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Conserving Dirty Concrete: The decline and rise of the Pasmore's Apollo Pavilion, Peterlee

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Abstract

The Apollo Pavilion, Peterlee is large sculpture built to the designs of the artist Victor Pasmore.

Always controversial, the pavilion has been under threat for much of its life. However, it is recently restored and in December 2011 it was granted grade II* listing.

This might be seen as a story of an artwork and monument rescued from ruin by an artistic and cultural elite similar to the one which created it, as part of a wider "Authorised Heritage Discourse" that has sought to re-valorise avant-garde modernist structures despite public hostility.

However, we argue that the pavilion also needs to be understood in other ways. First, the impetus for creating a positive future for the pavilion has been generated locally. Second, we need to understand it in the wider context of the landscape in which it sits; as the visual culmination of an ambitious collaboration between artist and architect. Third, we need to see the pavilion as a monument embodying progressive values, as part of the post-war settlement that strove to create better living environments for all. Fourth, we argue, it is an object that will continue to provoke, rather than becoming part of a warm, comforting blanket of heritage.

Introduction

The Apollo Pavilion is a large sculpture built in the post-war, first generation New Town of Peterlee in North-East England, to the designs of the artist Victor Pasmore. It was the culmination of Pasmore's involvement as part of the design team creating the new town, built to give mining families of the east Durham coalfield better housing, facilities and new employment opportunities. Employed from 1955 as a consultant to have a leading role in the landscaping of Peterlee, Pasmore's principal involvement was in the design of the residential neighbourhood of Sunny Blunts, where the pavilion was constructed in 1968. The pavilion has always been controversial and at various points has been under threat of demolition. However, in the 1990s a different discourse of the pavilion began to emerge; as heritage. Whilst rejected for listing as being of "special architectural or historic importance" in 1998, the landscape around the pavilion was inscribed onto English Heritage's Register of Parks and Gardens of Special Historic interest in 2002. In 2008 a grant of £336,000 was made by the Heritage Lottery Fund to enable restoration and in December 2011 the pavilion was listed as a grade II* building.

In this paper we discuss the history and revalorisation of the pavilion and the landscape in which it sits as heritage in terms of the conceptual lens of the "Authorised Heritage Discourse" (AHD) (Smith, 2006) and in the context of the English post-war (post-1945) listing programme. As such, we consider whether the listing of post-war modernist structures such as the pavilion should be seen as an external elite imposition on their host communities. After introducing these ideas we then chart the history of the pavilion. At a broad level we seek to locate it in terms of the history of the construction of the post-war new towns and more specifically in the deployment of public art as part of the new towns programme. More locally we set the pavilion in the wider story and landscape of Peterlee and the way that Pasmore and his collaborators sought to develop a distinctive and new form of urban design, with the artist an integral member of the design team, in the development of the south-west area of the New Town, of which the pavilion was the chronological and visual

culmination. Finally we discuss different ways we might understand the pavilion and its story. At first sight this might be seen as a simple story of an artwork and monument rescued from ruin by a similar artistic and cultural elite to the one which created it, with a new, safe, culturally-validated status as heritage; an Authorised Heritage Discourse. However, we go on to argue that the Apollo Pavilion also needs to be understood in other ways. Specifically we need to see it as heritage that has been generated locally and as part of a wider, ambitious design strategy in this part of Peterlee. Further, the Apollo Pavilion and this wider landscape represent progressive values embodied in the creation of the new towns that sought to create a better life, both materially and culturally, for their inhabitants relocated out of inner cities or, in the case of Peterlee, from Durham pit-villages. Finally, the significance of the Apollo Pavilion is also as an object, we argue, that will continue to provoke, rather than becoming part of a warm, comforting blanket of heritage. The paper has been developed from archival sources, on-site analysis and engagement and discussions with a range of Peterlee groups and individuals.

The Authorised Heritage Discourse and conserving the Modern

Laurajane Smith's formulation of the idea of the AHD (2006) has proved influential in recent work in heritage studies. Smith argues that "heritage is heritage *because* it is subjected to the management and preservation/ conservation process, not because it simply '*is*'" (p3, emphasis original). In practice officially-sanctioned heritage is, it is argued, a self-serving elite construction, controlled by a relatively small, elite grouping of heritage professionals who decide what is "authorised" and what is not. Smith has considered how particular values are sustained and privileged and used to regulate heritage practice and norms in terms of discourse. Using Critical Discourse Analysis she posits an AHD that she applies to multiple forms of material cultural heritage protection and management. The AHD is considered a self-referential discourse that "privileges monumentality and grand scale, innate artefact/ site significance tied to time depth, scientific/aesthetic expert judgement, social

consensus and nation building” (p 11). There is seen to be a class basis to the AHD; “the heritage discourse also explicitly promotes the experience and values of social classes. This works to alienate a range of other social and cultural experiences and it has been no accident that the heritage phenomena has been criticized for absencing women, a range of ethnic and community groups, Indigenous communities and working class and labour history” (Smith, 1996; 30, references to other authors omitted from quote). The aim of the AHD is to create “something that is engaged with passively... in which the audience will uncritically consume the message of heritage constructed by heritage experts. Heritage is not defined in the AHD as an active process of experience, but rather it is something visitors are led to, are instructed about, but are then not invited to engage with actively” (Smith, 1996; 31). This can mean that there is an emphasis on “safe”, apparently uncontentious notions of heritage. As Gregory Ashworth has (critically) written, “Governments and their agencies have a vested interest in promoting heritage as a reassuringly warm and cuddly blanket, which will soothe away our individual and collective stresses, leaving only contented well-balanced people in an all-inclusive harmonious society, at ease with its promoted past and predicted future” (Ashworth 2006; 393).

