

"...it's about presenting different approaches that are meaningful for people who are concerned with a place and I was interested in a timeline as one way of looking at the role public art has played and the role of the artist. Possibly as the basis for a workshop activity. There is definitely an aspect of plugging the gap!"

By way of introduction...

Dear XXXX,

If you have a moment, go to <https://www.birmingham.gov.uk/> and do separate searches on 'community', 'public' and 'public works committee' and you will see the shift in emphasis that occurred between the closure of Birmingham's 'Public Works Department' in 1974 and the launch of the city's 'Community Development Project' in 1980. What we lost was the old Public Works' imperative of "Securing a Better environment for all the people of Birmingham."

In Britain, the Ministry of Public Building and Works was created in 1962 out of the 1943 Ministry of Works, and was absorbed into the Department of the Environment 1970. Along the way, the spirit of 'public works' got lost.

In the USA, "Public works is a multi-dimensional concept in economics and politics, touching on multiple arenas including: recreation (parks, beaches), aesthetics (trees, green space), economy (goods and people movement, energy), law (police and courts), and neighborhood (community centers, social services buildings). Essentially, it represents any constructed object that augments a nation's physical infrastructure."

It might be argued that public art is not possibly outside of a 'public works' agenda. Certainly public "for all the people of Birmingham" is no longer possible because of shift in scale from city-building to the community/the neighbourhood/the individual.

This becomes obvious when comparing the differing ambitions behind Raymond Mason's 1990 sculpture for Centenary Square ("Forward' presents the march of the people of Birmingham backed by the powerhouse of its industry") and Gillian Wearing's 2014 'A Real Birmingham Family' for the same place ("A nuclear family is one reality but it is one of many and this work celebrates the idea that what constitutes a family should not be fixed").

I would argue further that this shift in scale from public to community is indicative of the end of much of what steered the latter half of the 20th century. So, for me, the Long View for 2019 was an opportunity to remember old certainties in the hope of finding a way through the current neoliberal void...in which public art is no longer possible and, in its absence, nothing much else happens of any significance.

In modern times, Birmingham was the first modern city. "In just three short years as mayor, [Joseph Chamberlain] transformed the city from an oversized slum to one of the most advanced cities in the world. He took the gas and water supplies into city ownership and provided its residents with the cleanest and most effective water and power supplies anywhere in the country. He ploughed the proceeds into new housing, sewers and civic buildings, a new museum and art gallery, a grand boulevard to rival any street in Paris - today's Corporation Street - and a university. He was the man who built Birmingham." [<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-politics-37053114>]

The Chamberlain Memorial Fountain in Birmingham (1880) is a celebration of 'public works':

"This memorial...gratitude for public service...Joseph Chamberlain...many great public works were notably advanced...the Gas & Water Undertakings...to the great and lasting benefit of the inhabitants."

The Chamberlain Memorial Fountain is also an important example of the architect (John Henry Chamberlain, no relationship) collaborating with artists (Thomas Woolner, Samuel Barfield) and craftsmen (Salviati Burke and Co). This collaborative model dates back to the Italian Renaissance (Filippo Brunelleschi and Leon Battista Alberti). Most such monuments were funded out of the civic purse and/or local public subscription. Richard Westmacott's 'Statue of Horatio Nelson' in the Bull Ring, Birmingham's first public statue, was funded through local public subscription. Public participation in public works (including monuments) was either via the paying of taxes and/or voluntary subscription. The idea that the public might participate in public art in more meaningful ways was unthinkable.

The starting point for your "different approaches that are meaningful for people who are concerned with a place" begins only with the city rebuilding programmes just before and then as a consequence of World War 2. This led to the national agenda framed by the 1951 Festival of Britain, and the policy

imperatives that underpinned the 'never had it so good' later 1950s and the 'white heat of technology' of the early 1960s.

