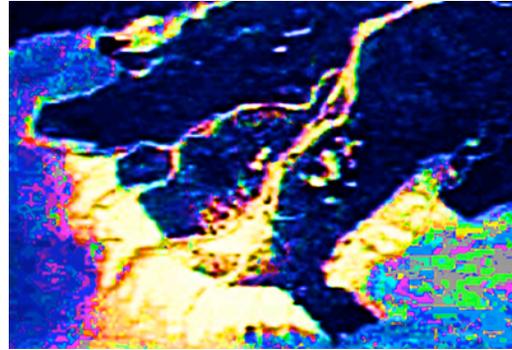


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Ontario College of Art and Design University (OCAD)
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Designs from The Terminal City:

Activist strategies for diversifying research &
educational offerings for a national centre in Toronto



abstract

Toronto has become one of three centres in North America for design education, research and innovation along with Los Angeles and the strip from Boston to Philadelphia. Within Canada, a number of factors have made

some Toronto institutions, such as OCAD, increasingly important often dwarfing the impacts of regional centres such as Vancouver. This discussion focuses on the current forces shaping a new set of opportunities and responsibilities for institutions such as OCAD as increasingly national and international forces in diversifying educational offerings and research initiatives that in turn are further highlighting and reshaping the roles of design in society and for community development in particular. In exploring areas of possible institutional growth for the OCAD Faculty of Design, this discussion focuses on ecological design and sustainability, intercultural and indigenous conversations and aesthetics, digital communications, increasing social and economic needs for better design and expansive redesigns, and the fertile interface of functional needs and contemporary visual culture. Examples of areas for bridging will include some from Canada, such as the modest cultural infrastructure and limited production and educational spaces around Vancouver's False Creek. "The Terminal City" is the other name for Vancouver that was proposed and nearly chosen over "Vancouver" with the city incorporated in 1886. Examples further afield will be explored for learning and research, and partnerships.

Introduction

Initially, I was going to focus this presentation on Vancouver's False Creek cultural precinct which has a few institutions comparable to and sometimes in competition with the design communities around OCAD in Toronto. "The Terminal City" is the other name for Vancouver that was proposed and nearly chosen over "Vancouver" with the city incorporated in 1886.

I was going to dedicate this talk to two individuals:

my first aboriginal (Salish) university professor, Mary Nelson, "Sne-Nah", and with whom I studied traditional and contemporary responses to Vancouver's False Creek and

Beth Alber, a recent Associate Dean in the OCAD Faculty of Design, the designer of an expansive collaborative work, the Marker for Change, located in the centre of the False Creek cultural precinct is one of the few monuments to the victims of the 1989 Montreal École Polytechnique Massacre.

But that discussion was not sufficiently focused on what I can offer OCAD. So while that presentation is for another day, my heart today is still with poorly celebrated but highly influential adjunct teachers, some of whom are aboriginal and warrant better participation in design faculties, and art college faculty administrators who still find time to design transformative works.

Strategies for developing new initiatives in Faculties of Design in Canada
I am here at OCAD today to share my vision and experiences for diversifying and expanding the research and educational offerings in a range of inter-related design (and contemporary art) disciplines, based on more community outreach and partnerships, in the Faculty of Design. And there are a range of questions and debates in contemporary design theory, scholarship, and pedagogies that come into play, particularly around expanding notions of design processes to expand the research and end-use evaluation phases, that I can only touch on very briefly today.

How can we envision badly needed new initiatives in design education, research and inter-regional and international partnerships for institutions such as OCAD? What kinds of bases and strategies for new funding and partnerships in these times of rising costs, soft economic growth, and limited prospects for increased revenues from tuition? How could national centres such as OCAD better partner with regional and international institutions to develop new programmes?

OCAD, and its surrounding precincts and communities, constitutes far more of a national and international centre for design education, research, and innovation. Vancouver's False Creek is only a regional centre for design and related education. But in January of this year, Emily Carr University of Art and Design received \$113 million in funding to move to an expanded campus at the far eastern end of False Creek roughly 3 kilometers east from its Granville Island campus.

So in coming to OCAD today, I have some bad news and some good news. Smaller cities in North America, including historical centres such as San Francisco, are not sustaining rich environments for design education, research, and innovation because of the following trends:

- i. insufficient numbers of local design education facilities to foster critical debate and innovation;
- ii. lack of regional policy commitments to support local and site-based design practices (and designers) and related studies;
- iii. high rents and space shortages;
- iv. lack of steady employment and freelance opportunities to make some design professions economically viable; and
- v. insufficient pools of talented individuals willing to toil creatively often for relatively low remuneration.

The good news is that the opportunities for the three viable North American centres for innovative design education and research, Boston - New York - Philadelphia, Los Angeles, and Toronto, will increase especially as respective institutions come to increasingly broker new initiatives in design and even partnerships.

