

**ARTS IN ACTION – A PUBLIC ARENA FOR ART: THE PRACTICAL, FUNCTIONAL AND SOCIAL
IMPLICATIONS OF ART WITHIN A CULTURAL CONTEXT WITH SPECIFIC REFERENCE TO
SOUTH AFRICA.**

by

WENDY ROSS

submitted in accordance with the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF LITERATURE AND PHILOSOPHY

in the subject

ART HISTORY

at the

UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH AFRICA

PROMOTER: PROF A CRUMP

JOINT PROMOTER: MS MD NICOLAU

BOOK I

NOVEMBER 2005

The thesis comprises three parts with each presented in a separate volume:

PART I

CONTEMPORARY PUBLIC ART: A HISTORICAL CONTEXT, DEVELOPMENT OF NEW TRENDS AND REPOSITIONING OF ASSESSMENT CRITERIA

PART II

“PLACE-MAKING” AND PUBLIC ART IN SOCIAL CONTEXTS: SELECTED INTERNATIONAL SITES

PART III

PUBLIC AND COLLABORATIVE COMMUNITY ARTS PROGRAMMES IN SOUTH AFRICA

PART III contains the BIBLIOGRAPHY and APPENDIX: Index of Public Art Programmes and Projects (Parts II and III.)

Title:

“Arts in action – a public arena for art: the practical, functional and social implications of art within a cultural context with specific reference to South Africa.”

Summary:

The research is based on the belief that the Earth’s survival is reliant on an understanding of the interconnectedness between people and the planet. The premise that creative expression is an inherent need in human beings and a powerful agent for social change is at the core of this study. The arts permeate all aspects of life and can play a positive pro-active role in economic and social upliftment. The study therefore explored a contemporary public context in which artists intervene in society to provide practical and functional social spaces but also, with the ecological crisis of the planet, to create an awareness of the interconnectedness of life. Place-making was of specific concern and one of the aims was to examine ways of re-shaping the appearance and meaning of public spaces. An equally important issue was the role and responsibility of both the artist and the commissioning process in a social context and the relevance of individual expression as modes of addressing social concerns and as a tool of public empowerment within a new democratic South Africa that can have a genuine impact on community well-being and social inclusion. The research therefore exists in between the arts, social sciences and the ecology of place: that is, the understanding of the role of creative intervention within social spaces.

The study provides a historical context and development of new trends in public and collaborative community arts, contextualises the notion of public and argues for a repositioning of assessment criteria for the arts within a social public domain and in the interest of the people. It is based on a critical survey of international collaborative arts and its potential as a guide to alternative solutions

and implementation within a South African context for creative interventions and regeneration of public spaces and empowerment and capacity building of its citizens. The research discusses the relevance and the position of the arts and craft industry as a means of poverty alleviation, job creation and empowerment in South Africa. Rebuilding community demands both the rejuvenation of social spaces and the restoration of community esteem together with mutual and self-respect.

List of key words:

Art activism; accessibility; alternative assessment criteria; audience participation; capacity building; collaborative public art; community arts; context of public; creative expression; ecological interventions; empowerment; interconnectedness of people and planet; local distinctiveness; new genre public art; ownership; place-making; pro-active role; public art; public context; responsibility; rural context; site specific; social intervention; sustainability.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This research would not exist without the unending calm, patience and support of my close friend, travelling companion of many years of international research, co-photographer, listener, editor and reader, Denise Bird who constantly questioned my ideas in order that I justify my thoughts and opinions. I thank her for all this – she has my deepest respect and gratitude.

I would like to thank my promoter and co-promoter for their assistance and encouragement. I would also like to thank my two colleagues, Gwen Miller and Celia de Villiers who have given me their support and particularly, time when it has been necessary, and to the University of South Africa for financial assistance.

Sincere thanks to Judi Rodokanakis of Op Art Studio, to whom I entrusted the layout, printing and final compilation of the documents. I am grateful for her time, understanding and patience.

And to Vicki, who never doubted.

This is dedicated to my grandmother who many years ago, had complete faith in my desire to achieve. Her simple faith is never forgotten and always an inspiration.

PHOTO CREDITS

Photo-documentation in this research is drawn from archives compiled by myself and Denise Bird, unless otherwise noted in a caption which references the relevant publication in the bibliography.

CONTENTS

PREFACE	i
PART I: <i>CONTEMPORARY PUBLIC ART: A HISTORICAL CONTEXT, DEVELOPMENT OF NEW TRENDS AND REPOSITIONING OF ASSESSMENT CRITERIA</i>	1
INTRODUCTION	2
CHAPTER I: An Overview of the Development of Contemporary Public Art.	15
CHAPTER II: Understanding the Public Context.	25
CHAPTER III: The Role of the Artist in a Social Context.	33
CHAPTER IV: Public Art in a Rural Context and its Partnership with Locality.	46
CHAPTER V: The Greening of Art: Ecology and Reclamation.	61
CHAPTER VI: Social Responsibility and Art Activism	82
CHAPTER VII: Arts in Education and in Communities	92
CHAPTER VIII: The Functional, Practical and Social Implications of the Visual Arts in a South African Context.	102
CHAPTER IX: The Repositioning of Assessment Criteria for Art in the Public Domain.	115
PART II: <i>“PLACE-MAKING” AND PUBLIC ART IN SOCIAL CONTEXTS: SELECTED INTERNATIONAL SITES</i>	128
INTRODUCTION	129

UNDERSTANDING THE PUBLIC CONTEXT IN “PLACE-MAKING”	134
SECTION I: “PLACE-MAKING” and PUBLIC ART IN CITIES AND TOWNS	140
SECTION II: “PLACE-MAKING” and PUBLIC ART IN URBAN AREAS	194
SECTION III: “PLACE-MAKING” and THE ART IN RURAL AREAS	230
SECTION IV: “PLACE-MAKING” and THE ARTS IN EDUCATION AND COMMUNITIES	309
PART III: PUBLIC AND COLLABORATIVE COMMUNITY ARTS PROGRAMMES IN SOUTH AFRICA	349
INTRODUCTION	350
SELECTED COLLABORATIVE PUBLIC ART AND COMMUNITY-BASED PROGRAMMES IN SOUTH AFRICA	355
A CRITICAL SURVEY OF SELECTED PUBLIC ART COMMISSIONS and COLLABORATIVE COMMUNITY ART PROJECTS BY WENDY ROSS	395
POSTSCRIPT	466
BIBLIOGRAPHY	481
APPENDIX: INDEX OF PUBLIC ART PROGRAMMES and PROJECTS (PARTS II and III)	498

PREFACE

This research is based on the premise that creative expression is an inherent need in human beings that contributes to spiritual fulfilment and plays an important role in the mindfulness of a society. A harmonious interface on the planet within the 21st century, when the planet is in crisis through the destructive actions of the human race, is considered as essential for the healing of our world and it is my belief that the arts can play a positive pro-active role in achieving this relationship and become a powerful agent for social change. The statement is based on the knowledge that Earth's survival is reliant on an understanding of the interconnectedness between people and the planet.

The research does not propose to prove the value or public good of art in a social context as this is considered to be within the fields of sociology and/or philosophy. The intention is to explore a contemporary public context for art and ways in which artists have intervened in society to provide practical and functional social spaces that are not only accessible to all but create an awareness of our response to and dependence on the environment. The study examines international collaborative public and community art programmes as demonstrating potential models or alternative solutions for creative interventions relevant to a South African context where art can have a genuine impact upon community well-being and social inclusion.

The methodology applied defined and addressed various aims pertinent to the public domain. These aims are discussed in relation to specific creative public interventions and their relevance as social process. The supposition is that art can play a positive pro-active role in the development and well-being of integrated societies by shaping the appearance and meaning of social spaces, in creating awareness of the interrelationship between people and the planet, and become a powerful agent for social change and public empowerment.

As the research progressed, the focus changed in the following ways: from the artwork to the process of creating and the intervention in a particular context; examined the differences between public and community as either groups of people or as spatial concepts; and questioned the notion of contested spaces and the privatisation of public spaces. These issues resulted in the research existing in between the arts, social sciences and the ecology of place, and the role of the artist within these confines: that is, the understanding of the role of creative intervention within social spaces.

Inherent to the concept of any form of art in a public context, is the concept of social intervention. One of the aims of this research is to examine how art can become pro-active in shaping the appearance and meaning of public spaces. The research deals specifically with place-making and centres these activities on people and the planet. An equally important issue is that of relevance of visual expression within a public arena and the arts as a mode of addressing social concerns. An understanding of the public context is essential to this research. The study is concerned with bringing into focus the potential role of the artist in a social context and in particular, as a tool of public empowerment within a new democratic South Africa. Rebuilding communities and establishing an integrated society demands not only the rehabilitation of our social spaces but also the restoration of community esteem and both mutual and self-respect.

Extensive research in public, community and environmental ecological art was conducted over many years in Europe, Britain and America. From this investigative survey, examples that were considered to be appropriate with regard to the implementation of good practice within these fields, have been selected to represent the diversity of sites and contexts within the public domain.

The research is presented in three separate parts that are independent of each other with each presenting a particular area of the research, but with basic core issues existing in all three sections. However, all three parts are interrelated and constitute the entire study programme. Further, it is to be noted that as each Part is an independent document there is of necessity duplication of certain material.

Part I provides a historical survey and the development of new trends in public art, an in-depth discussion of the various arenas within which contemporary public art operates and a justification of the area of study and its findings. It discusses at length, the concept of public and the repositioning of evaluative criteria for art within the public domain which are essential for any comprehensive understanding of this genre of art. It is envisaged as a guide for anyone wishing to work within the public domain and indicates possibilities for the role of art in society including modes for good practice.

Part II presents a critical survey of selected international public art programmes which are either individual or community projects.. It is divided into several sections that correlate with Part I and further interpret and define Chapters III -VIII thereby examining the various issues of the relationships established within the context of the process, the site and the audience. The selected programmes, projects and artworks discussed could serve as examples and a guide to ways in which the arts can be applied within a social context in South Africa with regard to regeneration of public spaces, and the empowerment and capacity building of South African citizens.

Part III provides a critical overview of the South African context, discusses specific selected examples of collaborative public and community art programmes and examines their relevance within the notions of upliftment and empowerment. This Part includes a critical overview of the collaborative public and community art programmes coordinated and/or facilitated and implemented by the researcher and the problems encountered in their implementation. This Part correlates with and extends Chapter VIII

of Part I. The international research undertaken over an extensive period of time, has influenced my approach to the arenas of public and community arts and crafts, and the potential for implementation within South Africa.

Captions to Illustrations: due to the nature of this research and in keeping with the majority of contemporary publications, listed in the Bibliography, dealing with this idiom of art-making, it is to be noted that an alternative method has been adopted for the provision of relevant information that is more appropriate, manageable and maintains consistency suited to the discussion of the relationship between site/space, creative interventions/artwork, process/collaboration and audience/participation. A list of illustrations is inappropriate and it is impossible to provide the formal traditional data of measurements. Additionally, artist, title, date and site are presented in a different format. Captions are provided only when and where necessary and, if appropriate, sources will be referenced using techniques as applied in text, that is, author, date and page in parenthesis.

Footnotes: each Part commences with new numbering.

PART I

***CONTEMPORARY PUBLIC ART: A HISTORICAL CONTEXT,
DEVELOPMENT OF NEW TRENDS AND REPOSITIONING
OF ASSESSMENT CRITERIA***

Index for site listings: Appendix. Book 3 page 498

INTRODUCTION

The motivation for this research rests with the need to find meaningful ways of integrating art¹ and society where art becomes modes of creative intervention using an interdisciplinary approach to transform public spaces and attitudes to the world in which we live. The research is based on the premise that creativity and individual expression through the arts have a valuable role to play in the development and well-being of integrated societies that are aware of the interrelationship between people and the planet. It is believed that the arts can function within a social² context by taking account of the concept of *the people and the place* as the genesis and subject for these manifestations.

The research investigates an interdisciplinary approach within the arts that offers opportunities for collaboration and the participation of communities in projects that are directly related to the social, cultural, economic, environmental and ecological contexts and concerns. The nature of the work under investigation could be said to be popular, public and accessible. There is a lack of critical and informed literature in this field of art-making and, what information is available, tends only to commend and expound the values of this relatively new area of art activity without dealing critically with the aesthetic, conceptual, social and political issues surrounding the work. Important to this argument is the factor that is generally not understood nor accepted: it is not the artwork that should be considered as *public* but the *context* and the *intention* of the process, particularly in the case of socially-conscious and activist art.

¹The term *art* in this document takes into account interdisciplinary modes of creative expression – the visual and performing arts including crafts and creative expression in the form of music, writing and poetry as well as landscape design/architecture.

²The term *social* in this study does not imply sociological intent but refers to the everyday context of any group or society.

One of the main aims of this research is to establish critical and appropriate evaluative criteria for these new forms of public art that acknowledge shared ownership, intentions that address and critique social issues, process and intervention, and alternative non-traditional art contexts. A critical language should include an assessment of social ethics and responsibility, the public, an accessible visual language, the quality of experiences and contexts as well as aesthetic principles. The study discusses the concept of *public* at length and, within the complexities of this idiom of art-making, it proposes the repositioning of assessment appropriate to art within the public domain, including elements of good practice in commissioning processes, which are essential for any comprehensive understanding of this genre of art. It is necessary to re-frame the various fields within which alternative collaborative and public art projects operate, and redefine public art not as a collectable product but as a process of a larger socio-cultural agenda.

The notion of democratising art with emphasis on the concepts of *public*, *appropriateness* and *audience* is addressed as well as *the role of the artist in society*. The issues of establishing relevant strategies and structures within a South African context are examined especially as the nature of public and participatory community-based art projects is at odds with gallery practice and precludes the application of traditional formal processes and criteria³. Understanding the *context* within which each project has been defined and structured, is essential to any meaningful assessment of this work.

The research argues for *intervention through the arts* and pro-active art projects that can become significant factors changing the paradigm or world-view of global society. As the research progressed, several issues of concern have changed. These issues deal with *public* versus *community* as people and as spatial concepts, with *contested spaces*, with the *privatisation* or *appropriation*

³ See Chapter IX with regard to the repositioning of evaluative criteria.

of public spaces, and as a result of these implications, with *whose public, whose community, and whose spaces* together with the concern for the quality and use of public spaces.

These concerns lead to an area *in between* the arts, social sciences, the ecology of place and the role of the artist. This presupposes that art is not merely an object within a space but that, operating within the public domain, it could become a combination of permanent or temporary structures or even transitory events as well as participatory ongoing projects that reflect the needs and social conditions of a particular group or society. Thus, art can empower communities and give them a *voice* to effect change and create social awareness. This is particularly necessary within the present South African context.

Throughout time, creative expression has found a place in the activities of the human race. These expressions have left their mark on the world be it physically in the land or as *objects d'art*. Traces of these expressions and artefacts, the remains of architecture, pottery, jewellery, tools and weapons, were typically a result of a way of life and cultural activities that have become the language by which we *know* or are able to decipher information about earlier societies. Artistic expression and architectural structures are the evidence of these cultures.

People have always found it necessary to create *art* not as art itself or art for art's sake as we understand it in the 21st century but as votive expressions, historical and religious recordings, ritual artefacts and decorative embellishments which afforded status to places, buildings or objects. In the earliest of times, pre-historic cultures created votive cave paintings in honour of the hunt, carved small fertility goddesses and engraved stones of burial chambers. Traces in the land as a result of cultural expression are

to be found world-wide from the curious ground drawings on the Nazca plains in Peru⁴ and land drawings such as *The Giant of Cerne Abbas* and *The White Horse of Uffington* in England⁵ to the complex structures of reclaimed landfill sites⁶ of today.

It could be said that in addition to the necessity for functionality, people desire to create objects, structures and spaces of aesthetic worth⁷. Consequently the artist or artisan, particularly in earlier times, played both a functional and aesthetic role in society. Progress⁸ in modern and especially in contemporary societies has resulted in the practice of separatist and specialist professions and could be said to have denied the artist his or her functional role in the 20th and 21st century societies. The artist has been relegated or elevated, depending on one's point of view, to the maker of additional but inessential artworks for reflection or decoration, with Modernism⁹ having played a major role in the aesthetics of purism, autonomy and separatism, that is, *art for art's sake*¹⁰.

⁴Drawn across the desert plains between Nazca and Palpa in Peru are hundreds of line markings of geometric shapes, spirals, bird and animal figures that are said to have originated between the 5th century BC and the 13th century AD

⁵*The Giant of Cerne Abbas*, Dorset, England. 1st or 2nd century AD, cut into chalk hillside; *The White Horse of Uffington*, Berkshire, England. Late Iron age hill figure.

⁶The disposal of waste in contemporary societies has become a major problem. Dump sites and landfill sites when open, were usually sited some distance out-of-town are often eventually surrounded by urban settings. In these instances this has necessitated the rehabilitation of these sites and are often then turned into public parks and recreational facilities.

⁷Suzi Gablik reports that author Ellen Dissanayake holds the view that art is “a biological need in the human species. ... According to Dissanayake, we are in this paradoxical spot because Western society treats art as a dispensable luxury, when it is really an innate behaviour that is essential to our human, biological nature” (Gablik in conversation with Dissanayake 1995:41). Lippard holds similar views (1983:41).

⁸Gablik states that we believe that “we must maximize growth and economic development at whatever the cost, even if we devour this land and the Earth's resources as we go – a process we ... identify as ‘progress’”. She pleads for a paradigm shift that will halt the destruction of our world and that in the work of many artists today, “we are beginning to see the emergence of a new clarity and firmness of intention concerning the environment... . She believes that many artists address the critical issues of a more coherent relationship between people and the natural world and that it means “exploding the humanist notion of the autonomous individual as the solitary center (sic) of all meaning, and replacing it with a sense of human dependence on a stable climate, fertile soil, living rivers and forests, and a sustainable biosphere ” (in Oakes 1995:3).

⁹Modernism advocates the self-contained aesthetic of the complete freedom and autonomy of the artist and the artwork with emphasis on the work as being self-reflective as in “art for art's sake” which takes no account of its audience.

¹⁰Gablik believes that it is “a competitive and power-driven professionalism, combined with an art-for-art's-sake philosophy that has disenfranchised art from any social role. The remapping (sic) of the modernist paradigm, happening now throughout our entire culture, requires alterations in the framework and context in which we do our work. For many artists, this means nothing less than a total reassessment of the meaning and purpose of art (in Oakes 1995:4).

In the last three to four decades, however, artists again feel the need to play an active role in the well-being of the present conditions of society and the planet. Baile Oakes in *Sculpting with the land*, demonstrates how the visual language of art can expand our dialogue and understanding of our vital relationship within the living systems of our planet home and states,

All of our lives are forever linked to the health and well-being of the life of the Earth. All of our actions influence this vital relationship. ... A historical perspective explain[s] how art has been used to express ecological concerns throughout the ages. ... We presently find ourselves so removed from a perception of our place in the natural order of the world that we view humanity and technology as entities separate from the Earth and its other life forms. [He focuses on humankind's interrelationship with Nature and] the unmanageable conflict between those espousing human centered values and those who emphasize the need to preserve the life supporting systems of the planet (1995:1)¹¹.

The problem for the recognised art establishment however, is that these new social activities by pro-active socially responsible artists question the position of modernist concepts and the authoritarian control of the establishment that promote exclusion and elitism. This socially responsible and activist work is frequently not considered by the art world to be *art* as in the collectable commodification of museum or gallery artworks¹². These new public artworks are demeaned and questioned as being urban design, social work, therapy, politics or even scientific investigations, rather than art.

This research is based on the premise that creative expression is an inherent need in human beings and that it fills the spirit and plays an important role in the mindfulness of a society. This fullness of spirit or mindfulness of the inner-self is akin to a sense

¹¹These views are held by many including Lippard, Smagula, Eliade, Sonfist, Capra, McHarg and Krauss.

¹²Malcolm Miles writes that public art is placed in a marginal area of art practice that has "little appeal to curators, dealers and critics for whom it lacks the autonomy of modernist and contemporary art" (1999:1).

of harmony in one's existence on the planet and, within the 21st century when the planet is in crisis through the destructive actions of the human race, is seen as essential for the healing of our universe. This statement is based on the knowledge that humankind has always had a relationship with the Earth, that the planet's survival is based on an understanding of this interconnectedness and that as a species, people have always returned to the land/Nature for healing and inspiration. This is noticeable in all spheres of life whether in the arts such as painting, poetry, photography and performance or in the sciences as in our fascination with the skies and outer space explorations. The thought that eventually ordinary citizens will be able to see Earth from outer space captures the mind and fills us with awe.

There is great concern world-wide for a re-evaluation of so-called *progress* in relation to humankind's destruction of the planet. There are many publications, policies, movements and events that attest to this concern such as Rachael Carson's *Silent Spring*¹³ as early as the 1960s, the establishment of the Clean Air Act in 1963 and Greenpeace¹⁴ in 1969 as well as events such as the first Earth Day in 1970 and the last 2002 World Summit, hosted by the City of Johannesburg, being two of many international gatherings focusing on world issues concerned with the protection of people and the planet. In the light of these current affairs and concerns for *living lightly on the earth*¹⁵, this research argues a *critical role for the artist* that questions, examines and creates an awareness

¹³Carson states, "The most alarming of all man's assaults upon the environment is the contamination of air, earth, rivers, and seas with dangerous and even lethal materials. This pollution is for the most part irrecoverable; the chain of evil it initiates not only in the world that must support life but in living tissues is for the most part irreversible" (1995:6). Her research investigates the pollution of the earth through DDT, chemicals and poisons.

¹⁴Greenpeace is an organisation dedicated actively to oppose any actions, be it by governments, the corporate world or others, that destroy, pollute or cause harm to the planet. Their modus operandi is to intervene physically, prevent or hinder activities that are seen to be destructive.

¹⁵Suzi Gablik speaks extensively about the need for a new world-view in which we *live lightly on the earth* (1993 &1995).

of essential universal issues on which the physical and spiritual well-being and connectedness between people and the planet depend¹⁶. It proposes a closer relationship between everyday life and art as a way of enriching and empowering people to take control of their lives: creativity can offer a way of expressing our lives and provide physical and psychological environments for this to occur.

A critical look at art within the context of the 21st century reveals a confusing arena, where boundaries between art and many other disciplines in relation to life and creative expression are impossible to define. Many artists are in fact re-evaluating their positions and feel that their art needs to address the present conditions of society and especially, the many existing *universal ills*: pollution of the planet, health and particularly HIV/AIDS, crime, gender, race, orientation and abuse of any kind, to name but a few. Socially responsible artists are concerned with works that address and create an awareness of these issues. In many instances such work is closely aligned to modes of visual expression used in popular culture such as photography and mass media advertising.

In *Mapping the terrain: new genre public art*, Suzanne Lacy writes:

For the past three or so decades visual artists of varying backgrounds and perspectives have been working in a manner that resembles political and social activity but is distinguished by its aesthetic sensibility. Dealing with some of the most profound issues of our time – toxic waste, race relations, homelessness, aging, gang warfare, and cultural identity – a group of visual artists has developed distinct models for an art whose public strategies of engagement are an important part of its aesthetic language. ...

Unlike much of what has heretofore been called public art, new genre public art – visual art that uses both

¹⁶Oakes proposes the “powerful role visual arts has in helping us reestablish (sic) a balance with the living systems of our planet. Art can be used as a tool to bring us closer to our planet, to help us look at the Earth and see ourselves (1995:2).

traditional and nontraditional (sic) media to communicate and interact with a broad and diversified audience about issues directly relevant to their lives – is based on engagement. ... [A]rtists draw on ideas from vanguard forms, but they add a developed sensibility about audience, social strategy, and effectiveness that is unique to visual art as we know it today (1996:19 –20).

Arlene Raven, in the Introduction to *Art in the public interest*, states, “Activist and communitarian, art in the public interest extends the modes of expression of public art of the past several decades. The new public-spirited art can, critique ... the uneasy relationship among public artworks, the public domain, and the public” (1993:1). Within the South African context this area of artistic expression is still little known and suffers, even more than internationally, as being not easily accepted as art unless placed within an acceptable art context.

One could question social responsibility as the role of art in a progressive contemporary society but culture and society have always been sources of reference for artists with art being a reflection of the times. Art is communication. It communicates the world to the world. But does the contemporary world really want to listen? Or does it merely want *good modernist art*? It is generally felt today, that it is society’s elite that constitutes the world of art and in this arena it is acceptable to reflect on the spiritual, the philosophical, even the historical but is it acceptable to confront the fortunate, the astute, the philosophical, the elite with depravity and degradation? Social work and social conscience is not considered to be the domain of art. This new socio-politically conscious art poses several problems for the art world. Not only is the modernist notion of autonomy being challenged, but aspects of collectability and the art context are inconsequential. The physical site and audience for art has been brought into question: the sanctity of the gallery or museum versus any appropriate accessible context.

If a general definition of public art is understood to be any art form in a public space then a historical overview will show that public art has always existed in one form or another: ancient sites, rituals, religious events and icons, parades, architectural embellishments, monuments, propagandistic posters and murals. These forms of artistic expression were and remain part of culture, part of everyday existence, accessible to all both physically and conceptually. The role of these artworks is not merely decorative but usually edifying, didactic or propagandistic in some form or another. The Industrial Age and Modernism changed all that! Modernism established notions of individualism, separatism and autonomy of the artist and the artwork¹⁷. Art was in the service of itself as opposed to the notion that art served the needs of the people, that of religion, politics, education, beauty, decoration and architecture.

The research investigates the role of the artist in a contemporary social context and takes into consideration sociation as an intention of art in the public domain, as well as the place of social activism¹⁸ in contemporary public art¹⁹. In these senses, a definition of art in the public interest could be said to be situated *in between the spaces* of public art, architecture, urban planning and design, street furniture, landscape architecture, social activism and ecological concerns. In particular, the study examines the need for good practice²⁰ in the field of contemporary public and community arts, that is, commissioning processes, the physical form and structure of the work in relation to the site and its audience, suitability, accessibility and inclusiveness as well as maintenance.

¹⁷Suzi Gablik comments on modern aesthetics as “inherently isolationist, aimed at disengagement and purity” and feels that in the future art will become “essentially social and purposeful” (1993:4). There is certainly evidence that this change is in fact taking place.

¹⁸Miles cites one aspect of contemporary public art as an emerging practice of art as activism and engagement. He further states that it is recognised that there is no “general public” and that its site is that of the “public realm” rather than one of location (1999:84).

¹⁹Definitions of public art are problematic but for the purpose of this research, contemporary public art refers to art in public spaces that has a social dimension or is concerned with sociation and creates particularised places for people taking into account the needs of its audiences and/or deals with social critique through social processes of collaboration and participation.

²⁰Good practice in public art secures its acceptance by the public and incorporates into its social process issues of accessibility, visual language and appropriateness, location and installation, materials, maintenance and sustainability, as well as the commissioning processes and its collaborative nature.

In addition, the social and functional context of art within the public domain and the implications thereof, both practically and physically, will be examined including the way in which a public context defines the artwork both in terms of site and as communication.

The methodology applied defined and addressed various aims pertinent to the public domain. These aims are discussed in relation to specific creative public interventions and their relevance as social process. The supposition is that art can play a positive pro-active role in the development and well-being of integrated societies, transform spaces into places of sociation and change attitudes to the world in which we live. The overall objective is to re-frame the various fields within which collaborative public and community arts operate and redefine this work as a process within a larger socio-cultural agenda with the intention being to promote art as a tool for social and ecological change and examine ways in which collaborative art processes can be gainfully employed to these ends in the South African context.

The aims are defined for the role of art within a social context as being:

- to shape the appearance and meaning of social spaces;
- to create awareness of the interrelationship between people and the planet;
- to become a powerful agent for social change and public empowerment.

In relation to the above, it is important to reposition the way in which this collaborative approach within the public domain is accessed. These new forms of public art acknowledge shared ownership, address and critique social issues, employ modes of process and intervention, and use alternative non-traditional art contexts. An important additional aim then is to establish a critical language and appropriate evaluate criteria that include an assessment of social ethics and responsibility, intentions, the public, the collaborative process, an accessible visual language, good practice, the quality of experience and contexts as well as aesthetic principles.

The research was motivated by the necessity of finding meaningful ways of integrating art and society where art becomes modes of urban regeneration, public expression, ways of addressing past histories and a tool of public empowerment within a developing democratic South Africa. The research further argues for intervention through the arts and pro-active projects that become significant factors in education, literacy and poverty eradication within South African society by examining the potential within arts to facilitate such objectives.

Part I of the thesis consists of nine Chapters. Chapter I presents an overview of the development of new trends of public art within a social context and is concerned with, in particular, the 1960s re-evaluation of society's place on this planet and the subsequent emergence of land and environmental art and its influence on contemporary public art.

Chapter II argues the concept of public as more than merely a place or physical space but rather as a social construct that is involved in all aspects of our contemporary society. Notions of ownership, accessibility, and participation are explored as well as the relationship between an artwork, its site and its audience.

Chapter III examines the role of the artist and approaches to art in a public context within the city and urban areas and investigates the concepts of artist as interpreter, art as a social process and a tool of empowerment. The relationship between artist, artwork and audience has become even more apparent in artworks during the last few decades where in some instances, the interaction or process of making becomes the artwork. (Discussed in Chapter VI in relation to alternative approaches to public and participatory arts.)

Chapter IV reviews art within a rural context and particularly its practical and functional implications.

Chapter V examines the relevance of ecologically concerned art as a sign of the times, signs of a world searching for reconciliation with nature. Contemporary society's concern seems to be with progress and economic development at the expense and destruction of the greater natural planet. It is this latter behaviour that is at the core of much contemporary environmental art. This is even more noticeable in the 21st century. Photography has played an important role in the dematerialisation of the art object in 20th century art, becoming a means of notation, conceptualisation and communication. Photography is also discussed in relation to technological developments such as video and "mass media" artworks as a public arena particularly in the context of environmental and ecological concerns.

Chapter VI discusses the intention to initiate change as an important aspect that has influenced much contemporary socially responsible art. It looks at the use of temporary events and pro-active modes of expression.

Chapter VII investigates the arts in education as well as community arts with references to residencies and community contexts and its application to a South African context.

Chapter VIII examines a positive pro-active role for the arts in skills training, entrepreneurial opportunities and the creation of social spaces in South Africa.

