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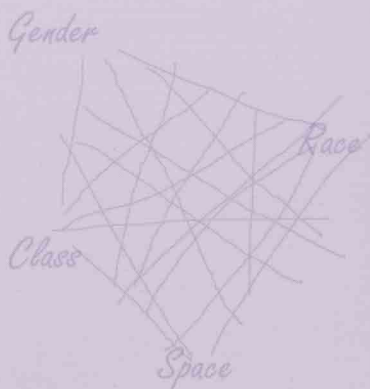
A Study of Four Contemporary American Novels
By Black Women Writers



性别·种族·阶级·空间

——四部当代美国黑人妇女小说解读

申昌英 著



外语教学与研究出版社

FOREIGN LANGUAGE TEACHING AND RESEARCH PRESS

臺灣中國文哲研究通訊社學術叢刊

**Gender, Race, Class and Space:
A Study of the Contemporary American Novel**
By Susan Jensen Jensen

性別・種族・階級・空間
——美國當代美國小說研究

作者：蘇

中國文哲研究所藏書

INSTITUTIONAL COLLECTION, CHINESE LITERATURE RESEARCH CENTER

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北京 BEIJING

图书在版编目(CIP)数据

性别·种族·阶级·空间:四部当代美国黑人妇女小说解读 / 申昌英著. —
北京: 外语教学与研究出版社, 2008.4
(北京外国语大学 2006 年博士文库系列)
ISBN 978-7-5600-7470-2

I. 性… II. 申… III. 美国黑人—妇女文学—小说—文学研究—美国—现代 IV. I712.074

中国版本图书馆 CIP 数据核字 (2008) 第 052090 号

出 版 人: 于春迟

责任编辑: 周春梅

封面设计: 袁 璐

出版发行: 外语教学与研究出版社

社 址: 北京市西三环北路 19 号 (100089)

网 址: <http://www.fltrp.com>

印 刷: 北京外国语大学印刷厂

开 本: 850×1168 1/32

印 张: 6.375

版 次: 2008 年 4 月第 1 版 2008 年 4 月第 1 次印刷

书 号: ISBN 978-7-5600-7470-2

定 价: 14.90 元

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Acknowledgements

With both relief and gratitude, I have concluded this dissertation. Along all the way, I have been much obliged to a lot of professors, friends and family members. I would have liked to dedicate this to all of them but for a fear of my own immature ideas and my own faults and mistakes that may appear in this dissertation.

First of all, my greatest debt is to my Ph.D. advisor Prof. QIAN Qing, without whom I definitely could not have written this dissertation and would not have embarked on this scholarly journey in the first place. She is my mentor in every sense and what I have benefited from her is not the completion of a dissertation only. Her patient guidance, great insights, and generous support, both mental and material, have been indispensable not only to my present dissertation but also to my future work and life in general.

I am also indebted to Prof. JIN Li, my M.A. advisor and chairwoman of my Ph.D. committee, who has always been a guide and an inspiring mentor since my M.A. years, whose generous help in many aspects can never be repaid.

I owe much to Prof. WANG Jiaxiang and Prof. LIU Jianhua, who have given me invaluable advice on my proposal and helped to shape the structure of my present dissertation. Prof. Wang, in particular, has been of great help to me with her expertise in this field and her generous book-lending.

I would like to thank my colleagues and the staff members of the School of English and International Studies of BFSU for the support and encouragement I have been receiving during these years both as a

faculty member and as a Ph.D. student.

Acknowledgement is made to the China-U.S. Fulbright Program for a precious year at Yale University from 2003 to 2004, where I was initiated into the studies of black women writers at the Dept. of African American Studies.

I am most grateful to Prof. Hazel V. Carby, my advisor while I was at Yale, who had enabled me to see another vision with her enlightening courses, vigorous and passionate research and a great sense of responsibility. The topic of gender and space was actually suggested by her in our discussion about *Maud Martha* for her course, and she had kindly offered me reading lists in this field. My first draft of the second chapter here was also read and commented by her.

I am also grateful to many other Yale professors who have helped or inspired me in one way or another, in the form of talks, lectures, books, reading lists, or even chats over lunches or dinners. My special thanks go to Prof. Margaret Homans, Prof. Robert Stepto, Prof. Wai Chee Dimock, and Prof. Paul Gilroy.

My thanks go to my friends in the U.S., especially the warm-hearted Benjamin Chapman Kirchup, Reidar Kiljan Malis, and HAN Xuemei.

