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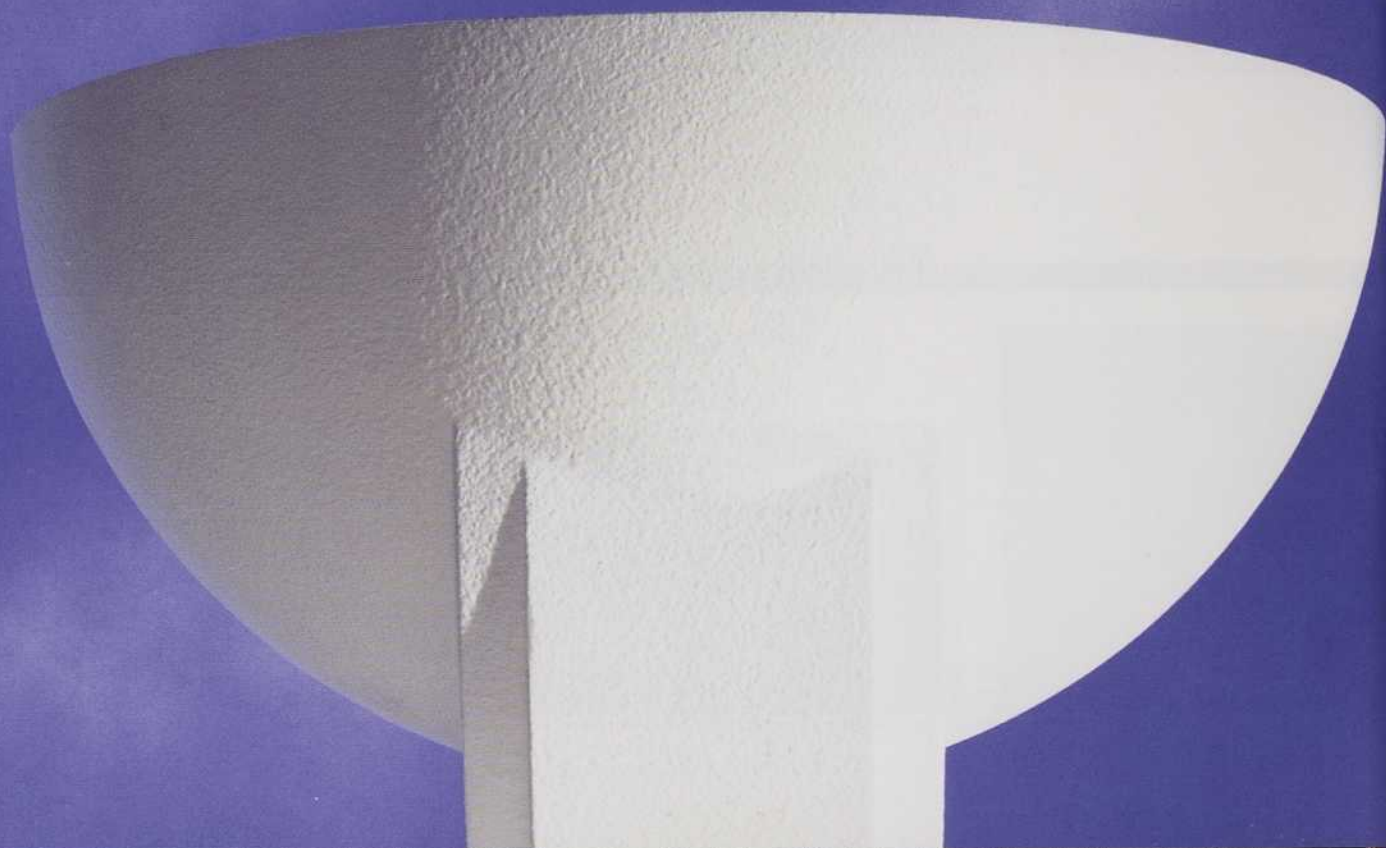


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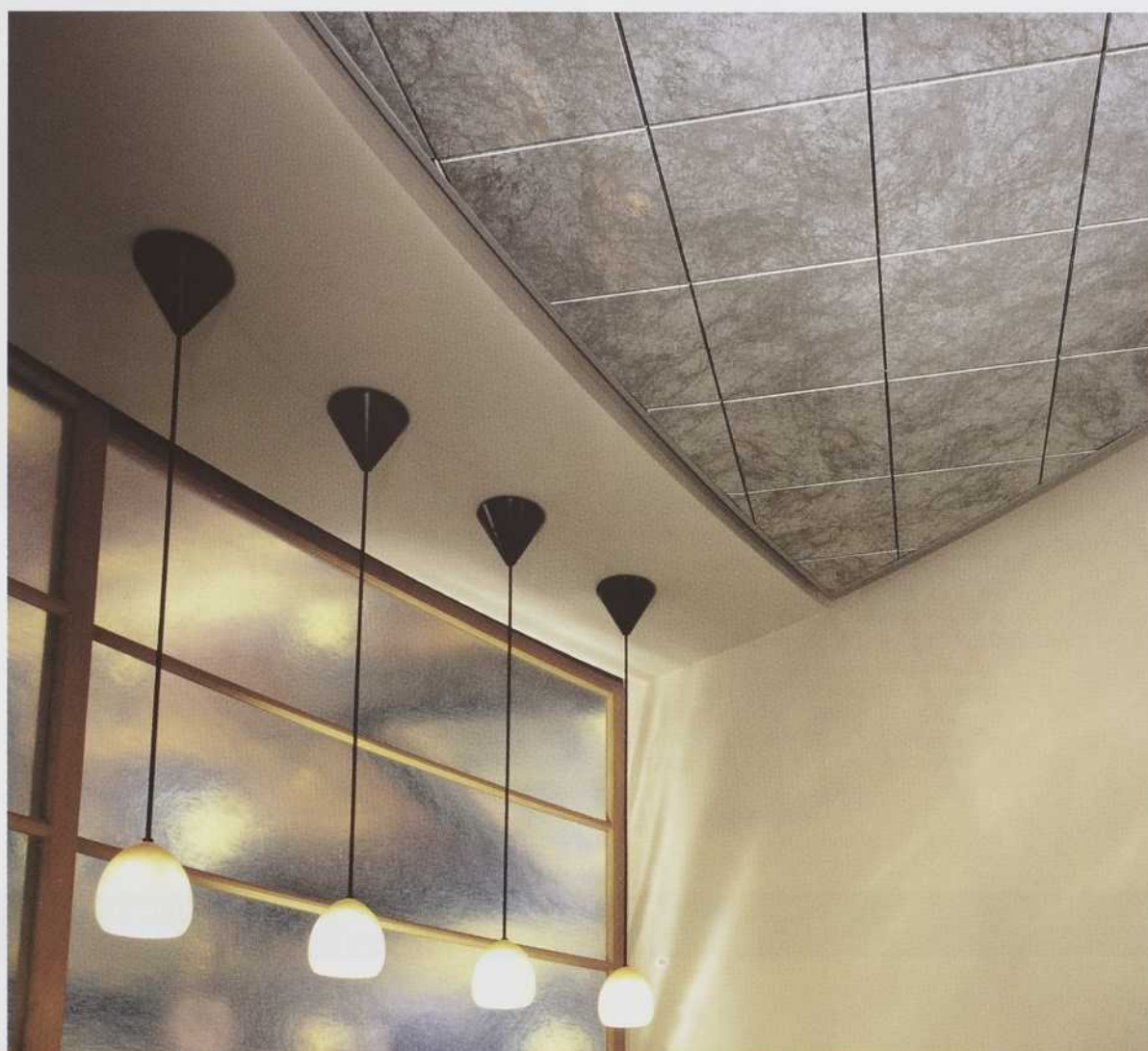
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## JOHN BLAND : TRADITION AND MODERNITY

IRENA ŽANTOVSKÁ MURRAY, HEAD, RARE BOOKS AND SPECIAL COLLECTIONS, MCGILL UNIVERSITY AND CURATOR, CANADIAN ARCHITECTURE COLLECTION

The present issue brings together contributions from different parts of the country - Montreal, Quebec City and Vancouver - as a testimonial to the enduring legacy of the work of John Bland, architect, planner, educator, historian and heritage activist. Some of the contributions address more familiar themes - Bland's popular design and planning practice (Shine) and his equally popular role as a teacher, and a gifted administrator who had helped shape the oldest school of architecture in Quebec (Sheppard). Others venture onto a new, or little known ground - Bland's seminal role in the recognition and restoration of the built heritage of Quebec City (Noppen/Morriset), or his pervasive, albeit indirect, presence in the west coast architectural and urban development of the post-war period (Windsor Liscombe, Oberlander).

His tenure as Director of the McGill School of Architecture (1941-1972) influenced successive generations of practitioners and academics who literally fanned out across the country imbued with Bland's 'clear, consistent purpose' - his commitment to the social focus in architecture and planning. Such purpose not only gave cohesion to the program in the School (Sheppard), but also credibility and structure to Bland's interventions in the heritage matters, and beyond (Noppen/ Morriset). A proponent of Modernism in his teaching and design, John Bland drew much of his confidence in the future from his knowledge and understanding of the past. Not only of the built past that, expressed in the regional vernacular architecture, fascinated him by its power of 'transplanting architecture fully formed', but also in the personal past, particularly as it was connected with the McGill School. Like his predecessor, Percy Nobbs, he fought for the belief that in the life of a teacher of architecture, a professional career could and indeed must co-exist with an academic career to maximize the benefits of both.

Several contributors to this issue point to the fact that John Bland has been uncommonly able in bridging two traditions of his early education and training, that of the British Arts and Crafts Movement and of the value system, emphasized by the Architectural Association, which emphasized the architecture of social purpose. In fact, it would be fairer to say that out of this early hybrid view he and many of his students helped forge the tradition of the modern in Canada - that of simpler, bolder design, of common sense planning, but also that of the recognition of the shared inherited past, its documentation and interpretation. As Guy Desbarats remarked in an earlier contribution honouring John Bland's eightieth birthday: "*John Bland ... possessed a rare personal ability to relate architectural history to the everyday sights - domestic, religious, commercial or even industrial. By linking them to studio projects, he gave relevance and power to historical precedents. He awakened generation after generation of students to the value of a tangible, local and varied heritage of architectural forms. Beyond his own span of actions and span of time, he will be influential ... through the generations of his students. He sensitized them in a free and unburdened way to the relevance of history in the design of their contemporary works.*"

John Bland's holistic approach has embraced every aspect of his rich and long career: long after his retirement as a teacher, new students and researchers seek him out in his home in Ste-Anne-de-Bellevue. More than sixty architectural archives he helped preserve in the Canadian Architecture Collection at McGill serve scholars across the country and his remarkable collection of images of Canadian architecture has recently served as the basis for *Building Canada*, a modular Web site used by secondary schools to learn the rudiments of Canadian architectural history. His contribution to the heritage agenda was recognized when he received the 1994 Heritage Canada Gabrielle-Léger Award and his own buildings continue to hold their own at the turn of the century.

Having recently celebrated his eighty fifth birthday, John Bland remains an active presence as his protean career of some sixty years continues to bear fruit in all its many ramifications. The synthesis of his contribution is yet to come, but then, his own contributions still keep coming.

For John Bland's biography and projects please consult: *ARQ* August 1996 issue, and *John Bland at Eighty: A Tribute* (eds., Irena Murray and Norbert Schoe-nauer), Montreal: McGill University, 1991, respectively. I would especially like to thank Daniella Rohan, CAC Associate, for her invaluable assistance in assembling and editing the material for this issue.



1. John Bland, as a young man, Montreal; Bland personal collection.
2. The launching of *Building Canada* at the Canadian Architecture Collection, McGill University with John Bland, April 2, 1996, Peter Martin photo; CAC Bland Archive.
3. John and Fay Bland, wedding picture, 1942; Bland personal collection.
4. John Bland and his children, Ste-Anne-de-Bellevue, c.1951; Bland personal collection.



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## TEACHING ARCHITECTURE IN THE AGE OF MODERNISM

ADRIAN SHEPPARD

Architecture, in the early days of Modernism, was perceived as being a social art to which definite ethical and professional responsibilities were attached. Serious architecture could not circumvent its societal obligations. Bringing to students an acute awareness of the moral and social purpose of architecture is John Bland's primary legacy to the McGill School of Architecture. Like Gropius, whom he greatly admired, Bland became a notable teacher not on account of a special methodology or pedagogy, but because he had a clear, consistent purpose.