Chapter IX proposes that within the complexities of art in the public realm, a re-framing should be initiated to re-evaluate criteria of assessment appropriate to contemporary public art. Accessibility in terms of a visual language and content become central issues in this socially concerned public process. Aspects such as context, intention, process and appropriateness is examined and includes issues of good practice, collaboration and participation. These issues are cross-referenced in Part III in the Conclusion and discussion of the future development of the South African arts and crafts industry.

Part II of the research presents a critical survey of selected international projects where *place-making* as public art in city, urban and rural environments are seen as essential for sociation. Through adaptation, these creative interventions could be considered as possible examples for implementation within a South African context.

Part III of the research provides a critical overview of the South African context and includes the collaborative public and community art programmes coordinated and facilitated by the researcher.

For the purpose of this research, formal monuments and individual Modernist sculptures, although often placed within public spaces, do not fall within the parameters of contemporary public art as defined within the context of this investigation and are not included. It is also considered that murals which deal with the public domain, occupy an extensive parallel arena and are, therefore, not included in the research unless they form part of a specific public space under discussion or are appropriate to the discussion of a particular context.

CHAPTER I

An Overview of the Development of Contemporary Public Art.

This chapter presents an overview of the influences on the development and new trends of art in public spaces and takes as its point of departure the development of *art in the land* that emerged in the 1960s together with the general concern for the planet that emerged simultaneously during this era.

The origin of public art can be traced back to earliest of times when artworks served civic, political and religious agendas and dominant ideologies. Creative expression, beliefs and daily activities were integrated, with one informing the other regarding the manner and space in which these activities took place and in their overall connectedness to planet Earth. As the function of these early artworks was social and spiritual, the work was physically and conceptually accessible to all. The two notions of “interconnectedness” and “accessibility” are particularly relevant to this research on contemporary public art.

Throughout the ages, the Earth has been a major point of reference and influence in humankind’s creative and spiritual activities. However, in the early sixties there was a renewed awareness of, and a yearning to return to nature. Lucy Lippard’s contention is that “the reestablishment of a coherent relationship between nature and culture is a critical element in any progressive view²¹ of the future” (1983:12). This resulted in artists exploring ways in which to interact with the Earth and experience anew the extraordinary order and mystery of the universe. The environment itself became a new arena for artistic activities and the terms Land Art,

²¹This view is held by many: see footnote 8, page 5.

Earthworks, Process Art, Environmental Art and, what has become known as Eco-feminism, were used to define artworks dealing with the land. This development was due partly to a fascination with the past, partly to dissatisfaction with the technological age and the commodification of art, and in part, to universal concerns for the sustainability of the planet²².

Rachael Carson was one of the earliest writers to attract public attention to the state of the planet and the exploitation of the land through her publication *Silent Spring* in 1962²³. Since that time, there has been a radical spiralling of information warning about ecological concerns and the future state of the planet. Artists have always been concerned with a reflection of the world in which they live²⁴ and in this sense, it could be said that the depredation of Earth has had a major influence on the approach taken by artists working *in* the land. In addition, Lucy Lippard, author and critic, in 1967 wrote for the first time on the subject of the “dematerialisation of the art object” as a process de-emphasising the art object²⁵. This dematerialisation of the art object together with the concern for the environment, impacted on the development of art and in particular, art that dealt with actual sites whether physical or psychological. Emphasis shifted from the object to *place* and the associations implicit within that site.

The development of environmental art of the sixties was symptomatic of a rejection of a technological and capitalist society. This idiom of art-making encompassed a wide range of works with *the earth* as a common denominator and dealt with the materiality of the land, space, time structures and various natural processes and systems. Artists worked directly not only with the land but

²²Many authors including Lippard (1983:4, 6) and Smagula (1983:261), hold these views.

²³The edition listed in the bibliography was reprinted in 1995.

²⁴Both Popper (1975:12) and Sonfist support this statement. Sonfist states “Art has always reflected the questioning of a society by itself and often takes an active role in the search for the answers to those questions” (1983:xi).

²⁵This concept was also emphasised by Popper (1975:11).

also with phenomenological processes of nature, with aesthetic intent: they interacted with rather than merely represented nature. Cosmological energies such as lightning, growth, phases of the moon and the resultant tidal processes, star constellations and the solar system are some of the natural phenomena that have been used as source material and content by artists concerned with the environment and nature. These works in the environment during the 1960s - 1970s were however not necessarily socially responsible or activist in intent.

In his introduction to *Art - action and participation*, Frank Popper discusses the notions of the environment (both the natural and built environments) and spectator participation as two vitally important aspects in the development of contemporary art (1975:8). Although his discussion is concerned particularly with performance art and public locations, the distinction can certainly be applied to aspects of environmental art. He distinguishes these two facts as having modified the audience's passive response to one of becoming an active physical and mental involvement in an actual, if altered, environment in which the relationship is determined explicitly by the interaction between participant, the event or artwork and the social space. Popper pre-empted today's public context for art when he suggested,

A new art based on man's environment, but also on his creative needs and aspirations is about to be born; It reaches out into an entirely new area through the convergence of the environmental investigation factor and that of public creativity. ... It is through a new expression based on his true environmental and creative needs that he will really become committed to art (1975:12).

He regarded this development as producing truly "democratic art", art that is concerned with and involves the audience. Environmental art was concerned with the interaction between people and the space of the natural world. If one looks at socially

oriented art today, it could be said that Popper's prophecy has in fact been fulfilled. This relationship between artist, artwork and audience is even more apparent in artworks of the last few decades where in some instances the interaction or process of making, becomes the artwork. This will be discussed in Chapter VI in relation to alternative approaches to public and participatory arts.

The primary concerns of artists working during the early developments of Land Art indicate an interest in contemplative or conceptual statements relating to people and their relationship with nature. Twentieth century society's preoccupation with the environment also led to a re-investigation of traditional and indigenous societies²⁶, past and present, which regard the earth as a *living entity* and consequently, live in close harmony with the natural world. Lucy Lippard, in her publication *Overlay: contemporary art and the art of prehistory*, suggests that art began as a result of a society's response to the world and says that art is born of "social, biological and political experiences" and that "one of the roles of female culture has always been to reach out and integrate art and life, idea and sensation – or nature and culture" (1983:42). She further states that the creative act was the result of a desire to keep in touch with the world and, through creative re-interpretations, early societies called on the earth spirits to intercede with the forces of nature. It could be said that art developed as a result of this process: the interaction between a culture, the physical world and a spiritual awareness of the universe. The resurgence of this desire, to connect to the universe, has resulted in an urgent need to address environmental issues in a world determined for economic development and the resultant depletion of natural resources. The reason for the continued relevance of ecologically concerned art is a sign of the times, a sign of a world searching for reconciliation with nature²⁷. This is even more noticeable in the 21st century as is discussed in Chapter V on the "greening" of art.

²⁶"Traditional societies" in the context of this thesis refers to societies that retain the traditions of their ancestral customs and beliefs. They believe that human existence is dependent on a harmonious relationship between humankind and the life-forces in nature.

²⁷Gablik states that the "essence of the new paradigm emerging in physics, general systems theory and ecology changes our whole idea of reality with the notion of interconnectedness – an understanding of the organic and unified character of the universe". This shift in thinking is apparent in present Reconstructivist ideas in which there is a "transition from Eurocentric, patriarchal thinking and the 'dominator' model of culture toward an aesthetic of interconnectedness, social responsibility and ecological attunement" (1993:22).

One avenue in the development of the public domain was that of the concern for the land. The material was the land itself: earth, mud, water, air, stone, space, place. The developments that occurred during this period cannot be discussed without reference to the alternative but analogous area of exploration dealing with the basic concepts of death, birth and regeneration. Author John Michell, 1975, says that early societies believed everything to be imbued with a life-force from which people were inseparable²⁸. Co-existing with this belief in a spirit-filled world, was a belief in the concept of a *life-after-death*²⁹. It was around this concept of rebirth, the after-life or the interconnectedness of the universe that ancient rituals and ceremonies were based³⁰. The observation of natural occurrences in the universe served as a basis for a belief in a cyclical system of regeneration: as the setting sun dies in the west it is reborn in the east with the cyclical birth of each new day. The orientation and construction of many ancient sites and structures also demonstrates the influence of cyclical time and rebirth. The domed passage-grave of *New Grange*³¹ in Ireland is oriented towards the east in such a way that at the time of the winter solstice the rising sun that brings the new year and new life, shines through the “roof-box”, a small opening in the entrance to the passage, and travels through to the burial chamber at the end of the passage bringing this new life. The approach to time was non-historic and cyclical rather than linear and evolutionary, and implied the idea of ongoing processes and events as in rituals that dealt with the re-enactment of Creation myths³².

²⁸Michell says that “the earth was sacred ... because it was in fact ruled by spirits, by the creative powers of the universe, manifest in all the phenomena of nature, shaping the features of the landscape, regulating the seasons, the cycles of fertility, the lives of animals and men” and that “the spirit of the earth and the spirit that animates all living things are of the same essence” (1975:4, 12).

²⁹Eliade states that primitive societies “always think of the beginning of life in a cosmological context” Burial in the fetal position especially emphasizes the hope of a new beginning of life – which does not mean an existence reduced to its mere biological dimensions. For the primitive “to live” is to share in the sacrality of the cosmos (1965:59).

³⁰Eliade states that “regeneration rites always comprise, in their structure and meaning, an element of regeneration through repetition of an archetypal act, usually of the cosmogonic act ...” that is, free from chaos and the profane to order and the sacred: the periodic rebirth of the world (1974:85).

³¹*New Grange*: c3400 BC. Chambered passage-grave mound surrounded by standing stones. Boyne Valley, County Meath, Ireland. (Personal site tour, 1986)

³²Discussing ancient ontology, Eliade says that “the ‘history’ of the Cosmos and of human society is a ‘sacred history’, preserved and transmitted through myths. More than that it is a ‘history’ that can be repeated indefinitely, in the sense that the myths serve as models for ceremonies that periodically reactualize the tremendous events that occurred at the beginning of time” (1974: xiv).

The interest in early traditional societies was influenced not only by the activities and belief structures of these cultures but also by ancient structures. Pre-historic sites and structures became major influences on environmental art because of both the visual impact effected by the simplicity and monumentality of form and their materiality and because these sites remain in humankind's psyche as part of one's existence. The enigma of ancient sites evokes strong psychological and spiritual responses from the visitor. The mysteries concealed by these structures, considered to be sacred sites, tantalise the mind not only because of their inexplicability and obscurity, but also because the *unknown* mystifies and arouses one's intrinsic curiosity and spiritual awareness. These structures, whether of earth or stone, can be seen as structural and spatial metaphors for past eras: as such they attract interest, fascinate the mind and encourage investigation. The influence of these ancient structures can be seen in the environmental artworks of the 1960s as well as in recent contemporary public environments in which artists have used earth mounds and stone structures, have made use of the spiral, circle and the straight line, as well as solar, lunar and astronomical alignments.

A characteristic of land art is that it exists in the real world and interacts with real time-structures. Inherent to the land itself is process and subsequently, systems. The involvement with the Earth was also heightened by a modern aesthetic that is the result of technological progress, namely, the aesthetics of process synonymous with participation. The creative process became the content of the artwork and not simply a means to an end. Artists dealt with the phenomenological processes of life itself. Influenced by *the earth*, Process Art emphasises the notions of time, place, systems and process. Working in the land made it possible for the artists to draw on dynamic geophysical structures as well as natural phenomena such as lightning, growth, the seasons, tides and the solar system, to name a few. Time, as a sculptural element, was not only implied but also utilised as durations of time; in other instances it functioned as a process of change. These aspects of process, participation and change are inherent in much contemporary environmental public art.



SNOW
WARM GRAVEL
SNOW
STONES ROCKS
DUST
PINE NEEDLES
POWDER DUST
GRIT

PICO DE ORIZABA

A 5½ DAY WALK FROM TLACHICHUCA
TO THE SUMMIT AT 18855 FEET
AND BACK

MEXICO 1979

**RICHARD LONG, *Pico de Orizaba* (Mexico), 1979. Photograph,
text. (Fuchs 1986:128)**

Combined with the idea of *art as process*, is the notion of dematerialisation of the art object. The art object becomes art idea, space or process. British artist, Richard Long *walks* in order to make art. As an artist who has walked in the land since the 1960s, he is interested in works that are concerned with his experience of and relationship to the material world, and many of his land pieces deal with the concept of walking. *Walks* are a familiar activity, and walk is a term filled with evocative connotations: a walk is an activity that is often determined by the senses, by the need to be in communion with nature, an aesthetic experience. Author Nancy Foote says: “a walk offers a chance to check up on nature, to give in to your senses. ... A walk is an abstraction, an idea. It is a particular kind of passage through space and time; you embark on it to stretch your consciousness. ... [T]he point of the walk is the walk itself” (1980:42). Richard Long’s walks utilise process, time and space. Although he incorporates a specific duration of time in his walks, he alludes to the passing of time in abstract references. The process of walking is the artwork. They are the experiences that Long shares with his viewer through printed *word-images*: the words or phrases create mental images. The spectator responds to the word-image by conjuring up his own interpretation or experience of place by recalling similar past experiences. The printed word-image and/or photograph becomes more than a visual rendering of fact, it becomes a ritualistic reminder of past places, experiences and activities. Peter Randall-Page is one of several artists working in the public domain, who *borrow*s and extends on the work of Long by incorporating these aspects of the walk in many of his environmental public artworks as part of the experience of participation and knowledge of time. In addition, the development of pedestrian and cycle pathways and bridleways, populated with sculptural and functional artworks are considered a direct result of creative interventions in the land that involve the necessity of accessing these works on foot. This is discussed in Chapter IV that deals with new trends in non-art rural contexts.

A direct consequence of process-oriented and environmental land art has been the emergence of photography, firstly as a form of documentation, secondly as an extension of process art and thirdly, as an art form in its own right. Photography has played an important role in the dematerialising process in 20th century art, becoming a means of notation, conceptualisation and communication. In Chapters V and VI photography is discussed in relation to technological developments such as video and mass media artworks as a public arena.

The process of a work is a central issue in environmental art. This aspect, together with time, implies the idea of a future as well as change and the results of change. These issues are opposed to a traditional concept of sculpture as a static timeless object. The intention to initiate change is important and has influenced contemporary socially responsible art which is temporary in nature, and /or ongoing, and often takes the form of performance. This is discussed in Chapter VI.

The specific use of space defines environmental art. Artists considered the context or environmental space as an intrinsic part of the artwork itself. The concept of *place* took on a new significance. Earthworks were invariably situated in inaccessible unpopulated areas where space was available and a large format artwork was frequently necessary in order for the work to relate to its environment without being dominated by or becoming insignificant within the vastness of the site. This involvement with vast spaces influenced the thinking of artists as large-scale artworks became possible and even manageable. This opened the way for artists to work in public spaces such as parks, in which the spectator can meditate and satisfy his yearnings for natural spaces. The work exists in, and is part of, the physical world of the spectator. The concept of the park is related to *public* and *participation* as discussed in Chapters IV and V.

The renewed awareness of nature was concerned in part with the loss of an earlier idealised, romantic and rural view of the natural world and also in part, with an expanded experience of the environment and knowledge of “the role economic, psychological, cultural and biological forces play” (Smagula 1983:262). Currently world-wide, attention is being given to all aspects of the sustainability of the planet: changes seen in weather cycles, plant life, water and air pollution together with negative effects of waste materials and chemicals to which these changes are attributed and are of universal importance³³. Ecology, in which the human race plays a major role, has become a focus area in education, industry and civil society, and the reclamation and rehabilitation of disused, destroyed and toxic areas are being widely practised. Chapter V looks at these new developments in ecologically based artworks and artists such as Mierle Laderman Ukeles, Joseph Beuys, Alan Sonfist and Patricia Johanson.

Primordial consciousness differs vastly from contemporary 21st century cognition. The difference between present Westernised societies and traditional societies, both past and present, is of importance to this thesis. Western society has been preoccupied with a limited vision of the uniqueness and dominance of *humans* as the superior beings, and the Earth as a commodity to be exploited. However, environmentalist Ian McHarg states that in societies very different from Western society, people can still be found “who believe that man and nature are indivisible, and that survival and health are contingent upon an understanding of and a co-existence with nature and her processes ...” (1971:27). Ancient people lived in a system that was atavistic within a matriarchal society (Lippard 1983:42). The essence of nature is fertility and was a central theme in ancient thought. Early society’s concern

³³Capra says the “profound change in our world view, from a mechanistic conception ... to a holistic and ecological view, a view which I have found to be similar to the views of mystics of all ages and traditions” (1984: xvii). The concern for conservation of the earth and its natural resources has become a major world-wide issue. In the Introduction to *Landscape and conservation*, Brian Hackett says that “there is a growing interest in conserving landscape, sometimes as a strict preservation process and sometimes in an acceptable modified form to meet the current economic and social changes” (1980: no pagination). McHarg states that “we need, not only a better view of man and nature, but a working method by which the least of us can ensure that the product of his work is not more despoliation”(1971:5). Similarly, Rachael Carson’s *Silent Spring*, 1962 announced these concerns in the use and results of pesticides.

was primarily one of survival within the greater natural world, hence their obsession with the idea of fertility. Contemporary society appears to be preoccupied with progress and economic development at the expense and destruction of the greater natural world. This latter behaviour is at the core of the new approaches to collaborative creative interventions in contemporary environmental ecological art as discussed in Chapter V.

With this in mind, these social and ecological concerns could be considered to have determined an alternative history alongside that of the logical progression from environmental land art to the landscaped sculptural public places now being developed in city and urban contexts. Real social contexts, the media of life, became the tools with which the artists explored their world. Popular culture and popular concerns were the impetus for socially engaged pro-active art in which cultural critique became the intention. Many of these activities assumed the form of performances and events. The present position of art within the public domain merges these two histories with a more concentrated focus on relevant social issues positioned within a public arena.

In this chapter attention has been drawn to particular aspects of environmental art that have influenced the development of contemporary public art: that of physical space, the site and scale; the dematerialisation of the art object; the concern for the natural world and the sustainability of the planet; participation and the relationship between the viewer and the work; happenings and performances; and the notions of time, process and change. There has been a definite shift from an art form in which the spectator is merely an onlooker, to a situation in which there is an active interrelationship between the artwork, the space and the audience. Within this context many artists feel that there is an urgent need to influence society and create an awareness that will influence the way in which people interact with each other and the way society coexists on and with planet Earth. This interconnectedness is essential to the future of our planet.

CHAPTER II

Understanding the Public Context.

Essential to this research is an understanding of *a public context*. The Concise Oxford Dictionary (1983) defines the word *public* as being “of or concerning the people as a whole”. Although it is a general word referring to everyone, in context with other words, its implications are far greater than merely “of the people”. It proposes the idea of belonging or accessible to all persons. Generally, it defines a group of people, a collective thought or action, an organisation, or anything that deals with a grouping of people. Public implies a commonality or sameness. Inherent in the term though is the implication of a common status, of the common people as opposed to the upper classes. Public therefore, can also be seen as a social and psychological construct in terms of citizenship in notions such as belonging, status, shared concerns, civil society and empowerment, while in today’s world, public can be seen as a universal construct.

Globalisation has given rise to a situation in which the relocation of people to all the major cities of the world has created a *public culture*. The term is itself a dichotomy and needs to be defined within a multicultural context. It gives meaning and definition to the general concept of a public world-wide. The term implies similarity, a culture that is connected by shared concerns. This public culture is in reality the 21st century’s society and shares many issues of universal concern that permeate our current technological although anxious human race – issues such as economic development, scientific and technological advances on the one hand and on the other, poverty, health, water and air pollution, toxic waste, and human rights. Issues of universal concern are public concerns, of concern to all people world-wide, to the public world with globalisation creating the establishment of a *global* or *world public*.

Public as a term denotes accessibility; accessibility in essence implies reception (familiarity). However, the implication of public is contrary to its reality in that it is constructed by context. The question of *whose public* becomes relevant. The physical or psychological reality of the construct, be it space, people, knowledge or even human rights, is governed by various factors that contradict the notion of complete accessibility. In reality, if a homeless person whose appearance could be deemed unacceptable, should venture into a public play area for children, that person could unfortunately be told to vacate the site albeit a public site. In his or her condition the homeless person is *unacceptable as a public person* and in this context, the notion of respectability would define the publicness of the space. But whose idea of respectability is valid: the homeless person or the child-minder who is offended by the appearance of the homeless person? Public as a construct is manipulated by both psychological access and social acceptability. The poor are excluded simply by being poor, the rich elect not to fraternise with the lower class, the disabled or challenged are considered different, and the result of racial prejudice is discrimination. These are some of the obvious but unwritten popular laws of publicness that become acts of *privatisation of the public*.

Dealing with actual public space has its own specific ramifications as no public grouping is homogeneous. However, the general nature of what constitutes a particular public for a particular space should be taken into account. For any physical space to be described as public, the quality of that environment needs to be conducive to its general (as in a city space) or particular (as in an urban space or park) inhabitants; it must become a *social space*, a shared space. For this to materialise, the space needs to be infused with a sense of identity and belonging: the public or users of that space should feel comfortable, feel as if that space is a known, familiar place and belongs to all. The space becomes a metaphor for and equal to one's own space that one chooses to share with another like-minded person. However, no matter how public a space appears to be, there is always the question of actual

ownership: this is usually determined by legal ownership or title deeds; but in many instances, psychological occupation often dictates and limits the accessibility of a space. *Ownership* is a complex abstract notion implying occupation, control and restricted access similar to the discussions presented around the concept of *public*. In many major cities of the world, gang warfare, for example, determines access to an area and ownership of the area is *claimed* by psychological occupation and superiority, backed by physical violence. The same could be said for less aggressive annexure or colonisation of a public space. In what could be considered to be an *acceptable* appropriation of space – assuming the responsibility of physically maintaining and caring for a public space – also implies the same psychological ownership. Public access of space is thus often governed by a notion of *occupation* or *claimed* ownership.

The considerations of exclusion and acceptability, public versus privatised public, occupation and accessibility, ownership and appropriation, and social versus public space all require careful interpretation. Two main developments of art within a public arena are the appropriation of non-art contexts and the relationship that is frequently formed by this appropriation between the artwork, the context and the audience. Irrespective of the form that the context takes, it is central to the work and in fact becomes the artwork. Becoming a participant within the site rather than a mere spectator of it, not only establishes an active interaction but imposes a relationship on that spectator.

The concept of claimed ownership or membership through *participation* is another aspect of appropriation by artists in both individual and collaborative socially concerned artworks that implies psychological ownership. Being party to a process implies concurrence with the inherent intention of the process. A perfect example of this is the world-wide acceptance of the red AIDS

ribbon³⁴ that has become common property. The ribbon was conceived by a coalition of New York artists as part of their *A Day Without Art* call to action campaign for 1st December 1989³⁵. Similarly, the use or occupation of a functional public artwork or aesthetically mediated or articulated space makes one an active and automatic participant in the experience of the artwork and simultaneously implies part-ownership. Maya Lin, winner of the competition for the Vietnam Veterans Memorial in Washington DC, 1982, designed a work that captured the minds of not only the people who suffered loss as a result of the war, but of all who visit the site. The Wall is not merely a memorial – it also critiques the actions of those in power. Loss is made visible; the enormity of that loss is felt by all who visit the site. The mere act of walking through the site makes one an active and automatic participant of the artwork. The popularity or acceptance of the work and universality of its content has made the Monument public, belonging to all, and has become an international symbol of the futility of war.

The late Robert Smithson (1938 - 1973) is considered to be the protagonist of American environmental land art and was one of the first artists to produce what could be considered socially responsible public art in his land reclamation projects. He felt that art should mediate between ecology and industry. Critic and author John Coplans states that Smithson believed that art could mediate between ecology and industry and that “the artist could become a functional worker within society, changing the socioeconomic [sic] basis of art by restoring to it an everyday function within society; and making an art that restored to the common man his sense of place in the world” (in Hobbs 1981:48). Much contemporary ecologically based environmental art in fact fulfils this belief and is discussed in Chapter V.

³⁴The ribbon was conceived by the Visual AIDS’s Artists’ Caucus during the Persian Gulf War in 1991 when yellow ribbons were tied everywhere for the returning armed forces. The idea was borrowed from these yellow ribbons with the intention of creating a portable symbol that could be inexpensive, easily made and accepted internationally (Finkelpearl 2000:429-430).

³⁵This was also conceived by the Visual AIDS’s Caucus as “a day of mourning and call to action in response to the AIDS crisis” (Finkelpearl 2000:429-430).

In Chapter I the notions of accessible space and spectator participation were mentioned as being two important aspects through which Frank Popper suggested that the use of social space and incorporation of audience participation would influence the development of a “democratic art” thereby creating a new paradigm for art³⁶. This relationship between artist, artwork and audience is certainly apparent in artworks of the last few decades. Ecologically concerned American artist, Alan Sonfist states that “society faces crucial decisions about its way of life. Art has always reflected the questioning of a society by itself and often takes an active role in the search for the answers to those questions” (1983:xi). He further states that “all great art has derived its meaning not only from artistic quality but from the social needs of the time. Our overriding social need is to develop a sensitivity to nature so that we can preserve our planet” (quoted in Foote 1980:29).

World-wide, artists of today’s public culture are feeling the need to take control of their existence in the world. Suzanne Lacy in her introduction to *Mapping the terrain*, new genre public art includes the following two artists’ statements: Guillermo Gomez-Peña says “I feel that more than ever we must step outside of the strictly art arena. It is not enough to make art” and Juana Alicia says “I feel a great urgency in my own work to address the issues of our destruction and not to make works of art that keep our society dormant” (1996:31). These statements confirm those of Sonfist’s (1983) and the many artists who are concerned about our place in the world and whose art addresses these issues.

As this research investigates the role of the artist and the practical, functional and social implications of art in public spaces, it is essential to consider the *intention* of these artists. An accessible public context is necessary to all socially responsible artworks.

³⁶See page 15: reference to Popper’s statement.

An artwork that is created for a particular environment relocates the viewer by creating a context that alters both one's physical experience of the place and aesthetic emotive response to the site. Artists reflect the spirit of the times: they interpret their world and they present the social conditions in which they exist. The intention of socially engaged public art is to create awareness of or provide access to certain issues through the use of a public context, be it a physical location, a publication, the mass media or a temporary action: content is of prime importance. There are several recent publications³⁷ that look critically at this area of socio-political engagement in which artists' approaches towards the present condition of society and the state of the planet, are recorded. These artists have chosen to work collaboratively within the realm of everyday life and local communities. They are concerned with artistic citizenship, with their position *within* society, with artworks that become *a social process*.

Many sculptures placed outdoors in a public space exploit the site merely for its accessibility without considering the implications of either its *context* or the concept of its *publicness*. The physical site is often not taken into account as having an effect on or as becoming a part of the artwork itself. Inherent to the notion of public art is the issue of *social intervention*: it imposes itself on the public within its space. In historical, political and religious monuments and artworks, this imposition is understood as the underlying function of the work and consequently used as didactic or propagandistic agendas. However, in what should be called outdoor sculpture, the basic concept of intervention is generally not given consideration nor acknowledged as the essence of a work in a public venue. The focus of these outdoor works still remains, as in a gallery context, the individual expression of the artist rather than that of addressing an audience. Contemplation and individual authorship are also of prime importance in these outdoor modernist artworks. In comparison, in contemporary public art individual authorship is replaced by collective relationships

³⁷See Bibliography: Gablik 1993, Lacy 1996, Lippard 1997, Miles 1989 & 1999, Oakes 1995, Jacob 1995, Raven 1993, Burnham & Durland 1998.

and shared ownership. Merely placing a work in a public place certainly does not make it public. *Function* and *intention* create publicness; place only provides physical accessibility. What differentiates contemporary public art from outdoor sculpture and other artworks placed outside, are the concerns that deal with the concepts of:

- public as a social construct;
- accessibility of interpretation;
- audience and intervention;
- dialogue and relationships between artwork, context and audience;
- collaboration, participation and collective ownership.

Public spaces are particular spaces with particular needs and with particular audiences and not merely outdoor spaces into which any artwork can be dumped. The concerns of any form of art within the public domain are of its connectedness to the actual world, its practical and social functions, its public aims, public location, inclusiveness and its collaborative nature. The audience or public becomes the focus of this art rather than the self-expression and autonomy of the artist. Suzanne Lacy states that art placed within the public context should be built on the concepts of “audience, relationship, communication, and political intention” (1996:28). Further, she refers to this art as socially engaged, interactive art that deals with issues directly relevant to the lives of its audiences (1996:19).

In part, contemporary public art can be considered as an extension of the 1960s' concerns for nature as in environmental art that also provided a public context and dealt with the public domain, and in part, as a development of social activism. Contemporary public art is by nature diverse in form and content, and incorporates all the arts. This idiom of creative activity includes permanent and temporary artworks in both indoor and outdoor spaces. Essential to all this work is the understanding of the public context. Consequently, this implies accessibility and audience participation. Chapter III investigates how artists have explored the relationship between form and space and the resultant functionality and social implications of these spaces.

CHAPTER III

The Role of the Artist in a Social Context.

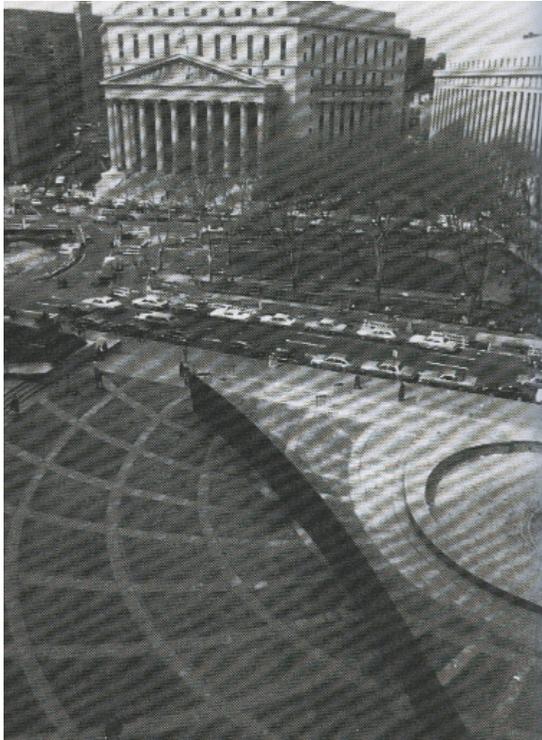
Chapter III surveys the role of the artist in a contemporary social context within the city and urban public domains with specific reference to permanent sites and urban renewal. This includes an investigation of the concepts of artist as interpreter, art as a social process and as a tool of empowerment.

