

Edward Said, in his discourse on culture and imperialism (1993), asked how otherwise decent people could accept colonization of the masses in other regions of the world. Culture, he maintains, is a key vehicle to make occupation of others' lands acceptable. Drawing upon the relationship between culture and empire, Said would label the noble primitive construct of the Alaska Natives as the "anti-imperialist irony." The "anti-imperialist irony," in this case, is to argue that the significance of the superiority of American society arises when it is contrasted to the life of the "primitive" Eskimo and at the same time maintain that there is "nobility" in this primitive condition worthy of emulation. Both constructs, the "primitive" and the "noble," are products of filmmakers who are at liberty to visit their fantasies upon Alaska's Natives. From such a viewpoint, aboriginal people have no life, history, or culture of their own worth representing without American industrial civilization. It is noteworthy that some of the filmmakers arrived in Alaska after having completed productions of *Tarzan* and other films about safaris in Africa. Like the European Tarzan in Africa, often the leading actors in the films were not Alaska Natives (Ray Mala being a notable exception). The aboriginal people constituted the extras on the set; they had little impact upon the story, but were there to lend artificial authenticity for the benefit of southern audiences.

Freeze Frame is not only a narrative of film constructs of the "Eskimo," but also a response by Alaskans to images that are banal at best, and racist at their worst. An emancipation of sorts has emerged through the very medium that began the constructs. It is through film that the heterogeneity and complexity of the lives of Alaska Natives can be seen. Since the 1970s, coinciding with the oil boom, documentaries, ethnographies, and television programming have increasingly put the power of the media into the hands of Alaska's various communities. Experiments in participatory production of films have had varied success. Fienup-Riordan points out how film has been used by communities to draw attention to social issues. Nonetheless, the development of locally based filmmaking is juxtaposed with the continuing monolithic construct driven by Hollywood and market concerns. The irony is not lost on Fienup-Riordan, who points out that the search for "authenticity" helps more and more Alaska Natives get parts in films today. While the "Eskimo" image of Alaska Natives is not significantly transformed in these films, the participation of Alaskans has increased. A film aimed at mass entertainment has a larger audience appeal than a documentary made by Alaskans. This brings to light yet another irony: in today's marketplace, the "Eskimo" is not just a product of Hollywood, but a consumer of Hollywood products.

Freeze Frame also provokes many engaging questions that are worthy of further research and analysis. How does private-sector funding tied essentially to nonrenewable resource use enable filmmaking by Alaskans for Alaskans? Keeping in mind the boom-and-bust cycles of resource industries, is this funding source sustainable? Who controls the film media, and what are the political implications of this

control among Alaskans? To what degree are the early film constructs of "Eskimo" identity influencing Alaska Natives today? Are young people perceiving these images as the way life used to be? What are the implications for new constructions of identity using film? Now that Alaskans are documenting their traditional knowledge through film, who has copyright over that knowledge? To what degree is community participation in filmmaking a genuine objective rather than a means of getting things done in an increasingly (though superficially) politically correct climate for Native and non-Native relations?

Would I recommend this work to others? I would particularly recommend this book to the readers of this eminent journal. Whether we are social or natural scientists, working in a northern context or seeking to do so, this work teases out the hidden stereotypes about northern societies and the romantic urges for the exotic which we may hold subconsciously as a result of a long and steady diet of manufactured images. It may help us see in ourselves some of the self-indulgent tendencies of the Hollywood filmmakers. What to us may be a frontier, to be conquered through study, is in fact a homeland to diverse cultures. This realization can only lead to more meaningful and collaborative work in the North.

REFERENCE

SAID, E. 1993. Culture and imperialism. New York: Knopf.

Karim-Aly S. Kassam
The Arctic Institute of North America
The University of Calgary
2500 University Drive N.W.
Calgary, Alberta, Canada
T2N 1N4

BARE POLES: BUILDING DESIGNS FOR HIGH LATITUDES. By HAROLD STRUB. Ottawa: Carleton University Press, 1996. 194 p., maps, b&w illus., glossary, bib., appendices, index. Softbound. Cdn\$34.95.

In the 1950s, the Canadian government began attempts to assimilate Inuit families into a broader Canadian economic and social reality. Inuit families gradually abandoned their traditional hunting camps as the government concentrated them into nearby settlements or sent them off to colonize "artificial communities" created in the Canadian High Arctic. However, another type of resettlement that occurred during this same time period has, until recently, been largely overlooked. Almost overnight, Inuit families were moved from traditional dwellings to government-subsidized prefabricated houses. These new houses were designed and built largely by people the Inuit had never met, using materials that they had never seen. Furthermore, the interior placement of walls and rooms circulated and segregated family members in new and unaccustomed ways. The Euro-Canadian house was but one of several new building types introduced to the Inuit through

