

Confronting the Spatiality of Women's Fear, and Why It Matters

Duane Allyson G. Pancho

Ateneo de Manila University*

ABSTRACT | This work deals with the problem of women's fear and its spatial dimension. Women's fear in and of the urban space may only be properly discussed with a return to their everyday lives and experiences as women. Looking more closely into women's lives, we find that their fear issues from the conditions that surround their embodiment. Building on the work of Gill Valentine, Leslie Kern, Iris Marion Young and Simone de Beauvoir, this paper seeks to prove that the mechanisms which objectify women in their experience as embodied are precisely what drive them to a state of fear. In turn, such fear also holds the power to shape women's space, thereby accounting for how the feeling of not-belonging in the city persists in women. To address women's fear and to build more inclusive spaces, therefore, requires that our recognition of women's oppression take on a spatial dimension, and our construction of the city seriously consider the women who inhabit it.

KEYWORDS | City; Women; Fear; Embodiment; Objectification

* *Correspondence:* Duane Allyson G. Pancho – Loyola Heights campus, Katipunan Avenue, Loyola Heights, 1108 Quezon City, Philippines. Email: duane.gravador@obf.ateneo.edu



In 2018, Twitter profile “feminist next door” posed this hypothetical question: “Women, imagine that for 24 hours, there were no men in the world... What would, or could you do that day?” (feminist next door (@emrazz) 2018) Years later, the tweet was replicated across different online platforms, and in 2020, the same question blew up on TikTok. And while there were occasional variations in the responses, the one response that stood out as the most common one was: “to walk around freely at night” (Writers 2020).

These results make us ask why men’s presence is a concern in relation to women’s activity and mobility. Perhaps, the underside of this discovery that may be drawn from this is that, because men are present, women cannot walk around freely at night. However, to immediately blame men’s being present for women’s insecurity—fear—in relation to spatiality, would be taking the easy way out. The approach that this paper chooses to take is to give an account of women’s fear by tying it to their experience of embodiment, treating of it as a consequence of the conditions surrounding women’s embodiment. That is to say, women are afraid in and of space because of the objectification that women, in their embodiment, have had to endure over the years.

Following Leslie Kern and other feminist philosophers on both the body and the city, this work builds on the insight that our embodiment directly impacts our navigation and occupation of space. However, since the conditions surrounding our embodiment also bear the codes of prevailing social and power relations, then the ways by which we navigate and occupy the urban space are not neutral. As Valentine (1989, p. 389) shows, there is a geography to women’s fear of space. According to Valentine, women’s use of space which manifests itself in inhibition and restraint, is simply patriarchy, expressed in spatial terms.

Taking Valentine further, this paper seeks to show that women’s inhibited use of space which stems from their fear is one that begins in women’s embodiment as the site of objectification. Young (2005) offers an account of what it means for embodiment to be an important factor in the experience of space and shows how this dynamic plays out particularly in women’s lives. Analyzing how women become aware of their space on account of how they are made aware of their bodies, Young shows how women’s consciousness of their space as limited owes itself to the way women have been raised to use and make use of their bodies as sites of limitation and constriction, as well.

Young suggests that women’s experience of their bodies and, by extension, space, is itself a consequence of the mechanisms of objectification that women suffer at the hands of patriarchally defined relations and institutions. Taking Young’s analysis even further, we build on Simone de Beauvoir’s discussion of how women come to be objectified (Beauvoir 2011) – as subjects stripped of their subjectivity,

as subjects who rely on men for definition and fulfillment, as subjects who are othered. It is therefore in this othering of women that we find an exhaustive account for women's objectification.

From these mechanisms, from being treated as both sites of objectification, women are introduced and socialized into the world in such a way as to make them internalize the objectification. The mechanisms of objectification thereby create the fearful woman, the one who carries in her body the script that she is endangered because she is a woman. According to Koskela (1999, p. 111), when women's fear of violence is realized, it takes the form of spatial exclusion. As women come to internalize the idea that they are in constant danger in the urban space on account of their being women, this also translates into their avoidance of the space, or, at the very least, their being careful within that space.

