generic forms from the popular to the theoretical.

It is apparent that when, as Wearing does, we articulate a poststructuralist approach to Sociology to the traditional voice of an autonomous rational agent, we are dealing with fluid and often puzzling disciplinary relations. We are dealing less with a settled intellectual map than with various, and at times, intersecting axes of discursive negotiation. There are disagreements between intellectuals of various “disciplines” about the nature and proper scope of their disciplines; there are closely related disagreements (from both “within” and “without”) about the demarcations of the disciplines themselves; and there are disagreements about the forms and sites actual, possible or desirable – of affinity, intersection and even identity between “disciplines.”

Wearing fails to recognise that the opening up of Sociological writing to its own recognition of its “other” – rhetoric – directs us towards that “other,” towards rhetorical analysis of figures in Sociological writing. The “other” is no longer merely rhetoric, the negative pole in the dialectic of European thought and culture. Spivak (1987), Said (1978, 1983), Irigaray (1985), Niranjana (1992), and Le Doeuff (1991), expose the motivated rhetoric in metaphors for “other.” Wearing does demonstrate a tactical use of tropes for “othering” which now challenge the way the world is presented and ordered. “Woman,” once thought of as “other,” can now be thought along with differently positioned subjects of enunciation involving innumerable bodies: not anonymous women, black people, not orientals or Moslems in the abstract, but historical, living subjects who experience othering, including gendering in local, institutional, cultural and social differences.

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Gender, Identity, and Place: Understanding Feminist Geographies is a text that usefully and thematically summarises an extant body of knowledge. Any tertiary student, new researcher or reluctant colleague wanting to understand the contribution of feminist geography to the discipline will find easy access to that story in the highly readable narrative that Linda McDowell has composed.

My first positive response to Linda McDowell’s book comes from my appreciation of its usefulness as an introductory and, in a sense, summative text. I developed a further set of positive responses on going back for more considered readings of chapters that particularly caught my eye – chapters such as “In and Out of Place: Bodies and Embodiment” (Chapter Two), “In Public:
the Street and Spaces of Pleasure” (Chapter Six), “Gendering the Nation-State” (Chapter Seven) and “Displacements” (Chapter Eight). Thus, my second appreciation was for a work of meticulous self-interrogation that actively destabilizes the notion that the author’s “science” will provide answers. Third, *Gender, Identity, and Place* has a structural integrity that belies the first glance appearance it gives of being a “set of essays.” Fourth, the book draws extensively on the interdisciplinary fields of “feminist philosophy” and uses different schools and perspectives within feminism to analyse the directions taken by feminist geographers. Finally, this is a book that holds gender still to be “one of the small number of crucial relations of power” that structure our lives – thus it embodies a political commitment that is often lacking from contemporary geography texts. I use these five points to structure my review.

As a “useful” text, McDowell’s book will become a key reference simply on the strength of its scope and scholarship. The text is built on very current, as well as more traditional and well-known sources. Some fifty of the books and articles that form the extensive bibliography, which highlights the span of feminist geography from the late 1970s, were written between 1997 and 1999. The key themes, in addition to the four already mentioned that relate to embodiment, public space, nations and displacements, focus on home, community and work so that the seven substantive chapters cover the breadth of territory that has increasingly informed and been informed by the feminist project in human geography.

Not only does McDowell’s lucid survey fit out the landscape of a new geography world order, but readers will also find access to interdisciplinary links that have been well-facilitated by feminist, and more recently by post-modern and post-colonial, scholars. The contributions of Anthropology, Cultural Studies, Feminist Philosophy, Feminist Political Theory, Film and Media Studies, Gender Studies, Queer Theory and Sociology to the reshaping of self-world understandings, are all appositely cited in the text. Thus, the text’s use is extended to being a bridge between contemporary feminist thought, feminist geography and other disciplinary areas.

The thematic breadth and interdisciplinary strength of *Gender, Identity, and Place* provides a stable and perhaps predictable starting point for a resume of feminist geography. The place of questions in the text, however, provides a destabilizing counterpoint. The interrogative role that McDowell adopts throughout her narrative serves implicitly to critique the notion of “knowing science”. The first sentence in the preface begins with a reiteration of a now hoary refrain: “what is all this stuff about women and geography?” (viii). This is a personal question – one that McDowell has been asked and that she is now prepared “to attempt to provide an answer to” (viii). Reader and writer are brought together in the multiple rephrasing of the question “How is gender linked to geography?” (1).