To study architecture at McGill in the late fifties was an exciting and inspiring experience. It meant sharing in a commitment to a movement that was barely out of its pioneering infancy. The logic and the rhetoric of Modernism was so persuasive that we hardly felt the need to question the Movement. Because of Modernism's universal and unitary views, other ideologies were easily discarded. Modernism's mission: a yearning for the renunciation of the old world, a commitment to mass housing, and a heroic vision for the future made the movement akin to a crusade for a new order. Optimism was boundless, but so too were an arrogance and a misplaced sense of piety. Everything appeared feasible. No megastructure was too large or too bold, few forms were proscribed, and most of what did not fit the accepted ideological mould was readily rejected.

With the benefit of forty years of hindsight, it is clear that the fifties was concurrently a period of rationalism and romanticism. Despite the orthodoxy that was rooted in logic and positivism, it was a period of freedom in which originality was celebrated over rules, values were celebrated over causes, free expression over fixed behaviour, and prototype over paradigm. Architecture's reductivist view rejected the use of precedent. The aesthetic mantra of the time, *Less is more*, led to an inevitable over-simplification of form and content and to the reduction of architecture to tectonic abstractions. That disaster did not strike our School and that our training was ultimately sound is attributable to a great extent to the teaching of a value system which emphasized the social purpose and accountability of our *métier*. Social purpose gave the program cohesion, clarified our ideals, and motivated us to link purpose and human needs to aesthetic canons. We profoundly believed that architecture is for people and that buildings must speak of their social function.

John Bland came to the School in 1938 after having studied architecture under Ramsay Traquair at McGill in the early thirties, and later as a graduate student at the Architectural Association School of Planning in London. He was a product of the intensely British Arts and Crafts tradition that was prevalent at McGill, and of the AA's emphasis on the social concerns of architecture and planning. Bland's training, consequently, bridged two traditions, two continents, two periods of architectural history. His understanding of architecture and the strength of his convictions sprang from these dualities. His concern for meticulous design and construction came from the Arts and Crafts legacy and his commitment to the social mission of architecture from the AA.

John Bland was, by virtue of training and his place in time, a transitional figure in the history of teaching of architecture in Canada. Since he understood the old rules, he could re-interpret them and apply them in a modern way, he could abstract the best of two worlds and he could erase the frontiers between two eras. It was because of this rich mix that Bland was able to successfully transform a British-inspired Arts and Crafts School into the modern school of architecture that we came to know.

The strength of the School was perceived by many as deriving from the heterogeneity of its faculty, but there was, in fact, a homogeneity of ideology. Bland had indeed assembled a varied circle of architects from Europe and Canada who came to the School with very different backgrounds and from different cultures. Teachers at the School had the freedom to run their design studios as they wished. Inevitably, each studio bore the personality of its instructor. Divergence in personality, however, did not mean divergence in ideology.

Though no formal doctrine was proclaimed, the School followed an overriding orthodoxy. Architecture was taught as a reasoned discipline at the service of society. The opinions of Mies and Gropius hovered over us always. Mies' rationalism, his sensibilities, technical mastery and extraordinary aesthetic elegance embodied for us the very essence of the new architecture. Gropius, on the other hand, inspired us not so much by his architecture (which, except for the Bauhaus School, we, as students, found uninspiring) but through his teachings on the newly-defined profession and on the mission of architecture. Gropius spoke of professional responsibility, of an architecture rooted in purpose and program, of technology and rationalism in a way that no architect had done before. He was the philosophical mentor of our School.



1. John Bland as a student in front of the Macdonald Engineering Building, McGill University, second row, second from the left; McGill School of Architecture collection.
2. Left to right: Prof. John Bland, Hon. Pres.; Ted Baker, Assistant Treasurer and Librarian; Alvaro Ortega, President; Ray Affleck, Reporter; Sheila Baillie, Treasurer; Rolf Duschenes, Secretary; Jacques David, Vice-President; McGill School of Architecture collection.



3. The McGill staff, early 1970s. Back row: Bruce Anderson, Pieter Sijpkes, Stuart Wilson, Witold Rybczynski. Seated: Peter Collins, Derek Drummond, John Bland, Radoslav Zuk; McGill School of Architecture collection.

Our firmament of architectural stars also included Aalto, Wright, LeCorbusier, Dudok, Perret and Sullivan as well as the engineers Nervi, Fressinet, Maillart. Aalto and Wright, the two great Romantics, were admired, even loved but, inexplicably, we never emulated their work nor did we fully assimilate their vision. LeCorbusier was acknowledged as the father figure, the grand old man of the Movement. He was, for us, the ultimate creative genius, the most mystical of the pioneer form-givers of Modernism. Though Bland admired LeCorbusier, his true allegiance, we felt, was to Mies. Perhaps it was an uneasiness with the French wing of Modernism. For whatever reason, the English, Dutch, German and Scandinavian schools were closer to McGill's heart and way of thinking. John Bland urged us to read. He made continual references to books which became our constant companions. We read Gideon, Witkower, Summerson, Pevsner and Richards. We devoured LeCorbusier (especially *Vers une architecture*), and Gropius' *New Architecture and the Bauhaus*. *Space, Time and Architecture* was the text that gave us the most satisfying definition of the Modern Movement. Summerson's *Heavenly Mansions* (and especially his essays on LeCorbusier) introduced us to a new, non-dogmatic interpretation of architecture. James Fitch's *American Buildings* and Pevsner's *An Outline of European Architecture* were our basic reference guides to American and European architecture. Gaunt's elegantly written *The Aesthetic Adventure* initiated us to Art Nouveau, which we loved, but grudgingly, for this knotted and 'slightly deviant' art contradicted all that was morally right and aesthetically beautiful. Wright appealed to our romantic impulse. His books were loud manifestos written in a passionate mode. Bland encouraged us to read *Architectural Principles in the Age of Humanism*, Frederick Gibbert's *Town Design* and Ruskin's *The Seven Lamps of Architecture*. Our primary historical reference tome was Sir Banister Fletcher's *A History of Architecture*, though we were soon to learn of its flagrant omissions.

Many of the significant buildings we studied in Bland's History and Theory course are still considered icons of Modernism today, but some have lost their status as exemplars of modern architecture. For example, the UN Plaza, LeCorbusier's League of Nations, Mies's Commons Building at IIT and Perret's apartment building on Rue Franklin Roosevelt are considered as seminal today as then. However, the UNESCO Headquarters in Paris, Harrison and Abramovitch's three small chapels at Brandeis College and SOM's Air Force Academy near Denver are amongst the buildings which no longer have a place in our architectural references.

There are always lacunae in education. Our aesthetic sensibilities were unduly based on an orthodoxy rather than on a broad appreciation of architecture and its past. We were unable to value Victorian or eclectic architecture for its own sake. Perhaps the 19<sup>th</sup> century was too close for comfort. If we accepted any works of pre-modern masters, we did so more on ideological than on aesthetic grounds. What we deemed of merit was either very old or very new. We naively believed that contemporary architecture was a manner of building with a sense and sensitivity which owed little to the past. Historicity could only hamper objectivity and logic in the design process.

To reflect on the past is to reflect on the present and to question Academe today. Architecture has abandoned its early heroic commitment to society. Formalism, Aestheticism, Historicism and Eclecticism which we rejected then in favour of a new rationalism are back with a vengeance. Modernism has been supplanted by Neo-Modernism, the latest of many stylistic pastimes. In a world where problems have become more complex, society more democratic and heterogeneous, morality more circumstantial, and pessimism more prevalent, questions arise: to what degree is it still feasible and relevant to persevere along the path established in the late forties and fifties? Is an architecture of social purpose congruent with global capitalism, bureaucratic thinking and ever-changing values?

We, who trained in the fifties with John Bland, recognized in him the moral and professional conscience of the modern School at McGill which he had built and led. He made us feel part of a dedicated and socially committed environment in which rigorous training and professional excellence were the quintessence of our existence. He made us feel that architecture could change the world, that architecture mattered.

John Bland's School reflected the *Zeitgeist* and embodied his personal values. He brought a new expression of purpose in architecture, a faith in the architect's problem-solving ability, a vision of collective work and common good, a rejection of self-indulgence and aestheticism, a belief in the social and functional basis of form, a hope in internationalism and a liberalism. These were his concerns and his commitment. By the time we finished school they had become our concerns and our commitment.

#### NOTE

Adrian Sheppard, B.Arch.'59, FRAIC, is an Associate Professor of Architecture at McGill University.

## A PARTNER'S PERSPECTIVE

ANTHONY SHINE

Over the years a number of friends and admirers have written about Professor John Bland, the teacher and mentor to many of us who were nurtured in the McGill School of Architecture. Some have described his work as an historian and guardian of Quebec's architectural heritage. Others have recorded his work as a town planner. An assortment of articles have even expanded at length about some of the projects that were executed by successive partnerships over the years.

John Bland, as a teacher, always believed that a professional practice had to co-exist with an academic career. As the Director of the School of Architecture at McGill, he managed to undertake a limited number of commissions that could be fitted into his schedule but he always surrounded himself with part-time faculty who were full-time practitioners. That was until the mid 1950s when the opportunity to join Vincent Rother and Charles Elliott Trudeau set the stage for a succession of partnerships that carried on until the 1980s and survives still today, albeit without John Bland.

The nature and character of the Rother/Bland/Trudeau partnership set the tone for a truly remarkable story. In 1955, Montreal was still the premier Canadian city, and modern architecture had arrived. Here was a magical blend of ethnic backgrounds, choosing to forge an alliance to pursue decent and honourable work. In short order Rother/Bland/Trudeau became a name firm. Already some of the best and brightest of the new crop of architects had done a stint with Vincent Rother and for the next twenty-five years a steady flow paraded through the drafting room. The common thread of continuity was John Bland. It was as though a torch or a mantle had been passed on that had to be kept intact.

With the early death of Vincent Rother in 1959 and the decision to retire by Charles Trudeau in 1960, a new role evolved for John Bland. He became the senior partner and with each successive permutation of the coalition of principals and associates, it became a pattern to have younger architects as partners at ten-year age intervals in a benign plan to keep the firm alive and active. John Bland, the tutor at school, became the mentor in the office. The majority of us had been students at McGill and inevitably the atmosphere of the office took on a studio-like character. JB, as we called him mostly, would come over and make the rounds and give us a 'crit', always with the enthusiasm that we had a real project in the works with a paying client.

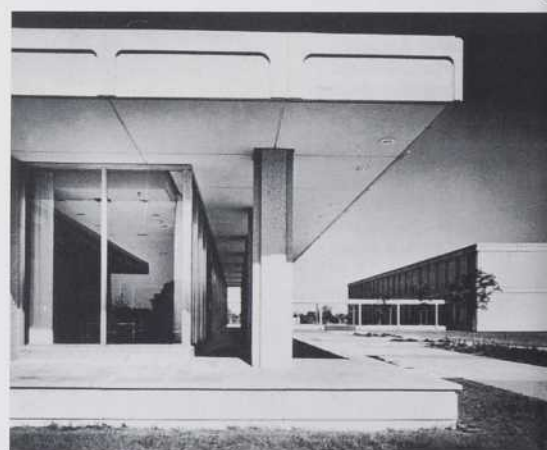
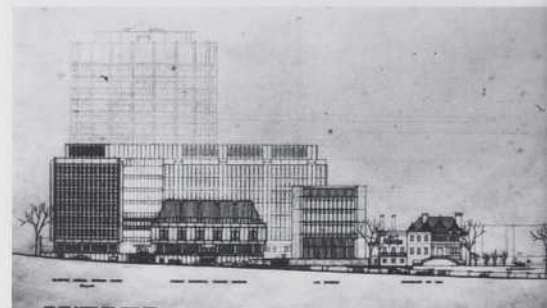
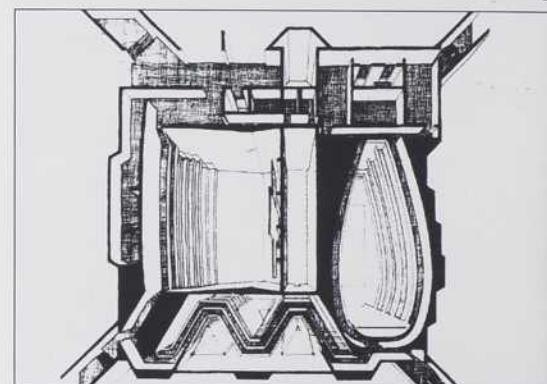
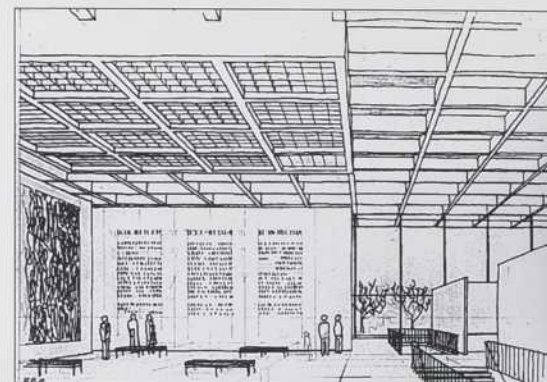
Those were the days when JB also took on the role of pitch man, which we knew he hated like the plague. With the conviction that the survival of the firm was important to us and that we had something to offer to the community, JB went to bat for us and made the contacts that kept us going. For a modest and, at times, shy person, this was the supreme act of bravery. It must have been worth it because over the years the roster of clients grew and the practice became secure in its ability to produce 'bespoke' architecture, which could pride itself as being good, sound, unpretentious and pleasing in a genteel manner. After all, one of Professor Bland's guiding principles in school had been 'architectural good manners', where buildings were good neighbours to each other. This was the mantra of our youth and it stayed with us because JB stayed with us. It was a gentleman's approach to society and this had been the culture that seemed to flow from JB's background through to the Montreal of those years, into the McGill School of Architecture and then to the office.

