

## ***Enhancing your word-of-mouth and viral marketing***

### **Nicky Webb, Director, Artichoke**

**Nicky Webb** is the Director of Artichoke. For fifteen years she ran a successful specialist arts marketing and PR agency, where clients included Glyndebourne Touring Opera and the Southbank Centre as well as many festivals including the Belfast, Lufthansa and LIFT Festivals. During this time she worked with Helen Marriage intermittently, firstly at the LIFT Festival and later at Canary Wharf in the early nineties. Between 1993 and 2000 they transformed the Salisbury Festival from a small music festival into an internationally successful event, increasing the audience by more than 60%. In 1998 Nicky became Head of Press and Marketing at Glyndebourne, and in 2001 was appointed Marketing Director for the Brighton Festival and the Brighton Dome. She re-launched the Festival, which resulted in audience growth of 100% in the first year, and re-opened the 1,800 seat Dome Concert Hall after refurbishment. In 2005 she and Helen Marriage founded Artichoke Trust. Since then, Artichoke have brought Royal de Luxe's *The Sultan's Elephant* to London, and produced the globe-spanning *The Telectroscope*, giant spider *La Machine*, Antony Gormley's epic fourth plinth project *One & Other* and *Lumiere* – a spectacular light festival in Durham. Their pieces transform communities and cities, attracting hundreds of thousands of people from across the world.

#### **Introduction**

This session examined how talking points and stories around art events and activities emerge and catch on, how a buzz is generated and how this is harnessed and translated into an ongoing relationship with the public.

#### *Nicky Webb*

I wanted to talk to you a bit about the kind of events that Artichoke produces and the ways we've begun to use social media, but also the conventional media to create a buzz about, around those events. So we founded Artichoke in 2005. Helen Marriage and I had come from working in different arts organisations and working sometimes together and sometimes separately and what we found was that things that really appealed to us were things which we mounted in public spaces. So for example when we were at Salisbury, we found it very exciting to work in public spaces, squares, the market place, the landscape around the city, outside the cathedral, in the close and so on and what we discovered was that having broken down those barriers that exist often between audience members and the arts, we could create events which had a much wider and broader appeal. I suppose we believe that the arts are just as much about their audience as they are about the artists themselves and the work that they produce and we try always to create events like this one:



This is a picture round the back of St. James's Palace in London during the Sultan's Elephant. Really to create events where the audience has an extraordinarily deep and meaningful relationship, not only with the arts that they're watching, but also with one another and we found that that event really set the benchmark very, very high for us, it was something which I suppose changed the way people looked at our public spaces, but they also looked at the possibilities of producing events in public spaces in a whole new way. So the Sultan's Elephant we produced in London in 2006, I know that my co-director came to talk at this conference a couple of years ago and she talked about this event, so forgive me if I bore you, but I wanted to talk a little bit about this event in particular and later on in my presentation this morning we'll talk a bit about the techniques that were used.

So the Sultan's Elephant was an extraordinary show, a piece of street theatre, really, it happened in the middle of London during four days in May 2006, you'll remember that that was very soon after the bombings in London in 2005, in fact we had to postpone the event by about six months because the implications for security, for the way we treated the crowd, meant for us that the people wouldn't have such an interesting time. You can see that it was very, very popular. Apparently a million people came to London during the event and this is, cast your mind back five years ago, people were using websites to get information about events, but really nobody tweeted, I'm not even sure Twitter existed five years ago, Facebook wasn't that big a thing. What we expected to happen was that people would use their mobile phone, now everybody's kind of stopped using mobile phones for sending pictures and texts to one another about events, but at that time it became hugely, hugely significant for us over the marketing of this event and I think that extraordinary crowd was generated partly through the press

coverage that we were able to harness and partly through that mobile phone technology. It's a real pity that none of the mobile phone companies would sponsor it, but there you are, that's another story.

Later on we produced another event which again was really about communications, it's called the Telectroscope, it's an enormous telescope really, an art installation that we installed in London, but also in Brooklyn in New York and basically we used teleconferencing technology to allow people to communicate silently and instantly across the Atlantic. We decided that the communication was really part of the process of people's experience of this event and so rather than just installing a very large brass funny telescope thing in the middle of London and the middle of New York and then allow people to use it, we would create a kind of back story which we then told to people, fed to people over several months. We announced through the media on April Fools Day in 2008 that a tunnel had been discovered under the Atlantic and we then took that story, took a huge back story. We commissioned plans, ostensibly Victorian plans of the building of this tunnel, we commissioned drawings, we commissioned letters, we wrote a whole series of stories which we fed through a blog and through the media and thereby encouraged people to sort of not quite know whether we were pulling their legs or not and then come to use the Telectroscope to communicate with people the other side of the Atlantic. And indeed that very charming kind of crazy idea became something that people really embraced, they began to use their own, for example, people were posting on the blog and on their own blogs lots of messages about whether this was true, could it be true, oh yes, I know an engineer who knows all about this tunnel that obviously did exist under the Atlantic.

