

Title: There is no such thing as ~~Public Art~~.

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Abstract:

This paper contends that there is no such thing as “Public Art”. The term “Public” will be examined in its use and development to show that its generality is now misleading. The concept “Public” when examined is of a 'label' applied to 'others', a use of a 'taxonomy' without any rigorous definition and often is a pejorative term in differentiating individuals. The second term, “Art” has if anything become an even more amorphous term in relation to any object. Following from this the term “Public Art” becomes a Chimera, which is fabricated from a mistaken idea of art work and artist, and the use of a taxonomy which applies to nothing which can be defined in particular. “Public Art” works are thus nothing to do with any “Public” or “Art”, but are monuments to those persons who instigate them.

Key Words: Public Art, Non Art, Post Modern Art, Anti Society, Individualism, Fake Art.

1. The non existence (extinction) of “The Public” and the evolution of the individual, “Cell-Phone Man”:

The term “The Public” or “General Public” is a 'given'. We all know what it means; it means in effect most often 'the other guy'. For the media, it's the man or woman in the street, the Vox Pop, which has little or no real meaning, whose opinions are always balanced and matched to reduce the statements elicited to saying nothing. To Politicians they are the voters, yet they themselves vote, to Law Enforcement Officers “The Public” are those who are not Law Enforcement Officers, to the Military, the non Military, to Hospital Workers, Ambulance Drivers and Fire Men those who are not Hospital Workers, Ambulance Drivers or Fire Men. To the shop worker, the non shop worker in the store is 'the public', for how often in a store or some such place does one see a door marked 'No Public Admittance'. In which case it follows that the actual “general public” is either an almost zero quantity, or else the “general public” is a virtual phenomenon which comes into being and constantly passes out of being. In the latter case for example a Nobel Physicist can become part of the “general public” if asked a question of Botany, assuming she has no specialist knowledge. And this exposes the perhaps hidden pejorative idea of a “general public”. Though often said to be important, certainly by politicians and the media, this is false, they are in fact seen as stupid, non experts, or unqualified, uniformed, lacking in skills etc. So though the media makes the obviously false claim that the general public's opinion matters, firstly it doesn't, one wouldn't canvas the passengers on a plane on the best move the pilot should take given some incident, but more importantly those singling out the “general public” discriminate against them as knowing less, as being some mean or median.

There is a deeper philosophical problem here of the identity of a “general public” coming into and passing out of being. In particular that of the idea of 'The House Builder' in Aristotle¹, of the builder of houses, identified as a “House Builder” is still a house builder even when not building houses. In which case how can someone continue to be of the “general public” when not being whatever it is to be in that category? Moreover the idea of a person being just “general” seems difficult, strange, and just wrong. Pedantically, there is no generic “Tree”, you can't find a “general tree”, only Oaks, Larches, Sycamores... so why expect there to be a “general public”? Aristotle sort fixed categorical definitions of the world via a definite taxonomy such as class, order, family, genus and species, which, as shown above, cannot be applied to the idea of “The General Public”. The distinction in humanity is not fixed, and such fixed categories are now more generally contentious, such boundaries can be no longer applied in many contemporary sciences. The idea of terms, class, order, family, genus and species are problematic. The “Bell Curve”² now replaces “The Category”.

There may have been a time of “A General Public”, as some vague idea of a general mass of humanity, but this is no longer the case³. “Cell-Phone Man” has 'evolved' from “the common man” by technological development in

