

# Across the Board 2016

## *What does it mean to be able to think, work, and operate across domains?*

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## Injecting a Breath of Fresh Air

On behalf of Witte de With Center for Contemporary Art, I am proud to share our reflections on the first pilot phase of *Across the Board*, which brought together some twenty promising young professionals operating at the intersection of three fields: arts, politics, and, dare I say, business.

*Across the Board* started with an in-house discussion in 2012. What does it mean to be able to think, work, and operate across these domains? What are the defining principles, values, strengths, and limitations of each of these fields? What are the skills, tools, and responsibilities essential to charting new ground, and to meeting the challenges of the current decade? It was quickly agreed that these are questions both the practitioners and institutions must ask themselves together. This discussion seeded our desire to bring together practitioners and key leaders across multiple disciplines to explore the fertile ground between the sectors, and their relationship to society, with a timely professional development program.

In its first pilot, launched in fall 2016, *Across the Board* set out to instigate a dialogue on the question of shared values. Co-developed with the professional experience and insight of our in-house team, the program sought to open up a more in-depth understanding of the interrelations between the at times conflicting sectors.

*Across the Board* was structured around a series of masterclasses and workshops led by seven stellar tutors, each experienced in navigating complex cases throughout their careers, and some of whom are indeed still doing so. These included Renilde Steeghs (Dutch Ambassador of International Cultural Cooperation), Martijn Sanders (Chairman of the Board, Holland Festival, former director of Het Concertgebouw, Amsterdam), Wilfried Lentz (founder of Gallery Wilfried Lentz, Rotterdam), and Cuauhtémoc Medina (critic, curator and historian, Mexico City), among others.

I would like to extend our sincere thanks to all participants and individuals who were integral to this process. For leading and shaping this exciting program, I am grateful to Yoeri Meessen, our Associate Director of Education and Public Affairs, and for its coordination, Docus van der Made, our Education Assistant. My heartfelt thanks go to all the participants who generously contributed their time, energy, and insights to *Across the Board*, helping to inform its next steps. Operating as a springboard for talent over the past twenty-five years, and having built our reputation upon the constant invention of modes, formats, and operational models for the field of art and its institutions, we already look forward to shepherding the program, together with them, towards its next iteration.

Defne Ayas  
Director, Witte de With Center for Contemporary Art

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*In a new and broader look upon governance, themes such as corporate social responsibility and sustainability are not done on the side, like a kind of hobby, but form an integral part of business. Increasingly, corporate goals will intertwine with social ones.*

## Yoeri Meessen Learning Across the Board

*Community life is easy. All it takes is finding people who think like you do. Cooperation is hard because it is about learning to live with people who think differently.<sup>1</sup>*

<sup>1</sup> Richard Sennet, *Together: The Rituals, Pleasures and Politics of Cooperation* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2012).

What does it mean to be able to think, work, and operate across domains? Interdisciplinarity has become a keyword on many levels, from scientific research to community work, and from innovation trajectories at multinational companies to governance of not-for-profit organizations. Drawing on multiple branches of knowledge and skills in order to create something new has become a central modus operandi in many domains. Yet, at the same time, the growing level of specialized knowledge within each separate domain of practice seems to promote ever more isolated ways of valuing and understanding the world. More often than not, cooperation across domains is instrumentalized as the importing of a technique from one domain to another, in order to find a solution to a problem. This can result in a clash of values, which is caused by a lack of reflection on the particularity of what is being brought together. How to find a common language to deal with the complexity of the vast economical, cultural, and social changes we face? How to cooperate in order to locate and re-evaluate shared values?

With *Across the Board*, Witte de With sets out to trace a more pluralized and nuanced trajectory for cooperations across the public, private, and artistic domains. It is an educational program that focuses on teaching rather than learning, and on building trust rather than investigating difference.

In contemporary education, knowledge is inseparably linked to value, and both are increasingly privatized. Knowledge has become the trading commodity of choice, replacing land, raw materials, and cheap labour. The term 'knowledge economy' has been introduced as a metaphor for the rewriting of the industrial economy into an interconnected, globalized one, where knowledge resources such as trade secrets and expertise are as crucial as other economic resources. In the course of this project of transition, theologian John Henry Newman's concept of universal knowledge has been displaced by a new, unruly, and fluid notion of knowledge that is shaped by informatics, postmodern scepticism, and swings of the market.<sup>2</sup> This new notion favours knowledge as a tool to *create* value, rather than seeing knowledge *as* value. In a similar vein, the way professionals are educated has undergone a radical transformation over the past decades. At the core of this has been the premise of investing one's own human capital in education in order to launch one's career in the knowledge economy. Within this educational paradigm, the professional is a particular kind of human being who is to be educated according to a predefined ideal, and to be equipped with a specific skill-set. Universities and art schools alike have been involved in an ongoing attempt to transform education. Shifting away from non-vocational practices, the university is turned into a 'knowledge factory' and the art school into a 'creative foundry.'

<sup>2</sup> See: <http://www.newmanreader.org>.

When knowledge is tooled towards specific purposes it is also isolated. Our education systems, but also our systems of governance and commerce, are increasingly separated into singular domains. The arts, politics, and business all have singular frames for understanding what it is that they do. Each of these domains has given rise to its own singular system of values: artistic value, public value, economic value. And while initially these systems were intertwined, recent events such as the financial crisis, dwindling trust in politics, and an ongoing discussion around support for the arts, have shown these systems are ever more resistant to a common exchange rate. The type of value and knowledge brought about by each of these domains exists in silos. In the nineties, literary theorist Jonathan Culler introduced a concept of knowledge different from this notion of isolated knowledge. He frames this concept as the corpus of works that are unbounded, and which succeed in challenging and reorienting our thinking in domains other than those to which they belong.<sup>3</sup> This functions in contrast to the continuity of disciplinary closure, that which keeps the boxes black, unusable, and unknowable; impenetrable to any kind of democratic assessment of their functioning and their consequences.

<sup>3</sup> Jonathan Culler, *Literary Theory* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 203.

Challenging and reorienting our thinking across domains, actually cooperating, is a skill. So, as with any skill, as sociologist Richard Sennet reminds us, it takes patience and practice. In order to develop the necessary skills to allow for a more pluralized and nuanced trajectory for cooperations across domains, a new framework of learning is required: a framework that resists the value-for-money principle, which positions the student in a supply and demand system with their teacher, who in turn is in a similar relationship with their employers. This way of thinking leads precisely to singular knowledge structures, and lies at the base of the emergence of a culture of accountability and distrust in education. According to educator Gert Biesta, trust is a core concept that needs to be part of a new language of learning and cooperating. Or, to be more precise: trust without ground, in addition to violence and responsibility, are the three interlocking concepts Biesta introduces to advocate an opening up of existential possibilities in education.<sup>4</sup> How these concepts can be mobilized to further skills of acting and thinking across domains is worth investigating.