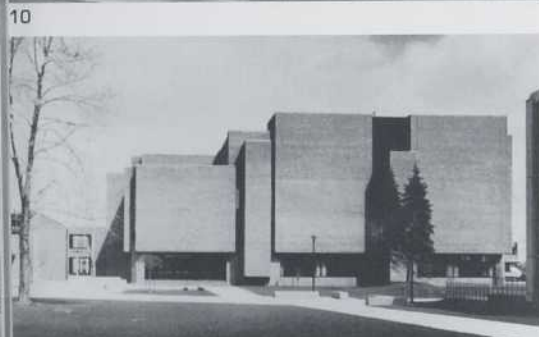
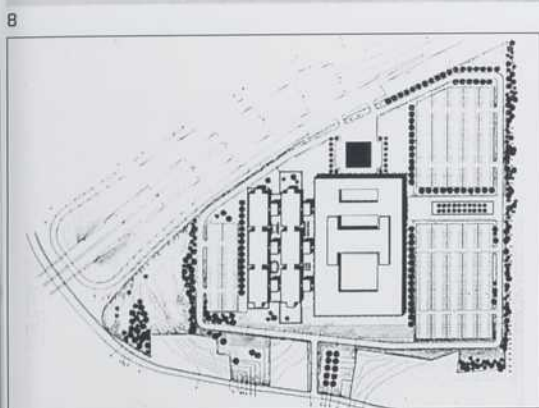
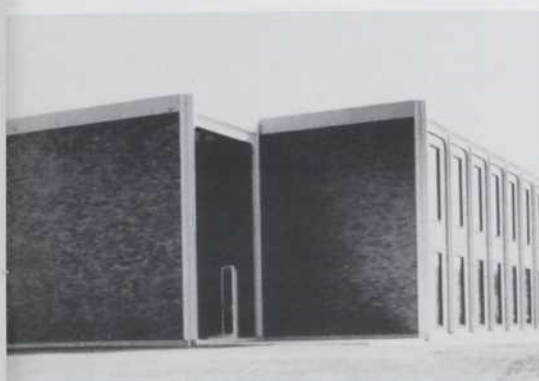
In order to maintain this symbiosis of the firm being accessible to JB, there was a magical geography that bound the office to the school. It was always understood that the office premises had to be within easy walking distance from the school. For twenty-five years or so of the partnership, the office was always located either on or off Sherbrooke Street, always in familiar territory. For years JB could be spotted wearing a beret and a bright red scarf over his raglan tweed overcoat striding along Sherbrooke between his two downtown worlds. His vigour seemed to suggest that he enjoyed it immensely. And as part of the same comfort zone, JB's station in the office remained a constant in an open cubicle space. This was sort of a trademark in the office. The ambiance was open and separations were for furniture. No computers and Autocad. Everything by hand and lots of ink and pencil.

It was a given in the office that JB was the town planner. He had developed a reputation in this field in the 1940s and 1950s and a number of jobs came to be undertaken by the firm in the 1950s and 1960s. These were projects like new towns, university campus layouts, zoning plans and bylaws and urban renewal schemes. For these, JB would get onto the drawing board and with a fine draftsman's hand, he would sketch and draw up the beginnings of schemes that would be developed and re-worked in the grand old style of tracing over tracing over tracing. Those were happy times and very special because of the sheer delight in exploring the extra dimension to architecture which was JB's interest in civic design and hence, town planning. Of all the projects that the firm



1. 2290 St-Mathieu Office, 1958: Kazimierz Grzegorek, Tony shine, Victor Virak, Jean-Louis Lalonde, Gordon Edwards; Tony Shine collection.
2. 2290 St-Mathieu Office, 1958: Jean-Louis Lalonde, Victor Virak, Roy LeMoynes, Tony Shine (Harvey Wolfe in the background); Tony Shine collection.
3. Bland/LeMoynes/Edwards: Fathers of Confederation [Memorial Building], Charlottetown, Prince Edward Island, 1962, Interior perspective; CAC Bland Archive.
4. Bland/LeMoynes/Edwards/Shine: Expo '67 Labyrinth, National Film Board, Mackay Pier, Port of Old Montreal, 1964-67; plan; Tony Shine collection.
5. Bland/LeMoynes/Edwards/Shine: Expo '67 Labyrinth, National Film Board, Mackay Pier, Port of Old Montreal, 1964-67; Tony Shine collection.





was involved in over the years, without a doubt it was the ones that set buildings into a context of harmony and delight that brought out the best in John Bland. In a strange twist of events, the fact that the firm had a solid footing in both architecture and planning opened up the door to a new role in project management, along side of engineers and construction personnel. This was a different kind of consultancy role for JB and he played a key role in helping to blend all the disciplines into a working team. Those were the days of CAIM, Consultants en aéroports internationaux de Montréal, when the firm was engaged in the planning and design of airports and Olympic installations.

One of the most rewarding features of the practice which included John Bland on its masthead, was that it was truly contemporary with its times and, maybe more significantly, it is among a select few that participated in events that cover the history of the period. New towns in the north were designed for Port Cartier, Lebel-sur-Quévillon and Twin Falls. University campuses were expanded for McGill, Windsor, Acadia and Carleton. Research laboratory centres were designed for Northern Electric, Smith Kline & French, and McGill at Mont St-Hilaire. University buildings included the library of Windsor University, the McGill Law Faculty's Chancellor Day Hall, and the Pollack Concert Hall. Jarry Metro Station was designed for the new Montreal subway system. For Expo '67, there were the National Film Board Labyrinth Pavilion and John Bland's Boy Scout Pavilion, along with his consultancy role in the Museum and the associate role that the firm played in the design of the British Pavilion. Urban renewal schemes were developed for Greene Avenue and Westmount Square (before Mies was brought in) and La Colline Parlementaire in Quebec. An embassy in Accra, Ghana, and an ambassador's residence in Dakar, Senegal, were designed for the Government of Canada.

In a curious dose of architectural anthropology, the name of the firm that started as Rother/Bland/Trudeau went through several metamorphoses between 1957 and 1982, which were my years of attachment. After Rother/Bland/Trudeau, it became Bland/LeMoyne/Edwards, which begat Bland/LeMoyne/Edwards/Shine which begat Bland/LeMoyne/Shine which begat Bland/LeMoyne/Shine/Lacroix. Also, an association was made between Bland/LeMoyne/Shine and Victor Prus who formed a consortium with SNC and BBL to CAIM. Then, in the grand chain of events, the firm morphed into LeMoyne et Associés, with a chapter known as PLLL, concocted for the Palais des Congrès, made up of the firms of Prus, LeMoyne, Lalonde and Labelle. JB retired from



the firm at around that time and the team became LeMoyne/Lapointe/Magne who carried on with an old legacy and an infusion of new talent.

Just in case some of the alumni care to bear witness, these are remembered as all having shared many of these memories with and of JB in the firm: Jean-Louis Lalonde, Stig Harvor, Louis Balogh, René Menkes, René Welter, Victor Virak, Roméo Savoie, Kazimierz Grzegorek, Ann Marie Balazs, Harvey Wolfe, Radoslav Zuk, Harry Vandelman, Hubert Chamberland, Mounir Kerba, Brian Klopper, Michel Barcello, Audrey LeMaistre, Ron Matthews, Gerald Sheff, Earl Murphy, Phil Gooch, Roger Desmarais, Bruce Anderson, Thomas Bégin, Michael Fieldman, Alex Kowaluk, Gilles Letourneau, Dick Tobin, Peter Haley, André Caron, Norm Globerman, Frank McMahon, Monique Quesnel, Maria Calderisi, Francine Vézina, Murielle Forcier and Gustave Lavoie. Along with my partners of the past, Roy LeMoyne, Gordon Edwards and Michel Lacroix, we all salute you, JB.

#### NOTE

An architect and a planner, Anthony Shine is currently working in private practice, Anthony Shine Consultants.

6. Bland/LeMoyne/Edwards/Shine: Law Building, McGill University, 1963-64, View from Dr. Penfield looking north; Tony Shine collection.
7. Bland/LeMoyne/Edwards/Shine: Northern Electric Co. Ltd. Research and Development Laboratories, Ottawa, Ontario, 1964; Tony Shine collection.
8. Bland/LeMoyne/Edwards/Smith, Kline and French Pharmaceutical Centre - Research Laboratory, Senneville, Quebec, 1964; Tony Shine collection.
9. Bland/LeMoyne/Edwards/Smith, Kline and French Pharmaceutical Centre - Research Laboratory, Senneville, Quebec, 1964, Master plan; Tony Shine collection.
10. Bland/LeMoyne/Edwards/Shine: Law Building, McGill University, 1963-64, Model; Tony Shine collection.
11. Bland/LeMoyne/Shine/Lacroix: Library Extension, University of Windsor, Windsor, Ontario, 1970; Tony Shine collection.
12. Bland/LeMoyne/Shine: University of Windsor Campus, Windsor Ontario, 1970; Tony Shine collection.
- 13 - 18. Unit Masonry Awards Program, Design Canada, 1972. Winners of Awards of Excellence for the Library Extension, University of Windsor, Windsor, Ontario: John Bland, Roy E. LeMoyne, Anthony J. Shine, Michel Lacroix, Earl B. Murphy, Thomas-E. Bégin; Tony Shine collection.

## THE MODERNIZING OF WEST COAST DESIGN

RHODRI WINDSOR LISCOMBE



John Bland, Director of the School of Architecture, McGill University, early 1970s; McGill School of Architecture collection.

The influence John Bland exerted on the emergence of a distinctive Modernist architectural culture and design in the West Coast is as significant yet indirect: indirect because Bland neither spent any considerable time in its centre, Vancouver, nor became involved in specific modernizing policy. Yet he acted as a benign version of those other Montreal-based or central Canadian institutions that, like the CPR or McGill University, modelled the socio-economic and cultural fabric of the provinces. In architecture, the potency of central Canadian practice would actually only impact from the late 1950s - well after Bland had projected his enthusiasm for the Modernist agenda, westward through the migration of former junior colleagues and students.

Consequently, this estimate of John Bland's influence will derive from the cumulative contributions to Vancouver Modernism of those he encouraged and the values he inculcated. It will privilege what might be termed the cultural narrative and will concentrate on the period 1945-1965; from the broad acceptance of Modernist aesthetic and planning of the Reconstruction era, to the onset of cynicism as its ethos became subsumed by Consumerists and corporate objectives - and in Vancouver, the completion of Simon Fraser University to designs by Bland's erstwhile pupil Arthur Erickson in partnership with Geoffrey Massey and in cooperation with at least one other former student, Duncan McNab.

Erickson and McNab, among a bevy of other McGill alumni had already created a distinctive regional genus of Modernism - especially in domestic design - but Simon Fraser heralded a more self-consciously inventive phase of West Coast Modernism. This change eventuated partly in response to growing anxiety about the degradation of Modernist values Bland had helped articulate. In 1960, he persuaded the *Journal of the Royal Architectural Institute of Canada* to publish a series of articles and illustrative polemics by McGill architecture students disappointed with Paul Rudolph's appearance in their midst. Their often astute and melancholic diagnosis of the conventionalisation of Modernism by materialism reiterated the warnings of impending 'urbanicide' at Vancouver voiced in *Project 58*, the pamphlet on participatory planning written by a group including Erickson and another Bland protégé, H. Peter Oberlander, plus the redoubtable Wells Coates.

