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A sculptor for our time: bringing Peter Peri into the light

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Gillian Whiteley

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Ben Read was, aside from being a generous, witty and human(ist) scholar, an increasingly rare species in today’s competitive institutional environment, a teacher who captivated undergraduates with anecdotes drawn from a lifelong immersion in the arts and an enthusiast for all things sculptural; above all else, a champion of the marginalised, the peripheral and the unfashionable. Ben encouraged my interest in alternatives to the modernist canon: he invited me to contribute an essay, ‘The impact of the survivor: the sculpture of George Fullard 1923–1973’, to the inaugural volume of *Sculpture Journal* in 1997, and supervised my doctoral excavation of sculptural ‘outsiders’, ‘Transgressing the boundaries of sculptural acceptability: George Fullard 1923–1973’, University of Leeds, 2001.

fig. 1 facing page

Peter Péri (1899–1967), *The Spirit of Technology*, 1960. Coloured concrete on mild steel armature, h: approx. 3.04 m. West-facing wall of Rutherford Hall, Loughborough University, Leicestershire (photo: the author)

A sculptor for our time: bringing Peter Péri into the light

Gillian Whiteley

With flight, the refugee experiences the vertical of time and the horizontal of the spatial as too fluid to be fixed and crossed. The feeling of Being at home, intimate and familiar is denied in the sense that it takes generations of sedentary life to build up a stable point, where such a crossing can be established and nurtured.¹

Walking through the University of Loughborough campus in the April sunshine, I meander along verdant footpaths lined with crocuses and daffodils. Spring is blossoming everywhere and my sense of anticipation grows with it. Despite carrying out extensive research in the late 1990s on the Hungarian émigré sculptor Peter (László) Péri (1899–1967),² and having worked at the University of Loughborough for over a decade, I had never sought out Péri’s ‘horizontal-relief’ *The Spirit of Technology* (fig. 1), mistakenly thinking this was yet another of his lost, destroyed or dismantled works.³ Tucked away across the campus, well hidden behind the Pilkington Library, amid a labyrinth of buildings and pathways, this particular piece had become peripheral even to my vision. There, on the wall of one of the purpose-built student halls of the 1960s, the figure juts out horizontally, reaching high into the trees, proclaiming the power of technology to the birds. The figure is a classic example of one of





fig. 2

Peter Péri, *The Preacher*, 1961.

Coloured concrete on mild steel armature, h: approx. 4.1 m. Exterior wall, Forest Gate Methodist Church, 38 Woodgrange Road, Forest Gate, London (photo: © Historic England)

fig. 3

Peter Péri, *The Spirit of Technology*, 1960.

Detail showing the artist's 'Pericrete' signature and date, positioned below and to the right of the figure (photo: the author)

headquarters at 36, Soho Square in London led to the Association providing materials and inviting Péri to stage an entire exhibition of work in concrete, *London Life in Concrete*, at Soho Square in 1938.⁴ Péri's earliest concrete low reliefs were made by trowelling mortar on to metal mesh. From the 1950s, though, he created a series of large-scale works, building up the Pericrete on an armature, usually *in situ*: for example, Péri used this technique for another of his 'horizontal-reliefs' – a term used by Péri and adopted by others – *The Preacher* (1961) at Forest Gate Methodist church, a figure that bears strong formal resemblances with the one at Loughborough (fig. 2). Over the years, many of these have suffered from internal corrosion, causing the coloured concrete to crumble. *The Spirit of Technology*, a ten-foot-high naked male figure, vaguely draped, is, however, in reasonable condition. The hands held aloft grip the metal remains of the

the sculptor's 'Pericrete' works, made with a special recipe for coloured concrete (a mixture of concrete, polyester resin and coloured metallic powders) which he had developed around 1933. An important commission for a concrete wall relief entitled *The Concrete Mixers* (1936) for the Cement and Concrete Association's boardroom at its



original aerial component of the piece, but there is no sign of a rusting armature, and even the separate plaque, with its concrete tracery of Péri's signature and the date 1960, given by the artist on installation, still clings to the brick wall (fig. 3).⁵

Indeed, this remarkable sculpture is far from lost; it is vibrant, exuberant in its orangey glow, the colour of warm sand. How could I have failed to properly notice it before? Out of term-time, it absorbs the surrounding stillness and seems to exude the spring sunshine. My determination to write about this overlooked piece, situated on the periphery of the campus, by a little-known, often ignored, sculptor, is confirmed.

