

Crossing Lines::Going Forward 2011_response

Thank you to all who contributed to the request for reflections & proposals regarding how Crossing Lines might develop in the immediate future.

My own response is restrained as I'd like to avoid a 'check-list' of items/ideas that need to appear at each CL session or activities that should be included in a programme for the year. A lot of what has been good over the past year has arisen naturally from the shared affinities of group members; from the commitment to maintain a rolling programme of monthly presentations; from individuals being prepared to share unformed, half-formed, formless ideas that might have a life but equally might be a dead end; from a belief that critique can move us in directions of which we are unaware; from the mutual respect that we have for one another's authenticity. How we develop from here should preserve these characteristics & qualities.

I have filtered the responses but the following summaries & extracts from contributors do, I think, represent a general consensus of views. Mail me if you think I'm wrong.

Practical issues

1] Varying lengths of presentations

10 mins for a quick, "this is what I'm up to" presentation

20 mins for an "i want some feedback" presentation

30 mins for a "I think this is large and will want discussing" presentation

I think these times should be loose. Most people, when asked, opt for a short time slot without recognising the multiple issues that their work can generate & the multitude of ways images can be viewed & related to each other.

2] Stricter editing re. numbers of images during presentations

Twenty images as a guide for a presentation of a single project with liberal exceptions if the narrative of a project demands more.

3] The critical response process

Suggested by Claire Haslam [<http://danceexchange.org/projects/critical-response-process>]

- i. Statements of Meaning: Responders state what was meaningful, evocative, interesting, exciting, striking in the work they have just witnessed.
- ii. Artist as Questioner: The artist asks questions about the work. After each question, the responders answer. Responders may express opinions if they are in direct response to the question asked and do not contain suggestions for changes.
- iii. Neutral Questions: Responders ask neutral questions about the work. The artist responds. Questions are neutral when they do not have an opinion couched in

them. For example, if you are discussing the lighting of a scene, “Why was it so dark?” is not a neutral question. “What ideas guided your choices about lighting?” is.

- iv. Opinion Time: Responders state opinions, subject to permission from the artist. The usual form is “I have an opinion about _____, would you like to hear it?” The artist has the option to decline opinions for any reason.

I think it would be restrictive to formalise the response process but becoming self-aware of our own motives when responding to a presentation would be valuable.

It's reasonable for a presenter to simply listen a statement without feeling the need to respond to it.

I think the idea of Artist as Questioner is excellent & has the benefit of encouraging the presenter to articulate to her/himself their own motives & purposes for assembling the presentation.

Communication issues

1] The CL blog & Google Group

This could be used more effectively to keep us all in the loop regarding sessions that are missed or discussions that could continue. That is in my realm of responsibility & I need to address it.

The other side to this is that we all have demands upon our time & many of these demands are timetabled and/or stringent. I think that we have to accept that our contributions outside the monthly meetings are probably circumscribed by personal & other professional demands & what we give to the group is what we find possible to give.

2] Pre-meets

On meeting days our room is booked from 5pm & can be used by us for any pre-meet business that we choose. I am happy to facilitate this on request. Equally, if any member of the group wants to discuss any issues related to CL issues then I'd be happy to schedule that in on days that I travel down from Cambridge.

3] Facilitating collaborations

Linking with similar groups outside London & the UK is to be encouraged & would have the support of CUCR. I have already had indication that some of last year's PUC group intend to create CL-type groups in their home countries & I will maintain contact in this regard.

Project focus

1] Detours

The two detours that were organised by Brian Daubney (Shadwell/Limehouse & Three Mills) were excellent & thoroughly researched. Although much fine work was derived from them on an individual basis I think we missed a trick in not exploiting their extended project potential & maintaining contact with both Brian & the areas

Creating similar detours is difficult unless we as individuals with an intimate knowledge of a location can put together a detour that informs as well as offers opportunities for further research.

Most of the group are sufficiently engaged in keeping heads above water in study & full-time work.

