

Radice, Martha, Alexandrine Boudreault-Fournier, (eds).

*Urban Encounters: Art and the Public.*

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352 pages.

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The closing section of the last chapter in Martha Radice and Alexandrine Boudreault-Fournier's thought-provoking collection *Urban Encounters* is entitled Artists and social scientists: a curious encounter. The tongue-in-cheek finish is apt for a volume that blurs both sides and explores the ways in which public art performs the city and its publics. The follow-up to an international colloquium held in Halifax in 2013, the volume gathers eleven different articles from authors who operate across Canada between academia and practice and cover a range of fields including art, architecture, anthropology and geography. Articles include fieldwork analyses, criticism and descriptions of curatorial and artistic work—all located within Canada (save for one). Given this range of approaches and the serious questions posed by the book about the way we conceive of cities, publics and the public realm through public art, the objectives of the book are extensive. The editors, therefore, introduce the contributions by defining some of the book's main concepts: the public, public art, and the city. Noting the multiplication of forms of public art to be potentially problematic, the editors prefer proposing that the subject of inquiry is "art in public", or work that appears, as it were, to the public and in public space. The public is seen as "patterns of social relations", differential and heterogeneous, following three threads: a "spatialized realm" where strangers come into contact (after Goffman and Lofland), a "discursive sphere" following in the habermasian tradition, and the "addressed audience" of the work of art (with reference to Warner). Their definition of the public admittedly straddles fields and points out the flexibility and mobility of these concepts. The city is the chosen site of intervention because of its concentration of difference, of publics, and, one can think, of capital. With clear theoretical threads running throughout the book (Lefebvre, Debord, Goffman, De Certeau, to name a few), researchers generally interested in urban studies, art and design humanities, and particularly interested in public space and the aesthetics of encounter, will surely find a challenge here.

The articles are divided into three parts: performing, making and encountering. Although there is significant overlap between the three parts—some of the contributions distinctively make the case for all three and every piece can be said to be performative in some way—they are useful in establishing a register for the book's interrogations. The articles in the first part, *Performing art publics*, look at the dialogue between the reciprocal performance of public art and its emerging, "provoked" public. Those of the second part, *Making art, making the city*, look at the ways art in public participates in the formation of urban situations. This part's contributions come closest to a discussion on methods for understanding and projecting the city, with a critique of institutionalised art in Hamilton, descriptions of situated art practices by its authors, and an exploration by anthropologists into research-creation who, we are told, "should not just look downwards" (205). The articles of the third part, *Meeting art in public*, interrogate the result of encounters between art and the public in urban space, which the editors present through Mauss' theory of the gift (giving, receiving, reciprocating), from the perspective of two curatorial projects and a "pop-up ethnography" project.

This book raises significant questions about the state and performative aspects of public art in the city, and questions the relationship between art practices and research-creation. One such line of thinking is on the definition of the public itself, and the book is at its most perceptive when the contributors challenge the context in which they or the artworks operate. When does the public happen, and why? are questions that keep creeping up. As Radice, Harvey and Turner write, "Art in public space is not always art for the public." (290) This observation is worth exploring, since the book presents the public as something critical to the work of art in the city, with the potential to challenge an established order. So, is there an urban political project that can emerge from, or exist in relation to these practices? The editors are clear about the absence of certain practices

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that would edge the collection toward a stronger critique of urban space. It is perhaps a symptom of the absence of a collective urban project understood through public art that the book does not address political or social inequality more strongly. I admit bias, here, from a design perspective, which looks at the event of the city and the convergence of art, urban studies and the social sciences as necessarily tied to a project. By focusing the discussion within a relatively restrained practical and professional context, however, the book has the advantage of presenting an unambiguous discussion between artists, design professionals and academics in the social sciences interested in urban public space as a site of artistic intervention. In the context of public art being instrumentalised by municipalities, this is a cautious approach. The potential for further application, projects or other, as the editors encourage us to do, is for this book's public to encounter.

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