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Clore Leadership-AHRC Online Research Library Paper

The Artist as Leader: case studies towards a working definition

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2010/11 Artist Fellow on the Clore Leadership Programme

Joshua SOFAER

Research Report

Arts & Humanities Research Council

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ARTIST AS LEADER:

Case studies towards a working definition

Abstract

What could the term ‘artist leader’ mean? Does it provide a useful way for thinking about the practice of artists and leadership in general? These two questions have been at the centre of this research.

A series of 7 recorded interviews with artists and cultural practitioners have restated those questions in the context of artist collectives, artist run institutions, socially motivated practices, the intersection of art and business, education, and the work of art itself.

Although many of the interviewees recognise that they are exercising a form of leadership, most eschew the term ‘artist leader’ for themselves. Part of the disavowal of the appellation ‘leader’ is caught up with what many consider the inescapable popular definition of the term as ‘one who issues commands’. This is seen as irreconcilable with much of what interviewees reflect their art practice to be about, which often seeks to interrogate structures of power.

Presented with an expanded notion of leadership as ‘a creative behaviour that is conscious and intentional about change’, interviewees were, in general, more willing to see what they were doing in terms of a leadership agenda but remained sceptical as to the use value of a term that had to be reimagined before it could effectively mean something.

It remains the contention of this research that it is important to interrogate the relationship of artists to leadership and to press for a consideration that artists might be offering creative alternatives to the traditional leadership roles. It is part of the conclusion of this research, that it is precisely because artists find value in doubting the terms of ‘conventional leadership’, that they make inspiring leaders.

This research report is precisely that: it reports on the research that took place between September 2011 and February 2012. The main publication point will be a dedicated micro-site of www.a-n.co.uk from which users will be able to listen to the unedited recordings of interviews with each of the individuals and groups that form the core of this study. As such, the ‘raw data’ of the research will be accessible to others. It is hoped that it will produce further interpretations and considerations of the notion of artist as leader.

Reason for undertaking research

For the first time in the 2010/11 intake, the Clore Leadership Programme named a dedicated ‘Artist Fellow’. This provokes the questions:

- What does it mean for an artist to be a leader?
- How does leadership manifest in the things artists do?
- How can we rethink the role of an artist in the context of the need for leadership?

Over the last year, I have been setting in motion a portfolio of leadership development activity with Clore and I have become increasingly interested by the idea of 'the artist as leader'. I am committed to trying to unravel what exactly that might mean. So far there seems to be little consensus. This research has been an opportunity to draw some disparate threads together.

What is interesting is that for many of my artist colleagues the idea of the 'artist as leader' just does not scan. Even more, some consider it laughable, almost as if it were somehow an antithesis. Even amongst my Clore fellows there are those who didn't really 'get' what I have been doing on the programme.

This research considers the ways in which artists are leaders and is disseminated to artists and those that work with artists. Ultimately I want artists to feel empowered to be leaders themselves and for those who work with them to take artist leadership potential seriously.

An important precursor to this research project has been the work of Anne Douglas and Chris Fremantle, who undertook a three-year research project, *The Artist as Leader* (2006-2008) and published their findings in 2009. In Section One of their report, 'Policy and the Context for Practice', the authors outline the cultural landscape in the UK and the opportunities and needs for leadership with particular focus on the creation and implementation of policy. In Section Two, 'Three Scenarios', they explore the 'influence of quality art', the role of 'artists leading within organisational practices', and 'artists who have positioned themselves in the political'¹.

One of the conclusions of their research is:

'The need to publicly recognise where artists are leading, and have led, through practice; highlighting the relevance of their leadership to wider cultural, social, environmental and economic development.'²

This 'need' has been a foundational principle of the 7 interviews that form the basis of my own research project.

Context

In their essay 'Engaging hearts and minds: leadership and taking part', Nicola Jennings and Holly Jones argue for a new style of leadership.

'We call it 'Engaging Leadership' and we believe it has a fine pedigree in existing creative practice. Embedded within their creative practice, cultural organisations hold the key to an exciting new leadership model built upon principles of dynamic engagement.'³

It is Jennings and Jones contention that new forms of participative art practice that engage directly with the public, offer a model for how cultural institutions themselves could be run.

It is a persuasive idea but what it dodges is the possibility that it could be the art and artists themselves that are doing the leading.

Most artists are 'portfolio people', which is to say that they work with a range of different individuals and organisations in a variety of contexts. As Charles Handy says in his book *The*

¹ Anne Douglas and Chris Fremantle, *The Artist as Leader Research Report*, On The Edge Research, Gray's School of Art, The Robert Gordon University, Garthdee Road, Aberdeen AB10 7QD (2009) ISBN 978-1-901085-98-3

² Ibid. p.8

³ Nicola Jennings and Holly Jones, 'Engaging hearts and minds: leadership and taking part', in *A cultural leadership reader* ed. By Sue Kay and Katie Venner with Susanne Burns and Mary Schwartz (London: Cultural Leadership Programme & Creative Choices°, 2010. Downloadable at <http://www.culturalleadership.org.uk>) pp.24-31 (p.28)

Elephant and the Flea: ‘...portfolio people are seldom in a position to run any sizeable organisation. We do trade power for influence.’⁴

If artists are leaders, then surely one of the main ways in which that leadership is revealed is through the effect of influence.

