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# PUTTING SOUL IN THE CITY

## - TOWARDS A MANIFESTO

Using public art to transform the 21st Century urban landscape



poet in the city

**FARRELLS**





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## INTRODUCTION

This essay is a call to radical action. It is a call to create William Blake's *future city of the arts* in the digital age, and to use the arts and culture not only to beautify the public realm but also to express our values, provide social identity and cohesion, and provide new opportunities for science and enterprise. It is a call for a complete change in the way public art is taught, planned, commissioned, delivered and built, making it a key part of place-making in every urban development. It is also a call to empower culture and the arts, restoring them to their rightful place at the heart of the social project, encourage and stimulate the building of social capital, and contribute to a new kind of active citizenship. And it is a call to create environmentally sustainable cities, fit for the future. We live in a bland and bureaucratic age where originality, beauty and difference are usually crushed. And when a place is anonymous and without identity we describe it as *soulless*. This is a call to put the soul back into the city, and to recognise the central importance of public art to our shared humanity, to allow the free expression of a democratic culture, whether in material forms or through live street arts, and to liberate culture and the arts to create bold new public expressions of who we are in the 21st Century. It is a call for a manifesto for these public arts.

This essay has emerged from the Farrell Review of Architecture & the Built Environment 2014 (<http://www.farrellreview.co.uk/>), and from a new initiative to raise the profile of the arts in the context of the Review. The initiative is being led by Beam ( [www.beam.uk.net](http://www.beam.uk.net) ) and is part of the newly-formed Place Alliance (<https://www.bartlett.ucl.ac.uk/placealliance>).

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## SENSE OF PLACE

Sense of place is not a new idea, but is grounded in our history and philosophy. Our definition of it goes back to its classical roots. In Ancient Athens, the first ever democracy, public art was everywhere. Its streets, temples and law courts were filled with a vast array of multi-coloured statues, carvings and text art, used to embody the city's democratic ambitions. The sense of place as we know it developed from the ancient Roman concept of *genius loci*, the idea that every place has a unique identity and a protective spirit. This idea was brought firmly into the modern age by the poet Alexander Pope (1688-1744) whose ideas of garden and landscape design, and the placing of public art within them, still influence landscape architects to this day.

Modern philosophers have explored this idea from a more contemporary viewpoint. Martin Heidegger (1889-1976) was one of a group of 20th Century philosophers who took as their starting point the way human beings actually experience the world (phenomenology). This approach allowed him to explore the many layers of meaning and significance that people attach to the places they inhabit. The way we regard places, and use them, is influenced not only by practical factors but by all of the ideas, associations, hopes and dreams which we bring to them. The best of public art responds to and articulates this sense of place.

The Czech philosopher Jan Patočka (1907-1977) took the sense of place a step further, connecting it not only with the human capacity for projecting or reflecting

ideas, but also with our lives as social and political beings, and members of a community. Returning to the starting point in ancient Athens he noted the close relationship between private virtue, participation as an active citizen in a democracy, and the expression of these social and political values in the built environment of the city. Patocka called upon the modern age to learn from this example, and to find ways of *putting soul in the city*.

This was very much the project pursued by Jane Jacobs (1916-2006) the urban design campaigner and critic who fought to preserve Greenwich Village and other historic neighbourhoods of New York under threat of demolition in the 1980s. In her seminal book *The Death and Life of Great American Cities* she observed in great detail *the ballet of the streets*, the way that real people behaved and interacted in her street and neighbourhood. Her work demonstrated persuasively that human beings like their communities to be bustling and varied, that they benefit greatly from the casual contacts with neighbours and shopkeepers, and that their world is rendered much safer and friendlier by many *eyes on the street*. Our public art too should reflect our need for such community and social capital, in other words the friendships, participatory networks, associations and civic relationships which characterise a properly functioning democratic society.

Finally, sustainable city theorists, activists and ecological architects like the Australian Paul F Downton (1957 - date) are writing about the important connections between eco-cities, the environment and the arts. The sustainable city of the future needs not only to be an economic success, but also to be sustainable indefinitely in terms of its ecological impact. For instance, it needs to be able to feed itself and to have a symbiotic relationship with the surrounding countryside. It needs to power itself from renewable sources of energy, and to produce minimal quantities of pollution. And it needs to use land efficiently, to compost, recycle, and convert waste into energy. In short it needs to have the smallest possible ecological footprint. For this kind of city to be born it is clear that we also need a transformation in the approach to both politics and culture. Public art becomes one of the most important ways of symbolising and championing the values that need to underpin a decisive transformation in our approach to city-building.