So that was very interesting for us, it became an event which blurred the boundaries between the communication and the art itself and we felt that, I think we managed to reach a whole new crowd of people who were kind of interested in the playfulness of that idea.

Now, Machine, there's a show that we commissioned for Liverpool in 2008. Liverpool, you'll remember was the Capital of Culture in 2008 and they asked us to produce a show which had the same effect that the Elephant Show had had previously in London. We worked with a company called La Machine who'd created the elephant itself. La Machine create ridiculously ambitious machinery and they made this spider for Liverpool.



We decided that we would keep the identity of the spider a secret and I'm going to talk a bit more about secrecy in a minute, because I think that's a really important part of creating a buzz for events of this kind, but clearly, I think what people were expecting us to produce was something big and ambitious, but quite cute and quite sweet in the way that the elephant had been. Instead to produce something that was a forty foot high mechanical spider was a bit surprising for most people and indeed did create quite a lot of controversy.

In 2008 in Liverpool, we expected social media to become much, much more important, by 2008 people were using Facebook all the time, they were using blogs, they were very comfortable with this technology, but what we discovered in Liverpool and it's very important to remember, I think, that not everywhere in the country there's the same kind of broadband penetration, the same kind of comfort with using these kinds of technologies and so in Liverpool actually it was less important than we expected. We did use Facebook, we used blogs and so on to tell the story and we certainly used our own website in the telling of the story about the arrival of the spider, etc, through regular e-blasts and so on. It was important, but not as important as we had imagined.

This is something we produced last year, Anthony Gormley's One & Other:



And then last Autumn we produced a festival in Durham in the North of England, it's a very beautiful medieval town and what Durham wanted us to do was to create something that would put Durham on the map and would engender a sense of pride among people who lived in and around Durham, but also bring people out onto the streets and people into Durham who didn't normally come to Durham, particularly not on wet November evenings. So we commissioned a variety of different artists to work in light, there were twenty two different installations which we placed all over the centre of Durham:



So I suppose what's common about our events is that they all take place in public spaces and they're all as much about the audience and the audience's experience and their sense of community as they are about the work itself. One of the techniques we use is, often we keep our events completely secret before they happen and as a marketing person who's spent twenty five years trying to communicate with people, that's rather a sort of counter-intuitive position to take, but actually it seems to be sometimes very, very successful.

For example, the elephant show began with a rocket apparently landing in the middle of the street, that's a square in London called Waterloo Place and what we tried to do, we didn't tell anybody about the rocket landing, we told people we were bringing a show involving a large elephant to London, but of course when you say a large elephant, people imagine an ordinary elephant, you know, elephants are large, aren't they? So we didn't tell people about the girl, we simply said that this extraordinary company were coming to London and they would create something massive that people shouldn't miss. But we had to keep the faith, I suppose, we decided that we would go along with the wishes of the director of the company, Royal Deluxe who wanted very badly that we didn't talk about the nature of it before it happened. I was extremely sceptical, it has to be said and I could imagine the situation where we'd worked for five years on bringing that show to London and the idea of standing in the middle of the Mall with nobody else was terrifying to me. But anyway we kept faith, we didn't announce the detail of the show and we simply installed, overnight this rocket shell in the middle of the Waterloo Place and what happened was very interesting.

We'd worked with the conventional media to tell them under embargo what was going to happen, we'd persuaded them not to reveal the details of the story. For example the Today programme did come down to the rocket, we got them to announce, as if it was really a rocket that had landed from outer space, we got them to do a story with that sort of serious tone, slightly mischievous tone of voice and what I think happened was the use of the conventional media and the use of individual members of the public who happened across this thing and sent their friends pictures, texts, made phone calls etc, began to get that word of mouth out there, in a way that it simply wouldn't have done had we not kept the secret at the beginning.

We did the same thing with the Telectroscope. We announced on April Fool's Day that a tunnel had been discovered, but we didn't say what we were going to do, we didn't talk about the use of the art installation for communication purposes, we simply installed this huge drill bit just outside City Hall in London and another one, identical one in New York and we left those drill bits turning gently, throwing up bits of earth for two days. What that does is to create a great sense of speculation, you know, it's not much different from Barnham – these techniques are publicity stunts, but it is part of the show and what you end up

with is a situation where people are speculating about what's going to happen next, they're excited about what you might be doing and they feel a sense of playfulness and of course talk to one another about it, so very important.