4 Gert Biesta, *The Beautiful Risk of Education* (Boulder and London: Paradigm, 2013).

Where does learning to cooperate in a non-linear way begin? It begins with trust. Working together inherently includes a risk that the outcome of this cooperation has an effect on those involved. Both desired effects and undesired effects can be the result. For who has not found themselves changed through interaction with the other? What is needed to enable us to deal with risk is trust. Trust is what is needed to engage in a constructive, co-operative way in situations where one does not know what will happen. Trust should not be blind, but neither is trust a calculated risk. In order to truly learn, and to fashion a collaboration that goes beyond the corpus of single domains, a degree of trust without ground is needed. Trust in the possibilities to bring about the planned outcomes, but also trust in the productive risks that a co-operation results in; things that none of the parties involved could have imagined beforehand. If risk is negated because there is no trust, then possibilities contract, accountability is demanded, inspection and control are imposed, and co-operation across domains is instrumentalized in a singular way.

The second concept that could enable us to find a common language to think across the values of individual domains is philosopher Jacques Derrida's notion of transcendental violence. The core of the educational process is the principle of taking responsibility for the subjectivity of the individual learner. Education has a crucial role to play in confronting learners with what and who is different from themselves. This is especially apparent where it concerns parties who have already developed their own internalized systems of knowledge. A relation is originally instituted, according to Derrida, by a certain pre-ethical, transcendental violence, which does not spring from a distinct way of encountering or exceeding the other.<sup>5</sup> Learning to cooperate is thus not necessarily a pleasant process. Learning is always done in a relation that is by definition violent. It is about challenging each other with difficult questions and confronting participants with otherness and difference. This is the kind of violence that is bestowed with the nature of crafting

possibility. It is a violence that does not leave one alone to stay within the safe confines of a single domain. In order to locate and re-evaluate values as a basis for collaboration across the board, we look at creating problems, and at creating difficult situations, rather than solving them.

5 Jacques Derrida, *Writing and Difference* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978), 128.

If working together is, as we have seen, an extremely difficult, risky, and violent affair, by definition, it also implies a huge responsibility. Plurality and difference are inseparable from the human condition. It is the question of how we take responsibility for plurality that defines how we shape our society. In learning to cooperate, taking responsibility for the uniqueness of each individual involved is paramount. This responsibility, argues Biesta, is a responsibility without knowledge. That is, a responsibility that cannot be calculated. If the structure of collective creation of knowledge follows a calculated path, it would make of ethics and politics a technology. Rather, it belongs to the very structure of responsibility that we do not know what we take responsibility for.

The notions of responsibly, violence, and trust are three interlocked educational principles, which aid in structuring a trajectory that is as yet restless in terms of forms and methods, but which, in the first year of this program's inception, show much promise. *Across the Board* at Witte de With has the long-term goal of creating a platform where frank conversations about the problems of working together are raised, and a new language around disciplined forms of knowledge is developed. Connecting the public, private, and cultural domains is not only about sharing knowledge, skills, and dispositions. It is about creating possibilities and locating values that allow for a reorientation of the ways by which existing social structures, divisions, and inequalities are reproduced. It is about challenging our thinking in domains other than those to which we belong.

*Yoeri Meessen is Witte de With's Associate Director, Education & Public Affairs. Previously he was Head of Education at Manifesta, the European Biennial of Contemporary Art. Originally trained as a teacher of fine arts and art history, he holds a Masters in Arts, Culture, and Media from the Rijksuniversiteit Groningen; specializing in arts and social theory.*

Annika Kappner

*As trial and error is of vital importance in the development of a child, so it is for the expansion of our perception and imagination.*

## Maria Lamslag With Mihaela Rădescu On Architecture, Education, and Exchange

*Mihaela Rădescu (1986, Tîrgu-Mureș, Romania) is an independent Rotterdam-based architect and designer. Among others, she collaborates with Horta Museum (Brussels), Collective East (a group of young architects spread across Europe), and with Tom Postma Design on the exhibition design for the Prospects and Concepts exhibition at Art Rotterdam.*

Maria Lamslag: You participated in the *Across the Board* program, exploring cultural value creation through a cross-sectoral network. What is culture to you and where do you see the added value of involving different fields?

Mihaela Rădescu: For me, culture is a dynamic, vibrant set of complex relations between material and immaterial forces, manifestations of what people do or make, which we can see, hear, touch, smell, or taste. It is an intangible component in our lives, resulting from how people are, behave, and think. Therefore, culture isn't an island unrelated to its surroundings, but rather it overlaps with all aspects and components of our societies. It contributes as much as other realms to the evolution of humankind, and to the evolution of our world.

When we are talking about the 'cultural field,' cross-overs are necessary and highly valuable. Without them, the cultural field would become self-referential, which is contrary to what I claim culture is: a mirror of society in both form and content.

ML: How do you professionally contribute to this? How do you interact with other fields of work?

MR: Studying architecture appealed to me because it embodies several creative disciplines. As a freelance architect, I aim to transform my professional activity into my testing ground. I always try to take on projects with strong public, cultural, and artistic components, and I enjoy working on projects that allow me to engage with the art world from a different vantage point and to interact with various creative professionals.

A setting in which I am able to test borders is with Collective East. Together with young architects from Romania, France, Belgium, and the Netherlands we take on projects ranging from architecture competitions to art installations. Our latest project is a self-initiated interdisciplinary research project about the reactivation of Bucharest's public libraries, under the name of BiblioHUB. The project was kick-started in September 2015, when a grant offered the possibility of an exploration, inventory, and analysis of Bucharest's public library system, through interdisciplinary dialogue with experts between the Netherlands and Romania. The collected findings were presented on the BiblioHUB website ([www.bibliohub.org](http://www.bibliohub.org)) in an indexing study, corroborating statistical data with spatial information, photo surveys, qualitative evaluations, as well as relevant models of Romanian and international initiatives.

I think my curiosity for variation also comes from my cultural upbringing. Both my parents are actors, and I practically grew up in theaters and on tour. At a very young age I witnessed the preparations and activities backstage but also the final presentations onstage. This position of being between various creative disciplines inspired me to test these borders, both theoretically and practically.

