

# Cornerhouse

## **Impact study**

September 2005

Cornerhouse impact study

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# 1 Introduction

It is a tricky task to evaluate the impact of an organisation that is so much a part of the fabric and identity of a city: it is impossible to imagine the city without it.

This is the case with Cornerhouse. The organisation has held a highly valued and celebrated place in Manchester for the past twenty years and in many ways Cornerhouse has epitomised, provided the crucible for, and has been the cornerstone of the development of what we know as contemporary Manchester.

Cornerhouse is a centre that provides contemporary cinema, visual art, education, bookshop, and a social and critical hub for Manchester. The building has three cinemas, three galleries, education suite, a shop, bar and café. There is also a significant, but to most people an invisible, art publishing arm which distributes (and formerly published) books across an extensive national and international cultural network.

Cornerhouse has had, and continues to have, a multiple impact on Manchester:

- It changed the face of Manchester when it opened in 1985
- It makes a massive contribution to the cultural economy
- It has helped shape the careers of many contemporary cultural producers
- It is a focus for creativity
- It puts Manchester on the international stage
- It is a centre for innovation
- It provides a vital contemporary critical forum
- It is one of the most significant and valued social and cultural hubs in Manchester



## 2 Methodology

To understand the cultural, social and economic impact of Cornerhouse, Morris Hargreaves McIntyre carried out the following research:

### 2.1 Primary research

#### **Depth interviews**

We interviewed 24 Cornerhouse stakeholders over the phone, in person and by email (we received comments from a further two interviewees via Cornerhouse's PR agency). These stakeholders included artists, curators, current and former employees and key figures in the cultural sector.

#### **Staff discussion**

We facilitated a discussion session with a group of Cornerhouse staff, in which employees gave their views on the impact of Cornerhouse and pointed up further lines of enquiry.

#### **Web survey with patrons.**

49 Cornerhouse customers completed a web survey about their memories and experiences of visiting Cornerhouse, and what difference it has made to them.

### 2.2 Secondary research

Cornerhouse provided Morris Hargreaves McIntyre with accounts information, data on films, exhibitions, publications and distributions and visitor figures. We also had access to a number of market research reports.

Our analysis of Cornerhouse's information was augmented by desk research to assess the impact of Cornerhouse.



## 3 Changing the face of Manchester

To fully understand the significance of Cornerhouse on the social life of Manchester, it is important to recognise just how underdeveloped the city was when the building opened in 1985.

*'I don't think there was ever anywhere in the centre of Manchester that was a contemporary exhibition space... anything a bit more cutting edge just wasn't there.'* Kevin Bourke, theatre and arts correspondent

Although the Hacienda was in full swing and Factory records was leading the UK music scene, the early eighties was a pre-historic period for the city: pre-minimalism; pre-designer beers; pre-designer bars; pre-multiplexes. Cinema had been in the doldrums and the only option available was the down-at-heel Odeon or flea pits with dodgy programmes.

*'There used to be a BFI cinema in Manchester in the 1960s: you could go and watch a D.W Griffiths spectacular from 1915 with accompaniments, or the latest Jean Luc Goddard movie. It closed in about 1972 so there was this void in Manchester: There was the Aaben in Hulme which tried to do some of it but there was a gap where there was nothing.'* CP Lee, author and educator

Café culture had yet to be invented. The only places to drink were traditional pubs or 'wine bars' in dingy cellars with chianti bottle candlesticks. Chinatown was as exotic as food got and the Gay Village had yet to be invented.

*'When I first started working for Cornerhouse, Dewi [Lewis, Director] had to take us to the Pizza Hut up the road for dinner: there was nowhere else to eat around that end of town then.'* Alan Ward, graphic designer

*'..in 1985 Cornerhouse was still very much unique in it's combination of activities but also in the café bar culture, you couldn't eat in Manchester if it wasn't at Cornerhouse, it was only then within a pub or within a department store, there just weren't any cafés.'* Cornerhouse staff



So when Cornerhouse opened, people hungry for contemporary culture enthusiastically embraced it.

From the moment the doors opened, this contemporary-minded crowd clambered to fill it up. It has stayed full ever since, providing a space for experimentation and new ideas.

*'Within two days of opening you couldn't park anywhere near Cornerhouse, so that was one of the first impacts. I forget now how many we'd expected in the first year – probably 150,000/ 200,000 perhaps, but we got close to half a million in that first year. It was massively successful.'* Dewi Lewis, publisher

### 3.1 Renaissance in the self-image of Manchester

Cornerhouse was instrumental in transforming Manchester from a provincial city to an international city. The foundation of Cornerhouse both reflected and encouraged a change of attitude towards cultural activity in Manchester, and the renaissance of pride in the region during the eighties. The founding of Cornerhouse made a statement about Manchester as a cultural centre and reflected the growing confidence of Manchester in its level of cultural production and international orientation:

*'You can't see the existence of Cornerhouse separate from Arnolfini in Bristol or Ikon in Birmingham. They all came out of a kind of sophisticated regionalism, which had a view to Europeanism ... it was art for the people, but it was sophisticated.'* Nick Crowe, artist

*'When I first moved to Manchester in 1984 it seemed to me like a culturally empty city. When Cornerhouse opened ... it had a huge impact because it was the only multimedia arts centre outside London. It made Manchester a much more interesting place to live.'* Alison Crosby, publisher

Cornerhouse's early popularity proved to sceptics that there was a significant contemporary-minded population in Manchester, who were willing to spend money and time on cultural pursuits:

*'Cornerhouse was a triumph because when it opened there were a lot of doom merchants who didn't believe there was an audience in Manchester for anything that was avant garde. But it coincided with the renaissance in Manchester's psychic soul and that both went hand in hand, marching gloriously forward into the future.'* CP Lee, author and educator