Bland's own earlier exposure to Coates and to the other émigré Modernists in London while attending the Architectural Association had, in 1939, fitted him to carry the McGill School of Architecture through an earlier, deeper pedagogical crisis. He was hired by Cyril James - newly appointed Chancellor of McGill, to replace the enfeebled Academic-cum-Arts and Crafts curriculum with one that introduced Modernist concept and practice. Bland quickly won the respect of the small, disgruntled but talented, ros-

ter of students, three of whom would become leaders of the postwar Vancouver profession - McNab, John C.H. Porter and the pioneering Catherine [Chard] Wisnicki, McGill's first woman graduate in architecture.

There is another dimension to this western legacy of Bland's dynamic teaching which should be considered at this juncture. Part of his enthusiasm for Modernism was its recovery of the courage to innovate and to rethink every aspect of design from typical conventions to structural material. Consequently he welcomed the expertise of those young designers who had, like himself, studied or worked in the European and British centre or offices of Modernism. One such design was Frederic Lasserre, the Swiss-born but University of Toronto trained architect who had worked at TECTON when Bland was still in London. Another was the Canadian, Hazen Sise who had travelled to France in order to work with LeCorbusier. Both Lasserre and Sise had assisted in the organization of the 1938 MARS (Modern Architecture Research) Group exhibition in London, under the direction of Wells Coates.

Each would be brought onto the McGill faculty by Bland - Lasserre but briefly, before being appointed inaugural Head of the Department [later School] of Architecture at the University of British Columbia in 1946. Lasserre would emulate the curriculum Bland had already established, synthesizing Bauhaus artistic and analytical reductionism with Corbusian poetic abstract formalism, modulated by the organic and craft sensibility of Wright and Aalto, and initially, to a much lesser extent, by the intellectualised structuralism of Mies. Lasserre also introduced courses on sociology and community planning (including lectures by Leonard Marsh, another émigré from McGill to UBC, who had compiled the *Federal Advisory Committee Report on Reconstruction* [IV], 1944). He introduced architectural history, sharing Bland's view that when divorced from mere stylism and derived from genuine vernacular, it offered significant lessons in design. The sense of place - of topography, climate and culture - Lasserre shared with Bland and it was articulated in the objectives he set for the UBC Department: the creation of a regional Modernist idiom that would carry good design to the widest spectrum of society. Another of Bland's colleagues, Douglas Shadbolt, would direct the UBC architectural school through the late 1970s and mid 1980s, strengthening its prestige.

The network of Modernism Bland signally helped to weave across Canada included a highly talented cadre of émigrés from Nazi Germany and Austria, resettled, supposedly temporarily, in Quebec. Their number included Rolf Duchenes and Wolfgang Gerson, who collaborated with Lasserre on the earliest Modernist Church in Canada, and St. Cuthbert's Anglican in the Town of Mount Royal (1945-46). Its





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uncompromising geometrical massing demonstrated the liturgically radical central plan church interior and matched the brick utilitarianism of recent Anglo-Dutch architecture. Equally novel, and more directly anticipatory of the wood frame and sheathed site was Gerson's house for Hugo Simon at St. Rose in the west end of Montreal island - a frequent place of pilgrimage for McGill students following its completion in 1943. Gerson would be enticed to Manitoba in 1947 by John Russell, and eventually to UBC in 1953 by Lasserre. Gerson was not only a notable teacher, but responsible for a series of successively visually subtle interpretations of Modernist functionalism in domestic and ecclesiastical work, culminating in his own three-level house on Sentinel Hill, West Vancouver (1958-59), and the Unitarian Church on Oak Street (1959-62).

A third émigré was H. Peter Oberlander, who completed his training at McGill before studying under Gropius at the Harvard Graduate School of Design and being recruited by Lasserre in 1951. He brought to Vancouver his wife, Cornelia Oberlander, who would become the outstanding Canadian landscape architect of the postwar era. Oberlander emulated Bland's 1944 conference on Community Planning at McGill by teaching an enlightened version of CIAM, British and Scandinavian theory at UBC, eventually establishing departments of community planning and human settlements. Thus Oberlander helped to sustain the momentum for urban renewal in the decrepit east end Strathcona district of Vancouver. This had been forged in the 1945 New Community schemes exhibited by the Art in Living Group under the leadership of Fred Amess and B.C. Binning, and reinforced by the UBC-funded Marsh redevelopment plan published in 1950. The next year, with Lasserre, Oberlander endeavoured to augment the community facilities projected for the Alcan townsite at Kitimat in northern BC, so as to correspond with the best of the British New Towns he had worked on briefly in 1950. By the centennial of the province of BC, Oberlander, in company with Erickson, Massey, E.J. Watkins and Coates, argued in vain, for public participatory planning to redress the disempowerment of the citizen by the onset of large-scale real estate development and absence of effective civic planning.

Again Bland had already contributed to the potential alleviation of this deficiency. In 1950-51 he had compiled a report with his friend and colleague, Harold Spence-Sales. This had resulted in the establishment of a municipal planning department in 1956 to oversee development and conservation. The local preoccupation with private property development and rightist provincial government conspired against their more liberal vision. The existence of the City Planning Department did enable the implementation of a much diminished redevelopment in

the east end. Instead of the surgical reconstruction envisaged by the Art in Living Group and Leonard Marsh, the provision of extensive, new low-cost housing (new homes for large families, maisonnettes and apartments) was concentrated in three smaller projects effected through CMHC funding and expertise. The first two were the McLean Park 'superblock' and Skeena Terrace housing (1959-63), each with a remarkable variety of scale and spaces forming fine landscaping by Cornelia Oberlander. The third was the more densely compact Raymur Place (1962-64), by Duncan McNab. McNab, it should be noted, had realized Bland's ideal of socially responsible architecture in plain but well-planned veterans housing constructed shortly after he demobilized from the RCAF at Vancouver in 1946. An important inspiration for the dense yet pleasant environment of Raymur Place was McNab's visit to the recently opened Jeanne Mance complex in Montreal for which Bland (with his partners Vincent Rother and Charles Trudeau) acted as architectural and planning consultant.

Almost two decades earlier, in 1949, McNab had sought to effect the reforms in applied design Bland pursued through the foundation of such national advocacy organizations as the Design Council. McNab mounted the *Design for Living* exhibition at the Vancouver Art Gallery in concert with Chard Wisnicki and Porter, Pratt and E.R. Pratt with R.A.D. Berwick, and Peter Thornton, whom Bland had met in prewar London and who built the earliest Modernist west coast house in Caulfield, West Vancouver (1938-39). The *Design for Living* exhibition presented a series of prototype reasonably-priced middle class houses, informed by psychological and ergonomic no less than by aesthetic considerations. The renderings of the houses and mock-up of their living rooms, encapsulated humanistic but non-elitist values shared with Bland, and especially the ideal of widely accessible, intelligent housing - the matrix for the compound growth of the southeast and north shore suburbs of Vancouver.

Bland's promotion of West Canadian Modernism alike continued through the high proportion of awards to Vancouver region buildings when he chaired the 1955 Massey medal selection committee. That year, too, a group of colleagues and graduating students from McGill won the national competition for the Civic Auditorium at Vancouver, organized by its leading proponent Lasserre. Affleck, Desbarats, Dima-kopoulos, Lebensold, Michaud and Sise devised a graceful Modernist complex, reminiscent of the architecture at the 1951 Festival of Britain in London. That inaugurated the refurbishment of the inner section of the city, recently extended by the erection of the new Vancouver Public Library and Federal Office Building by yet another former student, Moshe Safdie (with Downs Archambault). The main part of the Auditorium was opened in 1960 as

the Queen Elizabeth Theatre and recognized by the architectural educator and writer Abraham Rogatnick as marking the cultural maturity of Vancouver.

Within three years the dynamism of the west coast architectural culture Bland helped foster was confirmed by the Simon Fraser University competition through the commissioning of Erickson and Massey's highly novel concept. The interplay of structure and setting, program and effect, spaces and ambiance achieved by Erickson and Massey epitomizes the kind of imaginative empiricism championed by John Bland.

#### NOTE

Rhodri Windsor Liscombe, is Professor of the Department of Fine Arts, University of British Columbia, Vancouver. He is also Vice-President of the Society for the Study of Architecture in Canada and a Fellow of the Society of Antiquarians. He met John Bland while teaching in the Department of Art History at McGill in 1974-76.

2. Erickson and Massey: Simon Fraser University, Burnaby, British Columbia, 1963-65, Exterior view; CAC Bland Archive.
3. Erickson and Massey: Simon Fraser University, Burnaby, British Columbia, 1963-65, Exterior view; CAC Bland Archive.
4. Erickson and Massey: Simon Fraser University, Burnaby, British Columbia, 1963-65, Interior view; CAC Bland Archive.
5. Affleck, Desbarats, Dimakopoulos, Lebensold, Michaud and Sise: Queen Elizabeth Theatre, Civic Auditorium, Vancouver, British Columbia, 1955; CAC Bland Archive.

## CAC WEB SITE


1. The Bland Archive
2. Building Canada

Netscape - [The Bland Archive]

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Location: <http://cac.mcgill.ca/cac/bland/building/>

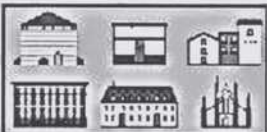



# The Bland Archive



**JOHN BLAND**, B.Arch. McGill 1933; Diploma in Planning, the Architectural Association, London, 1937; Dr.Sc. (honoris causa) Carleton University, 1975; Professor of Architecture Emeritus, McGill, 1979.

Born in Lachine, Quebec in 1911, John Bland studied architecture at McGill University where he received a B. Arch. in 1933 and planning in London at the Architectural Association School, earning a Diploma in Planning in 1937. Upon graduation, Bland worked in London for the Planning Department of the London County Council and in 1938 he travelled throughout Europe. In partnership with Harold Spence-Sales, Bland designed a number of commercial and public buildings in England as well as prepared planning reports. Bland returned to Canada in the late 1930s and began his long association with the School of Architecture at McGill University: he served as Director of the School of Architecture from 1941-1972 and became Emeritus Professor of Architecture in 1979. During this time he was also actively involved in the design of numerous architectural and planning projects in partnership with Vincent Rother, Charles Elliott Trudeau, Roy E. LeMoyné, Gordon Edwards, Michel Lacroix and Anthony Shine.

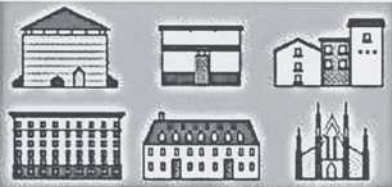
The holdings of the CAC reflect Bland's dual career as educator and architect. John Bland was responsible for assembling the materials which now form the archives of the CAC. There are 71 projects from the John Bland Archive that consist of drawings, photographs, and reports. Other literary material, such as his publications, lectures, and unpublished papers, offer insight into the plethora of subjects that captivated Professor Bland's interest. The archive is rounded out with articles by others on John Bland and his work, as well as his personal collection of slides, maps, and books.

	<a href="#">Building Canada</a>
	<a href="#">About John Bland</a>
	<a href="#">The John Bland Archive</a>
	<a href="#">Publication</a>

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# Building Canada

A Selection of Images from the John Bland Collection of Canadian Architecture







Version Française  
Text only



During his tenure as educator and director of the McGill School of Architecture (1941-1972) Professor Emeritus John Bland assembled a unique collection of slides of buildings from across Canada. The collection became the basis for his course on the History of Architecture in Canada, the first course of its kind in Canada.

The aim of the **Building Canada** project was to digitize a selection of these images so that more people could see examples of Canada's architectural history. The title of the project, **Building Canada**, is referential to both the structures that are depicted and how the built environment of Canada is reflective of the country's builders, past, present and future.

Contents of the **Building Canada** site:

-  [Canadian Architecture 101](#): Learn about Canada's architectural history
-  [Pop Quiz](#): Test your knowledge
-  [Project Overview](#): A description of the **Building Canada** project and its contributors
-  [Glossary](#): Terms and phrases
-  [The John Bland Archive](#)
-  [Canadian Architecture Collection home](#)

## CANADIAN TOWN PLANNING : COMMON SENSE PREVAILS

H. PETER OBERLANDER

There is nothing magical about town planning, either how it is accomplished or what it accomplishes... its aim is to provide better living conditions... [and] town planning would be automatic if changes came slowly... town planning... cannot be done without the understanding and foresight of citizens. (John Bland, *Planning: Suggestions for Canadian Communities*, Montreal, Canadian Chamber of Commerce, Field Service Department 1947.)

