



Building a Values Driven Institution: Two Case Studies at OCAD University

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This talk will discuss the creation of a values driven strategic plan for the Ontario College of Art & Design (OCAD) University and the results of this work as demonstrated by an overview of curriculum and research and then provide two case studies. The first is the Aboriginal Visual Culture Program: Art, Design and Media, a local and national pedagogical and research program built on principles of self-government. The second case study is the Inclusive Design Research Centre and its network, the Inclusive Design Institute, an international network that creates technologies that enable access to the Internet for people whatever their abilities may be. These two initiatives focus on serving communities with rich histories of knowledge that have a history of marginalization from university communities.

The Ontario College of Art & Design (OCAD) University – a 136 year old institution - has followed a seven year path of change and adaptation. OCAD University is located in Toronto, the largest city in Canada in the downtown core, adjacent to the Art Gallery of Ontario. It is located on the traditional lands of the Mississauga people in one of the most culturally diverse cities of the world. It is the largest and most comprehensive art, design and media institution or set of programs in Canada and one of the largest in North America and Europe. We currently have 4300 undergraduate students in attendance and approximately 200 graduate students. That is one big wave of talent!

OCAD University's vision states that, "OCAD University is Canada's "university of the imagination," engaged in transformative education, scholarship, research and innovation. OCAD University makes vital contributions to the fields of art, design and media through local and global cultural initiatives, while providing knowledge and invention across a wide range of disciplines.

How did we derive this vision? In 2006 we undertook a rigorous strategic planning process that refocused the institution and set a framework for its transformation. The plan was refreshed in 2012 – we had achieved 80 per cent of our goals. In both instances the planning process has made use of intensive community engagement and consultation through a process of Strategic Foresight, an analytic method that results in trend analysis – through horizon scanning research, external and internal consultations, brain-storming, planning and scenario testing. This was led by our sLab (Strategic Foresight and Innovation Lab) and their graduate students. Here are some slides of the signals of our era:

The horizon scanning process identified key drivers. Drivers of Change in this period include the following:

- Economic restructuring
- Cultural values
- Civic instabilities
- Institutional (dis)integration
- Resource availability

- Rising global powers
- Technological connection
- Demographic shifts: aging; diversity; migration

As a result of this process the university created scenarios in order to understand the key uncertainties affecting art and design.¹ Events such as the global economic recession of 2008, changes in government, and new technological possibilities are closing down some avenues and opening others. Each scenario has a story which then can be applied to understand potential impacts on the institution and hence help to drive strategy.

Legacy Island: An inward-directed world dominated by traditional, local and regional values. In reaction to economic and other challenges, industries and organizations embrace familiar and DIY formulas, and learners seek to deepen disciplinary skills.

Payback: Quid-pro-quo and ‘measurables’ are everything in a highly risk averse world where everyone strives for more but makes do with much, much less.

Commercial World: A world in which performance and value is equated with sales volumes and number of impressions. Unceasing pursuit of attention, status and influence permeates dominant culture and drives the majority of creative initiatives.

Globeland: An environment of optimistic, outward-looking initiatives, and interdisciplinary ambition. The catch-phrase of Globeland is “big problems, bold solutions.”

We looked for common threads within the scenarios. We saw art and design as cross-cutting in a future filled with tension between the local and global, wealth and restraint, highly applied and abstract values. Art and design could not stay only within their own boundaries. We posed our value to the world as a mix of intrinsic and instrumental qualities:

- Talented students and alumni who will make contributions in their fields and act as agents of positive transformation and change
- Research and creation by our faculty and students that approach grand challenges, galvanize us with new ways of understanding and acting in the world, and produce material and virtual objects and systems
- Art, design and media that inspire, interpret and move us
- Relationships and actions that strengthen communities, build social capacity and economic strength

Emerging from our history, the foresight work, and strategies to address these, it was clear that the institution needed to ground itself in a set of values that promoted engagement and collaboration, OCAD U values, respects and advances ethical practice, flexibility, advocacy, diversity, accessibility, Aboriginal cultures, wellness, global citizenship, as well as the manifestations of creativity in entrepreneurship, innovation, and sustainability.

