in the teaching of design history have largely abandoned such imperatives in favour of more neutral and nuanced models of history, Valen, in pointing toward a moment in which “historical thought and practice were once intertwined,” identifies a desire shared by a number of other contributors to this issue. In the context of a comparison of theoretical frameworks within video game studies with those of design studies more broadly, for example, Laureline Chiapello takes up Alain Findeli and Rabah Bousbaci’s 2005 article “L’Éclipse de l’objet dans les théories du projet en design.” Following their argument, Chiapello asserts the necessity of a symbiotic relationship between design pedagogy and design theory through the “fertilization of practice by theory.” This approach calls for a recognition that studio educators are already (if non-explicitly) deploying theoretical models in their teaching, models that favour the designed object over design processes (or vice versa), or else give the central role to the actors of design networks (designer, client, audience, etc.). While advocating for a rapprochement of video game studies and design studies on the basis of shared theoretical approaches, Chiapello argues for the production of reflective practitioners (and theorists) through a more open cross-fertilization of these approaches.³

The shift Findeli and Bousbaci identify in design studies, away from the formal properties of the finished object and toward process and context, is also evident in a number of the contributions to this issue. These articles tend to focus on disciplinary and institutional concerns as well as on situating designed objects in their broader conceptual, ideological, and social frameworks, while largely eschewing formal discussion of specific objects. In part this is due to design studies’ intentional move away from the formal, biographical, and connoisseurial paradigms of art history with which it began; nonetheless, it remains the case that design studies today still finds itself caught between establishing a historical groundwork via close readings of signature objects and the careers of significant designers, on the one hand, and a process-and-context-oriented multidisciplinary on the other. One conviction shared by a number of contributors seems to be the possibility of attending to the real materiality of the designed object, both as a key element in the “external” forces within which it is caught and as the source of a necessary criticality vis-à-vis contemporary media and consumer culture.

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A similar view appears in Carmela Cucuzzella’s article “Is Sustainability Reorienting the Visual

Expression of Architecture?” Surveying a number of recent Quebec-based competitions in architecture, landscape, and urban design, Cucuzzella considers the emergence of sustainability as a criterion for judgment in design competitions since the early 2000s and traces its shaping of formal and aesthetic responses in design, often in counter-intuitive ways. Here, we see how a social and cultural imperative not only impacts directions in design, but is given shape and public visibility through design. While visible strategies marking “sustainable design”—green roofs, garden walls, and so on—initially dominated responses to this new desideratum in competitions, Cucuzzella shows how an adherence to a single technical standard (LEED certification) marking a design’s sustainability has favoured design responses that deploy largely invisible modes of environmental design for sustainability (airflow, placement of fenestration, etc.). This article reminds us that design’s imbrication in networks of social, economic, and technical forces is not a one-way street, but an endlessly recursive loop of mutual negotiation.

For other contributors, “criticality” is of the essence in understanding design’s social role and in shaping future directions for design studies. Against a hidebound set of formal-aesthetic criteria borrowed from an (outmoded) model of art history, Williams and Rieger’s “A Design History of Design: Complexity, Criticality, and Cultural Competence” argues for a material-culture approach to design history and design studies that would be “more concerned with the context of production, consumption, and mediation than with the reproduction of a canon or a narrow set of values.” This expanded approach, they suggest, gives design studies its crucially important function within design studio education, that of imbuing future designers with a deep sense of criticality with respect to design’s complex framework of “community, consumption, mediation, and production.”

Brian Donnelly, in his article “The Inversion of Originality through Design,” takes a different approach to the question of criticality, arguing that the cultural force of graphic design and its critical function for social change have derived

not from a putative “originality” emphasized in art historical approaches to individual works and designers, but rather through design’s basis in mass reproduction, copying, remixing, and imitation. Like so many other contributors to this issue, Donnelly bases design in its social and economic milieu and suggests that it be understood as a social technology, “yield[ing] an art that is most powerful without the individual genius, finding powerful critique out of existing forms and relations of communication, through mimesis, common agreement and public, shared practice.” It is by intervening into mass culture as part of mass culture, rather than from the putatively exterior point of avant-garde practice, that design can exercise its real power, “developing and improving everyday objects to meet human necessities at the same time as it also defines itself as a distinct visual culture, yielding unique effects”—making a difference, within a culture defined by difference.

This view seems to be echoed in a statement by the design theorist and historian Maurizio Vitta quoted by Williams and Rieger:

If the *culture* of design is meant to explain the *culture* of the object, it must of necessity share the object’s fate. And, as the object in our system is at the same time a sign of social identification, a communication instrument, a use image, an oppressive *simulacrum*, a fetish, and a tool, design cannot help but be an instrument of social analysis, an area of intervention in everyday life, a language, a fashion, a theory of form, a show, a fetishism, a merchandise.⁴

This, it seems to us, points to a forward direction in design studies, one that is well reflected in the wide range of approaches on display here: design not merely as an object of social analysis, but as an instrument that—in the hands of the theorist and historian—can begin to open up the extraordinary culture of objects and images that surrounds us and defines our lives.

