Gendered Space and Social Conformity in Selected Modern Architectural Photographs


Two photographs from the Panda Architectural Photography Collection (figs. 1 and 2) provide a context for the current discussion of gender and space in architecture. Offering a rich contrast both in terms of imagery and connotations, these two images of mid-twentieth-century modernist buildings in the Toronto area form part of the vast collection (some 500,000 images) from the Canadian Architectural Archives’ Panda Collection. Figure 1 shows a 1964 view of the John B. Parkin Associates-designed Terminal One of Toronto Airport; figure 2 shows Yorkdale Shopping Centre, also in 1964, which opened to great excitement and general acclaim in that year. Both the airport and the mall became regarded as iconic examples of modern architecture. In the airport, purposeful, business-suited male figures embark for a flight. The photograph of the shopping centre, by contrast, seems characterized by indolent leisure and ease. When considering these photographs, is it appropriate to consider the spaces they depict as “gendered” in some way? If so, did the photographer intend any such connotations? And what underlying ethos or value system do the photographs seem to reinforce? In responding to these questions, I propose to explore gender and space, considering architectural photographs that seem to reinforce gender-specific behaviour and encourage stereotypical gender roles. Examining these photographs may provide insights that one might extend to other images within the collection, as well as within modernist Canadian architectural photography more generally.
METHODOLOGICAL CONSIDERATIONS

A substantial literature discusses the "intersections of gender and modernism" and "the ways in which the spaces of modernity reflect (and create) the spaces of our contemporary lives." As Victoria Rosner and Elizabeth Birmingham argue in the context of a review article considering several recent publications that address the subject of space and gender, modernity shaped the ways that we inhabit spaces, all of which are gendered, raced, and classed. The authors showcase studies that promote the "recovery of women in modernism to focus on the ways in which modernity shaped the spaces, both public and private, in which gender was enacted, and the notion of 'woman' was reshaped by the experience of modernity." Such studies provide a methodological framework for those who might wish to subject modernist architectural photography to the same kinds of questions about space, gender, and modernity.

With respect to gender more specifically, some authors have focused on gender and space (do certain socialized and ritualized activities specific to one gender only occur in certain spaces or places?); others have analyzed gender in space (do certain forms or places possess qualities that would lead one to call them "gendered" in one way or another?); still others have written on the sexuality of architecture (do certain forms or spaces recall, encourage, or proscribe sexual behaviour, whether heterosexual or homosexual?). In this essay, I concentrate on the first category—gender and space.

With respect to images in magazines, Katharina Lindner has compared and contrasted the depictions of women in advertisements contained in general interest and fashion magazines from 1955 to 2002, with a view to exploring the ways that "images also act as socializing agents that influence our attitudes, values, beliefs, and behaviours." She shows that fashion magazines contain more gender stereotypes than general-interest magazines. The character of the depictions hardly changed over the decades that Lindner examined, despite the movement. Her point is not simply to demonstrate that these stereotypes exist in popular media (although there is value in demonstrating this, particularly due to her exacting sampling methodology), but also to illustrate the effects that these stereotypes exert on people. She writes:

"These images also act as socializing agents that influence our attitudes, values, beliefs, and behaviours. ... Research suggests that exposure to gender role stereotypes in advertising often influences gender-stereotyped attitudes. ... Results of a study ... revealed that people, after being exposed to advertisements that depict women in stereotypical roles, showed significantly more negative attitudes toward women, especially concerning their managerial skills, than after being exposed to advertisements that depict women in professional roles that require such skills. These results suggest that there is indeed a relationship between the way women are portrayed in advertising and people's ideas about how women are supposed to behave and the roles they are supposed to occupy within society."

Lindner concludes that women are often shown in subservient roles, dependent on men, and in attitudes and activities associated with leisure rather than with work.

