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CURATING WORSHIP



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To those who have the gift of not fitting in

‘The new paradigm begins as soon as you are ready to
perceive it.’

Kate Tempest

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Contributors

Steve Collins is a member of Grace alternative worship community – <www.freshworship.org> – and lives in Ealing, west London. He is an architect specializing in corporate interiors, and works for a large practice in central London a couple of blocks behind Tate Modern. He has contributed online through various websites: <www.smallfire.org>, for an amazing collection of photos of alternative worship events; <www.smallritual.org> for personal reflections; <www.alternativeworship.org>, the directory site for alternative worship. He blogs at <www.smallritual.blogs.com/small_ritual>.

Laura Drane is one of the founding members of Sanctus1 – <www.sanctus1.co.uk> – an emerging church in Manchester city centre, as part of which she's been planning and curating services since 2002. She works in the arts and cultural sectors as a project manager and consultant, particularly specializing in festivals.

Ana Draper is a doctor in systems therapy and works as a consultant psychotherapist in the palliative care field. She started to wander and explore as a child in the jungles of Ecuador, where she walked a path from which she witnessed inequality, poverty, and barriers to education and health care. This formed a hunger in her stomach to feed the poor and to work towards a world of inclusion. She then moved to England and experienced a whole new world, got socio-vertigo and spent some years trying to recover, although it is always now in her DNA. In this time she joined other travellers in an exploration of a whole new terrain, where faith became about questions and doubt and she was able to connect with her childhood hunger. As she journeyed and

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explored new places, she started to reach out to those marginalized by spiritual cliques that turned people into clones. She strived to create freedom that allowed others to celebrate and explore what it means to be human and yet made in the image of God. This has involved founding and being part of different communities along the way, including Live On Planet Earth in Kent, L8r and Shape in Northwood.

Nic Hughes is a designer, lecturer and co-founder of Vaux – <www.vaux.net>. He blogs at <<http://hauntedgeographies.typepad.com>>. **Kester Brewin** co-founded Vaux and is a teacher and freelance writer. His second book, *Other: Loving Self, God and Neighbour in a World of Fractures*, is published by Hodder. Kester blogs at <www.kesterbrewin.com>.

Cheryl Lawrie lives in inner-city Melbourne and is generously employed by the Uniting Church in Australia to spend her time exploring the city to find the meeting points between spirituality, culture and context. She has curated many events in the city with a collective and she also curates worship in a prison. She regularly writes for the *Age* newspaper on spirituality and postmodern culture, and would one day love to be a landscape gardener. Her online hub is <<http://holdthisspace.org.au>>.

Lilly Lewin is a worship curator, atmosphere architect, author, speaker and extroverted contemplative. She is the co-founder and curator of Thinplace and Maproom in Cincinnati, Ohio where she lives with husband Rob and sons Mac and Hudson and the wonder spaniel. Thinplace is a community of friends seeking to live their faith in the way of Jesus with monthly and weekly gatherings featuring Lectio Divina, artistic response, journalling and hospitality. Maproom is an experiential open house for God for college and post-college adults in and around the University of Cincinnati. She is the author of *Sacred Space* with Dan Kimball (Zondervan, 2008).

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Sonia and Iain Mainstone-Cotton and Clare Birch were founders of Sanctuary in Bath. Born out of friendships and a desire to meet with God, Sanctuary started when several people who were having trouble finding space to worship in mainstream church decided to begin meeting together and exploring worship, faith and creativity in ways that felt authentic. It began with a monthly worship service, and later a monthly teaching/discussion slot and a monthly community meal were added. In the 11 years since Sanctuary started, children have arrived, and lots of people have come and gone, but the essence of Sanctuary remains the same – creating spaces where people can meet with God, have fun with that process, and learn to love one another – <http://sanctuarybath.wordpress.com>. Clare is a jeweller and writer and currently works in a community café. Iain is a stonemason, lettering artist and sculptor – www.iaincotton.co.uk. Sonia is a charity development worker and an early years trainer and consultant.

Martin Poole has been an ordained, non-stipendiary priest in the Church of England since 1987 when he was working as a professional actor and serving in a south London parish with John Sentamu. Since then he has become a TV marketing professional working on branding and marketing strategy for clients such as ITV, Sky and the BBC and most recently setting up his own international consultancy, Sway Media. He moved to Brighton and Hove in 1999 and in 2007 set up BEYOND – www.beyondchurch.co.uk – with a dedicated group of like-minded volunteers and some resource funding from the Chichester diocese. BEYOND has a growing reputation for its creative worship installations and journeys in public spaces, the best known of which is the Beach Hut Advent Calendar.

Pete Rollins and Jonny McEwen are active participants in Ikon – www.ikon.org.uk, a Belfast-based collective which offers anarchic experiments in transformance art. Jonny is an artist with a background in creative approaches to conflict. He also produces chilled

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out music under the name Dubh – see <www.proost.co.uk>. Pete is a writer, lecturer, storyteller and public speaker. His virtual study is <<http://peterrollins.net>>.

Steve Taylor has led churches, both as a church planter and change agent pastor. He is now a Kiwi-in-exile, working as Director of Missiology, Uniting College, Adelaide. He has a PhD in emerging church and cultural change, is the author of *The Out of Bounds Church?* (Zondervan, 2005) and blogs at <www.emergentkiwi.org.nz>.

