Face Value: The Politics of Beauty
by Robin Tolmach Lakoff and Raquel L. Scherr
(Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1984)

Mass production and mass communications turned beauty from something rarely beheld to something constantly beheld.

In their lives measure themselves against the current norms of beauty and find themselves woefully lacking. But what do we do about it? After reflecting on our age, our class background, our race and our personal circumstances. Race value tends to assume both that white western standards of beauty are powerful universal standards and that all women respond deeply to slaves of race.

Women of all races have fought back against normative messages of beauty. Black women in western society have rebelled against the equation of white beauty and against social ranking in the black community based on lightness of skin. White notions of beauty lie at the heart of racism and, as the authors state, "Beauty is never more political than when it is used to prop up the race while it renders others powerless, immersed in self-hate."

The black beauty revolution has only partially penetrated the visual media and its standards of beauty. Black models and actors by and large are still obliged to pose under their skin's 'Caucasian features of the white ideal of beauty.'

"Beauty's power is used to divide men from women, women from women, race from race. To be beautiful is compensation for lack of power, but a beautiful woman is not a powerful woman. It is beauty, not woman, who has the power, and in pursuit of pursuer we seek beauty. Perhaps until recently men had so little else to make their lives comfortable, psychologically as well as physically, that they needed the promise of beauty, and the thrill of competition with..."
other women in this arena, to make living worthwhile.

What are the psychological roots of our responses to beauty? Unfortunately the authors do not get to the heart of the question. Their research turned up only contradictory positions. Academic psychologists link beauty with happiness, competence and goodness. Psychoana-
lysts link it to misery, passivity and im-
more. Both claim "empirical" evi-
dence...The two together form a whole the whole of our myths, literature and popular stereotypes about beauty.

In their own surveys the authors found that, without exception, all the women they interviewed claimed that beauty was important to them, though none could elucidate why. Many felt guilty at admis-
ing its importance, believing that their concern for personal beauty was anti-
thetical to feminism. In the fight to be valued equally and on the same basis as men—for our activities—parts of the feminist movement have often polemicized on the issue of beauty, with the result that we no longer should share our legs, paint our eyes or participate in the ex-
change. Feminist political rhetoric has
served two ends. It liberated some from tedious cosmetic routines but put many others off. The result is that young
ly feminist endures, especially among younger women.

Women are perhaps the greatest arbiters of beauty and we have to be ourselves and the world. To do so is to be they to us. When we realize that we are the arbiters of beauty, we are the arbiters of the world. We are the arbiters of beauty, and we are the arbiters of the world.

What Castells attempts to do in this book is develop a theory that will make sense of urban grassroots political movements. His approach is to discuss some of the more spectacular urban conflicts in cities across the world, as going back to Castellani Spain in 1952 and the Com-
mune of Paris in 1781, to a dozen other examples this century in Europe, South America and the United States. The stor-
ies are ones that are not well-known—after all, urban struggles have not been treated by researchers, much less by scholars.

One learns for the first time about the remarkable rent strike in Glasgow in 1915, the tenement movement in New York, the struggle in Vercingetorix in 1922 and the bitter struggles of the early 1970s in the Grand Ensembles—the post World War II new towns in the commuter belt
of Paris. There are intricate discussions of the Mission District in San Francisco as well as the urban impact of the gay commu-
ity in the same city; explanations of the gay community in the same city; explanations of queerer communities in Lima, Mexico and Santiago de Chile, and the profile of the citizens' movement in Madrid in the mid 1970s.

Unfortunately, none of the stories turn out to be terrifyingly interesting, at least not in the way they are told. Castells recounts them not for their own sake, but to draw out his thesis and that means he has not the time or inclination to outline the characters firmly and to inject all the details of the battles that make them so fascinating. (Take a look at John Cheever's marvelous book Oh What a Paradise It Seems to experience how well
written of these urban stories can be told).

When something can't be drawn out to fit in any way with the thesis—as indeed happens in this book—the story is watered down—Castells is reduced to saying, 'These stories offer no lesson.' Well, thank goodness he let me know, but it hardly provides enlightenment.

Castells generally concludes that ur-
ban movements do have a role to play in the movements of our time, although neither on the scale nor terms that are adequate to the task...they are more than a last, symbolic stand and desperate cry: they are symp-

toms of our contradictions, and there-
fore potentially capable of superseding these contradictions. What does this ac-
tually mean? I'm not quite sure. It is but one of many examples of a paragraph starting out with panache and direction, then ending in a puddle of words that have lost their sense. There is a roman-
ticism about Castells' conclusions that is irritating. One wishes he'd be a bit tougher about everything...although Marxist theory might not have room for social movements other than the historically proved class struggle, social move-
ments persist. So experience was right and Marxist theory was wrong on this point. Perhaps the traditional tools of a study of social change should be recast.

Dinah Forbes

THE CITY AND THE GRASSROOTS
by Manuel Castells

(Los Angeles, California: University of California Press, 1983)

Many communities have spent the last two decades fighting off developers and their high-rise towers

1. It must have goals related to collec-
tive consumption demands (such as lower rents), community culture (that feeling of being part of a neighborhood, for ex-
ample) and political self-management (such as participation in decision-making). Indeed, he showed that the important struggles always include these three elements, and if you think of significant battles in any community, these are the struggles that will be there. Take the case of the fight of the Toronto Island residents. They want reasonable rents, the right for their community to continue its exis-
tence and a say how their community is run. Those kinds of criteria are handy to keep in mind as one assesses the seriousness of a community's struggle.

2. It must be conscious of its role as an urban social movement. In other words, it must have a sense of history, rather than being an instantaneous backlash worried only about its own status.

3. It must be related to society through the media, professionals and traditional political parties.

4. It must be autonomous of any poli-
tical party. We all know the damage that a political party—a group with its own agenda—can cause to a community group.

Castells has a great deal of sympathy for struggles involving these elements, and he is very critical of the limits. Urban social movements are aimed at transforming the meanings of the city without being able to transform society. They are a reaction, not an alternative; they are call-

ing for a sleeve of existence without being able to create that new bread.