

The privatisation of public art?

Public Art Now Conference ICA London 1999

The paper below is based upon what was said at the conference but extended (in terms of footnotes and further clarification of certain areas) for publication.

Introduction

Art has existed in public places for as long as such spaces have been described as 'public'. Within the mainstream Western Tradition, this domain has been predominantly urban or close to habitation, with the exception of territorial boundary markers or memorials (usually of battles). This may have something to say about our culture generally. More specifically, it is clear that the function of public art, historically at least, has been to inspire social cohesion, to focus and embody social values, whether these be civic, religious, aristocratic or oligarchic, nationalistic or militaristic. Those who determined the meanings these works should convey were the commissioners.

In the Twentieth Century and more particularly in post war Britain, this was complicated by the stylistic dominance of Modernism together with the emergence of the 'arms length principle' in public funding. Control of the meaning of the art work was, formally at least, deemed to be the province of 'free artistic expression'. Business corporations or public bodies who wished to be regarded as forward looking embraced this new style because, in its abstraction, such work was 'meaningless' in traditional representational terms. Rather its aspirational meanings were inscribed both in its forward looking "Modernism" and within its socially elitist context; it celebrated the power of the commissioner as one of the progressive elite. It still retained the old power relations between commissioner and audience but expressed them differently; gone were any attempts to persuade and inspire social cohesion - albeit from the top down - instead it became a statement of difference¹.

More recently, public funding agencies have shown concern about public response. This is mainly because of the adverse reactions to such public art - especially when public money is involved - and partly out of the questioning of Modernism, the debates issuing from the constituencies of black arts, women's

¹ This does not refer to the intention of the artists, which may have run counter to this, but to the Corporate and institutional contexts which coded the work.

art and community art. Much of this institutional concern is tokenistic, being more about heading off criticism than a wish to truly engage such publics; nevertheless there is a noticeable shift in the climate. Words such as *participation*, *consultation* and *ownership*, once consigned to the derogatory margins of 'Social Service art'² are now buzzwords in Public Art parlance. There are at least the beginnings of a move to make art works which deal with the aspirational values of the communities and constituencies in which they are placed.

With the extension of 'public space' from the urban into the countryside through 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'. Accessibility is the watchword. What then is the relationship of such work to its publics?. Is it simply to provide visual spice to the countryside experience as a tourist attraction? Is it 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; commodify it ³ ?.

The issue art's relationship to its publics is complex, regardless of its location. The recent genre of 'Public Art' is further complicated by the mediation of professional art agencies who increase the 'arms length' separation of artist from commissioner. Who the commissioner is, is also blurred by complex funding partnership arrangements: this can involve a Local Authority, Single Regeneration Budgets or the European 'Objective' funds, Lottery, Charitable Trusts and/or private sponsorship. All of these wish to see 'outputs' fitting their criteria. Before artists begin the process of building any relationship to a public constituency they are often faced with navigating the demands of all these

²"Social Service Art" was most frequently applied to Community Arts but has also been used pejoratively against artists who work with marginalised or disenfranchised sectors of society.

³.See Raymond William's 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'; the humanisation of nature, ranging in degree between nurturing and controlling in much the same way as contemporary cultural forms may be used.

'investors' and mediators, all of whom have more tangible power than the - often as yet unknown - public.

The Aesthetic: private or public?

In the 1750s, a German scholar, Alexander Baumgarten, wrote a book called 'Aesthetica'. He invented a new Latin word for this title derived from the Greek 'Aisthesis' - material things, perceived by the senses (as opposed to immaterial or conceptual things). He coined the term to emphasise the importance of '*subjective sense activity* in specialised human creativity in art'⁴. His book had a limited circulation but his ideas were taken up, elaborated and critiqued in Kant's discussions on beauty ⁵. The word 'Aesthetic' did not occur in English, nor did the term gain common currency in other European languages, until the 19th Century where it was associated with the redefinitions of the meaning of Art taking place at the same time. Art, once regarded as a refinement and 'mastering' of a skill, had increasingly become associated with an 'intellegensia' and a class based profession/vocation⁶. 'Art' and 'Aesthetics' reinforced each other as terms which not only defined a profession but an ideology of isolated *subjective sense-activity* as the basis of art and beauty. It legitimised a 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 growth of an independent art market and, later, the development of 'universal education', including the establishment of art schools, meant that the power of those Academies was soon eclipsed. But the legitimation of this professional territory was even more strongly forwarded in the call for an even 'purer aesthetics beyond representation'. In short, Aesthetics was a term invented in quite recent history to proselytise a specific view of specialised cultural activity

