

## The Aesthetics of Collaborations

Peter Dunn & Loraine Leeson of *The Art of Change*

*Art Journal, CAA, USA. 1997 The Subject of Aesthetics*

Modernist aesthetics are predicated upon the concept of an individualised vision or 'oeuvre', but they subsume under the 'Western cannon' modes of collective production from ancient and medieval cultures, as well as from tribal cultures and contemporary Western consumer culture. In the later stages of Modernism - Surrealism, Dada, and Pop Art for example - and in post-modern practices, this individualised concept has been under attack from many quarters. With the rise of Community arts practices in the U.S. and the U.K., the re-articulations of women artists and artists of colour, Public art, and the increasing use of new technology, group practices and collaborations have increased dramatically. Sometimes these have been driven by ideology, sometimes by sheer necessity. In certain practices, the *process* of collaboration has been paramount; the 'growth' or 'enabling' of individuals or groups being the goal<sup>1</sup>. However, in situations where there are ideas which need to communicate more widely, aesthetic power becomes especially important - it is central to the work's ability to speak beyond the confines of any particular interest group. The 'beauty' of such images derives from the imaginative interpretation of meanings embodied in the ideas, in the distillation of the desires of a constituency, in a form that expresses those ideas effectively. This, we believe, results from a transformation through critique, collaboration and communication. It involves social and visual processes inextricably linked. In a sense, the work forms a 'lens' which creates a focal point in the energies of transformation. Desire focused is passion, and what is socialised passion but aesthetics!<sup>2</sup>.

Focused desire and structured passion does not, in and of itself, make for 'good' aesthetics, however<sup>3</sup>. And there is an important distinction to be made here between 'good social aesthetics' and 'good aesthetics in art'. The former concerns issues of ethics and democracy, the latter does not have to. This may seem like heresy to some on the left. But the aesthetic in Art<sup>4</sup> - the composition of visual elements to create visual power<sup>5</sup> - can be achieved without reference to ethics or democracy, in fact it can even be used to oppose them. We can all think of examples of works that are visually and aesthetically powerful or compelling which represent an ideology or world view that we disagree with or find distasteful. But we would not normally describe these as beautiful<sup>6</sup>. Beauty has a *social aura*; it may be culturally specific, ideologically conditioned; it

certainly finds individualised expression but also is socially mediated; it is confirmed by consensus. In these terms then, beauty is a fusion of 'good' social and artistic aesthetics<sup>7</sup>. This is not to say that 'the aesthetic' in art is value free, transcendent or universal, but to point out that it is a means of organisation which is both technical and creative, with its 'accumulated wisdoms', traditions, schools and factions. It has a history and a geography. It began as very culturally specific<sup>8</sup> but, as a result of a broader colonisation process, it has become trans-cultural and assimilative of other cultural elements<sup>9</sup>. Like the English language, it is not the *only* form of international communication but it is the dominant one. Habermas said Modernism is dead but dominant<sup>10</sup>. He was only partially right. It may have cast off its mortal coil, but that was really a skin representing a particular historical period. The 'aesthetic', while defined in a particular modus operandi by Modernism, lives on in continuous metamorphosis within the increasing globalisation of culture. It may become unrecognisable in its mutations from its origins but that is no more remarkable than the transformation from medieval English to Californian Cyber-speak<sup>11</sup>. To refuse to speak a language because of its colonial past may be to cut oneself off from the very people one wishes to speak to. Yes it is vital that we nourish and maintain our own 'local narratives'<sup>12</sup> but it is not useful to be seduced by the romance of the marginal. It is also vital that we are able to have access to the local narratives of others. We need some common ground.

### **The Art of Change**

*The Art of Change* is a visual arts organisation. More importantly it is a philosophy in practice of an *art of engagement*. An art concerned with ideas, issues, processes and products of transformation, focusing particularly on issues of change in the urban environment and cultural identity. An art of engagement is people centred and critical. By critical we mean that meanings and identities should not be prey to superficial stereotypes, that mechanisms and processes are established to allow the lived, changing, complex and problematised identities to emerge. Our practice is about empowerment. In that sense it is a political statement as much as an artistic one.

