

Canada: The Edge Condition

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Context

Canada has always stood on the edge of empire. In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the St. Lawrence and Maritime colonies existed to serve the ends of their European masters, first French then British. The nineteenth century brought new immigrants, westward expansion, and, in 1867, a federal arrangement uniting four provinces into the Canadian “Confederation”—but no declaration of independence from Britain. By 1905, there were nine provinces in Canada, and its territory expanded from the Atlantic to the Pacific. Despite significant industrial and urban development in Montreal and southern Ontario, Canada remained an outpost of the British empire, highly dependent economically on the export of “staples” like prairie wheat, northern ore, and British Columbian timber. As our southern neighbor emerged as a world power in the twentieth century, Canada moved out of the British sphere of influence—the queen and our continuing membership in the Commonwealth notwithstanding—and into the shadow of the American giant.

Peripheral by virtue of its colonial history, Canada has also been characterized by its internal divisions, some of which fit into a “center-edge” model. The best known of Canada’s internal divisions is its linguistic dualism—the historical cohabitation of a French-speaking minority concentrated in Quebec and an English-speaking population that constitutes the vast majority of every other province. French-Canadian nationalism and the growing movement for the sovereignty of Quebec (there have been two provincial referendums on the question since 1980, the second of which, in 1995, was lost by the *indépendantistes* by less than one percentage point) has been the major political “story” in Canada for a generation. But Canadians also live in a society divided by region, by ethnic and racial origins, and by social class, gender, and the other attributes that historians Ramsay Cook and J. M. S. Careless called Canada’s “limited identities.”¹ These historians were among the first to argue that Canada’s identity is to be found in its very diversity. But with diversity, as they would certainly acknowledge, have come social and economic imbalances, political grievances, and sometimes open conflict. Ongoing

debates concern aboriginal self-government; employment equity for women; oil-rich Alberta’s resistance to the Kyoto accord on climate change; continuing underdevelopment and unemployment in Newfoundland; the costs and benefits of the North American Free Trade Accord (NAFTA) of 1992; and continued fragmentation on the political right. All are important issues on the current Canadian agenda that can be better understood in this context.

Regional and interprovincial tensions are one of the great themes in Canadian history, and it is here that the center-periphery paradigm is most apt. Canada’s richest and most populous province, Ontario, is also the site of its capital city, Ottawa, and its largest metropolis and financial center, Toronto. Along with nearby Montreal (in western Quebec), these cities form an important political and cultural triangle, functioning in some respects like the Eastern seaboard of the United States. Although divided by the linguistic barrier that Montreal novelist Hugh MacLennan called the “two solitudes” in 1945,² Ontario and Quebec are often perceived in the other parts of Canada—from Newfoundland to British Columbia’s Pacific coast and from the prairies of southern Saskatchewan to the high Arctic—as a single, central, and inordinately powerful region, known universally as central Canada. Implicit in this description are the peripheral positions occupied, and often strenuously resisted, by other parts of the country, whether, as in the nineteenth century, on matters such as railroad freight rates and import duties or, in more recent times, on fisheries (decided in Ottawa but affecting coastal communities) and energy policy. The centrality of central Canada also plays out in everyday terms. Toronto newspapers identify themselves as “national.” The weather report, an institution of great interest to Canadians, frequently begins with Ontario and Quebec.

Architectural history is a domain well suited to serve nationalist claims. As the most visible and material manifestation of a nation’s history, architecture is often seen as a sign of a people’s desire for endurance. The neo-Gothic parliament buildings in Ottawa are themselves a kind of history lesson in stone, evoking not only our ties with England, but also, by their dramatic siting on a cliff hovering

above the majestic Ottawa River, our precarious existence within an untamed landscape. What a contrast between Washington's confident, universalizing neoclassicism set on a radial plan and Ottawa's agitated silhouette of buildings sitting on a river's edge! Perhaps some sense of that peripheral existence has translated in the architectural historian's classroom.

Historical Overview

Early original work in architectural history in Canada was initiated at McGill University's School of Architecture in about 1900 by its first leaders, all trained in Edinburgh, who brought to Victorian Montreal something of the Scottish ideal of the architect as gentleman scholar, historian, and polemicist.³ Stewart Henbest Capper, Percy Nobbs, and Ramsay Traquair had pragmatic views of architecture, perhaps shaped by their own nebulous positions on the Scottish edge of the empire, and not impervious to the pervasive influence of Beaux-Arts principles of design (Capper had trained at the École under Jean Louis Pascal). Each architectural educator had an interest in architectural history and preservation. Capper, the first director of the School of Architecture, had trained as an art historian and had been active as a conservationist. He had collaborated with the well-known botanist Patrick Geddes and brought Geddes's socialist ideas and attempts at civic revitalization to Montreal. In his inaugural address at McGill, Capper underlined the importance of old buildings in the study of history: "Architecture is the great 'object lesson' of history. Without its eloquence of storied stone, history would be shorn of its most poetic, its most impressive and often times its only witness; it would sink to the dull prose of the half forgotten chronicler."⁴ There may have been nothing unique about Capper's historical method. His various courses in the history of architecture at the School of Architecture were quite traditional, steeped in the classical tradition with great emphasis on the Renaissance. His choice of textbooks included those of Reginald T. Blomfield, James Fergusson, and Russell Sturgis.⁵ But there was in his teaching a unique sense of the importance of history for architects that went beyond Beaux-Arts principles.

