

*'Artists tend to move to where the battle is joined most fiercely... They are trying to redefine the basic elements of reality, to recapture them from the ad men who have hijacked our world'.*

J.G. Ballard<sup>1</sup>

## **'UNBRIDLED LUST: THE PAST REVEALED, THE FUTURE RELEASED'.**

This uncanny sentence is a transcription from a large outdoor poster displayed in Kingsland Road, London, matched with an unspecified archive photograph of a 19<sup>th</sup> century horses' stable, and publicising a newly completed and 'now available' private development of 'penthouses'.

However condescending and marginal as it may appear, this unusual piece of marketing copywriting caught my attention because of its attempt to alter, if not deepen, an otherwise trite and crass mechanism typical of these instances of property marketing rhetoric.



Such attempts are by no means rare; in N1, London, stands the future 'NIRVANA' luxury housing development, whilst in Cardiff, Bute terrace, The Redrow Homes development 'ALTOLUSSO: *Life lived in the spotlight*' delivers its euro-exotic meaningless jargon –*Altolusso has no meaning whatsoever in Italian*- and promises a celebrity lifestyle for all its 292 apartment owners.



Returning to Kingsland Road in London, here was not only a distant, sensual glamorisation of the 'lifestyle' forcibly associated with the purchase of a loft in the development, but a more direct, specific message.

Clearly, '*unbridled lust*' is a far more potent image than the '*oasis of tranquillity*' rhetoric (Nirvana) or the promise of celebrity in the face of mediocrity (Altolusso) usually associated with 'edge of city' luxury housing developments. It evokes a kind of rabid, uncontrollable viral purpose, either mirroring or enhancing the lifestyle of those privileged loft-owners. And it certainly refers to a higher state of desire, a vigorously active and dynamic personality trait that is the key to survival in a competitive urban ecology, as well as in merciless globalised markets.

These are narratives internalised into, and explicit of, the metabolism of the urban environment; they also serve incredibly well the purposes of urban developers and their most openly opportunistic agenda.

The work of the Chicago school of Urban Ecology in 1925, first postulated a link between the ecological theories of Frederick Clements and the capitalist style of urbanism they observed in their surroundings. Edward Burgess and Robert Park, sociologists by training, encapsulated in their theories the *'naturalisation'* of the urban expansion patterns by transferring the then dominant and fashionable ecological theories of 'succession' and 'community climax' into social studies of urbanity.

These scientific studies of nature strongly influenced by Darwin evolutionary theories, served the purpose of legitimising and contextualising within urbanist thinking, the evidences of an unstable and uneven social order produced by the forces of capital movement. Their city was:

*'...a product of human nature, an expression of ecological processes and the evolution of the division of labour which serves to distribute economic functions and ethnic groups through metropolitan spaces...cities are environments like those found in nature, governed by many of the same forces of Darwinian evolution that affect natural ecosystems. The most important of these forces is competition.'*<sup>12</sup>

Such a regrettably synchronic model, is built on the understanding that through competition, the city would *naturally* expand from the centre to the periphery until a critical mass –*a crisis*- after which it would settle into a stable status –*homeostasis*<sup>3</sup>- which could be experienced as the only possible settlement of the self-regulatory activity of all the city's organisms.

Beside the evident shortcomings and the total obliviousness to issues of gender, class, race and ethnicity, Burgess and Park's theories were submerged into the radical changes that their object of study –*the city*- would undergo through its endless redefinitions as it moved from modern to post-industrial era.

Sociologist Marc Gottdiener would later reframe their achievements in these terms:

*'...urban ecology explains settlements space as being produced by an adjustment process involving large numbers of relatively equal actors whose interaction is guided by some self-regulating invisible hand. This **organic** growth process –propelled by technological innovation and demographic expansion- assumes a spatial morphology which, according to ecologists, mirrors that of lower life forms within biological kingdoms. Consequently, the social organisation of space is accepted by mainstreamers as inevitable, whatever its patterns of internal differentiation.'*<sup>14</sup>

Despite these observations, the constant need for dynamic spatial rearrangements that is the prime demand of an urban capitalist economy, seems to survive any critical agent; if the struggle or abuse of a specific social group can be interpreted as a step in the city's overall ecological strife towards an ultimate state of natural balanced urbanity, -as *some speculative deterministic accounts still maintain*- then one can justify and condone the endless expansions, construction and re-construction of the city, its re-shaping of vistas, the clearance of dereliction to make space for regeneration and the self-perpetration of cyclic rearrangements, as convincing and unavoidable as natural occurrences.