Our work is collaborative for the reasons discussed above but also because we want to ensure that it is as precise and appropriate as possible. That means working with those who have first hand knowledge of what is needed, whether they be activists, professionals, or someone who has relevant personal experiences. It is about inspiration and aspiration. In that sense our practice is a desire for beauty as much as call for social

change. The projects we are using as examples of an approach are not chosen because they are typical. We have no typical projects. They have been chosen because of the differences in context, participants and processes of engagement. Our approach is not formulaic. On the contrary we hope the examples will show that the specificity of contextual factors requires custom made processes. The first project involves a group of culturally diverse young people and their relationship with two institutions, state education and 'state art'<sup>13</sup>. The second area of work we will discuss involves an approach to 'Public Art', not as isolated artworks but within a strategy of consultation, collaboration and 'ownership'.

## The Projects

***Changing Places*** followed on from two previous billboard projects - *West meets East* and *Celebrating the Difference* - which explored issues of culture and identity, commonality and difference, and were displayed in East London<sup>14</sup> during a period that was particularly fraught with racial tension. It was a collaboration between ourselves, a secondary school on the Isle of Dogs in London's Docklands, and the Tate Gallery. We had worked with this school before. It is in a tough area with a high proportion of minority cultures who, at the time, were under a sustained attack from the neo fascist British National Party. The Tate approached us to do some work based on their collection, involving young people from 'our community'. We decided quite early that, if we were going to make this project work, we would have to get the kids - some of whom had never been to a gallery in their lives - to 'change places' with the artists whose work they were looking at; to find a way to make it their own<sup>15</sup>.

Our initial thoughts about working with images from the Tate gallery revolved around the fact that the collection is Euro-centric through its historic focus on British Art and its more recent Modernist collection. While Modernism in its various forms borrowed heavily from the aesthetics of the cultural 'other' - Cubism being a classic example - the critical emphasis on Formalism maintained a 'correct distance'<sup>16</sup> from the social, economic or political context of that other which is not allowed to contaminate the purity of the (artistic) field. Our main concern was how the communities we work with - with backgrounds rooted in diverse cultures, many non-western - might relate to the work in the Tate in a way that was meaningful and empowering. With the young people we explored issues of 'place', Britishness, the cultural meanings of death and regeneration. We push-pulled the pictorial conventions of the Western Tradition, both during the process of *Changing Places* and in the resulting image

**Awakenings** for which we brought into play the tools of digital imaging technology.

This project offered the possibility of bringing together a number of elements central to our practice. The first was the use of the creative process as a vehicle to allow people to move from present circumstances to future possibilities - to use the Tate Gallery's collection not so much as works of art to be appreciated but as a rich source of material to feed the imaginations of participants. By putting themselves in the shoes of the creators, the collection became the material through which to 'dream', to visualise and concretise possible futures. Much of our work starts with a process that can involve people in a variety of ways - a drawing together of issues and experiences that is wider than the knowledge of any one individual and roots the work firmly in the communities from which it stems. For us it is important that this process culminates in the production of an artwork - the visual power of the product is an important part of the empowering process - for participants see *and have confirmed* that they have contributed something they can feel proud of. Digital imaging is an ideal medium for this. It enables us to combine a range of disparate material, whether 2-D or 3-D either by direct scanning or photographs. We can work with whatever scale and media are appropriate for the situation and, most importantly, draw on particular skills and interests in a range of participants.

Students visited the gallery and initially chose a work which they had a gut response to. After identifying elements that signified social and historical position, including race, culture and gender, the images were copied using traditional media but a single significant item was changed to reflect their own identity. They started this process individually then divided into small groups to work on a larger scale using a variety of media, this time keeping only the *formal structure* of the work and re-casting all of the iconography in terms of themselves, their cultures and their environment. This allowed the students to situate themselves more clearly in relation to the historical and social framework within which the paintings were made.

### **'Awakenings'**

Stanley Spencer's monumental 18' x 9' *Resurrection, Cookham* was chosen for the final phase. There were a number of reasons for this. From the beginning we had wanted to make a large scale work involving the whole group in a way that would allow each individual a clearly identified role. Physically and compositionally Spencer's *Resurrection* contains a 'jig saw' of discrete elements, and the numbers of people represented meant that all those involved

in the project - pupils, teachers, artists, and Tate personnel - could be included. **(short description of Resurrection? - surely better to have image)** Secondly, the artistic tradition of 'The Resurrection', as a 'moment of rebirth' set in some unspecified future, is frequently used to explore contemporary values, both as critique and an embodiment of aspiration. It is of course also a celebration. *Awakenings* was chosen as the title for the final work, not only to remove it from a purely Christian interpretation<sup>17</sup> but to root it in the personal experience of the young people involved, who were poised at the beginning of their new life as adults<sup>18</sup>.