Maite García Lechner

Culture can translate feelings, words, and specific communities into an artistic product. Whether this is a protest song by Bob Dylan or Beyoncé, the modernity-

Beyoncé, the modernity- and war-glorifying movement of Futurism, or George Orwell's Animal Farm, which, in my words, sought "to fuse political purpose and artistic purpose into one whole."

ML: Speaking of your upbringing, you were born in the heart of Transylvania and grew up in Bucharest. What brought you to Rotterdam, and later made you decide to work in Bucharest again?

MR: During my first years of studying architecture in Bucharest, I realized the educational system in Romania wasn't enough to support my ambitions. I went to France for a year, followed by Rotterdam in 2010 to study an MSc program at the architecture faculty of Delft University of Technology. Working in Bucharest with the BiblioHUB project is all about value creation through culture, which is what drew me back. Libraries are a neutral playground and play a powerful role in bringing together communities. They can promote education and support personal and community development. For countries like Romania, filled with the potential of its people and ideas, but without a framework to develop these ideas, this is specifically interesting. The lack of a functional framework and the absence of a real sense of community are, paradoxically, strongly related to Romania's communist background. Given the 'flattened' environment of nationalized communism, where everything and everyone was supposedly equal, and then with the fall of this communist regime, many people were left divided. In response to current situations of the government undermining its citizens, a new sense of community is luckily emerging through a growing activist attitude in the younger generations.

Libraries are able to catalyze that attitude. The network is already there, but it is outdated and not really used to empower people. The first phase of BiblioHUB was all about setting up a framework that can work with the existing infrastructure. The project is ongoing, and thanks to a collective effort, we started appearing on the radar of other public libraries in the country. What is challenging is that there's no clear legal framework about how public and private parties can work together, and how to get the latter interested in investing.

ML: Is it your ambition to specialize in this niche?

MR: I am not planning on specializing. I am too curious about too many things, and I'm not a big fan of fragmentation, either. Closer to graduation I noticed that architecture tends to get very specialized, judging by the job openings and PhD subjects offered. What does it lead to, an architect designing only doorknobs? Of course, specializations are not only about this zooming-in, yet an equipped architectural mind can understand all the forces in society and materialize it. When you get too specialized, you risk closing down, rather than opening up, the profession.

Given my professional plans, I think working with other disciplines is of essential importance. Within the architectural realm, I have always appreciated the intrinsic generalist approach. I find it valuable in setting up the prerequisite for constant crossovers, thus broadening our knowledge and professional responses to tomorrow's society. Given the speed at which society is moving, we don't always have (or take) the time to define what we are doing per se.

ML: By interacting with other sectors or disciplines, you get a better understanding of the frameworks and dynamics in fields unknown to you. Do you think our current education system is behind on this?

MR: We should think of new structures that give way to flexibility within these dynamics. For architecture schools, that could mean offering super-specialized courses in response to the clear need within society. And when you think specialization is going so deep that it loses its purpose, you pull back, reassess, and reconfigure accordingly. Education and specialization should evolve in a dynamic way. There should be a balance, however, it's not so much about finding a perfect recipe for that balance. It is a recipe that is always changing.

I would like to see more open and accessible platforms. Crossovers can take place in coordinated programs and public-private partnerships, but also in self-initiated collaborations. I don't think everything should be institutionalized. Many institutions are driven by political and financial motivations, which inevitably gives them a 'strict' edge.

ML: What can individuals do to skill themselves in opening up their work to other sectors and disciplines?

MR: I think that in any collaboration, there are a few key tools for professional dialogue: leaving the ego at the door, ensuring there are no hidden agendas, and listening and communicating freely. Only like this can we truly learn from each other and make the best out of the collaborative project. It's not so much a matter of actually learning the skills, but more about understanding the flux of these unknown territories.

ML: Speaking of unknown territories, and coming back again to the *Across the Board* masterclasses, with whom of the program participants would you like to spend a day learning more about their field?

MR: It would be interesting to spend a day with all of the participants to work on a group assignment of some sort, which would allow us to know each other better professionally, and to make use of our potential.

With the lectures, two stood out in terms of learning things from a totally different perspective than my own: the class of Renilde Steeghs on cultural diplomacy, and Ron Soonieus's on leadership and governance in the art world and the commercial realm. However, if I could spend a day with only one of the lecturers, it would definitely be Cuauhtémoc Medina. Not only because he worked very closely with Francis Alÿs, one of my favorite artists, but also because it was just a pleasure to hear the stories behind his artistic practice and the contextual forces that drove him to change from politics to art.

Yoeri Meessen

*As an independent contractor, Maria Lamslag (1988, Harderwijk, the Netherlands) works on research and stories for (documentary) films, photography, and journalism. At Kunsten '92, a lobby organization for the Dutch arts and culture sector, she works as a project manager*

**Challenging and re-orienting our thinking across domains, actually cooperating, is a skill.**



## Annika Kappner Power, Pokémons, and Patriarchs

Marieke Tiesinga

You should find a solution, but also search for the question behind the question.

As a child, while watching the news, I started wondering why humanity apparently was unable to learn from its many mistakes throughout history, and was seemingly unable to change. How was it possible that wars had to be fought over and over again instead of evolving from them and collectively developing better solutions? This naive yet very sincere quest brought me to study business management and work in the financial service industry as an investment banker, as I wanted to get to know the forces sculpting the face of the contemporary earth from inside. What I observed ultimately led me to become an artist, for I concluded that non-verbal, non-linear investigation and communication might be able to detect and reveal truths hidden from logic and data analysis, overlooked in the global race for profit.

Moral and spiritual values have seemingly long succumbed to the overbearing magnetism of money. The all-devouring machine of capitalism, which is stripping the earth and humanity of its material and mental wealth to feed a pyramidal global power structure, controls all, including those apparently benefitting from it. The dissociation of producer from final product, in the case of labour division; value from physical object and product, in the case of trade bills and derivatives; and ownership from responsibility, in the case of stock markets, has led to ever-increasing human, machine, and capital productivity, exponentially increasing short-term efficiency and consequently return rates. The space-time collapse induced by digital technology continues to speed up product and capital cycles, accelerating all steps involved, from resource-extraction to creation and delivery systems of physical and intellectual goods and services (including financial products), and has given birth to super corporations and plutocrats. In a self-perpetuating manner, principles and practices devised to maximise efficiency (starting with the invention of tools, specialization, agriculture, etc.) have exponentially augmented the power of the one tool that is key to the easy transfer of property: money.