Other writers have examined the means by which gender stereotypes were promoted in Canadian media. For example, images that seem to promote gender-specific behaviours, sometimes subtly, sometimes overtly, are encountered in Canadian architectural publications of the period. In Canadian architectural magazines from the 1950s and early 1960s, men typically are involved with gainful work, while women often are shown in poses related to their personal lives. The images reveal clear stereotypical gender divisions. Rhodri Windsor-Liscombe, for example, considers the gender stereotypes in postwar western Canadian architectural magazines. He argues that such stereotypes re-emerged "through the popular promotion of modernism despite its claims to enhance the status of women." Since these are precisely the same kinds of differences I observe in the photographs under examination in this essay, it is helpful to be aware of Lindner's and Windsor-Liscombe's arguments.

Christopher Dummitt's highly original and absorbing book, The Manly Modern: Masculinity in Postwar Canada, scrutinizes gender stereotypes of masculinity in post-WWII Canada. He argues that postwar modernity masked an underlying social conservatism. Men reasserted traditional patriarchal roles swept aside during the war. Although Dummitt's book looks specifically at Vancouver (and even more specifically at case-studies of masculine imagery within that city), it can be gleaned for more general insights. Among the most important of these, certainly germane to the present essay, is Dummitt's contention that the "manly modern" as he terms it came about because the "years after the Second World War saw a backlash against the threat of gender uncertainty and ambiguity that had been brought about by depression and war." That is, women temporarily gained a degree of independence because they were needed in the work force during the Second World War; following the war, and as a backlash,
the idea of the manly modern provided an explanation of men’s and women’s differences and a powerful justification for inequality. It contained a neat logic of gender distinctions, presenting men’s leading roles in the public sphere as a natural outgrowth of basic proclivities, which was not to say that women could not work but simply that men were better suited by reason of their ingrown capabilities to do many of the most valuable kinds of work. In an age ostensibly devoted to democratic family life and when many of the public signposts of gender difference such as voting restrictions had been removed, the manly modern ideal was appropriately contemporary.¹⁴

Dummitt convincingly demonstrates just how wholeheartedly postwar society bought into this idea of the manly modern. The manly modern exuded an air of quiet authority; its avatars were men such as Lorne Greene, whose voice resonated with assurance and confidence.¹⁵ Even though many men initially benefited from their “manly man” roles, by the 1960s all these gender stereotypes were widely questioned and then widely (if temporarily) overthrown. As Dummitt writes,

The main difference between the men of the 1940s and 1950s and those who came later lay in the fact that the earlier men did not turn their concerns into an all-out critique of manly modernism or of the modernist project more generally. Postwar men, even those who felt undermined by manly modernism’s contradictory effects, still had much to gain by supporting its idea of gendered authority.¹⁶

This aura of “gendered authority” seems to be present in the photographs under examination.

PANDA COLLECTION OF ARCHITECTURAL PHOTOGRAPHY

Panda Photography was one of the few Canadian commercial photography firms devoted to modern architecture. Paul Rockett, Lockwood Haiti, and Hugh Robertson—Royal Canadian Air Force photographers, all—started Panda Photography in 1946.¹⁷ By 1960, Robertson (1917-2004) owned the firm as the sole proprietor. Although he had technical training, he did not initially have an eye for modern architecture. He credited modernist architects themselves with supporting him to photograph buildings to represent the iconic modernist images that they desired. Specifically, “Robertson studied under John B. and John C. Parkin: he offered to take photographs, bring his prints for criticism, and redo the shots if requested. The Parkins were obliged to pay only for what they liked. John C. Parkin was the critical one,” said Robertson. “He taught me the most. He lent me all the magazines […] He wanted stark and clean.”¹⁸