It was the Arts and Crafts architect Percy Nobbs and especially his close friend the archaeologist Ramsay Traquair who would make the teaching of architectural history a unique endeavor at McGill. Traquair pioneered the study of Canadian vernacular architecture, focusing on the old architecture of his beloved Quebec. In the first decades of the twentieth century, he took generations of architecture students into the field to record with great accuracy the

architecture of New France, which led to the publication of his pioneering monograph, *The Old Architecture of Quebec*, in 1947. Traquair's vision was couched in a specifically Canadian form of conservatism: the surrounding ancient Quebec vernacular was an instrument in shaping a Canadian architecture resistant to the universalizing Beaux-Arts style and other more commercial trends coming from the United States. The measured drawings carried out by Traquair were meticulous and systematic, but his gaze was hardly free of colonialist motives. His work served well the interest of an English Canadian ruling class that enjoyed pitting a picturesque image of the *anciens Canadiens* against American materialism. For better or worse, it may have contributed to the "construction" of French Canada, often no more than a scenography of old stone houses with bell-cast roofs and fine pine furniture, an image still savored and eagerly projected by Quebec's tourism industry.⁶

Yet, the early twentieth century was a moment when English and French speakers interested in the field of architectural history seemed to work in concert. The leader of the preservationist movement in French Quebec, the art historian Gérard Morisset, often collaborated with Traquair. His classic book *L'Architecture en Nouvelle-France* (1949) was in a sense a revised edition of Traquair's, bringing to the study of architecture in Quebec the vocabulary and methodology appropriate to the discipline of art history. Morisset's art historical outlook (he had trained at the École du Louvre in Paris) was infused with a Quebec nationalist sentiment. As he organized the battle to preserve and restore the old architecture of Nouvelle-France, he also sought to clarify the French tradition within the context of North America. "There exist two ways to wreck a country," wrote Morisset in his preface, "either by destroying, one after the other, the monuments worthy of interest that constitute the country's ornament, or by hiding these monuments amidst a mass of mediocre constructions."⁷ Beyond preservation, Morisset was also the apostle for a new architecture inspired by the theories of Eugène-Emanuel Viollet-le-Duc, through which not the forms but the character of Quebec's ancient architecture would be revived.

Few other Canadian architectural historians embraced the value of painstaking fieldwork before World War II. Eric Arthur's lifelong study of architecture in Ontario is probably the only contender. Born in New Zealand, Arthur arrived in 1923 at the department of architecture of the University of Toronto after completing a B.Arch. degree at Liverpool University in England. Before coming to Canada, however, Arthur spent a brief period in the office of Sir Edwin Lutyens, where he learned something of his way of combining classical and vernacular traditions.⁸ Once settled

at the University of Toronto, he brought innovations to a program that was, since its founding in 1890, largely modeled on Beaux-Arts teaching methods. He taught and aggressively promoted architectural history, particularly of local architecture. But Arthur, who also taught and practiced architecture with ever-increasing modernist daring, was no “pure” historian. Educated in the motherland of the Commonwealth, but as a New Zealander simultaneously an outsider, he was well placed to see the potential for a distinct Canadian architecture. He had at least the necessary awareness, as noted recently by Michelangelo Sabatini,⁹ to recognize the need of addressing the difficult issue, especially for a young nation such as Canada, of the reception of foreign models. He was prepared to promote a gradual awareness of a national identity in architecture that could go beyond neocolonial emulation.