Again with the spider show, we built and rehearsed the spider show in a disused warehouse the other side of the Mersey and somehow managed to persuade all those people who worked on the show (there was a crew of 200 people) to keep it under wraps, literally. So, we were able to install overnight, again overnight, we seem to spend a lot of time standing by roads in the middle of the night watching creatures being lifted into place. Anyway we rigged this spider on the side of a building in the middle of the night and what happened was that the commuters who pour out of Lime Street Station the following morning were greeted by this extraordinary sight and again, new media, old media, instant word of mouth created, because of the fact that we hadn't trailed what was going to happen.

So first of all the conventional media, I think it's really important now, it's very exciting this revolution that has happened over the last few years, but it is really, really important to remember that an awful lot of people still read the conventional press, they listen to the radio, we are social beings, as we've been hearing all week and we receive information in a whole variety of different ways, so I think it's really important, especially now in this time of cuts that we remember using the media is a tremendously powerful tool and something that arts organisations are very well placed to use in a very constructive and interesting way.

So we work very hard to get the media on side, we work very hard to turn our events into news stories. Now when you do something on the scale of the elephant or the spider, that's quite easy, because they are clearly news stories, it is very unusual, very spectacular and it's possible to make sure that the media do take notice, whereas it isn't always, as we're finding at the moment in Milton Keynes, it isn't as possible to create news stories on every event, but what we try to do is always to find the controversies, to find the stories, to really work with the media, sometimes under embargo, but to persuade them to tell the story in the way that we would like them to tell it. So, in the case of the Telectroscope, for example, we worked with various different publications and we persuaded them to enter that piece of playfulness, not to reveal the whole story up front, to tease their own readers just as much as we were teasing the rest of the audience.

## **New Media**

So lately of course this has become very, very much more important. We do continue to use conventional tools like print and what have you, but new media is something now that we rely very much on. I think we're just beginning to be good at it. I think we've worked very quickly to try to, as most arts organisations have, to try to incorporate these different tools into our communications strategies, sometimes with huge success and sometimes not. The event I really want to talk

to you about, the best example, I suppose is the Anthony Gormley One & Other project, which was, would never have been possible, I think, without the harnessing of interest through new media. For example we created whole communities around that project, so the plinths themselves, people who went on the plinth (who, by the way, called themselves plinthers, we didn't name them that). We asked through the Facebook group, what shall we call you and they came back loud and clear with the answer, they wanted to be called plinthers, so that's a good example of a real conversation that was happening with a group of people who were very engaged in a project and the result was another spin-off Facebook group called I Plinthian, which they all started and the word plinther, I gather is now in Wikipedia, so I think that was a success.

So I'm just going to tell you a little bit about this project. Anthony Gormley, obviously very well established, very celebrated sculptor, he was commissioned by the Four Plinth group, that's a competition which is run under the auspices of the Mayor of London to find a piece of public art, there's usually one or two every year, which could fit on the empty plinth in Trafalgar Square, the fourth plinth. Anthony Gormley's original idea, thank goodness he didn't manage to bring this one to fruition was that a different person should stand there every hour for a whole year, luckily we managed to persuade him that a whole year was maybe a little bit beyond the call of duty, but what he wanted was to create essentially a portrait of Britain in 2009, through allowing each individual a place in that very sort of ceremonial space which is Trafalgar Square. Now the other people on the plinth in Trafalgar Square are generally forgotten, in fact I can't remember who any of them are now and his point, I think was that that square is a very sort of ceremonial space and it's used to memorialise people who have been involved in various wars or imperial occupations or whatever and actually what we should do now in 2009 is allow the people their chance to show what it means to be British in 2009.

So his idea was to allow each person an hour, he at one point, he had very, very big ambitions for the project, he wanted every person in England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland to know about this project and clearly, you know, that is something, it sort of makes a marketing person a little bit nervous, the idea that you're trying to run a campaign on not very much money that will reach every person in Britain. Well, I think we had a stab at it, but clearly we didn't manage to have quite that much awareness of the project.

There were huge barriers to participation and what we were trying to do is to create a sense of commitment to the project through all the various media so that when people had been selected for a place, there was a great sense of pride and commitment and they weren't then going to call up on the morning and say, you know what, I can't get a plane today, I'm not coming. Although some people did that, we did by and large, through a series of conversations with the individuals who'd been selected, some of them real life conversations, ringing them up, for

example, and some of the other kinds of conversations using new media, we did manage to persuade them to commit to the project.

It was quite an extraordinary thing looking at the unfolding of that project over a hundred days, how varied it was and how much there were people who frankly hadn't thought at all about what they might do, other people who simply wanted to occupy that space and stand there and felt that that was enough and that was fine, it was enough and others where the whole variety and eccentricity of Britain came out.



