

'Arts for All' and 'In Search of Cultural Democracy', 2012

Then Secretary General of the Arts Council of Great Britain, Roy Strong's 'Arts for All' supported the idea of widening access to the arts on the basis of the democratisation of culture. This was, essentially, about expanding appreciation and enjoyment of received and established culture, i.e. the 'the Great Tradition of European Art'.

Following the 1984 publication of 'Community Art and the State, Storming the Citadel' [Comedia, 1984], Owen Kelly wrote 'In Search of Cultural Democracy', a direct attack on Roy Shaw's notion of 'Arts for All'.

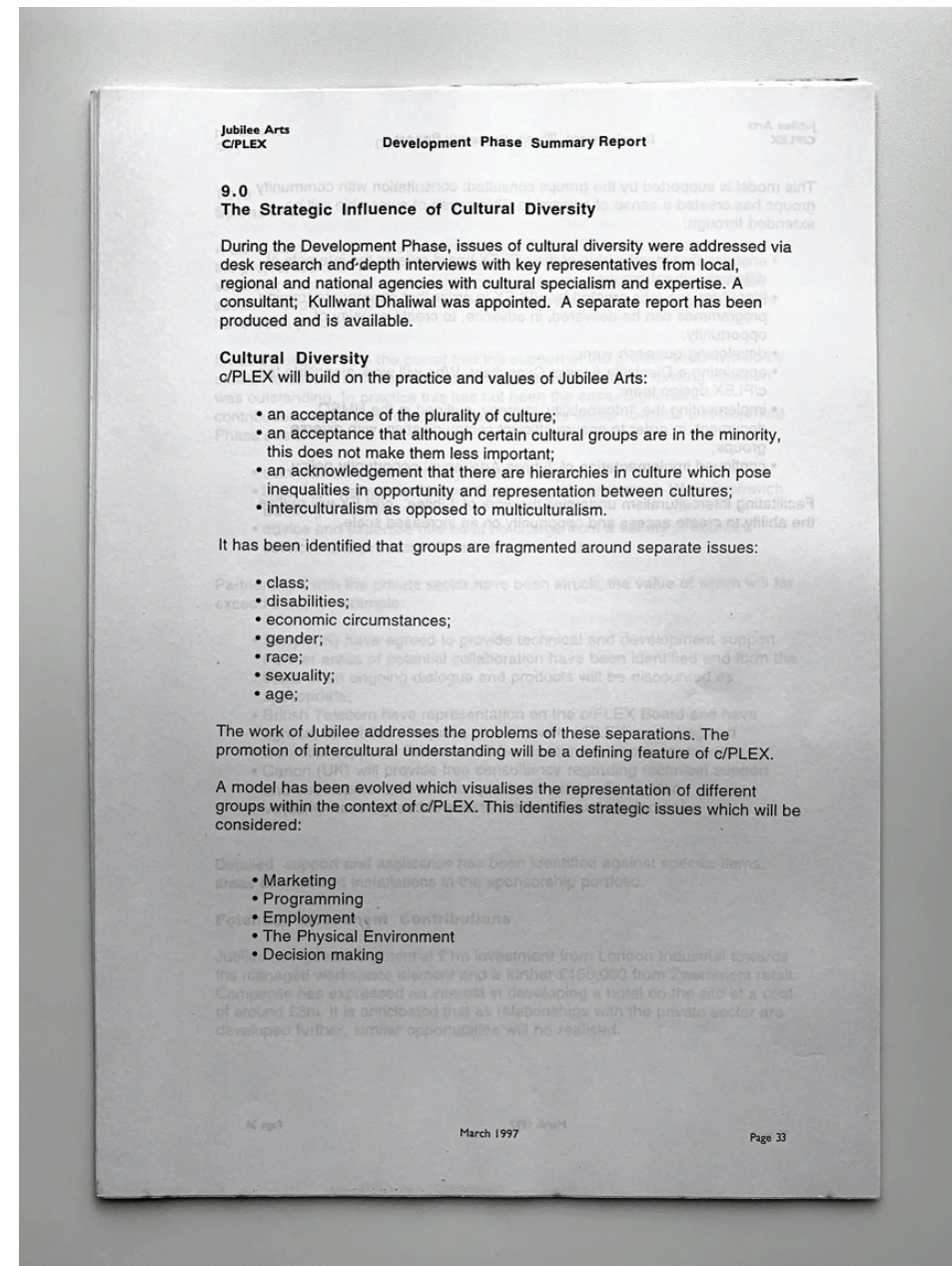
"From a distance, the idea of 'arts for all' sounds like a good idea. It might be the kind of notion that could bridge the gap between the interval at Sadler's Wells and half-time at the Kop. Close up, however, the idea evaporates. I certainly do not believe in it, neither do many others within the community arts movement. When we hear the phrase 'arts for all' we want to know just what 'arts' are being referred to, and why. We want to know what it is about these 'arts' that is so important that everybody needs to have them. When Roy Shaw says that I dismiss 'the Great Tradition of European Art' as 'an ideological construction of the imperialist climax', he misses the point. It is not the art that I am dismissing, it is the 'Great Tradition' which claims the right to say what is and what isn't art. It is not what is being graded that I am condemning, rather it is the method of grading" [Owen Kelly, 1985].

