

DOMESTICATED PORN

Rita Felski

Jane Juffer, *At Home with Pornography: Women, Sex and Everyday Life*, New York University Press, New York 1998, 271pp; \$55 cloth, \$17.95 paperback.

Juffer's title gives one pause. We don't usually think of being at home with pornography. The phrase conjures up visions of cosiness, cocoa and bedroom slippers at odds with the usual accounts of pornography's subversive influence. Neither is sex often linked to the everyday, in spite of the evidence for such a connection. After the first few weeks of delirious coupling, many intimate relationships settle into a familiar and predictable sexual routine. If sex surveys can be believed, for most people, most of the time, sex is pretty ordinary.

Yet we also invest an enormous amount of meaning in sex. It is hailed as the quintessential limit experience and the means to transcending everyday life. It is often burdened with quasi-religious significance and laced with the language of transgression and redemption. This trend has recently reached academia, which has discovered sex with a vengeance. Scholars are learning how to talk dirty. Perversion is chic. When a famous queer theorist recently disclosed that her sex life consists of weekly intercourse with her husband in the missionary position, she could not have produced a more scandalous revelation.

Jane Juffer sets out to counter this trend and to separate the study of sex from the obsession with transgression. She is interested in the domestication of pornography and in challenging the negative associations of domestication. She writes, 'pornography is domesticated when it becomes integrated into the routines of everyday life - not exactly rendered invisible, but managed by women who have achieved a degree of agency through a structured movement between sites of access and sites of consumption' (p233). Juffer wants to explore the mainstreaming of erotica, its everyday function as commodity, entertainment and education. She wants to emphasise dependability and predictability rather than the frisson of perverse desire. This insistence on the ordinary nature of much pornography separates her both from the anti-porn feminists, who demonise images of sex, and the pro-sex feminists, who rhapsodise over the breaking of taboos.

Juffer defines her position in relation to recent writing on pornography by Laura Kipnis and others. She identifies three main problems with this work. First, Kipnis and similar-minded critics rely on a text-based model of meaning, which imputes transgressive capacities to the individual work of pornography. Their position thus has much in common with a conventional high modernist aesthetic which evaluates a work in terms of its ability to

violate the reader's expectations. Second, this relentless focus on the transgressive text has resulted in a neglect of many contemporary forms of soft-core pornography, although these are often targeted explicitly at women and hence of potential interest to feminists. Finally, in imputing agency to the individual text or to the labile workings of the unconscious, feminist scholars ignore the conditions under which pornography circulates. They have paid little attention to issues of access, distribution and reception, and to the social meanings of different kinds of space. Writers may enthuse about subversive feminist uses of pornography, but walking into a sex shop alone can be a harrowing experience for most women.

Juffer is interested in the spatial politics of sexuality. Hence her focus on the home, which is, after all, the place where most women consume sexually explicit material. A public sexual culture for women is close to non-existent. In one sense, then, distinctions between the domestic and public sphere still carry significant weight. Yet the mass media and new information technologies also blur many of the conventional distinctions between the public and the private. Politicians and legislators express their outrage at the flood of sexual images invading the sanctity of the home. Juffer is more interested in thinking about how the media may improve women's access to sexually explicit material. How many women are watching the Playboy channel or taking part in sexual banter on the internet? How are these outlets changing women's relationship to pornography by reshaping the relations between public and private?

Juffer also suggests that women's increasing buying power is influencing both the content and the marketing of pornography. There is now a very large body of sexually explicit material that defines itself as erotica rather than pornography. Pro-sex feminists have often scoffed at this distinction as having no analytical or political value. Juffer argues, however, that it has an important impact on reception through the classification and marketing of texts. Erotica provides a way for sexually explicit literature to enter the mainstream (bookstore chains such as Borders, for example, contain sections on 'Erotica' featuring series aimed specifically at women). Through its appeal to notions of literary value, erotica is acceptable to many readers who find the idea of pornography unpalatable.

