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Mass Modernism

*Graphic Design in Central Canada,
1955 – 1965, and the
Changing Definition of Modernism*

by

Brian Donnelly, BFA

A thesis submitted to the Faculty of
Graduate Studies and Research in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts
in Canadian Art History

Carleton University

OTTAWA, Ontario

January, 1997

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The undersigned recommend to the Faculty
of Graduate Studies and Research acceptance of the thesis
**"Mass Modernism Graphic Design in Canada, 1955-1965, and the Changing Definition
of Modernism"**

Submitted by Brian Donnelly, B.F.A.
in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts.

Kelly Crossman, Thesis Supervisor

John Shepherd, Director: SSAC

Carleton University

Ottawa, Ontario

January 1997

Abstract

MASS MODERNISM: GRAPHIC DESIGN IN CANADA, 1955 – 1965, AND THE CHANGING DEFINITION OF MODERNISM

Noting the lack of a general history of graphic design in Canada, this study looks at the careers and work of several designers in Toronto and Montreal, including Carl Dair, Leslie (Sam) Smart, Ernst Roch, and Allan Fleming. It shows how modern design emerged as an industry, by differentiating itself from advertising, typesetting, and commercial art studios. It argues that modernism in Canadian design was developed as a synthesis of several, well-understood international influences and traditions, such as those of Britain and Germany, and always maintained a visually complex and intellectually critical relationship with those influences. The study concludes that the synthetic approach of Canadian designers, as part of the movement of modernism into the mass sphere, necessitates a broader definition of modernism: one fully compatible with mass, commodity production.

Acknowledgements

Tracing the postwar history of design in Canada for this thesis has been the start of a remarkable and rewarding process of discovery. The initial impetus came from my exposure to the *Annuals of Advertising and Editorial Art*, first published in 1949 by the Art Directors Club of Toronto. Although I had worked as a designer since 1978, trying to interpret and understand the unfamiliar images in these books was a plain lesson in how little I knew about design history.

First and foremost, my sincere thanks go to the designers themselves – Henry Eveleigh, Sam Smart, Clair Stewart, Frank Davies, Frank Newfeld, Peter Dorn, Theo Dimson, Rolf Harder, Ernst Roch, Ulrich Wodicka, Eiko Emori, and Neville Smith – for allowing me into their homes to interview them. Massey College Librarian Marie Korey was extraordinarily patient with my comings and goings among the Dair and Fleming papers, and I thank her for her support. Thanks also to Richard Landon at the Thomas Fisher Rare Book Library; Linda Scott at the Imperial Oil Archive; Monique Ouellet at the E. B. Eddy Company; and Carl Dair scholar Gerry Proderick, of Oakville.

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As Robert Stacey has noted, interest in design history appears to be reaching a critical mass. A revealing and important part of our cultural and social history; graphic design deserves to be properly collected, archived, argued over, and exhibited. To borrow Walter Benjamin's expression, it is out of a close reading of the wreckage of the storm of history that we understand our current position.

Oakville, December 1996

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Introduction

Graphic design can be defined as the conscious engineering and specification of the elements on the printed page or surface, with the goal of realizing effective and consistent visual communication. As a profession, design merits study as a distinct artistic field, just as architecture can be distinguished from the history of building methods, or literature from the history of printing and publishing. Given the number of practitioners and their achievements, it has become possible to meaningfully trace and record the individual talents involved in the design of mass-reproduced objects in Canada.

However, despite its presence as a major industry in Canada, and its well-established status as a field of study at universities and (especially) in practical programs at community colleges, graphic design in Canada has not been comprehensively or even critically studied. In particular, there have been few studies of its history and none which attempt to provide a complete chronology. This compares unfavorably with the situation in the United States or in Britain, where several books and monographs have appeared over the last fifty years which pay the subject appropriate attention.

Possibly because of the central importance of words and reading in our culture, it is only in the current century that a widespread, clear, and critical awareness has arisen of the visual, connotative aspect of communication inherent in printing. Our concern for the more immediate, semantic denotation of the words alone, recoils at the thought of the 'manipulation' of literal meaning implied by consciously reshaping the form of an author's text and the deliberate placement of accompanying imagery. As with forests and trees, this is an instance of failing to see the design for the words.

As an awareness of design history developed, it was very soon allied with the dominant definitions of the modern, based largely on tracing the development of formal reduction towards a final, stylistic goal. This approach was typified by Nikolaus Pevsner, whose book *Pioneers of Modern Design* (first edition 1936) attributed modernism to one man, Walter

Gropius, and a single, machine aesthetic. “With Gropius [the] character [of the modern style] was ultimately determined,”¹ he wrote, as if modern design was over almost before it started.

In much the same way, a single style of graphic modernism came to be seen as the modern ‘norm,’ based on the work of Swiss teachers, designers, and typographic designers. “Modernism in Switzerland became a crusade” after World War 2, writes a British critic,² one based on the codification of restricted formal means. For many historians, and possibly in the mind of the public, this style both epitomized and froze the modern movement in a “purity of means and legibility of communication [which] enable the designer to achieve a timeless perfection of form.”³ To this day, Josef Müller-Brockmann, a central exponent of the Swiss approach, maintains that “laws last and are independent of time.” and admits valuing a certain sans-serif typeface because its strokes end in the more “universal” right angle, as opposed to the “subjective,” acute or obtuse angles of other faces.⁴

Despite these and other attempts to strictly limit the parameters of modern design, narrow definitions of modernism have always had an uneasy partnership with the eclecticism and popular roots of the arts of mass reproduction. Many practitioners closely identified with modernism scarcely desired or deserved to be seen as rigid or restricted. In 1947, influential American designer Paul Rand took up the debate over modernism in design, by defining the distinction between good art and good advertising. Typically, his conclusion was neither a narrowly distinct position nor was it based on a reductive formal analysis. Rather it was a synthesis, a compromise: “good advertising art.”⁵ Rand’s approach lay in considerable simplification and formal restraint, but he was better known for his playful semiotics of form, the use of punning references to period styles or abstract paintings, and the exploration of the expressive quality of abstract form, color, line, and typography. For Rand, whose stature allowed him the privilege of signing his advertisements, modernism in design never led him to settle on a single style, advocate a formalism based on a strictly reduced aesthetic, or claim a functionalism based solely on immediate, informational tasks.

1. Quoted in Peter Fuller, “The Search for a Postmodern Aesthetic,” in John Thackara, ed., *Design After Modernism* (New York: Thames and Hudson, 1988), 119.

2. Richard Hollis, *Graphic Design, A Concise History* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1994), 130.

3. Philip B. Meggs, *A History of Graphic Design* (New York: van Nostrand Reinhold, 1983), 379.

4. Yvonne Schwemer-Scheddin, “Josef Müller-Brockmann,” *eye* 5, no. 19 (Winter 1995): 15.

5. Paul Rand, *Thoughts on Design* (New York: Wittenborn, Schultz, 1947), 1.

In fact, many writers have noted the extent to which the works of the European modernists from the late 1950s (in what became known as the International Style), were a repetition, a return to sources from the prewar, Weimar period. Their work involved much adaptation, to be sure, but the determination to define modernism precisely and narrowly nonetheless led to a deliberate re-examination of the constructivist, machine-based rationality of the 1920s, which had so inspired Gropius and Pevsner. Kenneth Frampton has written of the distinct feeling that, by 1960, he was “*returning* to the modern line” (emphasis added).⁶ The reduced and minimal form of the most radical modernism of 1950s design was, curiously, the result of a return to tradition. “Europe had to rediscover its heritage,” notes William Owen, to revive a “frugal, ascetic modernism.”⁷

A modern art of the future that was largely a return to the past; a theory of formal purity that was often playfully synthetic: defining what constitutes modernism in graphic design has always been a difficult and self-contradictory practice. Yet modernism’s existence in design is indisputable. Richard Hollis recently summarized the pre-modern approach by suggesting that “Before graphic designers, there were craftsmen who made printing the way they thought printing should look.”⁸ And in 1957, Carl Dair bemoaned the fact that “Canadian printers are the most conservative people in the world.”⁹

Why were artists in the graphic arts compelled to overcome previous practice with modern forms, and how did the look of our printed environment change, from the reproduction of traditional forms dictated by conservative craftsmen to a dynamically experimental and rapidly expanding art form? Why, in other words, would an industry engaged in mass commodity production become a modernist art form, and how did graphic designers go about realizing that transformation? This study contends that this process, the movement of modernism into the mass sphere, necessitates a revision of modernist theory, which has almost entirely rejected the implications of a visually complex and synthetic, broadly applied, and truly mass modernism.

Further complicating the reading of modern design, of course, is “the feeling that a certain historical trajectory, or even, for some, history itself, is coming to an end.”¹⁰ This uneasy sense of termination, now so closely associated with postmodernism, has come to

6. Kenneth Frampton, “Place-Form and Cultural Identity,” in Thackara, *Design After Modernism*, 52.

7. William Owen, *Modern Magazine Design* (New York: Rizzoli, 1991), 80.

8. Richard Hollis, “Have You Ever Really Looked at This Poster?” *eye* 4, no. 13 (Summer 1994): 4.

9. Anon., “We Need Typographic Designers,” *Canadian Printer and Publisher* (October 1957): 70.

10. Frampton, “Place-Form and Cultural Identity,” 51.

completely color any interpretations that try to understand modernism as anything but a limited, historical event, something that was tried, but which failed. There is a sense in which the modern has not only ended, but “has lost any claim it may once have had to modernity.”¹¹ In a telling metaphor, Peter Fuller goes on to claim that modernism has assumed the role of an “ageing dictator,” an overpowering presence which never had any legitimacy in the first place.

This study is not immune from these theoretical narrowings, endings, and absences. Nonetheless, it will endeavor to construct a narrative and a meaning for modern design in the face of these prevailing winds, by arguing two central and linked propositions. First, that modernism in Canada was developed as a synthesis of several, well-understood international influences and traditions, and that it always maintained a visually complex and intellectually critical relationship with those influences. Second, because of this synthetic approach, graphic design necessitates a broader definition of modernism itself, one which is neither formally teleological nor visually predetermined. It is a broad, inclusive process, at work across a wide variety of visual practices and styles, and does not require the heroic isolation of specific visual innovations and individuals.

Furthermore, as an important instance of the movement of modernism into the mass sphere, modern graphic design shows the modernist tradition as a broad social process, one responding to the modernist energy inherent in capitalist economic development, and fully compatible with the industrial mass-production of commodities. Modernism seen on a mass scale does not render popular forms obsolete or unimportant. As such, it contradicts many of the important theorists of modernism, who focus exclusively and triumphantly on isolated, individual modern works; and it further suggests, contrary to post-modernist practice, that the modern moment is far from over, and that its intellectual tools still provide the clearest explanation of our contemporary visual culture and design’s central role in it.

History first

The first task is to organize and present the historical record, which has sadly gone lacking in Canada. The current study cannot pretend to cover the entire modern history (post World War 2) of design, or all of Canada. It will instead concentrate on the time frame

11. Fuller, “Search for a Postmodern Aesthetic,” 117.

which saw the greatest qualitative change, those vital ten years between 1955 – 65. The period chosen is remarkable in that it represents the establishment of the idea of the professional designer in Canada. These years marked the greatest change in the position of the designer (although it is obvious that subsequent decades have seen greater quantitative growth), and firmly established design as a vital and important form of cultural expression and an indispensable tool for business and marketing.

An important exception to the timeframe of this thesis is the inclusion of earlier writings and work by Carl Dair. Dair's role in establishing design as a separate practice, his relationship to international approaches, and the development of his own theories and personal approach after 1955, cannot fully be appreciated or understood without looking at his earlier work.

A focus on the emergence of design in the ten years between 1955 – 65, however, is not meant to deny the modern sophistication and effectiveness of the commercial art of the early '50s (or of the thirty years since). The design of the period before 1955 has been called a Rococo Modernism, its "wayward forms" leading to a "regression into fantasy[which] had gone so far that the cry arose in the age of reason for a return to control and discipline."¹² This traditional definition of modernism – as a disciplined, objective triumph over fantasy and ornament – makes earlier work appear irrelevant, invisible, and hardly seems to do the period justice (as this author, Lesley Jackson, would fully agree). A full appreciation of the sources and achievement of Canadian advertising and design of the immediate postwar years will have to be pursued elsewhere.¹³ However, the moment is well expressed by Penny Sparke, who suggests that the "practical demands of post-war reconstruction had been replaced, by the 1950s, by stylistic demands, in which the power of consumer choice equalled that of its manipulators."¹⁴

It is important to note the emphasis Sparke places on the consumer, or audience, as the *equal* of their professional "manipulators." As design grew, it became increasingly professional, and developed its own internal, professional standards. Yet this growth also represented the triumph of the consumer and the growing demand for meaningful style in

12. Lesley Jackson, *The New Look: Design in the Fifties* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1991), 21.

13. A partial study, discussing in particular the role of gender in early 1950s advertising and design in Canada, and the way in which subsequent definitions of modernism have rendered the early 1950s invisible, can be found in Brian Donnelly, "Invisible Modernism: Space, Modernity, and Femininity in 1950s Graphic Design." Directed reading, Carleton University, 1995.

14. Penny Sparke, *Design in Context* (London: Quarto, 1987), 181.

A Rococo Modernism?

P. E. & E. Staff Artists. Advertisement for Photo Engravers and Electrotypers. 1956.

Clair Stewart. Book Cover for "Leaven of Malice." 1954.

everyday life, making the visual satisfaction of desire the most practical and effective route to economic growth (and the growth of the profession). In looking at how "design became the ideal tool for [economic] reconstruction"¹⁵ after 1945, this paper will also investigate the crucial relationship between the changing, social basis of design's production, its growth as an industry, and the changing, modern, and designed look of artistic modernism itself.

This thesis will trace the fundamental shift in emphasis (which was at its peak in the decade 1955–65) away from illustration, image, and a concern with taste, toward design, function, and rationality; in short, the shift from commercial art to design. The powerful arts of illustration, photography, imagery, and fantasy remained prevalent throughout the entire postwar period, however (and remain so fifty years later). The complex and evocative power of pictures did not disappear with design's preoccupation with type, space, form, color, and other abstract formal qualities. In many ways, a thorough history of modern design could be written simply in terms of its changing relationship to photography and illustration.

15. Peter Bartl, "Everybody is Their Own Designer," *Graphic Design Journal* 1, no. 1 (Summer 1993): 12.

Design is prior to these arts in the production process, inasmuch as designers tend to specify the look and placement of images (while illustrators or photographers very rarely return the favor). The creative process of art direction, so long associated with the most powerful figures in the advertising industry, was assumed by designers (along with its attendant assumption of control), as they positioned themselves as the central arbiters of the look of the finished, printed work.

This study will further restrict itself largely to Toronto, Montreal, and Ottawa. This does not by any means represent the extent of modern design in Canada at the time, even if the developments in these cities had enormous implications for the rest of the country, and in many ways set the tone for work outside of central Canada. It is also important to note that the focus of this study remains almost entirely Toronto, with the single exception of two non-francophone designers in Montreal and two who were briefly in Ottawa. Much research remains to be done in cities such as Vancouver, Winnipeg, and Halifax, where modern printing plants, advertising industries, and thus also design were under simultaneous development. Particular attention is also required to the remarkable modern design of French-speaking Montreal after the war.

Toronto undoubtedly boasted the most concentrated printing and advertising industries, and had the strongest links with international design communities (notably that of New York). It is telling, then, that as designers in Toronto moved to differentiate themselves from advertising, they increasingly looked to international sources from Britain and continental Europe, often to the exclusion of the more prevalent and immediate presence of American advertising and magazines.

As the list of sources below indicates, Toronto also has produced the most extensive resources for studying design history, in the form of publications and archives. If this thesis focuses almost exclusively on Toronto, however, it must be conceded that this is out of necessity and the limitations of the present writer, and cannot be taken to mean that one city had a complete monopoly on either design or the idea of the modern.

Additionally, while different amounts of time are spent on various designers, this does not represent a final value judgement as to their relative merit or importance. With so many pieces of information still missing (and several cities completely unaccounted for), the varying weight of the respective chapters and sections on individuals at least partly reflects the amount of available information, and the relative applicability of certain designers' work to the thesis of this paper. It is far too premature to claim to have per-

formed anything like a comprehensive survey of Canadian design. It is not at all premature, however, to suggest that one is overdue.

Outline of the study: artists

The designers studied here reveal modernism's contradictions in a variety of ways. Canadian-born Carl Dair was one of the first to develop a keen understanding and good working relationship with continental European design (that from outside of England, long the central influence on Canadian printers in the former British colony). His work is our starting point here. As will be shown, interwar design developments from Germany grew to be a strong influence in his work. However, Dair's approach is complex in that, by the mid-1950s, his research and writings led him to turn increasingly to older, more traditional references. Dair not only came to abandon the early impetus of *Die Neue Typographie*, but to outspokenly oppose its later incarnation in the simplified, analytical International Style. He typifies the extent to which contradiction and complexity, not unity or coherence, make up modern Canadian design.

Other traditions were at work in Canada, most notably the British publishing industry, and thus the next chapter focuses on the four English-trained emigrés who came to found the Society of Typographic Designers of Canada (TDC). These designers were strongly influenced by their national tradition, but this is not to suggest that they were not modern. In its contradictory way, it is the clear emergence of design's role at the centre of the typographic and printing trades, and the commitment to design as an organized profession which they imported, which carved out the space in which modern, conscious, and newly effective approaches to that tradition could be developed.

In apparent contrast, then, the following chapter examines the influence of the first aggressively self-conscious and self-styled modern movement, now called the International Style, which was rooted in innovative and analytical forms of design. It developed throughout the 1950s in a variety of places, including Canada, but primarily in Switzerland and Germany. The International Style had an explosive impact on Canadian designers and their exhibitions, competitions, publications, and teachings after 1960. The influential and controversial work of Ernst Roch and Rolf Harder presents two unique approaches to a renewed constructivism in the period of this study; and would seem to be a logical benchmark for modern design in Canada.

But again, contradictions are central to modernism's development and reception.

In the extraordinary consistency of their approach, and their singular commitment to the communication of essential design solutions, designers with an internationalist outlook, such as Harder and Roch, played the traditional modern role of rational counterpoint to the more prevalent and popular stylistic eclecticism of many of their colleagues. This analytical version of the modern proved highly appropriate to the growth and unification of government and corporate design cultures. However the cool precision of much of this work was, and is, strangely at odds with the wider cultural experimentation and release of popular styles that marked life in the 1960s. And it would be a gross and inaccurate simplification to suggest that modernism simply involved understanding, accepting, and applying a preset, foreign style in a Canadian context. The work of Roch and Harder, certainly, and their relationship to international trends, was always more negotiated and complex than that.

Neither did the internationalist vision ever come to completely dominate the profession (even if it has dominated the collection and historical vision of institutions such as the Museum of Modern Art). Perhaps this was due to the resistance and the equal power of consumer demand and desire, as noted by Penny Sparke above, something which the professional, applied art of design could only partly supercede.

Finally, the study will look at the response of those modern designers whose careers developed in Canada itself, and the synthesis which emerged from the range of influences noted above. The designs of Allan Fleming, Theo Dimson, and Gerry Moses were important and exciting precisely because they located visual solutions in ways which were neither purely analytic nor merely synthetic and eclectic; neither constrained by strictly defined communicational demands nor solely dedicated to the pursuit of difficult innovation; neither blindly professional nor avowedly popular; neither narrowly international nor widely local: a truly complex and unpredictable modernism.

None of the existing studies of international design history mentions a single Canadian designer, or spends a single sentence on Canadian trends. Yet Canada, despite its apparent 'backwater' status as an artistic or design-producing nation, was subject to the same economic and cultural forces which shaped design elsewhere and gave it a global character. Canadian technological development has been accompanied by visual and intellectual developments of equal importance. Yet it would be disingenuous to suggest that Canada's development (possibly as a *result* of this lack of international attention) has been anything but uneven. It is the country's combined and uneven status, as a major

developed nation and important player among the industrialized powers, yet also a largely unexplored, unappreciated, and undocumented design-producing nation, which lends Canadian design history its current unevenness, and its urgency.

This study will show ways in which Canadian designers of the period were centrally aware of international, modern trends, and often implemented individual solutions which were contemporary to visual developments anywhere else. Canadian designers were part of the ongoing international process whereby such solutions coalesce into distinct styles, and become consistent and deliberate approaches to the ongoing problems thrown up by modernization and the unabated pace of social, technological, and economic development. Canada's lack of world-scale technology and industry devoted to publishing, printing, and typesetting were crucial in limiting the promotion of Canadian modernism and its reciprocal impact on international thinking. Thus Canadian design maintained a broader, less focussed, and more synthetic approach to specific modern solutions or styles, which were the product of larger graphics manufacturing, publishing, and printing industries with international impact and a global reach.

Outline of the study: theory

In constructing an adequate theory of modernism to encompass the diversity of modern Canadian design, we find that the tools of modernist theory have been bent almost out of shape, unable to accommodate a modernism of the mass sphere. It is necessary (perhaps in the tradition of postwar modern design itself) to first *return*, to the roots of modernism's definition. These roots lay in the establishment of differentiation as the core of the modern ideal. With this came the separation of different spheres of life, allowing distinct and critical methods to develop in ethics, aesthetics, and politics.¹⁶ Modernism can only be understood in the context of the changes in professional organization and structure which the emergence of design, as a differentiated practice, represents. As this study argues, it is the process of the economic and intellectual self-definition and differentiation of graphic design, its definition as a profession, which is the modernist event itself.

This study will then look at the double transition brought about in the modern idea in the postwar era. First, in its movement from Europe to North America and Canada, modernism moved to *deny* the avant-garde ideal – the union of art and life in an opposi-

16. This definition is fundamental to Weberian sociology. See Scott Lash, *Sociology of Postmodernism* (London: Routledge, 1990), 5 ff.

tional synthesis – through the development of an institutionalized ‘high’ modernism. The second transition, which follows from this institutionalization, is the movement of modernist theory from its basis in *differentiation* to a theory of *autonomy*, the isolation of modernism in a removed, high-cultural position, and the carving of a ‘great divide’ between high arts and low. Modernism became hostage to a notion of an autonomous, privileged culture from which it has yet to recover.

However, it will be argued that the notion of modernist differentiation and professionalization can be rescued from this restricted definition through looking at modernism in mass culture and through such developments as modern design. The study will argue that (as evidenced in these designers’ histories, among other ways) that there has always been an exploratory, sometimes self-contradictory, and always synthetic approach to the language of modernism. Language has never been a problem which lent itself to the analysis of a single solution, but only to renewed application and dynamic change. This dynamism and self-contradiction, it will be argued, are inherent in the nature of communication itself.

However, the instability of modern artistic language has been resisted by many modern theorists themselves. Some, such as George Lukács, have rejected modernist innovation as the product of a fetishized system of commodity production. More recently, Perry Anderson has argued that mass culture spelled the end of the brief modernist interlude. In contrast, this study will argue that it is necessary to retain the link between modernism and modernization (that is, the basic economic progress of mass, modern, technological society itself), in defining the former as a conscious and necessary artistic reaction to the latter.

Notably, of course, postmodern theory has also undermined the very idea of modern forms of artistic expression arising from the continuing modernization of production. This study, then, will proceed to look at the ways in which the central questions of postmodernism, and many of its methods, actually reflect and continue the modernist argument itself, particularly its disdain for the modernism apparent in mass culture. This disdain, of course, has been shared by many modern and Marxist thinkers, including Jürgen Habermas, Louis Althusser, and Theodor Adorno, who are among those touched on here.

Modernism, then, has been fundamentally misrepresented, in the false, institutionalized autonomy of high-modernism, in the rejection of the restlessness and contradictions

of mass communication and language, and the abhorrence of popular, mass imagery by modern and postmodern theorists alike.

In a brief look at Walter Benjamin, and the Marxist theory of use-value, this study will finally argue that modernism still exists, in practical form, in the continuing energy and restless movement of mass culture. Design, as shaped by Canadian practitioners in the formative decade studied here, is a form of mass modernism, the inheritor of the modern movement of the pre- and postwar period. In arguing this, it will be possible to arrive at a renewed, conscious definition of the modern project, one which arises directly out of the continuing economic development of the productive forces of society, and which locates modernism's persistence firmly in the use of mass culture and the creativity of human labor. The survival of modernism as a theory necessitates abandoning what Andreas Huyssen has termed the "great divide," and tracing the movement of modernism into the mass, everyday, applied realm which is the natural, useful territory of design.

Sources of this study

Canadian Art, founded (as *Maritime Art*) in 1943, has been an important source for design history; largely due to the interest of Donald Buchanan in interior design and the involvement of the National Gallery in retaining links between the fine and applied arts. Articles by Buchanan, Fred Haines, Allan Harrison, Carl Dair, and Paul Arthur date from 1945 until 1960 (when articles on design and architecture largely cease, with the departure of Buchanan and the start of an exclusive focus on fine art). These articles give an excellent indication of the tentative steps taken in moving towards the idea of design itself, defining the ambiguous relationship among professionals within typesetting, printing, engraving, illustration, interior and product design, and advertising.

There are also the annuals published by the Art Directors Club of Toronto, which produced its *Annual of Advertising and Editorial Art* between 1949 and 1964; and the *Typography* exhibitions, six of which were held by the Typographic Designers of Canada (later the Society of Graphic Designers of Canada) between 1958 and 1964. It is largely through these exhibitions and professional associations that design came to a process of self-definition, and these annuals are an invaluable source of information on what the designers themselves valued in their own work and that of others. The published results are catalogues of interesting, challenging, and often long-vanished ephemera.

Other sources include contemporary design publications, such as *Applied Arts* and

Studio. By and large these Canadian trade magazines emphasize what is current, new, and eye-catching, but they offer only occasional fragments of history, and discourage critical views in favor of self-promotion. In contrast, more developed American and European publications, such as *Design Issues*, *Journal of Design History*, and *eye*, tend to offer much more considered opinions on design history and theory, but contain little or nothing on work done in Canada.

The two principal archival sources have both been drawn from the University of Toronto. Massey College has the Allan Fleming archive and a significant portion of Carl Dair's papers, and there is a great deal of information on other Canadian designers there as well. The Cooper & Beatty Archive at the Thomas Fisher Rare Book Library has recently been catalogued, an excellent exhibition of the printed material has been mounted, and, uniquely, a catalogue with proper color reproductions published.¹⁷

The E. B. Eddy archive in Hull, Quebec, has been catalogued but rests in its original, inadequate, overheated warehouse space. Nonetheless, this was the source of many original and striking pieces of publicity done by Dair and Henry Eveleigh during their productive four-year partnership in Montreal (1947 – 1951). Finally, the Imperial Oil archive supplied information on Gerry Moses and the groundbreaking *Imperial Oil Review*.

The National Archives has two significant sets of papers relevant to design in the postwar period, those of Eric Aldwinckle, and the official government records of Design Canada and the National Design Council. Because the printed samples in the Aldwinckle archive are scarce and none have been collected separately from his letters and other material, a fair bit of mental reconstruction is required in order to position Aldwinckle properly as one of the early and influential commercial artists with roots in the interwar years. (His strongest and most influential work falls before 1955 and has been excluded from this study). The Design Canada archive poses the opposite problem, requiring an extensive applied effort to separate the material on graphic design out of the mass of government documents, most of which reflect the emphasis on industrial design of the Design Council and its secretariat, Design Canada.

In the documentary art section, the remarkable collection of sketches done by Allan Fleming, James Valkus, and others towards the design of the new CN logo in 1959 pro-

17. Edna Hajnal and Richard Landon, *Cooper & Beatty: Designers with Type* (Toronto: Thomas Fisher Rare Book Library, University of Toronto, 1996).

vides an unusual opportunity to watch the slow development of the designers' thinking. The number and visual variety of the sketches also strongly support the central contention of this paper, namely that the development and reception of a modern design idea in Canada were complex, contradictory, and also contested.

Some effort has been made at the Archives to collect graphic design, almost entirely in the form of posters. Perhaps because of its similarity to easel-based painting, the single, oversized, public poster has received almost exclusive attention in museum collections. This paper will shift the focus away from the single iconic image to an understanding of the broader patterns inherent in the everyday application of design, where the modernist process of differentiation and professionalization has been most strongly felt, accepted, resisted, and developed.

In extending the study of design to the everyday, to mass culture, and to the mass commodity expressions of modernism, the present paper will show the balanced, synthetic, and sometimes self-contradictory nature of Canadian modern design, and above all will show that this has been the source of its strength.

CHAPTER ONE:
IN SEARCH OF DESIGN HISTORY

Art lovers will find reward in learning to appreciate typographic design [with its] visual pleasure in the lettering and page design; intellectual light; chemistry; industry and business; mechanical inventions and mechanical skill; human communication of exact concepts as well as needed information; taste and relevance in expression.