The English (and British) system of listing buildings of special architectural or historic interest would appear to be a classic case of the AHD. It is explicitly an expert-led process, with recommendations on listing made by an inspector working for the national heritage agency, English Heritage, on the basis of criteria cast in terms of age and architectural importance; in effect defining one particular narrative of the country’s architectural history from multiple other possibilities. The system of listing was created as part of 1940s post-war planning legislation (Saint, 1996). It operates on a principle of being more selective the closer buildings are to our time; so, for example, most buildings built before 1840 are listed but only a very small proportion of twentieth century buildings are so protected. Since the system was developed in the 1940s it has taken two big steps forward to deal with more recent heritage; first to consider pre-1939 modern movement buildings, a process started

in 1970 on the basis of recommendations by the architectural historian Nikolaus Pevsner, and second, post-1945 construction. In 1987 the Government introduced a Statutory Instrument extending the period of eligibility for listing from 1939 to any building at least thirty-years old. The so-called 'thirty year rule' had the additional proviso that buildings ten or more years old can be listed if considered to be outstanding and under threat (Harwood, 2010).

The post-war listing programme that subsequently developed has been documented by Aidan White (2007). Whilst post-war listing encompasses neo-traditional buildings it is the listing of modern movement structures that has been more controversial. As White describes, this was the beginning of a reappraisal of the architecture and planning of the 1950s and 1960s, following a significant backlash against post-war modernism. The conservation of modern movement buildings threw up new philosophical and technical challenges for conservationists, such as the balance between design intention and historic fabric, or the problems with dealing with experimental (and failed) technologies. But the biggest challenge was the unpopularity of modernism and its association with the social and technical failures of post-war architecture and planning; particularly problematic in this regard was the "dirty concrete" of welfare-state Brutalism; as Adrian Forty (2005) has discussed, concrete as a material seems indelibly associated with transformation at the cost of the loss of the familiar. As listing decisions are subject to ministerial approval, approval for listing such structures was by no means assured. While describes how an infrastructure was created in English Heritage - the Post War Steering Group - that both gave authority to recommendations for listing and which tacitly acted as advocate for the principle. English Heritage combined this with a series of activities - thematic surveys, public exhibitions and the commissioning of opinion polls - to support the case for seemingly controversial listings and was joined in this cause by the lobbying of the Twentieth Century Society. Within a decade, whilst there remained on-going controversies about particular cases, the broad principle of selective post-war listing no longer seemed particularly remarkable.

In practice, however, most of the post-war listing programme has focused on significant architectural icons. As While (2006) has discussed elsewhere, the wider townscapes and landscapes of the post-war period are yet to generate the same level of reappraisal and protection. Given the significance of the new towns programme, the amount of listing that has been undertaken in new towns is relatively small. Elain Harwood's (2003) comprehensive survey of post-war listing suggested that, at that point, around five per cent of post-war listed buildings were to be found in new towns and were often building types, such as churches and schools, common in post-war listing generally. Examples more specific to new towns are limited but include, for example, the Clock Tower and raised pool at the centre of Stevenage and at Harlow the Water Gardens and a development of town houses. Rob Doctor's (2000) discussion of perceptions of post-war architecture and planning in the Netherlands revealed a similar situation, with the acceptance and valorisation of particular architectural icons, but little value placed upon the wider post-war landscape exemplified by new towns.

On the face of it, the post-war listing programme, of which the listing of the Apollo Pavilion forms part, might be conceived of as very much part of the AHD, as a group of experts contrive to push a particular construction of heritage in the face of wider public hostility with a hope that that this becomes neutralised and quiescent as the AHD is absorbed and accepted. Put another way, this can be seen as part of what Gavin Stamp (1996) has described as the conservation movement being "one jump ahead" of public opinion. Even from some of its advocates, this revalorisation of the post-war Modern Movement architecture has been argued to be largely out of tune with wider public sentiment. So, for example, John Allan, an architect and restorer of modern movement buildings, has argued,

"Of course, there is a select number of post-war public buildings that are listed and even admired by a wider audience than merely architects and historians, but it remains the case

that the British public's rapprochement with modernism itself, let alone modernism as heritage, is still on, or beyond, a distant horizon" (Allan 2010; 655).

