

Reviews

Recensions

Martha Langford and Johanne Sloan,
eds.

Photogenic Montreal: Activisms and Archives in a Post-industrial City

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Photogenic Montreal: Activisms and Archives in a Post-industrial City is simultaneously reflective and reflexive—both a process of thinking about events of the past and a reaction to events taking place in the present. The editors, Martha Langford and Johanne Sloane, have drawn together a collection of essays that reflect deeply on the history of a place—namely, Montreal—and the ways that collecting institutions and collective memories construct, share, and circulate those histories through the photograph. Yet, each contribution to the volume is a particular reflexive response to both the authors' own relationships, and those of the photographs and photographers they write about, to Montreal as a city in transformation. The attribute of being photogenic,



or being attractive and well-suited to being photographed, encompasses this reflectivity and reflexivity in the ways that Montreal as a photogenic site is “able to thrive within a range of photographic practices and relationships, while resonating across architectural history and theory, urban planning, community building, civic pride, and civil unrest” (6).

More than an examination of the relationship of photography and architecture to place, *Photogenic Montreal* positions the city itself as the subject of reflection and as an active site of work in which photographs become records of progress, transformation, decay, and preservation; tools of activism and persuasion; and visual manifestations of histories, communities, and imaginations. As the editors remark: “Montreal is a perfect example of utopic/dystopic development, a

history in which photography has often played a dual role, as both visual record and work of art” (5). Indeed, Montreal has a storied and engaged history of photographic practice and scholarship centered on the city as subject. Writings such as Michel Lessard's *Montréal au XX^e siècle. Regards de photographes* (1995), Pierre Dessureault's *Regards échanges: Le Québec, 1939–1970/Exchanging Views: Quebec, 1939–1970* (1999), Lise Lamarche's essay “La photographie par la bande” (2003), the winter 2017 issue of *Ciel Variable*, “Montréalités/Montrealities,” to name only a few, are woven and extended throughout *Photogenic Montreal* as continued conversation.

The collection of essays comes together from the editors' long-standing research into visualizations of the city: Langford's session at the 2016 Association of Critical Heritage Studies conference addressing the question “What does Photography Preserve?” and Sloan's ongoing collaborative research project, “Networked Art Histories: Assembling Contemporary Art in Canada, 1960s to the Present.” The roots of the project run deeper, however, with both of the editors bringing to bear their own relationships to Montreal and being forthright about their

unique insider and outsider perspectives. In fact, each of the contributors has a close relationship to Montreal, having lived, studied, or worked there. *Photogenic Montreal* presents an ongoing lived experience where many of the transformations towards a modern and post-industrial city in both infrastructure and attitude—industrialization, ruination and decay, civic shame and pride, and gentrification—have been experienced and expressed directly by the authors.

The edited volume is divided into two parts, though both find resonance in one another. The first, “Activisms: City as Social Laboratory,” opens with Langford’s essay on the ways that the discursive spaces of the museum and the community have transformed Alain Chagnon’s photographs of the Plateau-Mont-Royal neighbourhood throughout the 1970s and 80s from works of social documentary and memory to art and back again upon their return to the community through public exhibition, bridging then and now through place. Langford writes, “the social function of photography is the construction of individual and collective identities. The political function of the medium is as a tool for activism through the raising of working-class consciousness” (43). These social and political functions are further complicated in Louis Martin’s essay that looks for the “human factor” in Melvin Charney’s 1972 exhibition *Montréal, plus ou moins?* And Suzanne Paquet’s study of urbex (urban exploration) in abandoned industrial architecture, through visually alluring and stylized photographs that are

“simultaneously mysterious and astonishingly realist” (138).

One of *Photogenic Montreal*’s greatest strengths is the way the text itself is an active site for the bridging of reflection and reflex across time. Most of the essays feature some form of direct engagement with the photographers themselves. Three essays in the first section take on this approach, each in a distinct way. In Tanya Southcott’s essay on Edith Mather, the author reflects on her conversations with the photographer whose experiences of motherhood, photographic process, and architectural preservation become intimately entangled. Johanne Sloan’s transcribed interview with Selwyn Jacob on his film *Ninth Floor* (2015) considers the filmmaker’s uncovering of an archive of footage of the occupation of the Henry H. Hall building in protest of racism at Concordia University in 1969. Artist Clara Gutsche’s essay reflects upon her own personal motivations in photographing the gentrifying neighbourhood of Milton Park, her becoming of an “accidental archivist” (110), the impact of time on public reception of the photographs, and how her photographs have endured precisely because of their artistic impact. The photograph is not static, and neither is its maker. *Photogenic Montreal* makes a point of acknowledging how photographs, cities, and people can transform over time.