Although it is true that artists are in positions of executive authority and identifiable leadership roles in the conventional sense, across culture, in my perspective, leadership is resolutely not (necessarily) a position in an organisation, and definitely not (necessarily) the ‘head’ of an organisation. As such, when determining whom to interview, it was the aim to find a range of ‘exemplars’ for different potential incarnations of leadership, while at the same time not wanting to try and offer defining ‘types’.

Case Study Selection

The aim of the interviews was to bring together an exciting series of inspiring examples that would collectively interrogate the idea of the ‘artist leader’. There were several key situations that were identified:

- **artist collectives** – flattened hierarchies / artists coming together to support each other / artists coming together to support the sector
- **artist run institutions** – an expanded notion of the ‘artistic director’ / the institution or building as a form of art making
- **socially engaged practice** – engagement and leading of a community through arts practice / the instrumentalisation of art
- **art and business** – the role of art in the context of industry / art and the economy / art delivering economic goals
- **art and education** – teaching as a form of art practice / education as leadership
- **leading the genre** – the artwork as a form of leadership / managing a studio / the art system / the art market
- **the institution as artwork** – artists utilising conventional models only to subvert their meaning / organisation as meaning

The interviewees were (in chronological order of interview):

- **Field Theory**, an artist collective based in Melbourne, Australia, who came together to support each other and the wider sector
- **First Draft**, a long-standing Artist Run Initiative in Sydney, Australia, which is run by a rotating board of 8 practicing artist Directors
- **Masato Nakamura**, an artist based in Tokyo, Japan, who has recently set up an ambitious new model of art centre, 3331 Chioyda
- **Richard Layzell** and **Richard Hicks**, who collaborated as artist and businessman respectively at AIT software company for 7 years
- **Kate Love**, Senior Lecturer at Central Saint Martins College of Art & Design in London, who trained as a painter and has worked in a range of art colleges
- **Cornelia Parker**, sculptor and installation artist who has exhibited internationally at many of the major world art institutions
- **David Wilson**, Founder and Director of The Museum of Jurassic Technology in Culver City, Los Angeles, California

In total 13 people were recorded for formal interview but many more were consulted informally⁵. Interviews were conducted in Australia, Japan, USA and UK. Apart from the trip to meet with

⁴ Charles Handy, *The Elephant and the Flea* (London: Arrow Books, 2002) p.183

⁵ I was the first ‘Thinker-in-Residence’ at Performance Space in Sydney from 28th October – 25th November 2011. The aim was to investigate what it might mean for an artist to be a leader, both for artists themselves and for those who work with artists. As part of this work, which operated in parallel to the AHRC funded research project, I attended 36 separate meetings, with 51 people, in addition I made 1 public presentation and gave 1 public radio interview.

David Wilson at The Museum of Jurassic Technology, interviews took advantage of pre-existing international commitments and the cost of travel was not born by this research project.

The Interviews

(Presented in chronological interview order.)

FIELD THEORY

1st November 2011

Performance Space, Sydney

Recording Time: 52 minutes

fieldtheory.com.au

Jason Maling

Sarah Rodigari

Martyn Coutts

(3 of the 8 founder members of the collective)

Field Theory is a Melbourne based artists' collaborative of 8 that came together in 2010 as "an informal experiment", initially with the intention to form a discussion group. Their work extends from visual art to performance and is sometimes considered under the umbrella term 'live art'. It quickly established an alternative model for funding. Subscribers pay AU\$100 per year to affiliate and support the organisation. In exchange they are sent "gifts" of limited edition artworks that are made exclusively for members by supported artists.

Field Theory has supported 8 artist projects in its first two years. In each year, 2 of the supported projects have been proposed and authored by core founder members and 2 have been external projects loosely curated by Field Theory.

In the first year, the subscription was opened to 222 members. An upper limit was set in order to establish a community and to keep the administrative burden manageable. There are no formal roles within the collective. Those that are able to be present take decisions at weekly meetings. Although individual members of the collective have worked together as artists, the group has not worked as an entire collective on a single art project.

At the time of the interview Field Theory were conducting a cultural leadership initiative supported by the Australia Council (the main public arts funding body in Australia). One of a series of grants offered to promote and explore the idea of cultural leadership, Field Theory's grant, in association with Performance Space, saw them working on a programme of activity in Sydney. Each member of the collective was responsible for mounting an event or excursion that tackled a particular issue relating to leadership and live art. In tandem, Field Theory conducted a series of meetings with key cultural leaders in Sydney (from the park authority to social inclusion workers), to try and promulgate the kind of work they wanted to see happen in the city.