Contemporary public art covers a broad spectrum of styles, modes of art and intentions but as has been previously noted, this research delimits the area of investigation: that of art situated in a public space governed by various factors of intention and not merely referring to itself as an object of appraisal. Public placement in itself implies intention and intervention. Public appraisal is by nature diverse. If the artwork has no relevance or meaning to the average person in the street, it will be treated with disregard, ignored or even vandalised. A public space may create physical accessibility but the artwork may not necessarily be accessible in its use of visual language. In addition, art in public places creates its own complexities, essentially in the determination of the audience and its relation to its site and public domain. The artwork should interact with both its space (the site) and its audience (the public). The question of audience is crucial although unfortunately, in many instances it appears that artists and commissioners of public art are either unaware of this fact or choose not to acknowledge this issue. Much so-called public art is no more than outdoor display, does not pay heed to issues of publicness and cannot be seen to be *in the public interest*³⁸.

³⁸“In the public interest” can be interpreted in reference to the social value of a site and its intention with regard to sociation as in place-making or in non-permanent or temporary works, alternatively seen as critical comments on society.

As this research investigates the role of the artist and the practical, functional and social implications of art in public spaces, a distinction is made between art in public spaces that is concerned with social spaces and/or urban renewal, and those that are socially engaged, interactive artworks that are concerned with creating awareness of particular issues or eliciting change for social benefit. Providing facilities that are conducive to the health and well-being of the people in creating places for sociation can be considered to be in the public interest. Alternatively, social commentary critiquing the present state of society can also be considered to be in the interest of the public. To understand and interpret any contemporary public art, it is essential to look at the intention of such works. An artwork that is created for a particular site or environment relocates the viewer by creating a space that alters both one's physical experience of the place and aesthetic emotive response to the site. The intention of socially engaged public art, *new genre public art*, however, is the repositioning of the audience within his or her existence within a particular social context. In some instances these two intentions merge.

How an artist interprets and manipulates a particular site within any public domain is dependent on his or her intentions in relation to the participants within that space or site. The artwork becomes a social process of involvement and experience. It has the ability to alter the reality of the space/site, to alienate the visitor or alternatively, create a platform for participation and interaction. Public art should be governed by intention. A sculpture in a public site may quite easily alienate the viewer through its sheer size and use of material as in Richard Serra's *Tilted Arc* that was removed in 1989 from Federal Plaza in New York City (Raven 1993:23). The public or users of the space found the work to be intrusive, confrontational and unsuitable for its site. In this instance, it could be deduced that the mere physicality of the material, cor-ten steel that looks like rusted metal, combined with its size were subconsciously experienced as uncomfortable and imposing. It could be interpreted as an obstacle in the path across the plaza that forced



Richard Serra.

Left: *Tilted Arc*, 1981 - 1989. Corten-steel. (A Chauvet in Kwon 2002:71)

Right: *The Great Walls*, 1983. Brick plastered with powdered marble.

pedestrians to go around the sculpture. The work was Modernist in its style, its language abstract, its demeanour one of alienation and its intention being the autonomy of the artwork, art for art's sake. The artist's stated intention was not to address issues of *public* but to make art. In my opinion the work was ill-placed and the commission ill-considered.

A similar work by Serra in Barcelona, *The Great Walls*, 1983, was completely different in intention although almost identical in form. This work consists of two huge concentric walls that intentionally divide the space of a park. What had been problematic in *Arc* in New York, that of dividing the space, was successful in Plaça de la Palmera: the walls, although large are not aggressive but rather complement and to some degree, enclose the open space, have a subtle reference to bullrings, allow people to pass through the two arcs, are

minimal yet highly individual, austere yet exceptionally forceful, linear yet able to transform the essence of a space. ... The architects [P Barragá and B de Sola], in their turn, designed two entirely different zones on either side of the wall, which further helped to underline its essential nature as a divider. ... [I]n one section [is] an open, uncluttered space of bare, warm earth On the other side of the wall is an intimate, delicate, sheltered space ... (Permanyer 1991:137).

In contrast to Serra's *Arc*, the work by Claus Oldenburg, *Match Cover*, 1992, located in an urban area of Barcelona, is inviting and functional although it too is large and constructed from metal. Rather than being an autonomous self-reflective work as was Serra's *Arc*, the intention of this work is to surprise and even delight its audience by presenting an everyday banal object as extraordinary in its unique context; but it also asks its audience to question and re-asses *the everyday*. The site is neither austere nor confrontational, nor is the work exclusive in its language; rather, it is accessible in its openness of intention, its use of bright



Claus Oldenberg & Coosje van Bruggen, *Match Cover*, 1992. Painted steel and fibreglass. La Vall d'Hebron District, Barcelona.

colour, in its function as both seating and play structures and in its uniqueness: it offers a place to rest and play while it also touches the imagination. The language is direct yet surprising. The site is sculpturally well articulated and the artist has created a functional, aesthetic and imaginative public space.

The difference between the public reception of these two works is partly due to the commissioning process. Controversy in the acceptance of public art is often caused even prior to the selection and siting of public commissions due to a lack of understanding of the role an artwork plays within a public space. This issue is dealt with in Chapter IX. Nevertheless, one could also look at the intention of the two artists. Serra's *Arc* is formalist, deals with abstract notions of time and form, and is self-referential. Presentation of everyday banal objects that require re-appraisal by their audience has always been the focus of Oldenberg's art. The ordinary made extraordinary. The latter is about a social process of interpretation. Although the process was not collaborative in approach with regard to involving the community or taking into account their ideas or possible needs, Oldenberg has nevertheless considered the site with regard to its specific publicness and created a work that invites participation and has become popular with its audience³⁹. There is a definite interplay between artwork, audience and site. The site has been articulated through a series of structures that encourage participation in one way or another, physically and conceptually. The *Match Cover* is both ordinary and absurd – this juxtaposition is more than enough to interest and absorb its audience and has created a place that encourages sociation. Adults use many of the structures as seating while watching the children who have transformed the sculptures into play structures by climbing up, sliding down and balancing along the forms. Significantly, there has been no vandalism of this work as it is appreciated and enjoyed.

³⁹This is not the case with all Oldenberg's giant sculptures which are sometimes no more than an artwork placed in an outdoor context such as the baseball bat, *The Bat* in Chicago or the *Torch* in Las Vegas, USA.



Beverly Pepper
Spiral of Trees (above) and
Fallen Sky (below), 1984 - 1990.
Earth, ceramic and plantings.
Parc de l'Estació del Nord, Barcelona

Today *play* or recreation is recognised as a human activity essential to the well-being of a society and that sites conducive to such activities are essential in any built environment. Public art is seen as a way of rehabilitating urban spaces while at the same time creating aesthetic public sites that add economic and social value to the area. However, this type of approach should also determine suitability, accessibility and intention. This was the approach taken by the city fathers of Barcelona when it was found necessary to establish social spaces within what had become a congested and decaying city. From 1982 a series of large urban spaces were developed incorporating artworks that would give each park or square an individual identity, gain prestige and add value to the community. The intention was that the presence of the artwork would create an aesthetic facility of which the people could be proud and gain international recognition. With the construction and remodelling of new spaces and squares, the City has become known as an open-air sculpture gallery. However, in many cases it has become more than an outdoor gallery for the mere display of sculptures; artists collaborating with architects and communities have created much needed public facilities that are unique in form and character, have aesthetic value and have become important spaces of conviviality and community recreation and gatherings. In 1991 Harvard University awarded the City the Prince of Wales Prize for its town planning and urban development. The relationship between space and people was an important criterion.

Many of the parks that have been developed in and around Barcelona are a combination of art, architecture and landscape design. At *Parc de l'Estació del Nord*, 1984 -1990, in the El Fort Pius district, the existing station buildings were converted into a coach station, a national theatre and as use for other civic activities, while the gardens, adjacent properties, and old railway workshops were developed into sports facilities as well as a new public park. It was a joint venture by architects A Arriola, C Fiol, E Pericas and American artist, Beverly Pepper. An environment has been created that gives expression to both the site's past and present and takes into account the whole family. Initially, even prior to the original station development, the area was reclaimed from the



Above: Architect, Peña Ganchegui, Parc de l'Espanya Industrial and the *Baths of St George's Dragon*, 1982 - 1987.

Below: Andrés Nagel, *St George's Dragon*, 1982 - 1987. Painted steel.

sea, a fact that informs these site-specific artworks. The artworks take the form of land formations, meandering markings in the ground, seating and lamp-posts. *The Spiral of Trees* revolves downward into the earth as if returning to its former site beneath the sea, while the earth and ceramic mound, *Fallen Sky* appears to be pushing up from the land (or perhaps the sea) like a huge wave. It is as if the sky is reflected in the surface of the mound. The blue ceramic cladding equates the soft colours of the Mediterranean sea and sky. Two large white ceramic walls create an entrance as if the earth is being parted and held back by the rolling foam of two huge waves, and linear formations of ceramic tiles embedded within the grassed areas, create quiet ripples. The artist chose to interpret the space through ideas of earth, sea and sky, as well as light and shadow, sun and shade to create a public place that is a unique and wonderful playground for both young and old. Not only do the artworks create an aesthetic and imaginative functional space, they recall the original site and require that visitors reflect on the dualities of life: sun and shade, above and below, permanence and change. *Spiral of Trees*, in its contained spiral space, is forming a small “pocket” forest, particularly popular with women and their young charges. *Fallen Sky*, its linear ceramic ripples and the meandering tile pathway allows the more adventurous to create their own imaginative journeys throughout the site while many of the older generation gather beneath the trees to chatter or play the traditional game of *boule* (a game similar to bowls played mainly by men in Europe).

“The Parc de l’Espanya Industrial [1982 – 1987], is the result of the fight by the people of Sants to obtain a large open space in a district of Barcelona that has always had a high density coupled with a lack of public spaces. ... The locals played a decisive part in the project ... [in which the architect] Peña Ganchegui proposed a decidedly recreational function for this park ... ” (Permanyer 1992:25). The park was constructed on the site of the old cotton mills and covers an area of 50,000 square metres in the central city district of Sants. Two main features of the development are the *Baths of St George’s Dragon*, a large artificial pool and Andrés Nagel’s public sculpture of *St George’s Dragon*. The *Dragon* is an enormous play sculpture of black painted steel.



Public plaza with paving, amphitheatre, fountain and sculpture alongside St-Eustache Church, Les Halles, Paris. Sculpture: Henri de Miller, *l'Écoute* [sa]. Carved stone.

Children ascend the stairway into the creature's mouth and escape down one of the three or four slides that present themselves from within the *bowels* of the *Dragon*. The artwork is linked directly to its site both physically and conceptually: it is a symbol of the struggle against the power structures of the City. It also takes its meaning from the patron saint of Catalonia – St George, and in turn, gives meaning to both the place and the legend of which it is a part. Physically, the children (and those adults who cannot resist the temptation) conquer the dragon in their play, psychologically the children learn *to dare* to enter a dark unknown space and exit triumphantly. The sculpture allows a sense of cyclical time and ritual to take place as time and again the children enter into and escape from the *Dragon*: it recreates and repeats history and myth. It finds a place in the culture of the community to which it belongs. The park itself provides a large recreational space for the communities living and working in the area and the artificial lake is used throughout the year for boating.

Situated between the Metro Station, the Bourse de Commerce (the Produce Exchange) and St-Eustache Church in the area of Les Halles in central Paris, is a popular open area removed from the busy traffic and bustling streets. This old market area was developed as part of a new concept of urban space. Children play, people meet and talk, sit and read, while others look and listen to the sights and sounds around them. The artist and architects have interpreted the space in paved curvilinear design, concrete, grass, quiet running water, space and sculpture, creating an imaginative amphitheatre-like plaza. As I stood on the steps looking towards the open arena, I imagined the echoing sounds and bustling movements of people in what was once the old market place delineated by the curvilinear patterns inlaid in the paving, as if I was being personified by the sculpture *l'Écoute (Listening)*, (date unknown) by Henri de Miller. The giant- size head seems to represent people throughout time who have watched life pass through this space and who have also listened to the voices of choirs and *the word* emanating from the Church. The history of the site is embedded in the simple concept of life as a stage from which to watch, listen and contemplate. Visitors to the site become both present-day actors and audiences of past dramas.



Above: Tom Otterness, *The Real World*, 1992.
Bronze.

Below: Ned Smyth, *The Upper Room*, 1987.
Concrete aggregate.

Tom Otterness takes a completely opposite view of life in his whimsical but cynical critique of the world of finance, *The Real World*, 1992. Situated at the north end of Battery Park City along the New York waterfront in close proximity to the World Financial Centre, the work creates a small enclosed, almost private, park area. It is populated with *fat cats* and *workers*, bronze-cast figures that represent power struggles between *those who have and order and those who obey*. During lunch break, it is populated by the white-collar and tie accountants who jog along the waterfront and thereafter lunch in this small pocket park that seems designed specifically for them. Laid into many of the tables are chess boards, as if the artist is further commenting on the business world as a skilled game in which one has to outwit one's opponent. The artist has created not only a public artwork that can be appreciated for its formal and aesthetic value, but has also provided facilities for local city residents and workers. This is one of the few public artworks that critique our contemporary society. It is interesting to note that those who belong to the world he critiques, are in fact the most frequent visitors.

Further south along Battery Park City, is a colonnade architectural work by Ned Smyth, *The Upper Room*, 1987. This is situated at the intersection of Albany Street and the Esplanade bounded on two sides by waterfront apartments. The style of the structural elements is reminiscent of Egyptian and temple architecture with a small enclosed altar-like roofed pergola that houses a richly embellished iconic palm. A second symbolic palm rises from the centre of the long table lined on each long side by 12 seats. Embedded in the surface of the table are six chess boards. The iconic palm motif, long central table with twelve seats and the title of the architectonic sculpture would seem to reference the Last Supper of Christ. Additionally, it offers a space in which to rest, take refuge or view the river.



Architects, Robert Hanna/Olin Ltd and Artist, Robert Maki, *Westlake Star Axis/Seven Hills*, 1988. Water, concrete, bronze and paving. Details of water feature and bronze paving plates.

The artwork is popular and successful and is both aesthetic and functional. However, its relationship to the site is not satisfactory as it is dominated by the apartment buildings that enclose the area on two sides and once the trees planted down both sides have grown, the work will be even more confined. The *place* that is created seems to need space to breathe and, while looking out to the river from within the work this sense of space is achieved. However, looking in any other direction, the experience is one of being bounded.

Built into the downtown area of central Seattle is the large open plaza area of *Westlake Star Axis/Seven Hills*, 1988. Artist Robert Maki and landscape architects Robert Hanna, Hanna/Olin, LTD participated in an extensive collaborative process with the public and several municipal departments in the redevelopment of this central park which creates pedestrian links between the park and the surrounding built areas while retaining its separate identity and place in the City. The two main features of this constructed space are the stone arched speaker's platform, and the long post and lintel structure that creates three columns and two huge walls of cascading water, the latter through which one can walk. It is not known whether the water is turned off or freezes during winter and if so, it would seem an inappropriate work. The cascading water is the artwork! Even in June, I had to return to the site several times before I was able to see the fountain working. The entire plaza is paved in red, white and grey granite stones, inlaid at intervals with bronze plates that record historical details. The area is popular as it creates a welcome open public space in a busy city and although it echoes the geometry of the city it also recalls its surrounding areas of water and the Cascade Mountains to the north.

Located between the western pedestrian entrance for the Mount Baker Tunnel and 23rd Street on the landfill over the concrete lid of the Interstate 90 Highway in the urban district of Mount Baker in Seattle, is a work by K Beckley and D Evans, *The Philosophical Promenade*, 1989. The artwork consists of twelve sets of stations or stopping points along a pathway. The stations



Left top and below: K Beckley & D Evans, *The Philosophical Promenade*, 1989. Text, stone, bronze, concrete, tarmac.

Below right: Colin Wilbourn, *The Red House*, 1993 - 1995. Carved red sandstone.



are demarcated on each side by a rock set in concrete with a philosophical quote inlaid in bronze with a plaque alongside. On each plaque is a symbolic representation of different stages of a journey bridged by two large inlaid bronze words in a concrete crossing that spans the path. Two journeys, from west to east and east to west, are overlaid on the journeys that continuously travel on the Interstate 90 below. The artists have created not only a physical pathway for pedestrians or cyclists but also compel participants to undertake one of two imaginative journeys of the mind aided by the inlaid words and concepts. Even the youngest of travellers are able to access the journeys as they follow the rocks that start low at both ends and gradually increase in height to the centre. These are journeys that are travelled in play amongst the young and shared in thought with those who meet along the way. The physical artwork is immediate and accessible; the experience of the work is more complex and more enduring.

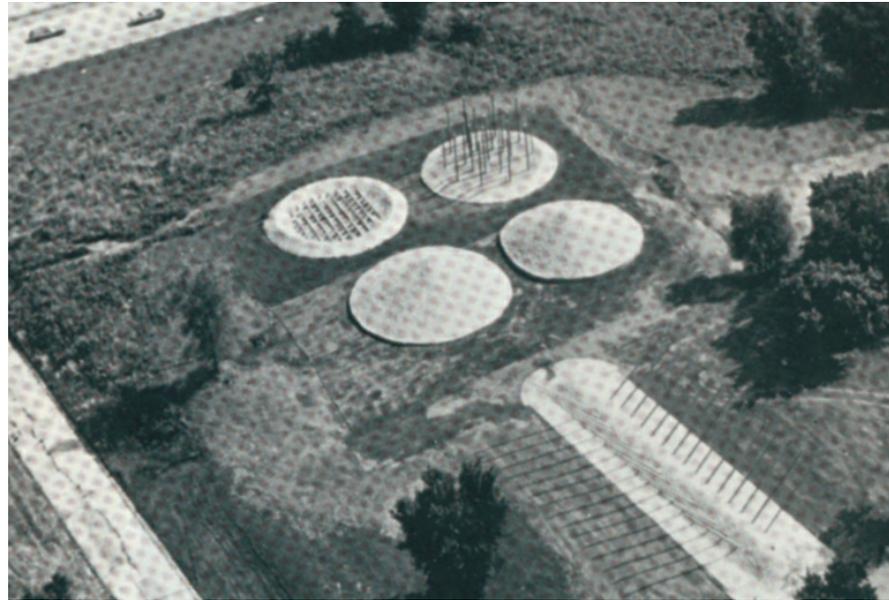
One of the most successful public artworks that turned a space into a particularised place in the interest of its public, is *The Red House*, 1993 - 1995 by Colin Wilbourn at St Peter's Riverside in Sunderland, North England. Wilbourn was commissioned initially as artist-in-residence, to conduct a feasibility study for a public art programme that would include the entire area of St Peter's Riverside waterfront as part of an extensive redevelopment along the River Wear. This resulted in a seven-year long arts programme with several permanent public artworks and many related community programmes being completed⁴⁰.

The Red House is situated along the waterfront pathway/cycle path at the central edge of a new housing development. Carved from red sandstone, reclaimed from the old Queen Alexandra Bridge, this artwork references an earlier period of the Barbary Coast prior to the shipbuilding industry, when this was a densely populated residential area. *The Red House* portrays an old

⁴⁰See: Part II, Section II, St Peter's Riverside Sculpture Project in "*Place-making*" and *public art in urban areas*.

Victorian house carved in stone with various pieces of furniture, carpets, household and personal objects, and a “leather” jacket hanging on the handle of the front door. The ruins represent the centre of the old house; it has now become the hearth and home of the new housing estate, a meeting place, popular with young and old. The place is familiar to all, the local community and visitors alike: ordinary household objects, while perhaps antique, are known to all, reminders of and memories from the past. It references history. Part of the popularity and acceptance of the artwork is that local communities were fully involved in the collaborative process.

The works discussed thus far relate to public recreational places in cities and urban areas. They all invite participation one way or another. The viewer cannot passively view the artwork; one has to become involved in the space which in turn alters one’s perception of the place. The artists have contrived to adjust the viewer’s understanding of place and time. Besides that of *place-making*, of creating physical imaginative spaces for public use by both young and old, the intentions of the artists discussed was to assist in sociation, in providing places in which people can interact and thereby create a sense of community and well-being. In addition to the above sited permanent artworks, are children’s playgrounds. The provision of children’s play areas has developed from those large flat open areas in which to run around, to those that are articulated and provide various types of spaces and structures. As an art form, the concept of *the playground* has become a space in which children are being encouraged to exercise their natural capacity for invention and make-believe. Play and ritual could be considered closely related activities by the fact of their continually repeated performances. It is also interesting to note that the forms and configurations that play activities assume, are similar to those found in the ancient sites of traditional societies: the circle becomes a *den* or a place of sanctuary; the tree, tree stump or pole becomes a centre or marker; the line demarcates a safe space; while the spiral configuration is often formed



Dale Eldred, *Cypress and Thirtieth Street Park*, 1971 - 1974.
Earth, stone, wood. (Coe 1978:107, 102, 106)

in group movement; and the mound is a structure to climb and conquer. Structures that in themselves are abstract are frequently able to spark the imagination and initiate play.

Cypress and Thirtieth Street Park, (1971 – 1974) designed by Dale Eldred is one such park that encourages the child's innate creative and imaginative sensibility. It was constructed in central Kansas City on a disused city lot. Simple conical stone structures, inverted conical pits, a long low rectangular stone mound and embedded wooden poles are arranged in a symmetrical order in the park. The geometric placement of abstract forms would seem to encourage repetition of activities while at the same time, allow for the disorder of play. The use of materials and forms is reminiscent of ancient burial sites and stone structures. The artist has converted an abandoned site into a safe and unique space for the specific purposes of providing an area of play and recreation in which the structures allow children to create their own imaginative games.

A redevelopment of a totally different kind is that of the *Gas Works Park*, 1972 – 1978, by landscape architect R Haag in Seattle overlooking Lake Union. The old gas works plant (the only industrial site conversion park in the world) has been turned into a fantastical mechanical play factory in which any child can imagine diving to the bottom of the sea in a unique machine, or boring to the centre of the earth in another craft-like contraption. Rather than demolish the plant, it was decided to preserve the site and “the unique industrial structures and to recycle the site into an urban, intensely used pleasure ground. The gas generator towers were held to be ‘sacred’ to the site for historic, aesthetic, symbolic and utilitarian values. ... The former exhauster-compressor building, now the Children's Playbarn, features a maze of machines, ‘ironmongery’, in brightly painted colors” (Miyagi & Yokohari 1990:92). There is also an outdoor play area and the boiler house was converted into a Picnic Shelter, an open dance



Architect, R Haag, *Gas Works Park*, 1972 - 1978.
Top detail: (Miyagi & Yokohari 1990: 93)



floor and a mezzanine stage for musical events. The park is popular both for its facilities and its historical value. Both *Cypress* and *Gas Works Parks* rely on the imaginative powers of the child to extend the possibilities of play.

Chapter III has focused on place-making as a criterion for public artworks and its potential to assist in sociation. This is based on an understanding of the relationship between the person and his or her experience of the place. Although many artworks in rural areas are also concerned with place-making, many are concerned alternatively with practical and functional implications such as providing seating, gateways, and other such facilities.

CHAPTER IV

Public Art in a Rural Context and its Partnership with Locality.

The previous chapter presented ideas and concerns related to place-making in city and urban contexts. This chapter investigates rural environments that have been transformed through the intervention of artists who, by focusing on the familiar, give new meaning and perspective to the world in which we live. Artists, taking cognisance of this potential of art in a public context, have been able to identify and capture the spirit of the place, thereby celebrating its uniqueness by evoking references to local culture. These activities are supported by the belief that culture and recreation contribute to the common good and well-being of society and should thus be available to all. Interpretation of site and social process are essential to the acceptance of these artworks that are frequently concerned with the provision and practical implications of seating, gateways, drinking fountains, pathways and other functional facilities.

Art projects and public artworks in rural environments become statements regarding the relationship between the people, the place, *nature* and about local culture. Ideally, artworks in rural areas should enhance the particularity of the surroundings by exploring the locally typical. These works should accord local history and environmental issues, as well as the character of the place and its people, a place in public consciousness rather than always burying this *localness* or culture in museums and libraries. François Matarasso, writer and an associate researcher in urban strategy and cultural policy, states,

Rural culture is different from urban culture – quieter perhaps, more reflective and closer to its own past and the elemental forces which we shelter from in cities... . Is it inevitable that this alternative way of imagining and expressing experience should be marginalized by louder, urban voices? That would be

lamentable ... because cultural diversity is, in its own way, as important to the future of humanity as biological diversity. (in Douglas 2002:27-28).

Matarasso is concerned with an approach to the conservation of arts and culture that “values diversity in itself ... and sees traditional rural cultures as a crucial part of our rich personal and shared identities. ... [An approach that] would value rural culture as the unique expressions of human experience and a source of great pleasure and deep satisfaction” (in Douglas 2002:29). The majority of public art in rural environments is based directly on the local cultural context of its site. It is this fact that differentiates these artworks from those of built environments

Married to these concerns for the conservation of culture, local history and local identities of place, is the concern for living in harmony with the earth and each other. Tim Beatly, associate professor in environmental planning, and consultant Kristy Manning, in their publication *Ecology of place* express the following concerns:

this dilemma [destruction of the planet] stems from competing visions of the future. ... one of continuing to accommodate the march of low-density, auto-dependent, sprawling growth; facilitating the loss of natural landscapes that sustain us and other life on the planet; ... witnessing the continuing decline in the bonds of community and the quality of our living conditions.

But there is an alternative vision, one that imagines a different future. This future is one in which land is consumed sparingly, landscapes are cherished, and cities and towns are compact and vibrant and green. These are places that have much to offer in the way of social, cultural, and recreational activity, where the young and the old are not marginalized, and where there is a feeling of community, an active civic life, and a concern for social justice. In these communities, the automobile has been tamed, many transportation

options exist (including public transport and walking), and fundamental human mobility and freedom are enhanced. ... [this] vision is about creating places citizens can be proud of – places of enduring value

At the same time that this alternative vision explicably connects human settlement patterns to ecological conditions, so too does it emphasize the needs of humans and the quality of human communities. ... Just as it seeks to protect, sustain, and restore the environment, it also strives to create livable, inspiring, enduring, and equitable places ... where the quality of life and the long-term quality of human existence will be enhanced rather than degraded. Hence, there is unity of purpose in the vision of sustainable places that is at once environmental and ecological, as well as social and human, in its orientation (1997:1-2).

Many of the collaborative art projects that have resulted in artworks placed in rural settings are based on similar aims and visions: the need for the conservation of cultural heritage and local identities through the development of places that encourage and promote these aims. *Place-making* is the intention, but not however, as in city and urban contexts which is about creating a sense of place within the limited and, in many instances, lack of local identity of the area of the artwork. The aim of these rural projects in Britain is to create an understanding and awareness over an extended area or region, along a bridle or cycle path, in a forest, through the hills, alongside a river and its surrounds, through a wetland, across the moors and along a coastal walk. These works seldom have labels to contextualise them as art and are often discovered by chance along a pathway. Such initiatives and artworks frequently create new local landmarks, a role acknowledged by Common Ground⁴¹ in their *New Milestones Project* that is about “what places mean to people who live in them, about how to express that meaning in an imaginative and accessible way through sculpture” (Morland 1988:15).

⁴¹Common Ground, a small NGO and charity organisation in the UK, was established in 1983 with two main objectives: to promote the importance of their common cultural heritage – common plants and animals, familiar and local places, local distinctiveness and the links with the past; and to explore the emotional value these things have for people by forging practical and philosophical links between the arts and the conservation of nature and landscapes (King & Clifford 1985: no pagination).

An artwork in a rural context does not have to be monumental in stature. It does not need to compete with the landscape, nor is the concept of permanence a criterion. Rather, it is the relationship to its context and its site that makes a work successful; the passing public more readily accept modest unassuming or even humorous works and enjoy the experience and the immediacy of participation or a reference to the past. Functionality has also become increasingly apparent in these works as seating, way-markers, stepping-stones, bridges, drinking fountains and other similar features. “Just as a milestone or wayside cross becomes a small scale landmark, taking its meaning from where it is, so these commissions [artworks] focus a place The work ... has reflected a plurality of style and medium, united by the need to relate in theme and material to place, and be a sympathetic part of the landscape” (Miles 1989:136).

In many instances, people do not immediately recognise the works as art but become acquainted with them as they interact with the artworks rather than merely passively observing the works, as in a gallery or a sculpture garden. Diverse interactions encouraging spontaneous responses are elicited by the artworks that have been commissioned for the many well-structured systems of paths and trails for walking, hiking and cycling in woodland, forest and rural areas and across wild regions of lakes, moors and mountain countryside throughout Britain. The artworks provide rich examples of the variety of roles that can operate in a rural environment, ranging from the esoteric to the popular. Many of these rural initiatives were developed with the aims of encouraging people to venture outdoor, to encourage walking and cycling as healthy activities, to rekindle a relationship with nature, and to develop an understanding of the interconnectedness between all living things within the universe. These works are aligned with a world-wide view of probably one of the most agreed global issues of eco awareness.

