

articles. This is where the deep work of minimising women's contribution to the field is being carefully reproduced through association with bathrooms and kitchen, role-playing (women as interior designers) and the use of nudity and sensuality common to advertisement strategies in general. The review articles tend to focus on accepted building categories such as housing and interior design for women architects.

What makes this chapter so important is the contrast it provides with the analysis of work actually done by many Canadian women architects. Eva Vecsei, for example, was a leading designer for Place Bonaventure in the mid 1960s and La Cite in the 1970s, both huge multipurpose projects in downtown Montreal. These are very large commissions, a far cry from the gist of articles provided by the RAIC journal.

If we compare this book to existing ones on women architects (such as those by Hayden, Favro, Berkeley, or Attfield) certain aspects stand out. First, it is a collaborative project between an architectural historian and a sociologist. Second, it is a very complete survey of all 1,500 women who were registered at one point in time in Canada - and this will remain as an important contribution to the field. Lastly, it rigorously avoids singling out certain women and turning them into heroes. We could say that it is a fundamentally democratic look at the issue of gender in the profession. In the end, Quebec women architects emerge as distinct in a number of ways: the unusually high number of them who practise in the province, and the fact that they mothered a relatively large number of children as they kept their practices going. One is left wondering why is that so. There is no doubt that this book has opened many important questions concerning both architectural practice and the particularity of the Canadian experience - and that is a great contribution to us all.

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Writing a Politics of Perception: Memory, Holography, and Women Writers in Canada.

Dawn Thompson. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2000; ISBN 0802043658; 143 pages; \$35.00 (cloth).

Women's Movement: Escape as Transgression in North American Feminist Fiction. Heidi Slettedahl Macpherson. Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2000; ISBN 9042013621; 262 pages; \$36.00 US (paper).

Women's fiction in North America is increasingly characterized by forms of narrative experimentation, which are, at least in part, engagements with postmodern practices of fragmentation, intertextuality, and disruptions of generic categories. Both Dawn Thompson's *Writing a Politics of Perception: Memory, Holography, and Women Writers in Canada* and Heidi Slettedahl Macpherson's *Women's Movement: Escape as Transgression in North American Feminist Fiction* participate in the debates surrounding this relation between feminist and materialist politics and contemporary fictional practice.

Dawn Thompson's *Writing a Politics of Perception* is based on an intriguing and timely idea. Thompson uses Nicole Brossard's theory of the holographic memory to read five Canadian women's texts: Brossard's *Picture Theory*, Margaret Atwood's *Surfacing*, Marlene Nourbese Philip's *Looking for Livingstone*, Beatrice Culleton's *In Search of April Raintree*, and Régine Robin's *La Québécoise*. The introduction of holography beyond the bounds of Brossard's fictional/theoretical *Picture Theory* opens up a space for a discussion of Canadian women's writing which accounts for the politics of form as well as of content.

The early chapters of *Writing a Politics of Perception* outline the theory of holography and the holographic memory. Brossard's theory describes literature as a virtual world much like the illusory three-dimensional world of the hologram. Holography, she suggests, foregrounds the process of creating and re-creating illusions by fracturing an image and re-presenting it. This idea theorizes, as Thompson points out, not the process of representing the object, but the process of *perceiving* it. Thompson's rearticulation of holography is heavy with mathematical and

scientific formulae and discussions of the technology involved in the creation and projection of holograms. Ultimately, Brossard's evocative metaphor becomes a general, sometimes misplaced, image which joins together five loosely connected essays about Canadian women's writing. The argument falters when Thompson tries to apply this theory too broadly and the reader is left searching for connections between the texts she discusses. Thompson attempts to account for this by acknowledging the arbitrary nature of her choice of women and of Canada as her focus (7). Canada, she suggests, with its inherent divisions, historical connections with colonialism, post-colonialism and multiculturalism, and its "strong feminist literary presence" (7) provides a "complex and interesting" (7) ground for her exploration of this theory. This early acknowledgement of the complexity of the field and the necessarily political emphasis that is required to draw such disparate texts as *Picture Theory* and *In Search of April Raintree* together is, however, lost in the individual discussions which follow.

