

Acarón, T. (2016). Shape-in(g) space: Body, boundaries, and violence. *Space and Culture*, 19(2), 139-149.

Synopsis

Acarón discussed the relationship of the body to both “personal” and “social” space, coming to the conclusion that bodies shape space, but space also shaped bodies. She defined *embodied space* through the categories of body centrality, portability, extensibility, transversality, and social flexibility. Explaining portability as the “bubble” of space we carry with us when we move about, Acarón related restriction of portability to ideas of “power, access, and ability” (p. 142). Other aspects of embodied space include extensibility, defined as “the space beyond the body” (p. 143), and transversality, which cuts across dimensions of the self and world (p. 144). When embodied space is limited, the bodies of the disabled, the elderly, and women are disproportionately affected. Acarón concluded her analysis by tackling the question of whether the body shapes space or space shapes the body. She used the example of Israeli soldiers to prove the duality of this space/body relationship. The soldiers shaped their environment by dominating it, but the environment also shaped them by provoking violent movement and reactions upon their later return. With this example of transversality along with examples of women’s “gendered spatiality” (p. 146), Acarón reached the conclusion that body shaped space and space shaped bodies, but some bodies shape and are shaped in different ways due to their identity. She finished by mentioning the “endless dance” between spatial frameworks that makes it impossible to reduce the body/space relationship to any universal definition.

Key Concepts

- **Embodied Space:** defined by Low (2003, p. 10) as “the location where human experience and consciousness take on material and spatial form” (p. 141).
- **Portability:** “the capacity to carry our sense of space with us as we move which also is related to our differing capacities of movement (p. 142).
- **Boundary:** “a permutable division or connection between self and other, self and the environment” (p. 144).

Key Quotes

- “Stereotypically speaking, embodying masculinity is archetypally equated with nonverbal expression of privilege, needing to “take up space”—widening, expanding; versus feminine socialization of “minimizing,” or “taking up less space” to avoid potential violence (Koskela, 1999; Linden, 2007; Low, 2003; McDowell, 1993; Pain, 1991)” (p. 144).
- “Being able to shape the space in our daily lives relates again to a sense of agency, of the capacity to shape or mold the environment around us—to exert change. However, to presume that agency is independent of social context is problematic.” (p. 145).
- “The body is not in a vacuum, it coexists within *embodied space* with its surroundings, is conditioned by its history, culture, gender, race, age, and class. This is what makes the discourse around violence, body, and space so relevant” (p. 147)

Essential Question

- Could men consciously choose to take up less space, and if so, how would this change women’s perceptions of space?