Cornerhouse (along with the Hacienda and a host of independent cultural entrepreneurs) led the development of the new positive, creative image of Manchester: a modern, European city that is in touch with international contemporary expression:

*'...my life would be very much the poorer without the Cornerhouse and Manchester would be even more of a cultural backwater without it.'* Visitor

*'...the fact that there was such a haven of civilisation in Manchester encouraged me to move here.'* Visitor

## 4 Contribution to the cultural economy

Economic impact analysis provides a lens through which to view growing public and stakeholder confidence in an operation. In economic terms, Cornerhouse bucks a trend: not only does it generate increasingly high levels of earned income but, in doing so, levers in growing levels of grant-aid. This twin-track growth in income generation reflects public support of the services offered and funders' confidence in the quality of the cultural programme.

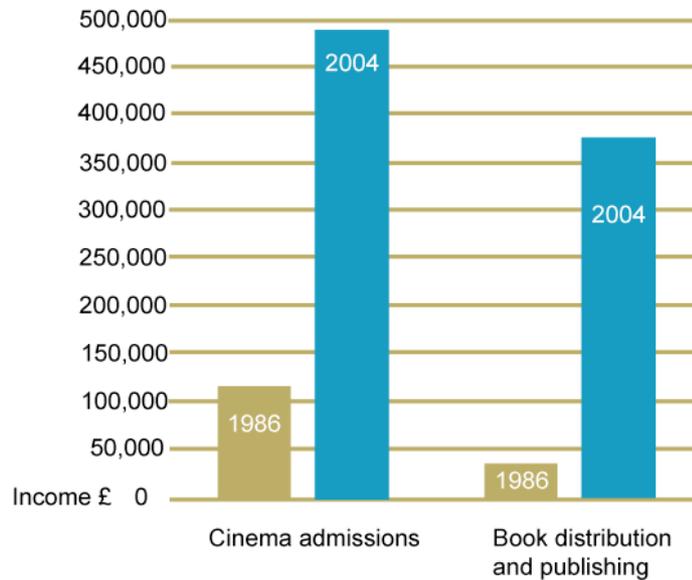
All in all, Cornerhouse has contributed directly to the cultural economy of Manchester. This is in terms of earned income generated, grant-aided income levered in, secondary expenditure and job creation.

Cornerhouse's turnover has increased from £19,500 in 1984 to £2.25m in 2004, representing an increase of £2.23m, representing £1.06m in real terms, an increase of 5425%.

Earned income is generated from a variety of sources. As well as cinema admissions, a trading subsidiary generates income through the bookshop, the catering and bar operation and concession sales.

From a standing start, Cornerhouse now generates a significant amount of its earned income, rising from £162,000 in 1986 to £1.1m by 2004, an increase of £938,000, representing £493,000 in real terms, an increase of 304%.

**Rise in income 1986-2004**



As shown above, income from cinema admissions has risen from £119,000 in 1986 to £489,000 in 2004, an increase of £370,000, representing £194,500 in real terms, a 163% increase. Cinema admissions now accounts for 44% of earned income.

Book distribution and publishing income increased from £35,000 in 1989 to £397,000 in 2004, a £362,000 increase, representing £219,000 in real terms or 627%.

Additional turnover from Cornerhouse’s trading subsidiary has increased from £35,000 in 1988 to £199,000 in 2004, representing £112,300 in real terms, 321% increase. The trading subsidiary is increasingly profitable, with gross profit rising from just 38% of turnover in 1998 to 58% in 2004, enabling the trading company to covenants significant amounts to the charitable operation, a total of £62,000 in 2004.

At the same time, Cornerhouse has been able to achieve greater artistic and cultural impact with significant increases in public sector funding. Funding bodies have formed stronger partnerships with Cornerhouse over the last few years, recognising the importance of its work and providing increasing levels of financial support.



Now a higher level of risk-taking activity is subsidised by funding bodies on the understanding that Cornerhouse maximises its capacity for earning. In 1994 whereas Cornerhouse received £1 for every £3 earned; by 2004 Cornerhouse received £1 in grant funding for every £1 earned.

Cornerhouse levers significant amounts of public sector funding into the region, generating £6.2m in the 10 years to 2004 in revenue grants and £1.9m of lottery grants.

#### 4.1 Job creation

Increased turnover means Cornerhouse employs more people and contributes significantly to the regional economy.

Cornerhouse as an organisation has grown from 16 unpaid directors but no employees in 1984 to 103 full and part-time employees in 2004.

*'It's actually had financial reward in Manchester as well – it's given people jobs, it's paid rents and mortgages.'* Staff

Of the £2.25m turnover in 2004, £705,000 was spent on the salaries of 103 people.

Manchester now has the largest regional concentration of creative enterprise, with over 18000 people employed in the creative industries and 4000 businesses operation in this sector. The sector contributes 3.48% of the total area GDP: around £627 million to the City Pride area. A further £1129 million is contributed indirectly.

- Visual art = 8.3% of total creative enterprises in the region, 3.5% of employment
- Film. Media = 6.9% enterprises, 19.7% employment
- 
- Obviously, Cornerhouse has contributed directly to this trend through employing staff, but also indirectly through its informal roles of social and cultural hub of creative activity, and informal seedbed for a diverse range of creative entrepreneurs.



## 4.2 Social impact

Cornerhouse is significantly developing the size of its audience. In 2004, Cornerhouse attracted in the region of 375,000 visits, compared to 236,000 in 2002, representing an increase of 59% in just two years. Around 145,000 people made these visits. An estimated 1200 visits are made per day, and 7500 per week.