Over time the efficiency-mania associated with the never-satisfied appetite of stock markets and investors for continuous profit growth has infused all areas of private and public life with the spirit of competition accelerated by technological progress. Humans in developed markets aim to be ever more productive, attractive, exceptional, up to date, to stay ahead of the game. Privatization of the public sector in the Western world has led to an increasing focus on efficiency and productivity, while it remains arguable whether this has led to either better services for consumers, or better working conditions for providers. As Paul Starr contends in *The Limits of Privatization* (1987), “best cannot mean only the cheapest or most efficient, for a reasonable appraisal of alternatives needs to weigh concerns of justice, security, and citizenship.” Nevertheless, since the 1990s European governments have introduced evidence-based evaluation policies to measure performance of publicly funded entities in the cultural, education, and scientific research sectors. Often this implies the use of quantitative performance evaluation techniques, making numbers the dominant form of information used to convey performance.

Cultural institutions are asked to validate their existence, justify the reception of public funding, and demonstrate their importance largely through quantitative criteria: visitor numbers, reach of educational programs, etc. This has led larger institutions in particular to focus strongly on ‘blockbuster’ exhibitions, in the case of museums, leaving little room to share lesser-known artists and oeuvres with a broader audience. One could argue that public spending cuts for the cultural sector frequently have a political character, the effective savings of these measures being marginal, being done mainly to appease the general public in moments of political/economic crisis. Yet, cuts have grave consequences for the effected institutions and individuals. As an example, the budget cuts introduced by the Rutte cabinet in 2011 decreased spending for the arts by a dramatic third in 2015, compared to spending in 2010. The difference of 150 million euros equals 0.06 percent of total government spending in 2015. The impact and contribution of arts and culture is oftentimes measured through quantitative indicators like contribution to GDP, and capacity to attract tourism and contribute to the gentrification of developing neighborhoods.

While, in general, to evaluate means “to form an opinion of the amount, value or quality of something after thinking about it carefully” (Oxford Advanced Learner’s Dictionary, 2015), performance evaluation has largely been reduced to performance measurement, with the process of thinking carefully being replaced by the process of measuring carefully. By considering measurement a necessary precondition for forming opinions, not only about the amount, but also about the value and quality of something, the focus of policy makers has been on finding the ‘best’ measures of value and quality, instead of understanding the process of forming opinions about value and quality.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Francesco Chiaravalloti, “Performance Evaluation in the Arts: From the Margins of Accounting to the Core of Accountability” (PhD thesis, University of Groningen, 2016), 1.

Especially for sectors where value and quality have a different nature to those in business (such as the public sector in general and the cultural sector in particular), relying on quantitative measures might result in a large gap between the abstract body of rules and procedures of performance evaluation, on the one hand, and the reality of those who are accountable for these results, on the other. Business, if aimed at profit maximization, as it is most often, and culture, as well as science, have a diametrically opposed nature. Research and Development in the private sector is instrumentalized to, at the very least, prevent decline in profit growth, or to accelerate it. Research and experimentation in the arts and science are driven by the desire to uncover truth, to discover the unknown, to expand knowledge regardless of the possible practical implications of the given results. Peter Higgs, the British physicist who discovered the eponymous boson, claims that today he would be excluded from academia as he would not be productive enough. Scientists and researchers at major institutions today have to ‘churn out’ articles and publications to ensure funding for their projects and employment.

Efficiency – and hence control – leads to uniformity, it is the enemy of diversity and vitality. Think of communist

Suki de Boer

We need to replace the linear logic of public-private partnerships with the cyclical logic of the

the cyclical logic of the ecosystem, which has no well-defined goal, but regards the collaborative process itself as the result.

regimes, shopping malls, or industrial farming. The capacity of art to renew itself, and to push existing boundaries can only be kept alive when new discoveries, the different, the avant-garde are possible. Funding for existing and established art is valuable as it brings a larger public into contact with formerly radical ideas. By definition, the very new is directly interesting and relevant only to a few. Yet it is vital for society, as it contributes to the continuous evolution and transformation of its thinking processes in the long run. This impact is ungraspable in its beginning. And it is arguably difficult to measure and select at inception which ideas will be valuable, as they are yet to be understood and developed. Space for experimentation, for failure, and for discovery are crucial for new forms of thought to flourish independently of quantifiable results.

In the global competition for physical, digital, and mental resources, space, and attention, success is evaluated by the capacity to quantify, ergo to monetize these assets. Additionally, the dissociation of financial investments from the actual productivity of underlying assets has allowed investors to profit independent of value creation through production, as in, for example, financial speculation with derivatives. Here, investors bet on the evolutions of underlying assets or the influences of external events, thus disconnecting profitability fully from the 'value' for society that the results have generated. Underlying assets and events range from stocks to election results and climate change. If accurately predicted, it is hence possible to heavily monetize evolutions that are detrimental to society. These financial instruments are the apotheosis of the self-perpetuating forces of efficiency.

By January 2017 Pokémon Go had been downloaded over 650 million times, and seventy-eight percent of its players are over 18 years old, according to a Forbes survey. A number of people two times the size of the population of the United States are hunting virtual creatures, in extreme cases only stopped by death or street accidents. Is this indicative of a crisis of meaning pervading the civilized world? What tools do we have to look differently at a world that we depict in this grim light? Could it be that the very tools that led to a crisis – economic, environmental, political, social – might not be the ones to solve it? The worship of logic and science propagated in the enlightenment period has led to a dismissal of intuitive and experiential knowledge creation. Collaboration and exchange between science, politics, economics, and the arts can shed new light on problems that cannot be solved with linear thinking and logic alone. Ninety percent of information processing is subconscious. Art can help us to make unconscious processes conscious, to look at ourselves differently, and possibly to understand ourselves better. Arts and culture are vital tools to evolve, to broaden our horizons, to question boundaries and existing frames of reference. It contributes to, it is emblematic for, it is diversity itself.

Like Goethe's *Sorcerer's Apprentice* (1797), we are grappling with our own creations. "Abuse of Power Comes as No Surprise" (Jenny Holzer, *Truisms*, 1977–9) when looking at the corporate and financial systems that humanity has created in a quest for more and more. But the very tools that have led to the creation of such a monstrous system must

not be applied to one of the few areas left to humanity where intangible, non-monetizable values are still sought and created. Undoubtedly, certain parameters have to be related to the measurable interests of the larger public, but the immeasurable qualities and contributions of art and culture to the development of a cultivated (as opposed to barbaric) humanity have to be embraced, recognized, and valued first and foremost by the cultural sector and the larger public, regardless of a quantifiable contribution. Experimentation and research should be celebrated, regardless of immediate measurable results. Just as trial and error is of vital importance to the development of a child, so too it is to the expansion of our perception and imagination as a society. Efficiency and quantitative measures are useful as benchmarks when applied beyond a self-referential scope, not as ultimate dogma. Arts and culture go hand-in-hand with civilization. I wish that the cynicism of postmodernity, so pervasive in intellectual circles, might give way to hope and belief in the capacity of art and culture to clean the dust off our souls, and to resist a final absorption into the destructive and Kafkaesque circuit of efficiency-mania.