⁴ 'Aesthetica' Alexander Baumgarten , 1756-8. the italics are ours.

⁵ In that peculiarly Enlightenment approach of distinguishing between the 'sacred and profane' expressions of a concept but of course in secular, reasoned 'scientific' equivalents. Thus distinctions between 'common & everyday' notions of beauty and that perceived by the 'higher' faculties of the artist and connoisseur. See Kant, 'The critique of Pure Reason' (check the reference)

⁶ The exclusion of engravers from the Royal Academy the end of the 18th Century made official the growing distinction between artist and artisan in Britain for example.

which reached maturity, and its contemporary meaning, with the development of Modernism⁷.

During the 20th Century, debate around 'the aesthetic' continued to take many twists and turns but it basically divided into two main camps: transcendentalist versus materialist. One side saw 'aesthetics' as the domain of the specialist - the individualistic visionary as artist and the trained eye of the connoisseur - the other as an historically and culturally specific expression of Modernist, some would say bourgeois, ideology. The former saw the aesthetic as 'above and beyond' the social and political, the latter saw it as rooted firmly within them. This was confused however by the transcendentalists claim - and validated by the term's origins - that aesthetics *is material*, it is directly about the *sensory*. But the main issue of contention was the claim of *universality* to this perception⁸. In order to counter this claim, Post or Anti Modernist critics emphasised the historically and culturally specific nature of 'the aesthetic', arguing that the term was therefore inappropriate as a concept to apply either to less individualised pre-Modernist practices or to collaborative anti- or post- Modernist practices. However this did not prevent much of mainstream Art History from continuing to apply a universalised 'master narrative'. More importantly the strategy of 'abolishing aesthetics' (as reactionary) that characterised certain critical practices of the 70s and 80s has also failed. It has to be acknowledged, however, that in displacing the focus to other, previously under theorised and under valued powers at work - the social, economic, ideological, and wider cultural contexts and 'readings' of the work - many valuable new insights have been revealed. But a refusal to engage adequately with something so central to the activity - the visual power⁹ or 'beauty' of the work - left a gap that enabled the transcendentalists, institutional gate-keepers and neo-Modernists to claim this ground for their own. Moreover, for practising artists - especially those working in collaborative forms - a whole area of activity, conceptual and perceptual fusion, remained inarticulate. Artists understand the complexity of this fusion *materially* because we practice it, but it has been critically and ideologically denied, or at best fudged, by *materialism*; which only reinforces the transcendentalist argument that it is 'beyond words,

⁷ See Raymond Williams' *Key Words*, Fontana 1976, particularly the sections on 'Aesthetic' and 'Art'.

⁸ Based as it was upon a Euro- later N. American - centric, hierarchical concept of 'civilisation' i.e. other cultures who did not share Western aesthetic standards were seen as lower down the evolutionary scale, more 'primitive', as indeed were past cultures within the Western 'lineage'

⁹ Although semiotics clearly created a new take on this.

beyond comprehension'. This confusion, some might even say hypocrisy, created a crisis in confidence for critical practices; a falling silent. In short, one might say that the 'materialist' view itself fell prey to the binary vision set up by the Enlightenment model, becoming a narrow mirror image of the 'transcendentalist' position.