Paradoxically, although Péri's work was deemed suitable for particular public, social and architectural settings, such as campuses, schools and housing estates, its critical reputation oscillated throughout his lifetime and since, attracting fervent admiration from some quarters, and neglect or derision from others. On the occasion of his memorial exhibition in 1968, Péri was described by one of his main champions, the critic John Berger, as an 'eternal exile',⁶ not only for his obstinate attachment to leading 'a foreign life',⁷ but also for his resistance to the kind of dominant modernist aesthetic which Berger viewed as lacking social conviction. Other key supporters of Péri's socially engaged ethos and realist aesthetic included leftists such as the Marxist art historian Francis Klingender,⁸ the art historian, teacher and lifelong communist Ray Watkinson,⁹ and the Courtauld scholar, Anthony Blunt, who described Péri as being 'in the straight line from Daumier and Dalou'.¹⁰ Over the last couple of decades, Péri's reputation has been regenerated by renewed critical interest through exhibitions, and a resurgence of research interest in émigré sculptors



generally.¹¹ However, his work has been equally ignored or denigrated: in 2010 Matthew Palmer cited comments by David Pryce-Jones in an article for the *New Criterion* in 2002, which described the 'justly forgotten' Péri as one of Blunt's 'hack artists', suggesting that his admiration for Péri's work may have merely been part of Blunt's network of subterfuges.¹²

fig. 4

Peter Péri, *The Sunbathers*, 1951. Coloured concrete, h: approx. 1.47 m. North wall, Waterloo Station, 1951 (photo: © Historic England, Archive aa51/06841)

The plot thickens: presently, as I embark upon the process of revisiting my own research from the 1990s, digging out dusty files, photocopied documents and folders of notes made in archives, letters to me from Péri's associates and acquaintances and transcriptions of interviews, a serendipitous coincidence occurs: I learn of Historic England's crowd-funding project to raise £15,000 to bring a 'lost' work by Péri – recently discovered in the grounds of the Clarendon Hotel, Blackheath, London – out of exile and into the light.¹³ It aims to conserve and re-site Péri's large horizontal-relief sculpture *The Sunbathers*, commissioned for Waterloo station as part of the Festival of Britain on the Southbank in 1951 (figs 4, 5).¹⁴ Suddenly, the marginalised, peripheral and unfashionable goes viral on social media. Finally, in July, Péri crosses 'the vertical of time and the horizontal of the

spatial' and his sculpture is brought 'home' to the Festival Hall, prominently installed in the bustling foyer, complete with video highlighting its rebirth (fig. 6). Days later, a bright yellow tote bag, printed with an image of Péri's figures on it, drops through my letter box: the synchronicity is uncanny. At long last, if only briefly, Péri has come in from the cold.

* * *

Sometimes the work is in the entrance hall ... sometimes outside on the forecourt in front of the playing fields, most often attached to the outside walls themselves ... The most important result of all, however, is the discovery that there is a sculptor in this country with genius for such work: Peter Péri.¹⁵



fig. 5

The Sunbathers, Clarendon Hotel, Blackheath, London, February 2017 (photo: © Historic England)

fig. 6

The Sunbathers after restoration, Festival Hall, London, 2017 (photo: © Thomas Malcherczyk)

The Spirit of Technology was commissioned in 1958 by Harry M. Fairhurst, the architect of the halls of residence for Loughborough College of Advanced Technology, as it was then known.¹⁶ The title of the piece reflected the ethos and pedagogical interests of the institution: notably, the college became Loughborough University of Technology from 1966, and was renamed as Loughborough University in 1996. Furthermore, it resonated with the political emphasis placed on technology at the time, summed up in the memorable phrase, ‘the white heat of technology’, coined and popularised by Harold Wilson’s Labour Party conference speech of 1963. With the formal approval of Péri’s final design in February 1960, at a total cost of £500, the artist probably installed the piece at Rutherford Hall during its construction, which took place from 1961 to 1962. It is one of a number of works sited on the university campus in the 1960s, commissioned for all the student halls, as well as for exterior social spaces on the campus. Consequently, the university’s mid-twentieth-century collection includes work by lesser-known artists with that of sculptors with significant reputations, including major pieces by Bernard Schottlander, Lynn Chadwick and Geoffrey Clarke.¹⁷