Juffer pursues her analysis of domesticated porn across a wide variety of genres and contexts. She discusses adult cable programming on television and sex education videos as well as women's literary erotica. There is a critical but not unsympathetic account of the John Gray industry (according to Juffer, *Men are from Mars, Women are from Venus* has now sold an extraordinary one hundred million copies). Juffer even offers an analysis of the Victoria's Secret lingerie catalogue, that ubiquitous companion to American life, and explains the reasons for its ascendancy over the more flashy but trashy Frederick's of Hollywood. As well as exploring various genres of domesticated porn, Juffer also discusses some of the social conditions behind its proliferation. These include the mainstreaming of

female masturbation brought about by feminism in the 1970s. Almost overnight, self-love turned from an embarrassing secret into a means to self-knowledge, a therapeutic outlet and indeed a moral duty for the emancipated woman.

Unlike the anti-porn feminists, Juffer rejects a simple equation between pornography and everyday life. Sexual fantasies do not bear any simple relationship to the way one behaves or wants to behave with others. Yet her analysis also complicates the radical defence of pornography as a subversion or negation of everyday life. She writes, 'as women have gained control of the means of production of erotic texts, they have emphasized the reconciliation of fantasy and reality within everyday contexts' (p235). Domesticated porn often emphasises women's everyday identities and routines; it combines the sexual with the mundane. Rather than disparaging such texts for their lack of radicalism, Juffer places them in context, making a careful case for the significance of women's erotica.

I learned a lot from reading *At Home with Pornography*, and would recommend it as a useful book for cultural studies and women's studies courses. Juffer addresses an important section of popular culture that has virtually been ignored in feminist cultural studies. She explores the impact of female consumers on the production, marketing and circulation of pornography without at any point idealising or essentialising female sexuality. She has interesting things to say about the gender politics of space that are relevant beyond the specific context of the porn debates. And it is refreshing to encounter an alternative to the bad girl/bad boy pose that has become *de rigueur* for so many cultural critics. Juffer's intelligent, lucid and level-headed book deserves a wide audience.

THE QUEERNESS OF QUEER SPACE

William Leap

Gordon Brent Ingram, Anna-Marie Bouthillette, and Yolanda Retter (eds), *Queers in Space: Communities/Public Places/Sites of Resistance*, Bay Press, Seattle 1997, 530pp; \$24.95 paperback.

Queers in Space is a collection of essays which explore how same-sex desires and identities can be shaped by, and can help to shape, the politics of location in late-modern society. The authors of these essays come from different professional backgrounds, but share interests in understanding how sexuality informs the built environment, and in using feminist/gender activism to make access to that environment more equitable for sexual and other social minorities.

The collection begins with an introductory essay by the co-editors. The essay argues convincingly that groups like ACT UP and Queer Nation are 'leading [lesbians and gay men] into new territory and "uncharted spaces"' (p4), and that concepts like ghetto, neighbourhood and community, which have traditionally framed our understandings of lesbian/gay spaces, are no longer useful for this task. This collection proposes to explore the interplay of territory and sexuality which is unfolding in current-day lesbian/gay politics, in hopes of developing terminology and theory which are relevant to the political activities which are creating new forms of lesbian and gay geography.

Appropriately, the first group of essays in the collection describe how some lesbians and some gay men actually created locations where lesbian/gay presence can be safely proclaimed. These locations include bars, beaches and parks, but also places of employment and unemployment, social services agencies, clinics, and police stations. As these locations begin to appear, the landscape associated with those locations - the ways of seeing those locations in broader context - also begins to change. And a second group of essays explores lesbians' and gay men's efforts to reconfigure the landscape(s) through the imagining of 'safe space', assertions of 'privacy' and other means.