In this discussion 3 of the 8 members of the collective talk about the genesis of the organisation, how it runs, and how they understand the way the issue of cultural leadership operates in relation to what they are doing.

Observations and Comments:

The premise for the creation of Field Theory is to "support work that could otherwise not happen". The imperative is one of action and change. Although members found it difficult to identify themselves as leaders, they could easily understand and label their fellow members as leaders. "I see you guys as leaders", Sarah Rodigari said, "but I don't know if I see myself as a leader".

Field Theory acknowledged that being in receipt of the Australia Council leadership initiative grant, necessarily positioned them as cultural leaders in some respect. They saw it as part of their role to investigate what that might mean. “In terms of what being a leader in this field [of live art] means, there is no precedent; we have to forge a path.” So to some extent the kind of leadership that Field Theory are exercising is determining what leadership actually is in the context of their art practice.

Their investigation meant a “constant questioning” of the terms of leadership but also, the very terms of live art itself. In this way, the ‘exercising of leadership’ became part of their interrogative art practice in and of itself. As was acknowledged towards the end of the interview, Field Theory have felt a bit uneasy about the way in which they have been “led to be leaders” (by the circumstances of the cultural leadership initiative) and this has forced them to try and untangle how the language of leadership might signify for them and their peers. As Martyn Coutts said, “A leader doesn’t need to be on the top of the hill sending the troops to battle.” Rather, they have begun to understand leadership as a kind of interrogative practice that is about shifting opinion and creating change.

Outside of the interview, Sarah Rodigari said to me that one of the main goals of their series of meetings in Sydney with key gatekeepers, was to “saturate and embed the term ‘live art’ in the city to such an extent that we can all just get on with our work”. This model of enabling, both for themselves and their peers, seemed to me a clear demonstration of leadership for the sector.

THE DIRECTORS OF FIRST DRAFT

16th November 2011

First Draft Gallery, Sydney

Recording Time: 36 minutes

firstdraftgallery.com

Dara Gill

Julie Burke

Georgie Meagher

Catherine Connolly

(4 of the 8 Directors)

First Draft is one of the most influential of a series of well-organised and respected Artist Run Initiatives (ARIs) in Australia. Founded in 1985, it now has a well-appointed gallery space in Surry Hills, central Sydney, a separate studio building in Woolloomooloo, and a printing press. It is managed by a rotating group of 8 Directors. It is part of the First Draft constitution that the Directors should be practicing artists.

In 2011 they took on their first member of staff, who acts as the Studio Manager. Otherwise the Directors conduct all the work on a voluntary basis with invigilation support from other volunteers. Directors are in post for a fixed term of 2 years, with 4 outgoing and 4 incoming each year.

The Directors meet weekly. There are new shows every three weeks. First Draft concentrates on new and emerging artists and experimental visual art practices. Most of the Directors have shown at the gallery before they become Directors. All outgoing Directors are offered a ‘free show’ within two years following their Directorship.

First Draft is often the place that artists from New South Wales have their first solo exhibition.

In this discussion, 4 of the 8 Directors, explain the history of First Draft and how it operates day today. They explore the original intention for the gallery, which was to support the work of emerging women artists who were not being recognised by the established gallery system, and how that has shifted to encompass all new and emerging practitioners as they begin their professional artistic career.

First Draft recognises that it is an exemplar for other ARIs in Australia and have seen their model of rotating Directorships, replicated by both other ARIs and in the professional sector (including by the Sydney Biennale).

Observations and Comments:

While the Directors of First Draft identify the organisation that they manage as a leader in the field, they are reluctant to think of themselves as leaders. They talk about their job as being “not to let the ship sink”, to keep the organisation running and not to “drop the ball”.

They consider that the work they are doing is somehow “conquering the new” and “changing attitudes” but they feel this arises as a *response* to trends in arts practices and the needs of the artists they seek to represent, rather than a vision that they as 8 individuals, may bring to the organisation. As Lionel Bawden (Director 2010/11) articulated it, “First Draft is an organisation driven by its main stakeholders”. What is interesting is that the Directors of First Draft are also its stakeholders. They are all early career artists. The majority show at First Draft. In this sense, to lead First Draft also to lead oneself, and the belief in the system (the importance of the ARI and of supporting emerging artists) is balanced by a desire for their own professional development.

Being a Director of First Draft is extremely time consuming. Part of its success is due to the fact that Directors are only ever in place for 2 years. So from the very first day, you know you have less than 24 months to go. This keeps the organisation fresh and vital but it also means that there is a constant re-learning of practical management issues.

Separate to the recorded interview, I sat in on one of the weekly Directors meetings and I was struck by the fact that all the Directors present were having to deal with the administrative decisions of their predecessors. In this way the organisation has to seed trust across its generations of Directors.