A FOUR DAY WALK

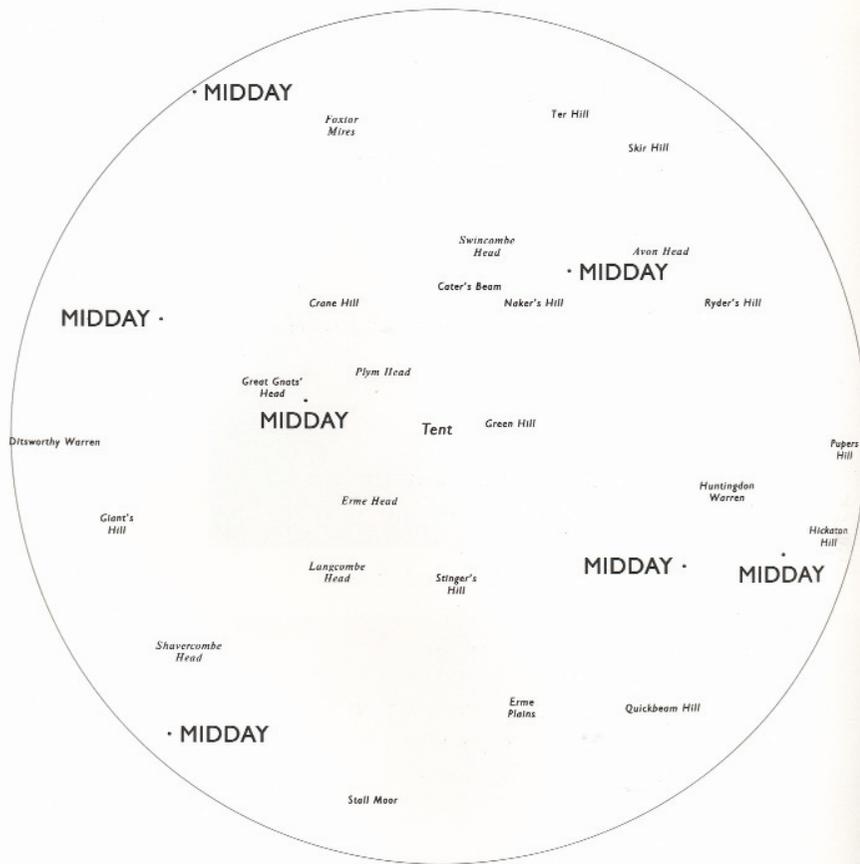
A LINE OF GROUND 94 MILES LONG

ROAD STONY TRACK ROAD GRASS FIELD
ROAD BARE ROCK LANE ROAD STONY PATH
HEATHER BURNT MOOR STONY PATH ROAD
ROUGH GRASSLAND RIVERBED SHEEPTRACKS EARTH WALL
ROUGH GRASSLAND GRASS FIELDS BRAMBLES GRASS FIELD
ROAD WOODLAND PATH ROAD DUSTY LANE
ROAD GRASS FIELDS EARTH PATH ROAD
SAND BEACH CLIFF PATH ROAD ROCKS
CLIFF PATH SAND DUNES SAND PATH EARTH PATH
ROAD OLD RAILWAY TRACK MUD FLATS SEA WALL
MUD FLATS ROAD RIVERBANK ROAD

ENGLAND 1980

Richard Long

*A Seven Day Circle of Ground, 1984. Text. (left) and
A Four Day Walk, 1980. Text. (above) (Fuchs 1986: 214, 152)*



A SEVEN DAY CIRCLE OF GROUND

SEVEN DAYS WALKING WITHIN AN IMAGINARY CIRCLE 5½ MILES WIDE

DARTMOOR ENGLAND 1984

The involvement with the site inextricably binds this rural public art to its site both physically and conceptually. The viewer becomes part of the site and an active participant in the experience of the work. The approach to these works is similar to that of the early land artists discussed in Chapter I who were a major influence on contemporary artists working in the land. One of the most important of these land artists was Robert Smithson. The ongoing process of a work of art reflects his concern for a continuous relationship between human life and nature. Howard Smagula says that Robert Smithson's

concept of art included a new role for the viewer: directly experiencing the earth and contemplating the contemporary landscape. ... A new, more public art was necessary according to Smithson – not more large-scale traditional sculpture, but work that forced issues and provided new realizations about ugliness and beauty, progress and destruction. Robert Smithson's art was public in the sense that it was accessible to anyone who thought about and confronted the ideas and experiences it contained. Consequently his art, like knowledge, could never be owned, only understood. His earthworks functioned as services, bringing us new perceptions and feelings about the earth, industrial development, and our relationships to society (Smagula 1983:277).

British artist, Richard Long, has also been working in the land since the early 1960s but is concerned with his direct experience of and relationship to the land. His artworks are the activity of walking, the process itself. Unlike the monumental statements of American earthworks such as those of Robert Smithson's *Spiral Jetty*, 1970, Great Salt Lake, Utah and Michael Heizer's *Double Negative*, 1969 -70 Nevada Desert, which are reliant on photo-documentation of the artworks because of the inaccessibility of their sites in vast open spaces, Long's prime method of presentation is also 2-dimensional but becomes an extension of Long's intimate walks. The 2-dimensional artwork does not provide an image of the work but owes its existence to the abstract and conceptual nature of the work. In works such as *A Seven Day Circle of Ground*, 1984, and *A Four Day Walk*, 1980, activity is the artwork, the experience of the act – walking from one place to another is the *artwork*. These acts are experiences which Long wishes



Richard Long, *A Six Day Walk over all Roads, Lanes and Double Tracks inside a Six Mile Wide Circle Centred on the Giant of Cerne Abbas*, 1975. England. Photography, text, drawing and map. (Fuchs 1986:85)

to share with the spectator through photographic images of *place*, and/or the *demarcation of a journey* on a map, and/or printed *word-images*. The image of place becomes a metaphor for the walk; the demarcation of the journey presents time and place; and the printed word evokes an experience of the site or journey. The spectator responds by imagining his own interpretation of place, recalling similar past experiences and his own spiritual and emotional responses to nature during a walk. Walking in circles and straight lines are activities that connote rituals and recreational practices that place the person in touch with nature. In *A Six Day Walk over all Roads, Lanes and Double Tracks inside a Six Mile Wide Circle Centred on the Giant of Cerne Abbas*, 1975, time becomes a ritual re-enactment of personal experiences with nature. The printed word-image, map or photograph is more than a visual rendering of fact, it becomes a ritualistic reminder of past places, historical markers, experiences and activities.

It is debatable whether Long's 2-dimensional presentations have the ability to convey the experience of the artwork. Photography and the 2-dimensional images offer more than a means of presenting a record of events; they offer modes of presentation that provide the spectator with an alternative perception of the artwork⁴². The 2-dimensional format cannot equate the artwork instead it becomes a visual metaphor or equivalent, a selected vision, and the transformation of the *actual* into an *evocation* of place, time and experience. Photography, in its capacity to render reality, has the potential to portray facts and images in ways that surpass the *factual* and *ordinary*. In addition to presenting an image of what is purportedly real (sound, weather, time and experience are excluded), the photographic medium makes the impermanent permanent and by focusing attention on certain visual information, the photograph presents a limited and specific image. By framing a particular vista and eliminating the surroundings, vision is

⁴²These 2-dimensional works can be seen as romantic renderings, as evoking nostalgia for wild places and past landscapes, and can be compared to the intentions of contemporary public art in rural environments to rekindle society's interest in nature and the interconnectedness of the living planet. These issues are discussed later in this chapter.



Richard Long, *Stones on Inishmore Aran Island*, 1975. Britain. Photograph. (Fuchs 1986:81)

condensed and, because of the visual emphasis, the image becomes demarcated and exaggerated and often evokes the sublime. In the work of Richard Long, the photograph and its caption and/or accompanying text express the character of place and experience. The photographic image of *Stones on Inishmore Aran Islands*, 1975, presents the spectator with a vista that combines ruggedness and spectacle from which the spectator is, to a certain extent, able to construe the event. However, the spectator subconsciously has to draw on previous experiences or the imagination in order to interpret and respond to visual information. This requires a personal intimate interaction between the artwork and the spectator despite the inaccessibility of the work. Simon Field, in examining the work of Richard Long, states that:

One is ... left with images and a presence that are extremely poetic, expressive of particular places, scale and time ... that behind this immediate poetry is a resonance that carries far beyond the gallery in which we stand, each work implies and involves all his others and ... 'earthworks' from another time and another place (Field 1973:15).

Part of the fascination of Long's work is its associative references to the past and to the land itself, partly the choice of impressive sublime spaces or landscapes, and partly the making process: Long merely *touches the earth*, rearranges material, or walks out a line which he then presents 2-dimensionally as photographic or 2-dimensional images. Both the process and these new 2-dimensional images become the artworks. The works remain elusive yet simultaneously accessible firstly, in the way they blend and harmonise with the environment, and secondly, in their 2-dimensional visual renderings. The sense of *the romantic* cannot be denied and it is this nostalgia that is closely linked to contemporary environmental art, the desire to be *in nature*, to be alone and commune with nature.

The concept of walking plays an essential role in many of the contemporary public art projects in rural Britain as many of these initiatives are situated along the walking, hiking and cycle paths crisscrossing the country. The allure and romance of nature is still prevalent and popular in Britain and has the ability *to attract* and even *to call to action*. “Many rural locations are cherished precisely because they appear unaffected by human intervention of any kind. The threat of sculptural intrusion becomes even greater when the area is as superlative as Dorset⁴³, where the gaunt yet lovely landscape is honoured for its sense of an unbroken link with primordial origins” (Cork in Morland 1988:10). There is a strong sense of ownership of common land in Britain as can frequently be seen when actions and protests are organised by local people when traditional “right of access”⁴⁴ to pathways, bridle paths and common land across privately owned property have been denied. Walking allows one to connect with nature, to indulge in a romantic view of wild places and open countryside.

Common Ground’s *New Milestones Project* is possibly the most successful and most closely aligned to the idea of walking and the romance of the land. In presenting the aims of this project, Clifford and King state that the intentions are to rekindle an interest in local distinctiveness and to emphasise that today’s feelings about everyday landscapes are important and can be explored imaginatively to initiate new contemporary cultural touchstones that connect with the past (in Morland 1998:15, 19). They argue that landscapes have been socially constructed throughout time, are not static and primordial, and that the land reveals many clues to an understanding of the past, the present and the evolution of culture. Further, they bemoan the fact that over the last four decades “we have extended our technical capacities and economic rapaciousness to change the land for all time” (1998:16). Deep

⁴³Dorset, South England, was the venue for the first of the sculptures placed by the New Milestones Project.

⁴⁴Countryside Rights of Way Act 2000: this act protects the right of passage across public or privately owned land of approximately 105 000 miles of pathways and tracks across Britain and are officially recorded on maps (Countryside Agency 2000).



**Peter Randall-Page, *The Wayside Carvings, II*, 1986. Dorset England. Purbeck marble.
(E McFall, postcard commissioned by Trustees of the Weld Estate)**

ploughing, heavy machinery, bulldozers, fertilisers and pesticides have destroyed the fauna and flora and are being replaced by farming, industry, commerce, transport and housing that become ever more greedy for land. The *New Milestones Project* and other similar projects are attempts to address this “rape of the British countryside” and alter this situation by imaginatively celebrating local distinctiveness as a starting point for local action.

Dorset was selected for the first artworks for the *New Milestones Project* as the history and pre-history of the landscape is still very apparent. These histories become the basis on which the project is based. The concept for these new “milestones” is that they draw on the past, become relevant to the present, link time and locations, and enrich the future. The Weld Estate was identified by Common Ground as a possibility as it includes two well-visited beauty spots, Durdle Door and Lulworth Cove, while a five-mile stretch of the Dorset Heritage Coast Path along the edge of the chalk cliffs offers enormous vistas of open downlands under cultivation, stretches of beach, and expanses of sea to the distant horizons. Peter Randall-Page accepted the invitation and liaised with the Estate manager, local farmers and workers in the area. This particular region of Dorset is famous for its abundance of fossils and the chalk cliffs also consist of tiny fossils. Randall-Page states he “liked the idea of making a kind of tribute to the ancient lives which now constitute our terra firma” (in Morland 1988:29). He chose to work with local Purbeck marble, a very hard limestone, blue in colour consisting entirely of tiny fossilised gastropod shells. This stone was used extensively for carvings in churches and cathedrals and the artist felt that, as one of the most beautiful native stones in Britain, “the look of preciousness that this material has would enhance the sense of intimacy [he] wanted to achieve” (in Morland 1988:32).

Small chambers were built into three sections of dry stone-walling using this Purbeck stone. A local craftsman assisted in the building of these fragments of stone-walling that were placed within the bank of a bridleway far enough apart from each other as not to be seen yet close enough to become part of a group of related works. *The Wayside Carvings, I, II, and III*, 1985, are each placed in a niche, in the traditional manner of presenting sculptures in cathedrals and wayside shrines throughout Europe. The presentation is important to the interpretation of these objects and their relationship to their local distinctiveness. Both the fragments of wall and the shell-like forms bridge geological time. The niche makes reference to the “specialness” and protects the shells as delicate traces of the past.

The Forestry Commission in Britain initiated a similar sculpture project in the Forest of Dean, *Stand and Stare*, with the intention of encouraging visitors not only to visit the forest but experience a deeper enjoyment and gain a better understanding of a working forest. The title of the project, *Stand and Stare*, references WH Davies’ poem *Leisure* in which he contemplates the poverty of our lives “we have no time to stand and stare” at the wonders of the world around us. Selected artists were invited to submit proposals for artworks that would interpret the forest and encourage visitors to explore its particular environment. The stated objective was the “experience of visitors”, to encourage the public to pause and contemplate their surroundings and establish *a sense of the place*. A walking trail of about two to three hours duration links the sculptures on a circular route. Place-making was the aim and as with other rural projects, the visitor is able to identify varying aspects of the local distinctiveness within differing artworks. The forest has a rich industrial history connected with charcoal, coal and iron in addition to cultural heritage and physical characteristics and the artists have incorporated this localness into the conceptual interpretation of the environment. By focusing on the familiar, the artworks in these public spaces of this working forest give new meaning and perspective to their context. Visitors are constantly asked to re-evaluate their understanding of and relationship to the forest.



Top left: Bruce Allan, *Observatory*, 1988. Wood.

Top centre: Keir Smith, *The Iron Road*, 1986.
Wood, metal.

Top right: Peter Appleton, *Melissa's Swing*, 1986.
Mixed media.

Left : David Nash, *Black Dome*, 1986. Wood.

Trails and routes of any kind are generally signposted and Ian Hamilton Finlay's *Grove of Silence*, 1988, plays metaphorically with this idea. Instead of directing your physical journey, he instructs you to halt your journey or be "still of mind" in order to move forward or fully assimilate your environment. The work is enigmatic. Silence is a concept that is unattainable as there is always sound even if the person remains silent. The work could be entirely overlooked as a sculpture but nevertheless forces the visitor to re-assess his or her position within this context and focuses on the issue of "the heightening of awareness".

Throughout the Forest visitors are constantly required to re-assess their understanding of and response to *the place* and the role of art in this particular context. Tradition has been discarded; conventional expectations of site, material, form and function are challenged. Participation is expected and the visitor is compelled to interact with the artwork – how can you resist the temptation to climb a "staircase to nowhere"? Curiosity forces you to interact with Bruce Allan's *Observatory*, 1988. At the top of this staircase, you are confronted by only yourself and your relationship to the forest. Similarly, both Keir Smith's *The Iron Road*, 1986, and Peter Appleton's *Melissa's Swing*, 1986, also demand participation. They act as reminders of childhood activities: railroad sleepers hold a fascination for people of all ages and most visitors delight in "giant-stepping" along the track or taking turns on the swing as nostalgia evokes the need to connect with the simple pleasures of childhood. The context adds to these temptations: coming upon these artworks in this unusual situation is unexpected and together with being in nature and in a forest, heightening the sense of the romantic.

Inherent to the forest, is a cyclical process of decay and regeneration. This is the identity of the forest, its changing character according to time and the seasons. Some artists have consciously dealt with the transience of materials through the processes of time. Working with natural materials, they anticipate these changes as part of the intention of the artworks as in *Black Dome*, 1986.

The wooden elements have weathered and are increasingly being covered by moss and lichen and the artwork has assumed the character of the many ancient burial mounds to be found throughout the countryside. This transience exposes the fragility of the ecosystem of this natural environment and decay becomes the history of the place as the forest reclaims itself.

The variety of ideas and materials offered by the sculptures in the Forest of Dean is an essential aspect of this project, providing conceptual challenges yet avoiding the alienation that could occur if visitors encountered too many works that might seem entirely enigmatic. Overlays and fragments of history, past and present, fact and fable, as well as *the place* itself, its natural elements, the flora, fauna, water, wood and stone, are all built into the works to sustain a sense of the local distinctiveness of place. The artworks are “of the forest”. This gives the artworks an authenticity and creates positive reactions between people, the place and the artworks.

A project with similar aims as those of the Forest of Dean, is *Art and the Travelling Landscape* initiated by Sustrans: paths for people⁴⁵. The overall objective is to create safe walking and cycling paths that link cities and towns with the countryside. The aims are to encourage people of all ages to walk or cycle wherever possible to lessen the dependence on the motorcar and change attitudes towards sustaining safer, cleaner, pleasant environments for living. Artworks and public facilities were commissioned to increase the popularity and pleasure of using these routes. Sustrans believes that “the popular success of any route is determined by its quality. This is a function not only of the smoothness of its surface and its safety ... but also of its continuity, its convenience, its attractiveness and its status in the minds of the public” (Sustrans Report [sa]:no pagination). The network of paths is public space and resource that is accessible to all. Artworks, facilities and access points are commissioned to make these routes pleasurable and memorable, creating *popular places and particularised journeys*.

⁴⁵Sustrans (sustainable transport) is a charity organisation that builds safe traffic-free routes connecting with traffic-calmed and minor roads, existing paths, parks and green corridors linking built environments and countryside throughout Britain.



Top: Gordon Young, *Gaius Sentius*, [sa].
Carved stone.

Below: Steve Joyce, *Brief Encounters*, [sa].
Recycled steel.

Synonomous with the other projects discussed in this chapter, the intention is not to create a particularised isolated place but to provide an overall journey in which the traveller can pass from one area to another, take pleasure in difference, appreciate the open vistas offered, and be able to identify with the context of these varying yet connected identities of place. It is anticipated that these journeys engender an understanding of people's relationship to, responsibility for and interconnectedness with the land. One of the many benefits of these routes was the opportunity of *taking art to the people*. The enormous increase in the numbers of people using this network of paths is an indication of the success of this initiative.

The Bristol to Bath Cycle Route was the first route to be constructed between 1979 and 1986 on the track bed of the former Midlands Railway. The sculpture project was initiated after construction. Seating, information posts and sculptures with drinking fountains were installed as regular features along the route. The most popular drinking fountain is the artwork by Gordon Young, titled *Gaius Sentius*, (date unknown), accompanied by two stone benches. Located at the junction where the path crosses the old Roman road, it has become a local landmark that not only delights its visitors in its offering of water and in its giant scale, but also in its references to the earlier Roman inhabitants revelling in festivities. *Brief Encounters*, (date unknown), by Steve Joyce is another work that enchants its audiences and recalls the imaginings of journeys and of situations that have befallen “these passengers held in thought” as they wait endlessly on the old abandoned platform. Both these works are figurative and are easily interpreted: visitors are comfortable in decoding and understanding the works. The artworks are of the locality, belong to their sites and their acceptance is guaranteed. In addition, installation has been well considered: materials are durable and the surrounding areas need no additional maintenance.



Poet, Tony Charles and Letter-cutter, Andrew Whittle, *Albert Street Cutting*, [sa]. Bridgewater South England. Text.

The River Parrett Trail Partnership, initiated in 1994, is a collaboration between many interested parties and employs a diverse range of projects aimed at promoting awareness and enriching understanding of the unique ecosystems present in the area. The projects encourage the relationship and synergy between people, communities, local industries and the environment with the river as a central and binding focus. The trail and the river pass through one of Britain's most ecologically sensitive and fragile environments, the Somerset Levels and Moors where the demands of agriculture and wildlife are carefully balanced to sustain the indigenous fauna and flora. The arts play a very quiet and subtle role in the overall scheme. The walking trail leads visitors alongside the river, past wetlands, withy beds, ancient and historical sites, medieval churches and architecture, orchards, farmlands, rhymes, flood-control canals, pumping stations and locks, including many local craft studios and home industries. Artists have been

commissioned to produce functional works such as bridges, stiles and seating as well as sculptures, brass engravings and creative features that interpret and reflect the local culture and countryside.

The individual works are relatively small in scale in relation to the previous projects discussed and tend to support and unobtrusively underline the overall intention. The brass engravings, *Clues on the River Parrett*, (date unknown), affirm this in their scale and locations. They are to be found on the side of signposts, inset into bridges and walls and attached to doorposts. These artworks/rubbings were introduced as participatory clues that provide fascinating information about particular locations along the river. In order to acquire a complete edition of these artworks, it is necessary to walk and follow the trail and personally create your own edition of each artwork by taking rubbings of the brass engravings. *The Albert Street Cutting*, (date unknown), by poet Tony Charles and master letter-cutter Andrew Whittle, was the result of a collaboration with children and other groups in the area

to produce a text artwork that expresses the tenacity of the workmen of the past. Although the cutting is positioned within the town, it is separated from the built environment and retains its sense of a rural environment and expresses a pre-industrial life-style. The text, carved *in situ* onto the beams, pays homage to and recalls the images of the past.

The discussion has indicated that public art in a rural context deals with more than place-making: the intention is to create an understanding of the overall area rather than focus on the limited space occupied by each work. Each work becomes a part of or stopping place within the whole journey that seen together, frames a larger vista of the surrounding area and cultural context.

CHAPTER V

The Greening of Art: Ecology and Reclamation.

The reasons for the continued relevance of ecologically concerned art are a sign of the times, a sign of global awareness and a sign of a world searching for reconciliation with nature. Contemporary society's concern seems to be with progress and economic development at the expense and destruction of the greater natural planet. It is this latter behaviour that is an inevitable concern and is at the core of much contemporary environmental art. American environmental artist, Alan Sonfist states: "Art has always reflected the questioning of a society by itself and often takes an active role in the search for the answer to those questions" (1983:xi). This is even more noticeable in the 21st century with ongoing processes of critique being a central issue in these ecological artworks that are rooted both in cultural history and the natural sciences. These processes engender the idea of the future as well as change and the results of change. The development of ecological art reflects the inherent aspects of social and political activism. While restoring natural and urban sites, these artists redefine their role in society as activists. Most ecologically concerned artworks are urban renewal projects sponsored by public or private institutions and are collaborative ventures between clients, artists and communities. Art offers alternative unique approaches that provide these creative activists new ways to synthesise art, nature and life. Through collaboration and research of local, cultural, historical and natural identity of the site, the creative process becomes multifaceted and layered with metaphorical and visual expressions that interpret and equate the dynamics of the local and social distinctiveness of the place.

In the Introduction to *Fragile ecologies*, the publication that accompanied the exhibition of the same name, curator of Queens Museum of Art, New York City, Barbara Matilsky states:

Artists are in a unique position to effect such environmental changes [revitalisation of urban waste sites for people and for other forms of life] because they can synthesize new ideas and communicate connections between many disciplines. They are pioneering a holistic approach to problem solving that transcends the narrow limits of specialization. Since art embodies freedom of thought, spirit, and expression, its creative potential is limitless. Art changes the way people look at reality. In its most positive mode, art can offer alternative visions (1992:3).

Matilsky believes that an understanding of ecology is essential for the survival of the planet. She states that art, ritual and myth developed as a need to secure a sacred connection to the earth and that the emergence of environmental art has re-established this vital link to nature, in which

contemporary artists actually restore or re-create natural ecosystems. Their artworks are located in or near major cities. Landfills, vacant urban lots, rivers, wetlands, the continental shelf – these are all creatively undergoing remediation and reclamation by artists. Not only are many of these sites made inviting for native species of plants and animals, they are conceived as public spaces where people can develop a closer relationship with nature (1992:4).

By the early 1970s, environmental art was playing an influential role in land reclamation with Robert Smithson being one of the first artists to work in this field. Lucy Lippard says that Smithson's art was also public "in its drive to communicate the ideas he made physical about the nature of nature, of land use, history, time and civilization" (in Hobbs 1981:33). Before his death in 1973, Robert Smithson worked on several ideas for land reclamation projects. *Broken Circle/Spiral Hill*, 1971, constructed in a disused sand quarry in Emmen, Holland. It is unfortunately the only reclamation project that Smithson was given an opportunity to complete, although the site was not originally conceived of as a reclamation project. Because of its popularity, the people of Emmen voted to preserve the work. Smithson felt that art should mediate between ecology and industry. John Coplans states that Smithson

believed that “the artist could become a functional worker within society, changing the socioeconomic [sic] basis of art by restoring to it an everyday function within the society; and making an art that restored to the common man his sense of place in the world” (in Hobbs 1981:48). His opinions regarding devastated mining areas for reclamation however, were opposed to the rehabilitation of a site. He felt that art should not “cover up” the exploitation of land but that recycling the site as Earth Art was a practical solution that is, reclaiming land as art. Inherent to these works would be notions of process and time, the changing of the earthworks over time. Rather than attempting to recreate idyllic landscapes, Smithson’s proposed devastated lands become earth art that “would provide a focus that would have positive visual value, and call attention to the surrounding reclamation process” (Hobbs, 1981:217). These works would become focal points on which people could reflect about devastation. This last factor may well be the reason why his proposals submitted to mining companies were never commissioned as their exploitation of the land would be exposed. Hobbs states that “Smithson’s work [and proposals for land reclamation] emphasized the changes, establishing and maintaining a dialectic between industrial ravage and bucolic reclamation, acting as a fulcrum to keep in suspension the two opposing states” (1981:219).

In 1979, land reclamation was the theme of a sculpture symposium held in King County, USA. The intention was the “rehabilitation of technologically abused land,” a major problem in the county:

The County was pursuing an active land-use policy. Earthwork artists did have a vision and the tools to propose aesthetic solutions to industrially abused land. Public opinion in the area had shown strong concern both for the arts and the environment. What could be more natural than a marriage between these two concerns (King County Arts Commission 1979:7).

In response to this proposed “marriage”, many artists expressed concern about the complicity of reclamation projects and the possibility of absolving the company from restoring the land. At the symposium, titled *Earthworks: land reclamation as sculpture*, Robert Morris addressed this issue of ethics especially as earth art was being promoted as “cost-effective alternatives to more traditional modes of reclamation” (*Earthworks: land reclamation as sculpture*, 1979:7). He further discusses the implications of such thinking:

The most significant implication of art as land reclamation is that art can and should be used to wipe away technological guilt. Do those sites scarred by mining or poisoned by chemicals now seem less like the entropic liabilities of ravenous and short-sighted industry and more like long-awaited aesthetic possibilities? Will it be a little easier in the future to rip up the landscape ... if an artist can be found to transform the devastation into an inspiring and modern work of art? (1979:16).

Matilsky comments that earthworks are seldom site-specific or address life-support systems and that they ignore the need for problem solving and for understanding how nature works (1992:47). However, in the commission for the rehabilitation of a four-acre gravel pit, *Untitled*, 1979, Morris purposely emphasised the land formation resulting from the mining activities, echoing the series of descending slopes, employing a method of terracing which has been used in ancient as well as present times. This method has produced “sites of such widely varying context and purpose as palaces and strip mines, highway embankments and mountainside cultivation. Persian and Mogul gardens were terraced as were the vast amphitheatres of *Muyu-uray* in Peru” (King County Arts Commission, 1979:27). Past and present merge in an art form which has at the same time a dialectical relationship to the site and serves a public function.



Left: Parc de la Creueta del Coll from the top of the quarry. Located off Cartago Mare deu del Coll, Vallcarca District, Barcelona.

Above: Eduardo Chillida, *In Praise of Water*, 1987. Concrete.

In Barcelona, the reclamation of the old Creueta del Coll quarry has transformed the space into a large multi-use recreational public space. The fundamental principle for this reclamation project held by architects, JM Martorell and D Mackay, was to enhance the impressive and formidable site of pure rock rather than detract from its existing character and formation. The quarry offered a unique natural space with an imposing hollow gouged out of the rock. The architects set an enormous pool of water into this hollow space surrounded by areas of grass, palm trees, fine gravel, terraces, steps, paving, pathways and natural vegetation. Artist, Eduardo Chillida, on seeing the quarry, was captivated by the site and especially, with the space as a living space together with the water, felt that it was ideally suited to his idea based on the ancient myth of Narcissus. His sculpture, suspended over the sheet of water, would be reflected and the work completed. *In Praise of Water*, 1987, was fabricated on-site using reinforced concrete, and weighs 54 tons. The sculpture is suspended from the top of the quarry by four steel cables.

On entering the site, you catch a glimpse of the rock wall framing this enormous imposing mass floating in mid-air as if held up by some invisible force – the cables are not easily seen from a distance. A slight but perceptible movement adds to the sculpture's vitality and dynamic presence that seems to defy gravity. The site is entered on a level lower than the sheet of water and only on nearing the work is the sculpture completed by its reflection. From the top of the quarry looking down onto the cut rock face and the artwork, the distance belies its size and weight, especially in contrast to the vistas afforded of the congested city below and the Mediterranean in the distance. The concept of reclamation applied to the quarry epitomises that of Smithson's a decade or two before, a dialectic between industrial ravage and bucolic reclamation. Over a short time, vegetation has begun to soften the austerity of the site and although it now seems as if it could possibly be a site formed by natural geological forces, the results of human activity will never be completely obliterated. Parc de la Creueta del Coll has become a popular *place of sociation* not only

because of the facilities offered for recreation but also through its ability to evoke a response of awe in our desire for and romance of wild places while nevertheless being a reminder of society's determination to dominate the planet.

German artist Joseph Beuys was a cultural critic, an environmental and performance artist who felt that his morally and socially engaged acts were synonymous with art and that his life was his art. His ideas about art in the land were more conceptually based and even more concerned with process. He saw nature as a living system of which the human being was a part and that all interventions in the land have either social or ecological implications. In 1971, he "waded fully clothed into a marsh at the edge of the Zuider Zee in the Netherlands, until little more of him was visible than the top of his trademark [his hat]" (Beardsley, 1998:159). *Bog Action*, 1971, was a demonstration of his concern for the widespread destruction of wetland ecosystems with the reclamation of shallow seas through drainage. This was only one of the many initiatives taken by the artist on behalf of environmental causes. In 1982, Beuys planted the first of 7,000 oak trees in Kassel, West Germany, a densely populated and intensively industrialised region. The final planting of *7,000 Oaks* took place after his death in 1987 and is the world's largest growing "green" sculpture. Beuys equated the reforestation of the city with the need to revitalise urban ecology.

