

72 | book reviews

New frontiers of space, bodies and gender

Rosa Ainley; Routledge, London, 1998, £15.99 Pbk, ISBN 0 415 15490 1

New Frontiers of Space, Bodies and Gender reflects the current mood among those interested in gender identity to explore the relationships between gender and space. The emphasis has moved from simply identifying and reacting to gender differences in accessing space to understanding their relationships to behaviour and finding new spaces. This book contains a number of chapters by writers and researchers in a variety of fields with a common interest in identity and space. From lesbian and gay studies and cultural studies to film and photography, the book discusses a variety of lived experiences and theory with interpretations of spatial environments ranging from the bodily, built and community to the cultural, cyber and imagined. *New Frontiers* comprises 15 essays that are presented in four sections: 'Coming From the Same Place? Bodies', 'Taking Another Look: Spaces', 'Outside Possibilities: Cultural Planning' and 'Altogether Elsewhere: Futures'. Although there is no single overall view in the book, most of the essays offer a positive look at gender and space with examples of the past, the present or the future.

In the introduction to the book Rosa Ainley states that the group of essays in each section concerns the organization and negotiating around, the representation and theorization of, and strategies of resistance to a particular area. For example, section two concerns hard physical space and looks at the relationships between architecture and design and social control. In this section, Lynne Walker's essay considers how middle class feminists in Victorian London organized and renegotiated their use of private spaces to improve their access to public spaces. By living locally to each other in central London and using their homes for political ends such as securing and improving women's access to education and employment they blurred the boundaries between private and public. This gave the women a sense of control over social action, affirmation of their political identities and eventually a new form of visibility for women in public spaces. Rosa Ainley's essay also looks at architectural control in relation to the panopticon structure of surveillance. From Bentham to Foucault and Bozovic, Ainley discusses how modern architectural representations of controlling space feature in both public and private spaces and she compares their effectiveness to that initially theorized in terms of the panopticon. The relationship between gender and space is not clear in this essay although Ainley provides an interesting (albeit brief) interpretation of

Berenice Abbott's photograph 'Court of the First Model Tenement'. The public space of the courtyard surrounded by the distinctly private spaces of housing blocks is subject to surveillance and designed to represent safety and communal living. This is combined with the numerous rows of washing hanging out to dry which Ainley interprets as a degree of 'intrusion' of the public/masculine by the private/feminine. The final essay in section two illustrates how physical space can be redesigned and inhabited differently in order to resist gender inequalities. Inga-Lisa Sangregorio considers collaborative housing in Sweden whose inhabitants, both men and women, organize and share responsibilities of cooking, cleaning and childcare for all the tenants, thus relieving individual women of these domestic burdens. Sangregorio shows that rethinking domestic space offers possibilities for improving the quality of women's lives. In summary, this section looks at the various ways in which gender relates to different spaces in the city such as forming identities, seeking a sense of belonging in public and improving equality in private. Ainley has similarly attempted to group other essays together in the different sections of the book.

The majority of essays are concerned with the lived experiences of women, but despite Ainley's attempt to avoid a fragmentary feel to the book by grouping essays into sections I personally found the groupings unsettling, particularly as the essays varied in the degree to which they combine experiences with theory. For example, Sally Munt's essay discusses the concepts of 'nation', 'nationalism' and 'community' and the adoption of these by lesbians since the 1970s. In this essay, she details the appealing as well as problematic features of these forms of discursive and imagined spaces in relation to sexuality. This contrasts with Robyn Longhurst's essay on pregnant women's experiences of a particular shopping centre in Hamilton, New Zealand. Longhurst begins by touching on the work of Grosz on the mutually productive relationship between the body and the environment. She then dedicates the majority of the essay to describing the shopping centre and interpreting numerous photographs and interviewee quotations obtained during her research. In addition to this, a number of essays in the book omit theory and concentrate on problems and solutions in specific contexts which sometimes seem limited to providing pointers for similar projects in future. Ainley had however intended to find a variety of new ways to discuss the built environment in relation to identities without starting with the view that women are victims in public; in this sense the collection of essays is a success.

New Frontiers makes an optimistic attempt to look at gender and space while also taking into account class, sexuality and ethnicity. The range of topics concern lived experiences of women in cities around the world including Britain, America, Canada, New Zealand and Jamaica and it is essential that these types of research findings continue to be documented. Overall the book illustrates that to have gendered and sexual identities is not about what we 'are' but what we 'do' and where we do it in the city. *New Frontiers* makes attractive reading of current issues

around gender identity and space for those interested in cultural studies, social geography and women's studies.

Sadhana Soborun

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Policing sexual assault

Jeanne Gregory and Sue Lees; Routledge, London 1999. £15.99, Pbk, ISBN 0-415-16388-9

This substantial (217 page) study covers a vast number of issues in an intelligent and thought-provoking manner, dealing not only with the oft cited and still shockingly low conviction figures in rape and sexual assault trials, but delving deeply into the highly hegemonic police culture, and the role of the Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) in perpetuating a climate within which serious sexual offences are, in the vast majority of cases, either downgraded on prosecution, 'no-crimes' or thrown out by the CPS prior to trial.

The book is divided between original research undertaken by the authors into women's experiences in North London of reporting rape and other major sexual crimes, and a far-ranging review of the ways in which the criminal justice system has responded to feminist calls for reform of the treatment of victims of domestic and sexual assault. It provides a clear overview of the interconnected roles of organs of the state involved in policing, the dominant discourse on female sexuality, and the construction of the 'classic victim' whose case is likely to lead to conviction.

A groundbreaking chapter on male rape is included in this book, and the comparisons between conviction rates for male and female rape, police handling of complaints and the gendered meaning of sexual assault are considered from within a feminist discourse. While for both genders, experiences of interview and psychological effects on victims remain similar, the heterosexism displayed by police officers in their recording of assaults of men is starkly outlined. In contrast to the discussion of police paradigms of gay male sexuality, the absence of discourse around lesbian experiences of sexual assault was clearly lacking, although this may well be as a result of the reluctance of lesbian-identified women to discuss their traumatic experiences. I was particularly struck with the fact that the issues of 'race' and disability were pervasive throughout the in-depth analysis of sexual assaults, although within the context of this study, learning disability was the primary disability considered, and in the main, within the context of male victims of rape. However, the sensitive issues of 'race' and ethnicity were considered when analysing types of assault reported, the prevalence of intra-racial assaults, police and CPS attitudes to prosecution and the outcomes of sexual