NETWORKS IN CANADIAN CULTURAL ANALYSIS

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One of the longstanding claims about Canada is that its geographical characteristics —its occupation of an enormous space between three oceans and the U.S. border— have made problems of infrastructure and interconnection central to Canadian life. Originally enshrined in heroic nationalist narratives of expansion (like those around the completion of the national railway), a Canadian fixation on infrastructure has come to be seen more and more as expressing (and underpinning) the violence of colonial extermination and as a major precondition of Canada's long-term economic dependency on the United States. James Daschuk's recent book *Clearing the Plains: Disease, Politics of Starvation, and the Loss of Aboriginal Life* (2013) shows in stark detail the ways in which withholding food in a coordinated way was central to removing indigenous people from lands intended for building railroads to carry European settlers to Canada's West. In the 1980s, communications scholar Maurice Charland (1986) argued that the building of technological infrastructure (such as satellite communication and cable television systems) with the avowed intention of forging a unified and independent Canadian media culture largely served to install the pathways through which U.S.-based media industries more efficiently achieved their domination of Canadian culture. More and more, then, the values of infrastructure have come to be set against those of place and community. This conflict is at the core of recent battles over announced plans to build pipeline systems carrying oil from Canadian extraction sites to U.S. markets or Canadian ports (see, for example, The Real News.com, 2014).

If infrastructural thinking is tainted with the violence of genocide —and the admittedly more trivial drama of cultural dependency—, it is important

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to ask how we might think of phenomena such as networks and assemblages, which, on first glance, might easily appear simply as smaller scale infrastructures. More specifically, what might we recuperate from the language of systems and networks in order to think productively about the contours and operations of Canadian culture? A familiar response to the perceived oppressive character of structure is a reassertion of the resistant qualities of those things that appear irreducible to structure: the values of *locality*, of the deeply expressive cultural "work," or of the community, whose bonds appear to be stronger and more deeply rooted than those of the networked assemblage.

In the discipline in which I mostly work, media and communications studies, this reassertion of the local and the expressive over the infrastructural inevitably reignites one of that discipline's most long-standing disputes. This is the lingering debate that pits a political economy of culture, attentive to the over-arching institutional structures under which media operate, against a cultural studies actively seeking the moments of resistance or autonomy nestled within the operation of those structures. This conflict is normally known as the "political economy versus cultural studies debate." For some time, now, authors evoking this debate have felt compelled to begin with the acknowledgement that, at worst, it is exhausted and unproductive and, at best, simply boring (Grossberg, 1995; see also Peck, 2006). Indeed, the energies that kept this debate going have dissipated in recent years for at least two reasons. One is the predictable retreat of text-centered and institutionally-focused scholars into circumscribed, self-sustaining academic venues and communities from whose vantage point there is no longer an external disciplinary center to be fought over. The other is the general failure of attempts to devise methods that will reconcile the two sides of this debate. These attempts typically work between structure and text, by demonstrating that the work of regulatory or industrial structures is visible within the complexities of cultural texts and that an inclusive analysis may account for both. The problem of these efforts usually lies not in their well-intentioned attempts at reconciliation but in their inability to escape the traditional challenges of a sociology of cultural expression, which must convincingly answer the question of when the fabled "last instance" of economic or political determination enters into the constitution of cultural meaning.

One way in which this debate has been displaced is through the emergence of a variety of methods and orientations in cultural research that, while

concerned with the complexities of cultural expression, nevertheless address such infrastructural elements as networks, distributive systems, patterns of circulation, and cartographies of interconnection (see, for a summary, Straw, 2010). Network analysis and cultural cartography have come closest, I would argue, to offering accounts of culture in which both the structural features of the relational map and the cultural dimensions of collective expression are productively understood. We may see these sorts of analysis in such internationally disparate fields as the history of scientific knowledge (Beaupaire, 2014), art history (Joselit, 2012), print culture studies (Murphy, 2014), urban cultural analysis (Mercado, 2014), and popular music studies (Crossley, McAndrew, and Widdop, 2015). In each case, attention to the shape of networks and the pathways of movement of cultural materials has helped to reveal hitherto overlooked power relations and forms of "distributed creativity."