The next group of essays describes the emergence of physical settlements, and claims to community, within these (newly) sexualised landscapes. Particularly important here are the ways in which changes in landscape are linked with the emergence of those claims. How landscape and community are linked to conflict and confrontation is the subject for the fourth group of essays. These essays also provide reminders (as if anyone could forget!) that lesbian and gay spaces and landscapes can never escape the negative scrutiny of the heteronormative. Continuing that theme, the last group of essays highlights statements about power, sexuality, and marginality which

are implicit in various forms of public architecture.

The essays in this collection address different topics, but the discussion shares a common goal: the creation of a new, and decidedly lesbian/gay friendly, spatial politics which is rooted in specific (sexual) communities, locales, and desires, but also informed by the broader contexts of political economy, aesthetics and environmental design. Measured against heterosexual orthodoxy, the spatial politics, communities and desires under discussion here are all located 'on the margin.' That location, combined with the transgressive nature of the sexual identities, practices and locations being proclaimed here all point to queerness, and to queer theory, as the frameworks through which these discussions most usefully could unfold.

Unfortunately, and the editors acknowledge this point in the collection's introduction, queer theory has yet to grapple effectively with the dynamics of sexual geography and spatialised sexual politics. One reason for this failure has to do with the close ties between queer theorists and white male privilege (p7), which is the one group for whom claims to space are likely to be only minimally problematic. Another reason has to do with queer theory's focus on the gendered messages proclaimed in the spaces of high culture (e.g. fiction, poetry, photography, cinema), at the expense of attention to queerness within the more mundane locations of everyday life.

There is a third reason for queer theory's shortcomings in this regard. In spite of the claims to inclusiveness broadly implied by this term and its proponents, *queer* is frequently used as a synonym for *lesbian and gay*. This usage appears in everyday conversations, in media reports and in many of the attempts at building queer theory. This is also the meaning of *queer* which is attested throughout the collection.

Note how the editors' definition of *queer space* depends completely on assumptions and practices of same-sex desire and little room for queerness defined in terms of other forms of sexualised or other marginality:

queer space: an expanding set of queer sites that function to destabilise heteronormative relations and thus provide more opportunities for homoerotic expression and related communality (p449).

Moreover only one of its thirty essays, Clare Hemmings' '...mapping the territory of a bisexual genealogy', deals explicitly with the spatial dimensions of bisexuality. And while transsexuals, transgendered persons, 'straights' who enjoy homosex, and persons embracing other sexual/gendered stances are referenced (along with their space-making practices) in other chapters, these people's struggles to gain access to (public) space and to actualise alternative visions of sexual landscape are not addressed with any consistency here. Strictly speaking, under this definition, the efforts at creating geography which Hemmings describes, and with which transsexuals, transgenders, 'heterosexuals' and others are engaged, cannot be considered to produce queer space, at all.

The problems created by 'saying *queer*' while 'meaning lesbian and gay' do not end here. The tight focus on lesbian and gay spatial politics makes it difficult to build alliances with other marginalised groups, or to co-ordinate their struggles within lesbian/gay/queer political agendas. These difficulties, in turn, reproduce the social cleavages and hierarchies already marked by race, class and other forms of divide-and-rule difference.

This tight focus also suggests that lesbians and gay men have similar spatial concerns - a claim which, at best, is highly fictional. Anna-Marie Bouthillette (writing in her own chapter, p215) observes quite directly: lesbians and gay men '... have tended to interact with space in very different ways, although class, cultural and racial divisions have also been major factors'. Analytically necessary under such circumstances is to distinguish carefully between lesbian and gay practices, to sort out the socio-economic constraints which diversify them, and then to look further within each of the opposing supercategories, to see how different constructions of lesbian and of gay man diversify spatial practices even further.

This is exactly the kind of highly nuanced analysis of 'queer space' which the editors demand and defend, and several of the essays make use of such analysis in powerful ways - Joan Nestle's 'Lesbian Bars and Beaches of the 1930s', Sarah Schulman's 'People and their Streets, Places', Sanchez-Crispin and Lopez-Lopez's 'Gay Male Places in Mexico City', and Laraine Sommella's insightful interview with Maxine Wolfe. On the whole, while *Queers in Space* does a commendable job of unpacking the politics and tensions surrounding lesbians' and gay men's spatial practices in various settings, the queerness of the 'queer space' being proclaimed here has yet to be fully detailed.