The notion that art, design, science, technology and innovation practices can hold a deeper

¹ The development of “Leading in the Age of Imagination” was itself a dynamic process. The core working group included students, faculty, administrators, alumni, staff, and the Board of Governors. It used all manner of participatory design and brainstorming tools. It held extended brainstorms at OCAD beyond its own membership. It met with faculties (Art, Design and Liberal Studies). The plan was passed by Academic Council. The Student Union held a series of fora that resulted in additions to the plan. It was then unanimously adopted by the Board of Governors in 2006.

dialogue than in the recent past emerged from these analyses. The turn to an activist engagement with the sciences (including medicine, earth sciences, physics, and material science as well as the digital) is driven by the desire and need to provide relevancy, cogency, and power to art and design practices. An engagement with the social sciences provides a set of parallel methods and tools for analysis of human factors in creative fields. Art and design are fundamental tools for innovation and economic development and should be foreground not sidelined.

Hence we reaffirmed our engagement with five themes that consolidate and build on existing cross-disciplinary curriculum and research interests and allow us to lead innovation, building bridges among art, design, media, liberal arts and sciences.

- **Sustainability** – This is an overarching challenge for the 21st century, reflected in the use of materials, energy, economic autonomy, biodiversity and climate change.
- **Diversity** – Engagement with rich cultural diversity and global citizenship is a core challenge in creative practice and a requirement for problem solving, combined with attention to place and indigenous values
- **Wellness** – Discovery among art, design, health, wellness and lifestyle promises significant innovation potential and shifts in the delivery of care.
- **Technological innovation** – Rapid growth and persistent change in technological platforms are a constant. Digital culture and tools are transforming everyday life, creative practices, business models and cultural industries. Artists and designers continue to move beyond using current technologies to imagine and invent new technologies and applications. Our Digital Futures Initiative which has linked physical and digital making, given birth to a major research centre and new UG and graduate programs is a result.
- **Contemporary ethics** – Art and design grapple with ethics and social justice, at times embracing divergent strategies such as critique, revelation, intervention or problem solving.

OCAD U's community undertook intensive sketching as well as word based exploration. We depicted the institution with intertwined yet semi-autonomous systems that were able to evolve in systematic yet complex ways. We then created metaphors for the new OCAD University, describing the institution's intellectual environment as "The New Ecology of Learning." This nomenclature reflected images of an institution that is organic and porous, whether biological, plant-like, or cellular: penetrable yet able to absorb and adapt to new growth. Brian Goodwin, in *How the Leopard Got His Spots: the Evolution of Complexity*, captures this image when he states, "organisms...must be understood as dynamical systems with distinctive properties that characterise their living state."² It is a strong metaphor, one that emphasizes our role in building reciprocal and porous partnerships with communities, whether city building or social transformation, OCAD U offers vibrant disciplinary and cross-disciplinary opportunities for cultural and lifelong learning in concert with local, national, Aboriginal and international communities.

² Brian Goodwin, *How the Leopard Got His Spots: the Evolution of Complexity* (Princeton: Princeton Science Library, 2001) 3.

Here are two case studies that act on our values, focus on interdisciplinary practice and address our themes:

Aboriginal Visual Culture Program: Art, Design and Media

My people will sleep for one hundred years. When they awake, it will be the artists who give them their spirit back. -- Louis Riel

The Aboriginal Visual Culture Program: Art, Design and Media is a major institutional initiative spanning undergraduate and graduate education, community engagement, exhibition and research.

OCAD University's focus on global citizenship and engagement is balanced by a strong commitment to acknowledging diversity at home and in particular – a commitment to indigenous people in Canada, their cultures and their rights. We are located on Mississauga lands, close to Ojibway and Nishnawbe territory and Six Nations. Indigenous people – First Nations, Inuit and Métis as well as non-status Aboriginal people represent a significant part of Canada's population – in fact its fastest growing group, and are located across Canada, in urban centres and in remote communities and reserves. In the Prairie provinces they make up 7% of the total population and some 30% of cities such as Winnipeg and Regina; 5% in British Columbia and 2.5% in Ontario. The territory of Nunavut is administered under Inuit self-government.

