

Kemble, Roger. *The Canadian City St John's to Victoria: A Critical Commentary*. Montreal: Harvest House, 1989. Pp. xiii, 220. Illustrations, appendices. \$19.95. Paper

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[Aller au sommaire du numéro](#)

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well. His main concern is, perhaps as it must be, to disentangle the ways in which the MTHC responded to changes in the political and policy environment. The status of the Company was called into question several times, and its story is, in large part, one of adaptation and survival. McMahon is especially good at setting the scene for the Company's birth. It is probably here that he drew most heavily upon the acknowledged assistance of John Bacher, a colleague in the Metro Archives whose PhD thesis is the definitive history of federal housing policy up to the 1940s. McMahon says rather less about the administrative policies of the Company and very little, except by implication, about what it meant (and means) to live in Housing Company projects. He notes that, after an initial phase of low-rise construction in Metro's suburbs, when the Company began to build in the City it was forced by land costs to experiment more and more with high rise slabs. He is aware of the social implications of this decision. A grainy reproduction of his own photograph, showing a man with a cane walking home to his unit in one of the larger slabs, marked the frontispiece. But in the text he passes over such issues lightly.

It should not be surprising if the balance is weighted a little. The impetus for the volume came from the Company itself, which wished to produce a commemorative history. Such volumes can become mere catalogues of achievement. *Metro's Housing Company* is far more than that: it marks the real accomplishments of the Company by setting them in their political context, and shows where difficult decisions had to be made that some might regret. It needs a map, ideally one keyed to the list of projects in appendix 6, and the illustrations of people and projects might usefully have been referred to specifically in the text. But there is a good deal of useful material here for the history of public and social housing in Toronto which, one day, someone should write.

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Reiss, Steven A. *City Games: The Evolution of American Urban Society and the Rise of Sports. Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1989. Pp. xii, 332. Tables, maps, illustrations, index.*

City Games is a very badly written book about a very interesting topic: the relationships between the development of American cities and the development of organized sports. The book is valuable to anyone trying to understand or teach American sports history because it is a compendium of most of the important developments in American spectator sports. It has the added value that the sports are discussed particularly as they have related to urban ethnic groups.

Steven A. Reiss, who is professor of history at Northeastern Illinois University and editor of the *Journal of Sport History*, has organized the book around important questions in sports history. The focus of his discussion is on the development of cities and urban culture between 1870 and 1960. In that period, Reiss reviews in detail the relationship of sports to urban social structure, to racial and ethnic groups, and to urban spaces. Organized youth sports, the development and commercialization of professional spectator sports, and the relationship of sports to urban politics, organized crime, and American business are all discussed at length. A final chapter examines sports in what Reiss calls "the Suburban Era" from 1945 to 1980.

There is, however, little clear analysis of any of the questions the book covers. Reiss takes little care to portray human beings, individually or in the aggregate, who are subject to human passions, desires, habits, abilities or limitations and who actually lived in the past Reiss covers. The writing is imprecise, repetitious, and full of vague, ill-

defined phrases and neologisms — for examples, "zone of emergence" is used a multitude of times, "sports" and "sport" are used interchangeably, and the following sentence opens a concluding paragraph: "Urbanization's impact upon sport in the radial city was particularly crucial because of changing spatial relations."

Reiss expects his often misused words to carry substantive historical content or precise analytical meaning, but he rarely provides the content or the meaning. In his conclusion, for example, he writes: "The importance of athletics to city folk was stressed by the widely accepted positive sporting creed which by the turn of the century had become the conventional wisdom. Athletics and, in particular, team sports were regarded as symbols of democracy and as integrative mechanisms which taught traditional small-town values to urban youth. Many agencies tried to implement the ideology to Americanize and assimilate urban boys, especially impoverished second-generation inner-city lads . . ." There is no further definition of "sporting creed" or "ideology," no explanation of "integrative mechanisms" or "assimilation," and no description of any "agencies" or of the real people who "stressed" or "regarded." It is a shame a book so full of potential interest, which brings up so much of importance about its subject, was so inadequately edited.

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Kemble, Roger. *The Canadian City St John's to Victoria: A Critical Commentary. Montreal: Harvest House, 1989. Pp. xiii, 220. Illustrations, appendices. \$19.95. Paper.*

Books on the topic of Canadian cities, particularly those that set out to address the physical, phenomenal environment, are not common. The publication of such a text is therefore welcome, sight unseen.

Kemble's book is a kind of documentary, idiosyncratic and prodigious, of public spaces and development trends in our major cities from "St John's to Victoria." The general tenor of the text develops around the view that our cities are, to all intents and purposes, uninhabitable.

