Introduction

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What is the purpose of Canadian Studies? This was the question that was investigated in 1975 by the Commission of the Association of Universities and Colleges of Canada to understand how the government and the universities could work together to strengthen a better understanding of the diversity of cultures in this country. At that time, the notion of area studies began to raise certain attention among scholars and for the government these studies would contribute to disseminating knowledge on the specificities of Canada. Most of this report is about the self-knowledge of Canada which means the way the Canadian universities and colleges covered the question of Canadian identity from a multidisciplinary perspective. There is also a section devoted to Canadian Studies abroad that updates some of the conclusions of the Massey Commission in 1951 on 'the projection of Canada abroad' (Symons, 1975, p. 246) which is one of the most important report on the relation between Canadian identity and culture.

Vincent Massey (1887–1967) devoted his life to working to develop a form of modern cultural patronage with, among other things, the creation of a foundation. 'In politics he was broker, consultant, at best a frustrated leader; in the arts and education he was originator, director, publicist, critic, and, occasionally, practitioner, as well as patron' (Bissell, 1981, p. 195). Massey can be considered as the pioneer of a Canadian cultural diplomacy projecting the image of an open country. As a Canadian representant in the international conference of the Commonwealth in 1934, he declared:

We are small, we are young; but Canada has a prestige in the international sphere out of proportion to her size or her youth. We are happy in having no enemies. We can be accused of no ulterior purpose. We can approach international questions with an obvious disinterestedness and with the force which that rare quality lends. Our participation should be no perfunctory matter (Massey, 1934, p. 823).

At the time he was chancellor of the University of Toronto (1847 and 1953) and chairman of the National Gallery of Canada (1948–1952), he became chair of the Royal Commission on National Development in the Arts, Letters, and Sciences known as the Massey Commission. In his final report of 1951, he proposed the foundation of a Canadian Council, the National Library of Canada and a national festival of the arts (Granatstein, 2018). Beyond his action in the arts, Vincent Massey was an ardent defender of Canadian identity by avoiding accentuating the conflict between French Canadians and English Canadians (Massey, 1928, p. 5; Massey, 1948).

In line with the primary thoughts of Vincent Massey, the notion of Canadian Studies addresses the question of cultural diplomacy as the image of the nation is at stake (Finlay, 2016). However, how can we be assured that we treat this object in a scientific way with the necessary distance that critical thinking requires? It would be possible to describe a collection of museums, libraries and universities that devote some time and research to the complexity of this identity. In Europe, it is also possible to find many institutions and associations that focus on Canadian Studies to make scholars and practitioners meet to understand the development of this fascinating country (Brooks, 2019, p. vii). Working with and on Canadian Studies implies understanding the genealogy of this nation which is enrooted in a conflictual relation between two colonial powers and the social erasure of Indigenous cultures in the background.[1] 'Canadian society is a complex social formation: it is

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[1] Vincent Massey's views on Canadian history is a striking example of the invisibilization of the First Nations. 'What I want to do – not, I hope, at too great length – is to give you some idea of how Canada grew from a few scattered hamlets of French and English settlers in the primitive "bush" into that something which we call a nation' (Massey, 1928, p. 5). Thobani

considered part of the "new" world from a European perspective, yet indigenous people have been here since before recorded history' (Clement, 1990, p. 3). Further, when examining the genealogy of Canada, the successive waves of migration from multiple countries require attention, as they have shaped the image of a multicultural country. Birk and Gymnich noticed that the myth of a multicultural nation dates back to the 1920s when the writer John Murray Gibbon distinguished the mosaic from the image of the melting-pot that suits to the United States (Birk & Gymnich, 2016, p. 516). He used the metaphor in the title of his book *The Canadian Mosaic* published in 1938 (Gibbon, 1938). The success of the metaphor contributed to a more differentiated perception of Canada, especially when it is compared with the American 'melting pot'. The myth of a tolerant country integrating different waves of migration is often dealt with when it comes to the elaboration of a cultural model reinforced by federal social policies that Brodie identified with the notion of 'Pan-Canadianism' (Brodie & Trimble, 2003, p. 23). Afterwards, the Canadian philosopher Charles Taylor built his own philosophy of recognition on the learnings of Canadian history. He defended the perception of the identity in a dialectic way:

> the thesis is that our identity is partly shaped by recognition or its absence, often by the misrecognition of others, and so a person or a group of people can suffer real damage, real distortion, if the people or society around them mirror back to them a confining or demeaning or contemptible picture of themselves. Nonrecognition or misrecognition can inflict harm, can be a form of oppression, imprisoning someone in a false, distorted, and reduced mode of being (Taylor, 1994, p. 25).