- 1 See Heinaman, Robert, 'Aristotle on Housebuilding' for a detailed exposition, here the house builder, like “The Thinker” has a category, unlike “The public”, and for Aristotle at least a “Thinker” doesn't cease to be a thinker when not thinking. As above the idea of a person being part of “The Public” becomes that of coming into being and passing out of being in order to exist at all. No 'one' is 'general'.
- 2 Biologists no longer “see” species as simple and distinct, but groupings which blur into each other, "the long-standing problem concerning the nature of species" - in Kevin de Queiroz 'Ernst Mayr and the modern concept of species'. As elsewhere attempts at absolute definitions... 'To pit this single insight, that in the Absolute everything is the same, against the full body of articulated cognition, which at least seeks and demands such fulfilment, to palm off its Absolute as the night in which, as the saying goes, all cows are black – this is cognition naïvely reduced to vacuity.' G. W. F. Hegel, Hegel's Phenomenology of Spirit, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1977, p. 9.
- 3 Again space is limited, but many ideas such as belonging to a group such as a nation state are constructs, as are ideas of class. The term

much the same way, by virtue of technological tools, that Cro-Magnon Man evolved from its predecessors. “Cell-Phone Man” evolved into a totally individualized individual, to the extent that the term 'Man' here relates to the Human (hominid *Homo sapiens sapiens*) and no longer to a binary gender, but a defuse sexuality⁴. An individual equipped with a smart phone is at once, not only in their own eyes but in fact, individually linked to the largest body of specific and detailed knowledge that has ever existed. They are known as a “particular” in their tweets, blogs, and social networks as individuals. Proof- there may be many James Whiteheads but there is only one James@Jameswhitehead.org. The idea of “a general public” might have once been a useful myth, but I would argue this is now not the case.

As long ago as the 1970s and pre internet, the economist Jaques Attali in his book “Noise”, which traced the political economy of music through its history of mass audiences to a conclusion of “A music produced by each individual for himself, for pleasure outside of meaning, usage and exchange...”⁵ Identified the demise of mass audiences.

The smart phone provides the technology for Attali's prediction, from custom playlists through to virtual musical instruments and composition tools, and is not limited to music, but any art form, including populating individually, via various avatars, virtual realities. Such individuals have access to global information and can and often do assume multiple identities. “Cell-Phone Man's” decision making process is totally different from the “Common Man's”. Whereas the “Common Man” merely recollects limited stored information, “Cell-Phone Man” can access colleagues, can discuss outcomes, and can search databases and news feeds in a real-time process of decision making and judgement.

If a “general public” (an impossibility) did matter, if their uniformed opinions mattered, that would negate the once main criteria of “Public Art”, to educate and inform this general public and so remove the generality. If on the other hand “Public Art” is the art of the public (and not art **for** the public) the production of it is pointless as the public already has it. Otherwise assumptions have to be made that this “Public” lacks “Art”, and is poorer for lacking the “Art” it does not have. This might have once been the case, or thought to be, however there is no longer any “High Art” cut off from a “general public” for which it lacks and for others to provide it with, something I will explore more below.

There is no generic “public”. The echoes of this are everywhere, though the idea of a mass of a population is still extant, we live more and more in a dynamic of unpredictable individuals, single issue organisations and groupings such that the normative ideas such as in politics of left and right⁶, static party members and voters are seen as inadequate in attempting to explain society, if we can now even maintain the idea of a single society.

2. Monuments to... and Art for... Art Vs Monuments:

There is a significant difference between a Monument and “Public Art”. Monuments have a long tradition, in major use in the Roman Empire, and in all Empires since. The construction of monuments and at times their destruction reflecting power, social and political change. They do not serve the same purpose of a “Public Art” which is **for** the public, but obviously serve to commemorate a specific person, persons or event. (Nothing more obvious is the name given to the monument which commemorates The Great Fire of London whose name is “The Monument”.) Various Triumphal Arches and statues around cities the world over, through to the grand and not so grand cemetery monuments mark a purpose to record for posterity or for some deity the passing of history, and some form of continuity after some event, be it someone's life or something other. “Public Art” has no such pedigree, or obvious use⁷.

“General Public” seems to relate to a 20th C of mass media and mass production... so there was a time before the “General Public” and like Post-Fordism a time after.