The emphasis on individualism in art practice has also led to a conflation of the 'personal' with the 'private'. The 'private' is associated with personal 'inner experience' or 'vision' which is made public, distilled and refined, through the work. The metaphor often used is that of the shaman whose inner visions and dreams are communicated to the rest of the tribe through ritual means. This is seldom placed within the context of the public role of the shaman as carrier of tribal 'memory' and future 'visioning'; a process which has long since been differentiated among many other specialisms in our culture. In short this metaphor is romantic atavism. However the persistence of this metaphor is more than just need to search for a lost importance, to seek legitimation for a marginalised practice. Like most persistent metaphors it contains a grain of truth, a 'resonance of authenticity' which people recognise intuitively despite the rational arguments against it. The metaphor represents a simplified model of a more complex process. If one emphasises on the role of a *practice*, rather than the 'special powers' of an individual, and upon the *process of providing a means of focusing or distilling* the fears, anxieties, hopes and aspirations of a constituency, then one may come closer to the root of a contemporary interpretation of this myth.

Modernist aesthetics is certainly predicated upon the concept of an individualised vision or *oeuvre*, but it also subsumes under the Western canon modes of collective production in 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 postmodern 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.¹⁰ However, in situations where there are ideas to be communicated more widely, aesthetic power becomes especially important it is central to the work's ability to speak beyond the confines of any single 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 that creates a focal point in the energies of transformation. Desire focused is passion, and what is socialised passion but aesthetics?¹¹

Focused desire and structured passion do not, in and of themselves, make for 'good' aesthetics, however.¹² 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 the composition of visual elements to create visual power can be achieved without

¹⁰ 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, the 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 projects 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 are markers of growth for the individuals or groups concerned and as such have "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 such interior focusing as engaging a "localised aesthetic."

¹¹ This does not apply just 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 of Expressionism, for example.

¹² It is interesting what a difference it makes, however, if you use adjectives like *well* focused and *elegantly* structured.

reference to ethics or democracy, in fact it can even be used to oppose them.¹³ We can all think of examples of works that are visually and aesthetically powerful or compelling, but which represent an ideology or world view that we disagree with or find distasteful. But we would not normally describe these works as beautiful.¹⁴ Beauty has a *social aura*; it may be culturally specific or 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.¹⁵

It requires a public, that is to say a social, process.

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 that 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 but, as a result of a broader colonisation process, it has become transcultural and assimilative of other cultural elements (including a backwardly acquisitive reinterpretation of history).¹⁶ 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.¹⁷ He was only partially right. It may have shuffled off its mortal coil, but that was really a skin

¹³ Regarding the aesthetic, I am referring to the Western tradition here but, as we discuss later, this is not geographically confined and has constantly shifting boundaries. On the value of a visual power consider what Martha Rosler has called "well-formedness" in her paper "Ethics and Aesthetics" (New York, 1996).

¹⁴ For example, one could say that the swastika is a visually powerful, well-designed logo, but unless one is sympathetic to fascism one would not call it beautiful. It might be considered beautiful by a Hindu, however, who uses the symbol in reversed form, and who is unaware of or distanced from the events in Europe in the '30s. The point is that the social significance of the image crucially affects the designation of beauty.

¹⁵ We obviously have to be clear who we 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.

¹⁶ See Raymond Williams, *Keywords* (London: Fontana, 1976), particularly the definitions of "aesthetic" and "art."

¹⁷ Jürgen Habermas quoted in *Habermas and Modernity*, ed. Richard Bernstein (London: Polity Press, 1992).

representing a particular historical period. The aesthetic, while defined in a particular *modus operandi* by modernism, lives on in continuous metamorphosis with the increasing globalization 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 cyberspeak.¹⁸ To refuse to speak a language because of its colonial past may be to cut oneself off from the very people to whom one wishes to speak. Yes, it is vital that we nourish and maintain our own "local narratives," but it is not useful to be seduced by the romance of the marginal.¹⁹ It is also vital that we are able to have access to the local narratives of others. We need common ground.