For Taylor, the recognition of others is a fundamental principle in social pacts as we learn to accept ourselves. The discourses on social erasure can be avoided with a philosophy based upon dignity, authenticity and respect of cultural differences. This philosophy echoes the concept of hospitality developed by Jacques Derrida

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criticized this founding myth by showing that the capture of the territory created second class citizens without very limited possibilities to have their voices heard (Thobani, 2007, p. 40).

where the action of hosting implies an empowerment of the other with a risk of losing a preconceived identity (Shepherd, 2014, p. 55). The recognition could also be illustrated by a translation of cultural spaces where the donor and the recipient share something in common (Shepherd, 2014, p. 55). Hence, the philosophy of Taylor opens new horizons for those who are ready to go over fixed identities and who refuse to be reduced to the location of their birth.

> The monological ideal seriously underestimates the place of the dialogical in human life. It wants to confine it as much as possible to the genesis. It forgets how our understanding of the good things in life can be transformed by our enjoying them in common with people we love; how some goods become accessible to us only through such common enjoyment. Because of this, it would take a great deal of effort, and probably many wrenching break-ups, to *prevent* our identity's being formed by the people we love (Taylor 1994, p. 33).

It is one thing to honor our ancestors and our traditions, it is another one to welcome other states of mind and question ourselves. Multiculturalism is not the simple observation of a diversity of cultures, it is based on the recognition of a multiplicity of encounters that shape the Canadian society.

In addition to the important multicultural dimension of Canada, the country's northern location must be considered when attempting to understand its identity. This is even more relevant when studying Canada from the perspective of other northern countries such as the European Nordic and Baltic countries, which, because of their location, share common characteristics, interests and challenges with Canada, and can offer a relevant point of view on their circumpolar counterpart. The book *Nordic and Baltic Perspectives in Canadian Studies: An Interdisciplinary Approach to Northern Spaces Narratives* is a way of concretizing a dialogue between spaces of the North that may counterbalance the number of Southern discourses on the North. We believe that such a transnordic travel contributes to understanding the multiplicities of nordicities (Davis, 1994, p. 12; Cedergren, 2019; Cedergren & Premat, 2020). Daniel Chartier described the concept of *nordicité* as a system of signs that includes sometimes contradictory

discourses on the North (Chartier, 2020) whereas Briens highlighted the difference between the imagined North and the situation of the southerner's perception with the concept of borealism (Briens, 2020). As a form of exoticism that impose stereotypes on the northern areas of the planet, borealism requires critical examination to recomplexify representations of the North and identify forms of self-exoticism. In Canada, nordicity is deeply connected with the perception of the Canadian North and, in that respect, it shares similarities with its European perception.

> The Canadian North is also more than a geopolitical entity. It is a highly constructed reality that became the centre of the multifaceted discourses of the North. Regardless of geographical, historical, political, and socio-cultural differences, the Canadian North – just like the Orient – is commonly portrayed as Europe's other. Constructed by and in relation to the Europeans who explored it, the North came to be known as the contrasting image and idea of the colonial elite (Rüdiger, 2009, p. 38).

This attention to how images of the North are constructed reminds why the Nordic and Baltic perspectives on Canadian Studies should be done with a permanent concern on avoiding any kind of essentialization. The North is related to latitude but not only, it is a cultural construct that evolves over time and space. As Sherrill E. Grace pointed out,

> what Canadians mean by such enigmatic phrases as 'the North' or the 'true north strong and free' is constantly changing, and we have located North almost everywhere within our national borders; even Vancouver, where I sit writing and facing north, is now as often called Hollywood North as it is Lotus Land. For anyone living in Montreal in the 1860s or 1870s, North was the *pays d'en haut*; by the turn of the century, the discovery of gold in the Klondike had extended our northern reach and led to a reshaping and renaming of a part of the country. And it has always been this way: North is an idea as much as any physical region that can be mapped and measured for nordicity (Grace, 2001, p. XII).