Sources:

Roy Shaw: 'Arts for All', Arts Express, August/September 1985

Owen Kelly: 'In Search of Cultural Democracy', Arts Express, October 1985

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The scope and range of this work is underpinned by a number of conceptual and operating frameworks which ensure site-specificity, cultural diversity, public involvement and local benefit.

The delivery and success of the programme is contingent upon new services being developed in parallel with the new-build programme. These will be managed by Jubilee Arts and emphasise the resourcing of, and provision for, public art production, training, presentation and distribution. The c/PLEX Public Art Programme is costed over a six year period to ensure the early involvement of commissioned artists as from RIBA Stage D. This period also ensures opportunities for real involvement by partner organisations and local publics in realising c/PLEX as a unique and dynamic place fulfilling need and accommodating aspiration.

This summary document for the public art programme at c/PLEX is supported by its own appendices (attached) and is detailed further in the Public Art 'PLEX File' held at Jubilee Arts. Additional contextual and conceptual underpinning is provided by eighteen other c/PLEX submission documents grouped as 'Artistic Case', 'Business Case' and 'Common Documents'.

2.3 4 Development Phase Artists Commissions Vision

The Public Art Programme of c/PLEX will give expression to the concept of place within the new millennium.

"...a site represents the constituent properties of a place – its mass, space, light, duration, location and material processes – a place represents the practical, vernacular, psychological, social cultural, ethnic, economic, political dimensions of a site. Sites are like frameworks. Places are what fill them out and make them work. Sites are like maps...while places are the reservoirs of human content..."

Jeff Kelley

"In cities and communities fractured by change, public art cannot mend, heal or rationalise a nostalgia-driven desire to return to less volatile, confused times. But it can provide points of access to new conceptions of community so that the fragmented elements of personal experiences and urban dramas are reconciled, if not reconnected in a supple, contemporaneous idea of public."

Patricia Phillips

Creating c/PLEX provides Jubilee Arts with a new and extended base which brings with it considerable responsibility for the curation and management of a public square and the ordering of a 'new place' in West Bromwich, Sandwell.

The Public Art Programme is fundamental to this task through its relevance to audiences and practitioners, its command of content through technology, its aesthetic impact, and its power to animate and explore "the reservoir of human content". The skills to realise this work already reside within the history and competences of Jubilee Arts.

The c/PLEX Public Art Programme takes account of the need to provide a flexibility of procedures for making and placing art within an inventive and attentive critical process. Meeting these challenges, and those which Patricia Phillips suggests above, demands a simple,

yet layered, set of opportunities within that process.

The c/PLEX Public Art Programme opens up the potential for dialogue as a continuing process. It provides the means to locate and develop interaction at each stage of the design and construction phases, and into, and beyond, the exposition and animation of the new place – c/PLEX.

Delivering the vision demands new mechanisms and structures for the effective management of the programme. To encourage maximum gains for c/PLEX, its publics and the wider region suggests setting up a new project base within the parent company to provide and resource public art production, training, presentation and distribution. This project base is called 4-C.

The c/PLEX Public Art Programme provides opportunities for art and its publics to come together. These opportunities are realised as a number of commissions which take the form of: performance, residencies, and physical links to West Bromwich town centre. The Public Art Programme ensures that interactivity and shared visions become a reality at c/PLEX. These are noted as the key components of the c/PLEX Public Art Programme – The Tower to Cultural Democracy, the Performance Triangle, the Public Square and the Water Line.

2.4 Scope of the Public Art Programme

The c/PLEX Public Art Programme sets out procedural, contextual and operating frameworks to be applied across the project from:

- conceptual development to detailed design;
- building commissioning through construction;
- completed construction through the first two years of c/PLEX operation.

This will allow Jubilee Arts to respond to:

2.4.1 the new build opportunities particularly:

- the c/PLEX Public Square;
- the Tower to Cultural Democracy;
- the Performance Triangle;
- the future RIBA Stage D/E detailing of internal public places and spaces.

2.4.2 the wider site/place contexts particularly:

- physical links to other places including West Bromwich town centre and Dartmouth Park;
- the transport routes to and from c/PLEX;
- the connecting of one place to another through commissioned performance work;
- virtual links to cultural democracy sites at the four corners of the earth.

2.4.3 the stated ambitions of artists, communities and community members particularly:

- the scheduling of residency-based commission opportunities;
- the provision of 4-C Production, Training, Presentation, Distribution;