

Abstract of presentation at the Practice to Policy 2010: Barriers to Transformation panel (@ ISEA 2010 RUHR) Dortmund, August 24 2010 (15:00-16:30), Orchesterzentrum NRW, Brückstraße 47, organized and hosted by Virtueel Platform (NL).

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Much like the shifting relationship between social movements and NGOs 10-15 ago, we see a growing tension between the existing models of 'cultural organizations' that deal with new media culture and arts versus informal networks. Unlike a decade ago the cultural new media sector can no longer claim to embody the 'avant-garde' position because that has been taken over by the market. This situation leads to a void: neither truly innovative nor particularly critical, new media organizations in the non-profit sector are starting to float. They are not doing proper research either, or at least not what policy makers and academics consider useful. Should they then all just be closed now that the introductory phase of new media is coming to a close? The massive digitization of 'cultural heritage' has proven to be useless for the new media sector and has merely reproduced the existing, conservative cultural landscape that is dominated by museums, opera and concert halls.

Instead of aligning ourselves with the 'creative industries' agenda, the proposal here would be transform the current organizational model into facilitating hubs that empower 'organized networks'. Over the past years, together with Ned Rossiter, I have done both theoretical and practical work to find out how we can develop 'new institutional forms'. It is not enough to submerge in the bitter insider-outsider logic over ever diminishing budgets. It is time to invent our own sources of income. A first step for this would be to recognize the ideology of free and open, such as advocated by some in the 'free culture' movement as a trap. We also need a new notion of the public domain and public broadcasting in particular in which new media will have an equal status, next to film, public radio and television and (subsidized) print. Barcamps, unconferencing, booksprints, festivals, bricolabs and our recent Wintercamp event (Amsterdam, March 2009) are all manifestations of a thriving culture of temp media labs. Instead of asking how these emerging practices can contribute to 'policy' we should reverse this question: how can cultural policies strengthen networks?