A NEW ORLANDO

Clare Hemmings

Sally R. Munt, *Heroic Desire: Lesbian Identity and Cultural Spaces*. Cassell, London 1998, 184pp; £40 cloth, £14.99 paperback.

Sally R. Munt's impressive work on the spaces and places of lesbian desire shows a theoretical sophistication and complexity that bodes extremely well for the future of lesbian studies. Munt traces the various bodies, narratives and tactics of lesbian subjectivity and history that combine to produce both the author's and her readers' sense of the lesbian hero. This lesbian hero emerges as a sign of both the concrete embodiment of past and present lesbian resistance to dominant culture and the changing and often ambivalent nature of that embodiment. Thus Munt contends that:

To live as a lesbian today ... is still an heroic act. Using the lesbian heroic ... involves the invention of a new kind of self which can decentre essential individualism in favour of a pluralistic, multivalent self. This construction allows for the expression of an authentic personal history ... [while] ... it also provides a model of the self as a series of intersecting plates (p2).

Such a perspective is consciously posed in response to what Munt conceives of as 'the prevailing parodic temperament of the queer intelligentsia' (p3), which she believes results in critique without vision, leaving itself open to reappropriation by dominant culture. Munt's strategy, then, is to reclaim lesbian heroic identity as 'a utopian gesture' (p11), but not as a fixed essence with ahistorical narrative coherence, as the bearer of 'ontological stories ... [and] ... narratives of becoming' that are 'the tactics of presence, of spatial occupation' (p4).

In order to realise the above ontological concerns, Munt brilliantly combines two recent trajectories within lesbian and gay, or queer studies - the concern with sexual geographies¹ and the revived interest in butch/femme subjects and histories² - through her focus on the figure of the butch. Munt is, of course, well aware that whether one likes it or not, '[b]utch ... is the gospel of lesbianism, inevitably interpreted as the true revelation of female homosexuality ... Explicitly and implicitly the butch stands for the lesbian in the Lesbian Imaginary' (p54). In her choice of hero, Munt joins other contemporary lesbian theorists who have rewritten the narratives of damnation that consign 'the "butch", the tears, the despair of it all',³ to an unenlightened heterosexist past, emphasising instead narratives of butch resistance and their political resonance as *the* lesbian coding of desire. Munt

1. Most notably David Bell and Gill Valentine (eds), *Mapping Desire: Geographies of Sexualities*, Routledge, London 1995; and Gordon Brent Ingram, Anne-Marie Bouthillette and Yolanda Retter (eds), *Queers in Space: Communities, Public Places, Sites of Resistance*, Bay Press, Seattle 1997.

2. See Joan Nestle (ed), *The Persistent Desire: a Femme-Butch Reader*, Alyson, Boston 1992; Madeleine D Davis and Elizabeth Lapovsky Kennedy, *Boots of Leather, Slippers of Gold: the History of a Lesbian Community*, Routledge, New York 1993; and Sally R. Munt (ed), *Butch/Femme: Inside Lesbian Gender*, Cassell, London 1998.

3. Blanche Weisen Cook, "'Women Alone Stir My Imagination': Lesbianism and the Cultural Tradition', *Signs*, Vol. 4, No. 4, 1979, pp718.

tracks her butch through sexology and psychoanalysis (pp60-70), for example, marvelling at her ability to survive. She identifies her through Ann Lister's diaries (pp99-100), as well as Amazon and Lesbian Nation activism. And she emphasises her ambivalent outlaw status in such diverse figures as Wonder Woman (p105), Brandon Teena and Anzaldúa's 'mestiza' (pp149-52).