ARIs occupy a central place in the Australian art scene. They are considered by many to be a vitally important part of the art ecology. I have no doubt that First Draft is a leading organisation within that scene. Despite their reluctance to see themselves as leaders, the Directors of First Draft are exercising a fragile but highly effective form of collective leadership born out of the passion of volunteering, a belief in the work and reputation of the organisation, and the hope that it will also bring personal rewards.

MASATO NAKAMURA

6th December 2011

3331 Chiyoda, Tokyo

Edited transcript of recorded interview

www.3331.jp

www.m-lab.org

www.commandn.net

www.zero-date.org

himming.jp

Masato Nakamura trained as a painter at Tokyo Arts University. After postgraduate study in Japan and Korea he engaged in a number of art projects, which culminated in 2010 in the inauguration of 3331 Arts Chiyoda, a new model of art centre in Tokyo, of which Nakamura is Founder and Executive Director.

Nakamura is involved in many ventures. On top of his primary role as Director of 3331, he is Associate Professor of Painting at Gedai (Tokyo Art University), a founding member of ‘command N’ artists collaborative, and Director of arts and urban regeneration NPOs Zero-date in Akita, and Himming in Himi, Toyama.

Nakamura has exhibited internationally as an artist, including representing Japan at the 49th Venice Biennial.

In this interview, Nakamura talks about the path he has taken over the last 25 years, his commitment to transforming the art education system in Japan, and to his notion of an expanded arts practice which focuses on complete integration into the community.

3331 Arts Chiyoda is a large former Junior High School building in Akihabara, central Tokyo. It has been converted into an art centre that strives to be at the very heart of the community. The building ranges over 4 floors with an organic rooftop garden. The former classrooms now house separate art organisations, NPOs, technology centres, artist studios and workshops. There is a large gallery space on the ground floor, a library, an artist led toy exchange for children, a community events space, and a café. Additionally 3331 hosts international artist residencies. Artists are encouraged to make work in corridors and other public spaces.

(The title of the building, 3331, alludes to the ‘tejime’, a Japanese custom of ceremonial rhythmic hand clapping, performed at the end of a special event to bring the occasion to a peaceful, lively close. Tejime may be performed at the conclusion of such events as a celebration, meeting of shareholders, or the close of bargaining or other business negotiations. Tejime observes fulfilment, realization, and completion. In this way, the title of the building speaks to the idea of a harmonious community finding fulfilment together.)

Observations and Comments:

The published literature states that, ‘3331 Chiyoda is founded on the basis of artist leadership’. Indeed it is difficult to imagine an institution or building that could more fully embrace the idea of the artist as leader. It was incredibly inspiring.

Masato Nakamura is involved in many initiatives but there seem to be two main imperatives that run across all of his work: the support of artists and the embedding of art in society. 3331 Chiyoda does both of these things.

Nakamura laughed when asked if he thought of himself as a leader but he had to agree that he was. Although he could imagine that all artists were leaders of their practice, the differentiation that he made between ‘artist’ and ‘artist leader’ was “the context of group working”. It was coming together as a group that Nakamura identified as the way in which his artistic practice now operated and it was within this context that he now led. “I have a vision and I ask everyone if they want to follow, in order to make those decisions in the group.”

Although Nakamura was at pains to point out the collaborative nature of all of his endeavours, he is, nevertheless, demonstrably a ‘leader’ in the conventional sense. It is his vision that is carried forward, and he who is the figurehead of the organisation.

There are two seemingly opposing concepts that Nakamura refers to repeatedly in the interview: those of ‘challenge’ and ‘collaboration’. He finds it necessary to challenge the way in which art is taught in the higher education system in Japan⁶, to liberate artists and art practice from its historical strictures; he also wants to challenge the pyramidal structure of the art world, museum and gallery system and to free art from its commodification, where objects accrue value and are sold on. At the same time, he wants to collaborate with these very institutions in order to affect change; he also wants to collaborate with the city authorities and the community at large, and although he never uses the word ‘compromise’ there is a sense that in order to arrive at his ultimate goals (of supporting artists and embedding art in the community) he must sometimes accept compromise while trying to enrol others in his vision.

⁶ The entry examination for art colleges include what some might consider as outdated techniques, including the formal copying of ‘great masterworks’. Art education is often formulaic and restrictive.

RICHARD LAYZELL AND RICHARD HICKS

28th December 2011

Soho, London

Recording Time: 50 minutes

http://www.rescen.net/Richard_Layzell/r_layzell.html

Richard Layzell is an artist working in a variety of media, which include sculpture, installation and performance. Richard Hicks is a businessman who was founder and CEO of AIT, a software company that went from a standing start in 1986 to full stock market listing in 1997.

From 1995 until 2002 Richard Layzell worked, as an artist, at AIT. At first his title was 'Artist in Residence' but when that proved hard for people to understand, he devised the term 'Visionaire'. (Although this was a 'joke' term, it was one that people soon identified with.) Initially Layzell worked 1 day a week at AIT as a freelance contractor but by the end of his 7 year employment he was working 3 days a week and was a member of the company.