By this, we then see how the account of women's fear comes full circle: women are afraid because the mechanisms of objectification imposed upon them have made many of them believe that fear is their only recourse; conversely, that women are afraid and stay afraid reconfigures their space, with their spatial inferiority seeping into the into their interactions and engagements. Women's fear in relation to space serves a special function in the service of patriarchy – for as long as the objectifying mechanisms are in place to make women believe that their fear is synonymous with survival, then the construction of a more just urban space shall remain to be difficult, if not altogether illusory.

1 Women's Fear, Embodiment, and Objectification

This paper takes together the concepts of embodiment, spatiality, and the urban space, because in the context of the work the understanding of one concept is dependent on the other two. We understand embodiment as it is fleshed out in space, and conversely, we understand space as it is configured, reconfigured, built, rebuilt, in the countless number of ways that we express our embodiment within it.

The way we negotiate our engagement in and with space is made possible because we are embodied. To extend this further, the way we negotiate our engagement in and of space is mediated by our being embodied, an embodiment, which, in turn, has been heavily influenced by the countless involvements and structures that legitimize and codify our existence. Hence, the discussion of how embodiment is to be understood must be done in relation to the discussion of how space is constructed and reconstructed. In the context of this work, embodiment is taken to mean both our physical, material existence as well as the interpretations that

govern the way we perceive our materiality. With this account of embodiment, we find that human bodies are not neutral. The material emerges simultaneous with interpretation, which means that our understanding of who we are as embodied is always tied up with the meanings that are attached to it. We are never without the context, the space within which we interpret ourselves and are being interpreted by others.

In the same way, the way cities are constructed is not a neutral process, either. To speak of a city's construction is to conceptualize such construction on at least two levels (Gieryn 2000, pp. 464–465) – the physical and the interpretive or what I call the symbolic. The physical construction of the city corresponds to the urban space that emerges from various ways by which governments and urban planners allocate space, determine how it is to be utilized, by whom, for how long, to what extent. It corresponds to the physical rendering of urban planning (or lack thereof), including zone assignments, city clusters, and the requirements that come with these zones and clusters. Viewed symbolically, the construction of cities is reflective of social relations. Because human interactions always take place in time, these interactions also come to reconfigure a city's shapes, landscapes, streets, corners, and buildings. These relations become fleshed out in space.

However, social relations themselves reflect prevailing power dynamics, which means that the construction of cities heavily relies on this question of power, of how positions of privilege are set in place, and of who occupies these positions. Cities, thus, are constructed doubly. As Martina Löw discusses in *The Sociology of Space*, a sociological analysis of space must always include an account of its material substrate, which is composed of human beings and their relations with one another (Löw 2016, p. 41). The same argument holds for the city or the urban space. One can provide an account of the city as a space only if one also provides an account of the relations that take place in it and the social arrangements that operate and prevail within it.

The urban space, therefore, is not neutral, if by neutral we mean devoid of human intervention. This space is not neutral, if by neutral we mean that it can be successfully severed from human affairs. The urban space, or more precisely our experience of it, is connected to human life, and one's experience of this space is hinged on prevailing values and social relationships, including unjust practices and structures. Existing inequalities and injustices come to take spatial form in the city.

Gender is one of the most prominent features of social relations that is closely tied with inequality. The way gender is constructed at a given period also determines one's rights and privileges; and because rights and privileges are always

lived in relation to space and time, gender then contributes to the question of how much 'place' one can afford within that period.

Given that the ways of life of the city's inhabitants are significantly shaped by their gender identities, then the city, too, takes on a gendered character. *The city is gendered* (Beebeejaun 2017, p. 323) which means that the many ways human beings interact and relate with each other (including the many ways that they cannot, or refuse to), take the form of place, or are also set in place.

As articulated by Massey (1994, pp. 147–148):

The degree to which we can move between countries, or walk about the streets at night, or venture out of hotels in foreign cities, is not just influenced by 'capital'. Survey after survey has shown how women's mobility, for instance, is restricted – in a thousand different ways, from physical violence to being ogled at or made to feel quite simply 'out of place' – not by 'capital', but by men.

