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Fred Evans, *Public Art and the Fragility of Democracy: An Essay in Political Aesthetics*, New York: Columbia University Press, 2018/2021, 342 pp. 22 b/w illus., $ 75 US (hardcover) ISBN 9780231187589, $ 30 US (paper, 2021) ISBN 9780231187596, $ 29.99 US (eBook, 2018) ISBN 9780231547369

Felicia F. Leu

"Revised Commemoration" in Public Art: What Future for the Monument?
État des lieux de la « commémoration corrigée » en art public : quel avenir pour le monument ?

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of these monuments is only sometimes mentioned, and the precise study of their (de)heritagization processes could have given fruitful results. Bellentani concludes his book with two suggestions on how to deal with controversial monuments today. First, and very interestingly, he emphasizes the importance of both participatory methods and digital technology when approaching the design and cultural reinvention of monuments to better deal with the multiplicity of interpretations monuments always carry. Second, he states that "planning and design are inevitably political, but they should not be politics" (171), which might be, if not contradictory with the reality he describes, a bit optimistic. Overall, the book proves how useful it is to consider the post-socialist space when trying to make sense of the recent debates on controversial monuments, and how inspiring this can be when thinking about the afterlives of a newly contested heritage. ¶

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1. Here is a short selection: Sheila Watson, "The Legacy of Communism: Difficult Histories, Emotions and Contested Narratives," *International Journal of Heritage Studies* 24, no. 7 (2018): 781–794; Francisco Martinez, *Remains of the Soviet Past in Estonia, An Anthropology of Forgetting, Repair and Urban Traces* (London: UCL Press, 2018); Francesco Iacono, "Revolution and counter-Revolution: or why it is difficult to have a heritage of communism and what can we do about it," *International Journal of Heritage Studies* 25, no. 5 (2018): 507–521; Laura Ingerpuu, "Socialist Architecture as Today's Dissonant Heritage: Administrative Buildings of Collective Farms in Estonia," *International Journal of Heritage Studies* 24, no. 9 (2018): 954–968.

Fred Evans
Public Art and the Fragility of Democracy: An Essay in Political Aesthetics
New York: Columbia University Press, 2018/2021

Felicia F. Leu

What role does public art play in reinforcing democracy and resisting autocratic tendencies in society? Raising this question is imperative during a period in which democracy is repeatedly being exposed to threats from white supremacists and others and in which, at the same time, more and more of the monuments that have enshrined racist beliefs are being brought down in the decolonial spirit. In doing so, Fred Evans, professor emeritus of philosophy at Duquesne University, provides an exceptionally relevant and compelling publication concerning public art in the US. His extremely well researched "essay in political aesthetics" invites its readers to reflect on how public art, characterized as "any artistic creation that has the intent or effect of addressing democratic values and occurs in public spaces" (10), can be a force in "shaping our views of democracy" (2) and "motivating citizens to participate in civic activities" (14).

Evans's remarkable philosophical account is a valuable contribution to the vast body of interdisciplinary literature on the entanglements of democracy and public art. For, what renders Evans's book unique is his development of an inspiring systematic criterion to evaluate "public artworks as acts of citizenship" (8), qualifying as the latter when they "augment democratic tendencies" (231), either by direct "innovative affirmations" or resistance to "white supremacy and other nihilistic oracles" (235). His publication excels through a new and fruitful way of imagining the complex constitution of the public involved in public art, namely through the primary notion of the voice with its traits of audibility, specificity, and flexibility, based on his stimulating volume *The Multivoiced Body: Society and Communication in the Age of Diversity* (2009). The author characterizes the public sphere through the interplay of diverse and agonistic voices, in which "voices are never merely persons talking to one another" but "vocal forces" expressing social discourses (35). This "multivoiced body" as society's fundament is elaborated regarding public art in the first two chapters as an outstanding conceptual ground for his criterion. Within its eight chapters, building upon each other, and with reference to a great many philosophers, art critics, and other thinkers, the publication succeeds through the author's impressive ability to make the theorists' different voices talk to each other to relate their ideas to various examples of public art, and to give intelligibility to their complex notions of politics and aesthetics as he develops his conclusions.