The take-up of these tools within Canadian scholarship follows what has transpired elsewhere, but I wish to argue here that this variety of approaches is particular pertinent to cultural analysis within Canada. There are two reasons for this. First, I would suggest that approaches grounded in some version of network theory effectively express the interplay of interpretive and institutional analysis that is almost inescapable in Canadian cultural scholarship. Differently put, it is difficult to think about Canadian cultural fields without using a perspective that sees them as necessarily assemblages, shaped by a variety of forces both institutional and inventive, and produced through the interweaving of materials from a variety of cultural "places."

The inescapability of this integrative analysis in Canada comes not because Canadians have somehow magically resolved the gap between a political-economic and text-centered analysis, but because a sense of the place of cultural artefacts within circulatory systems is part of the common sense understanding with which, in Canada, cultural artefacts are received and become meaningful. Indeed, I would argue that this is the case for most national-cultural spaces in which the production of culture is not naturalized or viewed simply as the operation of a general system. Within Canadian cultural life, it is difficult to escape a sense of the specific ways in which public policy, linguistic diversity, and processes of adaptation (or translation, both literal and metaphorical) all work to de-naturalize the cultural object, to make us conscious of its arrival from somewhere else or its status as a locally-produced option. Watching Netflix, going to see versions of U.S. films dubbed or

subtitled for Quebec audiences, or purchasing books online, one cannot escape a political-economic understanding that sets the cultural text within a complex field of internationally differentiated systems and structures, knowledge of which is fundamentally constitutive of the sense we make of such objects.

For this reason, the most fruitful of models for grasping Canadian culture, I suggest, will employ some sense of the network or the map. By this, I mean that Canadian culture is best understood as the movement of materials and influences in and out of particular assemblages that sometimes congeal as "works" even as their constitutive parts then move off in other directions, toward the production of institutions or other expressive entities. All such movement is an intervention in (and sometimes a transformation of) a cultural field shaped by economic relations, policy frameworks, and the broader differentiation of markets and populations. In an earlier text, I used the examples of 1930s low-brow magazines and 1970s dance music recordings to show how versions of Canadian culture are produced as shifting relations of actors (in the expanded sense that actor network theory gives to that term, so that it includes people and things), and different trajectories of movement (Straw, 2005). Bruno Latour's (2005: 12) well-known instruction to scholars to "follow the actor" has always seemed particularly useful in the analysis of cultural processes that mobilize and cut across complex clusters of policy, commerce, and creativity.

In the history of Canadian cinema and the visual arts, since the 1960s at least, it has often been more interesting to map the nodes and interconnections that have sustained cultural creation than to contemplate the character of individual works. It is not that the expressive substance of these works is unimportant, but that many of the truly distinctive achievements of Canadian culture have involved the interaction of forces in the cultural field to produce institutions, publications, associations, cooperatives, and other entities. These entities may cohere as formal structures while serving as nodes within those more loosely-defined assemblages of people and things that we may call "scenes." If cultural creativity is often compressed within canonical or consecrated works, it is also "distributed," in the sense that the anthropologist Alfred Gell (1998) gave to the term, dispersed across a variety of objects and institutions.

One might say, for example, as Michael Dorland once suggested, that the history of cinema in Canada is best imagined as a set of shifting relationships in which documents, policies, and institutions have been engaged over

several decades in generating "talk" about a Canadian cinema. The occasional production of a film has often seemed incidental to these processes (Dorland, 1998). Certainly, the continuities of policy-talk trace a more intelligible history of Canadian cinema than does a history of individual films, typically marked by jumps, idiosyncratic starts, and waves of activity that are often short-lived. Certainly, the sense of Canadian cinema as a collective project has more to do with the building of institutions and the elaboration of policy frameworks than with the emergence of waves or movements more typical of other countries. In a very different way, *The Record Project*, the on-line gallery that claims to show the cover of every record album sold in Canada between 1950 and 1969, stands as a compendium of the ways in which commercial relationships, tariff policies, and the transnational flow of influences produced the substance and contours of Canadian popular musical culture during these years (The Record Project, 2015). In this respect, each record album cover is a hieroglyphic crystallization of one moment in the transnational circulation of cultural motifs. In the field of contemporary art, an ongoing collaborative research project, funded by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council on Canada, on the theme of "Networked Art History: Assembling Contemporary Art in Canada, 1960s to the Present," treats the artistic field in Canada in part as a distributed phenomenon involving (and generating) magazines, organizational forms, institutional roles, and local communities.