Artworks commissioned for and sited on university campuses, particularly those built or expanded in the 1960s, can be viewed as



part of the broader development of new social spaces for contemporary art and public sculpture which began in the aftermath of the Second World War in Britain.¹⁸ While housing estates, public parks and playgrounds became sites for open-air exhibitions and contemporary works of sculpture, with art education acquiring a new emphasis, the educational environment itself was seen as a key element. As the war neared its end, R.R. Tomlinson, Senior Inspector of Art at London County Council, emphasised this connection, arguing that young people would need ‘to be acquainted with the world’s great art and craft in addition to well designed things of modern manufacture, and that they should live and work in as suitable and beautiful surroundings as possible’.¹⁹ Stressing the importance of the physical ‘learning’ environment, Tomlinson urged education authorities to recognise this and give due emphasis to the design of new school buildings after the war: ‘it is to the children of today that we must look for the great reconstruction of our towns and of society which all right-thinking people hope to see brought about now that peace has returned’.²⁰

On the eve of the 1944 Education Act, Tomlinson was echoing the ideas behind the newly formed Society for Education through Art (SEA) which, again, laid great emphasis on the built environment. In 1943 Herbert Read (1893–1968), who was a founder member of the SEA, devoted a chapter of *Education through Art* to the design and architecture of places for education:

The school in its structure and appearance should be an agent however unconscious in its application of aesthetic education ... The question of cost is irrelevant: there is land, there are building materials, there is skill and

labour. In a rational society, there is only the question of priority and no services in such a society, save those of nourishing and protecting life itself, should have priority over education.²¹

These unequivocal views were influenced by the pre-war pioneering ideas and work of the radical Director of Education for Cambridgeshire, Henry Morris, who, in the 1930s, had declared:

we shall not bring about any improvements in standards of taste by lectures and preachings: habituation is the golden method. The school, the technical college, the community centre which is not a work of art is ... an educational failure.²²

These ideas were, in turn, shared by a few significant educators who came to hold key positions in local authorities in the early post-war period. The 1944 Education Act, which guaranteed primary and secondary education for all as a central plank of a programme of social welfare reforms, and the subsequent school-building programme provided an opportunity to put some of those ideas into action. In 1948 the government set up a development group, made up of educationalists and architects, and some of the ideas, including commissioning artworks for new schools, were taken up by progressive local education authorities: Hertfordshire was one of the first, with Leicestershire quick to follow.²³

Leicestershire Education Authority demonstrated a particular commitment to the ideals articulated by Read and Morris. The county’s Chief Education Officer from 1947 to 1971, Stewart Mason, had served as a junior school inspector under Morris in Cambridgeshire in the 1930s.²⁴ Mason played

a particularly important personal role in commissioning and selecting many large-scale sculptures and other artworks for new schools and other education establishments across the county. By 1957 Mason had commissioned sculptures, murals and reliefs for twenty-five new schools. Mervyn Levy's article, 'Pioneering patronage for schools: British art in Leicestershire', referred to the county's remarkable collection of over 150 works by contemporary British artists, noting with approval that every new school in the county had a sculpture especially commissioned for it.²⁵ Furthermore, in 1967 the county's collection, including works by Péri, was celebrated in an exhibition at the Whitechapel Gallery. In the catalogue introduction, Bryan Robertson commented:

Here England was once the progenitor, our next revolution must be to bring art into life by means of education ... England must enter the 20th century and we should at once provide evidence of its existence in our environment.²⁶

Working closely with architects such as Tom Collins, each new school was individually designed and viewed as an incubator of progressive educational practice and building design. Many of these commissions for schools and colleges were carried out not by native British artists but by émigrés – such as Péri, Willi Soukop, Georg Ehrlich and Uli Nimptsch – who had settled in Britain. Significantly, these exiled artists created works that were not just realist in an academic figurative sense, but often reflected communitarian and realist concerns originating in other countries.

* * *

Only the discipline of his earlier abstract phase could lead Péri to his present mastery of form, but it is his peculiar merit that in an intense and often bitter struggle he has succeeded in applying his powerful weapon of a new technique to its proper and fruitful task of expressing the vital experiences of ordinary men and women.²⁷

Over the last decade or so, the notion of the socially engaged artist has become ubiquitous, exemplified by projects such as Nato Thompson's *Creative Time Summits*, and outlined pedagogically in Pablo Helguera's handbook, *Education for Socially Engaged Art*.²⁸ In 1955, careful to distinguish it from Socialist Realism, Berger had written an impassioned defence of social realism in the work of a handful of 'famously unacceptable artists', derided by others for their realist approach and raw, proletarian subject matter.²⁹ As a socially engaged artist active in the mid-twentieth century, an artist of 'commitment' as it was often termed then,³⁰ working in a social realist aesthetic, Péri was one of the elders among Berger's coterie of 'famously unacceptable' artists. Reflecting back on his relationship to Péri in an interview in 1981, his close friend and fellow artist Clifford Rowe articulated just how difficult it had been to be a socially engaged artist at that time:

Neither of us were recognised by the established artworld – that world was completely hostile – they were wholly antagonistic to anything political in art at all – it was a real – you might say vendetta – while the people were on our side – engaged art – as opposed to those who advocated 'free art' – which implies that engaged art was not 'free' – which put us on the defensive for a start – those others believed that art should

be entirely separate from economics and politics.³¹

In England in the 1950s, Péri was firmly positioned on the periphery of the contemporaneous mainstream, and avant-garde, artistic developments. Paradoxically though, as we will see, this was not a place he had always occupied.