4 Ibid. The Bell Curve. Also "I speak mostly, and have for a long time, about sexual differences, rather than about one difference only" Jaques Derrida, interview published in Le Monde de l'éducation (September, 2000).

5 Attali, Jacques, Noise The Political Economy of Music, University of Minnesota Press, first published 1977, p. 137. in translation.

6 As I write there are examples in British politics of Brexit cutting across party lines, and in France The Yellow Jackets- “protests over fuel prices this month are presenting him with a new kind of political challenge. This is a protest with no official leader, no national organisation, not run by any union or political party; a protest that feels distinctly spontaneous, individual and diverse.” <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-46265136> (accessed 26/11/18)

7 Monumental public art has a long history, several millennia in fact of structures such as The Pyramids, Silbury Hill, through to medieval examples, I would note, the touching medieval crosses across England, markers of each resting place of the dead Queen Eleanor's journey to London, erected by Edward I, her loving husband, through to the once ridiculed high Victorian 'reliquary' in memorial of Prince Albert, or the, at times, more dubious monuments to the Wars and horrors of the previous century. These are not 'for the public' as such, but for the people and events they mark.

The public space and social space in the UK was exemplified in the Post War New Town Schemes. Alongside The National Health Service, reform of education and a general move towards addressing the previous social ills, culture was seen to play a vital role. Many of these towns had as their centres “Public Spaces” incorporating shopping centres and often having specially commissioned “Modern Art”. Two of these new towns feature in the following examples⁸.

The Mander Centre in Wolverhampton had a Barbara Hepworth sculpture at its 'centre' - “Rock Form”, removed to the local Art Gallery but now back 'on loan'.

Harlow new town, - probably is the 'best' and remaining example- The Harlow Arts Trust was set up in 1953 to purchase sculptures to place around the town. Works by Henry Moore, Barbara Hepworth and Lynn Chadwick were among the first to be acquired and these, along with subsequent acquisitions and commissions, were placed in residential and town centre locations⁹ and are still *In situ*.

Milton Keynes had its "Concrete Cows" by artist Liz Leyh, originally located at a parkland site, have subsequently been placed in the National Hockey Stadium in Milton Keynes.

In the UK perhaps the most concerted effort at a “Public Art” since Harlow New Town was the ill fated Peter Stuyvesant Foundation's "Sculpture for Public Places Scheme" of 1972...

This 1972 project marked an ambitious moment in the history of public sculpture in Britain. Large-scale works by living sculptors at the forefront of contemporaneous debates were placed in busy urban centres. The ambition was to showcase new sculpture that was disconnected from monuments and memorials. Importantly, it set out to stage dialogues between abstract sculpture and people living and working in urban environments outside London. City Sculpture Project boldly unsettled established viewing habits and expectations generating debate about contemporary sculpture's relation to place. At the end of the six-month exhibition period each city had the option of buying the sculptures and having them on permanent display. None did and all the sculptures were relocated elsewhere – some were sold, and others destroyed.¹⁰

For instance Monro's “King Kong” was commissioned in 1972 for display in Manzoni Gardens in The Bull Ring, Birmingham. It was offered to the City Council who declined; being bought by a used car dealer for £3,000 and used to advertise at the King Kong used Kar (sic) sales lot, subsequently resold, placed in store and now is in The Henry Moore Institute, Leeds. The Barry Flanagan work in Cambridge which used fabric materials in a public park installation was destroyed by vandals within days of its installation.

