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Book Review

Taylor, Yvette. 2012. *Fitting into Place? Class and Gender Geographies and Temporalities*. Surrey, Burlington: Ashgate

In *Fitting Into Place*, Yvette Taylor undertakes an ambitious study of the intersectional relationship among social class, gender, race, geography, and temporality, utilizing a multi-methods approach (map drawing, focus groups, interviews, and performances). Taylor challenges the recent trend in sociological thought that regards post-modern understandings of identity as fluid, flexible, multifaceted, and deterritorialized. She points out that social class hierarchies still exist in twenty-first century Great Britain (and elsewhere), and that such enduring inequalities foster the retention of “old” identities. While she acknowledges that new theories of assemblages, affects, and networks have their place, Taylor cautions sociologists not to be so quick to dismiss social class or gender as relics of the past. Against a contemporary context of post-industrialism in which individuals are increasingly expected to transcend economic and social constraints in pursuit of self-regulation, she asks, “which social subjects are able to mobilize and spatialize their interests in order to achieve legitimate subject-positions in these new landscapes?” (p. 2). This challenge to Foucault’s concept

of “governmentality” is the central organizing principle of Taylor’s project, which she artfully weaves throughout this book. Taylor gives due credit to others who share her perspective (Adkins, Skeggs, Reay and colleagues) and adds further complexity to the intersectionality conversation (the usual suspects being social class, gender, and race) by adding geography and temporality to the equation.

In the first chapter, “Fitting into Place? Class and Gender Geographies and Temporalities,” Taylor raises several insightful questions with regard to postmodern identity theory including: (1) What or who is worth losing or gaining?, (2) Who do we want to “fit in”?, and (3) How might classed and gendered pasts, presents, and futures collide rather than cohere in everyday places? Taylor is critical of discourses, which relentlessly individualize opportunity, choice, responsibility, and aspiration. As such discourses relate to gender, she points out that they share a propensity to emphasize “new times” for womankind alongside a so-called “crisis” for men, thus masking the myriad ways in which gendered assumptions are still frequently reproduced

in everyday life. Taylor notes that recent research reveals younger women continue to internalize heteronormative paradigms that influence their current plans relative to their projected future commitment to their families, while older women act on family commitments as mothers and grandmothers (differently from men). She draws upon Bourdieu to support her argument that while “new choices may be available to some...inequalities resurface as people go about investing in their future selves according to logics of choice, attainment and embodied accomplishment – where some cannot and/or will not invest or «appear» in place” (p. 2) and utilizes his concept of *habitus* to explain why certain people inhabit place as their own while others seem not “meant to «become» or arrive in place” (p. 49). When Taylor speaks of “place” she uses the term both literally and figuratively to refer to the geographical locations affected by post-industrialization, as well as the people who inhabit those spaces and their response(s) to expectations that they should aspire to middle-class lifestyles. As the concept of “place” applies to gender, Taylor highlights the tension between “old” expectations that a woman’s “place” is in the domestic sphere and “new” paradigms that assume all women can/should attain successful identities in the public sphere.

Taylor outlines her methodological approach in the second chapter, “«City Publics» and the «Public Sociologist»,” in which she emphasizes that while her fieldwork site is situated in the North East of England, her case study can neither be read as an abstract *everywhere* nor should it be dismissed as *nowhere* because of its specificity. Rather, Taylor calls upon us to think of continuations and parallels in and beyond the case and place of her study, recognizing how different material, emotional, cultural, economic, and embodied distances can

“reveal what, where and who is rendered proximate or remote” (p. 21). Taylor explains that she selected the North East of England because like other UK regions it has undergone major transformation in response to global economic changes in recent decades. Shipbuilding, coal mining, and heavy engineering kept the region bustling up until the 1980’s, when the coal mining industry (once one of the UK’s largest employers) began closing pits and laying off workers in droves. Taylor notes that by the close of the twentieth century, only one percent of coal mining jobs remained nationally, plummeting from 700,000 jobs in 1947 to 8,000 jobs in 1997 (p. 24). Today, the major components of the North East economy are service and knowledge-based employment, with manufacturing, business services, and the public sector dominating the field. As a result, many rural areas in the region continue to suffer economic hardship, “lagging behind” their counterparts in the South of England, as it is framed pejoratively in public discourse.

Taylor is an effective qualitative researcher, mining her interviewees’ empirical accounts (she interviewed both residents and public officials in the North East region) to demonstrate how class and gender are bound in “negotiations and reclamations of the past, present and future even as they are disguised as personal «choice,» individual extensions and regional expansions” (p. 71). She points out that, in the wake of globalization, people in the North East region have been re-branded as “consumers” and “citizens” (in contrast to their previous roles as “workers”) in public discourses on transformation and regeneration. Here Taylor takes issue with the idea of “regeneration” itself, a term used to symbolize a “coming forwards” and the transcending of place, gender, and social class. She argues that postmodern discourses

of “regeneration” speak primarily to the middle-classes, while marginalizing working-classes is justified by the perception that they are “lagging behind.” Taylor pointedly asks, “what does it mean for an area, and its inhabitants, to be deemed in need of «place shaping» in order to become part of a future and saved from a failed past of social-spatial «death»?” (p. 31). Her answer to this question lies in her empirical findings, which reveal that rather than problematizing the regeneration of such spaces, public officials instead wonder why working-class subjects are not “coming forward” and participating in regeneration initiatives more readily. Indeed, one’s participation in consumer culture has come to be viewed as a pre-requisite to active citizenship. Hence, middle-class tastes and behaviors are deemed superior, while “working-classness” is pathologized in twenty-first century public discourse.

Taylor makes a strong case for reconsidering the ways in which social class, gender, and race intersect across time and place. While her project focuses mainly on class and gender, she does ad-

dress the issue of race in chapter six, “Geographies of Excess,” where she emphasizes that she found no singular racist geography or narrative. Rather, her informants expressed different types of racism, which were influenced by economic factors, as well as their own sense of belonging. A major strength of this book is that Taylor’s theoretical claims are supported by her substantive empirical findings. However, her final chapter fails to drive home the points she so powerfully articulates throughout the rest of the book. Rather than offering specific policy solutions or conclusions to tie together her ideas, Taylor is deliberately brief, inviting the reader to review the themes outlined in her first chapter. Aside from this minor flaw, the book is superbly researched and crafted. Taylor reminds us that as sociologists we must rethink the interconnection between tradition and futurity, and remain alert to what avenues are closed when we rely solely on postmodern theories of identity. This book is a valuable resource for anyone interested in public policy, urban planning, as well as contemporary class and gender theory.

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