To this day, Arthur’s classic *Toronto: No Mean City* of 1964, revised and expanded by Stephen A. Otto twenty-two years later, remains the best architectural history of Canada’s largest city.¹⁰ The book’s two appendixes, featuring brief biographical entries on architects, builders, and contractors, make it one of the most useful reference works in the field. There is a great narrative coherence in the book, as Arthur traces the architectural evolution of the metropolis from a network of ancient trails to the burgeoning modern city of 1900. Nostalgic for buildings destroyed in the name of progress, the tone of *Toronto: No Mean City*, like Traquair’s tome, is both conservative and didactic. It reflects a commitment to the virtue of restraint and contextualism in modernism, typical of Canada and England. Perhaps one of Arthur’s legacies at the University of Toronto was his support of Thomas Howarth, an architect-historian who was to write the definitive monograph on the work of Charles Rennie Mackintosh. Howarth was dean of the Faculty of Architecture from 1958 to 1974. In this position, he continued to nurture the idea of the central importance of architectural history as a form of critical thinking in architectural education, serving to humanize the more scientific methods then dominating the field of design. This led to conflict within the school, where “radical modernists,” such as Peter Prangnell, resented the intrusion of history on his building-performance research.

It may be under the influence of such debates that the School of Architecture at nearby Waterloo University decided to move away from engineering systems design to the adoption of a more humanistic attitude. Founded in the late 1960s, the school was originally part of the influential Faculty of Engineering. Following a short academic war led by a group of professors committed to an interdisciplinary approach, it was thrown out of engineering and settled in

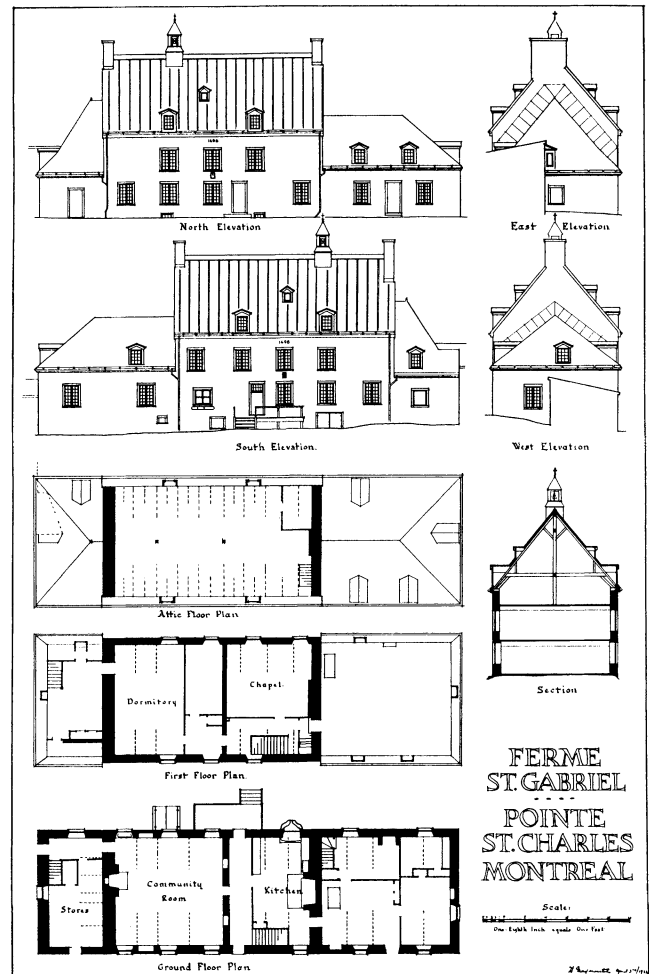


Figure 1 A typical page of measured drawings as undertaken by Ramsay Traquair and his students at McGill University. The drawings are signed by Harry Mayerovitch. From Ramsay Traquair, *The Old Architecture of Quebec* (Toronto, 1947), 40, pl. 15

the newly formed Faculty of Environmental Sciences. At that point, Larry Cummings and Robert Wilger, two professors trained in English literature who had a keen interest in architecture, developed a very original series of courses in cultural history, which is mandatory for all incoming students in the School of Architecture. Joined by the architect/archaeologist Rick Haldenby, they created a set of four demanding courses that provided a variegated portrait of Western European history from the perspective of a modernistic critique of utopia inspired by the work of Fyodor Dostoyevsky, Franz Kafka, Friedrich Nietzsche, and Sigmund Freud. Architecture remained the backdrop of such cultural history, although not a superfluous attachment. The course’s global vision was expected to be reca-

pitulated within the architectural form. It is significant to note that Cummings's original turn toward architecture stemmed from his interest in medieval drama, in which the cathedral acted as a stage and a Christianized form of the tragic chorus. Unfortunately, Cummings and Wilger did not publish their lectures, which endure only in the memory of countless students.