Munt does more in *Heroic Desire* than simply reverse existing negative connotations of the masculine woman, however, a strategy that would require fixing lesbian meaning in a way that the author actively resists. She follows her daring lesbian hero through her myriad narrative, temporal, theoretical and geographical transformations, suggesting possible meanings of her re-incarnations, often in unexpected ways. So, for example, Munt subtly and humorously re-imagines Radclyffe Hall's Stephen Gordon as a lesbian flâneur in contemporary Brighton. Turning Weisen Cook's provocative and dismissive rendering of 'Stephen Gordon's swagger, Stephen Gordon's breeches, and Stephen Gordon's wonderful way with horses'⁴ on its head, Munt's contemporary butch can be seen instead '[s]waggering down the street in her butch drag, casting her roving eye left and right' (p43). For Cook, the 'swagger' and 'breeches' signify all that is wrong with dominant constructions of lesbianism as the sexual invert of sexology. But for Munt, the 'swagger' and 'breeches' are precisely what make (Stephen) a lesbian hero, complex and narcissistic, desiring and desired. I would like to suggest, too, that such an open reading of butch heroism lends itself to further re-framing of Stephen's swagger, both for parallel lesbian cartographies, such as those of Terry Castle and Laura Doan,⁵ and for transsexual readings, such as Jay Prosser's.⁶ In similar vein, though to very different effect, Munt also connects her own story with those of masculine women in the past. In a particularly harrowing passage, and as the prelude to the section on sexological inscription of the butch body, Munt describes her experience of anal rape at the hands of a consultant (pp60-61). As a result Munt's reader is able to appreciate fully the impact of her genealogy of the ways that fetishisation and horror have marked the butch body.

It is precisely Munt's flexible engagement with a range of theoretical insights offered by sexual geography, critical race studies, literary criticism, lesbian studies and queer studies, that allows her to narrate her lesbian hero's epic journey through literary texts and auto/biography (for example, *The Well of Loneliness* and *Stone Butch Blues*), particular adventures and experiences (visits to bars, cafés and hospitals), as well as moments and movements of historical and political significance (for example, the death of Brandon Teena, and *The Lesbian Avengers*). As I highlighted above, Munt movingly, and at times painfully, incorporates her own autobiography into her text, posing alternately as butch rake, shamed subject, political visionary and gender outlaw. In fact, I find the temptation to read *Heroic Desire* as a contemporary, theoretical *Orlando* difficult to resist, only this time Vita writes her own story, and (we would like to imagine) gets the girl

4. *Ibid.*, p719.

5. Terry Castle, *Noël Coward and Radclyffe Hall: Kindred Spirits*, Columbia University Press, New York 1997; and Laura Doan, *Fashioning Sapphism: the Origins of English Lesbian Culture*, Columbia University Press, New York forthcoming 2000.

6. Jay Prosser, *Second Skins: the Body Narratives of Transsexuality*, Columbia University Press, New York 1998.

in the end.

There is a particular problem with Munt's innovative attempt to link narratives of identity with a mapping of lesbian cultural space, however, which I think the author herself would be the first to acknowledge. Munt's positioning of the butch as the authentic lesbian hero begs the question of how those other subjects that historically and currently also occupy and produce lesbian spaces are positioned. Munt is clearly aware of the possibility of this reading in relation to femme subjects, arguing in her own defence, that:

I have not examined the uses of femme with the same energy. Undoubtedly this lays me open to the accusation that I have perpetuated the straight discourse of femme invisibility. Although I think this could be true, first, I do not think that butch and femme are interdependent categories but have separable histories; second, excellent writing by femmes about femmes exists; third ... I confess I cannot attempt an intellectual authority on femmes in the same way that I can with butches (p55).