—Pearl McCarthy, “Teething Period of Printing Lives Anew in Dair Collection.”¹⁸

While the printing trade was imported to Canada along with the first presses in the late 18th-century, it was not until after 1945 that the graphic design of the page was extensively and consciously analyzed and theorized in this country. The man whose writings most extensively brought a self-awareness to the trade of the commercial artist was, perhaps surprisingly, not himself an import, but a former newspaper delivery-boy and self-taught ad layout man from Welland, Ontario. In looking at the work of Carl Dair and his impact after 1955, it will be necessary to go back to pick up the thread of his career before that date, and look in particular at some of the important writing and design done in Montreal from 1945 until he left for Toronto in 1951.

Born in 1912, nothing in Dair’s career suggested anything but a then-common and highly commercial training. He began in 1930 as an apprentice type-caster and layout man in the advertising department of the Stratford *Beacon Herald*. His first job was a \$3 dis-

18. Pearl McCarthy, “Teething Period of Printing Lives Anew in Dair Collection,” *Globe and Mail* Toronto, 21 September 1957.

play ad for a local drugstore. “I threw everything I had into that design,” he recalled in a 1960 article.¹⁹ He spent much of the 1930s as an itinerant typographer and printer, often doing hand-lettering. He arrived in Montreal by 1940, and throughout the war was a freelancer and art director at Montreal department stores and at Ronalds printing. He said that it was the end of “the jazz age,” when showy display faces such as *Bodoni* and *Broadway* were common. Dair was also centrally aware of very different trends, the Bauhaus typographic revolution (the highly-influential German design and architecture school), and the important work of Jan Tschichold, especially through his book *Asymetric Typography*, which established particular principles upon which, Tschichold argued, modernism in design must be based.

Dair emerged from the war years as typographic director of the National Film Board which, together with the Wartime Information Board, had quickly developed into an extensive in-house government design facility. But Dair’s establishment in Montreal of the Eveleigh-Dair studio, with illustrator and designer Henry Eveleigh in 1947, was a landmark event. This studio was the first built around what was to be the blueprint for many subsequent design studios: small, creative, and centered around the specific skills of individual designers. Importantly, Eveleigh and Dair were working outside of the established advertising and commercial businesses (although they often produced work for ad agencies). As Dair later noted, it was “unorthodox:” smaller than an advertising agency; it did not depend upon selling concepts or advertising space, and was more typographic in orientation than the traditional commercial art studio ‘supermarkets’ of the time.²⁰

Perhaps not everything about the partnership was modern, though. In a 1947 article in *Canadian Art* written with Charles Fainmel, Eveleigh was to echo a traditional theme of the time: that easel painters were “research artists,” exploring the “visual trends of tomorrow.”²¹ In expressing the wish that advertising might educate rather than sell, the article revealed a strain of moralism and conservatism not uncommon in commercial art. The article also opposed chrome on cars, and toasters that popped up. In retaining strong

19. Much of Dair’s biographical detail is available in a remarkable and unprecedented ‘for a trade publication reminiscence written in 1960. See Carl Dair, “Typecast for Thirty Years,” *Canadian Printer and Publisher* (November 1960) for this and the following references in this paragraph.

20. The term is commonly used by Theo Dimson. Theo Dimson, interview with author, Mount Albert, ON, 13 February 1996.

21. Henry Eveleigh and Charles Fainmel, “The Proper Function of Advertising,” *Canadian Art* 4, no. 4 (Summer 1947): 159.

Carl Dair and Henry Eveleigh. Canadian Business. Cover and Interior Spread. May, 1951. 1951

links between the fine and applied arts, the authors leave no doubt about the superior position they accorded to the former, and the secondary status of design. The article certainly does not point forward to the growing, modern separation of design as a distinct profession.

One of the important projects the Eveleigh-Dair studio undertook was the redesign of *Canadian Business*. The logic of the process was described in a remarkable little booklet, printed to explain their redesign. In it, Eveleigh and Dair explain their “engineer’s approach,” lack of “superfluity,” careful consideration of “type selection, format, organization of material, page layout, departmentalization,” and their belief that “once form is suited to function, beauty will result.”²² This purely functional and rational approach is the hallmark of the influence of the prewar German *Neue Typographie* tradition. Even if, stylistically, Eveleigh-Dair’s *Canadian Business* did not achieve the highly angular, reduced, or asymmetrical look of its European precursors, its layout was clean and logical.

But three different works from the same period, more directly influenced by Dair’s own hand, show that he had thoroughly absorbed his lessons from Europe. A small exhibition announcement, produced in 1951 for the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts, uses nothing but type and a single, solid bar, but the treatment of these simple elements creates an important and interesting statement of Dair’s relationship to international trends. The disproportionately large scale of the single, sans-serif ‘3,’ the vertically-angled type with its one-word description, “sculpture,” the overlapping and mixing of different typefaces and the priority given to open, white space (it takes up virtually half of the card), all strongly echo the constructivism of the Bauhaus, and the equally rational, assymetric work of Jan Tschichold and his prewar followers.

Carl Dair. Montreal Museum of Fine Arts Invitation, “kennedy. kahane. archambault.” 1951

22. Carl Dair and Henry Eveleigh, *Canadian Business Redesign*, 1949 (Carl Dair Archive, Massey College Library, University of Toronto, in “Examples” box).

*Carl Dair. E. B. Eddy Advertisement from the 1949
Art Directors Club of Toronto Annual. 1949*

In the same vein, a 1949 advertisement for the E. B. Eddy Company uses the dramatic scale of a single, page-filling capital 'E,' while Dair runs smaller copy in well-spaced lines of type which fill the interior space of the large letter. The logo is reversed out of the vertical stroke of the letter as well, and the rational 'overall' layout, logically-filled space, clean geometry, simple asymmetric balance, and the restriction of visual means to type alone, all serve to underline Dair's thorough knowledge of European thinking in design.

Carl Dair. Eddy Paper Company, 1948 Annual Report. 1949.

Finally, his Eddy Paper Company 1948 *Annual Report* (which would most likely have been done in 1949), uses dramatic shifts in scale as well, this time in the photography. Dair emphasizes a single large web (or roll) of paper, in contrast with the overshadowed, tiny figure of the mill operator in the background. In the extreme foreground is the shape of a wrench (which may be part of the mill equipment, or an added, collage element). The wrench was a symbol Eveleigh and Dair used several times (note also the cover of *Canadian Business*, p. 17), in a clear reference to a famous wartime poster, “America’s Answer!”

Jean Carlu. America's Answer! Production. 1941.

Carl Dair. Symbol for Cooper & Beatty. 1951

Production,” done by French designer Jean Carlu in 1941 for the American government. Simultaneously an icon of the war effort (Dair was also engaged in producing wartime posters at the NFB) and of modern design itself, Carlu’s work features a single gloved hand turning a huge wrench.

But understanding and adopting modern elements in one’s work is not the same as making a focussed commitment to a singularly modern and totalizing style. His ambiguous relationship can perhaps be symbolized by a trademark done for the typesetting firm of Cooper & Beatty in the early 1950s. Cooper & Beatty was the largest typesetting firm in Toronto, serving numerous national advertising agencies and many other clients, and

as such it played a key role in shaping the look of type, and ultimately the development of design as a unique profession (see the section on Allan Fleming, below). Dair's symbol for the firm featured type set in *Futura*, the most significant modern sans-serif typeface of the 1920s, wrapped around a crest, with calligraphic letters drawn in a deliberate fifteenth-century style, in a very deliberate and jarring contrast of old and new.

Like the deliberate contrast in this crest, in his writings and later work, Dair remained open to the entire five-hundred-year-old tradition of printing and design, and it was this openness, and the scale of the task he set himself as the main Canadian proselytizer for the new field of design, which turned his concentration from the radical, geometric constructivism of Germany and Switzerland to a more synthetic, complicated, and traditionally-based conception of modernism.

The E.B. Eddy Booklets

Dair's most important single contribution to the development of design was undoubtedly a series of publications written and designed to promote the E.B. Eddy paper manufacturing company of Hull, Quebec, and distributed to the printing trade. Dair began in 1946 with *Type and Paper*, followed by *Design for Printing*, (1947 – these first two booklets were each reprinted twice); *Portfolio of the Work of the Great Master Printers* (1948); *Type Talks* (1948); *Design of Letterheads and Business Forms* (1951); and *Spacing* (1954). The best known and most important of these pamphlets, however, was the *Handbook of Print Production* of 1952 (it was a significantly larger size, closer to a book than a pamphlet), which was reprinted several times. On their own, these booklets make up a remarkable body of work and a considerable commitment on Dair's part to the education and professionalization of the printing and design community.

Type Talks, for example, was a reprint in revised form of a series of articles which ran in *Printing Review of Canada*, starting in May, 1946.²³ Drawing on his experience at the NFB, the twelve articles display a remarkable knowledge of type and printing history. He ranges over the customary division of type history into Old Style, Transitional, Modern, and Contemporary; the “nuance of feeling”²⁴ which is possible within a single typeface; the

23. Carl Dair, “Type Talks,” *Printing Review of Canada* 21, no. 12 – 22, no. 11 (May 1946 – April 1947).

24. Carl Dair, “Type Talks: Choosing Type Faces,” *Printing Review of Canada* 22, no. 6 (November 1946): 14.

Carl Dair. Type Talks. 1948

need for unity in layout; the importance of restraint in the use of heavy headline types; and the difference between static and dynamic balance.

Overall, one senses Dair's concern to restrain the exuberance of undisciplined typography or layout, a desire to organize and control. As Fleming was to note, Dair's approach to typography was like chess, with "a few simple rules, and an enormous number of possible combinations."²⁵ In the article "Type Talks: Choosing Type Faces" (noted above), Dair insists that, quoting printing historian Daniel Berkeley Updike, "there are many ways of being wrong, but only one way of being right." Importantly, in the final article (April 1947), he notes that the composing room is "the research laboratory of a new typographic idiom;" thus taking an important step beyond those who, like Fainmel and Eveleigh, still reserved experimentation for fine artists and illustrators.

25. Allan Fleming, "He's Not the Type to Go Gothic," *Toronto Daily Star*, 18 February 1967.

Dair's commitment to finding the distinct and unique artistic value inherent in typography; still widely seen as a trade (particularly by the tradesmen themselves) or as the mechanical, technical reproduction of the original written text, must have come as a revelation to typesetters as they worked, anonymous and unnoticed, in the backrooms of printshops, typesetting companies, and publishers. In fact, Allan Fleming later recalled the importance of reading *Type Talks* as an eighteen-year-old high school student, and it was precisely this generation of emerging artists that Dair must have hoped his articles would reach. It is in Dair's understanding of design, his tenacious focus on the separate art involved in page composition and typographic design itself, which, more than any stylistic innovation, signals the beginning of the modern moment in Canadian design and its emergence from advertising or commercial art.

"Direction — A Canadian Typographic Idiom"

In 1947, Dair wrote an important article for *Canadian Art*, entitled "Direction – A Canadian Typographic Idiom."²⁶ It was designed by Dair himself and set in *Futura*, a modern sans-serif which stood apart from the more traditional style of the rest of the magazine. The article contains a long discussion of the first Canadian typeface, Methodist minister James Evans's hand-made, wood block letters in the Cree alphabet (in the absence of a Cree written alphabet in the European sense, Evans also designed the syllabic letter forms), reputedly produced in 1841 from melted ammunition and tea boxes.²⁷ However, Dair's research uncovered no other Canadian typographic examples, and so, far from tracing the long Canadian typographic and printing tradition (which after all did run back through to the beginning of the nineteenth-century), the article serves only to suggest the vacuum that Dair felt himself working in, pointing by its very absence to Dair's lack of confidence in the Canadian typographic innovations and practices of the intervening century and half. He could only comment that "our industrial typography...lacks design, good taste, restraint, dignity."²⁸ It is no wonder he complained that no one had ever heard of a typographer. "He is the rare bird," Dair summarized.²⁹

26. Carl Dair, "Direction – A Canadian Typographic Idiom," *Canadian Art* 4, no. 2 (February – March 1947): 70.

27. Pearl McCarthy, "The Book of Books Goes on Display," *Globe and Mail* (Toronto), 11 September 1956.

28. Dair, "Direction," 71.

29. *Ibid.*, 70.

The article is also quite prophetic in its diagnosis of the problems facing the emergence of Canadian design. Like the imported printing presses its printers used, Canada lacked the industrial basis for independent type cutting and casting. Typographic design was produced in type houses which imported their fonts, and had no tradition of generating their own fonts and type designs. Because the engineering and manufacture of typesetting and printing equipment were also imported, Canadian typographers lacked the skill base which comes from an exporting, global, graphic arts industry. And nowhere was design *per se* considered a full-time occupation, with a distinct title or a position. It remained an anonymous step in the production process, just another trade, to the advertisers, illustrators, and the commercial artists of the time.

Significantly, in his article, Dair looks to the prewar design of Germany, quoting Laszlo Moholy-Nagy (an important instructor at the Bauhaus) and underlining that design is “an abstract art.”³⁰ (at a time when abstract fine art was itself highly uncommon in Canada). Above all, he notes the formal qualities of the printed page: “type is texture, it is tone and mass and shape.”³¹ In his understanding that typography and design possess distinct, formal elements, and by his call for the development of specific expertise in page composition, Dair clearly sets the stage for a modern analysis and professional approach, and provides the basis for a growing self-awareness of graphic design itself.

Dair was singlehandedly creating a common wealth of information for other designers to draw on, differentiating a new profession in his definitions of the formal aspects of design and his long articles on the history of print and typefaces. His educational bent in part owes to the benefits he derived from apprenticing with Louis Blake Duff, editor of the Welland Port Colborne *Evening Tribune* and a man of considerable typographic and printing knowledge. (Duff himself had researched the European tradition of modern typographic design directly in Europe, including meeting with Tschichold.)

The first edition of Dair’s book, *Design with Type*, published in 1952, drew heavily on his teaching notes from classes given at the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts, and the Ecole des Arts Graphiques (where he was credited with “provoking new interest in typography”),³² and in the informal Saturday morning seminars he conducted with Montreal

30. Ibid., 73.

31. Ibid.

32. Gilles Hénault, “Reflections on Seeing Typography ‘62,” *Canadian Art* 20, no. 5 (September – October 1963): 288.

printers and designers.³³ (Dair was to teach, as a sideline in addition to his design practice, for most of his life. After Montreal, he taught at the Ontario College of Art until 1962, and later in Jamaica.)

Dair's obsession with type and history conflicted with the power of the advertising agencies in the 1950s. He left Montreal in 1951, precisely when the small Eveleigh-Dair studio began to transform, largely at Eveleigh's insistence, into an advertising agency itself. Dair's vision of design as distinct from commercial art required a firm move away from the well-established agency system, with its division between sales, concepts, and writing, which the agencies handled, and the creative, which was farmed out, very much as a subsidiary role, to typographers and, especially, to large commercial art studios.

Dair was responding to a significant vacuum of information on type design, and design with type, and his response was both remarkable and encyclopedic. But we have to conclude that it was the very absence of an extensive Canadian tradition, or industry, and a corresponding lack of awareness of other national traditions, which led him to emphasize history over the contemporary. Dair's task was to bridge the gap, to compensate for several centuries of missing information about European printing history; a lack of educational institutions in design, and a general isolation from contemporary international practice. There is little wonder that, while he was well-informed about modern experimentation and adept at it, his relationship to it was nonetheless balanced, and hence contradictory. In counterpoint to Dair's 1947 article, "Direction," in *Canadian Art*, which was indebted to sans-serif type and to Switzerland, the very same self-defined modernism of the emerging International Style in Europe was an influence which seems to have been absorbed by Dair, but subsequently displaced.

The balance of Dair's work in Montreal, the advertising work for E.B. Eddy which made his national reputation, and his first five years in Toronto, including the writing of *Design with Type* (first edition published 1952), all fall outside the time frame of this paper. I have included detail from the immediate postwar years and Dair's writings, however, because his work and his goals at that time place the designer between the prewar modern tradition of Europe, and the even older European printing tradition which dates back to Gutenberg. For reasons of space, important projects such as his Westvaco booklets, articles for *Canadian Printer and Publisher*, and *Canadian Art*, his involvement in the *Typomundus*

33. Carl Dair, "Typography Can be Creative," *Canadian Art* 5, no. 4 (Spring – Summer 1948): 188.

exhibition of 1964, and an assessment of much of his later design work, will have to be examined elsewhere. The five sections which follow concentrate on the extent to which Dair's later career, until his death in 1967, was shaped by a concern for history, and how that shaped the complex modernism of his own work.

Liber Librorum

By 1956, after five years in Toronto and with a large body of writing behind him, Dair had already had a large impact on design in Canada, and his pamphlets, articles and classes had gone a long way towards developing a consciousness among his fellow artists of the distinct status of the designer in the printing process. One workshop on typography, given at the Cooper & Beatty typesetting company, was delivered five times due to the demand. But it was Dair's participation in the *Liber Librorum* exhibition of that year which best exemplifies his position among designers in Canada, and his growing orientation toward printing tradition.

Liber Librorum was a project initiated in Europe, whereby an international collection of 43 printers in fifteen countries were to commission a designer to re-vision the first page of the book of Genesis, to mark the 500th anniversary of Gutenberg's 42-line Bible. The resulting designs, it was agreed, would be made available at no charge for the subsequent

Carl Dair. Art of the Printer, Gatefold Spread with "Liber Librorum" Designs. 1956.

use of any interested publisher. Working with Gaylord Printing of Toronto, Dair used Hermann Zapf's just-released *Palatino* typeface. He used the italic, to echo the late fifteenth-century cursive type of the Italian printer Aldus Manutius, which was itself initially designed to imitate handwriting. Dair's economy of means extended to removing the verse numbers from the flow of the text and placing them unobtrusively in the margins. "Can we revive the Aldine page?" he asked.³⁴

Dair was looking back to the early history of typography for inspiration while simultaneously pushing modern technology forward: he mentioned his difficulty in getting the typesetter to provide letterspacing which was tight enough. (His efforts were rewarded, however. Zapf was to write from the Stempel Type Foundry in Frankfurt that the spacing of his modern serif font was "correct.")³⁵ The National Gallery exhibited the 43 pages of *Liber Librorum* in the summer of 1956, and issued a press release to note Dair's participation.

Later that year, in September, a similar show was organized at the Royal Ontario Museum, comprising the *Liber Librorum* Bible pages, a copy of the Cree bible from Manitoba printed by James Evans (described in Dair's "Direction" article; see above, p. 24), and several pages of incunabula (the earliest printed pages, from the late fifteenth-century) recently acquired by Allan Fleming during his two years in Britain and Europe. The catalogue essay, also by Fleming, acknowledges the origins of movable type in eighth-century China, but credits Gutenberg with making the process efficient and mechanized. (Gutenberg apparently adapted a grape press to this end.) In tracing typographic history up to the present, through to the work of Eric Gill, Beatrice Warde, and Stanley Morison in England, Fleming felt compelled to conclude that design in Canada was "still at the level of England in the mid-nineteenth-century, a period not of bad taste, but of no taste at all."³⁶

Projects like *Liber Librorum* and the ROM exhibit were working to expose contemporary Canadian designers to the European tradition but, importantly for our understanding of Dair's approach, he was at pains to trace that tradition back to the fifteenth century. Dair was neither overwhelmed by the avant-garde work from the 1920s of

34. Anon., "How Would You Design the Bible?" *Canadian Printer and Publisher* November 1955: 40.

35. Ibid.

36. Allan Fleming, "Introduction," in *The Art Of Fine Printing* (Toronto: Royal Ontario Museum, 1956; exhibition catalogue of show, September 11 – October 12, 1956).

German-based designers such as Tschichold and Moholy-Nagy, nor did he focus on their postwar counterparts (and Dair's own contemporaries) such as Max Bill or Josef Müller-Brockmann. Neither were, for example, important developments in magazine and advertising design from New York or Chicago represented.

One wonders what Toronto's typesetters and advertising layout men were to make of this display of ancient wonders. In what way did the traditional book design of the fifteenth-century relate, precisely, to the loud and rapidly growing mass culture of popular magazines, ubiquitous street signs, billboards, and ads? And how were advertising layout artists and typesetters to take the historical knowledge Dair offered, and create the new profession of design out of it? The contrast between the small scale of the printing and publishing industry, relative to the global centers of press and typesetting manufacture, and the stimulating innovations and history that were becoming available to Canadians, suggests one reason why design in Canada would be open to adopting a variety of approaches, both historic and contemporary:

Dair's reception among commercial artists was enthusiastic, and his stature among his colleagues, especially those few artists who identified themselves as 'designers,' was unique and unrivaled in the 1950s. The modern revival and adaptation of traditional methods was an effective means of establishing design on a consciously professional basis in Toronto and throughout Canada.

Holland, and Cartier

In July 1956, Dair took a step which was to thrust him even deeper into the study of history and tradition. Through the intervention of Alan Jarvis and the National Gallery, Dair obtained a \$4,000 grant to study type design at the Joh. Enschedé en Zonen foundry in Haarlem, Holland. The Welland *Evening Tribune* noted that a former delivery-boy had made good, and Dair duly credited the boyhood influence of "snatching 'slugs' of type from the hell-boxes of the Tribune."³⁷ He mentioned that he planned to work towards a typeface of his own, which he was already calling *Cartier*.³⁸ But in fact the Enschedé foundry was established in 1703, before even that of William Caslon, and Dair chose to

37. Anon.. "Type Design and Cutting to be Studied in Europe by Carl Dair," *The Evening Tribune* Welland, ON, 19 May 1956.

38. Anon.. "Carl Dair, Canadian Typographer, to Study for Year in Europe," *Canadian Printer and Publisher* June 1956: 82.

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Carl Dair. First proof of Cartier. 1966.

learn a process, the hand punching of dies, which in 1956 was still being practiced by only five or six highly skilled (and older) men, such as P. H. Radisch with whom he studied. “That’s Nice, But Why?” read the title, somewhat defensively, of Dair’s own 1957 article about this move, in *Bomac’s Visual*, a trade publication.³⁹

Dair defended his choice of laborious and dated hand production by pointing to the lack of any more mechanized and modern foundry methods in Canada. It was as if he was attempting to overcome, literally by hand, the deficit in Canada’s printing and technological infrastructure. In searching for a “lusty, workaday type that reflects the vigour of our country,” he noted the “impact of the tool and the resistance of the material” in shaping the letters, giving him the angularity for which he was looking. There is no doubt that the months he spent chipping away at tiny blocks of steel under magnifying glasses is reflected in the edgy, cut look of *Cartier*. So complex and quirky are some of the compound curves in Dair’s typeface that many of the letters have been extensively simplified and ‘cleaned up’ when finalized for film or electronic typesetting equipment.

39. Carl Dair, “That’s Nice, But Why?” *Bomac’s Visual* (n.d. [1956?]) (Carl Dair Archive, Massey College Library, University of Toronto, in “Writings” box).

Ironically, while several very contemporary faces, including many which Dair knew well (such as Zapf's *Palatino*), were being produced for the still-prevalent metal typesetting machinery, *Cartier* was first made available as a phototype font. *Cartier*, then, is contradictory in many ways: an antiquarian's diversion, based on his study of hand-punching and early italic forms, representing a definite and deliberately conservative step for Dair and for type design in Canada generally, yet arriving too late (in 1967) to be cast on the metal-based typesetting technology which was its inspiration. It has been dismissed as overly Italian in influence, and Dair himself acknowledged its origins in "a theory derived from a study of certain letters used by Anton Miscomini in a page printed in 1482."⁴⁰ Perhaps most tellingly, it has only found limited use, and been dismissed as "overblown."⁴¹

Yet *Cartier*, the product of work over the last ten years of Dair's life, provides an important measure of Dair's role in modern Canadian design. Dair has been called "the starting point of the modern design concept in Canada,"⁴² and it is important to note that the starting point of his writings and practice was the study of the European history and tradition of type. In helping bring a level of self-awareness to the emerging profession of design, he marks the important transition between designers who were primarily illustrators, such as Clair Stewart, Eric Aldwinckle, and Allan Harrison (whose work he acknowledged as influential), and the later generation of designers who emerged after the war (and who in turn acknowledged Dair). "Carl was high profile," noted Sam Smart in 1987, "and whatever way he swung would have a profound effect."⁴³ It was largely Dair's influence which won early respect for the fledgling Society of Typographic Designers of Canada (TDC), and the English typographic influence in the work of its founders (see chapter two, below).

While in Europe, in late 1956 and early 1957, Dair wrote a series of letters to his fellow Toronto designers, particularly Franklyn Smith and Allan Fleming at Cooper and Beatty, occasionally titling them "Epistles to the Torontonians." There is a wealth of historical material and anecdote, and tales of Dair's hunting for incunabula and other printed ephemera in the bookstores of London and Holland (which he noted had been so recently scoured by Fleming). On August 24, 1956 he writes about his meeting with Jan

40. Carl Dair, *First Proof of Cartier, Roman and Italic* (Toronto: Cape and Company, 1966).

41. John Gibson, interview with the author, Toronto, ON, 13 February 1996.

42. Peter Bartl, "Graphic Design in Canada," *Novum gebrauchsgraphik* 11/83 (November 1983): 7.

43. Quoted in Marjorie Harris, "A Salute to the GDC Fellows," *Applied Arts* 2, no. 2 (Summer 1987): 16.

Tschichold, a “magic name,” calling him “the father of Die Neue Typographie.”⁴⁴ As art director of Hoffman-La Roche, Tschichold’s hatred of the Nazis kept him from returning to Germany (he apparently felt that many of the old fascists were still prominent in the postwar Federal Republic). Dair notes that Tschichold’s work had returned to symmetry and traditional styles and forms. The assymetric and angular typography of the interwar avant-garde was seen as no more than “the New Formula,” and Tschichold saw only the spirit of National Socialism – the mass-man, the military machine, the dehumanization and death of the Third Reich period – in the work which had given him an international reputation. (The link between Weimar-period modernism and Naziism seems a strange one. As Dair notes in this letter, other key designers of the period who also suffered Nazi persecution, such as Kurt Schwitters, more accurately maintained that the modern experiments in type of the 1920s were anti-Nazi: they were suppressed by the Third Reich.)

In all, Dair spent over four hours with Tschichold, but concluded at the end of the interview that “the new typography is an unfinished work. Tschichold will not finish it!” While Dair might not have agreed with the elder typographer’s drastic assessment of the dire political content inherent in Die Neue Typographie, the abandonment of a recognizably modern style in design must have echoed Dair’s own thinking, having chosen to learn historic type technologies, focus on the preservation of historic standards and connoisseurship, and hunt down five-hundred-year-old printed pages, all while at the peak of his influence as a designer and educator. Tschichold was well known for writing about and teaching the essentials of design, and the parallel with his own approach must have struck Dair. Despite having been strongly influenced by the typographic revolution of the 1920s in Germany, it is clear that Dair had also resolved not to complete the “unfinished project” of the prewar modernist design experiment. His modernism was to take a different direction.

Type for Today and the Guild of Hand Printers

On his return from Europe, and a year after the ROM exhibition of *Liber Librorum* and Fleming’s incunabula, Dair assembled another exhibition in the same museum, of his own treasured pages of incunabula scoured from the bookstores and markets of Europe. A panel, entitled “Type for Today,” was organized on September 16, 1957 to launch the

44. Carl Dair, “Epistles to the Torontonians, Chapter 2,” (unpublished letter, 24 August 1956, Carl Dair Archive, Massey College Library, University of Toronto, in “Letters” box, “Letters from Europe” file).

TDC's second year, featuring designers Carl Dair, Paul Arthur, and Leslie (Sam) Smart, Cooper & Beatty President Jack Trevett, and chairman Frank Davies. The increasing self-definition of design was noted in a review by Pearl McCarthy, who wondered if the division of labor didn't represent the "danger the designer will become technically incapable and the workman intellectually irresponsible."⁴⁵

McCarthy needn't have worried, at least on the last point: the workmen of the Society were bent on establishing their professional credentials and links to the past, and were at pains to emphasize quality over any revolutionary change. The first item of discussion for the panel was to ask how Canada compared intellectually with the international design industry. The answer varied from Paul Arthur's terse "not well" to Sam Smart's discussion of the lack of an apprentice system in Canada.⁴⁶ In a somewhat ironic reference to the type of yesterday, all of the designers confessed to following the current fad for Victorian decorative typefaces and old-fashioned engravings and illustrations.

Two of Carl Dair's more important interventions at this event suggested the influence of his European trip. He argued that designers should work to regain the skill of type cutting, as they had in the first centuries of book publishing, when each printshop was distinguished by the printer's unique typeface; and he noted that "the functional approach to typography is dying," a reference to the logical, machine-age typography of Europe, and its conception of the design process as objectively driven by a given communication challenge, not by the subjective dictates of personal taste and style.