Péri was born on 13 June 1899 in Budapest.³² His father, Mano Weisz, was a Jewish tailor, and later a railway porter. While still a teenager, Péri persuaded his family to change their name from Weisz to Péri, a Hungarian surname.³³ He was apprenticed as a youth to a stonemason, while studying art at evening classes. Péri became involved in revolutionary politics, and, after supporting Bela Kun's short-lived Soviet Republic in 1919, was forced to seek political refuge successively in Vienna, Paris and, for a longer period, Berlin. There, he became part of the avant-garde group *Der Sturm*, and was closely involved with the Bauhaus, exhibiting in the *Sturm* gallery with László Moholy-Nagy in 1922. By the mid-1920s Péri's unusually shaped painted canvases known as *Raumkonstruktionen* (Space Constructions) and the *lineoleumschnitte* derived from them had gained him a reputation as a leading Constructivist artist.³⁴ From 1924 to 1928 he worked for the *Stadt der Berliner Architekturbüro* as an *undermensch*, largely carrying out minor regulatory tasks, but designing blocks of flats and a monument to Lenin in his own time.³⁵ He also continued to draw cartoons for the communist daily *Rote Fahne* and workers' journals such as Siemens' *Der Lautsprecher*. In 1933, a few days after the Reichstag fire, his wife, Mary Macnaghten, was arrested for distributing anti-Nazi propaganda.³⁶ The couple were forced to flee, and sought refuge in London, settling initially in Ladbroke Grove, North

Kensington, and then in Willow Grove, Hampstead, Herbert Read's famous 'nest of gentle artists', which provided sanctuary for many other émigrés at the time.³⁷ Péri then moved to a studio in Camden Town, where he lived until 1966.

In London, his political sympathies and socially engaged practices drew him to other anti-fascist artists, and he became firmly associated with a coterie of leftist and Marxist artists and writers. In 1933 he helped found the Artists International (later the Artists' International Association or AIA) and played a very active part in it alongside Pearl Binder, Misha Black, James Boswell, James and Phyllis Lucas, Betty Rea and Cliff Rowe. Although there was no particular didactic style or aesthetic associated with it, the AIA played a key role in setting up ideological and aesthetic debates surrounding communism and realism. The collective position on art was set out in one of the first jointly authored manifestos: the place of the artist was 'at the side of the working-class' with a demand that they use their artistic abilities as a 'weapon' to develop a 'new socialist art'. Péri himself clearly identified with this as he later explained in his own reflections on the role of the AIA:

We wanted to put our talents and craft at the service of the people who not only dream of a better life but organise to build up a society free from the fear of war and want ... We did not forget that first of all we were artists, and we put up our first exhibition in Charlotte Street in 1935. Its liveliness was overwhelming because all the exhibitors were able to free themselves from the usual handicap of an artist who believes he is at the centre of the universe.³⁸

One of the commonly highlighted enigmas of Péri's career was his abandonment of the abstract Constructivist style that he had worked in alongside avant-garde artists in Germany, in favour of a realist aesthetic based on the quotidian and human figure. However, given Péri's political views and associations, it is clear that his change of style was not merely aesthetic, but was ideological and political.³⁹ Péri himself made this clear in his own writings, describing the shift as a conscious change of direction and specifically referring to it as a 'cleansing process'.⁴⁰ As early as 1928 in Berlin, Péri had started to experiment with modelling in wet concrete on wire armatures, making small figures in a realist style. By the time he was established as an artist in Hampstead, Péri's work, consisting of coloured wall reliefs and small, free-standing works in concrete – cheap, versatile, industrial – fitted well into the figurative New Realist aesthetic being promoted by leftist artists and critics. Klingender wrote in the communist journal *Left Review* about his particular brand of realist sculpture, praising its use of concrete and the 'proletarian sensitivity' of works such as *Street Corner Meeting of Workers* (1933).⁴¹ Similarly, for Blunt, Péri's sculpture epitomised a new, socially progressive artform, noting in the catalogue for a solo exhibition of Péri's work in Cambridge:

From the crucial *Street Corner Meeting* of 1933 to the present day, he has devoted himself to the rendering of the ordinary life of people in the streets and parks of London. His groups represent everyday scenes of the workers' life in a straightforward but subtle technique, and in the medium of concrete, the use of which, as the most important building material of today, opens up the possibility that again sculpture may be united with architecture. In this way,

sculpture can again become a communal art.⁴²

Through to the mid-1950s and beyond, alongside a leftist perspective, Péri maintained his unfashionable figurative aesthetic, labelled as 'social realist' by Berger at the height of the Cold War.⁴³ That said, it is important to point out that Péri did not share Berger's more discerning leftist views on some of the crucially divisive political issues of the era.⁴⁴ Berger was a Marxist and had various communist associations, including involvement with the officially designated Communist Party Artists' Group, but he was no apologist for the Soviet regime and indeed was a fierce critic of Stalinist policies.⁴⁵

In later years, while Péri's politics remained left-wing, his commitment to pacifism drew him to the Quaker community, and he joined the Society of Friends and left the Communist Party.⁴⁶ As his politics developed a quieter aspect, his work expressed his humanist sympathies more directly, encapsulated most of all perhaps in the *Little People* series. Péri started to make these during the Second World War when materials for sculpture were scarce, and there were few opportunities to exhibit or sell work. The production of these small figures and groups, some only a few inches high, continued until his death in 1967, by which time his Camden studio was inhabited by hundreds of small concrete figures. *Little People* depicted men, women and children doing ordinary everyday activities: sweeping the yard, playing games, hanging out washing, changing a lightbulb, waiting for a bus, or reading a newspaper. Individually, these works present closely observed fragments of the quotidian but, in combination, they become a community.⁴⁷ Even here though, as Henderson explained in 1945, the legacy of his earlier Constructivist approach was evident in the dynamic way he



DARLEY HOUSE



fig. 7 facing page

Peter Péri, *Following the Leader: Memorial to the Children Killed in the Blitz*, 1947–48. Stair tower, Darley House, South Lambeth, London, 1949 (photo: © Historic England, Archive (DP164326))

fig. 8

Peter Péri in his studio, 1950s. Photograph. Leeds Museums & Galleries (Henry Moore Institute Archive) (photo: © Wolfgang Suschitzky)

explored rhythm, perspective and space, combining these formal elements with a deep sense of real lived experience, of the warmth of human beings at work and play:

This sculpture matters because it presents a world of living, working, suffering humanity and is far from the mystical vision of the artist who sees his fellow men and women as trees walking or petrified stones. It is this quality of

common humanity and half-ironical fellow-feeling that gives it a place among the most vital and significant products of our age.⁴⁸

Alongside the *Little People*, through the 1950s and 1960s Péri also worked extensively on a series of large-scale commissions, developing his signature ‘Pericrete’ horizontal-reliefs for social architecture and public spaces, and producing work on housing estates. One of his earliest commissions was for London County Council, with Péri creating three large concrete reliefs on the external staircases of a block of flats on a South Lambeth council estate (*Children Playing, Footballers and Following the Leader: Memorial to the Children Killed in the Blitz, 1947–48*) (fig. 7).⁴⁹ Pertinently, Péri produced many works for schools and other educational establishments, particularly in the East Midlands, many of them in Leicestershire.⁵⁰

Writing in the left-wing *New Statesman* in the 1950s, John Berger wrote appreciatively about Péri’s political commitment as an artist, but also applauded the social accessibility of his work. Berger enthused: ‘Here, his works modelled in concrete on brick walls beside a football field or a gymnasium, he comes into his own ... he is not the least illustrative, and has the sculptural energy of an artist like Zadkine.’⁵¹

Although few might have known his name, generations of children and young people would be familiar with Péri’s sculptures and concrete reliefs, as many would have watched him create them, and then walked past them every day in the playgrounds and driveways of many Leicestershire schools in Oadby, Scraftoft, Wigston, Castle Donington, Longslade and other villages. Péri’s works for the Leicestershire Educational Authority

were popular with pupils and staff. Matthew Palmer, who attended an infant school in Evington, a suburb of Leicester not far from Scraftoft which had Péri’s *Boy and Girl Calling a Dog* on its exterior wall, noted that they found their way on to school badges and even acquired nicknames.⁵²

* * *

Peter Péri was an exile. Arrogantly, obstinately, sometimes cunningly, he preserved this role.⁵³