The aim of this book is to propose a transnordic journey by investigating the multiple voices of the North, focusing on Canada as an important actor of this region. Even though there are obvious

similarities in landscapes, spaces and social problematics in the northern countries, it is not possible to serve a discourse merging the different Norths. Furthermore, Louis-Edmond Hamelin showed the ambiguities of the polarization North/South in Canada, emphasizing the fact that in the case of the province of Quebec, the North was often associated with the First Nations whereas the *Québec méridional* reflected the ambitions of the settlers (Hamelin, 1998, p. 97). In this vein, transperipheral connection between the spaces of the North contributes to highlight some of the challenges faced by Canadian society with the integration of recent waves of migration on the one hand and the recognition of the Indigenous populations on the other hand. A challenge that the Nordic and Baltic countries experience in a lesser degree, regarding Indigenous communities such as the Sami, and migrant populations. This transperipheral perspective also proves useful when it comes to bilingualism as there are similar situations in the Nordic and Baltic countries, like in Finland with the officialization of the Swedish language besides Finnish (Thomsen & Korkka, 2019, pp. 227–228). It explains also why there was an interest for Canadian Studies among Nordic and Scandinavian scholars, who gathered around the Nordic Association for Canadian Studies (Thomsen & Korkka, 2019, p. 229). The transperipheral approach is also significant for the Baltic countries, where societies had to fight to protect a cultural specificity during the different occupations of the region, the Soviet one being the latest and most known. Some historical events like the cultural expressions of the Singing Revolution in the Baltic countries strongly echo the pacific *Révolution tranquille* of Québec in the 1960s (Smidchens, 2014, p. 318). We believe that this trans-North perspective, which pays attention to the specificities of the northern countries, is important for exploring Canadian Studies and better situate Canada in regard to the Nordic and Baltic countries. This is why *Nordic and Baltic Perspectives in Canadian Studies: An Interdisciplinary Approach to Northern Spaces Narratives* presents a collection of articles from several fields in the humanities that introduce major topics of Canadian studies, as they are examined in the Nordic and Baltic countries, with a focus on how the Canadian northern area can be narrated and compared with the European northern countries.

In this collection, Canada is considered as a cultural area that is built by discourses as well as by the direct experiences that can be made of this place. Following Chartier's notion of 'idea of a place', the Canadian space 'exists first and foremost as a discursive network, as a series and an accumulation of discourses that determine and form its limits, components, history, parameters, etc' (Chartier, 2013, p. 15). The discourses that collect to form the idea of Canada include fiction and documentary and are not limited to written ones but include all media, whether they are recorded or not. The discursive existence of this place accompanies its phenomenological one, so that they both contribute to the 'construction, interpretation and acknowledgement of the place' (Chartier, 2013, p. 16). Thus, acknowledging a place like Canada is an individual matter, as each person builds their own idea of this place through the discourses that they have encountered and, eventually, through experiencing its materiality by living there or visiting it. This individual construction, comparable to the 'reader's text' elaborated from the 'work's text' through the reading encounter (Mazauric, Fourtanier, & Langlade, 2011), is a work in progress, with the 'idea of Canada' continuously qualified by the discourses encountered and new experiences of this place. The idea of Canada, just as any idea of a place, is culturally influenced, a phenomenon highlighted by studies in imagology (Barkhoff & Leerssen, 2021). The notion of idea of a place thus appears particularly relevant within the scope of cultural studies and formulated from a geographically distant perspective such as the Nordic and Baltic countries one on Canada. Being aware of this discursive construction allows to examine how it is elaborated, sometimes to the point of forming a stereotypical image, especially when there is no direct experience of the place. Conversely, the discursive construction of a distant place generates a reflective posture on the comparable construction of the local and deconstructs the commonplace of the granted. In this context, the borders of a place are not limited to geographical ones but instead pertain to 'parameters utterly discursive, that is density and coherence' (Chartier, 2013, p. 18), so that the borders are relative to the accumulation of more or less consistent discourses.

In parallel to this Aristotelian and constructivist perspective of world-making, a new materialist approach of space and place suggests that borders are 'produced and iteratively reconfigured in the materialization of phenomena and the (re)making of material-discursive boundaries' (Barad, 2007, p. 179). By insisting on the 'mutual constitution of entangled agencies' (Barad, 2007, p. 33), the agential realist framework states that matter is not a linguistic construction but a discursive production itself, since 'matter is a dynamic intra-active becoming […] a dynamic articulation/configuration of the world' (Barad, 2007, p. 151). Materiality's 'constant process of shared becoming […] tells us something about "the world we inhabit"' (Iovino & Oppermann, 2014, p. 1) and is thus opened to be read as a text and in texts, as suggested by material ecocriticism. Since matter and meaning go together, this ecocritical approach aims to 'analyze the interlacements of matter and discourses not only as they are re-created by literature and other cultural forms, but also as they emerge in material expressions' (Iovino & Oppermann, 2014, p. 6). Such a 'diffractive' reading, applied to the field of cultural studies, conceives textual interpretation as reading nature and culture through one another rather than separated:

> Instead of concentrating on texts and seeing how they 'reflect' the world's phenomena […] such an interpretation reads world and text as an agentic entanglement. This involves a reconceptualization of both the idea of a text (as distinct from other nontextual material formations) and the idea of world (as "the outside of text") (Iovino & Oppermann, 2014, pp. 9–10).