In this interview Layzell and Hicks recount how they met on the Greek island of Skyros, when Layzell was the Course Director of a holiday retreat for British nationals. Hicks had gone on the retreat because the Guardian had announced that it was a good holiday for singles. He was unprepared for the impact that the retreat would have. Layzell had engineered a number of activities that were about bonding the group of 60 strangers and stretching their personal boundaries. Hicks thought that some of this could be useful for his company. He approached Layzell and asked if he would come and visit AIT in Henley-on-Thames when they were back in the UK.

Layzell had been interested in the idea of artists working in industry for some time. Attached to O&I (Organisation and Imagination) a continuation of the influential APG (Artist Placement Group) set up by John Latham and Barbara Stevani, he had been looking for an opportunity to explore some of his concerns in relation to artists working outside the artworld, in business contexts.

Hicks was interested in creating "the best company in the world to work for" and he identified that having an artist working on site might deliver that goal.

During the 7 years of his time at AIT, Layzell worked on a range of initiatives at all levels. His main role was to give staff a sense of belonging, and enjoyment of working at AIT. So, for example, he took charge of the meetings, 'curating' them to become more like events or happenings; gave a voice to those who would normally not be noticed (for example, the mini-bus driver); he created bespoke events that addressed the problems and needs of the developing company.

Observations and Comments:

The working relationship that Layzell and Hicks developed came about through a chance encounter. The initial arrangement was informal and on a trial basis. For it to be sustained for 7 years, something successful must have been happening.

It is powerful to hear Richard Hicks talk about the success of having an artist working inside his business. Retention of staff, which at the time was incredibly difficult in the growing technology sector, was well above average. Senior people were making unsolicited applications to work for the company. AIT was listed as 'number 3' on the Sunday Times list of 'Top Companies to Work For'. Although it is difficult to quantify how it was achieved, Hicks is certain that Layzell was influential. "It's more like cookery than chemistry. You have to have the right ingredients."

It is interesting in this context to think about who is leading. As Course Director in Skyros, Layzell had 'led' 60 strangers in a process of engagement that caught Hicks's imagination. Layzell then

worked towards Hick's goal of creating "the best company in the world to work for", a goal that Layzell describes as being a challenge that he wanted to rise to.

What Layzell achieved during that time, may have been in response to Hick's vision but at the same time it was innovative and leading in terms of the relation between arts and business. Throughout his time at AIT, Layzell understood what he was doing as part of his arts practice and considers that his work was developing. "I was being acknowledged for skills that I didn't know I had." He also recognised that he was creating a model that other artists could use, "If I can make this happen maybe other people can."

Layzell refused the opportunity to go full time. He still needed to show work in the more conventional contexts of the artworld and ultimately, perhaps, he had to let go of the hold AIT had on his creativity. For the duration of 7 years, Layzell and Hicks formed a collaboration that proved both artistically stretching for Layzell and made sound business sense to Hicks.

KATE LOVE

31st January 2012

Soho, London

Recording Time: 56 minutes

www.csm.arts.ac.uk/research/staffresearchprofiles/drkatelove/

Kate Love is Senior Lecture at Central Saint Martins College of Art & Design in London. Trained as a painter in the 1970s and 80s at Goldsmith's College, Love started teaching shortly after her Fine Art MA. "I thought that teaching in an art school was part of my art practice." Love has worked in many UK art schools, a strategy she describes as a kind of "guerilla teaching". Currently she works on the BA and MA Fine Art courses at CSM. "My role is to think about writing as a practice; trying to think of writing as a practice like painting."

Love finds many of the terms under discussion problematic: 'teacher', 'artist', 'leader' are all contested. "I don't like the word 'teaching' because I don't think I'm teaching anything."

In this discussion Love talks about her journey and her understanding of what is happening in the space of the art college. She interrogates the idea of the 'artist as leader' by considering both the meaning and use of the phrase. "If you are allied to the left you are far more likely to be sceptical of the idea of leadership."

When confronted by the term 'leader' Love immediately considers the political 'buffoon', especially at this moment in time, when 'leaders' across the world are being ousted from their tyrannical regimes. "I don't think of artists as leaders," she says, "it's hard work to make it signify".

When asked about her own role as a teacher and mentor, she says, "I would be nervous of thinking I was leading anybody in anything. It suggests in some way someone is following me, and that I am taking them somewhere by my own volition."

Observations and Comments:

Kate Love's difficulty with the notion of the 'artist leader' articulates a general problem that interviewees (and more informal interlocutors) have found across this research project. The culturally dominant identification of the leader as a 'political buffoon' is simply so prevalent that finding a way to make 'artist leader' mean something else, is exceptionally hard. Further, it raises questions about what the use value of such a resignification might be.