At the same time as it provides a picture of the richness already present in contemporary design studies in Canada, this issue also points toward the work that remains to be done. As we have seen, the future of design studies in this country depends on an immediate investment in scholarship, both in the development of university programs in design studies/design history and in the strengthening of design studies within existing

studio-based design programs, as well as in the establishment of much-needed collections and archives to preserve and display design history for future generations of design researchers. Much work also remains to be done to expand the range of topics in Canadian design history and to realize its rich potential—firstly, to establish the basic framework of our histories of design and lay a groundwork for further research, and secondly to address the lacunae of that history, moving scholarship beyond the modern, and beyond central Canada, to a truly national scope. Design history in this country must include histories of colonialism, decolonization, and cultural diversity and must engage scholars of and from the prairie, coastal, and northern regions to write the design histories of these regions. Rather than reflecting a static view of the “state of the field,” or presenting a single view of design studies in Canada today, this issue will, we hope, serve as an encouragement and initial opening onto future work, scholarly collaboration, and conversations yet to come. ¶

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4. Maurizio Vitta, “The Meaning of Design,” *Design Discourse: History, Theory, Criticism*, ed. Victor Margolin (Chicago, 1989), 35. Italics in the original.

design studies (at Edmonton's MacEwan University), and there are no stand-alone design history programs at either the undergraduate or graduate level. Museum collections and archives of design-related materials are similarly scarce, or entirely absent; and the scholarly literature on Canadian design history in Canada is scant, with many sub-fields of design and many key figures still lacking even introductory treatment. While good historical surveys exist for some genres and contexts, these are all of recent vintage and lack competition, a single text standing in many cases for an entire field.¹ Given this situation, a number of the articles in this issue make explicit calls for the elevation of design studies programs, of collections and archives, and of scholarly research.

The major figures in the history of Canadian design are still little known even among members of the educated and interested public; with the exception of a few high-profile architects (Arthur Erikson, Douglas Cardinal, the expatriate Frank Gehry), key individuals are almost wholly unrecognized, even if their works are sometimes familiar. Stuart Ash, Douglas Ball, Marian Bantjes, Sigrun Bülow-Hübe, Robin Bush, Oscar Cahén, Michel Dallaire, Carl Dair, Allan Fleming, Jacques Guillon, Julien Hébert, Bruce Mau, Geoff McFetridge, Karim Rashid, Rex Woods: all these and more have almost entirely escaped not only public knowledge but scholarly treatment or institutional collection in this country, with some actually being much better known outside of Canada than within it.² All this points to the need for further work on the part of scholars and institutions. Jaleen Grove's article "Drawing Out Illustration History in Canada" surveys the neglected fate of Canadian illustration history and its ideological underpinnings, from the denigration of illustration by historians focused on "fine" art to disciplinary gatekeeping and to an endemic anti-Americanism on the part of Canadian cultural critics prejudiced against those illustrators who made their careers in US magazines. Grove also launches a well-justified call for the development of a permanent home for print collections and archives of Canadian illustration, in the absence of which future research in this area will be further impeded, if not made impossible.

Both Grove and Sarah McLean Knapp call for stronger institutional initiatives in the collecting and teaching of design, while many other articles in this issue remind us of older (mostly unrealized) calls for professional, educational, and institutional development of design and design studies in this country. Martin Racine's article on Julien Hébert explores the activist work of this celebrated Quebec designer, specifically considering his two proposals (in 1961 and 1971) for a Design Institute in Montreal and for a "Projet de réinsertion" that would see design education as a tool for the social reintegration of disadvantaged members of Quebec society. Margaret Hodges shows the complex interplay among designers, corporations, cultural institutions, media outlets, and the general public in the promotion of "Scandinavian" design as a means to shape public taste and develop a homegrown Canadian design industry in the 1950s and 1960s.

It becomes evident in this collection of articles that Canadian designers' engagement with international modernism in the decades following World War II constitutes an especially fertile site of historical inquiry. This reflects a concern with origins that owes as much to the nascent status of the field as to its interest in issues of disciplinary formation, professional status, and institutional support. Certain key figures and agencies play prominent roles here—the seminal National Industrial Design Committee (NIDC), established in 1948 under the direction of the National Gallery's Donald Buchanan, is mentioned in several articles—while other stories, from Cheryl Dipede's narrative of professionalization in Toronto graphic design circles in these same years, to Margaret Hodges's analysis of the work of the Montreal designer Sigrun Bülow-Hübe, Martin Racine's discussion of Julien Hébert, and Dustin Valen's look at Hazen Sise's architectural history course at McGill in the 1950s, reveal little-known aspects of this rich period.