My special thanks also go to all my friends in China, who have been always supportive and encouraging without the need to know what I was actually doing, who have helped me with the printing and offered me internet access when my own computer broke down at the most inconvenient time. The names of them all would be too long to be listed here, yet they always stay in my heart.

Last, but not the least, I want to express my lifelong gratitude to my parents, whose unconditional love and support is the greatest treasure of my life, who have literally taken very good care of me during the whole process of my dissertation writing in spite of the lack of space.

Abstract

Space is neither pre-existing nor neutral. It is a social product that is *both* a precondition *and* a result of social superstructures. As such, it can confer and signify social status; it can also be turned into a “frame of possibility” for social reconfiguration. The dualistic division of gender has resulted in a hierarchical spatial division in the society between the public and private spheres, a separation of the dominant public male realm of production from the subordinate private female one of reproduction. A feminist geography, originating in the late 1970s and flourishing in the 1990s, aims “to investigate, make visible and challenge the relationships between gender divisions and spatial divisions, to uncover their mutual constitution and problematize their apparent naturalness”.

In my dissertation, I will employ the theories of the feminist geography to examine four contemporary American novels by black women writers: Gwendolyn Brooks’s *Maud Martha*, Paule Marshall’s *Brown Girl, Brownstones*, Gloria Naylor’s *The Women of Brewster Place* and *Linden Hills*. Each novel will be studied in a different chapter, and Conclusion is a comparative study of the relationships between these black women characters’ identities and their social spaces. I will argue that black women’s urban space is produced by the interlocking factors of race, gender and class, and that their identities are largely determined by the space where they move about. In order to transform their identities and modify their social relations, black

women will have to devise various survival and oppositional strategies to transform the urban space that they inhabit.

The introductory chapter gives an overview of the theories on gender and space, and explores the divisions of the urban space based on various factors like race, gender and class.

Chapter 2 mainly examines Maud Martha's representational space, the kitchenette, and her negotiation with the space of home in her identity formation. Her strategy to create an expansive inner space to counterbalance racism, sexism and classism on a symbolic level is also discussed in detail.

Chapter 3 focuses on the conflicting spatial circles with social connotations that the protagonist Selina Boyce encounters in her Barbadian community in Brooklyn, especially those of her parents. Like a wanderer among those spaces, Selina tries to integrate what she has experienced into a unified consciousness and self-identity, and manages to keep an open vision of her own future.

Chapter 4 is about the everyday struggles of seven women in Brewster Place, a dilapidated, walled-in street for the impoverished. The wall is the very symbol of racism, sexism and economic exploitation, a spatial sign of these women's marginalized identities. What enables them to survive the harsh reality is the communal space being built that offers them mutual love and support. Yet this communal space is exclusive of those who are not considered as the "same", lesbians for example. This exclusion weakens the power of the communal space and at the same time reproduces the hierarchy in the dominant society.

Chapter 5 discusses the women residents in a wealthy black suburb called Linden Hills. In their complicit pursuit of material

wealth, many of these women are subjected to male domination and have lost their own identity. A female empowerment is made possible only through the recovery of the lost stories and hidden voices of women and a construction of a female community across time.

Conclusion summarizes the common features of the interaction between black women's identities and their social spaces in the four novels, with special analyses of their relations to the space of "home", the function of communal space, and the female characters' strategies in spatial reconfiguration. Meanwhile, the authors' narrative techniques have also been compared to see how they heighten their characters' interaction with their various social spaces. Finally, it is important to note that writing itself is a tool for spatial expansion, and the three black women writers discussed here have all created a literary space both for black women's experience and for their own literary visions.

Key Words: gender, race, class, space, identity, spatial reconfiguration

内容摘要

空间既非预先存在，也非中性概念。它是一种特殊的社会产物，既是上层建筑中各种社会关系的综合体现，又是各种社会关系的发展前提。作为社会产物，它既决定社会地位又成为社会地位重构的突破口。性别二元对立的社会思维导致社会空间的等级分配，即社会空间一分为二，公共的、生产的、支配性的空间属于男性，而私人的、生育的、从属性的空间则属于女性。女权地理学研究（起源于20世纪70年代末，流行于90年代）就正是要“考察、揭示和质疑性别对立和空间分配之间的关系，指出二者实际上互为构成，并非天然形成”。