Canadian Studies

An attention to networks and pathway of circulation is useful to understanding, as well, the infrastructures for scholarly cultural analysis within Canada. The example of the academic field known as Canadian studies, to which I will now turn, provides one useful example with which to pursue the question of the networked character of Canadian intellectual expression. Today, as at various points in its history, one hears the diagnosis that Canadian studies is in a crisis —a condition traced, variously, to its successful growth and subsequent fragmentation, to the present-day fragility of certain kinds of interdisciplinary programs within universities, to a crisis in the very idea of "nation," or to the absorption of Canadian studies within various kinds of trans-regional

enterprises (such as programs devoted to hemispheric or continental studies). Nevertheless, it is important to distinguish between a crisis in the founding or canonical ideas underpinning a scholarly field and the condition of the networks in which it is implicated.

There is no doubt that, over the past two or three decades, crises in the conception of the "nation" and, in particular, challenges to exclusivist or essentialist notions of national identity, have weakened some of the ground on which Canadian studies rested in its formative years. Arguably, however, crises of purpose do not always slow the extension of academic fields. Indeed, much of the time, such crises generate new forms and directions for discourse, moving these fields in novel directions and producing hitherto unseen forms of interconnection. In these movements, academic fields may come to seem newly interesting, as their crises are "performed" in ways which suggest rich intellectual ferment. Famously, disciplines such as anthropology or American studies have seen challenges to their legitimacy or historical purpose serve as the basis for an expansionary re-organization of the intellectual and institutional networks in which they are implicated, for example, by binding them more closely to post-colonial studies or post-structuralist literary theory. In other words, rather than hastening their decline or disappearance, these crises serve as the basis of rejuvenating moves in which internal critique motivates new inventiveness and productive new sets of relationships. (Cynically, of course, we may see these moves as little more than survival strategies.) In the case of Canadian studies, we might argue that, whatever its health in a formal, institutional sense at present, the networks of interconnection that sustain scholarly work on Canada might be said to be more dense and complex today than at any point in its history.

By now, to those who live and work in English-language Canadian universities, the emergence of Canadian studies as a field or discipline since the 1960s is recognized as a history of achievement. This history is normally understood as one of the "Canadianization" of universities, following a time in which Canadian subject matter was absent from (or marginalized within) them. This "Canadianization" worked both centrifugally and centripetally, insinuating Canadian content into disciplines that had not hitherto offered any, while consolidating the newly dispersed Canadian scholarship within programs, usually of an interdisciplinary character, which mapped out the study of Canadian phenomena as a relatively coherent enterprise. Somewhat later,

Canadian studies implanted itself in universities around the world, sometimes as separate degree-granting programs, often as sections within larger units devoted to the study of North America or the Americas more generally.

Beginning in the 1970s, these developments were supported by Canadian government initiatives (such as the Faculty Enrichment Program) intended to send Canadians to other universities and bring international scholars to Canada to acquire materials and expertise. The Faculty Enrichment Program was one part of a broader Understanding Canada initiative, intended to nourish the development of Canadian studies abroad. As Canadian studies programs around the world grew, Canadian scholars themselves were increasingly likely to be invited to such programs as visiting professors or speakers at national conferences. The international expansion of Canadian studies thus expanded the networks of movement and collaboration of scholars based in Canada.

For those in the cultural humanities, activities such as these were supplemented by other initiatives that promoted Canadian literature, cinema, and other art forms internationally. The movements of Canadianists made possible by the Understanding Canada program regularly intersected with the itineraries of Canadian cultural creators, whose visits to other countries were made possible by other Canadian funding programs, such as those of the Canada Council for the Arts or the Department of Foreign Affairs, Aid and International Development. In addition, in different places, and depending on the political character of the moment, Canadian diplomatic services and the Délégations génerales du Québec (the Quebec government's diplomatic offices outside of Canada) might cooperate or compete in supporting the mobility of academics and cultural figures. It is also important to acknowledge the international growth of annual festivals or fairs in the fields of literature, cinema, and the visual arts over the last quarter century. These recurring events have both expanded and regularized the presence of Canadian artists internationally and have often involved the participation of Canadian academics whose focus is the cultural field. It is impossible to underestimate the effectiveness of these developments in expanding the networks within which Canadian studies came to be dispersed across the world. A multiplication of international events in which Canadian scholars and artists participate has meant broader international circuits and networks of collaboration for the study of Canada.