It is exactly by being subjected to innumerable possibilities and transformations beyond our control and comprehension, that the urban post-industrial space can generate aesthetic experiences some accounts describe as *bordering on the sublime*:

*'what awe us now is not the promise of technology to remake the future, but the speed with which change dissolves the past and constantly reshapes the once immutable landscape around us'* <sup>5</sup>.

Still, the notion of an immutable landscape, particularly in reference to urban space is itself a fallacy; the formulation of an idea of immutable space is actually an attempt of translating the secular into the ontological, the transient into the illusion of the persistent, and ultimately the *social* into the *natural*.

Despite the fact that notions of the city as ecosystem, and therefore its possibility of being studied as an organism, still persists, it appears unlikely now more than ever, that a theory of *homeostasis* applicable to urbanity would receive any attention, despite the challenges of sustainability and pragmatic environmentalism now into the agenda of the governmental greening. The idea of *stability* actually recedes as an implausible goal, belonging to an earlier phase of capitalism, that might still be paraded as a resourceful utopia that can only help to anaesthetize the growing sense of uncertainty, danger and painful apathy that many city dwellers experience.

And so the promise of 'Unbridled lust' comes to signify an aspirational force that guarantees to place its followers on its dynamic course, but then confines it to its midst, as there can be no end to what is 'unbridled lust' other than a drainage of resources, a burn-out of energy to which several recent studies of *urban ecological footprint* can now give some form of scientific evidence<sup>6</sup>.

The second part of the sentence then –*the past revealed, the future released*– establishes the milieu into which the ‘unbridled lust’ might be channelled; in evoking both past and future, through ‘revelation’ and ‘release’, the poster seems to congeal into its allure all the myths and promises associated with neo-liberal capitalistic trajectories of growth and progress: freedom, knowledge, self-realisation.

The world behind the poster’s surface appears like a ‘suspended present’ where the past is always behind but the future is always ‘here and now’, freed, –*released*– available.

It is a persuasive, engineered ‘place’; synchronic, ahistorical and removed from contingencies. Such a space is also described by Rosalyn Deutsche as she analyses Henri Lefebvre’s writings and its notion of capitalist space as *abstract*:

*‘abstract space can function as a space of control because it is generalised from specificity and diversity, from its relation to social subjects, and from their specific uses of space’<sup>7</sup>*

This *concept* of an aspirational, free to purchase and pre-determined individually satisfying space is a crucial stakeholder in the formulation of the spaces in which Public Art constantly engages; its merchandising agents (in this case, private property developers) are powerful players in the *production of space*, enacting a ‘not-so-subtle’ emphatic colonisation of subjectivity in which all of us can dream of being ‘*unbridled*’ in a ‘*Future Perfect*’<sup>8</sup>.

In the ‘battle of ideas which is played out in the ‘conceived space’ (Lefebvre) of urban signs, power is intended as *the power of communication*, which grows exponentially with the weighty ‘presence’ of such visual/textual signs.

In these subliminal territories, for too long the preferred and uncontested stomping ground of capital, the marketing *technologies* have consistently constructed and analysed their own creation, and mythologized their own practice by elevating focus groups to the status of pragmatic laboratories of empirical evidence and questionnaires to the level of individual *constitutions*.

The effects of such practices are nowadays considered so strongly beyond doubt, that the notion of ‘*social marketing*’ as expressed by Kotler, flows seamlessly into a tried and tested understanding of social relations modelled around the preeminent figure of the *customer*.

*‘Social marketing is the application of commercial marketing technologies to the analysis, planning, execution and evaluation of programs designed to influence the voluntary behaviour of target audiences in order to improve their personal welfare and that of the society of which they are a part’<sup>9</sup>*

Meanwhile, in Sheffield, artists Mel Hewitt & Andy Jordan, were displaying a rather different kind of poster, but one that somehow strangely relates to the first, through its countering plea for spaces of future ‘release’ in the public sphere.