The initial chapter, entitled "Democracy's Fragility and the Political Aesthetics of Public Art," revolves around the "dilemma of diversity" (12). Evans considers democracy to be strong and fragile
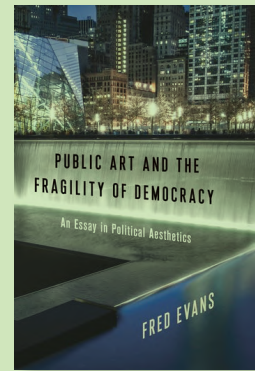
at the same time, a system that oscillates between heterogeneity and solidarity, but longing for and finally embracing "a unity *composed of*—rather than *imposed on*—difference" (12). *A unity composed of difference* becomes Evans's leitmotif. This is reinforced by two metaphors that run like red threads through the book, structuring the elaboration of the aesthetic and the political part of his criterion. Democracy has "two vacancies that must be filled while leaving them open" (16): "public art's 'plain tablet'" (81) and "democracy's 'empty place'" (48). The latter idea, coming from philosopher Claude Lefort, alludes to the absence of a single, fixed site of power in democracy; the first recalls a debate on public art in which the US Congressman John Nicholas (1764–1819) proposed, instead of an authoritarian stone monument commemorating George Washington, the installation of a plain tablet inviting citizens to act democratically by expressing their opinions.

Throughout the second chapter, "Voices and Places: The Space of Public Art and Wodiczko's *The Homeless Projection*," Evans focuses on his key concept of vocality in the public square as "microcosm" of democracy (46). Drawing on art historian Rosalyn Deutsche, especially on her account of Krzysztof Wodiczko's *The Homeless Projection: A Proposal for the City of New York* (1986), Evans exemplifies democratic society's agonistic body through the interactions of politicians, audiences, artists, and corporate elites as the participants of public art in Union Square, as multiple voices contesting for audibility. Striving for social hegemony, some voices challenge the dynamic of diversity with their dogmatic claims "present[ing] themselves as absolute truths and thus not in need of significant revision" (38). Evans typifies these voices as "oracles," such as the dominant infiltration of Union Square by real estate capital as the decision-making force in the 1980s, working in favor of

some powerful beneficiaries and leading to the eviction of the poor and homeless people living there. In return, public artworks as acts of citizenship are meant to disrupt and resist those oracles, evolving an agency in the public sphere that Evans refers to as "quasi-voices" (42). This is achieved by the "counter-architecture" Wodiczko suggested (39): digital projections onto the square's monumental statues render them into homeless people, among whom George Washington (1856) appears, as if in a wheelchair and offering to clean windshields. Wodiczko's notion of activating monuments in this manner reflects the processual nature of both public art and democracy itself while advocating for the audibility of marginalized societal groups.

The third chapter, "Democracy's 'Empty Place': Rawls's Political Liberalism and Derrida's Democracy to Come," is meant to set the political foundation for Evans's discussion of the "macrocosm" of democratic societies and its "empty place" (48). Philosopher John Rawls focuses on stability in democracy as arriving through an overlapping consensus by people supporting different ideas. Evans juxtaposes this idea with philosopher Jacques Derrida's dissensus-driven "democracy to come." Re-considering Derrida's notion of democracy's paradoxical autoimmunity, in which its means of self-preservation are also an internal threat, Evans concluded convincingly that democracy's fragility—the ever-present potential imbalance between unity and heterogeneity—is not intrinsic to it, but instead results from citizenly interaction and is "the product of...the players and not the game itself" (81). The player's "agon of contesting voices" (75) ensures the continuous transformation of society's identity, as "each [voice] is what it is through its difference from the rest" (77). Those opposed to democracy must be heard in democracy's open space yet must not be accepted as "policymaking powers" (79).

The fourth chapter, entitled "Public Art's 'Plain Tablet': The Political Aesthetics of Contemporary Art," serves to develop the aesthetic base for Evans's argument through an incorporation of a variety of current art historians reflecting on contemporaneity, heterochronicity, and anachronicity. Contemporary art's heterogenic temporalities, spatialities and vocalities fill the "plain tablet" superbly, in complete rapport with Evans's pluralistic conceptualizations. His consideration of art historian Claire Bishop's accentuation of the importance of the aesthetic dimension in socio-politically charged participatory art paves the way for the fifth chapter, "Democracy and Public Art: Badiou and Rancière." Alain Badiou's theorization of "inaesthetics" (147), which comprehends art as a "singular truth" (122) separated from politics is juxtaposed with a rethinking of Jacques Rancière's "aesthetic regime of art" and his explorations of the particular relations between aesthetics and politics (142). In this way, Evans fruitfully brings together his reflections on democratic politics and art in public spaces. The author posits public art's simultaneous adherence to the three political virtues of *heterogeneity, solidarity, and fecundity* ("the production of new voices," 81) as essential when classifying it as an act of citizenship in a democracy, as is the upholding of a creative tension between political and aesthetic dimensions in public art. Neither the political idea nor the aesthetic aura should dominate, so that they reinforce one another rather than cancel each other out.

