

For all that I enjoyed this book with its focus on the “small finds,” I have to say I was left somewhat unsatisfied. While the discussion was—as far as it goes—enjoyable, I feel it could have been further developed. For example, the conclusion might have been better positioned as an introduction with its points picked up and further explored throughout the book as they relate to the various needlework tools and, then, returned to in a concluding chapter. That said, I suspect that this work holds more for

those in Archeology than for readers outside that discipline. And, Beaudry’s thorough historical discussion in *Findings* will undoubtedly provide an important foundation for others to create future deeper cultural analyses. In the meantime, it is wonderful to see women’s material culture, which is often very difficult to assess and appreciate, taken seriously. *Findings* reminds its readers that the everyday is important and that the simplest objects often hide complexities.

## References

Parker, Rozsika. 1989. *The Subversive Stitch: Embroidery and the Making of the Feminine*. London: Routledge Press.

## ELIZABETH BEATON

Review of

Caplan, Ron, ed. 2005. *Views From the Steel Plant: Voices and Photographs from 100 Years of Making Steel in Cape Breton Island*. Wreck Cove, NS: Breton Books.

Pp. 224, black and white illus., \$18.95 soft cover, ISBN 1-895415-69-1.

This is an important publication because it is the first book specifically about the Cape Breton steel industry intended for popular reading.<sup>1</sup> Through numerous interviews of former steelworkers and others, and almost 100 photographs, it provides a comprehensive and empathetic—but not romanticized—look at the Cape Breton steel industry. This collection offers a strong realization of industrial life both inside and outside the plant. The early days of the industry, the labour movement, steel-making technology, management and the wider steel community are represented both through the voices of men and women directly involved and through song and poetry. Readers of more than twenty-seven years of *Cape Breton's Magazine* will notice that every chapter in *Views From the Steel Plant* is a reprint, and one is a secondary reprint from *Acadiensis*. Nevertheless, the book’s accessibility and its relevance for many workers from the industrial era give it particular value, not only as a tribute to Cape Breton steelworkers, but also as a serious contribution to oral history in Canada.

The vignettes related to each topic capture the steelworkers’ pride in their work. The workers describe how they acquired their steelmaking skills through watching and doing and, if lucky, through the generosity of more experienced workers. The different departments of the plant—open hearth, blast furnace, mills, shops, cranes, transporta-

tion—are all part of the network of specialized knowledge held by these workers. With intuition and a sharp eye as the basis of their skill, the complexities of steelmaking become almost an art form; the technology depicted subtly, yet clearly, through the stories of the workers. Their storytelling charm and prowess, sometimes tinged with wry humour, conveys a veracity of experience; one case in point is Frank Murphy’s recollection of the mere ten-minute work stoppage when his foot was cut off by the open hearth charging car.

The excellent photographs in this book help to depict the strength and skills of the steelworkers and the dangers they faced. Photographs also depict the passage of time. Pictures showing steelworkers at their job or in friendly interaction, and then later in life as they were interviewed, gives us a sense of “real” people once young, and now older and reflective. The academic reader might look for more consistent labelling of the photographs.

In his chapter, “The Steel Boom Comes to Sydney, 1899,” Ron Caplan documents the political conniving and general hoopla leading up to the coming of steel to Cape Breton. Local and North American newspapers and academic research by Ron Crawley are cited showing that the plants in Sydney and Sydney Mines were considered to be world-class operations. The maturity of the steel industry, centered on Sydney since the 1920s,

brought forth a range of products. Sydney Steel made 200 grades of steel for its own manufacture of rails, tie plates, wire, nails and bar which were sold to Canadian National and Canadian Pacific Railway. Product was also shipped to Poland, Malaysia, South Africa and elsewhere. The plant's raw steel was sent to national and international manufacturers for other secondary products. Clem Anson, who came to Sydney Steel in 1925, and who later became general manager of the plant, noted that shipping raw steel to England in 1932 pulled Sydney out of the Depression while other plants were still struggling.