There are two effects of Munt's argument here that I want to draw attention to. Firstly, while clearly butch and femme subjects do have different histories, they also occupy spaces together. To claim they are 'separable' in a volume concerned with lesbian space has the unfortunate result of privileging teleological narrative over contested spaces of juxtaposition, in a way that jars with the rest of Munt's project. Secondly, such a (false) separation seems to deny the fact that a butch epic cannot fail to have an impact (intellectually authorised or not) on the ways in which femme meaning is produced, precisely because of their cultural interdependence. If the butch is constituted as 'roving flâneur', for example, the femme, who is currently made visible within cultural space primarily through the presence of a butch, becomes positioned as object of the gaze, *unless otherwise signified*. Munt's best intentions to leave femme signification to femmes backfire, I believe, precisely because it is unconvincing to suggest that individual subjects are the only ones who write their histories, or that silences (such as Munt's in this instance) are not themselves productive.

I do not mean to suggest that Munt does not acknowledge the fact that lesbian cultural spaces are shared, however. In writing of *Stone Butch Blues*, for example, Munt rightly notes that this text 'has been variously read as a lesbian novel, a butch novel, a transgender novel and a transsexual novel, according to the projection of the reader' (p22). As a reader of the cultural spaces that Munt is a part of, her own readerly projection is, of course, lesbian. Thus when she narrates, '[s]ometimes when I am queuing for pool in the corner of the bar I gaze around me in that sentimental glow of inclusion that at least four beers brings, and I ponder the amalgam of courage that has brought each woman here, to the lesbian homeland' (p10).

there can be no doubt that each woman included is read as lesbian. No doubt, too, Munt would admit to the possibility that a different subject would read that homeland differently, according to her or his own projection in turn. But this gives the impression of parallel or sequential cultural universes that sexual cartographers might usefully dispute, suggesting instead these cultural universes both exist in the same space, but also mutually influence one another. In other words, *Stone Butch Blues* could perhaps more usefully be theorised as a site of contestation produced *through* its simultaneous lesbian, butch and trans readings, and the fact that lesbian gaze in the bar might not be as unproblematically inclusive as it at first appears could be addressed directly.

That said, *Heroic Desire* is the most exciting book of lesbian theory that I have read since Butler first shook us out of our reverie.⁷ As the first book-length study to bring together narrative and spatial approaches to lesbian identity, it marks an important turning point in the ways we theorise and imagine lesbian culture, offering a unique glimpse of the treasures that sexual geographers will, I hope, continue to offer us in the future.

7. Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*, Routledge, New York 1990.

BOOKNOTES

Grady Clay, *Real Places: An Unconventional Guide to America's Generic Landscape*. University of Chicago Press, Chicago 1994, 297pp; £18.50 paperback.

Journalist and long-time de facto cultural geographer Grady Clay's profusely illustrated *Real Places* is a kind of elaborate dictionary of terms for rarely named places, or perhaps an encyclopaedia of them. It is structured less randomly than either of the genres above, but it serves their purposes in an idiosyncratic and literally eye-opening survey of America's generic forms of space. This novel work organises its 124 terms (out of over 5,000 Clay has charted and studied) into three main prefaced sections: 'The Center', 'The Front', and 'Out There' which are in turn subdivided into nine chapters that make groupings of terms ('Border Zones', 'Ephemera'), each of which is identified, described and historicised. The careful taxonomy helps us to feel the analytic import of the whole, while at the same time we can enjoy the descriptions, etymologies, social histories and potential futures of the 'Landing', the 'Village', the 'Dump'.

Many of these forms are of course applicable globally - 'Downwind', 'National Border', 'Event/Festival Site', 'Avalanche Zone' - and many more to at least the 'developed world' ('Drug Scene', 'Skyline', 'The Sandcastles'). But they are described and illustrated here in their American variants, under American names, and the whole is therefore greater than the sum of its parts: it delineates a national culture through a method deeper than its brief sub-chapters at first suggest. The pleasure of watching certain forms leap into salience through the naming process enacted here may be greatest for an American; everything identified here is familiar to me, but much of it has so far gone unseen. The national shaping power of the real estate and development industries, as well as the franchise system, was never quite so clear to me, nor so noxious, although Clay is not directly polemical or nostalgic. *Real Places* is not written as a critique, and indeed Clay revels in some kinds of place ('Vacant Lot', 'Wetland', 'Flea Market'), but the reading process gradually reveals the outlines of a late-capitalist enemy.