Péri’s relationship to being an outsider was complex and curious. Ostracism, alienation and assimilation were all part of his experience (fig. 8). Writing in the catalogue for Péri’s memorial exhibition at Swiss Cottage Central Library, Camden, in 1968, Berger described him as an ‘eternal exile’.⁵⁴ Many of Berger’s own literary works captured the experience of being in exile. Importantly, Berger’s first novel, *A Painter of our Time*, published in 1958, a couple of years before Berger took up a ‘self-imposed’ exile of his own in France, dealt with exile and displacement. Berger discussed the novel with the artist while in the process of writing it. The central character, Janos Lavin, is partly based on Péri, and partly on another Hungarian émigré friend of Berger’s, the art historian Frederick Antal. What both shared was what Berger called ‘the depth of their experience of exile’.⁵⁵

As Berger recognised, then and subsequently, the experience of exile – the state of mind that might be called ‘refugeeness’⁵⁶ – has become the defining contemporary condition, and is now the most urgent political question of our own time. Hence, just as his sculptures are brought out of ‘exile’, Péri might after all be a

sculptor for *our* time. His work reminds us that that which is on the periphery must not remain there. We have a duty, as scholars, researchers, artists and global citizens, to bring it into the light.

¹ S. Dobson, *Cultures of Exile and the Experience of Refugeeeness*, Bern, 2004, p. 302.

² Publications by Whiteley featuring Péri include ‘Re-presenting reality, recovering the social: the poetics and politics of social realism and visual art’, in D. Tucker (ed.), *British Social Realism in Film, Literature and Visual Art since 1940*, London, 2011, pp. 132–71; ‘Peri, Peter Laszlo [formerly Ladislav Weisz] (1899–1967)’, *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, <https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/64507>; accessed 24 April 2018; ‘On common ground: sculpture and the viewing subject 1950–75’, in P. Curtis (ed.), *Vol I: Sculpture in 20th-century Britain*, Leeds, Henry Moore Institute, 2003, pp. 185–99; ‘Art for social spaces: public sculpture and urban regeneration in postwar Britain’, *Designing Britain 1945–75*, September 2002, <https://vads.ac.uk/learning/designingbritain/html/schools.html>; accessed 24 April 2018. Conference presentations include ‘A “comradely salute”: social realism and the public work of Peter Péri’ at the ‘Figuration/Abstraction: Strategies for Public Sculpture in Europe 1945–1968’ conference, Henry Moore Institute, Leeds, 2–4 December 1999; ‘“Real” workers, monumental heroes or the pursuit of Everyman: Peter Péri and his antecedents’, at the ‘Work and Image’ conference, University of Leeds, 1998; ‘Looking forward, looking back? Avant-gardistes, engagés and British sculpture in the 1950s’ at the Association of Art Historians’ annual conference, University of Exeter, 1998.

³ Four works by Péri are included in the ‘Lost and removed works’ section in T. Cavanagh and A. Yarrington, *Public Sculpture of Leicestershire and Rutland*, Liverpool, Liverpool University Press and the PMSA, 2000, pp. 307–30.

⁴ See J. Kay, ‘Sculpture, schools and people’, in *Peter Peri, 1899–1967, A Retrospective Exhibition of Sculpture, Prints and Drawings* (exhib. cat.), Leicester Museum and Art Gallery, Leicester, 3 August–29 September 1991, p. 8.

⁵ Cavanagh and Yarrington, as note 3, pp. 211–12.

⁶ J. Berger, ‘Impressions of Peter Péri’, in *Peter Peri*

Memorial Exhibition (exhib. cat.), Swiss Cottage Library, Camden, London, 1968, p. 3

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 2.

⁸ Francis Klingender (1907–55) pioneered sociological and Marxist approaches to art, as in *Marxism and Modern Art*, London, Lawrence & Wishart, 1943; he also wrote on Péri: ‘Introduction’, in *From Constructivism to Realism* (exhib. cat.), Foyle Art Gallery, London, 1936.

⁹ Ray Watkinson (1913–2003), art historian, founder of the William Morris Society, art critic of the *Daily Worker* in the 1950s; see obituary, *Independent*, 25 March 2003. A close personal friend of Péri, Watkinson wrote an essay in *Peter Peri 1899–1967* (exhib. cat.), Gardner Arts Centre, University of Sussex, May–June 1973.

¹⁰ Anthony Blunt (1907–83), director of the Courtauld Institute, London (1947–74), Surveyor of the King’s/Queen’s pictures (1945–75), acted as a Soviet spy from the 1930s to the early 1950s. A. Blunt, ‘Art under capitalism and socialism’, in C. Day Lewis (ed.), *Mind in Chains – Socialism and the Cultural Revolution*, London, 1972 [1937], pp. 105–22.