The Artists and sites were as follows,

Cambridge: Barry Flanagan and L Brower Hatcher
Newcastle: Luise Kimme and William Tucker
Sheffield: Bernard Schottlander, Nigel Hall and Kenneth Martin
Southampton: Peter Hide and Bryan Kneale
Cardiff: Garth Evans and William Pye
Plymouth: Liliane Lijn and John Panting
Birmingham: Robert Carruthers and Nicholas Monro
Liverpool: Tim Scott and William Turnbull

This “Public Art” effectively fails, is ignored, destroyed or removed to art galleries. These artworks are not monuments. They were commissioned for the elucidation of “The Public”. They are in their purpose not much different from being ideological propaganda. Commissioned for a public, but not chosen by that public and subsequently, in all the above cases, not wanted by the public. Ignoring any critique of art as propaganda, at best

8 With just in the U.K. the number of works of “Public Art” is quite astonishing, so I can only refer to a few examples. Anyone interested in a more comprehensive catalogue should refer to Lynn Person's book, *Public Art since 1950*, published in 2006, which even as of 2006 lists over 240 artists, over 300 works in over 120 places.

9 https://www.davidharding.net/?page_id=13 & <http://www.harlow.gov.uk/sites/harlow-cms/files/files/documents/files/harlow%20sculpture%20trail%20map.pdf>

10 <https://www.henry-moore.org/press-office/press-release/2016/10/25/city-sculpture-projects-1972-press>

it relates to the attempt by an authority to educate an ignorant public for what an authority saw as their own good. As we will see this is no longer the case with contemporary "Public Art", but it certainly once was, "it set out to stage dialogues between abstract sculpture and people living and working in urban environments", but the debate was very one sided, "living sculptors at the forefront of contemporaneous debates" in dialogue with a public who were not "at the forefront of contemporaneous debates..". The comparison might be resisted but I will make it nevertheless, examples of such social endeavours being not only aspirational "Public Art" but the contemporaneous short public information films made throughout 1950s and 70s for the benefit of "a public". These ranged from 'The use of a handkerchief' to "Watch out for homosexuals", and in the "Duck and Cover" films of how to survive a nuclear attack."

3. The Non creation of Art, the destruction of Genius:

Within the term "Public Art" we have already seen difficulties with the word "Public", in a short paper the difficulties with the other term, "Art", are insurmountable. Yet I intend to deal with this. As a starting place I will offer the definition of Art as "Art is something made by an Artist", as this might seem fairly unobjectionable. (It can even accommodate the 'challenging' nature of 'readymades'.)

The idea of an "Artist" as more than a talented craftsman undertaking specific instructions from an other, as someone who has creative imagination and a licence to be a genius developed from around the time of the Renaissance to one in early nineteenth century Romanticism where,

By arguing that aesthetic judgements necessarily had their own autonomously established criteria for judgement that were irreducible to other types of judgement, Kant had irrevocably detached art from both craft and entertainment and pushed it into its own, autonomous realm; Schelling further radicalised that conclusion, attributing to art powers for revealing truth that transcend all other ways of getting at what was ultimately real. Departing even further from Kant. Schelling also claimed (without much argument but in a way that later had great historical influence) that the standards of beauty in art set the norms for what we found beautiful in nature, not vice versa.¹²

An idea which remained into the twentieth century. Though after the period of "Modern Art" (1860s to the 1970s), Post-Modern Art became something very different. With post-modernity came a levelling of "High Art" and the "Avant Garde", the substitution of "autonomously established criteria" for (mere) sensation¹³ and banalities, ironic works and ironic critiques, "Modern Art" and the Artist as Genius became myth...

...myths build up around the artist and it is a delicate question as to how much the artist is pushing the myth self-consciously and how much the myth is a product of fantasies imposed upon the figure from the outside. This is certainly the case with Picasso and Pollock but even with Warhol too.¹⁴

Exhibitions became "shows", and this 'decline' in the status of Artist has not abated.

"I can't wait to get into a position to make really bad art and get away with it." Damien Hirst.

"A lot of my work is about sales." Jeff Koons.