The last section of Henry Moore's address to the 1952 UNESCO International Conference of Artists ('The Sculptor in Modern Society') is important:

These are perhaps obvious rights for a sculptor to claim in the conception and execution of a composite work of art, but nothing is such a symptom of our disunity, of our cultural fragmentation, as this divorce of the arts. The specialization characteristic of the modern artist seems to have as its counterpart the atomization of the arts. If a unity could be achieved, say in the building of a new town, and planners, architects, sculptors, painters and all other types of artist could work together from the beginning, that unity, one feels, would nevertheless be artificial and lifeless because it would have been consciously imposed on a group of individuals, and not spontaneously generated by a way of life. That is perhaps the illusion underlying all our plans for the diffusion of culture. One can feed culture to the masses, but that does not mean that they will absorb it. In the acquisition of culture there must always be an element of discovery, of self-help; otherwise culture remains a foreign element, something outside the desires and necessities of everyday life. For these reasons I do not think we should despise the private collector and the dealer who serves him; their attitude to a work of art, though it may include in the one case an element of possessiveness or even selfishness; and in the other case an element of profit-making, of parasitism, nevertheless such people circulate works of art in natural channels, and in the early stages of an artist's career they are the only people who are willing to take a risk, to back a young artist with their personal judgement and faith. The State patronage of art is rarely given to young and unknown artists, and I cannot conceive any scheme, outside the complete communization of the art profession such as exists in Russia, which will support the artist in his early career. The present system in Western Europe is a very arbitrary system, and entails much suffering and injustice. The artist has often to support himself for years by extra artistic work - usually by teaching - but this, it seems to me is preferable to a complete subordination of the artist to some central authority, which might dictate his style and otherwise interfere with his creative freedom. It is not merely a question of freedom. With the vast extension of means of communication, the growth of internationalism, the intense flare of publicity which falls on the artist once he has reached any degree of renown, he is in danger of losing a still more precious possession - his privacy. The creative process is in some sense a secret process. The conception and experimental elaboration of a work of art is a very personal activity, and to suppose that it can be organized and collectivized like any form of industrial or agricultural production, is to misunderstand the very nature of art. The artist must work in contact with society, but that contact must be an intimate one. I believe that the best artists have always had their roots in a definite social group or community, or in a particular region. We know what small and intimate communities produced the great sculpture of Athens, or Chartres, or Florence. The sculptor belonged to his city or his guild. In our desire for international unity and for universal cooperation we must not forget the necessity for preserving this somewhat paradoxical relation between the artist's freedom and his social function, between his need for the sympathy of a people and his dependence on internal springs of inspiration.

I believe that much can be done, by Unesco and by organizations like the Arts Council in my own country, to provide the external conditions which favour the emergence of art. I have said - and it is the fundamental truth to which we must always return - that culture (as the word implies) is an organic process. There is no such thing as a synthetic culture, or if there is, it is a false and impermanent culture. Nevertheless, on the basis of our knowledge of the history of art, on the basis of our understanding of the psychology of the artist, we know that there are certain social conditions that favour the growth and flourishing of art, others that destroy or inhibit that growth. An organization like Unesco, by investigating these laws of cultural development, might do much to encourage the organic vitality of the arts, but I would end by repeating that by far the best service it can render to the arts is to guarantee the freedom and independence of the artist.

But this needs to be seen against Lewis Mumford's 'The Story of Utopias', 1922: "What I protest against is the way in which the field of the genuine artist, during these last three hundred years, has been whittled away, so that it has become more and more a mark of the artist to concern himself solely with the narrow province of pure esthetic experience, and to protest his complete aloofness from anything that lies outside this realm. ...art is as large as life, and it does not gain vigor or intensity by reducing its scope to that of the puppet stage."

Mumford becomes important to artists and city-building projects with the publication of his 'The Culture of Cities' [1938 USA and 1940 Great Britain] in which he declares:

"Nothing is unthinkable, nothing impossible, provided it comes out of the needs of life and is dedicated to life's further development."

