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International **Festival**  
for **Sustainable** Immobility

Draft Outline and concept for a distributed festival,  
co-ordinated from Amsterdam, The Netherlands  
Realisation: March 18–20, 2010  
(Concept: November 2009)

# ElectroSmog

## International Festival for Sustainability Immobility

Outline and concept for a distributed festival,  
co-ordinated from Amsterdam, The Netherlands  
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### In short...

ElectroSmog is a new festival that explores the concept 'Sustainable Immobility' in theory and practice. Sustainable Immobility is first of all a critique of the expanding crisis of mobility. Today's systems of hyper-mobility of people and products in travel and transport are ecologically no longer sustainable. While the worldwide growth of mobility may be temporarily slowed down by the current economic slump, long term projections still point towards increased movement and exploding energy needs. Therefore we urgently need to develop alternatives for the current state of hyper-mobility.

Sustainable Immobility is a quest for a lifestyle less determined by speed and constant mobility. A lifestyle that celebrates stronger links to local cultures, while at the same time deepening our connections to others across any geographical divide by means of new communication technologies instead of physical travel .

### What?

What we propose may sound a bit paradoxical: The proposition of the festival is that the unfolding crisis of mobility can only be effectively addressed by deepening our connections across geographical divides by means of new communication technologies. The festival wants to engage the fundamental promise of the information age that communication technologies can replace the need for physical mobility, and thus both contribute to ecological stability as well as a more rewarding both deep-local and translocal life-style. While this promise has existed since the dawn of the information age, it was never realised. New material realities, however, force us to critically re-examine these promises and seriously start to turn them into viable choices.

Nothing is self-evident for the organisers. Therefore we will also critically question the underlying premise that reliance on electronic connections and local roots are self-evidently more energy efficient and more ecologically sustainable than our current systems of globalised mobility of people and goods. Is 'going local' the only solution? What are the true energy costs and environmental and health hazards of using even more electronic technologies (electrosmog)? How can remote connections become a truly rewarding experience in and of themselves?

We believe that only by answering such questions a viable alternative to the current unsustainable systems of hyper-mobility can be found.



## Who?

The ElectroSmog festival intends to bring together a broad coalition of designers, environmentalists, urban and spatial planners, technologists, artists, theorists, and engaged and concerned citizens, to explore and 'design' sustainable immobility. The festival will stake its claim for a radical break with the current systems of hyper-mobility not simply by discussing the issue, but by actually implementing it. To achieve this the very concept of an international festival and its traditional conventions need to be rethought and redesigned fundamentally.

## How?

ElectroSmog will therefore be a highly international festival, with everything you might expect of such a festival: including international debates and discussions, performances, art projects, exhibits, site specific projects, screenings, design competitions, and much more....

**However: no presenter will travel beyond their local or regional boundaries to participate in this event.**



## Where?

To achieve this we will work together in a network of accomplished cultural and new media centres, labs, theatres and other public venues to create the local 'hubs' that will inter-connect for this unique festival.

A crucial dimension of the festival will be its on-line presence, where audiences from basically anywhere with an internet connection can follow events on-line, join in discussions and debates, and contribute to the program.

## Beyond the broadband enclaves...

ElectroSmog acknowledges from the start that bandwidth is not equally distributed across and within societies. Therefore remote connection to lower bandwidth spaces, do-it-yourself telematics, and information technologies for the majority world will be one the central concerns the festival wishes to address, again both in theory and in practice.

# ElectroSmog

## International Festival for Sustainability Immobility

### Conceptual Background

The current systems of hyper-mobility sees itself confronted with an unfolding energy crisis collides with severe ecological limits – most prominently visible in the intense debate on global warming – citizens and organisations in advanced and emerging economies are forced to reconsider one of the most daring promises of the information age: The move towards a more sustainable and less mobile lifestyle through the use of advanced communication technologies.

Is it possible to look back today, without a simper or at least a slight sense of unease, at the bold promises of the ‘electronic cottage’ that futurologists such as Alvin Toffler spelled out for us in the early 1980s, in such books as “The Third Wave”? And yet, new realities are forcing us to take a fresh and critical look at exactly those grand aspirations.