Mary Campbell

Garry Bellow and Martha Minow (eds), *Law Stories*, University of Michigan Press, Ann Arbor 1998; 233pp; £14.95 paperback.

In *Law Stories* Bellow and Minow bring together a selection of accounts offered by lawyers of their personal involvement in a variety of cases. The book belongs to a series entitled 'Law, Meaning and Violence' which aims to develop interdisciplinary debate, and intervene constructively in the law's conversation with itself.

There is a curious sense, however, in the editors' framing discussions,

that they remain slightly dissatisfied with the end result. Though they characterise law work as word work, as rhetoric, they nevertheless tend to treat the lawyers' accounts on their own terms, as factual testimonies. They note that much is excluded, without recognising that the narratives are the result of a continuous process of rhetorically and professionally motivated decisions. The narrators each occupy particular positions and operate a set of fairly unexamined assumptions, as do the protagonists in their stories. Attention could have been drawn to the status of their stories as literature and discourse. One lawyer/narrator offers a touching biographical account of a 'poor woman's' life, for what it shows of how women are able both to 'find opportunity' and 'make community' in the 'shadow that the law casts'. In the end the impression is given that this is a benign and sheltering shadow, that a little *chutzpah* is all it takes to overcome the inevitable hindrances caused by race and poverty. The narrative deploys both an impersonal scientific register and realist fictional strategies to construct a picture of the protagonist's character and environment, building toward a celebration of her success in transcending these factors. The authority of this narrator's discourse and confidence in the system evidently derives from her professional position and source of funding (details supplied). There is, however, no real attempt on the part of contributors or editors to acknowledge the significance of such factors.

Bellow and Minow conclude with the justifiable claim that 'each of the stories raise questions for reformers', but they do not properly address the extent to which these versions of encounters with legal practice and the legal system are open to linguistic and discursive analysis. They note the essentially 'prosaic' nature of law work, and allow their critical project to be similarly inhibited.

Stella Swain

Ron Eyerman and Andrew Jamison, *Music and social movements: Mobilizing traditions in the twentieth century*. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 1998, 191pp; £14.95 paperback.

This is a welcome addition to the small but growing library of books on politics and popular music. Eyerman and Jamison address the question of tradition, wanting to rehabilitate as progressive a concept until recently regarded within social theory as conservative. The book is perhaps at its best when outlining the case for addressing the neglect of culture and tradition within social movement theory (Chapters 1 and 2). Whilst it is by no means original (not least in folklore studies) to argue for 'tradition' as being continually remade, a *smörgåsbord* of empirical chapters provides a helpful synthesis of materials with which to make the point. Chapter 3 makes a convincing case for viewing popular culture (particularly folk song) as a wellspring of American idealism and radicalism from the 1870s right through

to the 1950s and Chapter 5 usefully draws on the authors' own already-published material to develop a similar argument for the mutually reinforcing relationship between social movements and popular culture in the USA in the 1960s.

The limitations of the book lie particularly in its tantalisingly brief treatment of other forms of popular music. Chapter 4 shows how the American black civil rights movement throughout the present century mobilized elements of black musical tradition (for example, Mahalia Jackson's treatment of Dorsey's gospel music) but the chapter focuses on song texts (as does the whole book, generally) to the neglect of other important elements in black music and confines discussion of rap to a single page (p105). Chapter 6 provides a useful account of the Swedish folk music revival, from its American-influenced origins in the 1960s leading to a position of global pre-eminence in the 1990s 'world music' marketplace, but builds the discussion around a rather crude model in which 'politically charged music' inescapably follows a trajectory in which it is 'continuously depoliticized ... from political folk music to harmless rock music' (p140; although on the next page we read that rock music is far from harmless - 'rock music causes more social problems than it helps alleviate', p141).