Again, it is evident that Dair gave far greater emphasis at this time to the past, and the preservation of classical standards, than he did to the development of modern or groundbreaking experimentation. The panel discussion was accompanied by a lecture, given by Dair on hand punching type, a display of Dair's own dies, and his film of Radisch's last day on the job at Enschedé. Dair's dogged commitment to *tradition* as the basis of "Type for Today" seemed bent on establishing design as a privately-held guild, rather than as a critical and challenging part of mass communications.

Despite his role in pushing the TDC forward, he did not play a role in its founding (it was begun while he was in Holland, in 1956). Perhaps more tellingly, he did play a direct role in the Guild of Hand Printers, which was founded in his living room in

45. McCarthy, "Teething Period of Printing."

46. Anon., "We Need Typographic Designers," 70.

September, 1959. Dair is attributed with working to “refute the attitudes of an established old guard,”⁴⁷ but the preservation of handset typography and private, small printing presses marks the Guild as the preserve of private artistic expression, a “hardy breed of after-hours ink daubers.”⁴⁸ Nine issues of the Guild’s only publication, *Wrongfount*, were assembled (published is too precise a term) between 1960 and 1979, some in bound volumes, some collated loosely into envelopes, all comprised of limited-edition pages pulled by hand on the variety of letterpresses remaining in private hands. The sixth edition, *Wrongfount 6*, was fittingly a tribute to Dair, issued in 1968 shortly after his death.

Will Rueter joined the Guild in 1961, and was one of the professionals in a mixed group which included many amateurs, writers, librarians, and other fans of printing. Rueter has noted that “*Wrongfount* allowed serious professionals by day to experiment with type after hours.”⁴⁹ As such, and despite some remarkable and unusual pieces, particularly by Dair, Rueter and Peter Dorn, the highly varied level of skill and differing intent of the contributors meant the Guild and *Wrongfount* never served as an important or influential source of visual experimentation among applied artists. Questions of professionalism and self-definition within graphic design would not finally be determined by detailed work with aging technology, but by a determined search for the relationship of tradition to the modern in mass culture itself.

“The Dean of Canadian Typographers”

The emphasis upon traditional standards was not without its rewards. In early 1960, Dair took the Silver (second prize) medal at the prestigious Internationale Buchkunst-Austellung, an event which annually took over the city of Leipzig, and the TDC was sent into a “general jubilee mood”⁵⁰ as Sam Smart took the bronze. Dair set “A Cry from an Indian Wife,” a poem by Pauline Johnson, using a font from Holland, and Smart used a turn of the century font and illustrations by Laurretta Rix to display Robert Service’s famous poem “The Shooting of Dan McGrew.” For Canadian designers to claim two of the top prizes was confirmation that professional standards were on an international level.

47. Roger Burford Mason, “Wrongfount at the Right Time,” *Applied Arts Magazine* 10, no. 1 (April – May 1995): 40.

48. John Gibson, “Comments by Carl Dair on the State of the Then Society of Typographic Designers of Canada” (Massey College Library’s title)(unpublished notes, 1967, Carl Dair Archive, Massey College Library, University of Toronto, in “Biography” box, “TDC” file).

49. Mason, “Wrongfount.”

50. Pearl McCarthy, “Toronto Typographers Honored,” *Globe and Mail Toronto*, 2 February 1960.

Carl Dair. *A Cry From an Indian Wife*. 1959.

Leslie (Sam) Smart. *The Shooting of Dan McGrew*. 1959.

However, in the simplicity and the sparsity of the works, one can see the process of professionalization as a reduction, paring away and eliminating the excess, until all that remained was the precision of type, in its spacing, texture, and layout. There is nothing obviously experimental about the style of either folio, only a modern simplicity:

By 1962, Dair was being called the “dean of Canadian typographers,”⁵¹ reflecting the emphasis he placed upon type, and the importance of typographic knowledge in the definition of design as a separate field. He had briefly been a principal in an advertising agency, Goodis Goldberg Dair Limited, where he added typographic sophistication to, among other projects, the annual reports of the Rio Tinto Zinc Company. He was also typographic consultant to the printing firm of Cape and Company, aiding them with academic publishing projects. In January 1963, Dair accepted the Royal Canadian Academy medal in a ceremony at the Art Gallery of Toronto.

51. In an editorial comment appended to Carl Dair, “Design for a Budget,” *Quill and Quire* 28, no. 1 January – February 1962: 24.

One remarkable episode in Dair's later career involved the two years between 1963 and 1965, spent at the Jamaica School of Arts and Crafts, teaching a course in design which Dair had proposed and built up from scratch. He covered "Gestalt psychology and optics, basic design elements, symbols, letter forms, problem solving, the art of seeing (pattern, texture, and detail explored by photographic assignments), vision in motion, techniques of reproduction"⁵² – in short many of the same elements of design which his writings and lectures of the 1940s and '50s had covered in such detail. Dair also had to design and equip the schoolroom, including a photography darkroom and a print shop, and drew on contacts in the Canadian design industry for support. In his own words, Dair was performing "missionary work."⁵³

In a letter to Gerry Moses, Dair suggested that Jamaica was proceeding from a pre-literate culture straight to television, without stopping to develop a written culture, let alone an understanding of the possibilities of design. Accurate or not, this McLuhanesque assessment of a third world nation in the grip of the global village comes close to suggesting the depths and complexity of Dair's attitude to design. Through his teaching, writing, and proselytizing, he had evolved from a very detailed analysis of the formal elements of printing, through to a mature understanding of the role of typographic design and tradition in the context of modern society.

The urge to work internationally no doubt was partly prompted by his long-held Communist Party politics (although it seems he was never a full member of the Party). But his move to Jamaica is a logical development out beyond the details of the printed page to include its wider social and political potential. It is somewhat ironic, therefore, that it was rising post-colonial and nationalist anger among Jamaicans (which Dair would have been sympathetic towards in any event) which led to his contract going unrenewed after two years.

"Typographic Design and the New Technology"

The final night of Carl Dair's life was spent, appropriately, lecturing. A conference at the Composing Room in New York led to Dair speaking on "Typographic Design and the New Technology," on September 22, 1967. His theme was the problem which had pre-

52. Carl Dair, "Proposals for the Graphic Design Course," (unpublished notes, 1 October 1963, Carl Dair Archive, Massey College Library, University of Toronto, in "Biography" box.

53. Ibid.

occupied him his entire career, “the heritage of the graphic arts in the face of the new technology,” a counterposing of tradition standing “in the face” of changes.⁵⁴ He began by noting that typography was born out of the impact of metal as a material on handwritten letterforms, and that even with a computer drive to accelerate the work of the compositor, typography was still based on type founding. With the development of offset printing (as opposed to metal-based letterpress), the layout of the page could break from the strict “rectangular prison of metal,” and with film typesetting, the most flexible medium of all, light, could be used to scale type up and down infinitely; and achieve absolute control over spacing (even to the point of overlapping through double exposure). And Dair did note the coming potential of cathode ray-based technology and electronic typesetting.

But despite all of these acknowledged advances, Dair still looked for a standardized typography; which would make the printed word truly invisible, subliminal. And rather than celebrate the stylistic and experimental potential of these technologies, he closed his talk with the assurance that “perfection and high standards” were on the horizon for the designer who could best exploit them. Small wonder that an obituary and review of the lecture found Dair’s doubts and fears as pronounced as his qualified optimism, and his lecture “as blunt and reasoned as Machiavelli’s.”⁵⁵ The intervention of the individual, steeped in history and sensitive to tradition, was the basis by which Dair felt design would come to be seen as a modern art form. Dair’s modernism, then, offered “a reasoned response to Twentieth-century technology,”⁵⁶ but not an uncritical celebration or seemingly functional exploration of it.

We have traced Dair’s understanding of the modern tradition as it developed in Europe, and his complex and well-researched approach to typographic tradition. He worked through, and then beyond, the modern prescriptions and formulae (particularly asymmetrical, sans serif typography) of *Die Neue Typographie*. But his work does not represent a turning *away* from modernism. He merely continued moving outward toward a more inclusive and historically-informed approach to the modern, and his work suggests a definition for modernism far beyond the singular vision of prewar Germany, or any

54. Carl Dair, “Paul A. Bennett Memorial Lecture,” (unpublished notes, 22 September 1967, Dair Archive, in “Writings” box, “Paul A. Bennett Memorial Lecture” file).

55. Eugene Ettenberg, “The Heritage of Carl Dair,” *Inland Printer* January 1968.

56. Doug Poff, “Carl Dair and Cartier Type,” (unpublished essay, March 1976, Allan Fleming Archive, Massey College Library, University of Toronto, Box 5, file 7).

other narrow, final, formal definition. His tireless work in establishing and building professional organizations, his writings and teachings, the central importance his opinions and work held for the growing design profession, even his personal commitment to developing design (albeit in an imported, international form) in Jamaica, show the work of a man wrestling with visual problems in a resolutely conscious, modern fashion. Dair's work demands that the definition of modernism in design expand to encompass the living, vital application of traditional sources and historical reference.⁵⁷

In the mid-60s, Dair wrote to Marsh Jeanneret at the University of Toronto Press, hoping for the position of designer there. Instead, in 1967 the job went to the man who had read Dair's *Type Talks* articles as a teenager, who shared his interest in antique type, and who benefited greatly from Dair's ability to communicate the history of printing to designers in the present. In many ways Allan Fleming, and a number of other Canadian designers, represented a correction to Dair's historicism (as we shall see in chapter four). However, before approaching the synthesis of stylistic revolution and tradition that arose in Canada, it will be important to look specifically at the influence in Canada of two national traditions, those of Britain and Germany.

57. This is, of course, the central basis on which a 'postmodern style' in the arts was to be defined. For more on postmodernism as an extension of the modern, see below, p. 129 ff.

The British Typographic Tradition

CHAPTER TWO: A DEFINING MOMENT

We saw a need for an objective view of the basis of a new art form, namely typography. There isn't another art form that is nearly as subliminal as ours.

—Frank Newfeld⁵⁸

Throughout the 1950s, a European design tradition began to assert itself in Toronto, one based in the long-established book publishing industry of Britain. In looking at four men, emigrés trained in that industry, it is immediately apparent that they all shared a background as typesetters, a technical skill which in Britain was passed on through a combination of technical college training and a formal apprenticeship system. The emergence of design as a separate profession arose as designers claimed creative control over the look of the page, and as they began to organize and educate themselves about the potential of type as a tool for the separate process of design. In large part, it is this consciousness of the powerful, and distinct visual language of design which marks their work as important and modern.

However, in looking at the careers of Leslie (Sam) Smart, John Gibson, Frank Davies, and Frank Newfeld, we will also be looking at one of the defining moments of Canadian design history, the founding of the Society of Typographic Designers of Canada in 1956, and it will be argued that the foundation of a separate typographic *design* society was a crucial step in its emergence as a profession. Establishing the social basis for the self-

58. Frank Newfeld, interview with author, Oakville, ON, 20 November 1995.

definition of design, marked the beginning of modernism in Canadian design as much as did the specific formal innovations of the professionals who increasingly called themselves designers.

Leslie (Sam) Smart

The postwar economic depression in England was the principal motivation behind Smart's emigration to Canada, in 1954. Born in 1921, his training at the Portsmouth College of Art and his teaching experience there soon landed him work at the MonoLino typesetting company. His evenings were spent teaching art at Ryerson College. He recalls that at the time he felt himself on a "missionary expedition,"⁵⁹ looking to apply the awareness of design and typographic tradition which he had acquired. By 1956 he had established his name as a freelancer in addition to his full-time employment at MonoLino, and he incorporated his own business, Leslie Smart and Associates, ten years later.

He quickly focussed on one of the weaker aspects of Canadian printing and design, its book design. The Manchester *Guardian* wrote, the year Smart arrived in Canada, that Canadian book design was "in dullness, second only to the books of the Soviet Union"⁶⁰ (low praise indeed at the time). Several book designs were commissioned from Smart by William Toye at Oxford University Press, who frequently drew on freelance design talent for book production. Smart had rejected work in advertising agencies, preferring to stay closer to the basic element of design practice in working as a typesetter. Above all, he aimed to simplify the typography and layout of books. He later stated his objective at the time was a "Scandinavian" simplicity, evident in interior design and furniture from countries such as Sweden and Denmark. He has also said that the simplicity of Scandinavian style is "now a bloody bore. But it was a good discipline to go through – simplifying everything."⁶¹

That simplicity and typographic elegance can be seen in Smart's 1958 design for *The Arts in Canada*. The dust-jacket uses only type, set at right angles and run fairly evenly across the available space. There is no illustration, and none of the strictly hierarchical arrangement (title, then subtitle above, and author below), or centered type which a pure-

59. Leslie 'Sam' Smart, interview with the author, Toronto, ON, 25 January 1996. Subsequent unattributed quotes and much of the biographical detail in this section are from this interview.

60. Quoted in Harris, "Salute to the GDC Fellows," 16.

61. Ibid., 18.

Leslie (Sam) Smart. The Arts in Canada. 1958.

ly traditional solution would dictate. Using only a traditional serif typeface, Smart has suggested the diversity and liveliness of the various art forms covered in the book, through the simplest of formal means: an 'overall' composition; right-angled type; type grouped in blocks of relatively equal scale; and subdued color.

Smart remembers Toronto as a very "bleak place" in the mid 1950s, and that his career just evolved naturally, without conscious direction. Yet he was obviously conscious of building something new, and he worked deliberately to translate his experience into the

Canadian context. By the late 1950s, Smart was writing a column for *Canadian Printer and Publisher*, called “Design Workshop,” and one notable article included an analysis of Carl Dair’s own stationery.⁶² Smart noted that the style of a design must always reflect the product or service, and demanded that designers consider the following points in their work: whether anything in a design could be safely omitted; the appropriateness of a given paper stock and color choice; the conscious study and manipulation of type as it aligned itself into blocks; and whether the type blocks, as abstract elements, could be further simplified into a single unit or shape. These are exactly the ideals we see in his *Arts in Canada* cover.

Because of the largely self-congratulatory and promotional nature of trade shows such as the Toronto Art Directors Club annual awards show, the critique of design was something new, and criticisms of Smart’s columns were not always welcomed. However, as a specific workshop in the formal analysis and awareness of the concrete workings of design, Smart was clearly working to raise the self-awareness of the typical typesetter, layout artist, or art director, encouraging them to follow a logic, the logic of the designer, rather than copy previous styles and solutions.

In 1962, Dair returned the favor, in an article in *Quill and Quire*, “Design for a Budget.”⁶³ Type alone was seen as the basis of a new aesthetic, and he praised Smart’s “skilful restraint” amid the “noisy clamor of existing covers.” The logic of design, its ability to serve an end, was seen as “practical,” primarily in its ability not to interfere with the message. While a modern logic was aimed at, Dair still attributed the most important part of the process to individual skill, praising Smart’s eye for size and spacing.

A similar idea, the necessity of personal restraint complementing the objective functional requirement in modern design, was expressed in a brief 1975 biography and article on Smart. Design must “convey the messages of others,” but its strength and its aesthetic were the result of the “touch of the stylist.”⁶⁴ The modern ideal remained a consciously simplified style or taste, rather than a rigorously applied exploration of reduced formal means themselves. “Good taste is a practical thing, not a spiritual one,” he was later to conclude. “If it works, you can read it and it looks pleasing.”⁶⁵ Smart’s work exemplifies the practical application of traditional knowledge in classically modern ways.

62. Leslie [Sam] Smart, “Design Workshop,” *Canadian Printer and Publisher* (February 1961): 58.

63. Carl Dair, “Design for a Budget,” 24.

64. Anon., “Sam Smart,” *IDEA* (1975, special issue on Canadian graphic design): 115.

65. Harris, “Salute to the GDC Fellows,” 18.

John Gibson

The importance of typography in establishing design in Canada was further emphasized by the career of John Gibson. Born in 1928, he studied at the London School of Printing, and taught there after graduation. While typography was the focus of his training, the fundamentals of printing, paper, and presses were also important. He served a seven-year apprenticeship as a hand compositor, and also acquired knowledge of photo composition just as it was becoming widely available. He arrived in Toronto in 1952, first moving to Calgary (which he concluded at the time could not be too far: it was only “three inches away from Toronto” on the map)⁶⁶ and came back to Toronto by 1953. He established a separate design department at Howarth and Smith, which (with MonoLino and Cooper & Beatty) was one of the three largest typesetting firms in the city. By 1956, Cooper & Beatty hired him to establish its new office in Montreal.

Gibson notes that the most important creative work available to designers, as they expanded their professional reach as the employees of typesetting firms, was self-promotional material which presented no conflict of interest with the design work of the company’s own clients. Some of his work in Montreal involved very precise specification and design of type for CN, which after 1960 was fully engaged with the massive corporate redesign undertaken in support of its new symbol (see p. 97 below). His role with Cooper & Beatty there, and in Toronto after his return in 1964, was less direct composition of design by hand or machine, than art direction and the interpretation and specification of client’s requirements.

Gibson found time to direct *Typography 64*, the Typographic Designers’ exhibition, and to organize its catalogue. This project was turned over to him by society president Gerry Moses (who was himself immersed in the preparations for *Typomundus 20*, which came to Toronto in that year). Gibson remembers that the design of the catalogue was done by Tony Mann, although in the catalogue itself it is credited to Gerhard Doerrié. Gibson’s hand, however, was uncredited, and his influence was exerted from the background. Indeed, much of Gibson’s design work in this period was conducted in the same way as the running of that exhibition: with the designer as the organizing influence, apply-

66. John Gibson, interview with the author, Toronto, ON, 13 February 1996. Subsequent unattributed quotes and much of the biographical detail in this section are from this interview.

ing his knowledge of typography to various Cooper & Beatty projects (he remained there until 1969), without taking the design credit himself.

Yet Gibson's influence on the profession was significant enough that he was twice elected national president of the TDC, both during times of transition: in 1967, just prior to the name being changed to the Society of Graphic Designers of Canada (GDC), and 1976–78, immediately following the Society's reorganization and national incorporation.

The National Archives has at least one of his works from the 1950s (although it rests among the papers of Charles Goldhamer⁶⁷ and has not been identified for collection with the documentary art section), the 1957 re-design of the letterhead of Central Technical High School. (Goldhamer was himself a 1926 graduate of the Ontario College of Art and taught commercial art at Central Tech.) Gibson's redesign uses sans-serif typography in an asymmetrical layout, and includes a very simple logo, which he designed for the school, which is subtly blind embossed at the top and to one side. (A blind emboss is type or any shape which has been impressed into the paper without ink, leaving only a raised surface and apparent only from the way it catches the light, or by touch.) The archive also contains the school's previous letterhead, and its very traditional, centered layout and busy, dark school crest make for an instructive contrast with Gibson's work.

A similarly clear job of simplifying and strengthening an existing design came with the June, 1961 issue of *The Printing Review*, redesigned by Gibson while working for Cooper & Beatty in Montreal. The cover is a model of sparsity, and it makes very evident the simple three-column grid and large top margin around which Gibson has structured the entire publication. The 'horizon line,' on which the cover masthead sits, runs throughout the entire book, as a single, visual organizing device. The space between columns, the use of larger than average leading (the vertical space from line to line in the body copy), the clear and objective photography, and the white space built into each page layout give the design a very open, readable feel well suited to an informational publication but much different from the heavy, industrial style of most trade publications.

Tellingly, Gibson is credited as "Typographic Design Director," rather than the more common title on magazines of Art Director. The design is clearly and successfully driven by type and spacing alone, and dispenses with stylish illustrations and flourishes (elements more closely associated with the function of advertising art director, and which

67. See the Charles Goldhamer Papers, National Archives of Canada, MG30 D330, Vol. 1.

John Gibson. The Printing Review. June 1961, Cover and Interior Spread. 1961.

The Printing Review / JUNE 1961

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John Gibson. The Printing Review.
June 1961. Table of Contents.
1961.

dominate the advertising in *The Printing Review*). The style also approaches, but does not adopt, the sparse look of Ernst Roth's comparable publication, *Alcan News*, of the previous year (see below, p. 70). With its extremely tight spacing, sans-serif fonts, minimal differences between body type and heads, and its generally reduced and logical solutions, Roth's work makes for, again, an instructive contrast with Gibson's approach, which is clean and spare but more firmly rooted in elements of traditional typographic practice, using looser spacing, serif typefaces, and relatively large heads.

In the catalogue produced for a 1990 exhibition celebrating the TDC founders, Gibson gathered a selection of his own designs, but the earliest is dated 1971.⁶⁸ In the 1950s and '60s, as the employee of a typesetting firm which still frequently provided design services, pursuing clients on a freelance basis represented a potential conflict of interest.

68. Tüti Telmet, ed., *The Society of Typographic [sic] Designers of Canada* (Toronto: Society of Graphic Designers of Canada, 1990).

Trade publications such as *The Printing Review* represented a unique and infrequent opportunity to step out of the shadow of his employers. Thus, although he did not produce a large body of work in the 1950s or '60s which can be credited to him as sole designer, it is indicative of the growing importance of typography and the changing status of the designer that Gibson could help shape the look of Canadian design both by intervention through the professional societies, the TDC and later the GDC, and through his influence over typography as an uncredited part of the Cooper & Beatty typesetting firm.

Frank Davies

Frank Davies was the first of the TDC founders to arrive in Canada, but unlike Smart and Gibson, had not apprenticed as a typesetter. Born 1923, in Nottingham, England, and trained at the Nottingham College of Art, he had a wider background, which included theatre design and art history. His first work in London was as an exhibit designer for the Royal Navy, for an exhibition on radar which toured Canada. Later, in London, he worked for advertising agencies as a junior and then senior designer, and art directed *Tempo*, a music magazine, and various publications for the Royal Opera House.

Davies emigrated to Montreal in 1951, drawing on contacts he had made at the National Film Board during his earlier tour. His first work in Montreal was with the Herald Press (a division of the *Montreal Herald*). He moved to Toronto a year later to work with Clair Stewart, and later Ted Morrison, at Rolph Clark Stone. (These two were later to found Stewart and Morrison in 1960.) By 1954, Davies became art director of *Liberty* magazine (a sister publication to *Saturday Night*), for the Consolidated Press under Jack Kent Cooke.

Frank Newfeld remembers Davies being “aghast at what he was being forced to do by Jack Kent Cooke,”⁶⁹ yet the steady stream of writers, artists, illustrators, and other Toronto intellectuals parading through the *Liberty* and *Saturday Night* offices provided him with numerous contacts, including Sam Smart and Frank Newfeld (who received his first work in Canada from Davies). Davies recalls that he had only had lunch with Smart a few times before talk of a type design society began.⁷⁰ Smart was evidently encouraged by reading an article, by Davies, which appeared in the newsletter of the British-based Society of Industrial Designers. Their old British connections were paying dividends in Canada.

69. Newfeld interview.

70. Frank Davies, interview with the author, Toronto, ON, 12 February 1996. Subsequent unattributed quotes and much of the biographical detail in this section are from this interview.

Eventually Davies became “restless” at Consolidated, and applied for the position as head of design for the line of industrial and trade publications at McLean Hunter, moving there in 1956. In all, there were 47 monthly publications, including *Canadian Printer and Publisher*, and Davies notes that each was designed to a unique, and therefore time-consuming, format. His modern, systematic approach led him to standardize columns of type, making each magazine three columns at thirteen picas each, with a single pica gutter between them (a pica is the standard type measurement, equal to twelve points, or approximately one-sixth of an inch), and he further standardized the sizes and styles of photographs and illustrations. The approach was “all very logical,” he admits, and led to remarkable increases in productivity at McLean Hunter.

Most important, it shows the way in which the modern impulse in design did not simply encompass a purely stylistic uniformity. International magazines, Davies avers, were not a large influence in his work, and he did not consciously go looking for what he refers to as “big style.” The modern response to the problem of mass magazine design could begin from the simple rationalization of production and design, without concentrating on specific visual solutions. “Design is organization,” Davies reminds us.

Yet the question of style, of a visibly modern look, was pressing in on Canadian designers willing or not. The Manchester *Guardian* article, which unflatteringly compared Canadian book design to that of the Soviet Union (see p. 40 above), caused “a bit of a stink,” Davies remembers, and it was largely this prodding – and the presence of a Soviet book design exhibition in Toronto – that led the four TDC founders to organize their highly successful inaugural meeting at the Arts and Letters Club in 1956. Although their initial idea was to limit themselves to the modest goal of a single exhibition of book design, by the time Davies organized the first Typography exhibition for the TDC, in 1958, the project had grown to include many other facets of design as well.

One interesting design of Davies’s is an invitation done for the TDC in 1959. It was for a meeting which was to include a “talk on matters sandbergian,” and the invitation was done in homage to Willem Sandberg, an Amsterdam museum director and experimental designer. His *experimenta typographica*, done while Sandberg worked for the Dutch resistance during the war, had become a strong influence in the postwar period. Davies borrows much of its formal inventiveness here, including strong primary colors, extreme shifts in scale, an aggressive, asymmetrical layout, lowercase type, and rough, ‘battered’ edges to the enlarged, geometrically reduced letterforms.

Frank Davies.
 Typographic Designers
 of Canada Meeting
 Invitation. "talks on
 matters sandbergian."
 1959.

The contradictory, critical, even reserved, response of designers in Canada to the most extreme forms of international modernism in design can be read clearly here. Davies makes knowledgeable use of 'sandbergian' innovations in a hand-printed invitation, a format as close to personal work (or fine art) as designers are likely to find. Yet there is little or no trace of these influences in any of his other work. Specifically 'modern' design styles were well known and understood in Canada, but they were not necessarily widely employed. When they were used, it was often in a context where the audience was primarily other designers (as with this work of Davies's, or Allan Fleming's many self-promotional pieces for Cooper & Beatty).

Davies remained with McLean Hunter until 1960. He taught at the Ontario College of Art, beginning with substitute teaching for Carl Dair when Dair could not make classes. He was Creative Director for the Cape and Co., as well as sharing office space with the printer at their Spadina Avenue offices when he founded his own company: the Design Unit, in 1962. Together with Carl Dair, Davies produced significant work with Cape and Co. for several new universities at this time, including York, Brock, Laurentian, and Trent. Each school was assigned a different modern typeface (*Palatino* for York, *Optima* for Trent, and so on) as part of their ground-up architectural, signage, and graphic identity programs.

This experience with new architectural development was to serve Davies well. After a long and productive association with Clairtone (manufacturers of modern audio equipment), and the redesign of the Bowering retail chain, his later career was to turn to the design of identities, signage, and related material for corporate real estate, beginning with the development of groundbreaking marketing concepts for the Sherway Gardens shopping mall. Throughout all of his work, we see the notion of modernism in design as a rationalizing of production and organization as much as the understanding and application of formal innovations.

Frank Newfeld

One of the most broadly talented of Canadian designers, Frank Newfeld could have built an entire career around book design, illustration, or teaching, but instead made important contributions in all three areas. Although frequently credited with changing the face of Canadian book publishing, he cites numerous Canadian influences in his own work, especially that of Jack Birdsall and Les Trevor, who were senior designer and art director, respectively, at Rous and Mann Printers.

Born in the Czech Republic in 1928, Newfeld spent only a short time at the Brighton College of Art, Sussex, England, and divided his time among illustration, painting and design. Upon arriving in Canada in 1954, he continued to produce paintings, but decided he was too “scared”⁷¹ to show his work. He developed a preference for illustration and the design process itself, which involve analyzing and fashioning a response to a specific problem rather than self-authorship.

His style of illustration was more expressive and less realistic than the most popular

71. Newfeld interview. Subsequent unattributed quotes and much of the biographical detail in this section are from this interview.

Frank Newfeld. Cover Illustration for *The Princess of Tomboso*. 1961.

illustrators of the day, including James Hill and Oscar Cahén. Nonetheless, Newfeld's very first commissioned illustration in Canada attracted attention. The December, 1954 issue of *Farmers* magazine featured a expressionistically-rendered Newfeld nativity scene, and despite the disapproval of Newfeld's approach by the magazine's own publisher, it won the Art Directors Club award for best black and white illustration of that year. He also pioneered a modern scratchboard style (and continues to use it today), which gives his work a detail and complexity that is unmistakable. It was Newfeld's speed, however, that earned him a position illustrating at *Maclean's* magazine. Assignments would arrive in the early afternoon one day a week, and by six p.m. that day his illustrations for the various stories had to be completed and ready to go on the press.

Newfeld established his own studio in 1954, on Spadina Avenue in Toronto. Near Grossman's art supply store, the studio is remembered as a local hangout for Michael Snow, Graham Coughtry, and other figures working in both fine and commercial art. He also became close with British designers, including Sam Smart, Frank Davies, and John

Gibson, and it was here that some of the seeds were planted for the formation of a society for typographers and designers.