Beuys' primary intention was to direct attention to environmental *ills* and not to make "art" as with other environmental artists who were concerned with creating an awareness of ecological concerns. In the last few decades particularly, as with Beuys' concerns for nature as a living system, systems and cycles of plantings and growth have been used in recent reclamation projects. Gardens and vegetation can be seen as metaphors for rebirth while growth implies the concept of fertility and continuity. James J. Kelly says that "sculptural form becomes a natural *system* dependent on soil, seed, moisture, light and growth, and, similarly,



Alan Sonfist, *Pool of Virgin Earth*, 1975. Lewiston, New York, USA. Stone, earth and plantings. (Sonfist 2004:160, 161)
(Auping titles this work *Pool of Earth*.)

the *system* becomes sculptural form” (Kelly 1981:113). In *Pool of Earth*, 1975, and *Time Landscape*, 1965-1978, Alan Sonfist used time-structured processes that reflect the present concerns with conservation and ecology and refer to the relationship between man and his environment. Working with geologists and ecologists, Sonfist planned an ecological living system that would convert a chemical-waste dump into a forest of native plants and trees (Auping in Sonfist 1983:102). The first stage of this living system was *Pool of Earth*, a rock-ringed circle of virgin soil placed within the dumpsite. The planting stage was provided by nature through seeds being carried in by wind, birds and animals. These two environmental land pieces exemplify Sonfist’s aesthetic philosophy of the interdependence of humans and nature. “The impetus behind Sonfist’s art is an acute fascination with living things and their processes of survival” (Auping in Sonfist 1983:100). In these artworks he deals directly with plant growth. *Pool of Earth* gives birth to a new forest, and in *Time Landscape*, by returning a series of sites to their pre-colonial vegetation, Sonfist re-established indigenous virgin forests in various locations throughout New York City. These are public artworks, investigations into a design with nature as well as into the position of nature in the modern world in which a romantic view of nature is presented and in which the site predominates. Elizabeth Baker says: “All sorts of outdoor land pieces and site pieces located in settled areas incorporate into their content the way they interact with daily life, with circumstance, with other man-made forms, and the way they declare themselves art in such contexts” (in Sonfist 1983:70).

Ecological artworks represent a more socially oriented approach, are based on the concept of biodiversity, place an even greater emphasis on natural processes and time sequences and sensitise the viewer to the fragility of nature. Spaces are created in which the spectator can relate to nature and its natural forces. Sculpting or alteration of the land is less important than living systems. Mark Rosenthal states that “the viewer is presented with birth, growth, regeneration, and decay, themes that can easily be construed as pointed parallels to the human condition. ... these pieces ... give absolute priority to nature” (in Sonfist 1983:68). These



Patricia Johanson, *Leonhardt Lagoon*, 1981 - 1986. Gunite and plantings. (Matilsky 1992:62)

artworks do not merely capture nature as a moment in time but present the natural world constantly changing through artworks that mirror its cycles and rhythms.

As early as 1969, Patricia Johanson conceptualised *Garden-Cities: turtle mound*, the first proposal by a contemporary artist to reclaim a landfill site. She states,

It would seem that the time has come for the creation of a vast new public landscape By interweaving man's construct with the profuse phenomena of nature – water, geological formations, plants and animals in their natural habitats – it might be possible to shift away from a world oriented to power and profit, to a world oriented to life (from an unpublished manuscript quoted by Matilsky 1992:40).

Johanson was innovative in her development of art, ecology and urban renewal in which artworks revitalise and rehabilitate natural ecosystems while also providing a *popular accessible place* that introduces the public to these fragile environments. Two such works are *Leonhardt Lagoon*, 1981-1986 and *Endangered Garden*, 1988-1996. *Leonhardt Lagoon*, previously known as *Fair Park Lagoon*, was commissioned by the Dallas Museum of Art to commemorate the sesquicentennial of the state of Texas. The project set “an important precedent for an art institution playing an activist role in environmental remediation and community education” (Matilsky 1992:60). Matilsky describes it as a model for other institutions and communities to emulate. The lagoon, over five city blocks long and initially constructed as part of a flood-control project, had “died”, it had been polluted by seepage of synthetic fertilisers from the surrounding lawns and the water had become a solid mat of algae. The area had once been a thriving wetland and in collaboration with members of the Natural History Museum, Johanson re-introduced indigenous plants, fish and reptiles in order to revitalise and balance the food chain as well as planting indigenous emergent vegetation adapted to shallow shoreline waters (1992:60-62).



Patricia Johanson, *Endangered Garden*, 1988 - 1996.
Painted Gunite and plantings.

Left: Detail of *ribbon worm tidal steps*.

Using Gunitite, a type of casting concrete, Johanson created an intertwining grid of sweeping forms that are an interpretation of the roots and leaves of two of the newly introduced plants. The forms provide public access – pathways, bridges, seating and observation platforms – that allows young and old to venture out into the lagoon and enjoy this newly revitalised wetland and lagoon ecosystem. Functioning as a public place and “refuge” from the city, *Leonhardt Lagoon* is a living sculptural ecological artwork.

Similar in intent, *Endangered Garden*, is located at Candlestick Cove in the San Francisco Bay area. The work is built over Sunnydale Facilities, a pump station and holding tank for excess rainwater and sewage that would normally flow into the bay during heavy rains. Johanson has designed the work as a series of habitats connected by the serpentine “baywalk” representing the endangered San Francisco garter snake. Candlestick Cove is a fragile wetland environment bounded by the coastal expressway, Route 101, Candlestick Stadium and a corporate office complex. The artwork provides the public with greater access to the bay and wetlands, and encourages the visitor to explore and become familiar with the various natural habitats and pre-modern landforms that have been re-established. *Ribbon worm tidal steps*, constructed from Gunitite, as is the walkway, are an example in which the structure creates a complex inter-tidal ecosystem. With tidal movements twice daily, this becomes a time-based ecological work constantly changing with the ebb and flow of the tides. Maintenance however, seems to be problematic. Many of the gardens along the tail-end of the walk, were dry and plants neglected and dying. Even ecological artworks need regular monitoring and maintenance.

American artist, Mierle Laderman Ukeles has devoted her time and attention to the problem of pollution and waste since the early 1970s. In 1977 she became artist-in-residence with the New York City Department of Sanitation. *The Social Mirror*, 1983, was

a sanitation truck with its side of mirrored glass reflecting the images of city residents of Manhattan, the very people responsible for the garbage being collected and transported. Ukeles' major installation, *Flow City*⁴⁶, 1983, was an attempt to educate the public about its role in preventing and slowing down the tide of waste. The installation was originally located within the New York City Marine Transfer Station at 59th Street on the Hudson River where trucks deliver garbage for barging to Fresh Kills Landfill on Staten Island. The artist envisioned a "museum of the environment". Her intention was to re-interpret the many processes involved in terms of the concept of regeneration. *Flow City* installation would include *Passage Ramp*, a 248ft passageway from recycled material giving access to the *Glass Bridge* offering the visitor views of the transfer of garbage from truck to barge and ending in *Media Flow Wall*, a 24-monitor video bank magnifying the connection between the flow of the Hudson River with the flow of waste. Her design of spaces and structures introduce

the concept that waste is a false cultural construct; every item is inherently valuable if only our traditional thinking about garbage can be changed. In reality, there is no such thing as 'waste'. Within the natural world, everything is reused and recycled. Only human beings have neglected this fundamental principle of nature (Matilsky 1992:76).

Along with Johanson, Ukeles was one of the first artists to envision urban landfill sites as art. She is presently working at the 2200-acre Fresh Kills Landfill on a major reclamation project that will incorporate a memorial for the 9/11 Trade Centre disaster. The site was officially closed in March 2001 but re-opened in September 2001 to house the Twin Towers' debris that changes and gives new meaning to how people will respond to this reclamation landfill site when completed.

⁴⁶Unfortunately when trying to locate this permanent exhibition in 2003, I was informed that funding had prevented the completion of the project and that installation had been relocated.



Above: Mierle Laderman Ukeles, Mayor Thomas W Danehy Park including *Turnaround/Surround*, 1989 - ongoing. Earthworks, plantings, concrete, glassphalt.

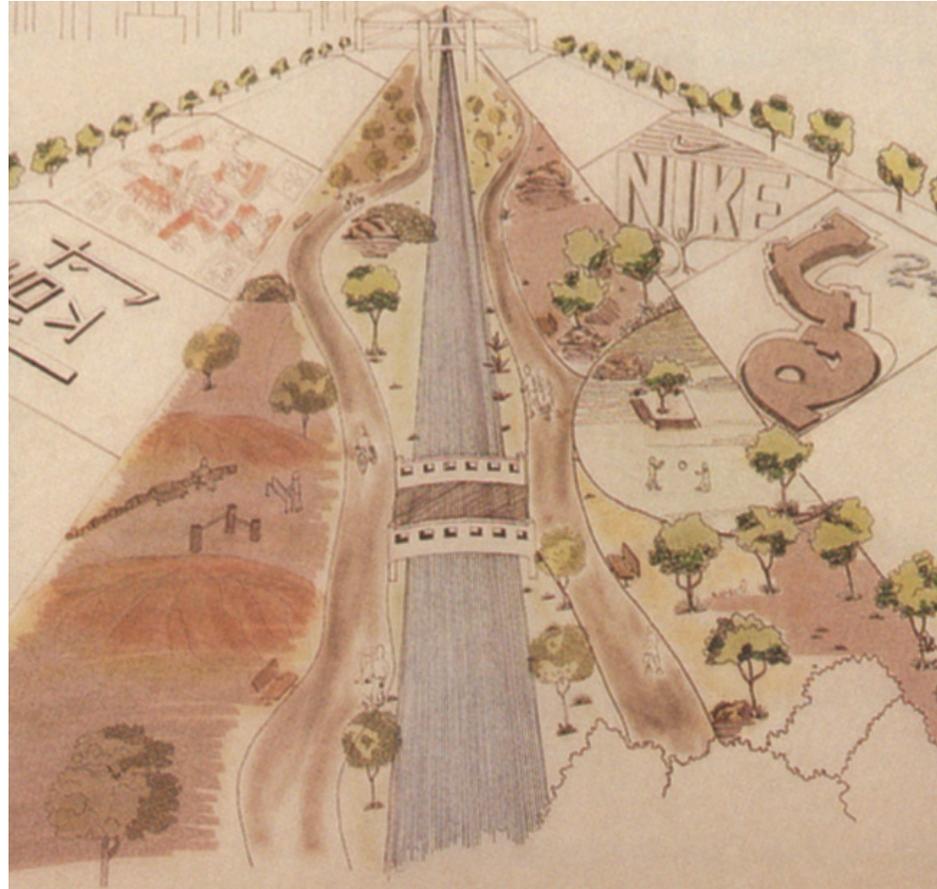
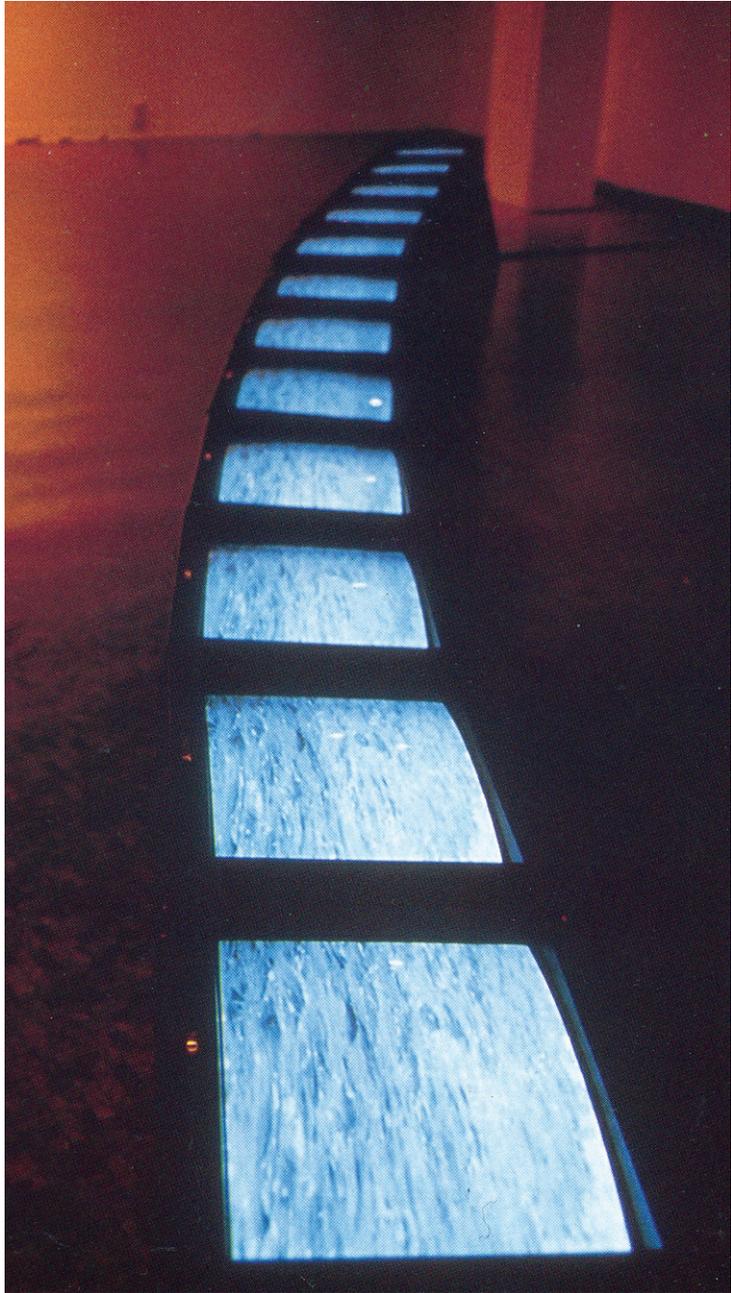
Left: Detail of *The Galaxy* dance floor.

Ukeles sees the landfill as a social sculpture and her intention is “to address the interface of humans and nature while charging the site, as she did in *Flow City*, with a new philosophical dimension. For Ukeles, this melding of reality and meaning is what defines art” (Matilsky 1992:79).

Turnaround/Surround, commenced in 1989, Ukeles’ current public project commissioned by Cambridge Arts Council, Massachusetts, is a landfill reclamation in Mayor Thomas W Danehy Park, Cambridge. The 50-acre site originally consisted of clay pits, quarry and brickyard. From 1952 till 1971 it was used as a landfill. After closure, construction of a recreational and sports facilities park was undertaken. With the appointment of Ukeles to create public art, an extensive process of meetings with local communities and school visits was established over a five-year period. Collaborating with landscape architect, John Kissida, the artist incorporated a variety of different planted areas into the site: wetlands to filter and purify seepage and run-off water, treed areas, wild sites with tall native grasses as “wavers” in the wind, rose and herb gardens, play areas and quiet recreational spaces as well as sports fields and an athletic track.

The childhood game of becoming the *king of the castle* is inherent in Ukeles’ design for the large mound from which you can view the entire park and become the king or queen of the castle. To further emphasise this popular game, the artist plans to install two thrones on the mound across the path from *The Galaxy*, a “dance floor” with its yellow and blue design based on the heavens. Her intention is to imbue the mound with a sense of grandeur, pomp and ceremony. To achieve this, a “glassphalt” pathway constructed from recycled crushed glass and mirror leading up to the mound, was conceived as a sparkling carpet⁴⁷ or walkway

⁴⁷On visiting the site, it was disappointing to note that the “glassphalt” pathway fails to sparkle as was intended.



Cheri Caulke & Susan Boyle with students from Wilson High School, *L.A. River Project: Vision of the Future*, 1988 - 1989. Exhibition video installation and drawing. (Matilsky 1992:112, 113)

up to the thrones and the 20ft circular dance floor. “A two-month-long ‘Handing-Over (sic) to Community’ ritual – a performance created by the artist – is planned Representatives of Cambridge’s 56 different cultures will provide the artist with memorable objects for insertion into the hilltop, thus converting the site into a public monument” (Spaid 2002:96).

The design of garbage should become the great public design of our age. I am talking about the whole picture: recycling facilities, transfer stations, trucks, landfills, receptacles, water treatment plants, and rivers. They will be giant clocks and thermometers of our age that will tell the time and health of the air, the earth, and the water. They will be utterly ambitious – our public cathedrals. For if we are to survive, they will be our symbols of survival (Mierle Laderman Ukeles in Spaid 2002:94).

Photography played an important role in the dematerialisation of the art object in 20th century art, becoming a means of notation, conceptualisation and communication while the dematerialisation of the art object influenced the development of land art and further, ecological art. Artists working in the land relied on technology, photography, video and film, to present their work as with Robert Smithson and Richard Long. Smithson’s artworks, although often permanent structures, are inaccessible while Long creates work that is reliant on his activities in the land.

Photography and video have become the most common mode of presentation for environmental works. Most ecological works are known only through documentation such as the *L.A. River Project*, 1988 -1989, a collaborative work by Cheri Caulke and Susan Boyle with students from the Wilson High School⁴⁸. Caulke worked with Susan Boyle, head of the Humanitas programme for three years at the school in East Los Angeles in an innovative approach to interdisciplinary education that incorporated history,

⁴⁸Information was extracted from the publication, *Fragile Ecologies* by Matilsky 1992:112-113.



**Collaborative community wetland project,
Seen & Unseen, 1995 - 1997.
Wood, plantings.**

literature, politics, film and video, and the relationship between people and nature along the river. The project involved a 12-monitor video “river” that explored the social, historical and ecological aspects of the LA River as well as an 8-monitor installation about the local community incorporating commercials on AIDS awareness and environmental pollution. The effectiveness of the project was not in the final temporary installation but was rooted in its results: the capacity gained by the students in their achievements, in their understanding of the interrelationship of linked environmental, social and economical problems related directly to students’ lives explored through a multidimensional educative process using technology and art. The work was as much about capacity building as it was about ecological issues. The temporary nature of the work was concretised through the experience of the students.

Seen & Unseen, 1995 – 1997, is an unusual alignment between place, people, pollution and the planet that has resulted in an ongoing environmental arts and science programme that has united artists, crafters, communities, ecologists, environmentalists, historians, engineers, scientists, government departments, various organisations, museums, and the Universities of Durham, Newcastle and Sunderland. The degradation of the north east of England due to closures of coal mines and the decline in shipbuilding industry, as has been previously mentioned on several occasions, has resulted in the arts being employed in many regeneration programmes. Additionally, the suffering and neglect of communities in the region has given rise to strong community bonds, a sense of place, a campaigning spirit and a determination to improve the environment, and in this instance, to regenerate and rehabilitate the local waterway, the Stanley Burn, and its surrounding natural habitats. Artists’ Agency’s (now Helix Arts) Artistic Director, Lucy Milton describes the birth of this project as follows,

It all started in my allotment in the early '90s, when I noticed that my vegetables would only thrive if I planted them much earlier in the year than usual. I began to worry about global warming and its effect on future generations; in particular, and selfishly, that my daughter would inherit a world incapable of sustaining itself. I besieged everyone I knew with questions, got even more worried, and began collecting a growing number of newspaper articles. At first I felt hopeless – there was nothing I could do as an individual to make a difference. Then I thought that if I could use my knowledge of the arts to develop a local project tackling a major pollution problem in the Northern Region, this might contribute to critical mass of positive solutions. These solutions could connect the local to the global and encourage us to realise that if we work together we can all do our small bit to help us preserve our world for future generations. Thus *Seen & Unseen* was born.

I felt that the most effective way to tackle environmental problems was for people with different areas of expertise – artists, scientists and communities – to pool that knowledge and explore new ways of working together. I chose water pollution both because of its importance as an issue, but also because of water's potential for metaphor (in Kemp & Griffiths 1999:8).

Quaking Houses mining village, having outlived the industry, lies right in the middle of this northern coal mining region and its residents became the core of this unprecedented and extremely complex project. Today, the Village appears to be located in a rural setting – but beneath the surface the unseen legacy of the mining industry continues to degrade the area, The mining pits have fallen silent, some of the spoil heaps levelled and grassed over, and the surface workings/mine structures demolished. However, the unseen becomes the seen – pollutants from the spoil heap near the Burn are continuing to seep into and poison this small local stream. Even the name of the Village carries the undertones of the exploitation of the planet inherent in the coal mining industry – Quaking Houses suggests the tremours and subterranean violations of depleting the earth of its resources. The closures left the region and many villages “derelict, doomed, damned” (Kemp & Griffiths 1999:24) were allocated category D status with no or little further capital investment expenditure for these villages.

The landscaped coal mines have “hidden” or disguised the damages past and present. High levels of aluminium hydroxide cause white foaming, and high levels of acid cause iron deposits. Added to this degradation of the water, are high levels of salt caused by the de-icing salt from the run-off water from the roads. Stanley Burn, its immediate local ecosystem and further downstream areas are slowly dying. Scientist and university lecturer, Paul Younger felt that a passive treatment system that uses “biomediation processes of natural resources, with a combination of physical, chemical and biological mechanisms similar to those found in many natural wetlands. Such processes [bring] about the removal of metals and the neutralisation of acidity in the effluent water” (Kemp & Griffiths 1999:52). *Seen & Unseen* began with the construction of the artificial Gavinswelly wetland as a pilot project. Children, residents, local volunteers, Environmental Trust and University personnel and students began “digging” a compost-based wetland anaerobic wetland of four “cells in series”. This differs from relatively better-known passive water treatment systems called “reed-bed aerobic wetlands” that treat organically polluted water. With time the pilot project proved extremely successful.

One could ask what *art* has to do with water pollution and why? Art is about the imagination, it can bring a visionary approach to an ordinary task. In this instance, it brought a rich and diverse quality to the collaborative process and became integral to the construction of the second-phase, the construction of a full-scale wetland as an extension of the Gavinswelly pilot project. People with vision saw the potential of an ecological collaborative process that would be to the social, cultural and environmental benefit of all involved. Besides the obvious ecological benefits, the programme afforded, through the incorporation of the arts, a richness of experience that created a greater impact through a variety of activities: educational, recreational, technological and social opportunities that would otherwise not have occurred. The creative interventions brought a unique dynamic to the project that has helped keep it alive. The complexity, ambitiousness and intentions created “major headaches” which once overcome resulted in

a project that received two national awards, testament to the creative vision of those involved. Lucy Milton of *Artists' Agency* described their aims as “offering artists an opportunity to extend the scope of their work in a new environment; to facilitate an exchange of ideas, knowledge and skills, leading to a greater appreciation of the arts; and to encourage individuals to develop their own creative skills” (quoted by Kemp & Griffiths 1999: 64).

Community participation fulfilled one very important aspect, that of making the unseen, seen. The more people involved in the project via children, families and friends, and through the schools, the more visible the problems became. Added to this, was the local youth club's series of radio broadcasts and world-wide web site as a result of the research and collaborations with artists and scientists. Creating an awareness of the merits of long-term viability of biodiversity within the ecosystem was of more value to people and the planet than of the economics of the project. The brief for the appointment of an artist was that innovative and creative approaches inherent in a wetland system be explored. Artist Helen Smith's approach was to ensure that the residency resulted in long-term community involvement with, enthusiasm for and maintenance of the wetland and in order to achieve this, a sense of ownership and pride needed to be the overall objectives. Four main elements were defined: use of the site; access to the site; design; and monitoring/maintenance. The collaborations resulted in a series of works, the focus being the *Boardwalk* and *Listening Posts*.

Art in this project goes beyond the typical examples of early land art, that of defining and articulation space. The site in *Seen & Unseen* has been considered as a socio-political site, an experience of process and a questioning of people's connectedness to the planet. The *Boardwalk* offers an experience of place as you walk over and through the wetland, while the unique and innovative

solutions of the *Listening Posts* used new technologies to foster information and communications and recorded the collaborative dialogues that had taken place. Initially, at each end of the walkway was a glass panel, one at the beginning of the wetland where you could view the “polluted” water as it entered and at the other, the glass panel provided a view of the “clean” water as it exited the wetland. By the time of my visit to this wetland, these glass panels had unfortunately been destroyed and as they were subsequently considered to be vulnerable, inviting destruction, they had been replaced by wood. In addition, I was unable to experience the sound *Listening Posts* as they had either been removed or were inconspicuous as the wetland was by this time well established. However, the pathway to the site was neglected and overgrown.

Speaking of environmental art today, Malcolm Miles states,

Environmental art today has four main aspects: art which reclaims polluted or damaged land; art which draws attention to threats to habitat and diversity of species; art which works practically to heal the land of pollution; and art which foresees alternative futures. ...

Responding to the extinction of species due to the loss of natural habitats ... Randall-Page carved three monumental life-forms from the list of endangered species, setting lines by Victorian nature poet and Jesuit Gerard Manley Hopkins on the plaque:

‘What would the world be, once bereft
Of wet and wilderness? Let them be left,
O let them be left, wilderness and wet:
Long live the weeds and the wilderness yet.’

A small number of projects have piloted practical ways to heal the land A project which unites the healing aspect ... with a concern to extend bio-diversity and reclaim derelict land as public space is *Nine Mile Run* in Pittsburgh (in Kemp & Griffiths 1999:122-124).

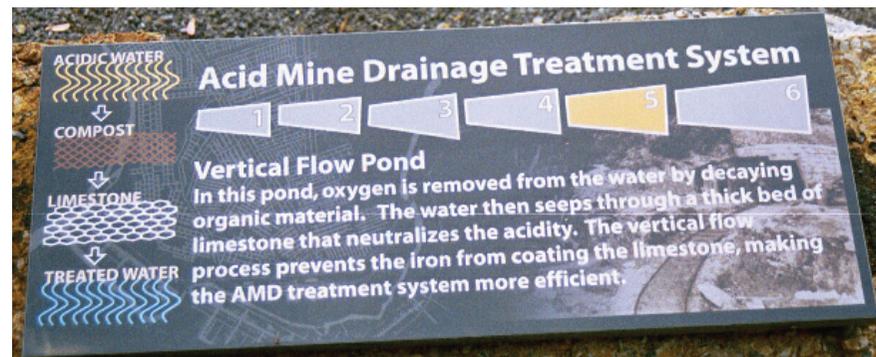
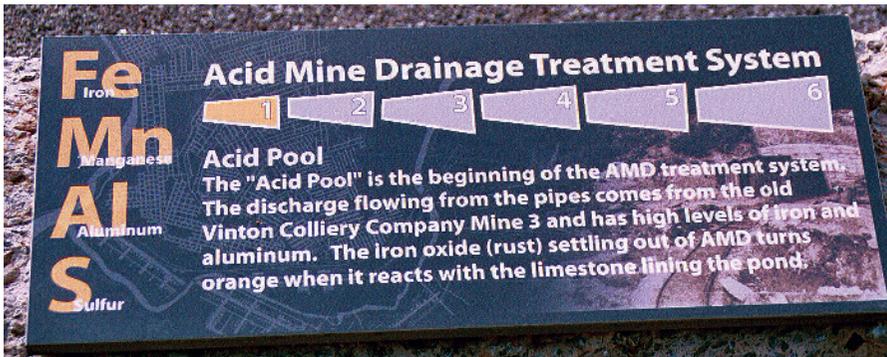


Nine Mile Run Greenway Project, 1997 - 2000.
Pittsburgh, USA.

Artists Tim Collins, Reiko Goto⁴⁹ and Bob Bingham are working together at the Studio for Creative Inquiry at Carnegie Mellon University in Pittsburgh on an extensive research programme to explore possible solutions to the degradation of the 230-acre wasteland site used from 1922 to 1970 as a slag heap from the steel mining industry. *Nine Mile Run Greenway Project* (NMR-GP), 1997 – 2000, was an extensive collaborative process. A “trailer studio” was set up as a working base, exhibition space and working laboratory, enabling the local community to link with and participate in the working processes. What had been a “wooded valley of special beauty” with a river running through was now almost completely obliterated by this slag heap that has become a slag “mountain”, approximately 10-stories high with a mere stream that trickles through what is now a narrow cutting between these slag heaps that occasionally opens into small areas of “valley”. Similar to the earlier approach towards reclamation taken by Smithson, the aim of the research team is not to *cover up* the degradation but to contrast and reveal both the legacy of industrialism and the ecological processes at work. Returning the site to its original state would be impossible; their aims were to find alternative creative solutions to retaining and upgrading the remaining areas of woodland and to rehabilitate the stream, polluted by sewerage and the acid seepage from the slag heaps, that by now is almost reduced to a trickle except when it rains.

After three years of NMR-GP-initiated workshops, site tours, panel discussions, lectures, and exhibitions, community participants generated alternative design guidelines that introduced a socially acceptable solution, that was also economical, aesthetically rich, and ecologically sound. Opting not to restore the brownfield to its original condition (where would the slag go?), they created an integrated ecosystem restoration indicative of nature’s complex goals. After careful scrutiny, the artist and biologists realised that slag heaps offer more biodiversity than typical lawns or city parks! So in 1999, the NMR-GP team started the recuperation process by spraying a mulch containing a mixture of nutrients and grass seeds to grow grass on the hard, gray, and otherwise porous slag heap. NMR-GP-related activities eventually altered everybody’s cultural, aesthetic, economic and ecological values (Spaid 2002:62).

⁴⁹I was fortunate to be able to discuss the project with Tim Collins, while Reiko Goto took me on a site tour of the area. The programme is ongoing.



AMD & ART PARK Rehabilitation Wetlands Project - ongoing. Details and information slate panels.

Not far from Pittsburgh, in the Dark Shade Creek Watershed region of the Appalachian Hills of Pennsylvania, is the Vintondale AMD & ART PARK⁵⁰ rehabilitation scheme with the stated aims of transforming environmental liabilities into community assets. The project is an interdisciplinary initiative re-creating *place*. It consists of a series of six Acid Mine Drainage Treatment Ponds as a water purification system into which the polluted acidic metal-laden water seepage from the coal dumps drains and deposits its pollutants as the water passes through each successive pond and finally filters as clean water into series of five expanses of water or dams which are being established as *History Wetlands*. The surface workings and machinery of the coal mine have been demolished and the site converted into these *History Wetland* using remaining stone foundations, columns and several large metal machine fragments to construct the dams. A “native plant *Litmus Garden*” has been planted and a large community recreational area and playing fields are under construction. At the time of my visit, artists were being commissioned to work on-site in residency programmes for an arts and science collaboration with the community to create a series of appropriate “history artworks” that record and comment on past activities but also look to the future rehabilitation of the site. In my discussions with the working team of Peace Corps members, I felt that they were not really appropriately qualified to carry out the scientific research and certainly not qualified to make decisions regarding the possible creative interventions for the site. At that point of the development, more advantage could have been taken of all aspects of the structuring and there were no clear stated intentions either written into a brief for the team or in a report prepared by this temporary working team. The project however, had great potential to become a successful project.