Canada's indigenous people were forced into residential schools where they experienced the violent suppression of their culture and languages as well as intensive physical and sexual abuse. Families, clan and governance structures were destroyed – including matrilineal and matriarchal patterns. Poverty, alcoholism, addiction and suicide and the inability to complete school characterize life in many remote communities. However, despite a nightmarish legacy of cultural destruction by external forces there are over 250 languages grouped into dominant linguistic types. The last forty years have seen an accelerated movement for rights and self-government, truth and reconciliation regarding the residential schools, a new generation of educated indigenous leaders, and an unprecedented cultural renaissance. Sean Atleo, the leader of the powerful Association of First Nations (AFN) has made education the number one priority.

OCAD University has a history of educating some of Canada's most prestigious Métis, First Nations and Inuit artists – names such as Rebecca Belmore, Tom Hill, Terance Houle and Mary Anne Barkhouse. While the last twenty-five years have witnessed a dynamic growth of scholarship and practice in the Aboriginal visual arts, design, critical and curatorial studies, Ontario and in fact Canada as a whole, lack dedicated programs in Aboriginal arts and design at the university, college or Aboriginal Institute level. For this reason, over the last five years – in close collaboration with First Nations, Métis and Inuit leaders across Canada, we have created a significant new initiative in indigenous visual culture, art, media and design with national opportunities, networks, and international links. The initiative embraces curricular Minors, and a newly minted Bachelors of Fine Arts, graduate courses, as well as partnered research and extensive outreach.

“Making a Noise” was a watershed conference at The Banff Centre in Canada (where I used to work). It shared Aboriginal Perspectives on Art, Art History, Critical Writing and Community. Joanne Cardinal Shubert (now deceased) gave the call to arms, “What is our practice? What is our tenet? What is our theory? Who were our heroes? Where is this information? When will we write about it? When will we celebrate it? When will we reference it? When will we write about it? When will we declare it?” She calls for Aboriginal artists, curators and critics to step back

and be leery of the wide spread interest and access to Canadian Aboriginal art in a context where there is a failure to protect and institutionalize that art at home, or bring that art to the Aboriginal community. “Let making a noise be truly our own noise, not a bad imitation...this is what we can leave to the next generation – the noise that we have always been here.”³

The OCAD U initiative centers on answering these questions – it is rooted in contemporary practice, theory and expression in First Nations, Métis and Inuit art, media and design in Canadian and international contexts. It is deeply referenced in traditions and ceremonies both past and present. At its core is the concept of story-telling, or narrative. Unusual for a university, the program is based on principles of self government, with a powerful Aboriginal Education Council. The AEC has a membership of 26 highly engaged Aboriginal leaders from many cultural and vocational backgrounds, including documentary filmmaker Alonis Abomsawin, curator Lee Ann Martin, arts administrator Tom Hill, architect Douglas Cardinal, story teller Louise Profit-le Blanc and media artist Zacharias Kunuk. In order to strengthen our ability to build the program we brought on board an Aboriginal chancellor, former Lieutenant Governor James K. Bartleman, who chaired the AEC for the first three years and is now its founding chair. OCAD University’s Board of Governors continues to be engaged in the development of the support for indigenous culture. Mr. Goyce Kakegamic, a former Deputy Grand Chief of The Nishnawbe Aski Nation, artist and community leader, has served on the board as does Dr. Tony Belcourt, founding president of the Métis Nation of Ontario.

Other principles of self-government are the integration of Aboriginal perspectives into course syllabi throughout OCAD U and the placement of Aboriginal faculty in the studios and classrooms to teach both Aboriginal and other curricula. The program undertakes outreach programming, in collaboration with school boards, Aboriginal associations, tribal/band councils, and Métis councils. Recruiters undertake workshops in high schools and on reserve, assisting with portfolio development. We have created an augmented first year transition program for students at a Northern university (Laurentian) to provide a transition year for students before they come to study in the city. A mandatory Visual Literacy and communities summer internship brings our students into remote, mostly fly-in communities where they engage young people in art and design, computer games design and video making.

Our program recognizes that relationship to place and land, language, storytelling through a variety of media, identity and well-being are closely tied. We support all forms of expression. Aboriginal art, cinema, new media and exhibition have become a key part of Canada’s larger identity and a key part of the growing cultural economy of Canada. Art, design and media bring a new set of skills and capacity to economic development in indigenous communities by opening up new opportunities for professional Aboriginal artists and designers.