**Polar Electronic Cottage?**

One of the main unrealised promises for the ‘coming information age’, made well before the rise of the internet as a public medium, was the suggestion that a radical reduction of (physical) mobility would become possible by the rise of ever more sophisticated communication and information technologies. Not only would, in Toffler’s vision, this transformation reap great ecological benefits, but it would also initiate a grand revitalisation of the ‘oikos’, the household and the family unit, and thus help to restore the psychic fabric of society, which had become unravelled through the brutal forces of ‘second wave’ grand scale industrial modernisation. Work and life at home could now be brought into unison again...

Today, more than 25 years after these all bold claims, we can observe exactly the reverse trend: Never before have men travelled more and farther. Not least because of their improved capabilities to keep in touch with the ‘home base’ from afar. The simultaneous exponential innovation of transport technologies and logistics, in particular of course in

the aviation industry, have had a cataclysmic effect on this fatal trajectory. That system of hyper-mobility has quite literally overheated itself, and it is heading for a crash. Even more so, it seems to exhaust itself at an exponential rate. The current rise of fuel prices might be partially related to speculation in international trading systems, but the underlying causes and their underpinning logic are structural and systemic: From an Anglo/European perspective, 'the BRICs<sup>1</sup> are to blame'. But are they really? Do the emerging economies not simply bring into focus what was a losing strategy in the first place: the dead-end street of the fossil fuel fixation.

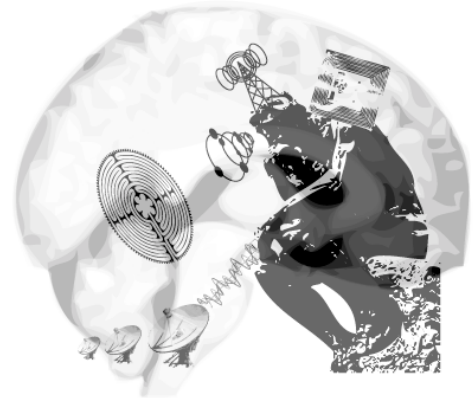
## So what is to be done?

Two possible trajectories present themselves:

– One trajectory explores alternative sources of energy and alternative transportation systems and technologies. Hardly surprising this is where most attention is currently focused. However, the uneasy link between biofuels and globally rising food prices has already revealed new limitations. A recourse to nuclear energy in the overall energy politics mix presents well known and unresolved problems. Meanwhile wind, water and solar energy systems still cannot be deployed at a sufficient (industrial) scale to offer a viable alternative for the future, according to Shell CEO Jeroen van der Veer in a recent televised interview on Dutch national television<sup>2</sup>.

– The other alternative looks simpler at first sight: a radical reduction of mobility itself, to scale down wherever possible the amount and the distance of regular travel, to return in effect to a slower pace of life. This solution looks both simple and attractive. But while most people do enjoy living in a global village, few appreciate a forced life in the local village. Furthermore the most likely mechanism to slow down the use of long-distance travel and transportation is pricing, which will introduce a new economic and social segregation of mobility that, from a societal point of view, is far from desirable.

Exactly for all of these reasons it has become necessary to critically re-evaluate that fundamental promise of the information age: To live globally inter-connected while not being forced to travel to meet. To find modes of creating a lifestyle of sustainable immobility. Such an approach is required to meet current ecological challenges without being forced to a regression to stone-age living conditions.



<sup>1</sup> BRICs – Brazil, Russia, India, China – the emerging economies of the new millennium.

<sup>2</sup> See also his e-mail to Shell employees about the company's take on energy futures here: [www.theoil Drum.com/node/3548](http://www.theoil Drum.com/node/3548)



## About the ElectroSmog festival

The ElectroSmog festival intends to bring together a broad coalition of designers, environmentalists, urban and spatial planners, technologists, artists, theorists, and engaged and concerned citizens to explore the notion of sustainable immobility. The festival will stake its claim for a radical break with the current systems of hyper-mobility not simply by discussing this issue, but by actually implementing it. To achieve this the very concept of an international festival and its traditional conventions need to be rethought and redesigned fundamentally.