Cornerhouse attracts visitors from throughout the North West and beyond. 50% of visitors come from Manchester itself; a further 34% from the rest of Greater Manchester; 9% from the rest of the North West and just over 7% from outside the North West.

On projected figures for exhibition and cinema visitors from outside Greater Manchester in 2005, additional spending would be generated in the region of £537,000, creating the equivalent of an additional 18 jobs.

Just under 64,000 visits were made to exhibitions at Cornerhouse in 2004-05, an estimated 54,000 of these from within Greater Manchester. The number of adults (15+) resident in Greater Manchester is just under two million (1,989,336), of whom an estimated 20% (393,888) have visited an art gallery/exhibition in the past twelve months. The average frequency of attendance amongst these gallery attenders is just under three visits a year, therefore the number of visits made to galleries by Greater Manchester residents is 1.1 million. Cornerhouse's share of this market is 64,000 visits; a market share of 5%.

Through its diverse international programme Cornerhouse attracts a culturally diverse audience, reaching into a range of communities. Research undertaken in 2004 suggests that 87% of Cornerhouse's audience is White British, 5% White European or other white and 8% non-white. This is in a city where the non-white population is 10%.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Matthews Millman (January 2005), *Cornerhouse Market Appraisal Final Report*



For Cinema, Cornerhouse has been competing in a rapidly growing and increasingly competitive market. When it opened there were only 1,271 screens in the UK. Now there are 3,342 screens with over 3% in the Manchester area and 13% in the North West. This represents the highest number of screens per capita in England apart from London. Only 6% of these screens are dedicated to non-mainstream programming.<sup>2</sup>

In this growing market Cornerhouse is increasing cinema attendances. Across the country 2004 saw the second highest cinema admissions in the UK in 32 years, at 171 million, up from 167 million in 2003, an increase of 2.4%.

In 2003-04, Cornerhouse achieved 104,000 attendances. Around 87,000 of these were from Greater Manchester. This means that Cornerhouse achieved an estimated market share of around 8.9% of the c.982,000 cinema admissions in Greater Manchester overall. This has been achieved through intelligent programming of niche genres; encouraging greater levels of cross-over and attractive packaging; the Reel Deal<sup>3</sup> on Mondays is regularly sold out.

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<sup>2</sup> UK Film Council (2005), *Statistical Yearbook 2004-05*, UK Film Council

<sup>3</sup> Reel Deal is a special promotion where purchasers receive a cinema ticket, pizza and a drink for a combined price of £10.



## 5 Shaping the careers of contemporary artists

*'If it wasn't for Cornerhouse I wouldn't be where I am today. I showed three pieces in a group show, Louder Than Words, in 1991 and I've not even had time to stop for a cuppa ever since.'* Damien Hirst, artist

The artistic programme of Cornerhouse has provided a springboard for hundreds of artists and cultural producers and managers through the years. Damien Hirst had his first public gallery commission at Cornerhouse; Quentin Tarantino made one of his first public appearances at the British premiere of Reservoir Dogs.

*'At the time nobody really knew who [Quentin Tarantino] was, but it seemed like a week later he was getting mobbed wherever he went.'* Kevin Bourke, theatre and arts correspondent

Within its home-grown programme, and as a regular venue for the New Contemporaries exhibitions, the galleries have exhibited virtually all of the generation of Brit artists before they became internationally renowned, including Mark Wallinger, Tracey Emin, Sam Taylor Wood, Cornelia Parker.

The Boyle Family and Willie Doherty enjoyed early showings. Isaac Julien was nominated for the Turner Prize when his work featured in the show premiered at Cornerhouse. Cornerhouse also helped shape the careers of a number of photographers including Martin Parr and Paul Graham.

New Contemporaries was first established in 1949. It has a history of unearthing future talent and offers audiences a show of vitality and variety with a unique insight into the potential and promise of the next generation of artists. New Contemporaries at Cornerhouse has been a significant launch pad for artists at the beginning of their career and the exhibition is a snapshot of current activity in the UK's art schools.

Hosting the show reflects Cornerhouse's commitment to supporting artists using new and innovative practices in their work. On the selection panel for this year's show are the artists Jeremy Akerman, Phil Collins, and Jane and Louise Wilson who have all featured in earlier New Contemporaries themselves.



The show is an opportunity to see work by tomorrow's stars today. Now established artists like Chris Ofili, Damien Hirst and Gillian Wearing have all featured in previous New Contemporaries. The exhibition is an unrivalled chance to see what is being produced by the next generation of artists.

The bar has traditionally been an unofficial meeting point for leading players in contemporary culture and those interested in emerging new scenes, for example it was where people from Factory Records and their friends would spend time before a night at the Hacienda. As a social venue it has attracted artists across all media from music to comedy.

*'I used to write the Paul Calf material and Steve [Coogan] and I used to sit in the Cornerhouse and write that ... there was a great sense of creative activity going on that I found it very conducive to writing comedy. So when we filmed the first Paul Calf video diary, we actually used the café as one of the scenes, and we pretended it was that Cinetech and so what actually was the kitchen we pretended people were going in and out of the Cinetech and so it is actually immortalised on film.'* Henry Normal, poet and producer

*'When you look at the local comedy scene, it was where Henry Normal had his table and Caroline Aherne, Steve Coogan, John Thompson, Dave Gorman, Tony Burgess: that is where they started writing stuff. That is where these things came from, meeting there.'* Ric Michael, Director - Manchester Poetry Festival

Cornerhouse staff have always moved on and upwards into larger, national and international organisations. Of the team of six who presently operate the London Film Festival three, including the Director Sandra Hebron, are previous Cornerhouse employees. The BBC and New Contemporaries have also felt the benefit of employing ex-Cornerhouse staff.