Perhaps not helped by the artists themselves, the rise in the popularity of contemporary art is as a social leisure activity, one in which elitism is seen if not to be a bad thing to be simply no longer the case; "Post-modern Art" is

11 Numerous examples can be found on You Tube... <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=amZ1tnUPRL4> (Watch Out For Homosexuals), https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sR2X-6p_Y8U (Use a Handkerchief.) <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Z4acZZBC3ws>(Africans On A London Bus), <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IKqXu-5jw60> (Duck and cover), <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KEHc1XGroSs> (Joe & Petunia)

12 Pinkard, Terry, German Philosophy 1760-1860, Cambridge University Press, 2002, p.191.

13 Sensation was an exhibition of the collection of contemporary art owned by Charles Saatchi, including many works by Young British Artists, (YBAs), which first took place 18 September – 28 December 1997 at the Royal Academy of Arts in London and later toured to the Hamburger Bahnhof in Berlin and the Brooklyn Museum in New York City. A proposed showing at the National Gallery of Australia was cancelled when the gallery's director decided the exhibition was "too close to the market.".... Damien Hirst's 'Treasures from the Wreck of the Unbelievable' of 2017 consists of 190 works across 54,000 square feet of gallery spaces in Venice. Galleries owned by François Pinault. Who owns Christie's Auction House, which sells "Hirst's" work. Who is estimated to be worth 13.7 billion dollars as of 2015. The artworks of 'The Treasures' were produced for Hirst, not by Hirst at Hirst's personal expense, at a cost of between 50 and 100 million UK pounds to manufacture.

14 Collings, Matthew, This is Modern Art, Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1999, p.26.

very different from “Modern Art”. The position of the 'Romantic' Artists as cited above, as somehow transcending the common and ordinary, in the case of current practices (as exemplified by the quotes above), is also no longer the case. Julian Stallabrass coined a term for this phenomena as “High Art Lite”, the title of his 1999 book¹⁵.

My term, 'high art lite', has the virtue of being descriptive... describe[s] an art that looks like but is not quite art... they [these artists] present conceptual work in visually accessible and spectacular form... it looks a lot friendlier to the general public... it allows those without specialist knowledge of art a way into itself...¹⁶

Two years after these two books were published, The Turner prize winner of 2002 was Martin Creed, with his 'installation' “Work No.227: the lights going on and off”, which was an empty room whose lighting periodically came on and went off. Artist Jacqueline Crofton threw eggs at the walls of the room 'containing' Creed's work as a protest. More sensation occurred when the pop star Madonna when presenting the prize at the award ceremony on live TV said,

“At a time when political correctness is valued over honesty I would also like to say - Right on, motherfuckers.”¹⁷

This is nothing particular, the prize has often been a source of media attention, in both the works exhibited, ceremony, spectacle and celebrity involvement, and even with the judges of the art works, who have included Lynn Barber, writer for Penthouse, The Sunday Express magazine and Vanity Fair, Michael Bracewell a writer and novelist, Miranda Sawyer a journalist with the magazine Smash Hits. So The Turner has been a focus of sensation, ‘discussion’, demonstrations and publicity not significantly different from any other public media event, and in no way anything transcendental.

My point here is not to criticize this trend, it would be a pointless exercise, but to note with the increased popularity of contemporary art runs alongside the no longer privileging the artist as genius, by both artists themselves and those who in effect become the originators, that is audiences, curators and selection bodies. In this recent “Public Art” the privileging of the artist is removed to the extent that the artist is no longer originally creative, no longer the judge of his or her work qua art. “Public Art” can not any longer 'educate' its “Public”, as any 'depth' has been exorcised as myth, and any contemporary work is simply a source of sensation. The sensation effected in its audience.

“Whatever it means to you is what it means.” – Unattributed.

“Public Art” is now originated not by any Artist, of whatever standing, but by some collective, and the work chosen by the same process. What follows should be obvious; the creative genius (literally "generative power") is not the Artist. So in the case of the opening definition, “Public Art” is not made (generated) by any Artist, the term “Art” in “Public Art” cannot be art in our naïve definition above. I can demonstrate this with some examples of more recent “Public Art” and their originators, three of which I've commented on in some detail....