Thus, fifty years ago Bland articulated the mandate for planning, anticipating a central role for community participation but tempered by a good measure of common sense. It was this common sense that ensured Bland's early successful planning practice. The immediate post-war era provided unique opportunities for Bland to practice what he taught and vice versa: laying out townsites to meet social needs within a measure of economic reality.

The most successful plan Bland developed was for what was initially a mystery site. Between 1945 VE- and VJ-days, I worked for the aeronautical division of the National Research Council in Ottawa. By July, Doug Simpson (one of Canada's future pioneer modern architects) and I were given the task of designing what was called the 'new chemistry building'. It had few architectural pretensions, it was a concrete box of several floors and a warren of unidentified interior spaces. Doug was curious and asked where the building was to be located: "after all, site specific design was basic to modern architecture". The answer was 'somewhere' on the 'Montreal Road NRC station in Ottawa'. We were to assume a flat and featureless site.

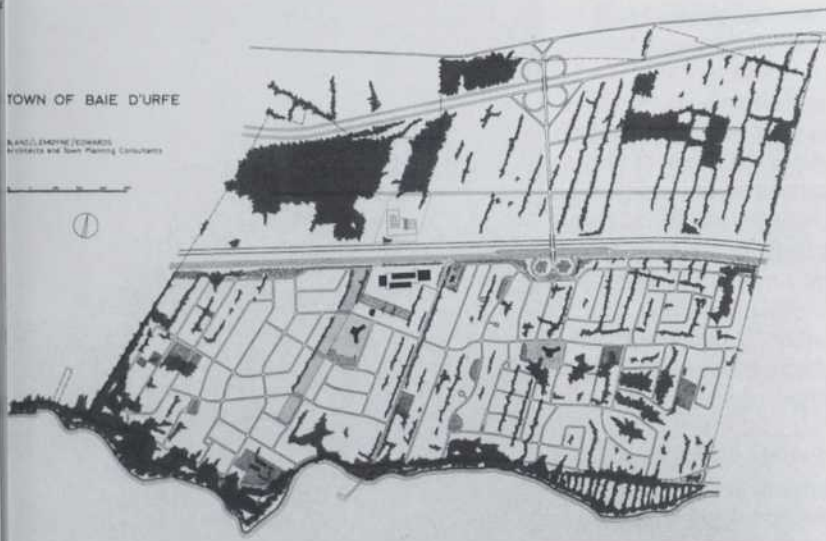
As World War II was drawing to its victorious conclusion, we awoke suddenly one August morning to the shattering explosion of the atomic bomb over Japan. The world had changed overnight and the mystery location for our 'chemistry building' suddenly became clear. The 'chemistry building' was a code name for the new headquarters of Atomic Energy of Canada Ltd. Its site was not in Ottawa but upstream on the Ottawa River at a place called Chalk River and it was to serve as the base of operations for Canada's first atomic energy plant.

We were amazed and perplexed by the turn of events. We also found out that a new town for scientists and workers was to be built nearby in Deep River, according to a plan prepared by John Bland. It was a pioneering layout, respectful of the Ottawa Valley landscape and its native forest. It quickly became an instructive model for post-war townsite planning with several significant innovations characteristic of John's respect for Canada's economic and social environment. It provided ample open space for the residential areas and convenient access to commercial and recreational facilities.



1. Deep River Housing, Deep River, Ontario, c.1956-57; CAC Bland Archive.
2. Rother/Bland/Trudeau: Town of Port Cartier, Quebec, 1959, Aerial view; CAC Bland Archive.
3. Rother/Bland/Trudeau: Town of Port Cartier, Quebec, 1959, Site plan; CAC Bland Archive.
4. Bland/LeMoyne/Edwards: Town of Baie d'Urfé, Proposed master plan, 1962-63; Tony Shine collection.





Its most innovative device in *building* the new town was the construction process of a given residential street. It allowed house construction only on alternate lots in any given year. The assumption was that the lots in between left vacant would be built upon in subsequent years and thereby encourage different house designs, lot arrangements and tree clusters to achieve a visual variety usually absent from instant residential streets all built up at the same time. For example, of ten lots along a given residential street, five alternate ones would become available for house construction in 1946, the remaining interspersed five lots would become available two or three years later when economic, social and aesthetic circumstances will have changed.

Another experimental idea was to provide along the same street lots varying widths, again to encourage variety of size and location of houses along the same street. This practical and common sense process infused a sense of organic growth and design variety into what was otherwise a boring instant new town. The approach proved popular and a victory for coupling planned design with its implementation. It could only be achieved because the land was in public ownership initially and infrastructure cost recovery could be staged over time. Deep River stands as an eloquent example of John Bland's common sense planning approach and his commitment to innovation.

A few years later I experienced John Bland's 'common sense' planning advice in the West. By 1950, Fred Lasserre (another great John Bland devotee from McGill teaching days) had invited me to join him at UBC and start the School of Community and Regional Planning in the context of British Columbia's rapid urbanization. Vancouver was in the midst of its first post-war development boom with a very modest and archaic urban planning system in place. It had a zoning bylaw (1926 pioneer vintage) and an equally old Town Planning Commission with two devoted part-time staff. How could planning be brought up to date, to guide the city's escalating construction, and how could it be linked strategically to the daily process of city building and private development? These questions were posed to its planning consultant John Bland (and his enthusiastic partner, Harold Spence-Sales, then also teaching at McGill).

John and Harold came to Vancouver in the summer of 1951 and I had the pleasure of hosting some of their professional enquiry. Bland's concluding advice was as practical as it was simple. He recommended integrating urban planning into municipal management just as engineering or legal affairs were part of 'City Hall'. Planning, as an on-going municipal responsibility, was to review all development projects systematically, establish an application process, resulting in recommendations for appropriate action after full consultation with all relevant municipi-

pal departments. Planning decisions should consider not only zoned land uses but the related aspects of utilities, traffic and road services, as well as shopping, school and park needs.

Apart from creating a municipal department of planning to lead the planning process and anticipate Vancouver's future, Bland was convinced that its major function was to coordinate the public and private works necessary to improve the development process and ensure that the city will become more than the sum of its parts. Incorporating urban planning into the municipal structure and system was a novelty in the early fifties. It has served Vancouver well to this day and represents an enduring testimony to John Bland's practical approach to planning. He was a pioneer planning consultant in post-war urban Canada and broke new ground in urban planning as he did in educating waves of successive generations of planners and architects at McGill. I had the good fortune to be among the earliest group.

#### NOTE

H. Peter Oberlander, C.M., B.Arch.'45, F.R.A.I.C., is a practising architect in Vancouver.

## HISTORIAN

KELLY CROSSMAN



The Architectural Undergraduate Society, John Bland lower right, Guy Desbarats, lower middle; McGill School of Architecture collection.

To the enthusiast of Canadian architecture the top floor of the Redpath Library at McGill University is a kind of paradise. There, tucked under the soaring eaves are two sunny, airy rooms filled with the treasures of the historian's trade: rare books, manuscripts, drawer upon drawer of architectural drawings, maquettes, old student papers, and historical photographs. All are meticulously taken care of, and what is truly miraculous in this age of virtual reality, easily available to researchers *in the flesh*.

These beautiful rooms with their beautiful objects are one of the sights at McGill. They now form the Canadian Architecture Collection (CAC). But as Irena Murray, Head of the Blackader-Lauterman Library of Architecture and Art and Curator of the CAC has eloquently described, they were once known as the Nobbs Room with a collection built up by John Bland, long-time director of the McGill School of Architecture.<sup>1</sup> While its treasures have continued to grow since Murray took over as curator in 1982, the unique character of the CAC as a place and as a collection, its personality, its range, its accessibility, its focus on Montreal and McGill, all are the legacy of John Bland.

The thriving presence of the CAC today makes concrete a facet of Professor Bland's career often overlooked: his work as a historian. In the history of McGill, and Canadian architecture generally, John Bland is something of a legendary figure. And for good reason. Appointed Director of the McGill School of Architecture in 1941 at the age of 30 he has been a key figure in the development of Canadian architecture ever since. His success as a university administrator and practicing architect has tended to obscure the fact that John Bland has also had a long and abiding interest in the study of architectural history.

It is often forgotten that from his earliest days at McGill, Professor Bland chose to teach history to the students around him. Over the course of his career he emerged as an architectural historian in his own right; quite apart from his role as curator and collector. As Montreal architect Guy Desbarats observed on the occasion of John Bland's 80<sup>th</sup> birthday: John Bland's scholarly interest in the subject of Canadian heritage architecture grew as time allowed from school administrative duties. His earliest papers date from 1948, becoming more numerous and dealing with more weighty subjects over the years.<sup>2</sup>

Taken as a whole John Bland's historical writing is remarkable for two things: the originality of his perceptions and the fact that it spans almost half a century. Although he was a regular contributor to the *Journal of the Royal Architectural Institute of Canada* (JRAIC) throughout the 1940s, Bland, as Guy Desbarats rightly points out, published what could be legitimately called his first piece of historical writing in 1948. He is still at it; his most recent contribution to the understanding of our architectural past is an

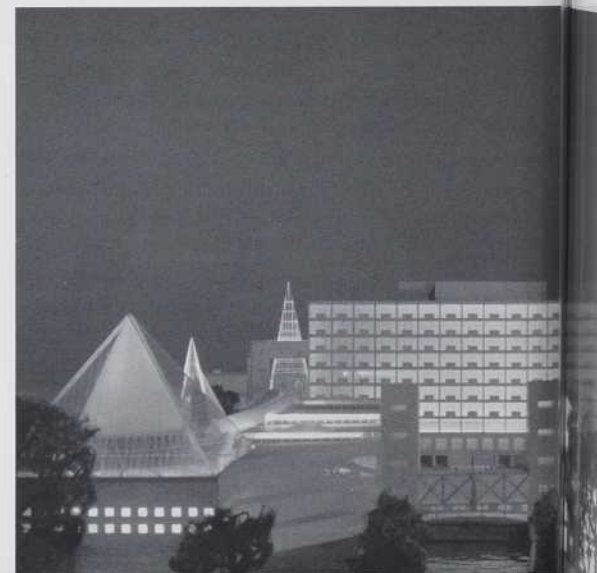
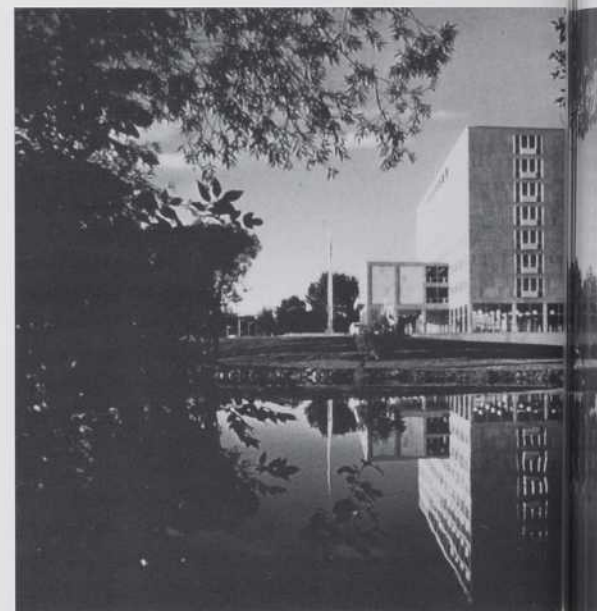
essay in the catalogue *Moshe Safdie: Buildings and Projects*. This has only just appeared, published in 1996 by McGill-Queen's University Press.<sup>3</sup>

It is difficult to imagine a young director of an architecture school having much time for scholarship during the hectic years of the post-war period. Schools were flooded with returning service men, the world filled with new ideas and soon the economy would boom. A bibliography of John Bland's work lists 24 published articles between 1948 and 1954; ten in 1953 alone. It is hard to think of many heads of departments equaling that output today. Subject matter ranged from criticism: "Mies van der Rohe et LeCorbusier" or A Developing Church Architecture in Montreal to commentary, reportage, and planning issues.<sup>4</sup> Today they provide useful insights into the climate of opinion at that time.