However, if we are to give an account of women's fear of the urban space precisely as it plays out in the urban space, we cannot rest on up-in-the-air analyses of the persistence of gender inequalities in cities. Because fear is felt on the level of everyday life, because fear is lived, not as a concept, but as a real state of being with real implications for women and their lives, then a more meaningful account of women's fear must return to women's real lives. We ought, then, to look more closely into women's experience of embodiment, or more precisely, how women have been made to experience their embodiment, and its effects on their consciousness of space.

I remember, when I was still about 8 or 9 years old, I was in a jeepney with my mama and papa. We lived on the outskirts of the city, and we were on our way to the city center. Inside that cramped jeepney, I was sandwiched in between Mama and an old man. I took notice of the old man, who began looking at me with a look that I could not understand. All I knew was that the look made me uncomfortable. My mother quickly came to my rescue, telling my father to switch places with me, telling him, *Kaning tigulang sige'g tan-aw sa imong anak* [This old man keeps looking at your daughter].

When I was 16 years old, I once decided, quite spontaneously and at about 3 in the afternoon, to walk from one mall to the next, the distance of which was about a kilometer. In that kilometer-walk, I was catcalled three times, by men who were in jeepneys and working on construction sites.

While neither of these experiences made me stop wanting to get around whether by public transportation or walking, both did make me believe painful things: easy

mobility was not meant for me, and the city did not feel like home. Especially not if I wanted to avoid being ogled or harassed.

Thus, if I were to be asked to pinpoint one specific experience that made me afraid of being in the city, I would be unable to offer one answer. My fear is made up of a thousand experiences that brought me to the conclusion that the city was not a place for me. It was in the way that old man looked at me, even as a child, on public transportation. It was in the way I was catcalled as a high school student who simply wanted to see more of the city by myself. I felt it in the way my elders would remind me to be mindful of what I was wearing, to be careful to preserve my modesty. Or in how the standing rule for me until I graduated from college was to be home by 6 o'clock in the evening, because that was the respectable time for girls to be home.

Needless to say, I am not the only one with this story. Available data on violence against women and girls (VAWG) show that my fear is, in truth, shared by many, if not most, women, and that it is a fear we have all been made to feel since childhood. In Cuenca, Spain, ninety percent of the women who resided in urban areas reported that they had experienced some form of sexual harassment (Women 2020, p. 7). In Guatemala, women identified public service infrastructure such as "public transportation, closed alleys, roads/walkways, parks, open spaces and bus stops" as the areas where they felt most unsafe (p. 13).

In response to this fear, women have learned to cope. Valentine (1989, pp. 385–386) presents several responses that women rely on in relation to this state of fear. Some have learned to function according to a mental map of safe and unsafe spaces, which also vary according to the times of the day. The mental map serves several purposes. For one, it serves as women's first line of defense against their perception of dangerous spaces, seemingly effective at telling women which spaces to avoid altogether and which ones to approach with caution. The mental map also serves an educational purpose, as it is a tool that is eventually taught by adults to girls. In time, adolescent girls are made to confront the established "fact" that some spaces are simply not for them.

As Kern (2019, pp. 1440–145) so deftly puts it, in the attempt to account for the female fear:

... This is when the volume turns up on the message that girls and women are vulnerable due to our gender and that sexual development is going to make that danger real. Instructions about appropriate behavior (how you sit, speak, walk, hold yourself, etc.) take on a sense of urgency that indicates they're not just about polite social behavior. Some women can pinpoint the exact moment they became aware

that something was different. Maybe it was the day mom told you to start cinching your robe around your nightdress, or the night when your playful use of mom's makeup and high heels went from cute to inappropriate. For many of us, however, the message comes in like an IV drip, building up in our systems so gradually that once we become aware of it, it's fully dissolved in the bloodstream. It's already natural, common sense, inherent.