So while OCAD may not be able to obtain huge grants from provincial and federal governments, in coming years, to expand educational and research programmes, its location and position in Toronto is so favourable that the impacts from cobbling together new resources through partnerships, could be much greater. An underlying question today is that of whether or not that \$113 million be more beneficial for a regional centre, such as in Vancouver that suffers from chronic isolation, erratic economics, and under-funding of the arts and design, or for a national centre such as OCAD in Toronto?

Problem statement

I am making this particular presentation because I want to explore two questions.

1. How can the OCAD Faculty of Design better advocate for the greater importance of (and allocation of resources to) design education, research and innovation as an increasingly national and international centre -- but in such a competitive time for funding?

2. How could OCAD Faculty of Design lead, as a national and international centre, in forging new synergies and partnerships with regional North American centres and international schools and facilities?

As a partial answer to these questions, this presentation explores an expansive concept of "infrastructure" (physical, ecological, cultural and educational) as a way to view and support advocacy for allocation of more social and economic resources to the design fields and the respective expansion of research, education, community engagement, and partnerships at OCAD's Faculty of Design. In other words, Toronto, Ontario, Canada and the world need more and better design education, research, innovations, and solutions.

Somes goals for programme expansion

Some obvious areas of institutional growth for the OCAD Faculty of Design, for educational offerings, research, and community partnerships include, ecological design and sustainability, intercultural and indigenous conversations and aesthetics, more innovation in digital communications, increasing social and economic needs for better design and expansive redesigns, and the fertile interface of functional needs for design and contemporary visual culture.

And there are many more growth areas for design education and research with practical importance. Here I would like to ask the audience for some other examples of needs for new programmes and initiatives that come to mind.

But what exactly is growth and even resilience for education, research, community outreach, and partnerships for the OCAD Faculty of Design? There can be a lot of markers that shift between departments and programmes.

Expanding design research, teaching, studio content & pedagogy

So far, much of what I have outlined are the organizational dynamics with which teachers and administrators in a school of design work on a day-to-

day, studio-to-studio and research project-to-research project basis. Now it is worth while to revisit the position of design and design education in the early decades of the twenty-first century. There are more problems where communities need design(ed) solutions. The standards for many design fields are being further codified with increasingly legalistic dimensions. And various kinds of design-embued "creative" economies are too often viewed, naively, as being necessary for community development. But the inverse relationships of better design processes and services requiring more social resources, space, and economic support remain poorly discussed and appreciated.

So to develop a strategy to expand the OCAD Faculty of Design's, we can expand our notions and working relationships to research, especially for enrichment of educational offerings, through a higher public profile, community outreach and partnerships spanning the local, regional, national and international.

My concept for expanding the work of the Faculty (and to rationalizing more competing for scarce resources) could be called "expanded design" in the sense of highlighting and further support for the earlier, needs assessment and research phases of design processes, on one end, and more work in communication, construction, fabrication, assessment, evaluation, and redesign triggers on the other end of the spectrum.

Such new initiatives need research funding, paid time taken away from teaching, sabbaticals, paid time for curriculum development, and many other university resources that can be difficult to locate. And such research projects, teaching and learning initiatives and partnerships could be used to enrich core the Faculty of Design over the longer-term such in the following ways:

- enriching contents of already offered studios and courses;
- expanding venues of already offered studios and courses;
- development of new studios, courses, and professional development education (and funding for adjuncts and core faculty);
- additional studios and courses developed through new research projects;
- new research initiatives that better use Faculty resources already allocated;

new research initiatives that indirectly fund more faculty time, travel, and sometimes facilities;

new partnerships that bring more resources to teaching and learning; and
new partnerships that fund facilities, research, and support for design professions.

In trying to expand these aspects of the work of the Faculty of Design in these uncertain times, the following can be some guiding principles for beginning to explore possibilities.

1. Base the majority of new initiatives on the work and historic links forged in the departments. In other words, the bulk for strategies for expansion and diversification of education, research, and community partnerships should be driven by the Departments.

2. Further support and find resources for faculty (both with core appointments and adjuncts) in providing leadership in their fields, generating their own theory and acting as public intellectuals.

3. Study and serve historically under-served, under-studied, and marginalised communities -- particularly but not limited to Canada.

4. Work at making intercultural, inter-regional, and international relationships and collaboration but shop around carefully for partnerships.

5. Support and highlight faculty research and other scholarly achievements and carefully value intellectual output through a broader set of criteria for achievement, all that is peer-reviewed and curated, than at longer-established universities.

6. Develop proposals for educational and research initiatives for design topics not yet well-served in North American design schools.

7. Respond to the educational and research needs for design in Canadian regions better than or in cooperation with respective regional design schools.

Expanding & diversifying design work: Ingram's world

In considering the kinds of personalities to further support the development of the Faculty of Design, I wager that the following experience would contribute to the success of upcoming initiatives:

- a. intercultural engagement in a range of Canadian design 'worlds' including aboriginal;
- b. a solid history interdisciplinary education, teaching, administration in various aspects of design and related research and scholarship;
- c. a long history of research and teaching in international contexts and in building partnerships between institutions across Canadian regions and with other countries; and
- d. research engagements and relatively public outputs of ideas that highlight the name for greater societal resources for design education and research.