As already noted, a concern with pedagogy is another shared theme of the articles assembled here, from historical accounts of educational initiatives to the more frankly activist intentions of McLean Knapp, Wayne Williams and Janice Rieger, and Laureline Chiapello. McLean Knapp's

“Design Studies in Canada?” briefly surveys the history of design education in this country in relation to the rise of design studies/design history programs in the UK over the past four decades, to pointedly make the case for new Canadian programs in design studies in order to strengthen studio education and to retain young scholars. Williams and Rieger, for their part, are no less polemical, arguing strenuously not only for framing design studies using a material culture lens but also for a renewed conception of the first-year design history survey to reflect the multidisciplinary and open-endedness of this field.

In some sense, these calls might be seen to echo what Valen sees as Sise’s “operative” mode of teaching modern architectural history at McGill, which used a historical survey to convince students of the rightness of the modern, thereby “to transform Canadian architecture through its future practitioners.” While contemporary approaches in the teaching of design history have largely abandoned such imperatives in favour of more neutral and nuanced models of history, Valen, in pointing toward a moment in which “historical thought and practice were once intertwined,” identifies a desire shared by a number of other contributors to this issue. In the context of a comparison of theoretical frameworks within video game studies with those of design studies more broadly, for example, Laureline Chiapello takes up Alain Findeli and Rabah Bousbaci’s 2005 article “L’Éclipse de l’objet dans les théories du projet en design.” Following their argument, Chiapello asserts the necessity of a symbiotic relationship between design pedagogy and design theory through the “fertilization of practice by theory.” This approach calls for a recognition that studio educators are already (if non-explicitly) deploying theoretical models in their teaching, models that favour the designed object over design processes (or vice versa), or else give the central role to the actors of design networks (designer, client, audience, etc.). While advocating for a rapprochement of video game studies and design studies on the basis of shared theoretical approaches, Chiapello argues for the production of reflective practitioners (and theorists) through a more open cross-fertilization of these approaches.³

The shift Findeli and Bousbaci identify in design studies, away from the formal properties of the finished object and toward process and context, is also evident in a number of the contributions to this issue. These articles tend to focus on disciplinary and institutional concerns as well as on situating designed objects in their broader conceptual, ideological, and social frameworks, while largely eschewing formal discussion of specific objects. In part this is due to design studies’ intentional move away from the formal, biographical, and connoisseurial paradigms of art history with which it began; nonetheless, it remains the case that design studies today still finds itself caught between establishing a historical groundwork via close readings of signature objects and the careers of significant designers, on the one hand, and a process-and-context-oriented multidisciplinary on the other. One conviction shared by a number of contributors seems to be the possibility of attending to the real materiality of the designed object, both as a key element in the “external” forces within which it is caught and as the source of a necessary criticality vis-à-vis contemporary media and consumer culture.

The first of these two approaches is evidenced by Michael Windover’s article, “Designing Public Radio in Canada,” which takes up the case of a single transmitting station—Watrous, Saskatchewan’s CBK, designed and built at the outset of the Second World War. Windover unfolds the story of the construction of mid-twentieth-century radio publics, which took place not through an immaterial and ephemeral network of listeners, but through the designed infrastructure of radio, from the sitting-room radio cabinet around which families gathered, to the purpose-built environments of transmitters, station buildings, and employee housing. In this view, the self-consciously modernist transmitting station drew around itself a number of overlapping spatial registers, from domestic intimacy to the national scope of the broadcasting network. Design here is not merely an outcome of other (technological, economic, social) forces, but is itself an active agent in shaping these.

A similar view appears in Carmela Cucuzzella’s article “Is Sustainability Reorienting the Visual

Expression of Architecture?” Surveying a number of recent Quebec-based competitions in architecture, landscape, and urban design, Cucuzzella considers the emergence of sustainability as a criterion for judgment in design competitions since the early 2000s and traces its shaping of formal and aesthetic responses in design, often in counter-intuitive ways. Here, we see how a social and cultural imperative not only impacts directions in design, but is given shape and public visibility through design. While visible strategies marking “sustainable design”—green roofs, garden walls, and so on—initially dominated responses to this new desideratum in competitions, Cucuzzella shows how an adherence to a single technical standard (LEED certification) marking a design’s sustainability has favoured design responses that deploy largely invisible modes of environmental design for sustainability (airflow, placement of fenestration, etc.). This article reminds us that design’s imbrication in networks of social, economic, and technical forces is not a one-way street, but an endlessly recursive loop of mutual negotiation.

For other contributors, “criticality” is of the essence in understanding design’s social role and in shaping future directions for design studies. Against a hidebound set of formal-aesthetic criteria borrowed from an (outmoded) model of art history, Williams and Rieger’s “A Design History of Design: Complexity, Criticality, and Cultural Competence” argues for a material-culture approach to design history and design studies that would be “more concerned with the context of production, consumption, and mediation than with the reproduction of a canon or a narrow set of values.” This expanded approach, they suggest, gives design studies its crucially important function within design studio education, that of imbuing future designers with a deep sense of criticality with respect to design’s complex framework of “community, consumption, mediation, and production.”