In other words public art is not external to our society and its sense of itself, but is a fundamental way of expressing our identities, history and values, of celebrating, exploring, commenting and questioning, and of championing a sustainable future. It is from our sense of place that we construct our meanings and our communities, and from which we can develop our social capital. Together these strands of thought provide a firm foundation for a fresh philosophy of place based on real people in their communities, on a commitment to the importance of art, and on a powerful sense of public virtue, civic pride and social cohesion.

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## RECLAIMING THE LANGUAGE OF PLACE

In order to transform our approach to public art we must challenge the lazy and corrupted use of phrases like ‘place-making’, ‘public engagement’ and ‘participation’ which are wheeled out thoughtlessly to justify every piece of urban design. The involvement of the community in public art must be real. Instead of clichéd talk of ‘regeneration’, ‘urban renewal’ and ‘renaissance’ resulting in the same old soulless, windswept and underpopulated urban wastelands, we are calling for a real relationship between place and people. There must be a debate and a reconciliation between the demands of artistic merit and the needs and wishes of people who use and own the public spaces concerned. We must reclaim the sense of place and involve real communities in reinventing it.

We must challenge the tyranny of the bland, which leads directly to depression, disillusionment, nihilism and extremism. The procurement of public art must reflect and be inextricably linked with the education of citizens for a democracy, and their active participation in their communities. It must allow them to influence what happens in their place, in their town, and empower artists to make these places different and distinctive. Artists have a crucial part to play in developing a purpose-built humanist landscape, in creating the urban spaces, buildings and thoroughfares which reflect the values of the 21st Century urban community. *The future city of the arts* contributes directly to identity, happiness and involvement in a community of shared values. Our shopping malls, motorways and suburbs really do damage the functioning of our societies. Our squares, clubs, gathering

places and public fairs really do make a direct contribution to them. Public art provides a means of championing a new sense of liberty and identity in our society. What matters in our approach to public art are the communities, identities and histories it represents and embodies, the meanings associated with it, and the sense of place.

New approaches to public space are being informed both by the physical design of the spaces themselves and by the virtual or transient uses to which they are being put. 'Public art' in this context does not just mean the monument in the square but also the plethora of live arts, digital art, transient art and 'band stand' performance which has the potential to reinvigorate our sense of place.

We have the ability to use the arts to create 'smart' public spaces, using a combination of virtual and physical elements, embedding technology in the built environment connected with the technologies in our pockets and worn in clothing. Public art in the digital age encompasses everything from temporary lighting installations, screen technology, augmented reality content, and information hubs. It also includes participatory experiences, 'happenings' designed to challenge our perceptions of the uses of public space, and the riotous carnival of street arts. Outdoor festivals and the cultural activities associated with them are already playing a more important part in how we live, and we are being guided to them ever more efficiently by our mobile technology. Whether it is permanent or semi-permanent, physical or digital, beautifully crafted design detail or grand electric spectacle, eclectic public art has the capacity to celebrate who we are.

In the painting by Pieter Bruegel the younger, *The Fight Between Carnival and Lent*, we see observational scenes of a community working out its tensions and re-enacting its own cohesion through a chaotic conflict of cultural activities in public spaces. New technology allows us to imagine modern riots of colour and cultural meaning filling our streets in a similar way, witness for instance the recent Will Self installation in Brixton which displays overheard snippets of dialogue. In fact this sense of carnival has the potential to contribute directly to the new forms of community participation and social capital building we are advocating. This is a call to put the soul back into all of our places, our buildings, our squares, our streets and our parks.

And in an age where climate change, a rising human population, and the degradation of the natural world are facts of life, the need to create environmentally sustainable cities is essential. Far from being a luxury extra, an ideas-led approach to our urban environment is perhaps one of the only ways to produce the necessary change in our mind-set. Public art can represent and symbolise a new vision of what a sustainable modern city can and should be like.

