

BOOK REVIEWS

Designing Modern Childhoods: History, Space, and the Material Culture of Children. By Marta Gutman and Ning De Coninck-Smith, eds. (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 2008. Pp. vii + 346, introduction, photographs, epilogue, index.)

CATHARINA I. KESSLER

Designing Modern Childhoods is a collection of fifteen illustrated essays that draw from a vast variety of sources, accompanied by a foreword by Paula S. Fass and an epilogue by social and cultural historian John R. Gillis. Marta Gutman is an associate professor in the School of Architecture, Urban Design and Landscape Architecture at the City College of New York, and Ning de Coninck-Smith is an associate professor in the Department of Educational Sociology at the School of Education at Aarhus University in Denmark. The book is partly a result of an international, multidisciplinary conference organized by the two at the University of California, Berkeley in 2002 and assembles contributions from architectural historians, social historians, social scientists, and architects.

The essays are grouped into four parts: 'Child Saving and the Design of Modern Childhoods'; 'The Choreography of Education and Play'; 'Space, Power and Inequality in Modern Childhoods'; and 'Consumption, Commodification, and the Media: Material Culture and Contemporary Childhoods.' Drawing on data from the USA, Canada, New Zealand, South Africa, Europe, Turkey, Senegal and Indonesia from the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, the collection covers a broad spectrum of landscapes and time periods. The essays are framed by the thesis "that spaces and settings made for children are pivotal to the construction of modernity in global society" (2).

The first two sections of the book are mainly historical and discuss and challenge the concept of the "islanding of children," described by Gutman and de Coninck-Smith in the introduction as "the specialization of space and material culture" (5) designed by adults for children, thus systematically separating the lives of the two groups by relegating children to the home (as in the paper by Annmarie Adams and Peter Gossage), schools (Anne-Marie Châtelet, Zeynep Kezer, Kristin Juul), special children's hospitals (David C. Sloane), playgrounds and special parks (Roy Kozlovsky, Anéne Cusins-Lewer and Julia Gately), and summer camps (Abigail A. van Slyck). An essay by Annmarie Adams and Peter Gossage on "Sick Children and the Thresholds of Domesticity" sits well in this volume and highlights the large "extent of healthcare practices that took place beyond the thresholds of the bedroom and the home" of Canadian families of the Victorian era (77). The authors ask to reconsider notions of the passive child in their analysis of letters written by members of John William Dawson's family, culled from the McGill University Archives. Adams and Gossage show

how Dawson's healthy teenage daughter manages the everyday affairs of her sick siblings while her mother is away, actively reordering the domestic spaces, opening windows to provide them with fresh air, and reporting back to her mother about her activities, in which she is aided by a close network of relatives and other families (70). The study challenges historians' suggestion that in the past, sick children of middle-class Canadian families were tended by mothers before being admitted to hospital, isolated from other families or outside institutions. Rather, it argues that sick children inspired travel and connection beyond the home.

The second half of the collection is mostly ethnographic, focusing on the historical present of childhood with one section on power and inequality, and another on consumption, commodification and the media. The chapters in this section complement the first, historically-oriented portion of the volume in positioning children as actors in their own right. They highlight children's strategies of using, co-creating and influencing spaces of the house and backyard (Rebecca Ginsburg), street (Harriot Beazley) and school (Mary S. Hoffschwelle), or their use of material goods and associated cultural practices such as presents (Alison J. Clarke), McDonald's Happy Meals (Helene Brembeck), snowboards (Olav Christensen) and anime media (Mizuko Ito). The insightful essay by architectural historian Rebecca Ginsburg on "The View from the Back Step," set in the context of South African apartheid, draws attention to the tight nexus of dominant social values and spatial order by examining how white children learned about apartheid by observing and partaking in its racial geography. Through the analysis of interviews with white people who were children in the 1960s and 1970s and former African servants from the same period, Ginsburg traces the relationships of white children and their black nannies, who used to live in huts in their backyard. The authors show how their understanding of racial hierarchies led many children to change their views of these maids from integral figures to peripheral ones, while others defied their parents' expectations by regularly venturing into the backyards and spending time with their nannies. The chapter provides a nuanced view of children's varied responses and actions in a social world where behaviour appears to be spatially restricted.

Overall, the volume is a good example of comparative, multidisciplinary childhood studies, demonstrating especially the importance of material culture to, and the impact of design on, children's lived experience. The broadly conceptualized book appears to be very useful for classroom instruction in Folklore, Childhood Studies, Architecture and History, as it introduces readers to a wide-range of topics as well as to different forms of data and analysis, making it a valuable source for any instructor willing to contextualize the special scientific and theoretical backgrounds of the different chapters.