Stark and clean became the hallmarks of Robertson’s work. With photographs characterized by clarity and technical excellence, Panda Associates played a central role in documenting the built environment of post-World War II Canada, particularly Toronto and its vicinity. Some of the architects whose work Robertson photographed include: Arthur Erickson, Raymond Moriyama, John B. Parkin Associates, as well as the Canadian work of internationally acclaimed figures such as I.M. Pei, Mies van der Rohe, Viljo Revell, and Skidmore, Owings and Merrill. From 1946 to 1992, Robertson photographed a wide variety of building types, from commercial, corporate, educational, exposition, government, and industrial, to religious and residential. Although the structures he photographed are located primarily in Toronto and vicinity, he also photographed projects located in several other Canadian cities as well as limited international sites. Robinson typically included interior as well as exterior views, construction photographs, competition drawings and models. He also photographed culturally noteworthy events.
such as Expo '67. The collection thus provides a detailed portrait of twentieth-century Canada as well as a visual record of five decades of Canadian architectural and cultural heritage. Robertson died in 2004, by which time he had pursued photography for sixty years and had won more awards than any other photographer in Canada.\(^19\)

Hugh Robertson and the Panda Collection bear comparison with a select group of American architectural photographers. Among these are Hedrich-Blessing, in Chicago, founded in 1929, and still extant. In 2000 the Chicago Historical Society (where some three hundred thousand images of the firm's work are now housed) celebrated seventy years of their work. A monograph on the firm's work was published in the same year. The two other most celebrated American architectural photographers of the twentieth century were Chicago-born and New York-trained Ezra Stoller (1915-2004), and Julius Shulman (1910-). Stoller worked with many of the twentieth century's leading architects, including Gordon Bunshaft, Marcel Breuer, Richard Meier, I.M. Pei, Paul Rudolph, Eero Saarinen, Mies van der Rohe, and Frank Lloyd Wright. He was particularly known for having completed extensive photographic essays of single buildings. As for Shulman, that adopted Californian began his architectural career in 1936, when he initiated a long and fruitful collaboration with Richard Neutra. Eventually, Shulman worked with an extraordinary who's who of California modernist architects and designers, including Charles and Ray Eames, Pierre Koenig, Rudolf Schindler, and Frank Lloyd Wright. Both Stoller and Shulman are known for having interpreted modern architecture rather than simply documenting it. Shulman is also known for having constructed iconic images of modernism that are stunningly if austerely beautiful and powerfully evocative, such as the Pierre Koenig-designed Case Study House #22, Los Angeles, of 1960.\(^20\)

With the exception of these notable individuals, architectural photography has received relatively little scholarly attention. Architectural photography specific to Canada has received even less. For example, Robert Elwall's 2004 book, *Building With Light: The International History of Architectural Photography*, while highlighting work in Great Britain, the United States, Europe, and Japan, contains no Canadian content.\(^21\) However, an extensive discussion of Canadian modernist architectural photographers may be found in Rhodri Windsor-Liscombe's 1997 publication *The New Spirit: Modern Architecture in Vancouver* .\(^22\) Adele Freedman discusses architectural photographers in her introduction to this work. Focusing mainly on west-coast photographers, Freedman discusses the work of Graham Warrington, Selwyn Pullan, Henry Kalen (from Winnipeg), as well as Robertson.\(^23\)

**CASE STUDIES**

In the photograph of the Toronto Airport waiting room (fig. 1), a group of business-
suited male figures may be seen. They are viewed from a distance, imparting an air of anonymity yet sameness to them. The 1964 interior photograph of the then-newly opened Yorkdale Shopping Centre (fig. 2) is quite different. In this photograph, a mother and her child look at a fountain while several other shoppers compare purchases. The height and spaciousness of Yorkdale's interior (at twenty-seven feet high it was and remains anomalously spacious for a shopping centre), combined with the provision of pleasant amenities such as a fountain, make the space pleasant and inviting to linger in; it seems almost languorous. Abundant and tall plants impart a luxuriant, even oasis-like, imagery. An aura of relaxed repose predominates: the generous, vaulted ceiling, abundant, flowing, water, luxuriant plants, and calm, peaceful atmosphere seem other-worldly somehow, definitely distanced from the hustle and bustle of the business world. While not quite cluttered, the space is nevertheless much more diverse than the airport photograph, which has the precision and repeated forms of a military phalanx. By contrast, the people in the Yorkdale photograph seem haphazardly and casually dispersed. One might even argue that the imagery of Yorkdale's is reminiscent of historical conceptions of paradise—particularly water and plants. And if this is a paradise, in it the women are domesticated. They are, in a word, safe, spoken for. Taken. Men are present, but they seem to be privileged visitors to the essentially female realm of shopping. Indeed, the image seems to reinforce domestic virtues of fertility and the pleasures of being a heterosexual couple in a world where those attributes brought privilege and approbation.