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## TRANSFORMING OUR APPROACH TO PUBLIC ART

Planning our future built environment now requires an understanding of how the quality of our public places connects with the functioning of our communities and the health of our democratic institutions, and a sustainable approach to the natural environment. This is the time for visionary thinking and for imagining a *future city of the arts* which is more beautiful, more connected, and more fit for 21st century democracy. In keeping with the digital age it is no longer possible or acceptable for such planning to be top-down, for grand projects to be imposed on people for whom they have no obvious meaning or resonance. Now is the time for us to reassert the importance of a sense of place and to empower local communities to make their own places *special and different*. Bringing together talented designers, architects and public artists with places and the communities who live in them creates the opportunity for great public art which also answers the strong human desire for meaning, identity and the public expression of civic pride and values. It is that energy which will produce relevant public art and new relationships between communities and their public spaces.



Some public art may be big and ambitious, but this is not the point. Projects can also be small scale and intimate, bringing character, beauty and utility to a small plaza, an alleyway or a street corner. We should not think in terms of scale but of design quality and context. The complete change we are calling for is a revolution in the skills dedicated to making ordinary places better. Every community has a right to great public art. The triumphal arches, military equestrian statues and grand boulevards belong to the past. Public art should respect the past, and learn from it, but must also reflect the way we live now, be playful and experimental. The decisions to monumentalise or memorialise, or to embody our values in our built environment, are very important. We must be sure that the meanings are culturally rich and varied in their associations, relevant to their communities, and resonant of their values. Designing public art is a project which goes to the heart of our human project. Equally, public art which is bland, ill-conceived, badly managed or poorly executed, says something about the lack of quality in our urban life and our sense of community. Public art should explode the concept of the ordinary, and introduce quality and aspiration into all of our lives. It should tell us where we are, where we came from, and what we would like to be. Real life may sometimes fall short, but the architecture constantly reminds us to aspire to be our better selves, fully engaged citizens, active participants. This essay is, in the best sense of the word, political. It calls for a fundamental change in how we regard our public and urban spaces, our *polis*. It draws on the passion and the expertise of many professionals across the field of architecture, planning, design and the arts.

Transforming our approach to public art requires a complete change in the approach we take: an education in the possibilities of public art (**Education**), an improvement in skills and techniques (**Design**), and a renewed association of public art with the culture, history and identities of our places, both past and present (**Culture**); It also requires a clear-sighted understanding of the social and business benefits of great public art and the vital role it can play in stimulating this wider economy (**Value**); It is going to require government to play an enabling and empowering role, creating and implementing policy (**Strategy**); Finally, it is going to require bold and inspiring leadership by those responsible for all aspects of public art and the built environment (**Leadership**). We shall take each of these areas in turn:

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## EDUCATION

If we are to transform public art for the better we must start with education. Architecture, design and the sense of place should be taught across many subjects including design, geography, aesthetics, history, maths, technology and engineering. Young people should be introduced to the great possibilities which attach to public art. This is not a matter of top-down learning either, but an education in citizenship. The task of reflecting our values, aspirations and political structures in our public spaces is inseparable from the project of involving individuals in active citizenship and social capital building. Young people must be empowered to be creative, to solve problems, and to change things for the better. Teaching them about public art and the built environment is also promoting a better future for a pluralistic participatory democracy. If we believe in this, we need to champion it in our schools and reflect it in our public art. With the help of architecture and planning organisations, teachers need to be enlisted and trained to pass on their passion and belief in a better built environment to younger generations.

A passion for place is also a necessary foundation for another important aspect of education: the encouragement and dissemination of skills. The digital age is an age of blurring boundaries between old professions and crafts, of intelligent and surprising cross-arts collaborations, making use of new technology, new techniques and new materials, by individual makers with entirely new design and

fabrication skills. The training of architects, planners, landscape designers, engineers and artists should reflect this new eclecticism, and embrace its new possibilities. It is no longer sufficient to work in specialist silos. We are entering a new *age of the maker*, in which technology will allow artists to manufacture beautiful craft objects on a scale and at a cost that should make them available to a lot of people. Instead of waiting for others to take the lead we should be exploring and experimenting with the use of these new tools and encouraging a new generation of high tech craftspeople to innovate. The means of skills acquisition are themselves evolving rapidly, and every opportunity should be taken to promote and encourage these future makers.