*Annika Kappner (1980, Berlin, Germany) crafts multi-sensory experiences in the extended field of painting, reverting principles of virtual and digital realities into the analogue realm to create glitches in perception. Prompted by her experience as an investment banker, her work ultimately is interested in the evolution of consciousness in relation to mental patterns, and the underlying forces that shape their systemic counterparts in nature, visual arts, technology, and science. She is a co-founder of the cross-modal artist collective Elephants & Volcanoes.*

Martijn Sanders

Seen from the perspective of the art collector, the art world is constituted by a paradox. While artistic value is not quantifiable, at the very same time the artwork itself is a negotiable

artwork itself is a negotiable commodity. The question every collector must ask themselves is how to find a proper attitude towards this paradoxical situation.

## Maria Lamslag With Marieke Tiesinga From Culture to Finance, and Back Again

As a Strategy Consultant for Corporate Banking at ABN AMRO Bank, Marieke Tiesinga's (1988, Groningen, the Netherlands) main objective is finding ways to expand and optimize business. Alongside her job, she teaches yoga, practices theater, and is part of a group of young bankers advising non-profit organizations on strategic issues.

Maria Lamslag: As a participant of *Across the Board*, you were one of the few with a background in finance. In our group, you were sometimes addressed as representative of the business sector, while, actually, you move around different domains and disciplines. Do you often experience people trying to put you in a box?

Marieke Tiesinga: Yes, I do. In my sector, I don't often run into people with a similar background to me. Though, coincidentally, I just met a manager in my bank whose background is in theater marketing, most of the time people consider these as two alien worlds. I have even experienced this during a job interview, when I was asked to explain how becoming a consultant paralleled with my involvement in theater. I get a little resentful when people want to place me exclusively in a business box or a cultural box. I mainly see a lot of beautiful crossovers.

ML: Can you illustrate this? What parallels, for instance, do you see between the financial and cultural sectors?

MT: Often people oppose the two sectors, but actually every organization has multiple identities that can be conflicting. In a bank, it could be a prudent risk department versus the acquisition business department. In a theater, it could be the artistic direction versus the business direction. Both organizations are best off when incorporating and securing diverse identities such as these in an integrated process. A bank can, for example, place a risk department closer to their business department to make sure it protects processes from that side of the business. A theater could involve marketing earlier in

the operational process, maybe even synchronically with forming the artistic vision.

ML: So you feel both sectors could profit from interacting more?

MT: Yes. In fact, the concept of multiple existing identities within organizations comes from my Masters in Managing in the Creative Industries, undertaken at the University of St Andrews, Scotland, which involved analyzing business structures in the cultural field. Later, when I worked for ABN AMRO Bank, I realized this concept was valid there as well. I think banks can learn from how cultural organizations deal with these different identities, and vice versa.

For example, I like the *agile* approach a lot of banks and other companies are currently embracing. The idea is that, right from the start, an interdisciplinary team works together on launching a minimally viable product. After the release, they observe how the market responds and, if necessary, improve it bit by bit, or withdraw the product if it fails. ING Bank did this, for example, with a smartphone payment app that was not as successful as had been hoped. This approach saves a lot of money and time if you compare it to the earlier way, where several departments successively worked on designing a perfect product, spending a lot of time and money, while the market value remained unproven until the launch. This interdisciplinary and learning-on-the-job approach could be successful in other sectors as well.

Luckily, we see more and more connections being made. When I enrolled in the Masters program in Scotland, I was very much attracted by the diversity of the cohort.

One classmate was Scottish, but all the others came from outside the United Kingdom: China, the United States, the Netherlands, Greece, and Lebanon, among others. Our backgrounds were also diverse, ranging from an opera singer and a former personal assistant to director Steven Spielberg, to people coming from advertising agencies or business administration like myself. Combining expertise really accelerates the creation of a unique knowledge.

Mihaela Rădescu

I think that in any collaboration, there are a few key tools for professional dialogue: leaving the ego at the door, ensuring there are no hidden agendas, and listening and communicating freely.

ML: So you finished a Masters in Managing in the Creative Industry, and value working in that field. Where does this interest come from?

MT: Art has always played a very prominent role in my life. For as long as I can remember, I have actively participated in arts as an amateur. As a child, I was involved in theater, in primary school I started singing in choirs, and during my college years I discovered improvisational comedy. But my interest in business is equally natural to me. I think it comes from being an analytical thinker.

When in high school I started thinking about a future career, my interests were also both in art and economics. I had this vague dream that one day in the future I could perhaps become a managing director of a theater. That's why after high school I first thought about following a Bachelor in Arts & Management. However, the class I took at an open day was so disillusioning that it led me to reconsider my initial idea. I was disappointed with the level at which the business side was addressed. That's why I decided to study 'mere' business administration. I figured that, with this study, I could at least go into depth, and enlarge my chances of getting a job, including the option of becoming a managing director in a theater one day. [Text continues on page 24.]



Across the Board  
2016

**Participants**

**R.S. de Boer**  
*Droog design, PhD candidate  
VU Amsterdam*

**Marie-Louise Calame**  
*Project manager FestivalTickets,  
coordinator and project  
leader IFFR Rotterdam*

**Floor Margarita Cornelisse**  
*Social designer, chairman  
Beeldkanon co-operative*

**Seren Dalkiran**  
*Co-founder Synergized Earth  
Network, initiator Millennial  
Motion*

**Benedine Dassen**  
*Sr. policy advisor Ministry of  
Education, Culture and Science,  
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**Nataly van Driel**  
*Sr. policy advisor Ministry of  
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**Maite García Lechner**  
*Program manager European  
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**Manus Groenen**  
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**Anne Janssen**  
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**Annika Kappner**  
*Artist*

**Maria Lamslag**  
*Kunsten '92, Research & Stories*

**Aurélie Lever**  
*Assistant general director  
Nederlands Dans Theater*

**Chiara Nuzzi**  
*Independent curator, artistic  
director Sonic Somatic*

**Claartje Opdam**  
*Project manager EYE Filmmuseum*

**Mihaela Rădescu**  
*Freelance architect, exhibition  
designer, researcher*

**Marieke Tiesinga**  
*Strategy Consultant ABN AMRO*

**Jaurana Verschuren**  
*Secretary NVTC, Dutch Association  
for Supervision in Arts & Culture*

**Martine Zoeteman**  
*Founder STADVOGELS,  
coordinator Temporary Programs  
Sandberg Institute*

if You Don't read the  
 you. DŌ READ! it You  
 DŌ ? THAT'S the GREAT  
 EFFECT OF TOO MUCH Information ?  
 to Bē First, NOT even to Bē