⁵⁰AMD & ART began with a mission of addressing Appalachia’s most significant environmental problem, acid mine drainage (AMD). Their working processes are holistic, collaborative and interdisciplinary, seeking to integrate AMD remediation with economic development and community renewal (AMD & ART Newsletter Winter 2002/3).



Shai Zakai, *The Last Supper: Monument to the Cessation of Pollution*, 2002.

Inset: Transportation of a 100 tons of concrete dust and asphalt.

(Zakai 2002: unpublished paper presented at World Summit 2002, no pagination)

THE CONCRETE CREEK: a stream reclamation project as an artwork, 1999 – 2002 was an ambitious complex ecological art programme to clean up and rehabilitate a stream that runs alongside the road that leads in and out of the quarry and cement factory. Israeli eco-artist, Shai Zakai worked with the factory community on the project for two and a half years to create an awareness of the stream's daily damage by concrete pollution, dust from sawing the concrete, concrete washed off surfaces flow directly into the stream and careless dumping of excess concrete every day. Again there are the “seen and unseen” damages and correctional procedures – the physical cleaning up and collecting of the 100tons and 650ft of concrete dust and asphalt that was then transported to a gallery in Tel-Aviv; and physical interventions in the stream itself so that over time, nature would carry out the rehabilitation of the stream. Of the “unseen” activities, social investment in “human capital’ could be said to be the most important – that of changing attitudes, of altering working procedures to become more ecologically aware, of motivating workers to invest in both the clean-up process and in creating on-site permanent collaborative artworks.

The cleaning of the stream necessitated collaboration with geologists, environmentalists and ecologists to devise a collective process that would involve a wide section of the local people. The end results of the many processes were the permanent artworks within the factory grounds, the temporary performance by the artist that took place for the factory community at a special event, the exhibition of the removed rubble and photo-documentation at a gallery in Tel-Aviv and most significantly, the first eco-tourist route in Israel through the quarry and surrounding areas and along the stream. Instead of a catalogue of on-site artworks and creative interventions, a “hiking kit” will contain a map with significant stations along the stream that will act as indicators to the slow but natural rehabilitation process, markers of historically important sites of reclamation, and a work log and photo-documentation of the entire process with written descriptions of various stages of the project. The kit will serve hikers when tracing the route of this artistic reclamation process.



**Above: Detail of Creek filled with concrete slurry.
Right: Shai Zakai, Exhibition installation, 2002.
(Zakai 2002: unpublished paper presented at World Summit 2002, no
pagination)**



Art has joined forces with science, technology, ecology, green movements, schools and communities around the world to repair, reclaim, heal, rehabilitate and demand justice for the planet; to take action against the ravages, destruction and greed that is wrought upon the planet in the guise of progress but in the form of devastation and exploitation; to effect a paradigm shift or world-view that again recognises the interconnectedness and interdependence of the human race with the planet in the hope of slowing down and preventing the slow but sure destruction of our world that is evidenced in global warming, the melting of the Arctic ice-cap, and in the many natural disasters that are occurring.

There are many such programmes of this nature internationally but as I have been able to experience only a few, I am reluctant to discuss too many projects relying only on information gathered from publications. However, I feel that it is an extremely important development within collaborative contemporary public art and therefore needed to be included in the study. The partnership between ecology and art is playing a significant role and is an area of investigation that is crucial to the environmental situation within South Africa and should be explored to the benefit of the Country's ecological context.

CHAPTER VI:

Social Responsibility and Art Activism.

Art activism is not about artworks, it is the creative intervention into society that attempts to change attitudes: it is not about the artist; it is not about an artwork; it is not about an artist dealing with social injustices in an artwork that is afforded an “art” status, exhibited in a gallery and sold/collected. It is about how an individual connects in a unique way with “another” for the common good of the whole planet in even a small act that is able to change the perspective of our relationships.

Lucy Lippard, in *Overlay: contemporary art and the art of prehistory*, states that the publication was based

on the premise that art has a social significance and a social function, which might be defined as the transformation of desire into reality, reality into dreams and change, I see effective art as that which offers a vehicle for perceiving and understanding any aspect of life, from direct social change, to metaphors for emotion and interaction, to the most abstract conceptions in visual form. Such art is not, however, effective simply by being created, but by being created and communicated within carefully considered contexts. The social element of response, of exchange, is crucial... . Without it, culture remains simply one more manipulable commodity in a market society where even ideas and the deepest expressions of human emotions are absorbed and controlled. I resist the notion that in modern times the task of image and symbol making should be relegated to one more frill on the “quality of life”.

Despite the fact that ... art [has] been devoted to blurring the boundaries built up over millennia to separate art from life, art is still overdefined in Western society, to the point where its function is limited to decoration or status symbol. ... [S]ociety ... pay[s] a lot of lip service to “creativity” but has little actual respect for art as an integral social function, as a “profession” or work, much less a necessity. The reintegration of art into social life means risking “exposure” and denial of the treasured myth of embattled individualism, of the artist as alienated hero.

[Some] artists ... have made conscious attempts over the last decade to combat the relentless commodification of their products and to reenter the “outside world”. ... Feminism and the civil rights and gay rights movements encouraged autobiographical and psychological exploration, which in turn led during the next decade to deeper roots – less personalized, more collective – with individual memories growing dimmer as a sense of common history invaded the psyche.

The real challenge to a socially aware artist working in this mode is to make the resurrected forms of meaningful *now*, not in terms of nostalgia, but in terms of present struggles, and dreams, and hopes and fears (Lippard 1983:5-6).

The intention to initiate change has become a critical issue and an important aspect that has influenced many professionals including artists, resulting in contemporary socially responsible art, art activism, art performances, art and science collaborations, art and community actions and collaborative ecological environmental art as only a few areas of human activities that protest the degradation and abuse of both people and the planet. This idiom of art-making in most cases, makes use of temporary events and pro-active modes of expression to create social awareness of the many *ills* that plague today’s global society: racism, abuse, poverty, crime, HIV/AIDS, pollution, ecology and destruction of the planet, to name a few. One of the biggest challenges that faces the world however, is not the *ills* as much as the attitudes towards responsibility for these crises. Finding ways of addressing and changing these ignorant, elitist, indifferent and politically-based attitudes that choose to avoid or deny realities are the issues with which artists are concerned. The average person, irrespective of class and status, distances him- or herself from the global crisis and ignores the possibility that he/she is as responsible as the next person in some way or another, for the social and ecological destruction and exploitation of the planet. We lock ourselves in the safety of our homes, connect only with like-minded persons of same colour, creed and status, and institute self-imposed isolation from these realities. Most people who are able or in a position to make a difference, detach and isolate themselves in “safe” situations in which they do not “see” the poverty, pollution and

dereliction of our ever-changing planet. This year alone in 2005, more than 15 natural disasters have struck planet Earth leaving havoc in their wake. People donate or “pay” their way out of responsibility and continue to pollute, segregate and discriminate.

Many artists in the 21st century have chosen a social role for their art activities. Regrettably, in South Africa, activist art in a “social context” is a little known territory and not afforded a credible “art” status, although the few artists who deal with local social issues nevertheless, do so within the accepted art context. Therefore at present in this Country, an artist needs to be courageous to work within this idiom, not desire recognition, nor need to earn a living through art. These artists see themselves as activists – they are concerned with the relationship between life as everyday living and life as expression, of art as living: that is, theirs and everybody’s life/art as being concerned with and expressing in some way the interconnectedness between all things. However, the elitism of “modern life and art” has created separatism and ignored the notion that art is a necessity not a luxury. Throughout publications⁵¹ such as *Mapping the terrain: new genre art* (Lacy, ed), *The citizen artist* (Burnham & Durland, eds), *Conversations before the end of time* (Gablik), *The reenchantment of art* (Gablik), *Ecovention: current art to change ecologies* (Spaid) and *Sculpting with the environment* (Oakes), we are constantly reminded that society must take heed of its role in the destruction of our world – its people and its earth – and for this to occur, the present world-view or paradigm must shift.

The present global paradigm/world-view ignores this interconnectedness but fortunately, society is always in flux and it is apparent that people are becoming aware of the need for a new philosophical framework: a paradigm shift is taking place. This is apparent, particularly in the pro-active role taken by many art activists throughout the world working in the public domain with communities,

⁵¹Many fields of study deal with the urgent need to change the present world-view and shift the paradigm to an approach that acknowledges the notion of interconnectedness.

with HIV/AIDS, with poverty, with scientists, in the greening of art, and in the socio-political arena. Gablik states that according to Robert Johnson, “Ecstasy is an archetypal need of our being, and if we don’t get it in a legitimate way, ... we will get it in an illegitimate way – which accounts for much of the chaos of our culture. Boredom, cynicism and chronic materialism are all symptoms of our need for an ecstatic dimension in our life” (1993:85). Looking at the corporate world today, there is evidence of this: the gatherings or “bosberaads”⁵² at which employees are obliged to attend and encouraged/expected to participate in fire-walking, drumming, art-making, rituals, chanting and other repetitive acts “as being sure way[s] to make a direct hit of this ‘dreaming’ aspect of the psyche” (Gablik 1993:47).

Gablik goes on to say

It would seem that the capacity to move beyond the old art-and-life, subject-object polarities is precisely where the frontier of a post-Cartesian framework is to be found. Community is the starting point for new modes of relatedness, in which the paradigm of social conscience replaces that of the individual genius. In the past, we have made much of the idea of art as a mirror (reflecting the times); we have had art as a hammer (social protest); we have had art as furniture (something to hang on our walls); and we have had art as a search for the self. There is another kind of art, which speaks to the power of connectedness and establishes bonds, art that calls us to relationships. Perhaps, as James Hillman⁵³ says, the new aesthetics will not be found in museums or beautiful object ints, but in some visible manifestation of ‘the soul’s desperate concerns’ (1993:114).

⁵²An Afrikaans equation for an out-of-town get together during which time colleagues learn to cope with stress, anger, new approaches to productivity and well-being within the workplace.

⁵³James Hillman writes about the philosophical and psycho-analytical status of the human race and the need to change present global attitudes.

American artist Michael Nash⁵⁴ is one such artist whose concern is not art but life. He collaborated with the group ACT UP/Denver with presenting visual interventions on the AIDS crisis. Nash created a computer interactive publication, *Silence Still = Death* as a result of the American government's inaction with regard to AIDS. If there was an artwork in this action, it was "text-as-dialogue" that was always in flux, always changing, always being updated with every new visitor to the on-line site. The art activist work was widely accessible but intangible, never the same but always retaining its inherent intentions: action and knowledge. The concept of writing-as-dialogue on-line would have been effective in the dissemination of not only official data, educational information, practical advice, and privacy within a public space, it also afforded the audience an active role in actions against the non-action of the government. The programme permitted privately/anonymously voiced public accusations and also offered the opportunity of downloading posters and flyers for public distribution.

What I am doing is not ART.

I don't care about making ART as a final product.

I don't care if it is not looked at as ART.

My images are about FUNCTION.

My images are about INFORMATION.

My images are about VISIBILITY.

My images are about PRESSURE.

My images are about CHANGE.

My images are about ACTION.

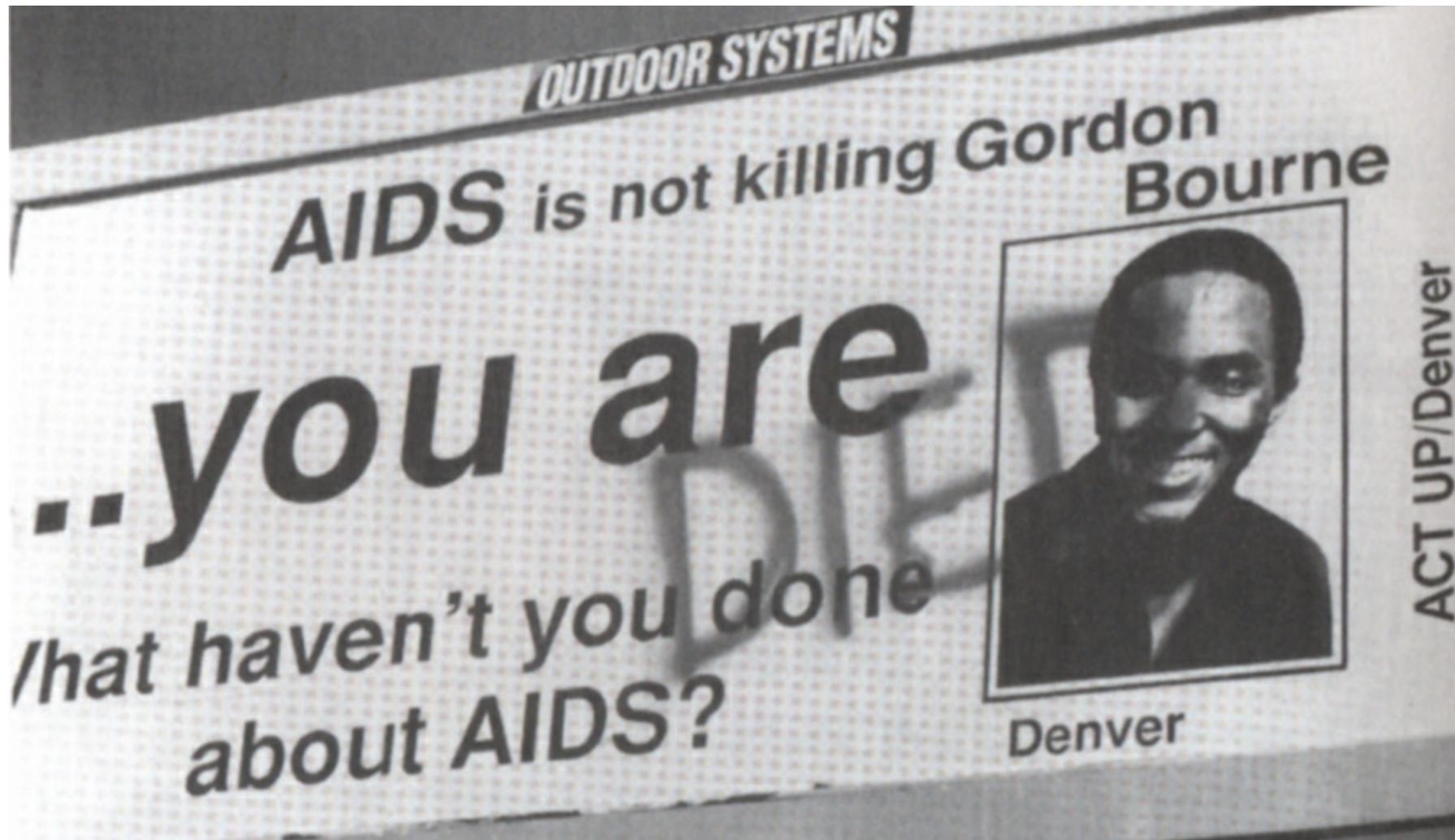
My images are about COLLABORATION.

My images are about COOPERATION.

My images are about AIDS.

(Michael Nash in Burland & Durham 1998:129)

⁵⁴Information on Michael Nash has been extracted from Lucy Lippard's article *Silence Still = Death* in Burnham & Durland, 1998. Discussion of the artist's work is my interpretations and opinions.



Michael Nash, *Silence Still = Death*, 1990. Printed billboard. (Burnham & Durland 1998:130)

The second major project for Nash's MFA exhibition was the series of ambitious and provocative billboards. Portraits of five local men willing to publically declare their AIDS status, were used to create billboards. The text in English and Spanish stated, "AIDS is not killing Gordon Bourne [as in example] --- YOU ARE. What haven't you done about AIDS?" (Lippard 1991, in Burnham & Durland 1998:135). Colorado is a conservative American state and 51 simple compelling but confrontational excessively large blatant taboo statements publicly displayed for all to see, would not be easily digested. These billboards did not go away, the contract was for four months – they could not be easily taken or torn down and when four of the persons depicted on the board, died from AIDS, the billboard company did not fulfil their agreement of adding DIED across the relevant boards, the ACT UP team carried out a spray-paint task and in doing so these statements would have become even more poignant and shocking to the conservatism of Denver. Nash and the ACT UP team continue to assail the authorities and people of Denver with variations on the theme of denial and memory.

Greenpeace⁵⁵ is not normally associated with the art world even with art activism, but the "gigantic head-line banners" aimed at toxic waste, nuclear issues and ocean ecology ... [linked in their placement] to older public sculptures brings these 'installations' of Greenpeace more firmly into the history of public visual art ..." (Durland in Raven 1993:31). Parallels can be drawn with Barbara Kruger and Keith Haring (both discussed later in this chapter), Michael Nash, the AIDS Quilt and many more activist actions associated with artists. Much of what is achieved by Greenpeace however, has to do not merely with their actions but with the mass media and television coverage that is afforded these actions. *Bearing witness* to an injustice or to a belief takes responsibility for that awareness or that idea: you may actively or passively bear witness but you may not turn away in ignorance.

⁵⁵Information on Greenpeace has been extracted from Steven Durland's article *Witness: the Guerrilla Theater of Greenpeace* in Raven 1993:31-42. Discussion of the work is my interpretations and opinions.



Above: Greenpeace Garbage Barge Project, 1987. Banner on New York garbage barge. (Durland in Raven 1993:34)



Top left: AIDS Quilt, Atlanta World Congress, 1988. (Weinstein in Raven 1993:45)
Above: Greenpeace Acid Rain Protest, 1984. Robin Heid jumped from 1100ft smokestack, Gavin Power Plant, near Gallipolis, Ohio. (Burnham & Durland 1993:33)

This is a moral action or ideal proclaimed by many groups and the very essence of socially responsible pro-active art and inherent to the basic concept of the power of individual action: it motivates people to take action.

The NAMES Project AIDS Memorial Quilt could be considered to have become a similar pro-active theatrical event. It is the largest quilt in existence and, as do all quilts, it tells a story in this instance of the ongoing pandemic of HIV/AIDS in the 20th and 21st centuries. One might question its position as art. Quilts are art, most often not of individual genius but of the collective memory of many, with each individual part speaking for itself and the whole. The *Quilt* was started in San Francisco in 1987 and now consists of tens of thousands of 3ft by 6ft panels joined into squares of eight panels each. It has been displayed across America in many cities. The displaying of the *Quilt* is like a memorial ceremony, a ritual as names on the panels are read out as each folded square of 32 panels is slowly unfurled one at a time by the hundreds of volunteers, until the entire floor of its installation site becomes the *Quilt*. A comparison can be made to the Vietnam Veterans Memorial, a simple compelling structure of names joining together those who have lived and died within an event/pandemic, a memorial that comments on futility, one of war and the other of ignorance and silence.

Helen Mayer-Harrison and Newton Harrison are activists who operate within the world of art by establishing critical debates around particular socio-political issues concerned with publicly announcing and demarcating ecologically fragile endangered land sites. As with Nash, their intention is to create awareness through dialogue; they are concerned with conversation. Dialogue and discussion become their artworks: these occur at conferences, on-line, in publications, at meetings, on maps, in text and in galleries and are accompanied by all the necessary scientific data, visual material, social and ecological impact studies and information. Their intention is *to make known* – to bring to the consciousness of all concerned, the ecological destruction past, present and

future of the planet. They engage in *questioning*. They collaborate with whoever is willing, and then the task is to set in motion a process which will change perspectives and alter the course of destruction and pollution, re-establish eco-systems and build sustainable relationships between people and the planet by whatever methods are available. Although the work of the Harrisons' could be said to be concerned with *the greening of art*, I have chosen to include them in this chapter as the processes they establish are concerned with activism, with moral actions in relation to global survival.

*The Serpentine Lattice*⁵⁶, [sa] is one such process. The area of concern is the coastal range from San Francisco Bay to Vancouver Island, an area of approximately 2,000 miles long and 20 – 30 miles wide. In this area approximately 95% of the great conifer trees have been cut down but instead of concentrating on the 5% remaining “old growth” or uncut trees that would not save the forest, it seemed more positive to re-establish the 95% which, held in trust and without cutting the new growth every 30 to 60 years, will become old growth in 200 or 300 hundred years from now. *The Serpentine Lattice* is “a multimedia installation proposing a new history for the North American Pacific Coast temperate rainforest” (Oakes 1995:202). The installation presents images of all aspects of the region including the watershed areas, rivers, tall growing trees, logged and chopped trees, bare and forested mountain tops, and text that relates the process from basic information, to conversations, to the proposed reversal of the destroyed lands.

Mierle Laderman Ukeles was discussed in the previous chapter but, as with many of the artists mentioned within the ecological and environmental contexts, as an artist concerned with the condition of the planet with regard to pollution Ukeles can also be

⁵⁶Information on *The Serpentine Lattice* was extracted from the publication by Oakes, *Sculpting with the environment*. Discussions of ideas are my opinions.

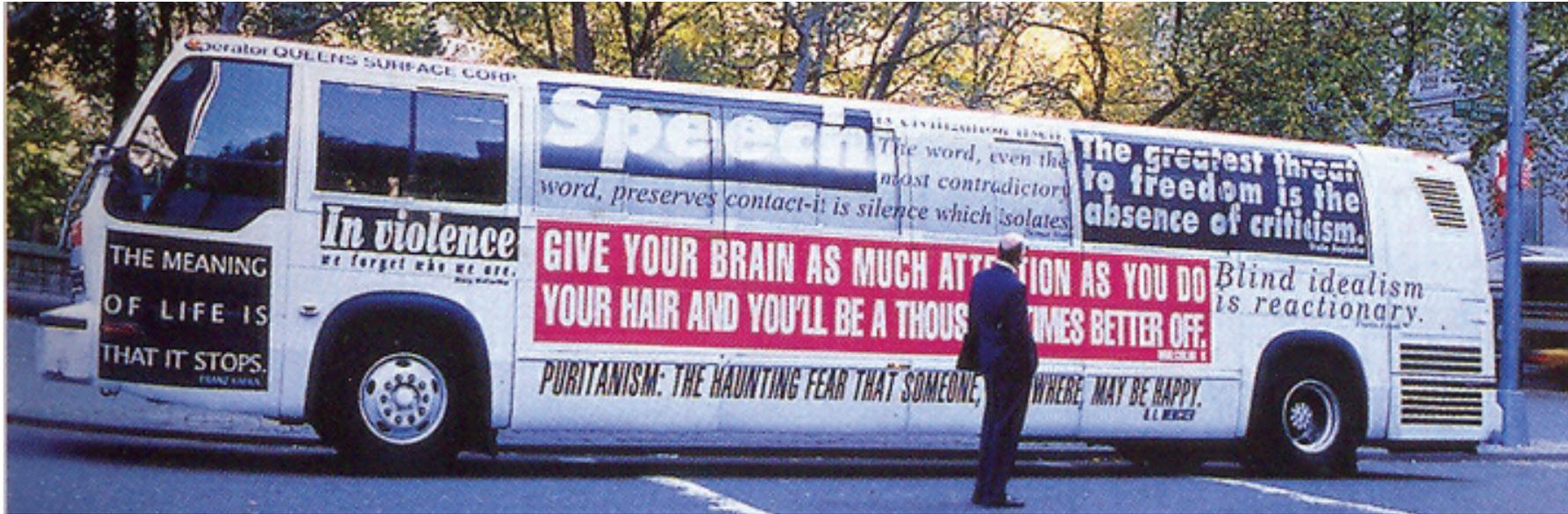


Left: Maya Lin, Vietnam Veterans Memorial, 1982. Washington DC. Black polished granite, text and land formation.

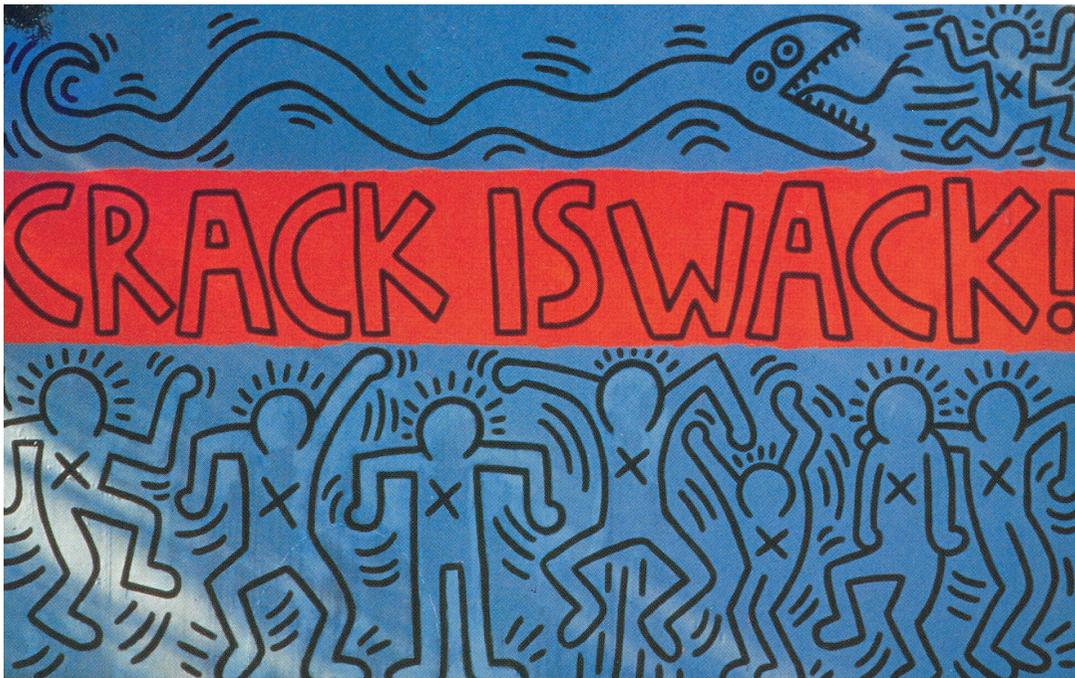
Above: Mierle Laderman Ukeles, *The Social Mirror*, 1983. Manhattan NYC. Reflective glass. (Matilsky 1992:75)

categorised within this chapter on social responsibility. The statement made by Ukeles in *The Social Mirror* by transforming the sanitation truck into a mirror, is not only a literal reflection of Manhattan occupants, but a reflection on the people of this City as well as a universal statement or metaphor reflecting the human race in general. As with the Harrisons, Nash, the AIDS quilt, Greenpeace and the Vietnam Memorial, Ukleles exploits the concept of self-reflection. All these artists ask their audience to look at themselves, to reflect on the actions of the human race. Humanity is a metaphor for destruction. The public is confronted by what they are doing in their daily lives, the little unnoticed actions and non-actions. Barbara Kruger continues this mode of silent confrontation that follows the public as they move around the city, like an action of surveillance, watching, waiting, *in your face*, her short *biting* “iconic, red-on-black graphic aphorisms have appeared in New York’s cityscapes several times over the past decades, as billboards, bus shelter posters, and building banners, and in other public modes of address. ... ‘I just want to you to think about what you see when you watch the news on TV,’ read [a message]” (Wehr in Eccles, Wehr & Kastner 2004:132). Her writings are ubiquitous. In *Bus*, 1997, she transformed the banal unseen everyday vehicle into a moving confrontational *text monster* that unashamedly travelled the New York streets proudly displaying its array of quick pithy phrases. The local commuter bus was entirely wrapped in text “from bumper to bumper in quotes, song lyrics, and literary excerpts, in a cacophony of font sizes and typefaces that graphically conveyed a diversity of twentieth-century voices” (Wehr in Eccles, Wehr & Kastner 2004:132). Placed vertically, horizontally overlaying each other, concealing at times, unfinished in others, insulting, accusing, witty and questioning, demanding your attention, they are an intervention in your space, they question who you are and you cannot ignore this assault.

Keith Haring (1958 – 1990) also exploited the written word but combined his text with the simplicity of an easily read, attractive brightly coloured mass media symbolic visual language. Similar to Kruger in the infiltration of text into public spaces, Haring’s work also confronts, questions and is witty but is nevertheless, the complete opposite in that his intentions were to pronounce the



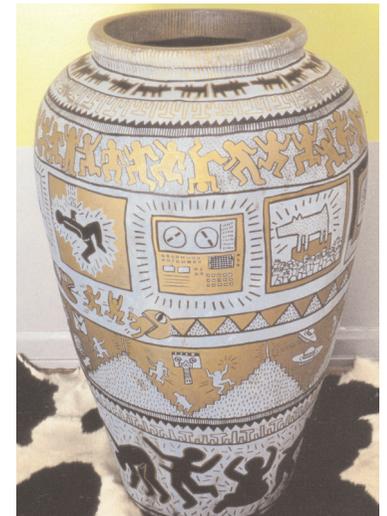
Above: Barbara Kruger, *Bus*, 1 - 30 November, 1997. NYC. Text.
 (Eccles, Wehr & Kaster 2004:33)



Left: Keith Haring, *Crack is Wack*, 1986. NYC. Billboard.
 (Celant 1992: no pagination, fig 95)

love of each other, the care of children and family values on the one hand and to create an awareness of the dangers of drug abuse and unprotected sex on the other. His images were full of vitality and life, dynamic and playful but also often grotesque, vulgar and obscene. The latter was often hidden, indiscernible and disguised in obsessive patterns, lines and colours that obscured the obvious to become acceptable in its intention of *making known*. He too believed that *silence = death* and that *Crack is Wack*. His paintings and drawings covered all manner of things from reproductions of *Michelangelo's David* and other sculptures to walls, floors and ceilings including the Berlin Wall to baby cots, floating blimps and functional utilitarian objects. His work is both horrific and delightful but always successful in its intentions of social responsibility.

Art critic, Arlene Raven (1993) in *Art in the public interest*, discusses the growing dissatisfaction amongst artists with commodification and materialism of the art world and their desire to make socially responsible art that bridges the gap between art and life. With this in mind, all of the community projects with which I have been involved or implemented under the guise of *Arts in Action* discussed in Volume III, the intention has been that of activism in either making comment on the actions of society or by providing opportunities for participants to find *their voice and express their concerns*. The work is open and naive and the imagery is of the everyday life of the maker. Much can be achieved in the simplest of ways in collaborative projects that equate group action.