The airport is a place of work. People are traveling somewhere important, presumably to work. There are no children here, no connotations of holidays. By contrast, the shopping centre is purely about leisure. It is not so much domestic space as domesticated space. Everyone here is allowed to disengage, as it were, from the real world, something that is made clear by the paradisiacal imagery of plants, unreal architecture, and water. The photographs reveal strikingly contrasted, gendered spaces, thus reinforcing stereotypically male and female roles.

Are what I am taking to be as gender differences simply coincidences, or is there something deeper going on? This question cannot be answered definitively (and I admit that my choice of images is selective and could lead others to draw different conclusions from them). Nevertheless, perhaps the photographs can be mined for information on what they reveal about the society that produced them. To go further, perhaps they model what normative behaviour was expected in a time when Canadian society was in a considerable degree of flux. In other words, might these photographs be considered as instructional? They model the kinds of behaviours that were expected in new forms of building types. Both these spaces were new to post-World War II Canada—the massive and impressive international airport; the equally huge, multi-purpose shopping centre. The suburbs were only then being developed. Patterns of work that would characterize postwar Toronto were similarly crystallized. And while it is true that many immigrants from many different countries of origin were thronging to Toronto after World War II, bringing with them a greater diversity of urban forms and lifestyles than is suggested (or even recognized) by these photographs, this diversity is in no way reflected in the architectural imagery of these photographs. Instead, a prevailing sameness was being promoted—not only an international style in architecture but of life itself. So in these photographs, the airport is clearly modeled as a place for male work, whereas the shopping centre is modeled as a place for female leisure.

Is there something particularly Canadian about these images of modernism? As opposed to the powerful, dream-like images of the American photographer Julius Shulman—whose modernist architectural pictures are clearly about wish-fulfillment and represent both women and men as autonomous beings seeking pleasure—these Canadian modernist photographs convey values such as conventionality, predictability, conformity, duty. They seem to tell us that there is only one norm to aspire to, and reinforce values prevalent in the culture that produced them—in particular, a safe, domesticated image of women, as contrasted with an adventurous, out-in-the-world image of men.

And if someone happened to find him- or herself outside this bifurcated model? If a person were non-white, non-heterosexual, non-partnered, non-white-collar-income, non-child-producing? At least to judge from the photographs, there is no room at all in the Toronto modernist vision for such people. They would be relegated to the margins of society. Or rather: those who lived otherwise were not so much critiqued as ignored: they were covered by a wave of conformity. These photographs, in other words, are exclusive and conservative, telling viewers, subtly and not so subtly, to behave, to toe the line, to buy what was advertised, not to step outside the box. The choice was to either go underground or conform. And there is something quintessentially and conservatively Canadian about behaving. “Peace, order, and good government,” the old catch phrase of the
British North America Act, comes readily to mind. These are highly ordered photographs, produced for an equally highly ordered society.