Kern raises important points. First, she makes clear that the rules surrounding the rearing of girls make them believe that they are in danger because they are girls. Kern also shows how the rules make girls believe that the situation gets worse once they grow up into women. The lives of girls, therefore, generally become stories of learning how to become and be careful. Girlhood becomes synonymous with vulnerability, and the good girl is one who follows the rules so that the danger does not become real.

If the lives of girls become centered on stories that paint them as damsels in distress, and if, with education and training, the choices they make spring from this place of constantly needing protection, then it does not come off as surprising that for women, their fear in relation to space takes on the status of instinct. Hence, it is important that we provide an account for this fear, precisely because it is not irrational or baseless. Fear, particularly women's fear as it plays out in the urban space, is not without justification, not without logos, not unreasonable. This fear is a learned response from generations of internalized objectification, where, through time, we come to believe the scripts they give us. This fear, as shall be shown in this paper, stems from the many ways that women, as embodied human beings, have been treated as objects, and have been made to believe that they should be treated as objects.

Our experience of space is not neutral. Our experience of space is tied to our embodiment. It is through our embodiment that space becomes a physical encounter. Our bodies bear the codes into which we were born, and these codes, be they genetic or societal or both, help to determine how much space we may occupy, how much space we are *allowed* to occupy. Bodies exist in a particular position in time; bodies are historical.

Gatens (1999, p. 228) emphasizes the historical nature of the body. The body cannot and never will be separate from the environment to which it belongs. Within this environment, there are expected ways of being that are imposed on the body, and in turn give the body its particular shape, inform it, so to speak.

Young (2005), in *Throwing Like a Girl*, discusses how this connection between embodiment and the experience of space is very real for women. According to

Young, women have been raised and socialized such that they come to acquire a conception of the space they occupy that is vastly different from men's idea of the space they occupy.

In order to illustrate her point, Young uses the imagery of the way women accomplish tasks and achieve goals. Taking off from Merleau-Ponty, Young stresses that what defines our relation to the world is primarily the fact that our bodies are purpose-oriented; as embodied beings, we identify tasks for ourselves and then direct ourselves towards the doing and the eventual completion of the said tasks.

Young uses the concepts of motility and spatiality to elaborate. According to Young, women's experience of motility is shown in three modalities. First, woman experiences her body as an ambiguous transcendence. On one hand, woman does see that her body is the only way by which she can engage with the world; her body is the only way by which she can live, perform tasks, and pursue ends. And yet, on the other hand, woman also experiences her body as perpetually rooted in immanence at the same time (Young 2005, p. 35). Second, woman experiences her body as an inhibited intentionality. Merleau-Ponty grounds intentionality in motility, where a person who declares for himself, "I can", necessarily concretizes this assertion by moving out to achieve that goal. For woman, however, the assertion of "I can" is simultaneous with the assertion "I cannot" (p. 38). Whatever belief she may have in her own capacities is always paired with self-doubt; hence, woman's intentionality is inhibited intentionality, where the inhibition springs from woman's lack of confidence in her own self, with respect to the performance of bodily tasks. In many instances, we may even observe that women are often surprised at their own achievements. Many of them cannot believe that 'they actually did it', and yet they did. Third, woman's body is experienced as a discontinued unity with the rest of its surroundings. Woman has a difficulty in seeing her body as a unified whole, and in the same way, cannot see her body and the rest of the world as existing in harmony (p. 38). There always seems to be a disconnect between and among woman's body parts, as well as between woman and the world.

These three modalities of motility reveal the second dimension to be discussed, which is spatiality. According to Young, still following Merleau-Ponty, it is motility that gives us the insight of space – the extent of our motility shows how much space we think we move in, how much space we think we occupy (p. 39). First, woman experiences herself as moving around in an enclosed space. As enclosed, woman's body posits an enclosure that limits her movement, meaning, the space that is physically available for woman is much wider than the space within which she allows herself to move around, the space which she permits herself to use. Second, she experiences this space as taking on a dual structure – the space "here" and the space "yonder", (pp. 40–41), where here means the space where

she can move, use, and actualize her bodily possibilities, and yonder means the space where there are more possibilities that others may achieve, a space where others can move, but not her. Woman's experience of her own space is one that is characterized by a discontinuity between where she is and where she can be, but the 'where she can be' is also at the same time experienced as a practical impossibility. And third, she experiences this space as something that puts and keeps her in her position. As positioned, woman feels that there seem to be invisible spatial coordinates that help to determine her position, and the experience of these coordinates are what keep woman "in her place". Thus, woman experiences herself as rooted in a position, moving in more closed and inhibited terms.