He had an early desire to design books, and he recalls that by the late 1950s, illustration had shrunk to become approximately one quarter of his workload. He made contact with Nelson Publishing, through its president and family friend, Colonel Neary, who had habituated his mother's poker parlor in England (a legal activity at the time). Book publishers rarely had art directors or designers on staff (the exception being William Toye, art director at Oxford University Press), and this enabled Newfeld to find significant freelance work. He worked for Gage Publishers, for example, one of the handful of Toronto's book publishers willing to invest in design. The most important of his assignments, however, started in 1956 when he began to design for McClelland and Stewart. He recalls that in 1957, he designed fewer than ten books altogether, but that a decade later, at McClelland and Stewart, he was responsible for up to 200 books annually.

Social and professional contacts among the small community of designers were frequent and often helpful in building careers. When a conflict of interest prevented Allan Fleming from designing a logo and identity for the Royal Ontario Museum, he handed it to Newfeld, who admitted that he had never tackled such an assignment. (Fleming responded by simply advising him not to tell the client.) Newfeld went on to design numerous catalogues and other publications for the museum, the first of which, *Masks, The Many Faces of Man* won an award in the twelfth annual Art Directors Club of Toronto exhibition, in 1960. It featured the very elegant repetition of a single, carved, native mask balanced by very simple and restrained typography.

A trademark of his rapidly developing skill at book design involved the use of extensive 'prelims,' where several pages at the beginning of a book would be devoted to a careful and unique design treatment, like a "curtain raiser," as he has referred to it. The design of books, perhaps even more than single-page designs, involves the element of time, setting a rhythm and a speed which is appropriate to the content. Newfeld was determined that books not be overdesigned. In his essay for the 1960 catalogue, *Typography 60*, he notes the importance of the text setting in developing the 'feel' and readability of a book.

Too often the illustration of the book jacket was the only real application of design to a publication. As an illustrator himself, Newfeld understood the importance of clearly distinguishing the different visual elements of the book and its dust jacket, allowing the typography itself to stand as a significant, measured statement in addition to the illustra-

Frank Neufeld. *Typography 59*, Cover and Interior page. 1959.

tions, size, color, paper stock, and so on. He saw that his main challenge at the time was to strip away ornament and clutter, and where illustrations were used he carefully integrated them so as not to compete with the type. By concentrating on the setting of text, its smooth flow across the page, and proper spacing, Newfeld developed a subtle but very effective and readable design style, an art of restraint and intelligence.

The design of the *Typography 59* catalogue is an excellent example of the control and logic which went into Newfeld's designs. The overall pattern on the cover is the abstract imprint of the 'honeycomb' grid used while printing on a letterpress. It is both an abstract pattern (Newfeld often used patterns of metal typographic ornaments in his work) and an inside reference, a symbol of the printing process itself. The only other mark on the cover is a simple logo, designed by Carl Dair for the TDC, which features three interlocking capital 'T's' in a bold, sans-serif. There is no other cover type. Only upon opening the book does it become evident that Newfeld has laid it out in a horizontal, 'landscape' format. The eye flows across the width of the pages, as if past works on display on a gallery wall (which, because this is the catalogue of an exhibition, is how they first would have been seen). Through the simplest of formal and abstract elements, the designer could powerfully signify typography, printing technology, and the exhibition itself.

In 1960 he designed the Art Director's Club of Toronto Annual, its 12th, for which he again specified an unusual format, this time larger and square, approximately the dimensions of a vinyl record jacket. The Art Directors annual was a very big show; he suggested, and required the greater room which his design allowed. It also allowed more play with graphics and white space, and Newfeld took full advantage of this. Large characters, such as the numeral '12,' set the size of a full page, and the bold use of solid color and reverses mark a very aggressive use of the means at his disposal. Newfeld's strong sense of drama and scale was at work too. He even specified a foil cover, designed to grab attention and generate a sense of importance and interest. The look of the 1960 annual could not have been more different from previous annuals, which were all 8 1/2 x 11 inches. It was most notably different from its immediate predecessor, the stark and rather dull 1959 edition designed by Allan Fleming. This edition had clumsily shoehorned the reproductions into an arbitrary grid, which was actually printed on each page in a distracting yellow.

1960 seems to have marked more than just the start of a new decade. The layout of Newfeld's annual was just a very visible symbol of the huge watershed in design of this immediate period. The examples of design from the annual itself show an explosion in the

Frank Neufeld. The Spice Box of Earth. 1961.

manipulation of extreme scale and contrast in type, the control of dramatically cropped photography, a restrained use of simple, graphic line illustrations and a bold use of color and shape. The dominance of Fleming's work, so notable in Canadian and international shows and annuals between 1957 – 59, had given way to the presence of a much larger

number of designers, who understood how to wring the maximum impact out of design.

In a subtler key, *The Spice Box of Earth* (1961) was part of a series of small publications for which Newfeld argued, convincing Jack McClelland of McClelland and Stewart to produce a limited number of books using expensive paper (sometimes donated from manufacturers), and allowing the designer a freer hand in the use of unusual layout and illustrations. *The Spice Box of Earth* is a unique example of Newfeld's concept of the book as a single, coherent performance, through the internal rhythms of its illustrations (done by Newfeld himself), the flow of white space around the text, the use of a second color throughout, and the occasional insertion of simple, decorative, abstract patterning. The die-cut, black dust jacket allows a high-contrast photograph of the face of Leonard Cohen to stare hypnotically out at the reader below the book's title, which is printed in gold in an elegant and personal calligraphic script. It was a lavish and sophisticated production.

In 1963, McClelland and Stewart took the then-unique step of buying Newfeld out, purchasing his studio and making him their in-house art director. It was a turning point in Canadian book publishing, marking a tangible and permanent commitment to design on the part of a major publisher. Newfeld remained there until 1970, and became company vice-president, leaving only when his administrative duties eclipsed his responsibility for design.

Newfeld also produced notable catalogues at this time for the Art Gallery of Ontario, such as the catalogue *Picasso and Man* in 1964, for Jean Sutherland Boggs. This experience led to a later contract as publishing consultant with the National Gallery between 1973–75, following Boggs's move there.

The modernism in Newfeld's work, and the work of his British-trained colleagues, arose from the precise and informed use of type's expressive and visual dimension, renewing its traditional forms in a professional and conscious process of revision. There was no signature 'look' to any two of his books which, on its own, might be identified as *the* look of modern Canadian design. Newfeld located room within the styles and traditions of typography, and an applied knowledge of illustration, pattern and other graphic elements, to bring a synthesis of expression and intelligence to typographic design.

The Society of Typographic Designers of Canada

While still in England, Sam Smart had been a member of both the Society of Industrial

Artists and the Royal Society of Artists; Frank Davies was a member of the former society; and John Gibson a member of the London Society of Compositors. Together with Frank Newfeld, they hatched the idea to found a new society, the Society of Typographic Designers of Canada (TDC), in their adopted country. The emphasis on their distinct status as *designers* (as opposed to the advertising art *directors* represented in the Toronto Art Directors Club) was important enough for them to incorporate it in their name. Their first meeting was held at the Arts and Letters Club in Toronto, in 1956, and was a success far beyond the founders' expectations.

Carl Dair was an early supporter of the new society, even though he was absent for its founding. From Europe, he wrote to Allan Fleming and Franklyn Smith at Cooper & Beatty, suggesting that their support of the expatriot Britishers was overdue. The founders were not "misinformed neologists," Dair insisted, undoubtedly responding to an unflattering characterization of Fleming's, but "British enthusiasts for Morison," the well known British typographer and designer of the *Times* typeface and, as Dair well knew, an important influence on Fleming himself.⁷² Dair saw the new society as a way to "raise the standard of the general average" (quoting Moholy-Nagy), reflecting the growing number of people employed in the industry who were identifying themselves as designers, and actively incorporating the distinct functions of the designer into their job descriptions. Dair noted the the limited number of opportunities for professional development, the lack of any professional code of ethics, and suggested that a society might fill these needs. He also gently prodded Fleming by calling on him to transform his status as a "phenomenon" into that of an "influence" instead.

How tightly the new Society was to regulate its members was open to debate. An early attempt, borrowed from Swiss industry practice, to establish a set fee structure which member designers would all adhere to, drew a sharp response from the Society's lawyer. Such collusion verged on price fixing, he argued, and was likely in contradiction with the Corrupt Practices Act which allowed for fines of up to one million dollars. The plan was dropped.⁷³ Instead, the society settled on a round of regular exhibitions, meetings, lectures, and publications which would use influence, education, and inspiration rather than regulation or collusion, to stimulate the emerging practice of design.

72. Carl Dair, Letter to Allan Fleming and Franklyn Smith, 24 June 1957 (Fleming Archive, Box 5, file 6).

73. This anecdote is from the interview with Smart (see above, pg. 40).

The TDC quickly attracted the support of *Globe and Mail* critic Pearl McCarthy. She attended their first meeting and regularly reviewed Society exhibitions and events, noting the growing number of international awards, even concluding that the TDC was the “healthiest-minded art group in the country.”⁷⁴ Robert Fulford, a close friend of Fleming’s, also frequently wrote articles on the TDC, Fleming himself, and design, while *Canadian Art* devoted a special issue to graphic design (May, 1960). This was part of a stated but unrealized commitment to expand *Canadian Art*’s coverage beyond painting and sculpture, and to give equal weight to graphic design, interior design, and architecture. The establishment of the Society had succeeded in generating a critical mass of interest in design, and by 1960 it can be said that the profession had truly emerged in its own right.

The “Typography” Exhibitions, 1958 – 1964

Although the TDC was founded while he was away studying in Holland and Europe, after Carl Dair returned to Canada he quickly became involved. He called on a contact at Rolland Paper, Leo Considine, and convinced the company to sponsor a juried exhibition and publication. *Typography 58* shows how tightly-knit was the small group of designers in Canada. Fully half of the 276 designs shown were typeset at Cooper & Beatty, and the most striking work was largely the product of Allan Fleming, who was rapidly gaining a higher profile and greater professional freedom as design director at the firm. The same was true of the *Typography 59* exhibition, although the work in the show was nearly upstaged by Frank Newfeld’s elegant and understated catalogue design.

The *Typography 60* catalogue, from the third annual TDC exhibition, was designed by Frank Davies and featured articles by the founders and other designers. Frank Newfeld wrote on book design, where he emphasized the importance of pacing the readers of a book or other publication. Keith Scott suggested that the entries in the category of magazines and (especially) newspapers lacked any visual surprise or challenge. The exceptions, he noted, were company publications, such as the *Imperial Oil Review* and *Provincial’s Paper*. As publications whose sole purpose was to establish a modern corporate image for these companies, they allowed their designers increasingly greater leeway to experiment. By contrast, Jack Birdsall (who had been art director at Rous and Mann Printing since his graduation from the Ontario College of Art in 1949), noted the increasing importance of

74. Pearl McCarthy, “Carl Dair Sets Forth Creed for Designers,” *Globe and Mail* (Toronto), 1960 ?.

Frank Davies. *Typography 60*. 1960.

design for the general public, in contrast with “intramural design matches,”⁷⁵ those promotional situations (such as *Provincial's Paper*) where designers worked largely for an audience of other designers. In her review of the 1960 show, Pearl McCarthy noted that design worked best when it stayed between the traditional and the “too original or contrived.”⁷⁶

Davies's article, “Why all this fuss about typographic design?” gives a good overview of the changing situation in the Toronto design industry of 1960.⁷⁷ He begins by noting

75. Jack Birdsall, “Printing for Commerce: A Report by Jack Birdsall,” *Typography 60* (Toronto: Society of Typographic Designers of Canada, 1960), 33.

76. Pearl McCarthy, “Display Shows Designers' Skill,” *Globe and Mail* (Toronto), 20 August 1960.

77. Frank Davies, “Why All This Fuss About Typographic Design?” *Typography 60*, 51.

that the tradition of printing was five hundred years old (dated, in European fashion, from Gutenberg), yet Canada was still not a center for type design (as, for example, were Holland or Germany), nor was it a center of book publishing (unlike London), nor even particularly “a focal point for the latest graphic arts trends” (read New York, Switzerland, and Japan). Yet the international economy and its mass media were having a irreversible influence on the look of Canadian culture.

But why was design, in Canada and internationally, concerning itself with *typography* specifically? Davies noted that designers were beginning to relate the look of the type to the content of the text, to read the material they were designing. In other words, typography was central because it permitted conscious intervention in the text, and not simply its faithful reproduction or decoration. Typography became design when it began to exploit the potential of visual means themselves to enhance the message, and in so doing to fashion a new, more powerful message, rather than (in traditional craft practice) making at best a cursory stylistic reference to an historical period through the choice of a typeface designed in that period.

With a growing number of distinct schools and styles to learn from (which Davies listed as the “cold and mathematical” Swiss school, “dull and ethical” English typography, or “intellectually stimulating” Americans such as Paul Rand, Saul Bass, or Lester Beall), Davies saw the potential of design to synthesize solutions based on an inner logic and creative approach, rather than particular stylistic mannerisms. His article neatly sums up the range of influences available to Canadian designers, and their conscious, critical adoption of them. This article offers perhaps the best single suggestion of the expanded definition of modernism – simultaneously aware of stylistic innovation and typographic tradition; visually yet consciously and critically eclectic; socially rooted in the professionalization and organization of design – which Canadian design of this period forces us to confront.

Davies noted however, that North York (the postwar ‘planned community’ where Davies lived) had 250,000 residents and only one library. Canadians, even those working for typesetters, commercial art studios, and printers, were not necessarily exposed to modern design or trained to understand it. No wonder that Carl Dair, in a submission to the Canada Council in 1959, argued that support for graphic design was vital, in the form of fellowships, scholarships, assistance for shows and publications, and above all an increased emphasis on education – further evidence that Canadian design was emerging in compe-

tition with (and under the influence of) global design industries, but doing so in the absence of an equally effective, national, educational and industrial infrastructure.⁷⁸

This limited infrastructure explains the slow growth of the society in its early years. After five years, (by 1961) the *Typography 61* catalogue listed three TDC Fellows (Carl Dair, Allan Fleming and Sam Smart), 32 members, 11 licentiates, a smattering of honorary members (including *Globe and Mail* critic Pearl McCarthy), and six students. The Rolland Paper Company, the sponsor of the *Typography* shows, noted in the same year that with the new developments in design, “Canada has achieved a place among the mature nations”⁷⁹ – no mean feat for a diverse group numbering around fifty.

Yet the impact of design was reaching influential clients, and growing increasingly impossible to ignore. The 1961 show had 1,660 entries, fully six times the response to the first exhibition, and pride of place went to Allan Fleming’s CN logo, Frank Newfeld’s design of Leonard Cohen’s book of poetry, *Spice Box of Earth*, and the Rolland Paper 1961 *Annual Report*, designed by Ernst Roch. These three works – a radically minimal logo for a corporate redesign, done on a truly national scale for a major Canadian corporation; a dramatically elegant and limited-edition, illustrated book of poetry; and a corporate publication done in the most analytically minimal, clear fashion, as part of the rapid development of an International Style – summed up the key directions of Canadian design at the time. They showed that it was beginning to have an impact on society greater than the number of its practitioners might suggest (for example, through large corporate redesigns such as CN’s); that it was capable of critically adapting typographic tradition; that it was fully a part of the shifting flow of the international modernist current; and finally that, even when producing work more obviously based in traditional solutions, styles, or typefaces, modern graphic design was defining itself as such by its critical, innovative responses and systematic manipulation of older approaches.

(There were five *Typography* exhibitions organized between 1958 and 1962. The sixth and final show was assembled in 1964, in the shadow of the international *Typomundus 20* exhibit which landed in Toronto as a hostage to international politics when East European judges were prevented from travelling with the show to New York. However,

78. Carl Dair, “A General Submission on the Graphic Arts,” (unpublished, submitted to the Canada Council, 1959[?], Dair archive, “Biography” box, “Lurs” file).

79. Anonymous postscript. *Typography 61* (Toronto: Society of Typographic Designers of Canada, 1961), n.p.

because the emphasis of that show was significantly different, and provoked a very different kind of reaction, it will be looked at in the next chapter.)

New York typographic specialist Aaron Burns noted it had been “barely thirty years since the movement of modern typography took seed.”⁸⁰ It had clearly set its roots in Canada, expressing itself through the growth and increasing self-differentiation of an active, professional organization, capable of a variety of effective and modern solutions.

But it had not settled on a single, consistent visual approach to modernity. The *Typography 62* show travelled across Canada, ending at the Canadian National Exhibition in Toronto, in October, 1963. Gilles Héneault wrote a review in *Canadian Art*, and made the telling observation that, in asserting that form must follow function, “one has merely expressed an equation in which the two terms, form and function, are unknown quantities.”⁸¹ Whether modern designers defined each project as an objective (*sachlichkeit*) problem to be analyzed, or a subjective, socially-grounded practice, there was still the matter of how Héneault’s equation, which is the central question of semiotic understanding, was to be solved. What form, exactly, equals what function?

It is important that Canadian critics, as early as 1963, were arguing that this equation with its two open terms, form and function, has numerous solutions. His realization was part of the space within which modern Canadian design could explore a variety of different approaches, all of which, in their restlessness, conscious self-development, and deliberate response to the challenges of modern technological and social development, were expressions of the modern. If they lacked the impetus of a global, exporting graphic arts industry, TDC members and others were nonetheless fully a part of the international, critical, and intellectual discourse in contemporary, modernist issues.

The Society of Graphic Designers of Canada

Marshall McLuhan was the keynote speaker at the 1960 awards luncheon, and his theme was the way in which the once-technical skills of typographers were being developed as part of a wider communications revolution.⁸² McLuhan related a parable of millworkers in England, who were offered a workshop in fabric design. None of the weavers bothered

80. Aaron Burns, “Where Are We Going?” *Typography 61*, n.p.

81. Gilles Héneault, “Reflections on Seeing *Typography 62*,” *Canadian Art* 20, no. 5 (September–October 1963): 288.

82. Pearl McCarthy, “Typographic Designers Most Creative Group,” *Globe and Mail*, 17 September 1960.

to go, as none felt that design was an essential skill in fabric manufacturing, evidently relying on their tradesmen's faith that fabric design was firmly established by tradition.

By 1960, graphic design had fully absorbed the first part of McLuhan's lesson, and had moved beyond the traditional principles of page design. The modernism of the founders and members of the TDC had led them to expand the basic typographic skills acquired as apprentices within the technical trade of typesetting. The existence of the TDC itself confirmed the existence of design as a creative, self-conscious, independent profession. What remained to be seen, however, was whether designers could adapt to the remarkable explosion of communications and media, firmly begun by 1956, and whether design could become part of the increasingly technological weave of modern society itself.

As evidenced in their writings, works, organizations, and exhibitions, by the early 1960s modern Canadian designers had greatly expanded the symbolic potential, formal innovation, and visual effectiveness of printed communication. In the face of this expansion of design's purview, interest in type alone, either through the study of its history or the extended exploration of its formal possibilities, could no longer sustain interest as the sole basis of the design profession. Increasingly, the look of the type was seen as only one aspect in a linked chain of signification. By 1967, the then-president of the TDC, John Gibson, asked for comments from senior members as to the state of the society and of design.

Carl Dair responded that the TDC was indeed losing its all-important emphasis on type, and it clearly worried him. He noted the trend to admitting members whose knowledge of the old traditions, fonts, and methods was limited. Communication and media studies were seemingly more important than an exclusive focus on traditional letterforms, and Dair wondered if there was now a need for a newly separate typographic society, to distinguish itself from "communications people who want to sit around discussing Wittgenstein or early bird satellites or McLuhan."⁸³

In his contribution, Frank Newfeld allowed that the exploration of type's properties might have lost its cutting edge, and wondered, "what are we doing as a hallowed society for the preservation of five-to-the-em word space [a very tight and precise setting] in 1967?" And, completing the range of responses, Tony Mann looked outward toward a new, expanded field. He suggested opening up the society and positioning design as a

83. Carl Dair, "Comments by Carl Dair on the State of the then Society of Typographic Designers of Canada" (Massey College Library title. Unpublished notes, 1967, Dair archive, in "Biography" box, "TDC" file).

wider, more all-embracing discipline, establishing the society as a national presence, and placing a greater emphasis on education.

Clearly the organization of design professionals around a shared approach to typography – its tighter technical control and the inspiration of consistent approaches to experimentation – had served to define the society in an important and useful way; but interest in it as the sole basis of design was slipping away. Thus, the TDC renamed itself the Society of Graphic Designers of Canada (GDC) in 1968, in order to “reflect all aspects of visual communication.”⁸⁴ The ‘new’ Society mounted a major exhibition at the Design Canada design centers in Toronto and Montreal to mark the occasion, and by 1976, when the Society was legally incorporated by national charter, a federal structure of local chapters across the country had emerged.

The small, Toronto-based society had achieved a significant impact on design in Canada over its first ten years. The British emigrés who founded it had established how modern variations within traditional means could enhance communication. And a significant maturity, most evident after 1960, signalled a wider understanding, both within the profession and outside of it, of design’s growing function. Their work, both in design and in organizing designers, clearly established modern design in Canada, and just as clearly leads us to broaden the definition of modernism to incorporate the social and professional development of visual tradition within mass culture.

The early 1960s, however, also experienced the widespread development of a tightly focussed and rigorously analytical approach to modern design, as the growing influence of designers from continental Europe began to establish a very different, and much more specific, definition of modern design in Canada, to which we now turn.

84. Burton Kramer, “Graphic Design in Canada,” *IDEA* (Tokyo), 1975, special issue on Canadian graphic design: 115.

The European Modernists

CHAPTER THREE: THE RENEWAL OF INTERWAR EUROPEAN TRADITIONS IN CANADA

The concentration on an austere and almost puritanic form-language, which is only sporadically in evidence in the United States, has become a distinct force in the narrower field of Canadian graphics, and might almost claim to be the dominant influence.

—Hans Neuberg, Rolf Harder, Ernst Roch⁸⁵

The work of Carl Dair, and his grounding of modern design in a deep engagement with history and typography, and that of the TDC founders, with their emphasis on professional organization and the critical adaptation of international styles and trends, have been examined in order to advance a wider, more effective definition of modernism. In looking at two emigré artists from German-speaking Europe, however, we turn to work that was an influential part of a self-described modern movement, a deliberate attempt to transform graphic practice by a close, analytical definition of what was specifically modern in design.

The publication of the design journal *Neue Grafik / New Graphic Design / Graphisme actuel* in Zurich in 1959, served as a rallying point, allowing a specific, rigorously analytic and sparsely geometric school of modern design to coalesce and achieve international impact. Edited by Hans Neuberg, Josef Müller-Brockmann and other influential Swiss typographic designers, it does not mark the beginning of a 'Swiss' or international style, but

85. Hans Neuberg, "Rolf Harder, Ernst Roch," *Graphis* 143 (1969): 230.

Neue Grafik New Graphic Design Graphisme actuel

NEUE GRAFIK
NEW GRAPHIC DESIGN
GRAPHISME ACTUEL

2

Carlo Vivarelli. *Neue Grafik*. 1959.

rather drew together existing tendencies which had achieved a critical mass of recognition and self-awareness. The principles visible in Carlo Vivarelli's cover design were to find an echo in the work of many designers in Canada, for many years after, as the Neuberg epigram above suggests.

In the work of Ernst Roch and Rolf Harder however, the Canadian designers who were most centrally involved in developing the rigorous and analytical approach typified by *Neue Grafik*, we can still find evidence that Canadian design remained an expressive and complex modern form, and its relationship to international styles and thinking was equally complex and critical.

Ernst Roch

Ernst Roch was the first to arrive. Born in 1928, in German-speaking Yugoslavia (now Croatia), his father was a printer, printmaker, and designer. The German term is *gebrauchs-graphik*, meaning commissioned work, or art applied to a purpose, and his work (especially the hand-lettering) influenced his young son.⁸⁶ Roch held a variety of odd jobs after the war, but finally returned to his father's calling when he chose to study at the State School of Applied Arts, in Graz, Austria, from 1948 – 52. In addition to drawing, composition, and perspective classes, he remembers studying the hand drawing of letters in classes which would last all day.

He came to Montreal in December, 1953, landing work within a week as one of sixty artists in the Rapid, Grip and Batten art office, which provided layout, lettering, illustration, and photography services in a production-line fashion. Roch recalls that the process was directed by a "layout man," a position that was far from the equivalent of a designer, as it offered far less creative control or freedom. Layout men were expected to reproduce proven formulæ dictated by the salesman and art director. After eight months, layoffs at Rapid, Grip and Batten led Roch to take on freelance work, doing labels for socks, retouching photographs, and other small, "boring tasks."

He eventually landed at the Y & M studio of Gerard Caron, Yolande Delorme-Cyr, and Tancrede Marsil, all trained at the Ecole des Beaux Arts in Montreal. Marsil and Caron had both worked for the Eveleigh-Dair studio previously, and Delorme-Cyr was a fashion illustrator, as was typical for women in the commercial art field at this time. Roch was to spend five years there, from 1954 – 59, and recalls that it was clearly one of the most progressive and high-quality design studios in the country at the time. At its largest, it had four partner-designers and four to six other artists, for a maximum staff of ten. Its size and the senior position of the designers within the company were crucial to the studio's greater level of creative freedom, as compared with Rapid, Grip and Batten or Montreal's large advertising agencies.

Roch also recalls urging Caron to approach Canadian National Railways for design work, but, famously, in 1959 that contract was to go to a New York industrial designer named James Valkus. Roch was then considered by Valkus for the CN logo redesign, but,

86. Ernst Roch, interview with the author, Montreal QC, 21 June 1996. Subsequent unattributed quotes and much of the biographical detail in this section are from this interview.

Ernst Roch. Symbol for O'Keefe's Fisheries. 1954.

equally famously; that contract went to an articulate, affable, and engaging designer from Toronto named Allan Fleming.

However, because Fleming was not prepared to move to Montreal to work on the complete application of the redesign at CN, Roch was eventually lured out of Y & M, to spend six stormy months in early 1960, working on the CN project with the James Valkus Montreal studio. Roch felt that the commitment to modernism implied by the abstract, sinuous CN logo was not being realized, and too many concessions were being made to CN middle management, as the hard, delicate task of implementing a fully integrated, consistent, and modern corporate identity met the entrenched interests inside the very large, but not-so-modern corporation.

The entire experience seems to have strengthened Roch's resolve, and led to the truly formative period in Roch's career. The next five years he spent as the principal in his own studio, and it is at this time, after 1960, that the strongest statement of an internationally-influenced, self-consciously modern style was to be made in Canada.

Consider an early work of Roch's, a logo done for O'Keefe's Fisheries in 1954. All of the elements of a renewed approach to constructivism and rational functionalism are present: a single line of equal weight; a reduction to minimal form; the representation of elements (a fish and the letters O and K) in the simplest means possible; and a balanced, equally stressed, seemingly objective composition. But, just as with Frank Davies's "sandbergian" design (above, page 49), the understanding and fluency which Canadians could demonstrate in new design languages did not necessarily translate into a single, consistent approach. Throughout the 1950s, there was no common acceptance that a singular vision

Alcan News

Ernst Roch. Alcan News, June 1960. 1960.

Ernst Roch. Alcan News, June 1960. Interior Spread. 1960.

of the modern in design was required in Canada, and Roch's work of the period does not single-mindedly pursue the implications of the O'Keefe's symbol.

However, the logic of Roch's career, his movement towards ever greater autonomy, in studios of ever smaller size, was definitely a factor in pushing him to adopt a consistent, clear, and essential approach to modernism. The intervention of a like-minded client helped, too. The Swiss-educated editor of the *Alcan Ingot*, the in-house, corporate newsletter of the Montreal-based aluminum manufacturer, paid Roch to make a proposal for the redesign of the publication. Beginning with the June, 1960 issue, Roch was to not only rename it but also completely transform it, from a loose layout, heavy with illustrations, decorative elements, and subjective, arbitrary layouts, into a completely logical and powerfully rational, single design.

Through cropping the photos to maximize their scale and emphasize the geometric lines of their subjects; establishing a single, inviolable horizon line along the top of the cover and every interior page; tight setting of sans-serif type in closely-spaced, justified columns; narrowing the outside margins and pushing the copy and images as close as he

dared to the edges of the page (a distance dictated largely by the tolerances of trimming and binding machinery); specifying no difference between the size of the body copy (the columns of text) and the heads, setting them apart only by their position and bold weight; and above all the rigorous and intelligent use of a geometric grid to constrain the text and images: Roch combined all of his thinking about the potential of a logically reduced modernism into a single eight-page newsletter.

Such designs share more than just the name, the International Style, with the architecture of the time. There is a distinct parallel in the structure of these pages and that of a modern 1960s office tower: an open, empty plaza in front of the building (like the open, negative space above the inviolable ‘horizon line’ at the top of the page); the grid of the facade which rises directly out of this space (like the gridded blocks of body copy); the even, overall geometry which incorporates every available inch into a single rectangular plan (just as the grid runs copy and photos perilously close to the trimmed edge of the page); the lack of ornament in the positive spaces (as in the sparse columns of sans serif type); and the apportioning of open, white space wherever it logically fell.

