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Book review: American Visual Culture. By Mark Rawlinson. Oxford: Berg Publishers. 2009. xi —248 pp. 40 b/w illustrations. £17.99 Paperback. ISBN: 9781845202170

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Cultural Geographies 2011 18: 138

DOI: 10.1177/14744740110180010908

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but also presents opportunities for visibilities and the contestations of heteronormativities. Tucker refuses to focus only on marginalization, examining empowerments that cannot be located in 'oppression' or be lost to hopelessness. Instead, this book inspires hope as well as understanding, demonstrating how heteronormativity can be usurped and homophobia challenged, such that queer men become visible. Yet, he illustrates that not only do queer men resist and transgress heteronormativities to create diverse visibilities, there are also possibilities *because* of the operation of oppressive regimes, for example the clampdown on gay bars in the De Waterkant area increased excitement in attending these events. In pointing to the dangers of gender violence for cross dressing coloured men, Tucker notes that whilst it is important to attend to the dangers and experiences of gendered violence against these men, these should not be used to dismiss or erase empowerment and the successes this group of men have attained in wider communities. This has implications in how we approach studies of sexualities, explore visibilities and empowerments, even where violence is present. This does not negate such violence, but neither does it allow it the predominance in discussions of (in this context) gender expressions.

This book offers a rich engagement with urban spatialities, that refuses a reduction of sexual visibilities to ghettos and territories. It explores how identifications and enactments of queer male sexualities are spatially constituted and historically located. Finding that sexual expressions are not ubiquitous even within Cape Town is a challenge for urban investigations of sexualities, particularly those which are focused on closets and coming out. Such an investigation has clear implications for the study of other urbanities. For example, what would a similarly nuanced account of the sexual spatialities of other cities (within and beyond the Global North) reveal? How would this alter the focus of what we are looking at and for when foregrounding investigations of sexuality?

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American Visual Culture. By Mark Rawlinson. Oxford: Berg Publishers. 2009. xi–248 pp. 40 b/w illustrations. £17.99 Paperback. ISBN: 9781845202170.

American Visual Culture is presented as a snapshot of American 'film, television, art, advertising, design, architecture, illustration, photography etc.' (p. 1), a broad survey of how the production and consumption of these forms of media have shaped perceptions and identities in/of America. Rawlinson highlights the interdisciplinarity of visual theory by citing sources from sociology, anthropology, history, art and geography. This approach sounds good in theory, but is also problematic; even though Rawlinson acknowledges his desire to have the book serve as a 'suggestive survey' (p. 1) making this a good introductory text, I would contend that overall, the book *implies* a lot but doesn't *do* much.

Rawlinson outlines one of his goals as an attempt to examine the ways that visual culture is 'riddled with contradictory narratives, which ... problematize the existence of a distinct national "American" identity' (p. 6). Unfortunately, Rawlinson undertakes this radical examination in segregated post-modern trope chapters on race, class and gender which are rather predictable. It's not that Rawlinson does not invoke some interesting thoughts and issues here, but that the vast range of the text's temporal frame, topical treatment and theoretical framework, contrasted with the fact that it is all squeezed into one book defining what is 'American', while trying to highlight the diversity of that term, leaves me, by the end of the book, feeling enticed by the topic and appreciative of Rawlinson's motivations but unconvinced that the aspirations outlined in the introduction were achieved.

A chapter on 'Visualizing Various American Landscapes' includes a foray into Donald Meining's work on American landscapes paired and contrasted with the work of visual culture theorist W.J.T. Mitchell. The result is a rather awkward description of what landscape 'is' and why it must be visualized only 'through representation' (p. 22). From here Rawlinson turns to the work of David Harvey to begin to unpack the various political agendas behind mapmaking. Further on in the book, Rawlinson references Gillian Rose's book *Visual Methodologies* but does so to make a point about Freud. The thing that I find strange here is Rawlinson's adherence to, quite frankly, outdated geographic theories to discuss a very contemporary topic. In this sense, the work falls flat geographically, ignoring many new key theories about forms and roles of representation, place and, especially relevant to a work on American culture, mobility.

My final grievance is in regard to the lack of content on new media. To write about a culture so immersed in new media, I find it very odd indeed to have little or no mention of film/video, consumer media, citizen journalism or online consumption and production of visual culture, especially when the work is already reaching so far.

Despite these concerns, *American Visual Culture* was interesting to read and is well written. Rawlinson likely won't surprise you, but he also won't bore you.

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