Brian Donnelly, in his article “The Inversion of Originality through Design,” takes a different approach to the question of criticality, arguing that the cultural force of graphic design and its critical function for social change have derived

not from a putative “originality” emphasized in art historical approaches to individual works and designers, but rather through design’s basis in mass reproduction, copying, remixing, and imitation. Like so many other contributors to this issue, Donnelly bases design in its social and economic milieu and suggests that it be understood as a social technology, “yield[ing] an art that is most powerful without the individual genius, finding powerful critique out of existing forms and relations of communication, through mimesis, common agreement and public, shared practice.” It is by intervening into mass culture as part of mass culture, rather than from the putatively exterior point of avant-garde practice, that design can exercise its real power, “developing and improving everyday objects to meet human necessities at the same time as it also defines itself as a distinct visual culture, yielding unique effects”—making a difference, within a culture defined by difference.

This view seems to be echoed in a statement by the design theorist and historian Maurizio Vitta quoted by Williams and Rieger:

If the *culture* of design is meant to explain the *culture* of the object, it must of necessity share the object’s fate. And, as the object in our system is at the same time a sign of social identification, a communication instrument, a use image, an oppressive *simulacrum*, a fetish, and a tool, design cannot help but be an instrument of social analysis, an area of intervention in everyday life, a language, a fashion, a theory of form, a show, a fetishism, a merchandise.⁴

This, it seems to us, points to a forward direction in design studies, one that is well reflected in the wide range of approaches on display here: design not merely as an object of social analysis, but as an instrument that—in the hands of the theorist and historian—can begin to open up the extraordinary culture of objects and images that surrounds us and defines our lives.

At the same time as it provides a picture of the richness already present in contemporary design studies in Canada, this issue also points toward the work that remains to be done. As we have seen, the future of design studies in this country depends on an immediate investment in scholarship, both in the development of university programs in design studies/design history and in the strengthening of design studies within existing

studio-based design programs, as well as in the establishment of much-needed collections and archives to preserve and display design history for future generations of design researchers. Much work also remains to be done to expand the range of topics in Canadian design history and to realize its rich potential—firstly, to establish the basic framework of our histories of design and lay a groundwork for further research, and secondly to address the lacunae of that history, moving scholarship beyond the modern, and beyond central Canada, to a truly national scope. Design history in this country must include histories of colonialism, decolonization, and cultural diversity and must engage scholars of and from the prairie, coastal, and northern regions to write the design histories of these regions. Rather than reflecting a static view of the “state of the field,” or presenting a single view of design studies in Canada today, this issue will, we hope, serve as an encouragement and initial opening onto future work, scholarly collaboration, and conversations yet to come. ¶

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1. Harold Kalman, *A History of Canadian Architecture* (Toronto and New York, 1994); Virginia Wright, *Modern Furniture in Canada* (Toronto, 1997); Marc Choko, Paul Bourassa, Gérald Baril, *Le design au Québec: industriel, graphique, de mode* (Montreal, 2003); Rachel Gotlieb and Cora Golden, *Design in Canada: Fifty Years from Tea Kettles to Task Chairs* (Toronto, 2004); Robert Bringhurst, *The Surface of Meaning: Books and Book Design in Canada* (Vancouver, 2009).

2. Jaleen Grove notes that the renowned illustrator Anita Kunz, although an Officer of the Order of Canada, has never received a ma-

major exhibition in Canada, while her work was shown at the US Library of Congress in 2003.

3. The relationship between theory and practice is especially pertinent to design studies, where a large number of leading educators, historians, and theorists are also active or past practitioners (as opposed to, say, the situation in art history, where this is rarely the case).

4. Maurizio Vitta, “The Meaning of Design,” *Design Discourse: History, Theory, Criticism*, ed. Victor Margolin (Chicago, 1989), 35. Italics in the original.

Les études du design au Canada (et au-delà): un état des lieux

Keith Bresnahan

Ce dossier thématique de *RACAR* présente un aperçu de l'état actuel des études du design au Canada, révélant à la fois le progrès et les défis particuliers auxquels font face ces études aujourd'hui, en tant que discipline. Au moment où les programmes d'enseignement de la pratique du design croissent et se multiplient, le développement constant (quoique lent) des études en design—incluant la recherche historique et théorique sur le design et la culture matérielle—nécessite un moment de réflexion. Les articles présentés ici dressent un premier portrait, bien que partiel, de l'état des lieux des études du design au Canada, réunissant des études historiques sur des figures clés et sur des œuvres importantes mais méconnues, des réflexions sur la formation disciplinaire dans ce champ, sur la pédagogie, la théorie, la fonction critique du design et son rôle social, ainsi que des provocations qui sont un appel explicite à l'action autour de l'élaboration de programmes universitaires, la collection et l'exposition, et l'étude scientifique du design.