We are trying to make it possible for students to remain in their communities and study. The program explores ways that art practice and exhibition can be tied to community – seeking the balance of protocol, definitions of the work as subversive or inclusive (Candice Hopkins) and the sense that Aboriginal art must always have a fundamental community shaping role (Vincent Collison)⁴ It explores who the primary audiences for Aboriginal art, media and design are and asks questions such as:

- How are aesthetics to be judged?
- What constitutes authoritative sources for the creation of histories (oral, textual)

³ Joanne Cardinal, “Flying with Louis”. In Ed. Lee Ann Martin, *Making a Noise: Aboriginal Perspectives on Art, Art History, Critical Writing and Community*. Banff: Banff Centre Press, 2003.

⁴ Ibid.

- How are artifacts to be handled and by whom; collected and by whom?

With a strong focus on curatorial practice it questions how indigenous curators can intervene into the historical construct of the museum or contemporary gallery with its architectural and philosophical histories predicated on colonialism. For this reason it held a major **Revisoning the Indians of Canada Pavilion: Ahzhekewada**, a collaboration with the Aboriginal Curatorial Collective that examined the history of indigenous representation within formal institutional settings. There were over two hundred participants (including from Australia).

We have created a dedicated Aboriginal program infrastructure, including a program chair – Bonnie Devine - and three other tenure track faculty (2 begin next July) and six part-time faculty; dedicated scholarships and bursaries; Ancillary support services, in particular a counselor to meet the needs of Aboriginal students on campus; A mentorship program led by Duke Redbird and now David General augments counseling and support for students, and assists with cultural activities, faculty development, and curriculum development; An Aboriginal student centre that holds regular buffalo stews open to the entire campus; An Aboriginal recruiter accesses communities throughout Canada; A curriculum development officer (an OCAD U graduate) who helps to develop curriculum working with communities and our AEC; partnerships with over fifteen indigenous organizations and regular exhibition opportunities; annual graduating ceremony and celebratory powwow as well as a conference that coincides with our AEC meeting.

In development:

- On-line or hybrid course development – including art/design history and ideas courses
- Enhanced liaisons with remote and urban communities to maintain and develop mentorship programs for transitioning students within the university context;
- A research project for the preservation and dissemination of Indigenous/Aboriginal Traditional Knowledge: a living archive they are calling The Digital Knowledge Circle. The platform would be accessible to communities, students and researchers through a series of protocols depending on content
- A contemporary art and design gallery dedicated to indigenous practice
- An Aboriginal field in our MFA in Aboriginal Criticism and Curatorial Practice
- Mid-career completion program for fast tracked 1 + 2 Bachelors plus a masters degree that recognizes Prior Learning Achievements

By September 2010, 106 students had self-identified as Aboriginal, Métis or Inuit in OCAD's "Under-Represented Student Survey". This is more than double the goal of the program's original vision. There are currently six indigenous graduate students representing two percent of our graduate students. This program transforms not only the lives of indigenous students but the entire institution through its presence.

Inclusive Design Research Centre

Inclusive Design is design that is inclusive of the full range of human diversity with respect to ability, language, culture, gender, age and other forms of human difference. The Inclusive Design Research Centre is a 28 person research unit at OCAD University. Its philosophy is that, "Accessibility and inclusion are not only rights to be protected, but catalysts for new ideas, design principles that lead to better design, business strategies that make good business sense, and economic drivers with ubiquitous social benefits." It leads the Inclusive Design Institute (IDI) a larger regional public-private research hub focusing on the inclusive design of emerging information and communication technology. to develop tools for everyday interfaces and

education as well as providing insights on standards.⁵ The IDRC is involved with standard setting at the international level as well as policy development, for example consulting with the Ontario government in the development of the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act. Both entities engage in participatory design with relevant communities throughout our region and internationally, developing core technologies that facilitate access for diverse cultures, literacy and ability. People with disabilities continue to face exclusion from digitally mediated education, employment, social activities, recreation, culture, commercial interactions and other essential services.

A shift from individual experience to hybrid group experiences is precisely the aesthetic challenge that Warren Sack, (a designer of collaborative spaces for large-scale online conversations) makes to artificial intelligence research and cognitive science in his recent article in *Database Aesthetics*.⁶ He argues that contemporary technology systems require an aesthetic that allows the emergence of new common and collectively constructed shared experiences and identities. New technologies, especially mobile ones, provide the double strengths of malleability and adaptability to individual needs while at the same time joining that individual to a larger collectivity. This duality is of specific value to the field of inclusive design where there lies the possibility of entirely new identity formations through enhanced accessibility.