I think the first thing to say about that project when faced with Anthony Gormley's ambition that sixty million people might apply for the project. I suppose what we tried to do is to think first about what partnerships we could make in order to pull that project off and have some hope of allowing the project to really fly. So the first thing we did was to find a partner in the form of Sky Arts who would enable us to really get the word out very much more broadly than we would otherwise have been capable of doing and by that I don't mean media coverage, because actually they really didn't cover it all that much, certainly not as much as many of the other media, but what they did do is create for us and with us a very powerful tool in the form of the website, which really was, it was not only the repository of all the information about the project, but it was also the means by which people applied, were selected, it was the place where we had twenty four hour streaming as you probably know, people could post comments, they could find a profile of every single one of those 2400 people who'd been selected, they could make a pledge to watch, they could send links and widgets and little badges to one another or post them on their own Facebook pages and so on, so it really was the most significant of the tools and we couldn't possibly have created

anything as complicated or rich without a partner like Sky. We've also worked very successfully with other media partners in the past, so we worked with the BBC for example over the elephant project and I think you can't underestimate the power of those partnerships. When they really work for you, you will be able to take your project to a much, much broader audience.

### **Problem areas**

Our first problem was how to get people to actually apply for this opportunity. Many people seemed quite interested when you spoke to them about it and other people found it a really horrifying idea that they might stand twenty five feet in the air on a plinth that was intended originally for a man on a horse. So we knew that it would be probably quite an easy matter to engage with an audience and people who are interested in the work of Anthony Gormley, interested in taking part in a big participatory artwork, but what we thought would be much, much more complicated and much more interesting was how to get interest and awareness out to a much broader demographic of people. So, one of the things we did was to work initially with Anthony Gormley himself who agreed to kind of front the project. We asked him to make a film which we posted on YouTube, a sort of invitation really to take part with him in making this project a reality, we worked through the conventional media, we did a huge launch in February and then a series of other launches around the country, thereafter. We worked with him on creating awareness right round the UK, so partly through conventional media, partly through other partnerships that we were able to create with, for example, the National Association of Housing Associations. So housing associations account for something like six million homes in this country and we were able to reach a very broad network of people in that way.

The other thing we were trying to do, it's that commitment again, we were trying to persuade people that when they applied for this opportunity they were, if they got a place, going to really value that place and they weren't going to relinquish it, they were actually, having accepted the place they were actually going to turn up to take their place on the plinth. And the other thing we wanted to do was create a whole sense of debate around the project, not only in the sort of chattering classes, if you like, but also among people, you know, just in the pub, people who wouldn't normally engage with the idea of an art project.

So we worked a lot with the media, of course, actually we only had twelve people who took their clothes off on the plinth out of those 2400, but they are sort of often used to represent this event and it did certainly cause us a lot of headaches in dealing with policemen who kept telling people to put their clothes on again. I think what we tried to do is to embrace controversy, partly through the media and partly through other forms of social media and so on. We tried to use all of those 2400 people as our advocates, of course that was the big opportunity that we had, 2400 people already very heavily involved in the project, very willing to go out and talk to everybody about the fact that they had got a place and what might

they do. We suggested to all those participants, for example, that they might use their own networks, their own conventional press, put their own Facebook pages, their own networks of friends and so on to discuss the idea of the project in the first place, also to ask for people's suggestions about how they might use their time to ask for people to vote on who they were enjoying on the plinth and who they thought were terrible, so it was really about using those participants as advocates for the project. The media coverage initially in that first period where we launched the project in February was really crucial to getting people talking about the idea and it was really important that we got the word out, not only in London, but also in the whole of the rest of the UK, because as I said, we really didn't have any much of a budget. So we used the media and we used other forms of social media in order to get that word out and the initial interest in the project there.

### **Media coverage**

There were about thirteen hundred articles all over the UK in the conventional media and about 250 pieces in the news pages of the national press and the other thing we managed to do is to think, for example about ways that we might incorporate this project into other, using other tools, so for example I had an idea one day while driving somewhere, listening to the Archers that it would be great if we could persuade the Archers to incorporate the idea of the project into their storylines, which eventually they agreed to do and although by about the second month of listening to Linda Snell debating about whether or not she was going to apply for a place I was a bit sorry I'd had that idea actually. It did help to get a certain demographic of people talking about this idea and it did indeed help many people to make up their minds to take part and we certainly know that from our research with plinths afterwards.

### **Who would take part?**

So we thought about who was likely to want to take part in this project and how we might reach them and we obviously as all good marketing people do we reach people in different ways, according to who they were. Reaching people already engaged with art was quite straightforward, there are many, many networks that are tried and tested, we work with galleries including Anthony's own, but also including the Tate and other networks of artists and museums and so on, to get the word out about taking part in a project like this. That was quite straightforward and easy and indeed, I think a great number of the people who did take part in the project were either practising artists or involved in the art world in some way. But we were interested in broadening that audience and broadening that participation to people who perhaps weren't at all interested in the arts and one of the groups that we felt was really significant were people interested either in the whole notion of democracy or in social causes, social justice and indeed we tried very hard at the outset to work with charities, lobbying organisations and so on, pressure groups, to get the word out about this project,

