

Leon Whiteson, *Modern Canadian Architecture*. Edmonton, Hurtig, 1983. 272 pp., illus., \$50.00 (cloth)

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he saw as the feudal patronage given to the Nazarene artists under Friedrich Wilhelm IV. The alliance between the monarchy and this group, as well as the anachronism of a mediaeval Christian aesthetic in 19th-century Germany, drew Marx's scorn in his 1842 critique of Christian art. Marx saw Nazarene painting as escapist and transcendent; he sought instead an art that was not 'alienated' from the sensuous and material existence of the people, an art that was not idealist in Hegelian or Christian terms, but which was somehow socially productive. For Rose, the key to Marx's own vision was the utopian philosophy of Saint-Simon, which viewed art and the artist as avant-garde leaders in the battle for social change. The 'productivist' element of art so important to Marx was developed from the Saint-Simonian doctrine that the arts must merge with technology in the modern world and allow artists to participate in the system of production from which they were necessarily excluded in capitalist economies. The first part of Rose's book details Marx's reactions to what had become the official Nazarene taste in art and his elaboration of an alternative. In part two, the divergence of these ideologies is examined through Rose's exploration of the turbulent interaction of Socialist Realism and Constructivism in early 20th-century Russia.

Marx's name has often been used to justify the form of state propaganda that we call Socialist Realism unleashed by Stalin in the 1930s. According to Rose, however, there is very little evidence that Marx's theories on art were sympathetic to this style. On the contrary, his Saint-Simonist ideas accorded closely with the Constructivist aesthetic of Lissitzky and Tatlin. Saint-Simonian socialism had been officially censored in Tzarist Russia up until the 1917 revolution, and its doctrine of cooperation between art and technology was only a distant possibility in what was still largely a pre-industrial country. But perhaps because artists like Lissitzky could develop an artform that embraced engineering, design, architecture and the visual arts right from the beginning without an already industrialized society to change, the Constructivist aesthetic is a pure embodiment of Saint-Simonian ideals. Saint-Simonianism was also a source for the self-consciously avant-garde stance taken by the Constructivists in their attempt to create a secular art that would serve the revolution. Their

works were sanctioned by the new government for some time after the revolution, but with the political purges of the later 1920s went this anti-Realist form. The State, it seems, began to demand more control over what the artists produced. Their productivist techniques were concerned with the characteristically Modernist task of 'showing how' art worked. The State wanted propaganda potential to be able to 'show that', rather than 'how' (as Rose states, these distinctions come from Gilbert Ryle). Lissitzky was in the centre of this dispute over art's rôle. 'It boils down to this,' he said, 'whether art is taking an active part or merely 'reflecting'' (p. 154). Thus Rose points to a contest between a productivist art (Constructivism) that *leads* society and a 'reflectionist' art (Socialist Realism) that merely *mirrors* the State's version of history.

It is ironic – and historically inaccurate – to see Marx as a supporter of the reflectionist view. He hated the realism of the Nazarenes and based his aesthetic alternative on the Saint-Simonism that will be so perfectly realized by Constructivism. *Marx's Lost Aesthetic* forces us to re-think Marx's historical rôle in the development of the State art of the U.S.S.R. Rose's historical examination of the ways in which three artistic styles – Nazarene, Constructivist, Socialist Realist – were involved with Marx's thinking consciously avoids the methodologies of a traditional history of *art*, yet because of its resulting breadth and novelty, her study adds greatly to our understanding of Marx and the artistic styles in which he was implicated.

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LEON WHITESON *Modern Canadian Architecture*. Edmonton, Hurtig, 1983. 272 pp., illus., \$50.00 (cloth).

In his Foreword to this book Raymond Moriyama states that 'architecture in Canada has matured, diversified, and achieved a place second to none in the world.' This may be the case. The world pays attention to the works of several Canadian architects. Canadian buildings including Habitat 67 in Montreal, the Toronto Eaton Centre or Robson Square in Vancouver are obligatory references in international

surveys. For the first time since Thomas Fuller headed south, Canadians are undertaking important building projects abroad. Readers of Leon Whiteson's book will be hard-pressed to identify the causes of this new maturity. In his General Introduction to a survey of some 60 projects constructed in the last twenty years, Whiteson declares recent Canadian building to constitute a great achievement but for no discernible reason except that it rises on Canadian soil.