Spencer's work revolves around a celebration of *place* - Cookham - and the *local narratives* of that place<sup>19</sup>. Much of our work explores how local narratives provide a specificity to broader and more general themes and issues that affect our lives. Brecht has said that all the great issues of human experience are enacted upon local stages. This idea tied in perfectly with the initial aims of our project and reflected very much the distinctive sense of place which the Isle of Dogs seems to generate for those living there. There were also interesting correspondences between Spencer's 'place' and ours. Both are joined by the Thames, a river of time from the early part of the Century to its latter period, and from West to East. Spencer's Cookham, to the West of London, is an island created by irrigation and navigation channels during the agrarian revolution; an island of rural English village life threatened by encroaching industrialisation and the changes following in the wake of the First World War. The Isle of Dogs, in East London, was made an island through industrialisation and the building of the docks. Its urban communities are threatened by a post-industrial climate of unemployment combined with the physical and social dislocation of a major redevelopment and the racially divisive tactics of British National Party campaigning<sup>20</sup>.

Spencer's work also celebrates the pictorial values developed during the early Italian Renaissance but also incorporates 'precious gifts' from Africa. The centre section of the painting depicts African figures rising out of baked earth, in what looks like a boat, bearing mysterious objects. Spencer's brother in law, also featured in the painting close by, was an Anthropologist and mounted one of the first exhibitions of African Art in Britain. We interpreted this as important cultural influences from 'afar'. We asked pupils about such influences in their own lives - some knowledge or wisdom passed through their families bringing information and insight from elsewhere, whether from the past or another place - if there were objects associated with this. For this group, these influences were not African but Bengali, Chinese, Irish and Greek. For all those involved,

*Awakenings* became a celebration of another fusion: a remaking of 'Englishness' that is not a muddy multi-culturalism but the variegated richness of cultural difference.

Students were taken through a process of imaginatively rethinking different aspects of the painting in their own terms. For example we asked what their families or relatives might do with their body if they died. How might their family commemorate their life? What images would *they* choose to be remembered by? If they awoke from the dead, what would be the first thing they would do? Where would they like to come back to, where would they feel most 'at home'? They each took a section to re-make as their 'own space' as well as contributing to shared parts of this complex work. Clay was chosen as the medium for re-making the 'tombs' and commemorative plaques, while batik was used for some of the foliage, textures and 'soft' materials. Photographs were taken in a temporary photographic studio set up in the school. Participants were asked to take up a pose in keeping with the 'space' they had created for themselves and what they imagined they would be doing there. We used a synchronised flash set up and a medium format camera with a Polaroid back so they could check if the pose was right before taking the final shot to film. They took this themselves using a squeeze-ball trigger. The final work was compiled on computer. Image construction was complex both on a technical and compositional level. Lighting sources had to be consistent and tonal and colour balances manipulated to ensure compositional harmony and aerial perspective. The basic structure of Spencer's composition is retained but pushed and pulled so that the different colours and icons, the photographic imagery, proportions, tones and textures still maintain the overall balance of the composition. The scale of figures presented a particular problem in that Spencer's original used distortion both to express hierarchy - in the tradition of early Christian composition - and to distribute the 'weight' of figures as compositional elements. Our figures were photographic and did not look right distorted in the same way. It required different kinds of manipulation of individual sizes and foreshortening to create a similar 'all-over effect'. For us the work represented a fusion of elements of high art and popular culture, new technology and more traditional representations of space and volume which are part of the western tradition, together with the forms and signifiers of other traditions. The teacher commented: "We have learned that 'Changing Places' with artists can give pupils a way to learn both *about* art and *through* art. They (the pupils) responded by reflecting not on their differences but on their common interests: for instance, the importance of good

relationships in their lives. There was a lot of 'talking in class'. As one pupil remarked, " *I've thought mainly about personal things, my family and myself. I think Spencer's painting is about his family and friends....Everyone has got to die; all different cultures, children, old people, all have to die. .... enjoy your life before you die*". Awakenings was displayed as a 13ft x 7ft Cibachrome print at the Tate Gallery, together with examples of work in progress and some of Spencer's working drawings, from 9th May 95 - February 96. It has since been purchased by the London Borough of Tower Hamlets to hang in the Town Hall, near the entrance to the Isle of Dogs.