Angel of the North, designed by Antony Gormley, selected by Gateshead Council.

Tilted Arc, designed by Richard Serra, selected by The General Services Administration (GSA).

Richard Serra's Tilted Arc was a massive public sculpture installed outside government buildings in Federal Plaza, New York, in 1981. It was, in effect, a wall of steel – 12 feet high and 120 feet long – that traced a subtle arc over its length and leaned slightly to one side.¹⁸

The work placed in The Federal Plaza, which it bisected, prevented ease of pedestrian passage, blocking sunlight and denying public access and places to sit. “The Public” did not want it. Following heated debates it was removed in 1989.¹⁹

15 Stallabrass, Julian, High Art Lite, Verso, 1999.

16 Ibid, p.4.

17 Youngs, Ian (2002) "The art of Turner protests", BBC www.bbc.co.uk, 31 October 2002. Retrieved 8 January 2007

18 <https://www.tate.org.uk/context-comment/articles/gallery-lost-art-richard-serra>

19 See Bresler, Judith. "Serra v. USA and its Aftermath: Mandate for Moral Rights in America?" in The Trials of Art, edited by Daniel McClean, 195-211. London: Ridinghouse, 2007.

Spire of Dublin, designed by Ian Ritchie Architects, selected by Dublin Council.

Dreamspace V, designed by Maurice Agis, selected by The Arts Council of England.

Maurice Agis disillusioned with the gallery system began making “Public Art” in the 1960s. These consisted of numerous public installations using plastics as a material, In Travemunde Germany in July 1986 a piece called 'Colourspace' lifted off the ground, injuring five people. Dreamspace V was selected and part funded by The Arts Council of England (£60,000) and installed at Riverside Park, Chester-le-Street on the 22nd July 2006. On the 23rd the 'artwork' broke its moorings and flew 30 feet into the air, colliding with a CCTV tower. Two of “The Public” were killed in the incident, with 13 others being injured.

Two women have died and a child is in a serious condition this afternoon after sustaining injuries when an inflatable exhibition broke its moorings tipping those using it on to the ground.

Tragedy struck at Chester-le-Street's Riverside Park at about 3.30pm today when the Dreamscape inflatable rose up to about 30 feet in the air colliding with a post supporting a CCTV camera, which brought it to the ground. It's believed up to 30 people were on the inflatable at the time.²⁰

Subsequently Agis was charged with gross negligence manslaughter, the trial failed and Agis was eventually fined £2,500 for health and safety offences.

La Joute, designed by Jean-Paul Riopelle, selected by the Quebec government.

Apollo Pavilion, designed by Victor Pasmore, selected by The Peterlee development corporation.

This controversial piece of art is a rare example of a large-scale experiment in the synthesis of art and architecture in the UK... The structure, which spans a small man-made lake, is made of reinforced concrete, cast on the site. The design comprises large geometric planes of concrete with the only decoration being two painted murals.... It became a popular hangout for local youths and was subject to graffiti and vandalism. In 1982, Victor Pasmore met with residents during a public meeting at the pavilion. Pasmore suggested that, if anything, the graffiti had humanised the piece, and suggested that the solution would not be to remove the piece, but rather, the disruptive families that were abusing it....

The Pavilion's fate remained in the balance for some years and demolition was considered after one local district councillor, Joan Maslin, mounted a campaign against the work.....in 1998 English Heritage and the Twentieth Century Society recommended the structure be given listed status, however, this failed due to lack of public support... it was agreed that the structure would be repaired with lottery funding... £336,000 of the funds came from the Heritage Lottery Fund, while the remaining £65,000 was provided by Durham County Council.²¹

The effect of this is the removal of an artist of creative genius in some cases, to in others, the idea of the removal of the “Public” for which the “Public Art” was intended.

