

**Dave Moutrey, Director and Chief Executive and Sarah Perks,
Programme and Engagement Director, The Cornerhouse,
Manchester**

***Imagine delivering artistic excellence that captivates and engages
the public ...***

Dave Moutrey has been Director and Chief Executive of Cornerhouse since April 1998. He took the post after having worked as Director of Arts About Manchester (AAM) for over six years, during which time he was also Director of Marketing for Manchester City of Drama in 1994. Before working at AAM, he managed the Abraham Moss Centre Theatre in North Manchester. He is a qualified teacher, artist and theatre producer, a fellow of the Royal Society of Arts, a member of the Chartered Management Institute, the British Academy of Film and Television Arts and chair of the Millennium Quarter Development Trust and Pilot Theatre Company, an advisor to AmbITion and a board member of Manchester City South Partnership, the Association of Independent Film Exhibitors and North West Film Exhibitors. He helped establish an arts marketing consortium in Canberra, Australia, has worked on international tourism conferences in Prague, Graz and Amsterdam and presented papers at a number of arts marketing conferences.

Sarah Perks is Programme and Engagement Director at Cornerhouse. She is part of the senior management team and responsible for the visual arts and film programme, education and marketing. Previously Education Director, Sarah manages the team that produced *LiveWire* (for 14 – 19 year olds) and *Projector* (schools and colleges programme). Sarah is currently producing a tour of films by Hong Kong female directors and is also a director of Northern Film Network and a lecturer and writer specialising in Asian art and cinema. She recently completed a Common Purpose Matrix Leadership course and led a Cultural Leadership programme for mixed art venues. The report, *From Silos to Shrek Ears* (the subject of this presentation) is available from the Cornerhouse website.

Cornerhouse, an international centre for contemporary visual arts and cinema, has been exploring what it means to be an 'open' organisation that involves the public throughout its work. During 2008/9 it presented 3850 cinema screenings, nine exhibitions and 271 education events. In this keynote presentation Dave and Sarah talked about how the organisation has combined programming, marketing and education into one department highlighting the benefits and challenges of such an open approach for the organisation and its audiences / visitors.

The Art of With

Dave Moutrey began by explaining that he had spoken at the very first AMA conference and was so good he had never been asked back.

Cornerhouse is based in the centre of Manchester, working across the visual arts including film. Education is central to the work and its aim is to bring artists and ideas into Greater Manchester and send artists and ideas out. Cornerhouse wants to continue to build on this role, having recently clarified and refined this role. Superfast internet, a world class airport,

three ambitious universities on the doorstep and the new Manchester International Arts Festival are all helping to make this achievable.

'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

Cornerhouse's work includes:

3 Galleries

- 40,000 exhibition attendances during last year
- 5 exhibition slots showing 10 exhibitions

3 Cinemas

- 122,000 Cinema attendances
- 3,724 screenings
- 50% European film programme
- 2 Film Festivals

Education

- 2 education spaces
- 317 education events
- 9,000 education attendances

Live Wire: in which young people manage the programme for themselves with the support of one of the team

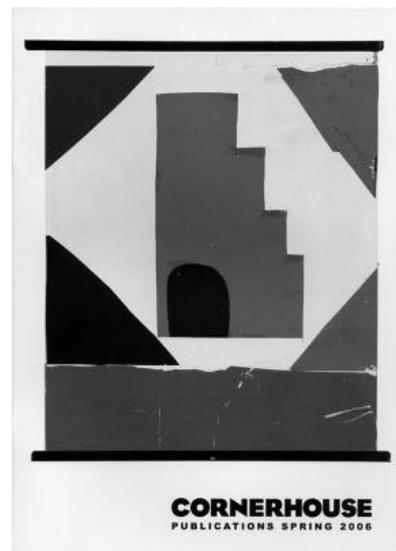
- 150 LiveWire events
- 742 attendances

Publications

- Work with over 60 publishers
- Selling over 35,000 units per year
- Providing a worldwide service

Social

- Café - 120 covers
 - Open 7 days per week
 - 24 hour licence
 - DJ events, Art
- Bar



'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

Business

- Turnover £2.5 million
- 33 full time staff, 70 part-time staff
- Footfall 500,000 visits per year

Strategy Review

During 2007, Cornerhouse undertook a review of the environment in which it was operating so that it could become more responsive to audiences and to create greater impact beyond its core audiences.

Important outcomes of this review included a prediction that public funding for arts and culture would be subject to a squeeze up to and beyond the 2012 Olympics, that the existing building limited the ability of the organisation to earn more income and develop parts of the programme, that Cornerhouse as a brand had strength that could be exploited and that there were opportunities afforded by the Knowledge Capital Strategy and the Oxford Road Corridor strategies. In addition, the management team was not functioning effectively enough to respond to the challenges faced by Cornerhouse.

Cornerhouse decided it should aim to increase attendances for the existing programme, build on links with other organisations, reduce inefficiencies, increase margin and develop new business strands.

New thinking was also required. Cornerhouse was set off on a path led by work that John Holden had done on personalisation in the arts. Other cross-art form venues (such as FACT and Watershed) were also interested in this and put together a proposal to the cultural leadership programme. A group of emerging leaders were able to go away and do some research, the result being *'From Silos to Shreck Ears'* (available on the Cornerhouse website).

The way in which new technologies were facilitating social networks, user innovation, crowd sourcing and wider participation was especially interesting.

It was felt that the audience expected artistic policy to continue to be in the realm of contemporary visual art and film. Therefore, Cornerhouse would continue to:

- be concerned with the art and culture of now
- work with innovative artists and filmmakers
- critically engage with ideas through the work of artists and filmmakers
- be international in outlook and approach
- be an even stronger and higher profile part of the artistic and cultural life of the city and region
- work towards the widest possible audience engagement and participation
- work in ways that do not confine the programme within the confines of the building, so use public spaces, other venues, web, internet, publishing etc....

But more than this was the realisation that sometimes audiences wanted to engage in different ways; they wanted to be active participants and to make a contribution. In addition, and perhaps uniquely, 'open source' working was to be placed at the heart of what Cornerhouse was doing.

In this context, open source meant creating a way of working in which:

- New ideas are welcome from audiences, staff and artists, wherever...
- Cornerhouse shares these ideas with audiences, staff and artists who in turn help improve them to the point where they become programme activity

The implication therefore was that Cornerhouse needed to create a culture and structure that facilitates collaboration, openness and innovation so:

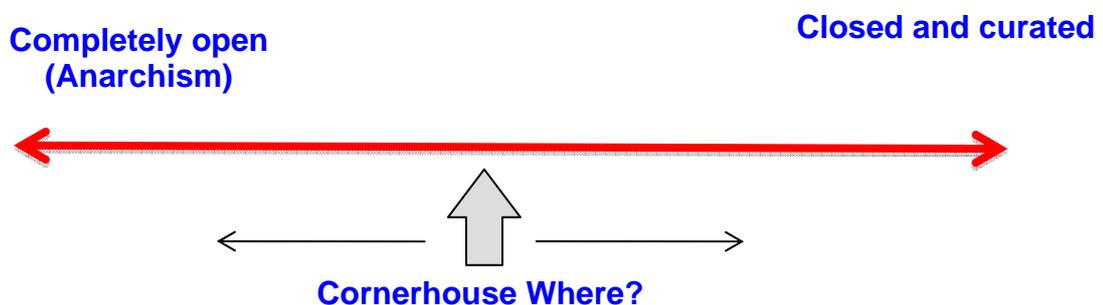
- The cinema and visual arts departments were merged to create one Programme Team
- The education and marketing departments were merged to create an Engagement Team
- A small capital project was focused on facilitating this by creating new flexible spaces

It was all very well saying that the organisation would move to being open, but this would not happen over night, as the major cultural shift required more than structural change. As a result of the changes a number of senior and long-serving members of staff left the organisation. This was sad but the organisation had to focus on what it needed to do.

It had been difficult to recruit a programme director so the programme and engagement teams were brought together under the same director, Sarah Perks. It was realised that an inter-disciplinary team would require more scope and efficiency through greater flexibility.

In order to underpin this process, Cornerhouse commissioned Charles Leadbeater to write an essay about 'we-think' and its potential impact on a contemporary arts organisation. This led to The 'Art of With' symposium.

What is right for our audiences?



It was important for Cornerhouse to find itself on this scale. Whereabouts should it lie between anarchy at one end and closed and curated at the other? The Cornerhouse's audiences want and trust the organisation to make some choices but they also want to be involved in a conversation.

The answer appeared to be to model the organisation itself on the idea of being an 'intelligent search engine': permeable to artists and audiences. In the same way that Google keeps learning from the searches that are made, so it should be possible for Cornerhouse to do the same thing. This involves the audience as consumers and producers as well as maintaining the value of the Cornerhouse brand and the respect with which it is regarded by the audience.

[At this point Dave Moutrey handed over to Sarah Perks]

All about the 'how'

There is now a new team: the visual arts, cinema, marketing and education departments have become one team. This situation didn't come out of nowhere; Cornerhouse learned much from the already existing projects such as *LiveWire*. This was an informal youth programming project for 14-19 year olds in which they were supported by Cornerhouse to create their own programme. It was an open process – participants could come in at any time – and the organisation focused on working *with* rather than *for* them.

The Facebook group (mainly Cornerhouse members) was also used to facilitate programming of special occasions, for example the Christmas film. They could nominate and then vote for films. As it happened, the Facebook group organised itself into a group dedicated to making sure the film 'Diehard' won because they thought it was not something you would normally see at an arthouse cinema. The programming team was nevertheless enthusiastic about the idea and it has been one of the most popular Christmas films shown.

As part of the visual arts programme, Cornerhouse worked with artists who explore participatory methods such as Jeremy Deller. Deller created *Procession* as part of the Manchester International Festival which involved people who wouldn't normally take part (as well as some who do) in processions and parades. It was a great event for the new team as it brought together different elements of participation, marketing and programming.

The 'Art of With' programme was about commissioning essays and generating a debate on how we make ourselves more open, with or without technology.

Benefits for Audiences

Evaluation of *LiveWire* suggested that it was time to move on from traditional print and press methods. The young people involved would be much more likely to respond to text and telephone. It was also important to enable good peer to peer communication.

It was decided that instead of using one piece of copy to suit all audiences and all communication channels, a more tailored approach to writing should be used, focusing on the three key groups: 14-19 year olds, the general public and specialised academics.

This new audience interaction could also be used for evaluative purposes and overall there was a feeling that the audience was *with* us rather than having work provided *for* them.

Organisational Challenges

There is a new team with new roles or new elements of roles and a new structure. A considerable amount of time has been spent 'on-boarding' the staff – making sure they were comfortable with the new direction and vision.

One of the new rules was that no-one was allowed to work only in one area. They couldn't, for example, work only in film programming. This immediately had efficiency savings, with information being centrally collated. Before long, this approach meant that the silos started to melt away as everyone was forced to talk and work together.

Interdisciplinary project teams were created for the delivery or production of the project. In *Procession* people came out of their traditional roles to work together as a team on this big project. It created better understanding for everyone with the team being involved in the whole process from the beginning. Confidence is built and staff are able to take decisions and responsibility. Skills and expertise are not neglected; it's about developing a holistic approach.

Benefits to the Organisation

- The organisation works strategically with a focus on new vision
- Public engagement becomes embedded so that projects like LiveWire aren't seen as separate or special
- Diversification of skills
- Developing management of complexity and uncertainty
- Staff become more actively involved in generating new ideas

It has taken time to develop these new elements, especially the digital engagement strategy. The way in which the change is paced is a key consideration, which needs to be done in an open sharing context.

[Sarah Perks handed back to Dave Moutrey, who asked the audience where they were on the line of 'closed' to 'anarchic' – see above. The majority (60%) were in the middle, though a significant number (about 25%) were at the closed end. Most responded that they wanted to change where they were on this line.]

In summary, this is a journey and there are more experiments to be done. It has been scary, some talented people have left, the team is smaller, but it has enabled exciting ways of doing things.

www.cornerhouse/theartofwith