## Public Art

Two Public Arts Strategies we did during '95/6 really focused our thinking. For a long time we have been dissatisfied with the way much of Public Art is commissioned and used. It is exploitative for the majority of artists, tends to use art as a band-aid for badly designed public spaces or urban deprivation and is often a 'gilding the ghetto' exercise. Regeneration Authorities seldom have sufficient funds to truly regenerate. materially and economically, so public art is used as a means of 'creating the right climate' for the holy grail of market led investment, which most people now recognise as a myth of Thatcher-Reganism<sup>21</sup>. And in most cases, the 'plonking' of artworks - usually designed for gallery contexts<sup>22</sup> - without considering a site holistically results in bad aesthetic solutions, negative public response and seldom produces a beautiful *place* to be.

The meanings produced by the built environment are crucial to the quality of urban life. They are the visual signs and resonances of how we live and the value of that life. As such they are as important as economic activity, in that they can sustain our spirits, give us pleasure in the present and hope for the future. Of course negative meanings produced by our environment have the opposite effect. Economic activity without seeing and feeling the benefits is a promise postponed. Similarly, without economic activity, these visual signs and symbols become an insult, simply heightening cynicism and resentment. In short the cultural and economic must go hand in hand to build confidence and empower the community. Public art, in this century at least has played a patchy role in this process<sup>23</sup>. So we have to add two more crucial factors if we are to avoid the problems outlined above: accountability and involvement.

Public Art, within the Western Tradition at least, is mainly assumed to be urban, with the exception of territorial markers or memorials. Its function

historically has been to inspire social cohesion, to focus and embody social values, whether these be civic, religious, nationalistic or militaristic. Those who determined the meanings these works should convey were the commissioners.

In the Twentieth Century, this was complicated by the stylistic dominance of Modernism and the emergence of the 'arms length principle' in funding<sup>24</sup>. Control over meaning was, formally at least, seen as the province of 'free artistic expression', although the dominance of abstraction rendered such work 'meaningless' in traditional representational terms. Rather, its aspirational meanings were inscribed both in its forward looking "Modernism" and within its culturally elitist contexts: it celebrated the power of the commissioner as one of the progressive elite.<sup>25</sup> Gone were attempts to persuade and inspire social cohesion - albeit from the top down - instead it became a statement of difference.<sup>26</sup>

Recently, public funding agencies have shown concern about public response to such works. There are many reasons for this including the questioning of Modernism from many quarters, both radical and reactionary, but mainly because of adverse publicity around public funding of such works. Institutional concern therefore tends to be tokenistic, more concerned with diverting criticism than a genuine wish to engage. Nevertheless there is a noticeable shift in climate. Words such as participation, consultation and ownership, once consigned to the derogatory margins of 'social service art' are now the buzz words of Public Art parlance. It represents at least the beginnings of a move to make works which deal with the aspirational values of the communities and constituencies in which they are placed. Beauty is not perfection, but it is inspirational and aspirational to perfecting.

**Challenging Public Art:** a public art strategy for the Bethnal Green City Challenge area (1995) was a two month consultancy where we worked with the Community Development Trust and the more official Urban Design Strategy Team. As well as having formal consultation meetings where 'experts' or 'representatives' were invited - from community and ethnic organisations, women's groups, business or professional bodies, arts groups - we also visited many more informally. In this way sites were identified as strategic, 'gateways' and 'corridors' were defined and explored from the perceptions of different sections of the community. As well as establishing a consensual or a targeted approach to strategic significance, this process was useful in exploring