Yet to consider the listing of post-war heritage purely in this way misses some of the wider politics involved. The Apollo Pavilion was the creation of the subsequently much criticised post-war paternalism of the welfare state (see, for example, Ravetz, 1980). Whilst the pavilion was created *in* a working class community it was not created *by* that community. However, as While and Pendlebury (2008) have discussed in relation to listed post-war social housing, it is important and relevant to understand such buildings not only in terms of their architectonic qualities as architecture, but in terms of the social intent that lay behind their production. There was a broad commitment to what might be called progressive practice, and social equality was a key theme (Gold, 2007). Whilst many of the criticisms made over the failures of post-war modernism are certainly valid, the commitment to progressive ideals often delivered housing of significantly better design and quality than was available elsewhere at the time. There is significant potential in Modern Movement Conservation to reassess, recover or at least celebrate aspects of the progressive intent of the original architects. Much heritage can be said to relate to *nostalgie de la boue*, or memory with the pain taken out (Crimson, 2005). So, for example, many industrial structures such as mills where workers often endured dreadful conditions are listed, as are other structures, such as rural psychiatric institutions. Whilst bodies such as the National Trust might occasionally through their custodianship interpret the experiences of workers or inhabitants, such as at their workhouse at Southwell, more commonly redundant structures seek new uses such as residential conversion. Not surprisingly, the pain of previous use tends to be glossed over by developers in such circumstances; Patrick Wright has described the dissonances that follow in such a case in the conversion of a large factory in the east of London into up-market flats, famous for a match-girls' strike in the nineteenth century (Wright, 1992). Conversely, in focusing on the Modern Movement, and New Towns specifically, there is potential to explore a built environment (and potential heritage) of progressive

social intent, albeit with failings in execution. With this in mind, we now turn to discuss the story of the Apollo Pavilion and Peterlee.

New towns and the urban design of Peterlee

The British New Towns programme was, it has been argued, “the greatest conscious programme of city building ever undertaken by any country in history” (Leslie Lane, Director of the Civic Trust in 1966, cited in Ward, 1993; 11). Built across the country, the underpinning rationale for New Towns varied. Those ringed around London were designed to stop the remorseless spread of the capital through new, reasonably self-contained settlements. In the north of the country the agenda was often different and focused on generating new employment opportunities. Yet all the new towns had goals in common, including providing better housing standards and better environments for their new inhabitants. For Elizabeth Darling this was the extension of the benefits of modernity to the working classes; “The middle classes had benefited to a considerable extent from progress and achieved a state of intellectual and social modernity... For working class people the experience of modernity was largely a negative one. Urbanisation had brought them not freedom but alienation, impoverishment, poor health and appalling living conditions, circumstances which, in effect, prevented them from even the prospect of entering a state of modernity” (Darling 2006; 85). And new town proponents held that significant achievements had been made in early evaluations of the programme; “We claim full success for the first stages of the British experiment in creating new towns.... In fundamentally important respects these towns mark an immense advance on any type of industrial towns that preceded them” (Osborn & Whittick, 1977; 90).

The history of Peterlee, named after the miners’ leader Peter Lee, begins with the 1946 New Towns Act. The impetus for new town status came about, uniquely, due to bottom-up campaigning and it was built to give mining families of the east Durham coalfield better housing and social facilities and

to provide some new employment opportunities, including for female labour. Famously, Peterlee's first master-planner was Berthold Lubetkin, but he resigned in 1950 (Allan, 2000). Subsequent plans were developed under the oversight of the architect George Grenfell Baines, working with the General Manager appointed in 1948, A. V. Williams. Williams was a dynamic reformer, with a strong interest in the potential of town planning; in a previous post in Bilston in the West Midlands he worked with the planner Sir Charles Reilly, who was well known for his ideas about developing small communal "greens" (Harwood 2008; Osborn & Whittick; 1997; Larkham, 2006). Thus, it is perhaps no surprise that Williams became concerned with the quality and degree of conventionality of Peterlee as it began to evolve and, in his view, the insufficient emphasis given to the organic use of space. In October 1955 he stated that the look of Peterlee might be improved by "the employment of an artist capable of organising small units of building in terms of mass and colour" (Harwood, 2008; 92). This led to the engagement of the artist Victor Pasmore, a well-known painter who had decisively moved into abstraction in the post-war period. Williams felt about Pasmore's role that "if it were possible to bring him into collaboration with our own architects it might be possible to create against the larger canvas of an actual landscape of considerable beauty" (Williams cited in Harwood, 2008; 92). His appointment would help to "work out a new concept of urban design within the framework of the building limitations at Peterlee." (Williams, cited in Bowness and Lambertini, 1980; 250 -255).

Pasmore insisted that his appointment would depend on him being able to start from scratch in designing a completely new part of the town, working with a team of architects and reporting directly to Williams (Cork, 1992; 20). Williams agreed and Pasmore was integrated into the Housing Group of the Development Corporation. He was involved in a number of the stages of development in the virgin site of South-West Peterlee including the area known as Sunny Blunts. The brief given to the South West Area team was open-ended and the only constraint imposed by Williams was that the design should not repeat what had already been done at Peterlee (Williams, cited in Philipson, 1988; 104). The roles within the team were clearly defined; Pasmore focussed most of his efforts on

developing the formal composition of the site layout and aesthetic appearance of the houses, whilst the architects dealt with the interior planning and detailing of the dwellings (Grieve, 2005; 124).

Pasmore drew directly on his experiences as a landscape painter and he later claimed that this had given him the advantage of a strong “sense of form and space as mobile experience – an essential condition of urban design, and indeed of all architecture.” He viewed the urban environment as “an artificial landscape so that the process of constructing it is not unlike making a pictorial composition through which you move imaginatively” (Pasmore, cited in Bowness and Lambertini, 1980; 259).

Throughout the various phases of urban design which Pasmore was responsible for, there is a careful control of geometry, composition and proportion in the planning of the housing clusters. The layouts are characterised by a clear separation of functions in which roads, streets, housing and landscape and public and private realms are given a clear hierarchy and expression. This extends to the sensitive use of topography and levels in which each element is treated differently; inclined planes of roads and forecourts, the horizontal plane of houses and the contouring of the landscape.

Although each house had access to its own private screened outdoor space the layout avoided the generous fenced back garden typical in the new town and instead a free flowing communal landscape was allowed to penetrate the housing areas. Over time Pasmore’s working approach appears to have become more intuitive, moving away from plan and model based design towards a method based on the imagining of sequential views, with a particular emphasis on the variety and subtlety of overlapping urban spaces. In the later phases of the South West Area a clear compositional distinction is drawn between housing, landscape roads and paths in which contrasting geometrical orders and a concern for differing speed of movement are brought together as a means of generating urban form. In deploying these distinctions as the foundation of the urban design approach an environment was created in which variety, individuality and surprise became prominent. This contrasted with the earlier design concepts for the South West area where orthogonal layouts and repetition were the norm. This emphasis on movement and the kinetic explorations of space and time resonates with other contemporary urban design strategy emerging

through ideas of townscape (see for example Sharp, 1948; Cullen, 1961). At Peterlee, these ideas were most fully realised in Sunny Blunts where he seized on the opportunity presented by the existing landscape features of the dene and burn running east-west across the site to organise groupings of geometrically simple, imaginatively interrelated houses arranged around an artificial lake and with a fluid relationship with landscape and topography.

[\(fig 1 near here\)](#)

The Apollo Pavilion

During 1955-6, and in parallel to the early works at Peterlee, Pasmore had collaborated with architect Rudolph Williams on a competition entry for a Museum of Art and Science in Chicago to commemorate the physicist Enrico Fermi. The unsuccessful proposal shows a composition of two distinct forms at right angles to each other, with a long horizontal block consisting of closed and open orthogonal planes and a balance of solid and void. Pasmore succeeded in resurrecting some of these ideas by persuading A.V. Williams that the small artificial lake he had created at Sunny Blunts “needed an eye-catcher”; a visual focus that embodied the broader environmental design principles of the housing layout. Pasmore later wrote: “I tried to make it clear that the object of all the sculpture, including the Pavilion, was to give dignity, focus and “impact” at various central points in the environmental complex of what is virtually a Council housing estate. But, to my mind, Peterlee is not a housing estate, but an important town. If for nothing else, therefore, the function of the sculptures is justified to underline and demonstrate this” (Pasmore, 1976).

The Pavilion, named after the US space programme, was the culmination of Pasmore’s work in Sunny Blunts and indeed Peterlee. The substantial structure was designed as a crossing for the lake and is organised on two levels, providing a covered pathway at water level, and a raised deck with a series of interconnecting spaces. We can understand the pavilion as embodying the broader urban and environmental design principles of the South West area through the manner in which its layout

and composition emphasises the interpenetration and relation of landscape and built form. The upper level is partially roofed with a concrete loggia that directs views outwards over the lake and the arrangement of deeply projecting orthogonal blocks, penetrated with open spaces running through and under, emphasises a fluid relationship with both water and landscape. The pavilion is largely constructed from expressed reinforced concrete with the exception of a brick clad pier at the northern end that acts as a visual anchor to the horizontal form. The structure's only decoration is confined to the concrete finish itself and two black painted organic form murals that wrap around the planes at either end, and contrast with the rectilinear concrete blocks. The Pavilion was not ascribed with any function and Pasmore described it as; "an architecture and sculpture of purely abstract form through which to walk, in which to linger and on which to play; a free and anonymous monument which, because of its independence, can lift the activity and psychology of an urban housing community onto a universal plane" (Pasmore, cited in Philipson, 1988; 117).

(fig ii near here)

New town progressive values, public art, Sunny Blunts and the Apollo Pavilion

The developments at Peterlee and the opportunity afforded to Pasmore need to be contextualised within the wider agenda of the New Towns. Beyond physical improvements, such as housing conditions, the new towns programme had "explicit brave new world ambitions [and] they were emblematic of the whole 1945 settlement" (Kynaston, 2007; 159). These were, in the words of Lord Reith, the chairman of the committee appointed by the government to advise on the New Towns, to be "an essay in civilisation" (cited in Ward, 1993; 11). There is an element of superior, patrician values and paternalism evident here. The New Towns would not only improve housing conditions but also improve their inhabitants. As Lewis Silkin, the responsible government minister, said in parliament, "We may produce in the new towns a new type of citizen, a healthy self-respecting

dignified person with a sense of beauty, culture and civic pride” (cited in Alexander, 2009; 72). This morally-improving dimension was an integral part of the vision and, for example, comes across strongly in A N Wilson’s novel set in a new town, *Late Call* (Wilson, 1964), where the central characters take on this cultural mission with an almost evangelical zeal. Modern architecture was to play a central role in the vision for brand new, rationally designed towns, which became the “moral imperative of the time” (Alexander, 2009; 33). New ideas about architecture and urbanism were accompanied by the use of art as a civilising and fundamental aspect of new town urban design. As Colin Ward said two decades ago, “if anyone wanted to see contemporary public sculpture in Britain, it would be necessary to tour, not our historic old towns, but our New Towns” and “the investment in public art ... is a kind of shorthand for the very important notion, contradicted elsewhere, that somebody cares about the non-commercial, non-retailing, aspect of public places” (Ward, 1993; 59). In Harlow New Town, the pioneering Arts Trust was set up in 1953 to purchase sculptures to be placed within important “meeting” locations around the town; as a means to add visual diversity to the urban spaces in which they were set (Gibberd, cited in Cork, 1992; 19). However, the Harlow Arts Trust focus on acquiring pre-existing art works meant that the sculptures had “only a very generalised relationship to their surroundings” (Cork, 1992; 19). David Harding has contrasted this with the integrated approach taken at Peterlee; “Peterlee invested in the artist and Harlow invested in the artwork” (Harding, 1995).

The Pavilion is unique in the work of Victor Pasmore, being of a scale quite unlike anything else he produced. The integration of art into the substance of the physical and social development of the town expanded the conceptual framework for public art and the integrated approach at Peterlee was the inspiration for several new towns that followed (Harding, 1995). Pasmore’s position at Peterlee stands as one of the first and certainly one of the most important examples of artist/architect collaborations in the post-war era. According to Cork, writing in 1992, the pavilion “stands today as a fascinating example of how contemporary artists can translate their concerns into wholly architectural terms, and... to yield a purely imaginative feat” (Cork, 1992; 20).

Decline, but not quite fall

The innovative design approach adopted at Peterlee was not without problems. As early as 1961 serious faults in the detailing and construction methods deployed in the South West area led to major technical failures and the houses suffered water penetration through their flat roofs, windows and wall panels. The inexperience of the design and contracting team together with financial pressures and inappropriate material substitutions meant that the interfaces between traditional materials such as brickwork and new techniques such as the prefabricated timber infill panels were poorly conceived and implemented. These faults resulted in major remedial changes to the house designs during the 1970s and 1980s; most notably the replacing of flat roofs with pitched roofs, a change that significantly altered the form and aesthetic of the development.

The Pavilion encountered a different set of problems and in 1981 local residents, led by independent councillor Joan Maslin, began a campaign calling for the Pavilion to be demolished stating that it had become a poorly maintained and graffiti-covered eyesore that was a focal point for anti-social behaviour. The developing fuss about the pavilion led to on-going correspondence between Pasmore, Easington District Council (by this time responsible for the management of the pavilion) and the Peterlee Development Corporation and the possibility of demolition was discussed. The nature of this period is captured by Development Corporation minutes from 1982 when demolition was effectively ruled out for the time being because of severe financial restraints on public authorities, unless they could persuade the Army to undertake demolition as a training exercise. The possibility of a clean-up by the Scouts was raised as “their entry to “The Kentucky Fried Chicken Co.” annual competition, [with the Scouts] subsequently returning at a later date to design a mural to be painted on the Pavilion” (Peterlee Development Corporation, 1982). Pasmore, by this time resident in Malta, visited in April 1982 and met a deputation of residents led by Joan Maslin at the pavilion. Following the meeting Pasmore was pilloried in the press for jocular and somewhat facetious

remarks about the graffiti. He reportedly said that he thought the graffiti improved the sculpture and that a better solution than the proposal to demolish the pavilion would be to “dynamite the neighbouring houses” (cited in Ward, 1993; 17). In correspondence subsequently sent to the Development Corporation he downplayed the impact of the graffiti suggesting that he “had expected something really sordid and objectionable over the whole building: but when I was confronted upstairs with a gay and colourful exhibition of free child art I was so relieved that I could not help laughing and joking about it. It never occurred to me or my colleagues that the Pavilion would become a children’s painting studio.” However, in the same correspondence he also expressed sympathy for the problems endured by residents living in close proximity to the pavilion and he proposed better lighting and restricting access to the upper level to prevent young people from gathering (Pasmore, 1982). By 1984, Easington District Council had responded to the calls for demolition by proposing alterations to the physical appearance and use of the Pavilion aimed at preventing it being used as a place to gather. Significant alterations to the physical form of the structure were not ultimately undertaken, but the Council removed the stairs and introduced planting to the top deck in 1985.

Rise

Despite the continuing campaign for demolition a more positive discourse and reappraisal of the pavilion began to emerge in the 1990s. English Heritage proposed listing the structure in 1998 as part of its thematic post-war listing programme discussed above, but this was opposed locally and the Minister then responsible, presumably nervous of controversy, declined to proceed with the recommendation. Momentum for a positive outcome for the pavilion, or indeed any sort of outcome following the lack of action subsequent to the interventions of the mid-1980s, began to develop in the early part of the 2000s. The landscape around the pavilion was inscribed onto English Heritage’s Register of Parks and Gardens of Special Historic interest in 2002. This was probably something of a

backdoor approach by English Heritage to give the pavilion some status, given that its listing recommendation had been blocked. However, it did give some recognition to the fact the pavilion has a landscape context, albeit the registered landscape was tightly drawn around the lake and does not include any of the housing. The same year saw the vegetation removed from the pavilion so a structural survey could be undertaken and, crucially, the creation of a steering group comprised of residents, supporters, Peterlee Town Council and Easington District Council to examine long-term solutions. This group, which eventually became the Apollo Pavilion Community Association, was central in developing a more positive local discourse for the pavilion and momentum for improvement. 2004 saw the formation of a small professional advisory group which met monthly with the residents' steering group. About this time further attention was brought to the pavilion by the Baltic Centre for Contemporary Art in Gateshead commissioning the artists Jane and Louise Wilson to make a video installation 'A Free and Anonymous Monument' featuring the structure. By 2005 a feasibility study was completed that recommended a scheme to convert one of the nearby houses into a dedicated visitor centre. This proved overly ambitious. Between autumn 2006 and spring 2007 the professional advisory group prepared a revised restoration scheme on behalf of the newly formed Apollo Pavilion Community Association that was submitted to the Heritage Lottery Fund in December 2007. In July 2008 the Heritage Lottery Fund awarded a grant of £336,000 towards the costs of restoring the Apollo Pavilion. The approved scheme involved restoring the Pavilion and surrounding site back to its original condition. The project entailed extensive repairs to the spalling concrete and decaying reinforcement together with the repainting of Pasmore's murals. Recessed lights that had not functioned since the 1970s were reinstated together with balustrades and an access stair to the upper level reintroduced; although only one, which is kept locked at night. Substantial work was also undertaken to the lake edges and the surrounding landscape, including measures to prevent algae bloom.

The project has subsequently received a national Civic Trust Award (2010) and various other awards, including a RIBA Regional Hadrian award (2011). With the successful restoration now complete, the

The Apollo Pavilion Community Association felt able to apply in 2010 for the pavilion to be listed and the pavilion was given this status in December 2011. It was listed as grade II*; this indicates “particularly important buildings of more than special interest” (English Heritage, undated); only 2.5% of buildings are the highest grade I, 5.5% the next grade II* and the rest grade II. The pavilion was listed on the basis of artistic quality: “the only truly three-dimensional work by the internationally known artist Victor Pasmore, the Pavilion is an abstract work of art, a demonstration of Constructivist ideas on a large scale and an expression of brutalist architecture” and for reasons of setting; as the centrepiece of the registered Pavilion Landscape (English Heritage, 2011; 2).

[\(Figure iii near here\)](#)

The Audiences for the Apollo Pavilion and the creation of an AHD

Prior to the restoration, Paul Usherwood, viewing the pavilion as a piece of public art, argued that it had five audiences (Usherwood, 2002). Two of these were said to have a positive appreciation of the pavilion. The first was “that fraction of the fine art community with the disposition and competence required to enjoy the Pavilion in the manner intended by the artist” who “living outside Peterlee tend to know the structure only through photographs”. The second was a “preservationist” audience. At the time he was writing the preservationists had achieved little; English Heritage had lacked local support when considering potential listing, it was not yet included on the English Heritage Parks and Gardens Register and the first tentative efforts to secure Heritage Lottery Funding were only just beginning. Usherwood’s third identified audience was, “some would say [the] real audience, those living near the Pavilion” whose critical feelings (somewhat over-stating the case) “have always led to calls for the Pavilion’s demolition”. Partly, he argued, this was linked to the particular form of the pavilion as a Brutalist reinforced concrete structure. Concrete has often been considered intrinsically ugly and unsuitable to a damp, British climate and the staining it produces. As we have discussed, reinforced concrete and Brutalism also came to symbolise the failed dreams of the post-war welfare state and the collapse of the master-narrative of Modernism in the 1970s.

Usherwood's fourth identified audience was a subset of residents, the presumed young males largely responsible for vandalism, graffiti and anti-social behaviour who had found particular, although problematic uses for the Pavilion. The final audience he identified was the architectural and architectural history community. Perhaps surprisingly, this was regarded by Usherwood as a hostile audience (especially surprising as there was a clear overlap with the preservationist audience he identified). Usherwood evidenced this with both architectural critiques of Pasmore's work at Peterlee contemporary with the design and construction of Sunny Blunts and the pavilion, and more recent evaluations, such as the way it was ignored by Elizabeth Williamson in the 1983 revised edition of County Durham in the Pevsner Building of England series (Pevsner and Williamson, 1983). Partly this seems to relate to Pasmore's interloper status as a non-architect designing residential layouts and substantial structures and partly to the social hostility to Brutalism being pervasive within the architectural community. Whilst this might have been true when Williamson was compiling the Pevsner volume in the early 1980s, as we have discussed, a very different discourse for Modern Movement architecture and Brutalism was subsequently established and significant efforts made to selectively rehabilitate some buildings and structures as heritage, that saw a combined effort of conservationists, architectural historians and architects linked with modernism who had hitherto been hostile to conservationism (Powers, 2001).

If we take Usherwood's audiences together with the growing appreciation within the architectural world for Brutalism, the conservation of the Apollo Pavilion looks like a classic case of a regressive AHD. It appears to be elite outsiders – art connoisseurs, conservationists and architectural historians - using their power to impose ideas of cultural worth on disgruntled residents. Heritage status can be seen as an attempt to neutralise the potency of the pavilion in local debates about place and to close down the possibility of demolition. It also brings an external authority to its value and places it in the past, to be read as history rather than something actively constituting and forming the contemporary place. Thus, we can consider the pavilion an elitist monument, rescued from ruin by a

similar artistic and cultural elite to the one which created it, with a new safe, culturally-validated status as monumental heritage. But are there other ways we might read it?

Alternative readings

Local Heritage

The first challenge we can make to this reading of the Apollo Pavilion story is that it was a local group that led the Heritage Lottery Fund bid and who have subsequently been the pavilion's principal champions, including seeking the listing of the pavilion as heritage. As such, if listing represents state-sponsored AHD it is an AHD initiated at local level by a grassroots organisation rather than simply being a top-down imposition. Whilst it is true that some residents, led by Councillor Maslin, have long been hostile to the pavilion, it is evident that this view is not universally held and indeed the formation of the steering group was something of a reaction against Councillor Maslin's views being presented as representing all residents (Taylor-Gooby, pers. comm.). It would be more accurate to say that residents were universally unhappy with the pavilion in its previous, degraded condition. The formation of the Community Association was a mobilisation primarily by local residents of Peterlee to see the pavilion in different terms; not just as a problem but as something of value to its immediate vicinity and the wider town. The Community Association has sought to develop an active events programme in and around the pavilion, to promote it and its restoration to local residents. These initiatives have included local photography, art, dance and poetry events that have explored the Pavilion's contemporary meanings within the community together with a wide-ranging school-based educational programme that seeks to situate the Pavilion within a positive history of the New Towns and the development of Peterlee, and to use public art as a source of pride.

As part of a wider landscape

Thus it is notable that the Apollo Pavilion Community Association's interests extend beyond the pavilion itself into a wider engagement with the design and history of the new town and promoting this as source of value and pride. As we have discussed, the Apollo Pavilion was just one rather monumental outcome of the design of this part of Peterlee. Sunny Blunts was an innovative collaboration between art and architecture. Unlike other new towns such as Harlow who adopted an approach to public art that viewed urban design, architecture and art as distinct but mutually reinforcing fields, the approach at Peterlee was different; Pasmore through the nature of his employment worked collaboratively not only with architects and planners but with engineers and landscape architects. It is noticeable that through all the controversy about the pavilion it is only now that the wider design of Sunny Blunts (as opposed to the immediate setting of the pavilion) is receiving any serious attention, through the education programmes of the Apollo Pavilion Community Association. The pavilion has been accepted as heritage but its wider context, the landscape in which it was designed to sit, has not yet been so recognised (the registered park and garden is confined to the immediate setting of the pavilion, see figure 1). The pavilion is a remarkable structure. It is also part of a remarkable Sunny Blunts landscape created to improve the lives of people from the Durham coalfield, which despite insensitive amendments to much of the housing to remedy technical flaws, remains largely intact. There is potential for much further work in understanding this piece of pioneering urban design, within the context of the new towns programme.

Progressive values

If the AHD is about the assertion of the superiority of one set of cultural values over another, we can, as discussed, see this as the largely externally-imposed assertion of a particular set of aesthetic

and artistic values over local, less appreciative readings. But we can also construct competing values in a different way. The British new towns created in the post-war period can be understood as monuments to progressive values, characteristic of the welfare state, and as a legacy of post-war leftist thinking. There was an impetus both to improve peoples' standards of living and quality of life. The use of culture and art was seen as an important means of achieving these goals. Sunny Blunts and the Apollo Pavilion can be seen as representative of this value system. They stand as a very particular urban design realisation of these aspirations, where one of the most renowned contemporary artists of the day was an integral part of the design team to create a district of working class housing; almost unimaginable today. As the Pasmore quotes above demonstrate, the aspiration was to lift the quality of the environment from the standard typical, rather mundane public housing estate, to something more befitting a new, important town. The vision of Pasmore and his co-workers still stands largely intact; the houses altered following technical problems but standing in a mature and rich landscape with the restored Apollo Pavilion its culmination.

Provocation

The AHD has been characterised as focusing upon "grand, tangible and aesthetically pleasing sites, monuments and buildings" (Waterton, 2011; 345). The pavilion is certainly grand and tangible but has not generally been portrayed as aesthetically pleasing, nor, in Ashworth's terms would this seem to be "heritage as a reassuringly warm and cuddly blanket". Nor, if authorized heritage is something to be engaged with passively, has this been the story of the pavilion to date. When Usherwood was writing in 2002, the pavilion's future was in the balance. His view at that time was that the public controversy stirred by the pavilion was a vindication of the "very concept of public art". He noted its positive role in bringing together local residents and a whole range of interested parties "in purposeful, unmediated and civilized (if noisy) debate" (p. 71). There seems little doubt that the non-utilitarian, material and aesthetic aspects of the work will continue to provoke discussion and

debate about its role within the community – and the future sustainability of the pavilion will depend on those involved in the local community association and other interested individuals and groups continuing to participate in negotiating and building a broadly based social context for the structure. This is likely to rely on a continuation and extension of the recently established public events and the educational programmes in which the pavilion has come to represent the wider narratives around the development of the New Towns, and of Peterlee in particular.

Discussion and Conclusion

The story of the post-war listing programme and specifically the conservation of the Apollo Pavilion can be read as the imposition of an Authorised Heritage Discourse. However, much of what is embraced by post-war listing does not neatly fit into the established interpretations of what constitutes authorised heritage in the UK; it is not “warm and cuddly”. Structures such as Apollo Pavilion are challenging and often controversial. Architecturally Brutalist in style, they have underlying aims and motivations that were ambitious and socially progressive, albeit delivered by top-down, patrician means. This recent period of history is still to be fought over and the architectural legacies have rather indeterminate contemporary meaning. The controversy surrounding the pavilion is illustrative of this contestation, between those who have wanted to erase the pavilion and those who have championed not only its survival but its restoration as being of contemporary relevance and importance to Peterlee. Considered in this way we can see this in terms of heritage as dissonance (Tunbridge and Ashworth, 1996; Graham et. al. 2000) The core argument behind this concept is that the creation of any heritage may exclude those who do not subscribe to how this heritage is being defined. Whilst dissonance maybe destructive; conversely it is a condition of pluralist societies and can be mobilised as part of constructive imaginings of identity. As such it may be productive to consider Pasmore’s Pavilion in terms of the critic Patricia Phillips’s notion of public art as something that gains its meaning and ‘publicness’ through an engagement “with the

congested, cacophonous intersections of personal interests, collective values, social issues, political events, and wider cultural patterns that mark out our civic life” (Philips, 2000; 192). Further, as Usherwood suggests: “In reality a piece of public art does not perform a particular, discrete task for its audience. Nor is its audience likely to be homogeneous or stable” (Usherwood, 2002; 62).

