

On January 18, 2013 I attended the first annual meeting of Dutch Communication and Media Design (CMD) schools. Started 10 years ago, this rather diverse group of 'new media' 'polytech' BA degrees within the Dutch universities of applied sciences now have 6300 students, spread over 9 schools in different parts of the country with 350 staff. There are also CMD schools in Belgium ([Hasselt](#)) and Germany ([Aachen](#)). There were about 100 staff members present at the meeting, hosted by our Hogeschool of Amsterdam. Our Institute of Network Cultures is a research centre attached to one of them, the former School of Interactive Media, now called [CMD](#) at the Amsterdam University of Applied Sciences (HvA). Our degree, founded in 2002 by Emilie Randoe, originally positioned in between (web) design, IT and business, now celebrates its 10th anniversary. Next step will be the creation of a European network of CMD degrees. More on that later.

The day started with two talks. The first one started off with a rather depressing yet mainstream Californian-dotcom-VC-style message: top talent will reach firms even without a finished degree. It is a hard reality to swallow for schools that they merely cater for mediocre students. We have heard this time and again: our students will end up at the mid-management level, directing the masses of even more low-level coders and builders. So be it. This guy, a certain Ruurd Priester of (itself very mainstream) Lost Boys company here in Amsterdam stressed the importance of cheap solutions using the three rules: beauty, usability and utility. The trend in the 'interactive media' industry is now to assist average companies to become e-commerce firms. We can say to ourselves: fuck marketing, but then what? We need to understand that 'new media' is now part of marketing (and not the other way around, despite the objective coolness and historical supremacy of the first).

Priester, who finished the Amsterdam Rietveld art academy himself, presented the audience with five rules:

1. Tech is cool. Tech is the a-priori and creativity will come later, produced in collaboration with others. The nerd is cool and he is the driver and source of everything. The process of Making is central, the person who rulez is the one who Makes (a premise adopted, of course, from the Wired ideologist Chris Anderson).
2. Creativity is embedded in the collaborative creative process. The loners will be excluded. T-shaped personalities are favoured.

3. There is a need for omni creatives. Students need to be ambitious to become the best. What is needed are frontend developers and visual designers, professionals that combine different skills and disciplines.
4. Practice what you preach: as a school become part of the free and open source movement.
5. Think Big. Dig into history.

The second speaker, [Vasilis van Gemert](#) of the Mirabeau office interestingly argued for more art history (in order to better understand design) and knowledge of typography. Do not raise specialists. Respect for people with other skills is essential, grow your legal awareness, share old courses, bring up the overall level of the degrees, do less internships and provide students with more knowledge. Firms are struggling with the low level of students.

We will see if 2013 will bring an overall change. The gap and the tension between tech and art in the applied degrees is still there and seems not yet properly addressed. Whereas tech and marketing knowledge dominate, the question where 'art' and 'creativity' fit into the curriculum was not addressed. What does it mean to educate thousands and thousands of 'designers' that do not get even the most basic education into visual design, contemporary arts and art history?