Canada offers an example that suggests the algorithmic growth in the need for inclusive technology. The Canadian population is aging. Seniors will surpass children aged 14 or under for the first time ever sometime between 2015 and 2021. The incidence of disability increases dramatically as we age, 37% of persons age 65 to 74 and 60% of persons age 75 and over experience a disability compared to 15% of the general population.⁷ As this aging trend continues Canada confronts a labour gap in critical positions throughout our economy. Many of the more skilled, knowledgeable and senior employees will retire or cease to be able to work, without younger candidates to replace them, leaving significant gaps in our work force that can be partially addressed by presently excluded persons with disabilities.⁸ Numerous reports (the Conference Board of Canada or Rick Miner's People without Jobs, Jobs without People) have identified persons with disabilities as a potential labour pool to address future labour gaps. It has been estimated that Ontario alone could realize a 4.7 billion dollar increase in annual wages or an 853 dollar increase in GDP by taking the steps required to provide greater accessibility for people with disabilities.⁹ On the other hand, these figures suggest that if the challenge is not addressed exclusion and inequity will continue to lead to a vicious cycle of under-education, unemployment, poverty, physical and mental illness that affect not just the excluded and their family but the entire society. According to Wilkinson and Pickett the more inclusive a society the lower the incidence of physical or mental illness and crime, throughout the population.¹⁰ Canada is just an example -- the incidence of disabilities globally is rising, due to the aging trend

⁵ Funded by the Canada Foundation for Innovation and the Ontario Ministry of Research and Innovation, with 7 core partner academic institutions in the Greater Toronto Area and over 100 other partner organizations in the public and private sector (IBM, MS, Apple, Google, RIM...)

⁶ Warren Sack, "Network Aesthetics," *Database Aesthetics: Art in the Age of Information Overload*, ed. Victor Vesna (Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 2007) 183-210.

⁷ Participation and Activity Limitation Survey (PALS) 2006, Statistics Canada. Catalogue no. 89-628-X.

⁸ <http://www.conferenceboard.ca/hcp/default.aspx>

⁹ <http://martinprosperity.org/research-and-publications/publication/releasing-constraints>

¹⁰ Wilkinson, R., and Pickett, K., (2009). *The Spirit Level: Why More Equal Societies Almost Always Do Better*. Allen Lane.

but also due to advances in medicine that increase the chances of survival with disabilities and population growth.¹¹

Digital mediation has the potential to address many current access barriers and digital tools can be far more accessible than their non-digital counterparts by virtue of the plasticity or mutability of the digital medium. Digital systems can be personally reconfigured or transformed to address each individual's access needs at virtually no additional cost (e.g., increasing size and contrast of text or speaking text using a voice synthesizer). The advent of mobile technologies and networks is of particular power in supporting the personalization of devices that can act as an interface to other technologies. Digitally delivered education and digitally mediated employment or employment in the digital industry can be more accessible than traditionally delivered education and traditional employment, presenting an unprecedented opportunity to address this inequity.

The Inclusive Design philosophy aligns with the values of our institution, with a strong interest in innovation and imagination to solve grand challenges. One of the most powerful and proven drivers for innovation is diversity. The more a group includes a diversity of perspectives the more successful will be the group's decisions, predictions, problem solving and planning, but more importantly, the more innovative and creative the group will be.¹² People with disabilities are a rich source of diverse perspectives. What is more, invention makes creative leaps forward when we address challenges at the margins of any domain. Services, technologies or design changes made for people with disabilities benefit everyone (as recently verified in Toronto when public transit began to consistently call out stops to meet the needs of passengers who are blind).