For the author, the proper passport is sufficient guarantee of architectural excellence. Pointing out that Toronto's Royal Bank Plaza by the Webb Zerafa Menkes Housden Partnership stands cheek to jowl with buildings by Ludwig Mies van der Rohe, I.M. Pei and Edward D. Stone, he enthuses: 'The only one of the four to be designed by Canadian architects, it is also, *by no chance*, the most imaginative solution to the construction of a massive downtown office tower' (italics mine). Not even Mies van der Rohe can beat the local boys. The reason lies deep in the Canadian 'soul'. While acknowledging that this 'soul' is 'defined too often by negatives of not this, not that', Whiteson characterizes the Canadian architect as 'less sophisticated ... less hip ... less street-smart, less sharp ... not so acutely aware of the agitation of the times.' Their very isolation from the pressures of real life ensures that our Canadian architects will retain what Whiteson calls a 'simplicity' that gives to their work the virtue of 'innocence.' He adduces Moriyama's subtle and knowing Scarborough Civic Centre as 'a fine instance of this cheerful innocence.' Stranded in the by-ways of history, it seems that the 'cheerfully creative' Canadian architect can be all the more humane, caring and blithe.

Nowhere is the comparison more striking than with what Whiteson inevitably identifies as 'our powerful, troubled neighbour to the south.' There 'the neon pop modernism of Las Vegas casinos and California hamburger heavens is offered as symbolology.' There too 'the religion of superstars' reigns supreme. Thus Whiteson feels justified in quoting Moriyama's smug assertion: 'We design and build more scrupulously than the Americans tend to do.' None the less, the author is quick to cite an American journal when it proposes, not surprisingly, that Toronto is nicer than Houston. He clinches his argument with the boast that an American, Jane Jacobs, actually 'chooses to live in Toronto.'

And he praises the vernacular architecture of Montreal for no better reason than that it is 'as distinctive' as the architecture of the French Quarter in New Orleans. Despite his protestations, Whiteson turns constantly to the United States to validate Canadian work.

He goes on to indicate how hard it is to be an architect in Canada. As they struggle to soar in the azure realm of self-expression, Canadian designers confront a 'Brave New World of meritocrats' bent on exploiting architecture to fashion 'an imagery of progress and profit.' The match is hardly fair for we learn from Eberhard Zeidler, quoted here, that the architect is in fact 'the last amateur in an industry of professionals.' Luckily, he or she can count on god-like instinct to prevail. The distinguishing characteristic of Quebec architecture is its 'Gallic instinct for the elegance of ideas.' The success of the Toronto Eaton Centre can be ascribed to Zeidler's 'Germanic instinct for the hierarchy of proportions.' And on the Prairies Douglas Cardinal does not so much design and build as play 'Dionysius [sic] to Clifford Wiens's Apollo.'

Whiteson's overview of Canadian architecture turns, then, into a vision of Mount Olympus. The real dynamics of professional architectural practice in Canada and the true relations of architects with one another and with their clients, both in Canada and abroad, are transformed into myth. It may be flattering to the self-esteem of Canadian architects to read that they are morally superior instinctual innocents, blissful *amateurs* toiling to Create. But it is not true. Such notions advance neither the practice nor the critical appraisal of architecture in Canada.

If Whiteson's assessment of the conditions of building in Canada is eccentric, so too is his selection of some 60 works for inclusion here. Whereas the author declares that he will deal with 'projects designed in Canada by Canadians since the Second World War,' in fact the earliest buildings date only from 1964 and the majority were constructed in the 1970s. Regardless of size, complexity, or influence on subsequent architectural practice, each structure receives a uniform four pages of photographs and text. The distinctions that a critic ought to make are blurred by a format that grants equal status to Simon Fraser University and what looks like a pre-fab ski chalet, and in which suburban condo

schemes – indistinguishable from their equivalents in Detroit or Dallas or Durban – receive the same attention as an innovative and influential building like the McMaster Health Science Centre.