The Art of Change - Collaborations

The Art of Change is a visual arts organisation concerned with issues of change, particularly its impact on identities, quality of life and the environment. We use the focus of Agenda 21 - the agenda for the 21st Century that came out of the Rio Earth Summit - to pull together the strands of Art, Ecologies, Cultures and Change, through interdisciplinary practice.

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.

Our approach is a philosophy-in-practice of an *art of engagement*: concerned with ideas, issues, processes and products of transformation. It 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. It is about empowerment. In that sense it is a political statement as much as an artistic one.

¹⁸ 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 in the visual.

¹⁹ See Peter Dunn & Loraine Leeson "Digital Highways, Local Narratives," , *AND* magazine No27 (London 1992) p4 & 5; see also J.F. Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1984).

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. Change is about inspiration and aspiration. This, we believe, results from a transformation through critique, collaboration and communication. It involves social and visual processes inextricably linked, forming a 'lens' which creates a focal point in the energies of transformation.

A critical practice is not simply about a critique of what is, the point is to construct new models, to begin to create stepping stones in the pathway to a different future. Collaborations are both the means and the end.

Public Art, Public engagement.

The way we involve people is of course customised according to the particularity of each project, however some common threads can be identified

Structuring engagement : what we call a 'New Narrative' Approach. This is an approach derived from debates around photography and new media, an approach based upon non-linearity and customisation. Whether it is a Billboard Project, a CD ROM, an net project or a Public Art Project like Wymering , our approach is - through consultation - to create a framework, a matrix of information related to an overarching concept or theme - in the case of Wymering, Agenda 21 pulled together the local and global, with interweaving narrative strings from history, future aspirations, the relationships between generations - a whole range of identity issues.

This matrix then becomes the vessel for specific inputs from other participants - these may be other professionals, artists, or those who have specialist knowledge or first hand experience of the issues or themes being explored (i.e. active members of a constituency or 'community of interest' - - in this case the community of Wymering) These participants input in a 'site specific' way - site specific in this sense is not simply physical or geographic but more in the Foucault's sense (as a node or 'position' in

spheres of intersecting discourses, of the particular, the social, ideological, of local and global ripples of power). It is this specificity that introduces the lived, complex and changing representations and signifiers which provide 'meaning' and a sense of the 'authentic' for those participating. Those who interact with this matrix, whether they be directly producing or consuming are nevertheless actively engaged in customising their 'journey' through the matrix, in making their own 'sense' of the narrative which they create or navigate for themselves - either in the making of the work or visiting it after completion.

In our work we have identified *three main levels of engagement*:

1. Primary - those involved quite closely in production processes - either in intellectual production - constructing meanings in consultation/collaboration, or involvement in the physical construction of the work or elements within it; or indeed both.

2. Secondary - Wider public who may interact directly with the work but more in the role of 'consumers' either actively or passively

3. Tertiary - through different medium: trade/art magazines, through forms of documentation, slide-talks, lectures, conferences etc. - usually with specialist audiences

There is also an issue here about 'communities' and constituencies, some definition is called for. As far as we are concerned there are only 'communities of interest'. Classical sociology divides communities into three types: geographic communities, communities of identity and communities of interest

However, we believe - with Raymond Williams's - that 'community' is a dynamic process inextricably bound to the process of communication - just because people live in the same geographic location does not make them a community. Just because people are ascribed an identity - for example black or gay - does not make them a community, not until they choose to engage with others in exploring, challenging or redefining that identity.

As Raymond Williams says in *Culture & Society*

"The process of communication is the process of community: the sharing of common meanings and thence common activities and purposes"

(these are the sustaining elements which nurture and consolidate meanings, norms and values); *"the reception and comparison of new*

meanings, leading to the tensions and achievements of growth and change". (these are the transformative elements which generate aims and goals - direct its becoming)

This concept of community is not sited in neighbourhoods, although 'place' can be a focus for it. It is a dynamic of interlocking and overlapping spheres of discourse. A tension between inclusion and exclusion.