Sue Wallace is a musician and multimedia artist who has been working for the Visions alternative worship community since 1992 – <www.visions-york.org>. She was ordained as a Church of England priest in 2006 and has written four books on multi-sensory prayer which have been inspired by ideas used in the Visions services over the years. Transcendence has been a recent partnership between Visions and York Minster curating an ancient-future mass in the context of a cathedral.

Dave White curates Stations of the Cross in the public gardens in Hamilton, New Zealand – <www.stations.org.nz>. He works in mission with Incedo – <<http://incedo.org.nz>> – is a writer and is part of Exile, an alternative worship community in Hamilton.

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Curation is a term that comes from the art world. The curator is the person who has the role of imagining and overseeing an exhibition in a gallery or museum. This includes working with an artist or group of artists, selecting and commissioning which pieces of work to display, and arranging those in the spaces. The curator may also be the person who looks after a museum's collection, the 'keeper', which is what the role meant more traditionally. When you visit an exhibition it is highly unlikely that you will see the curator there or even be aware that there is one unless you read the small print in the catalogue. That is a sign of good curation – if the work is done well the curator disappears behind it.¹ The curator's role takes place over months and sometimes years before you arrive. But by the time you are there it is done. The environment has been created, the art has been framed and an articulation has been made. If it has been done well, it is a space that can be navigated seamlessly and visitors can immerse themselves in it without giving a second thought to the curator. As the art is encountered there are moments of epiphany, delight, provocation, questions are evoked and the work of the artist or artists on display is appreciated more. If it's been good it can linger in the imagination. The catalogue, if there is one, is an integral extension of the exhibition and can be taken away to explore further beyond the experience itself to find more depth.

Worship curation takes this approach as a model for how worship is put together. It affords a very different way of thinking about what is involved in leading worship and what it means. It throws up in the air whether leadership is even a good word to use. It certainly imagines a very different kind of leadership, which is backstage rather than on stage. Worship leading generally seems

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to have come to mean one of two things: either the role of the president or person who presides over liturgy in a denominational church, or the role of a charismatic personality who fronts a worship band. One way of thinking about both of these is as genres. They have a certain discourse, a logic, known rules of engagement and sets of expectations to them within which the leader and congregation know how to operate. That is a good thing. Genres in films or books function like that in our lives. If you mess with a genre or mix genres it generally doesn't work very well. There is an art to leading in both of these genres that can be done in creative and interesting ways. Some people are very skilful and gifted at it. Curation is a very different genre. It blows apart the notion of someone up front leading, and opens up a very different kind of imagination. Curation is a term that is being adopted in a number of areas beyond the discipline of the art world, not just in worship. The *New York Times* picked up on this observation.² This is because it affords this very rich and different way of thinking about leadership. A worship curator makes a context and a frame for worship, arranging elements in it. The content is provided by other people.³

Curating Worship is in two parts. The first explores curation both in the art world and in worship, considering the kind of imagination, process, skills and discipline that are involved – what might make for good curation. The second and major part of the book is a series of interviews and conversations with worship curators from a number of contexts and communities who have constructed amazing worship experiences. These can be read in any order. This approach grew out of the movement known as Alternative Worship⁴ and most of the people interviewed were or are part of it. That term is not in and of itself important. Its insights and inspiration have now been picked up and co-opted and remixed in lots of other contexts. The book is inspired in part by Hans Obrist, who feared the loss of memory of some of the practices of curation in the art world and published a series of interviews, *A Brief History of Curating*,⁵ teasing out from curators

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the ideas and theories behind their approach, and the practical processes involved. I hope these interviews in a similar way help avoid amnesia and provide sparks of imagination. They also highlight how the new electronic information environment enables rich networking, connectivity and sharing of ideas and learning across the world.

Part 1

CURATION IN THE ART
WORLD AND IN WORSHIP



A space for encounter

Somehow, something happens. Sometimes that's hard to remember when you're taping down cords or lighting coals or dashing down the hall to the photocopier (again).

Somehow, something happens. People gather. And in silence and words. Sound and movement. Stillness. Between the clumsiness and the elegance and the whimsy and the beauty. Somewhere, there, something happens.

And that's the grace of it. That's the Life in it. That's the hope for it.

A space for allowing our humanity to be held gently. A space for wonder. A space to be at home. A space for lamenting. A space for hoping. A space for playing. A space for encounter.¹

In an old disused church in Bermondsey at Dilston Grove a pool is filled a few feet deep with black water. On the edge are some steps up and one solitary stepping stone. It's inviting someone to step out from the edge and see what happens. This is the Bridge, an installation by Michael Cross.² It's actually a trial, a prototype for something he hopes will be on a bigger scale on a lake. The way it works is that when you take the risk of stepping out, the force of your weight on the stepping stone triggers another one to appear from underneath the water. In this way the viewer slowly leaves the edge one step at a time to make their way out into the water. It's a wonderful location for it. And it is nerve-racking. That experience lingered with me for quite some time. For several weeks, when I prayed I could picture that step of faith and trust.

One of the most memorable exhibitions I think I have ever been to was *New Ocean* by Doug Aitken at the Serpentine Gallery.

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explored new places, she started to reach out to those marginalized by spiritual cliques that turned people into clones. She strived to create freedom that allowed others to celebrate and explore what it means to be human and yet made in the image of God. This has involved founding and being part of different communities along the way, including Live On Planet Earth in Kent, L8r and Shape in Northwood.

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