John Gibson, working in Montreal at the time and familiar with Roch’s work through the TDC chapter he started in the city, noted in *The Printing Review* in 1961 that the new look of the *Alcan News* “has probably caused more strong comment, both for and against, than any other similar undertaking.”⁸⁷ Nonetheless, a similar design for the Rolland Paper Annual Report won Roch one of only three awards of excellence in the *Typography 61* exhibition organized by the TDC in 1961, fittingly, alongside Newfeld’s much more synthetically modern book, *The Spice Box of Earth*.

Once he was on his own, Roch’s publication work became a kind of manifesto, a definite challenge intended to stake out a clear position in modern design, and introduce the ideal of objectivity into a national design tradition which was still very subjective and eclectic. Roch has stated that “graphic design means stripping down a message,” and that his goal was always to achieve “minimal means and maximal clarity.”⁸⁸ He also notes that it is hard to see how necessary and revolutionary such deliberate steps were at the time. He carried this philosophy into long-term design relationships with several large corporations, including Alcan.

87. John Gibson, “Ernst Roch,” *The Printing Review* 37, no. 1 (June 1961): 10.

88. Ernst Roch, untitled essay, *Graphic Design Canada* (Toronto: Methuen and the Society of Graphic Designers of Canada, 1970), n.p.

Ernst Roch. 1962 Definitive Stamp. 1962.

In 1962 Roch moved into a very visible but easily overlooked aspect of design, winning the competition to design the five-cent 'definitive' stamp. Featuring a simple, centered profile of the Queen, the balance of space around her head and the precise placement of the restrained type conveyed a functional simplicity, strength, and a clarity born of minimalist means. Although small in size, in many ways this stamp represents the beginning of the federal government's commitment to clear, functional design. Over the next two decades the use of geometric logos, simplified, gridded layouts, and the systematic (if not always inspired) application of aspects of the style Roch and others developed were to dominate the design of government and corporate communication, as surely as rectangular geometry dominated their architecture.

These formal developments were the inevitable expression of design seen as a technical or objective process of communication. In bringing several of Roch's pieces together, however, something else emerges, a visual continuity which fully suggests the presence of a 'style.' Roch has himself spoken of his personal "taste" as the partial basis for his work. Seen as individual answers to individual communication problems, each work can claim a logic which dictated its look. But there is also no doubt, in reviewing this work with over thirty years of hindsight, that a very specific aesthetic was at work, delimiting the visual range and eliminating decorative excess in order to highlight the designer's own creative intelligence and formal strengths. The end result was, ironically, a visually reduced overall effect which worked just as any style does: shaping visual preferences (including a notable preference for black and red), and providing recognizable continuity and familiarity.

The simplified, modern tendencies of Tschichold's day and the design of Weimar Germany and Soviet Russia in the 1920s, had undergone a thoroughly rational and rigorous makeover in order for the newly emergent International Style to arrive with such impact. We can see from its development in the work of its key Canadian exponents that much of that transformation took place in Canada itself, simultaneously with its emergence in the late 1950s in Europe. But there were, significantly, two central ironies in this development.

The first was that while the modern style represented a significant and liberating transformation in the intellectual and formal approach to design, it also comprised a totality, a visual aesthetic which suggested that a geometric simplicity of means and the non-traditional look of sans serif type contained all the necessary elements for an appropriate solution to modern design and communication problems generally.

The other irony lay in the timing, whereby a process requiring considerable control, discipline, and reduction of formal means could exert a powerful influence all through the 1960s and well into the early '70s: a decade and a half of astounding social change, political upheaval, and countercultural freedoms. The success of an international style which stressed intelligence and order, while eliminating much of the author's own hand, might have fit with Structuralist, 'death of the author' theories of the period. But by and large, this style is a stiff antidote to, rather than a simple reflection of, the 'go-go' nature of the wider cultural milieu.

The very success of this style stressed clear, authoritative communication as the basis of Canadian design, and marked a shift away from the domestic and emotional fantasy of much 1950s imagery. Its success is an indication of the strength of the economic boom of the 1960s, in that it represents the ability of governments and corporations to point "objectively" to the facts of the economic boom, seemingly without sentiment, fantasy, smoke, or mirrors.

In its austerity, it was originally an intentionally unpopular style (which is, after all, another meaning of the term 'professional'). However, over time it was to become hugely popular, adapted by the majority of designers in Canada at one time in their careers to solve some communication problem or other. And its development as the signature style of the professional designer in the early 1960s led it to become ubiquitous, and ultimately quite familiar to mass audiences. Its very functionality, effectiveness, legibility, and simplicity led it to be broadly picked up and adapted (to the purist, this would be seen as cor-

rupted and misapplied), and re-mixed or synthesized with other styles and tastes. It became in time part of the visually complex and intellectually critical Canadian approach to modernism.

Despite its basis in logic and objectivity, the mass application of even the most rational and systematic principles transformed them from modernist manifesto to contemporary style. Such designs were not only clearly legible in themselves, but also read on another level, as an emotionally laden symbol of economic progress, and the fantasy of continued prosperity – the very smoke and mirrors the style intended to avoid.

Rolf Harder

Rolf Harder was born in 1929 and studied for four and a half years at the National Art Academy in his native Hamburg. Although schooled in typography, drawing, metal and woodblock typography, and printing technology, he describes his training as “broad and haphazard.”⁸⁹ From 1953 – 55 he was a layout artist at a Hamburg advertising agency, doing some illustration and other work “more in the direction of design,” as much as permitted by the agency structure. A somewhat romantic notion of North America seems to have been fuelled by a film he saw on the Alaska highway, and in part this led him to travel with the intention of eventually working in New York.

His visit to Montreal in 1955, therefore, was not intended to be permanent, yet he spent two years there, from 1955 – 57. He was very briefly employed at Y & M (and first met Ernst Roch there), but lost that position when asked to draw a refrigerator, having been given neither a clear idea of North American fridge design nor of the typical advertising illustration style required. He freelanced and also travelled the continent, finally returning to Hamburg for two years between 1957 – 59 to work and to marry.

His return to Montreal in 1959 was marked by equal restlessness. He again intended to stay only long enough to receive a visa to travel on to New York. Instead, he developed such a strong client base through freelance work that he ended up, finally, staying. The clients of his small, personal studio included pharmaceutical giant Hoffmann-La Roche, Alcan, the Royal Bank, Inter City Papers, International Paints and many others: no small roster for someone who did not even particularly intend to stay.

89. Rolf Harder, interview with the author, Montreal, QC, 6 May 1996. Subsequent unattributed quotes and much of the biographical detail in this section are from this interview.

Rolf Harder. Vous Pouvez. 1959.

He recalls that it was unusual for companies to work directly with a designer, the more normal route being through the intervention of an agency or other company. Yet the growing importance of communication and marketing led to a commitment to in-house expertise on the part of many corporate clients. Harder remembers, for example, that the Swiss-educated design buyer at Hoffmann-La Roche, Peter Decker, was unique in his understanding of the potential of design and of contemporary trends in Swiss and German design (particularly, of course, the increasingly well-known advertising of European pharmaceutical companies). Their symmetry of interests led to a thirty-year relationship between designer and corporation.

A booklet produced for Hoffmann-La Roche in the early years of his Montreal studio, in 1959, is perhaps surprising, then, in the context of our present understanding of the International Style. “Vous Pouvez” is a small, square booklet, in the style of a children’s book, and uses illustrations, text, and borrowed Victorian engravings in an engaging collage. A 1961 article in *International Advertising Art* noted that “these designs so distinctly show all the typical characteristics of present-day Canadian and American advertising art, that an uninformed observer hardly would believe them the work of a European artist.”⁹⁰ The article went on to praise this characteristic of Harder’s work, referring to the “sure under-

90. Eberhard Hölscher, “Rolf Harder,” *International Advertising Art* (1961): 36.

Rolf Harder. International Paints 1962 Annual Report. 1963.

standing and great intuition” which allowed him to quickly adapt to and effectively engage in Canadian design practice.

Indeed, Harder completely belies the received notion of a formulaic approach to design, no matter how rational and precise the means chosen. As with some of Roch’s work, there is a complexity, sometimes even a playfulness, which emerges upon a close reading. Harder’s cover for the *International Paints Annual Report 1962* is a case in point.

There are the usual internationalist hallmarks: sans-serif type, type close to the trimmed edge of the page, and abstract, flat, and geometric areas of color. Yet again, there is no obvious or overpowering feeling of a grid determining the layout, which is a gentle overlapping of three paint rollers; the sans-serif type is tastefully condensed; the contrast between the obvious flatness of the roller designs on the page contrasts with their round ends and their suggestion of the illusion of depth; and there is a further playful contrast between the rollers' weight and the exaggeratedly thin roller arms, which end in small, curlicue circles. It is hardly a dogmatically high-modernist solution, but surely a modern, attractive one.

Another work to consider is his "Librium" advertisement of 1963. Nothing could be simpler than the eight lines of sans-serif type, and a single, close-cropped image in a field of white. But the haunting power and clear message of the meticulously staged photograph is anything but simple. It is a single, highly appropriate conceptual idea, and it undoubtedly commanded greater attention than the busier, copy-heavy and heavily-illustrated advertisements which were more common in the early 1960s. This work displays a sophisticated approach to the emotional power of the 'Big Idea,' an approach which was becoming prominent among New York advertising art directors.⁹¹

To be sure, geometry, abstraction, simplicity, and order played a very important role in Harder's work. A single page done for the TDC publication, *Format*, of 1964, relies on the dramatic movement of the letter 'F' out of one corner to capture the entire page, as a kinetic symbol for the design process itself. The dynamic control of space as a central concern echoes the architectural modernism of the International Style, which efficiently captured every square inch of productive space in its radically rectangular highrise office towers. Yet the dynamism of the interlocking shapes also creates something close to a decorative pattern. Design for Harder always began with a clear visual idea, something that was not lost through the conscious process of "filtering it down to the essence of the message." Like anything, Harder insists that design "becomes boring if it is not inventive, if the idea is lacking."

Harder is careful to stress that his and Roch's approach was not simply transplanted from Europe, or taken up in Canada as a fully developed form. They were influenced by the International Style, emergent in the late 1950s in Germany and Switzerland, and

91. See Steven Heller, "Big Ideas that Built America," *gye* 6, no. 22 (Autumn 1996): 66.

Rolf Harder. Librium Advertisement. 1963.

Rolf Harder. Page from Format. 1963.

Typography 64
Typographie 64
T 64
T64

Tony Mann.
Typography 64.
1964.

they did owe much to the geometry of constructivism and to Swiss typeface and poster design. This influence was typified by the publication, *Neue Grafik*, and it is worth recalling that Helvetica, the sans-serif face most closely associated with international design in the 1960s, was the ancient Roman word for Switzerland.

Yet by 1960, both Harder and Roch had been in Canada for many years, and had worked for established Montreal studios and many major Canadian clients. The transformation they spearheaded involved working with and against the traditions and restrictions of the design industry they were part of in this country. The elements of internationalism in their work did not just arrive in their suitcases, and drew on a synthesis of Canadian sources.

T64

The final TDC typographic exhibition, *Typography 64*, drew the ire of Carl Dair, who growled that it had “gone all Swiss.”⁹² The cover of the catalogue gave him all the ammu-

92. Carl Dair, letter to Gerry Moses, postmarked Jamaica, 2 January (1965?; Dair archive, “Letters” box, “Gerry Moses” file).

nition he needed. Designed by recent English immigrant Tony Mann,⁹³ it featured bold, black and blue, sans-serif typography on a white background. Four rows of type across the top of the page rationally abandon all extraneous elements and reduce themselves down to the simpler ‘T64.’ The inescapable logic of it seemed to deny the presence of an artist at all, or at least to have rationalized away any individual, arbitrary sensibilities or frivolous inventions.

Despite Dair’s protests, however, this new analytical movement was emerging hand in hand with greater interest in modern design generally. *Typography 64* received 2,272 entries, allowing the selection 218 winning designs⁹⁴ – incredibly, this was almost as many as the number of *entries* in the first *Typography* effort, in 1958. The 1964 show toured to Ottawa, Montreal, Toronto, and other cities. Allan Fleming, quoted in the *Globe and Mail*, declared that the entire exhibition was “a Swiss show, consisting chiefly of international, modern types of typography,” notable only for its “well-oiled, highly professional and quite safely anonymous designs.”⁹⁵ The debate was joined directly in the pages of the catalogue itself, as in his essay Fleming further explicitly rejected the “homogenous, safe, society” which such design suggested to him, comparing it to a society of roaches or ants.⁹⁶ This continued Sam Smart’s 1961 complaint that it was a “formula,” but one which perhaps offered “a disciplined and improved solution” for routine or high-volume design production. “Just what effect this [style] may have on the Canadian scene is a matter of conjecture,” he concluded, somewhat ironically.⁹⁷

There was, to say the least, a clearly mixed reception accorded to the rise of this highly analytical, precise approach to design. It misses the mark to suggest that men such as Dair, Fleming, or Smart were just being defensive, reactionary, or anti-modern. Their modernism simply reflected a different approach, a more immediately synthetic logic, and retained a broader, more inclusive vocabulary. However, given the public reaction of the central figures of the well-organized design community in Toronto, it is perhaps not surprising to find that a Canadian version of the postwar revival and renewal of analytical,

93. Although the publication lists Gerhard Doerrié as its designer. See Gibson interview, page 43.

94. Kay Kritzweiser, “Seven Artists Win Typography Awards,” *Globe and Mail*, 1964.

95. Ibid.

96. Allan Fleming, “An Appreciation,” *Typography 64* (Toronto, Society of Typographic Designers of Canada, 1964), n.p.

97. Sam Smart “Printing for Commerce,” *Typography 61*, 27.

functional design should arise in its earliest and strongest form in another city entirely, Montreal.

Paul Arthur

Paul Arthur is somewhat of an anomaly in the development of the European-based International Style in Canada, in that he was educated here, at Upper Canada College and at the University of Toronto, but also in that his field of study was English literature. His love of books led him to work in printing and publishing in England, where he met typographic eminence and editor of the *Times Literary Supplement*, Stanley Morison. A chance recommendation led him to work as Assistant Editor, under Walter Herdeg, on *Graphis* magazine in Zurich between 1951 – 56. Even in the early 1950s, before the identification and internationalization of a clearly constructivist flavor in modern design, *Graphis* was focussing international attention on German and Swiss innovative simplicity.

In 1952, Arthur wrote “Advanced Design – As Seen from Europe” for *Canadian Art*.⁹⁸ He suggested that the best advice for young designers was to come to Europe and learn about modern design directly from the source, rather than as a second-hand influence through émigrés in America. He noted the irony, however, at being a frustrated Canadian looking for work and artistic development in Europe, when (as we have seen) so many designers were moving the other way, leaving Europe in search of new opportunities. He was skeptical of the “adjectives and earnestness” of much overly-complex, contemporary advertising. Early on, however, Arthur was underscoring the developing difference between advertising and design, noting that the latter permitted the understanding of communication as something more essential than marketing and style. Through articles such as this, he was a key link between the Canadian design community and intellectual and visual developments from the larger design industry of Europe.

At the urging of Alan Jarvis, Arthur returned to Canada in 1956. He took a close look at the changes that had occurred in Canadian applied art and advertising, in a review of the eighth annual exhibition of the Art Directors Club of Toronto. He noted that design had grown enormously, but wondered if it hadn’t simply become “bigger and brassier,” like a seven-foot-tall chorus-line dancer.⁹⁹ He was particularly critical of government pub-

98. Paul Arthur, “Advanced Design – As Seen from Europe,” *Canadian Art* 10, no. 1 (Autumn 1952): 31.

99. Paul Arthur, “Eighth Annual Exhibition of Editorial and Advertising Art,” *Canadian Art* 14, no. 3 (Spring 1957): 104.

lications, a situation he worked to change directly. Arthur estimates that, as Director of Publications for the National Gallery of Canada from 1956 – 67, he produced a publication every week, on average, over eleven busy years.¹⁰⁰

A similar suspicion and distance from advertising was to surface four years later, in the special issue of *Canadian Art* (May, 1960) devoted to graphic design. Arthur bluntly compared the rising tide of promotional material and the spread of advertising, to “litter.” At the same time, English emigré Tony Mann (see page 86, below) was developing the same frustration at Cooper & Beatty: it is “pointless,” he wrote to Carl Dair, “to concentrate on the fun and games of advertising graphics.”¹⁰¹ Design in Canada was developing a logic and approach which were increasingly at odds, in the view of some designers, with advertisers’ and agencies’ demands.

Arthur was after subtlety and control, treating the page simply as a formal “two-dimensional rectangle,”¹⁰² and emphasizing its essential qualities. Conscious development of graphic standards, not merely the intuitive use of convention by artists, was called for. He noted that movie and book reviews were common, but printed design rarely rated critical mention anywhere but in the most specialized trade publications. Arthur, like Dair before him, was an important writer and promoter of his vision of modern design. Unlike Dair, however, Arthur was able to ‘institutionalize’ himself more effectively. In addition to his work for the National Gallery, he was managing editor and designer at *Canadian Art*, beginning in 1958. His redesign of the formerly traditional layout in the magazine borrowed extensively, if also quite naturally and effectively, from *Graphis*.

Yet his desire to expand both public and professional awareness of design contradicted a simultaneous concern, which was to reduce graphic design to its essence, making it standardized, anonymous, and functional. Design, he argued, was to be driven by its single most important responsibility, which was to the reader, who “does not read expressly to be dazzled by typography.”¹⁰³ Yet the purely functional and professional design idiom Arthur sought was opposed to the rowdy, popular imagery which those same readers strongly preferred. Their mass preferences were shaping imagery and marketing, and were the basis of the very popularity which tended to make “brassy” advertising so effective. Such

100. David Peters, “The Great Canadian Controversy: Paul Arthur’s *artscanada*,” *Graphic Design Journal* 1, no. 3 (1995): 18.

101. Tony Mann, letter to Carl Dair, 23 February 1965, Dair archive.

102. Paul Arthur, “What is a Designer?” *Canadian Art* 17, no. 3 (May 1960): 193.

103. Ibid.

were the contradictions which designers wrestled with, even if they were not always able to resolve them completely:

Arthur was (and remains) a key presence in the international movement towards globally comprehensible signs, and coined the terms “signage” and “wayfinding” as descriptions of the complicated role of design in public spaces. The United Nations approved a Geneva protocol in 1949 calling for the development of uniform traffic signs in all countries.¹⁰⁴ Arthur’s work for the State of Vermont highway sign system was an important step in realizing this goal. On contract with Transport Canada, he also redesigned the interior signage at Winnipeg and Edmonton airports in 1962.

His best known project, however, was undoubtedly his work for Expo 67. Arthur’s pictograms and other innovative signage, his choice of color, lighting, and even the design of street furniture contributed to making the international exposition “a graphic wonderland.”¹⁰⁵ Such international fairs, a continuation of the growing pre-war trend, made an important contribution to the development of common symbols in international points of contact, such as airports and highways, helping make design “an integral part of the urban infrastructure.”¹⁰⁶

Arthur’s Ottawa studio grew rapidly in the mid-1960s, largely as a result of Expo. Arthur took advantage of his unique, European experience and his highly advantageous position, proximate to government agencies (including the Canadian Government Exhibition Commission) willing to adopt a singularly, avowedly, modern design language. His years at *Graphis* had clearly sharpened his eye for talent. A highly impressive roster of designers, all of whom were to play an important role in Canadian design, flowed through his offices, including Gerhard Doerrié, Burton Kramer, Fritz Gottschalk, and Jean Morin.¹⁰⁷ The amount of time devoted to Expo ironically took its toll on his business, however, as other clients became neglected. The post-1967 period saw the departure of several designers, such as Kramer and Gottschalk, who left to start their own companies. It was a time of transition for Arthur, who soon moved to Toronto to rebuild his practice.

As a farewell to *Canadian Art*, he was to design ten remarkable issues of the renamed

104. Katsumie Masaru, “Towards an International Symbolology,” *Graphic Design Tokyo*, date unknown circa 1964?, reprint in Fleming archive, Box 4, file 10.

105. Anon., “Expo ‘67,” *Id: Typographer’s Digest* 24 Fall 1967: 4.

106. Michael Large, “A Good Sign: Paul Arthur Receives the Order of Canada,” *Graphic Design Journal* 1, no. 3 (1995): 16.

107. Peters, “Great Canadian Controversy,” 20.

artscanada in 1967, all of which were published as a looseleaf collection of papers and other ephemera and media (such as flexible vinyl recordings), sold in a transparent bag wrapper. He confessed this unusual “television sort of approach” was “quite shocking to the art world”¹⁰⁸ (which in 1967 should have grown quite used to shock and change). It was, he says, an attempt to produce something more immediate, fighting with the long lead times required by letterpress color reproduction (as opposed to faster and higher quality color production by offset). It was also a highly erratic move, defying the all of the conventions of publishing, and simultaneously refuting the image of the modern designer as overly professional, rigid, and predictable.

Perhaps above all, these issues of *artscanada* were a prelude to the even greater influence which was eventually to be exercised upon Canadian design by the broader social and cultural change of the 1960s and '70s. If the priority of designers before 1965 remained the definition of professional standards, resisting popular influences, and emphasizing the rigors of communication over the more immediate pleasures of style, it is obvious from these issues of *artscanada* that professionalism was preparing to escape in dramatic fashion from its grid-like certainties.

Gerhard Doerrié

Gerhard Doerrié is primarily known today as a teacher and promoter of the International Style, and as an especially influential teacher at the Ontario College of Art and the Nova Scotia College of Art and Design. At least one student of his, Neville Smith – whose work is better known for its complexity of pattern, shape, and decorative effects – recalls that upon graduation from OCA in the early 1960s, everything in his portfolio had been deeply influenced by the ‘Swiss’ style.¹⁰⁹ If the logic and clarity of the International Style had the impact of a steamroller on Canadian designers, it was partly due to the focus and intensity of designers such as Doerrié.

Born in Celle, Germany in 1936, he trained as a typesetter in Paris. He contacted Ernst Roch in Montreal, after reading an article of Roch’s in the German design magazine *Gebrauchsgraphik*. Doerrié eventually was brought to Montreal in 1960 on Roch’s recommendation, to work at the Valkus studio on the CN corporate redesign (where, ironically, he outlasted Roch himself). He moved to Ottawa in 1964, to take a position for the

108. Ibid., 19.

109. Neville Smith, interview with the author, Aylmer, QC, 5 January 1996.

Gerhard Doerrié. Design Canada Announcement. Major Appliances Exhibit. *n.d.*

next two years in Paul Arthur's studio. Arthur's international perspective, gained from his years at the *Graphis* design journal in Zurich, no doubt suited Doerrié well.

Doerrié gave a clean, communicational approach to government communication, through numerous pieces designed for Design Canada, and lent credence to the usefulness of sans-serif typography, on a balanced grid, as a concrete and logical basis for government and corporate communication. His entries in the *Typography 64* catalogue show design reduced to simple circles, arrows, and the *Helvetica* typeface. But their presence in the "experimental typography" section shows that Doerrié valued dramatic exploration of the formal, 'concrete' aspects of type and form. Chris Yaneff and Arnold Rockman were to write, in the same catalogue, that his designs represented "a series of poems in which each individual letter, syllable, word and overall image all make their contributions – singly and in concert – to the overall effect."¹¹⁰ There is perhaps no clearer definition of the residual poetry in even this most analytical approach to design.

The central concern for Doerrié was problem solving, a positivist belief that the proper framing of the question would yield a single answer – the conviction that communication had an essence. He became disillusioned by the application of this approach, however, as it became more widely used. Writing in the catalogue of a 1970 exhibition, held by the recently-renamed Society of Graphic Designers, Doerrié wrote that "I see in

110. Quoted in Marjorie Harris, "Gerhard Doerrié: Mercurial Brilliance," *Applied Arts* 3, no. 1 (Spring 1988): 77. This article is a major source of information on Doerrié.

surface perfection an unconscious overcompensation by the designer to cover up the absence of a problem or purpose in what he is doing.”¹¹¹

His demanding and perfectionist approach often made him a difficult personality to work with, and resulted in a career spent in several different cities and with many different firms and schools. (Ernst Roch also remembers that he was sadly capable of drinking an entire bottle of scotch in a single evening.) His restlessness suggests that his supremely focussed and committed approach to a particular vision of modernism was out of touch with the sensitivity and taste needed in its application. Doerrié’s strengths led to a position in Massimo Vignelli’s famous studio in New York, but this lasted less than a year. In 1970 Doerrié moved to become head of the department of visual communication at the Nova Scotia College of Art, where he also lectured in semiotics and communication theory. By 1974 he was a freelancer again, and he died in 1984 after returning to his native Germany. His was indeed a “mercurial” career.¹¹²

Tony Mann

Tony Mann also came to teach at NSCAD, but his move through the Canadian design field was considerably less dramatic than Doerrié’s. English-born, a graduate of the Manchester College of Art and the London Central School of Arts and Crafts, he came to Toronto in 1962, following ten years running his own design practice in London. By late 1962 he was creative director at Cooper & Beatty, replacing Allan Fleming.¹¹³ His highly-European and geometric design sense, and clear preference for modern sans-serifs, must have been a somewhat wrenching change for the firm, after Fleming’s more playful and much less formally reduced style.

Before founding Design Collaborative (with Ernst Roch, Rolf Harder, and Alfred Faux) in 1965, however, Mann left his mark on Toronto’s most established typesetting company. His promotional piece for Cooper & Beatty, “Fast 1,” shows a remarkable sense of how loose and subjective the concrete practice of typography could be, making communication the priority while still allowing room to re-work the language of design through unusual combinations of type and space. It is also a display of how strange, unusu-

111. Gerhard Doerrié, untitled essay, in *Graphic Design Canada* (Toronto: Methuen and the Society of Graphic Designers of Canada, 1970), n.p.

112. As Marjorie Harris calls it in the title of her article.

113. This brief outline of his career comes from *Design Collaborative*, a promotional folder published by the studio on its amalgamation in 1965.

*Tony Mann. Cooper & Beatty Brochure.
"Fast 1." 1963.*

al, and pleasurable seemingly familiar lettershapes can be, and a simply beautiful example of the concrete poetry of the International Style in Canada.

As Rolf Harder noted, the International Style was simultaneously developed in Canada, taking some of its inspiration, but not its final form, from developments in Europe. Canadian designers were not simply applying a finished formula, but adapting and developing an international design language, and engaging in an argument about modernism, as when Allan Harrison argued that the application of international standards and ideas to the Canadian context *was* the true Canadian style.¹¹⁴

But despite the 'truth' of internationalism in design, a variety of influences and approaches were subsumed within this particular modern style, even in its austerity. The mass, applied art of design necessarily draws on a synthesis of sources, and takes even the most radically reduced approach and coheres it, through familiarity and repetition, into a familiar and evocative style. And indeed, modernism hardly ended with the mature development of this most self-conscious of modern styles. Other popular strains were brewing throughout the 1950s, creating lively individual works which were highly subjective, and which consciously synthesized popular reference, symbol, and emotion. A very few of these will be the subject of the next chapter.

114. Allan Harrison, "An Appreciation," in *Graphic Design by Rolf Harder and Ernst Roch* (Ottawa: Design Canada and Design Collaborative, 1977) (Exhibition catalogue of show at National Library, Ottawa, and other centers, 1977).

A Canadian Synthesis

CHAPTER FOUR: THE CANADIAN SENSE OF STYLE

The aim of typography is that of Beatrice Warde, who defined it long ago as that of the 'crystal goblet,' containing fine wine, adding to the sparkle of the wine yet invisible to the unknowing eye.

—Allan Fleming¹¹⁵

If a strong, residual subjectivity and sense of style and taste can be clearly perceived in the exponents of an international form of modernism in Canada, such flavors can be even more strongly noted in the work of designers whose careers, education and training were conducted entirely in Canada. This study has noted the strong disposition to history and tradition among Canadian modern designers, such as Dair, and the breadth of influence, style and talents of others, such as Newfeld. Even while it worked to differentiate itself as a separate field, Canadian design also retained strong links to illustration and fine art late into the 1950s, with many artists practicing effectively in a variety of professional roles.

Together with a limited educational infrastructure (compared to the attendance at art, design and printing schools, and apprenticeship programs that was an important aspect of the careers of the British and European artists looked at above); the absence of a manufacturing industry for type founding and design, or for printing and typesetting equipment; and the relatively small scale of printing and publishing industries in Canada – there are many reasons why Canadian designers would come to draw on a wide variety

115. Allan Fleming, untitled, 1979? (note written in Fleming's hand, Fleming archive, Box 11, file 16.)

of sources, and produce work which strongly suggests that synthesis, across a broad and popular range of visual reference, is the essential basis of modernism.

