



Dundee Contemporary Arts

MANUFACTURING CULTURE 20th March 2009

Morning Discussion

[Clive] I'm conscious that we did break into something of a conversation half way through there. It seemed to pick up on a few different points. And I think the multi-cultural and inter-culturalism thing is an issue, but it's a very specific one and I'm not entirely sure unless we can draw that back round into some of those bigger ideas about who we are doing this for. Getting stuck on that terminology might be something of a problem. But the stuff that Francis was picking up on as well about how much do we recognise in the problematisation of what it is we're doing and who owns that problematisation is something that I think is quite an important and interesting point. But I don't want to do that thing of summing up, I'm just actually standing here talking in order to get your attention and pass it over to you...(laughter).

So, I really just wanted to step to one side, and invite somebody to fill that space really.

[Anne] Clive, you've thought (...inaudible...)

[Clive] Well, I'm going to do that but I'm going to do it from a slightly different position. So I don't just want to say – this is what we're going to talk about – but I'm kind of happy to try and stop people if I think we're hitting a dead end. So.

[Anne] We should start with Francis then.

[Clive] Are you happy to run over those points Francis?

[Francis] Can't remember them now! One thing was just the way it was presented, which we were restricted and had burdens and I don't think it's a very helpful way to go about it and I don't recognise it. And I don't think there's a river going past these centres with people in them are like stones that are dead. Also even if you open up and are responding to the virtues, you know, I like that idea but I think there's also a role for leadership and thinking within that. It's

not just that you take what comes in, you're meant to be an organisation that thinks and that contributes and discusses and reflects and is not just presenting it, it's putting a context around it.

[Clive] But I think what's interesting about what Tom is presenting is that, if you'll allow me to perhaps suggest this, something that is representative of the level of thinking that exists at a certain level in policy-making. And I suppose it's whether or not we, as people who are engaged in the running of these centres, recognise that there is a validity to that policy in some cases or whether or not we need to posit an alternative policy which actually sits outside of the things that Tom has suggested, and I may have a vague idea myself of where that might be but I wouldn't claim to be in a position to actually articulate that fully.

[Francis] I want just to be devils advocate – I make it up as I go along. And say yes, the policy makers are very far behind at the moment. They tell us things like, 'it's a changing environment, and that you're producers and users...' 1993 was the time for that, that's all come and gone we know that. Everybody knows that. So, those are the kind of policies the policy-makers are making. Plus this kind of terrifying notion that it's just a down turn, rather than there's a possibility there's a completely different way to talk about everything now. It may close down and it just may be a down turn, that's what the government seems to want, but it would be great if there was some other alternative we could reach to try and establish something else at the moment. So that kind of excites me and obviously you're pointing out that they were saying that...

[Tom] I think you've slightly misinterpreted me that those ten things are from a policy-makers perspective. And that's a very top-down view. And likewise if you turn it round the other way there's certain venues, an increasing number of venues actually, that are developing a different space, they don't even have those arguments, it actually tries to develop a new language and a leadership role. And that the opportunity is, more so because of this downturn, that there is an absolute possibility to reposition the overall discussion into something new.

[Francis] They'd have to get political as well then. You can't just do that because eventually they're the people with the money. You know, they can just stop that. That's very clear in Scotland anyway. So, you have to posit it back to them and change that somehow.

[Clive] I don't want to pre-empt some of the things that Brian might say this afternoon but if what we're talking about is some kind of notion of a

rejection of the principles that are setting what we do against those concepts that are defined by things like an economic downturn, which is something that I would probably endorse, are we in a position to actually do that? And how do we do that if that's something that we want to take on? Because I'm aware that operating in Scotland where there's been five years of fairly high level policy discussion that have not resulted in something that can give us whatever that next step is that we haven't managed to step outside of that envelope. And, are we big enough to do that is my question. And therefore, is our strategy to better understand the things that Tom is talking about so that we can operate within them. That's a question that this morning I was trying to get my head around before we go into thinking about some of those other models that might spin off that. So I'd quite like to know from people here whether or not that they would feel comfortable working within a policy framework that is the one that is articulated by Tom this morning.

[Ben] I suppose my thinking and listening this morning was about a description, a reflection of what was happening, and in a way, where was the policy environment? And, you know, ten years ago there was a very clear direction set out by the New Labour government and now, what I thought you started to hint at was that that environment has changed and we never got to where the policy was but you described what the reality was on the ground much more than the policy framework behind it. And I suppose that's where I was thinking.