## 6 A focus for creativity

The social aspect of Cornerhouse has also been key to the development of a cultural 'scene' in Manchester. The café and bar, in acting as an informal hub for discussion and debate amongst (and between) the city's various creative circles, have acted as a seedbed for ideas, as well as office for budding creative individuals:

*'...it's always been a really special social space ... Cornerhouse was, and still is, a place where a lot of artists go and drink. You'll see people in the bar at Cornerhouse always.'* Nick Crowe, artist

*'It definitely became a focal point for the fledgling artistic community: not just the private views but the bar as well.'* Liam Spencer, artist

*'It's such a valuable organisation in terms of it's capacity to generate new social interaction – especially when you're new to the city and you don't know anyone – Cornerhouse is the place if you're interested in the visual arts where you come and meet new friends and generate new contacts and not all of them are from Manchester. It's the pulse of the city – the visual arts pulse and new things come out of that place and new contacts and networks.'* Andrea Hawkins, Visual Arts Officer - Arts Council England NW

*'At various times when I haven't had offices the Cornerhouse has been my haven. I used to sit and do some work in the bar downstairs.'* Ric Michael, Director - Manchester Poetry Festival

The location of Cornerhouse was also key – it acted as a hub, complementing and connecting a variety of creative organisations, and in this way adding to the impression of a strong force to be reckoned with in Manchester's cultural, social and economic landscape:

*'I think Cornerhouse to me was always very central. I think the fact that you have got the BBC just down the road. You have got the Green Room down another road; it always seemed that it was a very good central place in terms of the creative heart of Manchester.'* Henry Normal, poet and producer

The multi-faceted nature of the Cornerhouse offer can be seen as a contributory factor on stimulating creativity and the sparking of ideas. The fact that all the different aspects of Cornerhouse are under one roof facilitates a certain amount of cross fertilisation for visitors:



*“With its rather special combination of galleries, cinema and educational events all under one roof, Cornerhouse offers the public distinctive, diverse and creatively challenging experiences that are recognised both nationally and internationally.”* Carol Comley, Head of Strategic Development - UK Film Council

This cross-disciplinary nature of Cornerhouse’s offer might also help to explain its enduring appeal to loyal cohort of customers:

*‘The beauty of Cornerhouse is that it attracts you at different periods of your life. There have been periods when I’ve gone to the cinema there loads and other times when I haven’t gone for a couple of years, but I don’t think there’s been a time when I’ve not been to Cornerhouse for three months.’* Ric Michael, Director - Manchester Poetry Festival

And enables Cornerhouse to reach a wide variety of markets and radiate cultural influence:

*‘...it operates on several levels because first and foremost you have a cultural centre and obviously people tend to think its just cinemas but there is actually the gallery and the educational aspect of it. And there’s Cornerhouse Publishing so culturally it contributes an enormous amount to the renaissance of Manchester.’* CP Lee, author and educator

## 7 Centre of innovation

Cornerhouse has always been associated with risk-taking and radical thinking in its programming, publishing and educational work.

### 7.1 Visual art

Since 1985, Cornerhouse has shown 270 exhibitions featuring the work of over 1500 different artists.

Cornerhouse's status as an independent organisation has meant that curators have had the freedom to be experimental and cutting edge:

*'It was never set up with a particular collection or a particular type of exhibition in mind. It was set up in order to explore the controversial, the avant-garde, what's happening today, so that it could be a temperature gauge of where art was going.'* Fran Toms, Head of Cultural Strategy - Manchester City Council

From the outset the exhibitions programme was ahead of its time in the 1980s in being politically bold and firmly rooted in the urban context of Manchester. Early shows such as Image Employed and Black Markets stirred controversy in that they fearlessly explored issues around race and culture.

The early programme featured feminist art and the work of emerging black artists. Exhibitions drew on the urban, social, cultural and political issues affecting Manchester and its people. The desire was to create an organisation that could have an impact on the city through an exploration of contemporary culture. In this Cornerhouse was unique as a contemporary art centre and drew considerable critical attention.

*'It was so exciting to be involved in the setting up of a brand new arts centre for the city. Back then, mid-80's dour Thatcher government, there were so many social and political agendas. It was a time of great risk-taking and experimentation. We all passionately believed in the potential of art to make a difference. To the extent that some of the exhibitions provoked real protest and even the odd occasional death threat. Seems crazy now, looking back.'* Bev Bytheway, curator

Cornerhouse has always supported the work of regional artists and their practice. It has placed great emphasis on commissions and integrating local artists within its programming. In this respect it has proved an important springboard for northwest artists as well as providing a strong magnet to counteract the gravitational pull of London.

At the same time the programme has always had its eye on the international stage bringing in major national and international names:

*'I think the Lari Pittman show at Cornerhouse was significant. At the time, he was famous in America but almost completely unknown in Europe. After his show at Cornerhouse he became much more successful on this side of the Atlantic, but Cornerhouse showed him before he was a big name.'* Alan Ward, graphic designer

Cornerhouse initiated exhibitions that went on to tour nationally and internationally, for example This Not That, a major retrospective of John Baldessari, which toured four venues in Europe.

Cornerhouse has also initiated exhibitions that have subsequently received their critical acclaim once they reached London such as Broken English.

Sublime was Cornerhouse's most popular show, focussing on the design of the music industry featuring album cover and poster design by Peter Saville and others. This exhibition was also significant in that it connected with and gave importance to contemporary culture, which had originated in Manchester:

*'Sublime was part of the city, and with that exhibition Cornerhouse was tapping into the lifeblood of the city...'* Catharine Brathwaite, PR and Shelagh Bourke, PR

In providing a focus for the exploration of contemporary practice the exhibitions policy at Cornerhouse has obviously changed considerably over the years.