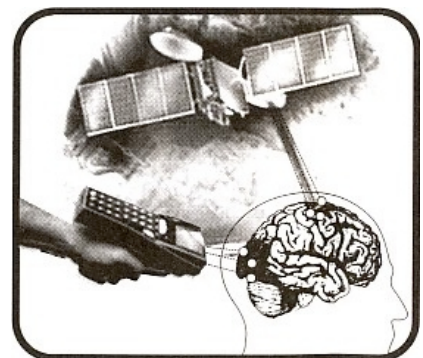
To begin with we will organise an international festival for which no presenter, artist, no large scale art work or installation, will physically travel or be shipped across regional or local boundaries. The festival will consist of a variety of formats and types of events and presentations, varying from live debates, concerts, screenings, performances, and installations, to mobile and outdoor projects, and interactive works. The international aspect will in all of these cases be preserved by exploring remote connections using various forms of media technology, ranging from bottom-line low tech solutions to highest tech.

## Beyond the Techno-Fetish

The festival will not simply celebrate this technological dimension. Instead we intend to start a deeply serious discussion and practical exploration of the usability of various types of remote connection technologies. The experiential dimension of the different modalities of remote connection are crucially important to us. If replacing physical mobility by remote and electronically mediated connections is to be treated as a serious proposition, such connected experiences should offer a rich and rewarding experience in themselves, more than a merely useful and practical activity and certainly also more than a mere simulation of physical encounters.

We also call into question the apparently self-evident proposition that remote and technologically mediated real-time tele-connections automatically lead to ecologically more sustainable solutions for being and staying in contact with people afar. Recently produced and contentious surveys have for instance argued that the energy demands for keeping an avatar alive in a metaverse system such as the popular Second Life on-line environment are comparable to the daily energy needs of an average citizen of Brazil. More in general the energy needs of data centres are a fiercely debated issue, as these data centres, through their excessive power consumption, put a disproportional strain both on local electricity grids as well as the environment at large. The way how these resources are managed decisively influences how eco-friendly or disastrous these technologies can be.

Also, the again exponentially growing trend towards mobile, wireless and wearable media brings with it a new set of health-related and environmental concerns. Recent public debates and anxieties that flared up around the placement of UMTS transmitters near homes and in residential districts, a.o. in The Netherlands, have ignited a debate about the health-risks that might be related to electromagnetic pollution, or electrosmog. This new form of environmental pollution is a direct result of the swift dissemination of these wireless technologies (mobile



phones, wifi networks, GPRS, UMTS, wireless transmissions, electromagnetic power fields and more..)

## The Right to Disconnect..

Finally the tyrannies of an always on, real-time connected society are a serious matter of concern for us. A society that relies to such an extent on a sophisticated system of ubiquitous connectivity should enshrine and protect the fundamental right for a selective disconnectivity for all its citizens.

**BuBL SPACE**

**Pocket-size.**  
The BuBL Device is pocket-size and lightweight. It measures only 73x52x16 mm and weighs 65 g - so it is easy to create your BuBL Space anywhere and at any time: in trains and buses, in bars and restaurants, in the street and at home, work or school. The soft rubber surface of the BuBL Device makes it water- and shock-resistant.

**Easy to use.**  
There is only one button on the BuBL Device. Press it for a short while to instantly eliminate all mobile phone signals in your direct surrounding. The harder you press, the larger your BuBL Space grows - up to three meters around the device.

**Economical.**  
The BuBL Device has a long-lasting rechargeable cell, so you don't need to change batteries. Just plug it into a charger to reload it and enjoy hours of BuBL Space. Easy, inexpensive and non-polluting.

**Discrete.**  
A small LED flashes on when you press the button. The BuBL Device doesn't make any sound or movement. It works from your pocket.

**BuBL SPACE**

**BeepFree.**  
Do you need a break from the daily mobile soap? Surround yourself with soothing space. Simply press your pocket-size BuBL device. Release a bubble of silence. You'll feel pleasantly isolated inside, even in a crowded place. Evaporate all phone signals up to three meters around. Enjoy the silence. Create your Personal BuBL Space.

[www.bubl-space.com](http://www.bubl-space.com)

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A classic in disconnection....