Nevertheless, it is important to identify additional factors encouraging the emergence of these networks. Since the 1980s, federal research funding for Canadian academics in the humanities and social sciences had expanded and been transformed from what was principally a means of supporting individual sabbatical research to programs that actively encouraged the formation of research teams and collaborative relationships at both the national and international levels. The pressure to seek funding for one's research and, in particular, to collaborate in teams, did not come without controversy, particularly for humanists, who felt it incompatible with the solitary, archive-based practice of so much research. Even more controversial is the now-entrenched expectation that scholars in the humanities and social sciences fund graduate students with their own grant money, a shift widely seen as the downloading of institutional responsibilities onto faculty (and as the importation of a model based in the physical or medical sciences into contexts where it is not appropriate). Nevertheless, the expansion of research grant programs in Canada (and in Quebec, which has its own significant research-granting agency) has given large numbers of full-time scholars funds with which to travel for research and its dissemination. More profoundly, perhaps, the policies of granting agencies in Canada have changed, from limiting the participation of non-Canadian scholars in Canadian-funded research to actively encouraging such participation (and providing at least some of the funding needed to make this possible). These changes are inseparable, of course, from a broader internationalization of academic work, in which the growth in the number of conferences and the generalization of internet-based communications have played key roles. Another key development has been the expansion of project-based research funding in many of the countries whose scholars collaborate with Canadians, such as Brazil or the members of the European Union. The growing symmetry of research funding programs at the international level —the increased expectation, for example, that scholars in the social sciences will direct funded "laboratories" that may become partners in research sponsored in other countries, or that an international labour force of postdoctoral fellows is available for recruitment— has facilitated the expansion of these research networks.

In 2012, the Canadian government cancelled the Understanding Canada program and its initiatives, such as the Faculty Enrichment Program, which had provided modest funding to international scholars for visits to Canada.

As noted, these visits had frequently provided the impetus for the establishment of Canadian studies programs in other countries. Mike Blanchfield, who presided over the program at its beginnings, pointed out in one among many public responses to the closure, that Understanding Canada had supported Canadian studies programs in 39 countries and provided travel assistance to 7 100 scholars (Blanchfield, 2012). Commentators were quick to note that the program had been cost-effective and that its spending was low compared to the monies spent in Canada by its recipients on travel, accommodation, and the purchase of Canadian materials to support their research and teaching. The closure of Understanding Canada was one among several decisions whose effect —and apparent intent— was to assume greater government control over how Canada was studied and talked about elsewhere in the world. In countries like Hungary, whose Canadian embassy serviced several other countries in the region, the government had cut diplomatic posts in the cultural and educational fields as part of its declared emphasis on the development of trade and business opportunities. In the United Kingdom, more recently, the Canadian High Commissioner moved to assume full control over the Foundation for Canadian Studies, which had administered a fund intended to support the study of Canada in the UK since the 1970s (Bronskill, 2015). The past president of the Canadian Studies Network, which is now the leading organization of Canadianists working in Canadian universities, recently addressed these developments in a powerful article with the title "Who Killed Canadian Studies?" (Coates, 2015).

The internationalization of Canadian studies at the institutional level and increased mobility of participants within it have transformed the networks of those studying Canada in important ways. Alongside these developments, Canadian studies has been the focus of different conceptual reorientations that have altered the status of the Canadian nation within the project of Canadian studies. For my purposes here, I will focus on two of these. One works to resituate Canada within broader transnational entities, the better to study historical and contemporary patterns of migration, flows of resources, and observable transnational cultural identities. The other, in contrast, participates in what we might call an "urbanization" of Canadian studies, in which cities have emerged as a key conceptual and empirical unit of analysis.