the experience of settlement life. Nursing stations, schools, band offices, and recreation centres, for example, soon became prominent features in many Inuit communities throughout arctic Canada. However, it was not long before serious flaws in architectural designs, the use of improper building materials, and deficiencies in construction practices became apparent. Poorly placed entrances were frequently blocked in winter by drifting snow; windows perpetually iced up; and drafts found their way into houses through floorboards, door frames, and walls. In addition, by using houses in ways that facilitated their unique northern lifestyles (e.g., storing seal meat in bathtubs, repairing snow machines in kitchens), Inuit families frequently defeated the intentions of Euro-Canadian designers. The expensive “utopian” designs of such visionary architects as Ralph Erskine and Moshe Safdie, for example, now lie abandoned in many northern communities because they failed to anticipate the rigours of northern climates and the values, traditions and customs of Inuit families.

Bare Poles: Building Designs for High Latitudes outlines and addresses many such design problems. Written by Harold Strub, a building professional with many years of experience in the Canadian Arctic, this comprehensive and engaging book uses both technical and anecdotal approaches to critique polar architecture. Strub uses information on Inuit culture history, polar climatology, and arctic terrain, peppered with observations made during his many forays into the North, to contextualize and identify building design problems in arctic regions. The first three sections of the book provide a non-technical summary of the people, climate, and terrain of the Canadian North. The sections that follow deal primarily with how such variables bear on the design of buildings used in circumpolar environments. Strub’s critique of polar architecture concentrates on three main issues: the programming of the built environment; the shape, location, and orientation of buildings within communities; and the construction and maintenance of the “building envelope”—the “space-suit” which contains and regulates a comfortable environment for the user.

Architects “program” buildings to function in specific ways—as houses, hospitals, or prisons, for example. In order to accomplish this, the architect must organize space within the structure in a way which both facilitates and enhances various types of human activities. The successful programming of a building, however, is contingent on the architect’s understanding of the requirements, values, and customs of the user. Strub outlines a number of factors which have traditionally hindered communication between the architect and northern aboriginal users. First, the linguistic and cultural gap that exists between the Euro-Canadian designer and the Inuit occupant can often result in misunderstandings as to what constitutes an appropriate design for a dwelling. The abandoned “igloo-style” houses in Cambridge Bay and Cape Dorset and apartment-style housing in Resolute Bay provide examples of such miscommunication. Second, Strub states that because architects tend to be a transient presence in many northern communities, they often develop an incomplete understanding of Native reality. As a result, there has been a

tendency for architects and planners to structure northern house designs and community layouts on the basis of what they are most familiar with—the southern Canadian suburb. Aboriginal architects and planners might provide solutions to such problems; however, Strub points out that at present there are few such individuals.

Successful buildings circulate people in ways that define their intended purposes. Strub’s evaluation of how successful buildings are in circulating people is based on the notion of optimal routing; i.e., how quickly, logically, and directly an individual is moved from one space to another. This approach, derived from wartime strategic research and systems analysis, has been used by many post-war architects to shape buildings so that they minimize the circulation of inhabitants (Ward, 1996:36). By optimizing the movement of people through a building, the architect can eliminate walls, doors, and rooms, thereby reducing building costs—an important consideration in northern construction projects. Unfortunately, this systematizing of space denies any social and symbolic significance for the built environment, and therefore runs the risk of culturally alienating its inhabitants. Strub advocates the use of interviews and community consultations to bridge the cultural gap between architect and aboriginal user. He provides guidelines for structuring interviews with aboriginal users which, while useful, are unfortunately much too brief and not very explicit. He suggests adopting questionnaires, for example, but fails to consider the many problems frequently encountered with their use in social scientific research, such as language differences, gender bias, sustaining the interest of the interviewee, and the potential for culturally ambiguous questions.

Strub moves on to discuss the significance of the geometry of buildings and their location relative to other structures within the community. In any settlement, buildings can be conceptualized as “islands” whose shapes and heights contour and distort currents of air that flow across the landscape. As polar air currents frequently carry precipitation in the form of snow, the shape and orientation of buildings, as well as their proximity to one another, can influence the location and depth of drifting snow. Snow drifts can block entrances to buildings, as well as hinder access to oil, sewage, and water tanks. Consequently, Strub states that the control of drifting snow through architecture is an important, yet often neglected, design consideration. The location of buildings within communities is also dependent on terrain characteristics. The seasonal freezing and thawing of active layers above the permafrost table, for example, can alter the load-bearing capacity of the ground. Strub explains that load-bearing capacity can also vary spatially across a site. Consequently, proposed building sites require a thorough geomorphological investigation prior to construction. Strub provides an interesting and detailed discussion of the various successful and unsuccessful strategies that have been employed by architects for supporting and stabilizing building foundations in arctic regions, from “space frame” steel piles and gravel pads to the artificial refrigeration of sites using buried blocks of frozen carbon dioxide (minus 70°C). As the arrangement of

Euro-Canadian houses in northern communities is often based on such factors as terrain, the provision of utilities, and fire prevention, Strub suggests that settlement layouts have tended to disrupt traditional patterns of coexistence through the segmentation of the extended family. To illustrate, elders may occupy houses at the opposite ends of the community from those of their nieces, nephews, children, and grandchildren, perhaps hindering the sharing of food, labour, and information.