As Time Magazine commented in April 1938, Mumford's "guiding principle is that the City is not only a form of life but, through its layout and architecture, a form of art - potentially the form of forms" and expresses beautifully the relationship between city-building, public works and public art.

To get a complete picture, both Moore and Mumford need to be read against Alex Comfort's 'Art and Social Responsibility', 1946, which again reminds us that the artist's responsibilities are more than the aesthetic niceties of the chattering classes.

"...manifestly not identical with the ideas behind 'Art for Art's sake' - it would be far fairer to regard them as art for responsibility's sake . . ."

Comfort's short essay is available online (pages 103 to 111) at: [https://libcom.org/files/Graham%20R%20\(Ed.\)%20-%20Anarchism%20-%20A%20Documentary%20History%20of%20Libertarian%20Ideas%20Volume%20Two%20-%20The%20Emergence%20of%20the%20New%20Anarchism%20\(1939%20to%201977\).pdf](https://libcom.org/files/Graham%20R%20(Ed.)%20-%20Anarchism%20-%20A%20Documentary%20History%20of%20Libertarian%20Ideas%20Volume%20Two%20-%20The%20Emergence%20of%20the%20New%20Anarchism%20(1939%20to%201977).pdf)

In terms of timeline, the 'never had it so good' later 1950s were followed by a decade or so of developing popular culture and wider cultural experimentation. This began to find fuller expression in the revolutionary and radical party politics of the early-1970s, through the feminisation of the city and the beginning of widespread economic malaise. Then, of course, comes Thatcherism and fight cultural democracy...and then neo-liberalism...leading to Blake's:

LO, a Shadow of horror is risen
In Eternity! unknown, unprolific,
Self-clos'd, all-repelling. What Demon
Hath form'd this abominable Void,

All big stuff, of course, but important to understanding how artists have worked with people and place. Some of is best explained by looking at the trajectory of the Arts Council, from its early beginnings as CEMA (Council for the Encouragement of Music and the Arts), and its inherent contradictions that have always comprised the later Arts Council on its path to becoming the Ministry of Fun we all love and respect today. And this has much to do with this (highlighted part):

Labourers in Art

Gordon Fyfe
Keele University

Studies in Design Education Craft & Technology

Labourers in Art
Gordon Fyfe
1975, Vol. 7, No. 2

A major purpose of this paper is to focus attention on the way in which institutions of art (academies, art galleries, museums etc.) confer a creative role on some men, whilst denying it to other men. If societies distribute unequal life-chances through their mechanisms of political and economic control, then one important aspect of those life-chances is to do with the production and consumption of art. However, the values of art are so often projected as being fundamentally antagonistic to the core values of industrial living, that their function as agents of social and cultural differentiation is usually obscured. The values of art 'appear' as antagonistic to those of rational bourgeois culture: art is a 'superior reality' encountered in opposition to the experiences of our daily lives at home and in the industrial sphere. Such an opposition is sustained in the advice of one contemporary art historian on the matter of collecting works of art:

"One of the great mistakes new collectors can make is to try conscientiously to find a work of art that will match colors in a particular room . . . Works of art are meant to speak for themselves. They should function independently in their own surroundings and because they

a trade."² In holding this belief men unwittingly conspire in their own aesthetic impoverishment.

A proper understanding of this problem of aesthetic impoverishment is a matter, not of locating the intrinsic characteristics of the consumer (bad art education) but of grasping the way in which such characteristics are given in the *relations* of artistic production and consumption. Likewise the characteristics of the producer are to be understood in terms of his/her orientations as occupant of an artistic role. Thus, the role of the contemporary artist as an autonomous creative ego is the end product of a process of atomization amongst art producers that has been going on since the beginning of the last century. That atomization has been brought about by massive changes in the focus of power within the art world (structured by external social processes) and by the proliferation of agents and functionaries who live off the artist's 'alienation' and the public's 'ignorance'. Viewed in this way art institutions can be seen correctly in their function as mechanisms of control and legitimation in relation to the existing division of artistic labour.