AccessForAll assumes "one-size-fits-one", matching the individual needs of each person using ICT. The Inclusive Design Research Centre works with the US National Public Inclusive Infrastructure and invitation by Obama administration to develop a Global Partnership Initiative and Framework 7, EU. Projects: FLUID – open source software infrastructure that allows specific tools to be built. Flexible Learning for Open Education (FLOE) Hewlett Foundation – for disabled learners. AEGIS is an Open source framework and tools to integrate accessibility into standard ICT (desktop, Web and mobile) with EU. IDRC has created a personalized needs and preference server to assist the full diversity of end users to discover, identify, label, store and retrieve personal needs and preferences regarding access to digital systems. The server will act as a repository for research into technologies to address a large variety of needs including needs related to ability, age, literacy, language, culture and other common barriers. As part of this research the IDI is creating a cloud based research platform to find and deliver resources and user experience functionality that matches individual user preferences on a variety of devices, in a variety of contexts. This project is in conjunction with an international consortium funded by EU Framework 7 money. IDRC has partners throughout the developing and emerging world.

A core aspect of the IDRC philosophy is a commitment to open source tools because an open source environment supports the rapid build and dissemination of tools and mobilizes the capacities of hundreds of programmers and designers. The new platform will create

¹¹ <http://www.un.org/disabilities/default.asp?id=18>

¹² Page, Scott E., *The Difference: How the Power of Diversity Creates Better Groups, Firms, Schools, and Societies*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, 2007.

opportunities for SMEs to build specific applications appropriate to a diverse range of users at reasonable cost and with the potential for commercialization.

The IDRC and IDI use participatory design as they are building interfaces that apply directly to end users –people with disabilities or other barriers, engaging end-users in the imagination and systematic design of technologies that will influence their lives. Hence, the creation process for the IDRC involves brainstorming software, workshops to delineate that phase of the development path, including the production of paper or electronic prototypes, the software build, often making use of distributed contributors and the documentation of that phase of the software, as well as regular usability testing.

OCAD University recognized the need for academic institutions to develop education and training in the inclusive design of digital tools and media and that the demand globally for ICT professionals with skills and knowledge in inclusive design is growing, in part through the growth of legislative initiatives that require inclusion. The Inclusive Design Masters builds expertise in inclusive digital media and information and communication technologies (ICT), design approaches and policy understanding. Students typically come from many sectors that engage digital media and ICT systems, including government, education, finance industries, ICT companies, arts, culture and health. The program is fully accessible to students and faculty with diverse needs, including students with disabilities and students for who English is a second language. There are two on-site intensive summer sessions each year in which students will be engaged in intensive academic programming and collaborative experiences to familiarize them with fellow students, faculty members and researchers. The primarily online program uses highly interactive instructional design techniques. These include online collaborative group activities, discussion forums with guest experts, moderated synchronous chats, and guided online tours of both online and physical sites and examples. There are multi-disciplinary seminars delivered at a distance and co-taught by world leaders. Students engage in IDRC and IDI research.

An important element of the IDRC's practice has a direct impact on creative communities, developing translational tools that allow diverse communities to work in synaesthetic media. But more than this – without access to literacy, education, and online design tools – disabled people will be marginalized from contributing as artists, or as audience members.

Conclusion

These two case studies are two very distinct examples of how our institution has taken up the need for transformative interdisciplinary practice that is rooted in communities and that makes a difference on many fronts – from providing tools to creating cultural expressions that build specific communities as well as the larger cultural framework. The Aboriginal Visual Culture Program has a powerful rootedness in place, while engaging with indigenous students and faculty across Canada, with a deeply interdisciplinary approach. The IDRC and its masters program defines its community at the global level, yet is tangibly engaged with local issues, experiences and policies that impact inclusion.

Aspects of the methods and philosophy that I applied at OCAD University to develop our strategic plan emerged from the period that I spent at The Banff Centre, as Artistic Director of Media and Visual Art and Founder and Director of The Banff New Media Institute. Banff supported the development of a powerful Aboriginal Arts Program that emerged and operated in close alliance with indigenous communities around the world and operates to this day. The BNMI was a fifteen year experiment in collaboration between artists, scientists, technology inventors and designers – from its interdisciplinary summits and workshops, residencies and

research initiatives. There are many lessons from Banff – such as methods to support interdisciplinary brainstorming and creation and foresight that can be adapted to contemporary times. I have recently finished a book, with Sarah Cook, *Euphoria & Dystopia: The Banff New Media Institute Dialogues*. It provides a window on the emergence of new media art, industry and research through the voices of the many participants at Banff from around the world. I have brought a few sample copies and information on the book. I have also brought much information about our programs at OCAD U for those who are curious.

Many thanks for the opportunity to speak here.