

derive

The derive detectives review: The Art Of With

Cornerhouse Manchester 2009

to flow; to have origin; to descend; to proceed; to be deduced

This review is written by four artists who along with the vast majority of artists; visual, conceptual, live and many other disparate forms of practice (including people who work in the industry of art), make up the target audience of individuals with whom *The Art Of With* concerns itself to include as participants, and who were not present at the first seminar in June. Their reviews are written by proxy, through a meticulous system of interrogation and cross referencing four other artists who were at the last seminar. With this review together we have attempted to organise ourselves in a particular way as a direct relation to the institution of *The Art Of With* and *Cornerhouse*. We also choose to make our organisational structure part of the dialogue, as a gesture of transparency, in the hope that *Cornerhouse* see value in doing the same and opening up to suggestions and ideas from parties outside of their immediate jurisdiction.

The review was conducted as a murder investigation, the charge being that a murder had been committed as part of *The Art Of With* seminar. There were no extra details given when beginning, other than this accusation; it was then up to the review process to determine what had happened. Starting with this structure meant that each artist involved in writing the review, had to adopt one of two roles depending on the value of their participation in *The Art Of With* seminar, it was up to the individual how much they played on this:

The four who were present at the seminar became the witnesses

The four who wished to be shared in the dialogue, but were not present became the Detectives ...The interviewing then began

This review is split into two definitive approaches, page 3-6 shows the individual reviews of the detectives, page 1-2 is a composite or palimpsest of the individual reviews, however, the review stands together as one document, and invites a specific engagement from the reader. The palimpsest is written in the first person, despite being a composite it highlights our working method as a deliberate reference to the decision made early on in the creation of the internet; to remain as one singular internet, rather than numerous fragmented versions. This decision puts the reader in the position of having to navigate multiple pluralisms written in the first person, and the review in its split entirety serves as a well considered response to *The Art Of With*, relayed through the resources of the participative audience so frequently cited, but so far not approached and unacknowledged.

James Snazell, Dani Abulhawa, Tom Watson, Morry Carlin, Evi Grigoropoulou, Tracey Eastham, Liz Murphy, Maria Dada, Aaron Mo ..and special thanks to Bill Campbell
take a look at the derive website.. www.toftowtobeduced.com
contact us if you like what you see mail@toftowtobeduced.com

Cornerhouse can be applauded for looking at such a topic; a need to shift from working 'to' or 'for' an audience towards working 'with' an audience. A process that would see a community of people - become connected to Cornerhouse in a way that they hadn't felt connected before. How this collaborative process is achieved is critical; there is the real danger that it would distance elements of an arts community who would see such a process as a way for Cornerhouse to gain free use of an arts community. I got the impression that one witness didn't feel a great amount of affinity to the invited speakers and that it was a definite "lecture situation"; a situation that had a strong structure and process that wasn't up for negotiation, the reliance on this format appears to be a major stumbling block. There didn't seem to me to be much of a discussion during the seminar around ways of working and of techniques of working in a collaborative way, more specifically in terms of doing exhibitions and of reaching out and connecting with artists, creatives and others who wouldn't describe themselves as artists but who are nonetheless interested in the arts (i.e. the people who comprise the audience for the Cornerhouse). One solution I would propose regarding this problem, would be through an activity, such as discussion in small groups about how to go about creating collaborative audience participation. From this further activity could be devised to look at taking those ideas and making them work outside of the seminar, disseminating the focus from the seminar to an outside community.

If this series of seminars and online forums was supposed to be sustainable then I ascertain that a serious account of neglect has happened. My verdict, with regard to this investigation, would therefore be that of Murder due to neglect.

The problem I see is that any event that takes place over a pre-determined period of time – in this case from 11 – 3.30pm with a break in the middle – must die out. The ephemeral nature of the seminar format and the way in which it provides a temporary social space is part of its beauty, as a space for the discussion and transformation of ideas and the pushing forward of a concept. Interestingly, there was by all accounts a highly active and vibrant debate prior to the seminar, through the posting of Charles Leadbeater's The Art of With essay onto Cornerhouse wiki site, which received numerous responses. One great thing about online forums is the perception of anonymity they provide, avoiding any possible feelings of intimidation a person might experience, compared with the seminar scenario of a room full of people listening intently to your every un-edited word. However, since the seminar has taken place and the article removed, this has all but died out; the sustainability of debate surrounding the project is clearly a major concern. After the last seminar Cornerhouse remains as a cultural gatekeeper, adapting to the shifts in social change by absorbing various ideas and beliefs on collaboration and participation. The missed opportunity I see here is that rather than being based upon a new sense of community it would be a case of meet the new arts organisation, just the same as the old arts organisation.