At any given moment an existing division of artistic labour has emergent properties.

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To get a feel for this stuff, it would be worth skim-reading a couple of Arts Council Annual Reports if you have the time:

1971 at <http://www.artscouncil.org.uk/sites/default/files/download-file/The%20Arts%20Council%20of%20Great%20Britain%20-%20Twenty%20sixth%20annual%20report%20and%20accounts%201970-1971.pdf>

1986 at http://www.artscouncil.org.uk/sites/default/files/download-file/Arts%20Council%20-%2041st%20Annual%20Report%20and%20Accounts%201985_86.pdf

1996 at https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/235454/0639.pdf

It was the failure of the Arts Council's 'New Activities Committee' 1969 - 1970 and the resulting Baldry Report that forced a divide between what we now know call 'community arts' and 'public art'.

See: [DOC] ACGB and Community Arts

https://www.reading.ac.uk/web/.../ACGB_Community_Arts_ed.doc

ACGB/103/16 Community Arts Policy 1974-78. ACGB/103/20 Combined Arts Unit 1982-84. ACGB/103/25 Combined Arts Unit: Officers' Correspondence 1981- ...

that had succeeded in attracting new, younger audiences.

Defining 'community' proved to be a challenge. The working party decided it often meant people living in a limited geographical area or neighbourhood but not always. (Tenants associations, new towns, hostels, schools, youth clubs and so forth supplied ready-made commu-

Since the measure of success was the extent of community involvement and creativity, process was valued more than product and 'the achievement of standards acceptable to specialists in the various art forms'. Furthermore, community art cut 'across the distinction between particular art forms' and 'the distinction between professional and amateur'. (It is important to distinguish public art – that is, paintings and sculptures made by professional artists for public places – from community art that was the result of collaboration between artists and non-professionals.) The working party could find no simple answer to the question: 'Is it art?' but did recognize that art was an open-ended concept rather than a fixed one inherited from the past.

The fact that this divide between community arts and public art came into being due to financial accounting conventions rather than informed or intelligent debate simply adds to the general sense of frustration with things as they are. The reality is that the labels simply make the map smaller and easier to fold, and have nothing to do with art. Before we had 'community arts' and 'public art' we simply had the notion of an 'extended arts practice' as something different from 'gallery art'.

The 'Long View' process with ixia was (is?) to invite others to identify particular projects that would help illustrate and explain further the trajectory since 1945. For me, there are perhaps two projects that help set the parameters for a practice that isn't limited by the terms 'community arts' and 'public art', and these may help describe the territory you are going to be exploring. Victor Pasmore's Apollo Pavilion at

Peterlee finished in 1969 (<http://www.apollopavilion.info>) and Stuart Brisley's Artist Project / History Within Living Memory, in the same 'new town' in 1976 - 1977 (http://www.stuartbrisley.com/pages/27/70s/Works/Artist_Project_Peterlee_History_Within_Living_Memory/page:27).

So...broad brushstrokes summary milestones (not all of which are on the ixia spreadsheet):

