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ASPECTS OF URBAN HERITAGE: AN INTRODUCTION

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John H. Taylor

Derivative forces worked strongly on the nineteenth century Canadian cityscape, in a fashion perhaps typical of burgeoning colonial centres. The impact of such forces is evident in the three historical articles that follow, whether the focus is the builder and contractor of Susan Buggey's Halifax, the architect and capitalist of David Hanna's Montreal, or the military "planner" of Michael Newton's Ottawa. The ideas, imperatives, strategies, and models of the metropolitan society imposed themselves forcibly on the design of the colonial outpost, however strong or apparently mature that outpost was. The observation that colonial societies owe much to the metropolis is perhaps obvious and even trivial, but in unmasking the "deception" of the colonial cityscape, it is an observation not to be ignored, for such a premise leads to an important question. Have the research designs or strategies employed to unmask the nineteenth century Canadian cityscape been as derivative as the city itself? And as such, can they possibly work?

If a generalization may be permitted, the mature European centre is typically analyzed in an historical or linear fashion. Its profile, in whatever era, is sought mainly in an investigation of its historical roots. The larger context in which it emerged is often given a lower priority. As a research strategy it is probably a sensible one, with the additional virtue of massaging the local or national ego. Paris and London emerge as cities unlike the others. History confirms what is believed anyway.

The case of the colonial city is often quite different and evidence is accumulating (including some in this issue) to sustain the claim in the particular case of the Canadian city. In these urban outposts, a research strategy in a linear or historical mode, even where a city has a long history - like nineteenth century Montreal or Halifax - is probably not too appropriate. It would seem that a cross-sectional or synchronic approach should have an equal or even higher priority to a linear or diachronic one. What was going on in the world *around* a Canadian city at a given time is at least as important as what had gone on *in* it. That is, the contemporary context has an impact equal to or greater than the local historical one and that knowledge should be reflected in the research design. A double burden is thus placed on the researchers of the Canadian city. They must show not only a sensitivity to a place, but to the international context of design, planning and building in which it was created.

Much of the Canadian cityscape is *stuck on*, and is not evolutionary. But that phenomenon is not unimportant and it is both susceptible to and worthy of explanation and analysis. Derivative forces account, among other things, for the heterogenous pattern of the Canadian city and its tendency to conservatism in

style. Aggressive and *superior* metropolitan design is mixed up with vernacular forms, materials and *inferiority*. The real point is that stuck on theories and research approaches are not adequate to deal with the stuck on colonial city. Something more is needed than the simple replication of experiments done elsewhere and more appropriate to a different experience.

It would seem then that in attempting to explain the Canadian city, there has to be a search for both what is indigenous and what is derivative and an explanation of how and the degree to which they are integrated. A beginning is to be found in investigating the channels, whether human or institutional, by which the metropolitan design was imposed. The promise of that beginning is evident in the Buggey, Hanna and Newton articles that follow. All three authors focus on a vehicle by which the metropolitan design was translated onto the British colonial landscape. For Buggey, it is the Halifax builder and contractor, George Lang; for Hanna, the architects and the prestige (in the eyes of local capitalists) of British Terrace housing in Montreal; for Newton, the British ordnance planners who set the conditions for the development of Ottawa in terms of their own strategic requirements. The three authors go further. All attempt to show how the metropolitan design was imposed on the Canadian cityscape, to some extent how the design was integrated into it, and the impact of the design on it. It is to be noted that by and large the approach of all three authors is cross-sectional. Evolutionary elements peculiar to each city (in the case of Ottawa, of necessity, there were none) tend to have a lower priority. Their efforts are worthy of some emulation.

The fourth article in this volume, "Retrospective Orientations," in large measure addresses itself to the matter of conserving the heritage that surrounds us and the contemporary social meaning of what the past has wrought. One very important question (among others) is addressed in this article: to what extent are contemporary urbanites sensitive to their past and in what forms? Perhaps surprisingly, given apparent political disinterest, there is a high degree of public interest in the historical environment, and it is extensive as well as intensive. Moreover, the authors have found that interest to be to some degree measurable. Historical research on the cityscape is not occurring in a vacuum of public apathy. One thing Professors Konrad and Taylor demonstrate is that the historians of the city are operating in a yeasty milieu.