Young's analysis is more than just a closer look into how girls throw. It is an attempt to offer an explanation for how girls and eventually women live their motility with respect to their consciousness of spatiality. To put it simply, Young is giving an account of the way women move in response to how much space they think they occupy.

The space that is allotted for women's place necessarily carries with it some understanding of what it means to be a woman, what tasks are proper to one who is called woman, and the characteristics that one must possess if they are at all to be considered a woman. However, women are forced to confront a bigger problem because they are made to believe that the power to occupy space is not as readily available for them as it is for men. The conditions that surround womanhood as well as the meanings that have been ascribed to it across generations and institutions have largely served to give birth to women who develop a sense of fear towards space. Dwelling on the point that women are conditioned and defined then leads us to the connection between women's fear and women's space: women's objectification.

Beauvoir (2011) provides a powerful account of women's objectification. Beauvoir begins her introduction to *The Second Sex* by posing the question: What is a woman (p. 28)? In response to the question, Beauvoir develops the thesis that to be "woman" is to be a subject, but she is a subject who is at the same time an object (p. 27). Such objectification is the position in which woman finds herself, one which she finds difficult to overcome. Woman is subject, in the sense that as a human being, she, too, is free to choose and pursue her own ends. And yet, at the same time, woman is object, as she is forced to take the unenviable position of being the Other of Man, othered by men, thus resulting in the difficulty in resisting her position.

In her analysis of woman as subject, Beauvoir emphasizes that to be a subject, to be a human being means to be a person of freedom and liberty, capable of making choices which then set the direction for one's life, or life-projects (p. 27).

Now, insofar as woman is a human being, she, too, is capable of making choices which determine her life and worth. She, too, is capable of going beyond what is given her, if only to truly make something of herself without being dependent on or constrained by external conditions. This is what Beauvoir would call the capacity of the human being to transcend their limiting circumstances, which all human beings share, precisely because they are human beings.

However, women's situation makes transcendence difficult. The difficulty lies in the fact that woman has been unduly classified by man as his Other, and as Other, is defective, incomplete, always only relative to him (Beauvoir 2011, p. 29). While man posits himself as the Absolute Sovereign Subject, never needing to define or explain himself on the basis of being man, he relegates woman and binds her to her sex, making her believe that by virtue of her being woman, by some sort of default setting, she is barred from attaining fulfillment.

Thus, we see that this domination over woman as Other permeates all of human life – we see men enjoying privileges which are impossible for women, in terms of owning property, getting higher salaries, qualifying for job promotions, availing of “proper” education, and many others. Many women on the other hand, are limited, so to speak, to the kind of existence that is to have none of the above privileges. They are doomed to the kind of existence that may never claim equality with men, may never enjoy enough liberty to aspire for projects to fully define herself. Women are forcefully doomed to immanence (p. 29).

Such objectification of women, however, has spatial implications. In the same way that the values we uphold are immortalized in the construction of our cities, the many ways by which patriarchal institutions enforce control over women show up in how women come to know and understand their place in the world. The objectification of women, then, is something that takes place.

Young, following Beauvoir, links women's experience of spatiality to objectification and shows that the objectification of women accounts for how they experience their space. According to Young, while “growing up as a girl” may seem to give a good explanation, she goes on to show that the deeper reason for woman's experience of her own spatiality as such is due to the fact that she is conditioned to regard herself as mere object to be looked at and evaluated (Young 2005, p. 44).

First, it is her being defined as an object that leads her to experience space as enclosed. This is because in being defined as an object, woman is forced to limit herself according to other people's perception, or according to how she would anticipate others' perception of her, and to act accordingly.