Ces dernières années ont vu un nombre croissant de séances et de discussions sur le design lors des congrès annuels de l'AAUC, soit de façon indépendante ou sous les auspices du Réseau canadien des études du design, affilié à l'AAUC. En aval de ce développement, les rédacteurs invités de ce numéro ont sollicité des contributions de spécialistes pour réfléchir aux questions et aux débats actuels dans ce champ d'études, dans le but de stimuler une discussion sur l'étude du design au Canada. Ce numéro présente les fruits de cet appel. La diversité des approches dont témoigne ce dossier thématique souligne l'ampleur des préoccupations dans les études du design et l'impos-

sibilité de définir ce champ en termes d'une méthodologie particulière ou d'une seule position théorique; en effet, la nature multi- ou interdisciplinaire du design est un sujet explicite dans de nombreuses contributions. Aussi divers que soient les textes réunis ici, on peut identifier un certain nombre de thèmes communs, ainsi que certaines lacunes ou absences. La grande majorité des contributions note la nouveauté de ce champ d'études, s'interroge sur sa nature et sa portée, et lance des appels pour la reconnaissance d'un statut plus élevé des études en design, pour de nouveaux programmes, des collaborations, et ainsi de suite. Essentiellement, ces questions sur le statut disciplinaire (et sur les frontières disciplinaires) sont celles qui ont accompagné les disciplines et les études du design au cours du dernier demi-siècle.

Ce qui ressort clairement de plusieurs textes est le besoin d'élaborer une approche spécialisée de l'histoire et de la théorie du design, c'est-à-dire une approche qui ne reproduirait pas simplement celles de l'histoire de l'art, mais qui traiterait des questions spécifiques soulevées par le design, dont son lien étroit avec les réseaux matériels et économiques et les questions de durabilité et d'impact sur l'environnement, de déterminations d'usage, de matrice concepteur-société-client, etc. Parmi les préoccupations liées à la formation disciplinaire et aux frontières disciplinaires dans les études du design, l'on retrouve non seulement la relation de longue date (et souvent controversée) entre ces études et leurs champs contigus—en particulier l'histoire de l'art et de l'artisanat, et la pratique du design—mais aussi les différents sous-domaines qui constituent les études du design:

design graphique, design industriel, illustration, typographie, publicité, design d'intérieur, design de mode, et le champ mieux établi des études architecturales.

Globalement, le champ d'études du design en est encore à ses débuts, et cette situation est particulièrement frappante au Canada. Malgré la hausse fulgurante du nombre de programmes dans les cursus d'enseignement de la pratique du design au cours des dernières décennies, et malgré la position qu'occupe le design dans la conscience populaire, il n'y a qu'un seul programme entièrement dédié aux études du design dans ce pays (à l'Université MacEwan, à Edmonton), et aucun programme autonome de l'histoire du design, ni au premier cycle, ni aux cycles supérieurs. Les collections muséales et les archives liées au design sont tout aussi rares, ou totalement inexistantes. La littérature savante sur l'histoire du design canadien, quant à elle, est peu développée: de nombreux sous-domaines du design et maintes figures clés n'ont pas encore été étudiés, même de façon préliminaire. Bien que de bonnes enquêtes historiques aient été menées sur une poignée de genres et de contextes, celles-ci sont très récentes et trop peu nombreuses, un seul texte représentant souvent un champ entier.¹ Compte tenu de cette situation, un certain nombre d'articles de ce numéro incitent à élever le statut des programmes d'études du design, des collections, des archives et de la recherche scientifique.

Les figures centrales de l'histoire du design canadien sont encore peu connues, même parmi les membres du public cultivé et intéressé; à l'exception de quelques architectes renommés (Arthur Erikson, Douglas Cardinal, l'expatrié Frank Gehry), les personnalités majeures sont presque totalement méconnues, même si leurs œuvres sont parfois familières. Stuart Ash, Douglas Ball, Marian Bantjes, Sigrun Bülow-Hübe, Robin Bush, Oscar Cahén, Michel Dallaire, Carl Dair, Allan Fleming, Jacques Guillon, Julien Hébert, Bruce Mau, Geoff McFetridge, Karim Rashid, Rex Woods—des noms qui, comme tant d'autres, ont presque entièrement échappé non seulement à la connaissance du public, mais aussi au traitement savant et à la collection institutionnelle au Canada, d'aucuns bénéficiant même d'une plus grande reconnais-

sance à l'extérieur du pays.² Cet état des faits accentue la nécessité, pour les chercheurs et les institutions, de poursuivre le travail. Dans ces pages, l'article de Jaleen Grove, «Drawing Out Illustration History in Canada», raconte notamment l'histoire négligée de l'illustration canadienne et les fondements idéologiques de cette histoire, dont le dénigrement de l'illustration par des historiens de l'art qui l'ont jugée d'après les critères du «grand» art, une anxiété par rapport aux frontières disciplinaires, et un anti-américanisme chronique de la part des critiques canadiens nourrissant des préjugés contre les illustrateurs qui ont fait carrière dans les magazines états-uniens. Grove lance de surcroît un appel en faveur du développement d'un site permanent pour préserver les collections d'imprimés et d'archives de l'illustration canadienne, sans lequel la recherche future dans ce domaine sera entravée, sinon rendue impossible.