Love points out that the noun 'leader' in many ways stands in opposition to the notion of a creative practice: "Leader sounds singular but most creative processes are ongoing and multiple."

Having spent a year on the Clore Leadership Programme considering 'best practice' models of leadership, the interview with Love made me realise that I have been caught up in a kind of idealised notion of what leadership might mean. My own working definition that leadership is a 'creative behaviour that is conscious and intentional about change', is extremely distant from that of the 'political buffoon'.

Having seen different kinds of leaders in action, working effectively for change and noting the power that these individuals have (including Love herself), and especially how the creative practice of artists can be a highly effective form of leadership, and an alternative to the popular notion of 'the leader', I have felt an imperative to acknowledge where artists were leading. Perhaps the 'behaviour' that I am interested in requires a different vocabulary.

In the face of Love's difficulty with the term 'leader' I offered that perhaps it had become 'crystallised', in other words that the meaning was now fixed. That 'leader' could only mean all the things that Love was troubled by: the political buffoon, the pompous figurehead etc. Love argued that this was never the case and implied that no term was ever immune from shifting signification. The problem, as she articulated it, was getting the resignification "to stick". In other words, the *use* of the term 'leader' in relation to artists, in the sense that I want it to mean, and the efficacy of that meaning, is short-circuited if the popular culture idea of 'the leader' predominates.

Towards the end of the conversation Love suggests that perhaps the way in which I am thinking about 'leadership' is, in itself, a kind of practice; that the task to interrogate the meaning of 'artist as leader' is a form of art making. In this way, Love could understand the idea of 'leading the field' where 'lead' is a verb rather than a noun and has some use value in relation to artists working. Perhaps this is where we end up: 'leadership' is something that you do (that anyone can do), something that you practice, rather than inhabiting a position, as the term 'leader' implies.

CORNELIA PARKER

1st February 2012

Shoreditch, London

Recording Time: 33 minutes

www.frithstreetgallery.com/parker.html

Cornelia Parker is a British sculptor and installation artist who exhibits internationally. Parker studied at Gloucestershire College of Art and Design (1974–75) and Wolverhampton Polytechnic (1975–78). She received her MFA from Reading University in 1982 and honorary doctorates from the University of Wolverhampton in 2000, the University of Birmingham (2005) and the University of Gloucestershire (2008). She was shortlisted for the Turner Prize in 1997 and appointed OBE in 2010.

Parker describes her position in the artworld as that of a "maverick" or outsider, and this is something she is keen to maintain.

In this interview, Parker talks about how she came to art making and the way in which she understands what it is she is doing. "My default position is always to undo something and then redo it." Parker is resistant to the idea that she would become an 'expert' in something, "I don't want to be too adept." In this way she meets the material afresh each time.

Parker says that she is "reinventing the wheel with every piece I make". Attracted to exploring and challenging 'received ideas', part of her method of inquiry is to unpick commonsense assumptions.

Observations and Comments:

Parker is reluctant to be considered a leader: "It sends a chill through my heart because I don't want to be a leader. A leader presumes that you are in authority, that there is something you can

teach, that there is a path that you can lead people on.” She continues, “I like being lost. If you are a leader it presumes that you know where you are going.”

When offered conventional positions of leadership: head of committee, course director, even lead artist, Parker has refused. Part of this is to do with her understanding and relation to power. “I never wanted a position of power. All my work is about undoing positions of power”.

When presented with an alternative definition of leadership as a creative behaviour that is conscious and intentional about change, and asked to respond, Parker says, “I love the idea of being a catalyst. If being a leader is being a catalyst, I’d be very happy about that.”

A lot of Parker’s work presents itself as counter-intuitive about the act of creation. Squashing, exploding, ripping apart, Parker uses destruction and deconstruction as part of her creative process. This flips on its head the idea of what creation might be and has formed a new vocabulary of creativity. In this sense, Parker has ‘led the field’ in contemporary art. When presented with this reading of her work, she says, “Perhaps I should be leader backwards: redael”. Although Parker makes this statement in a light-hearted and jokey way, this idea of doing leadership backwards, of being a ‘redael’, is actually very productive for this research. Many of those interviewed have felt that the term ‘leader’ is just not useful in the context of art practices. As Parker herself says, “I don’t find the word ‘leader’ useful.” Perhaps ‘redael’ can conjure (at least conceptually, if not in common parlance) this form of artistic leadership, which is continually at question and seeks to interrogate structures of power. If part of what this research project is trying to do is to understand what a working definition of ‘artist as leader’ could be, then ‘redael’ seems to offer an answer.

One of the particularities of contemporary arts practice is that it is process driven. The ‘outcome’ is often only the way of publicly sharing that process. Parker differentiates between the goal-oriented focus of the leader, and the process of an artist. “You don’t necessarily know what you’re doing.”