# Overview of Themes

The program of the Festival will be structured around a series of interlocking themes:

## ● Crash Imminent – Please Slow Down! Exploring the limits of hyper-mobility

This section will set the thematic framework for the entire festival where we will ask questions such as: What are the prospects of the current systems of mobility? Is the current turmoil caused by exploding energy prices and global warming situational and temporary, or are they the first signals of a systemic problem? How does the explosive growth of mobility in countries such as India and China affect the mid- and longer term development of current systems of mobility? Are we facing the beginning of the end of hyper-mobility? Is mobility a right or a privilege?

## ● The Promise of Ubiquity: Being everywhere at once, while staying home

After the initial hype the idea of telework and the replacement of work related travel and transport by remote connectivity has become something of an object of derision. In the face of new realities, however, the utopian notion of the electronic cottage needs to be reconsidered, but this time from a more practical perspective: What is the current state of affairs in tele-connected work, learning and leisure activities? Is the network-city finally becoming a reality? Do people actually work more from their homes rather than at the office terminal? Is the rise of new generations of professional wireless and wearable devices reducing or increasing (professional) mobility?

## ● Aesthetics of Distributed Space

This theme explores the experiential dimension of connected and distributed spaces. What constitutes a rich and engaging experience in distributed and tele-linked spaces? Experiences in distributed spaces should be taken seriously in their own right. They should not aim to simulate and replace real-life physical encounters. An important element of this thematic section is the development of alternative scenarios for tele-linked encounters and live events in distributed spaces.

One important question to ask is how to move beyond screen based interfaces? Other modalities of connecting people across spatial divides need to be developed to create more engaging experiences.

Aesthetically, the linkage of distributed spaces should highlight and intensify the spatial separation, involve people in a play with space and spatial discontinuities and inconsistencies, rather than trying to cover them up in a seamless connection (that never works anyway). Play and engagement are therefore guiding principles here.

## ● ElectroSmog is Good for You!

The future of the internet is wireless, mobile and wearable, increasingly we will no longer be accessing the network but much rather carry it with us wherever we go. This holds not just for the technologically advanced zones of the planet, but increasingly also in the so-called emerging economies of the future. But how does a society that becomes increasingly reliant on such wireless and 'spectral' technologies deal with the apparently ecological damaging effects of the same? How can we get reliable information about actual and bogus claims about electromagnetic pollution and electrosmog?



Part of this theme is also the question how the presence of various electromagnetic waves , their density and strength in your own local environment – hazardous for your health or not – can be effectively measured, and how they can be mapped?

### ● Greener Links: Rural Connectivity

Debates on new communication technologies, spatial planning, and connectivity are predominantly focused on the urban context. One of the most enticing prospects of sustainably immobile life–style choice, however, is to (re–)locate outside the congested urban context, in a networked and highly connected countryside.

### ● Tyrannies of the Real–time / Technologies of Deceleration

The ideal of the always–on society is to be connected in real–time all the time. This invites new pressures, however. In complete visibility privacy becomes a relic of past. French theorist Paul Virilio's has famously critiqued the dominance of the real–time for destroying the available time to think and reflect, which especially in the fields of politics and military conduct constitutes a fatal strategy. Virilio also laments the complete lack of R&D into technologies aimed at slowing processes down, rather than speeding them up. Furthermore, this always–on society needs to acknowledge the fundamental civil right to disconnect, to be able to remove oneself from all media and information flows – something which seems to become increasingly impossible.

### ● Do–It–Yourself Telematics: Technologies for everybody else

The technologies of tele–connection are not global. In the Majority World connections are still often feeble, if not altogether non–existent. Especially advanced audiovisual interfaces for remote interaction, streaming media, and video chats are still mostly reserved for the broadband enclaves in the net. Their global dispersal is extremely limited. So it's clear from this that we still need quite a bit of creative tinkering to get the majority world connected. In the foreseeable future global connectivity will still have to rely more on a pirate electronic modernity than on any governmental or post–governmental ICT program. In this thematic section we want to explore alternative approaches to tele–technology that address the needs of the Majority World and of less 'capital–intensive' communities anywhere.

