

Boddy, Trevor. *Modern Architecture in Alberta*. Regina: Alberta Culture and Multiculturalism and the Canadian Plains Research Center, 1987. Pp. 156. Black and white colour illustrations, index. \$24.00 (cloth)

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[See table of contents](#)

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urbains a, bien sûr, plusieurs dimensions. L'une de celles-là est de faire appel à l'histoire urbaine, de deux façons. La première, qui marque surtout les deux premières parties de l'ouvrage, est de faire re-émerger un âge doré. C'est, par exemple, le cas de K. Greenberg qui appelle à la "valorisation de plus en plus grande des qualités urbaines authentiques, d'une meilleure compréhension de ce qui, nous le savons (sic), a fonctionné dans le passé" (p.57). J.-C. Marsan poursuit un objectif similaire lorsqu'il définit l'urbanisme de projet comme un moyen de protéger "l'esthétique de la diversité" qui, prétend-il, caractérise Montréal et fonde la trame de son histoire culturelle. C'est, le plus souvent, en niant la "légitimité" du passé récent — celui de l'urbanisme fonctionnaliste et moderniste — que les auteurs réhabilitent ce passé idéal. La seconde façon de se rattacher à l'histoire, consiste à faire référence à l'archéologie dont on tire un processus généalogique de la formation des places publiques (et autres équipements structurants) dans la ville. Ce processus est appliqué autant aux oeuvres anciennes, telle que la Place Saint-Pierre, à Rome, (C. McClendon) qu'aux villes nouvelles. Il prend alors le nom "d'archéologie inverse" (A. Grumbach: p.81-82). Cette notion, d'une architecture appartenant à la longue durée, est appliquée, implicitement, à Copley Square, Boston, dont le réaménagement en cours ne serait que "le dernier épisode de la longue histoire des rêves qui se sont si profondément inscrits dans ce lieu unique" (T. Piper: p.132).

Pour retrouver ces "rêves" et ces "qualités urbaines authentiques" d'un passé plus ou moins éloigné, on fait valoir qu'il faut pour les architectes et les urbanistes "réapprendre à travailler avec les forces vives qui structurent l'espace urbain" (K. Greenberg: p.62). Cependant, pour la plupart des auteurs rassemblés ici, ces forces vives sont principalement représentées, à Montpellier, par la nouvelle élite cultivée qui exprime des besoins d'animation culturelle (G. Frêche), à San Francisco, par les professionnels du

service municipal de l'urbanisme (G. Williams et D. Macris), à Barcelone, par les cercles professionnels, administratifs et universitaires réunis dans un bureaux de projets urbains (O. Bohigas). Bref, les principaux interprètes de la vision à échelle humaine des agglomérations urbaines sont ceux-là même qui, il y a vingt ans, étaient les ardents défenseurs de l'urbanisme fonctionnaliste. "En 1986, la ville, certes, n'est pas encore entièrement reconstruite, mais un objectif important a été atteint: nous avons abouti à un bouleversement des esprits! Les théories de 1960-1970 ne sont plus défendues par personne. Et ceux qui illustraient alors les théories en vogue sont nos meilleurs adeptes" (S. Moureaux, sur Bruxelles: p.154). Comme son prédécesseur, l'urbanisme de projet néglige facilement le point de vue des usagers. P. Korosec-Serfaty nous met d'ailleurs fort justement en garde contre l'effet sclérosant que risque de produire cette évacuation des usagers. "Le rôle de ces places est soudain de matérialiser l'idée de patrimoine commun et de réifier les valeurs qui sont liés à travers des édifices ou un ensemble architectural" (p.114). Ayant perdu leurs fonctions de sociabilité, les places publiques sont, prévient-elle, désormais "muséifiées"; on assiste à une homogénéisation de l'usage des lieux au profit d'une élite restreinte. C'est dans le même sens que, frappé par la polysémie de la problématique de la centralité urbaine, subséquente au virage technologique, M. Castells déplore que "En essayant de conserver le centre pour la consommation de l'élite, on en détruit d'une certaine manière la spécificité historique, la diversité sociale et culturelle qui en faisait précisément un centre" (p.191).

Le livre de Germain et Marsan est fort précieux pour tous ceux que préoccupent les enjeux actuels de l'aménagement urbain. Il faut souligner aussi la qualité et l'abondance des illustrations (159 photos, cartes ou plans) qui enrichissent, d'une part, et facilitent, d'autre part, la lecture de cette dizaine d'histoires de cas. Toutefois, la qualité

de la langue française est fort variable d'un chapitre à l'autre — ou, peut-être, est-ce la qualité de la traduction qui est en cause. Quoiqu'il en soit, certains chapitres auraient gagné à être soignés, sous ce rapport, par la maison d'édition.

Jean-Pierre Collin
I.N.R.S. - Urbanisation
Avril 1988

Boddy, Trevor. *Modern Architecture in Alberta*. Regina: Alberta Culture and Multiculturalism and the Canadian Plains Research Center, 1987. Pp. 156. Black and white colour illustrations, index. \$24.00 (cloth).

Modern Architecture in Alberta is a brief account of architecture from the decline of historicism in the early decades of the century to the formation, in recent years, of a mature modernism towards an Alberta architecture. The book, handsomely presented in a small, square format and abundantly illustrated, provides a text whose swift image-laden prose provides verve and vigour to a sometimes glitterless subject.