Government also has an important role, especially in ensuring that this new approach to public art and the built environment extends across our schools, colleges and skills academies. It is desirable that the importance of the arts is taught in business schools, that the value of business is understood in architecture schools, and that planners are persuaded of the role of art and architecture in social capital building. All education should prepare students to be flexible, to engage in broader decision-making, give them cross-disciplinary understanding, and encourage them to step up into leadership roles. The one-size fits all educational model, which is rigid and over-specific, will not produce the talented individuals we need for a rapidly changing world. Lack of opportunity and creativity in education squanders the innate talents of young people and under-uses the assets of our society. Young people should be encouraged to think creatively about their home, street, neighbourhood and urban community.

The sociologist and educational philosopher Emile Durkheim (1858 - 1917) identified two distinct functions of secondary education: identifying and encouraging talented individuals and enabling them to succeed in their chosen field; and educating individuals for a life of active citizenship. In concentrating on the former it seems that we have almost completely forgotten the latter, equally important objective. In an age of new kinds of job, porous boundaries between subjects, and portfolio careers, this distinction is perhaps also collapsing. The answer to what is most important really is 'Education, Education, and Education' but we are still waiting for it to be given the priority it really requires for the future health and prosperity of society.

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## DESIGN

Design has the potential to create and communicate a transformation in our built environment. Mass produced, poor quality designs for everything from cutlery to building materials are not a necessary part of our future. The age of the 3D printer opens up the possibility of an explosion of creative new design, starting in the design studio or *urban room* and spreading to every area of our lives. We need less stuff, but this stuff should be much better designed and built. Good design does not happen by itself. It needs skills to be acquired and passed on. It needs patrons, clients and customers who are design-literate.

This is the century of city-making. Human beings are moving to and living in cities on a scale never previously imagined. British architects and designers lead the world in sustainable city building. It is time that this great strength in design is connected to a bigger vision of how human beings should live in their communities. Public art provides an important way in which artists and architects can project bigger ideas about human values, community, and social capital building. It provides a way to champion and set out a vision for a civilised, prosperous, tolerant and inclusive future city which is also environmentally sustainable. A new era of cultural, intellectual and professional exchange between cities is emerging and there is an opportunity for British designers to be at the forefront of a new model.

We need to unlock this potential transformation by placing culture at the heart of our thinking and adopting a new approach to place-making. If we do so we can dramatically change our urban landscape, with significant implications for

community development, business and international relations, and the environment. If we do so, the world will beat a path to our streets and squares, to our new public spaces, and our new symbols of popular participation. We should not just lazily evoke or imitate the cityscape of ancient Athens, we should build our own modern and dynamic version of it here, in our green and pleasant land.

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## CULTURE

The great battle of modern versus traditional, new versus heritage, does not exist now in the same way as it did in the 20th century. Our culture is gradually absorbing the great ruptures of that century and understanding that a sense of place, identity and history can be combined with modernity and sustainability. The new era is more likely to seek intelligent and practical ways of combining the old with the new, breathing new life into historic buildings rather than demolishing them, and converting them to new social and commercial uses. New developments are more likely to try and rediscover and amplify the sense of place than they are to sweep away the past entirely in an attempt to create a brave new world. Our built environment is more likely to be built for the way we want to live rather than the way it is thought that we should live, and for a sustainable future. This bold marriage of the old and the new, this sense of place, has the potential to reinvent our streets, towns and communities. It has never been a necessity for all places to look the same or to be reduced to a similar formula. The sense of place allows us not only to preserve our heritage but to create a future heritage, transmitting what is most special about our places to new generations.

Once again the question of what makes good public art is inseparable from a wider approach to the role of culture in our civil society and its importance to building social capital. Periods of great creativity in the arts such as the Renaissance do not flow from economic success alone, but from a passionate desire on the part of patrons and clients, artists and the wider public to express cultural values on a public stage. Its symptoms are a promiscuous explosion of art and creativity led by ideas, and by experimentation, breaking down the artificial barriers between the arts and sciences, and an enthusiasm for projecting social, political or religious beliefs into the public realm, along with our aesthetic ones. Without sufficient social capital, plazas will remain windswept, and open air theatres will be permanently empty. With it, you will see a proliferation of user groups and income streams.

