

Paul R Jones (2010)

Cerbyd - Background

Introduction adapted from Cerbyd Website

"In August 2010, 10 selected artists journeyed across Wales in a bid to forge important links with society by visiting diverse community groups and creating art works in response. The project enabled 10 selected artists to get to know one another while making creative responses to their country and the communities encountered. The participating partners included community groups such as the George Fomby Society of North Wales (Connah's Quay), Raise the Dust - Appalacian Dancers (, Caernarfon Model Railway Club (Caernarfon) and the Randor Beekeepers.

Cerbyd was founded by Tom Goddard and directed with Brian Watkins. It aims to be a potential catalyst for engaging new audiences, for sharing networks to mutual advantage and for cross pollination of ideas and approaches for artists and community groups. It will also benefit those wishing to work in Wales, by bringing contemporary art practice and new audiences into rural areas."¹

Cerbyd as project²

The sphere of artistic practice now encompasses curating, educating, collaborating and activating. In response to the social realm an artist takes on many roles and often produces situated, relational or dialogical outputs, where the exchange of ideas, knowledge or experience are paramount. The artist is concerned with encounter and exchange. In questioning the traditional models of artistic output they now explore modes of sociability and intervention.³

Developing on from institutional critique of the nineteen seventies where artists highlighted the importance of context and participation, much art since the late eighties explored spectatorship and exchange. Many of the works were long term, durational and processed based and aimed to engage with a multiple audience. Since the late eighties the social field⁴ has become an important aspect within art practice that now include terms such as 'the project' and 'network'. These modes of working reconfigure art and society.

The **Project** become prevalent in the nineteen nineties as an umbrella term to describe artistic output that did not specifically generate an exhibition. In fact projects tend to view the exhibition in terms of a medium rather than an end product. A **Project** can include approaches such as collective practice, self-organized activist groups, trans-disciplinary research practice or participation art. However, fundamentally a **Project** sets out to rethink the relationship between art and society.

¹ Goddard, T. Cerbyd: About [2010] <http://www.cerbyd.org/> [last accessed 10 March 2011]

² Claire Bishop's presentation on with the notion of the **Project** at the TATE Britain has been a valuable resource for this section. See *Art and The Social: Exhibition of Contemporary Art in the 1990*, 30th April 2010 [online] Available:

<http://www.tate.org.uk/britain/eventseducation/symposia/20917.htm> [last accessed 20 October 2010]

³ Vivinee Riess in Butler, D, & Riess, V. [2007], *Art of Negotiation*, Manchester, Cornerhouse Publishing. p10-19.

⁴ Artists such as Marc Dion and Suzanne Lacy are just two examples of artists embedding themselves within the social field.

Conviviality played an important role within the Cerbyd experience.⁵ Each visit was an exploration of a relational micro-territory, within which inter-human exchange occurred. Openness and dialogue were key aspects to the success of the Cerbyd Project. The interactions between the artists and selected groups targeted forms of human relations⁶ and could be studied as portraits of community.⁷

For both the artists and the societies this experience lay outside of their normal routine. Each performed for the other, creating a zone for reception, participation and relation. The premise being that through this series of Host-Guest transaction further interactions and collaborations could take place.⁸

Cerbyd was travel as art.

One can understand Cerbyd as a journey in which the artists became tourists of the social. It was a pilgrimage, a way of world-making. A Grand Tour of Wales that yielded encounters in which the artists took on the role of explorers, visiting micro territories, observing and participating in rituals and customs of the societies they met. This created a trajectory of encounters. As Cerbyd journeyed across the Welsh landscape an itinerary of time, movement and space was recorded. ⁹ Each new encounter brought with it new knowledge, raised by both a geographical and psychological shift.

Cerbyd as collaborative practice?

Many discussions were concerned with the future of the Cerbyd experience and focused on the idea of collaboration. This included collaboration between the artists and the invited groups. However, questions arose as to whether Cerbyd was a collective or collaboration. What did Cerbyd aim to create out of itself? Fundamental to this argument was the question as to what collaboration meant to each artist.¹⁰

Collaborations can be organic or formal. It is hoped however, that those involved share a common mission. Collaboration has its precedents in Russian Constructivism, Surrealism and art generated from the nineteen sixties onwards¹¹. These movements aimed to produce work outside of the traditional individual artist ego model. In collaborative work the sense of an artists' own identity becomes less important.¹²

⁵ The notion of Coviviality is explored by Nicholas Bourriaud in Bourriaud, N. [2002], *Relational Aesthetics*, les press du reel

⁶ Further examination of this idea can be found in Bourriauds essay *Relational Aesthetics* in Bishop, C. [2006] *Participation*, London, Whitechapel and MIT Press. P160-171

⁷ What is common to both is that each share being a marginal position.

⁸ Alder, J. *Travel as Performance Art* in *The American Journal of Sociology*, Vol.94. No. 6. [May 1989] pp1366-1391

⁹ Much of the experience of the journey was reconstructed through images and text and through web-based sites such as Twitter, artists Blogs and the Cerbyd web site.

¹⁰ Evidence of this debate can be found on the Cerbyd Web site. [Online] Available: <http://www.cerbyd.org/userimages/forum.htm> [last accessed 20th October 2010]

¹¹ We can also trace collaboration back to the traditional artists studio in which apprentices were employed to mix paints, stretch canvases, create grounds, transfer artists drawing to the canvas, apply under painting and so on. The difference between this and twentieth century models of collaboration is that traditional artist studios would be focused on the Artists style, for example the school of Rembrandt, rather than working towards a more authorless output.

Through collaboration artists develop a sense of trust and flexibility between themselves, and that ideas, however ridiculous they may seem, can be expressed and explored within the site of the **collaborative**.

Perhaps one could argue that Cerbyd acted a matchmaker? After all, one of the reasons why Cerbyd came into existence was so that artists from all over Wales could be introduced, support and mentor each other.¹³

12 Michael P. Farrell, *Collaborative Circles and Creative Works*, [online] Available: <http://collabarts.org/?p=20> [last accessed 22 Oct 2010]

13 For further information about Cerbyd refer to Helen Turner's interview with the organisers and originators Tom Goddard & Brian Watkins [online]. Available: <http://www.cerbyd.org/page21.htm> [last accessed 22 October 2010]