but I think it wasn't really until the first person stood on the plinth in July last year that that opportunity, to use the hour as a means of highlighting a particular issue or charity really began to work and then it took off absolutely like wildfire. The first person to stand on the plinth was a woman who took a lollipop with the NSPCC, I think it was, website on it and she talked during her hour about the NSPCC and its work and then it clearly lit a bit of a fuse with other applicants because immediately after that we had many, many more applications from people who were involved in various charities or who decided to lobby for a particular issue and you saw some of those in the film. So in terms of how we engaged them, we worked again through the media, but also through Facebook groups, through the individual organisations that we targeted to suggest that this might be an interesting way to use the space and then we used the people who had been selected up until that point to then get word out to their own networks and have their own conversations with their own networks who then managed to suggest other things that they might do with their hour.

### **Generating talking points**

The idea itself did become a huge talking point, but we also we decided to create some. We drip fed information about who could apply, about what the rules were, about what you couldn't do and in some cases we held a debate through Facebook groups and on other forums about what would be possible and what we would have to not allow people to do and there was almost nothing people weren't allowed to do. There was, for example, a huge debate about nudity in London, because there were many people who felt that nudity in London was inappropriate, they would be bound to be arrested the second you took your clothes off. In fact that wasn't the guidance that we'd had from the Metropolitan Police who said, no, it's an artwork, there are plenty of nude models in art museums and there should be no issue over nudity. Unfortunately they didn't communicate that to their own policemen quite often, so we often had occasions where I had a letter in my hand from the head of the Metropolitan police saying it's absolutely fine, nudity no problem and at the same time special constables would be beetling their way across Trafalgar Square to insist that people dressed themselves again.

There were lots of conversations, for example about balloons, because there were huge numbers of people who decided to take a bunch of balloons up on the plinth and then release them. Now obviously that in these days when we're all concerned about green issues is something which is very controversial and we instantly, we stepped right back from this, but there was a huge amount of discussion and conversation about whether people were being irresponsible in releasing balloons and certainly there were many, many comments posted on the profiles of those people who did go out and decide to release balloons and many conversations through Twitter and other forums.

## **Making use of advocates and ambassadors**

We tried to use ambassadors, advocates for the project, especially in its early days. We worked with people from all sort of walks of life who were celebrated in some way, so we worked with people like, let's think, Vanessa Feltz who presents the BBC London, who became an ambassador for the project and she agreed to talk about it, not only on her own radio programme, which was very, very helpful; she held lots of phone-ins; she advocated; and suggested people should apply, etc, but also she used her own network, her own Facebook fan page, all sorts of other networks as an opportunity to talk about the project, so we had a variety of different ambassadors who agreed to work with us on promoting the idea.

So we thought a lot about what would motivate people to take part and there was, I suppose, a great sense that some people would just want to be part of a piece of art. They'd want to be taking part in a huge project that actually was going to have a huge amount of public attention. We wondered whether people were interested in their fifteen minutes of fame, as it were, we wondered whether people felt that having an opportunity for an hour as a kind of celebrity was in the days of sort of Big Brother and stuff something that would motivate people and in fact that that really wasn't a motivation for most people, they weren't really interested in that, but what they were interested in is the opportunity to take part in something that was really very unique and special and that they would be able to tell their children and grandchildren about. So it's that communication thing again and lots of people were encouraging their peers to apply for something in order that their own community was represented somehow. Then of course there's the question about social justice which we've talked about and I think, I've just said this, haven't I, things your own community is doing became very important.

## **The website**

I've said that the website we created was with Sky Arts, and it was a tremendously rich complicated site. It was certainly bigger than any other site that I've been involved in building. It had to do a variety of things. It had to run the competition so that people could take part in the project and I have to say that's something I'm not convinced that the company that built the website really understood very well at the outset. It was crucial that people should be able to apply online in a very straightforward and easy way, but what we wanted to do was not just do one drawer, it wasn't just one lottery, you can see that 35,000 nearly did eventually apply, we only had 2400 spaces and what we wanted to do was to ensure that geographic representation that I talked about earlier on. So, one of the things we realised very quickly was that if we just selected all 2400 people on one occasion we would not enjoy the kind of continuing momentum that picking them several times would give us, so actually we held three or four different draws and each time there was increasing interest in the project. So

people could stay in the draw if they didn't get selected the first time and what we tended to find was that more and more people applied during the whole process, but there were fewer and fewer spaces, obviously, as the project continued and that helped to encourage more and more people to talk about the project, had they been selected etc.

We wanted to be able to stream the whole thing twenty four hours a day and we discussed long and hard whether it would be a good idea to publish either the full names and identities of everybody who took part in the project in advance or whether we would only do that on the day that they stood on the plinth and actually we decided to opt for that latter option. So on the day, we published the list of the people that would be up there on the day and each person had their own page, they could upload information about their own life, about their own story about why they decided to take part in the project, they could upload video links if they wanted to, they could upload photographs of themselves, they could upload any other information they felt was interesting or pertinent and what this did was to begin to create a kind of forum where people were having conversations with one another, plinthers with one another, but also friends.

## **Social media**

We used social medium, Twitter, and had 1600 tweets during the project itself. It became hugely significant, a lot of people became slightly obsessed with the project and were watching, dipping back into the website constantly. I think that Twitter helped really to fuel that ongoing discussion about what was going on at that moment, did you see such and such last night and we really stood right back from any of that conversation, because except in some cases where we were being asked specific questions, it was really important that those people taking part, indeed many people tweeted from the top, but the people taking part were able to have their own conversations and indeed people following the project and there became a huge number of followers of the project on Twitter.

Also on Facebook there were two or three different Facebook groups, one which we had started at the outset, but it quickly became clearly that people didn't really want us to be moderating that, they did sometimes want information about things, but by and large they were having their own conversations and it did become a very rich kind of resource.

## **Statistics**

- 843,000 unique users, 1.8m
- visits and 8.8m hits
- 33,000 comments posted
- Average time on site 6.5mins

- 160,000 tweets
- 1m photos on flickr
- 2 facebook groups 4,000 members and 350 members

## Questions

*Mel Larson, independent marketing consultant: Hi Nicky, don't know if you remember me. First of all I want to say I'm a super fan of Nicky Webb, I just think you're amazing and amazing project, what you talked about reminded me of a project I worked on called Memory Marathon, which was much, much smaller, but I really identify with a lot of things we were talking about in terms of getting people to commit and that nervousness of are they going to show up on the day, what are they going to do, are they going to get ill. Can you say a bit more about the dialogue or the surety you need as a producer and a marketer on a project like that.*

Nicky Webb: Well it was the worst nightmare, I suppose, it was our worst nightmare and something that really preoccupied us that people wouldn't turn up, first of all or that they would, once the project began, if lots of people didn't turn up, then the whole thing would fall apart, so I suppose what we tried to do is to make them feel extraordinarily special when they were selected, I mean that was really the first thing, so as soon as they got, I mean there were a lot of people who had applied, so I think by and large, the fact that they had a place and an awful lot of other people and I think there were 35,000 people who applied, so if you get one of 2,400 spaces and you know that all those other people have applied, that does make you feel special, so we did, we kept emphasising how special that was. We did things like, we sent them all a little sort of welcome pack, we rang them three times between being selected and their time on the plinth and those phone calls, although that was a nightmare to administer, you can imagine, because no-one's ever there, what we decided was that it was really important to make people feel that a. this was a real commitment and they'd be letting the side down if they didn't turn up, but also that we would put their minds at rest. So these were real conversations about what can I do, what can I not do, is there a place to leave my stuff, all those sort of questions that people inevitably had, we were able to answer in real conversations, but also other media like Facebook and so on, it meant that people were talking, people were often answering questions before one and another, rather than needing, that's funny, isn't it, that's why it's called One & Other, I guess, yes, people were able, they were part of a community and they definitely as if they were part of a real community. So one of the lovely things that's happened for example is that people who took part in the project began to support other people on the plinth, so you would often find that people posted comments on the pages relating to

plinths, which were supportive of them, particularly if they'd been having a difficult time with the crowd. There was a problem with heckling, you can imagine, then you would find other plinthers often leaping to the defence of the person saying, well, that's just somebody who's drunk on a Saturday night, you know, I thought you were really interesting or whatever it might be, so there was that sense of supportiveness in the community of plinthers themselves and then I think that was the main thing we tried to do was have real conversations, but also allow them to talk to each other, so that we provided the platform if you like and then people really enjoyed the fact that they were part of something very special and in fact some of them did things like, one lady came along and produced a T-shirt which she'd printed with her number on it and then she allowed people, she gave people, not the T-shirt, but the artwork for their own T-shirt with their own number on it, etc, that kind of thing, so people were very very supportive of one another.