Release from the restrictions, interference and travesty of private property into public spaces, but also release from the job of imposing coherence, order and rationality on those spaces, as expressed by professions such as urban planning and design.

The poster, as much as the building on which it appears and the quarter in which it projects its message, awaits its destiny of regeneration.

This, like many other empty overgrown pockets of abandoned urban mire, get collected through serial purchases and are built up behind fences, percolating land value until the seizing moment arrives.

Such processes flow like endemic waves that might appear like a natural phenomena, an unpredictable seasonal alternation of bounty and famine within the space of a generation or less, but more than often, this eerie scenario can appear as scripted *as if planned*.

When speculative national or global capital departs from a location, it migrates elsewhere looking for the same conditions it needs to exist, and within this logic of pilgrimage for cheap land and/or labour, it often retraces its steps.

This is where the extremes of regeneration and abandon, for anyone having observed with attention the seesaw of fortune in some urban areas, are two movements of the same symphony, orchestrated by the same investment forces, dressed up first as fugitives and then as saviours.

This is particularly well expressed by Ernest Mandel:

*‘development and underdevelopment reciprocally determine each other, for while the quest for surplus-profits constitutes the prime motive power behind the mechanism of growth, surplus-growth can only be achieved at the expense of less productive countries, regions and branches of production. Hence development takes place only in juxtaposition with underdevelopment; it perpetuates the latter and itself develops thanks to this perpetuation.’<sup>10</sup>*

Hewitt & Jordan's work, is a piece of Public Art, although the passers-by might not necessarily be aware of this identification. It discusses Public Art, and it does so in reference to private property. The poster employs a text-based strategy typical of conceptual art practices where, concealed in its deadpan delivery and denial of aesthetic appeal, one can detect an extremely eclectic commissioning method and a critical position towards the area it discusses.

But, as its proposition is a non-commercial commentary within a commercially available advertising space, it begs questions of purpose, use and value, both for the site it occupies and for the practice of public art.

The space that it attempts to construct *behind* the poster could be identified with what Lefebvre calls *differential*<sup>11</sup> space, described as the representational space antithetical to the *abstract*<sup>12</sup> space of Capitalism.

The sentence it displays is a circular, self-reflective and spiked attempt to address a failure; the failure of the Public Art *machine*<sup>13</sup> to do scarcely more than fulfil its function as trigger and visible manifestation of urban economic development whilst extending art practice outdoors, without being capable -or maybe willing- to suggest alternative forms of urbanism, environmental management or economic and spatial development.

Whilst this might be considered by some a far too demanding and antagonistic mandate for an art 'public', it is my opinion that the sense of distance, autonomy and neutrality often displayed by urban public artworks and artists statements alike, is a misplacement of concepts and most of all an unsupportable position to be taken in spaces which are, by their very constitution, social, political and, by negotiation, cultural.

Whilst the existence of this undeniable context does not preclude any aesthetics judgement, appreciation of material qualities or the experience of sensuous engagements, it *pre-empts* them as it *predates* them in the *pecking order* of the production of space.

The deliberation of the *context* in urban public space is blatantly predominant as it is the result of a clear, deliberate and controlled project activated by planning and enacted by private capital. It is only after this *moment* that any account of public art can begin.

Once this rather crippling factor is acknowledged, there are still however, many options and strategies offered.

Space, according to Lefebvre, is not entirely hegemonic, since whilst it develops within uneven circumstances, all those active in its production are equally and concurrently subjected to the consequences of its making, being both subject and agents of change.

Within these inherent topologies of power in space, it would be tempting, in pragmatic terms, to consider the public sphere as democratic because of its pluralist access system, but when the dominant structures of production of space are organised in such strong synergy and mutual benefit as they are, for example, in the spaces of urban regeneration created by retail-led or leisure-led plans, the infiltration of any other significant element in the production of the space can only resort to moments of epiphany of the carnivalesque<sup>14</sup>, of the vandalised or, of the antagonistic<sup>15</sup>.