Despite Arthur's pioneering work on Ontario architecture, burgeoning interest in Canadian architectural history remained strongest in Quebec. A key figure in the post-World War II era was the architect John Bland. First trained at McGill under Traquair in the early 1930s, Bland had gone on to the Architectural Association in London, where he discovered the new modernist discipline of planning. After working at the London County Council, he returned to Montreal during the war to head the School of Architecture at McGill. As he prepared to modernize the school by bringing in outstanding figures in various fields—the two most noteworthy being the painter Arthur Lismer, a founding member of the famous Group of Seven (Canada's leading painters who had aspired to give expression to the Canadian landscape), and Gordon Webber, a student of László Moholy-Nagy in Chicago—he also sustained a keen interest in the old architecture of Quebec. For more than three decades, Bland taught a popular course on the history of architecture in Canada, with special emphasis on Quebec. The teaching methods were not considerably advanced compared to Traquair's. Bland continued the patient and modest work of recording monuments and houses, with little interest in rethinking methods of interpretation that might do justice to the specificity of the vernacular. But that history, however basic, was passionate enough to build a critical dimension in the face of the unquestioned dogma of modernism in the U.S., where architecture had become increasingly conceived as applied research. The fruits of Bland's labor, too, eventually formed one of the most significant archives on Canadian architecture, recently renamed the John Bland Canadian Architecture Collection and housed at McGill.

Bland's impact was also palpable in his role as an administrator who encouraged studies of vernacular architecture. In 1961, he hired the Hungarian architect Norbert Schoenauer, who through his active interest in contemporary housing problems eventually turned to a systematic study of indigenous housing around the world. His classic monograph, *6,000 Years of Housing* (1981; expanded 2000), is a good example of the long tradition at McGill of embracing the vernacular, which leads to a more encompassing, pluralist reading.¹¹ It remains a work of compilation and morphological description, enriched with great attention to the rituals of

social customs. Yet the book was an original history of housing that opened up possibilities for design by constituting a type of morphological research through history.

Furthermore, Bland contributed to the history of architectural history in Canada by hiring, in 1956, Peter Collins, among the most original and influential Canadian figures in architectural history. In 1965, Collins published his magnum opus, *Changing Ideals in Modern Architecture*, still a leading account of the history of modern architectural ideas in Europe from 1750.¹²

Having no interest in the history of Canadian architecture, and even less in the vernacular, Collins broke with the McGill tradition. His most significant course was entirely focused on Europe with special leanings toward the French rational tradition. But Collins's teaching was no standard account of European architecture. He ridiculed any formal, stylistic categorizations and preferred to spend his time discussing architectural ideas as they were expounded in architectural treatises and other historical forms of architectural writing. He also had an instinctive distrust of overarching historical narrative. As early as the 1960s, he criticized the standard accounts of Sigfried Giedion, Henry-Russell Hitchcock, and Nikolaus Pevsner. Neither *Zeitgeist* nor *Kunstwollen* entered his conception of history. His method was instead to present a debate between various positions, history becoming a heterogeneous field of ideas. There is nothing specifically Canadian about Collins's approach, except that our country, far from politicized Europe and a fair distance from the trends set in the U.S., provided a neutral and more supportive conservative setting for Collins's critique of mainstream modernism. Ultimately his conception of history meshed well with Bland's contextual modernism.

The discipline of architectural history has confronted very different challenges within art history programs. No longer an instrument to direct contemporary architectural practice, it has been enlisted to shed light on historical questions. If freed from the tussling between historians and practitioners so common in schools of architecture, it still risks being tossed aside as a subcategory of art history. Historically, however, architectural history has often held a dignified place within art history. German art historians at the turn of the twentieth century such as Dagobert Frey, Alois Riegl, Heinrich Wöfflin, and Wilhelm Worringer considered architectural history a key to their discipline.¹³ The University of Toronto's art history program, developed after 1936 by Peter Brieger, a German Jew who fled Europe in 1933, followed this model. Though he never worked in the field, Brieger had studied in Breslau under Frey and thus, we may assume, was sensitized to its importance. During

his tenure as chair between 1947 and 1964, the architectural historians H. Allen Brooks, Hans-Karl Lücke, Michael J. F. McCarthy, Douglas Richardson, and Frederick E. Winter were hired, a formidable team constituting one of North America's art history departments most strongly focused on architectural history. Largely centered on the great Western architectural traditions, Toronto's art history department, the oldest, most respected, and most comprehensive in the country, modeled after the department at Harvard, has been called the "national" program. Despite the focus on European architecture, the faculty included an Americanist, Brooks, and a historian of Canadian architecture, Richardson. Although the latter publishes infrequently, he is recognized as among the most knowledgeable in his field. Richardson's approach, based on a meticulous study of the formal qualities of buildings, is well suited to the conservationist's work of classifying and recording.