¹¹ Péri’s early work featured in *Nature and Technology: Moholy-Nagy Reassessed 1916–1923*, Hungarian National Gallery, Budapest, 2008, and *Art for the People: Peter Peri 1899–1967, An Exhibition of Sculpture, Prints and Drawings*, Sam Scorer Gallery, Lincoln, 2008. For recent scholarly interest, see M. Palmer, ‘Peter Peri (1898–1967) – an artist of our time?’, *Eger Journal of English Studies*, X, 2010, pp. 113–35; G. Johnston, ‘Art, political commitment and reputation in 20th century Europe: the case of Peter Laszlo Peri (1899–1967)’, *British Art Journal*, 14:1, 2013, pp. 83–92. While there were no papers dedicated to the work of Péri, the general context was discussed at the ‘Émigré Sculptors Conference 2016’, organised by the Public Monuments and Sculpture Association at the City and Guilds of London Art School, May 2016.

¹² Palmer, as note 11, p. 113.

¹³ In 2016 Historic England staged *Out There: Our Post-War Public Art* at Somerset House, The Strand, which celebrated public art, highlighted ‘lost’ sculptures, and launched a public appeal to find them. See <https://historicengland.org.uk/get-involved/protect/save-the-sunbathers/>; accessed 16 February 2018. *Sunbathers* was displayed in the Festival Hall, 5 July–30 August 2017.

¹⁴ An article entitled ‘Concrete sculpture’ in the Festival edition of *Concrete Quarterly*, the Cement and

Concrete Association Journal, August–October 1951, pp. 29–36, illus.

¹⁵ J. Berger, ‘Artists and schools’, *New Statesman*, 54:1375, 27 July 1957, pp. 81, 108–9.

¹⁶ Harry Fairhurst was a member of the Manchester dynasty of architects, and was responsible for the Manchester Medical School and the Chemistry and Physics Buildings for the University of Manchester Institute of Science and Technology (UMIST); the latter had a mural, *The Alchemist’s Elements*, by Hans Tisdall. Fairhurst was president of the Manchester Society of Architects from 1969 to 1971; https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Harry_S._Fairhurst; accessed 10 January 2018.

¹⁷ Cavanagh and Yarrington, as note 3. In 2012 the artists Joanne Tatham and Tom O’Sullivan produced a guide to the sculptures on campus as part of a Radar (Loughborough University Artscentre) project entitled *The default exchange adjusted*.

¹⁸ Radar (Loughborough University Artscentre) is part of a consortium developing an AHRC network project, *Curating the Campus*, initiated by the University of Warwick to investigate and document artworks on a series of English university campuses.

¹⁹ R.R. Tomlinson, *Children as Artists*, Harmondsworth, 1944, p. 27.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 31.

²¹ H. Read, *Education through Art*, London, 1943, pp. 296, 301.

²² H. Morris, ‘Buildings for further education’, paper delivered to the Royal Institute of British Architects in 1945, reprinted in H. Ree, *Educator Extraordinary – The Life and Achievement of Henry Morris*, London, 1973; T. Jeffs, *Henry Morris: Village Colleges, Community Education and the Ideal Order*, Nottingham, 1998.

²³ C. Burke, P. Cunningham and J. Howard (eds), *The Decorated School, Essays on the Visual Culture of Schooling*, London, 2013.

²⁴ D. Jones, *Stewart Mason: The Art of Education*, London, 1988.

²⁵ M. Levy, ‘Pioneering patronage for schools: British art in Leicestershire’, *The Studio*, 166:845, 1963, pp. 92–7.

²⁶ B. Robertson, *British Sculpture and Painting in the Collection of Leicestershire Education Authority* (exhib. cat.), Whitechapel Gallery, London in conjunction with Loughborough University of Technology, 1967.

²⁷ Klingender, ‘Introduction’, as note 8, unpaginated.

²⁸ N. Thompson (ed.), *Living as Form, Socially Engaged Art from 1991–2011*, Cambridge, MA, 2012, and P. Helguera, *Education for Socially Engaged Art*, New York, 2011.

²⁹ J. Berger, ‘Social realism and the young’, *New Statesman and Nation*, 50:1273, 30 July 1955, pp. 133–4.

³⁰ The notion of ‘commitment’ in Jean-Paul Sartre’s polemical essay ‘What is literature?’, first published in 1947, is discussed in A. Briggs, ‘The context of commitment’, *New Statesman*, 56:1438, 4 October 1958, pp. 453–4.