Keith Haring.
Above: Untitled, 1983
Below: Untitled, 1981
(Celant 1992: no
pagination, figs 14, 43)

CHAPTER VII:

Arts in Education and in Communities

We live in a visual world surrounded by the real and the created. The first language we learn is that of seeing, the act of looking and internalisation of these visuals into information. Thereafter, we learn words through the visual language we understand. This is our primary but subconscious learning experience throughout our lives. Creativity and the arts are the result of our visual reading of the world but need not necessarily be bound by only the truths and realities of the factual world. The arts are a combination of what we see, know, experience and desire wrapped up in imagination. All modes of creative expression encourage the imagination, albeit in most cases based on life experiences, knowledge acquired and the expression (subconsciously) of one's innermost emotions and desires irrespective of the person's cultural context or age. In the creative arts a person need not be intimidated by the "correctness" of facts and images and can be praised for the openness of the mind, interpretation of ideas, be the results real, imaginary, naive or even "the scribbling" of the very young that may be completely incomprehensible. This freedom of expression is essential to the healthy development and fulfilment of the individual who is able to work through both subconscious and known emotions.

Chapter VII investigates the arts in community contexts as well as in education with references to residencies in communities and schools. These projects serve defined communities or specific groups. This factor directly affects the intentions of the artist and takes into account the "needs" of that community that dictates the intentions and nature of the intervention, its permanence or temporality, the collaborative process and the creative activities and, in particular, the required or intended result. The projects



**Pepón Osorio, *I have a story to tell you*, 2003. Philadelphia. Photo-laminated glass, steel.
(When I visited the site in May 2003, the work was still fenced off as it was to be inaugurated the following week.)**

link the arts with life, function and the environment. Occasionally, place has taken precedent in relation to identity, function, and sociation. On other occasions, emphasis has been placed on the experience and expression of the process.

The selection of projects discussed exemplifies different ventures in a variety of locations working with people of all ages from the very young to the elderly. The intention is to examine how creativity affects attitudes, assists in a creative approach to learning and life skills, and is able to play an active and dynamic role in capacity building, independent thinking and enhances the social fabric of communities. The approach adopted in the discussion of the selected programmes is to pay particular attention to the context in which a project has been developed, to identify the approach, explore the processes implemented, and assess the outcomes where possible. Alternative assessment with regard to “intentions and outcomes” of these projects is crucial and particularly, the *added value* that the projects present. The reframing of assessment criteria are discussed in Chapter IX.

Commenting on the challenge of public art, Robert Hughes, art critic, states,

The arts are the field on which we place our own dreams, thoughts, and desires alongside those of others, so that solitudes can meet, to their joy sometimes, or to their surprise, and sometimes to their disgust. ... that is the social purpose of art: the creation of mutuality, the passage from feeling into shared meaning (quoted from *The New Yorker* by Bach 2001:7)

*New * Land * Marks: public art, community, and the meaning of place* is a programme that aptly represents the “passage” referred to by Hughes. The Fairmount Park Art Association in Philadelphia, USA, initiated this programme in order to “plan and create unique and original public art projects. ... *New * Land * Marks* encourages projects that celebrate community identity, commemorate “untold” histories, inspire civic pride, respond to the local environment, and invigorate public spaces” (Bach



Pepón Osorio, *I have a story to tell you*, 2003. Photo-laminated glass, steel. Detail of interior of the structure.

2001:12). This programme was a lengthy and extensive social process: one of discussion, controversy and agreement, reflections and reality, collaboration and particularly, place-making. The aim of the projects was to be “in the public interest”. Several communities responded to the call for participation and in each instance an artist was “matched” with a community group to work together to produce a proposal for a public artwork that became a reflection of the neighbourhood and a new landmark for that community. The artist and the community were to form an equal partnership: a marriage between the creativity of the artist and the needs and desires of the community.

I have a story to tell you was the first completed project in this programme in which artist Pepón Osorio worked with the multicultural community agency of Congreso de Latinos Unidos and the Latino community in North Philadelphia. Osorio’s artistic process “precisely reflected the group’s interests”. He states that “[his] principal commitment is to return art to the community. [His] creative process is one of listening to stories, uncovering histories, channeling collective experience, and transforming these into works that can serve as reflectors to the group” (Osorio in Bach 2001:123). The resultant work was a small photo-laminated glass-walled *casita* (little house) situated in the courtyard of the new premises of the Congreso de Latinos Unidos. The images on the glass walls “pay homage to the sacrifices and struggles” of the community, reflect their history and represent their belief in the value of the family. The casita serves as a gathering place both conceptually and in reality, and the images laminated within the glass panels can be seen from both in- and outside the translucent structure. At night it becomes a “glowing community photograph album” and together with similar photo-laminated windows inset into the main building, the panels tell their story to all who pay attention.

The work is a result of the collaboration between artist and community: the stories and lives of the people are not only reflected

physically in the work but are also understood as the culture that sustains this community. The overall benefit to the community was not only an artwork to be appreciated by everyone but the sense of pride and ownership that resulted from being part of the process. Individuals would also have felt empowered by being part of a process that would affect their own spaces, and for a short while, would have been in charge of their own destinies. This sense of community would have been further bonded socially in the processes of sharing ideas and discussion, and having to make decisions together in a situation where no one person was more important than the next.

The artist on the other hand, would have had to change his approach and put his own interests aside in order to act as interpreter of information, of ideas and of the community as a whole. He would have needed to integrate all the ideas, and inspire and encourage the people to sustain the process of collaboration. His efforts would have been enriched by this collaboration and his benefit would have been that of being part of a collective group of the community especially as he was committed to returning art to the community as stated above.

Culture in Action, 1992 – 1993, was a year-long “exhibition” of eight experimental collaborative processes exploring new trends in contemporary public art but with similar intent to *New * Land * Marks*. The programme was initiated and implemented by Sculpture Chicago. The primary intentions were to move *art* out of the gallery and museums, transform it into creative community actions, transport these actions into the streets and communities of Chicago and thereby create new audiences for a *new art*, an art that was concerned with and based on the lives of the people. The emphasis was placed equally on creative action and audience, the two being interdependent. In many ways it subverted or inverted the notion of “outreach” – that of the traditional

institution reaching out to the audience as actions of those in authority with knowledge reaching out to or uplifting the sensibilities of those considered to be without an understanding of *art*. The year-long experimental creative processes further undermined the institutionalised art world, in order to view or experience the “artworks”, the regular gallery and museum art audiences had to visit the out-of-town locations which, in most instances, reversed the situation and placed these typical art audiences in a foreign context, out of their comfort zones physically but also conceptually due to the nature of the artworks. Added to this, traditional assessment criteria were inadequate to evaluate the collaborations. The overriding philosophy of the programme was transformation.

The stated goals were “to integrate art and culture, to make art a real part of people’s lives, to push the boundaries of public art, to be audience-driven and, above all, relevant” (Olson in Jacob, Brenson & Olson 1995:14). Issues addressed were gang violence, public housing, minority youths, HIV/AIDS caring, multiculturalism and ecology. Author of the accompanying publication to *Culture in action*, Michael Brenson, in his article *Healing in time*, states that all the artists involved were activists who usually worked collaboratively and that all the projects took place in working-class or poor areas that were hardly ever visited by those living outside the areas and never by tourists. “In order to stand on solid ground in experiencing and evaluating the [various and diverse] projects, the communities had to be entered , their voices heard, power shared” (Brenson in Jacob, Brenson & Olsen 1995:19).

The work of New York artist, Mark Dion is concerned with ecology and degraded endangered environments across the world. His collaborative archaeological work Tate Thames Dig, 1999, presented a collection of debris “dumped” in the river over time by people and extracted from the river bed at low tide. Dion’s *Raiding Neptune’s Vault*, 1997/98 is a similar comment of the disregard

by the human race for the planet. Mary Jane Jacob states the following concerning Dion's philosophy towards art,

By merging his skills as an artist ... with those of the scientist, Mark Dion posits that art can function as a productive partner in environmental undertakings. He believes that images can be created that affirm our connection to the environment rather than our domination over it. To do so, he brings to the general discourse of science and conservation, techniques of art that have been untapped for this purpose: irony, humor, metaphor. He seeks to contribute to the ecological movement by raising issues of representation and exposing what images of nature tell us about institutions, societies, and cultures, as well as about the animals or landscapes depicted. ... he brings his art to a larger audience and to find a place where art can be used as an agent of social change (Jacob in Jacob, Brenson & Olsen 1995:106).

For *Culture in Action*, Dion established a student programme with two main aims, one was to set up an ecological group of junior high school students, *The Chicago Tropical Ecology Group* and the second aim was to afford these youths an opportunity to experience alternative approaches to and collaborations between art, science and conservation as possible directions for future college studies and careers. The project involved 15 students from two schools, one in a poor African-American area and one from a fashionable upmarket area. An "experimental field station" in a small publicly owned building alongside a lagoon in Lincoln Park was established where the students set up a public "eco drop-in" information centre and working studio. The Group was exposed to several action groups such as Greenpeace, Chicago Rainforest Action Group, Turn-a-Lot-Around and Green Chicago as well as embarking on a 10-day trip to the small Central American country of Belize and the world-renowned Zoo and Tropical Education Center. The project merged art, education, science, ecology, nature conservation and the daily lives of the youth. It was an example of the role of art in education, its ability to create unique interdisciplinary programmes and new meaningful functions for collaborative interactive activist creative interventions: art as education and education as art. At the end of the programme and on their return from Belize, the student group elected to continue the programme and renamed themselves *The Chicago Urban Ecology Action Group* and to



Antony Gormley, *Angel of the North*, 1998. Corten-steel.

**Following page: Community programmes.
(Allan 1998:132-137) and (Gateshead Council 1998:16)**



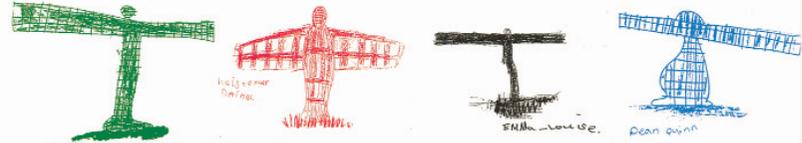
extend their creative conservative activist actions in order to continue to create an awareness of the relationship between art, life and the environment in which we live⁵⁷.

Antony Gormley is a world-renowned British artist whose work challenges the traditional exhibition context by finding alternative spaces in which to exhibit his art – abandoned warehouses and factory buildings as well as outdoor public spaces and even a cathedral crypt. He is concerned with the human body, memory and transformation, energy fields and the contrast between the natural world and heavy industry. His most exceptional and excessive public artwork could be considered to be *The Angel of the North*⁵⁸, 1998, in Gateshead, north east England. It was constructed at a steelworks with industrial techniques and machinery and, using 200 tonnes of weathering cor-ten steel, standing 65ft in height and spanning 175ft in width. The intention of the work was threefold: historical in its reference to the coal mines beneath its site, referencing the industrial past to the technological future, and as a symbol of regeneration and hope (Gormley in Gateshead Council 1998:5).

I have included this work with regard to the extensive educational programmes that were undertaken during the two and half years from approval to the installation. I believe that without the educational and community participation programmes, although the commission was not without controversy, public opposition would have been overwhelming and the work would not have gained the sense of ownership and pride that it has acquired by the local population (personal conversations on several occasions with Anna Pepperall:1997 & 2000). Over 1,400 children and 30 schools were involved in making work connected with the *Angel*.

⁵⁷The proposal for *The Cleaning and Greening the Park*, of Olievenhoutsbosch in Part III, was influenced in part by this project.

⁵⁸I do not discuss the *Angel* as an artwork with relevance to the South African context but the community processes as important to a public art commission.

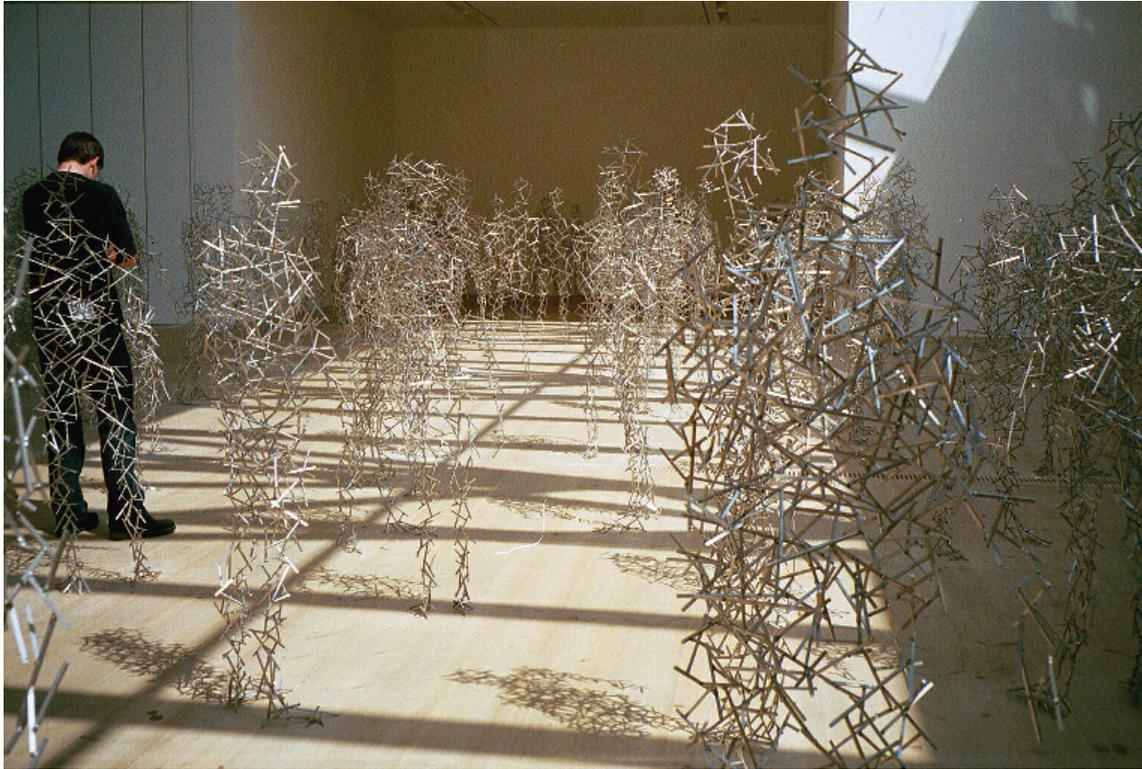


Ann Marie Crichtlow - There was once two fine
 who had to go to bed one night they went
 but they saw an angel. Who are you they
 I am the angel of the north. & I thought
 very good! By Ann Marie Crichtlow 165 Rawling
 Gateshead Tyne and wear

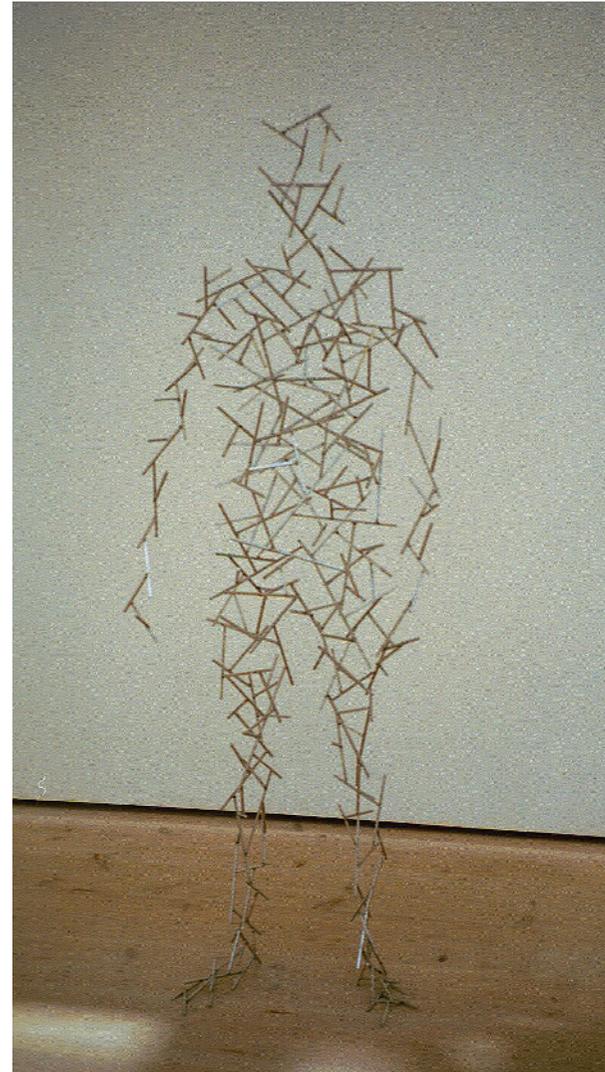
Gateshead has developed an extensive public art and educational programme in which it is considered “important to involve local schools and community groups. ... This has been achieved through artists visiting schools, public lectures, exhibitions, and [the annual Gateshead Family] Sculpture Days in Saltwell Park” (Gateshead Council 1996:8).

The first Family Sculpture Day was held 1985 to celebrate the first phase of Gateshead Public Art Programme. One of these Family Sculpture Days was dedicated to the *Angel*. Wood is the medium used on these sculpture days and, on the occasion of the angel sculpture day, the entire park was alive with a multitude of “angels” taking all manner of shapes and sizes with local sculptors assisting and inspiring both the very young and the elderly. At several schools, artists-in-residence ran a variety of projects based directly on Gormley’s *Angel* using concepts, techniques of body casting, mould-making and plaster construction. Other projects were concerned with the concept of site-specificity, creating sculptures designed for specific locations within the school. Many junior schools made their own angels for selected sites within the schools. The intention was to ensure that as many students as possible were given the opportunity to become involved in the art-making processes in sculpture.

Domain Field, 2003, 286 life-size domains from people aged 2½ to 85 years, was a more participatory temporary installation by Gormley in which the community of Gateshead played a significant role and in which they were able to follow the making of the work from beginning to end. The old Baltic Flour Mill was converted into a gallery and art centre with the aim of encouraging the public to become more than mere spectators: the intention was to create an “art factory” not merely a gallery. Gormley’s *Domain Field* was an ideal collaborative and participatory factory process involving local residents of all ages and sizes. These volunteers were moulded in plaster and these moulds used to construct the unseen interiors of the outer persons. The final installation



Antony Gormley, *Domain Field*, 2003. Welded steel rods.



was an energy field of a collective body of 286 “domains” – it was as if the nerves became the energy field, zones beneath the skin, currents spanning the spaces between these inner fragments of welded rods. This energy was enhanced by those participants who seemed to visit the exhibition time and time again. I saw people pointing to “themselves”, excited, delighted, and I too felt this vitality and energy. The gallery space added to this sense of vitality as the light flowed through two long sections of glass, reflecting off the steel rods, visually fragmenting the open inner bodies further with the steel rods disappearing in the light.

From Level 5 viewing platform, visitors and local residents alike were able to observe the entire working process that took place over a period of time in the Level 4 exhibition space that for this period became an art factory. The following comments are recorded in the participants’ book expressing their experience: *to be immortalised; to overcome my fear; to be famous; and I liked the idea of being part of a work of art; I did it because it was a very fun thing to do* (from the book displayed on Level 5 viewing platform at the exhibition).

Similar to the sculpture project in the Forest of Dean discussed in Chapter IV, is the sculpture project that was established at Grizedale Forest⁵⁹ in Cumbria, north west England. The Grizedale Society has established an extensive art educational programme with a “theatre in the forest”, a gallery, studios, museum, a visitors’ and resource centres. The programme involves artists-in-residence at local schools, schools’ sculpture workshops within the forest conducted by the artists working in the forest, and guided tours. The Society caters especially for school outings with specially prepared Education Resource Packs with the intention of enriching a child’s experience of the forest and sculpture, and particularly, their own creative responses to this unique environment of a

⁵⁹See Part II, Section III: public art in rural areas.



Langport Visitor Centre, *Discovery Room*, [sa]. Somerset, England
 An interactive educational permanent exhibition room developed with schools as a community participatory project.

working forest. “A sense of place” is one of the main aspects of this programme (personal conversation with Director, Bill Grant 1997) visitors of all ages with or without an awareness of art outside of a gallery context are exposed to environmental site-specific permanent and temporary artworks and art processes that use an array of traditional and non-traditional local materials from wood and stone to the unexpected use of leaves, water and mud. Besides the emphasis on schools and the general public, the Society has built up an extensive and diverse collection of sculptures through their popular artist-in-residence programme initiated particularly to promote emerging sculptors and provide opportunities for them to respond to a particular site and context.

The River Parrett Trail, discussed in Chapter IV, has also established an extensive educational programme and special educational interactive Discovery room within the Langport Visitor Centre. The programme includes a variety of events over the year, from the annual River Festival, various guided walks based on either the history, the environment, the arts and crafts industry, words and images, and sketching and painting. In addition, the programme ensures all aspects of the rich fabric of the area with the recording of *Where the Parrett winds peacefully*, traditional folk songs collected from towns and parishes along the River, while *The Song of the Parrett* was commissioned as a song telling the story of the area. *In time of flood*, 1996 is a publication as a result of a collaboration between poet James Crowden and photographer, George Wright. Words and images unite to create a powerful reminder of the past, the present and the need to remember and sustain. The area is rich in history, culture and local industry with a particularly fragile ecology that will only be sustained through education and an understanding of the necessity for its existence.

Areas such as the Somerset Levels and Moors and the ancient Namaqualand Palaeolithic floral kingdom along the north west Cape coast, are now few and far between with many having been destroyed world-wide. Cultural and arts programmes such as the River Parrett Trail, are essential to the survival of these remaining wildlands, wetlands, deserts, rainforests, prairies, rivers and watershed areas, mountains and oceans.

CHAPTER VIII:

The Functional, Practical and Social Implications of the Arts in a South African Context.

Part III states that this research was motivated by the necessity to find meaningful and tangible ways of integrating art and society where art becomes modes of urban regeneration, public expression, ways of addressing past histories and a tool of public empowerment within a developing democratic South Africa. In addition, it states that the study is based on the premise that creativity and individual expression through the arts has a valuable role to play in the development of integrated social structures in which the arts can provide effective programmes of human resource development through appropriate education and training that is not necessarily based on standards of prior learning and therefore is able to accommodate wider and diverse communities. Various artworks, sculptural public spaces, projects and programmes in South Africa are discussed at some length in Part III.

Chapter VIII looks at a positive pro-active role for the arts in skills training, entrepreneurial opportunities in the South African context where there is a desperate need to find ways of sustainable development for integrated societies. The arts have the potential to play an important role in regeneration in the Country by creating visual identities and dynamic environments for sociation for all communities. It is a generally accepted notion that “the arts can build communities”. To prove this would require an in-depth sociological study which it has been stated is not the aim of this research. Nevertheless, I concur with this notion and am of the belief that collaborative multi-national arts projects can bring together different groups and effect socio-economic change. This chapter examines three aspects in particular: collaborative community entrepreneurial and public art programmes; art projects involved in the regeneration of public spaces; and the potential synergy between industry, the corporate world and the arts as possible ways of addressing and finding solutions to poverty alleviation, job creation and pollution through the creative recycling of available resources.

Art in history reveals that creative people have always played a role in the social and cultural development of a society. Given a public context from which to operate, creative expression gave voice to political, spiritual, historical and social concerns of every culture.

Primarily, the Republic of South Africa (RSA) is a developing country characterised by a multicultural population which is at different levels of development, and which has diverse values and systems of norms. South Africa is also characterised as having a variety of levels of income and welfare, economic activities which differ from one geographic area to another, low economic growth, unemployment and poverty. The country also has to cope with a high rate of population growth, swift urbanisation, serious housing shortages as well as a growing need for education, health and social services. ... In any community there is a distinct relationship between political, economic, physical and social development. ... To a great extent the dynamic interdependence and interaction between economic, political and social aspects, determine the process of balanced development which takes place in any community (Schoeman in Lombard 1992:1)

It is within this changing dynamic of South African society that the arts have a significant role in the socio-political context of people and can become an important tool of empowerment and economic development. However, even within the last decade, extensive arts training has been afforded to previously disadvantaged groups without great effect. This disappointing result could be attributed to the lack of understanding of the need for an interdisciplinary approach to development and the interdependence of one aspect of daily life to the next. Training on its own is insufficient to further the needs of people. It has been stated in the Preface that this research is based on the premise that creative expression is an inherent need in human beings that fills the spirit and plays an important role in the mindfulness of a society. The intention is to explore a contemporary public context for art as self-expression and empowerment and ways in which artists can, and have intervened in society to provide practical and functional social spaces that are not only accessible to all but create an awareness of our response to and interdependence on each other and

our environments. This research therefore exists *in between* the arts, social sciences and the ecology of places, and the role of the artist within a socio-cultural context within these confines. Social intervention has also been motivated as inherent to art in a public context. One of the aims of this research is to consider how art can become pro-active in shaping the appearance and meaning of public spaces but is also concerned with bringing into focus the potential role of the artist in a social context within South Africa. *Intervention through the arts* can become significant factors in education, literacy and poverty eradication. To date, I am unaware of any interdisciplinary research of this nature undertaken in South Africa. It is not within the scope of this research to conduct a statistical sociological study but the study does examine various projects that substantiate the premise that art interventions can produce positive socio-economic results.

There have been several examples of positive results from collaborative community arts programmes in South Africa⁶⁰. There are also good examples of *place-making* within the arts that in themselves have created new dynamic spaces. Unfortunately, many of these training programmes and creative spaces have not made a noticeable difference to the lives of the people affected by these projects. The mere transferral of skills will not necessarily create work or the creation of new dynamic spaces, sociation. Further structures for implementing skills are essential in the one instance, and in the other, some form of linkage or mode of intervention is necessary to connect community to site. What incentive is necessary to connect people to a site? Do these sites provide opportunities for play and recreation or alternatively, job creation and informal trading? Are these new upgraded sites merely superficial window-dressing without the core problems being addressed? These questions should be part of the initial planning process and the reason for the development. Were the people consulted with regard to *their needs* prior to the developments? The reasons for the ineffectiveness of many programmes are the lack of cohesion or long-term planning, or groups

⁶⁰See Part III: *Public and Collaborative Community Arts Programmes in South Africa*.

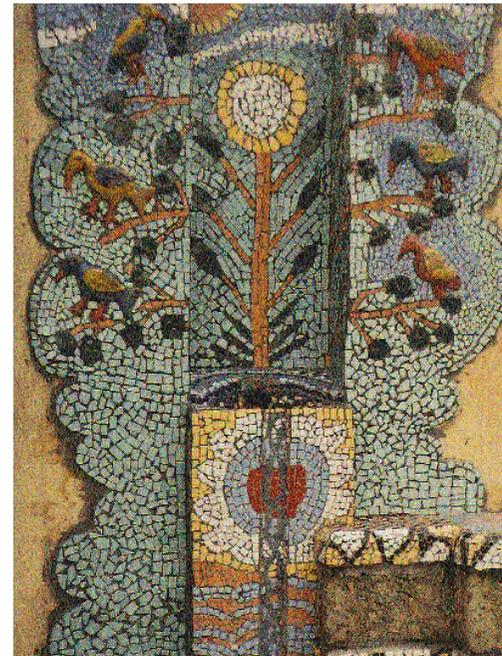


Langa Community Centre, Cape Flats, Cape Town.

working in isolation and often, the lack of comprehensive understanding of the complexity and full ramifications of the situation. When creative interventions are incorporated into such projects that are then not successful, the inherent potential in the arts suffers and is said to be a waste of the additional money involved. In other words, the arts are blamed rather than the implementation processes!

The community centre in Langa, Cape Flats, could be seen as such an example. The design and structure of the building is unique and adventurous with a flavour that is *of Africa*. From the exterior decorative and relief embellishments and the functional utility sculptures in the entrance courtyard, it can be deduced that much activity and vitality had been put into these creative interventions. While visiting the Centre however, I found only two women sewing in a back room. For the rest, the centre was deserted, the fully equipped ceramic studio having not been used since the construction was completed, the exhibition area empty with no exhibits, the kiosk closed, the community hall and recreational courtyard empty, with no one entering the centre within the hour that I spent there on a Saturday afternoon. A little further away in Philippi, the recently completed elaborately mosaic decorative community facility precinct and public plaza alongside the Community Hall and Library centre, was also empty on this weekend afternoon. Statements have been made that these developments focus on intensely used spaces with the many street traders inadequately accommodated. Why then is this new facility not being occupied by these many informal traders? What is necessary for this newly reconstructed place to become part of the fabric of this society, for ownership to take place?

New library complexes were constructed in the Gauteng townships of Sharpeville in Sebokeng, Etwatwa near Benoni and



Phillippi Community Centre, Cape Flats, Cape Town.

Centre right: Mobile Arts Centre. (Hagg 2001:55)

Olievenhoutsbosch near Centurion, Pretoria, where I was commissioned to create public sculptures⁶¹. Having spent many months at these centres while constructing the artworks, I noticed that they are used mainly by high school students as learning centres, somewhere to study in a quiet area. Other than this, a few programmes are presented by outside people, but in the main, these libraries are completely underutilised with no credible programmes being presented by the library staff who are certainly not overworked or understaffed considering the lack of activities taking place. On the few occasions that I have visited the Benoni Central, Sandton Centre, Pretoria Central and Brooklyn (Pretoria) Libraries in up-market areas, I have found them to be as underutilised. Surely these are ideal State-owned facilities which could be easily employed for essential and important arts and culture activities. South Africa needs to develop a culture that understands the necessity for the arts and both Central and Local Governments should be providing the necessary funding to support these programmes at existing facilities. Bureaucracy of “who runs what and who is responsible for funding what” is destroying potential education and development for all our citizens. An interesting innovation initiated in the provision of a community centre, was the use of a “mobile arts centre” for the Northern Cape (Hagg 2001:50). Schmahmann also refers to a mobile arts centre for the Mpumalanga area. Apart from the obvious advantages of this concept, is the fact that this mobile unit is operated by personnel specifically and solely for the purpose of presenting cultural activities. It would seem that this is a more cost-effective venture, inherently resolves the problems of responsibility and intentions, and would ensure community interaction as an eagerly anticipated event in these outlying areas. I am unaware of whether these still exist. Nevertheless, I feel that this initiative should be explored to a much greater extent and implemented throughout the Country.