Such a perspective is comparable to the one adopted in biosemiotics, with which it shares an 'attentiveness to the connections between the physical realm and meaning processes' (Maran, 2014, p. 141). When it comes to approaching the idea of Canada, such a relational ontology of becoming (Nieuwenhuis, 2016) provides a dynamic apprehension of this area since 'space is not a collection of preexisting points set out in a fixed geometry, a container, as it were, for matter to inhabit' (Barad, 2007, p. 180). Rather, spatiality is continuously produced and reconfigured through iterative intra-actions that differentiate and thus enact

boundaries as material demarcation of space. In this democratization of relations and agency, 'humans are not the sole producers of geography, no longer the sole "geo-graphists"' (Nieuwenhuis, 2016, p. 306). Thinking Canada within the circumpolar space in terms of 'differential relations' lends temporary consistency to a heterogenous milieu, thus 'spacing' (Doel, 2000) or 'worlding' (Thrift, 2012) the area.

In this collection, we pay specific attention to the materialization of the Canadian space through cultural productions and practices, keeping in mind that this northern area as long being imagined and represented from a more southern point of view. As pointed out by Daniel Chartier, it is crucial that when considering the 'imagined North', we put into perspective the often-simplified external Western view and the overlooked internal Nordic views, so as to 'recomplexify' the cultural North (Chartier, 2018). Chartier argues that the external representations of the North and the Nordic cultures do not meet often: they are 'placed as differentiated discursive layers, even though they are both connected to the same territory of reference' (Chartier, 2018, p. 74). Therefore, approaching the Canadian cultural area from a Nordic and Baltic perspective appears a relevant way to multiply the northern views on this northern area, views that are perhaps more attuned to the specific challenges of this place through a comparable experience of circumpolarity. Furthermore, the interdisciplinary perspective adopted in this book, attentive to multilingualism and multiculturalism (including Indigenous cultures), provides a more complex understanding of Canada, based on various material examined with different methodologies.

Major notions in Canadian studies are approached from different angles by the coming chapters, which, by addressing specific topics (such as language teaching, landscapes, native art, etc.), provide a wide perspective of the current challenges faced both by Canada and the respective fields that examine this cultural area. Although this book is based on cultural studies as a theoretical background, opposing a diplomatic perspective and arguing that there is a specificity of Canadian culture that requires attention from academia, each chapter builds on theories and methods specific to the different fields of the humanities involved to address

narratives (understood broadly and including visual narratives) of this northern space.

The first chapter of this collection offers a literary and native perspective on Canada, as Christophe Premat examines First Nation writer Bernard Assiniwi's masterpiece *The Beothuk Saga* (2000), a historical novel written in French in 1996. In this novel, Assiniwi incorporates oral stories in the written genre of historical novels to present the history of a nation that was destroyed by colonizers with the help of rival clans. By introducing a chronology on the history of this nation, Assiniwi adds a literary style to enlighten the cultural specificity of Beothuk. He uses the origins of the novel to deal with the disappearance of Beothuk, described as a cultural genocide. The chapter focuses on the notions of magic realism to analyze the voice that is given to ancestors and the Beothuk traditions. Magic realism reflects the relation between facts and dreams where the characters project themselves into possible futures connected to the land. This first chapter contributes to the overarching goal of this book to investigate Canadian narratives through a Nordic and Baltic perspective by offering an important analysis of a First Nation literary view on a genocide foundational to the establishment of Canada. Fiction comes to partially repair the invisibilization of Canadian subjects towards whom the Canadian government belatedly recognized a marginal identity (Thobani, 2007, p. 42).

In the second chapter, Kristina Aurylaitė investigates how some of Canada's Indigenous writers elaborate a cultural resistance with the use of textual remix. She studies the particularities of two poetry books, *It Was Treaty/ It Was Me* by Dënësųłiné and Métis Matthew James Weigel and *Injun* by Nisga'a Jordan Abel. Kristina Aurylaitė proposes a very stimulating interpretation of these elaborations which aim at reworking and rewriting some historical sources. By playing with the texts and using patchwriting strategies, these Indigenous writers use art as a decolonial resistance to avoid the imposition of the winners' narrative. The postmodern style is here adapted to break the foundationalist perspective that is at the heart of the settler colonial archives. In other words, 'the decolonial gesture' is characterized by the attempt to re-member some fragments of the past which were totally erased.