本论文以女权地理学的研究成果为理论基础，按章节分别解读以下四部当代美国黑人妇女小说：格温德琳·布鲁克斯的《莫德·玛莎》，波勒·马歇尔的《褐姑娘，褐色砖房》，格罗莉娅·内勒的《布鲁斯特街的女人们》以及《林敦山》。论文的主要观点是：黑人妇女的城市空间是由她们自身的各种社会关系决定的，其中包括性别、种族和阶级等因素。与此同时，她们的身份在很大程度上又由她们各自拥有的空间决定。若想改变身份或者调整社会关系，这些黑人妇女就必须运用各种生存、对抗策略设法重构自己已有的城市空间。

绪论部分大致概括了性别和空间关系方面的理论研究，从而考察城市空间是如何根据性别、种族和阶级等因素进行分割的。

第二章主要分析女主人公莫德·玛莎的代表性空间，即狭小的kitchenette，以及“家”这个空间和她的身份形成之间的互动关系。该章还将详细论述莫德·玛莎在创造一个可拓展的内在空间时运用的策略，正是这一内在空间使她在象征意义上得以抗衡她所遭受的

种族、性别歧视以及阶级压迫。

第三章重点分析褐姑娘塞利娜在纽约布鲁克林的巴巴多斯人聚集区成长时所面对的各种互相对立的观点及其代表性空间（尤其是她父母亲的观点对抗）。塞利娜就像一个穿梭于各种空间的游子，迷茫之后是自身经历的整合，以便有一个完整的自我意识和身份，同时又对未来保持开放的心态。

第四章解读七个女人在日常生活中的抗争故事。这些人都穷困潦倒，住在破烂不堪的布鲁斯特街，一堵墙把它隔成了一个死胡同。这堵墙正是种族、性别歧视和阶级压迫的象征，也是这些黑人妇女边缘化身份的空间标记。这些女人们能够支撑下来的关键是她们在互助间共建的社区空间。但这一空间还是排挤了被当作另类的女同性恋者，从而削弱了它的力量，同时又再生产了主流社会的等级制度。

第五章研究的是一些住在富人区林敦山的黑人妇女。她们在追求财富的过程中进一步受到了男性的压迫，失去了自我。只有重新找回妇女们失落的历史和声音，跨越时空建立一个女性社区空间，妇女才有可能强大。

结论部分总结了这四部小说中黑人妇女在身份和社会空间互动之间的一些共性，其中着重分析了她们和“家”这个空间的复杂关系、社区空间的作用、以及女主人公各种不同的空间重构策略。同时通过比较分析作家不同的叙事手法可以看出她们是如何在小说的不同背景中强化主人公和空间的互动关系。值得注意的是，写作本身也是空间拓展的一种工具，通过她们的创作，这些黑人妇女作家给黑人妇女的独特经历以及作家自己的想象力都找到了一个自由的文学空间。

关键词：性别 种族 阶级 空间 身份 空间重构

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Chapter 1 Introduction

*When the man wants weight, the woman takes it up,
And topples down the scales; but this is fixt
As are the roots of earth and base of all;
Man for the field and woman for the hearth:
Man for the sword and for the needle she:
Man with the head and woman with the heart:
Man to command and woman to obey:
All else confusion.*

— Alfred Tennyson, *The Princess*

The above lines from Alfred Tennyson are quoted in Richard D. Altick's *Victorian People and Ideas* (1973) to discuss the dichotomy of man and woman deeply embedded in Victorian thought. This binary distinction that privileges man over woman is actually the fundamental issue that feminists have been grappling with in an effort to dismantle it. Earlier feminist suffragists had half-heartedly accepted this categorical difference and resorted to the notion of universal human rights to fight for women's equality. The second-wave feminists, however, had questioned the binary assumptions and uncovered the social construction of gender, a cultural term different from the biological term "sex". Simone de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex* (1949) has become an epochal feminist work with her open declaration that "one is not born, but rather becomes, a woman" (267). In the postmodernist age, feminism both as a political movement and

as a theoretical field of analysis has engaged in a deconstruction of the dualism inherent in Western intellectual thought. In this dualistic thought, “male” and “white” are always the norm, while “female” and “colored” are seen as the “Other”, thus ascribed with inferior, undesirable characteristics. With a rejection of dualism comes a growing recognition of plurality and diversity even within feminism itself. A feminist geography, originating in the late 1970s and flourishing in the 1990s, is part of the fruit of this diversity. Its specific aim is “to investigate, make visible and challenge the relationships between gender divisions and spatial divisions, to uncover their mutual constitution and problematize their apparent naturalness” (McDowell 1999: 12).