- 1940 First printing in England of Lewis Mumford's 'The Culture of Cities' [1938]
- 1940 Council for the Encouragement of Music and Arts [CEMA]
- 1943 Herbert Read 'Education Through Art' and the Butler Education Act
- 1946 Arts Council of Great Britain (ACGB) created
- 1946 Alex Comfort's 'Art and Social Responsibility'
- 1948 Local Authority spending on the Arts begins
- 1951 Festival of Britain
- 1961 Colin Ward: 'Adventure Playground - A Parable of Anarchy', Anarchy 7
- 1966 (to 1979) Artist Placement Group (APG) founded by Barbara Steveni with John Latham
- 1966 Gustav Metzger's Destruction of Art symposium in London
- 1967 First Art Lab
- 1968 David Harding defines the role of 'Town Artist' at Glenrothes, Scotland
- 1968 ACGB 'New Activities Committee'
- 1968 Welfare State International founded by John Fox, Sue Gill and others
- 1969 ACGB 'Experimental Projects Committee'
- 1970 Victor Pasmore completes 'The Apollo Pavilion' at Peterlee
- 1971 Poster-Film Collective support the Miners' Strike
- 1972 Lawrence Alloway: 'The Public Sculpture Problem', Studio International vol. 184 no. 948
- 1974 Venice Biennale as cultural protest
- 1974 'Art into Landscape 1' exhibition at the Serpentine Gallery
- 1975 Stuart Brisley starts 'Artist Project Peterlee'
- 1976 Peter Senior and the 'Manchester Hospitals' Arts Project'
- 1978 'The State of British Art', ICA
- 1978 Su Braden's 'Artists and People'
- 1978 Richard Cork's 'Art for Whom?' exhibition at the Serpentine Gallery
- 1979 ACGB funding for Combined Arts etc. devolved to RAAs
- 1981 Docklands Community Poster Campaign
- 1984 Art Monthly: 'Art Within Reach'
- 1984 Owen Kelly's 'Community, Art and the State: Storming the Citadels'
- 1985 ACGB imposes Public Art Agencies on Regional Art Associations/Boards

1988 P. Korza & R. Andrews (eds) publish 'Going Public: A Field Guide to Developments in Art in Public Spaces', Seattle

1989 Removal of Richard Serra's 'Tilted Arc' from Federal Plaza, New York

1989 Patricia Phillips' 'Out of Order - The Public Art Machine', Artforum & 'Temporality and Public Art', Art Journal 48

1990 'Context & Collaboration' conference, Birmingham

1992 W. J. T. Mitchell's 'Art and the Public Sphere'

1993 Harriet Senie's 'Critical Issues in Public Art'

1993 National Lottery etc. Act

1993 Richard Cork's 'A Place for Art'

1993 'Public Art - The New Agenda' conference, University of Westminster

1995 Sarah Selwood: 'The Benefits of Public Art: the polemics of permanent art in public places'

1995 Suzanne Lacy (ed): 'Mapping the Terrain: New Genre Public Art' <http://www.suzannelacy.com/mapping-the-terrain/>

1995 Mary Jane Jacob's 'Culture in Action - a Public Art Program of Sculpture Chicago'

1998 Linda Frye Burnham & Steven Durland's 'The Citizen Artist - 20 Years of Art in the Public Arena'

2000 'Our Towns and Cities: The Future - Delivering an Urban Renaissance Report', the 'Urban White Paper'

2002 Nicolas Bourriaud's 'Relational Aesthetics'

2003 The Sustainable Communities Plan: Building for the Future

2004 Tim Cresswell's 'Place, A Short Introduction'

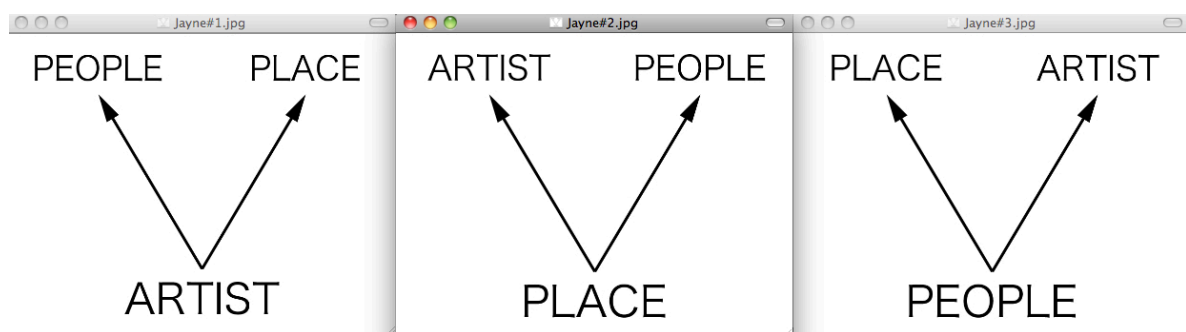
2005 Kyoto Protocol

2005 Bob and Roberta Smith: 'Art U Need', Thames Gateway

NOTE: The fuller draft timeline for ixia is attached. On this, I have left open the 'statements of significance' to help explain process.