[Anne] Yes, I think there's a real danger about being too generalist about this kind of thing because this is a whole lot of different things. That sort of model that Tom is positing, the mixed art venues, DCA fits absolutely into that type of venue. But there's hardly any other venues in Scotland that would actually be your sister organisation. You are much more akin to the English and Welsh mixed art venues – that's your group there. The key thing about being in this city is to do with scale, it's to do with at what point is value a neutral space and what type of personality, when have you got an opinion, when are you open? In a city you've got a variety, you've got to have a mix – well, maybe you don't. We do have a mix in cities, in our major cities – I mean Glasgow and Edinburgh whereas the role that DCA plays is to do with the scale of Dundee, its to do with the other provision there and all sorts of things. And then you're also not the same as Inverary Town Hall – and I say that because I worked with the communities groups and council there six years ago by creating the sort of space that you're talking about, of course they couldn't do it because of funding but nonetheless I

looked at it in Sunderland ten years ago. You know, it will all begin to happen; these are all to do with different scales of infrastructure that's required and the need in different communities. And so without going into all that and a plan for cultural infrastructures we've got to be a bit careful they are very very different things and it's about niches and it's about specialisms. The other thing in challenge to your question which is, are we big enough to challenge the policy makers? Well, why aren't you? I would say. I mean what makes somebody a gatekeeper? Especially at this particular time in terms of possession. I mean who gives the decision of the gatekeeper? But why would you not have the clout and the confidence? Just even DCA you know, with some other ones to make the case but if you start becoming too generalist and just say 'well, we're all the same thing you invalidate the argument.

[Clive]

I think I accept that. In terms of DCA we've reached a position whereby we're in a privileged position where we're a big institution in a relatively small city and we're able to do things which reflect on the things that Tom was talking about, about creating a sense of or representing a sense of international ambition that the city has. And then endorsing what has happened here in the past even though there might not have been an understanding or an insight as to what was actually going to happen here that was fully shared, that's now endorsed because it's seen to have a value. That value hasn't necessarily been translated into a clear articulation of it but actually there is a belief now, there is a trust that exists and one of the things that we're now doing is to try and take some of the expertise that's been built up around some of those areas of practice and spread those out across a wider base that is represented by this institution and that it *can* begin to have that effect. You know, at the moment, we're working with the city council on its cultural strategy. Now that's a really important thing for us to do because we can't survive unless there is an ambitious cultural strategy within the city so we have to do that. But obviously not all institutions are in a position to do that where that gate is going to be open to them, so I guess I recognise the privileged position that we're in.

[Pat]

Clive, could I add to that and it might be interesting maybe for some people here who don't know much about the history of DCA, not that I want to suggest that I should be telling you this but anyway, let me chip in. And I think the background to DCA, and the partnership, the framework that brought it together that gave birth to it - Amanda you were very involved in and very very careful modulation that the Scottish Arts Council did to actually create that partnership is one of the great hallmarks of its success. You did bring together the Scottish Arts Council and the University of

Dundee and the City Council. Now when you have those three incredibly powerful organisations if you want to call them that, with such passionate energy to make this work, I mean that to me is one of the great hallmarks of the success at DCA. Because within those three organisations, I mean I don't often use the word 'stakeholders' but I will hold my breath and say it, within those three groupings you did have such a very very persuasive group of stakeholders. And I think that that's still something that again, should be very much considered as something that you can live on from.

[Clive] While I'm conscious that we're here talking about DCA in the context of its tenth birthday, I am nervous about DCA as a model. I'm not entirely sure that the model that's here is replicable elsewhere...

[Pat] Sure, absolutely, but I think it's worth analysing what the model is and actually has at least given you a platform for success but I particularly share - and you and I have personally discussed before - that you cannot rest on that, you've always got to be exploring. And I would say that the public, the government level in the Scottish Arts Council, the local level with the city and the great intellectual strength that you have from the University of Dundee. That's a really good mixture.

[Clive] No, I wouldn't disagree. If I wanted to create DCAs in every city I'd have to strip every city down to the size of Dundee to actually make them work.

[Pat] Yes, scale is something that's already been mentioned..

[Clive] ...but I think that's something that I'm not in a position to do. But, yes, sorry Chris you had something....