the current 'feel' of a site and how this might differ according to such factors as the gender, age, and cultural background of people using the space. This is crucial when considering how one might change or retain that 'feel', in order to create a space that people might feel good in. It also helped that we have lived and worked around this area for almost fifteen years. From this we created the strategic approach and identified key sites. Over sixty sites were discussed in the report, together with an overall strategy for consultation processes, financing and infrastructural networks. Visualisations were produced for prioritised sites. We did not consult in detail on individual sites because that would be an essential part of the commissioned artists' brief. It might also raise expectations within the community too soon, producing 'consultation fatigue' or disappointment if the site is not subsequently developed. There were however suggestions for specific projects, especially those directly resulting from discussions with consultees. The approach was site specific, people centred and critical, allowing for mono-cultural approaches were appropriate but reflecting the diversity and cultural richness of both past and present inhabitants in the development of an overall hybridity<sup>27</sup>. The strategy provided a step by step guide to enable the BGCC to create a framework for public art that would engender a feeling of ownership, celebration, and a sense of *becoming* for the communities living in the area. And for visitors, a feast of visual richness, diversity and potentiality; a fresh experience of the inner city environment. In its expression of potentiality, beauty may evoke transcendence but that does not make it transcendental.

**The Green Chain:** forging the links of a Public Art Strategy for Lee Valley Park (1995). The park extends over an area of 23 miles, following the course of the river Lea from Ware in Hertfordshire down to the Thames in East London. It is unique in this span from rural habitats through reclaimed gravel quarries to urban 'green space'. We were asked to provide an 'umbrella concept' for the whole park and to focus on two areas, one rural and one urban, to demonstrate how this would work in practice. What was particularly interesting for us was addressing the issue of the extension of 'public space' from the urban context into the countryside. With the establishment of National and Regional Park Authorities and the expansion of the tourist industry, the tradition of the 'sculpture garden' has been expanded into the 'sculpture park'. Public art has added a cultural dimension to the 'countryside experience'. Its audiences are no longer those who live or work in the vicinity but the tourist, the visitor; those 'in

pursuit of leisure'. What is the relationship between such work and its publics? Is it to provide visual spice to the countryside experience, to mediate between the 'social' and the 'natural'; to humanise and (given our dominant culture) urbanise such environments together with trails and convenience facilities to make nature more palatable; to commodify it?<sup>28</sup> We believe Regional and National Parks are more important than this. They present an opportunity to perform a vital role both ecologically and socially.

Following a process of consultation similar to that described above in 'Challenging Public Art', the umbrella concept of *The Green Chain* emerged as a metaphor because it evokes a single entity, a unity, which is dependant upon each link. It has both industrial and ecological ramifications (like the food chain) in which diversity is the key to the vigour of the whole. It also reflects how the Park is physically - as a 'chain' along the river - and how people use it: links can be geographic, service or facilities based, historical or conceptual. The cyclical nature of chain links also have rich overtones - the seasons, growth and change, of renewal/recycling. Underlying the whole is *continuous transmutation*. The Visualisations we produced were examples of an approach exploring the 'green chain' concept in a variety of ways, some artist led with consultation, others as enabling projects. Some utilise high technology and a number use post-industrial or natural materials found in the Park.

### **From Strategy to Implementation.**

As a result of producing 'virtual art works' for these Public Art Strategies we have been commissioned to do some major public art works. For example we have just finished ***Dragons' Gate*** a large stainless steel sculpture, 10 meters circumference and eight meters tall, incorporating fibre optic lighting, in Limehouse. Two dragons, twisting to form the shape of the river in Docklands, are used to celebrate the first and oldest 'Chinatown' that existed in Limehouse. An ancient Chinese symbol of good fortune<sup>29</sup>, dragons also represent power. In cyclical form biting each other's tails they embody the power of unity and renewal. The Year of Dragon gives birth to the new millennium.

The symbol of the dragon in the shape of the river in Docklands originally came from a meeting of tenants and action groups during the campaigns of the mid eighties<sup>30</sup>. We collaborated with Anne Thorne Architects to create this sculptural version and with the *A Team, Arts & Education* project to involve young people from Limehouse Youth Club and

two local schools in a parallel project, exploring the theme of dragons in different cultures around the world. These resulted in a series of banners. There are two versions of each, one which will hang outdoors accompanying the sculpture and one to hang indoors in the schools and Youth Club. This means that local young people have a sense of connection with, and ownership of the work, as well as providing some beautiful hangings for their own buildings.