The contribution of women to Cape Breton's steel industry during the Second World War is documented in two chapters of *Views*. Eight women who came from jobs in retail, hospitality and teaching tell of their experience working at the coke ovens and in the mills. Some of them juggled motherhood with their jobs at the plant, where they did the same work as the men. All gave this up—jobs with exciting possibilities and good pay—when the men returned from the war.

There was a very tangible culture of work in the Cape Breton steel industry. Outside the plant, the workers supported each other, usually through their specific departments: they celebrated together at weddings, or provided comfort and financial aid to one another in times of illness or death. Benefit societies and immigrant organizations such as the Ukrainian Labour Temple became part of the steelworkers' labour movement. Ethnicity and religion decided work placements or, in some cases, barriers to work placements. For example, Catholics dominated the open hearth; Protestants controlled the shops. A black steelworker remembered, "People of foreign extraction [and blacks] could not get a job with the bricklayers" (204). An immigrant seeking regular shifts in the "yard" had to give a bottle of rum (also maybe a chicken or cigars) to the foreman in payment for the favour.

The union movement made important changes to these "traditions" at the Sydney steel plant and the story of that evolution is well recorded in this book. Labour leader George MacEachern provides a concise history of the coming of the trade union act in 1937 that opened the way for a steelworker's union.<sup>2</sup> Winston Ruck, who became Canada's first black union local president in 1970, tells of gradual changes at the plant from the time of the establishment in 1940 of the steelworkers union. Quotes from the *Cape Breton Post* act to weave together steelworkers' remembrances of the 1923 strike and

the attack on steelworkers' families as they walked home from church on that July 1 Sunday.

Probably the most poignant moment in the history of the Cape Breton steel industry took place outside the plant gates. It was the Parade of Concern on November 19, 1967—a month after owners Hawker-Siddley called for the closure of Sydney Steel. The response of an industrial community to the loss of its lifeblood industry is found in the words of Fr. William Roach, St. F X Extension worker, who helped organize politicians, media and thousands of people to walk in the famous march through Sydney. He tells of the moment when singer Charlie MacKinnon stood up with his guitar and started to sing "Let's Save our Industry," written the night before on the back of a cigarette package. "And my God, the people joined in ... you know, it was a pure accident" (186). Unfortunately, the outcome of this community action—the takeover of Sydney Steel by the Nova Scotia government—did not result in continued good health for the industry in Cape Breton.

For one steelworker, the bitterness of the difficult times took the form of poetry. MacGillivray and Frank (1987) present the life and several poems of John S. "Slim" MacInnis whose writings over fifty years speak eloquently of working conditions and poor pay, strikes and the ignominy of war. MacInnis's works appeared anonymously in the *Steelworker and Miner*, sometimes creating anxiety for the paper's editors. That his poetry was taken seriously by both rank and file and management is indicated by apparent attempts to silence him—including sending him off to war. MacGillivray notes that Slim MacInnis's compositions may be the only verse to come directly from a steelworker at Sydney Steel.

This publication walks a sometimes-awkward line between the academic and the popular, even while it benefits both constituencies. That conundrum is shared by academics who write community histories. If there is a follow-up edition to *Views From the Steel Plant*, there might be more consideration for its use in cultural or history studies. For instance, an introduction by the editor could explain his selection of interviewees, his interview and transcription methods and his editing decisions. While this may seem to risk turning a good read into arcane analysis, a fuller explanation of approach would be appropriate given the potential wider use of this publication, and the position of Ron Caplan as a North American leader in the field of oral history.

## Notes

1. Heron (1988) provides a historical analysis of the Cape Breton steel industry in the context of the wider Canadian steel industry. This publication would not be termed “popular”.
2. See MacGillivray and Frank (1987) for a more complete oral history of MacEachern’s life in the labour movement.

## References

- Frank, David and Donald MacGillivray, eds. 1987. *George MacEachern: An Autobiography*. Sydney, Nova Scotia: University College of Cape Breton Press.
- Heron, Craig. 1988. *Working in Steel: The Early Years in Canada*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press.