The political emphasis gave way to a wider international focus, a cross-disciplinary approach and recently Cornerhouse has been concentrating on emerging artists' practice from across Europe. The funders are now supporting this focus. This year's programme features artists from Austria, Slovenia, Bulgaria, Germany, Poland and Finland, as well as Ghana Canada and the USA.



## 7.2 Education

Education has always been a part of the essence of Cornerhouse. From the very outset there has been a fully integrated programme of cinema courses, seminars, talks and lectures which always sell out.

Over the years Cornerhouse has presented 850 special screenings as part of a course or guest appearance; nearly 3500 pre or post screening discussions and over 6000 special season screenings.

### Youth projects

*Vivid* was a pioneering educational project aimed at teenagers aged between 11 – 16 year old. Regular Saturday workshops stimulated participants' ideas and creativity through screening and creative workshops built around aspects of the cinema and galleries programme, and exposed young people to career opportunities in the media sector through a programme of visiting speakers and an exploration of the work of specialists within the sector.

Table 1 – Vivid Attendance Figures 1997-99

Year	Attendance
1997	469
1998	481
1999	451

Cornerhouse is establishing itself as a leader and innovator of learning practices for the 14 – 19 age group both formally and informally. *LiveWire* has been running since 2003 and is an informal project (outside school/college etc) for 14 – 18 year olds. It's unique as the young people themselves are the *LiveWire* Management Team, directing the project and are also involved in areas such as funding and marketing. *LiveWire* tours around venues in Greater Manchester to reach new audiences and also targets socially excluded young people.

In 2004, there were 452 young people involved in LiveWire, and the tour in early 2005 involved over 100 young people in practical filmmaking workshops.



## Lifelong learning and adult education

The educational programme also particularly appealed to certain high profile personalities: Christopher Eccleston recently contributed to an education workshop.

*'People used to book up for the cinema education programme the week it was announced.'* Virginia Tandy, Director - Manchester City Art Gallery

*'I've got people who come along to the things I do and have been repeatedly for ten years or more.'* CP Lee, author and educator

From the start, Cornerhouse has stood out because of its events and courses that support the programme. Evening courses in an array of colourful subjects around art, film and culture (e.g. *Who You Lookin' At!! Punk Rock on Film*) have been accessible to a cross section of the general public and no course is complete without drinks in the bar afterwards.

For many course attendees it's a pleasurable way to expand their knowledge, for others it's also a route into further or higher education. Manchester Metropolitan University ran a two year talks programme and staff are still involved with Cornerhouse, giving one off talks and presentations. There are close and historic links with the region's further and higher education institutions; many of their staff gives talks and presentations and a current collaboration is the popular Tuesday Talks series with Manchester Metropolitan University.

The attitude of the education department is inclusive and welcoming: attendees are instantly brought into Cornerhouse's creative community, rather than being treated as pupils:

*'...it was always a great way for communicating ideas because it was never a student/lecturer thing, everybody was a course participant that was the great thing about Cornerhouse education. Everybody was a course participant and everybody had something equally to contribute.'* CP Lee, author and educator

Educational courses are also a great way for like-minded people to meet up and form new creative ventures.



## Schools and colleges

Cornerhouse has worked consistently with schools and colleges over its history running regular weekday study sessions and exhibition tours. A new set of formal schools events started in 1997 which became *Cine-file* programme in 1999, and has pioneered new ways of using films in education, including developing a highly successful model for students of modern languages. In 1999, 1648 students from schools and colleges attended the sessions, rising to 2029 students in 2004.

Keeping with the Cornerhouse's tradition of innovation, the *Cine-file* programme will be re-branding for the 2005/6 academic year to *Projector*. This programme will more closely reflect the Cornerhouse's artistic policy and programming across visual arts and cinema, and include study days for art and design students. *Projector* will involve over 30 study sessions in four strands; Film & Media, Art & Design, Modern Foreign Languages and ESOL.

### 7.3 Film

Cornerhouse has also always taken risks in its programming, from current arthouse releases and exhibitions to offer one-off experiences, which, while not being money-spinners, offer visitors access to art which they could not have experienced otherwise:

*'Being able to see "Shoa" – Claude Landesman's eight-hour-long documentary about the Nazi holocaust in two parts – was incredibly important for me. This film is so rarely shown that if Cornerhouse had not screened it I would never have got to see it. Even though only about fifty people went to see it, it was an extremely powerful experience for me.'* Howard Rifkin, Director of Arts and Literature - Arts Council England NW

*'The one off showing of "Man with a Movie Camera" with the synthesiser duo "In the Nursery" sticks in my mind particularly – something very special about live music made to a screening.'* Visitor

Cornerhouse has been instrumental in developing products and audiences for certain specialist film genres to the point where they have grown beyond the capacity of the organisation.



## Home to festivals

Cornerhouse's promotion of Spanish language film with the **Viva!** Festival sparked a resurgence in interest and re-examination of Spanish cinema. **Viva!** has, for ten years, celebrated the best of Spanish cinema. For its 11th incarnation, Viva! has changed its subtitle to The Spanish & Latin American Film Festival to reflect the growing significance of the pictures emanating, particularly, from Mexico and Argentina. **Viva!** now tours to 30 other venues.

*'The Viva festival has been a big deal in terms of the recognition of the rebirth of Spanish cinema, and sparking a reconsideration of Spanish film'* CP Lee,  
author and educator

The Lesbian and Gay Film Festival on tour, which was hosted in Manchester by Cornerhouse, became so popular that it is now screened at the Filmworks multiplex to accommodate growing attendances.