Operating within the public domain, art projects could be a combination of permanent and temporary structures or even transitory

⁶¹See Part III, discussion of selected community projects that I have implemented.

events as well as participatory ongoing projects that reflect the needs and social conditions of a particular group or society. These projects can empower communities and give them a *voice* to effect change and create social awareness. One such project was the Unisa/Mississippi *Journey to Freedom*, discussed in Part III. Various groups of people worked together on the project, sharing ideas to produce an artwork that comprised two embroidered wall hangings and a DVD animation of the embroidered images to coordinate with the lyrics performed at a celebratory event. When the women, who created the artworks, attended the performance, there was no doubting the pride and joy of seeing their work exhibited and the projected animations based on their work. They were further rewarded by being selected as winners of the Gold award for the FNB Crafts Exhibition.

François Matarasso is concerned with an approach to the conservation of arts and culture that “values diversity in itself ... and sees traditional rural cultures as a crucial part of our rich personal and shared identities. ... [This approach that] would value rural culture as the unique expressions of human experience and [be] a source of great pleasure and deep satisfaction. ... cultural diversity is, in its own way, as important to the future of humanity as biological diversity” (in Douglas 2002:28). Much of the public art in rural environments is based directly on the local cultural context of its site. It is this fact that differentiates these artworks from those of the built environments.

The *Ilithalomso Craft from Waste*, also discussed in Part III, is an important collaborative environmental community project within a completely different ethos and agenda. It originated as a training programme for *The Coastcare* project, initiated in 2000, of the Kommetjie Environmental Awareness Group (KEAG) with two of the main aims being that of concern for the environment and equally important, that of poverty alleviation. It may be that as a result of its environmental concerns and context, the overall working

process was more clearly defined and focused on an integrated programme of collecting, cleaning and environmental rehabilitation when necessary. The “craft from waste” project was an unexpected outcome as a result of recognising the latent potential and being prepared to follow up on the inherent possibilities. The Working for the Coast Project supports 20 women working in teams who collect on an average 1000 refuse bags of litter per month. The disposal of this refuse was an additional element and although a problem, it was transformed into an advantage and an income-generating potential. Artist Monique Fagan, already working with waste material, has developed a recycling craft training programme using the collected waste, establishing the *Ilithalomso* craft.

Although the material is available and could be assumed to be a “free source”, the process from collecting, sorting and preparing the material to the manufacture of the final product, is labour intensive resulting in craft objects becoming relatively expensive. However, taking into account production time and the uniqueness of concept and creativity, the product can be considered as an individualised artwork and therefore, not merely a mass-produced craft item. The success of the project is in the ongoing product development that ensures that the artworks retain individuality and uniqueness, resulting in the creation of brightly coloured, well crafted items that are both functional and decorative crafted from the flotsam and jetsam washed up by the tides. Several important criteria are applied within the project: dialogue, openness and sharing of ideas with individual responsibility; quality of craftsmanship and uniqueness in production; and product development.

There are many situations within the Country that offer similar possibilities and in some cases the inherent potential is even greater. One of the biggest challenges we face is finding ways to change attitudes toward waste management. This also applies



Craft Market, Mexico City.

to the creative re-use of waste⁶² or recycled materials. The *Ilithalomsó Craft from Waste* collaborating with *Coastcare* and KEAG has shown how a recycling project can be sustainable, successful and unique. Unfortunately, South Africa does not put great emphasis on the concepts of reduction, separation and recycling of material – recycled material is seen as waste and therefore, its monetary value as limited. South Africa has the necessary resources and labour as well as potential skills. However, unless attitudes change towards the need for waste management and recycling and the potential thereof, the support for art, crafts and functional objects made from waste/reusable materials will not be substantial enough to sustain this new industry. In addition, there needs to be a radical change in attitudes by all South Africans towards self-help programmes and job creation, not as second-rate or as inferior, but as a positive and exciting development to a major national problem and therefore deserving of support. Without sufficient funding and sound principles of intentions, this field of art-making and its potential cannot be effective. But more importantly, the courage or the vision to venture into the potential of recycling is lacking. Without the initial risk-taking and unless credit is given to the possibilities, there can be no proof of the potential these creative interventions can impart.

In many countries, the arts are seen as a thriving vital industry not merely for tourists as artefacts but as traditional artworks, decorative crafts, as everyday functional secular or religious objects, as beautiful home furnishings and wall hangings, carpets, architectural embellishments and hand-carved furniture. Excellent examples of the arts as a credible respected industry are for example, Mexico and India, to name just two. In India, state emporiums provide the necessary structures through which the industry is marketed. In addition, as in Mexico, there are numerous permanent established “craft markets” or craft bazaars as in the traditional sense, while in America, the equivalent is the many trading posts where one can acquire the arts and crafts of the various cultures.

⁶²Waste material is not necessarily only material that has been thrown away, but also includes new materials that are by-products or materials rejected when slightly faulty or remnants or “end cuts”.

Informal traders can be found in certain areas in major cities in South Africa but there are no formal structures protecting either the buyer or the artist/crafter at these street markets. In addition, there seems to be no assistance for these informal traders to be able to upgrade their businesses and improper trading methods are often followed for want of facilities, experience or training. A good example of this would be the crafts found along Durban's beachfront area. There is a complete mix of imported cheap commodities that are detrimental to this trading and added to this conglomerate of cheap imported commodities, is the fact that the traditional original crafts are all the same with little variety or ingenuity. In other instances such as gift and craft shops, there is no control of quality or the pricing of these arts and crafts, and in many instances, both the buyer and the maker are being exploited by the "middle-man". Collaborative art programmes where artists work together with communities are ideal opportunities for and important tools of group expression. The visual language or images that result from these collaborative community programmes are drawn from and assume the life of that community. The results are the universal language of art rather than merely another duplicated handmade object. Nevertheless, very successful programmes have been established throughout the Country and these are discussed in Part III of this research as well as several situations/projects in which artists work within collaborative contexts such as *The Keiskamma Art Project*, the *Hollard Contemporary Bead Collection* and *Monkeybiz* bead project.

Several attitudes must change in South Africa for this industry to have any hope of becoming viable, successful and sustainable: the understanding of the importance of retaining and sustaining our cultural heritage; the necessity of accepting our role in the human degradation of the planet – such as poverty, illiteracy, joblessness and homelessness as well as environmental pollution; the need to value and appreciate the initiative and endeavours of those creative entrepreneurs who can create new unique and fascinating objects and artworks. Most importantly, the potential in the synergy between protecting the planet, its resources, the re-use of

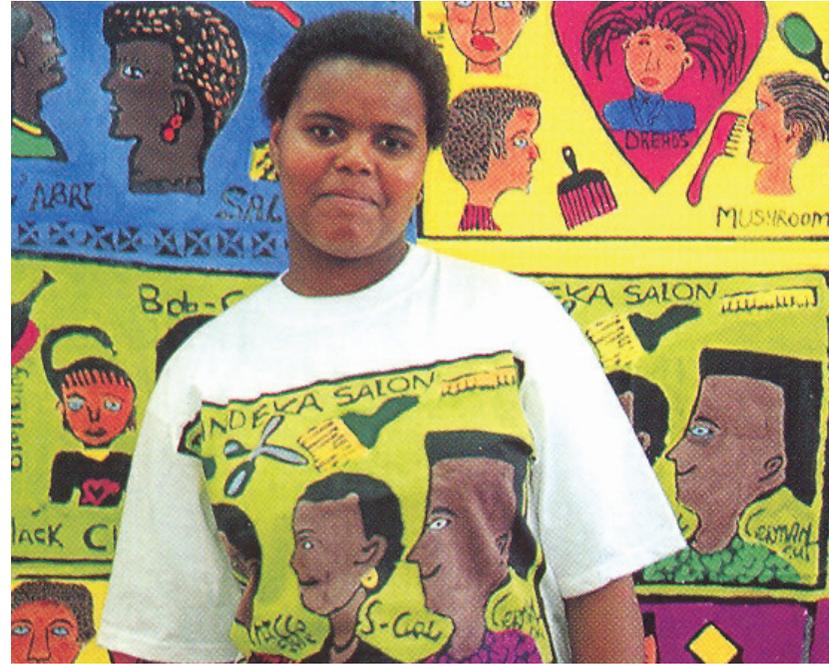
materials, job creation, poverty alleviation, reduction of crime and greater productivity must be understood as a potential resource rather than only a range of critical problems.

Education is essential, not just in schools but in all sectors and levels of society. There is enormous potential in developing partnerships between industry and the arts. Links between industrial manufacture and the handmade can become catalysts for economic, social and environmental change. Social environmental strategies for sustainable growth are essential and the arts can fill part of this gap: broad-based models for collaborations and multiple-beneficial programmes facilitated through industrial and corporate social investment in conjunction with the arts. They can support and encourage recycling initiatives. How? By commissioning corporative gifts made from their own by-products/reject materials, by using these crafted objects in advertising, promotional campaigns, as unique crafted logos in alternative media, as corporate gifts, by exposing these objects at conferences and expos, and thereby visually and physically supporting and focusing as much attention as possible on these unique and individual achievements.

Besides the obvious criteria of quality and uniqueness, sustainability of this new industry is dependent on:

- industry and corporate support and awareness
- resources
- reduction of time and labour
- residencies/apprenticeship programmes
- research

To a large degree, the appreciation for objects made from recycled materials is dependent on the quality of the material itself. In



South African arts and crafts.

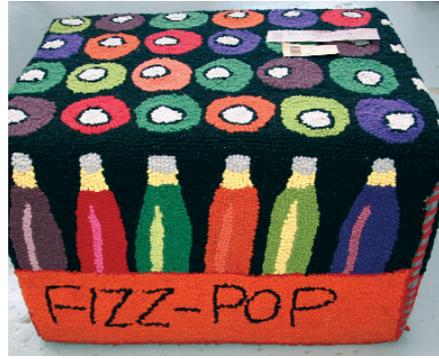
Above: (Philani Flagship Printing Project pamphlet)

Following page: (W Ross, J le Roux and Sellschop [sa]:35)

this respect much work needs to be done. Understanding of the medium, its potential for transformation and possible construction techniques can greatly enhance the crafter's knowledge of the best use of the medium. Partnerships between production factories and new crafters could be developed that would fulfil this need. This could take the form of "residencies" or technical on-site apprenticeships. This would also create an understanding and reciprocal relationship between factory personnel and the artist/crafter-in-residence. An excellent and successful example of such a partnership is Richmond Buthelezi, a recognised South African artist, who has established a working relationship with the National Plastic Federation.

An alternative interpretation to the typical temporary artist-in-residence system, is the possibility of setting up workshop contexts on-site. This will be beneficial to all concerned: space for the artist to work, safe storage for resources and products, reduction in costs of removing waste materials, waste material/off-cuts will not be soiled/ruined which will enhance the quality of the craft, and most importantly, alleviate the necessity of crafters having to find, transport and clean resources resulting in the reduction of time and labour. From the on-site management contracts for sorting, separating and recovery of recyclable materials, it is a very simple step forward for an on-site crafter to intercede in this system to use this use recoverable material on-site to produce unique works. The manufacturer will immediately be adding sustainable value to the waste stream. The craft work will receive exposure to staff who would immediately provide a market as well as advertising and marketing channels. Simple ideas shared, swapped and debated between crafters and factory staff could easily result in significant empowerment projects and assist in product development.

Design, marketability and uniqueness are essential to the sustainability of any enterprise. Product design is dependent on an understanding of the medium and an understanding of the consumer market. On-site partnerships could result in collaboration between industry and artists combining research, technology and creativity. The greater the involvement by industry and the corporate



world in this new industry, the greater the awareness of the need for waste management and the potential thereof in terms of the re-use and recycling of materials. In addition, the gains to industry are numerous: goodwill, productivity through the use of excess resources, reduction of transport costs of redundant materials, implementation of good practices and social environmental investment. Arts and crafts made from waste materials are presently making a small but meaningful contribution to waste minimisation in South Africa. The potential for expansion of this form of waste minimisation is enormous. Examples of sustainable businesses in waste art and craft already exist and these models should be fostered and promoted. The benefits of waste-art to the waste industry and to the country are significant, particularly in terms of sustainable job creation and poverty alleviation. These are the challenges facing artists, crafters and the industry.

The research argues for *intervention through the arts* and pro-active art projects that can become important factors in education, literacy and poverty eradication within South African society. Unfortunately many community projects are merely skills-based and decorative in nature. Decoration itself is however, not creative self-expression although it may bring reward, satisfaction and self-esteem through achievement. There is, naturally, value in any project even if only decorative but this study is concerned not only with the aesthetic value of the arts but in particular, with its ability to effect socio-economic change, its ability to speak of everyday concerns and its aims as being pro-active.

The research investigates an interdisciplinary approach within the arts that offers opportunities for collaboration and the participation of communities in projects that are directly related to the social, cultural, economic, environmental and ecological contexts and concerns. These are discussed in greater detail in Volumes II and III. The role of community-based art in South African society can be enormous, if afforded the opportunity. In the multi-dimensional and complex society that exists in this Country, artistic expression has the potential *to give people a voice* and enable them to reclaim their place in society. It is also a means of building



FNB Crafts Exhibition. (J le Roux)

capacity and community, both of which are sorely needed. The knowledge that one can be creative and use that creativity expressively, in itself creates capacity as well as self-esteem and dignity. The arts enable and provide opportunities to present works that instill social consciousness and question or create awareness of social responsibility. Artists use their creativity not only to give voice to their own expression but to present the world with a vision of itself. Social responsibility and social awareness are the tools of *Everyman* that enable him or her to play a role in the re-establishment of an integrated and healthy society. Visual artistic expression is the vehicle, accessibility is the key and a public context is the space.

CHAPTER IX

The Repositioning of Assessment Criteria for Art in the Public Domain.

Chapter IX proposes that within the complexities of art in the public realm, a reframing should be initiated to evaluate criteria of assessment appropriate to contemporary public and community arts. Inherent in the public domain are its context and the concepts of public, process and intervention. It is essential that these issues including those of intention, accessibility, suitability, collaboration and maintenance, be considered in the evaluation process. This does not imply that quality is compromised but additional criteria are equally important within a public context. *Intention* is of primary concern together with *accessibility* with regard to a visual language and content that become central issues in any socially concerned public process. Issues of audience participation and response, as well as permanence as opposed to temporality are also examined, particularly, the elements of good practice in commissioning processes.

One of the main aims of this research is to establish critical and appropriate evaluative criteria for these “new forms” of public art that acknowledge shared ownership, intentions that address and critique social issues, and alternative non-traditional art contexts. A critical language must include an assessment of social ethics and responsibility, the public, the quality of experiences and contexts as well as aesthetic principles. Contemporary public art must be assessed in part by its relationship to the collective social proposition to which it subscribes. It is necessary to reframe the various fields within which alternative collaborative and public art projects operate, and redefine public art not as a collectable product but as a process of a larger socio-cultural agenda. In addition, assessment should make provision for the quality of experiencing art as a forum for dialogue and social activism. It can be seen not only as

an art for public places but also as an art form which addresses socio-political issues. Collaboration is essential: in assessing the needs of the community, in establishing the project and in creative decision making. The integrity of a public art programme is based on this integration and interrelationship. It is necessary therefore, that strategies and structures be developed that allow for both the voice of the artist and the greater community.

Traditional forms of assessment are difficult in this genre of art due to its diversity and multiplicity. There are nevertheless, specific criteria that do not apply to conventional modes of art that cannot be ignored in public collaborative and community arts. In traditional contexts, quality is associated with the art object rather than with audience response or a relationship to the site and context: aesthetic autonomy versus social intervention. Conventional art criticism does not account for intention or reception of the work. It generally examines the artist's individual creativity and freedom of expression. The problem with critical writing about public and collaborative arts is that no models exist that reframe the criteria within the arenas of intention in relation to intervention, audience participation and response, appropriateness or process. Many publications and project reports discuss practical issues such as commissioning processes, budgets, economic value, the provision of facilities, and a description of projects. There has been much conflict but little critical debate around public art programmes and the viability, ethics and value of such projects. However, there seems to be one point of consensus, that of the value to both the city/urban/rural context and the public. It is generally claimed that these projects instil a sense of pride and ownership, have economic value, provide an identity and a sense of place. I am unaware of any study in which these claims have been officially proven through critical research surveys. Nevertheless, my own findings support these claims although there were many instances in which these statements of public good could not be justified. In these cases, attention was not given to the evaluative criteria presently under discussion.

Regrettably, there are very few publications that focus on evaluation, appropriateness and the suitability of projects. The resultant artworks/spaces of these public and collaborative public programmes seem not to have been subjected to the same rigorous debates as artworks exhibited in typical art venues and galleries. Possibly in their eagerness to promote public art, authorities, commissioning agencies, artists and reviewers of public art, do not critically evaluate or even invite criticism. The implication is that there is no doubt about the value and success of these projects. Unfortunately this is often not the case. It is therefore, essential that new critical, qualitative and conceptual evaluation criteria dealing with concepts of intention, function, accessibility and relevance as well as relationship to site, context and audience are established. This new mode of public art moves beyond the boundaries of “Fine Art” and demands a new critical and evaluative system that should include sociologists, anthropologists and psychologists thereby developing a new interface with other important disciplines. This falls within a post modern idiom that breaks down the hegemony of the closed, protected areas of ownership. As with all artworks, aesthetic standards and the suitability of public art and collaborative projects will be maintained only when intensive and critical debate is established.

Public artwork should be appraised within *real-life* contexts of the space and the communities of which they are a part. Suzi Gablik in *The reenchancement of art* states,

It seems clear that art oriented toward dynamic participation rather than toward passive anonymous spectatorship will have to deal with living contexts; and that once an awareness of the ground, or setting, is actively cultivated, the audience is no longer separate. Then meaning is no longer in the observer, nor in the observed, but in the relationship between the two (1993:151).

The many contradictions these works inherently challenge are the established definitions of art. These contradictions also necessitate alternative modes of interpretation. The artworks pose awkward questions:

- does *public* refer to place, ownership, accessibility or content;
- to whose public does it refer;
- does public refer to the intention of the artist or to the interest of the audience;
- what is the role of the artist in a public arena in today's society;
- can public art affect society or empower communities?

The *relationship that a public project establishes with its context* is the essence of the work and assessment should be based on this relationship. Interpretation is based on an understanding of the broader context of the work - this is essential and should take cognisance of the origins of the project, its commissioning process, and the ongoing public response. As stated in previous chapters, most public projects are not about individual artworks or art objects in the traditional sense. Ordinary functional forms and structures as well as recreational areas, playgrounds, reclaimed abandoned and damaged sites, dumps and landfill sites, parks and public plazas are being transformed into sculptural environments and public sites of sociation. Cycle paths, gateways and bridges, ornamental paving, water features and drinking fountains, seating and play structures, lamp-posts and refuse bins are only some of the many structures included in the manipulation of form and space. Spaces are converted into *public places*, into aesthetic public environments.

The *processes of good practice* are essential to creative interventions within the public domain and are dependent on the same principles that are advanced in the arguments that promote it: a sense of place and local distinctiveness; engagement with the people for whom it is intended; imagination; and regeneration of the site. The formal and conceptual interaction between site, structure and context is critical. To relate an artwork or implement aesthetic transformation to a location is *to confer identity* on

the site. However, identity is not something that can be imposed by the artist or designer but is the result of *local distinctiveness* incorporated into both the work or site and the collaborative process. This demands an understanding of the nature of the *place*: its physical location and material identity, the people and the local history. This synergy can only be established through sound working relationships in which *dialogue* takes place between the commissioning body, local authorities, the community and the artist. These are basic criteria for good practices in any public process in which *intention* becomes accepted by all parties.

Intention:

It is important that all parties affected by the project are considered. However, affected parties, the public in general and in some instances, even particular communities, are seldom given the opportunity for consultation. The intentions of the client or commissioning agents are not always or necessarily in keeping with the *needs* or requirements of the people who may use the site. Alternatively, there is no particular public to consult. Although dialogue is essential, it is usually complicated to implement. It involves considerable time and it is almost impossible to obtain consensus unless the collaborative process is open and receptive.

The overall aim of a permanent public project generally includes various objectives, particularly a council or municipal project: commercial value, refurbishment, recreation, facilities, tourism, safety, and/or ecological, “the greening” of an area. Numerous private companies initiate projects that enhance the communal spaces accessible to the public. Their intentions could be said to support the arts but many consider these intentions to be of economic value or a “cover up” and thus collaboration is certainly not considered. Almost all major corporates advertise their products through their attempts to improve the indigenous world. However, for example, large forestry, oil and fishing industries continue to deplete the world of its natural resources cutting down forests, over-fishing and whale-hunting.

A prime and recent example of the conflict between the intentions of those in a position of authority and power and a specific public's needs or opinions, is that of the 2012 London Olympic Games development and refurbishment programme. At the time of the award (5 July 2005), television reporting by CNN and Sky News stated what was considered to be the many positive aspects of hosting the Games. However, interviews with residents and owners of small businesses in the designated areas for the development, expressed great concern for both their businesses and homes that will have to be relocated and especially, for the disappearance of the last and largest area of open green common land in Europe that will be replaced by sporting facilities and stadia. The stated intentions of the London Games Committee are refurbishment, employment, prestige and tourism. It would seem that these intentions are considered to take precedence over the concerns expressed by the communities including the loss of an important ecological site. Although the Games development does not necessarily centre on the arts, the project is similar to other refurbishment and urban housing developments where new recreational spaces are created by design teams which have included artists. Artists were given a significant and prominent place in these programmes⁶³.

Conversely, the award of the 1992 Olympic Games to Barcelona furthered and supported the aims, initiated by the Mayor in 1979, of the enhancement, refurbishment and greening of the city and the creation of recreational public areas in which the local communities and artists played important roles in the collaborative and implementation processes⁶⁴.

⁶³See: Part II, Section II, St Peter's Riverside Sculpture Project.

⁶⁴See: Chapter III.

Accessibility - an appropriate visual language:

Inherent to the concept of public art is the concept of *social intervention*. In historical, political and religious sculptures and monuments, this aspect is understood and consequently used as a didactic or propagandistic agenda. This aspect differentiates art in the public realm from the mere display of “outdoor sculpture”. Collective relationships and shared ownership are two additional elements that define a public context for art.

An important prerequisite for any form of art intervention in a public space is the need for *an appropriate visual language*. Language is the framework for interpretation. If meaning is hidden in obscurity, the viewer will have no frame of reference and communication will be lost, and as a result, the work could be treated with indifference or even antagonism. Artists working in the public domain need to develop a personal but *popular* language in keeping with contemporary culture. The traditional language of classical forms of art seems inappropriate and the abstract or conceptual format of much “modern” public art is often incomprehensible to the general public. It is essential that the form and content of public art is accessible to public understanding, similarly, artists’ intentions should relate to contemporary society. This does not imply a formula or that public art will become mundane, unimaginative, devoid of magic, or unable to make reference to relevant and conceptual issues. It does, however, imply a necessity for a visual language that is inclusive not exclusive, popular not elitist, and pluralistic not singular in intent. This will ensure public art programmes that not only beautify environments but also offer social and psychological benefits for communities by enriching the lives of people. However, it is essential that a public context also affords the opportunity of socio-political critique as expressed in *The Real World* by Tom Otterness discussed in Chapter III.

The relationship between site, structure and context:

The relationship that a public project establishes with its context is the essence of the work and assessment should take cognisance of this relationship. The formal and conceptual interaction between site, structure and context is crucial. It should enhance the space through the suitability of the formal structuring of the site, the relevance of its content with regard to its public and the appropriateness of the materials used in relation to the local distinctiveness. Intention plays a critical role in the evaluation of the relationships that operate within the work. Artworks created for a particular environment could relocate the viewer by creating a space that redirects, focuses and enhances both the physical experience of the place and aesthetic emotive response to the site. Movement in and through the site is controlled by the manipulation of form and space. The intention of socially engaged public art, new genre public art, on the other hand, is not concerned with the manipulation of space but rather with the repositioning of the audience and a person's existence within the planet in relation to a particular social issue. Many of these creative interventions are temporary and take the form of events.

In a permanent constructed environment, the relationship between artwork, audience and site is one that is constantly in flux, each determining and affecting the other. Introduce time, weather and movement to this constant dynamic of change in these interconnected spatial dimensions and the result is a continually changing social context. How the artist interprets and manipulates a particular site therefore, is dependent on his or her intentions in relation to the participants of that site. In this way the artwork becomes a social process. It has the ability to alter the reality of the site, to encompass or alienate the visitor, or alternatively, create a platform for participation and interaction. The space constitutes the artwork, a space that in itself elicits a very particular response from its audience. This space is also constructed with people in mind and consequently, becomes *place* through its articulation by its audience. The audience becomes part of the space, part of the artwork.

A sense of place and local distinctiveness:

To relate an artwork to or implement aesthetic transformation on a location is to *confer identity* on the site. Identity is not something that can be imposed by the artist or designer but is the result of *local distinctiveness* incorporated into both the work and the collaborative process. This demands an understanding of the nature of the *place*: its physical location and material identity, the people and the local history. An artwork cannot merely be placed on a site with the expectation that the two will merge into a satisfactory relationship nor that this will be representative of either its place or its public. A successful public work is a result of its context, interacts with its space and creates a new imaginative place. *Place-making* is in essence the intention.

Appropriateness and relevance:

Appropriateness and relevance are related to local distinctiveness and intention in both temporary and permanent public artworks intent on regeneration as well as with socially responsible activist artworks. The content localises a work, enhances its appeal and together with formal elements, contributes to its magic and aesthetic quality. However, if content is not imaginative, entertaining or even confrontational, relevance alone is insufficient to be of consequence.

Collaboration and working relationships:

Engagement, dialogue and collaboration: these are the fundamental requirements of art in the public domain. Work imposed on any site or community is usually ignored and/or vandalised. In most semi-public and corporate spaces, collaboration is not given credence. In many other instances, it is often impossible to locate a “public” for consultation, or alternatively, the “public” are apathetic and not interested in being involved. This latter attitude exists because of past experiences and people do not believe

their “voice” will have any impact on decisions taken. However, this should not be accepted – it is essential that within these relatively new modes of art-practice incorporating collaboration, processes should be established to encourage social participation in which people can trust and believe that their “voice” will make a difference.

Regeneration and facilities:

One of the main criticisms of public art is that it is merely regeneration and/or improvement of a site that offers public amenities. Functionality is seen in opposition to the role of artworks. However, this attitude has changed dramatically over the last 35 years and many international artists consider it essential that artists take a pro-active stance against the many socio-political and ethical issues related to power structures, ecological concerns, poverty and the abuse of or “othering” of people. Alternatively, there are many socially responsible artists who feel that numerous public art projects commissioned by the corporate world are complicit in covering up issues and are used “to make them look better”.

Nevertheless, public and socially responsive art are acceptable modes of practice and are being successfully employed internationally. The difference between mere function and/or social work and activist or functional artworks is *imagination*. It can be said that art in the public domain expresses community or social values; enhances our environments or shared spaces and rehabilitates degraded spaces; can be operational in heightening our awareness of social issues; and can be either provocative or question our “safe” assumptions. Consideration of a work’s imaginative value places the work beyond mere function. The *imaginative or inventive context* of the work allows the spectator to interpret the object or space in alternative, fanciful or unique ways and often presents the ordinary as extraordinary.

What can public art offer or add to the development of city and urban spaces over and above that offered by other professions? The artist offers a vision that is different, that is concerned with the imagination, that evokes a distinctive response to spaces related to the interconnectedness of the world and not necessarily to the economics of the built environment, and most importantly, the artist communicates with the audience, the people who will use that space.

Place-making:

One of the criteria for public art is that spaces are converted into places, into aesthetic public environments. A major development of art in the public context is the appropriation of non-art spaces and the relationships that are established by this appropriation between artwork, context and the audience. Artists are changing the socio-economic basis of art. Frank Popper suggested that the use of social spaces and audience participation would influence the development of a “democratic art” thereby creating a new paradigm for art (1975:12). It is this relationship on which *place-making* depends and is therefore a necessary aspect of the evaluation process.

Installation, Maintenance and Guardianship:

Installation and maintenance are two aspects that are given the least consideration in many public projects partly because they are misunderstood in their relevance to sustainability. Choice of a suitable durable medium, appropriate physical access to the site, and constant maintenance of the structures and/or environment are the fundamental elements essential to the works’ lasting value and appreciation. Unfortunately, many well-conceived structures and environments suffer neglect due to poor installation, inappropriate use of material, and an unsuitable access area and ground surface surrounding the work. It is essential that budgets

for permanent public projects make provision for ongoing expenditure of regular maintenance and repair. This is generally not anticipated and after a few years, additional funding is required when this issue becomes a problem. Unfortunately, by this time, there is no responsible agency nor funds available for maintenance as in the original planning and budgeting process these factors were overlooked. What became a popular public place, over time reverts back into a derelict and neglected space.

Artists and commissioning bodies are often ignorant of the complexities of art within the public domain. The lack of both critical assessment and the understanding of essential processes necessary for the successful implementation of public and community-based arts, is its downfall. These two factors frequently result in poor aesthetic quality and deterioration of many artworks/sites. Regrettably criticism is being levied against this mode of art-making. However, it is not the idiom of art that is problematic but the implementation thereof due to inexperience, ignorance and lacking expertise in collaborative art practices.

COMMENTS

Public art, community arts, collaborative and interdisciplinary approaches to the arts are not new but in relation to what could be said to be mainstream art, they tend to be relatively less popular within the art world as idioms of art-making. Yet as demonstrated, these socio-cultural artworks and sculpturally articulated public spaces are popular with their audience and are playing significant roles in the lives of many people whether they call themselves artists or whether they merely involve themselves in art. These artworks are alternative approaches to the world of art in a world of people where the two meet on equal terms, non-artists united by art in non-art spaces.

What, why and how a work or site is created in relation to its content and context is what is important. The concerns are with art that reaches beyond traditional forms to locate itself and its making processes within the concerns of people to effect social change and transformation. Artworks/site were selected because of how these creative interventions have either transformed areas into spaces of sociation, have been able to create awareness of our natural world, have questioned our place in and interconnectedness to the planet, or have added value to the lives of those who have been involved with or affected by the creative process.

PART II presents a survey of international collaborative arts that have been selected as good examples of public art that is socially concerned. As it is difficult to place these work into any homogeneous category, they have been grouped according to their context – city, urban, rural or educational.