Thompson notes that holography "may be significant to the works of minority politics in general" (117). But the category "minority politics" is not as simple nor as definitive as Thompson's statements and her discussions of these texts seem to suggest. The notion of fragmentation as a political strategy may be, as she says, "transportable," but the limitations of this transportation, and the sources for this sort of discussion beyond the context of holographic technologies, are not adequately addressed. It is clear that Thompson has chosen the widely different texts that she discusses as a way of exploring the far-reaching applications of the holographic metaphor, and her choices work well as examples of the ways in which alterity is represented in contemporary Canadian women's writing. But because of this blurring of racial, cultural, linguistic and regional categories, the hologram is divorced from any inherently political application and instead has politics inscribed onto it through Thompson's reading.

The overall effect of *Writing a Politics of Perception*, then, is one of fragmentation and a lack of coherent overriding theme or agenda. This sense of discontinuity undermines Thompson's intelligent and thoughtful readings of the individual texts. The

sections on Atwood's *Surfacing* and Robin's *La Québécoise*, for example, provide original and provocative insights into the relationship between the form and content of these works and will prove to be valuable contributions to the existing criticism. In spite of its flaws, or perhaps because of them, *Writing a Politics of Perception* opens up a space for discussing alternative strategies for reading alterity and fragmentation in Canadian women's fiction.

In contrast, Heidi Slettedahl MacPherson positions her argument in *Women's Movement* clearly within the context of current debates about national identities, feminist politics, and postmodern theory and practice. She clearly outlines the ways in which a feminist political reading will position the large body of literature she discusses here in relation to, but distinct from, traditional representations of escape in fiction.

Women's Movement is structured more or less chronologically, beginning with a general discussion of "critical reactions to escape and paradigmatic male escape narratives" (19) in which Macpherson outlines the critical and generic definitions, terms, and contexts that will shape her argument. Part Two focusses on the paradigm of escape in women's narratives. The chapters in this section are divided chronologically: the narratives of the 1970s are characterized by an idealistic relation to the idea of escape as something that can and should be accomplished; the literature of the 1980s is characterized by a distrust of the idea of escape and an exploration of the paradoxes of such a notion for the feminist subject; and the works written during the 1990s focus on the unstable, fragmented nature of escape and are engaged in an active reworking of the preoccupation with wilderness and identity that shaped the fiction of the 1970s.

Within this framework, Macpherson provides an intriguing reading of the political and generic implications of the idea of escape in feminist fiction. Discussions of the "conventional" adventure novel have characterized this genre as a flight from women in which "Woman" is encoded as the social and the domestic. For Macpherson, writing a feminist reinscription of escape involves both an acknowledgment of and resistance to such traditional definitions and representations of escape. Women's scripts, she says, "are different; as female

themselves [women subjects] cannot escape the female. What they attempt to escape, perhaps, is what female connotes: mother, dependent, wife" (225). The ambiguous nature of escape for women, then, is the focus of *Women's Movement*: defining escape beyond traditional categorizations and resisting a reduction of the term to physical, generic, or political escape allows Macpherson to explore the ways in which notions of "freedom" which have shaped North American narratives are challenged and articulated in the women's fiction of the late twentieth century. In this sense, Macpherson's study is more than a project which inserts women into existing literary genres. Her work articulates the ways in which the paradigm of escape in contemporary North America is something that exists both within and beyond existing masculinist categories and representations of the paradigm.

In spite of over-articulated demarcations of the shape of the book and continued sign posts to the reader throughout, *Women's Movement* is a valuable contribution to the on-going debates surrounding contemporary North American feminist fiction. Macpherson's study invites readers to explore the ways in which these multi-faceted definitions of escape work in relation to national, feminist, and materialist political criticism through a complex, accessible and coherent argument.

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