

# Thinking outside the Canadian box at the International Summit

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The International Canadian Studies Summit, held online June 10–14, 2024, offered a valuable opportunity for brainstorming to rekindle motivation, connect with professionals and academics in the field, and prepare for shared challenges. For scholars outside Canada, the Summit served as a fundamental ritual, reinforcing the interdisciplinary coherence of Canadian Studies. As Jane Koustas reminded us during one of the seminars, Canadian Studies is distinct from simply studying Canada. Although “interdisciplinary coherence” may seem paradoxical, it aptly reflects the challenges of Canadian Studies. Beyond projecting Canadian identity and values on a global stage, the field demands a nuanced understanding of colonial realities in all their complexities.

What does it mean to occupy land, to welcome new populations, to balance economic and environmental priorities, or to view international relations through the lens of Canadian history? For researchers, these questions require not value judgments but the creation of original methodologies to analyze them. For the Centre for Canadian Studies at Stockholm University, the Summit was particularly enriching thanks to its varied format, alternating between lectures and interactive sessions on major themes (Indigenous studies, international relations, political science, etc.). In this article, I wish to revisit the ideas discussed during the sessions I attended and to extend my gratitude to the organizers of this remarkable initiative, which brings purpose to the daily work of academics dedicated to the advancement of Canadian Studies.

## CANADIAN STUDIES AS A PASSAGE

Canadian Studies are, above all, a *passage* in the metaphorical sense that Michel Serres meant when he referred to the Northwest Passage: “I am searching for the passage between exact science and the humanities. Or, with a different language, or with some degree of control, between us and the world. The path is not as straightforward as the classification of knowledge might suggest. I believe it to be as challenging as the famous Northwest Passage” (Serres, 2019, p. 12, our translation).

This metaphor of the passage seems to perfectly capture the spirit of the presentation by Jean Michel Montsion and Dominik Formanowicz on the state of Canadian Studies from an international perspective. It echoed the presentation of the Canadian Studies Network by Chantal Richard, which offered a range of activities, events, and calls for papers related to Canadian Studies. By comparing institutional structures and key players (networks, stakeholders, associations), one can observe a highly diverse landscape with numerous branches—that is, strong academic support around Canadian Studies.

This aligns with the observation made by Colin Coates a few years ago about Canadian Studies evolving dynamically in opposition to the state, which may appear paradoxical (Coates, 2018, p. 162). The lack of institutional support from the Canadian government since 2012 has highlighted the importance of these networks that illustrate the real dynamics of intellectual exchanges. “While the similarities between Anglophone Canada and the United States may have served to lessen the exoticiza-

tion of the country in comparison to other parts of the globe, critics have often assumed that the Canadian studies project fixates on the search for over-arching national identities at the expense of rigorous analysis” (Coates, 2018, p. 155).

Far from establishing a specific national identity, it seems to me, in light of the seminars at this summit in which I participated, that Canadian Studies are characterized above all by this search for passage—a passage between exact sciences and natural sciences, a reflection on the interfaces of a globalized world, and on new trade and communication routes between countries (Premat, 2022). There is a need to use these meetings to relocate the gateways (Montsion, 2009, p. 641) and explore the passages.

## DECOLONIZING THE “STUDIES” THROUGH THE LENS OF DIASPORAS AND INDIGENOUS STUDIES

One of the possible passages enabled by Canadian Studies is the opportunity to explore the cultural power of diasporas. Indeed, Korina Jocson and Marissa Largo’s presentation on Filipino stories, the *kuwentos*, demonstrated how pedagogical approaches can support intercultural discovery within the classroom. In this regard, we have much to learn from each other, and diasporic tales reveal that navigating Northwest Passages requires listening, empathy, and collaboration. The second passage pertains to Indigenous Studies, which have taken a central place within Canadian Studies. The seminar on the Inuit film *Tia and Piujuk* (Tulugarjuk, 2018) illustrated the need to decentralize interests and objects of knowledge. Ultimately, decolonization is not merely a militant stance; it is achieved by broadening the epistemological landscape. The third passage was somewhat more discreet, emerging in the seminar on interactions between Canada and the Global South. This involves the perceptions of Canadian Studies in other regions, such as the Scandinavian and Nordic countries (Bédard-Goulet & Premat, 2023).

These passages include historical connections and, at times, geographic similarities. This perspective seems to me to align with an archipelago of relationships outside of any institutional ties between the Canadian state and other states. In my view, this philosophy of relations, as Glissant (1997) understands it, should be further cultivated in future conferences and gatherings on Canadian Studies.

The Summit was a unique opportunity to bring together two different audiences: those I would call Canadian Studies professionals (namely, professors, researchers, and students whose professional activities are directly linked to Canadian Studies) and a non-specialist audience encountering Canadian Studies without it being a direct professional interest. For us, these seminars provided an opportunity to discover new networks and, above all, to continually rethink the profile of Canadian Studies, which ultimately extends far beyond questions of nation branding and cultural diplomacy. The Centre for Canadian Studies at Stockholm University<sup>1</sup> is currently cooperating with the Swedish Institute for North American Studies at Uppsala University<sup>2</sup> and the Nordic Institute of Latin American Studies at Stockholm University<sup>3</sup> to explore a Nordic approach to Pan-American studies. Can Canadian Studies dissolve into these regional studies, or do they, on the contrary, retain their specificity by enriching perspectives on the North American continent (Premat, 2024)? ■

## NOTES

1. <https://www.su.se/centre-for-canadian-studies/>
2. <https://www.uu.se/institution/engelska/forskning/svenska-institutet-for-nordamerikastudier-sinas>
3. <https://www.su.se/nordic-institute-of-latin-american-studies/>

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