You ALL HAVE: to Tell the TRUTH  
 TRUTH, we LIVE! in Society  
 is First, WHO cares, GET it  
 WHO we DESTROY, we D.O.N.T.  
 it, sell it, anything YOU PRACTICE

Newspapers You ARE UNINFORMED,  
 ARE MISINFORMED, WHAT DŌ You  
 The QUESTION, WHAT is the long Term  
 ONE OF the Effects is the NEED  
 true anymore, SO WHAT RESPONSIBILITY  
 NOT Just to Bē First, BUT to Tell  
 now where it's About WHO  
 out there, we D.O.N.T. CARE  
 CARE if it's true, Just say  
 You GET GOOD At, even BULL SHIT!

Across the Board  
2016

Visiting Tutors

Jeanne Gaakeer  
*Professor Law and Literature*  
*Erasmus University Rotterdam*

Wilfried Lentz  
*Founder Gallery Wilfried Lentz*  
*Rotterdam*

Gabriel Lester  
*Inventor, artist, and filmmaker*

Cuauhtémoc Médina  
*Curator, art critic, and historian*

Martijn Sanders  
*Chairman of the Board*  
*Holland Festival*

Ron Soonieus  
*Managing Partner Camunico*

Renilde Steeghs  
*Dutch Ambassador of International*  
*Cultural Cooperation*

Moderator

Geert Maarse  
*Presenter and program maker*

Witte de With  
Center for Contemporary Art



[Text continues from page 17.]

ML: What is the current status of that dream, since you are currently working for a bank?

MT: I figured I could always still aim at that specific position. After graduating, I started working for ABN AMRO in a very specific direction in banking: asset and liability management. For three years, with great passion, I completely immersed myself in that field. Then, all of a sudden, I felt a little anxious. I found myself on a path that was so bank-specific that, even though I was happy with my job, I had to critically question whether my early belief that I could always work in another domain would actually withstand.

This was not even because I thought I was over-specializing, but rather because I noticed it was difficult for others to understand what I was doing. The word 'liability' scares many people, but for me, working on a non-profit advisory job, for example, I can use a lot of the same soft skills: conceptual thinking, detecting correlations, knowing how to get people on board. Still, I decided to move within ABN AMRO to a more general department requiring more demonstrable and universal skills, applicable in every field: strategy consulting.

ML: Can you tell more about this advisory job? What kind of expertise do bankers specifically bring to non-profit and cultural organizations?

MT: ABN AMRO has a foundation that every year offers charities and non-profit organizations a team of young thinkers to advise on a specific question. For me, joining this advisory group was definitely motivated by the possibility to get more closely involved in culture again. Together with six other young bankers, I am now working to advise how the Rotterdams Philharmonisch Orkest can appeal to a younger audience. This spring we will present it to the board.

Mostly the organizations have a very specific research question about a financial structure or business model, and are hoping that we as bankers can present them innovative alternatives.

However, again, it's more general skills that come in handy in the cultural field as well. One of the things I have learned from my positions in ABN AMRO is that it's crucial to make sure you and your client are attuned to the research question, and that you keep checking this during the research. From problem solving training at McKinsey & Company consultants I have learned that you should not focus primarily on finding a solution, but also search for the question behind the question. This explains why, with one case, we were asked to help a museum find new funding but ended up writing a social media marketing strategy. The existing financial structures were not an issue. Publicity was the problem. People simply didn't know about the project.

ML: You explained how a cultural institution could profit from your expertise. Can you also give an example of pollination the other way around? What have you learned from your cultural undertakings, and what does the bank stand to gain?

MT: Besides some small, simple things, such as easily speaking to audiences and sometimes incorporating theater exercises into group assignments as warm-ups or playful breaks, I can also play a role as mediator. Certain financial fields feel very distant from the cultural sphere, but when working together or financing cultural organizations it is important to have knowledge of the relevant topics and characteristics that con-

cern them. An example of this is knowing the meaning and consequences of having an ANBI-status [*Algemeen Nut Beogende Instelling*, or public benefit organization]. I can easily detect what knowledge is needed in our organization and connect disciplines and people in our company.

More generally, culture completes my personal and professional development. It encourages me to go deeper into things, to reflect more, and to try and view things from different angles. The importance of culture interwoven in my personal life comes from the same vision I have regarding the value of practicing yoga. I think many people nowadays neglect learning introspection – how to reflect or get in touch with themselves. There are a lot of external stimulants, smartphones being one example, and in school the main focus is on the exact sciences, which overshadow the humanities. I think people would profit from more guidance in developing self-reflection. Arts and yoga are examples of ways in which this can be achieved.

ML: Does this make you a strong advocate for incorporating arts and culture in other domains?

MT: I think any field can gain from crossovers. Different domains influence each other already. Whether through subsidies from the public sector or sponsoring and partnerships from the private sector, cultural organizations or artists are affected by both the public and private sectors in a direct sense through the funding they receive. More indirectly, the public and private sectors help to shape the environment in which the cultural organization or artist operates, and vice versa. On a smaller scale, there are also many different activities and perspectives within any one field from which people can learn. A rope is stronger than just one thread. That symbolism can apply to people, to disciplines, and also to sectors.

Maike Garcia Lechner

Maybe the biggest added value the cultural sector contributes to others is its curiosity, and a certain degree of boldness – a mentality not just to 'think outside of the box,' but to examine by doing. To make it work anyway.

*As an independent contractor, Maria Lamslag (1988, Harderwijk, the Netherlands) works on research and stories for (documentary) films, photography, and journalism. At Kunsten '92, a lobby organization for the Dutch arts and culture sector, she works as a project manager.*

People often oppose the sectors of arts and finance, but actually every organization has multiple identities that can be conflicting. Both are best off when incorporating and securing these diverse identities in an integrated process.

Suki de Boer

### Máximo Esfuerzo, Mínimo Resultado

“Máximo esfuerzo, mínimo resultado.” The Mexico-based artist Francis Alÿs has used this maxim in connection with some of his artworks. In *Paradox of Praxis 1* (1997), he pushed a large rectangular block of ice through the streets of Mexico City for nine hours, until it became nothing more than a little cube. When making *Cuando La Fe Mueve Montañas* [when faith moves mountains] (2002) in Lima, Alÿs opted for a similar approach, directing 500 volunteers armed with shovels to move a sand dune with a diameter of 500 meters ten centimeters from its original position.