By using the theories of feminist geography in this dissertation, I will examine the relationships between black women and urban space as explored by three contemporary black American women writers. I will argue that black women’s urban space is produced by the interlocking factors of race, gender and class, and that their identities are largely determined by the space where they move about. In order to transform their identities and modify their social relations, black women will have to devise various survival and oppositional strategies to transform the urban space that they inhabit. I hope this spatial perspective will offer new insight not only into the fluid and contentious relationships between space and race, gender and class, but also into a possible empowerment of women in general, enabling women to transcend their pre-set gender identities through a reconfiguration of their own space.

1.1 Gender and Space: An Overview

It has long been noticed that a spatial division in the society between the public and the private spheres plays a central role in the social construction of gender divisions. As the king declares in Tennyson's *The Princess*, men's world is the "field", while women's is the "hearth". Coventry Patmore's best-seller poem "The Angel in the House", dedicated to his wife, had also popularized a patronizing sentimentality toward women for men's self-interest. If woman was the angel, then her husband was the lord. This term was also incorporated into the "cult of true womanhood" advocated by the popular domestic fiction prevalent in the mid-nineteenth century. Nonetheless, critique of or rebellion against this gender division in the society also emerged soon after. Long before Betty Friedan's important discussion of "the problem that has no name" in *The Feminine Mystique* (1963), there had already been many female protagonists in late-nineteenth-century fiction who found themselves unfulfilled in the domestic sphere. Some described the home as a prison and wanted to escape from this "doll's house", some were even driven to madness by the forced inhibition, and others had to find outlets outside home in secrecy in the form of literary creation or sexual adventure.¹

However, a systematic study of the spatial division in the society did not begin until the 1970s, when there appeared a new science of space. One of the most influential works in this field is *The Production of Space* (1974) by the Marxist philosopher Henri Lefebvre. Before his work, the definition of space by earlier philosophers had always emphasized the "philosophico-epistemological notion of space"

¹ See, for example, Henrik Ibsen's *Doll's House*, Charlotte Perkins Gilman's "The Yellow Wallpaper", Louisa May Alcott's *Little Women*, and Kate Chopin's *The Awakening*.

that allows its mental realm to envelop its social and physical ones (Lefebvre 1991: 5). From Aristotle's "category" to Descartes's *res extensa*, a notion of space being the absolute/the Object, or the Kantian notion of space as *a priori* that allows us to comprehend our sense experience, space had been assumed as pre-existing and empty—in another word, neutral. Lefebvre, however, has used Marxist dialectic tools to construct the links between the modern epistemological notion that the status of space is that of a "mental thing" or "mental space" and its practico-sensory realm of social space, where talks about all kinds of space are constantly heard. After a historical examination of the production of social (spatial) practices, Lefebvre put forward several propositions about social space, and the following, in my own summary, has particularly enhanced my analysis of the four novels chosen for this dissertation.

First of all, "(social) space is a (social) product [sic]" (1991: 26). Being a social product and the outcome of social labor, social space "contains—and assigns (more or less) appropriate places to— (1) the *social relations of reproduction* ... and (2) the *relations of production* ..." (32). The theoretical error of seeing space as "neutral", "objective", "fixed", "transparent", "innocent", or even "indifferent" can be politically abusive, because it prevents people from seeing "a total subject which acts continually to maintain and reproduce its own conditions of existence, namely the state ..." and also "a total object, namely absolute political space—that strategic space which seeks to impose itself as reality despite the fact that it is an abstraction, albeit one endowed with enormous powers because it is the locus and medium of Power" (1991: 94). To put it in simpler words, the neutralization of space is actually a conscious or unconscious attempt

to hide the superstructures, including the embedded social relations, and to normalize the dominant ideology and the *status quo*, patriarchal and racist ideologies, for example. The space of a black woman, if seen as neutral or pre-existing, would then be understood as the result of personal choice rather than social relations.

Secondly, there is a conceptual triad of the perceived, the conceived, and the lived in the production of space: *spatial practice* (material and functional space, which embraces production and reproduction, and the particular locations and spatial settings characteristic of each social formation), *representations of space* (the conceptualized space, tied to the relations of production and to the “order” which those relations impose), and *representational spaces* (the lived, everyday experience of space) (33, 38). To use the gendered space as an example, the spatial practice would be the separation of the public and the private spheres, the representation of space would be the association of women with the private sphere, and the representational space would be a woman’s living space—the real home she lives in.

Thirdly, the production of space is different from other productions, because it can also influence the social relations to be formed:

Social space is not a thing among other things, nor a product among other products: rather it subsumes things produced, and encompasses their interrelationships in their coexistence and simultaneity—their (relative) order and/or (relative) disorder. ... Itself the outcome of past actions, social space is what permits fresh actions to occur, while suggesting