A number of such sweeping (and questionable) statements litter the book and detract from its overall value, at least as an exemplar of the relevance of social movement theory for students of popular music. Nonetheless, Eyerman and Jamison point up the dangers for 'movement intellectuals' (the true heroes of the book, one suspects) of 'commercialization' (in this respect, their observations on Dylan are well-made) and remind us (as in their discussion of music as a form of 'exemplary action' within social movements, in Chapter 7) of the unparalleled, if momentary, energy with which music can transform social movements (and individual lives).

Peter Symon

Anna Maria Smith, *Laclau and Mouffe: Radical Democratic Imaginary*. Routledge, London 1998, 216pp; £50 cloth; £14.99 paperback.

This is a very good introduction to Laclau's and Mouffe's post-Marxist theory of hegemony, both for those familiar with the issues and for students. It does an excellent job of explaining an often obscure body of work using case studies and concrete examples to clarify difficult theoretical points. In particular Smith is to be commended for situating Laclau's and Mouffe's thought clearly in relation to more traditional political theory: the radical tradition from which it has been developed and the liberal-communitarian debate. There are also interesting discussions of misinterpretations of their work, such as the difference between authoritarian hegemony and radical democratic pluralism.

This is not simply an introduction, however. Smith also makes some

pertinent criticisms. She contrasts Laclau's turn towards psychoanalysis as tending towards formalist explanations for hegemonic discourse with the Gramscian understanding of the historical conditions which make hegemony possible developed by Laclau and Mouffe in their earlier work. She is also highly critical of what she sees as the bias towards dominant groups of their theorisation of multiculturalism, charging them with a simple notion of pluralism which neglects how culture is linked to exploitation and erasure, as well as forms of hybridity and intra-cultural antagonism.

Smith has also developed an aspect of their work which, she says, is implicit as a way of countering criticisms that Laclau's and Mouffe's theory of hegemony gives too much emphasis to contingency and fluidity and not enough to the relative fixity of historical formations. This is the distinction between structural and subject positions. While it is questionable that Laclau's and Mouffe's theory gives us the conceptual tools with which to fully explore what is, in fact, a fairly traditional distinction in sociology, Smith's interpretation represents an interesting extension of their work in a useful way.

Kate Nash

The Land Without Music: Music, Culture and Society in Twentieth-Century Britain, Andrew Blake, Manchester University Press, Manchester 1997, 256pp; £40 cloth; £14.99 paperback.

These days, it seems that ethnicity is of central concern to the various inter-disciplinary approaches to music which feed into and partially comprise what are known as the 'new' or 'critical' musicologies, and Andrew Blake's current study applies the concept to that most ostensibly 'white' of national cultures - the 'British'.

But while he constantly (and correctly) problematises the concept of the 'classical' in opposition to the 'popular', he singularly fails to fully problematise his central concept of the 'British' beyond taking account of, for example, Asian or Caribbean popular musics. In general, his actual topic is not 'British' music at all, but specifically 'English' music (as if that concept wasn't already thorny enough). Just as 'Britpop' is underwritten by an intense anglocentrism, so too is Blake's notion of what he calls (without scarequotes and in the singular) 'the national culture'.

Generally, with a few passing exceptions, Welsh, Scots and Irish musics are discussed firmly within the context of 'indigenous' Folk traditions, tacitly denying these cultures one of the central concepts of Blake's polemics on 'Englishness' - *modernity*. Indeed, the presumed dialectic between tradition and modernity in 'Englishness' is one of the crucial theoretical axes upon which his argument turns - why not so for 'Celtic Britain', too? A further problem emerges in the dearth of references to, for example, the Afro-Welsh or Asian Scots, doubly-marginalised, doubly-erased within Blake's text. To ignore the ethnically diverse modernity of these two

countries, and to characterise them largely (albeit tacitly) within 'white' Folk contexts, is to take a highly reductive approach and ultimately to essentialise them in rather bog-standard establishment ways.

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