³¹ Transcript of an interview with Cliff Rowe by John Russell Lloyd, 1981; author’s correspondence with John Russell Lloyd, 1996–97.

³² Some publications give a different date of birth; 1898 is wrongly cited in Palmer, at note 11. John Russell Lloyd had extensive archive material and papers on Péri, and checked the Jewish Record Office and the entry in the birth register in Hungary; author’s correspondence with Lloyd, as note 31.

³³ The sculptor is referred to here, throughout, as Peter Péri. Settled in England, he decided to anglicise his name to Peter Péri, and this appears in many exhibition catalogues, often without the accent (his given and adopted names are frequently mis-spelt); author’s correspondence with Lloyd, as note 31.

³⁴ J.R. Lloyd, ‘Peter Peri: 1899–1967, a short account of his life’, in *Fighting Spirits, an Exhibition of Sculptures by Peter Peri and Paintings by Cliff Rowe* (exhib. cat.), Camden Arts Centre, London, 1987, pp. 21–2.

³⁵ These remained unrealised projects, although there are some extant sketches in archives held at the Henry Moore Institute, Leeds. Information about Péri’s life in Berlin gleaned from Whiteley’s correspondence with Lloyd, as note 31, and from a recorded interview with Lloyd and Mary Péri made on 12 July 1981.

³⁶ Péri was first married to Irma MacKassy, a fellow communist and the daughter of a former Hungarian general. In 1928 he met Mary, an Irish music student living in Berlin, and they were married in 1932; their daughter Anne (now McIntyre) was born soon after. In 1958 Mary and Peter were divorced, and in 1966 he married Heather Hall; author’s correspondence and discussion with Anne McIntyre, 6 January 1997, and with Heather Hall (later Niman).

³⁷ Read’s ‘nest’ included Walter Gropius, Naum Gabo, Piet Mondrian and Moholy-Nagy; H. Read, ‘A

nest of gentle artists', *Apollo*, 77:7, 1962, pp. 536–42.

³⁸ From the first Artists' International Association manifesto, cited in R. Radford, *Art for a Social Purpose*, Winchester, 1987, p. 23.

³⁹ John Russell Lloyd provided transcribed interviews with fellow artists such as Clifford Rowe and drafts of his own biographical writings, including his essay, 'In search of Peter Péri', and provided information about the artist's motivations in relation to his shift from abstract to figurative work. Whiteley's correspondence with Lloyd, as note 31.

⁴⁰ See 'Peter Peri on his own work', in *Peter Peri 1899–1967*, as note 9, n.p.

⁴¹ F. Klingender, 'Abstraction and realism', *Left Review*, June 1936, p. 473.

⁴² A. Blunt, 'Preface', in *The New Realism in Sculpture, Exhibition of Concrete Sculpture, L. Péri*, Gordon Fraser Gallery, Cambridge, 19 April–1 May 1937.

⁴³ On Berger's 'social realism' and aesthetic and critical debates on art and politics in the context of the Cold War, see Whiteley, 'Re-presenting reality', as note 2; J. Hyman, *The Battle for Realism, Figurative Art in Britain during the Cold War, 1945–1960*, New Haven, CT, 2001.

⁴⁴ Berger, as note 6, p. 3.

⁴⁵ Whiteley, 'Re-presenting reality', as note 2.

⁴⁶ Péri's *The Young Readers* was featured on the cover of the Quaker weekly journal, *The Friend*, 117:42, 16 October 1959; Mary Péri noted that he resigned from the Communist Party when he joined the Quakers in a recorded interview made by J.R. Lloyd, 12 July 1981.

⁴⁷ See *Peri's People* (exhib. cat.), The Minorities, Colchester, June–July 1970.

⁴⁸ P. Henderson, 'Modern life in sculpture', *Our Time*, November 1945, pp. 72–3.

⁴⁹ *Footballers* is illustrated in Johnston, as note 11, p. 89.

⁵⁰ See C. King, 'Peter Péri, pioneer of concrete sculpture', *The Studio*, 159:806, June 1960, pp. 208–9.

⁵¹ Berger, as note 6, p. 81.

⁵² Palmer, as note 11, pp. 126–7.

⁵³ J. Berger, 'Impressions of Peter Péri' [1968], in T. Overton (ed.), *Portraits: John Berger on Artists*, London, 2015, p. 321.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵⁵ As note 53, p. 322.

⁵⁶ Dobson, as note 1, p. 302