Gendered 'scapes: Place, Space and Landscape
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Spaces and places have a long history of being gendered on the basis of objects, uses, design, ambience, contours and angles, activities and identity-presentation. For example, it is common in Western society to think of the home primarily as a female space; the designation of this private sphere as female and the public sphere as male is widespread. All known societies gender space, although not all do so in the same way or to the same degree. Increased complexity in gendering space likely accompanied the development of the division of labor and the segmentation and specialization of consumption.

The presentations in this special session assess genderedness in space, place and landscape in a variety of settings. These concepts are all related; it is common to refer to “place” as a “structured space,” for example, or “space” as a “practiced place,” “an outcome, the product of an activity” (Morris 1992, p. 3, referring to de Certeau 1984). In this presentation, “space” will refer to indoor, structured venues, while “place” will move beyond the architectural space to include also feelings of identity both experienced by residents of a place and attributed by others to a particular locale. This “sense of place” is an important part of consumption experience. Finally, the term “landscape” is even broader, “incorporating the natural and cultural features we see around us...it has personal and cultural meaning” (Norwood and Monk 1997, p. 3). It should be noted, however, that we also “create” landscapes in which “we express our social and personal identities” (Norwood and Monk 1997, p. 3). In this sense, landscape also moves beyond the architectural space to include surrounding natural, geographic or geological, and cultural features.

The first presentation, “Challenging Gendered Perspectives of the American West” by Janeen Costa and Teresa Pavia will consider both natural and created landscapes in the American West. As a foundational background, Costa and Pavia will draw upon established scholarship in history, art and literature to illustrate the manner in which the traditional perspective of the West as a male space has given way to a more balanced treatment that now includes women’s voices and experiences. They will present their research on current recreational and tourism activities in the American West to show that, while some of the traditional stereotypes of the West as a place to be challenged and conquered primarily by men continue, female consumption experiences relating to Native American or New Age spirituality and to integration and harmony with the landscape are also important. They conclude that the experience of the West is complex and deserving of a polyvocal analysis.

The second presentation, “Gendering the Material Culture of our University Offices” by Joel Watson and Russ Belk, focuses on identity and the presentation of self in created and altered spaces. Watson and Belk analyze their qualitative data on university offices from the perspective of gender. They find that, in this context, women are more likely to craft personal statements of identity which mark their offices as their own space, establishing
identity and a “sense of place.” They also find differences between men and women in the use of certain types of objects in the marking of personal space and presentation of self. Importantly, however, their data also suggest that some gender stereotypes concerning the use of objects to define space and present self are not borne out. Specifically, personal and family mementos, as well as status-claiming objects, are found equally in both men’s and women’s offices. In conclusion, they draw upon the concepts of hypostatization and vivification, as well as the mechanical vs. organic distinction to clarify their findings.

In the third presentation, “Exporting Gender: Paris’ Disney Village and the ‘Rhythm of America,” Janeen Costa and Gary Bamossy present contrasting views about the created retail space located adjacent to Disney Paris (Le Parc Disney). Costa analyzes the space from a critical perspective in which American gendered perspectives, stereotypes and social structures are “exported” in the context of an entertainment-based, hyperreal setting. Costa suggests the space thereby confirms, maintains and furthers the power-based genderedness of American society, making it an object of admiration and emulation for non-Americans.

Bamossy, in contrast, analyzes Disney Village as a “fun space” where individuals consume images, products and experiences in a non-critical fashion. Bamossy believes the space was produced and is consumed without overriding implications in terms of genderedness and power. Rather, Disney chose to reproduce times and spaces from America that were and are conceived of as “fun” and “liminal.” Europeans consume the space in a similar fashion, partaking of the consumption of American society as part of entertainment without concern for either gender conflicts or issues of cultural imperialism involving the export of gender schemes.


Norwood, Vera and Janice Monk, eds. (1987), The Desert is No Lady, Tucson, AZ: University of Arizona Press.