Canadian Studies as Transnational Studies

As noted above, Canadian studies programs in other countries have often been part of units studying "North America" or "The Americas." Typically, throughout most of their history, these units have treated Canada as a minor specialization, rather than as central to ways of imagining larger territorial unities. The opening of Canadian studies to a consideration of supranational spaces and issues has usually been generated within the project of Canadian studies itself. One of the most long-lived and durable expressions of this transnationalism has been the field of "border studies," the focus of large numbers of conferences and publications over the last 20 years (for example, Martínez-Zalce, 2010; Roberts and Stirrup, 2013). An emphasis on borders expresses Canada's longstanding preoccupation with the United States, but the vitality of border studies goes beyond this single-minded focus. At the risk of simplifying, I would point to at least two ways in which an attention to borders has proved rejuvenating within the project of Canadian studies. One is a result of the malleability of the notion of border. It is a standing joke among the executives of academic associations that orienting one's annual conference around the theme of borders is one of the surest ways of encouraging high levels of participation: textualists may study borders which are psychic or discursive, others may speak of fractured or multiple identities, and others still may present work on trade or immigration policy. At the very least, an emphasis on borders encourages deployment of the thematics of anti-essentialism and fluidity that have been central to scholarship in the humanities since the rise of post-structuralist theory.

Borders are central to both culturalist and social-scientific treatments of Canadian issues, and they function as powerful condensations of the power relationships characteristic of present-day transnationality. Important scholarship has followed, first, the recognition that borders may be affective and ideological (and not merely physical or juridical), and, secondly, acknowledgement of the brute fact that the key border spaces in which entry to so many nations (like Canada) is regulated and negotiated are airports, immigration offices, and police stations —not merely those geographical points on which nations meet.

A second reason for the ascendancy of border studies, I suggest, is that it has filled a void left by the withering of certain kinds of bi-national com-

parative analysis. My own collaboration with cultural scholars in Mexico began 20 years ago as the attempt to compare musical industries and musical cultures in their country and mine. This seemed like a grant-friendly initiative that would allow all participants to continue studying their own national culture while coming together, at some future point, to note differences and similarities. With time, it became apparent that the bases of comparison were too big and obvious to be of significant scholarly interest or novelty. At the same time, transnational flows and patterns of circulation throughout the North American space have come to hold greater interest; for example, the ways in which the North American Free Trade Agreement had re-ordered the continental music industries as a set of north-south corridors rather than nationally specific "horizontal" flows, the increased pressing of CDs for the Canadian market in Mexico, the various moves by the Toronto-based Much Music to establish a presence in Mexico, the quasi-dominance of Montreal's night-life music scene in the 1950s by "Latin" music, the unexpected popularity of certain Canadian performers within the Mexican middle class, and so on. Anecdotal if taken individually, these phenomena all exemplified transnational networks of circulation and influence whose overlaid maps revealed complex cultural pathways.

Border studies fit more or less neatly within the broader transnational project of diasporic studies, which has situated Canada as part of processes of migration, enslavement, and trafficking in people, things, and ideologies. The field of indigenous studies, for example, necessarily (as in my own university) confronts the question of the extent to which its focus should be a transnational indigeneity rather than one whose geographical scope is defined by colonial borders. Developments within Quebec's intellectual history pursing ideas of *Americanité* are explicitly about networks of affect, genealogical connection, and language, whose recognition challenges the idea of a circumscribed Québécois space (see, for example, Lamonde, 1999). The scale of these networks has expanded in new theorizations of the "French Atlantic," of which William Marshall's *The French Atlantic: Travels in Culture and History* (2009) and Allan Greer's *La nouvelle France et le monde* stand as prominent examples (2009). The work of Canadian scholars like Charmaine Nelson (2015) on visual culture has both "internationalized" Canadian studies, with its attention to the forced or voluntary flow of people through countries bordering the Atlantic Ocean, and "Canadianized" diasporic studies,

by emphasizing the place of Canada within the slave trade and the shipping routes that sustained it. Nelson's work is faithful to Paul Gilroy's advances in his book *The Black Atlantic*, while exploring the specifically art-historical implications of transnational relationships, which left as one of their legacies a visual culture in which Canada's history as a slave-trading nation is recorded.