*Pam Fromer, Anglia Ruskin University: You named one of your slides the Democratisation of Art with a question mark, did you have any negative criticism about the nature of the project, particularly from the media and how did you address that?*

Nicky Webb: Yes, we did, I think we decided to adopt the same tactic that we did over other forms of control, i.e. not really to comment, because what you tend to find is that when people, for example there was quite a lot of very negative comment about it as an artwork, about Anthony Gormley, which he found terribly wounding, you can imagine, but in fact did help to engender a debate about the nature of art and you know, that is the nature of the project, it was all about, you know, is it art, is it not, is it democracy and action or is it not really very democratic, because there are lots of barriers to lots of people taking part in something like that, not least of all the cost. So you know, I think what we decided to do is to adopt that kind of hands-off approach with criticism in the media, as with criticism elsewhere and I think, well, I would use one example actually, it's not about this project, but about the Sultan's Elephant which was a project that was a huge success and a lot of people came to it and a lot of people enjoyed themselves and some people didn't, you know, particularly if you were a taxi driver, you really didn't enjoy the disruption, but I remember that after the project, there was a huge amount of very positive feedback that we got and a huge amount of good press and stuff and then there was a review which Michael Billington, the theatre critic wrote on the Guardian blog, which was poisonous, really hideous, hated the project, said it was infantile, said it was a waste of money and time and he couldn't get to his matinee, etc. Anyway it was and I remember it coming in and thinking oh, that's Michael Billington and actually that really matters from the point of view of the arts community and so on and we had a debate in the company about whether or not we should do anything about it and decided we couldn't do anything about it, but before an hour was out, as soon as this had come up, there were seventy five responses on the blog from people, not people anybody knew, just people who'd been at the event, just

basically saying, get a life, Michael Billington, I think was the upshot. So a lot of people this week or yesterday and today have been saying you don't need to control everything and although we are known slightly as control freaks, we do try to control quite a lot, but actually you have to step back sometimes and allow people to debate themselves and I think that is in the nature of what we now do.

*Pam Fromer: I think that was one of my question which is really about how you keep control. You talked about there about when to respond to the media, when not to, when to let others, but also this thinking about huge fantastic projects, but all the stakeholders involved and there you were talking about the police, you know, you'd had that letter from the top, but actually that was in their organisation and had filtered down. I wonder if you could talk a little bit about, you know, managing control.*

Nicky Webb: Well, I think sometimes, particularly when you produce events on that scale there are issues about controlling, about keeping people safe, actually and I would give you one example of where we did try to control the messages that went out to the public, we didn't want, for example, the Liverpool project, La Machine, we knew the streets of Liverpool are really narrow and they're really steep and we knew that huge numbers of people filling those streets would be dangerous and we were very keen, for that reason not to allow anyone to expect where the event would be at any one time, because we wanted people to follow the spider, not to be in front of the spider, thereby stopping the spider moving up the street. And so we were really careful not to give out any of that information except to those people who needed it, i.e. the media, photographers, etc, our own teams, but through nothing malicious, I think that somebody trying to be very helpful decided to give the Tourist Information Board a list of all the various photocalls that were going to happen, which we'd sent out to the media under embargo, but we sent out the list of where things would happen at what time and that very helpful person in the tourist information centre put it on their website, sent it out far and wide and of course you can't withdraw any information once it's out there in the public domain and it caused real real issues, operational issues in Liverpool. Well, luckily we were okay and nobody was hurt, but the streets were too full in Liverpool, I would say and that's a very clear example of where you don't want information to get out and you do have to control how much information's out there and what means you use to get it out, because sometimes it can be dangerous, so I think sometimes we take a more controlling attitude, because we have to. But I think communication, going back to what you said about the police, what you referred to about the police, that's really important and especially on events like this, sometimes we find that there's, we've made good contacts with certain stakeholders, but actually they don't communicate necessarily very well with their own staff, so you get a lot of kind of misunderstanding and so it's important to communicate sort of down as well as up.

*Abby from York Theatre Royal: I've been lucky enough to enjoy quite a few of your events in Durham and Liverpool and I just wondered in the true spirit of speculation what's coming up next. Am I allowed to ask that question?*

Nicky Webb: I couldn't possibly say, actually no, of course I'll say, so we're running this event called the Magical Menagerie in Milton Keynes, which is, actually one of the things I did want to say is that one of the problems we have with our events is about place. So what we try to do is surprise people as I've said, but that can be really difficult, it's very difficult to grow your audience if you're always in a different city or if you've always got a new set of stakeholders with every project you produce and Milton Keynes is a real case in point, in that it's the first time we've worked there, but there isn't really, it isn't possible, because we're not in a very very public place, we haven't managed to crack that presence, if you like and so it felt very, it felt to me rather invisible and rather difficult to get the news out, using the techniques we'd normally use, so it doesn't always work and I have to say that I think it's really important to use these techniques in conjunction with one another and be prepared to adapt them if they don't work. The things we're doing next, we're going back to Durham to do another festival of light in 2011, that project was really lovely and made an impact beyond Durham in a way that we didn't necessarily expect it would. We were asked to put together something for the city and to engender and foster a sense of pride and so on for the city itself, but actually huge numbers of people came from outside the city, particularly from the north east region, but also from further afield and that's something we're really looking forward to doing again, in order that we can begin to develop the audience there for that event and I think the frustration as a marketing person is that for me, on our events is that one's not able necessarily, because you don't go back to a place usually, we don't necessarily get to enrich our relationships with audiences and the other thing we're trying to do is to create, we're doing a mad version of, well, what is it, it's a five course Victorian banquet in a garden with the characters from Alice in Wonderland that we're doing in the Norwich Festival next year and then we're trying not produce a very big piece of work which is a series of installations in London, along the river in London, which is a hugely ambitious difficult thing and I've no idea whether we'll be able to pull it off yet or what kind of communication tools we might use. Anyone else?