The book also addresses the impact of the shape, perimeter, and internal volume of a building on construction and heating costs. Strub states that the most economical building forms utilize the least wall perimeter to enclose the greatest possible floor area. Many of the earliest houses constructed by the Canadian government for Inuit families, the one-room "Illukallak" models, for example, appear to have been designed with this principle in mind. Strub goes on to explain that the size or internal volume of shelters constructed by human groups is almost always inversely proportional to the harshness of the external environment. Thus, cold climates warrant the construction of small shelters because they are easiest to keep warm. The ethnographic record, however, suggests that among historic Inuit groups, social factors occasionally determined dwelling size to a greater extent than environmental conditions. Many of the Iglulingmiut snow house complexes recorded by Mathiasen (1928), for example, were impressively large structures that could accommodate as many as five nuclear families, including dogs, food, and equipment.

One of the real strengths of *Bare Poles* is Strub's comprehensive overview and discussion of the behaviours of various construction materials when stressed by the effects of sunlight, temperature, wind, rain, snow, and humidity. Important information on the design and construction of vapour barriers, roofs, floors, window frames, and doorways are all based on years of experience working in the Canadian North. In addition, concepts such as air locks, vapour barriers, and building envelopes are clearly described in the text and illustrated effectively using simple diagrams. Buildings are variably described as "space-suits," "islands," and "heavier than air, semi-rigid balloons," and Strub's use of such analogies makes the more technical aspects of the book easier to understand for the nonprofessional. At the end of the book, Strub provides a useful glossary of technical terms, a comprehensive series of climate charts, and detailed descriptions of building elements (foundation, window, and door types, etc.). Consequently, while building professionals will find *Bare Poles* an invaluable resource for architectural design work in northern regions, the book is enjoyable and interesting reading for anyone interested in either architecture or the Canadian North. Anthony Ward (1996:40) has recently stated that for many years, the architect was essentially viewed as either a "genius magician, or a black box—an impenetrable mystery whose inner life was unknowable, but could be inferred by objective analysis of design outputs." *Bare Poles* effectively demonstrates that contemporary architects are neither. They are, instead,

self-monitoring and reflective human beings who learn from their mistakes and experiences.

REFERENCES

- MATHIASSEN, T. 1928. Material culture of the Iglulik Eskimos. Translated by W.E. Calvert. Report of the Fifth Thule Expedition 1921-24, Vol. 6, No. 1. Copenhagen: Gyldendal.
- WARD, A. 1996. The suppression of the social in design: Architecture as war. In: Dutton, T.A., and Hust-Mann, L., eds. *Reconstructing architecture: Critical discourses and social practices*. Pedagogy and cultural practice, Vol. 5. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

Peter C. Dawson
 Department of Archaeology
 The University of Calgary
 2500 University Drive N.W.
 Calgary, Alberta, Canada
 T2N 1N4

COLD COMFORT: MY LOVE AFFAIR WITH THE ARCTIC. By GRAHAM W. ROWLEY. Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1996. xiv + 255 p., maps, b&w illus., index. Hardbound. Cdn\$29.95.

Rowley's book begins with an admonition, delivered in 1776, to glory-seekers who misrepresent the Arctic—a tendency that persists and nowadays includes a new ingredient of political correctness. This story is an effective response to the purple prose school: an autobiographical tale, told in clear and lively language, about the eastern Canadian Arctic as it was between the two world wars.

The story began with a visit in 1935 by Tom Manning, explorer and Cambridge graduate, to that university in search of members for an expedition the following year to Foxe Basin, off the west coast of Baffin Island. The objectives of the expedition were to complete the mapping of the Baffin Island coastline and to study the archaeology and biology of the region, including Southampton Island. Five young men joined Manning, all with some relevant expertise, and all but one with some experience of the Arctic. That one was Graham Rowley, the expedition archaeologist.

The book draws on the diaries and memories of several expedition members. It conveys the thoughts and feelings of the author, the progress and achievements of the expedition, and an intimate, affectionate account of the region's people and wildlife. Events unfold chronologically in 29 brief chapters that cover two and a half years in the Arctic, with a break of eight months midway, when most of the expedition members returned to Britain. Several themes are interwoven, with the threat of war in Europe as a distant backdrop.

Rowley's English is unpretentious, but has a wealth and clarity that one might expect from a writer who reads Sterne, Shakespeare, and Dickens in the igloo. His story is laced with