Allan Fleming

Allan Fleming remembers that as a boy his dream was to “conquer Manhattan on the strength of his superior illustrations.”¹¹⁶ This in itself might serve to distinguish Fleming, because unlike many of his design contemporaries he had no fine art background and did not aspire to be a painter. Born in 1929 in Toronto, he studied art for two years at a technical high school, leaving in 1945 at age sixteen. His career began inauspiciously, in the mail-order department at Eaton’s in 1945, where he earned \$15 a week.¹¹⁷ Until 1953, he worked his way up into design and layout positions at small commercial art studios, including Art Associates. Consciously imitating the work of Paul Rand, Fleming was openly influenced by American magazines. His intense love of illustration slowly changed to a passion for typography and layout.

In time, he gravitated to the workshops held by Carl Dair in Toronto after 1952, on the “Theory and mechanics of typographic design.”¹¹⁸ This was exactly the sort of intensive and detailed training which Fleming’s lively and natural intelligence needed. He decided to leave for England in 1953. It is instructive (and a measure of Dair’s influence) that he chose London and not New York or Zurich, apparently deciding to research the traditions of typography and design rather than their most radical contemporary applications. He found work at John Tait and Partners in London, and spent time studying at the British Museum. He apparently introduced himself to Stanley Morison of Monotype, the most respected figure in British typography at the time, and delved as directly as possible into the typographic and printing industries there.

Fleming returned to Toronto in 1955, having served his unusual apprenticeship and schooling, and became a freelance artist. He also began calling himself a graphic designer which, he notes, caused some confusion.¹¹⁹ He was one of a handful of independent designers in the city, together with Dair, Frank Newfeld, and such figures as Eric

116. Allan Fleming, 1963?, untitled, unpublished autobiographical manuscript. Fleming archive, Box 13, file 3. Apparently written while at *Maclean’s* or shortly after starting at MacLaren’s, this is an invaluable source of information on his early career.

117. David Cobb, “Media: The Source,” *Maclean’s* 91, no. 2 (23 January 1978); Fleming obituary.

118. Robert Walker and Irvine Brace, “CP&P Visits the New Cooper & Beatty,” *Canadian Printer and Publisher* (April 1959): 55.

119. Adele Freedman, “The Timeless Romanticism of Allan Fleming,” *Quill and Quire* (October 1977): 4.

Aldwinckle, who had been active in the pre-war Toronto art and design community. His work attracted the attention of W. E. “Jack” Trevett, president of Cooper & Beatty, whom Fleming referred to as “a nineteenth-century baron sort.”¹²⁰ Fleming was hired there as creative director in 1957, and the next five years were to prove a central turning point for the firm, for design in Canada, and for Fleming.

Independent research and self-motivation were two of his strengths, creating “intellectual” and “outstanding”¹²¹ work, most of it still using metal typesetting technology. The self-promotional advertising for Cooper & Beatty occupied much of his time, in addition to “two or three” designs daily for outside firms. The company’s principal clients were the approximately thirty advertising agencies in Toronto,¹²² although it has been noted that at one time all six of Canada’s major banks were having their annual reports typeset there.¹²³

The Type Directors Club of New York 1958 *Annual* prominently featured Fleming’s promotional work for Cooper & Beatty, and marketing mailers and promotional posters quickly became his research and development venue for experimental typography. Fully half of the designs in *Typography 58*, almost 150, were typeset at Cooper & Beatty, most of which almost certainly would have benefitted from extensive design input from their creative director.¹²⁴ To cap a successful year, in November, Fleming mounted a show of his designs at the Gallery of Contemporary Art.

Fleming also designed a number of elegant invitations and posters announcing exhibitions at this gallery, and Robert Fulford noted that “on at least three occasions his work has seemed to me to contain more artistic inspiration than anything in the art show it was advertising.”¹²⁵ Pearl McCarthy began to wonder if the market was sophisticated enough to absorb Fleming’s work.¹²⁶ The designer had just turned 29. Despite his enormous respect for Fleming, Frank Newfeld has suggested that, lacking a larger and more developed design industry to fit into, Fleming “suffered from overexposure.”¹²⁷

His use of large scale, exploding individual letters to dominate a design, the use of

120. Allan Fleming, unpublished autobiographical manuscript (Fleming archive).

121. Theo Dimson, quoted in Anon., “Profile,” *Quill and Quire* 37 no. 7 (21 May 1971): 4.

122. Walker and Brace, “CP&P Visits,” 55.

123. Hajnal and Landon, *Cooper & Beatty*, 1.

124. Walker and Brace, “CP&P Visits,” 55.

125. Robert Fulford, “CJBC Views the Shows,” (transcript, 23 November 1958, Fleming archive, Box 17, file 1. Taped on the occasion of Fleming’s solo exhibition at the Gallery of Contemporary Art, Toronto, for which Fleming had previously designed several small but highly-popular exhibition invitations and posters.

126. Pearl McCarthy, “One Man Design Show Brings Out an Issue,” *Globe and Mail*, 15 November 1958.

127. Newfeld interview.

Allan Fleming. Invitations for the Gallery of Contemporary Art. ca. 1958

unexpected angles and loose open space, and his sense of pacing, directing the reader across a page or through the folded panels of a flyer, show how liberated he had become from the strictly hierarchical and 'locked up' principles of page layout. Metal typesetting methods involved locking rectangular elements into a heavy frame, or chaser. It was a very physical, cumbersome process, making variation and experiment time-consuming and costly.

Fleming surmounted the disadvantage of the low number of metal fonts available by mixing and contrasting them in unusual ways. Many of his pieces appear to have been pasted up, using 'repro' sheets printed on proofing paper from metal type, a much more flexi-

ble working method. He mixed metal-generated typesetting with photographically enlarged type to maximize contrasts of scale. And he aggressively exploited the open space on the page, disrupting the ‘filled-in’ sense of space which metal typesetting technology tended to produce.

No wonder Fleming was quick to take advantage of many other photographic and optical distortion methods, including the first Fotosetter to arrive in Canada. By exposing type photographically, the Fotosetter and similar ‘second generation’ typesetting systems (that is, after metal, the third generation being the current digital generation of characters by computer) were therefore much more flexible in the sizing and placement of type. It arrived at Cooper & Beatty in 1951. Such technology was one of the benefits of designing for Toronto’s largest typesetting company:

The poster he produced to announce Copper & Beatty’s change of address in 1958, “Four Days,” shows his innovative approach. Its full size is 12 by 18 inches, but it was mailed folded to a quarter of that size, 6 by 9, in what is known as a french fold. Readers literally watched the poster ‘unfold,’ as the outer panels teased them in with large exclamation and question marks that echoed the red question mark which dominates the fully opened poster. These nine-inch-tall characters may have been printed from large woodblock display letters commonly used for street posters (their slightly crude shape suggests this), or they may have been photographically enlarged. The arrowhead which Fleming has added to the ‘4’ suggests that this piece was pasted up and modified by hand on the layout table, and not printed directly from metal.¹²⁸

Fleming has also broken apart the word “days,” even setting the final ‘s’ in a seemingly heavier font. The alignment of the main vertical and horizontal strokes of the ‘4’ with the folds emphasizes the designer’s subtle play on the folded poster format, and he leaves the main message – the fact that “What? C&B [would be] closed for four days!” – contrasted quietly yet forcefully with these large, teaser characters, and sitting alone in the otherwise empty, upper-right quarter of the page.

For good measure, Fleming most likely also wrote the clever copy, allowing him to work directly back and forth between the concept and the finished design, and he has had

128. In their 1959 article (Walker and Brace, “CP&P Visits”), the authors confirm that Cooper & Beatty was among those firms sending out the clay-paper ‘repro’ proofs, whether printed from metal or photographically. These ‘galley’s’ would then be pasted up in the final layout. Through technological change, pages were no longer being ‘locked up’ all at once in metal, and typographers were therefore divesting more of the responsibility for the finished form of the page to those “strange birds,” the designers.

Allan Fleming.
Announcement for
Cooper & Beatty.
"Four Days." 1958.

the poster printed on rough paper to give it the industrial feel of packing and shipping. A lot of thought went into this simple mailout, one undoubtedly produced in a few hours amongst a landfill of other work.

Equally deceptive is another invitation/mailler for Cooper & Beatty, "Stop – Go – Caution." A little under six inches square (folded size), it nonetheless uses typical Fleming devices such as pacing, mixing fonts, and semantic play with very simple symbols and shapes. Using traffic symbols as a motif, the designer has rendered the 'o's in "stop" and "caution" as solid red and amber traffic lights. Because his intention is to get the reader to

Allan Fleming. Announcement for Cooper & Beatty, "Stop. Go. Caution." Cover and Interior Spread. 1959.

STOP
GO
CAUTION

'go', however, he places that word in dramatically small fashion to one side of a large green circle. This circle is further emphasized by being the only element to break above the (invisible) horizon line Fleming has set exactly half way down the page. One can almost imagine his more traditional advertising clients at the time asking themselves why half of the entire piece was left blank, seemingly wasted.

Like this play between negative and positive space, other contrasts play a major role in the work: the four letters in 'stop' are each rendered in a different manner, with the 't' being a simple vertical rectangle crossed by the striped caution pattern of a traffic barrier; the headline is a tiny line of type wedged in among these letters (rather than the traditional prescription, which would have placed it large, bold, and centered at the top); and the jumble of letters which spells "caution" playfully echoes the shape of the large exclamation point beside it.

Allan Fleming. Saul Bass Announcement. 1959.

How simple could Fleming make an announcement while still remaining effective and clever? To announce a talk by Saul Bass, an American designer known for his experimental movie credits, Fleming simply ran the two names off the top and bottom of the page. The movement suggested by their radical cropping made them appear to be scrolling vertically past the viewer, like sequential film frames. Nothing could say more with less, in a more engaging way.

“The graphics man is on his way up”

Largely because of Fleming’s creative play, graphics were being recognized as a growing and exciting part of contemporary culture. In a 1959 *Canadian Art* profile, Robert Fulford celebrated Fleming’s “eclecticism,” and noted that he was “equally at home with the spatial relationships of Piet Mondrian and the Baroque letterforms of nineteenth-century England.”¹²⁹ Fulford had previously noted that Fleming combined the “bold vigorous American idiom and the more reserved and subtle English manner.”¹³⁰ Because clients by and large had yet to catch up with what design could offer, Fulford notes that his best works were the self-promotional pieces for Cooper & Beatty. In generating this kind of press (Fleming and Fulford were close friends), one of Fleming’s achievements was his role in bringing his clients to see the marketability of unfamiliar and expanded visual means.

A 1961 article in *Marketing* suggested that “the graphics man is on his way up,” as part of a more general discussion on how to integrate business more closely with design.

129. Robert Fulford, “Allan R. Fleming,” *Canadian Art* 16 (Autumn 1959): 268.

130. Fulford, “CJBC Views the Shows.”

The article title asked, “Can graphics break the management barrier?”¹³¹ and Fleming was its fitting focus, as his charming manner and broad intelligence made him a natural figure both to convince heads of business to expand their use of design, and also to promote the design profession.

John Gibson, who worked with Fleming at Cooper & Beatty, noted his ability to sell design “aggressively,”¹³² and not only to work up a variety of approaches or work in a variety of styles, but also to explain and justify his designs. Laying the ground for design’s professional expansion and its acceptance by business was not a matter best left to fate. Fleming applied this insight in perhaps his most famous creation and biggest marketing success, the CN logo of 1959.

The CN logo

In 1959, Canadian National Railways took the very modern step of conducting an opinion poll. The company had just spent ten years and 1.7 billion dollars reinvesting in new equipment and facilities. Despite this, the public’s opinion of the CNR remained “drab” and “Victorian.” Its symbol dated from 1896 and its slogan, in English only, was “Serves all Canada.”

To correct their image problem, CNR President Donald Gordon hired James Valkus, a 28-year-old, New York industrial designer. Gordon initially planned on nothing more than a new trademark, and Valkus was hired on the strength of nothing more than a chance recommendation and a four-page written brief. After extensive research, however, Valkus created a two-hour slide presentation which suggested that virtually everything connected with the company needed a complete redesign. Although the management of CNR was already overhauling its management structure, finances, and personnel, the presentation apparently prodded them into action on the design front as well.

Ultimately, CNR management did more than freshen up their sixty-year-old symbol. The resulting design process was one of the most thorough, consistent, and high-profile corporate identity programs in history. CNR even assigned Robert Ayre, nationally known art critic and long time public relations consultant with the railway, to oversee the design process. The implementation of this consistent design program, especially given the large scale, went beyond the visual. It also affected the structure of the business. This

131. Tim Dickson, “Can Graphics Break the Management Barrier,” *Marketing* (23 June 1961): 13.

132. Gibson interview.

is not to suggest that the designers were simultaneously management consultants, but in a real sense the design exercise did change the running of a company, as when over 200 different CNR ticket forms were pared down to just nine. There is a reciprocal determination at work in the visual culture of a corporation, as design does not just reflect a company, or improve its marketing, but forms a structural part of its products and services.

Valkus hired Allan Fleming to produce the new CNR symbol, and it was Fleming who suggested the shortening of the company name to the bilingual CN. There are two central questions which will be looked at here: what do we know of how the final symbol was arrived at, that is, to what extent was the design Fleming's own work; and what other key roles did Fleming play in selling and promoting the design.

It is immediately evident from the surviving sketches, in the collection of the National Archives of Canada,¹³³ that many hands were involved. Ernst Roch recalls seeing walls at Valkus's studio literally covered in variations, on a number of different themes and approaches, by several different artists from the studio as well as by Fleming and Valkus themselves.

A first set of sketches, by Valkus, shows that it was decided early on to combine just two letters. However, his first impulse was to use gesture and loose, lively shapes. A further sketch by him echoes the slab serifs and rectangular overall shape of Victorian display typefaces, much as Herbert Matter used in his 1954 redesign of the logo for the New York, New Haven and Hartford Railroad, or as Paul Rand used for his better-known IBM logo from 1956. The clumsy complexity of this chalk drawing suggests that Valkus lacked faith

133. For a brief and not overly critical discussion, see Susan North, "James Valkus," in Susan North et al., eds., *A Place in History* (Ottawa: National Archives of Canada, 1991), 227.

in the CNR's commitment to modernization – that is, he wasn't sure how much 'modern' to apply to the job.

One of Fleming's early design proposals continues to use arrows and movement, but in a calligraphic style. This has a popular, organic-modern feel to it, so common in the 1950s, which is to say it is quite traditional, as slashing curves, arrowheads, and light, open lines were very much in the style of the times. Fleming's own margin notes suggest that he found it too much like a hammer and sickle.

A further Fleming proposal comes closer to the final, and introduces a geometric approach, but retains the arrowhead and lively curves. There is little in these sketches to support Fleming as the sole author of the key aspects of the finished work, with its utterly simple geometry; consistency of line; and balanced, overall shape, which solidify it into a single, iconic symbol.

Thus, it seems the most important conceptual sketch was not done by either Valkus or Fleming, but one of Valkus's staff artists, Carl Ramirez. He did 30 ink designs on small squares of bristol board, working quite tightly, even tentatively. The meticulous methods employed suggest that, unlike the faster, gestural brushstrokes or chalk drawings of the senior designers, Ramirez was thinking his way through the process more than he was relying on a highly-developed manual facility. Such facility, of course, comes from extensive practice. This level of experience in turn likely also contributed to the conservatism of the two senior men, in their repetition of existing shapes, styles, and approaches. It is in part the use of rulers, compasses, and ruling pens which seems to have turned Ramirez's design process to a tighter, more geometric solution.

His solution is incomplete (it shows an elongated 'C,' and the inside of the curves are square), but he has hit upon the basic *idea*, missing only the rigorous simplicity and visual balance of the final shape. Because Ramirez develops a number of completely dif-

ferent shapes in the thirty sketches of his which remain, we can assume that this geometrically reduced 'C' and 'N' was largely his idea. Had the senior designers already settled on the basic shape, it can be assumed that they would have asked for variations on that one theme.

Fleming made one last pencil sketch, which settled on the proportions of the final symbol and its single, bending, flowing line of uniform weight, although it made that line quite heavy. Valkus's comments, in the lower right, are, "Make thinner and we've got it."

The final symbol was a simple, 'overall' solution, in which the artist's gestures and personal choices seem to have been removed. Its gestation at the hands of several different artists, and the implied debate, discussion, and input from many people, was an important part of removing the subjective, gestural aspects of the earlier sketches. At the heart of the modern style lies the importance of the *collective* visual intelligence of design as a profession, which pushes design toward an inherently more logical approach, stylistically independent of the individual's hand, and which allows translation from one designer to another and from one application to another.

According to his contract, Fleming was paid \$5,000 to design six marks and produce 12 comprehensive sketches,¹³⁴ but he spent over five months, on and off, wrestling with just two letters, in what he called "agonizing days and nights of investigating and turning down that led to the one that is right."¹³⁵ Legend (largely Fleming's own) has it that he arrived at the final design in a flash of inspiration, while doodling on a napkin and waiting in an airport lounge. The record suggests that the process was far from that simple, but rather much more collective, negotiated, and inherently modern.

134. Allan Fleming to James Valkus, 25 June 1959 (Fleming archive, Box 8, file 1).

135. Anon., "The Birth of a Symbol," *Keeping Track* 4, no. 1 (February 1961): 4.

Unknown. Allan Fleming and Charles Harris with the New CN Symbol. 1960.

Pitching Modernism

Fleming and Valkus were looking for more than just an appropriate symbol. What single symbol can truly be said to ‘appropriately’ represent a large, diversified organization? This is to ask Gilles Héneault’s question again – what form, exactly, follows what function? CNR was all of a transportation, property management, and communications company, and in addition to rail it also provided Teletype services, Telex, Hotels, Freight, Marine transport, and so on. A modern multinational like CN may be an abstract exercise in capital accumulation more than the actual running of hotels and trains, and in this sense an abstract symbol is the most accurate representation of what CN actually does. But this is not the reason corporations came to adopt monolithic, abstract symbols.

Instead, the designers were wrestling with the idea of the modern in the mass context itself, working with but also pushing against the essentialist, modern logic which permitted only one ‘right’ solution, and demanded a minimal and rational geometry. The struggle seems to have been not whether they *would* arrive at a geometric solution, (that is, were Valkus and Fleming ‘modern enough?’); rather, the designers needed to agree on whether they *should* arrive there (that is, was the *client* ‘modern enough?’) Several early sketches were clearly moving directly towards such a solution, after all, and geometric,

Allan Fleming. Slide from Presentation Made to CN. of Blurred Symbol in Motion. 1959.

minimal symbols would undoubtedly have been familiar to both Valkus and Fleming (for example the CBS logo of 1951, the symbols by Matter and Rand mentioned earlier, or even closer to home, Ernst Roch's O'Keefe's Fisheries logo of 1954). The appropriateness they were wrestling with was a social one, based on their understanding of the commitment of CN management to change, their level of understanding of marketing and design trends, and a reading (a guess, really) of the potential for success of such a symbol in the arena of popular communication. The question then became, simply, would CN buy it, and were they prepared to implement it thoroughly enough to make it work?

The final presentation of the symbol for management approval was a proper performance in its own right. It was tightly scripted (a copy of the script remains today in the Fleming archive), and included an impressive array of models and sketches. Fleming also used extensive visual aids and slides, including a deliberately blurred image which proved that the design solution was legible even while in motion (as many of them would be, much of the time). He showed CN management the Christian cross, the Red Cross, the Volkswagen logo, and many others, in effect selling them on the simplicity of the most timeless of historic symbols, and implying that CN could make a similar impact with the right modern design. The board could hardly refuse such rational, and flattering, modern logic.

The redesign project was announced while it was still underway, and the results were widely anticipated in the press and the public. It was actually news when the design was first 'leaked,' prior to its official unveiling. Before its official release, photos of the new symbol ran in Montreal newspapers, in November, 1960, when it first appeared around the city on trucks. Fleming himself is seen in publicity stills, taken expressly to promote the

new design, with Charles Harris, CN's new head of Public Relations. Not even the most timeless or rational of symbols can survive without some serious promotional push.

This is perhaps the most important aspect of the work which Fleming did for the company. It was the collaboration of the CN management which allowed the designers to push the level of simplicity and geometry in this symbol further than most contemporaneous symbols, and Fleming was key in winning that collaboration. CN's reward was not long in coming. By 1966, an opinion poll of attitudes showed that the public felt CN was "progressive, efficiently run," and noted improvements in service, a greater sense of job security, and increased company morale as major benefits.

The *Montreal Star* reported that Alfred Pinsky, chair of the Fine Art Department of Sir George Williams University, told a group of businessmen in 1966 that "The CN symbol has a flowing sinuous movement so vivid that it immediately takes hold of the eye and mind. It is one of the best examples of good design in Canada." Other commentators predicted "it will mean a major change in management policy towards design in this country."¹³⁶ (according to the copy in CN's own newsletter, *Keeping Track*). The ceaseless flood of similarly minimalist logos and symbols which have appeared in Canada since 1960 suggest that this change *was* thoroughly instituted.

Recent writers continue to claim that the logo "has the same vitality and power that it had the day it was unveiled."¹³⁷ The CN redesign had succeeded in establishing itself as a creation myth, the birth of a particular, narrow vision of high modernism, in design and in corporate management in Canada. Such internationalism, codified in a seemingly neutral or rational visual language, was designed to suggest the naturalization of corporate power itself. The inherent implication – that corporate enterprises like CN, and by extension global capitalism, are equally the most efficient and rational organization of resources – remains equally powerful. The CN logo makes the ideological argument that the end is a given; only the most rational means of reaching it remain to be worked out.

After CN and Cooper & Beatty

Although Fleming produced similar symbols for Ontario Hydro, Design Canada, and Grey Coach Lines, the CN logo is in fact quite unlike virtually all of the rest of Fleming's work. In particular, its regular geometry contradicts the typographic designs and advertis-

136. Ibid., 5.

137. North, "James Valkus," 227.

ing of his work in the years immediately previous to 1960, some of which we have looked at. Despite the remarkable fame and subsequent work which the symbol provided him, Fleming had a complex and contradictory reaction to the very argument for modernism which the symbol's form implies. And neither was he to join in the growing movement toward an international modernism.

He did make admiring comments in 1959 on the influence on design of Kurt Schwitters and Marcel Duchamp, and noted that the Swiss influence in design, so different from the English, "was a refreshing change from the neo-Victorian school of English typography."¹³⁸ He was well-read and international in outlook. Yet, as we have touched on above, in 1964 he also admitted to being "bothered" by "one-world design," and the "homogeneous, safe society" to which its international vision of uniformity aspired.¹³⁹ Fleming understood that the visual form of modern design itself was not a given, and that more than simply the most rational means of reaching it remained to be worked out. He called the CN symbol a "tapeworm rampant," and popular interpretations which defied its basis in abstraction or geometry, preferring to read it literally as a train track snaking across the country, were common. If international styles of modernism were a game Fleming could play with consummate professionalism, he retained a certain critical distance from it all.

In 1962 he left Cooper & Beatty, and spent nine months at *Maclean's* magazine. However, the deadline pressures and very different working methods of a weekly news-magazine led to some ungainly work. Fleming redesigned the magazine, but his time there resulted in no lasting design developments. So effective with clever marketing pieces or formal, typographic publications such as annual reports and books, he seemed somewhat uneasy with the complexity and art direction of a popular publication. It represented a very different tradition from the quick impact demanded of a focussed marketing message, or a single visual problem in need of a solution.¹⁴⁰

From *Maclean's*, he joined MacLaren Advertising, a move which surprised many of his fellow designers. Unlike Cooper & Beatty, this was a huge corporation with \$46 million in billings in 1966, with the largest of national accounts.¹⁴¹ While he no doubt strongly influenced MacLaren's work, he could hardly dominate it, or the Toronto design com-

138. Allan Fleming, "Uppercase 2," *Royal Architectural Institute of Canada Journal* (September 1959).

139. Fleming, "An Appreciation," n.p.

140. Anon., "Achievement by Design," *Newsprint* 3 (1975): 2.

141. Antony Ferry, "Actually, MacLaren's doesn't run everything..." *Toronto Daily Star*, 8 October 1966.

munity, as single-handedly as he once had. Additionally, in keeping with advertising industry standards, his work became much more anonymous and collective there. Although he spent five years at MacLaren, his 1977 retrospective exhibition at the Vancouver Art Gallery included nothing from this period in his work. Despite accepting the Royal Canadian Academy medal in 1965, it is fair to say that Fleming's star was somewhat eclipsed in the period of the mid 1960s.

Fleming's modernism was based on a breadth of experience and influences, and the greatest among them was his knowledge of history. He claimed it was necessary to know "the history of design so intimately that its application to each new problem becomes automatic."¹⁴² He would happily debate the most esoteric of nuances as well, as when he conducted a friendly if heated exchange in 1961 with Carl Dair, in the letters pages of *Canadian Architect*, regarding the origins of building signage in Roman typography on public monuments (the debate hinged on whether the Romans had ever used three-dimensional letters riveted to stone).¹⁴³ He was willing to concede that the typographic revival in England of the 1920s produced a calming, classical influence, so necessary for the progress of English design after the vulgarity of Victorian excess, but also maintained in the same article that "tidiness can be a bore."¹⁴⁴

His approach involved an intense accumulation of information and detail, from attention to the crucial role of white space of the page (he argued that it was the white paper which reflected into the eye, and that it was the white area around letters which the eye actually 'read')¹⁴⁵ and the technical precision of the color and spacing of a given block of type, to the proper method of mixing fonts and their "metaphorical feel."¹⁴⁶ In truth, there was no single 'Fleming style,' only a deeply informed and intellectual sense of purposeful function – without any preconceived ideas of what 'functional' implied. If stylishness suited the function, then he could just as easily emphasize style, as when he reminded designers to make type "desirable" and not just legible.¹⁴⁷ In a sophisticated refutation

142. Quoted by Robert Fulford in "Notebook: My Letterhead, Allan Fleming, and the Look of Canada," *Saturday Night* 91, no. 8 (November 1976): 11.

143. Allan R. Fleming, "Lettering on Buildings," *Canadian Architect* 6, no. 3 (March 1961): 61.

144. Allan Fleming, untitled speech (given on occasion of Toronto Public Library Exhibition of Victorian Broad-sides, 6 June 1965, Fleming archive, Box 13, file 1).

145. Quoted in Anon., "Quietness of Design Draws Attention to Advertisements: Fleming," *Industrial Sales/Promotion* (April – May 1962): 32.

146. Allan Fleming, "Typographic Design," *Graphicoids/Info-graphisme* (Montreal: Domtar Fine Paper Ltd., 1, no. 1 (1977?); n.p.

147. Walker and Brace, "CP&P Visits," 59.

of positivism and objectivity, he could assert that “the image we build up in our minds is not necessarily based on truth, but on what we believe to be true,” (this in the context of explaining his new symbol for Ontario Hydro!)¹⁴⁸

Modernism for Fleming could not possibly rest on formal uniformity, or pretend to a basis in strict rationality. This pattern in Canadian design, which preferred synthesis over analysis, is continued in the work of two designers, very much Fleming’s contemporaries, who themselves created many remarkably original designs.

Theo Dimson, Gerry Moses and “The Imperial Oil Review”

Like Fleming, Theo Dimson was drawn to American magazines, as well as comic books, illustrations, antique Victoriana, antique postcards, antiques, ephemera from the 1920s: almost any form of commercial art.¹⁴⁹ He was simply excited by design itself. Born in 1930 in Toronto, he graduated from the four-year course in commercial art at Danforth Technical High School, which included commercial art fundamentals as well as a fine art emphasis. This training allowed him to graduate from the Ontario College of Art in only three years (one year sooner than the norm). Immediately after leaving college he made a huge impression and won awards at the 1951 Toronto Art Directors exhibition, where he was immediately recognized as a talented newcomer.

He held out for a better-than-routine job, and was eventually rewarded with a position at Art Associates, replacing Allan Fleming as junior designer and working under Rolf Prine. Although he has referred to commercial art companies such as Art Associates and TDF (which was the largest) as “supermarkets,” because of their wide range of illustration, layout, and photography services, Dimson nonetheless had a relatively free hand. Much of the work was for advertising agencies (Dimson particularly remembers working on the Ford Trucks account for Cockfield Brown), but occasionally work would arise which called for a more creative touch. He stayed with Art Associates between 1950 – 53, and then left to freelance, where he recalls the money was even better: as much as \$100 a week.

Dimson developed a particularly stylish hand at illustration at this time, and worked on his own for magazines such as *Liberty*, *Mayfair*, *Canadian Home Journal* and others. One significant freelance project was illustrating and designing the entire twenty-fifth anniver-

148. Lois Lane, “Man of Letters: Allan Fleming,” *Ontario Hydro News* (June 1965): 15.

149. Unattributed quotes and much of the biographical detail on Dimson in this section are from the Dimson interview.

sary issue of the *Imperial Oil Review* in 1956. The large illustrations, done in the fashion of period woodblock prints, were well integrated with the text, giving the entire magazine a strong, overall, period-design look. This issue of the *Review* helped establish Dimson as a master of period styles, and also led to an invitation to mount a one-man show of his drawings at a gallery in, curiously, Kalamazoo, Michigan.