The Commonwealth Film Festival is the latest independent film festival to be hosted by Cornerhouse. Founded in 2001 by Michael Burke and Michael Fox, two of the North's most successful media producers, the first festival was launched in June 2002, as a beacon project of the Spirit of Friendship Festival in conjunction with the Commonwealth Games in Manchester.

*'The Commonwealth is an image of Diversity, and the culture that arises from this vast diversity is worth a lifetime's exploration.'* Nelson Mandela, courtesy of  
Commonwealth Film Festival

Over 500 feature films, 400 documentaries and 500 shorts from as many as 70 nations of the Commonwealth have been shown to increasing audiences in Manchester and beyond, with average attendance per screening doubling in the first year. Cornerhouse played a significant role in the early development of the festival and has hosted all three editions.

**exposures** is the leading student film festival of its kind, a unique showcase and career resource dedicated to promoting, celebrating and developing the very best in the country's film-making talent. Organised and pioneered by Cornerhouse, it has grown from its humble origins to the renowned film festival it is today, with 15 films



from the best upcoming filmmakers in the country being screened on the Community Channel. These films represented the best of the festival and were chosen for being the most creative, most original and even the most absurd.

*'On the back of the festival, North West Vision called me at home and stated how much they like **the Chemist** and STRONGLY advise me to apply for some money...All thanks to exposures.'* Lawrence Gough, filmmaker

In 2004, the festival introduced two new competition strands – Music Video and Screenwriting – and the number of entries continued to rise exponentially, from 147 films in 2003, to over 250 films and scripts in 2004.

*'I was really impressed with some of the stuff in the Music Video category – especially Rik Nicholson [15]... his work was a joy to watch.'* Jonny Wardle, Partizan Production

Table 2 – **exposures** Film Festival attendance figures

Year	No of attendance
1996	375
1997	253
1998	743
1999	757
2000	744
2001	708
2002	1056
2003	1337

This year the young creatives successfully completed a First Light funding bid to enable them to set up *LiveWire Studio* and produce four short films. Previous projects have included a music video for a signed local band, website designing and Vjing. They are also involved in organising the incredibly successful *underexposed* – the under 18s strand of exposures student film festival.



## Meeting the makers

Cornerhouse has always majored on attracting film-makers and artists to come and speak about their films. This on-going programme of personal appearances have ensured that Cornerhouse is not just a place for the passive consumption of films but a place for a proactive debate around the whole process of film-making. This has ensured that personalities within the industry have valued and endorsed the role of Cornerhouse:

*'...seeing Pedro Almodovar introducing one of his films and even though he has an interpreter he made a really funny and articulate little speech.'* Visitor

*'[My highlight of Cornerhouse] is Paul Abbott's scriptwriting talk, no contest.'*  
Visitor

*'It's wonderful to see how Cornerhouse has been transformed. It's become a vibrant social place as well. That's all part of the whole cinema experience: somewhere to meet and talk about films as well as watch them. It's crucial to have these kinds of places really. I always think the only good thing you can ever do, as a filmmaker, is to hope that there is someone sitting out there in the audience who actually ends up becoming a filmmaker. The new generation of young filmmakers are out there waiting to take over and a place like Cornerhouse allows that person to sit there and dream.'* Danny Boyle, artists

Cornerhouse is also recognised as a prime location for experimentation within the distribution sector:

- The UK film council claimed a global first with an e-premiere in 2003. The feature film 'This is not a Love Song' was released simultaneously in a number of different formats on Friday 5 September 2003. It was streamed and digitally projected in selected cinemas across the UK and was downloadable on the Internet on the same day. Cornerhouse was chosen to be part of this historical event.
- Also in 2003, the BBC collaborated with the Cornerhouse Cinema to bring 'The Bigger Picture', a season of regionally produced short films and video art, to the Big Screen. Cornerhouse has consistently provided a forum for public art and locally produced films.



- The premiere of 'A Way of Life' was hosted at the Cornerhouse. The feature was the winner of the prestigious UK Film Talent Award and was opened by Trevor Phillips, CRE Chair, followed by an introduction by its young black director Amma Asante. 'A Way of Life', Amma Asante's debut feature, is the story of a teenage mother who gets involved in a racist murder. It explores the themes of racism, poverty, alienation and integration – issues affecting all of Britain's communities, including Manchester.

### **Not just a cinema**

Visitors define the experience of visiting Cornerhouse by its difference from bog standard multiplex visits. Cornerhouse's atmosphere is closer to a café than art centre, making a visit feel as unique as the film and art you'll see there. The uniqueness and quirkiness of Cornerhouse is felt to be important in an age where culture is becoming increasingly homogenised:

*'In these days of 100 television channels all producing the same output and 100 coffee shops offering the same cappuccino there is even more of a need to provide the unexpected and the uncategorisable and that's what Cornerhouse should be about...'* Paul Bayley, former director exhibitions

*'It was a bit smaller inside than I expected, which again was nice – a change from the huge multiplexes with loads of kids running around screaming the place down.'* Visitor

*'All the good movies, the comfy seats and an audience that knows how to behave in a cinema and respects other cinemagoers...'* Visitor

Cornerhouse goes beyond simply providing access, adding value through screening British and North West premieres of films which go on to be big hits; the British Premiere of Reservoir Dogs was screened at Cornerhouse.

The cinema programme remains risk taking with politically sensitive screenings, for example Palestinian films and Israeli films. The police exerted pressure not to screen 'Injustice' because of the fear of reaction. Censorship is an issue that Cornerhouse is constantly examining – the porn season in June 2005 examined this in particular. As a charity Cornerhouse is not allowed to take a party political standpoint and therefore remains open platform for debate.



