



LIQUID GEOGRAPHY

LANDSCAPE & IDENTITY; LANGUAGE & TERRITORY CREATIVE LAB 1
Institute For International Visual Arts 22 March 2002

INTRODUCTION

Landscape and Identity; Language and Territory was the first of two events investigating collaborations between the arts, academia and civil society organisations using new media and technology. It forms part of SoMa's Liquid Geography research theme, and is a partnership between Proboscis, INIVA and MEDIA@LSE (London School of Economics).

Using the themes of 'Landscape & Identity; Language & Territory', the Labs explore how innovative use of new technologies can transform our perception of other societies and cultures, territories and places, and provide enabling tools which are a catalyst for the development of new ideas. The Labs aim to provide an opportunity to examine how new technologies might cross a range of disciplines to make ideas and knowledge available to diverse communities in different areas.:

- to map out an area of collaborative practice under the LI;LT theme that bridges culture and society.
- to look at digital communications technologies and their creative use by artists and designers as a catalyst for engagement with social issues.
- develop the basis for a programme of work.
- to create a forum for development of ideas and partnerships through participatory events.

SUMMARY

The first Lab initiated the process of mapping out the broad issues and questions at the heart of cross-sector collaboration between cultural and social organisations – what each can learn from the other, and how creative partnerships can be mutually beneficial.

The second Lab will build on the outcomes of Lab 1 to focus on the area of Broadcast and to present the eBook commissions for LI;LT as models for creative uses of technology. It will aim to identify models of how creative uses of broadcast technologies by artists and designers can act as bridges between cultural and social agendas – demonstrating possible partnerships that could create and deliver this.

DISCUSSION

Lab 1 was attended by participants spanning academic, art, cultural and civil society organisations. This documentation, covering the full day event, is an indication of the breadth of discussion rather than a transcription.

The group analysed the significant questions & issues relating to cultural organisations and civil society agencies whose agendas include the issues raised by LI;LT.

- Diverse points of view and different backgrounds provided a good introduction to the various concerns involved.
- The openness of the discussion without boundaries or qualifications provided a free and creative space in which to speak.
- The next session requires a more specific agenda working tightly around a single objective.

Several themes emerged from the discussion:

Knowledge

– knowledge of geography, territory, language – provenance of information – availability of information – access to knowledge – the ability to create and disseminate information to parallel traditional knowledges.

- We are currently experiencing a critical and urgent period of intense globalisation of knowledge – What does it mean to be free?
- There is a need to examine the creation, definition, movement of boundaries – what is landscape and what constitutes territory?
- Definition of heritage – past, present and future meanings?
- Importance of sustainable development – long versus short term.
- Different interpretations of value/ ownership/ money.
- The attention economy – how do minority groups get a voice?
- Trust, idealism, empowerment, enabling belief.
- Look for new areas of communities and communication.
- 'Third places' offering new physical environments.
- There is a need to look beyond technology to provide meaning and quality of experience (Social themes versus technological platforms).

Language

- How do we define the languages that we use?
- Who are the mediators?
- How do we deconstruct and reconstruct expertise?
- Can we expand the idea of universal languages?

Ownership & Participation

– ownership of territories, membership of spaces. Collaboration and Partnership. Participation.

- Objectification – how we separate ourselves from the world?
- Current principal of looking at the world as if it is something to plunder resembles a 'colonial' methodology.
- How can introduce empowerment of participation: that is is valid for everyone to have a view and to participate in cultural production?
- Collaborations versus partnerships. Establishing rules – partnerships are different to collaborations. Are creative conversations more powerful than either?
- Collaborations are about looking for similar aims and objectives. Need for integration not restrictions through commonality of purpose and trust.
- It is unfashionable for artists to bridge with commerce.
- Problem of artists expected to provide a service or fulfil specific roles – restricts freedom and benefits of creative approaches.
- Social responsibility – how to leverage corporate/business input to give something back.
- Longer term agreements are needed in order to make a difference.

Culture and Society

– separation of culture from society is artificial – problem of a public distanced or disengaged from cultural activity.

- Role of Artists and Cultural Organisations: in changing perspectives; revealing dichotomies in society; challenging the way people and industry operate. Facilitating risk and experimentation – provocation and different ways of thinking.
- How do we create tools to enable a responsive model of partnership?
- Longer term relationships – Artists in society. We need a plurality of roles – beyond traditional perceptions of the role of the artist.
- Culture and Society: Need for a deeper meshing versus decorative frill.
- Need for public policy to be visibly relevant to society: partnerships and collaboration between civil society organisations and artists/cultural organisations could help create demonstrations of relevance and use.

Audiences

- Who are they? Too many assumptions are made, more definition is needed. Are they passive or active? Are they consumers or producers? Are they participants or observers?
- What language do they speak – is it common?
- The importance of individual experience: interpretation, facilitation, transparency, advocacy – wider concepts of ownership needed.
- Issues of privilege – accessibility and the danger of public disengagement.
- Value of different points of view. The power of incremental growth and of small or personal intervention in a broad context.

How do we engage with audiences?

- Look beyond technology at behaviours to cross issues and boundaries.
- Create connections that traverse society.
- Be aware of the danger of talking to ourselves – setting up new peripheries?
- Need to develop low-fi applications
- Producers need to subvert technologies.

OUTCOMES

General outcomes were suggested to guide the development of the project:

Ownership & Technology

- Taking a step back to critique use of technologies.
- Audience effects on technology – slippage.
- Gain a greater understanding of the technologies that influence our lives, and how our modes of living affect the development and use of technologies.
- Investigate how technology changes experiences – enhancement of social/emotional connections.
- Using technology to link different forms of knowledge and expertise.

Partnerships & Communication

- Need to define a variety of models for creating and sustaining cross-sector partnerships..
- Create dynamic models that provide facilitate risk and experimentation.
- Not to separate new media technologies from other means of production.
- To be both inspiring and challenging.
- Manage expectations and negotiations by concentrating on engagement. Focus on society and people.
- Need for networks and brokers to facilitate partnerships and stimulate ad hoc networks.
- Create sustained spaces for creative conversations across disciplines and divides.

Knowledge & Identity

- Investigate common languages and vision that transcends 'presentness'.
- Question fundamental concepts of identity.
- Enhance local visibility.
- Promote thinking outside of context.
- Develop user led processes.
- Build and connect bodies of knowledge and experience.

CONCLUSION

The Lab mapped out a large number of issues at the heart of the Landscape & Identity; Language and Territory theme, giving a strong indication that cross-sector and cross-disciplinary partnerships would be beneficial to the arts and to civil society and public policy. Several areas (see outcomes above) merit deeper analysis and discussion in order to establish meaningful partnerships.

Further Creative Labs under SoMa's Liquid geography research theme will focus on specific issues and collaborative and partnership models.