## MARIE-ÈVE BONENFANT

Compte rendu de

Valérie Rousseau. 2007. *Vestiges de l’indiscipline. Environnements d’art et anarchitectures*. Collection Mercure, Études culturelles no 81. Gatineau, QC: Société du Musée canadien des civilisations.

Pp. 208, d’illus. 106, ISBN 978-0-660-97232-9, 34,95\$ (reliure souple).

Art indiscipliné, art populaire, art insolite, art naïf, art autodidacte, autant de termes différents pour tenter de désigner le travail d’artistes œuvrant à l’extérieur des réseaux traditionnels de l’art. Entre 1996 et 2004, Valérie Rousseau a mené une recherche sur les environnements d’art populaire québécois. L’ouvrage intitulé *Vestiges de l’indiscipline. Environnements d’art et anarchitectures* présente les sites de sept créateurs « indisciplinés » figurant parmi la quinzaine étudiés. Appelés tantôt artistes « du bord des routes », bricoleurs ou *patenteux*, ces créateurs ont développé des environnements artistiques dont l’envergure est étonnante. Ils se nomment Léonce Durette, Richard Greaves, Charles Lacombe, Roger Ouellette, Émilie Samson, Adrienne Samson-Fortier, Palmerino Sorgente et Arthur Villeneuve.

L’ouvrage se divise en trois sections. La première présente un portrait de chaque artiste et de son environnement artistique ; la seconde est formée d’un dossier photographique et la dernière propose une réflexion et une analyse autour de thèmes précis. Le parti pris de Rousseau quant à l’ordre de présentation de ces trois sections sert efficacement le sujet. D’abord, les créateurs sont présentés à tour de rôle à partir d’informations recueillies lors de visites répétées de leurs sites de création et d’entretiens réalisés avec eux et certains de leurs proches. On découvre ainsi des environnements d’art aussi différents que surprenants. Léonce Durette a tapissé, au fil des ans, les murs et les plafonds de sa maison d’œuvres réalisées à partir de matériaux récupérés. Son environnement d’art comprend également de nombreuses installations extérieures, dont certaines sont animées, qui

occupent toutes les surfaces disponibles du terrain et les façades de sa résidence. Pour sa part, Richard Greaves construit des *anarchitectures* à partir de matériaux provenant, entre autres, de granges et de garages démolis. Ces structures de nature architecturale sont dispersées en pleine nature, sur sa vaste terre, et tapissées à l’intérieur des archives personnelles du créateur. L’environnement d’art de Charles Lacombe, créé à partir de matériaux récupérés, possède quant à lui un caractère plus éphémère. Outre les œuvres conçues pour l’intérieur de sa maison, celles installées sur son terrain sont exposées aux intempéries et connaissent une existence relativement courte, en fonction des matériaux dont elles sont constituées. Roger Ouellette a installé des sculptures en ciment et en bois sur son terrain, exhibées à la vue des passants. Il a également créé un environnement d’art sur un terrain qu’il appelait la « Montagne de la fée », composé d’un chemin de croix parsemé de sculptures et de visages peints sur les roches. L’univers de création d’Adrienne Samson-Fortier s’inscrit dans le sillage de celui de sa mère, Émilie Samson. Il se compose d’objets créés à partir de matériaux divers, tels que des rebuts domestiques, de vieux vêtements et des pierres trouvées, saturant l’espace intérieur de la maison. Palmerino Sorgente, originaire d’Italie, tient une boutique-atelier de brocante où il expose et vend des objets de piété. Il confectionne notamment des couvre-chefs inspirés de ceux utilisés par des représentants de l’Église catholique ainsi que des objets portatifs, tels que des porte-clefs ornés d’une photographie de lui posant en tenue de cérémonie, qu’il offre aux visiteurs. Enfin, s’il est un environnement d’art célèbre, c’est celui