This chapter highlights the discrepancy between settler and native narratives of the Canadian territory and identity.

The third chapter of this collection takes into account the larger context of Francophone culture in some of the predominantly English-speaking provinces of Canada through a focus on literature. It examines the Francophone presence as a theme in a selection of French-language texts published outside of Quebec, to elucidate the questions of narrative identity, spatial relationships and the role of the English language. To do so, theoretical notions such as *exiguïté, scénographie* and transculturality are used, and the works studied are discussed in relationship to both Canadian and Francophone literature. The corpus includes *Sauvage-Sauvageon* by Marguerite Primeau (British Columbia, 1984), *Pas pire* by France Daigle (New Brunswick, 1998) and two plays by Manitoba-born author Marc Prescott, *Sex, Lies et les Franco-Manitobains* (2001) and *Fort Mac* (2009). This chapter offers an insightful view on the connection between language and space and how they are articulated in narratives to build a place.

The fourth chapter of this collection builds on contemporary critical theory and its reflection on how modernity has alienated humans from the Earth, underlining a 'return' of the neglected planet. In this context of ecosystem destruction and new planetary awareness, a revision of the human connectedness to the biosphere is taking place, involving, among others, the notion of landscape. The chapter questions the possibility of 'nonhuman landscapes' in two recent video artworks that present landscapes in Quebec using aerial views provided by a drone. It argues that the technological possibilities offered by the drone encourage to imagine a nonhuman or less human gaze on the environment that raises the possibility of a less anthropocentric landscape or nonhuman landscape. This hypothesis is based on several notions, such as wilderness, the landscape genre, camera embodiment. While the chapter focuses on *Blanc* (2017) and *Stem* (2020) by Quebec artist Nelly-Eve Rajotte, it also refers to comparable video artworks that use robotic cameras, *La Région Centrale* by Michael Snow (1971), a seminal work in Canadian landscape, and *In the Land of Drought* by Julian Rosefeldt (2015), which shows post-apocalyptic landscapes with a drone. This chapter contributes

to the understanding of the Canadian landscape and its contemporary construction, influenced by past narratives.

In the fifth chapter of this collection, Rūta Šlapkauskaitė focuses on environmental concerns and colonial history, which contribute to building Canadian culture and identity. Her new materialist approach to contemporary English Canadian literature brings our attention to the fragile entanglements between human and nonhuman agencies and the discursive, physical, and biological substratum supported by the land. In *Curiosity* by Joan Thomas and *Minds of Water* by Ed O'Loughlin, she examines how the meaning of oikos is challenged and the boundaries between human and nonhuman historicities are rethought. Concentrating on the human embeddedness in the biotic world, she maps the literary ecologies of the two novels, unearthing the ethics of movement in *Minds of Water* and the poetic of compost in *Curiosity*. Her chapter provides a timely example of material-semiotic ramifications in the Anthropocene, made visible in the geopolitics of the polar regions and the petropoetics of industrial modernity, addressing challenges of northern countries facing the neoliberal postindustrial modernity.

In the sixth chapter of this collection, Tatjana Bitjutko addresses bilingual education in the 20th century, which became a researched practice in a changing historical context that questioned monolingual nation states. The author examines bilingual education in Canada, Latvia and Estonia with a special focus on immersion, interrogating the suitability of Canadian immersion program in the two Baltic countries. This contrastive approach builds on a comparable linguistic context between, on the one hand, Canada, officially bilingual, and, on the other hand, Latvia and Estonia, where the Soviet legacy has left more than a fourth of the population speaking Russian as their native language. It offers an important perspective on the co-existence and teaching of languages in Canada and in the Baltic countries, underlining the advantage of studying the circumpolar area as a connected yet diverse whole. The chapter contributes to the aim of this book of examining Canadian narratives by examining the important practice of bilingualism that has shaped and keeps shaping the country.

The final chapter of this collection focuses on the practice of riddling in Newfoundland, where it is a social activity that requires an ethnographic attention that goes beyond the collections of printed riddles. Drawing from fieldwork undertaken in the eastern province of Canada, Jonathan Roper attempts to identify the rules that guide this practice, paying attention to the etiquette determining how riddles are posed and solutions proposed. Among other points, he describes the opportune situations in which double-entendre riddles can be introduced during a riddling event. This chapter offers an important perspective on the oral culture of eastern Canada based on the scholarship in folklore studies that exists in the Nordic and Baltic countries, highlighting the benefits of a transnordic approach to Canada. It also shows how vernacular culture studies contribute to the understanding of the geographic and historical significance of a given place and its traditions.

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