Outside of these subversive narratives, the description of public art as a *cultural service provider* may describe an uncomfortably reflexive and symmetrical relation with its client.

This relationship can become symbiotic up to the point of producing an embodiment of values –or *their deliberate absence*– that ends in *amalgamation* regardless of the intrinsic qualities of the artwork. Any resistance to becoming the means of representation –*cultural interface*– of dominant forces may be futile. It comes as no surprise that for many, and particularly those interested in questioning power and its contradictions, public art is still an odious occurrence, a signal, even a *detector of power in space*.

It is not difficult to observe and find examples of this perception of the practice of public art at a cultural level, even from within artistic practice itself. Such is the subversive quality of sporadic and deliberately fugitive instances, as it was in the case of David Hammons *Pissed Off*, which delivered its title in full. In 1981 he urinated directly on Richard Serra's Tilted Arc, in a near parody of the disenfranchised black man against the empowered, whom Serra epitomizes.<sup>16</sup>

In more recent years, two concurrent evidences of the negative cultural appreciation of public art, interpreted as symbol of disquieting urban economic inequalities, are David Fincher's FIGHT CLUB<sup>17</sup> and Naomi Klein's NO LOGO.

In FIGHT CLUB, the anarchic underground militia of Project Mayhem unleashes its pent-up testosterone-driven anger by blowing up the support of a piece of corporate art (a large, abstract, non-descriptive bronze globe which appears to be a cross-over between an Isamu Noguchi and an Anish Kapoor's sculpture) that once unhinged, rolls down the steps of the square that forms its site, and destroys in a climactic sequence a Starbucks coffee-house.

It would be difficult to be more explicit; in the context of the film script, the piece of sculpture and the branch of Starbucks are equivalent and interchangeable signals of the same market forces enacting their dominant tendencies within privately owned/publicly accessible urban spaces. In the film, the location is the US, but its architecture bears the hallmark of the worldwide corporate spaces of the 80s and 90s; it could have been shot in Broadgate, London.



frame from **Fight Club**, David Fincher, 1999

In the opening page of NO LOGO, Naomi Klein describes 'Toronto's ghost garment district':

*'...it was so unfortunate that City Hall saw fit to commission a series of public art installations to celebrate the history of Spadina Avenue. First came the steel figures perched atop the lampposts: women hunched over sewing machines and crowds of striking workers waving placards with indecipherable slogans. Then the worst happened: two giant brass thimble arrived, right at the corner of my block. There it was: eleven and a half feet high and eleven feet across. Two giant pastel buttons were plopped on the sidewalk next to it, with wimpy little sapling growing out of the holes. Thank goodness Emma Goldman, the famed anarchist and labour organiser who lived on this street in the late 1930s, wasn't around to witness the transformation of the garments worker' struggle into sweatshop kitsch'.<sup>18</sup>*

Once again, it would be improper to express the geographic confines of Toronto as specific and exclusive to these observations; anyone who might know the real history of mining in South Wales and encounters the bronze figures displayed in Cardiff Bay who are supposed to 'stand in' for those histories could make the same observations.

The strategies of spatial re-organisation orchestrated by global capital carry only a fairly thin patina of distinction between the apprehension of differences between distant localities.



*'The economic function of public art is to increase the value of private property.'*<sup>19</sup>

The palpable sense of disappointment in those few words is externalised in the demand for public attention towards an internal struggle of the public art constituency; it 'goes public' in order to 'expose' a systemic malaise which cannot remain within the confines of the constituency it affects –the public art machine.

Because of the tension resulting from the *public* address of a *private* struggle, it seems to me that the project becomes capable of communicating simultaneously at many different levels, in a perceivable mixture of contradiction, ambivalence and specificity.

Through its public 'airing' it tries to exorcise the prevalent inability of public art commissioning practices related to urban regeneration and/or redevelopment to maintain a critical position within the spaces – physical, psychological, metaphorical- it operates in.