The event was not well advertised and ironically, as one witness identified, had been greatly marketed through word of mouth, which obliges me to raise questions about the efficacy of advertising such an event solely via website and indeed of web-based collaborative environments, in practice. Simply putting something on a web site doesn't automatically make it participatory and accessible – build it (your website) and they won't necessarily come – to open the door really means something more active than that, it's about opening the door and shouting 'come in'.

Initially four witnessed the event, and now I am implicated, indirectly, through piecing together fragments of conversation. Hopefully this text can function in the way I propose, to carry on a conversation, to be recycled. Indeed, a group has been formed! Albeit one that is not directly responsible to Cornerhouse.

With this review I wanted to try to hold the door open for you, to jam one foot between the door frame and the door itself, to allow you in; in the hope you might offer the same courtesy to the person behind you.

The focus of the 'Art Of With' seminar in terms of, who it was for, was related to a large extent for galleries and curators in the North West. The focus of the content of the seminar related to the way in which galleries and curators could work in more collaborative ways with audiences and artists. With Charles Leadbeater's commissioned essay 'The Art Of With' and his talk at the seminar being a main focus highlighting collaborative working with a need to shift from working 'to' or 'for' an audience towards working 'with' an audience.

This focus of working collaboratively and talking about working with an audience which amounts to the involvement of the public was interesting because during the actual seminar there was no actual public involvement apart from the usual questions from the audience activity that one has at talks. There didn't seem to be that much discussion either regards the different ways in which to engage collaboratively with audiences by those attending the seminar which by and large consisted of curators and those working in galleries.

It could be argued that this seminar was only the first stage of an ongoing process that will include a number of seminars, and that as such its principle basis was there to act as a foundation. To set the stage, to lay out the context in a theoretical way and the practice of working collaboratively with audiences will come later. But it could also be argued, as to whether in fact such a process will occur later, for instance how has an audience/public been able to engage with this ongoing process, or even know about 'The Art Of With' as an event. The first port of call is to look at Cornerhouse website, there hasn't been any mention of it until very recently, on the home page or on the arts, the education or on the resources page, in fact one could only find mention of it by doing a Google search for the 'The Art Of With'. Once on the 'The Art Of With' page the most prominent thing on the 'Art of With' webpage that is related to collaboration is the 'Art of With' wiki which once you log into it works like a standard online forum. Except that not many people have added their comments (as is often the case with online forums) but this is hardly surprising as hardly anyone is going to stumble across 'The Art of With' webpage. More could be done in terms of collaborative projects whether online or offline and relying just upon a wiki as your sole connection to looking at working with an audience doesn't really show that the flag is being raised regards the process of collaboration.

Another curious aspect was that the seminar followed a very non-collaborative format in the sense that it followed a traditional lecture format of someone giving a talk where the speaker talks to the audience with questions at the end. There didn't seem to be a sense that the seminar was practicing what it preached that of acting upon ways in which to be inclusive of the audience, of looking at ways in which the audience could be more participatory in the event. For instance as the audience largely consisted of people who worked in galleries, there could have been the possibility (and there still is the possibility) of the audience through an activity such as discussing in small groups how to go about creating collaborative audience participation. From this a further activity could have been devised to look at taking those ideas and making them work outside of the seminar. The plan being to develop some kind of foundation of disseminating the focus from the seminar to an outside community. This could be done in its simplest format of asking those attending from galleries to get the respective galleries to place a link on their website to the Art of With 'wiki' or somehow look to promote the development of a discussion that forms the basis of the wiki.

Discussion during the seminar seemed to showcase to a greater extent tools that one can use to work with in a collaborative way, such as tools that can be found on the internet by way of software such as Wordpress that could be used to stimulate collaborative participation. Yet there didn't seem to be much discussion around ways of working, of techniques of working in terms of doing exhibitions and of reaching out and connecting with artists, creatives and others who wouldn't describe themselves as artists but who are nonetheless interested in the arts.