He also contributed a page to the Stratford Festival program of 1958, where each of the eight, full-page advertisements were loose interpretations of Shakespeare illustrated by a different contemporary illustrator, including Dimson, Harold Town, Graham Coughtry, and James Hill. Dimson's effort showed that he could stretch the limits of convention, as he included pasted-in halftone photos and Victorian engravings in a ragged collage that owed as much to Dada and Ben Shahn as it did to the Bard.

Dimson returned to Art Associates in 1958, having received "a hell of an offer" from Prine, and remained there until 1965, determined to make it "the hottest big studio in Canada." Two pieces from the period express his openly unconventional attitude. A trade advertisement for Art Associates is a development of a particular style of Victorian handbill typography (a similar source inspired Fleming's device of blocking letters into a disjointed box, as seen on the "Stop-go-caution" announcement discussed above). Dimson explodes it to the point of parody, running words at various right angles and in different sizes, in a tightly-tiled statement of the company's 'supermarket' of services.

What had been a confining aspect of metal typography, the rectangular chase in which letters had to be locked into place, becomes the source for an amusing typographic experiment. Dimson is careful to leave a band of white across the top, and set his headline in an extremely small size, to frame the period reference in a modern way. For the June, 1960 cover of a Japanese design magazine, *IDEA*, which ran a special issue on Canadian designers, a similar typographic treatment is offset by a vast expanse of white space, allowing the focus to rest on two, lifesize eyes.

Dimson's approach is remarkably fresh and would not be out of place in advertising today. Furthermore, the similarity in the typographic approach he takes in these two works represents the central aspect of his work. Despite the variety of visual approaches and solutions he arrived at, one always has the feeling that Dimson in *illustrating* in type, that he is fundamentally interested in creating a picture rather than setting type simply for its legibility, delivering a message, or elegant layout. Although his work in the 1950s and early 1960s was powerful and influential, the works he is best known for are his later

Art Associates Limited specialists in the art of advertising 405 Devonport Road Toronto, Canada. WA 5-2181

Theo Dinson. Advertisement for Art Associates. ca. 1959.

posters, including many for Toronto Theatre Productions, which are essentially large illustrations, drawn in a strikingly clean and brilliantly colored Art Nouveau style.

The eclecticism and edginess, and the illustration-based approach of much of his work (even when he is using only type), underline the way in which Canadian awareness and acceptance of modern experimentation were often enhanced by an engagement with traditional styles (such as Victoriana), humorous and ironic contrast, and a variety of visual styles and media, including illustration.

Theo Dimson.
 IDEA Magazine.
 1960.

Gerald (Gerry) Moses (1913 – 1994), was born in Toronto, where he started his career in 1930 as one of two art directors at Baker Advertising. The photographic training he received in the Navy during the war led to an interest in still photography and filmmaking, which he pursued during thirty years as part of the Imperial Oil public relations department. His art direction on the groundbreaking *Imperial Oil Review* was a small part of his career, which included leading roles in the Art Directors Club of Toronto, the

Gerry Moses, Art Director; Arnaud Maggs, Illustrator. Feature Spread from *Imperial Oil Review*, December 1956. "Let's Save Our Children's Lives." 1956.

Arts and Letters Club, the Society of Typographic Designers of Canada and the Aspen International Design Conference. He was also instrumental in establishing the Imperial Oil art collection.

Printed for mass distribution to Canadian shareholders and employees of the multinational corporation, the *Imperial Oil Review* enjoyed a period of intense and important experimentation in the late 1950s. At first, Moses drew on the work of local illustrators simply to enliven the covers. Eventually, however, the stylishness of the Toronto illustration community led him to expand their use to the feature articles. The illustration by Arnaud Maggs from 1956 is a remarkable example of Maggs's child-like style. Clear bold color and domestic themes were the almost universal concerns of advertising and publishing at mid-decade.

By the October, 1958 issue, Moses commissioned a cover collage by Michael Snow, and the links to the fine art community were deepened by having artists such as Dennis Burton contribute works for reproduction on the covers (as opposed to producing commissioned illustrations, as Snow had).

*Gerry Moses, Art Director;
John Richmond, Designer.
Feature Spread from Imperial
Oil Review, Christmas 1961.
"Perfume Isn't Just For People"
1961.*

In adding designer John Richmond to the staff in 1960, however, Moses was able to fully incorporate dramatic typography into the repertoire of the publication's visual experimentation. Richmond often used a remarkable blend of nostalgic elements in groundbreaking layouts. By 1961, the publication's art direction included modern, tightly cropped and 'objective' photography, as well as semi-abstract photographic treatments, including some memorable covers and interior layouts dedicated to the work of staff photographer Roy Nicholls.

As with Fleming, these designers were fashioning a range of powerful responses to modern life out of a variety of different tools, many of which were drawn from popular culture and the mass media, some of which depended on the changing nature of typog-

graphic and printing technology, and a few of which occasionally dipped into the fine arts and illustration. In both cases, however, it is the artists' intense engagement with, and response to, the power of those sources which permits them to shape a distinct, modernist vision.

In discussing the work of these designers, from Dair to Dimson, the discussion has circled largely around their argument *with* the modern, rather than how they exemplify a particular modern ideal. Far from being a single, or even a particularly simple, relationship, the variety of different visual approaches we find is as varied as their designer's definition of what was important about the state of their wider, contemporary, visual culture. In the final chapters, however, it is important to take the argument beyond the variety of these individual responses, to look at the intellectual construct of modernism itself.

In its application of modern methods in the context of mass reproduction, and the growth of imagery and design as important commodities in themselves, modern Canadian design history suggests that some revision is needed in the wider, contemporary, and theoretical argument about modernism. We will begin by tracing some of the wider aspects of that history, beyond the individual histories outlined above, to locate the various cracks in modernist theory which Canadian design history opens up.

Defining Mass Modernism

CHAPTER FIVE: RETRACING THE WAYLAID HISTORY OF A THEORETICAL IDEAL

The boundaries between high art and mass culture have become increasingly blurred, and we begin to see that process as one of opportunity, rather than lamenting the loss of quality and failure of nerve.

—Andreas Huyssen, *After the Great Divide*¹⁵⁰

Graphic design is concerned with surface, with the way in which appearance changes and enhances the function of a given commodity. The term has been primarily applied to printing on paper, although the changing look of printed publications and advertising has had a profound and reciprocal impact on exhibits, packaging, television, public spaces, clothing and many other areas. Designers touch on, and occasionally work in, all of these fields.

As has been shown, design's origins lie in the technical trades of printing and typesetting, as individuals in those fields became aware of the importance of design as a separate product, greater than the simple sum of its parts. As designers began to define the new field, they encountered and exploded the given constraints of the technical process of reproduction and its traditions. Design emerged, in other words, in the best modern fashion; by a process of separation and distinction, and the increasing division of labor, which created room for specialists who concentrated on changing the shape and definition of printed appearances.

150. Andreas Huyssen, *After the Great Divide: Modernism, Mass Culture, and Postmodernism* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1986), ix.

The large, well-established advertising industry (the first agency in Canada, Angus McKim, dates from 1889)¹⁵¹ forms a kind of silent partner in the self-definition of design, providing much of its energy and a steady source of business in its formative period, but also serving as an opposing tradition from which design distinguished itself. Unlike advertising, which was quick to implement the rapidly developing ideas of designers, graphic design is not centrally focussed on the successful marketing of other products. Indeed, it was initially concerned with self-marketing, struggling to be seen as a separate profession. Design started to grow once designers realized that the hours spent in shaping the page, a service formerly included in the cost of printing, engraving, typesetting, or advertising, were not only uniquely important but also billable separately.

Such a change in the economic basis of design automatically entailed pressure to create new ways of doing business, whether through smaller firms built around the skills of one or more individual designers, or else through the creation of separate divisions within larger firms. Design thus also distinguished itself from commercial art – the much higher profile arts of illustration and photography which gave publishing in the 1950s its irreducible element of fantasy and popularity. Designers also asserted a measure of direct control over the final printed form by breaking away from structure of the large studio and advertising agency system, which placed a deliberate distance (in the form of agents and sales representatives) between the artists and the clients.¹⁵² What had previously been practiced in the back rooms of large typesetting or engraving companies, on the floor of printshops, or in large and very industrial commercial art ‘supermarkets,’ was rapidly moving into a more personal, if still professional, office setting.

This differentiation, banal and commercial as it might seem, nonetheless is the intellectual grounding of modernist theory itself, and lies at the root of modernist practice. In an intellectual tradition dating to the Enlightenment and Kant, but most recently applied in the sociological theories of Weber,¹⁵³ differentiation has been seen as the defining characteristic of the modern generally. It also grounds specifically artistic forms of modernism in whatever medium or industry they appear – whether design, as marketed through offices; or painting, as marketed through galleries, museums, and government subsidy; or music, as marketed through performance and recording, and so on.

151. Angela E. Davis, *Art and Work: A Social History of Labor in the Canadian Graphic Arts Industry to the 1940s* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1995), 61.

152. Harrison, “An Appreciation,” n.p.

153. See Lash, *Sociology of Postmodernism*, 5 ff.

Unknown. The Eveleigh Dair Studio. ca. 1950.

Modern artistic practitioners have (traditionally) sought to partition a self-critical and self-aware space in which conscious choice and experiment could replace tradition. This differentiated, critical space implies a separation from other fields and professions, but also a certain critical tension between professional design and its audience. The post-war period is, of course, precisely the time when modern fine art became both widely publicized and well-known, but also much more difficult and unpopular. In design, as in painting and sculpture, a similar process of professionalization led to the development of difficult, unfamiliar forms derived from a critical analysis of the nature of design itself.

The separation of design as a distinct service owed much to the process of postwar recovery, production, and consumption which was well established by 1955. The increasing division of labor in Canadian design, and the visual freedom of individual designers in small, professional studios, permitted the development of a clear, internally consistent design language, in a variety of styles, which announced the arrival of modern, profes-

sional design. The success of the new language of design, and its effectiveness and consistency in corporate and governmental applications, in turn fed back, symbiotically, to stimulate the growth of the profession.

In Canada, this sense of differentiation was achieved partly on a professional basis, not simply as the result of an intellectual or theoretical argument, and the change had broad, immediate, material effects on our culture. The professional space of design collapsed the distinction between ‘make’ and ‘analyze;’ allowed the broad and relatively popular development of a critical awareness of visual language; and generated a tentative, critical, and collective approach among designers – the very basis of a modernist differentiation.

It is the process of the economic and intellectual self-definition and differentiation of graphic design, its definition as a profession, which compelled artists in the graphic arts to overcome previous practice with modern forms, and change the look of our printed environment from the reproduction of traditional forms dictated by conservative craftsmen to a dynamically experimental and rapidly expanding art form. This professional, industrial, mass process is the modernist event itself.

Design’s modernism was therefore not simply a visual cleansing of the non-essential. It was not even primarily so. It was largely based on its *position*, as part of the conscious development of the artistic potential of the mass media themselves. Modernism’s continuity and “lawful development” cannot be meaningfully reduced to specific visual innovations. A large part of design’s modern energy came from its growth as a profession, the variety of visual and stylistic approaches which were represented by the membership of national organizations, and the increasingly varied yet deliberate use of the design process by designers themselves.

Designers such as Fleming and Dimson were the start of this process of self-definition and critique within commercial art. They were self-identified designers from the beginning of their careers, and grew scornful of those who retained a yearning for easel painting. Fleming typified the designer who was so because he wanted to be, and not in spite of himself; someone in a position where “advertising art...has become instead something which is your life.”¹⁵⁴ Any artist could take up commercial art for purely commercial

154. Quoted in Fulford, “Allan R. Fleming,” 273.

reasons which, as Rolf Harder noted, most did initially,¹⁵⁵ but the importance of the post-war period lay in the enormous increase in the number of artists who chose design as their medium and sole profession. All modern art is produced for a competitive market – artworks are, after all, primarily “works” – but the modern designer/artist’s “ticket to success” was increasingly seen as a suit and an explanatory rationale, rather than the bohemian image of beards and sandals.¹⁵⁶

Postwar Transitions

In seeing design as the extension, even the culmination of the critical modernist project of differentiation, we have returned modernism to its roots. The European avant-garde of the 1920s dreamed of the union of art and life, and its experiments to this end were rooted largely in broad, revolutionary movements, primarily those of Weimar Germany and Soviet Russia, and in a focussed concern with the potential of mass cultural expression. Peter Bürger notes that the production of art became a very specific means to an often political end, whereby the interwar avant-garde removed the myths of aestheticism and turned away from traditional stylistic prescriptions. Yet, the parallel defeat of mass revolutionary working class movements in these and other countries dissipated the very basis on which such an avant-garde might be reconstructed, and after World War 2, these energies took a very different direction.¹⁵⁷ If the modern, mass arts of design express much of the initial impulse of 1920s avant-garde modernism, they in fact contradict much of what modernism has come to mean in the postwar years.

Ideas of modernism grew more stable, dominant, and controlling after 1945 because the process of capitalist modernization itself grew more stable. A specific set of forms could be designated the sole inheritors of modernism *tout court*, and a ‘high-modernism’ could be theorized, created, institutionalized, and defended. Given the size, scope, and success of the postwar economic boom, there is little wonder that the basis for a genuinely oppositional, postwar avant-garde is seen to have failed, “liquidated or driven into

155. Rolf Harder, “Design in Canada: A Thought on Graphic Design,” *Design Journal* (Seoul, South Korea) 32 (October – November 1990).

156. Sheila Gormely, “Where Beards Go By the Boards,” *Toronto Telegram*, 18 June 1964. In ironic homage to the prestige of the fine artist, however, a very high percentage of the ads for commercial art services in the back pages of the Toronto Art Directors Club Annuals throughout the 1950s use palettes, goatees, and berets to represent their services.

157. Alex Callinicos, *Against Postmodernism: A Marxist Critique* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1990), 6.

exile” from Weimar Germany and Soviet Russia,¹⁵⁸ only to be further denied and dispersed by the greater force and seeming productivity of postwar, capitalist, consumer culture.

This stable, dominant, high-modernism has been called the distinctive triumph of the bourgeoisie, which among other things, “gave capital the architectural language it had lacked,”¹⁵⁹ (and so, too, an international design style). Additionally, given the absence of a highly developed cultural hegemony in the United States, theorists of the modern were able to assume a position as honest broker or agent for the newly victorious and powerful American ruling class,¹⁶⁰ and former Trotskyists, especially those such as Clement Greenberg who were around the *Partisan Review*, could take the lead in steering modernism back into the academy.¹⁶¹

The result was nonetheless a hierarchy, the gulf of the ‘great divide.’ The confusion of modernism with a stylistic or formal teleology, defining it solely in terms of a specific trajectory of visual form (towards greater formal purity, reduction, and abstraction), contributed to the pronounced elevation of the fine arts in the postwar period, and a self-defeating resignation among many designers that the commercial nature of their position, and the demands of their clients, were somehow a restriction on the modern process of formal exploration and examination, which was best typified by abstract painting. A hierarchy among the arts was the inevitable result, and design became separated from the modernist project: invisible and untheorized by the terms in which high-modern art was being defined.

In this combined and uneven development between design and the fine arts, however, borrowing was common. One critic has noted how “Miro’s ‘*Woman and Bird in Moonlight*’ of 1949 is a veritable directory of design motifs for the 1950s,”¹⁶² and a look through the design annuals of the period shows a remarkable profusion of references to Calder and Mondrian, Pellan and Picasso. (It is not possible here to trace the reciprocal influences of advertising and design on painting in this century; but it must be acknowledged that painters in turn owed something to the design of the 1930s and ’40s.) For the

158. Huyssen, *After the Great Divide*, viii.

159. Callinicos, *Against Postmodernism*, 156.

160. Huyssen, *After the Great Divide*, 6.

161. See Fred Orton and Griselda Pollock, “*avant-gardes* and Partisans Reviewed,” in Francis Frascina, ed., *Pollock and After: The Critical Debate* (New York: Harper and Row, 1985), 167.

162. Jackson, *The New Look*, 30.

most part, designers respected and even envied the divisions between high and low arts. Theo Dimson has noted that Harold Town, painter and co-founder of Painters 11, was “infuriated” by the common, received wisdom that the fine artist was more important than the commercial. Yet in practice Town, despite building a successful career as an illustrator, clearly enjoyed and promoted his own enhanced status as a fine artist.

For its part, the increased division of labor within the mass arts was enabling the designer to eclipse the ‘creative’ illustrators, painters and photographers, a fact which led Fleming to predict (quite correctly) that the commercial art studio was “doomed.”¹⁶³ “Calling in an ‘artist’ to pretty up an ad,” he later explained, “is gone forever.”¹⁶⁴ In any event, those artists who tried it were not finding it all that easy to do. Jack Shadbolt, writing about his poster designs for the Vancouver Playhouse in the early 1960s, confessed that “it’s easy to make an elegant decoration, but quite another thing to evoke exact implication.”¹⁶⁵

A high-modernist autonomy

Modernism’s basis in differentiation, then, in its separation and maintenance of critical spaces specific to given fields, became the theoretical justification for the postwar emergence of an artistic high-modernism which claimed complete self-definition, and which institutionally isolated itself from social application. This led to the most important and telling transition in modernist theory: its assumption of autonomy from the modern mass culture which had been its original impetus. High-modernist theory maintained, moreover, that this separation was necessarily oppositional, that modernism stood not only apart, but also essentially *above* and *against* the broader cultural milieu. Modernism could retain the semblance of critical distance, but had abandoned the base in mass culture which made much avant-garde work oppositional in more than a merely theoretical sense.

The adoption of formal, artistic experimentation by large, professional institutions, in the context of the postwar economic boom and a liberal commitment to intellectual freedom, sought to ensure that any union between art and life would necessarily be on the ‘highest’ terms, those of a purified artistic practice, no longer “raising the general standard,” in Moholy-Nagy’s term, but setting the standard far apart from the general. High-

163. Allan Fleming, “Dammit That’s Just What I’ve Gone and Done” (unpublished speech, delivered to Ad makers, 26 January 1966. Fleming archive, Box 13, file 1).

164. Dickson, “Can Graphics Break Management Barrier?”

165. Robert Stacey, *The Canadian Poster Book: 100 Years of the Poster in Canada* (Toronto: Methuen, 1979), 58.

modernism deliberately abandoned any popular or contradictory forms of modern artistic development to the wasteland of lesser art forms, variously labeled kitsch, folk, ethnic, pop, dada, theatre, or else jettisoned them entirely as anti-art. Design fell into this 'lesser' category, its applied nature rendering the illusion of perfect, formal differentiation seemingly impossible.

Yet, in tracing the development of design, what becomes most apparent is the profusion of forms of modernism it has created. In effect, it is an examination of the tensions and contradictions in the work of designers, rather than the identification of a single, preferred vision, that allows the best assessment of the modern artistic approaches which were at work in Canada in the postwar period. Taken together, the range of design responses undermines any illusion that the most essential artistic expression of modern life was to be found in tightly defined, institutionally differentiated practices.

As a modernist art form, therefore, design retains vital links with other popular, cultural forms. It is these wider, practical issues which restrained the practice of formal reduction or stylistic separation in design, which the fine art system of studio, gallery, and museum could perpetuate. All of the artists surveyed in this study shared a formal understanding of typesetting and printing, and design emerged from that basis. But equally importantly, they also drew on a synthesis of other media, historical traditions, and stylistic influences. There remains a remarkable diversity in their approaches, totally at odds with a single, formally coherent definition of modern design's style or approach.

The growing complexity of design, and the process of the conscious development of type, composition, imagery, color, and shape, posed a synthetic, applied vision of artistic modernism, sharply opposed to the claim of autonomy for modern art. In part, this was part and parcel of modernism's heritage from the very start, something which not even the most determined critic could long repress. As with Bürger, Michael Newman revives a critically reflexive definition of modernism, noting a variety of processes which shatter the illusion of autonomy: the recurrent relationship of modern, abstract styles to wider cultural movements; the repeated emergence of a political stance, a "social consciousness," among the arts; and the permanent intrusion of 'outside' elements, pastiche and 'low' artistic references.¹⁶⁶ All of these are evident in the design of 1955 – 65.

The growth of design and its increased importance to marketing and economic life;

166. Michael Newman, "Revising Modernism, Representing PostModernism: Critical Discourses of the Visual Arts," in Lisa Appignanesi, ed., *Postmodernism, ICA Documents* (London: Free Association Books, 1989), 99.

the central position of designers in the print industry; their expanded role in art directing all creative aspects of a work; the growing amount of creative thought and control demanded of good design; and above all the explosion of design as an increasingly essential aspect of the commodity form: all of these modern developments combined to directly undermine the deeply-held myth of modern art as a higher, removed form of artistic expression (if it could not erase it completely).

Because design must prove its ability to communicate, increase sales, raise awareness, enhance image, and perform many other demanding and simultaneous functions, design cannot pretend to be a history of styles driven by great, individual “temperaments” alone.¹⁶⁷ It has from the outset posited creativity and communication as a collective process. And as an emerging profession, it met the criteria that modern artistic practice be coherent, formalized, and articulated, in conscious opposition to traditional and ideological aspects. As a critical process, modernism inevitably works to uncover and make conscious those ideological elements which must remain incoherent, invisible and inarticulate in order to hold any power.¹⁶⁸

High-modernism’s claim to autonomy attempted – impossibly – to buttress itself against the uniquely differentiated and critical energy which was its most salient and defining feature. This was an illusory freedom in any case. The freedoms of the ‘official’ modernist arts and the applied arts are equally constrained by the material basis of their production. Culture is not always directly profitable: it involves a certain willingness to invest – whether through government funding, private speculative purchases, or artists themselves willing to take a financial loss – in long-term and often vague goals, such as greater ideological stability, international prestige, and the maintenance of intellectual experimentation generally. Investment in such a socially differentiated space is therefore directly dependent on (but not entirely or crudely reducible to) the wider investment climate.¹⁶⁹

Hal Foster continues to wonder, however, how one can transgress against official transgression, the institutionalized presence of modernism. He traces the reduction of institutionalized modernism, its deconstruction to an autonomous, airless, energyless entropy; first through formal reduction, then intellectual and theoretical reduction, until

167. Adrian Forty, *Objects of Desire: Design and Society Since 1750* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1986), 7.

168. Terry Eagleton, *Against the Grain* (London: Verso, 1986), 16.

169. David Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity: An Enquiry Into the Origins of Cultural Change* (Cambridge, MA: Blackwell, 1990), 343 ff.

it seemed there were no visual, stylistic, or conceptual forms of radicalism left.¹⁷⁰ Modernism's most distinctive response, however, particularly in the postwar period which supposedly witnessed its demise, has been the crossing of the barrier between the fine and applied arts. It is precisely in its very *mass* whereby mass cultural modernism breaks down the comfortable differentiations which, as Foster documents, have become stagnant.

Communication as inherently contradictory

If its applied, social nature has allowed design to maintain a liveliness in the face of an autonomous high-modernism, Canadian design has displayed a variety of transgressive, modern forms also because communication is not analyzable to an essential solution, but is inherently a balance between irreconcilable tensions. While designers often state that their central function is communication, on the strict definition of communication as transmission, the clearest communication involves repetition of accepted and understood patterns.

The new science of information theory, or cybernetics, which emerged in the 1950s (and which led to the development of the modern computer), attempted to quantify the aspects of information with its concepts of redundancy and variety. As a creative art form, design might more naturally or usually be associated with innovation and variety. However, creative variety is what information scientists most want to avoid; it forms the unreliable or the unexpected, the 'noise' in a signal. Cybernetics and information theory define communication as a strict preference for redundancy and repetition in transmission. The redundant element of a design, the 'seen-before' or repetitive aspect which makes it familiar and readable, is more familiarly referred to as the dead weight of unexamined tradition.

Defined strictly as communication, therefore, design could not afford to be innovative or exceptional at all – qualities that information designers refer to as variety, or, less flatteringly, as noise in the channel. Communication as a goal is fundamentally at odds with the modern, creative intelligence, the development of the novel graphic *idea*, which is so central to the work of the designers studied here.

The contradiction between communication and innovation cannot, therefore, be resolved by more careful analysis, or a search for design's exact essence. Rather it points

170. Hal Foster, "Postmodernism: A Preface," in Hal Foster, ed., *The Anti-Aesthetic* (Port Townsend, WA: Bay Press, 1983), ix.

to the inherent tension in all visual modernism. On a visual level, this tension assumes practical form as the contradiction between an analytic and a synthetic approach; between designers who search for that single solution which is taken as 'given' by a proper definition of the essence of a problem, and those who look for a variety of solutions by drawing on eclectic influences.

At the level of social production, the same contradiction expresses itself as the tension between professionals and their mass audience. The professionalization of design saw a widening separation between *practice* – the considered application of definite technologies and the growth and development of an industry – and its *reception*, the way in which design was actually read and understood in homes, workplaces, and in the media and other public spaces.

And finally, the same contradiction is at work in the tension between international innovations and standards, and their local application and specific impact. Influences from other national design traditions, particularly those of England, Germany, and Switzerland, grew in importance and began increasingly to shape Canadian design. However, the unique qualities of the existing Canadian tradition in turn altered and adapted the reception of these ideas.

The modern in design has always been subject to the pressure of numerous influences: from neighborhood styles, which can be as specific as the visual tradition of your local newspaper or mall, its signage and advertising practices; to communities of gender or class which can be both widely dispersed and homogeneous; and so on outward to the latest visual innovations of the international design community, which was becoming increasingly familiar to Canadian designers through global design publications such as *Graphis*. In practice, design has had to balance some extraordinarily contradictory demands and sources.

Canadian awareness and acceptance of modern experimentation was always balanced by an engagement with traditional forms. This balance is inherent in all visual language, and arises from the necessity of redundancy; retaining standards and tradition in the interest of remaining recognizable and effective, while simultaneously accommodating variety and noise, the central, innovative dynamic of modernity; which constantly pushes to expand the bounds of the possible.

Modernism's ongoing attack on language

To the extent that Canadian designers consciously defined their goal as the objective process of communication, their work tended to move toward formal analysis and geometric reduction. Other Canadian designers continued to synthesize and stylize, their visual variety echoing the modern impulse not by trying to reduce or purify language, but rather by exploding it and experimenting with it. Whatever approach they took, however, whether synthetic or analytical, modern Canadian designers took an aggressive approach in defining and shaping and distinguishing the language of design.

Modernism generally; “being the very logic of capitalism itself,”¹⁷¹ greatly enlarged its powers of expression by a rigorous and applied process of professionalization of visual language, the systematic application of a variety of signifying practices. It ‘Taylorized’ language, exploring and exploding social relationships of sign and referent in increasingly effective ways.

Fredric Jameson goes on to note that the logic of this process, the dissolution of traditional limits, also tends to “disjoin the signifier from the signified.”¹⁷² But communication did not dissolve along with the traditional order, or vanish in a storm of modern, disjointed, arbitrary meanings. Instead, as conservatives such as Daniel Bell have decried, modernism created a “rage against order,” and a popular receptivity to disorder, speed, and dissonance.¹⁷³ Its typical procedures of quantification, desacralization, and rationalization have served to decode and deconstruct earlier social codes and trends. Bell was particularly incensed because in this century, modernism has also proceeded to work on altering many of capitalism’s current, class-based traditions. In effect, modernism is an energy that feeds on itself. The development of modernism, and modern design, is the process of destroying, in production, a privileged or autonomous site for the production, subversion, and reception of artistic language.

Why does modernism so aggressively disjoin, displace, and deconstruct meaning? One of the earliest modern theorists to note the relationship between production and per-

171. Fredric Jameson, *Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1991), 96.

172. Ibid.

173. Quoted in Lash, *Sociology of Postmodernism*, 126

ception was George Lukács. In *History and Class Consciousness* he observed that the

fetishistic character of economic forms, the reification of all human relations, the constant expansion and extension of the division of labor which subjects the process of production to an abstract, rational analysis without regard to the human potentialities and abilities of the immediate producers, all these things transform the phenomena of society and with them the way in which they are perceived.¹⁷⁴

Lukács underscores how our perception, our appearance, and our vision are altered by economic forms, the division of labor, and rational analysis, all of the hallmarks of capitalist modernization. Vision, language, and expression are not, and cannot be, finally controlled. They are shaken, loosened, and disrupted by the very dynamism and relentlessness of modernization itself. Modernism in the mass media, including the constant revolutionizing of visual language through design, reflects this ongoing transformation.

Modernism's basis in modernization

Given the variety of visual invention and the general lack of visual cohesion in the work of the modern designers profiled here, it grows apparent that there is no simple, purely *stylistic* basis for drawing these works together into a sequence, or for labeling them modern. The designers and their works display sharply varying relationships to tradition, defining and re-shaping that concept in different ways. Many use traditional means (fonts, styles, even old technologies) to create works of originality and power. Neither is there a common thread or consistent approach to international trends.

