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Social Housing in Performance: the English Council Estate on and off Stage. By Katie Beswick. London and New York: Bloomsbury Methuen Drama, 2019. Pp. x + 220. £64.80 Hb.

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This pioneering monograph shows the contemporary English council estate in crisis and as it is ambivalently produced through performance and performative practices. Beswick offers the first scholarly audit in performance and theatre studies of cultural work on and about the estate within an era of political austerity and social cleansing. Exhaustively describing mainstream theatrical renderings of the estate, estate-located performances by residents and artists and, the cultural performance of estates in social life, this is a rigorous micro and macro-political examination of social housing that identifies the un/witting reproduction of its stigmas in arts practices. The class politics of how estates appear in social life and as dramatic representations thus emerge for Beswick as ‘often transmitted through a middle-class lens, further shoring up inequalities in cultural production and consumption and concealing working class perspectives from view’ (p.77). The ‘idea of the council estate’ is concerted throughout the work with the intent of revealing the social costs of representational practices on estates and their residents (p.3).

Social Housing in Performance converses with recent theatre scholarship on the urban, housing and the arts’ role within it, examining aspects of gentrification and political economy put forward by Harvie (2013), McKinnie (2012); Bell (2014). ‘Monopolistic performance’ is, in McKinnie’s view, site unresponsive performance that creates an aspiration in the audience for the unobtainable real estate in which the performance is sited and, through which the performance intensifies the economic value of the site through its ‘non-replicable’ qualities (2012). Beswick further treats monopolistic estate performance as that which ignores the environment’s social backdrop, citing the National Youth Theatre’s production of *Slick* (2017) on the Park Hill estate, Sheffield, which had been designated for regeneration. *Slick* imagined the estate as an utopia and at the close of performances, leaflets advertising newly renovated privately-sold homes on Park Hill were distributed by Urban Splash, developers who bought the estate for £1 in 2004 from Sheffield City Council. Developing Harvie’s assertion in *Fair Play: Art, Performance and Neoliberalism*, that in the main artists do not wittingly collude with neoliberal regeneration projects but often can, Beswick concludes that estate performances are also implicated in class and race politics.

Identity politics are addressed across the book by highlighting the subjectivities of the estate such as, the chav, the single working-class mum, the hoodie, the benefit scrounger, followed up with analysis of specific figures such as Cheryl Cole, Mark Duggan and ‘deviant mother,’ Karen Matthews. A theorisation of the affects attached to the linguistic use of negative descriptors to identify subjectivities in this way would have been welcome but, Beswick engages, instead, with abjection through the sociological work of Beverly Skeggs and Imogen Tyler, confirming how *Revolting Subjects* (2013) are produced. Problems of identity politics or its historical shortcomings as a method of analysis are not directly engaged with but, the term ‘burden of representation’ is very effectively deployed across many chapters to articulate the trouble of essentialising, instrumentalising and typifying estate subjectivities, even when those subjectivities are self-representing. For instance, Andrea Dunbar’s, *Rita, Sue*

and Bob Too (1982), one of the earliest theatrical depictions of estate life by a resident, is noted by Beswick to maintain an 'authorial authenticity' that can result in the estate voice being 'framed as unproblematically real' (p. 85). This, Beswick argues, 'imbues the work with an added burden of representation, as the stage depictions operates to solidify existing understandings about estates and is often read as reflecting the authentic totality of estate experience' (p. 85).

Methodologically, a reading of social housing in performance is accomplished through a befitting taxonomy of estate performance that includes the 'quotidian' as the daily experiences of estate residents, along with terms such as, 'located arts practices' and 'resident/artist-led performance,' classifications that ensure the project confronts critiques of applied theatre, live art and installation performance about or, sited on estates. This is elaborated through a careful selection of performances, notable for Beswick's utter commitment to seeking out local, difficult-to-find practices such as: Fourthland's *The Wedding to the Bread* (2017); the delightfully knowing antics of Jordon McKenzie's *Monsieur Poo-Pourri* (2010-), a posh 19th century flaneur interloping on his own estate; countered by Eclipse Theatre's *Black Men Walking* (2018) who state that 'flanerie is for whites'(p. 166).

Most pertinently, this book honours the subjects it writes about by addressing it, not just to academics and students but, accessibly to a reach beyond the walls of the academy. This thoughtful book is balanced and respectful to the work of artists while retaining estate subjectivities as the focused priority. Critically, it has taught me that not all artistic practices on estates are uncritical of the economic, classed and racialised environments in which they work.