In Quebec, Université Laval's relatively smaller program focused from its inception on medieval studies and the history of Canadian architecture. It was founded by Roland Sanfaçon in the early 1960s as a subsection of the history department. Trained in France as a medieval historian, Sanfaçon would become a leading authority in late-Gothic architecture, adopting a method of social analysis of architecture influenced by Pierre Francastel but still contained within the bounds of a strong formalist discipline. With the arrival of Québécois architectural historian Claude Bergeron and later the Belgian Luc Noppen, the program placed a great emphasis on the history of the architecture of Quebec from the perspective of connoisseurship. Both Bergeron and Noppen have become ubiquitous figures in the history of Quebec's architecture, their heroic work of anthologizing and compiling always present in bibliographies on the subject. Perhaps as a consequence of its sensitivity to localized cultures, Laval's art history program also developed early on a series of varied courses such as "The Arts of Islam," "Art of Southeast Asia," "The Arts of China," and "Precolumbian Art," in which discussions of architecture played a significant part.

Two of the country's well-known architectural historians, the late Alan Gowans and Pierre du Prey, were trained at different times under Donald Drew Egbert at Princeton University, yet they developed very distinct methods of work. Gowans was fascinated with everyday North American life and material culture, incorporating high-style and vernacular art forms in his discussion. His *Looking at Architecture in Canada* of 1958 has long been a primary reference for a social history of Canadian architecture. His *Images of American Living* (1964) is one of the few surveys that attempts to look at North American architecture from a

broader cultural perspective.¹⁴ At the history department of the University of Victoria he founded the History in Art program, in which architectural history was a strong priority, but with an interdisciplinary component. Under Gowans's influence in the 1960s the program began offering a great number of courses on various cultural traditions, particularly Asian.

Du Prey has built a body of work of a very different register from Gowans's populist history. Focused on Western Modern European architecture, du Prey, an expert on John Soane, is adept at a fairly traditional monographic method based on the meticulous study of written documents and architectural archives. Yet such a severe approach to architecture has not made du Prey aloof from current affairs. Immediately upon his arrival in 1971 at Queen's University in Kingston, confronted with the wholesale demolition of the architectural patrimony of that historic city in eastern Ontario, he became an activist in historic preservation. He brought students to examine their surroundings as he led walks (and protests) through the city, and his introductory courses in architectural history came to focus on Canada. He quickly developed unique courses on the French and British modern traditions of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries in order to understand his immediate architectural context. His document-based approach expanded to include fieldwork around the historic buildings surrounding the university campus and trips abroad.

Contemporary Canada

In Canada today, like elsewhere, the teaching of architectural history confronts the trend of increasing specialization. Even if many of Canada's architectural historians are professionally trained architects, they rarely continue their professional practice, as was the case with Arthur, Bland, and Schoenauer. There may be a certain loss in severing the tie with practice, but there is also a gain. With increasingly sophisticated methods at its disposal, architectural history has grown to be a discipline in its own right with power to shed light on theoretical issues in contemporary architecture. Perhaps due to Canada's relatively small schools, historians are often directly implicated in the teaching of studio, which creates an interesting symbiosis between historical reflection and issues of design. In contrast, art history programs follow a trend of turning away from architectural history, as if, having developed its own methods, the latter discipline has been forced to migrate to schools of architecture. The example of the University of Toronto is instructive: there architectural historians are now more prominent in the Faculty of Architecture, Landscape, and

Design. The program provides a critical perspective on the modern Western architectural tradition. Moving away from chronological surveys, it threads in architectural theory as a kind of operative criticism for contemporary design thinking. With strong links to American universities on the Eastern seaboard, the department of architecture keeps to Toronto's "centralizing" vocation within the general economy of universities in Canada.

In contrast, there are other architectural schools that have profited from Canada's edge position between the United States and Europe. One is that of the University of Waterloo, with its cultural history program discussed above. Architectural history is examined from the wide frame of philosophical culture, interrogating the role of selected buildings within the historical drama of Western thought, and driving out from history only the special moments when architecture comes to the forefront of the human adventure.

The unique neutrality of the Canadian context may have accommodated the approach to teaching history at the School of Architecture at McGill University. Based upon a philosophical critique of modernity in the phenomenological tradition, the History/Theory program founded by Alberto Pérez-Gómez in 1986 is an intense course of study structured around the students' reading of major European architectural and philosophical writings, to the complete exclusion of conventional visual analysis of buildings. The intellectual exercise seeks to revive architecture's traditional symbolic dimension. Functioning as a school within the school, the History/Theory program also has its own special studio, which encourages personal investigations in the form of making architectural installations. Recently, it has been restructured to include doctoral studies leading to a short course-based master's degree. It is currently among the important architectural history programs in Canada, although there is nothing specifically Canadian about it. Indeed, the courses are entirely focused on Europe and draw from an Anglo-Saxon historiographical tradition. McGill's longstanding interests in both Canadian modernism and vernacular architecture are taught under the auspices of other programs.¹⁵