*Session Chair: I was just going to quickly ask, what is the usual timescale for a sort of a start to an end. It sounds like every project is totally different, the challenges are different, but I was just thinking, where do you start from?*

Nicky Webb: Well, the elephant took us five years, but that was because, that was because we didn't have a company, it was Helen Marriage and me in with two mobile phones and a clipboard in Starbucks, that was it, you know, so the reason it took so long was because, well, a. nobody knew us, nobody trusted us and when you go to, I don't know, the Metropolitan Police and say you want to bring a fifty foot high spider down the Mall, they tend to think you're a bit nuts and

so they didn't take us seriously for a very very long time. So, I suppose that's part of the reason why it took so long, but every project on this scale and particularly projects that happen in public space take a very long time, because of the fact that there's the whole issue about safety and what's allowed and what's deemed appropriate, so quite often we find that people, in the case of the elephant show for example, part of the battle of that show was that people kept saying do do the show, but do it in Battersea Park, don't disrupt the flow and of course the point for us is the disruption, that is why we do it and the reasons why we chose to do it in that very, in the middle of ceremonial London was in order to make the maximum impact that we could and had we done it in Battersea Park or people kept suggesting Milton Keynes, for example, big wide streets, not very busy, you know, all that stuff, it would have made nothing like the impact and the fact that when we landed the rocket in Waterloo Place, it happened to be purely by chance, it happened to be the day when there was a big Cabinet reshuffle going on at No. 10, so the world's media happened to be crossing Waterloo Place on their way between Whitehall, so that was just fluke, but it was very very helpful. It wouldn't have had that kind of impact elsewhere, so in terms of time, sometimes, you know, we put the Durham project together in six months, but that's very very short, usually each project, you know, there's a period of developing a project for about a couple of years before it comes to fruition.

*Helen from the National Theatre: I'm part of looking after NT Live, which is the broadcast at National Theatre productions around the world and I find it really interesting how people relate to us. The Facebook group has quite a small number of people, people relate to their cinema, to the theatre, the National Theatre itself and to NT Live, where do you see people relating to you, is it to the project, is it to you as a company and how do you retain those people to keep talking to them?*

Nicky Webb: Well, that's something that's preoccupying us very much at the moment. I think when we started out, we took a decision at the beginning that we weren't important and that the projects were what we really wanted to give the profile to, but actually latterly we've decided that's a mistake, because of this problem of actually what you want is for there to be an audience for your work, whatever that work is that will follow you and feel committed to you. So, actually we're changing our policy at the moment on that and it's very difficult, because when, as you will know, you're trying to create awareness for a particular show, but also you need to harness all that sort of interest in the town or in the company or whatever it might be and I think that's something that we're starting to think about and particularly for us, one of the crucial things for us is that we can only deliver our projects if we raise the funds. Every single project, our grants from the Arts Council only covers our overheads, it doesn't go anywhere towards the cost of the projects, so every project has to be paid for through fundraising and it therefore really matters that people know who we are, because otherwise our poor development team have a really much more difficult job even than they

normally do. So I think we are starting to address that, but we're not really anywhere with it at the moment.

*Anthony Pickfall, Liverpool Biannual: Possibly a slightly redundant question, because you started to answer it, what I wanted to know about is the conversation now very much between the audiences that are following you, so you started to say that yes, you're considering that. I'm very interested in how far we can encourage and enable people to not only come and see the shows or the spectacles or the exhibitions, but actually to be part of the curatorial process, which is very difficult in terms of having that conversation, because as you say it's a problem to fund the work, it's a problem about how organisations have traditionally operated and still want to work in terms of who controls the idea, how important is it that you remain in control of an idea and whether there is a revolution to be had.*

Nicky Webb: I think there is one to be had if we want it, but I'm not actually, actually we at Artichoke are not convinced at all that we want that revolution, because we believe in presenting the best work that we can and the thing about, had we asked audiences about whether they wanted a model elephant to walk through London the answer probably would have been no, because people can't imagine, most people don't have a great imagination, they can't imagine what they don't know, so it's that fantastic process of bringing people to something and encouraging them to be part of something that is a wonderful surprise for them, that's extraordinary in its own right, isn't it. We all love surprises, don't we and we like being taken on journeys where we feel we've discovered something new and so for us, I think, probably we're not, I think there are ways of engaging people without necessarily having to hand control over the actual artwork to other people, but that's probably the wrong answer in this context, isn't it, but it is what I think.