

Supervisor's assessment for Aneta Kohoutová

Aneta Kohoutová has written an original and evocative dissertation that combines philosophical reflection with art and architecture. In 'The ethics of public spaces: In between the lived and the built environment', she argues that public spaces are an integral part of the political community that citizens share, speak, and act in. In reflecting on the ethical aspects of public spaces, Kohoutová draws from Arendt, Butler, Foucault, de Certeau, Heidegger, and Sennett in conjunction with artists, architects, and urban planners to examine the importance of built and lived environment. In particular, she explores invisible spaces 'in between' buildings, benches, monuments, sculpture, performance, and public actions to demonstrate how public spaces are integral to active citizenship. Moreover, she critiques how the built environment often excludes individuals from public spaces due to economic precarity, alienation, conflicting understandings of history, gender, ethnicity, and race.

Throughout her dissertation, Kohoutová stresses the lived bodily experience of individuals in public spaces. She argues that individuals have a right to public spaces and the city. Her dissertation is to be highly commended for the original additional of artistic examples in each chapter that demonstrate particular aspects of public spaces.

Kohoutová is influenced by Arendt's idea of the polis and common world. Public spaces are thus fragile but vital spaces in between people that both separate and bring us together. Kohoutová emphasises that public spaces are less places fixed in concrete, wood, or stone than processes and intangible relationships between people and the lived environment. She develops Arendt's ideas of space of appearance, conditionality, natality, and action in public spaces. As she argues, the built and lived environment are mutually conditioned. Moreover, the space of appearance is rooted in the fact that everyone is born as a unique person into the world with the capacity to begin something new and to act. Kohoutová complements Arendt's question of 'who are you?' with Judith Butler's question of 'who am I, without you?' by paying attention to vulnerable and invisible people, who are often excluded from public spaces.

By engaging with Foucault, Kohoutová outlines disciplinary mechanisms of social institutions in the built environment. She draws from de Certeau to argue that people can resist exclusion and reclaim the city as citizens through everyday practices. Finally, Kohoutová argues that monuments carry and represent certain values in public spaces by using examples of controversial monuments that inspired protest during the Black Lives Matter movement. Thus, lived bodies protested against the built bodies of monuments erected in public spaces. Throughout her dissertation, Kohoutová examines what is 'public' about public spaces, how ethics is connected to public spaces, and how public spaces might be more inclusive. It has been a great pleasure to work with Aneta Kohoutová during her studies at the University of Pardubice, University of Tartu and the New School University.

DVM...
Siobhan Kattago
Associate Professor of Philosophy, University of Tartu

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