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A creative renaissance of this sort cannot be mandated by a government or a planning authority alone. It must come from the empowerment of the wider community through education, skills acquisition and ideas leadership. Above all it comes about because of a recognition of the central importance of culture to society. It is not an 'add-on', something which is 'nice to have' if there is any money left in the budget. Nor is it something merely instrumental, only of value if it helps to achieve some other social welfare objectives. Treating culture as a luxury extra is a grotesque error. Far from being something surplus to requirements and therefore easy to cut, culture lies at the very heart of what it means to be human beings living in a political community. It is not a luxury, it is a necessity. Public art is merely the most obvious manifestation of this, and poor public art (or its complete absence) is one of the clearest indications of a society that is alienated, disengaged from politics, and vulnerable to radicalization. We neglect culture and public art at our peril. It affects the whole quality of our public life and our society.

This essay therefore opposes all those who treat culture as either a mere luxury or as an instrumentalist device to achieve welfare objectives. These views represent the historical materialism characteristic of the 20th century, and shared by both the Left and the Right wings of the political spectrum. It represents an inversion of the truth. In reality culture comes first. It defines what is valuable and important to us, as human beings and as members of a community. Once culture is given its rightful place it quickly becomes apparent that it can determine new and innovative approaches to all of society's other issues. It mandates a broader and better education rather than a narrowly technocratic one, it calls for a questioning attitude and creative free expression over blind obedience and bland uniformity, it encourages active participation over passive consumption, it celebrates life over mere existence, and it asserts human dignity in the face of cruel and soulless systems.

The materialist demotion of culture has resulted in soulless public spaces and landscapes of bland uniformity. We fight to protect 'heritage' landscapes like Grantchester Meadows, the view of the Thames from Richmond Hill, or the moors behind Haworth parsonage without examining why *philosophically* they are so important to us. The answer in all three cases is entirely cultural. Without the poetry of Rupert Brooke, the paintings of JMW Turner or the novels of the Bronte sisters respectively it might have proved hard to resist the overwhelming of these landscapes by urban sprawl. It is art and culture which gives them their meaning and significance. Meanwhile many places have had their identity thoughtlessly crushed, despite the fact that they all have their own distinctive histories and identities. Public art provides a way, perhaps the only sensible way, of restoring these places to us.

Ideas can and do change the world. And acknowledging the central importance of culture in our lives will have direct results in the quality and experience of our built environment, a landscape which will be created for people and communities, not for machine-like automatons and mere consumers. It is time we left these 20th century ideological dogmas behind us and returned to a view of culture based on human values and on the way we actually live.

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## VALUE

Materialism and narrow instrumentalism ironically blind people to the very real economic and social benefits of culture and the arts. If we insist on treating these as a minor sub-set of ‘the creative industries’ and as ‘cultural exports’ we have already gone badly wrong, putting culture, which is actually the life blood of our society, in a sub-category of business, somewhere below computer gaming. We must start by reasserting the primacy of culture and meaning to the entire social project. If we do so we shall rapidly see that culture and the arts are far more important economically than a narrow materialist ideology suggests. For instance it has long been recognised that a significant work of public art (such as the Angel of the North), or a new gallery or museum (such as the Turner Contemporary Gallery in Margate) can have a massively disproportionate effect on the economic regeneration of a place or a town. This is the so-called ‘Guggenheim effect’ named after the bold new art gallery built on the decayed industrial riverside in Bilbao in Northern Spain. The effect clearly goes far beyond the sale of mugs and t-shirts from the Museum shop. The art comes to represent and promote an entirely new attitude to the place concerned, providing a powerful boost to its existing businesses and encouraging innovative new industries to locate there.

We must go much further than this and assert that good public art has the potential to regenerate and revitalise *all of our urban spaces*. Any such art, large or small, will encourage greater footfall, sustain more small businesses, create a new sense of local pride, and make a place more attractive for new enterprise. The sense of place comes first, and business follows. Nor does it need to be a case of stealing people from one place to feed another. New community and identity in our high streets, squares and housing blocks has the potential to reverse long term trends towards suburban living, out of town superstores, and passive forms of entertainment, creating new focal points for social and community life. As Jane Jacobs shows, as human beings we thrive in mixed use communities, where we know our neighbours, establish fierce loyalties to our local shop-keepers and café owners, and look out for familiar faces on the street. The reason we flock to Soho or Greenwich Village on the weekend is



because these buzzing urban places provide a simulacrum of the bustling village atmosphere which we as human beings love so much. Empty suburban streets, car parks and gated compounds do not cater for our basic human needs, and do not even keep us safe. Safety comes from neighbours and community, from eyes on the street and a sense of place.