Of any Canadian institution, the Canadian Centre for Architecture (CCA) is the most widely known in international architectural history circles. It, too, profits from its location in Canada. The CCA was founded by Phyllis Lambert in the late 1970s, but opened to the public only in 1989, when its unique facility was completed. Despite its name, the CCA is not devoted chiefly to Canadian architecture, but concentrates on world architecture, including contemporary developments. Its library, frequently

counted among the world's best, and its rich archives of drawings, photographs, and models form one of the premier resources for architectural research in Canada.¹⁶ According to its director, Nicholas Olsberg, the CCA finds a distinct advantage in its Montreal location.¹⁷ There is freedom to be gained in the distance from cultural capitals such as New York or London, Olsberg explains; shows like *Montreal Metropole* or *The New Spirit: Modernism in Vancouver* would never have been mounted in New York. The CCA's international reach thus provides global diffusion for the history of Canadian architecture. Strictly speaking, the CCA is not devoted to teaching. Yet its establishment has greatly augmented the potential for teaching architectural history at the graduate level, especially for universities in its vicinity. The CCA has partnered with McGill University and the Université de Montréal to create a scholarly association devoted to the history of architecture, the Institut sur la Recherche en Histoire de l'Architecture (IRHA). And in 1997, its already well known Study Centre opened for postgraduate research.

Teaching the Architectural History of Canada

Turning to the teaching of the history of Canadian architecture, we encounter the paradoxical situation that despite increased sophistication in the methods of architectural history in studies of colonial and vernacular architecture, Canadian architecture remains a relatively understudied topic, particularly in schools of architecture. Core courses in architectural history tend to focus on Europe, particularly England and France, rather than North America. Specialized seminars on Canadian subjects, as one finds on American topics at universities in the U.S., are virtually unheard of here. Until very recently, most architectural historians in Canada were educated in art history departments, rather than in professional schools of architecture. Many architectural historians in Canada were schooled in France, Britain, or the U.S., or studied architecture only as it related to art.¹⁸ This, too, may have contributed to the marginalization of Canadian architecture within the curriculum of professional schools. The secondary position accorded to Canadian architectural history may come from the enduring consensus that Canadian buildings have mattered little to world architecture, but it also results from a dearth of books on the subject. Indeed, the sheer scale and diversity of the Canadian built environment have made attempts to synthesize the various architectural traditions extremely difficult. Harold Kalman, the author of *A History of Canadian Architecture*, traces the history of Canadian buildings from the Iroquoian longhouse to the postmodernist structures of

the 1980s. Although Kalman's methodology is traditional and does not give heightened relief to Canadian architecture, there is a significant effort—mostly along formalist lines—to identify Canadian features in our architecture. Builders' houses, for example, are less likely to be brightly colored here than in the U.S. Kalman also argues that natural forms and local materials have been more respected in Canada than in other places. He sees the resource towns that developed near the sites of forest and mineral extraction as a particularly Canadian form, given their importance to the country's economy. In general, he suggests that Canadians have simplified models adapted from other places and that we have excelled in the architectural resolution of social issues.¹⁹

Canada's multicultural population, especially in western Canada, has also had a powerful impact on the teaching of architectural history. For example, the visibility of First Nations architecture and culture in British Columbia, the large Asian student population, and the strong Pacific Rim influence in Vancouver inspired the faculty at the School of Architecture, University of British Columbia (UBC), to include more non-Western material (especially Chinese and Japanese) than is offered in most of the survey courses and seminars in Canadian professional programs. It is integrated into thematic lectures: for example, an analysis of early structural paradigms pairs Chinese and Greek timber construction; the study of Enlightenment architecture brings together many cultures encountered during exploration; and the role of colonial architecture is examined in the context of international exhibitions in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries or current prefabrication practices in Japan.

Equally diverse are the perspectives in the teaching of the survey courses. At the University of Calgary, the two required courses, "Premodern Traditions of the World" and "The Western Tradition," are not significantly inflected by the Canadian context, with only one lecture devoted to Canada. An elective in Canadian architecture is offered by the art history department. In McGill's undergraduate architecture program, "Architectural History II" (planned as one of four required courses) explores North American twentieth-century architecture and includes approximately 25 to 30 percent "Canadian content." Other architectural historians focus intensely on Canada.²⁰

Since the pioneering work of Traquair and others, any credit for the rise of vernacular architecture as a respected academic discipline in Canada is due to scholars outside the realm of architectural history.²¹ It also seems to propagate most comfortably when at a safe distance from the country's center, Toronto. Geographers and folklorists, particu-



Figure 2 Canadian Centre for Architecture, Montreal, interior of the library

larly from Atlantic Canada, have led the way. This is probably due to the architectural traditions of the region (rural, antiurban, picturesque), as noted by Ian McKay in *The Quest of the Folk*.²² Following the revolutionary example set by American folklorist Henry Glassie, folklorist Gerald Pocius in *A Place To Belong* and architect Robert Mellin in his forthcoming volume on Tilting, Newfoundland, provide superbly detailed portraits of small communities, with an emphasis on measured drawings and the recording of local stories.²³ The popularity and preservation of Louisbourg, Lunenburg, and other tourist destinations have also resulted in an abundance of publications documenting and interpreting these historic sites.