Artist
or
Public

²⁰ https://web.archive.org/web/20060929122254/https://www.durham.police.uk/press/news_article.php?id=395

²¹ <http://www.apollopavilion.info/>

4. Conclusion:

“Public Art” is a fiction, its materiality is often the subject of vandalism, (a form of “public” critique?), indifference, or merely a tourist 'attraction', ontologically no different to non art objects such as waterfalls, historic buildings and other attractions. The Eiffel Tower might be regarded as “Art” or the London Eye, The Empire State Building, but what of the Grassy Knoll at Elm Street, Dallas, Texas²², or the Zebra Crossing on Abbey Road in London²³?

The fiction of Art as a publicly observable 'special' object (or even concept) can be demonstrated by one 'experiment' ²⁴ in particular, that of the empty (Fourth) plinth in Trafalgar Square²⁵.

In "Six Years: The Dematerialization of the Art Object"²⁶ Lucy Lippard, and in others elsewhere, effectuates the denial of 'objectivity', materiality as a necessary condition of Art. The ideas associated with this, 'The end of Art', 'Post-Modern Art', the completion (in failure or success) of the Modern Art 'project' and / or the paradigm shift in post-modern from what went before... are beyond the scope of this paper.

However the empty plinth invalidates any criteria of what “Public Art” **is** and any criteria for its judgement. I say it is an 'experiment' as it invalidates the hypothesis not only of the material reality of “Public Art” or of a conceptual reality in the same way as the famous Michelson–Morley experiment ²⁷ invalidated the 'reality' of a stationary luminiferous aether ("aether wind"). Any object or none, anything or nothing once associated with The Plinth is “Public Art”. There is no **necessary substance** to this “Public Art”. Existence is not a necessary attribute, any attribute is arbitrary.

Though a 'sign' can be arbitrary, in order for it to work there needs to be a difference, it has been established that any sign works by being different to something other, from Saussure through to Jacques Derrida. More simply at minimum in any form of communication a binary is required; zeros and ones, dashes and dots, puffs of smoke with gaps.... Without a difference no meaning or communication can be established. What we have with The Plinth is no differentiation whatsoever. Not only in the case of Gormley²⁸ was anything and any action 'allowable' but any future action – or not – not yet initiated is effectually already “Public Art” though 'it' is yet to exist. And if the argument in this specific case is valid, and I think it is, why should it not be equally valid elsewhere? In specific other such plinths²⁹. More generally having a “Public Art” which is yet to exist as a 'thing' anywhere, which might not exist, or which might of a necessary concept not exist and which might not be an existent or not, object/concept conceived of by an Artist or someone other, there is no substance to this “Public Art”. There is nothing in principle that can be different from it.

If there is no significant play of difference in the sign “Public Art”, it has no meaning, and so cannot be judged. Obviously there are 'things' which some will consider being “Public Art”. But that is no criteria for that being the case, it is a myth, “the myth is a product of fantasises imposed upon the figure from the outside.”

22 Site of the assassination of John F. Kennedy November 22, 1963.

23 Abbey Road, The Beatles eleventh studio album, the cover which features the four band members walking across a zebra crossing outside Abbey Road Studios. This crossing has become a major London tourist attraction.

24 In French there are not two words, 'experiment' - 'experience' but one 'expérience'. So here our experience with The Plinth will be an experiment to show the falsification of the hypothesis “Public Art”.

25 The Fourth plinth is in Trafalgar Square London. Originally intended to hold a statue of William IV, but remained bare due to insufficient funds. In 1998, the RSA conceived the Fourth Plinth Project, which temporarily occupied the plinth with a succession of works commissioned and established by the Cass Sculpture Foundation. From 6 July – 14 October 2009 the UK artist Antony Gormley let members of "The Public" exhibit on the plinth, a total over the course of a hundred consecutive days of 2,400 selected members. They were allowed to exhibit for one hour and to do anything they wished to and could take anything with them that they could carry unaided. See Perry, Grayson, Perry & de Vasconcellos, Isabel, Fourth Plinth: How London Created the Smallest Sculpture Park in the World, Art/Books; 01 edition, 2016.