Grove et Sarah McLean Knapp invitent toutes deux à la création d'initiatives institutionnelles plus fortes pour la collection et l'enseignement du design, tandis que plusieurs autres collaborateurs et collaboratrices à ce numéro rappellent les efforts plus anciens (et pour la plupart non réalisés) en faveur du développement professionnel, éducatif et institutionnel des études du design dans ce pays. Martin Racine, dans son article consacré à Julien Hébert, explore les activités militantes de ce célèbre designer québécois en tenant particulièrement compte de ses deux propositions (en 1961 et 1971) pour un Institut du design à Montréal et pour un projet de réinsertion sociale qui verrait l'enseignement du design comme un outil pour la «récupération du travail chez les déshérités» de la société québécoise. Margaret Hodges, pour sa part, montre l'interaction complexe entre les designers, les entreprises, les institutions culturelles, les médias et le grand public, dans la promotion du design «scandinave» comme un moyen de façonner le goût du public et de développer une industrie du design canadienne pendant les années 1950 et 1960.

Dans cet ensemble d'articles, il est manifeste que l'engagement des designers canadiens envers le modernisme international dans les décennies suivant la Seconde Guerre mondiale constitue un

lieu particulièrement fertile pour mener des enquêtes historiques, reflétant une préoccupation constante envers les origines du design qui doit autant à l'état récent de ce champ qu'aux enjeux de formation disciplinaire, de statut professionnel et d'appui institutionnel. Certains individus et organismes jouent ici un rôle prééminent—le Conseil national du design industriel, créé en 1948 sous la direction de Donald Buchanan du Musée des beaux-arts du Canada, par exemple, est mentionné dans plusieurs articles—tandis que d'autres textes, dont ceux de Cheryl Dipede sur la professionnalisation dans l'industrie du design graphique torontoise dans les années 1950 et 1960, de Hodges sur le travail de la designer Sigrun Bülow-Hübe à Montréal, de Racine sur Julien Hébert, et de Dustin Valen sur Hazen Sise et son enseignement de l'histoire de l'architecture à l'Université McGill dans les années 1950, révèlent des aspects peu connus de cette période.

Les enjeux liés à la pédagogie constituent un autre thème partagé par les articles publiés ici, présents dans les récits historiques d'initiatives en éducation ainsi que dans les interventions plus franchement militantes de McLean Knapp, Wayne Williams et Janice Rieger, et Laureline Chiapello. Le texte de McLean Knapp, «Design Studies in Canada?», sonde brièvement l'histoire de l'enseignement du design dans ce pays et la met en rapport avec la montée des études du design et des programmes d'histoire du design au Royaume-Uni au cours des quatre dernières décennies afin de plaider en faveur de la création de nouveaux programmes canadiens d'études du design qui permettraient de renforcer l'éducation pratique en design et de retenir les jeunes chercheurs. Williams et Rieger, pour leur part, de façon non moins polémique, soutiennent qu'il faut non seulement utiliser la perspective de la culture matérielle pour étudier le design, mais aussi renouveler la conception du cours d'introduction à l'histoire du design pour les étudiants de première année afin de refléter la multidisciplinarité et l'ouverture de ce champ.

En un sens, ces interventions pourraient être vues comme faisant écho à ce que Valen voit comme la façon «opératoire» d'enseigner l'histoire de l'architecture moderne qu'enseignait Sise

à McGill, où il utilisait une enquête historique pour convaincre ses étudiants de la justesse de la modernité, visant ainsi à transformer l'architecture canadienne au travers de ses praticiens futurs. Si les approches contemporaines de l'enseignement de l'histoire du design ont largement abandonné ces impératifs en faveur de modèles plus neutres et nuancés de l'histoire, Valen identifie un moment où la pensée et la pratique historique étaient étroitement liées, et révèle ainsi un désir partagé par un certain nombre de collaborateurs à ce numéro. En outre, afin de comparer les cadres théoriques des études du jeu vidéo avec ceux des études du design en général, Laureline Chiapello a recours à l'article «L'éclipse de l'objet dans les théories du projet en conception» écrit par Alain Findeli et Rabah Bousbaci en 2005. En cohérence avec ce texte, Chiapello affirme la nécessité d'une relation symbiotique entre la pédagogie et la théorie du design au travers d'une «fécondation de la pratique par la théorie». Cette approche exige la reconnaissance que les pédagogues du design déploient déjà (quoiqu'implicitement) des modèles théoriques dans leur enseignement, modèles qui favorisent l'objet aux dépens des processus de conception (ou vice versa) ou qui donnent le rôle central aux acteurs dans les réseaux du design (designer, client, public, etc.). Tout en prônant un rapprochement des études du jeu vidéo et du design sur la base d'approches théoriques partagées, Chiapello plaide pour la production de praticiens, praticiennes (et de théoriciens, théoriciennes) raisonnés à travers un enrichissement mutuel de ces approches.³

