

## Reflections on the Critical Contemporary Culture Project



**Antonia Dawes, LSE PhD Candidate and Chair of Critical Contemporary Culture journal, reflects on the launch of the journal's new issue on 'Crisis' and the kinds of wider intellectual discussion that emerge from the Critical Contemporary Culture project.**

The latest issue of Critical Contemporary Culture journal was launched on 27<sup>th</sup> November 2013. You can take a look at the submissions for Issue III – Crisis, [here](#). Please do post a comment or, if you feel inspired, submit a more extended response. This might be a poem, an essay, an artwork or any piece of thinking that adds a new layer of dialogue to the conversations already going on in the issue.

Critical Contemporary Culture (CCC) is an online journal that was founded by a group of PhD students at LSE and Goldsmiths about four years ago. The founders – Dhanveer Brar, Helen Kim, Malcolm James and Richard Bramwell – had grown frustrated with the way that culture was being talked about within the academy. They wanted to start a dialogue about culture between students of the social sciences and humanities and the other people who think about culture: artists, writers, actors, musicians and so on. They also wanted to create an alternative and welcoming space where students could start publishing and sharing ideas.

I am a fourth year LSE PhD Candidate and the current chair of the journal. The CCC editorial board have worked hard, over two issues, to defend the journal's aspirations and develop new languages and spaces in which to explore the urgent issues at stake in our common culture. We are a bit of a motley crew and based across Europe and the US. Irida Ntalla is the editor, Alexa Kusber is the art editor, Beatrice Ferrara is the new sound editor and SA Smythe is the new reviews editor. Find out more about us and our journal constitution [here](#).

The online launch was supported by a physical launch event held at the LSE. Alex Massouras sent us a paper which discussed his artistic contribution, *Alphabets of Babel* (2011). Rob Oldfield talked about his screenplay, *The Ward*. Daniel Koczy presented part of his paper about the Margaret Thatcher Death Day party in Trafalgar Square: 'Maggie Maggie Maggie! Dead Dead Dead! Kafka and the Danced we Did on Trafalgar Square'. Finally, Alexis Milne gave us a performance lecture about Hip-Hop, the Bronx, urban poverty and the transnational flow of culture. The Head of Department, Professor Mike Savage, then led a discussion with the audience about Crisis as a problem, a trauma, a transformative force, an event and a vehicle for continuous rethinking of knowledge production. You will shortly be able to watch video footage of the evening [here](#).



The launch event was organized in collaboration with the [LSE Sociology Forum](#), a departmental group that supports student research interests and organizes different events throughout the year. Public events and collaborations offer CCC the opportunity to showcase the work we do and reach out to many different people. They extend the intersubjective processes that the journal starts to galvanize on its website into new spaces, both traditional and fresh. For example, last spring we organized an experimental workshop about racist violence at a London Metropolitan symposium about the legacy of Stephen Lawrence (organized by the artist [Tahera Aziz](#)). Participants produced performative reflections for the room which were immediately tweeted on the CCC twitter page ([watch here](#) and [CCC twitter 27th April 2012](#)).

Having been part of this project for three years now, there are a few points I would like to make about what's at stake in the work CCC does, and is still trying to do.

Firstly, the journal has given everyone involved important lessons about working as a group. This isn't just a comment about what looks good on a CV. None of us work within an intellectual vacuum and learning to bounce key ideas around and take collaborative risks has taught us to strike the right balance between being respectful and open to other peoples' positions whilst protecting our own positionalities and agendas. Also, we aren't all PhD students and the different board members are based in the UK, Switzerland, Italy and the US. The same, and more, goes for the editors that work with us on the peer review process. In our collaborations we have worked with everyone from artists to youth workers and lawyers. We all share the journal's vision but we speak from different places that are fluid and multiple. Learning to be both rigorous and kind involves invoking a reflexive approach to group work as we go along.

Secondly: intellectual work is not just about good ideas and clever words! CCC is an online journal and this has meant learning to use, and be informed about, quite sophisticated forms of technology. It is no longer possible to ignore the economic, political and cultural importance of websites, blogs and online social forums in contemporary culture; but a lot of us are quite unprepared for what that entails in terms of the skills that we need to acquire and share. Thankfully the new board inherited a beautiful website from the old board and we have a very supportive web designer and programmer who has worked with us as the needs of the site have changed and grown ([Nicolas Combes](#)). These weighty IT obligations are obviously also connected to the journal's outreach plan and how we use the platforms we have set up. We are still learning how to use the [website](#), the [CCC Facebook page](#), and the [CCC twitter account](#) in ways that are innovative, exploratory and, of course, effective.

CCC has been very lucky to have the practical support of the LSE Sociology Department right from the beginning. Whilst gratefully acknowledging this, it remains enshrined in our constitution, and our vision, that we are an independent project because of the reasons about the journal's founding that I have outlined above. As such we are protective of both the way we are organized and the image that we project of the journal. This involves being reflexive about our constitution and peer review process in a number of ways. Ultimately this is a legal question. It's important to gain knowledge about copyright and intellectual property law for any sort of intellectual project. This also involves making particular visual and aesthetic choices in the way we appear publicly.

The issues raised above are still being thought through and developed at the journal. I believe I can speak for all of us when I say that we got involved because we are all committed to intellectual activities that are public, multi-layered and accountable. We also believe that fusing theory with practice generates new ideas and fresh approaches. At the core of this is a profound humility about all intellectual work and its attempt to think about the critical questions of our contemporary culture.

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