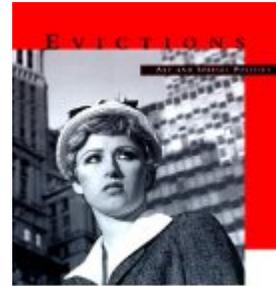


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Rosalyn Deutsche. *Eviction: Art and Spatial Politics*. Cambridge Mass., and London: MIT Press, 1996. xxiv + 394 pp. \$35.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-262-04158-4.

Reviewed by Martin Hayes (University of New South Wales, Sydney)
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Is the space of literature, that cozy term of comparative literature and post-modern English departments, the same as the space of architecture? We may not be able to define what they are—is the former a metaphorical or even psychological allusion, or is the latter about the physical measurement of architecture? Are proportion, or perspective aspects to be considered in this question of space? The associated viewing of space, and the positioning of the viewer(s) in it, are other points to be considered. Such vagueness in definition and insistence on metaphor dog the collected essays of Rosalyn Deutsche (from the 1980s) now published as *Evictions: Art and Spatial Politics*. For example, Deutsche contends that “space is not an obvious or monolithic category. It can be a city or a building, but it can be, among other things, an identity or a discourse” (p. 374). The space of a city or a building may come under the aegis of architecture, or that of urbanism. But wouldn’t an identity be concerned with subjectivity and a discourse with interlocutors? The latter two “things” just aren’t under the category of space, no matter how much one tries to fit them into it. The confusion of often different categories are subsumed by Deutsche, so that a piece of public sculpture becomes an urban intervention or even architecture. Yet sculpture clearly isn’t architecture.

Let’s examine the contents of the anthology to examine how Deutsche sustains and defends some of these confusions. The book is divided into three sections after an introduction that summarizes the general argument and structure of every essay in the collection.. The first section, entitled “The Social Production of Space,” consists of four parts: “Krzysztof Wodiczko’s *Homeless Projection* and the Site of Urban ”Revitalization,“ ”Uneven Development: Public Art in New York City,“ ”Representing Berlin“ and ”Property Values: Hans Haacke, Real Estate,

and the Museum.“ These last two chapters are concerned with the exhibition of art in galleries rather than projections. The former contain interesting information regarding changes in demographic and city planning policies about redevelopment, and where low income and homeless peoples inhabit areas ripe for ”revitalisation.“

Of course, all topics, examples and debates in the collection take place in the U.S. whether theoretically influenced by Paris or Berlin, barring the chapter on neo-expressionism. But after the analyses, Deutsche sees the slide projection of Wodiczko “as an attempt to create a democratic public space in the public spaces of the redeveloped city” (p. xv). The projection never actually took place; but the montages which remain are interesting as documentation. But are spaces democratic or totalitarian? Deutsche’s comments seems either utopian or naive in the light of writings by Foucault or Rossi.[1] “Representing Berlin” is a criticism of the presentation of neo-expressionism in an exhibition at the Royal Academy of Arts in London in 1985. She discusses the promotion of “the violent painters,” or “the boys from Moritz.” Whilst she dismisses this neo-expressionism as violent or unrepresentative of modern German painting (which seems quaint given the datedness of this movement, even in the short time of ten years since the exhibition), she also describes the use of painting to describe the condition of living in the city, following Simmel’s writings in the early 1900s and Tafuri’s use of Simmel in part of *Architecture and Utopia* (whilst ignoring his overall nihilism to architecture in that book) to emphasize this alienation of city life. Hans Haacke’s work is given as an example that such exhibitions ignored, using art to discuss the relationship between industrialist, his empire and the art such a man (typically) collects art of a different vein to the “violent painters.” The chapter concludes with the work of Louise

Lawler to contrast “the relationship between contemporary urban spatial arrangements and the regressive ideas about aesthetic space embodied in neoexpressionism” (p. 153).

The final chapter of the first section of the book, “Property Values: Hans Haacke, Real Estate, and the Museum” details the activist installations of Haacke, which questions the class and assets of the speculators of New York City in the mid 1960s, and the financial make-up of the board of the Guggenheim Museum in the early 1970s. Art as tables, dictums and figures, to show the background to the running of museums. That Haacke wasn’t able to have his pedagogical exhibitions shown tells us as much regarding the early 1970s U.S. art scene as the eventual showing of such work in the Museum of Contemporary Art in New York City in 1985-86. Unfortunately, the art has the same didactic simplicity John Berger’s *Ways of Seeing* has at the present time: useful twenty years ago, quite spent right now, in the face of more complex questions surrounding us.