In the following chapters, Evans deploys his conclusions in two case studies on large-scale public projects in order to demonstrate and sharpen their applicability. The sixth chapter, "The Political Aesthetics of Chicago's Millennium Park," characterizes the park as a dialogic and cultural hybrid structure, thereby resonating with Evans's conception of society's multivoiced body. To

get there, Evans carefully considers two oracles that risk disrupting the democratic tone of the park. First, the degeneration of art into a meaningless spectacle for entertainment without political force, following, among others, thinker Guy Debord. Second, the predominance of the decision-making power of capital through the increasing privatization of (art in) public spaces, as demonstrated in the naming of AT&T Plaza (hosting Anish Kapoor's *Cloud Gate*) or the Jay Pritzker Pavilion (designed by Frank Gehry). The indirect resistance of the park's artworks to these oracles manifests itself in the form of public participation, affirming the dialogic basis of democratic societies, which Evans exemplifies in one core piece. Mirroring oneself "together with others" in Anish Kapoor's *Cloud Gate* (2004)—shaped like a huge, silver-surfaced bean under which viewers can walk—the spectator understands that the sculpture can function as a bridge to comprehending togetherness and multiplicity in new ways through art (173). The piece's aesthetics, in form of the spectacular silver coat, add to the artwork's socio-political force. Finally, Evans successfully identifies public art as acts of citizenship when "promot[ing] and reveal[ing] new democratic values" and qualifying as resistant to oracles, while "be[ing] aesthetically effective" (180).

The seventh chapter, "The Political Aesthetics of New York's National 9/11 Memorial," reveals the memorial's controversial implications. While Michael Arad's *Reflecting Absence* (opened in 2011)—huge twin waterfalls that pour into the depths of the two footprint basins at the original towers' location—risks becoming a pure spectacle, the accompanying 9/11 Memorial Museum lacks a critical historical contextualization of the attacks. The memorial implies a "single narrative ... of loss and mourning" (194) and faces the "oracle" of the authoritarian voice of "American

exceptionalism" that leads to notions of victimhood—US citizens "as innocent victims" (207)—and a contextless "naturalization of terrorism" (208). As a contrast to this official memorial, Evans turns to Wodiczko's unrealized *City of Refuge* (2009). It was designed as a spherical interactive 9/11 memorial in New York harbour, accessible only by ritual boat rides. By opening up alternative, agonistic narratives, notably the artist's framing of US citizens as "innocent of murder but guilty of not actively challenging policies that have caused poverty, injury, and even death at home and abroad" (198), the memorial resists the aforementioned oracles and affirms democracy. What Evans calls the "performative aesthetic of democracy" (216) is key in comprehending public art as acts of citizenship and "quasi-voices." Instead of merely representing democracy, *City of Refuge* would have worked through dialogic participation as "collective...exchanges among contesting voices," taking the plain tablet one step further, as it "*performs* as well as symbolizes the agonistic type of democracy" (201).

This connects well with the main concern of the last chapter, "Public Art as an Act of Citizenship," where, in addition to offering a succinct summary of his arguments, Evans stresses the constant metamorphosis of democracy, public art, and citizenship as conditioned by the dynamic interplay of voices. This interplay composes the "evental" character of both Evans's criterion and society itself (233). Recognizing the imperative for democratic citizens to see themselves as engaging in dialogue (through art), Evans rereads Michel Foucault, presenting the idea of a democracy in which everything is openly articulated, and emphasizing the ethico-political component of a democratic society that allows its members to revise their own standpoint.

Fred Evans takes on the potentially paradoxical task of elaborating

guidelines for assessing public art as acts of citizenship while, at the same time, remaining purposefully flexible and non-definitive to reflect democracy's openness, allowing a multiplicity of voices to speak throughout his analysis. In light of Evans's illustration of the artist's and scholar's responsibility to unmask society's oracles as "myths," (38) and to resist them by ensuring a pluri-vocal discourse, he aspires to encourage new voices to join the conversation to possibly modify his criterion "for the better" (234). This striking move anticipates an amplified audibility of public art's role in reinforcing democracy, based on a *unity composed of difference*. While Evans does indeed rely primarily on canonical thinkers and well-known public art, his invitation to others to revise his own work nevertheless offers a stirring potential, as expanding on this approach could stimulate the increasing incorporation of a diverse range of voices into research practice, thereby helping to generate a more multivocal academia. ¶

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Sabine Marschall, ed.
Public Memory in the Context of Transnational Migration and Displacement: Migrants and Monuments
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Varda Nisar

The last decade has seen a renewed debate on monuments and their current relevance. It has come to