It is also important to *implicate ourselves* in this process..... we need to implicate ourselves because there is a lot of 'they' terminology used when discussing 'community' - from this view communities are euphemisms for those who are a problem, the marginalised, disaffected, deprived, incompetent. It avoids the fact that the communities or constituencies we may belong to are in competition for resources with those 'other' communities; that we win, they lose. It's more comforting to regard 'them' as being in a different category: a more simple, less sophisticated, sometimes even in a kind of 'noble savage' category that we can feel sorry for, do-good to, but not implicate ourselves in.

The process of implicating ourselves is quite simple to say, less simple to do:

- 1) recognise what communities or constituencies we actually belong to,
- 2) those we want to belong to or ally ourselves with,
- 3) identify other constituencies or communities who may be open to dialogue and exchange - to network.

This means making choices and being clear about them. You can't please everyone. If you are an artist working in the public domain, it goes without saying that anything that you do which is in any way challenging is going to generate hostility from some quarters. One community's celebration can be another's provocation. And this raises the thorny *issue of identity*

Identity - the interface between private and public.

The question of Identity is crucial. And identity has to be distinguished from the usual questionnaire approach which focuses on roles, economic banding and simplistic tick boxes of ethnic origin and the like.

Roles (worker, mother, union member, militant, conservative) can refer to the same person at different times. Roles are about organising functions (forgrounded by industrialisation), identities organise meanings. Meaning in this context is defined by Castells²⁰ as the symbolic identification by a social actor of the purpose of her/his action. For most, this is organised around a primary identity - one that frames all others but does not exclude other miscellaneous, strategic or contingent identities.

As Manuel Castells says in *The Rise of the Network Society*²¹:

"In a world of uncontrolled, confusing change, people tend to regroup around primary identities: religious, ethnic, territorial, national...
...In a world of global flows of wealth, power, and images, the search for identity, collective or individual, ascribed or constructed, becomes a fundamental source of social meaning...Identity is becoming the main, and sometimes only, source of meaning in a historical period characterised by widespread destructuring of organisations, delimitation of institutions, fading away of major social movements, and ephemeral cultural expressions...Meanwhile, on the other hand, global networks of instrumental exchanges selectively switch on and off individuals, groups, religions, and even countries, according to their relevance in fulfilling the goals processed in the network, in a relentless flow of strategic decisions...Our societies are increasingly structured around a bipolar opposition between the Net and the Self".

The construction of identities uses building materials from history, geography, biology, productive and reproductive institutions, the apparatus of power and religious revelations, from collective memory and personal fantasies. We rearrange these building materials according to social influences and cultural projects rooted in the social structures and time/space co-ordinates we occupy. The crucial issue is how these identities are constructed, by whom and for what purpose.

Manuel Castells distinguishes 3 main areas of identity building²²:

1. Legitimising identity - by dominant institutions or power bases to extend, rationalise, their domain vis a vis social actors (see theories of nationalism²³)

²⁰ Manuel Castells, *The Power of Identity*, Blackwell 1997.

²¹ Manuel Castells, *The Rise of the Network Society*, Blackwell 1996.

²² *ibid.* as in note 20

2. Resistance Identity - grounded in opposition to the rationalisations of domination - in positions/conditions that are perceived as marginal, devalued or stigmatised by the dominant legitimising means. Identity is built on principles distinguished from, and opposed to, the dominant; defined as a polarisation from, but in relation to, the dominant forms of legitimisation.

3. Project identity - often grows out of resistance identity - this is about building a new identity that redefines a position (e.g. 'I'm black and I'm proud', 'glad to be gay') and by doing so, seeks to transform the whole structure of society or an institution

For example in relation to our own practice: As the Docklands Poster Project back in the 80s - as part of a campaign - we were primarily involved in Resistance Identity, though at times beginning to move into Project Identity in constructing alternatives - for example our involvement with the People's Plan for the Royal Docks²⁴. As The Art of Change however, our interest has shifted to the transition from Resistance Identity to Project Identity, to try where possible create new models.

