Reflections on e-culture policy after the ASEF/Common Room 2005
Artscamp in Bandung.
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Notions on policy in Eastern Asia-Europe media spaces

What can we learn?

One of the most intriguing aspects of Bauhaus is that the most successful
unit, – the unit coming 'closest to Bauhaus intentions', as Gropius stated, the
pottery workshop – was located 25 kilometers from Weimar, in Dornburg. It
was hard to reach by train, and hard to reach by car. The workshop master
Max Krehan owned the workshop, so there was a business interest from the
start. The relationship with Marcks , the Master of Form, was not
contaminated with formalized roundtable discussions, but was a productive
twoway (abstract-concrete) interrelationship.

> "More important still, in terms of what Gropius hoped for the entire
> Bauhaus, was the way in which the pottery workshop operated in
> close co-operation with the local community in which it found itself.
> It made pots for the community and the town of Dornburg leased the
> workshop a plot of land which the students used for vegetables and on
> which, it was hoped, they would build."[i]

So what can we learn from this? That we must not aim to define, alter or
transform practices, processes, places or people. The aim should be to define
a vision.

A vision that should be able to inspire and empower young people in their
concrete experience of agency in this seemingly *undesignerly* new ambient
world, towards a humanistic and optimistic positive attitude in the role,
function and *leadership* of the creative individual in her[1] capability to make
sense, to work within an *uncertain* framework of unforeseen consequences,
unintended uses, and procedural breakdown.

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[1] The new creator is a she it appears. At the Third Asia-Europe Artcamp the numbers are
one to three.

What can we do?

So what does this mean for new media, emergent technologies and cultural policy departments and funding strategies?

In terms of new media and policy there is very little clear and good practice and this is very logical as the visual metaphors of digitisation for artistic purpose began only (with the exception of an it/virtual reality driven trend) thirtheen years ago with the launching of the browser. Rasa Smite from RIXC[2] claims that the reason why she and other public domain driven artists in Latvia liked new media immediately was that there was no advantage for any one in any country as it was just as new for everybody. No one could claim a history that was uniquely theirs, every country had its own equally important story. Shuddhabrata Genupta from Sarai relates how Bulgaria for example developed the highest expediency in software viruses as it had been assigned software production from Comecon.

At the ASEF-Commonroom Bandung organized and produced Third Asia-Europe Art Camp this very fundamental insight to the basic ingredients that make up new media was highlighted in the student presentations from a range as varied from Germany, Indonesia, Norway, Estonia, Myanmar, Japan and France. (see url).

The diversity was shattering, yet it would be very hard to categorize presentations in terms of level of conceptualisation, expertise or creativity.

All presentations are a necessary node in and on the modes of connectivity that makes up what we call new media.

There are a few common threads though. One is risktaking. As ASEF itself has taken a risk on focussing on emergent and not established practices, through showing a clear interest in hardwiring the future designers of our mediascapes through theoretical lectures, local assignments, a view of new media spaces in Bandung and interviews with the founders, and last not least and most important, giving every participant a clear insight into her own

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[2] RIXC The Center for new media culture is independent new media artists run space in Riga with its' experimental media laboratory, research programmes and public events space. It is founded in 2000 on a bases of E-LAB initiative (since 1996).

daily praxis, ways of working, strategies of communication and the level of digital saturization.

This brings us to the second point. As Anabelle (Singapore) states the issue is about Space, yes, but perhaps more importantly about Pace. This is a term that describes the various ways in which the digital context that informs everyday practices is matched by a level of conceptualisation that allows innovation.

The third common denominator lies in the basic irrelevance the participants assign to terminology. For them being called or labelled an artist, designer, creator of original ideas is only relevant when it comes to issues of funding.

The fourth is the belief that it is both extremely necessary to have a physical place where people can meet as well as a space that might also be thought of as a method, a format, a way of looking at the world that you have in common with a few or a group of other people. This space can and should be supported by as much digital connectivity as possible (web, mail, gps, roaming).

What can we do from a cultural policy point of view?

I. Place

We do not fund beginning places.

