

Book Review: Rethinking urban parks: public space and cultural diversity. By Setha Low, Dana Taplin and Suzanne Scheld. Austin: University of Texas Press 2005. ISBN 0292712545

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negotiations themselves. Her readings of Chicana literature offer a Foucauldian model of power as fluid and always already in negotiation, but without going over the postmodern edge of arguing that power never can, or already has been, subverted. Her third chapter, 'Intermarginalia: Chicana/spatiality and sexuality in the work of Gloria Anzaldúa and Terri de la Peña', is exemplary for its explications of the symbiotic relationship between statutory and cultural regulations of space and Chicana subversions of these norms.

Brady's study is laudable for adding more depth and range to the spatial studies canon also because the interstitial spaces she studies are inter-geopolitical as well. She notes how the US–Mexico border is anchored in the 'materiality of national borders' even as it has become a wildly loose floating metaphor in social theory, especially after Valdés's and Anzaldúa's testimonial works. This obvious but refreshingly critical reassessment both arrests the overextension of a metaphor and still allows for its usage. In this way, she succeeds in freeing spatial studies from its lingering fetish on localities like Los Angeles or Manhattan, or specific places in between or beyond, as the primary battleground in the articulation of subjects-in-struggle. After all, for women, especially lesbians, the battle is not confined anywhere, but always already exists at the site of their bodies, which Chicana authors locate everywhere.

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Rethinking urban parks: public space and cultural diversity. By Setha Low, Dana Taplin and Suzanne Scheld. Austin. University of Texas Press. 2005. xii + 226 pp. £14.95 paper; ISBN: 0292712545.

Over the years, the Public Space Research Group, housed at the City University of New York and headed by Setha Low, has received a series of commissions to analyse the use and meaning of large urban public spaces such as landscape parks, historic sites and beaches. To meet the goals of the commissions, members of the PSRG utilized what they call Rapid Ethnographic Assessment Procedures (REAP) – in essence a programme of observation, interviews with park users and 'experts', and the analysis of whatever documents can be brought readily to hand, all conducted in a very short time frame. *Rethinking urban parks* reports the results of these studies. Examining two urban beaches, two historic sites and one landscape park, the authors find that different cultural groups (e.g. Puerto Ricans, Italian Americans, youth, the elderly) like to use parks in different ways. Some like to play dominoes, others like to play drums. Some like to hike in the wooded areas behind the beachfront, others like to lie in the sand and talk. Some like to barbecue and picnic, others like to play soccer or softball. They also find that within cultural groups, not everybody thinks alike. They find that historical sites, like Independence Mall in Philadelphia, do not always serve as destinations for different cultural groups. In this latter case the authors attribute this fact, no doubt correctly, to the way history is presented in the park (as a heroic narrative of

founding fathers); but they do so while leaving the impression that the *purpose* of the park is little different than, say, Brooklyn's Prospect Park, a large landscaped park designed for recreation. This is odd.

Rethinking urban parks seems to be written for park managers and urban designers, but especially for that subset of managers and designers who (apparently) have no interest whatsoever in understanding not only the theoretical debates surrounding public space but the historical-geographical contexts within which parks exist – e.g. those contexts defined by rapidly restructuring cities (though, to be sure, the authors do provide a potted history of urban park development in an opening chapter). Such designers and managers will find some nuggets of useful descriptive information about several parks in the north-eastern United States, and a helpful set of recommendations brought together in the conclusion. If readers want to understand what those nuggets add up to, and indeed, even if they want to understand what, in its complexity, 'cultural diversity' is – if they want to understand why those conclusions matter – they will have to look elsewhere.

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