A maximum effort to achieve a minimal result is also something you see in the functioning of an ecosystem. Living (animals, plants) and non-living (air, water, soil) elements connect with each other, generating cycles together and finding a state of dynamic equilibrium. This also leaves room for natural growth, interaction, and decay, which then leads to natural growth, interaction, and decay, and so forth. Like Alÿs’s *modus operandi*, the functioning of an ecosystem has no linear goal. While in his masterclass for *Across the Board*, Cuauhtémoc Medina, Alÿs’s collaborator on *When Faith Moves Mountains*, championed an art that offers riddles instead of solutions, I would like to submit that this cyclical process offers possibilities for developing different models for the public-private partnerships currently very much in demand in the cultural sector.

A public-private partnership is a contractual arrangement between a public partner and a private partner who share their skills and knowledge to provide a service or facility for general public use.<sup>1</sup> Technically speaking, there are different models for public-private partnerships, varying from traditional agreements between a public and a private party to more elaborate and integrated arrangements, for example, the so-called Design, Build, Finance, Maintain, Operate partnership, which is frequently adopted in infrastructural and housing projects in the construction industry.<sup>2</sup>

- 1 This type of partnership is traditionally found in the construction, energy, transport, and telecom sectors, but after 2008 it was also picked up in journalism, the prison system, public security, and the cultural sector.
- 2 This arrangement looks beyond the construction or renovation phase. By also taking into account design, financing, maintenance, and exploitation, the focus shifts to the lifespan of the partnership between public and private parties.

Although the cultural sector uses various names like sponsorship or patronage, for lack of more specific terms, they amount to the same thing.<sup>3</sup> Corporate research has revealed that in many cases companies have already redeveloped traditional forms of corporate support like sponsorship and patronage into new forms, allowing them to establish more strategic cooperation with a public partner in a context of mutual promotion.<sup>4</sup> As a general rule, these forms can generate a high level of media exposure and marketing content.

- 3 Claudia Ventura, Giuseppina Cassalia, Lucia Della Spina, “New Models of Public-Private Partnership in Cultural Heritage Sector: Sponsorships Between Models and Traps,” *Procedia – Social and Behavioral Sciences* (10 June 2016), 257–64.
- 4 Bernadette McNicholas, “Arts, Culture and Business: A Relationship Transformation, A Nascent Field,” *International Journal of Arts Management* 7, no. 1, (2004), 57–69.

For example, when the Deutsche Bank and DZ BANK each separately established a public-private partnership with the Städel Museum in Frankfurt for the new expansion of the modern art wing, which was completed in 2012, both banks also seized on this partnership to show to the outside world that, as great patrons of culture and the arts, they embrace corporate social responsibility. The Deutsche Bank repeatedly announced to the media that it had provided sixty paintings and sculptures, 161 works on paper, and 379 prints from its own art collection for long-term loan to its own section of the new wing. The same applies to the DZ BANK, which openly publicized the fact that it had made 220 photo works from the DZ BANK Kunstsammlung available for its section of the Städel wing. One can be sure that this did not have an adverse effect on the financial value of their corporate collections.

Wilfried Lentz

Something worth that much costs nothing.

These examples show that for the time being public-private partnerships in the cultural sector are still dominated by a linear logic, meaning that the public partner has a problem (no money) for which the private partner offers a solution (money). But what kind of obstacles and difficulties do they run up against? And could public-private partnership in the cultural sector be organized differently?

Caring About Culture

Before addressing the dilemma of linear logic behind current public-private cooperations in the cultural sector, we must first outline why such cooperations are so in demand today.

It would be a mistake to think that the 2008 credit crunch has led to a decline in support provided to cultural institutions and organizations by companies or foundations that manage corporate funds. Corporate mediation in the cultural sector in the form of financial support or art acquisitions has remained stable.<sup>5</sup> In fact, in the past years both have even been given extra stimulus.<sup>6</sup> There are several reasons for this.

<sup>5</sup> Research on thirty-two Dutch corporate collections has revealed that since 2010 there has been neither a decrease in the number of collections that have an active acquisition policy nor any significant cutback in their acquisitions budget. VBCN, *Corporate collections as emerging heritage? Art market dynamics, corporate strategies, and public support for the arts*, 16 February 2017.

<sup>6</sup> Since 2008, banks like the Deutsche Bank and UBS have actually been spending more on the sponsorship of art fairs like Art Basel and Frieze Art Fair. See: Melanie Gerlis, "Banks cash in on spend and lend strategy," *The Art Newspaper*, 13 June 2012.

On the one hand, companies saw that their losses were increasingly grabbing media headlines and that the dark side of their operations was coming under repeated scrutiny.<sup>7</sup> In order to win back the trust of their clients, companies began to focus on their public art-related activities and to support museums, presentation institutions, and other art- and culture-based organizations, thereby creating an image that might give the client an impression of integrity.

<sup>7</sup> After 2008, it became publicly known that many banks and companies had caused widespread damage to society through their involvement in shadow banking and the manipulation of the international Libor rates. Shadow banking refers to the whole of non-bank vehicles that conduct bank activities commissioned by regular banks, but which do not have the necessary banking status and are not subject to regulation or supervision. Libor stands for London Interbank Offered Rate. The Libor scandal revealed that since 1991 a number of banks had manipulated rates by setting them either too high or too low. The fraud underpinned approximately 350 billion US dollars of loans, mortgage loans, small business credits, and personal loans worldwide.

On the other hand, since 2008, sweeping spending cuts have forced many public art institutions and organizations to seek more financial independence from their governments. This has led these institutions and organizations to develop a growing interest in private partners like wealthy individuals and especially companies, and to rely more heavily on their support in spite of the fact that in some cases the flow of funds might have decreased. The same applies to the many international museum and cultural conferences organized by ICOM, Frankfurter Allgemeine Forum, and UNESCO to discuss and explore the possibilities of public-private partnerships.

In Europe, governments are already addressing these issues by devising tax legislation that facilitates public-private partnerships. This has also given them a legitimate argument to further withdraw from the public art domain and to leave art to the free market. In the Netherlands, the Ministry of Education, Culture, and Science launched a campaign called *Cultuur, daar geef je om* [caring about culture], which aimed at making private investors and companies aware of the tax benefits that accompany donating to culture and the arts. In this context, reference is often made to foreign circumstances, where such political choices are a strategically proven concept. For example, the United States government and the British government each created a special public body – respectively the Business Committee for the Arts in 1968, and the Association for Business Sponsorship of the Arts in 1978 – designed to incite companies and wealthy individuals to sponsor the arts, thus paving the way for cuts in public funding.

