

## Comptes rendus / Book Reviews

Annmarie Adams and Peta Tancred — *“Designing Women”: Gender and the Architectural Profession*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2000. Pp. xiii, 190.

A fascinating study of women architects in Canada from 1920 to 1992, *“Designing Women”* sheds new light on the experiences of those who have long been considered to be on the “margins” of this male-dominated profession. Using a variety of statistical sources, archival material, and interviews with architects (women and men) in Quebec, Ontario, and Western Canada, Annmarie Adams (an architectural historian) and Peta Tancred (a sociologist) challenge the masculinist perception held by the architectural profession and show how it minimizes and even overlooks the presence and contributions of its women members. In the process, they discover that women architects have reacted to the “pressures” of the profession with ingenuity and innovation in practice and designs, rather than being systematically relegated to more “feminine” work. While they are conscious that these women have had many obstacles to overcome upon entering this male bastion, the authors question the “subordination model” often used to describe women’s experiences in other professions. Instead, they present these architects “as active agents in their own careers, rather than as mute victims of an uncaring profession” (p. 11). In fact, the title is meant to reflect an interaction between the architectural profession and these women: “As the profession ‘designs’ women’s place within it, women simultaneously ‘design’ buildings and careers to resist the profession’s narrow definition of their role” (p. 3). This dynamic is also very much apparent in the structure of the book.

After comparing the career trajectories of the first generation of Canadian women architects with the experiences of other women professionals in North America, Britain, and Australia, Adams and Tancred devote two chapters to the architectural profession’s ideas of women. To define the scope of their research, they relied on women’s own identification as architects in the census rather than using the restrictive definition provided by provincial associations, which ignores the existence of “unregistered professionals” and “de-registered architects”, most of whom are women. Looking at the pioneering period (1920–1970), the authors conclude that it was easier for women to enter the profession in the Western provinces, an environ-

ment in need of professionals and open to new ideas and influences. They also make particular note of immigrant women's contribution to the field, both in terms of numbers and as role models for future generations of women architects. However, these women were rarely featured in the architectural press. When they did appear in the pages of the *RAIC* [Royal Architectural Institute of Canada] *Journal*, the major professional magazine in the country, they were mostly portrayed as "helpers, in roles that finished or embellished work initiated by men" (p. 43). Associated with housing projects, interiors, and historic preservation, women architects seemed to play a complementary role on the sidelines while the "important" work was done by men. In these images, women's contributions were often ignored because their activities did not fit within the boundaries set by the profession.

In the next two chapters, Adams and Tancred redress this situation by focusing on women's ideas of the architectural profession. The interviews with architects from the post-pioneering period (1970–1992) bring to the forefront issues and patterns of innovation that the profession has tended to overlook because it is centred on members of provincial associations. These women architects talked about the difficulties of combining family responsibilities and professional commitment and their lack of power and authority in the workplace, but they refused to play a subordinate role or to leave the profession. Instead, they chose to modify their professional responsibilities by seeking alternative employment as city planners, teachers, and civil servants, all the while identifying themselves as architects on the basis of their training. Contrary to the popular image displayed in the architectural press, most of them were not making a career out of designing kitchens, and this was especially true in Quebec, where projects such as Place Bonaventure and Expo 67 offered women unprecedented employment opportunities in large-scale planning and construction. The authors are careful to compare the experiences of "de-registered" women and men architects, and they conclude that issues of time management and family responsibilities rarely account for men's decision to leave provincial associations. Women are still responsible for much of the housework and care-giving, but instead of abandoning their careers they have extended the boundaries of the profession to maintain a balance between public and private responsibilities.

In the last chapter, Adams and Tancred elaborate on the distinct career trajectories and experiences of women architects in Quebec, which highlight differences that are evident throughout the book. While Quebec was the last province to accept women within its provincial association, women have since entered the profession in greater proportions than their colleagues in the rest of the country and have practised in a variety of fields. This particular pattern developed during the rapid pace of social transformation occurring in the 1960s and 1970s, which, combined with "major self-affirmatory projects" (p. 118) requiring architectural expertise, created a context favourable for experimentation and a greater role for professional women. They also point to a tendency on the part of women in Quebec to identify with the architectural profession based on their educational training as architects, rather than their membership in the provincial association. This definition is more inclusive of women as it blurs the line between "the 'official' and 'unofficial' architectural domains" (p. 119).

Very specialized in its subject, this is the history of a small group of women and is not representative of working women's experiences in all occupations. However, what emerges from this study is the importance for researchers to distance themselves from the masculinist framework of any profession or male-dominated domain in order to include women who would otherwise be left on the "margins". Only by rejecting the categories of observation and analysis offered by the profession itself can we truly see the roles and contributions of women, and we may even discover that they are not automatically in subordination. In this sense, "*Designing Women*" challenges the traditional view of professional women, which focuses on discrimination and marginalization, by showing active agents applying their architectural knowledge in alternative fields and pushing the boundaries of the profession set by men in the nineteenth century. This book not only adds to the growing literature on professional women in Canada: it offers a valuable conceptual framework for other studies of women in the professions (or any other male-dominated field).

Adams and Tancred also remind researchers to refrain from assigning an inferior value to Quebec's experiences on the basis of its "distinct character" or "lateness". The usual line of questioning about what accounts for these differences implies that "other provinces provide a desirable standard for various 'achievements'" (p. 115). While they are not denying the validity of comparative history, the authors believe that researchers should rather try to explain the specific pattern that emerged in Quebec and study it for itself without systematically comparing it to the rest of the country. Such an approach would limit the interpretation of differences as anomalies or problems.

Very rich in quantitative data and qualitative material, this book offers a pleasant and quick read for academics, professional women, and members of the architectural community; most importantly, it constitutes a significant contribution to feminist and interdisciplinary scholarship.

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Robert E. Babe — *Canadian Communication Thought: Ten Foundational Writers*.  
Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2000. Pp. x, 448.

Defining intellectual history, the saying goes, is akin to nailing jelly to a wall. It defies easy description and categorization. The same is true for communication studies, a discipline whose recent vitality owes as much to its amorphous nature as to its alignment with digital-age New Media and the Information Society. The 1990s were comparatively good years for communications in Canadian universities; high enrolments meant larger programmes or new ones altogether. In its current state, communication studies counts many fields: mass communication, cultural studies, business communication, telecommunications, and organizational and interpersonal communication, to name a few (indeed, one department in the United States boasts a course in "intra-personal" communication). It is, in part, as an artful and propitious