What might be considered an anachronistic commentary in the face of an all-pervasive commodification of everything<sup>20</sup>, still proves to be a relevant and pungent consideration. The resiliency and persistence of certain models of public art can only be compared with the endurance of the economic model it signifies: its emptiness being its strength.

Mutations are allowed in formal concerns and varying degrees of irony in which all other considerations subside.

Public art agencies and consultants, still tend to act as service providers to the specific needs of their clients (whether it be a local authority, a private developer or another agency), and maintain a critical distance towards the goals of those entities mostly preferring to act as 'brokers', attaching their programs onto a general strategy which is very rarely identified with as the potential territory of engagement of the artists themselves. They believe, just as museum administrations might do in relation with their corporate sponsors, that their role is purely to locate, open and exploit spaces for art practices, *-encompassing now practically everything-* which, through their own separate agenda, might take advantage of the mutual co-option taking place, which is the archetypal sponsoring/sponsored relation.

The question of autonomy (of the artists, of the artworks and of the structures of the art world) has been for a long time now one of the most effective ways for artists to attempt to formulate new articulations of their role and of the role of their practice in various contexts.

It was the early unfolding of the critique of autonomy of the artwork, which ushered the critique of untenable modernist paradigms of artworks production.

Also, it was through the critique of that much maligned symbolic triad *-studio, gallery, museum-* that many artists in New York in the mid 60's arrived at the refusal and the exposure of what it appeared as the one and only pre-configured journey available for artistic production.

Hence, the migration outdoor of certain fringes of radical art practice, mostly sculpture, where social reading of the work could at least initially undermine the hierarchies of the artworld system of production.

The radical propulsion of the 60s to question the very structures that provided art its own illusion of autonomy could only push it out of its boundaries and into the real world. If countless artists since Duchamp had played with appropriation of elements of reality into art, it was only a question of time before reality itself would be confronted as a *work of art*, and art practice could once again legitimise the question related to its 'functions' as well as its 'uses'.

Clearly, the museums still exist and the number of new ones built everywhere in the 90s can attest to their vitality, as well their centrality within art's economic structure.

As for the practises that ‘migrated’ outdoors, many of the more radical ones were offered a more comfortable and protected roof within the newly launched laboratory-style museums, and some succeeded in opening up new spaces of practice through a deliberate marginalisation from the art world structures and funding bodies. Many more –*often and sadly the most visible*- have produced, and keep producing, the kind of work addressed by Hewitt & Jordan’s poster project.

Within art’s quest for its *autonomy*, Andrea Fraser’s words could be illuminating:

*‘If the critique of the production and exchange of art objects as commodities –like the critique of the studio and the museum- emerged out of a critique of the autonomy of the artwork, it was not just as a challenge to aestheticism. Rather, it was rooted in a recognition of the partial and ideological character of that autonomy and an attempt to resist the heteronomy to which artists and art works are subject by the apparatus which supports their legitimacy and through which that legitimacy is appropriated as symbolic and economic profit. The critique of the autonomy of the art object in this sense was less a rejection of artistic autonomy than a critique of the uses to which art works are put: the economic and political interest they serve.’<sup>21</sup>*

To sum up; once in the public space, artworks cannot escape social analysis and no analysis can be of value, unless it is conducted in a critical manner.

In abdicating, on behalf of the artists, one of the more specific role of the arts –*but not only of the arts*- which is to act as critical agents and stimulants for change, the public art commissioning agencies (a definition which must be inclusive of public institutions as well as private operators) often foreclose some crucial opportunities for a truly diverse, pluralistic, and more democratic understanding of public space and its formulation.

The prescribed specificity of the role of the artists in these situations (mind you, often with the artists’ tacit and self-interested approval) preclude all other roles, and generates, by default, the ‘branding’ effect that Hewitt & Jordan’s poster project attempts to discuss.

Implicated, co-opted and separated only by aesthetic canons from the other constitutive elements of public space, public art can only function as marker of the ‘quality’ of the development it is part of.