Second, it is her being defined as an object that leads her to experience a disconnect between the here and yonder. The disconnect is due to the fact that objectification dooms her to say that her achievement is limited only to this par-

ticular space here, and not for yonder. Being objectified leads her to see herself as always subject to other people's evaluation.

Third, it is also her being defined as an object that positions woman and keeps her in her place. What keeps her in her place is the perpetual threat of the gaze and the greater threat of the invasion of her space, the most extreme form of which is rape. Thus, we have women who allow themselves to be ordered around when it comes to all sorts of things – what time to go home, what to wear, what to say, how to sit, and many others – because by permitting herself to be kept in her place, she is also assured of protection, ironically by the ones who objectify her.

Young (2005, p. 44) then enriches Beauvoir's analysis of objectification by giving it its much-needed spatial dimension. We see how the objectification of women does not end with women or their bodies. The objectification of women permeates the very ways by which they view themselves in relation to the world and vice versa. The understanding that their space is enclosed, that there is a divide between where they are and that space which they no longer have a right to occupy, and that there are mechanisms to keep them in their place, when taken together, bring women to an experience of space that is menacing, as not-for-them. Conversely, this understanding brings women to an awareness of themselves as constantly out of place, as not-belonging. This felt disconnect between self and space place women in a constant state of insecurity. It is objectification, then, that creates the fearful subject.

With the picture that Beauvoir and Young provide for us, we see then that women's fear of the urban space is a learned response, stemming from the fact that patriarchy has assigned to women the definition of inferiority, and with it the limitedness of space within which they may move and act. Owing to how their embodiment has been defined as womb, women were made to accept the reproductive and domestic functions as their own, and as a consequence, their consciousness of their space has been limited to where these functions could operate best: the home, the 'private' sphere. At the same time, to men have been assigned roles that call for greater authority and mobility, roles that also allow them more space for domination. What begins in women as a feeling of not belonging to the public space festers and is reinforced to develop into a full-blown fear with every cat-call, or mocking comment about their presence, or even the warning to not wear anything provocative, masked as a show of concern.

2 Fear and Its Spatial Implications

Women's fear of the urban space, therefore, is a consequence of their objectification. Because of the way women have been made to feel about space and the act of occupying it, women are left with an awareness of space as foreign, and the act of occupying space as a transgression. There are areas where women are reminded that they are not supposed to be there, and the reminders come in various forms: as catcalls, as lewd stares, as comments on what they are wearing, as rules that they should get home before dark, or sometimes even as the strange but welcome suggestion that should the situation call for it, they can very well use their umbrella as a weapon. These constant reminders serve to render permanent women's awareness of space as hostile to them. Women become convinced that out in the open, they need to anticipate danger and protect themselves from it. These self-protective measures affect women's choices in life: dictating upon their mobility, determining their freedom of access, thereby also reconfiguring their space in turn.

According to Valentine (1989, p. 389):

Women's fear of male violence does not therefore just take place in space but is tied up with the way public space is used, occupied, and controlled by different groups at different times. There is a vicious circle in operation. The majority of women still adopt a traditional gender role, and as a consequence are pressurized into a temporarily segregated use of space...

Valentine (1989) is pointing out that women's fear of space owes itself to several reasons. First, women's fear of violence is born of experiences and stories of male aggression and domination. But then underlying this is the limitedness of women's options in terms of life-choices; many women still take on the traditional gender roles which push them to the confines of domesticity. Hence, it is not just because many women have experienced being harassed by men in public that they fear the spaces within which this harassment occurs. It is also because they have been raised to know their place, which, for a long time, has meant the domestic sphere. Outside of this space is the unfamiliar and menacing domain of men, one that women have learned to fear.

Taking Valentine further, this also shows that the fear emerges as a result of women's embodiment as being defined for them. The taking on and assignment of gender roles (often implicit and sinister) stem from long-held assumptions on and definitions of women and their bodies. For instance, that society "assumes"

women will take on the role of childbearing, and eventually child-rearing, owes itself to the fact that governments, religions, and cultural traditions have held fast to the idea that to be woman is to be womb (Beauvoir 2011, p. 26). The assignment of woman as womb then leads to a limiting of women's life-choices, and spatially speaking, the limiting also of spaces available and accessible to them.