In Portsmouth we have been commissioned to develop a series of eight related artworks creating an environment that projects the history, identity, desires and aspirations, of the community of Wymering. It will focus around the building of a new Community and Sports Centre which will not only provide valuable social, cultural and sports facilities for the area but will create an innovative *Agenda 21 Model Project*<sup>31</sup> collaboration of both regional and national significance. We will be project managing the whole scheme and producing a 'landmark' sculpture within it. Through this work we created a new focus for *The Art of Change* around Agenda 21 - the agenda for the 21st Century that came out of the Rio Earth Summit - which, as well as tackling ecological questions, takes a much more holistic view of creating *sustainable environments* which include issues of social and economic equity, quality of life, culture and identity.

It is time to move beyond an art practice that is used to put a band-aid on problems created by a politics and economics of short sighted and false binaries: a choice between continued prosperity or ecological sustainability; between individual 'freedoms' (of consumption) in the West or global responsibility; between the needs of producers (to pollute) or consumers (of the air, water and all the other means of sustaining life)? If we are to create a sustainable culture into the next millennium we have to move beyond these irrational binaries. There is little doubt that the key issues of ecology, sustainability, urban crisis, cultural and racial tensions, are becoming increasingly urgent as we approach the Millennium. By their very nature they require an interdisciplinary approach and an international dimension. Similarly there is a crisis, not only in the physical fabric of our built environment, but in its visual signifiers, lack of shared meanings and, perhaps more importantly, the negative social meanings which are generated by much of our urban spaces. This overflows into and is perhaps magnified in symbolic and virtual spaces. At the same time over 90% of art school graduates cannot make a living in their field of study<sup>32</sup>. Certainly Fine Art studies do not normally address any of the above issues in a direct

way, though these are areas in which many students hold a passionate interest. Those who want to engage in those issues, or work in the field of Public Art, may find themselves having to personally reinvent the wheel. It can be difficult gaining access to training, to work with other professionals, or to processes of teamwork and consultation. Graduates are often deliberately kept 'innocent' of financial or organisational management. They have to learn all this on the job, making mistakes and leaving any resulting 'damage' in the public domain. There is little or no critical framework in which these mistakes, or indeed ways forward, can be assessed, analysed, more widely debated or disseminated. We need to create a new aesthetic of collaborations; to develop practices in art that are sustainable, empowering and capable of reintroducing 'beauty' into our society as we approach the challenges of a new century.

To this end we are in the process of establishing an *International Institute of Art, Ecologies, Cultures and Change* (working title). This will initially be an action research 'think-tank' of artists, architects, cultural and media theorists, ecologists, sociologists, technologists and software programmers. It will use the focus of 'Agenda 21' to research new definitions and relationships between Art and cultures in post-colonial globalism, art and environment in a post-industrial world, and art and society in the age of electronic communications systems. The aim will be to develop new processes, new materials, new uses, and new ways of relating for the approaching Millennium. The 'think tank' will begin as an Art of Change project with possible finance from Millennium funding<sup>33</sup>. In the long term, however, the institute would become an independent entity but attached to a University<sup>34</sup>. Educationally such an institute will seek to establish new methodologies and structures for learning, utilising multi-disciplinary approaches and the tools of new communications technology, linking communities and constituencies of interest, training centres and academic institutions. Its objectives are to explore interdisciplinary approaches to changes in our environment, culture and communications; to develop a transnational network of organisations, institutions, groups and projects working on these and related issues; to activate and promote creative potential, both in the makers and users of social space whether it be physical, symbolic or virtual. Central to its goals is an art practice that is sustainable, empowering and capable of reintroducing 'beauty' into our society.

' Peter Dunn, Aug '96

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<sup>1</sup> Here we are talking about practices where the focus is 'experiential' and *what* is produced is less important than the experience itself or, in some cases, skills learned. The main emphasis is to provide 'motivational and practical tools' for people to become active producers (rather than passive consumers) in the future. In these practices the artist may be involved in therapeutic practices, skill teaching and assertiveness training, sometimes all rolled into one. The importance of what is produced is relative. Its meaning and validity is a marker of growth for the individuals or group concerned and as such has 'interior focus', not the 'exterior focus' and targeting of wider constituencies usually associated with the work of artists and other professional image makers. In that sense one might describe it as a 'localised aesthetic'

<sup>2</sup> This does not just apply to the arts, but we would include sports and indeed politics (as 'the art of the possible') - in its broad, perhaps even the original Greek, sense - in this definition of aesthetics. Desire focused can also be obsession - is socialised obsession aesthetics? One could argue that it has played a central role in particular aesthetics, Surrealism and certain forms Expressionism for example.