In terms of my own development as a designer, planner and theoretician, often working on the cusp of cultural infrastructure and contemporary art, I grew up in a remarkably fertile arc of aboriginal and western cultures around Victoria on southern Vancouver Island. These rich intercultural experiences gave me the confidence to delve into both reviving indigenous design traditions, on one hand, and contemporary 'Western' art, including West Coast movement, on the other hand. As I grew into adulthood, I experienced and engaged in the increasing contemporization of aboriginal arts movements. While engaged in site-based art, I kept a foot in documentary and landscape movements of photography ever cognizant that much of what we know as 'nature' embody aboriginal legacies.

Much of my work as a designer, scholar, teacher and administrator was formed through my twenty year association, spanning studio work, courses, supervision, teaching, and programme development, in the College of Environmental Design at the University of California, Berkeley, where my studies were aggressively interdisciplinary spanning architecture, landscape, urban design, and planning along with applications of ecology, social theory, aesthetics, and public art for the making of liveable communities. The

College of Environmental Design is a large global centre with strengths in the following movements in the design fields:

- a) ecological design and sustainability;
- b) for social factors in environmental design especially architecture, landscape architecture, and urban design – and critical social theory more broadly on campus;
- c) studies on traditional communities, vernaculars, and environments;
- d) GIS and other global positioning software in design especially as part of computer-aided design; and
- e) in site planning for public and other site-based art (and increasingly others kinds of cultural infrastructure and precincts).

My work at Berkeley involved a number of international projects and partnerships in Europe, Asia, and Africa that extended the scope of my learning and research well beyond the campus. From Berkeley, I have taught at several universities in North America, Europe and the Middle East while developing a collaborative based on Vancouver Harbour, side stream environmental design.

Towards An Activist Manifesto for New Design Education, Research & Partnerships

People need and deserve more, better, and increasingly innovative design responses -- and the necessary design education, research and exchanges. This 'politic' can be restated and re-articulated in many new ways, sometimes aggressively. The following are some principles for a manifesto to demand more from ourselves as designers and design research and more social resources from increasingly diverse sources. And while these ideas are well-known in design communities, they remain poorly appreciated if at all by large sectors of decision-makers (who could provide resources for design education and research) and whom may warrant polite challenges.

principle #1. Design education and research are just too important, to society in general, to not advocate for more social resources (only partially from governments) for both programmes, design-centred projects, and designers.

principle #2. Designers, design education, and design projects require more, better and secure space for all phases of research, production, communication, and dissemination.

principle #3. Design represents both cultural hybridity and the honouring of earlier traditions and movements. Design research is aggressively inter-cultural. Solution-identification increasingly requires critical forms of cultural studies that are inherently 'inter-cultural' generating interactions that can sometimes be uncomfortable (but respectful) while creative.

principle #4. Making space and allocating resources for debate and controversy are essential components of design and design research in general.

principle #5. These are times to expand and diversify the markers for achievement and success beyond a few prizes by organizations that often involve decreasing portions of the communities of designers and design educators and researchers in various fields.

principle #6. More and diversified educational offerings in a range of fields of design are so necessary that a range of exceptionally 'creative' business plans and funding strategies are necessary -- to the point of pressing the envelopes of more established forms of professional propriety.

principle #7. Designers and design students deserve and require viable career pathways and remuneration. The necessary professional, organization, and advocacy skills increasingly topics for design education.

principle #8. Users needs, post-occupancy and use assessments remain under-valued portions of design cycles and require advocacy extending to support for respective research and education.

principle #9. There are always research components of design cycles that warrant support and in many cases expansion and additional resources.

principle #10. Design is site-based moving from local ecosystems and cultures to global relationships. Sites always have real locations, user groups, and political economies. In other words, design, designers, and design research always has relationships to specific communities that can be better serve as part of their greater support.

Conclusions

The aerial composite of OCAD, Toronto and Vancouver's False Creek that I used to begin this discussion is also an ideogram of the central concept of this presentation. The three scenes are at different scales and OCAD is central with other Toronto centres, such as the Architecture, Landscape and Design faculty at the University of Toronto, are nearby.

In many ways, the effective of the OCAD Faculty of Design as a national and international centre will require a bridging and flow of ideas and knowledge between central Toronto and other parts of the country especially the margins, such as 'The Terminal City' -- building an array of partnerships and initiatives that are even far less familiar.

But the stark reality is that even with the severe funding constraints that OCAD U is facing as a public institution in Ontario, the prospects for development of new programmes are far more favourable for development of new educational offerings, research initiatives, and partnerships than virtually anywhere else in Canada and elsewhere North American. There are as many responsibilities as opportunities.

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Gordon Brent Ingram * May 2, 2013

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