If we challenge the obtuse idea that culture is not important we can suddenly see how new approaches to public art and the built environment can unlock new ways of living contentedly in densely populated urban communities, how it can offer us new identities and a sense of belonging, and how it can stimulate economic and social activities, creating a place where people want to live, and want to stay. Many people are groping towards this insight, for instance in the search for mindfulness, and in the increasingly interest in measuring our happiness and quality of life as well as our so-called standard of living. Where such culture-led communities are established, low rent ghettos are rapidly transformed into chic and desirable neighbourhoods. This transformation can be seen in Hoxton and Hackney where artists played a crucial role in changing perceptions, and making these into places where high tech start-ups and fashionable coffee shops want to locate. This often results in such areas becoming gentrified and expensive, driving out the area's original residents. But people very rarely draw the obvious conclusion that culture can improve and render more dynamic *all of our communities*, reconnecting people with their places in a way that will have an important social and economic impact.

Public art can be aspirational, meritocratic, creative and commercial. It potentially adds value in so many indirect ways that its direct economic benefits are the least part of it. Where you have a thriving community and active citizens the opportunities for entrepreneurial small businesses will proliferate rapidly. To state the obvious, business and business success naturally follow our human determinations as to what is most important to us. In an economy based on information such success is not going to be based on consumerism of the old sort but on shared experience and participation. The choices offered by new technology also suggest that businesses will need to be more value-driven. This is the domain of culture and the arts, and the expression of this new age in public art has the potential to symbolise and unlock new ways of living and of participating in a digitally connected sharing economy.

Most importantly, it is a question of what kind of society we want to be. If we are to create a new democratic model which enjoys the support of its citizens, this must be based on our values, on private virtue and public participation, on tolerance and respect for human rights. We need to stimulate new creativity and new forms of economic activity based on these values if we are to avoid becoming a society of masters and slaves, or one which is environmentally unsustainable. This will involve redefining the purpose of work and the role of society in caring for its weaker members, and accommodating protest and opposition. Only a culturally vigorous and educated society will be able to adapt successfully to a revolutionary new era. Public art offers us a way to express or reassert our values, to champion a pluralistic and tolerant society, and to inspire new forms of public life. Championing the transformation of the built environment is about embracing the future and ensuring that we do not sleep-walk into tyranny, environmental degradation and inhumanity.



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## STRATEGY

This essay is calling for a more ambitious use of public art, which has the potential to be an important revitalising force. This will require a radical step-change in collective expectations and actions to improve standards within the built environment. It is not a call for more intervention by government or for more expenditure by government, but for a smarter and more creative approach by government. Strategically it is a matter of recognising the sense of place and accepting that sustainable cities and ways of living are intimately connected with the built environment. It is also a matter of enabling a new approach to the built environment across government and of empowering local communities. Government needs to recognise the value of good design, the civic value of well-designed public spaces, streets and amenities, and the way they connect with the character and needs of existing communities.

In *practical* terms government needs to revolutionise the planning process. Imaginative and proactive planning is required, with thought being given in advance to the overall artistic integrity of a given project. Instead of being reactive, the planning system needs to think creatively about the future shape and form of our towns and cities, and the role that public art can play in reinvigorating our communities. Far from involving additional expenditure, this revolution in planning will be a very cost-effective way of developing more community-driven places. Time taken developing great plans and designs supported by local communities, and then implementing them over a longer period, will pay rich dividends when people start to get the communities they really want.

We are calling on government to introduce an *artistic audit* for all planning decisions in order to empower this new approach. We also call on it to appoint a new Chief Place Maker to champion this new approach and encourage the development of a few key places and projects designed to show what can be achieved by bold new public art with a sense of place. We also have much to learn from great public art initiatives and sustainable models for urban living from around the world. The building blocks for this radical new approach are already available. We also call on the government to support and encourage the development of the Place Alliance, a voluntary network hosted by UCL, bringing together all those who support a new approach to public art and the built environment, and providing a vehicle for radical change.