The second section of the book, entitled “Men in Space,” questions the elision or marginalization of feminist discourse by male critics of urban geography and form. The only problem with this, as a colleague has mentioned, is that Deutsche forgets that men such as David Harvey and Edward Soja are fighting a similar battle to hers, even if she sees their differences as outweighing their similarities. At least two references that she uses to contrast such “foundationalist” theories, in her view, manage to find their names on the back cover blurb (Mark Wigley and Bruce Robbins). This may or may not have occurred with the consent of the author. Nevertheless, I felt some discomfort that her references also promote the author on the back cover of the book. The second chapter in this section, “Chinatown, Part Four? What Jake Forgets about Downtown,” can be distilled as a criticism of the analogical model of urban form as a noir thriller. This criticism, against Mike Davis, David Harvey, Edward Soja, is posited on the danger for the female in noir fiction and film, whether physical or sexual, not to mention the masculinity depicted in such analogical approaches. Whilst she uses Laura Mulvey and others to criticize the male approach, she seems to have conveniently ignored (as they have), the Barbara Stanwyck or Ida Lupino approach to such “structures,” which is nonetheless dangerous, but navigable by them, as femmes fatales. Deutsche doesn’t presume to be definitive or exhaustive: “this brief sketch is not meant to do justice to the complexity of *Chinatown*, noir, or feminist opinions about noir” (p. 253). “Will urban theory interrogate this space, or will it re-

main ”just Chinatown? “ (p. 253) Is this the call for a fluid discourse, rather than a rattle of sabres?

The last section, “Public Space and Democracy” looks at the broad area of public space and policy regarding sculptures, or the acknowledgement that “urban space is the product of conflict” (p. 278). Using the first chapter to detail the life and death of the “Tilted Arc” sculpture, and its eventual demise via various government officials opposed to it. Deutsche sees notions of site-specificity in public art as having some sort of political value, quite apart from the artwork itself. The opponents of such works as Tilted Arc are seen as elitist (pp. 264-65), while the left (though not exactly defined) is seen as neglectful of critical issues regarding public art (pp. 267-68). The destruction of Tilted Arc may have been a victory of conservative forces in American art bureaucracies and governments, but that is possible in democracy also.

The final chapter, “Agoraphobia,” is a kind of summation of various themes throughout the collection. Thus, “the presence of homeless people in New York’s public places today is the most acute symptom of the uneven social relations that determined the shape of the city throughout the 1980s, when it was redeveloped not, as promoters of redevelopment claimed, to fulfill the natural needs of a unitary society but to facilitate the restructuring of global capitalism” (pp. 278-79). While homeless people are seen as a symbol of the mechanisms of global capitalism, the cover of a book edited by Michael Sorkin is taken to task for appearing to be inspired by early Renaissance paintings, and therefore guilty of the domineering force of perspective. That they are Renaissance figures on an escalator rendered in an Art Deco style blunts Deutsche’s arguments. That a cover can have so much said of it rather than its contents seems to be a contemporary phenomenon. This continues for the next 40 pages. So we are told that in an exhibition emphasizing “a richly agonistic life” (p. 292) called “Public Vision” in 1982, the subjects of the works represented are “no harmless fictions.” Does life become art, rather than comment? Does it represent or duplicate it in one way or another?

Omissions by art historians of feminist contribution we can decry; but Deutsche seems to induce certain of her commentary, rather than deduce it from the facts she presents us with. It isn’t that what she is saying isn’t worthy, but that she seems to be looking for red herrings, even if they are simply people not up with the latest references (Zizek, Laclau and Mouffe, Wigley), rather than presenting a critical commentary on public art and the

space it presents itself in, as well as the civil and political systems it exists in. If politics is about conflict, in Deutsche's opinion, how does such a society represent this quality in its legislation? Deutsche so easily makes provocative comments regarding the need to have a variety of approaches in the field of public art. It needn't be then subsumed into a catch phrase that ignores the realities of modern society.

In the final analysis, because the book is so American—in terms of debates, examples and references—it is hard to see it as applicable to other countries and societies. Perhaps it must be seen as representative of the current climate of American art commentary from a Left writer, but as one that fails to give ground to essays or artworks that don't fit into her intellectual schema. Thus, public art is seen as both text and as urban space while at the same time also representing those sections of society that have the least political voice: it would seem obvious that politics, rather than public art, would be the answer to their woes. The conflation of art as architecture, or even text, is confusing and not properly delineated or described in the collection. If we didn't have to read her proselytizing views so often and focused instead mostly

on the art world, rather than society or community at large, we may have been able to digest its contents more readily as they are, which is a collection of essays rather than a sustained piece of work concerning public art in the last decade in the United States.

Notes:

[1]. "I do not think that it is possible to say that one thing is of the order of "liberation" and another is of the order of "oppression." "On the other hand, I do not think that there is anything that is functionally - by its very nature - absolutely liberating. Liberty is a *practice*" (Michel Foucault, "Space, Knowledge and Power," in *The Foucault Reader*, ed. by Paul Rabinow, New York, Pantheon, 1984, p.245). In *Aldo Rossi, Building and Projects*, compiled and ed. by Peter Arnold and Ted Bickford (New York, Rizzoli, 1985), Rossi recounts how one may make love in the most drab building as in the most superb: that it was up to the people rather than the environment to play out the event.

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