This tendency, –*still a very powerful engine in the production of public art*- can be seen here, for example, in a sentence from the public art programme press release of the waterfront development MORE, in Tooley Street, SE1, London:

'The production of quality public art is an integral part of the Partnership's Public Spaces Strategy. This project's aim is to improve the quality of the public realm and new civic space in the More London Development area, in Riverside Square and Gateway Piazza by eight new contemporary art sculptures.'<sup>22</sup>



One of the most prominent artists to take part in this scheme was Fiona Banner. Her contribution to the public space surrounding the buildings has been, from the words of the artist herself:

*'...a series of site-specific giant full stops sculptures in bronze...[that] create an abstract encounter with language...The Full Stops function as abstract sculptures with or without their reference to language and punctuation...the sculpture articulate the space, scattered as if fallen from a big conversation. People walk amongst them like letters, in an abstract narrative'.<sup>23</sup>*



I would concentrate on the sentence *'people walk amongst them like letters in an abstract narrative'* to attempt to reveal an extremely symptomatic and commonly encountered artists' perception of art in public space.

The aesthetic, abstract proposition for the reading of Banner's own work, reiterates notions of *site-specificity* and *phenomenological* interpretation of the *use* of sculpture in public space that permeates public art discourse and can be historically traced as reaching critical mass in the debates surrounding the de-commissioning of Richard Serra's Tilted Arc in New York, in 1985.<sup>24</sup>

It appears clear that the events and their interpretation that led to that most notorious of *trauma* for public art practice, are still often re-enacted, alas without the controversy that at

least helped to expose and 'make public' a particular way for artists to relate to the social and political context of their work.

It was the self-fulfilling mechanism of that controversy (*populism* vs. *elitism*) that pushed the artist and its closest advocates (Rosalind Krauss and Douglas Crimp between others) to promote the idea of an ideologically *non-contingent* use of space, an *aesthetic use* of the public artwork simply available to all. Once it became trapped in between the dichotomy of critical aesthetics and socially critical engagement, no other defence was possible for Serra's work and its purely sculptural, phenomenological interpretation.

However it was exactly such a defence line that showed the most problematic aspects of that argument:

*'Phenomenological readings, placing subjective experience of space outside the socio-material conditions of the city, fail to take into account that the primary object of their study is already ideological...precisely because the ideology of space was never introduced, critical discussions about Tilted Arc, remained aloof from the most crucial public issues about the uses of public space in New York...these issues occupy the heart of urban politics'*<sup>25</sup>

In such a self-constructed but indefensible *neutral* aesthetic realm, artists like Banner might still attempt to find refuge from the contingent realities of *the production of* contemporary urban space whilst taking part in its process. My impression is that the sheltering of public art within critical aesthetic discourse is a spurious and far from neutral act which would simply promote an extension of narratives specific to the artworld into social space, without actually taking part in critical urban discourses where the power structures that shape those spaces come into view.

Rather than artists ready to explore public space, through critical engagement with the processes of its production, we have renowned artists' own brands moving into public space; *blue chip* artists, for *blue chip* locations, planned by *blue chip* developers executed by *blue chip* architects. Public Art sculpture as a logo.

Nineteen years after Tilted Arc, and a vast quantity of evidences produced within that period by social sciences studies, urbanism, critical geography, cultural studies as well as the evolution of critical art practice, still seem insufficient for mainstream public art practice to see its paradox

This might explain why the 'absent audience' of the poster in Sheffield are the public art professionals (artists, commissioners, officers, administrators) which in many cases continue unabated, to maintain this problematic arrangements suspended, unavoidable or ignored.

And since the blueprint of this relation between art practice and the social sphere is clearly a modified version of the art museum-corporate sponsors relation, it seems legitimate that Hewitt & Jordan's act of critical engagement would take place 'in public'.

We would argue that for this reason, a window of opportunity was seized by this project; to use a public art commission to talk about the problems inherent in past and still, sadly, contemporary public art practices and their *uses*.

Is this an attempt of generating a form of 'institutional critique' of the public art structures, enacted within a public art project? Are we then witnessing an occurrence of public art for public art's sake? I would argue this is not the case, at least not in the modernist formalist interpretation of that idiom.

Obviously, Sheffield's public space is not a controlled gallery environment in which incremental formal advancements determine a trajectory of progress and innovation typical of avant-garde mythology; this poster is a 'general public' exhibit, in the sense that beyond its primary targeted audience, exists another, non-specific public which is equally, if not more, an audience of this project.