The chosen projects are held to share 'a certain enduring quality of design that transcends fashion and formulation.' At the same time the author seeks 'balance', by which he means regional distribution. He divides the book into four chapters devoted to the architecture of British Columbia, the Prairies, Ontario and Quebec. Whiteson concedes that Ontario has a 'plethora' of good modern design but that he has restricted Ontario coverage so as not to overweigh the survey. Three projects in the Maritimes and one in the Arctic Circle are tacked on at the end. All four, however, are by architects from Ontario and Quebec, while distinctive achievements by Maritime architects, such as the Halifax Historic Properties, are passed over in virtual silence. Having abandoned quality of design as a criterion of selection, Whiteson jettisons balance too.

Such contradictions abound even within regional sections. Each is introduced in a brief essay by a noted architect. Of these, Peter Hemingway's guide to Prairie architecture is the most astute. For Ontario, John C. Parkin grandly announces that digressions, represented by Post-Modernism, 'will have little, if any, lasting significance.' Whiteson, on the other hand, praises Post-Modernism and includes documentation of witty works by Rocco Maragna and Peter Rose in a broadly defined Post-Modernist idiom, one Parkin must abhor.

Sometimes it is difficult to determine what Whiteson himself thinks about individual buildings. The lack of editorial unity leaves the reader confused. While informative plans and cross-sections are provided, critical analysis is minimal. The text can read like a list of contractor's specifications with a few glib phrases of appreciation thrown in. Whiteson's grasp of architectural history and terminology is shaky. He identifies Frank Lloyd Wright as, of all things, a 'folklorist', and refers to the 'flat dome' of Toronto's New City Hall; a dome may be shallow but it cannot be flat. Many photographs are excellent, while others are not of publishable quality; based on the over-exposed snapshots the architect himself has provided, it is

almost impossible to determine anything at all about Victor Prus's Brudnell Park Lodge in P.E.I.

It is worthwhile to have this corpus of images at hand if only because the photographs allow us to correct some of Whiteson's effusions. Whereas we are told that the Newfoundland Telephone Company Head Office is a sensitive exercise in urban good manners, 'handsome and discreet from any angle,' photographs reveal a building which, given the delicate urban scale of St. John's, is about as discreet as the Matterhorn, to which, moreover, its profile bears a striking resemblance.

This is not a history of Modern Canadian architecture, nor is it a consistent appraisal of contemporary practice. Whiteson has produced a picture survey of several buildings that, for reasons of his own, he wishes to document. It remains for others to begin the critical assessment of a significant national architectural achievement, an opportunity Whiteson has forfeited here.

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ROSALIND E. KRAUSS *The Originality of the Avant-Garde and Other Modernist Myths*. Cambridge, Mass., The MIT Press, 1985, 307 p., 19.95 \$ (broché).

Des quatorze articles qui constituent le dernier recueil de Rosalind E. Krauss, neuf sont déjà familiers aux lecteurs/lectrices de la revue *October*. Provoqués, entre 1977 et 1984, par l'aléatoire des expositions dans les musées ou les galeries, ces articles correspondent à ces années difficiles où la théorie de l'art, prétextant une rupture avec le passé, n'exigeait même plus de paramètres ou critères d'examen clairs.

Pourtant dans son Introduction, l'auteure semble vouloir poser qu'il s'agissait à l'époque d'établir un passage entre la « critique de goût » et une critique qui chercherait davantage à fonder la validité de sa démarche. Elle écrit: « Ne pourrait-on pas soutenir que le contenu du jugement évaluatif – ceci est beau, important, cela est mauvais, banal – n'est pas ce qui intéresse le lecteur? Mais que plutôt cette forme de critique n'est comprise qu'à partir de la forme de ses arguments, à