McDowell relates these questions not just to shifts in geographical knowledge but also to epistemological shifts that call up literal and
metaphorical evocations of place, space and boundaries in social science, the arts, humanities and lived politics. The instability of real material spaces and the spaces of knowledge is couched and questioned in the phrasing of the “cultural turn” (7, 227) and the critique of “categorical difference” (11). As McDowell suggests, “the belief in categorical difference, which is binary and hierarchical … is deeply embedded in the structures and practices of Western thought… [and] is also deeply implicated in the social production of space” (11).

The instability of the category of “gender” as a central concept in McDowell’s book, is also taxed by questions. The contours to the question “How is gender linked to geography?” are outlined in Chapter One. Gender, in McDowell’s personalized reading, is both “a set of material social relations [that also has] symbolic meaning,” and is something that has an “effect on my attitudes, beliefs, and future intentions, on my knowledge of and understanding of the world and different people’s place in it” (7). The question of gender is also represented as fluid, mutable and susceptible to deconstruction. McDowell’s self-interrogation can thus be seen as a technique that serves to open up discursive space. The brief section on “diversity, difference and deconstruction” provides a rich introduction to feminist-postmodern influences in geography (21-5).

The prejudice against the personal voice in scholarly texts has been a hard one to shift in the discipline of geography. Much of the impetus for making the shift has been the successful foregrounding of the authorial “I” in feminist geography books and articles. McDowell is explicit from the outset that hers is a book whose “emphases reflect…my own interests and some of the work I have been involved in” (viii). Thus, she provides what is in effect a “collection of essays” written by an “urban and social geographer” with a British and Eurocentric bias that is explicitly stated (viii).

*Gender, Identity, and Place* has a strength that is often lacking in multiply authored or thematically focused texts. The cohesion of the argument is not simply evident in the introduction and conclusion but is threaded through each of the substantive sections theoretically, empirically and stylistically. Structurally, each chapter follows a similar format. Key questions raise the topic themes. Some of the major interconnections between the topic and geographical thinking are highlighted. Core definitions are offered. Subtopics and different representations and perspectives are explored in a literature review format that showcases the writing of many geographers. A concise conclusion then summarises the main points.

Each chapter is clearly and explicitly built on its predecessors but is also self-contained so that each can be read independently. The questions raised in Chapter One call the conceptual building blocks of feminist geography into relief. This structural skill – using material themes underpinned by a strong theoretical argument – facilitates the fourth major strength of the text: the ubiquity of feminist philosophies in each point of departure.
The conceptual foundations laid out in Chapter One form the foundation for subsequent chapters. Chapter Two, which deals with one of the singularly frangible subjects in human geography – the body – addresses the exclusions of the private, the bodily, and the sexual from the corpus of geography. These exclusions are undressed within the frame of contemporary feminist philosophies ranging from Iris Young’s notion of “scaling bodies” to Elizabeth Grosz’s explorations of “bodies as surfaces” (48-51).

Feminist philosophical perspectives also explicitly underpin the content in Chapters Six and Seven that deal with issues of representation and nationalism respectively. By outlining the scope of feminist theorizing available to writers in each of these areas, McDowell creates a significant device for managing complex and otherwise unwieldy content areas. I was particularly impressed with McDowell’s treatment of “Gendering the Nation-State” (Chapter Seven). Here, more self-evident and well-rehearsed debates about the public/private dichotomies that structure women’s relationships with citizenship, the state and civil society are examined alongside less widely circulated (in geography) discussions about “systematic reconstructive thinking about the welfare state” and the “ways in which gendered language, imagery and artifacts are drawn on to construct…national identity” (191, 193).

As McDowell herself admits, “the feminist project – its theoretical examination of diverse ways of being a woman or a man and the protest against the currently available options – is, of course, no small enterprise” (10). Her book amply demonstrates the scale of the enterprise, its complexity and its multi-faceted nature. It provides would-be geographers with few excuses for side stepping “the stuff about women and geography.” The book concludes with a different and more politicized, set of questions “does gender still matter? Is the category of gender now so fluid as to be meaningless? Is feminist research still possible? Indeed is a feminist politics still necessary if we have deconstructed the category ‘Woman’?” McDowell at this point steps clearly back into her text and invites (“expects”) her readers to concur that saying “yes” to these questions does still matter (247). Some might argue that this is a curious subversion of the god-trick of science where the authorial voice really does know, and having demonstrated the truth puts the reader in a position to know too. But I would suggest that Gender, Identity, and Place reflects an autobiographical passion for matters of gender and justice and for the significance of the feminist project, not just to women geographers but to the discipline as a whole.

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