Colonialism in Quebec generally means New France, whose architecture is the focus of particular courses or forms a substantial part of broader courses on North America. Perhaps for political reasons, courses on Canadian architecture are rarely offered at French-speaking universities, though Canadian material is frequently included in classes on painting and sculpture.²⁴ At the Université Laval, a course on colonial architecture looks outside Quebec to the Maritime provinces (New Brunswick, Nova Scotia, and

Prince Edward Island) and New England. An elective at the Université de Montréal presents an interesting Americanist position, emphasizing links between North and Latin American architecture.²⁵ With respect to the teaching of architectural history, Quebec's distinct culture has tended either to isolate it from the rest of Canada or to link it to other colonial situations. The issue of Quebec's isolation is, naturally, much less pronounced when the subject is twentieth-century architecture. A research laboratory devoted to the study of architectural competitions in Canada after 1980 has recently been initiated by the architecture department of the Université de Montréal, in which cognitive processes are studied from the perspective of an epistemology of design. The Université du Québec à Montréal (UQAM) has also developed a unique graduate program devoted entirely to the study and preservation of modern architecture, with no special reference to Quebec or Canada.

Generally speaking, the history of Canadian architecture—probably because it has remained so close to issues of preservation—has kept to traditional art historical methods, emphasizing the lives of architects, especially those of the nineteenth century who are now appreciated as the “pioneers” of the profession. Canadian medical historian Wendy Mitchinson has described the consequences of physician-centered studies for her field, suggesting that such an approach has limited her discipline to “a case study of progress.”²⁶ The same can be said of Canadian architectural history's focus on the “great” architects and their apparent innovations. Good examples of this monographic genre are plentiful.²⁷

Moving from the amateur architectural history of Capper and Traquair conducted at McGill at the turn of the twentieth century to the constellation of specialized inquiries that make up the world of Canadian architectural history today, there have been definite advances. The discipline gained autonomy. It has been better able to define its own methods and programs. Hence architectural historians have begun to tackle difficult questions such as the specificities of a Canadian colonial architecture in relation to French and British powers, or a definition of the vernacular that can overcome pastoral clichés. But the increase in sophistication has also created a rift between academic historians and architects or preservationists. The tension has in many ways been productive since the exchanges between domains have become ever more challenging. Let us hope that Canada's edge condition, its “limited identities” in the face of American confidence, may continue to be nurturing ground for such dialogue.

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Notes

1. J. M. S. Careless, “Limited Identities in Canada,” *Canadian Historical Review* 50, no. 1 (Mar. 1969), 1–10.
2. Hugh MacLennan, *Two Solitudes* (Toronto, 1945).
3. Isabelle Gournay, “The First Leaders of McGill's School of Architecture,” *Society for the Study of Architecture in Canada Bulletin* 21, no. 3 (Sept. 1996), 60. See also, in the same issue, Norbert Schoenauer, “Teaching the History of Architecture at McGill, 1896–1903,” 67–69. We have consulted as well Schoenauer's “McGill's School of Architecture: A Retrospection,” in *McGill Schools of Architecture and Planning Prospectus* (Montreal, 1987), 3–28.
4. Stewart H. Capper, “Architecture in the University,” *Canadian Architect and Builder* 9 (Nov. 1896), 179, quoted in Schoenauer, “Teaching the History of Architecture,” 68.
5. Reginald T. Blomfield, *A History of Renaissance Architecture in England* (London, 1897); James Fergusson, *A History of Architecture* (London, 1893) and *History of the Modern Styles of Architecture* (London, 1891); and Russell Sturgis, *European Architecture* (New York, 1896).
6. An innovative study of Nobbs and Traquair in the context of postcolonialism is Nicola Spasoff, “Building on Social Power: Percy Erskine Nobbs, Ramsay Traquair, and the Project of Constructing a Canadian National Culture in the Early Decades of the Twentieth Century” (Ph.D. diss., Queen's University, 2002).
7. Gérard Morisset, *L'Architecture en Nouvelle France* (Quebec, 1949; repr. 1980), 8.
8. Our remarks on the work and teaching of Eric Arthur rely heavily on Michelangelo Sabatini's “Eric Arthur: Practical Visions,” *Journal of the Society for the Study of Architecture in Canada* 26, nos. 1, 2 (2001), 33–42.
9. *Ibid.*, 38.
10. Eric Arthur, *Toronto: No Mean City* (Toronto, 1964); rev. and exp. by Stephen A. Otto (Toronto, 1986).
11. Norbert Schuenauer, *6,000 Years of Housing* (New York, 1981; exp. 2000).
12. Trained as an architect in Leeds and Manchester, Collins went on to Paris to work in the atelier of Auguste Perret, where he subsequently turned to architectural history and wrote, without any formal training, a pioneering study on the history of reinforced concrete (completed in 1959 at McGill). Peter Collins, *Changing Ideals in Modern Architecture* (Montreal, 1965).

