

New Space for Women. G. Wekerle, R. Peterson and D. Morley, editors. *Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press, 1980.*

Published in 1980, *New Space for Women* was the first complete book to be published from an explicitly feminist viewpoint on the subject of women and the built environment.¹ This in itself was and is an achievement. As such *New Space for Women* represents an important milestone for feminists whose interests converge on planning, architecture and social issues concerned with the built environment including community activism.

This book was intended to be ambitious in its subject matter and treatment. Initiated by a United Nations Conference on Human Settlements in 1976, its editors wanted it to have an international coverage and contribution. Unfortunately, as the editors state in the preface, the book's content is predominately North American, with a strong bias towards academic research. The book is a collection of papers, divided into four sections, each introduced by a different editor. The four sections cover the domestic workplace, urban design, women in environmental decision making and women as environmental activists.

Perhaps because of its fragmented structure, or possibly as a result of its ambitious beginnings, the final quality of the book appears uneven. Some papers are outstanding, for example, Dolores Hayden's excellent account of nineteenth century experiments in communal house-keeping in the United States. And the anonymous and personal contributions, which break out of defined academic categories, are also interesting.

New Space for Women gives an account of the way in which housing is designed for nuclear families, of the exploitative division of domestic labour, the isolation of women in suburbia, the relative benefits of a suburban life style for men, the barriers to women's involvement in the environmental design professions and local gov-

ernment, and of women's initiatives in setting up women's centres and refuges and in tenants' movements. This is a comprehensive list which outlines key issues, but there are problems with the way in which the editors have approached the subject.

In particular, the book lacks a consistent analysis of how gender divisions are produced and reproduced as part of social processes. The impression given is that women are a category, with unexplained "special needs"; this approach tends to reduce us to our biology. The complex interactions of class and gender are left uncharted. For example whilst womens' representation in the architectural and planning professions is considered thoroughly, there is no mention of women's exclusion from the construction industry, and the challenge to gender roles which women take on when they become carpenters and plumbers. Similarly in the series of articles about suburbia there is no discussion except by reference, to the meanings which suburbia might have had, when first constructed, in terms of class and gender divisions, and of how and why these have changed over time. A problem also arises in the use of the concept "environment" in some of the articles. Buildings and the urban infrastructure are described as though they are set apart from, and are determinant of the lives which women live in and around them. This gives the disturbing impression that women are passive objects of social control. Fortunately Sheila Levrant de Bretteville's exhilarating account of the inception of the Los Angeles' Women's Building goes a long way towards correcting this impression.

Following the publication of *New Space for Women*, a few more specialised books have appeared on the subject of women and the built environment.² Perhaps the most valuable contribution which is made by *New Space for Women* is that it illustrates how much more research, analysis and action is needed on this vast and important area.

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NOTES

1. Previous books published on women and architecture are: Torre S. et al (eds.) *Women in American Architecture: A Historic and Contemporary Perspective*, Watson Gupull: New York, 1977; and Cole D. *From Tipi to Skyscraper: a history of women in architecture*, George Braziller: New York, 1978.
2. For example, Hayden D. *The Grand Domestic Revolution: A History of Feminist Designs for American Homes, Neighbourhoods, and Cities*. MIT Press, Cambridge, Mass., 1981; Ardener S. (ed.) *Women and Space: Ground Rules and Social Maps*, Croom Helm London, 1981; Brion M. and Tinker A. *Women and Housing: Access and Influence* The Housing Centre Trust, London, 1981.

Take Back the Night. Laura Lederer. ed. *Toronto: Bantam Books, 1982. Pp.366.*
Pornography and Silence. Susan Griffen. *New York: Harper & Row, 1981. Pp.277.*

The topic of pornography has become a major focus in recent feminist research and writing. Like rape and domestic violence, pornography epitomizes women's powerlessness in western society. And like rape, which has only recently been defined in terms of power rather than sexuality, newer notions on pornography have begun to approach it in a similar vein. Pornography, it is being argued, is not about sex, it is about submission. Kate Millet, among others, asserts this in *Not a Love Story* when she claims that the problem with pornography is that it isn't sexy. Of course, the problem is that for many people, men in particular, but unfortunately for many women as well, pornography *is* sexy. This is why the whole issue has become so central to feminist research. The significance of pornography in society lies far beyond its immediate sexual context. It is inextricably tied to the history of male/female relationships and the study of gender power. Thus, it is a topic for serious investigation and analysis.

Two of the most popular recent additions to this burgeoning interest area are Laura Lederer's *Take Back the Night* and Susan Griffen's *Pornography and Silence*. While I was asked to focus my remarks on the latter, it is rather interesting to compare the two works because they are so antithetical in substance and style. I should also like to add that I get the distinct impression that the latter book, i.e. Griffen's, has become the darling of the feminist movement. This is a fact I find difficult to understand since it is the former book by Lederer which is infinitely more thought provoking and useful.

Take Back the Night is an excellent selection of readings on the topic of pornography arranged systematically around various basic issues, for example, what is pornography, who is hurt, who benefits. The articles are concise and articulate, and they are written by a variety of people including, for example, an interview with a former pornography model. More importantly, it wastes no time in coming to grips with the really important issues in the field such as the distinction between erotica and pornography. In a brief but concise article by Gloria Steinem that argument is presented in a nutshell:

(...its message is violence, dominance, and conquest. It is sex being used to reinforce some inequality, or to create one, or to tell us that pain and humiliation (ours or someone else's) are really the same as pleasure. Perhaps one could simply say that erotica is about sexuality, but pornography is about power and sex-as-weapon in the same way we have come to understand that rape is about violence, and not really about sexuality at all. (p.23-24)

While there are a couple of articles that pertain specifically to the American legal scene, for the most part the readings are not local in nature. In summarizing this text, it is efficient to quote Adrienne Rich's afterword: