

The basics:

This book, like all books, could change your life.

It could change the way you see, think, and act.

Changing the way you see requires empathy, imagination, and sensitivity.

Changing the way you think requires critical inquiry, meditation, and self-awareness.

Changing the way you act, the most difficult of all, requires commitment, determination, and courage.

Consider as you read what action is required by the knowledge you gain from this text.

What changes in your thinking, seeing, and activity is Lippard suggesting? What would it take for you to make such changes (the ones that you value)? What keeps you from changing?

Be attentive to your responses to Lippard's claims, the way she spins situations. She criticizes mainstream American culture regularly throughout the book, and its opponents as well. Do you find yourself rejecting her claims often? Why? Do you find yourself agreeing with her without question? Why again?

As you read this dense work, be attentive to how it is written. Perceiving Lippard's organizational schemes will help you to make sense of what you're reading more quickly as you go. Be aware of what is proposed by the introductory material at the beginning of each chapter. Note where this ends and how the examples or case histories that follow relate. Notice how she uses un-indented paragraphs and italicized quotations to mark some transitions. Be attentive to the flow between abstract idea and concrete detail. Take note of the authors and artists who she cites and quotes. Notice how she uses or responds to their ideas.

And so on.

As you read the fabulous captions with the photographs of & from art projects, imagine as well as you can what it would be like to be in the presence of the work, or to be involved in the process of the work.

Consider some of the core ideas as you think about the examples:

“humanistic geography”      “moral discourse”(suggestive of “moral art”)

“place-responsible public art”      “geographical imagination”

“physical, metaphorical, and ideological land”

and of course      “the local”      “multi-centered”      “sense of place”

## THE INTRODUCTION

1. What does Lippard mean by a “multi-centered society”?

2. What is the “lure of the local” in your own words? Have you experienced this lure? When, why?

3. Lippard suggests that we are in a “retrospective moment in history.” Do you agree? Where do you see evidence of this? What might be the benefits and dangers of this condition? What's next?(10)

4. On page 13, Lippard expresses concisely the general perspective that your faculty have taken regarding history (and History). Some important questions are implied that you should keep in mind: What histories are missing & why? How do you relate to the dominant history? How does one uncover hidden or overlooked histories? What's the point of changing history? How does art relate to history? How does history affect the present?

5. On page 14, left column, Lippard explicitly states a thesis of her work. One idea in this thesis is “moral discourse.” Why do you think this needs to be specified? What is non-moral (amoral) discourse? What are the dangers of moral discourse? One difficulty with the word morality that she is responding to has much to do with the trends associated with “postmod-

ernism.” Seek out definitions of postmodernism and see if you can link them to a stance on morality.

6. In that same passage, she mentions “place-responsible public art.” Can you think of an example from your experience of place-responsible art? Why is this important? “Responsible” to what, exactly?

7. Lippard discusses “spiritual” connections to place. What is your relationship to the word spiritual? How does your relationship to this word affect (limit, enhance, amplify, prejudice, define) your relationships to place, land, history, ideas, etc.? ( take a moment to sort out the lists in that question)

8. Lippard refers to public art as a “new genre,” placing the phrase in quotes herself, perhaps to indicate that it is a somewhat inappropriate designation. In fact, public art is not new, but our attention to it is. Why do you think artists are turning toward this genre? Why are critics (like Lippard) examining it? How does public art change an artists’ relationship to his/her audience? In what ways do you imagine the nature of public art has changed over the last century? Why has it changed?

9. The closing phrase of the intro is a powerful one, establishing the depth of the author’s intentions: “to change the way we live.” It sounds so easy. But is it? How does this really change? What does change look like when it happens? How often does change happen intentionally? Where do “movements” for change (art movements, social movements, for instance) come from?

## PART I CHAPTER I

1. On page 23, paragraph 2, Lippard discusses memory and place and asks a number of important questions, including, “What if there are people with memories, but no one to transmit them to? Are their memories invalidated by being unspoken? Are they still valuable to others with a less personal connection?” How do you answer these questions? How does Lippard answer them? If it could be said that one job of an artist is to “transmit” memories, do you want to do that job?

2. On the same page, Lippard quotes John Dewey: “...unless communal life can be restored, the public cannot adequately solve its most urgent problems—to find and identify itself.” What would the restoration of “communal life” look like? Do you agree with Dewey’s identification of the “most urgent problems” as “find[ing] and identify[ing] itself”?

3. Below the Dewey quote, Lippard begins working on some definitions, starting with “community.” Would you agree that the word has been euphemistically applied to poor, or otherwise underprivileged neighborhoods? Did you grow up with a sense of community? What else makes “community” a difficult word to define?

4. Near the bottom of the first column on page 24, Lippard discusses residential life and the lack of common history in most “communities.” Are there values in our culture that predispose us to live in these “neighborless,” “substanceless” places? How are these values transmitted?

5. On page 25, she writes, “...most of us live such fragmented lives and have so many minicommunities that no one knows us as a whole. The incomplete self longs for the fragments to be brought together. This can’t be done without a context, a place.” Can you imagine a place, a community, in which you would feel “whole?” How do you cope with fragmentation?

6. Review the long list of questions on page 25. What do you know about the places where you have lived? What keeps one from knowing more?

7. On page 28, Lippard mentions Rybczynski’s book on Homes, and the parallel development of “self-consciousness”

and “interior life.” How have your living arrangements shaped your imagination, your sense of self, independence or dependence, etc.?

8. Lippard’s discussion of gender begins on page 28. Do women and men have different senses of place? Why or why not? Consider how gendered roles in our social system have affected our use of land, our cities, our homes, etc.

9. On page 30: “The content of the American homeplace is often conformity disguised as self-expression....” Some people would say this about people in general and all of our “self-expressions.” Would you agree?

## CHAPTER 2

1. “Finding a fitting place for oneself in the world is finding a place for oneself in a story.” I find this to be a profound insight. It relates to our interest in history, autobiography, and artistic identity. What story are you trying to find your way in to?

2. In the middle of the right-hand column on page 33, Lippard outlines what it seems to take to have a “sense” of a place. There are a great many skills that go along with being “in the field,” and having “contact with oral tradition, “intensive knowledge of local multiculturalism and ... multicenteredness,” and “historical research.” Are these the skills of an artist?

3. Page 36: “all art is regional.” What does this mean? Do you agree?

4. Lippard asks a question down below: “Why does this very local art often speak so much more directly to those who look at a lot of art all over the place?”

5. Try to sort out what Lippard is saying about the state of arts on page 37, left column: “Yet modernist and some postmodernist art, skeptical of ‘authenticity,’ prides itself on departing from the original voices. The sources of land-based art and aesthetics remain opaque to those who only study them.” What does it mean to be “skeptical of authenticity”? Why would artists feel this way? Why depart from the “original voices”?

6. On the top of the right-hand column of page 37, Lippard brings up two very significant terms in the discussion of art: form and content. The dynamic between them, as she discusses it, suggests a typical divide between “universal” art (that which seeks the broad audience within the “art world”) and landbased, or local art. The first typically favors form, and the second, content.

Do you see regionalism as having an “advantage”? What is the function of the “local filter”? In this conception, artists who work to show in galleries, sell to museums, etc. seem to have little to do with those working more locally, or without ambition, or who, on the other hand, produce work that simply doesn’t fit into the larger trend. What do you see as the point of bringing these two ends of the spectrum together, and, especially if an artist works directly with the public, on what basis should compromises be made in aesthetic values? Does valuing place and community mean abandoning the perhaps esoteric, certainly “formal,” concerns of art (Art)?

## CHAPTER 3

1. Refer to the quotation on page 41: Have you ever lived in a place with “no character, no history, and no community”? If so what caused this absence? If not, what has been responsible for creating and maintaining these qualities?

2. On page 42, Lippard begins discussing multicenteredness and identity. In the second column, she maps out a hierarchy of belonging. Think about your arrival (or life) in Olympia and your arrival on campus in these terms. What will it take (or what has it taken) for you to feel that you belong, that you are rooted, or that you have both the right and responsibility to create change?

3. Page 44. When you’ve finished reading this chapter, put down your book, go outside, and explore. Walk several miles in a random direction. Talk to people you don’t know. Make yourself at home.

## CHAPTER 4

1. The first column on page 46 discusses the naming of and storytelling about places. “the unstoried is unassimilable.” Figure out what this means to you in your own words. Can you think of examples of experiences of the “unassimilable”?
2. She makes distinctions between the kinds of names indigenous and Euro-American peoples give to the land: “Indigenous names tended to locate resources for common good...or to say what happened there;” “Euro-American names tend to be less about what is there than what it looks like or who was there...grassroots affirmations, ...bids for posterity, ...proof of ownership;” “Imperialism favors names that remind people of power and property.” Consider the names of things in places you have lived. How would you re-name places to reflect communal, local values? (Safeco field...?)
3. Page 50: “The answer is a story. Narratives articulate relationships between teller and told, here and there, past and present. In the absence of shared past experience in a multi-centered society, storytelling and old photographs take on a heightened intensity. . . . once you start hearing the stories, you are becoming a member of the community.” Here again: the significance of the “story.” Are you, as an artist, a storyteller? What kinds of stories can you tell that have the effect that Lippard describes? Where & how do you imagine finding these stories in a community? As an artist, do you see it as your job to uncover and express the stories embedded in a community?
4. On page 51, Lippard opens a discussion of “revisionist history” and “oral histories.” What do you see as the value of these histories compared with the “popular” versions of history (explored in grade school text books and on television)?

## CHAPTER 5

1. What do you think of Greenberg’s thoughts on photography, and, as Lippard explains, his view that “literary elements” and visual arts were incompatible with “quality”? Why do you think Greenberg (a very prominent art critic in his day, whose influence we still feel and have to thank for bringing to light many of the “Great American Artists”) held this view?
2. On page 55, Lippard is discussing the notion of “learning how to read photographs.” Somewhere between the picture and its “sense” is “the work of culture.” Do you see yourself doing this work? How does a culture “do work”?
3. On page 58, middle of the left column, Lippard quotes Rosy Martin: “we should use photos to ask questions rather than to show facts.” What does this mean?
4. In her discussion of “Women’s reciprocal approach” in the next column, Lippard parenthetically refers to being accused of being an “essentialist.” This is a specialized use of this word. What do you think it means? Why would it be considered “dread”?

## CHAPTER 6

1. How is “landscape a way of seeing”?
2. Page 62: “A hybrid culture can be fertile ground for multicenteredness, while assimilation can be a weapon against history, burying multiple pasts under a single marker.” What is the role of public art in the cultivation of multicenteredness vs. the burying of multiple pasts? Can you imagine a monument to an historical event that maintains multiplicity?

3. bridges, borders, boundaries, others : these are still important and useful words. Why?
4. Characterize your connection to, and feelings about land. Do you have a “retrospective, passive concept of the land”? (p.73)

## CHAPTER 7

1. “The gap between image and lived experience is the space in which both dreams and ideas are created...”  
Huh? This seems to have something to do with art. . . .
2. Page 77: How can a map “take a stand while pretending to be neutral...”?
3. How do “official boundaries” become internalized to become “identity markers”?

## PART TWO

### CHAPTER 1

1. Pages 85-86: Spend some quality time pondering Kevin Lynch’s ideas and questions. These will play a large part in our work in Winter quarter.
2. Kevin Lynch again on page 90 : “how distant [must the past be] to become valuable”?
4. On page 91, discussing history and specialization, Lippard laments that “[s]ocial and ecological histories... are usually unstated,” —it’s hard to look at natural history and human history at the same time. This notion of intermingled histories is a good one to keep in mind for when we read the Rings of Saturn.
5. What sorts of solutions can you imagine to the problems that seem to come with trying to represent history?
6. Lippard gives a fascinating tour through some labor struggles on pages 98-100. On page 100: “myths, cliches, and partial histories will foster moral landscape that erases a real history of struggle.” Here’s that word moral again, but in a seemingly negative light. How does this use of the word differ from Lippard’s idea of moral discourse in art and community?
7. At the bottom of that page, Lippard brings back in the artists. Are you a part of the burgeoning interest in representing the historic in avant-garde forms? What would this look like? What is the effect? How does one avoid simply creating another kind of whitewash over history?
8. Despite the function of myths to occasionally “erase [the] real struggles of history,” on page 103, Lippard quotes artist Will Insley: what is “absent from the ruin is often less marvelous than we imagine it to have been. the abstract power of suggestion (the fragment) is greater than the power of the initial fact. Myth elevates.” What is the relationship between these two uses of the word of “myth”? Can the myths, ruins and fragments give us a different kind of insight into how complex historical events might be remembered?

### CHAPTER 2

1. “Most monuments favor mythology and are even further from ‘reality’ than historic preservation.” Why is this the case?

2. Lippard continues to discuss the problematical nature of monument-making. How would you resolve some of these complexities? Do you appreciate the difference between the work of Maya Lin and the “typical” monuments to war?
3. Page 110: How can historical preservation and signage express the complex “contentment and despair” of a site? What kind of a difference would doing so make?

## CHAPTER 3

1. Consider parallels between the work of the archaeologist as Lippard describes it and the work of artists.
2. On page 121: “archaeologists now work closely with. . . [and so on] ...—a necessity if culture is to be considered in relation to places and their natural environments.” What does this relationship entail? Continuing into the next paragraph: what sort of interdisciplinary collaborations can you imagine taking part in as an artist?

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