Viewed from this perspective, it could be argued that the contemporary meanings and interpretations of the pavilion will not be primarily defined by its recent listing or given authorisation by the warm glow of its recently acquired heritage status. The culmination of the re-thinking of the pavilion as heritage, listed status might, it could be supposed, serve to stabilise the meaning of the pavilion, stripping away controversy and its ability to engender strong reactions, as would be suggested by the AHD. This seems unlikely and indeed translating public art into heritage is frequently a contentious and contested process as, for example, Tracey Avery (2009) has discussed in relation to Melbourne street art. It is more likely that the meaning of the pavilion to the people of Peterlee will continue to be formed and re-formed as part of an active cultural process that is self-consciously negotiated and constitutive of identity in the past and present. This identity is not intrinsic to the pavilion but also encompasses the wider discourses and narratives that have accompanied its construction and subsequent use. Indeed, it reminds us that all heritage is intangible – because no heritage object or place can have meaning outside of the discourses we construct about it.

Thus, whilst the listing is one manifestation of the heritage values of the pavilion, and connects to the AHD, it does not represent all the heritage values one might associate with it. Indeed, the listing was narrowly based on the pavilion constituting a major work of art by Victor Pasmore. This it undoubtedly is, but it is also much more. As Pendlebury and colleagues (2009) have noted in the case of the listing of the Byker Housing Estate in Newcastle upon Tyne, there can be a substantial gap between how listing defines what is special about a place and broader, locally-held understandings of specialness. In her work on working-class heritage in Castleford in Yorkshire,

Smith has discussed the complexities of the interactions of heritage produced through the AHD and more locally generated ideas of heritage and she emphasizes the performative dimension to local narratives; “Heritage in Castleford is very much about *doing* and not necessarily only or primarily *having*, the material elements that give the heritage discourse authority and ‘reality’” (Smith, 2006; 260). Dolores Hayden (1995) has argued powerfully for the use of urban landscape history as a process of empowerment to give control to communities to define their own collective pasts. This is a challenge that the Apollo Pavilion Community Association appear to be embracing.

As we have discussed, one dimension of this history is the way that the pavilion and the Sunny Blunts landscape are a monument to an endangered set of progressive political, social and aesthetic values from a particular period in British history, when a coherent alternative to the dictates of the market was presented. Built from the high moral ground, this was not an object to be spruced up as part of a Kentucky Fried Chicken competition and it is perhaps ironic that listing was declined by a Labour Minister and acceded to by a Conservative Minister in the Coalition Government. We live in an era of crisis, when global capitalism is teetering on collapse, yet no alternatives appear to be on offer. Structures such as the Apollo Pavilion remind us not only of past alternatives but more fundamentally that alternatives are possible; as Owen Hatherley describes it,

“Left Modernisms of the 20th century continue to be useful: a potential index of ideas, successful or failed, tried, untried or broken on the wheel of the market or the state” (2008; 13).

These social ideals also had their corresponding architectural approaches. These maybe uncompromising but according to Hatherley; “Brutalism was never just an architectural style. It was a political aesthetic, an attitude, a weapon - dedicated to the precept that nothing was too good for ordinary people. After decades of neglect, its buildings are now either "eyesores" or "icons", fine for the Barbican's stockbrokers but unacceptable for the people who were always its intended inhabitants” (Hatherley, 2010; 31).

There is a wider argument here about the erasure of Modernism, whereby “the aesthetic argument can be used as a smokescreen for the political” (Hatherley, 2008; 40). What Hatherley has in mind is the forced decanting of social housing, its demolition and replacement by market housing. Whilst these conditions don’t apply with the Apollo Pavilion, it is apparent that its survival should be set alongside a context in which this period in urban design and architectural history, and the values it represents, is being eroded and removed. Even in a case such as the pioneering deck-housing of Park Hill in Sheffield, in theory protected by listing, the state apparently no longer has the resources or the will to sustain the estate as social housing. Instead the estate has been passed to the developers *Urban Splash*, with significant subsidy, to radically remodel for a young, urban style-conscious owner-occupying demographic. The progressive social values of the welfare state are being lost along with the architecture and urban design that embodies these values, and whilst these challenging structures may be flawed it can also be argued that they are important historically and, as suggested by Hatherley (2010, 31), they are too often replaced by what he terms “mute, grinning, lobotomised buildings”. In the words of John Allan (2007: 44), the reward for conserving modern architecture is “to do with rediscovering its original sense of optimism – its expression of a belief in the possibility of progress and human betterment.” This is perhaps Victor Pasmore’s most important legacy to Peterlee.

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