As many of these early articles show, for John Bland history was not far from the surface of contemporary life. His interest and love of architecture was based on close observation. Entirely characteristic of his approach to architectural history is the article *Domestic Architecture in Montreal*. Published in the journal *Culture* in November 1948, this was based on notes prepared for a lecture in a series called "Our City" given at McGill. Reading the article, one can almost see the young professor and hear his voice as he leads his listeners up and down the streets of Montreal, pointing out this remnant of the French regime; and that product of the local builder's art. Bland was no simple antiquarian, he had a thesis: "In looking at the houses of Montreal", he wrote, "we can detect the strong native influences...the effect of country manners and of ideas of immigrants. We can judge the results of transplanting architecture fully formed. We can everywhere feel the relentless pressure of our climate."<sup>5</sup>

The record of John Bland's historical writing illuminates the profound impact which the culture of McGill had on his ideas and methodology. His articles are filled with a sensitivity to vernacular architecture, to the effects of climate and to the way building methods and materials have changed over time. In this we hear the echo and feel the influence of his colleagues and mentors, Percy Nobbs and Ramsay Traquair. It reminds us that at one level John Bland is an historian of the McGill School: a link between the Arts and Crafts ethos of the turn of the century and the mid-twentieth century spirit of High Modernism. John Bland, the historian, was also an innovator. His openness to social and cultural factors in the understanding of architecture took him far beyond the insights of Nobbs and Traquair and make him prophetic, a messenger for our own time.

For John Bland, the historian, architecture was a living thing, and all architecture worthy of study; not just high and low, the humblest three story walkup and the houses of the wealthy, but also architecture



in its totality. "An extensive architectural tolerance in matters of taste seems to be one of our most evident characteristics" he wrote in the 1956 article, "Effects of Nineteenth-Century Manners on Montreal." "Yet a force that acts with growing strength upon our architectural manners is the environment itself. In the architectural image of Montreal, buildings and manners of the 19<sup>th</sup> century play a surprising part". As an example, Bland noted that a " photograph of Dominion Square showing the Sun Life building alone is not nearly as full of the flavour of Montreal as one that includes a part of the melancholy facade of the adjoining cathedral with its battery of copper saints along the coping."<sup>6</sup>

So sophisticated an approach was light years away from the general indifference bordering on hostility which most architects and art historians felt toward Canadian architecture and its study in the 1950s. At a time when there were very few historians turning their attention to the historical architecture of Canada, and the few that there were tended to apply the methodology of style, Bland was already proposing a point of view which posits the now fashionable idea of architecture as a social and physical construct existing within a cultural landscape.

John Bland's writing of the 1950s reveals the emergence of a gifted observer of the Canadian scene. It is no surprise that so generous and tolerant a mind would find success as a teacher. The result of that success was opportunity and commitment, and during the 1960s, little time for writing of history. In the 1971 circumstances changed again. That year was marked by the publication of *Trois siècles d'architecture au Canada - Three Centuries of Architecture in Canada*, co-authored with Pierre Mayrand. The following year, Bland retired as director of the School of Architecture and the stage was set for the second and most prolific part of his historical career.

With time to devote to scholarship and the growing collection of the Nobbs Room around him, Bland was now able to develop many of the ideas he had been able only to suggest in embryonic form decades earlier. The result was pioneering work which continues to offer young historians methodological models. A good example is the 1977 article "Overnight Trains to Boston and New York Made Montreal 'American'."<sup>7</sup> Here Bland explored the idea first suggested in 1956 that "American taste became very influential here at the end of the century, possibly brought to Canada by the railroad barons."<sup>8</sup> His thesis, that transportation technology provides a smoking gun and answer to the question: what killed the indigenous Canadian architectural culture of the 19<sup>th</sup> century? It now seems irrefutable. Not only did his thesis deepen our understanding of the complexity of the processes which act upon our architecture, but it was argued with skill and wit, including such fascinating details as an account of the construction of



2. Rother/Bland/Trudeau: Ottawa City Hall, Green Island, Ottawa, 1956-58; CAC Bland Archive.
3. Rother/Bland/Trudeau: Ottawa City Hall, Green Island, Ottawa, 1956-58; CAC Bland Archive.
4. Ottawa City Hall extension, 1988, Model; CAC Safdie Archive. [slide]
5. CAC web page.

railway lines over river ice in the winters of 1879-82 in Montreal. Bland wryly noted that "On January 15, 1881, when a locomotive fell through [the ice]; the tracks had to be shifted 150 feet from the hole" and "traffic was immediately resumed on the new line."<sup>9</sup>

The many publications: books, articles, and essays which Professor Bland has written in the last 15 years are too numerous to discuss here but a few deserve special mention. First and foremost, are the series of catalogue guides to the Canadian Architecture Collection which have appeared in steady succession since 1986 and which are a model of their kind. Each includes a historical introduction by Professor Bland and these, written with characteristic grace and insight, are a gift to future generations.

As a final note, it is also worth mentioning that the Canadian Architecture Collection contains a number of unpublished articles by John Bland.<sup>10</sup> All are valuable but two strike me as works of particular interest. The first "The Public Buildings of New France" surveys the history of nine Quebec City buildings: the Château Saint-Louis, the Basilica, the Bishop's Palace, the Jesuit College, the House of the Recollet Order, the Hôtel Dieu, the Seminary, the Ursuline Convent and the Intendant's Palace. The second, an article entitled "The Art and Architecture of the '30s in Montreal" offers a perspective, part historical, part anecdotal, of a period in our architectural history which remains little known and poorly understood. Perhaps the help of a young student, John Bland could be prevailed upon to bring to press yet another in a long list of stimulating and invaluable articles.

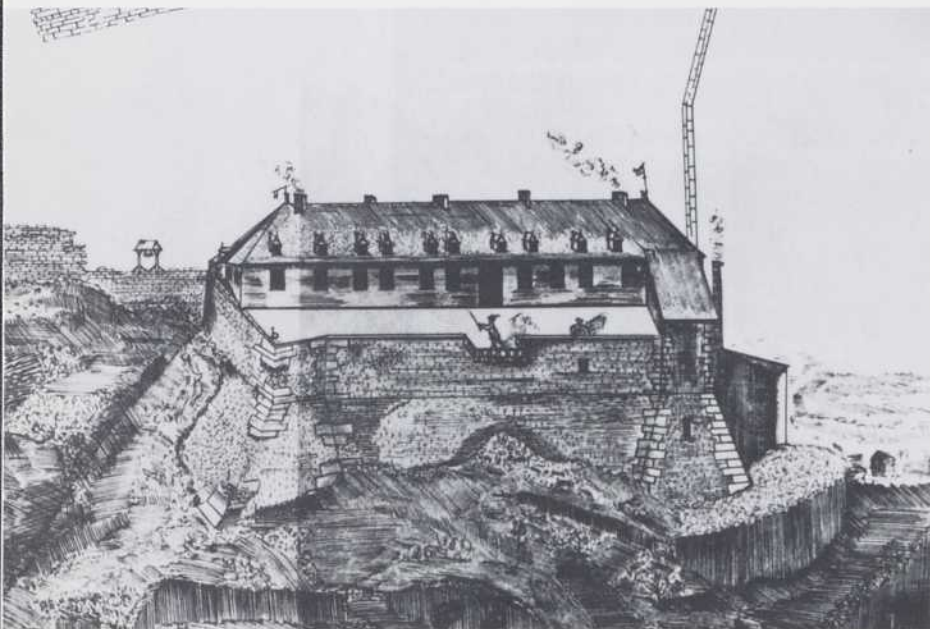
#### NOTE

Kelly Crossman is Associate Professor of Architectural History, Carleton University, Ottawa, and editor of the journal *AI: Architecture and Ideas*. He first met John Bland in 1981 while working on his PhD thesis.

1. Irena Murray, "Introduction", Irena Murray and Norbert Schoenauer eds. *John Bland at Eighty: A Tribute*, Montreal: McGill University, 1991, pp.2-3.
2. "Guy Desbarats", *John Bland at Eighty: A Tribute*, Montreal: McGill University, 1991, p.50.
3. John Bland, "Moshe Safdie: A Profile", *Moshe Safdie: Buildings and Projects, 1967-1992*, Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1996, pp.13-25.
4. For a comprehensive list of John Bland's writing, see *John Bland at Eighty: A Tribute*, pp.92-102.
5. John Bland, "Domestic Architecture in Montreal". *Culture 9*, (December 1948): 406.
6. John Bland, "Effect of Nineteenth-Century Manners on Montreal," *JRAIC* 33, No.11 (November 1956): 414.
7. John Bland, "Overnight Trains to Boston and New York Made Montreal 'American'." *Selected Papers from the Society for the Study of Architecture in Canada*. Vol. II. Christina Cameron and Martin Segger, eds., Annual Meeting 1977. Ottawa: Society for the Study of Architecture in Canada, 1982, pp.46-64.
8. John Bland, "Effect of Nineteenth-Century Manners", p.416.
9. John Bland, "Overnight Trains to Boston and New York Made Montreal American." *Selected Papers from the Society for the Study of Architecture in Canada*. Vol. II. Christina Cameron and Martin Segger, eds., Annual Meeting 1977. Ottawa: Society for the Study of Architecture in Canada, 1982, p.51.
10. These are listed in *John Bland at Eighty: A Tribute*, pp.99-100.

# LE VIEUX-QUÉBEC : UNE PAGE DE L'HISTOIRE DE LA CONSERVATION ARCHITECTURALE AU CANADA

LUC NOPPEN ET LUCIE K. MORISSET



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Le 9 novembre 1961, John Bland, directeur de l'École d'architecture de l'Université McGill, prononce une conférence devant les participants d'un dîner-causerie de la Chambre de commerce de Québec. L'objectif en est simple : faire la promotion de la restauration du Vieux-Québec.

Les propos de Bland faisaient alors écho à des préoccupations croissantes, celles-là qui conduiraient, moins de deux ans plus tard, au classement de l'arrondissement historique du Vieux-Québec. Quelques essais ont retracé certains des chemins qui conduisirent, finalement, à cette reconnaissance; en revanche le parcours de Bland lui-même, et son rôle au sein de l'histoire de la conservation architecturale au Canada, sont bien moins connus. En 1961, l'intérêt de John Bland pour le patrimoine, rétrospectivement, pourrait même surprendre.

## LE FONCTIONNALISTE

Les premiers pas de sa carrière ont en effet sacré l'architecte fonctionnaliste. *England's Water Problem* (publié en 1939, concluant son travail au Service d'urbanisme du London City Council), *The Growth of Physical Planning* (1944), *Regional Planning* (1944), entre autres titres, arriment les réflexions du jeune Bland au contexte moderniste de son époque, ainsi que, plus tard, les nombreux rapports de recherche qu'il signe. *The Heart of Montreal, Civic Needs and Traffic Requirements* (1956) exemplifie clairement les motivations qui animent sa pensée sur la ville: «the heart of Montreal», y apprend-on, «can only attain the distinction it warrants by cultivating the personality of the city and by ensuring that traffic needs are adjusted [...]». Le document, que Bland signe avec Harold Spence-Sales, ne laisse aucun équivoque quant à ses allégeances fonctionnalistes:

ségrégation fonctionnelle, répartition des circulations, transits autoroutiers — voire, longeant le Vieux-Port — ponctuent l'analyse structurale de la ville, prospectent ses potentiels, planifient son avenir. Comme d'autres, tels Jacques Gréber et Édouard Fiset qui — aussi en 1956 — entreprennent de réaménager Québec, Bland est ce que la tradition populaire nomme *un moderne*: sans nostalgie ni regret, l'architecte opte résolument pour l'avenir.

Cependant Bland, nommé directeur de l'École d'architecture de l'université McGill en 1941, est aussi l'héritier d'une tradition qui signa l'image de marque de l'institution, celle qu'y implantèrent Percy E. Nobbs, arrivé à McGill en 1903, puis Ramsay Traquair, qui quitta le poste de directeur de l'École en 1938. Bland, qui a complété son baccalauréat à McGill en 1933, s'est abreuvé à la bienveillance envers les bâtiments anciens qui distinguaient ces prédécesseurs; il compte d'ailleurs parmi ceux que Traquair emmenait visiter les églises anciennes de même que, comme Traquair, il commandera à ses propres étudiants des relevés d'architecture historique. «When [the old buildings] are destroyed by fire or decay or to make room for something more profitable it is a loss immeasurably more to be regretted than the death of a prominent citizen», écrit Bland, à la fin des années 1940.