The second half of the volume, “Archives: Ruins and Revisions,” complicates the idea of archive by addressing the many forms that an archive can take and the ways that institutional vision shapes

both photographic function and interpretation of the city space. Annmarie Adams considers the archives of Ramsay Traquair, director of McGill University’s School of Architecture from 1913 to 1939, and Traquair’s use of photography as a progressive teaching tool in the face of his own regressive resistance to Modernism and Americanisation, along with his racist and misogynistic attitudes. Philippe Guillaume looks to the work of the official city photographer Jean-Paul Gill’s Red Light District photographs, now in the Archives of the City of Montreal, as a “felicitous paradox” (195) in the ways the photographs participated in the destruction of a neighbourhood and yet today are celebrated as visual impressions of a bygone era. Will Straw turns to photographs of crime scenes and mug shots in the historic weekly magazine *Allô Police*, a “longlasting example of Quebec’s sensational ‘lowbrow’ periodical culture” which acts itself as an archive of a specific form of photographic documentation of the city” (200). Cynthia Imogen Hammond looks to three photographs of domestic architecture from Montreal’s most elite neighbourhoods in which “the buildings in question, and the entire district, were caught in the crosshairs of a remarkably unregulated urban-renewal ethos, and its nemesis, a burgeoning urban-preservation movement” (220). Martha Fleming reflects on the photographic outputs of her site-specific installations in abandoned civic architecture with Lyne Lapointe, remarking of the photographs that “they are objects with a particular ‘memorial’ agency that

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issues in part from the very processes from which they have emerged” (255).

The final two essays by the volume’s editors act as a kind of epilogue, but also as an invitation. Langford meditates on the photographs of empty lots—from those razed by the Great Fire of 1852 to artist Isabel Hayeur’s 2014 public projection, during the 2014 Montreal Biennial, of still and moving images drawn from the Occupy movement, which was then taken down at the request of the property owner—as interstices ripe with opportunity and potential yet laden with the (often violent) spectres of the past, now erased though somehow even more present. In Sloan’s examination of the residua of Expo ‘67, a moment that signaled to the world Montreal’s emergence as a modern metropolis, we find again the notion of potential, here framed as an envisioning of the city’s utopic future. Sloan remarks that “futurity has become a part of our heritage” (309). Potential binds together the past, present, and future; drives both the activist and archival impulses that call for ordered preservation and radical progress; and exists sometimes overtly and oftentimes latently in the photographic medium.

It is also in the idea of potential that these last two essays extend an invitation. While the authors and photographers featured throughout the volume are predominantly white and settler, the work of *Photogenic Montreal* as a reflective and reflexive investigation intentionally opens up histories and imaginings

of the photographed city to encompass a plurality of possibilities and perspectives. The thoughtful and thought-provoking essays that make up this extraordinary volume are only the beginning. While one might wonder what a volume so concerned with the specificity of place might offer to those beyond the physical and metaphorical island of Montreal, taken as a whole the essays deliver a proposition and a precedent that urges us to rethink understandings of photography’s role in heritage and activism, challenge what and whose stories are being told through photographic archives, and wonder what histories and futures are yet to be developed in the photographs.

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Anuradha Gobin
Picturing Punishment: The Spectacle and Material Afterlife of the Criminal Body in the Dutch Republic

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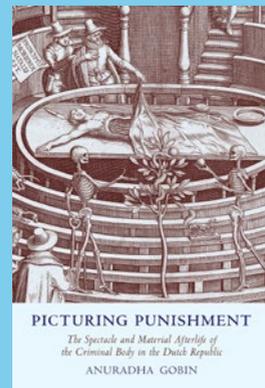
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Stephanie S. Dickey

This ingenious study weaves together the visual history of four distinctive features of the urban landscape in the Dutch Republic: the town hall, the house of correction, the gallows field, and the anatomy theatre. Each site has its own tradition of visual

representation that has typically been treated separately, but Gobin links these sites as loci for the performance of civic justice.¹ Taking Amsterdam, the Republic’s largest city, as her central case study, she charts the movement of the criminal body from trial to imprisonment, execution, and finally to a punishment that persisted beyond death in the form of dissection and denial of burial. The book derives from the author’s dissertation research at McGill University, a portion of which first appeared in this journal.²

The journey begins at the town hall, a focal point of urban life that typically housed a court of law and a jail as well as government offices. In her first chapter, Gobin describes the imposing classical building that was erected in the 1650s on the Dam Square in Amsterdam. Throughout its public spaces, sculptural reliefs



and paintings promoted themes of justice and good government to the building’s many visitors. In Chapter 2, Gobin follows the path of an accused criminal through the building from arrest to sentencing, emphasizing the public visibility