Certain other architectural photographs from the period seem likewise to reinforce gender-specific analysis of male versus female behaviour urban spaces. For example, Canadian Architect published four issues on “The Urban Scene” in the summer of 1957. July is referred to as a look at the “woman’s world” (shopping, entertainment, health problems, education). August is the “man’s city” (office, factory).25 In the context of these four articles, two photographs of the urban scene taken by architect-photographer Brian Shawcroft are particularly striking. Trained in art and architecture in the UK, in 1956 Shawcroft joined the staff of the progressive Toronto architecture firm of Page & Steele.26 He contributed freelance photo-essays to Canadian Architect, such as these evocative views of urban life. In the final part of a four-part series on the urban scene published in September, Shawcroft’s photographs showed a series of views of ordinary people on the streets of downtown Toronto (figs. 3 and 4). The untitled photographs, part of an extensive photo-essay entitled “A Final Need: The Diverse Region,” depict men and women inhabiting distinctly gendered spaces. Figure 3 shows women window-shopping. The caption refers to “an air of glamour, excitement, rarity.” The women stop to admire the objects in the window, seemingly absorbed by what they see.

By contrast (fig. 4), the men—an anonymous group of them, similarly attired, of a similar age—walk purposefully down the nighttime street. We see them from behind: their faces are invisible to the onlooker. Their anonymity is deliberate yet one might imagine them as a group of office-workers stepping out on the town after a long day at work. In contrast to the women’s air of repose, the men stride actively along the street. It is as if they own it. They don’t seem overtly menacing (although it is important not to generalize concerning how one group might “read” these images as threatening or not), yet clearly someone walking the other way would have to give way to them. The caption refers to “lights, movement, twenty-four hours-a-day bustle, each contrib[uting] to this unique urban atmosphere and [being] an essential part of it.” Above the men is a clock: it has just struck midnight. It could well be the same street as seen in the photograph of the women shopping. The time of day makes it different. That is, the women inhabit the space during daylight; the men inhabit it at night. Just as in the Panda photographs already considered, the “men’s world” is active, governed by a schedule: clocks, men about to board a scheduled plane flight, men out until late, “working” on their amusements. In such a purposeful view of life, they might be contrasted to the nineteenth-century concept of the “flâneur,” or boulevardier—someone who strolls. These are not strollers; they are striders. These men are part of time, in control of it. The men’s stance is active. In contrast, the women’s world is inactive. Their stance is passive. There is no clock to govern their schedule; presumably there is no schedule to govern.

CONCLUSIONS

In my introduction, I asked whether the photographs of the Toronto Airport and the Yorkdale Shopping Centre are gendered in some way, whether the photographer intended such connotations, and, if so, what underlying ethos or value system the photographs reinforce. The evidence presented here, which was broadened to include examples from Canadian Architect, suggests that one might consider Canadian modernist architectural photographs as reinforcing gender stereotypes. The ethos or underlying value systems being promoted were essentially conservative, reinforcing mainstream culture and its values.

As to whether the architectural photographers (either in Canadian Architect or in the Panda photographs) consciously and individually constructed photographs so as to convey a message of conformity and gender specificity, I cannot say, and I rather doubt it. I am perfectly prepared to accept that Shawcroft in particular (more so than Robertson) strove simply to document city life through photojournalism, à la Henri Cartier-Bresson (1908-2004), the French photographer considered to be the father of modern photojournalism. Certainly, however, client, photographer, and magazine collaborated in such a way as to emphasize values of conformity and conservatism, rather than any adventurous or experimental values. It seems possible that the photographer may have unconsciously selected what his clients wanted to see—predictable images that would make modernism palatable to a wider audience. Or perhaps this was simply what he saw, and the gender differentiation was just a fact.

Does modernist architecture itself have anything to do in reinforcing the theme of social conformity and gender difference? I prefer to see modernism in architecture as an innocent bystander in all this. Modernist architecture in other centres was an agent of social change, a means of fostering freedom of choice through new ways of living. Modernist architecture in Toronto has been subverted to reinforce a conservative, essentially static, view of society. In 1959, Eugène Ionesco published Rhinocéros, a denunciatory critique of conformity and totalitarianism.27 Although Ionesco was commenting on
the post-World-War II-Europe, perhaps his vision was also true to some extent of Canada. Canadian modernist architecture, at least seen through Panda's lens, reinforces a static vision of society. One might further argue that this vision is also both anachronistic and nostalgic, in that the gender-differentiated, racially homogeneous world that the photographs present of Canadian society was already in the process of dissolution and morphological adaptation.

