



## **PEER 2 PEER SEMINAR**

### **ROYAL COLLEGE OF ART APRIL 2nd 2001**

### **DOCUMENTATION NOTES**

#### **INTRODUCTION**

These notes are intended to indicate the breadth of issues discussed during the event. They are not exhaustive, but are culled from notes taken by participants during the group discussions. Additional contributions have been added at the end of this document.

Video documentation (in Quicktime format) of the group presentations can be found at:  
[www.peer2peer.org.uk](http://www.peer2peer.org.uk)

#### **GENERAL THEMES**

The aim of P2P was to explore questions of access to emerging networks and the potential for new kinds of cultural and artistic spaces to emerge as broadband, radio, wireless and ubiquitous computing affect and further mesh public and private spaces.

How artists and designers interact with physical, social, cultural, regulatory and business structures was a key issue for debate as well as the following sub-agendas:

- the changing cultural and social ecology of public and private spaces
- how to work with industry and government and with whom
- the global versus the local, or ubiquitous computing versus local specificity, or universal machines versus embedded devices
- the role of art and design in intervention and collaboration – research rather than product-driven activity, stimulation rather than consumption
- the dichotomy between content and infrastructure, or their enmeshing

#### **OUTCOME**

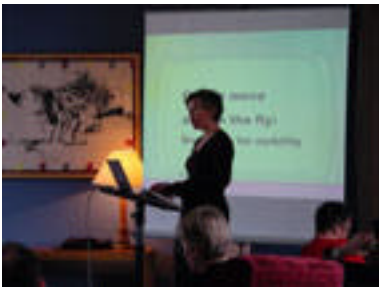
- The event highlighted some key issues affecting collaborative and cooperative partnerships between the cultural sector, industry and academia, notably the lack of models.
- There was a strong feeling that partnerships were desirable for all parties, but that with few examples to demonstrate the benefits, the argument for closer integration of creative practices in research and business was going round in circles.
- Most successful examples of collaboration tend to operate around personal relationships – two or more people from different disciplines coming together because of a personal bond rather than an institutional bond.
- Government is unlikely to offer the lead, but more likely to respond to 'concrete' examples.
- A loose, self-organising network enabling regular meetings and virtual interaction would help cohere those interested in collaborating.

## PRESENTATIONS

Five brief presentations were made to help frame the day's discussions and suggest possibilities for models of cooperation or ways in which artists and designers might be able to benefit industry through their approach to technology:



**DON FORESTA**



**LUCY KIMBELL**



**CAROLINE GRIFFITHS**



**PHILIP PHELAN**



**RORY HAMILTON & JON ROGERS**

## DISCUSSION GROUP I

Reporter: Peter Ride

Members: Rory Hamilton, Carsten Sorensen, Ron Corbett, Paul Bonaventura, Joan Shigekawa, Jon Rogers, Giles Lane, Philip Phelan, Alison Craighead & Jon Thomson.



There were five key areas the group identified and the discussion focused around:

- There was discussion of the intended and unintended effects and consequences of technology and technological development such as interaction overload – it is important to look at new ways to deal with the social effects of technology. Technology can take over the direction and create constraints and compromises for artists and social users. Artists need to explore and engage in the new but not be immersed in it yet you can only understand the limitations by being immersed in it.
- Industry has a different imperative from cultural producers: there are different objectives and outcomes that are not necessarily mutual. Collaboration itself is a complex term, maybe there are new ways we can think about it, perhaps research can give us models for projects that have multiple targets or intents.
- Artists can add value, socially, critically and creatively to technology based projects. There is also a shift in the role of artists as they are managing and articulating new areas of knowledge and can help us understand how we operate socially and as individuals using networks and information. Yet at the same time the role of artists and the way that role understood socially is itself changing in terms of the permanence of artwork and process based activity changing the way we look at artists.
- There is a change in our understanding of technology and its social implication – it doesn't work smoothly as we assumed it would, there is a lack of faith in technology or its authority. We can observe, but don't know, how to measure the effects of technologies.
- There is a shift in the understanding of ownership of technology and what we regard as being authoritative or useful in the ownership.

## DISCUSSION GROUP 2

Reporter: Scott deLahunta

Members: Roger Silverstone, Michael Craven, Matt Adams, Michael Atavar, Caroline Griffiths, Roshini Kempadoo, David Sinden, Tony White.



- A) Artists can play two roles:
  - 1) to 'push' the boundaries of technologies (although it was noted that specifically which technologies could be pushed is very much context-dependent) and
  - 2) to help provide bridges between old and new technologies (inspired by Philip Phelan's text top box) or provide a 'reappraisal of existing technologies', etc.
- B) Artists can provide 'out of the box' thinking in consultancy roles for industry/ applied science labs, etc. In a small group, they could be useful to kickstart projects and to help in expanding on the language of metaphors related to 'content' e.g. – content, in the hands of artists, could become 'atmosphere, ambience, perfume, relationships' etc.
- C) There are two views on the future of industry and potential for collaborations with artists: the pessimistic view which sees industry and business becoming increasingly focused on the bottom line, short term thinking and increasing competition. The pessimistic view does not see much room for involvement of or investment in collaborations with artists and at its most extreme sees society and social values in decay, etc.; the optimistic view recognises shifts in the culture of commerce away from these negative observations – that the sense of social insecurity, diminished loyalty in business to employees or employers, etc. shifting as a new wave or sense of ethical and social responsibility is beginning to possibly emerge.