[Chris] I was going to say there's two points that I want to make and I'll try and do it briefly. One is that there is a really interesting issue about the relationship between policy and practice. And the issue is partly how we learn from practice to generate policy and how policy informs practice and the fact that I don't think we actually even really understand that relationship very effectively. I don't think we understand the relationship between the Artist Placement Group in the sixties and seventies and the institutionalisation of the residency as a model in the contemporary. I don't think we understand the relationship between how you work with a piece of practice like DCA and other circumstances. I think that's opaque to us and it would be very useful for us to understand it better

because in a sense it comes from the heart of the problem that Tom was focusing on which is there are these examples and there are these policies. One of the problems in it is - my colleague David Haley suggested that policy is always at least five years behind practice. And so there is a temporal issue in that as well as how people relate to each other, how people in bureaucratic positions learn from people in practice positions, how people in practice positions interpret what bureaucrat's intentions are. The second thing, and I think it's more fundamental, and I sensed a problem with Tom's presentation because it took, or it seemed to take, and maybe you were hinting at, that growth is a fundamental. And I think that actually the issue of growth, in a sense may be part of Francis's uncomfortableness as when you're in an arts organisation talking about economic growth and it having a relationship with an arts organisation is incredibly challenging, they don't exactly tally. And I think that the SCVO (Scottish Council for Voluntary Organisations) is now writing policy papers on how we generate the different model other than the economic growth model as a measure in society and if there was a thing to generate it would be to articulate the fact that economic growth really isn't the driver and actually has a very curious relationship with arts organisations. And that arts organisations maybe need to think about what they are in relation to that issue.

[Clive] I'm very comfortable with that. But I guess what I don't want to do is to pre-empt what Brian will be talking about later on which maybe will give us a little more food for thought around some of those issues because I think the positioning of what we may consider our realm of influence and activity within the cultural sector can't be viewed in isolation from those notions of economic context and social context in which we operate. But I think what I was hoping we would stay a little bit on for this morning really is to pick up on our response to what we feel, practically and pragmatically, we can work with, in terms of what are the dominant policy agendas that are likely to be around for the next two, three, four years? It's pulling a little bit closer to home this morning so that we've actually got a clearer sense of what we're going to have to do in the next short term in order to achieve longer term visions that perhaps we can explore a little more towards the end of the day. So sorry that's a bit elusive, I apologise for that but...

[Chris] Can I chuck one back there?

[Clive] one....

[Chris] Jim Peck wrote recently in *Variant* in the current issue. He's

particularly critical of the whole creative cities model because it effectively lives in an accepting relationship with the social challenges, you kind of hinted at it, with the fact that in a sense the regeneration agenda will deal with the waterfront at Newcastle but not the bit behind it and I think there's a fundamental problem in that whole creative industries/creative cities agenda, which is that in effect it accepts social problems as something to cohabit with rather than dealing with them.

[Clive] Dave, please...

[Dave] I'm interested in this policy and practice that we talked about. They've now deified Tony Wilson in Manchester. He was asked what the council should do in order to be supportive to develop rock and roll in Manchester, and Tony Wilson said 'keep well away from it'. And to some extent I think that's true for anything involving arts organisation and institutions with visual artists. The reality of it is we need public money really in order to work. Some of the stuff that we've been knocking around this morning has made me think again about the sort of things that we do. My organisation, Cornerhouse, is and will continue to be involved in what artists do and engaging audiences. Like all of us, that's what we do. Right? And that's the thing that drives our agendas and makes us do whatever we do. I think, this morning, if I'm being really cynical, is about finding a language to represent the current policy framework that we're in to the people who have influence over the money. Now, is that a dangerous game to get into? Do we actually fight against that or do we just say 'policy-makers this is what we do, we're artists; we're going to do it, give us the money!' Or do we actually get into that; try to come up with a rational economic argument or whatever it is to justify that. So, the reality is that my policy at Cornerhouse is driven by what artists and audiences do and engage in and always will be. You can't change that point otherwise you might as well go home. But how much do I get into bed with these arguments. And at the moment I'm really abrasive because actually I see seriously choppy waters ahead and I think we haven't seen the worst of it yet. Now whether that leads to some good stuff or not I don't know but certainly I'm very very worried about the economic future and if I can find some rhetoric that enables me to go for the lifebelt.

[Clive] I think there's something really interesting in that which is from my experience of working in the sector for a longish period of time, is that we resign ourselves to a sense of duplicity around what it is we say and what we do. And actually I always try to be very upfront about that because I think that's kind of part of the process that we're in, it's about that negotiation. But the implication in that is that

the argument isn't winnable, and I don't want to give up on the fact that it's not winnable which is part of what we're trying to do here today, hopefully, to work out some of the terms on which we might make that argument winnable. Now that is the kind of horrible utopianism that I'm cursed with and I certainly wouldn't say that this is something everybody has to share, but I'm conscious for me that I can't do this stuff unless I feel that argument is winnable because the principle has to be that there is an ability to do that.

[Morgan] Given the argument it's not a loss though, it's not losing the argument, it's stepping away quick, in the sense of that combating or just ignoring policy but your point in terms of seeking the lifebelt which is that make a rationale for public funds so you can exist. I think increasingly places like Cornerhouse and DCA could be the lifeboats in the future where people will go to because it's about more than being warm in a different sense.

[Dave] I just have to always double check myself and say, come on a minute, am I following the policy right or am I actually following the routine? Because actually, if I go down the second then I agree with Clive, I might as well not bother, you know I'd go and make chips or something.

[Clive] I'm interested in your perspective Nick because you operate in a slightly different position whereby your kind of rationale is to operate in that space...

[Nick] Well, I think that what the Lighthouse does is played on this difference between intrinsic value of stuff we put in the gallery spaces and the reasons we can justify it externally. Improvements to the creative economy and all that kind of nonsense, the instrumental values that describe it. And I think increasingly it's going to be difficult, not only for Lighthouse but for all of us, to play on those kind of ideas that what we do has a really tangible and measurable benefit outside. It seems to me that we're going to have to come back to acknowledging that we put things in our spaces; we put things in DCA, because we believe that they're great, we believe in their intrinsic value. And that's going to be a very hard argument to win with politicians because it's very difficult to measure. But if we can't find a way to explain that this stuff has intrinsic value, whether it's film or theatre or art or architectural design then I think we are in tricky waters. But actually we're scared or find it easier to talk with the New Labourites to talk about the value to the creative economy. I mean the Lighthouse has played on that.

[Clive] Yes, yes.

[Nick] So what we're searching for is a way to describe the value of design and architecture in its own right? It's a tricky one...

[Clive] Yes.

[Brian] It seems to me that within the discourse of the creative industries there's a tremendous input from the business sector. You have this notion of innovation that has really determined the key to a certain kind of economic growth that was then pasted onto artistic inventional creation. So there's a big sector there which produces a lot of knowledge, has a lot of resources to produce that knowledge, discourse and rhetoric which then was supporting the arts for a while. It seems to me you have to look for other sectors to produce other discourses of support if it's not possible to rely on that one as kind of smoke screen over the real activity because I'm not sure, although it is important to you, it should also be connected to other folk, places in society that have a relationship to those houses.

[Nick] I think what Toms talk didn't acknowledge was that most of us here do what we do because we're passionate about the stuff we're working with, the artists that we're working with - not necessarily because we're passionate so much about improvements to the economy. Although we would take that as a benefit, a side effect, but we love the stuff we're putting in our spaces.

[Clive] Yes, but I think there is a danger..... a colleague that I once spoke to a long time ago talked about this notion of how within arts and cultural practice we have this drive to move to the centre of our own arguments whereby we can become protected by those arguments. So constantly we're pushing ourselves into this position whereby we're untouchable and one of the things we use for that is that sense of faith and self-belief in what we're doing as having its own virtues. Now, that's a great position to be in but it could also be a very deluded position and I want more than that. I want to know that there are tests that are testing us in the right way and not in the wrong way. And I think that some of the things that Tom was talking about I can see as being tests that I'd be happy with and there are some that are tests that I'd be unhappy with, so it's about working out how much of that is consensual amongst the sector that we operate in. And which ones we choose as being the right tests for ourselves that really do challenge us.

That's not meant to be a concluding remark by the way...

[Anita] Can you give me an example?

[Clive] Well, I suppose all of us would probably say that we recognise that in order to operate we need to have an engagement with a public sector that supports us with cash. So there is a term on which there is a trade that goes on there. What is it that we are giving in return for that trade and is it understood by both parties what that thing is? And if the terms of that trade are fuzzy then the people that are giving us the cash to do it think they are buying something, quite often they don't know what they're buying and so therefore there's an attempt to factor into that some rationale that provides some armour for the decisions that are then made.

A colleague of mine used to say that art is what happens when funding policies excluded everything that can't be funded. Therefore there needs to be a more positive attitude towards what is understood as being the thing that is being created within that process. (That's not an example is it? That's another set of rhetoric...)

[Anne] But what you talking about is the terms of the trade and basically... in terms of the public money, that's all we're talking about. So, I don't see why that's such a big deal - or am I missing the point because that's what we're talking about here.

[Clive] Well, I think for me, the paper that I circulated was talking about this thing, about the tyranny of rationality that we may find ourselves in. That actually in another mindset, another era in time, we would have a shared faith in what we're doing. Now we're at a certain phase in the development of our society where we're desperate to rationalise everything - absolutely desperate to do that. So we're taking things apart that actually we don't know how to put back together again. Now I'm interested in that because I'm in the middle of that, so I want to know, now we've started to take these things apart, how it is possible to put them back together again. But we have to know what that thing is in order to do it. And actually my fear is that we've lost what that thing is - we don't have an article of faith that we can return to that enables us to see what this thing is.

[Judith] Then as individuals do you have those belief systems? Because any artist that's doing what we do has a passion and obsession and a family of ideas or set of rules that they test themselves against. And us as gatekeepers/decision-makers all support those individual obsessions but I think the thing that worried me a little bit when I watched Toms presentation all I could do all the way through it was feel that the art was wallpaper for a lot of your ideas. As the art was

coming up I was actually saying to myself 'that's terrible art, that's really bad' and I don't know whether you did that actually to create that sense of...

[Tom] What I did do, I purposely didn't talk about art because that's not what current policy rhetoric is about. But also I think that what there is unavoidably is that the notion of audiences or the notion of artists has changed. And the notion of business versus culture is changing and that what was perhaps in previous times where the audience had jobs elsewhere, their jobs might not be expressed through the cultural building. I mean I suppose there was time where everyone was in bands and now there's a time where a lot of people are in start-ups So I think there is a real blurring of lifestyle versus commercial choices, aspirations, practices going on, which do raise questions as to what cultural venues capture and the role that art has as the hook that brings people into those buildings.

[Judith] But then what you're actually bringing into question is the audience specific artists and a specific argument and discussion. And the discussion really makes lots of judgments about what makes great art. It's interesting talking about participatory practice for instance, someone mentioned the Arts Placement Group but that was still, it's participatory, but it's still been canonised you know, it's still part of the art historical model. You can still judge it, and discuss it in relationship to art history. And what I'm really worried about when I see some of the models is the sense of losing curatorial expertise. Having these places that are interdisciplinary but they still need some form of editorial - I think they're the discussions that are really interesting.

[Tom] Absolutely and that's the balancing act that those venues that dare to move in that co-creational, co-curatorial direction. You're right, if you leave it open then you actually lose the value of broker on one hand but also you do find yourself in that challenge around quality versus quantity...

[Clive] Francis, do you have something...

[Francis] There's a curatorial role in brokerage. First you're choosing what comes in. But you can also keep certain things on business premises these days because there are certain things that are happening in a gallery which are more authoritarian and other things which are very open with a whole series of other organisations coming in. On a very practical level those other creative organisations can politically help you. It's much harder to get rid of you if there are fifty organisations that also have an

investment in the building, and it's active, it's working. And you're still doing curatorial stuff where people go in and out – you can kind of do both if you get that balance right but sharing the access shares the ownership and that makes it at the tougher when politicians respond to votes and I think there's something there, it must be value. A shared model.

[Clive] Yeah, is that actually, kind of quite specific, but is that a strategic direction that's' emerging from CCA or is it something.... (laughter)

[Francis] I think it is – done by accident totally. You can see the advantages if you choose to write things, so that things that are amenable and should be there, other niches that are small that need the support, you know we generate about £20,000 support in kind now through what we're doing. We're not actually spending we're just giving the people the space.

[Clive] We're using the term 'broker', and I really like the term 'agent' - and that concept of agency is something that I find really useful because it implies the act of curation but it also implies the act of facilitation and I really like that. Having worked at FACT for years there was this big dilemma about moving from being an agency to being a building and was something that we wrestled with for quite a long time. Because there was something quite beautiful about that concept of agency - and how you retain that concept of agency when you're in a physical structure and not constrained by that physical structure. That to me is a really interesting position to be in.

[Francis] Sometimes it's about the initial choice you make and then you step back. So you say, ok you're coming in and there's the space and you're giving them the space and then stepping back and so you're out in terms of territorial control but you've made the initial choice in terms of the ecology of the building.

[Clive] Yeah, but I suppose that, in itself, can be act of curation anyway?

[Eddie] Can I just chip in now with a few things. I was here ten years ago when DCA opened, on what I think was the opening night, (I can't remember - there were lots of opening nights). I just want to say a few things about burdens, limitations, opportunities that come with buildings, partly referencing Clive's little story about the FACT arc of agency to building. The speeches that I heard at that time were clearly that there was a kind of alignment between people and there was a management of expectation about what DCA was and nobody quite knew clearly at the time what sort of a transformative

impact DCA would have. So there was a good job done by everyone there. FACT came from a very different place so fast-forward four years from DCA opening to FACT opening. It wasn't developed by the city, it became sort of owned by the city a bit later on when the city saw it as a very important vehicle for getting Capital of Culture but it wasn't owned by the city. Of course there was investment from the Arts Council and it was, by accident, spearheading a kind of regeneration project. But I remember the press conference when we opened. We had 300 people or whatever it was, and the sets of expectations around FACT were really extraordinary. They surprised me. Obviously all the time you hear people say, 'will it be this? will it be that? will it do this?' - and I basically had to stop slightly short of offering world peace, because effectively there were those kinds of expectations around it, which I think were really extraordinary. Especially as it came from a very different place, it came from a very cultural place, but it was seen as something that could deliver against Tom's checklist that we saw before.

And I'll just fast-forward to about four weeks ago, I went to see Andy Burnham do the Fabian Society lecture in London and his speech was entirely about transformational impact. It was culture as transformational impact. And it was mostly about Liverpool actually so it was really interesting. He name-checked FACT - it was all kind of very nice from my point of view. But it was interesting that for him the culmination of ten years of cultural policy and New Labour was about the ability to transform people's lives through culture. I mean, it's not a new story, it's been around a long time and we're all familiar with it but it's just that the whole of his speech and the whole of his future rhetoric was about transformational impact and that throws up lots of issues about other things to do with how culture is generated and received and how it is produced and how we understand it collectively. And I'm interested then going back to Tom's point, about how at a policy level you see Andy Burnham as the key policy-maker in this area. There is how we understand, how we map this against an emerging model of new cultural organisations and I'm also thinking about the future political context - we're going to have an election next April or May - and anybody who saw George Osborne on Newsnight, when he was pressed, and they said you can't cut taxation; you've got to cut waste. So what's waste? DCMS is waste. By implication culture is a waste. So there is a very interesting political moment afoot here for organisations becoming more flexible and working in different ways against different agendas.

So just to kind of wrap this up, I'm interested about how in your

mind Tom – this is a very elaborate question for you - the way in which you're talking about the co-programme model. We know that what people really value is the editorial (as Judith just said), and a lot of things I've been to see recently have been examples of old school programming, packed full to the rafters – Sylvie Guillem, Robert Lepage, Theatre de Complicite, all those kinds of gigs I've been going to, packed to the rafters. There's no co-programming involved there, it's just old-school ways of working and more people than ever are going to it.

I'm interested in examples of the co-programming model and how that might be understood then as part of transformational impact ... as it were.

[Clive] Just a couple of things. I'm conscious that I've got to leave the room now and go and shake some hands, but I don't want to break this up. I know Kath had something you wanted to chip in as well? So I don't know if I can trust you fully and let you carry on, because it feels like there's something here that is self-sustaining. So I'll slowly withdraw.... I will invite you all to come downstairs in fifteen minutes, if you can, to join us in the gallery and have a look at the exhibition because it is a fantastic exhibition that opened last night and also some wine and some food as well. So carry on. So Kath do you want to chip in with your point?

[Kath] Well my point is responding to Francis. I can completely relate the model you are describing to my experience, which is trying to build a new model for a long time, a new capital building in Colchester in Essex. And I think the issue for us is that we relate to what you're saying it's how you're articulating that we all need to come out, so that is what we're doing, that's really the issue. And certainly we get very uncomfortable using the 'G' word, 'Gallery', and we're trying to build – I suppose it comes back to the physical – we're trying to build a new form of architecture that enables co-curation, new places of exchange. I've got all the language, we'll see what happens when it opens...(laughter). And the other thing I wanted to share was that in England at least, in our Local Authority relationships we're dealing with a series of local area agreement indicators, and some of those are around, most of you will be aware, the Arts and Sports. Essex have selected NI-11 which is 'Participation in the Arts' – so I just wanted to pick up on this, because you referred to the 'P' word, 'participation', a little bit in your talk and I was engaged yesterday in interviewing consultants to design a campaign to ensure that people of Essex knew that they were participating in the Arts. And of course, you probably already know, but there's something around over one hundred

categories of what that means and clearly it's not just about participating in the venue, you can sit at home and you are participating – do people really know that they're participating? Because when that phone poll happens we have to get 3% more people participating by the end of 2010 otherwise we will lose our funding effectively– I'm being a bit simplistic about it. I did a lot of thinking yesterday about the difference between what participation means, I think there's quite a lot there. That's my contribution.

[Tom]

Ok, just to respond to both of those points. One - on the transformational impact point - I think partly this is to do with the transformational impact personally experienced by both the current (UK) cultural minister and previously James Parnell. So much of this is about personal stories and personal perspectives from the politician's point of view. And I'd be very surprised if George Osborne in a previous life hung out in a mixed artform venue of his neighbourhood whereas Parnell and others have done. So there is an issue in terms of choppy waters ahead of us as to who gets *it* and who doesn't – and the *'it'* is such an extraordinarily complex thing that we are all faced with the impossibility of abstractly describing. As for the co-curation thing, the mix if you like, there are issues of scale there on the one hand, in that it's about the size of the potential audience and the role the cultural infrastructure plays in context. And that these recent experiences - mostly in London - where there are relatively old-fashioned cultural programmes but there's a hell of a massive audience, or bums on seats for that. I think that within a smaller demographic it's much harder to do that consistently over time and that it's the arts mix that is the real offer to smaller sets of different audience groupings and that to provide a very traditional programme here would have trouble in terms of providing a business model going forward. And it's actually the combination of offering a different cultural service that informs each other that provide the overall experience. And as for NI-11, I think that in the choppy waters ahead, NI-11s are one of the first things that will probably go if there's a change in government because it is on the one hand, well-intentioned, on the other hand it's absolutely riddled with and fraught with problems in terms of measurement, in terms of interpretation, in terms of the very paternalistic notion of participation. It's all wrapped up in that wider agenda around place shaping and cultural planning, which fundamentally is fine but actually it becomes very destructive when it comes to building places - particularly around the greater agenda in and around Essex. We're certainly seeing some horror stories at the moment in Harlow around what cultural participation means in a place like that. So...

[Kath] We still have to navigate it now - we have to engage with it.

[Dave] it's so far out the door now. In a previous life I used to work for a marketing company that specialised in audience research and a friend of mine still does that now. They've been doing quite a lot of work for the British Museum measuring people's quality of experience. They're using Maslow's 'Hierarchy of Needs', whether people are moving from one layer to another because of their experience – I just despair! That actually people are trying to quantify this - but presumably it's helping the British Museum, I don't know. But I'm sorry, if I have to go there, I just don't want to do this anymore. And so there's got to be a certain amount of resistance to some of those things, but then again you get caught in a dilemma. I know that I need Manchester City Council to buy into what we do more than they currently do because we've been building a stream of work that's been based on money from the North West Development Agency. It's taken us eight years to get there, we got three years worth of money, but as soon as the Tories get in at the next election that's going to disappear. It's gone, so we need to be pragmatic. The other alternative is just to forget all that, completely downsize, become very light and low cost and turn ourselves into another organisation, that time might yet come. But at the moment there's an opportunity to use some of the policy-makers rhetoric in order to access the resources. I'm just a hypocrite me.

[Anne] I think some of the things around measurement - I mean it's not one of my favourite subjects - but I think that it's pretty important though. If there were things measured - not by you necessarily - but if there were things that everyone believed measured the benefit or the impact of the involvement in the Arts that would just be it. Instead of having to always rearticulate things in terms of whatever the policy or the politics are of the moment. I mean, now that Clive's gone you know, these discussions that we're having in this room are the discussions that we've had forever, which is how do we make the case? And partly it's exacerbated at this point in time. We've got a recession, we've had the challenges around some of our major gate-keeping institutions, we've had what's been happening here in Scotland, the issues with the British Council, we've had a crisis of confidence that some of the established gatekeepers are not going to be able to do it for the moment for us, you know, we'll get over that. But that nonetheless has caused a crisis of confidence so back to the same thing. How do we make a case? And it seems to me that everybody does have to make a case all the time, a) tick, but b) if we could just have something, whether it's Maslow's Hierarchy or some metronomic thing, that is

measured, you know clink clink clink in some technologically enabled way that we didn't have to make this up all the time, then that would just be there. And I think one of the opportunities of the economic downturn and the need to create new business models that'll prove in the public sector business as well, and to harness the power of one of you guys you know? Through groups and the internet to somehow, not me, but someone to design something quite simple in the end that can have some validity some sort of system of measurement that's known to be robust and would just measure things and then we can just forget about having to look at it all the time.

[Amanda] I'm interested in that because I wanted to pick up on Chris's point about policy and practice. How do you get them to be closer together and then you can worry about all those things like measurement. For me, there's a moment in Scotland where policy and practice just could potentially be brought together and we should be putting our minds to how that might happen because it's not impossible and obviously if we're that creative then surely right now we don't have a policy. We're in a policy vacuum. I have to say that's a personal opinion we're in a policy vacuum but actually perhaps some policy could quite neatly be brought together and that would get us out of some of this – we've got to measure this, we've got to justify this, we've got to articulate this – because you would be working within a policy framework that you were not fighting against but was enabling and I think that quite frankly until we get to that point it's just a constant – having these kinds of conversations are just a constant. It would be much more invigorating to imagine the policy framework and how that does actually reflect the practice. It will never be ahead of the practice and it should never be ahead of the practice but at least it won't be lagging five years, ten years behind the practice, it can be a little bit more reflective than that. I think that can happen and I think it happens in small ways, it's intimate and it doesn't happen at big government level, and how could we maybe adjust that? I think that's quite interesting.

[Clare] Can I just offer an emerging example? That is by no means tested and for successes yet to come. But in England one of the collaborations that the Mission Models Money programme, which I'm part of, is enabling is between all the lead agencies and unions who are beginning to collaborate in new ways that they never had done before with exactly that kind of purpose in mind. So actually that is quite a short step in some respects but the fact is that over time those organisations have never sat around the table together in quite the way that they are now. So I believe it is possible.

[Gwilym] I'll just touch on the power of belief thing that we touched on a moment ago. I'm from the Shetland Isles which is obviously a small community which is fairly well resourced compared to other places in relation to the arts – very well resourced. We're just in the final stages of reviewing our cultural strategy partnership and an interesting thing has happened in that as a group of about thirty people have agreed that Shetland is the most creative island community in the whole world. This is a belief. There's lots of discussion about how we measure this. Do we go out and say this to the world? - we're saying this in Shetland now, because it's been consulted on widely, and how do we measure it is the big thing. I mean we can't go and say we're the most creative island community in the world. And what came back was actually that the belief comes out of the fact that we know that if you walk up to someone in Shetland and say 'you're not the most creative island community in the world' you're in big trouble. The measurement is going to be in the reaction from someone coming and saying the opposite. Which is a really interesting one. How we got to that point of saying that was that I talked about Tim Smit – Eden project guy – about his Tinkerbell theory. He talks about – 'you've just got to believe' - If you believe in fairies then it will come true. We've got high-level elected members coming into meetings and saying 'I believe in fairies', which is this magical transformation that's happened. So I think there's something about ambition and belief and being prepared to stand up and say that.

For us, as an Arts Development Agency, something that we recognise, it was very very important that we did that, because it's incredibly supportive for the individual artist. Because if any individual did that, particularly in the nature of the Shetland community (I think other parts of Scotland as well) where if you say that you're better in any way, you get knocked down. So we've championed that stance. And we've got Visit Shetland now talking about putting signs up saying 'Welcome to the most creative island community in the world'; that the gateways into Shetland are promoting that massively at the moment. Someone said 'well, what about Manhattan', you get all those kind of things thrown at you but that's fine, I think it triggers that debate. So I don't know how we get to that point where we're all able to do that – Scotland's able to do that, the UK's able to do that. But that's been a real change agent for us, just that one phrase.

[Anita] I think something Francis said earlier about is it just this downturn or actually are we at a point where there's a real opportunity for society to change and to re-establish values that have completely

gone by the wayside - and that's where I would see the opportunity for the art and artists to be leading in an alternative perspective rather than trying to follow everyone else's perspective and that if the bottom really has fallen out of capitalism in that way then personally I think there is a better way and somehow re-establishing values that people are needing in wider life is an opportunity for the arts to be right at the centre of that.

[Morgan] So there's no Department of Culture, Media and Sport needed, there's no conduit for money, there's no need to fill in the forms and spend all the time filling in the form then it is back to guerrilla art and sharing and participating because there is no source of patronage or money – that would be fun!

[Dave] Save me four staff!

(laughter)

[Tom] Should we...go?

(laughter)

[End]

Speakers

Clive Gillman
Anne Bonnar
Francis McKee
Tom Fleming
Ben Spencer
Pat Fisher
Chris Fremantle
Dave Moutrey
Morgan Petrie
Nick Barley
Brian Holmes
Anita Clark
Judith Winter
Eddie Berg
Kath Wood
Amanda Catto
Clare Cooper
Gwilym Gibbons