### ● Going Slow: Private Agency Towards a Sustainable Immobility

And what will YOU do? Being mobile is ultimately a form of action. Change of behaviour can therefore effect important changes in the current unsustainable system of hyper–mobility. Are changes in behaviour only to be expected from rising prices of mobility (i.e. material thresholds) or is it possible to articulate a new lifestyle aimed at a viable combination of sustainable immobility and selective connectivity? How will this play out for generations who are yet to see the world and experience cross–border diversity?



## Program elements

The ElectroSmog festival will contain all the elements to be expected from a decent festival: performances, concerts screenings, discussions and debates, workshops for the devoted, site specific events and installations. The logic of how all these events will be executed, however, will have to be rethought from the ground up. The guiding principle of all events is always that they happen in more than one space at the same time and that these spaces are connected for the event.

### Discussions and debates

Discussions and debates are an obvious element of this festival, where the themes of the festival can be debated vigorously and in depth. The obvious advantage of using remote connections is that specialists, stake-holders and activists from various places can be linked up live in debates that connect localities, audiences and different social and cultural contexts. This begs the larger question how such discussions should be envisioned and how they should be staged. We will investigate new ways in which active and lively participation of the audience in such debates can be facilitated and enhanced. In this process not just divisions in space and time (time-zones) will need to be bridged but also the differences in cultural conventions between participating localities.

### Performance Program

A major event in the festival will be a grand performance night, which offers the perfect platform to explore highest-tech connections between connected performance spaces. Here we want to explore the possibilities of HD-transmission over satellite and extreme broadband streaming connections via fibre-optics networks. Artists will be invited to come up with challenging concepts for real-time performances that can create a delirious experience of connection and dispersal.

### Wireless and wearable projects

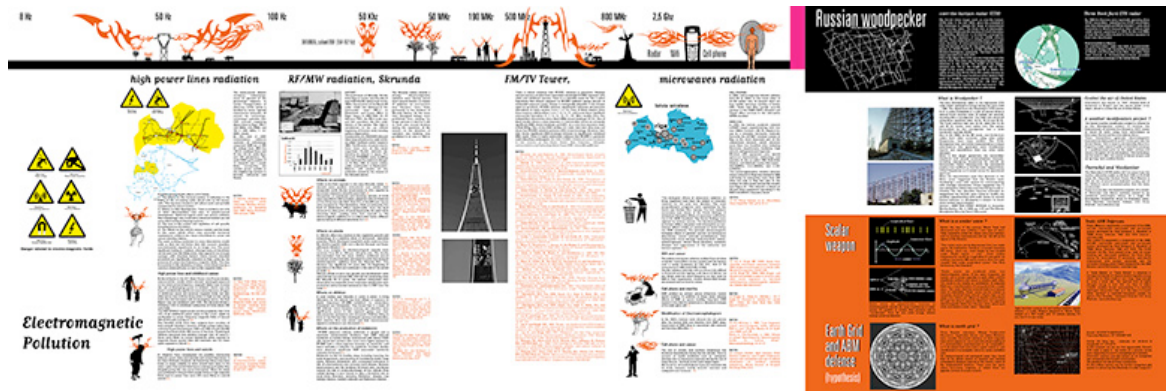
Following the premise that the future of the internet is wireless we will invite and develop projects that look at new approaches to wearable and wireless connected media. Clearly we want to go beyond the obvious. One challenging project that we want to feature in the festival is the 'TeleTrust' project of artists Karen Lancel and Hermen Maat, in which a data-veil covering the wearers complete body, made of an electrically conducting material, becomes an interactive membrane. Touch on the veil can be detected, and the cloth is fitted with sound devices and a wifi-link – thus opening up the possibility to create fully immersive scenario's for people connected in real time across virtually any spatial divide.

Through the use of mobile media projects can also be moved into public space or outside urban space. In the projects that we intend to develop the move beyond the screen-based interface will be an important design consideration.

### Spectral Investigations

We want to work together (remotely) with the French Spectral Investigations Collective (Bureau d'Etudes / Ewen Chadronnet) to carry out research and map electromagnetic

pollution in the Ring–City urban conglomeration in the West of The Netherlands. The collective conducted a similar research for the art & communication festival of RIXC in Riga Latvia that resulted in a highly stimulating exhibition and fierce debate on electrosmog in the country. Besides conducting this research we want to devote attention to the process of research and the mapping tools that especially the artist group Bureau d'Etudes has developed over the years, and make this knowledge available to others via workshops and tutorials.