<sup>3</sup> It is interesting what a difference it makes however if you use adjectives like *well* focused and *elegantly* structured.

<sup>4</sup> I am referring to the Western Tradition here but as we discuss later, this is not geographically confined and has constantly shifting boundaries.

<sup>5</sup> What Martha Rosler has called "Well-formedness" in her paper *Ethics & Aesthetics* (New York 1996).

<sup>6</sup> For example one could say that the swastika was a visually powerful, well designed logo, but unless one was sympathetic to fascism one would not call it beautiful. It might be possible for a Hindu, however, who uses the symbol in reversed form, who was unaware of or distanced from the events in Europe in the 30s. The point is that its social significance crucially affects the designation of beauty.

<sup>7</sup> We obviously have to be clear who are addressing and aligning ourselves with: just as one community's celebration may be another's provocation, one constituency's 'good' may be another's bad.

<sup>8</sup> The term was invented by Alexander Baumgarten in the 1750s, based on the Greek word Aisthesis - 'material, of the senses'. It was a key concept in the redefinition of "Art", away from its craft associations to a

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professionalised territory that was theorised, mediated, and indeed policed, by the gate-keepers of the institutions and Academies that had grown up in Europe in the 18th and 19th Centuries. The legitimation of this professional territory was even more strongly forwarded in the 20th Century call for a 'pure aesthetics beyond representation'. In short, Aesthetics was a term invented in quite recent history to proselytise a specific view of specialised cultural activity which reached maturity, and its contemporary meaning, with the development of Modernism. See Raymond Williams' *Key Words*, Fontana 1976, particularly the sections on 'Aesthetic' and 'Art'.

<sup>9</sup> Including a backwardly acquisitive reinterpretation of history.

<sup>10</sup> Jurgen Habermas quoted in *Habermas and Modernity* Edited by Richard Bernstein. Published by Polity Press.

<sup>11</sup> The references to language here are not to imply that 'the aesthetic' is itself a kind of language, as in 'the language of art', but to point out how cultural imperialism works: in language, in musical, theatrical and filmic conventions as well as the visual.

<sup>12</sup> See 'Digital Highways, Local Narratives' Dunn & Leeson, AND magazine

No27.U.K.1992 also see Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition*, Manchester University Press 1984

<sup>13</sup> .e. the British National Collection at the Tate Gallery

<sup>14</sup> The Art of Change owns four billboard sites which we built when we were part of a campaigning organisation of tenants and action groups - Docklands Community Posters.

<sup>15</sup> Or at the very least to understand what was not theirs and why they felt distanced from it.

<sup>16</sup> The Western Tradition has inscribed within it, on both a representational and philosophical level, a notion of 'Correct Distance'. On the representational level this is manifested most clearly in the development of perspective during the Renaissance, through to issues of focal length and depth of field in lens based media used today. On a philosophical level this concerns ideas about 'objectivity' in observation and the inscribing of disciplinary boundaries - the 'purity of the field' - elaborated during the Enlightenment. In our own times this concept has also come to embrace the negotiation of distance between the fledgling ego and its image, between infant and mother, during the 'mirror stage' in branches of psychology. In anthropological study, it is between the objective values of the 'home culture' and the 'culture of study' (going native). In other words Correct Distance is a concept applied to the space between our feelings, drives etc. and our self-representation in the development of

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consciousness, and the distance between *us* - of the cultural West - and *them* - the cultural other of 'primitive' or non Western cultures in the development of Civilisation.

In this view, the further one travels from the centre (of empire/ or ego consciousness) the more 'backward' or 'primitive' are the technologies and peoples or, in psychological terms, the drives and impulses. This is even more marked in Freud with the division between Ego and Id. Whilst some of these metaphors may be largely discredited within their fields today, *they have become part of our culture*. *Space* - distance from the centre - is equated with *time* - evolutionary development. It is no accident therefore that this *Colonial Time-Space Continuum* and the conflation of technological with psychological 'intelligence' is the basis of much racism, both conscious and unconscious. See Hal Foster's article "Postmodernism in Parallax" (*October* 63, Winter 1993 MIT press USA.) .