2] Rambles

We might allow ourselves to be less than comprehensive in preparation & still bring together interested members of the group in an area with which we are familiar, which we consider has possibilities for investigation/inspiration & can suggest avenues for investigation e.g. a number of the south-east suburbs would come within my personal experience. Equally, a location with which none of us is familiar & can be open to multiple methods of inquiry could throw up interesting representations.

3] Group work

The Elephant & Castle project was a fine model for engaging with an urban space & connecting to it both individually & collectively over an extended period. One of its characteristics is that it evolved organically, took multiple forms but hung together as a co-operative project—allotment-digging in contrast to barn-raising.

Michael Rodgers writes: *I thought it was good to have some work that converged on a central theme, and saw room for expanding that notion. Given that the E&C thing was fairly spur-of-the-moment in its planning, what could we manage to do if there was something planned with more advance notice? It would be nice to have more time for back-and-forth discussion of project work within the group. That of course means a longer-term involvement in a project, but it need not be massive for each individual in terms of output. It could be interesting to propose a single-image project, for example.*

We might take notice of the direction of individual interests as they're expressed in presentations & informal discussions & see where these might lead for a wider collaboration. The involvement that Alex, Claire & Christian had in relation to Canary Wharf would be an example of this.

Exhibition & curation

The gallery space at Linear House in Greenwich is available to us free of charge. The only expense (£30) being that of wall repair after exhibition closure. This is a generous gift from Tony Othen at Linear House & is available to us for as long as the space remains un-let.

It is not necessary for us to take advantage of this offer by considering it only as a space for a full-on two week show as we do at present. If we considered it as an available experimental space (whilst recognising that Linear House is also a place of transit & other people's daily work space) then we might consider alternative models of curation, use of space & fresh models of collaboration. Thus, an individual exhibition accompanied by a workshop or Crossing Lines meetup; a partnership offering two interpretations of an urban space/experience; a performance piece; an evening sound/vision presentation might be considered.

Panel & conference presentations

I think that we are not in the position of hosting a day's conference. This is not to say that the work that has been generated over the past almost-two years would not be sufficient to support one; rather that the logistics involved, the admin & the official form-filling that would be required

plus the regulations to be observed would, I believe, take us away from the fluid nature of how Crossing Lines has evolved.

If it were the case (as in 'This Is Not A Gateway' this year or Christian's proposal to run an exhibition in conjunction with an already-proposed one-day symposium or conference) that an opportunity arose in which those working in closely related areas could put a panel together then we can support it.

Finally

The Crossing Lines group has been successful because it has had, from its outset, the full support of CUCR. This support is ongoing despite the changes that are occurring within the internal administration of the College.

It is also successful because it hasn't attempted to institutionalise itself with formal procedures. It has had a fluidity of membership & ways of going about its business that reflect its membership & all the personal demands that constrain what each member can commit to.

Michael Rodgers again: *How do we define the group? Are we a group as in a gathering of people in the same space? Are we a group as in a band, acting in unity with a common sensibility? ... the main thing is asking whether Crossing Lines is simply a meeting place to show & share urban photographs, or whether it is a group that wishes to establish a stronger common identity, to create work as a group ... How the group progresses is linked to how the group is understood by its members, so I thought it's important to have that discussion first. That discussion is happening. I think if there's a good, clear, open understanding amongst CL members of how we perceive the group working, then that will best facilitate its development.*

I think the following is reasonable as a way of going about matters in Crossing Lines:

- i. we need space to ramble, think out loud, arrive at new ideas as we improvise
- ii. we should have time for discussion of the single image as for the series
- iii. presentations should be seen as 'notebooks' rather than 'novels'
- iv. talking about the process has equal value as the product
- v. the personal developmental aspect of photographic practice is a reasonable topic
- vi. the materiality of the image is as valid as the representation it embodies
- vii. a state of unknowing is a fine starting point
- viii. collaboration makes uncomfortable demands & is to be welcomed
- ix. group work creates new forms of organization
- x. walking backwards through an idea provides fresh insights
- xi. contradicting oneself is a handy prompt

John Levett :: 24th October 2011