Since 1985, Cornerhouse has programmed almost 5000 films from 85 countries, in 53 different languages shown in over 55,000 screenings.

#### 7.4 Publishing and Distribution

Early in the history of Cornerhouse, the company set up a publishing subsidiary which published the work of emerging photographers. Several of these, for example Martin Parr and Peter Fraser have gone on to become superstars of the photography international world. Cornerhouse Publications won the Sunday Times Small Publisher Award in 1990.

From publishing the enterprise moved in to distribution and filled a major gap in becoming the main international distributor of art publications with clients such as the Hayward Gallery, ICA and the Saatchi Gallery, Whitechapel Gallery and the Modern Art Oxford and British Council Publications as well as various prestigious international publishers such as Richter Verlag and Verlag der Buchhandlung Walther König.

296,949 books have been sold through Cornerhouse book distribution service since 1996.

Cornerhouse now distributes books to customers in 39 countries, including Bosnia, Chile, USA, Hong Kong.

Cornerhouse Publications currently distributes titles for 104 of the most exciting and innovative publishers, galleries and museums working in contemporary visual arts. Gross income generated from publications has increased 175% since 1996.

The book distribution service has also helped to promote a generation of British artists globally, contributing to Cornerhouse's artistic remit.

*'...the publishing in particular was an absolutely fantastic way not only to fulfil an artistic remit - to promote the work of predominantly young British photographers - but also, once we had developed the network to distribute our books, we knew they were going into bookstores in Tokyo, Chicago, Paris, Madrid ... I think books in particular are such a good way of getting a name about.'* Alison Crosby, publisher

The distribution service of Cornerhouse also has a massive impact on other arts organisations:



*'Cornerhouse also has that particular niche of delivering for arts organisations as far as publication and distribution is concerned ... it is known business-to-business for that.'* Lewis Biggs, Chief Executive - Liverpool Biennale

The bookshop was also recognised as an important specialist outlet for a range of publications.

Flux Magazine has been running for six years, whilst remaining independent and managing to command shelf space in most newsagents across the world. This is quite an achievement for a Manchester-based, popular culture magazine. Flux is edited by Lee Taylor and Claire Lomax, and it encapsulates the essence of creative energy surging through places outside cultural epicentres such as London and New York. Cornerhouse was a key marker in the magazine's development.

*'Although sales of issue one were only okay, comparatively, we sold loads in the Cornerhouse, Manchester's magazine and bookshop in a gallery and art house cinema. This was a place where I used to look at brilliant magazines from all over the world. That was one of the main things driving us – get Flux in the Cornerhouse.'* Lee Taylor, editor

## 7.5 Supporting cultural activity in the city

As well as innovation in film, publishing and the visual arts, Cornerhouse has a history of supporting new ideas and initiatives, which are outside its original remit of cinema and visual arts. This ability to think creatively and have the foresight to back creative entrepreneurs has directly contributed to the success and diversity of cultural production in Manchester:

*'Look at the amount of filmmakers that you have got in Manchester, and organisations like North West Vision. Without Cornerhouse, it would have been a lot harder for these organisations and filmmakers to get going – things maybe wouldn't have happened as quickly or as successfully as they did.'* Ric Michael, Director - Manchester Poetry Festival

*'I had an idea for the Hollywood of the North Coach Trip and we have done it every summer more or less from then, getting coach loads of people and going round the homes of the stars and where bits of films were filmed. From that I met people who had been involved in the film industry in the North West in the thirties and forties and through them I'm now running the next course that I'm doing is based on the Mancunian film company. I couldn't have done that with the originally push at the beginning [from Cornerhouse] so that in itself is very, very good.'* CP Lee, author and educator

*'I wouldn't underestimate [Cornerhouse's impact] in terms of live literature; there is now a really well established slam scene and poetry scene [in Manchester] ... most of these people cut their teeth at the live events Manchester Poetry Festival held at Cornerhouse.'* Ric Michael, Director - Manchester Poetry Festival

Cornerhouse has supported Manchester's development in becoming a key location for contemporary graphic and street art. In 1995, Cornerhouse hosted the first 'doodle session' in the bar, during which local graphic artists doodled on blackboards over the course of a session combining live music, DJs and spoken word performances.

Doodle sessions have detonated on an international scale: since 1998, the first Saturday of September is International Doodlebug day, with events held simultaneously in Manchester (often at Cornerhouse), Tokyo and London. 2004 saw graphic artists from around the world descending on Manchester to create new works across the city, culminating in an exhibition (at Urbis) exploring the complexity of this diverse artform.

Cornerhouse remains a focal point for innovation and experimentation in a diverse range of media. For example, Cornerhouse currently hosts the weekly B-Music night in the bar, run by an independent collective of DJs and musicians playing rare and experimental pop music. Cornerhouse continues to act as a hub for musicians, artists, designers and filmmakers at the cutting edge of contemporary practice.



## 8 Contemporary critical forum

Cornerhouse has contributed to setting a critical mass in motion around creative Manchester, helping to create an atmosphere in which other creative organisations and individuals can sustain their practice in the city. For example, within the visual arts ecology Cornerhouse provides a vital focal point for Manchester's significant artists' community. Whilst many regional cities suffer from a migration of artists to London, Manchester has remained home to a group of artists who have built national and international reputations. Cornerhouse has always been a key factor in providing Manchester artists with the necessary conditions that enable them to thrive in the city, in providing a critical forum.