<sup>17</sup> Many of the participants were from non- Christian backgrounds.

<sup>18</sup> Indeed the Resurrection was regarded by Spencer as his 'primavera' both artistically and as a celebration of his new life as a married (and sexually active) man. His new wife appears prominently several times in the painting, .

<sup>19</sup> Most paintings of this period (1920's -30's), whether they be a 'Resurrection' or some other significant historic/spiritual theme were depicted in specific recognisable places in or around the village of Cookham. Spencer believed there was a kind of parallel spiritual Cookham that could not be corrupted by the ordinary passages of time. It was for him the *embodiment* of place.

<sup>20</sup> The British National Party are a neo Fascist organisation that have targeted the East End of London because of the high concentrations of black and Asian communities, just as the 'Black Shirts' had during the 30s.

<sup>21</sup> We are talking about our experience in Britain, particularly with Government sponsored "City Challenge" initiatives, Urban Development Corporations and Housing Action Trusts, although we believe there are similar examples in the US.

<sup>22</sup> With the mistaken belief that simply 'scaling up' an artwork makes it work 'outside' the gallery or studio context.

<sup>23</sup>"Public art, like architecture, is the economic and intellectual property of a set of professional elites (planners, producers and critics), whose use of public resources generally has no recourse to any kind of democratic process".(Jonathan Harris, Art Historian, The Guardian, Sept. 26 1992, in response to an article on Richard Serra's sculpture at Broadgate, London).

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"It is the pre-emption of public spaces by an art that is indifferent, if not hostile, to human needs that has aroused such partisan passions". Arthur Danto, art critic, quoted in *The City as a work of Art*, Scottish Sculpture Trust 1994.

<sup>24</sup> Particularly in post war Britain with the establishment of the Arts Council of Great Britain but this model also has been adopted elsewhere, in Canada and Australia, and to some extent in the U.S with Foundations, Endowment Trusts etc.

<sup>25</sup> See *Collapse Magazine*, Issue 1 1995, Vancouver, *Conflicting Visions of Utopia in the Post War Period* by Angela Vanhaelen.

<sup>26</sup> This does not refer to the intention of the artists, which may and often did run counter to this, but to the corporate and institutional contexts which coded the work.

<sup>27</sup> There had been some pressure, especially from some Bengali restaurant and shop owners in one area, to create a 'Bangla-town' to attract tourists. This however was not popular among other sections of the Bengali community - particularly the younger generations - and was also problematic for the Somali, Jewish, Irish and 'indigenous British' communities who felt marginalised and threatened by this, especially if it was allowed to dominate thinking on the whole area.

<sup>28</sup> See Raymond Williams' seminal work *Town and Country*, also *Culture and Key words* by the same author in exploring the genealogy of the term 'culture' in relation to 'agriculture'.

<sup>29</sup> Providing you treat it with respect.

<sup>30</sup> It was used as the flagship Banner for the 'People's Armada to Parliament' where over 2000 people took to the river in boats for an annual demonstration/ festival (1984-6). The concept came out of a meeting of the Democracy For Docklands campaign group, was designed by us and made in workshops with members of the community. The design was also used on badges, mugs and T-shirts.

<sup>31</sup> Agenda 21, came out of the Rio Earth Summit as an Agenda for the 21st Century which has specific goals and outcomes which Nations signed up to. As well as dealing with more traditional 'green' issues such as ozone, recycling, energy conservation, it talks about economic and *cultural* sustainability - identity and stake-holding and 'ownership'. A model project is a declaration of 'good practice' in applying Agenda 21 principles, ranging from building materials and techniques through to the involvement of the

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community in consultation and participation in the construction of the artworks.

<sup>32</sup> This statistic is for Britain and may differ in the U.S though I suspect the percentage would still be quite high.

<sup>33</sup> Millennium Funding is a public funding category in Britain for large scale project that will contribute either to the celebration of the new Millennium or to longer reaching contributions to the life and culture of the next century.

<sup>34</sup> We are currently in discussions with the University of East London, the University of California (Davis) and with the International Institute of Art and Environment (INIFAE) which is a pan European Training and Educational organisation.