Le virage que Findeli et Bousbaci identifient dans les études de conception, virage qui se détache des propriétés formelles de l'objet fini au profit du processus et du contexte, est exposé dans d'autres articles de ce numéro. Ces textes sont essentiellement consacrés aux préoccupations disciplinaires et institutionnelles de même qu'à la mise en contexte des objets du design dans leurs cadres conceptuels, idéologiques et sociaux, tout en évitant, pour la plupart, les discussions formelles portant sur des objets spécifiques. Cette tendance est en partie due au fait que les études en design se sont intentionnellement éloignées des paradigmes formels, biographiques et méthodologiques de l'histoire de l'art sur lesquels elles ont d'abord été fondées. Néan-

moins, il reste que les études du design se trouvent encore aujourd'hui coincées entre l'élaboration, d'une part, d'un terrain historique par l'analyse d'objets signifiants et des carrières des créateurs importants, et, d'autre part, une multidisciplinarité orientée sur le contexte et le processus. Une conviction partagée par plusieurs contributions à ce numéro est la possibilité de se pencher sur la matérialité de l'objet du design, vue à la fois comme un élément clé au sein des forces «externes» qui la ceignent et comme la source d'un examen critique nécessaire vis-à-vis des médias contemporains et de la culture de la consommation.

La première de ces deux approches est démontrée dans l'article de Michael Windover, «Designing Public Radio in Canada», qui s'appuie sur le cas d'une seule station d'émission de la CBC—la station CBK, dans la ville de Watrous en Saskatchewan, conçue et construite au début de la Seconde Guerre mondiale. Windover retrace l'histoire de la construction des publics radio-phoniques, au milieu du xx^e siècle, qui a eu lieu non pas par l'entremise d'un réseau immatériel et éphémère d'auditeurs, mais plutôt à travers l'infrastructure matérielle de la radio: de l'armoire-radio, dans le salon, autour de laquelle les familles se rassemblaient, aux environnements construits spécialement pour les émetteurs, les bâtiments de la station et le logement des employés. Selon Windover, la station émettrice, consciemment moderniste, a rassemblé autour d'elle un certain nombre de registres spatiaux qui se chevauchent, allant de l'intimité domestique à la portée nationale du réseau de diffusion. Dans ce cas, le design n'est pas simplement un résultat d'autres forces (technologiques, économiques, sociales), mais il est lui-même un agent actif dans l'élaboration de ces dernières.

Une perspective similaire est mise en évidence dans l'article de Carmela Cucuzzella, «Is Sustainability Reorienting the Visual Expression of Architecture?». Faisant enquête sur de récents concours québécois en architecture, paysage et design urbain, Cucuzzella considère l'émergence de la durabilité environnementale comme un critère de jugement dans les concours de design depuis le début des années 2000 et retrace la façon dont ce critère a influencé les réponses formelles et esthé-

tiques en design—souvent de façon contre-intuitive. Ici, nous voyons comment un impératif social et culturel peut non seulement influencer les tendances en design, mais également prendre forme et devenir visible à travers le design. L'auteure montre que ce sont des stratégies visibles de «design durable»—toitures vertes, murs de jardin, et ainsi de suite—qui ont initialement dominé les propositions en réponse à ce nouveau desideratum dans les concours, mais que l'adhésion à une seule certification technique (LEED) pour juger de la durabilité d'un design a ensuite favorisé les conceptions qui ont déployé des solutions largement invisibles (flux d'air, emplacement de la fenestration, etc.). Cet article nous rappelle que l'imbrication du design dans les réseaux sociaux, économiques et techniques n'est pas une rue à sens unique, mais une boucle récursive sans fin de négociation mutuelle.

Pour certains auteurs, la «criticalité» est essentielle à la compréhension du rôle social du design et à l'élaboration des orientations futures des études dans ce domaine. Contre un ensemble rigide de critères formels-esthétiques empruntés à un modèle (lui-même démodé) de l'histoire de l'art, l'article de Williams et Rieger «A Design History of Design: Complexity, Criticality, and Cultural Competence» plaide pour une approche de type culture-matérielle de l'histoire et des études de design qui serait davantage préoccupée par le contexte de production, de consommation et de médiation que par la reproduction d'un canon ou d'un ensemble restreint de valeurs. Les auteurs suggèrent que cette approche élargie confère aux études du design leur fonction centrale au sein de la pédagogie en design, celle d'imprégner les futurs designers d'un sens profond de criticalité en accord avec la position du design à l'intérieur d'un cadre complexe de communauté, consommation, médiation et production.