That audience first response might as well be: 'So What?', questioning that there is nothing wrong in an artistic practice helping a city or an area's economic revitalisation through its presence, and certainly, H&J's have initiated a debate which will remain, like all others in the public sphere, '*chronically unsettled*'.<sup>26</sup>

It might then be taken as true, that for an art to be truly 'public', '*negotiation between social differences has to be part of what the artwork does*'.<sup>27</sup>

These negotiations do not necessarily occur directly, or even in real-time, as the communities one might address are non-geographically nor temporally specified; one might even speculate that the piece acts as a prologue; it attempts to enact a preventive action to intervene –at distance– with future occurrences of the kind of public art such as the one criticized by Hewitt & Jordan and discussed in this paper, thereby acting as a *warning* sign.

Its public then becomes a future one, its function a latent one.

'*They told us it would happen*'.

And then again, the poster, as a piece of public art (in as such as being the product of commissioning from a public art agency) still performs, unwillingly and in a kind of recalcitrant way, its function of anticipating certain paradigms of urban development we have become so accustomed to witness.

Such patterns can be summed up as: Construction, concentration of successful uses - *zoning*-, decline, decay, dereliction, reconstruction.

The question one might ask is: *'How much faster these cycles can go? And to whose benefit the visible acceleration plays into?'*

What seems to be clear is that until the tendency to even out these areas of negotiation into which public art operates are screened out before the artist's engagement takes place and remain locked into economically or ideologically vested interests, it will be increasingly difficult for both the artists and the public to contribute to, and experience public spaces in which they might see some of their own.

We are at present in a climate where until a month ago, Sit Stuart Lipton, the current *chairman* of Stanhope developers and the man behind Broadgate development in London had been also, for the past five years since its inception, the *chairman* of CABE (Commission for Architecture and Built Environment), the non-departmental public body set up by the government to *'champion the creation of great building and public spaces'*.

It took 5 years for someone to explore the possibility that some conflict of interest might arise from such a situation.<sup>28</sup>

CABE's emphatic mission towards the definition of 'quality design public space', seen as an *objective* criteria (and therefore beyond public debate and argumentation) can only be interpreted as either stubborn or vested interests.

Its declared pursuit of *championing excellence* seems to arise from a dubious conceptual leap perpetuated for a long time now in the public art and architecture community, that would want us to equate *quality design* with *social benefit*.

As a conclusion, one is moved to wonder whether all the constituents involved in public art could be more active and willing to take positions and responsibilities within these debates rather than subside into passive positions of oblivion whilst still invoking for themselves some remnants of an autonomous position. If co-option (aware or unaware becomes irrelevant from the public's point of view) appears to some area of contemporary public art practice the only way to allow for its existence, one possible consequence would be that its very existence as 'public' art may become ultimately meaningless.

I can only reside my hopes in the confidence that the vitality of the artists involved might be measured by their willingness and capacity to bite the hand that feeds them.

