

Leonardo da Vinci Medal 2018

Joy Parr (Western University Canada)

Joy Parr is an eminent historian of technology whose radical and influential approaches to feminist historiography, the everyday dimensions of technological change, and – most recently – the phenomenology of the technologically transformed environment, have won her multiple academic honours and awards as well as public recognition. The holder of a Canada Research Chair, a distinguished and beloved teacher, a supportive and inspiring colleague, Parr has played an important role in redefining the field of history of technology internationally, in inspiring a younger generation to engage with the field, and in building a vibrant community in Canada and beyond. Parr has been a model citizen of SHOT, serving on the Executive Council, chairing Envirotech, supporting WITH, working as consulting editor for T&C and contributing regularly to the journal, including special issues, individual articles and essays. SHOT awarded Parr the Abbot Payson Usher Prize in 1999, and the Edelstein Prize in 2011. We now enthusiastically nominate her for the 2018 da Vinci Prize.

Parr began work as a family and labour historian, and it was research on the apprenticeship of immigrant child labourers (*Labouring children: British immigrant apprentices to Canada, 1869-1924*. McGill-Queen's Press-MQUP, 1980) that laid the foundation for her transition into feminist history of technology. *Labouring children* was followed by *The gender of breadwinners: women, men and industrial change in two Ontario towns, 1880-1950* (University of Toronto Press, 1990), which investigated the nexus of industrial processes in textiles and furniture-making, social structures, and economic change in the United Kingdom and Canada, to show for the first time the gendered consequences of technological transfer and immigration as they were experienced in industrialising Ontario. The book was winner of the Francois-Xavier Garneau Medal, the John A. Macdonald Prize, and the Harold Adam Innis Prize award by the Humanities and Social Sciences Federation of Canada.

The feminist logic of Parr's research took her next from production to the consumption junction, to look at domestic technologies and the everyday technological dimensions of constructing personal and national identities and regimes of value. 'What makes washday less blue: gender, nation and technological choice' (T&C 1997), awarded the Usher Prize in 1999, is one of the most anthologised and influential articles on this topic, shaping research agendas on the politics of domestic technologies right through to the present. *Domestic Goods: the Material, the Moral and the Economic in the Postwar Years* (University of Toronto Press, 1999) developed the theme, offering an iconoclastic challenge to assumptions about the hegemony of the American postwar juggernaut, and offering a nuanced and sensitive analysis of how the often conflicting assumptions about gendered preferences and domestic needs of designers, manufacturers, consumer organisations and policy makers translated into material stuff and its uses. Here Parr's insights helped shape grand projects like *Tensions of Europe*, and contributed to the rise of user-centred analysis.

Sensing Changes: Technologies, Environments and the Everyday (UBC Press, 2010) was still more original, bringing together environmental history and a full-fledged phenomenological ethnography of the senses. A fascinating experimental investigation of how ordinary people experience technological "mega-projects", *Sensing Changes* documented five Canadian cases (the Gagetown military base; the Bruce Nuclear Facility; the St. Lawrence Seaway; the Arrow Lakes dams; and the Walkerton water-purification crisis). Parr and her graduate collaborators laid the experimental groundwork for recapturing the multi-dimensional embodiments of what

Tim Ingold, following Heidegger, refers to as ‘dwelling’: What is it to inhabit a world? How does one make that world one’s own? What is it to lose one’s world? What skills, principles, forms of knowing and recognition, or modes of apprehension and perception, are undermined when a landscape that offers particular forms of livelihood, sociality and aesthetics is destroyed or radically transformed? To quote Veena Das’ study of political violence and its ramifications in India, Parr aimed to describe ‘the way that [a violent, world-shattering] event attaches itself with its tentacles into everyday life and folds itself into the recesses of the ordinary’. She also investigated how people learn to ‘dwell’ in the new multisensory landscapes that megaprojects engender, to retool their bodies to new modes of attentiveness or aesthetics – a history of embodiment. From a slightly different angle, one might equally call her project a history of deskilling and reskilling. Winner of the Canada Prize of 2011, *Sensing Changes* was also awarded SHOT’s Edelstein Prize the same year.

These milestones of Parr’s work in history of technology are just one part of a wider oeuvre which documents and explores the history of Ontario and Canada through individual lives, family patterns and community changes; to mention but a few: *Gender and History in Canada*, *Histories of Canadian Children and Youth*, “Don’t speak for me”: practicing oral history amidst the legacies of conflict”. For *Sensing Changes*, Parr and her colleagues worked with local people to produce websites of photos, films, interviews and news reports, engaging “informants” as active creators of their own histories. Parr embodies the socially responsible and engaged historian, meticulously documenting the local to nuance or challenge dominant narratives, working long-term with local communities to give them voice and bring them into global history.

From pioneering feminist critique and persuasive focus on the linkages between everyday and state in the 1990s, to her recent work on the sensing body, on megaprojects and on risk, Parr has opened up one new horizon after another, bringing history of technology into new cross-disciplinary conversations. She has influenced generations of young historians through her teaching and research at Yale, UBC, Queen’s University, Simon Fraser, and most recently the University of Western Ontario. Working closely with students and with local communities, Parr has most recently developed new ways not only to study the sensory and its historical traces, but also to mobilise the sensory to disseminate her research. In addition to the impact of her work, Parr has been involved in SHOT in various capacities including the Executive Council and as a contributing editor to T&C for many years. She has won both the Usher and the Edelstein prize, and has played an influential role in building Canada's vibrant history of technology community and engaging them in SHOT. For this lifetime of outstanding achievement and commitment to the field, we are proud to nominate Joy Parr for the 2018 da Vinci Prize.