In the context of this optimistic view – we could usefully create bridges between industry and artists by engaging with those working in the social sciences who can bring to bear an analytical view of the arts and arts practices that will help industry better understand its potential value to them. This should also coincide with efforts to join the three pillars of education, culture and industry into one 'civic space' where the three can mutually inform one another.

## DISCUSSION GROUP 3

Reporter: Charlie Gere

Members: Karel Dudesek, Chris Townsend, Lucy Kimbell, Adrien Sina, Joan Johnston, Geoff Cox, Matt Locke, Quim Gil, Andy Stamp.



The group identified the following areas as of particular importance in considering the issues:

- The major part of the discussion focused around the artist and the role they might play particularly in relation to the avant garde.
- The relationship between artisan and technologist and particularly the role of the avant garde – what that might be – how that might be characterised.
- There is a lack of historical awareness of the relations between artists and technology and industry; things that seem to be 'new' are often not so.
- The often problematic relationship of artists and industry.
- The possible positive role of media centres.
- The problematics of broadcast distribution in relation to artistic practice and the questions of the autonomy and critical space.
- Questions of populism and critical debate.
- The possible role of artists as negative agents – critical & unpredictable.
- The increasing need of artists for lawyers.
- Artists traditional use of lo-tech, the best work has often been lo-tech.

## DISCUSSION GROUP 4

Reporter: Hannah Redler

Members: Dan Pinchbeck, Helen Cadwallader, Gabriella Kardos, Adrian Brazier, Brendan Walker, Don Foresta, Daniel Angus, Honor Harger, Andrew Chetty, Caspar Bowden, Alice Angus.



- the major part of the discussion was focused around a sense of alarm expressed at the degree to which the area is not simply industry driven but driven by an attempt to meet public demand yet there is a very limited understanding or idea of what public demand actually is.
- There was also concern over issues of privacy and security. These were issues such as conceptual matching / geographical pinpointing / encryption.
- Why do we need, become dependent on this technology – what does this technology offer? Technology is not always able to provide what people would like, bandwidth & speed etc. It is crucial to look at how it is and can be used – e.g. for some people text based communication is less inhibiting than using the current graphical interfaces. The artist as researcher was raised as important in exploring these issues. The context in which technology is developed and content seen is important
- At the crux of the technology is the ability to communicate in a new way. For example finding shared interests with different populations (not necessarily geographical) is possible. To an extent our reality is defined by communication and the new lines of communication available alter this. However there is great complexity in human communications that cannot be standardised and it is important to be aware of the 'class issues' in terms of what technology is available to whom.  
Again the importance of artistic research was raised in this context.
- There is need for more critical discussion on the nature of the medium. The technology doesn't develop 'by accident' or outwith political influence, there are thousands of decisions, some seemingly minor, that all impact on the nature of the development. For cultural activity to be part of these developments and have a 'space' in the resulting 'technology' there needs to be input, direct or indirect, in these early stages. Not necessarily intervention (though that has a place) but interaction and integration. Some of the most successful, and very subtle, strategies may be making relationships one to one rather than trying at the corporate level to affect development. This P2P day is one such example. In the field independent voices are important and it does not necessarily mean working in companies but may mean doing projects like MARCEL and FLIRT that 'lead by example' and take an element of control into their own hands.
- While there should be spaces for art and artists it is important that they should not be only relegated to an art space ghetto hence the above strategies.
- There is a need for artists to continue to redress the balance of capitalist driven society.

## OTHER OBSERVATIONS

### Unattributed

- What is the role of arts in technology and the purpose of artists work?
- Is SoMa not, to some extent, a replica of the old dream of dissolving the barrier between art as life (?) and one in which artists are given the cultural status as power?
- Danny Angus thought that it would be easier for people like him from the commercial sector to get involved if there was some kind of 'brand' that they could 'belong to' for the discussion groups etc. That would also allow people to identify with each other and he thought that it would help enable collaborations between the sectors if the commercial sector could see an artist was part of the same 'group'. (But then SoMa is that, or is SoMa too broad). Perhaps we just need to make it clearer to him and others that they are all participants in SoMa.

### Charlie Gere

- I want to pick up on a remark Don made about the failure of artists, despite some fifty or so years of television and several decades of video art, to inhabit or explore television.
- This seems to me, at least, to beg the question of what has constituted the artists role, both ideally and in practise, in relation to technologies of communication.
- One way of constructing the history of artistic modernism in – of a sense of engagement with and resistance to the ubiquity and the un – of communication technology and their role of – the hegemony of dominant ideology – to act as a blockage, a source of noise and perturbation.
- To readily explore the means of communication, court the danger of being swept along by powerful vectors of transmission and to be have – capacity for resistance.

### Adrien Sina

- Marinetti's telephone performance in 1917: on actor on the stage, the other present by telephone. The question of shared virtual spaces, telepresence
- Rethinking the role of Media Centres as a "flexible link" between Artists and Industries which can absorb the irregularities of artistic processes which deal with hesitation, mistakes, negativity, dissidence, unachievements which are not directly the concerns of the Industries
- The Negative, Unpredictable and Critical role of the artists
- The aesthetics of low tech versus the hegemony of high tech Artists should sometime turn back to low tech in order to improve their conceptual issues which can feed then high technological works
- The avant-garde is hidden during long periods, which means that Industries and founding institutions discover it when it's too late
- The discussion should not be limited to the relationships between Media and Technologies. Media works could as well be concerned by social and corporeal issues
- Multiple Targets
- Virusing, contaminating the mass media, art institutions and industries, rather than being submitted to their rules