*'...it was one of few things which I suppose created some sort of critical mass really ... there was enough activity to then start to attract other activities as once people could see that Castlefield and Cornerhouse it also coincided with institutions like Manchester art gallery becoming bit more active in contemporary art as well. It all added together to create a more desirable city to be in as a visual artist.'* Liam Spencer, artist

*If Manchester didn't have Cornerhouse there would be a void in the city. Cornerhouse has encouraged artists to stay in the city, and somewhere they can look to as a resource for their own practice. Without Cornerhouse, the city wouldn't have seen the growth in visual artists practice and artist-led organisations in the way that it has. It's the spine for visual cultural development in the city really.'* Andrea Hawkins, Visual Arts Officer - Arts Council England NW

The group of Manchester artists were instrumental in developing a pavilion at the Venice Biennale which necessitated the involvement of Cornerhouse:

*'Cornerhouse should look to build on the example of its engagement with artists in rebranding a Venetian bar as the Manchester Pavillion and extending its international reach.'* Paul Bayley, former director exhibitions

On a very practical level, Cornerhouse has provided a generation of emerging artists with employment and skills/ knowledge which have enabled them to live by their work in Manchester:



*'As a recent graduate trying to survive as an artist it was a very handy job ... you could leave it behind and then get back to your own practice as an artist and it was just a good environment to work in as well a good experience being on that side of the fence ... just the practical skills as well you know handling artwork, hanging exhibitions, wrapping them up. Even though some of the work was fairly mundane, it was useful nonetheless.'* Liam Spencer, artist

## 9 Social and cultural hub

*'The kernel of the Cornerhouse experience is always distinctive and sometimes difficult, wrapped as it is in a coating that is conducive, comfortable, familiar, sociable and reassuring.'* Matthews Millman, author 1

As well as overall cultural and artistic impacts, Cornerhouse also has a profound affect on the quality of life for its everyday visitors from Manchester and beyond, whether they are popping in for a coffee or attending an all-day film course.

Cornerhouse's innovative programme and inclusive attitude has had a massive impact on forming and developing visitors' knowledge and interest in contemporary film and visual art:

*'Oh boy! It's all your fault! Before you, I was a moderate teenage film-buff. Twelve years on I'm a Sight-and-Sound reading pseud (the kind of person who drops the words 'Tarkovsky' and 'oeuvre' into sentences irrespective of whether he can spell them correctly).'* Visitor

The international programming in both the visual art and film provides visitors with a way to explore and understand the art and culture of different countries:

*'Cornerhouse is my entrance for Europe (continent) and other countries.'* Visitor

Cornerhouse has also inspired some visitors to follow a career in the creative industries:

*'Visiting the Cornerhouse helped me pursue a career as a graphic designer which I still do now, 14 years later. It provides resources in the shop and inspiration everywhere else.'* Visitor

*'I have always spent a fair amount of time there, and have no doubt been inspired in my own career by what I've seen or done there. I'm a cameraman, and make my one shorts, one of which was screened at Cornerhouse in ComFest 04, which was a proud moment for me...'* Visitor

*'As a journalist, I began to think of writing film critique, and this is what I am doing at the moment.'* Visitor

And also provides support for budding artists, either through inspiration or practical opportunities:



*'If there's nowhere showing those films and exhibitions, there's nowhere for people to look and get ideas about being creative in the future.'* Staff

*'Seeing a short film I made on a training course shown on the big screen.'* Visitor

Both through its programming and its social environment, Cornerhouse has immense personal significance to visitors, who credit the organisation with inspiring moments in their lives, and affecting change on an emotional level.

*'Watching "Like Water For Chocolate" with my husband-to-be and deciding that it wasn't silly but you really could feel that way about someone. A really special evening.'* Visitor

*'The girls I've impressed with my sensitive side and taste in films... The confidence to go to the movies alone, and even get so carried away to cry a little... It's always there to help keep my creative juices flowing which is one of the most important things to me.'* Visitor

*'I think the Cornerhouse is brilliant, and there have been times in my life when it kept me sane.'* Visitor

Whilst some of the emotional impact can be put down to the art on show, the social experience of Cornerhouse also has the capacity to move visitors on an emotional level:

*'Some of the best films of my life that have moved me immensely in one way or another - the times I have walked out in tears and had to try to catch a bus without anyone noticing!'* Visitor

*'One of the most vivid memories is a full Cinema 1 on the final night of the French Film Festival, during the screening of 'Les Choristes'. It's hard to put into words, but seemingly the entire audience shared the same experience, as people were leaving silently, with tears in their eyes, but inspiration in heart.'*  
Visitor

*'Came to a talk by graphic designer/artist Peter Saville, which was then followed by an architectural tour of the Hacienda nightclub. It was awe-inspiring.'* Visitor

The social environment of Cornerhouse is also seen as intellectually stimulating by visitors:

*'I have met many different people from different parts of the North West and beyond who have similar interests and have encouraged me to continue studying and pursue other paths in my life.'* Visitor



# 10 Conclusion

Over the last twenty years, Cornerhouse has played an invaluable part in the creative, social and economic life of Manchester.

Through its trailblazing programming in the visual arts, cinema, publishing, education and social spaces, Cornerhouse has enriched the quality of life for its customers whilst staying at the cutting edge of contemporary practice in all areas of activity.

Cornerhouse has also contributed to the economic vitality of Manchester and the region, both directly through revenue and indirectly as part of the critical mass of cultural organisations which helped to reimagine Manchester as a successful, creative city.

Cornerhouse is still a vital forum for contemporary cultural activity, respected locally and internationally. With innovation at its core, Cornerhouse's activities continue to inspire and delight.

'I can't imagine Manchester without Cornerhouse now. I can't imagine it at all. Where would we be? So badly off, it's unimaginable, I don't want to talk about it.'  
CP Lee, author and educator



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