The writer includes all the contemporary issues of urban crisis, such as the fragmentation of the city by the channels of transportation, the triumph of the market over art, the "plastic" values of the consumerist society, and so on.

Unfortunately, the text is more of a scold than a critical piece. One cannot argue with Mr. Kemble's desire to draw attention to the collective guilt of our society (as any) for the quality of the built environment. Winston Churchill noted once that "We shape our buildings, and they shape us." It is disappointing that this *mea culpa*, vaguely flagellatory theme is peevishly and ambiguously overworked, part of a rambling, rather self-indulgent conversational style, careless in its organization and terminology. The author eschews scholarship and history in his introductory statement, but dabbles derivatively in both. Major architectural factors in the making of a resonant urbanity, such as the iconography of buildings and their settings, pop up suddenly to be dealt with chattily and superficially before moving on to the next item (e.g. 'palette').

I don't argue with the inclusion of these references, but only with the inadequacy of the description and the weak and unsustainable connections with his theme. In historic terms, the references are sometimes written in the "gee-whiz, golly" style of journalism that by random editing, manipulates truth or essence. "When the Regent wanted glory, hang the expense, he built his own Royal Mile . . ." (John Nash and 19th century London, pp 29, 30).

There is, however, admirable effort in this text. Certainly to this reader's knowledge, no one

else has personally undertaken this coast to coast journey with the same purpose. The difficulty is not with enthusiasm, but with over-ambition, considering the scale of the text, the medium of illustration and a research team of one. The lack of a conceptual order — e.g., typological, or a rigorous east-west or west-east sequential chronicle — diminishes the book's potential as a serious reference. One is taken from Place d'Armes in Montreal to Toronto's Nathan Phillips Square on the same page without any apparent logic behind the juxtaposition.

The laborious mode of tiny drawings taken from a crow's 360 degree eye view do not advance the cause of the public realm as something to be understood by a grounded human being. These sometimes very strange drawings — especially those with very high towers leaning out of the picture north, south, east and west — sent me back to my well-thumbed *Design of Cities*, Edmund Bacon's admirable text, illustrated diversely and most effectively by drawing, analytical sketch, and photograph, as appropriate. Most awesome of all, the superb 360 perspective of Todi by J.H. Aronson, using multiple vanishing points. This technique allows Aronson to hold onto a sense of normative viewing, whereas the axonometric projection into four directions leads to distortion. Either the number of sketches should have been reduced in order to refine the technique, or a more conventional axonometric, accompanied by judicious photographs showing not only the space viewed from a human perspective, but also showing some *people* in the space.

Some of these painstaking sketches are more successful than others. Figure 35, a sketch of Montreal's adjacent Place du Canada and Dominion Square, works well to show the outline landscape plan, the shift between the two in the city's grid, building masses and even a sense of their architectural articulation. The reader could wish for some 1970s Gordon Cullen "Townscape" drawings or photos for some sense of what this translates into as a ground level experience. This is

where social transaction takes place (plus or minus) after all. The success of the architecture of place is judged by its ability to accommodate or generate social exchange of some kind.

The author simply tries to cover too much territory. Given the superficial and unoriginal descriptions of the well-known spaces of Toronto and Ottawa, he might have done better to focus on the lesser known cities and documented these. I was interested in the courtyard buildings of St John's, dubbed "lucky horsehoes" by the author, and would have appreciated a more substantial analysis of this city, including photographs.

In the final chapter, "Tending the City," he focuses on the importance of the city not just as an economic resource, but as a human one, and the need to heal its current wounds. The analogy of planting it as carefully as a garden is an appealing way of presenting the case for cultural and architectural nurturing, as opposed to unlimited financial exploitation.

Problematic with the "visionary" propositions that follow are the 70s urban design massing diagrams and banal forms. Mr. Kemble refers frequently to the Canadian penchant for adorning cities with imported, pre-digested images from "abroad," but is vague in his own alternatives. From Gaile McGregor's "Wacusta Syndrome" he draws the following case: "When we express our uninhibited selves, our urban spaces reflect a theory of cabin fever. She postulates an interesting theory . . . and should provoke us to take a new look at ourselves and encourage us to rethink an architectural idiom more relevant to our needs [than importations]." No example is offered to support the spatial potential of cabin fever, and in his own proposals later on in the text — e.g., infill on the Place d'Youville, Quebec (f. 137), the tiny illustration shows a remarkably detailed facade that looks like the very pseudo-stuff (in this case, vernacular) he decries throughout. Alas, Cullen did it better in the "Townscapes" of the late 60s.

Literature is badly needed in this field, but I can't immediately identify a bibliographical niche for this book. However, the Cooks' Tour approach and a certain readability may well stimulate the reader to look more thoughtfully at our cities.

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