## World Chat XL / Club Interbellum

World Chat is a program format aimed at a younger generation of engaged citizens. By arranging international chat sessions, often combined with live streamed events and video chats, the organisers of World Chat wishes to engage participants from different countries in an international live discussion that address topical issues with a more than local appeal. For the ElectroSmog festival we want to create an XL–edition of World Chat devoted to the crisis of mobility and especially the role of personal behaviour and sustainable and unsustainable lifestyles.

Club INterbellum is a series of regular large scale thematic club nights in De Balie that take controversial social issues as a starting point for events that combine politically charged debates with hedonistic club cultures, refusing to be limited to either. A festival needs a good party, but for ElectroSmog such a party will be staged against the backdrop of the impending mobility crisis.

## The Disconnectivity Lounge

The disconnectivity lounge is the space of absolute disconnection, right in the heart of the festival in the Salon space of De Balie. The lounge is a sanctuary, unplugged from all media signals. It will be fitted with gsm, wifi and other wireless transmission blockers. It will not have any internet connection, nor a phone line, or even a television or radio signal going in. The disconnectivity lounge will be a strictly local space for physical encounter. To enter means to disconnect and become invisible to the global interconnected media network.

## **International Design Competition for Sustainable Immobility**

This design competition will be specifically aimed at students and young designers from the fields of the arts, graphic and interaction design, industrial design, architecture and affiliated fields. The call will be to design scenario's and possible applications that foster imaginative forms of sustainable immobility. The sky 's the limit – just as long as you don't step on a plane!

## **Workshops on Remote Technologies**

For artists, designers, technologists, developers and others who want to get hands-on, on the topics and technologies discussed and presented during the festival a series of workshops will be organised that address practical and professional issues more in-depth. Workshops are currently planned on the following themes:

- How to do remote workshops?
- How to make remote conferencing a worthwhile experience?
- Augmented Distributed Space
- Discussion of the richness of connected experiences (or the lack thereof)
- Using Metaverses / The user-experience of metaverses

## **Software Platform**

To carry through this ambitious project the Amsterdam organisers will develop a new software platform aimed at enabling streaming and on-line remote connections between different venues / localities. The aim is to build a intermediate platform that allows people locally to use standard off the shelf equipment and that makes it possible to integrate incoming feeds in various formats in a shared discussion and live-transmission environment where the audience can again interactively participate on-line and off-line with these transmissions. The underlying application will draw on research that has been conducted in this area by De Balie over the last four years in its Living Archives research trajectory.

Manuals and tutorials for this new software platform, which is aimed to be released as an open source software application during the festival, will be developed using the method and on-line systems of the Floss Manuals organisation.

([www.flosmanuals.net](http://www.flosmanuals.net))

# Organisers

## Organisations involved

De Balie, Amsterdam  
 Eyebeam, New York  
 RIXC, Riga  
 m-cult, Helsinki  
 Chelsea College of Art and Design, London  
 Medialab Prado, Madrid  
 Banff New Media Institute, Canada  
 ADA Digital Arts Network, New Zealand  
 Hivos, The Hague  
 Media Studies, University of Amsterdam  
 Cool Mediators Foundation, Amsterdam  
 Engage! Tactical Media, Utrecht.  
 Reframes, Munich

## Editorial Committee

(in alphabetical order – september, 2008)

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 Laura Fernández (Medialab Prado)  
 David Garcia (Chelsea Art College)  
 Marcos Garcia (Medialab Prado)  
 Caspar van Gemund (De Balie / Club Interbellum)  
 David Glas (De Balie / WorldChat)  
 Tania Goryucheva (Cool Mediators Foundation)  
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 Susan Kennard (Banff New Media Institute)  
 Eric Kluitenberg (De Balie)  
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 Gerbrand Oudenaarden (Engage! Tactical Media)  
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 Minna Tarkka (m-cult)  
 Mauzz Zero (De Balie / Meta.Live.Nu)