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NOTES

1. Thanks are due to Linda Fraser and Rebecca Lesser, with whom I curated an exhibition entitled Mid-Century Icons: Architectural Photography from the Panda Collection (Toronto: Eric Arthur Gallery, 2007). Discussions with them about the development and practice of architectural photography during the modern period helped me frame the argument for this essay. I would also like to thank Rhodri Windsor-Liscombe, who read and offered comments on an earlier version of this article. Thanks are also due to Karly Sawatzky, assistant curator, Canadian Architectural Archives, who arranged for the Panda photographs for this article. Dave Brown, photographer with Libraries and Cultural Resources, University of Calgary, did the copy photography from Canadian Architect.

2. The Panda Collection forms part of the Canadian Architectural Archives at the University of Calgary. The collection includes examples from the leading modernist firms in Canada, from the 1940s through the 1980s. For a general description of the Canadian Architectural Archives, see: [http://cca.ucalgary.ca/]; for a searchable database of the Panda Collection (more than 8000 images), see: [http://contentdm.ucalgary.ca/cdm4/search.php?CISOROOT=/pan], (accessed August 15, 2008).


6. Id.: 209.

7. For sexuality and architecture, see: «Preface», In Colonia, Beatriz (ed.), 1992, Sexuality and Space, Princeton (NJ), Princeton University School of Architecture, n.p. Although writings on feminism and queer space with respect to modern architecture are rapidly proliferating, these topics fall beyond the scope of the present contribution. See, however, Research on Place and Space: Place and Space in Feminism, Sexuality, and Queer Studies, as cited at: [http://pegasus.cc.ucf.edu/~janzb/place/gender.htm], (accessed August 15, 2008). See also «Themed Book Reviews: Gender and Architecture, Landscape Architecture, and Planning», compiled by Joni M. Palmer in Gender, Place and Culture, vol. 14, no. 4, August 2007, p. 499-511.


9. Ibid.


14. Ibid.

15. Canadian-born actor Lorne Greene (1915-1987) was known for his resonant voice and masculine presence, particularly in television programs, including the long-running western Bonanza and the science fiction program Battlestar Galactica.


17. They met while serving in the 39th Reconnaissance Wing of the Royal Canadian Air Force during World War II.


19. For an obituary, see the Globe and Mail, December 22, 2004, Karly Sawatzky informed me about this obituary.


24. Yorkdale was a remarkable architectural achievement. Featuring more than one hundred stores and services spread out over one million leasable square feet, it initiated a new form of semi-public space.

25. I am indebted to Rebecca Lesser, the assistant curator for the exhibition Mid-Century Icons, for having called to my attention these thematic issues of Canadian Architect, which are described in the May 1957 issue, p. 30. I did not find, however, that the editorial content in these issues spoke directly to men's versus women's worlds.

26. Brian Shawcroft, a member of the American Institute of Architects, was born in Nottingham, England, moved to Toronto in 1956 to join the staff of Page & Steele and subsequently moved to the United States, where he completed his master's degree in architecture at MIT and Harvard University in 1960. In 1971, he established the firm Shawcroft-Taylor and taught architectural design and writing for many years at North Carolina State University (NCSU). A committed modernist, in 1991 he received the Kamphoener Prize, which honors architects who are dedicated to modernist architecture, and was named after a feisty former dean at North Carolina State University who had personally hired Shawcroft to the NC faculty in 1960. For more details, see: [http://www.trianglemodernisthouses.com/kamphoener.html], (accessed August 15, 2008).