Alberto Duman, London  
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- <sup>1</sup> Interview published in *The Guardian* newspaper - 22.6.2004  
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- <sup>2</sup> Robert Ezra Park, Ernest Watson Burgess and Roderick Duncan Mackenzie, *The City*. By Robert E. Park, Ernest W. Burgess, Roderick D. Mckenzie, [University of Chicago Studies in Urban Sociology. Vol. 1.] (Chicago, 1925).
- <sup>3</sup> Claude Bernard, *Lectures on the Phenomena of Life Common to Animals and Plants*, American Lecture Series, Publication No. 900. A Monograph in The (Springfield, Ill.: Thomas, 1974).
- <sup>4</sup> Mark Gottdiener, *The Social Production of Urban Space*, 1st ed ed. (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1985). **p.78**
- <sup>5</sup> James Dickinson, "Entropic Zones: Buildings and Structures of the Contemporary City," *Capitalism, Nature and Socialism*. September, 1996 (1996). **p.82**
- <sup>6</sup> James P. Collins, Ann Kinzig, Nancy B. Grimm, William F. Fagan, Diane Hope, Jianguo Wu and Elizabeth T. Borer, "A New Urban Ecology," *American Scientist* 88.5 (2000).
- <sup>7</sup> Rosalyn Deutsche, "Uneven Development: Public Art in New York City," *Evictions: Art and Spatial Politics* (Cambridge, Mass. ; London: MIT press, 1996). **p.76**
- <sup>8</sup> Biffa, *Future Perfect: An Analysis of Britain's Waste Production and Disposal Account, with Implication for Industry and Government for the Next Twenty Years*. (Biffa, 2004). **p.1**
- <sup>9</sup> Philip Kotler, Ned Roberto and Nancy Lee, *Social Marketing : Improving the Quality of Life*, 2nd ed ed. (Thousand Oaks, Calif. ; London: Sage Publications, 2002). **p.17**
- <sup>10</sup> Deutsche, R. **p.74**
- <sup>11</sup> Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1991). **p.371-72**
- <sup>12</sup> Lefebvre, **p.228-29**
- <sup>13</sup> Patricia Phillips, "Out of Order: The Public Art Machine," *The City Culture Reader*, ed. Malcolm & Hall Miles, Tim & Borden, Iain, 2nd ed., The Routledge Urban Reader Series (London and New York: Routledge, 1988).
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- <sup>16</sup> Linda Danto Weintraub, Arthur McEvilley, Thomas, *Art on the Edge and Over: Searching for Art's Meaning in Contemporary Society*. (Art Insights, 1996). **p.88**
- <sup>17</sup> David Fincher, *Fight Club*, Fox 2000 Pictures, 1999
- <sup>18</sup> Naomi Klein, *No Logo : No Space, No Choice, No Jobs, Taking Aim at the Brand Bullies* (London: Flamingo, 2000). Introduction **p. 7**
- <sup>19</sup> [I Won An Artist In A Raffle, Jordan&Hewitt, 2003](#)
- <sup>20</sup> Susan Strasser, *Commodifying Everything : Relationships of the Market*, Hagley Perspectives on Business and Culture (New York ; London: Routledge, 2003).
- <sup>21</sup> [Andrea Fraser | The Critique of Artistic Auto...](#)  
*The concept of heteronomization comes from Pierre Bourdieu and can be expressed as: the imposition within the field of art of interests and values dominant in other fields, particularly economic and political interests. Such heteronomization can function directly, as instrumentalization, or indirectly, through the devaluation of specifically artistic criteria through the influence of economic and political (or social) criteria.*
- <sup>22</sup> [Pool of london: Regeneration: PLP Projects](#)
- <sup>23</sup> [Frith Street Gallery: artists](#)
- <sup>24</sup> Clara Weyergraf-Serra and Martha Buskirk, *The Destruction of Tilted Arc : Documents*, October Book (Cambridge, Mass. ; London: MIT Press, 1991), and F. Senie Harriet, *The Tilted Arc Controversy* (Minneapolis, Minn. ; London: University of Minnesota Press, 2001).
- <sup>25</sup> Deutsche, R. **p.63**
- <sup>26</sup> Patricia Phillips, "(Inter)Disciplinary Actions," *Public Art Review*. Fall/Winter 2003 (2003). **p.11**
- <sup>27</sup> Doreen Massey, *Personal Views: Public Art Research Project* (Milton Keynes: Mllton Keynes Council with Artpoint Trust, 2003). **p.18** [Artpoint: Home](#)

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<sup>28</sup> The embroilment of CABE with Stanhope extended further than its Chairman: 7 out of 15 of CABE commissioners had links with Stanhope development. Sir Stuart Lipton was the driving force of the Broadgate development and a strong supporter of the presence of public art in its masterplan. He particularly insisted on Richard Serra's *Fulcrum* to be part of the development, thanks to its strong connections with the Tate's supremo Sir Nicholas Serota who is still one of the 15 CABE commissioners.

Stanhope is involved in the development of the new London Stock Exchange in Paternoster Square, London and the construction of 4.500 homes in Stratford.

Sir Stuart Lipton is director of 30 companies and in the past he has been a Conservative government property advisor for 10 years.