The stated aim of the research was "to establish the trends and highlights of the development of modern architecture in Alberta, with a view to possible further study or designation of the most historically and architecturally significant buildings." We are, therefore, presented with a work of sorting and classification. The most unusual section of the book, included in the appendix, is "A Sampler of Modern Styles" which classifies under different headings a selection of representative buildings in Alberta accompanied by the European or American model.

For instance, the Stanley Engineering Building (1970) by Peter Hemingway is classified under International Style: Miesian and is juxtaposed with Mies Van Der Rohe's

Seagram Building in New York. A short list of "features" for each style completes the taxonomy. The appendix is significant in that it lays bare the technique used throughout the book. The architectural production of Alberta is constantly placed beside its model (usually of European source) in an indefatigable comparison of copy and original. The strategy is "art historical" since it lends dignity and visibility to the various integers of Albertan architectural practice. This approach also aims to find a strictly "regional" residue, which would precipitate as modern architecture in Alberta, and which is also brought into comparative excursus with high European modernism. It comes as no surprise to read in the Postscript that the "most important issues facing contemporary architects have to do not with style, but with the integration of a building into its social, historical, environmental, and cultural setting; in short regionalism." If Boddy uses primarily stylistic tools of analysis and classification, he makes no mystery of the collapse of such logic. The real heroes of Boddy's history are the overt simulacrum of main street architecture: service stations, cinemas, muffler shops, and hamburger chains. Through the procedures of classification we witness what Rosalind Krauss has called "the fall into the impulsive condition of the same." As pastiche becomes the universal condition of aesthetic practice, distinctions such as "original" and "copy" dissolve. The Edmonton City Hall of 1957 may be similar to Le Corbusier's Swiss Pavilion or Gropius's decorated diagrams, but no appeal can be made to the purity of "high modernism" — similarities and dissimilarities are weightless.

Boddy's stylistic charting, therefore, cleverly subverts itself. A glance at the index under "Architectural Styles" is revealing. At least 39 styles are listed. Intermeshed with the great categories of Western Art are parodies such as Jazz-Age Baroque, Odeon, Rococo Moderne and Stucco Vernacular. The term Modern Baroque qualifying the work of Douglas Cardinal is the ultimate quartering, a celebration of our consumption of styles that

results in the neutralizing of any possible work of classification: the term Modern Baroque defies definition, it is two opposite elements united in the virtual space of a parodic image.

The regionalism Boddy still feels able to uphold is of a very special kind. Tongue in cheek, he asks himself what future style awaits Alberta: "Whether that style will be the bizarre hybrid which is Post-Modernism, the avant-garde revivalism of the Neo-Modern, or some other variant, it is too early to tell." He ensures that the reader feels no urge to select from his list of 39 available masks. If regionalism is still considered, it is a masquerade for the purpose of local advertisement such as the Alberta Pavilion at Expo 86.

Boddy readily recognizes that his "study treads that dangerous path between architectural history and criticism," a narrow pass where history becomes self-criticism — a dangerous tool in the hands of the Historic Sites Service of Alberta Culture.

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Piva, Michael J., ed. *A History of Ontario: Selected Readings*. Toronto: Copp Clark Pitman, 1988. Pp. 322. Illustrations. \$15.95.

This volume is part of the New Canadian Readings series edited by J. L. Granatstein, which consists of collections of previously published articles focusing on "selected Canadian topics, problems, and issues." The main title is somewhat misleading and might cause the casual buyer to mistake it for one of the new survey histories of the province, whereas the book in fact consists of 14 articles on various aspects of Ontario's history from 1850 to the present.

The chronological representation of the

selections is even, and the thematic coverage is wide, including titles in social, economic, political, labour, educational, and women's history. The only obvious imbalance is the concentration on politics in the post World War II period: Gottlieb on Drew and the Dominion-Provincial Conference on Reconstruction, Oliver on Allan Grossman, Lyon's assessment of the minority government of the 1970s, and Bashevkin's article on women in Ontario politics in the same decade. There is also a clear urban bias, which is more in keeping with the later decade of Ontario's history than with the earlier period. Rural/agricultural history is represented only at the beginning, by Gagan's overstated demographic piece "Families and Land: the Mid-Century Crisis." The volume contains selections as diverse as Kealey's much-reprinted work on the Orange Order in Toronto, Barber on immigrant domestics, Stamp and Oliver on 20th-century education, Weaver's interesting study of suburban development in Hamilton, and Speisman's article on poor relief in Toronto (the title of which contains the second-worst pun to bless Canadian historiography).

The diversity of the material dictates that the book cannot be greater than the sum of its parts; it cannot pretend to be "A History of Ontario." Some of the contributions are very specialized and stand on their own only with difficulty. Dewar's article on the electrical utilities' campaign against municipal competition in the 1890s, for example, would be easier for the uninitiated if it was set in a wider context. As Piva notes, Dewar covers only "the first stage of a decade-long debate." These chunks of professional scholarship remain too specialized for the general reader despite the editor's attempt to tie them together in an evolutionary introductory essay of just over four pages.

Although the bibliography contains some popular works as well as academic titles, this volume is clearly intended for