Our own identity is once thing, but any social practice - and public art is by definition a social practice - is about the negotiation of spaces for the interface of a range of identities; personal, group, and other supra-groupings (which we will explore below). In order to understand the complex relationships which might emerge from this it is necessary to have a sense of the bigger picture, especially at this moment when these identities are undergoing rapid transformations due to many factors, local and global.

In most industrial societies Project Identity was constructed from, or in relation to, civil society (and its legitimising identity) - e.g. socialism was founded on the basis of the labour movement, on roles and functions inscribed within the capitalist structure. But in the transition to the globalised network society, the construction of subjects at the heart of social change take a different route. Subjects are constructed less and less around roles

²³ *ibid.*

²⁴ Alternative plans for the Royal Docks co-ordinated by Newham Docklands Forum - a consortium of tenants and action groups - with the assistance of the Popular Planning Unit of the GLC. We were involved in creating billboards exhibitions, posters, brochures and a range of other visual materials.

defined in relation to contemporary 'civil societies' (using the fiction of the nation state as its legitimising identity) *because the societies and roles defined by them are themselves in the process of disarticulation and disintegration.*

What we seem to be witnessing during this transition is a prolongation of resistance identities. Meanwhile the mainstream legitimising identities are being redefined, deconstructed and continuously transformed as a result of globalisation. If resistance identity does not have a global dimension, then it will become stranded and tossed in the turbulent eddies of globalisation as it rushes by.

In close relationship to the weakening of existing nation states and the collapse of, or scepticism about, supra-national states²⁵, we see an explosion of 'cultural nationalisms'; the sharing of linguistic, territorial, ethnic, religious, and historical narratives. However, Culture is not only what people share but also what they fight over²⁶. In this context, culture is spoken in images of communal languages whose first word is 'we', the second is 'us, and - unfortunately - the third word is 'them'.

We will digress for a moment to discuss the rise of fundamentalism because this encapsulates how easy it is to misunderstand the processes we are discussing. New identities are being constructed by fundamentalist movements²⁷ but these are not - as mistakenly held - simply returning to traditional values, as backward looking and stranded resistance identities. They are *reworking* traditional materials in the formation of what they see as a new Godly, communal world, where excluded masses and disaffected intellectuals (from Capitalism and Socialism) are seeking to *reconstruct meaning as a global alternative to what they see as an exclusionary Global order.*

With the possible exception of a small elite of geopoliticians and transnational economists, people all over the world resent the loss of

²⁵ The collapse of the Soviet Union and attacks from various quarters upon the European Union.

²⁶ 'Becoming National', Eley and Suny.

²⁷ One does not wish to over generalise but there are common strands between various forms of both Christian and Muslim fundamentalisms that have emerged in relationship to the 'new global order' (see Castells *ibid.*) .

control over their lives, their jobs, economies, governments, countries, environment, and ultimately over the fate of the planet.

It is essential therefore that the local is linked to the global. The old adage - 'Think global, act local' - still holds true, but with the addition of - 'and communicate globally'.

We have so far painted a somewhat gloomy picture of the effects of technology and globalisation upon identity. However, history shows that resistance does eventually confront domination, empowerment acts against powerlessness, and alternative projects challenge the legitimisation of dominion²⁸. The 'new global order' is increasingly seen as global disorder by people around the planet; and even the powerful find themselves powerless.

Anyone who knows anything about our work at The Art of Change, or our previous incarnation as the Docklands Poster Project, will know that we don't have a rosy view of a future dominated by the increasing globalisation of capital. But we wish to talk about technology and globalisation in a positive light for a moment :

For the first time (at least since industrialisation) , culture - as the symbolic processing of meaning and communication - is integral to a the creation of a new social and economic infrastructure. To quote Castells again, " There is a specially close linkage between culture and the productive forces in the informational mode of development... (and) modes of development shape the entire realm of social behaviour.. it follows that we should expect the emergence of historically new forms of social interaction, social control and social change"²⁹.

In short, culture will be the main arena where the forces which shape our culture will interact in conflict or collaboration. And we - as shapers of cultural forms - like it or not, will be implicated.