The work which is exhibited, must, in Parker’s view, maintain a space in which the viewer can bring their own meaning: “The work needs to have a potential space in it that people can occupy.” Once it is in the world, the work *does the work*, “I like the idea of the work having its own life.”

These sensibilities of lack of direction, a focus on process and experimentation, space for different interpretations and meaning, all seem to sit in contradistinction to the popular reading of a leadership agenda but perhaps this is what the artist as leader is, ‘redael’, doing leadership backwards.

DAVID WILSON

17th February 2012

The Museum of Jurassic Technology, Los Angeles

Recording Time: 39 minutes

www.mjt.org

David Wilson is the Director of The Museum of Jurassic Technology in Los Angeles. Fascinated by museums and the public communication of science, Wilson studied natural sciences at the University of Michigan. Interested in motion pictures, he later went to California Institute of the Arts to develop his skill set. He made television commercials, focussing on technical effects. These two sets of interest, biology and natural history on the one hand, and presentation and motion pictures on the other, led to the creation of The Museum of Jurassic Technology. “One day it just occurred to me that I essentially wanted to build a museum.” That was in 1984. Today, nearly 30 years later, the museum has a devoted international following, and is widely regarded as a unique and inspiring cultural institution, especially within science, museum and art communities.

The Museum of Jurassic Technology is difficult to categorise. This difficulty is part of what it is about. What Wilson calls, “the grey areas” are part of both the museum’s subject matter and its operative mode. Wilson’s “boiler plate” description, goes something like this: The Museum of Jurassic Technology is a museum that is inspired by the history of the institution of the museum. It

references a time when museums were encyclopaedic rather than specialist. As such, The Museum of Jurassic Technology encompasses exhibits from natural history, the history of science, the history of art, ethnography and so on. (“As we come up with new exhibits we just add to the list.”)

This description, while accurate as far as it extends, does not, however, help those who have no knowledge of the museum, to understand what the experience of going to it might be. The Museum of Jurassic Technology is a ‘work’ in and of its own right; in other words, it is more than the sum of its constituent exhibits. It is often the connection between exhibits that account for the experience of the visitor. (Exhibits include a series of glass vitrines showcasing “vulgar remedies”, for example, consuming mice to cure chilblains, to the work of micro-miniaturist Hagop Sandaldjian, whose sculptures, which include a proportionally accurate statue of Napoleon mounted in the eye of a needle, can only be viewed with the aid of a microscope.)

In this interview, Wilson talks about the imperative to create a museum, how he understands what it might be doing, authorship, the role of doubt, and explores the idea of creative leadership.

Observations and Comments:

David Wilson talks about the creation of The Museum of Jurassic Technology almost as if it were a divinely inspired vocation. It is as if the first half of his life were spent waiting for the idea to come to him, “My first sense of an epiphany took place in the Science Museum in London. I think I was 6 or 8 years old.” And the second half of his life were in service to its implementation, “I had built a case to keep the dust off some electronics and I placed it over these other objects and it looked like a display case, and then that just opened up this tidal wave. For 3 hours I was just writing as fast as I could write and it took me 5 years to complete all the ideas I had had that one morning.”

One of the imperatives of the museum is to promote the value of doubt (not just of what we are experiencing in the museum but a wider institutional critique). When I ask if he ever had doubts about building a museum, Wilson attaches doubt to the process and pragmatics, but never to the outcome. “It just felt absolutely right. [...] The material that we are able to present is so compelling, and so interesting, and so wonderful, and the process is so nourishing – what’s to doubt?”

For a long time, nobody would come to the museum and Wilson would stand outside, playing the accordion, trying to drum up interest.

David Wilson is described in the literature of The Museum of Jurassic Technology as its ‘Director’. But this title does not account for the level of engagement and authorship that Wilson has undertaken. Although I might understand what Wilson has created to be the work of an artist, he is not sure. “I’ve never thought of myself as an artist.” Part of this is to do with a social agenda that wants to encourage the collapse of conventional hierarchies: “I am not at all certain at the distinction between an artist and other people. [...] Just what exactly is that distinction? Maybe it’s more valuable to leave the grey areas larger and more grey. I’m far more comfortable when things are a little less precisely defined.” The paradox perhaps, is that it is this kind of attitude, which is demonstrable in his work, that makes Wilson, in the minds of many, an artist.

Similarly to the way in which Wilson considers the boundaries between artist and not artist to be spurious inventions, so too, he eschews the idea of leadership. “It never occurred to me to think of myself as a leader.”

When pressed to consider the idea of the ‘cultural leader’ or the ‘artist as leader’ Wilson responds, “We are happiest when people leave inspired. [...] I don’t know how leadership fits into the work that we do, unless you can consider inspiration as a form of leading. [...] When I am inspired by something, it leads me forward.”

Wilson acknowledges that The Museum of Jurassic Technology has inspired others, not just in terms of the value that is attached to its displays but for what it represents as a kind of ‘economic

statement' that is alternative to other forms of cultural institution. "We have been told by people that we have given them courage to undertake projects they would not otherwise have undertaken."