Women's fear affects their mobility in the urban space. This mobility, while very much referring to physical mobility in the sense that women are not as physically free as men in terms of accessing certain spaces, it also refers to the dimensions of mobility that are not strictly physical, such as employment, ownership of property, and women's invisibility in the city. Women struggle with mobility, therefore, because they are barred from accessing certain spaces in the urban space. Accessing certain spaces becomes a sort of misstep on the part of women, a misstep for which they are often made to suffer consequences.

Should a woman transgress, the enforcement of these consequences is accomplished in ways that are sometimes overtly violent, and at other times implicit and sinister. To put it concretely, human interactions have come to classify some spaces as "no place for a respectable woman." One may perhaps imagine the dark alleys and poorly lit streets, especially when night comes. These places are not for women because, according to media-fed stories and scenarios, these places are where women usually get sexually assaulted or harassed. These spaces are usually the places where women are harmed, and women being women, they are also not expected to be able to defend themselves against their attackers, especially since these attackers in the dark usually come in numbers. That women learn to avoid these spaces and teach girls to do the same then no longer comes as a surprise.

On the other hand, women may also be barred in the form of less obvious control mechanisms. These mechanisms force women to learn the painful lesson that there simply are places that are not for them, even before any act of transgression can be possible. Examples such as a lack of public restrooms for women, or the way city governments decide to build more roads instead of proper walkways when most of the pedestrians are women, or even in the way baby strollers does not seem to fit the streetcar (Kern 2019, p. 15), show how women have long learned avoidance as a means of survival. Fear becomes the emotional response to the risk of transgression and to the determination to avoid transgression.

Kern (2019, p. 28) writes:

Just as workplace harassment chases women out of positions of power and erases their contributions to science, politics, art, and culture, the spectre of urban violence limits women's choices, power, and economic opportunities. Just as industry norms are structured to

permit harassment, protect abusers, and punish victims, urban environments are structured to support patriarchal family forms, gender-segregated labor markets, and traditional gender roles. And even though we like to believe society has evolved beyond the strict confines of things like gender roles, women and other marginalized groups continue to find their lives limited by the kinds of social norms that have been built into our cities.

Following Kern, we see how the more obvious forms of violence and the less obvious ones serve the same purpose – to preserve the patriarchally defined positions of privilege. Ensuring that women are barred from accessing public space is the same as ensuring that they stay home where they belong – these are simply two sides of a single coin.

Koskela (1999, p. 11) establishes the necessary connection between fear and its shaping power. On one hand, she acknowledges that woman's fear of violence is due to her being positioned as an inferior. This fear is therefore a product and a result of the injustice that has been done to woman. And yet, Koskela also points out that this fear has the power to change woman's relations to space, as well as construct certain spaces in view of what she fears or would like to keep from happening. According to Koskela, the urban space is constructed by gendered power relations, and, by the same token, the construction of urban space is reinforced by the everyday interactions that also reflect those gendered power relations.

We discover, then, not only how fear is a consequence of what has been done to women, but also fear's corresponding capacity, once internalized, to re-configure woman's physical space. It considers and provides a background for the real feeling and experience of fear, revealing it to be a result of gendered power relations. The analysis of fear is also taken one step further because we also come to understand why and how fear can alter woman's treatment of space and construction of it.

Women's fear, then, serves a very special purpose with respect to the patriarchal agenda: as long as women are afraid and stay afraid, then there is a better chance that they will be unable to claim their own spaces in public life. As long as the necessary mechanisms of objectification, of exclusion, of oppression are set in place to make sure that women are afraid and are kept afraid, then there is a good chance for our structures – both physical and non-physical – to remain as spaces for objectification, exclusion, and oppression. The result, hence, are cities that are not for women.¹

¹ This is also captured by Gerda Wekerle's articulation: cities are still planned by men for men, as one of the claims in her article entitled "A Woman's Place is In the City" (Wekerle 2006, p. 11).