Cette expérience n'était pourtant pas quelque position en faveur de la restauration stylistique qui ferait (à la manière de Viollet-le-Duc) la fortune de nombreux praticiens francophones au Québec. Au contraire, car Bland est aussi — et surtout — légataire des positions rationalistes de Traquair; si, comme son professeur *Arts and Crafts*, Bland considère la franchise structurale, la pureté des formes, l'honnêteté fonctionnelle de l'architecture ancienne, c'est qu'il préconise une modernité semblablement vertueuse, «an architecture of clear form truthfully expressing needs, free of superfluous ornament, frankly and honestly modern». Quelque vingt ans après que l'Association des architectes de la Province de Québec se soit prononcée en faveur de 'l'architecture de bon goût d'autrefois' (1924), c'est une critique incendiaire — toute empreinte de *l'anti scrape* de John Ruskin — que John Bland réserve à la pratique de la restauration : «The loss of our historic buildings by neglect», écrit-il, «can only be equalled by the utter destruction of most restorations. Restorations at best make an old building conform to the current glamorous idea of the past. A restoration removes completely any historic interest».

## LA MÉTAMORPHOSE

Un heureux concours de circonstances, toutefois, propulserait bientôt le ruskinien John Bland à l'avant-plan du mouvement de la conservation architecturale: une prise de conscience pan-canadienne d'un dépérissement préoccupant du cachet historique du Vieux-Québec, en effet, prendrait le haut du

pavé sur l'incrimination des nostalgiques intégristes que dénonçait Bland. L'heure se prête à un tel éveil en faveur de la pérennité des monuments passés : au Québec par exemple, dans la foulée des offensives de l'Office du tourisme qui avait entrepris de miser sur les *couleurs locales* de l'artisanat et du patrimoine, ainsi que des projets du peintre Clarence Gagnon de créer un musée en plein air de bâtiments historiques du Canada en vue du Tricentenaire de Montréal, plusieurs intentions se faisaient jour de préserver plus attentivement les vestiges de l'histoire. En 1952, et en 1956, la législation québécoise accorde plus de pouvoirs à la Commission des monuments historiques ; puis, la Commission des lieux et monuments historiques du Canada restaure la maison Maillou, dans le Vieux-Québec, constituant cette première intervention en un cas d'espèce de l'engagement canadien en faveur du patrimoine. Plus probant, encore, de la généralisation de cette sollicitude 'patrimoniale' : c'est la Chambre de commerce de Québec, fondamentalement progressiste, qui installe ses locaux dans la maison Maillou restaurée. À cette aune, le progrès de Québec se loge désormais à l'enseigne de la préservation du patrimoine architectural.

Il faut dire que l'intérêt nouveau des gens d'affaires et des autorités gouvernementales pour le Vieux-Québec n'a d'égale que l'ampleur des destructions inconsidérées dont ses murs historiques sont les victimes. Dans les faits, en dépit de l'institutionnalisation dont témoignent législations et pouvoirs des commissions, tous constatent que la culture reste un domaine résiduel de l'activité gouvernementale; c'est en toute impuissance que le Canada entier voit tomber l'un après l'autre, sous les pics des promoteurs, les monuments historiques du Vieux-Québec. Même le pavillon d'Aiguillon de l'Hôtel-Dieu, malgré des protestations sans précédent, disparaît en 1955 pour faire place à une tour. Dotée d'un règlement d'urbanisme insuffisant et de pouvoirs inadéquats, la Ville de Québec échoue ainsi, à plusieurs reprises, dans ses tentatives de protéger les édifices historiques sur son territoire.

C'est dans ce contexte que le dominicain Georges-Henri Lévesque, fondateur de la Faculté des Sciences sociales de l'Université Laval, émet l'idée de créer un nouveau rassemblement : le Comité pour la Conservation des Monuments et Sites Historiques tient sa première réunion le 27 décembre 1960, dans l'historique maison Montmorency que les dominicains ont acquise dans l'espoir d'y établir un centre de rencontres. L'éventail de ses membres impressionne: Vincent Massey, Louis Saint-Laurent, Paul Gouin, puis Pietro Bellushi, doyen de l'École d'architecture du Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Maurice Careless, président du Département d'histoire de l'Université de Toronto, les architectes Hazen Sise et Charles Michaud, l'ingénieur Charles Blais, et... John Bland, vice-président de l'association. Il y apporte son



pois, la crédibilité de l'institution qu'il dirige — Québec n'a pas encore d'école d'architecture — et sa 'bienveillance' envers le patrimoine, dont témoignent régulièrement prestations publiques et articles qu'il signe.

#### LE CAS D'ESPÈCE

Les ambitions du comité sont dignes du prestige de ses membres. Son premier projet : «the Old Quebec Restoration». Le contenu de cette mission révèle, à nouveau, l'intérêt pan-canadien dans l'affaire, dont Québec est devenu le point focal : «Quebec is recognized», comme on l'avance, «as the cradle of North American culture and economic development — more than Montreal, New York, Boston or Williamsburg». Il est donc naturel que tout le Canada se préoccupe de l'alarmante dégradation de son berceau ; aussi le comité, tout en considérant qu'il faudra bien quinze ans avant que son projet ne soit mené à terme, propose d'en compléter une part importante à temps pour l'anniversaire (1964) de la Conférence de Québec au cours de laquelle, cent ans plus tôt, le «Vieux-Québec avait accueilli les premiers moments de l'Acte de l'Amérique du Nord britannique. Torturé par la modernisation, le Vieux-Québec / berceau devenait tout à coup le monument-clé de la Confédération que tout le pays se préparait à célébrer».

Il est amusant de reconnaître à nouveau, dans l'un des premiers communiqués du comité, la main fonctionnaliste des contemporains : «The Committee can accomplish an efficient traffic flow through 'Le Vieux Québec' by coordinating the traffic facilities», y apprend-on. Mais la mission proposée est autrement plus importante et, à cet égard, la mention de Williamsburg en comparaison de l'importance du

Vieux-Québec, devenu cas d'espèce, n'est pas innocente. La restauration de la capitale coloniale américaine prouve, semble-t-il, que «the saving of individual historic buildings in a modern setting is of only little value but the saving of whole areas to recapture the full spirit and heritage of the past is of inestimable value». Plus encore, la restauration de Williamsburg est l'œuvre d'un donateur notoire : John D. Rockefeller. Aux yeux du libéral Comité pour la Conservation des Monuments et Sites Historiques, il ne fait aucun doute : la solution à la léthargie qui mettait en péril l'histoire canadienne, la solution pour la préservation du Vieux-Québec, berceau de l'Amérique du Nord entière, ressortit à l'initiative privée. Nouvelle approche du problème, nouveaux partenaires, nouveau plan d'action ; c'est donc devant la Chambre de commerce de Québec que se joue l'épisode suivant de l'histoire de la conservation canadienne. Il s'agit, pour le Comité, d'y faire valoir les mérites de l'effort escompté ; le 9 novembre 1961, la Chambre de commerce reçoit donc à cet effet un conférencier de renom : John Bland.

*Le Programme possible de conservation et restauration de Québec*, comme le traduisit Charles Michaud, directeur du Service d'urbanisme de Québec, connut un écho des plus favorables : les archives, à vrai dire, regorgent de panégyriques de la prestation que John Bland livra dans la maison Montmorency. Le texte en fut intégralement publié dans la *Community Planning Review* ; le *Quebec Chronicle Telegraph* titra «Call Sounded For Serious Effort To Save Old Quebec» et réserva la page deux de son édition du 10 novembre à un compte-rendu de la conférence. Bland a convaincu : convaincu de l'impérative nécessité de préserver le Vieux-Québec, écrin de l'histoire des Canadiens anglais et des Canadiens



1. Château St-Louis, Quebec City, 1683; CAC Bland Archive.
2. Place Royale, Quebec City; CAC Bland Archive.
3. Plan of Quebec City, 1830; CAC Bland Archive.

français ; convaincu, aussi, quant au moyens de parvenir à cette sauvegarde. Une politique de la conservation devrait, grâce à la législation, protéger tous les édifices des 17<sup>e</sup> et 18<sup>e</sup> siècles, ainsi que ceux de la première moitié du 19<sup>e</sup> siècle ; une planification judicieuse devrait permettre de dissocier le centre d'affaires de Québec de la vieille ville, celle-ci étant réservée aux activités culturelles qui en assureraient l'animation ; le décor urbain devrait en être affiné, «épilé» d'encadrements incongrus (panneaux-réclames, fils électriques) afin de consolider le cachet des paysages historiques ; enfin, Bland proposait que la restauration du Vieux-Québec soit complétée par la «total reconstruction of a few great buildings that have now been lost».

Cette dernière déclaration étonne, dans la bouche du moderniste qui dénonçait quinze ans plus tôt le geste même de restauration. Mais plutôt qu'un changement d'orientation, il faut y voir une vision globalisante du problème de la conservation du Vieux-Québec, jusque là éclaté, jaugé à la pièce selon les intervenants ponctuels et les crises nées de chaque menace sur chaque bâtiment. Bland, ici, ne s'intéresse plus aux édifices particuliers, mais à l'ensemble de la ville historique, dont la conservation ressortit évidemment à l'entretien des parties, fussent-elles de plus vastes dimensions (un bâtiment contre une corniche...) que celles d'un individuel monument architectural.

En quelque trente minutes, John Bland a changé le cours des choses. Les deux années qui suivent voient le comité s'affairer à asseoir le projet de restauration. Un sous-comité entreprend de dresser un inventaire des bâtiments historiques de la ville de Québec ; Bland soumet le projet au Premier ministre Jean Lesage ; puis, le 17 février 1963, on fixe l'échéancier et les



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objectifs de l'entreprise. Puisqu'on conçoit désormais la restauration du Vieux-Québec comme projet commémoratif du Centenaire de la Confédération, l'on établit deux phases : la première prévoit le complètement de la rue Saint-Louis — où l'Hôtel Saint-Louis accueillit la Conférence de Québec de 1864 — en 1964 ; la seconde sera celle de la restauration de la Place-Royale, qu'on inaugurerait en 1967, date anniversaire. Le *Canadian Centenary Council* annonce son appui inconditionnel et se charge de colliger, auprès du gouvernement fédéral et de chacun des neuf gouvernements provinciaux, les contributions qui constitueront le «Canada's hundredth birthday present to the Cradle of Canada, its ancient capital».

Au fil des efforts du comité que mènent ainsi John Bland et le père Lévesque — il s'agit désormais du Comité *international* pour la Conservation des Monuments et Sites Historiques — Québec s'éprend de dynamisme. Le ministère des Affaires culturelles naît en 1961 ; comme Bland le proposait, on entreprend d'établir un plan d'aménagement général du Vieux-Québec ; puis enfin, en 1963, l'Assemblée législative sanctionne une nouvelle *Loi des monuments historiques*, y intégrant la notion d'*arrondissement historique* — comme l'avait fait plus tôt, en France, André Malraux. La législation répond alors précisément à cet ultime vœu du Comité pour la Conservation des Monuments et Sites Historiques, «[to] declare Old Quebec City to be a Historic Monument». Le rideau tombait sur une scène décisive — *dramatic*, écrivait le comité — de l'histoire de la conservation au Canada : de rassemblement d'édifices — historiques aux yeux de quelques amateurs — dont la survivance ne tenait qu'à un voile de bonnes intentions, le Vieux-Québec avait acquis le statut de monument national. Place-Royale, en son cœur, serait elle-même sacrée arrondissement historique en 1967.



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#### ÉPILOGUE

La réalisation concrète du projet de restauration du comité, toutefois, requerrait évidemment l'approbation du gouvernement provincial québécois qui, en mai 1964, refuse de demander l'aide financière que lui accorderait le gouvernement fédéral. Des «circonstances particulières» ont conduit le gouvernement québécois à opter plutôt en faveur d'un autre monument fédératif, «une place des arts dans la vieille capitale» (le futur Grand Théâtre). Quand s'ouvre à Montréal l'Exposition universelle, l'année du centenaire de la Confédération, la rue Saint-Louis n'a toujours pas retrouvé mémoire de la Conférence de Québec.

En 1962, le comité avait noté cette possible objection du gouvernement provincial, qui déjà, à tout le moins, manifestait une ardeur plus apparente à l'égard de la restauration de la Place-Royale. Et pendant que Bland continuait de conseiller, de corriger, d'évaluer les interventions ponctuelles menaçant l'intégrité du monument historique — il travaille aussi à l'aménagement de la colline parlementaire, ce «centre d'affaires» dont il préconisait l'établissement — le gouvernement québécois entreprit effectivement la restauration de Place-Royale, en 1967. Mais le foyer du Canada était disparu : Place-Royale, dès lors devenue «berceau des francophones d'Amérique», avait revêtu les couleurs idéologiques du manteau nationaliste dont on souhaitait donc la couvrir. Le plan-relief Duberger dont le comité, dès 1961, signalait l'existence — il permettait, comme le préconisait Bland, de documenter l'histoire de l'existant — servit de modèle à des restaurations à la *Viollet-le-Duc* «conform to the current glamorous idea of the past», comme l'aurait déclaré Bland vingt ans plus tôt.