26 Lippard, Lucy R, Six years: the dematerialization of the art object from 1966 to 1972; a cross-reference book of information on some esthetic boundaries. New York: Praeger. 1973.

27 The Michelson–Morley experiment was performed between April and July 1887 by Albert A. Michelson and Edward W. Morley at what is now Case Western Reserve University in Cleveland, Ohio, and published in November of the same year. It compared the speed of light in perpendicular directions, in an attempt to detect the relative motion of matter through the stationary luminiferous aether ("aether wind"). The result was negative, in that Michelson and Morley found no significant difference between the speed of light in the direction of movement through the presumed aether, and the speed at right angles. This result is generally considered to be the first strong evidence against the then-prevalent aether theory, and initiated a line of research that eventually led to special relativity, which rules out a stationary aether.” https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Michelson–Morley_experiment, accessed 25/11/2018

28 Ibid.

29 I actually know of one fictional other, created in the Radio Drama series 'The Archers' BBC radio 4 at the time of the Gormley Plinth. (<https://www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/tvandradio/5663650/Antony-Gormley-to-star-in-The-Archers.html>)

Just as the ideas in the phrase “The Holy Roman Empire”³⁰ was seen by Voltaire to be empty, the phrase “Public Art” has no “Public” and is not “Art”.

5. Post Script:

I have limited my examples of what some call “Public Art” in order to develop my ideas, that the very idea of “Public Art” is at best unclear, often misguided, and in reality contradictory nonsense. This last term may, for some, seem overly critical. However in the UK and elsewhere the penchant for “Public Art” is if anything growing, despite at times “public” indifference or hostility. Matters are made worse by 'percent for art' programs, found across Europe, in the USA and elsewhere. Where once “the public” might make donations and subscriptions of their own towards a monument, now politicians, local and national, make developers pay for "Public Art". Sadly, like the 'Empty Plinth', this has not always promoted significant contributions, and the forced requirement for such "Art" is now cluttering city spaces with irrelevant and unwanted objects. I'm reminded of a video by the late Mark Fisher, 'The Slow Cancellation of The Future'³¹ in which he notes "The bad news you already know [are]... symptoms of a cultural malaise... a newly ubiquitous sense of the waning of historicity... the thing that has disappeared is **difference**..." (My emphasis) Difference being essential to anything appearing. Fisher uses popular music as his example. I would argue the same could be said of "Public Art". Fisher's solution, a plea, which will of course be ignored, is to have an interregnum, rest-bite or hiatus in music. I would wish to see the same with so called "Public Art", until we could establish who is this "Public" and why should, and what should be, this "Art".

Unfortunately the good intentions of civic leaders seem to think otherwise, and one suspects their 'percent for art' is not to give "The Public" Art, which with its disappearance they cannot, but to create new monuments (not at their expense) to themselves. Here is a final argument against the idea of "Public Art", that it is a monument for those who instigate it and not “Art” **for** any “Public”.

If “Public Art” are Memorials to those who instigate it....

**I met a traveller from an antique land,
Who said—“Two vast and trunkless legs of stone
Stand in the desert. . . . Near them, on the sand,
Half sunk a shattered visage lies, whose frown,
And wrinkled lip, and sneer of cold command,
Tell that its sculptor well those passions read
Which yet survive, stamped on these lifeless things,
The hand that mocked them, and the heart that fed;
And on the pedestal, these words appear:
My name is Ozymandias, King of Kings;
Look on my Works, ye Mighty, and despair.
Nothing beside remains. Round the decay
Of that colossal Wreck, boundless and bare
The lone and level sands stretch far away.”**

Percy Bysshe Shelley

³⁰ "The Holy Roman Empire is neither Holy, nor Roman, nor an Empire." Voltaire.

³¹ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aCgkLICTskQ>

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