3 Conclusion

To ask women what they would do if men did not exist for 24 hours may at first seem to be some sort of clickbait tweet. But the implications of women's most common answer have served to shed light on existing problems: women's fear of the city, on one hand, and the city space as hostile to women, on the other.

The key to addressing the problem lies in acknowledging that they are interconnected. In the same way that cities cannot be severed from human affairs, women's fear of space cannot be addressed separately from the space within which it operates. Responses to women's fear that run along the lines of undermining it or dismissing it as baseless miss the point: the fear is real, and the mechanisms that keep the fear in place are real. In the same way, addressing the problem of an unsafe urban space through methods that are not in themselves rooted in an honest return to the lives of those who are most at risk also ends up missing the point: simply constructing more walkways will not do. Simply providing more streetcars will not do.

Women and allies of women need to confront the spatial implications of their objectification and their fear. Gender-based injustices always take place, which means that an adequate response to these injustices must also be able to account for their spatial dimension. In the same way, urban planners and those committed to the construction of a just urban space must recognize that spaces are reconstructed and reconfigured by the very lives of those who inhabit them. The construction of just spaces, therefore, presupposes the commitment to install justice in interpersonal and social relations.

We began with the question of what women would do if men were absent for 24 hours, to which women responded that they would walk around freely at night. In view of the above discussion, it is not so strange an answer, after all. In fact, until the situation changes on both the interpersonal and the spatial levels, then walking around freely at night with no men around will still be a liberating thing to imagine, at least for us women. Liberating, yes, but also imaginary.

References

Beauvoir, Simone de. 2011. *The Second Sex*. Translated by Constance Borde and Shiela Malovany-Chevallier. London: Jonathan Cape.

- Beebeejaun, Yasminah. 2017. "Gender, Urban Space, and the Right to Everyday Life." *Journal of Urban Affairs* 39 (3): 323–334. <https://doi.org/10.1080/07352166.2016.1255526>.
- feminist next door (@emrazz). 2018. "Women, imagine that for 24 hours, there were no men in the world..." Twitter, December 25, 2018. <https://twitter.com/emrazz/status/1077322309151744000>.
- Gatens, Moira. 1999. "Power, Bodies and Difference." In *Feminist Theory and The Body: A Reader*, edited by Janet Price and Margrit Shildrick, 227–234. New York: Routledge.
- Gieryn, Thomas F. 2000. "A Space for Place in Sociology." *Annual Review of Sociology* 26:463–496. <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev.soc.26.1.463>.
- Kern, Leslie. 2019. *Feminist City: A Field Guide*. Ontario: Between the Lines.
- Koskela, Hille. 1999. "Gendered Exclusions: Women's Fear of Violence and Changing Relations to Space." *Geografiska Annaler: Series B, Human Geography* 81 (2): 111–124. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.0435-3684.1999.00052.x>.
- Löw, Martina. 2016. *The Sociology of Space: Materiality, Social Structures, and Action*. Berlin: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Massey, Doreen. 1994. *Space, Place, and Gender*. Minnesota: University of Minnesota.
- Valentine, Gill. 1989. "The Geography of Women's Fear." *Area* 21 (4): 385–390. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/20000063>.
- Wekerle, Gerda. 2006. "A Woman's Place Is in the City." *Antipode* 16 (3): 11–19. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-8330.1984.tb00069.x>.
- Women, UN. 2020. *Safe Cities and Safe Public Spaces for Women and Girls Global Flagship Initiative: Second International Compendium of Practices*. New York: UN Women.
- Writers, SBS Staff. 2020. "Women Reveal What They'd Do If There Were No Men on Earth for 24 Hours." SBS, September 24, 2020. <https://www.sbs.com.au/topics/voices/culture/article/2020/09/23/women-reveal-what-theyd-do-if-there-were-no-men-earth-24-hours>.
- Young, Iris Marion. 2005. *On Female Body Experience: Throwing Like a Girl and Other Essays*. New York: Oxford University Press.