It is not the role of government to mandate change, and top-down approaches to public art and the built environment are unlikely to be successful. But what it can do very effectively is to enable change, remove barriers to creativity, and encourage the radical action we are calling for. Indeed this important strategic change of emphasis in favour of sense of place, culture and creativity must be enabled by government. If obstacles are removed and change empowered by government, thousands of talented individuals, artists, designers, makers, architects, fabricators, planners, academics and technicians will do the rest. The revolution in approach by government we are calling for in this essay will result in a far-reaching transformation in our relationship with public space, and will leave a great legacy for future generations, determining the quality of our built environment, and influencing the quality of our civil society and democracy for the next hundred years.

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## LEADERSHIP

Friedrich Nietzsche (1844-1900) once said that if he could find 70 people who thought like him he would be able to change the world. The complete transformation in public art we are calling for requires champions and advocates prepared to articulate a bold new vision of a design-led future, embedded in our built environment. We are increasingly aware of the influence of ideas leadership, and of those prepared to advocate publicly for change. We know that such ideas can start small, working their way into small group and networks, starting to appear on public platforms and in publications, before suddenly achieving a critical mass and becoming accepted as nothing more than reasonable and obvious common sense.

This essay is a call for such leadership not only from architects, developers and planners, but also from artists, politicians, business people, environmentalists and active citizens. Leadership can spring from anywhere. It will often be empowered by a strong sense of place, and will play a vital part in overcoming the many bureaucratic and institutional obstacles to the transformation of our built environment. Great leadership wins hearts and minds, builds consensus, and overcomes practical difficulties. Stepping up into such a leadership role, whether in our profession, business or in our community, is the first manifestation of active citizenship.

The ideas about public art and the built environment contained in this essay are already out there. They have found their way into print and into public pronouncements by architects, planners, artists and landscape designers. They have even been manifested in a few pieces of bold and exciting public art. The old ways are widely recognised to be inadequate for the 21st century, and the urgent need for new thinking has been recognised. And yet the old methods for the creation of public art (or its complete neglect) are still the norm, and our urban landscape is still blighted by soulless developments and damaged by false materialist arguments. The time for a revolution in our thinking about public art has come. It is up to us to be the leaders of a new school of thinking and to express this new approach in a manifesto. It is up to us, professionals, artists, politicians or citizens, to go out and champion the new approach in our own town, in our own community. We need to try, to fail, and then to try again, until a new paradigm for great public art is established. We can succeed at putting soul in the city, and the time to start doing so is now...

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If you would like to respond to arguments made in this essay please contact the author **Graham Henderson**, Public Art Consultant at Poet in the City on [\*\*graham@poetinthecity.co.uk\*\*](mailto:graham@poetinthecity.co.uk)

Pledge your support by emailing [\*\*manifesto@beam.uk.net\*\*](mailto:manifesto@beam.uk.net)

If you have a press or media enquiry please email **Emma**:

[\*\*emma@beam.uk.net\*\*](mailto:emma@beam.uk.net)

01924 215550

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- 1, 2 University of the Arts in the King's Cross Development Zone, situated on the site of William Blake's future city of the arts. ©John Sturrock 2015
3. New Poet in the City sculpture of Pope's Urn on Twickenham riverside. ©Guy Bell 2015
4. Pioneer Courthouse Square in Portland ©James Colhoff Jr. 2015
5. The 1995 Paolozzi statue currently at the piazza of the British Library ©David Olivier 2006
6. School children at Curious? Festival, Kings Cross. ©Poet in the City 2015
7. 'Mechaneu', 3D-printed spherical gear by Proxy Design Studio. Image property of Gizmodo.com
8. Celebrated view of the River Thames at Richmond ©Christopher Kent 2015
9. Image of street performance used with the kind permission of Roger Hartley from the Bureau of Silly Ideas
10. Auguste Rodin, The Kiss, installation view at Turner Contemporary. ©Hufton + Crow. Turner 2015
11. Brindley Place, Birmingham; Masterplan by Farrells ©Farrells 2015
12. Giant carved head of the Emperor Constantine from the Capitoline Hill in Rome. ©Chuck LaChiusa 2013
13. New Poet in the City sculpture of Pope's Urn and seating carrying extracts of poetry by Alexander Pope on Twickenham riverside ©Guy Bell 2015