La contribution du directeur de l'École d'architecture de McGill transcende cependant ce seul événement. Si le projet de Place-Royale avait refait surface dans un contexte plus proche de la valorisation touristique (il est contemporain de l'aménagement du mont Sainte-Anne) que de la pré-

4. John Bland and the members of the Comité pour la conservation des monuments et sites, 1961; CAC Bland Archive.
5. St-Louis Street, Quebec City, 1962; Luc Noppen collection.

servation historique, le *Concept général de réaménagement du Vieux-Québec*, héritier de la conférence que Bland prononça devant la Chambre de commerce, vit effectivement le jour en août 1970 et présida, comme prévu, à l'épanouissement de l'arrondissement historique finalement sacré. À ce chapitre le rôle de l'architecte est indéniable dans la constitution du monument qu'est devenu, finalement, le Vieux-Québec que les années 1950 massacraient; venu «de l'extérieur» dire aux Québécois l'importance du legs dont ils avaient la charge, et la nécessité de réinscrire ce trésor dans le contexte nord-américain, voire occidental auquel il ressortissait, John Bland dut éprouver quelque satisfaction quand Québec, en 1985, fut désignée Ville du patrimoine mondial. Par-delà le Williamsburg de Rockefeller, par-delà Louisbourg que le Canada avait entrepris de reconstruire, par-delà embûches, obstacles et détournements, le Vieux-Québec y gagnait enfin la position transnationale à laquelle Bland le voulait voir aspirer. Quant à la Place-Royale, clé de voûte du projet du comité et fer de lance de la renaissance du Vieux-Québec — dans un tout autre esprit — on ne sait, encore, les conclusions de Bland sur cette restauration dont il lança l'offensive...

Les documents auxquels nous référerons sont conservés dans les Archives Bland de la Collection d'architecture canadienne, Blackader-Lauterman Library of Architecture and Art, Université McGill.

#### NOTICE

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"Today in History" *Gazette* (Montreal) 12 December 1995: A3

Reviews the 50 years that John Bland served as director of McGill School of Architecture. He advocated construction of small apartment buildings rather than single family homes, to alleviate Montreal's housing shortage.

"Canadian History Goes on Internet" *The Hamilton Spectator* (18 April, 1996): D9

A photographic record of Canadian architecture, the collection of about 2000 colour slides assembled by John Bland, is at the heart of a new Internet site called "Building Canada". The slides were culled from an archive of more than 8000 slides housed in the Canadian Architecture Collection, Blackader-Lauterman Library, McGill University.

"Forging Bonds for the Future." *Gazette* (Montreal), 19 September 1996: E3

New projects are discussed in celebration of McGill's 175<sup>th</sup> anniversary. The Buildings Canada Web site - <http://CAC.mcgill.ca/cac> - is a collection of 2000 slides depicting the work of Professor Emeritus John Bland, when he taught the pioneering course devoted to the study of architecture in Canada.

This bibliography is a revised and updated version of the one published in *John Bland at Eighty* (eds. Irena Murray and Norbert Schoenauer), Montreal: McGill University, 1991.

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## MELVIN CHARNEY : PRIX PAUL-ÉMILE-BORDUAS 1996

GEORGES ADAMCZYK

En 1996, annoncé à la fin de l'année, le Prix du Québec en Arts visuels, le Prix Paul-Émile-Borduas, a été attribué à Melvin Charney. La rédaction de ARQ souhaite s'associer à la reconnaissance publique de ce grand créateur, architecte et artiste, professeur et critique, dont l'œuvre est si significative au plan local et international. En réalité, il était grand temps de souligner par la plus haute distinction accordée par le Gouvernement du Québec, le caractère exceptionnel de la carrière de Melvin Charney et son apport précieux à la vie culturelle de notre société. Pour bien saisir la place de Melvin Charney dans l'institution architecturale, on ne peut en rester aux limites d'un territoire professionnel: l'art, l'architecture, l'enseignement, l'écriture, l'animation culturelle... Il faut accepter l'indisociabilité de toutes ces activités, complémentaires et aussi contradictoires, chargeant de réflexivité chaque geste, chaque intervention, conférant une valeur transversale, souvent déstabilisante pour ses interlocuteurs, aux propos et aux créations de ce grand intellectuel.

Voilà plus de trente ans que Melvin Charney s'est imposé comme l'une des personnalités les plus fulgurantes dans le champ des arts visuels. Ses réalisations, aussi riches que diverses, innovatrices et stimulantes, manifestent un savoir-faire précis, une érudition subtile et une puissance esthétique remarquable qui lui ont valu très tôt une reconnaissance internationale. Paradoxalement, ce parcours si singulier ne s'est pas accompli dans le refuge d'un atelier. Son action artistique et sa contribution intellectuelle sont depuis toujours articulées aux réalités de notre temps et reposent sur un engagement civique animé par une réflexion profonde sur la ville et ses représentations.

Organisateur d'événements, historien, analyste et critique de l'architecture et de l'art urbain, professeur et fondateur d'un enseignement original, chercheur, Melvin Charney a eu une influence considérable sur la pensée et le projet d'une «architecture urbaine» traduisant la conscience historique et le sentiment d'appartenance des citoyens à leurs lieux d'existence quotidienne; il a su toucher toute une génération d'architectes et d'artistes qui lui doivent cette pugnacité et cette générosité qui caractérisent leurs pratiques orientées vers l'amélioration de notre environnement. Ses réalisations expriment avec vigueur cet engagement fondamental par la multiplicité des genres abordés. Que ce soit l'architecture, l'architecture de paysage, l'installation, la sculpture, l'art public, la photographie, la peinture ou le dessin, tous ces moyens concourent à produire une oeuvre dont la continuité et la cohérence sont exemplaires. Ces activités parallèles tissent une stratégie intertextuelle extrêmement féconde et qui lui est tout à fait propre, ce qui amène à voir en lui un maître incomparable.

Après quelques années consacrées à établir les bases de sa démarche avec des réalisations qui lui vaudront l'attention du milieu artistique et architectural, Melvin Charney créait *Memo Series* en 1969. Cette oeuvre inaugurale, qui se veut une alternative à la construction d'un musée d'aviation militaire, le positionne dans une pratique où dorénavant les rapports réciproques entre l'art et l'architecture constitueront les matériaux symboliques privilégiés de sa démarche. On peut dire que Melvin Charney est le seul artiste/architecte canadien qui représente le courant de l'architecture radicale telle qu'elle se manifeste alors au niveau mondial, en particulier en Italie, en Autriche et en Grande-Bretagne. Poursuivant son travail critique sur la «cité invisible», il aborde ensuite la «cité analogique», anticipant dans *Le trésor de Trois-Rivières* (1975) et surtout dans *Les maisons de la rue Sherbrooke* (1976) la *Strada Novissima* qui sera réalisée plus tard à la Biennale de Venise en 1980. Dès lors, la carrière internationale de Melvin Charney est établie et son rayonnement aux États-Unis, en Europe et au Japon surpassera même l'attention que lui accorde la critique locale.

Entre les situations du *Dictionnaire*, un travail continu depuis vingt ans, et les oeuvres *in situ*, l'univers de Melvin Charney se constitue progressivement pour prendre la forme d'une véritable somme traitant du procès du sens des choses matérielles et du statut sémiotique et esthétique de leurs représentations descriptives, contemplatives ou projectives, concrètes ou abstraites, figuratives ou allusives. Les «constructions» de Toronto, de Montréal, de New York, de Chicago, de Kingston, réalisées au tournant des années 1980, le placent désormais au coeur de ce concert d'artistes tels que Buren, Graham, Smithson, Matta-Clark et quelques autres qui affrontent la question des lieux, de leur production sociale, de leurs significations culturelles et qui en font le sujet central de leurs créations. Ses fictions, travaillées en superpositions et en disjonctions spatiales, anticipent les manoeuvres déconstructivistes de Peter Eisenman.

Dans le contexte de l'exposition «Les villas de Plinè et l'architecture classique à Montréal», ses installations trouvent leur source dans la rencontre du langage classique des villas avec le langage familier des «plex» montréalais, dévoilant par le fait même les analogies qui se tissent entre «l'héroïsme ordinaire» de ces derniers et les vanités savantes de l'architecture. Il démontre alors clairement sa position contemporaine, le haut niveau de sa culture esthétique et surtout, en faisant ainsi entrer dans le musée la grande architecture, l'architecture parlante de la Révolution française et l'architecture vernaculaire de Montréal comme une seule et même histoire, celle de notre civilisation prise comme totalité polysémique, il fait prévaloir la richesse du redoublement de son regard: celui de l'artiste et celui de l'architecte.

Les séries allemandes, *The German Series*, lui permettent d'aborder la «cité de l'oubli», son sujet le plus grave. La dimension tragique de son oeuvre s'affirme. L'architecture a perdu son innocence, elle se dévoile comme la trace de l'instrument de nos actes les plus nobles mais aussi de ceux qui sont les plus destructeurs pour l'humanité. L'oeuvre dessinée devient plus importante, plus présente, plus rouge. L'inquiétude de l'artiste se traduit par des représentations plus heurtées. Les passages d'un niveau de figuration à l'autre substituent à la relative consonance des modes de représentation, la dissonance engendrée par la profonde anxiété du propos. Nous sommes littéralement happés par ces dessins. Des thèmes réapparaissent. Notre propre mémoire des réalisations antérieures est sollicitée. L'architecture devient notre propre corps. Sa représentation est le miroir d'un état de crise que nous portons en nous. Dès lors, le caractère anthropomorphe de l'architecture s'affirme comme le noeud d'un rapport inconscient qui nous unit aux constructions auxquelles nous représentons. L'oeuvre de Melvin Charney trouve ici, dans le drame et l'émotion, sa dimension universelle.

Les installations pour le Centre International d'Art Contemporain de Montréal en 1985, la Biennale de Venise en 1986, le Musée du Québec en 1989, la Galerie René Blouin en 1990, le Centre Canadien d'Architecture en 1991 et le Musée d'Art Contemporain de Montréal en 1992 sont des oeuvres totalement accomplies qui font une place importante à la narration et qui multiplient les épaisseurs signifiantes sous une apparence familière. L'artiste y déploie ses lectures des lieux et des modes de représentation en proposant des analogies raffinées traduites dans des formes qui se jouent de la gravité par des assemblages techniques sophistiqués et gracieux. La culture matérielle, témoin de notre histoire qui se confond avec notre destin, s'y trouve transfigurée pour constituer de véritables «paraboles», sources d'un enseignement sur la condition humaine.

Parallèlement, Melvin Charney inaugure une nouvelle période au cours de laquelle son implication dans la «cité des hommes» s'inscrit concrètement dans la forme de la ville par une série d'oeuvres d'art public. Ce sont celles-ci qui le feront mieux connaître du grand public et qui révéleront son profond attachement aux réalités locales et les liens de son travail artistique avec la culture bâtie. *Le Monument National pour les droits de la personne* à Ottawa (1988-1990), *Le jardin du Centre Canadien d'Architecture* (1987-1990), *Gratte-ciel, cascades d'eau/ruisseaux... une construction* pour la Place Berri, (1990-1992), l'établissement avec autorité comme le précurseur d'une conception renouvelée des espaces civiques. De plus, ses études et ses propositions d'aménagement pour le Faubourg Saint-Laurent, la Rue de la Commune et le Square Viger à Montréal démontrent à quel point sa science et son art sont porteurs d'une sensibilité qui rencontre la demande sociale des montréalais pour faire de tous ces lieux laissés pour compte au fil du temps, des lieux de mémoire qui résistent enfin aux aléas des intérêts immédiats.

Des nombreux écrits de Melvin Charney, nous retiendrons surtout ceux qui ont toujours pour nous valeur de *manifestes*: «Experimental strategy - Notes for environmental design» publié en 1969, «Pour une définition de l'architecture au Québec» publié en 1971, «The Montrealness of Montreal: formations and formalities in urban architecture» publié en 1980 et «À qui de droit: au sujet de l'architecture contemporaine au Québec» publié dans nos pages en 1982. La lucidité et l'originalité de ces propos font de ces documents des jalons incontournables pour l'histoire de la pensée critique en architecture. À eux seuls, ils représentent un legs inestimable pour l'histoire critique de l'architecture

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