Further comment on 'Artist - Place - People'

The limiting terms 'community arts' and 'public art' have much to do with this:



It might be suit your purposes better to think in terms of 'Artist – Place – People' and to explore how these can be held in relationship. Like Henry David Thoreau's chairs ["I had three chairs in my house; one for solitude, two for friendship, three for society"] these three elements work together, but much depends on which one leads any process. An 'artist-led' project may be different from, say, a 'people-led' project, and so on. What leads will inevitably determine process and outcome.

In this precariously balanced set of relationships, 'Artist' is always the artist (as Ad Reinhardt said, "There is just one artist-as-artist in the artist, just one artist in the artist-as-artist", and as Herbert Read said, "Art, on the other hand, is eternally disturbing, permanently revolutionary. It is so because the artist, in the degree of his greatness, always confronts the unknown, and what he brings back from that confrontation is a novelty, a new symbol, a new vision of life, the outer image of inward things. His importance to society is not that he voices received opinions, or gives clear expression to the confused feelings of the masses: that is the function of the politician, the journalist, the demagogue. The artist is what the Germans call *ein Rüttler*, an upsetter of the established order."), 'Place' gives context and can also be situation or opportunity, and 'People' can be public or community (depending on scale).

And as Raymond Williams says, this work is a 'journey of hope':

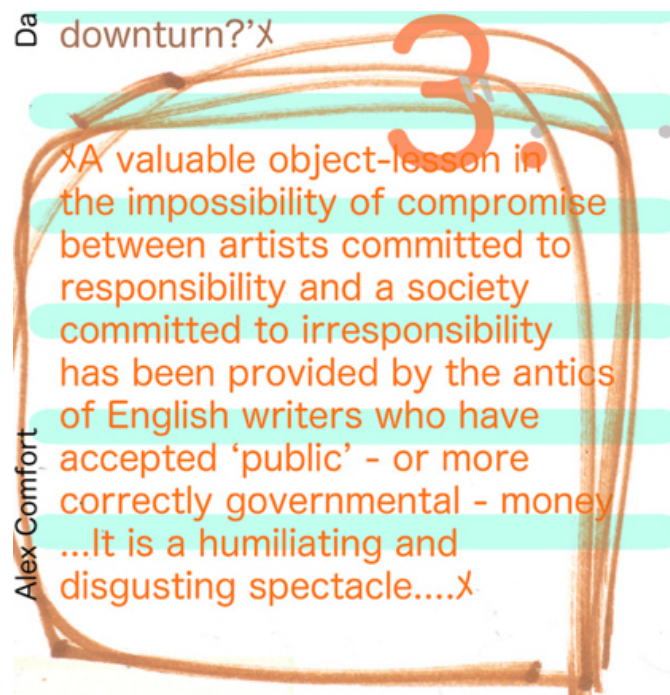
"It is only in a shared belief and insistence that there are practical alternatives that the balance of forces and chances begins to alter. Once the inevitabilities are challenged, we begin gathering our resources for a journey of hope. If there are no easy answers there are still available and discoverable hard answers, and it is these that we can learn and share. This has been, from the beginning, the sense and the impulse of the long revolution."

Public art as a 'journey of hope' is an attractive idea, and as my mentor Siah Armajani once said:

"The most important part of public art is that it is the greatest testimony to the nature of democracy. We have political democracy, but we should have cultural democracy and also economic democracy, and then art will be needed and all art would happen...and we are just at the beginning of it."

Good luck!

David 30.08.2016



David Patten 'We Are All Lemons' [extract]
Herbert Museum & Art Gallery, Coventry, 2009