Cornerhouse can be applauded for looking at such a topic and looking to develop it as a discussion on how to work with different audiences. A process that would see the organisation opening itself up, as it engages with an audience in collaborative ways. The benefit of such a process would be to see a community of people by way of the collaborative process become connected to or related to Cornerhouse in a way that they hadn't felt connected before. How this collaborative process is achieved is critical, as there is the real danger that all it would do would be to distance elements of an arts community who would see such a process as a way by

Cornerhouse to gain free use of an arts community. This might be a reason why those connected to the arts haven't used The Art of With wiki to voice their opinions and look to develop a discussion. By way of the fact of how is it going to benefit me as an artist when in actual fact all it's ultimately doing is benefiting Cornerhouse. Benefiting it in terms of Cornerhouse maintaining its market position as a cultural institution in relation to a society in which the means of social networking is changing. With the result being Cornerhouse remains as a cultural gatekeeper adapting to the shifts in social change by using various ideas and beliefs on collaboration and participation. Using such techniques firstly and foremost to maintain its position as a forward thinking cultural institution, as opposed to using such techniques to firstly and foremost to open up what is meant by an arts institution through the use of collaboration and participation. The danger being that rather than being based upon a new sense of community it would be a case of meet the new arts organisation, just the same as the old arts organisation.

This review is not really a review – For starters, we (the writers of this text, whatever it may be) were not there; we never attended The Art of With seminar, and we acknowledge that a review is generally something written by a witness, someone who has some direct experience of an event or circumstance to draw from; we're writing this second-hand, after a series of interrogations of four of the witnesses - four people we know who did attend. This is also not a review because it's more than that, in the sense that a review mostly functions to comment upon something finished or closed. Really, a review seemed inappropriate, under the circumstances, and the last thing we want to do is to appear disrespectful. We wanted to try to hold the door open for you, to jam one foot between the door frame and the door itself, to allow you in; in the hope you might offer the same courtesy to the person behind you.

The problem is that any event that takes place over a pre-determined period of time – in this case from 1.30 – 4.30pm with a break in the middle – must die out. The ephemerality of the seminar format and the way in which it provides a temporary social space is part of its beauty, as a space for the discussion and transformation of ideas and the pushing forward of a concept. The Art of With developed from a book written by Charles Leadbeater titled *We-think: mass innovation, not mass production* and based on the research and focus of this text, Leadbeater was commissioned to write an essay, *The Art of With*, which served to provide a critical context for the first seminar in the series. Ultimately, *The Art of With* project is focused around exploring how the web can function to foster collaborative and participatory communities in art and culture. However, by all accounts the actual seminar itself was not sufficiently open in its ability to encourage participation beyond industry personnel. The event was not well advertised and ironically, as one witness identified, had been greatly marketed through word of mouth, which raises questions about the efficacy of advertising such an event solely via website and indeed of web-based collaborative environments, in practice. Simply putting something on a web site doesn't automatically make it participatory and accessible – build it (your website) and they won't necessarily come – to open the door really means something more active than that, it's about opening the door and shouting 'come in'. The event was also quite pricey, costing delegates (or at least their employers in the majority of cases) £40 per person – a financial barrier in itself, particularly for the majority of artists who are likely not to have much of an expendable income. During our interrogations, these concerns seemed to foreground any discussion of the actual content of the seminar, perhaps because the seminar didn't meet what those witnesses perceived to be the very crux of *The Art of With* project.

Interestingly, it was felt that a highly active and vibrant debate had already begun prior to the seminar, through the posting of Leadbeater's *The Art of With* essay onto the Corner House wiki site, which received numerous responses. One great thing about online forums is the perception of anonymity they provide, avoiding any possible feelings of intimidation a person might experience when making a point on a topic, compared with

the seminar scenario of a room full of people listening intently to your every un-edited word. However, since the seminar has taken place and the article removed, this has all but died out; the sustainability of debate surrounding the project is clearly a major concern. And so, we would like to propose that this text stands not as a review, but rather as “a site of navigation, a portal, a generator of activities” (Bourriaud 2007: 19) - To quote someone who, like us, was also absent from the seminar (Nicolas Bourriaud was apparently invited to speak at the event, but unfortunately could not make it). Initially four people witnessed the event, and now a further four of us are implicated, indirectly, through piecing together fragments of conversation. Hopefully this text can function in the way we propose, to carry on a conversation, to be recycled.