²⁸ Besides the historical example of the conditions leading to both the rapid formation and dissolution of the Soviet Union, we see new initiatives like the Zapatistas in Mexico - the first 'informational' guerrilla movement 95/96)

²⁹ *ibid.* as note 21.

There are opportunities as society moves out of the fetters of industrialisation. It should no longer be necessary to occupy the narrow boxes of time and space organised and encultured around industrial production processes; to work from 9-5, to travel en-mass into large overcrowded conurbations on overloaded transport systems, where these tightly packed physical spaces leave enormous ecological footprints which are ultimately unsustainable.

Artists in the post-industrial culture can leave behind the constraints of Modernism - industrialisation's cultural child - dispense with the narrow boxes of style and hierarchies which squeezed out diversity, downgraded crafts and skills, pictorial narrative forms, anything non-western or related to popular culture (unless reprocessed and repackaged in a very particular way). We can of course retain what we perceive to be the useful things that emerged from Modernism.

To some extent this is already happening: our culture is being revitalised by not only by the forms, but the processes and concepts of other cultures. We are witnessing a beginning in the growth of diversity, new fusions of the craft based, hand made, and emerging technologies. The cross-over between older technologies, including the photographic with new digital forms. This may well create a huge increase in post-gallery art. We do not mean galleries as spaces will disappear, although what goes in them will diversify quite considerably. It will however shake the dominance of an institutionalised system with its focus on the gallery as marketplace. Those historically specific modes of art transaction, meritocracy, and economy, will become even more specialised and less significant to the mainstream of culture.

Post and extra-gallery work is already beginning to create new relationships between the local and the global, and - along with a new wave of cultural theorists like Castells - are beginning to recognise that new forms of communication will radically shape the development of our culture.

Issues of audience, identity, engagement - the interface between public and private - are not fixed and cannot be addressed by simple formulas.

They are problematised, complex and changing - particularly with the effects of globalisation, new communications technology just to name just two factors.

It is vital for us - at The Art of Change - to regard each project afresh while constantly re-assessing our experience and over-arching principles, through both theory and practice. As we have said, a critical practice is not simply about a critique of what is, the point is to construct new models, to begin to create stepping stones in the pathway to a different future. Or, as a very famous and now somewhat discredited old philosopher once said, it's not enough to describe the world, the point is to change it!

The Art of change has two distinct but interrelated strands of practice at this time which are in progress and will therefore be elaborated in more detail closer to the time of publication. However below are the bones of them:

The first is exemplified by the *Wymering Public Arts Project*, Portsmouth: a series of seven related artworks using the focus of Agenda 21 to create an environment that projects the history, identity, desires and aspirations of the people of Wymering. This is a lottery funded project currently in progress, due to complete in November of this year. It is being independently evaluated by Comedia. This has led onto us being lead consultants for the Portsmouth Millennium Public Arts programme in Portsmouth (strategy just completed - again using the focus of Agenda 21 - implementation due to begin shortly and following through to 2000). This 'strand' is also being developed in the Hackney Marshes Art Trail, a lottery and SRB project in collaboration with Groundworks and Sustrans (strategy in progress).

The second 'strand' began with the *Infinity Story* (1997) An interactive illustrated story produced by all pupils at a LB Newham junior school. Crossing areas of the curriculum, incorporating staff training and borough liaison, the project involved the whole school in a creative use of the Internet and related technology. This will be extended in a project called 'in your dreams', working with a number of schools in collaboration with the Tate gallery. This strand is leading to a major project with national implications called *Unlocking the Grid* (subject of an A4E application, 'Skills for the Millennium' and possibly NESTA). The project is designed to provide a key

to the creative potential inherent in the National Grid for Learning. It will begin in three primary schools in LB Newham and Tower Hamlets through a team of artists, media specialists and other professionals collaborating with teachers, children, the wider school communities and borough arts, education and ICT officers. Outcomes of the project will then be used to develop strategies for the creative use of ICT on a local and national level.

Peter Dunn 1999

5459 words