De Waag and V2 are our Dutch most successful labs. In less than 10 years they have grown into academic nodes on the SURFNET network, the Dutch academic network. This is unprecedented. Never before has a group of autonomous, critical individuals been able to get their ideas, narrative, theories and projects accepted as credible in terms of the existing academic discourse in such a short time span. How was this possible? Because of the liberal climate in the eighties and early nineties in the Netherlands that did allow for bottom-up creative initiatives. De Waag grew out of the non profit Digital City that was supposed to last for six weeks, the first Digital City in Amsterdam in 1993. Young idealists, hackers, 'hippies from hell' as they are called in Ine Poppe's documentary, provided free email and started the digital revolution with their internet provider xs4all. We are only eleven years later and the analogue world is becoming more hybrid as we speak

with digital connectivity. Xs4all has become a part of corporate KPN. V2 was the name of a squat building in Den Bosch, the Director Alex Adriaansens was there in 1981. He is still Director now in 2004. V2 participates in numerous European networks, is focussing on their own kind of R&D that is rapidly drawing attention from the regular and corporate research labs, hosts its own V2 publishing and V2 Archive. The young people that started these digital connectivities in spaces and actual places were concerned for more then their own particular work, products or living, their concern was for the *public domain; xs4all*.

As in Bandung, Delhi, Amsterdam, Riga, Minsk there was no government funding in the creation of the place. You deal with highly idealistic persons who care for public access and domains.

Labs that come from abroad unchanged go bust (Medialab Dublin). Labs that are dependent on one particular line of money can switch directions any time (Merging of IVREA with Domus)

Strategy of the place: bypassing (see Bauhaus story)

Strategy of funders: co-find the satellites (ITB-Common Room for example) and fund specific projects.

Question: When do you decide that the proposed alliances are going to do something no one else is going to do?

In Holland: In the Ministry of Education, Cultuurnota, individuals took risks. They funded through the visual arts budget (film/video/painting) a number of places that all have delivered quite something else. Instead of Visual Art the Waag is making socio-cultural applications (www.verhalentafel.org) that turn out to be very good for dementia. None of this was in the original research proposal. (This also shows that academic institutes need common rooms as much as they need them for asking questions that are not being deemed relevant within specific frameworks). Because of this risktaking and trust in young idealistic professionals (who in new media could be making much more money working for regular companies) Holland now has an extremely rich and densely saturated network of new media institutions that themselves now are becoming experts in fields that are economically viable: documentation, heritage, media formats, entertainment.

II. Triangle: arts, technology and business: creative industries

A clear difference between Europe and Asia is the lack of funding even after the initial phase of a place. Places in Asia describe themselves as for profit. In Europe it is the other way around. These two positions are coming closer though. De Waag has set up a business structure to sell de Verhalentafel to the US.

Policy focus in new media interfacing with Ministeries of Economy, Education, Tourism: creative industries

New media is about the soft side of innovation [3](ways of brainstorming, visualization techniques, mapping, designing trust for users in digital environments, didactic models).

Proposal: Meeting with Europe-Asia culture officials, companies (telecoms, media) that are very eager to work with new media artists and designers but need very good reason, arguments and a theoretical framework for doing so.

III. A possible focus for 2005-2010 projects: urban studies: living in the digital city.

As the Sarai Reader list so poignantly shows, people are beginning to map, debate, discover ways of writing and ways of publicizing their everyday lives in cities. As much as counter-research it is the emergence itself of a new kind of research that will have more repercussions for the academic research tradition then for the media places. Eventually it will become the default. As with new media itself, the uses of blogs, email, email lists, websites, mobile phones, play out fundamental changes on the news information mediascapes all over the world. Upstreaming says that the first pictures about incidents are now blogged before they are published. All over the world dominant paradigms of dispersing data and information will have to change or go bust.

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[3] Very debatable but very helpful. The Dutch 2005 policy document on Economy and Culture uses these terms, hard and soft sides of innovation. New media is also very much about hardware. Culture is a to be hardcoded variable in a media saturated environment, but this pace is for us, not for policymakers at this moment.

From a policy point of view: Who would you rather help or fund? People who will show onesided information? Or idealistic young professionals with a heart for the truth and the heart of the matter?

A focus on urban digital realities (cctv, microphones, rfid, active sensors) will hopefully (as has happened with de Waag) spawn off community enhancing project (see i3 website/Lime) instead of the use of digital technology for ubiquitous control.

Again, in this respect there is no Europe-Asia gap.

But the tables have turned. Here in Bandung you can say that Dutch Art Deco architecture mapped its way through an intuitive walking that has since embraced the map. This walking is now walked in our cities in Europe. Speaking only of Amsterdam, Rotterdam, Den Haag we encounter the creole at home. Over half of the young population has Dutch nationality but is from foreign descent.

The mix, the creole is the future and our cities are very much in need of the Asian expertise in *not running-running them.*

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[i] Whitford, Frank, Bauhaus, Thames & Hudson, 1984, p. 73-4