In order to rein in this variety of strategies, to subsume them under a meaningful notion of *modern* design, it is necessary to see modernism as a process, not a fixed, formally defined, end product. The modernist process cannot be said to have simply, finally rejected tradition, or claim to take a single form, no matter how rigorous, international, or essential such 'modern' forms may appear. If we are to effectively theorize modernism's ongoing, unfinished project, and explain its growing over into mass form, we will need a stronger definition which can retain some sense of its inherent and continuing oppositional energy.

Perry Anderson begins his investigation of modernism with the important distinction between *modernization*, which is the objective economic process of expansion and

174. George Lukács, *History and Class Consciousness* (London: Merlin Press, 1971), 6. (Original edition 1922.)

development of the means of production under capitalism; and *modernism*, which is the conscious artistic response it generates.¹⁷⁵ It was modernism's critical exploration of artistic form which allowed it to find the words and pictures to capture the dual nature of modernization, simultaneously offering progress and the destruction of those in its wake, a civilization bearing the multiple scars of its own inherent barbarism.

Anderson, however, rejects modernism as anything more than a term denoting the passage of time through the present, which he despairingly characterizes as "the imperial status quo of a consumer capitalism,"¹⁷⁶ the final triumph of Fordism. In his view, modernism occupied the temporary space provided by the convergence of three factors between the wars: academic and aristocratic European ruling classes; the rapid development of new technologies, like radio, magazines and airplanes; and the broad rise in social revolution, in Russia, Germany, Italy and throughout Europe. Anderson summarizes these as "a still usable classical past, a still indeterminate technical present, and a still unpredictable political future"¹⁷⁷ – in their historically specific forms as aristocratic rulers and academicians, capitalist forces of production, and insurgent workers' movements. For Anderson, World War 2 "destroyed all three of the historical coordinates...and therewith cut off the vitality of modernism."¹⁷⁸

But it seems remarkably shortsighted to suggest that the triangulation of artistic tradition, technology, and a politically uncertain future has disappeared. Even if older modernist forms have become the new tradition; or technology (especially communications and computer technology) has lost its utopian flavor in mass expansion and

175. The reverse process, however, by which changes in our perceptions are reflected in changes in social relations of production, is considerably more complex. It is here that technological determinism arises, flatly declaring that shifts in modern language and media necessarily create new kinds of society. It is necessary here, however, to re-establish the proper relationship between technologies (such as the visual language of design) and society.

The rapid development of the forces of production (that is, technologies such as the visual language of design) pushes up against the relations of production, demanding change. But technological developments alone cannot simply determine that change. The steam engine made it possible for the rapid development of capitalist relations of production, but it hardly ensured that development or determined its form. Similarly, computers, advertising, television, and mass circulation magazines strain the prevailing capitalist relations of production, but they cannot simply replace them, and neither does their development guarantee, predict, or preordain any future society.

For an excellent discussion of the key Marxist concepts of forces and relations of production and their relationship to languages and knowledge, see Chris Harman, "Philosophy and Revolution," *International Socialism Journal* 21 (Autumn 1983): 58, and "Base and Superstructure," *International Socialism Journal* 32 (Summer 1986): 3.

176. Perry Anderson, "Modernity and Revolution," in Cary Nelson and Lawrence Grossberg, eds., *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1988): 317.

177. Ibid., 332.

178. Ibid., 326.

commodification; or if the sharp downturn in political struggle since the middle 1970s has permanently dampened the political optimism of the very social layer of political and cultural theorists capable of maintaining modernism as a living tradition: still, *modernization* itself has not ceased.

And precisely as a response to the ongoing capitalist modernization of society, modernism reflects the instability and alienation of a society defined by exchange. Modernism thus tends to share in the suppression of all subjective, humanist remnants outside of commodity production and exchange.¹⁷⁹ This is why it is also a tendency with multiple, conflicting expressions. Since the interwar avant-garde, modernism has had definite technological and positivist expression, such as in Soviet Russia where mechanized art forms and a celebration of Taylorism were practiced by Productivists and Constructivists. (The response of fellow revolutionary artists George Grosz and John Heartfield was frequent bewilderment at these modern Soviet attitudes toward the grinding machinery of modern life.)¹⁸⁰ Modernism was also fully compatible with Fascism, in the form of Italian or English Futurism. But then as now, it above all reflects an alienated reality; and it cannot by itself transcend that alienation or the absence of human choice with a positive (or negative) political message. It is a process which is neither inherently left nor right.

Modernism, like science, is a conscious response which has its own rhythms, and cannot be reduced to ideology or wholly determined by the relations of power which give rise to it. It has not vanished with the rise of an apparently monolithic mass commodity culture (quite the contrary), nor can it be entirely extinguished by political downturn, just as it can hardly be said to have become obsolete along with those specific cultural forms with which it had previously been identified. It is a process which transcends the pleasure or pessimism of local interests, just as understanding and knowledge continue to take social form in the persistence of science, history, and theory.

The traditions, myths, and conventions of our visual culture arise out of our material needs, and are vestigial ways of knowing and controlling the environment which all too often rest, unexamined, below the level of conscious critical assessment and evaluation.¹⁸¹ In its ideological form, modernism is the process of exposing myths to collective

179. Susan Buck-Morss, "Envisioning Capital: Political Economy on Display," in Lynne Cooke and Peter Wollen, eds., *Visual Display* (Seattle: Bay Press, 1995), 115.

180. Huyssen, *After the Great Divide*, 12.

181. Harvey, *Condition of Postmodernity*, 30.

review, and its tools include consciousness, manipulation, control, and a continuous awareness of new potentials. Whatever its specific forms, the critical space of modernism continues to respond to modernization, by manipulating what is usable in tradition, and the technological present, and holding open the indeterminate political future.

The postmodern discourse about modernism

We have thus turned the development of modern design in Canada into a discussion of modernism itself, and traced the importance of the energy of mass culture in adequately theorizing its changing mass expression: moving beyond its institutionalization of autonomy, understanding the contradictory nature of communication itself, and the inherently destabilizing pressure of modernization on language use, the continuous questioning of form and meaning which modernism represents. Yet it is necessary here to look briefly at a body of theory which suggests that these forces have been eclipsed, that they no longer motivate contemporary culture. In looking at (an admittedly narrow range of) postmodernist ideas, it will be argued that this theory does not represent the denial of modernism, but rather, in several important ways, the continuity of high-modernism's central arguments. Most importantly, it has largely adopted the distancing of high and low arts and the pessimism about mass culture which we have described as central to the waylaying of the modern idea.

In describing modernism as an unfinished project, Jürgen Habermas nonetheless conceded that, far from challenging the norms of bourgeois culture as it originally had done, modernist art became the norm, its oppositional potential having become a new classical tradition.¹⁸² This has been a recurring tension, between the fleeting, creative process of change and challenge, and the desire to finally arrive at a fixed, eternally modern destination. For the Enlightenment, the gathering of modern rationality promised a highly desirable means of control over irrational, unexamined forces such as nature and tradition. However, for postmodern theorists, the application of that rationality, in its gathering of modern technology, domination, and alienation, has thrown that project into extensive doubt. The attempt to establish and police a high-modernism institutionalized the differentiation of modern practice in the languages and technologies of domination. This has itself in turn triggered the reaction of postmodernist theory:

182. Jürgen Habermas, "Modernity – An Incomplete Project," in Foster, *The Anti-Aesthetic*, 3. The point is also discussed thoroughly in Jameson, *Postmodernism*, 4 ff.

The idea of postmodernism has emerged from many of the same sources as the present study: the pressure generated by the study of popular cultural developments, the revenge of those ‘lesser’ forms which were rejected by the posture and visual practices of the tightly guarded, internalized, and high-modern arts. Partly, though, postmodernism has grown out of a re-engagement with the original modernist avant-garde of the 1920s. Indeed, postmodernism has been seen by many critics and writers as the continuation of modernist arguments by other means.

Huyssen has quite accurately defined poststructuralism as a “discourse of and about Modernism”¹⁸³ and defined postmodernism as the “search for a viable modernist tradition...outside the canon of classical modernism.”¹⁸⁴ Michael Newman accuses many postmodern theories of retracing a “pre-Greenberg” modernism, throwing the formalist, self-reflexive version of high-modernist culture out the front door, but sneaking modernism in the back in its more acceptable, critically reflexive, avant-garde forms (such as Dada, montage, the writings of Benjamin and Nietzsche – ironically because, as Newman argues, “Postmodern thought, Nietzschean to the marrow, is a betrayal of what is worthiest in modern culture.”¹⁸⁵).

Lash notes with regret that postmodernism is not as conducive to the left as modernism was,¹⁸⁶ and even calls for theory to draw deeply on its “ideological resources”¹⁸⁷ and return to symbols, such as liberty and justice, with all of their resonance and emotion. A central thesis of Alex Callinicos’s *Against Postmodernism* is that postmodernism appropriates the four essential analytical tools of modernism: self-reflexive theory; montage; ambiguity/irony; and alienation/technology/dehumanization.¹⁸⁸ Harvey notes a similar quadruple borrowing of applied, modern means: ephemerality; collage; fragmentation; and dispersal.¹⁸⁹ Even Jean-François Lyotard is compelled to take some strange twists and form unlikely alliances, as he (re)turns to the revolutionary potential of the early modernist avant-garde as a model.¹⁹⁰ What could erase the art-life dichotomy as neatly as the tradi-

183. Quoted in Callinicos, *Against Postmodernism*, 69.

184. Huyssen, *After the Great Divide*, 169.

185. Newman, “Revising Modernism,” 99.

186. Lash, *Sociology of Postmodernism*, 4.

187. *Ibid.*, 112.

188. Callinicos, *Against Postmodernism*, 12.

189. Harvey, *Condition of Postmodernity*, 302.

190. See Jean-François Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*, trans. Geoff Bennington and Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: U. Minnesota Press, 1984), and Jameson, *Postmodernism*, 60.

tional avant-garde strategy, which Lyotard borrows, of æstheticizing all of reality in an undifferentiated sublime?¹⁹¹

Yet perhaps Fredric Jameson hits it most accurately when he suggests that it is the loss of a contained, high-modernism which has bred the reaction of postmodernist theory; a shift in emphasis which takes eclecticism, popular arts, and irony – which were always present in modernist practice – and moves them from the margins of experience to the centre.¹⁹² For Jameson, postmodernism is a continuation of modernism's means on a popular stage, but without its central capacity for critical differentiation.

Postmodernism, then, continues the high-modernist project by retaining its ultimate disdain for the popular, mass arts (however much postmodernist theory discusses them), and its despair at the possibility of a mass, democratic subject in history. Postmodern theorists miss the point of the extensive, design-driven, consumer culture which so preoccupies them, by attempting to preserve their own autonomy and withdrawal in the face of social production generally. Postmodernism “only gains its appearance of a liberating movement when set against the false image of modern (‘enlightened’) rationality and truth which presupposes the existence of self-authorizing grounds for the conduct and reasoned debate.”¹⁹³ It only works if modernism is seen as an “ageing dictator,” a closed, internalized, and dead system.

The core of modernism, now resident in mass culture, still retains within it an energy which modern design inherently reveals. It is this continuing, transformative aspect, as evidenced in mass, modern, spectacular, commodified culture, which postmodernism assumes as the starting point for its pessimism. Lyotard retains the great divide between high and low culture in taking the subject of history, the consensus of people, as a great evil. Instead, an “abstract subject,” the state, eliminates all possibility of consensus and language, and he argues that attempts at consensus as a basis for knowledge lead not to freedom but control.¹⁹⁴

In fact, it is the *denial* of the mass voice, the elimination of its very possibility, which recloses and retards the modern, public sphere. The extension of modernism into the mass media transcends this great divide and the liberates our understanding of the seemingly

191. See Huyssen, *After the Great Divide*, 211.

192. Fredric Jameson, “Postmodernism and Consumer Society,” in Foster, *Anti-Aesthetic*, 123.

193. Christopher Norris, *The Truth About Postmodernism* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1993), 231.

194. Lyotard, *Postmodern Condition*, 30.

impossible contradictions shaping modern culture. “To speak of modernism without mentioning capitalist mass culture is like praising the free market while ignoring the multinationals.”¹⁹⁵ It is to miss, in other words, its greatest achievement.

A pronounced fear of mass culture

As suggested, postmodernists are not alone in their inability to break through their essential misunderstanding of mass culture. George Lukács’s book, *History and Class Consciousness*, has been called “the founding document, if there ever was one, of Western Marxism,”¹⁹⁶ and his theory of commodity fetishism (discussed briefly above), however accurate it may be as a description of capitalist production, provides the theoretical starting point for this misunderstanding.

Lukács starts from the abstract production process, whereby social relations assume “the fantastic form of a relation between things,”¹⁹⁷ to explain the inhuman, fantastic form of modern culture, what later critics have called its culture industries, spectacles, or post-Fordist consumption. This fantastic relationship, which Marx called commodity fetishism, is given by the independent life, or reification assumed, by commodities, as things produced by social relations that are hidden, and beyond collective control. Commodity fetishism/reification, poses a central question, which Lukács asked: to what extent does this process, inescapably central to capitalist production, “influence the *total* outer and inner life of society?”¹⁹⁸ He saw capitalism acting on society as a totality, breaking down the qualitative relations between people into quantitative relations between things, as commodity production “stamp[ed] its imprint upon the whole consciousness of man.”¹⁹⁹

Lukács thus presents an essentialist, reductionist version of Marx, locating an adequate explanation of consciousness as directly and entirely the result of an alienated and reified labor process.²⁰⁰ But workers are not commodities – only our labor power is. It is alienated from us and we do not control its use, but because our labor power does not completely define us as human beings, there is still room for our consciousness to resist.

Lukács himself was famously to use this room, in turning to the working class as the

195. Huyssen, *After the Great Divide*, 25.

196. *Ibid.*, 23.

197. Karl Marx, *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy*, Vol. 1, trans. Ben Fowkes (New York: Vintage, 1977), 165.

198. Lukács, *History and Class Consciousness*, 84.

199. *Ibid.*, 100.

200. Eagleton, *Against the Grain*, 124.

simultaneous subject/object of history. He was to return again and again to questions of culture and consciousness as the answer to reification, pitting consciousness against alienation. But, equally famously, Lukács proceeded to defend the realism of high, bourgeois culture as the only defensible artistic or cultural form. He followed the argument only up to, but not *across*, the great divide between high and mass cultures.

Yet, as Eagleton notes, the commodity is “always, already ‘aesthetic’ – textured, packaged, fetishized, libidized.”²⁰¹ There is always the potential in all things, all commodities, to (re)perceive our creative potential, to overcome the reified capitalist totality, with each small fragment of reclaimed, pleasurable, aestheticized culture. Each pleasurable, desirable, cultural piece is a holographic fragment of the larger human potential for unalienated, free production and pleasurable, human expression.

Hence there is no reason to *deny* that mass culture has the *potential* to act as a modern, transformative force. To be sure, mass culture does not necessarily, or even all that often, express *conscious* resistance. But it continues to move *toward* that potential, for example when it becomes extended, quantitatively and qualitatively, through the expansion of professional design. Modernism’s continuing explosion then assumes mass form, the flux of human desire captured as the demand for increasingly pleasurable commodities, flowing out and around the narrow, high, cultural realm, and suggesting the possibility of overcoming the fetishizing power which the commodity-form of production exerts on our lives.

Lukács (and virtually all other critical theorists) will not cross the great divide, preferring to remain with auratic, high culture, because of his (their) identification of commodity fetishism and its alienating power over us with *mass* commodities. Yet, as Lukács himself stressed, capitalism is a totality. The alienation of commodity fetishism must lie as heavily upon rare, expensive goods and high-cultural products as it does on the cheapest, most common items. Lukács simply cannot tear his eyes away from his vision of the mass commodity, “the quantitative increase of the forms of reification, their empty extension...cover[ing] the whole surface of manifest phenomena.”²⁰² But what he is actually describing here is modernization, that is, the general process of capitalist production itself, with its flood of commodities, of both high artistic ‘quality’ and low. The real potential of artistic production had eluded his grasp because it was right before his eyes, covering every surface, in the design of mass modernist culture.

201. Ibid., 133.

202. Lukács, *History and Class Consciousness*, 208.

Lukács's theory of commodity fetishism, however, was simply the foundation. The opposition to mass culture by critical theorists in this century has been profound. Habermas wrote very sharply against any positive reading of mass culture. Art, popular and otherwise, was beyond the ability to promise a new world. Rigorous critique and analysis, and not pleasure, would serve as the basis for the renewal of modernism's unfinished project. He saw as "nonsense experiments"²⁰³ the attempt by Dada and Surrealism to "level art and life, fiction and praxis." The process of criticism and tearing down pursued by the avant-garde did not provide a clear basis, in Habermas's view, to overcome the abstraction and alienation which were a feature of all aspects of life.

Other modernist critics, Marxist and otherwise, have maintained this limiting division at the core of their theory: Roland Barthes refused to surrender an avant-garde tradition, in fear of an ersatz postmodern consumer culture and the degradation of art by advertising.²⁰⁴ Jameson notes with atypical nostalgia that "genuinely 'popular' culture has been gradually colonized and extinguished by commodification and the market system."²⁰⁵ Antonio Gramsci railed at the class-bound nature of common sense, despite his understanding of the creative, positive value of working class consciousness in its negotiations with hegemonic ideology.²⁰⁶ Louis Althusser so totally rejected the ideologically-bound sense of the masses and mass culture that he dissolved the subject of history itself with a single, mystical wave of his imputed, structural, 'scientific' Marxism.²⁰⁷ Peter Bürger strongly cautioned that an art absorbed by the praxis of life cannot itself be critical, and notes how, for Adorno, the avant-garde alone has the (metaphysical?) power to "reject all false reconciliation with what exists and [is] thus the only art form that has historical legitimacy."²⁰⁸

And most certainly, the culture industry thesis of Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer pictured "the Enlightenment as Mass Deception,"²⁰⁹ seeing in modernism

203. Habermas, "Modernity," 11.

204. Terry Eagleton, "Roland Barthes and After," in Lisa Appignanesi, ed., *Ideas from France: The Legacy of French Theory* (London: Institute of Contemporary Arts, 1989), 28. See also Jameson, *Postmodernism*, 84.

205. Jameson, *Postmodernism*, 63.

206. Eagleton, *Against the Grain*, 126.

207. See Harman, "Philosophy and Revolution," 63.

208. Peter Bürger, *Theory of the Avant-Garde*, trans. Michael Shaw (Minneapolis: U. of Minnesota Press, 1984), 8. See also Callinicos, *Against Postmodernism*, 157.

209. Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, trans. John Cumming (New York: Continuum, 1972. Original edition 1944).

not chaos, but complete uniformity: its housing a reflection of “the absolute power of capitalism;” its broadcast media proof that “under capitalism, all mass culture is identical;” its television, that modern Wagnerian *gesamtkunstwerk*, nothing other than the “triumph of invested capital;” its films the flickering evidence that “the might of industrial society is lodged in men’s minds,” the “mutations” in film form of even an Orson Welles “all the more strongly...confirm the validity of the system” and “the untruth of style.”

Use-value, and Benjamin: restoring the commodity’s value

These virulent variants of Lukács’s cultural criticism are based on his central misconception, or reduction, in taking modern experience as based solely on commodity fetishism, completely reduced to an exchange-value which has replaced use-value. “Use value has been replaced by packaging and advertising,” Huyssen starts to say, but he then pulls back, suddenly stopping to realize that this formulation “ignores praxis,” because of course it cannot be true.²¹⁰ Function and use cannot be replaced. Even the most alienated, commodified life takes its pleasures, works to satisfy its desires through the use of things, and all the more so in the postwar period with its vastly increased access to mass-produced things.

In design, we find exchange based on the most modern of use-values – the subtle, intelligent, visual improvements inherent in the pleasurable possibilities of shape, color, type, image, and all of the formal elements of the print media. This is the revenge of the other aspect of the commodity as Marx defined it, its use-value, which is as irreducible as its exchange-value. *Contra* Lukács, even in mass culture, use-value remains. And as design has expanded, so too has the availability of mass-modern, intelligently designed commodities. Maligned as the most vulgar, reified, and alienated of all things, mass commodities increasingly exhibit that most subtle, humanizing, and intangible of use-values: visual pleasure.

There was, of course, one important exception to the tide of criticism which emerged from Lukács’s opposition to mass culture. “The eternal is more like the lace-trimming on a dress than like an idea,” Walter Benjamin maintained.²¹¹ Benjamin understood the confident power of “the simultaneously distracted and rationally testing reception of the masses.”²¹² He looked to replace ritual with politics at the centre of an effective mod-

210. Huyssen, *After the Great Divide*, 21.

211. Quoted in Callinicos, *Against Postmodernism*, 86.

212. Bürger, *Theory of the Avant-Garde*, 28.

ern art. Not a political art *per se* – “political demands are a perfectly useless instrument of literary criticism”²¹³ he cautioned – but the most significant, political, modernist act, reclaiming artistic production itself, the negation of alienation through the deliberate modernist alienation of vision.

Benjamin begins with an examination of the position of art in society, which is located not in the *attitude* of an artwork to social relations, but the social and productive *relations* of the work of art. Even objective photography, Benjamin insisted, might only work to transform the world by transforming the photographic process itself, allowing the author as producer to control his or her production as an author. “The best [opinions] are of no use if they make nothing useful out of those who have them,”²¹⁴ which is to say that the point of interpreting or picturing the world is to change it.

For Benjamin, then, to go beyond merely producing a changed art meant becoming capable of seizing the means of artistic production themselves. This was conceivable to him only as the vision of a dreamworld, a dimly perceived possibility within mass culture, flickering across the surface of such fantastic, mythical new tools as the collective arts of photography, design, film, or engineering; in short, in mass culture. Benjamin’s dreamworld contained the possibility of awakening class consciousness “because it takes mass culture seriously not merely as the source of the phantasmagoria of false consciousness, but as the source of collective energy to overcome it.”²¹⁵

Modern design clearly has been marginalized on the far side of the “great divide” which Huyssen describes. But in its continuing evolution and engagement with modern industrial society, design also clearly points to an ongoing attempt to understand and capture artistically the experience of modernity, of modern life – which is the precise definition of modernism. The beauty of an applied art, a *gebrauchsgraphik* in the German term, lies in its implicit denial of an autonomous, or formalist, or high-modernist illusion. As a *mass* modernism, graphic design has become a powerful cultural tool and a valuable commodity form.

Mass modernism has arisen directly out of material progress in direct response to it. Early modernism gave rise to artistic expressions which “became transformed from an ornament to an essence, from an expression of value to a source of value.”²¹⁶ The direct

213. Walter Benjamin, “The Author as Producer,” (original edition 1934), in Brian Wallis, ed., *Art After Modernism: Rethinking Representation* (New York: New Museum of Contemporary Art, 1984), 298.

214. *Ibid.*, 306.

215. Susan Buck-Morss, *The Dialectics of Seeing* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1991), 253.

216. C. Schorske, quoted in Callinicos, *Against Postmodernism*, 47.

absorption of artistic expression in the broader process of commodity production itself is, surely, the triumph and not the defeat of this process. The pressure, ubiquity, and seeming lack of individuality in our mass media are the necessary counterpoint to modernization's simultaneous brutality, and to the success of its enormously expanded level of production.

Popular culture has been marginalized by the assumption that a crude, direct relationship necessarily exists between the alienated condition of workers as a mass audience, and their experience of things. But what has been missed is the extent to which an increasing attention to appearance, to image, and to design in our culture, is *driven* by the mass demand for heightened pleasure and experience. However we may characterize the 'quality' of mass culture (borrowing traditional terms of social and class value and distinction), it is impossible to deny that an awareness of design, film, interior and furniture design, and the many other cultural forms of mass modernism has penetrated to the roots of our society:

Issues of quality; however, do not fundamentally determine the role of mass modernism in transforming art and design, and modernism cannot be confused with the call for a specific artistic prescription or for a radical or progressive form of art. Rather, in tracing its movement into mass culture, modernism requires us to draw radical conclusions from the production of art as it already exists, as we encounter it every day. The importance of design's development, its continuation of the modernist project, lies in its unintended consequences, not its ability to champion any individual vision of a better world, or communicate on behalf of any specific program. It is design's "problematic," more than any one practitioner's conscious intentions, which drives mass modernism.²¹⁷

In practicing design and consciously developing its functional means, designers were expanding the inherent implications of design, well beyond the deliberate intentions or messages of individual designers, advertisers, or corporations. The pressure of its very role, its unique task in elaborating the look of goods in the most mundane situations, has infinitely extended the consciousness of visual language into every aspect of life. Art and design are not special tools to be held aside for special tasks, such as saving humanity. For Mayakovsky, after all, art was manufacture, it was located everywhere, and it was made by

217. Louis Althusser defined the problematic of a given body of knowledge as the structure of the questions it asked, which in turn determine the nature of the answers it could generate. See Alex Callinicos, *Althusser's Marxism* (London: Pluto Press, 1976), 34, and note especially his criticism of Althusser's determinism. (The term 'problematic' here is a noun, not the more common adjective meaning something that is perceived as a problem or fraught with difficulty.)

workers, with tools.²¹⁸ To demystify it in this way takes away only the ‘special’ pleasure, and with it the myth that artistic expression is rare and unique.

The opposite possibility is that *all* work, including (but definitely not limited to) specialized artistic production, might become pleasurable, creative, and closer to its Marxist ideal as humanity’s essence. The very modernist eruption of design into daily life generates tension, working against the division of labor, suggesting the necessity and pleasure of artistic expression and elaboration in all aspects of life.

Modernism is the deliberate shaping of the “empty extension” of modernized production. It is as simple as taking “things in themselves,” as Engels put it, synthesizing and manipulating them so that they become “things for us.”²¹⁹ To borrow Engel’s own example, it is as simple as the modern production of alizarin from coal tar, synthetically, rather than gathering it naturally from madder roots. There is no metaphysical reality outside of objects, and all of human culture is built upon the shaping of material things such as Engel’s coal tar and alizarin: a process, in other words, of design.

The site of pleasure is always immediate, and it moves on, taking that alizarin and applying it to different canvases. The demand for designed goods, for more and better kinds of visual experience, is the force of modernism acting as a reaction to modernization in all of its abundance. The continued pressure for expression and form in everyday life provides the living, motive power of design, making it a contradictory, compromised, yet powerful expression of mass desire. As with any form of modern creative expression available in a commodified, market-driven, and resolutely capitalist culture, the visual, social, and political forms of the outcome cannot reliably be predicted.

218. Janet Wolff, *The Social Production of Art* (New York: New York University Press, 1984), 13.

219. Lukács, *History and Class Consciousness*, 132.

Conclusion

SUMMARY

In looking at the work of Canadian graphic designers, in the period 1955 – 65, this study has shown how design emerged as a modern industry by differentiating itself from existing traditions of advertising and typography. In order to create professional design as a separate commodity, designers had to establish and differentiate design as an important process separate from mechanical reproduction, typesetting, or decorative illustration.

In doing so, these designers turned to the synthesis of several traditions and styles. Exploiting the expressive capabilities of the printed page, and the shape and presentation of words and images, Canadian designers developed the language of design through conscious experimentation, analysis, and a profoundly creative engagement with the history and tradition of printing and typography. And through self-organization, in societies and exhibitions, they developed the means whereby design could enormously expand in influence and effectiveness.

This was part of a process, central to the history of this century, which has here been identified as mass modernism. Its expression in design was marked by the beginning of the conscious and self-critical artistic process of design within traditional trades. Modern artistic expression could become critically aware while remaining openly a form of commodity production itself. Mass modernism also thereby abandoned the necessity of privileged or autonomous sites of production and reception, extending aesthetic expression beyond localized structures of containment such as the art gallery and the museum.

Because communication is inherently synthetic and contradictory, without a single, analyzable essence, modern communication and design remain open processes, questioning and exploring language, rooted in the ongoing modernization of society. Attempts to explain modern culture as the product of a postmodern shift ignore the ongoing modernization of society. Further, they must be seen as an extension of high-modernist methods, particularly the rejection of the positive potential of mass culture.

Finally, in examining and rejecting the negative attitude towards mass culture of both postmodern and modern critical theory, this study posited an alternate response to the alienation of commodity production. In locating the alienation of commodity fetishism in the exchange relations within which commodities are produced, it remains possible to restore the importance of their use-value, the appeal and satisfaction of desire which design and commodities represent. This is to suggest, with Benjamin, that mass culture itself has the potential to overcome the phantasmagoria of false consciousness, and is the source of collective energy which objectively can liberate human creativity and productive labor on a mass scale.

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**MATERIAL ON
CANADIAN DESIGN HISTORY**
(CHRONOLOGICAL BY AUTHOR)

Abbreviations:

CDA - Carl Dair Archive, Massey College Library, University of Toronto.

AFA - Allan Fleming Archive, Massey College Library, University of Toronto.

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