Throughout the interview, Wilson refers to a collective 'we'. He never identifies as a singular author. "[To acknowledge] the merging of minds that takes place in collective and collaborative endeavours, that is only acknowledging what is true, what is real. The assertion of individual authorship seems disingenuous; it doesn't seem honest. [...] Ideas seem to appear in the space between two people working on something." This understanding that no ideas occur from a vacuum and that all cultural production is necessarily therefore collaborative, requires Wilson to disavow some of the conventional understanding of leadership. Perhaps this is what makes him such an inspiring leader.

Publication and Dissemination Plans

There are two main ways in which the research will be disseminated: (i) through seminar presentations, and (ii) through a dedicated microsite of www.a-n.co.uk

(i) Seminar Presentations

In these seminar presentations over the course of the research, I have been able to test out some of the ideas about 'artist as leader', to promulgate the idea that artist leaders exist and that the form of leadership exercised by artist leaders might be particular and even contrary to the ways in which leadership is commonly understood.

Leading through Practice

A seminar for Artists and Training Providers to examine issues around Artist Led Leadership in Participatory Settings

17 October 2011

Art Works, Paul Hamlyn Foundation at BAC, London

Challenges for the new theatre artist

Dramatikkens Hus, Oslo and Akademi for Scenekunst, Fredrikstad

22 January 2012

Dramatikkens Hus, Oslo

Artist as Leader

MA Performance & Visual Practices, University of Brighton

12 March 2012

University of Brighton

(ii) Website

To extend the reach of the research, I am working with a-n, the Artists Information Company and their subsidiary AIR (Artists' Interaction and Representation) who are the largest network of artists in the UK, currently with over 16,500 members. I am grateful to Susan Jones, Director and Publisher for her collaboration.

The idea is to create a 'cascade effect' and to get artists thinking about leadership. I want artists to develop a sense of what might be possible by thinking of themselves as leaders, or rather what leadership might mean in the context of art practice. Too often artists are put in a position of being 'reactive' to opportunities and commissions. Thinking of themselves as leaders by looking at a range of pre-existing models I want to inspire artists to think about what they can do.

I also want people who work with artists to think of artists as potential leaders and to empty out the old model of the artist who only has a stake in the isolated fabrication of their work.

In summer 2012 an edited version of this report, the audio recordings of the interviews, and where appropriate the transcripts, will be published on the a-n website and advertised to members.

As some of the interviews were conducted in Australia, Japan and USA, it is hoped that it will be possible to link in with artist networks in these countries too. NAVA (National Association for Visual Arts) in Australia has already been invited to host a link to the a-n microsite.

Conclusion

It would, perhaps, be accurate to say that whatever the operative position, few people would self-define as a 'leader'. Even when the job title includes that term (Course Leader, Party Leader, Group Leader) the idea of being 'a leader' is generally something that is bestowed by others. Perhaps this is truer for artists and cultural producers, than those who are not, because of the way in which art has resisted hegemony.

In almost all cases, interviewees were reluctant, or even opposed, to using the term 'artist leader' without considerable clarification. Although many of the interviewees recognise that they are exercising a form of leadership, most eschew the term 'artist leader' for themselves. Part of the disavowal of the appellation 'leader' is caught up with what many consider the inescapable popular definition of the term as 'one who issues commands'. This is seen as irreconcilable with much of what interviewees reflect their art practice to be about, which often seeks to interrogate structures of power.

Presented with an expanded notion of leadership as 'a creative behaviour that is conscious and intentional about change', interviewees were, in general, more willing to see what they were doing in terms of a leadership agenda but remained sceptical as to the use value of a term that had to be reimagined before it could effectively mean something.

But if we are to understand leadership as a matter of affect and not of intention, which is to say that we judge leadership by impact (rather than, for example, as a titled position of authority) then we need a way of recognising the impact that artists are having through the range of modes with which they operate.

It remains the contention of this research that it is important to interrogate the relationship of artists to leadership and to press for a consideration that artists might be offering creative alternatives to the traditional leadership roles. It is part of the conclusion of this research, that it is precisely because artists find value in doubting the terms of 'conventional leadership', that they make inspiring leaders.

While the argument for the power of 'creativity' is being made across business and social sectors, it is important that those directly involved in arts practices do not lose influence through the disavowal of a set of terms that have come to mean something limiting in certain contexts. As the politics of identity (especially the terms of sexuality and race) proved in the second half of the Twentieth Century, it is only through the reclaiming of language that you take hold of meaning and effect change. It is when terms are forced to resignify that they are put to work for a different agenda.

Perhaps there is something in Cornelia Parker's notion of the 'redael', of doing leadership backwards, that can act as a metaphor for a form of leadership, which is both on the one hand visionary, inspiring, influential and innovative, and at the same time, questioning, interrogative, plural, and doubting.