

*Leisure and Feminist Theory* by **Betsy Wearing**. Thousand Oaks: Sage, 1998. Pp. xvi + 207; US \$43.95 (paperback).

For most of its disciplinary and largely masculinist life, sociology has treated leisure as a much less compelling object of analysis than its conceptual binary twin - "productive," paid work. Feminism, through its various waves and interventions, has also responded to the problematic of leisure in a rather dilatory and patchy manner, often seeming to mirror - in the very act of contestation - the theoretical and empirical priorities already laid down. It is only in the last decade or so that wide-scale, intensive and consistent academic attention has been paid to the relationships between leisure and gender, so allowing the emergence of a corpus of research which is much harder to ignore (or pay lip service to) than heretofore.

In this book, Betsy Wearing, who is one of the pioneers of the feminist, sociological study of leisure in Australia, sets out to review the history and current state of leisure studies as they specifically relate to gender. This task requires first an articulation and appraisal of "pre-feminist" sociological analyses of leisure, stressing both their contributions to the serious study of leisure and their limitations in terms of gender analysis. Next, the gender conscious work that has been conducted in the foundational disciplinary strands is presented, followed by contributions from other or "inter"-disciplines that have enhanced critical inquiry into the subject of leisure. From this vantage point new directions in leisure theory are canvassed and promoted. In this way, the author conducts both a review and an elaboration of the leisure studies "canon," and presents a set of proposals for its development.

In the time-tested manner of introductory sociology courses worldwide, the first three chapters see Wearing take the reader through functionalism, (neo)Marxism and symbolic interactionism. These are shown to have explicitly or implicitly advanced the theorisation of leisure but also, even when they have taken greater account of gender and, perhaps, have been incorporated into the feminist "project," to have certain limitations. The author then looks to other (inter)disciplines, to neglected objects of analysis in leisure studies, and to other sub-disciplines of sociology to compensate for these flaws. Cultural Studies approaches to leisure practices, relations, meanings and identities are first addressed, followed, after a detour through some contemporary theories of masculinity, by the sub-disciplinary sociologies of the body, the emotions and the urban. The book then concludes by moving out of more orthodox sociology once more to embrace poststructuralist and postcolonial theory.

In the process the author provides a range of knowing reflections and potential avenues for analysis in a field where, it must be said, much of the mainstream literature is anodyne to the point of narcoleptic. Wearing searches diligently for points of theoretical departure that will enable much more challenging ways of seeing leisure emerge that enable a treatment of women's leisure that is neither ideologically wedded to victimisation nor to individualistic, self-induced liberation.

The ultimate position that Wearing adopts is synthetic and eclectic - a "feminist postmodern interactionist perspective" (143). Lured out of the sociological mainstream

to address such poststructural concepts as "chora" and "heterotopia," she stretches and deconstructs the interactionist "I/Me" duality by taking it into what she conceives as the simultaneously individuating and socialising realm of "personal space." Herein Wearing finds the potential for personal and collective pleasure and liberation for both men and women. How the reconditioning of George Herbert Mead by placing him in a theoretical matrix that includes Michel Foucault, Judith Butler, Elizabeth Grosz and sundry others will play - both in the teaching context and in academic discourse - is, as journalists are wont to say when stuck for a summation, yet to be seen. For this reader it is a suggestive approach that, on first inspection at least, may take hybridity to the point of incommensurability. Symptomatic, perhaps, of this problem is the author's occasional slippage between quasi-immanent and proto-constructionist treatments of the categories "women," "men," and "feminist" and "masculinist." In laying these tensions bare (often self-consciously and reflexively), Wearing's personal and political history ensures that she never posits, in Tanya Modleski's words, a "feminism without women."

In taking on the ambitious task of surveying leisure and feminist theory across a wide variety of perspectives, Wearing inevitably covers some areas more satisfactorily than others. It is hard, for example, to imagine any specialist urban sociologist being happy with a chapter headed "Urban Sociology" that not only neglects most of its distinguished contemporary exponents, but also turns mostly to urban geography for inspiration! Some surprising technical flaws can also be found in the book that should have been picked up during the editorial process. For example, the mis-spelling of as well-known a proper name as Laura Mulvey's (here spelt Mulvay), some other minor textual errors and the (virtual) repetition of passages on pages 77 and 90 concerning men's sport are unfortunate lapses. The early chapters also suffer from a degree of repetitiveness arising from the book's structure of conducting a critique of previous sociological theories in the light of anticipated new perspectives presented in the later part of the book. The concluding chapters, in frequently emphasising and summarising Wearing's new position, are also somewhat repetitive, while also bearing a slightly disconcerting resemblance on occasions to works located within the "self help industry" that populate so much shelf space in bookshops and libraries.

Overall, *Leisure and Feminist Theory* is a useful and consistently informative text, tapping into both classic and more *avant garde* theory and showing their possibilities for illuminating questions of leisure. This is a book clearly designed as a resource for students trying to grapple with contending frameworks for the understanding and critique of contemporary leisure structures, practices and identities. It can be safely anticipated that in the right androgynous hands it will work well in the classroom context in teasing out many of the complexities, contradictions and ambiguities of *fin de siècle* leisure. It is heartening that Betsy Wearing steadfastly refuses to forget issues of power and inequality in leisure relations, and the privileged nature of her own position when compared with the sundry subaltern groupings who are so often written out of - or caricatured in - even the most well-meaning leisure "scripts."

DAVID ROWE

*University of Newcastle*