Brian Donnelly, dans son article «The Inversion of Originality through Design», révèle une approche différente de la criticalité. Il fait valoir que la force culturelle du design graphique et sa fonction critique pour un changement social ne sont pas dérivées d'une putative «originalité» mise en valeur dans les écrits en histoire de l'art consacrés à des designers ou à des œuvres individuels, mais plutôt dans les fondements du design dans la reproduction de masse, le copiage, le remixage et l'imitation.

Comme tant d'autres collaborateurs à ce numéro, Donnelly replace le design dans son contexte social et économique, et suggère qu'il soit compris comme une technologie sociale: "yield[ing] an art that is most powerful without the individual genius, finding powerful critique out of existing forms and relations of communication, through mimesis, common agreement and public, shared practice." C'est en intervenant dans la culture de masse en tant que partie intégrante de la culture de masse, et non du point de vue extérieur de la pratique avant-gardiste, que le design peut déployer son véritable pouvoir, soit développer et améliorer les objets du quotidien afin de répondre aux besoins humains, tout en se définissant comme une culture visuelle distincte qui produit des effets uniques—en d'autres mots, faire la différence, au sein d'une culture définie par la différence.

Ce point de vue fait écho à la déclaration du théoricien et historien du design Maurizio Vitta, cité par Williams et Rieger:

If the culture of design is meant to explain the culture of the object, it must of necessity share the object's fate. And, as the object in our system is at the same time a sign of social identification, a communication instrument, a use image, an oppressive *simulacrum*, a fetish, and a tool, design cannot help but be an instrument of social analysis, an area of intervention in everyday life, a language, a fashion, a theory of form, a show, a fetishism, a merchandise.⁴

Il nous semble que cette idée pointe vers une direction future pour les études du design, une direction qui est reflétée dans le large éventail d'approches présentées dans ce numéro: le design non comme un simple objet d'analyse sociale, mais comme un instrument qui, dans les mains de théoriciens, théoriciennes et d'historiens, historiennes, peut commencer à dévoiler la culture

extraordinaire d'objets et d'images qui nous entourent et qui définit nos vies.

Bien que ce numéro esquisse un portrait de la richesse déjà présente dans les études du design contemporain au Canada, il met aussi en lumière le travail qu'il reste à accomplir. Comme nous avons vu, l'avenir des études du design dans ce pays dépend d'un investissement immédiat dans la recherche, tant dans l'établissement de programmes universitaires en études/histoire du design et dans le développement des études du design au sein des programmes existants, que dans l'organisation de collections et d'archives fondamentales pour préserver et présenter l'histoire du design aux futures générations de chercheurs, chercheuses. Beaucoup de travail reste également à faire pour élargir la gamme de sujets dans l'histoire du design au Canada et réaliser son riche potentiel: tout d'abord, pour établir le fondement premier de nos histoires du design et consolider la base des recherches à venir. Ensuite, pour combler les lacunes de cette histoire: stimuler la recherche au-delà de la période moderne, et au-delà de l'Ontario et du Québec, pour une portée véritablement nationale. L'histoire du design dans ce pays doit inclure l'histoire du colonialisme, la décolonisation, la diversité culturelle et doit engager les chercheurs dans les Prairies, les régions côtières et le nord, à écrire les histoires du design de ces régions. Plutôt que de refléter une vision statique de «l'état des lieux» de la connaissance en design, ou de présenter une vue unique des études du design dans le Canada aujourd'hui, ce numéro agira, nous l'espérons, comme un incitatif et une ouverture initiale à des travaux futurs, à des collaborations entre chercheurs et à de nombreuses conversations à venir. ¶

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1. Harold Kalman, *A History of Canadian Architecture* (Toronto/New York, 1994); Virginia Wright, *Modern Furniture in Canada* (Toronto, 1997); Marc Choko, Paul Bourassa, Gérald Baril, *Le design au Québec: industriel, graphique, de mode* (Montreal, 2003); Rachel Gotlieb, Cora Golden, *Design in Canada: Fifty Years from Tea Kettles to Task Chairs* (Toronto, 2004); Robert Bringhurst, *The Surface of Meaning: Books and Book Design in Canada* (Vancouver, 2009).

2. Jaleen Grove note que la célèbre illustratrice Anita Kunz, bien que nommée officier de l'Ordre du Canada, n'a jamais fait l'objet d'exposition majeure au Canada, alors que son travail a été exposé à la Library of Congress de Washington en 2003.

3. La relation entre la théorie et la pratique est particulièrement pertinente pour les études du design, où un grand nombre des principaux éducateurs, histo-

riens et théoriciens sont aussi des praticiens actifs ou passés (ceci est rarement le cas en histoire de l'art, par exemple).

4. Maurizio Vitta, «The Meaning of Design», *Design Discourse: History, Theory, Criticism*, dir. Victor Margolin (Chicago, 1989), 35. Italiques de l'auteur.