13. See Alina Payne, "Architectural History and the History of Art," *JSAH* 58 (Sept. 1999), 292–99.
14. Alan Gowans, *Looking at Architecture in Canada* (Toronto, 1958), rev. as *Building Canada: An Architectural History of Canadian Life* (Toronto, 1966), and Gowans, *Images of American Living* (Philadelphia, 1964).
15. A seminar in vernacular architecture is required coursework for the M.Arch. programs in housing; Canadian modern architecture after World War II is the focus of faculty research, including special projects on such topics as hospital design and Arthur Erickson.
16. For introductions to the CCA's collections and facilities, see Larry Richards, ed., *Centre Canadien d'Architecture/Canadian Centre for Architecture: Buildings and Gardens* (Montreal, 1989); special issue of *RACAR (Revue d'art canadienne)* 16, no. 2 (1989); and Eve Blau and Edward Kaufman, eds., *Architecture and Its Image* (Montreal, 1989), the catalogue from the CCA's inaugural exhibition.
17. Nicholas Olsberg, interview with the authors, 9 Sept. 2002.
18. The most recent review of the various programs appears in *Canadian Architect* (May 1998), 24–29.
19. Harold Kalman, *A History of Canadian Architecture* (Oxford and New York, 1994).
20. "I am always thinking about Canada and Canadian issues," explains Christopher Thomas from the University of Victoria. Thomas makes a special effort to include material on Quebec in his courses and admits he is more closely linked to central Canada than many western Canadians are. "I like to foster understanding and mutual appreciation between the sections [of Canada], to both of which I feel affiliated." Christopher Thomas, correspondence with the authors, 2 Sept. 2002.
21. Annmarie Adams, "The Monumental and the Mundane," *Acadiensis* 30, no. 2 (spring 2001), 149–59.
22. Ian McKay, *The Quest of the Folk: Antimodernism and Cultural Selection in Twentieth-Century Nova Scotia* (Montreal, 1994).
23. Gerald Pocius, *A Place To Belong* (Montreal, 1991).
24. Certainly a central issue in teaching architectural history in Quebec is the availability of French texts. A quick survey of architectural historians

who teach in major French-speaking universities—the Université Laval, the Université du Québec à Montréal, and the Université de Montréal—reveals the remarkable popularity of English books in translation. The "survey textbook" has no real equivalent in French. "Whether this is a question of culture, or market, I don't know," explains Marc Grignon from the Université Laval, "but I hold to my general impression that the textbook phenomenon has an Anglo-Saxon feeling." Marc Grignon, correspondence with the authors, 21 Aug. 2002.

25. "It appears impossible to separate them," Yves Deschamps, who teaches the course, said of European and North American architecture. "All my courses stem from an 'Americanist' point of view, even when a large portion is devoted to European architecture." Yves Deschamps, correspondence with the authors, 21 Aug. 2002.

26. Wendy Mitchinson, "Canadian Medical History: Diagnosis and Prognosis," *Acadiensis* 12, no. 1 (1982), 125.

27. See Geoffrey Simmins, *Fred Cumberland: Building the Victorian Dream* (Toronto, 1997); Angela Carr, *Toronto Architect Edmund Burke: Redefining Canadian Architecture* (Montreal, 1995); Isabelle Gournay, ed., *Ernest Cormier and the Université de Montréal* (Montreal, 1990); and Jacques Lachapelle, *Le Fantôme métropolitain: L'Architecture de Ross et Macdonald—Bureaux, magasins et hôtels, 1905–1942* (Montreal, 2001). Toronto architect Robert Hill's ambitious project to produce *The Biographical Dictionary of Architects in Canada 1800–1950* has undoubtedly helped some of this monographic work. Hill is extremely generous with the vast amount of primary source documentation he has collected over the past twenty years. A second source of inspiration for many Canadian scholars is Kelly Crossman's *Architecture in Transition: From Art to Practice, 1885–1906* (Kingston and Montreal, 1987).

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