At present, Canadianists sometimes participate in —and confront the risks of— a newly rejuvenated "American studies," which, in John Carlos Rowe's powerful account, seeks to move beyond its foundations in ideas of "American exceptionalism" "to encompass the different societies of the Western Hemisphere, their many different languages, the global intersections we identify loosely with the "Pacific Rim" and "Atlantic World," and the history of Western imperialisms and neo-imperialisms that continue to shape global realities" (2012: 21). The attractions of an "American studies" attentive to broader hemispheric and transoceanic flows of capital, people, objects, and ideas are obvious, but it is difficult in Canada to escape the sense that this move is both necessary —in the way it questions the primacy of national borders— and, at some level, imperializing. A rejuvenated American studies, with its key institutional bases in U.S. universities, is very likely to make the United States the vantage point from which new theorizations of the Americas as a whole are carried out. (To be clear, Rowe himself is quick to acknowledge this dual character of the new "American studies."). In several fields, arguably, from comparative literature to migration studies, the dissolution of regional or national knowledges within a newly expansive theorization of the Americas risks solidifying an economy of knowledge in which scholars throughout the Americas feel they must travel to the United States to find the most advanced tools with which to understand their post-coloniality.

Canadian Studies as Urban Studies

Ongoing moves to render Canadian studies transnational have been supplemented by more recent —and admittedly less pervasive— engagements with the urban. The term "urban humanities" now circulates internationally to designate an orientation of literary, cultural, and media studies around issues having to do with the character of urban life and expression. More broadly,

of course, the "spatial turn" of the last two decades has put questions of ur-
ban space at the heart of cultural analysis in both the humanities and social
sciences. Canadianists participate in both of these tendencies, but, argu-
ably, specific features of the Canadian situation have given them additional
momentum. One of these, specific to the cultural field, is the observable
decline of Canada's federal government as a key source of innovation within
that field and the ascendancy of cities and municipal governments as the
contexts within which cultural issues are addressed with greatest interest
and effect. This decline is felt sharply in Canada precisely because atten-
tion to policy frameworks has been a key constitutive feature of cultural
analysis in the country. The federal government continues to fund cultural ex-
pression through the Canada Council and other programs, to regulate media
through the Canadian Radio-Television and Telecommunications Commis-
sion, and to maintain, albeit with diminished resources, instruments of cul-
tural development like the National Film Board of Canada and Telefilm
Canada. However, few, if any, significant new federal initiatives have emerged
in the cultural field in recent years, and funding for innovative projects of
the early 2000s, like the Audio-Visual Preservation Trust or the Canadian
Cultural Observatory, was cut following the election of a Conservative gov-
ernment in 2006. Less visibly, the sustained research on cultural citizen-
ship and social cohesion that once flourished within the federal Department
of Canadian Heritage, in close interaction with academic work on similar sub-
jects, has largely disappeared.

During roughly the same period, cities have emerged as key incubators
for thinking about culture, though this is not simply because the Canadian
federal state appears to have vacated the cultural field. In the last two de-
cades, cities have become the locus of a multi-levelled complex of policies,
concepts, and initiatives in the cultural field, from "creative city" discourse
through the expansion of urban arts festivals and the development by Cana-
dian cities of all sizes of municipal cultural plans. Much of this activity is
contested, of course, in critiques that lay bare its complicity in gentrification,
increased income inequity, and an instrumentalization of culture. Never-
theless, it may be argued that citizenship in Canada —at least in its cultural
forms— is experienced increasingly as an urban phenomenon. The most in-
teresting and transformative artistic interventions or cultural innovations seem
to address urban space rather than, as might have been the case 40 years

ago, national identity. Culture is Canada is less and less about what Toby Miller (1993: xi) once called a "dramatological mirror" held up to a national collectivity. It is more and more about the innumerable experiments that mark contemporary urban life. These experiments, often minor when taken individually, intersect with others, and collectively produce the networks, media, and spaces in which urban culture in Canada today is being transformed. It is one of the challenges of cultural analysis in Canada to acknowledge and understand this transformation.

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