References Cited

Bourriaud, Nicolas. (2007). Postproduction. New York: Lukas and Sternberg

The ‘Art of With’ seminar at Cornerhouse. More organizers than artists; more of people with corporate interests. Perhaps this means the seminar was flawed by an overarching interest with things other than critical content and theoretical interest and therefore that it is irrelevant too much of artistic practice and common artist activity. However, this is what Cornerhouse must have set up to achieve when they commissioned essays, seminars and presentations to promote the activities of galleries working with the interaction of the public and the artistic community. Therefore, has Cornerhouse failed and has a murder been committed?

One witness I spoke to had the impression that due to private sponsorship the seminar needed to have the impression of being ‘open to the public’. For this reason the witness was able to purchase a ticket even though she didn’t have to go or wasn’t invited to go. It was “open to the public”. This witness “wasn’t targeted” or invited “because she was an artist”.

From another witness’ point of view I got the impression that he didn’t feel a great amount of affinity to the invited speakers and that it was a definite “lecture situation”. A situation that had a strong structure and process that wasn’t up for negotiation.

Considering the point that this seminar was to promote processes that allow for integration with the artistic community as well as the public I can agree with this witness’s opinion that the seminar was a happening which died and therefore a murder of some degree did happen. If this series of seminars and online forums lead by Cornerhouse was supposed to be a living process, sustainable from its integration with ‘outside influences’ then I ascertain that a serious account of neglect has happened; Murder due to neglect.

However, this little offshoot has happened. This discussion, this series of meetings and events has happened. The ‘Art of With’ has resulted in a form of participation with us, but one that is not wholly responsible to Cornerhouse. In this way Cornerhouse has succeeded in some part by creating a means through which open discussion, debate and collaboration can occur.

Enjoy, talk and do...

Enjoy

It's hard to say how enjoyable this event was. Taking all things into consideration, the setting, a lecture theatre, is a passive non threatening environment designed for learning and transferring information. Nicolas Bourriaud one of the advertised speakers could not attend which will have created a sense of disappointment, but perhaps did not directly affect the enjoyment of the event. The tickets came with a cost of £40 which does set expectations, and as the seminar was centered about ideas of sharing and discussion and trying to move away from previous forms of passive enjoyment, the format of the event did not seem to manage those expectations, which could have a negative impact on enjoyment.

Talk

Some witnesses reacted to the keynote speaker Charles Leadbeater negatively, on one particular occasion his reaction to questioning by fellow speaker Simon Yuill seemed ungracious, surely the point of a panel discussion is to air ideas rather than stick to scripts? He spoke of his 'Ned' model, a new spectator-typing perhaps. Ned 'enjoys' through watching TV and 'talking' to his peers through social networking sites and the phone (Mobile and landline I presume). To 'do' he draws with a pen on paper, but he also makes music and podcasts on garage band. A far cry from Gavin Wades, Spectator T model, all reactionary and destructive. He claimed this model proves that a younger generation were going to be less passive consumers of culture and more participants within it. But what happens when Ned grows up and gets a job, and has to come home at night and has to pay the bills, vac the car, feed the cat, what happens when Ned doesn't have time to embrace all this technology and the time to fill his life participating and interacting with all these things? I don't know what happens, Leadbeater didn't say. Tom Fleming spoke briefly about embracing the desire lines, how Cornerhouse should be acutely aware of where people actually want to leave their digital foot print and learn from this, rather than forcing or ignoring this process. He asked big questions 'How can we balance the agenda of openness?' but didn't seem to offer any answer and discussion at that particular point was not forthcoming, nor encouraged. Other speakers included Simon Yuill, Anne Bonner and Laurie Peak they all seemed to be talking about ideas wider than art and its institutions, but this made it feel like an exercise rhetoric rather than identifying concrete possibilities to test the premise of with. In the open session at the end this question was raised- straw poll style, about how possible are all these ideas. Leadbeater advised he thought this was all 90% achievable which, for some reason was not reflected in his lackluster delivery.

Do

This final session of the day was the chance to input from the seats of the audience, however, this was carried out again in the guise of a panel discussion. Surely this fundamentally destroyed all the concepts highlighted throughout the day. The audience get to ask questions which are then pooled by the chair and whipped together to become one generalised question, removing the discussion from being audience engaged to again watching someone else having a discussion, resulting in a lack of any collective doing what so ever.