Chiara Nuzzi

Contemporary art responds to the urgency challenging the imposed forms of social and structural oppression

## Corporate Caveats

In spite of apparently well-meaning corporate efforts and deliberate attempts by the government to stimulate partnerships between companies and public institutions in the cultural and art scenes, there is still a fundamental moral and practical dilemma: to what extent would they actually want to rely on corporate support?

Morally speaking, the philosopher Slavoj Žižek takes the view that the general corporate commitment to 'global responsibility' and the way it is being implemented has ensured that now capitalism is regarded as the most efficient instrument for the advancement of the interests of society. He considers this to be rather misguided because, in his view, it would amount to the separation of what he calls the basic ideological *dispositif* of capitalism (technological exploitation and individual greed) from socio-economic conditions that lead to the production and distribution of goods and services. This gives rise to the illusory idea that this *dispositif* is an isolated given that can be remedied by embarking on a more 'spiritual' corporate course – for instance by supporting art and culture – while real conditions remain unchanged.

According to Žižek, the alibi function of corporate social responsibility – from the 1990s until 2008, when political scientist Francis Fukuyama's dream of a neoliberal democratic world order, where large multinational companies with their "socially responsible eco-capitalism"<sup>8</sup> would play an important role, was shattered – has somehow always managed to convince. In his view, however, following the collapse of Lehman Brothers and the global financial-economic meltdown, which made the moral bankruptcy of the corporate scene more visible to the public, this function has simply become unsustainable.

<sup>8</sup> Slavoj Žižek, *First as Tragedy, Then as Farce* (London: Verso, 2009), 35.

As an example of this moral bankruptcy, Žižek points to the Ponzi scheme set up by investor and philanthropist Bernie Madoff, which affected a large number of businesses as well as consumers. He also refers to the Greek debt crisis, which was partially caused by the US multinational finance company Goldman Sachs, and which indirectly contributed to the strong rise of the Greek neo-Nazi party Golden Dawn.

Apart from Žižek's examples, there are numerous cases in which the art scene could ask similar questions about the moral character of the companies upon which they rely for support. This happened in 2010, when activists called attention to the fact that BP (British Petroleum) was sponsoring the Tate and related it to the environmental scandals caused by BP. Similarly, in 2011 artists and art lovers demonstrated against the Italian defense contractor and arms manufacturer Finmeccanica (now Leonardo). It sponsored the National Gallery in London with money derived from trade with both the secular Syrian regime of Bashar al-Assad and the 'neocons' in the US Pentagon.

Apart from these moral caveats, the practical question still remains of how much a withdrawing government would want to depend on the free market as a way to support culture.

Different reports by international supervisors in the financial world suggest that both the collection of global, systemically important banks, and the private parties



earmarked as important backers of public-private partnerships, are far from financially sound. For example, the Financial Stability Board even described the Deutsche Bank as potentially one of the most dangerous banks for the world economy.<sup>9</sup> Macro-economic studies show that after the credit crunch the global banking system shows even more signs of instability than before.<sup>10</sup>

<sup>9</sup> Financial Stability Board (FSB), *Update of Group of Global Systemically Important Banks (G-SIBs)*, Basel, 1 November 2012.

<sup>10</sup> See: Wolfgang Streeck, "The Crisis in Democratic Capitalism," *New Left Review* 71 (September–October 2011), 5–29; Joshua Aizenman & Ilan Noy, "Macroeconomic Adjustment and the History of Crises in Open Economies," *VOX, Research-based Policy Analysis and Commentary from Leading Economists*, 21 November 2012: <http://voxeu.org/article/macroeconomic-adjustment-and-history-crises-open-economies>

It is also clear that US banks such as Bank of America, Citigroup, Goldman Sachs, Morgan Stanley, and Wells Fargo, and European banks such as ABN AMRO, Deutsche Bank, Belfius (formerly Dexia), ING, Rabobank, Royal Bank of Scotland, and UBS, who present themselves as cultural benefactors on the basis of corporate social responsibility, could hardly have survived without support from the state. In their articles and editorials, analysts and economists have stressed that serious problems will remain as long as retail banking is not separated from investment banking and more powerful regulatory laws are not put into place. The question is whether banks, with their shaky foundation, can still be seen as solid backers of culture and the arts.<sup>11</sup>

<sup>11</sup> This also applies to other corporations. In 2008, for instance, the US automotive giant General Motors collapsed. Just eight years earlier the company, with great enthusiasm, had entered into a public-private partnership with the Detroit Institute of Art and had opened the GM Center for African American Art. It is ironic to note that following GM's bankruptcy, the entire museum, including the GM Center, had to be rescued by the Ford Foundation.

Even before the collapse of Lehman Brothers, it was already generally known that large banks and multinational corporations were not financially infallible. Although this is already problematic for these corporate entities and their close financial-economic environment, it often also has worrying consequences for the cultural sector – especially where public-private cooperation is concerned.

This is clearly illustrated by the financial implosion of the energy company Enron in 2001. Not only did the carefully-curated Enron art collection with its annual twenty million dollar budget fall apart, but a whole range of cultural institutions in Houston that were dependent on Enron for funding – the Houston Museum of Fine Arts, the Houston Holocaust Museum, the Houston Ballet, the Alley Theater, and the Houston Symphony – also ran into serious difficulties.

One might rightly ask if the current models of public-private partnership in the cultural sector will not eventually lead to an exacerbation of the problem. In an ideal world, corporations will never be the only solution when it comes to supporting culture and the arts.

#### Mueve Montañas

The reality is that the cultural sector is increasingly dependent on corporate support and that for the moment, at least, companies are not saying "no." It would therefore be wise to keep both feet firmly on the ground, and to regard the conservation and advancement of art as a viable structure that can be brought to completion.

Although there are a number of studies about public-private partnerships, a thorough analysis of its functioning in particular is clearly still lacking. Mapping its shortcomings and delights should be the first step. Subsequently, those findings should be used to develop models that break with traditional solution-oriented linear logic. All too often this logic gives the private party, with its greater financial resources, the upper hand in a public-private partnership, to the extent that the private party can instrumentalize its partnership with the public party – and the communication that this involves – for its own gain, thereby overshadowing the greater goal that they are supposed to share.

Alj's working method, which involves pushing an ice block through Mexico City, demonstrates that you can also solve a problem with a problem. One way to counter instrumentalization by the private party is to replace the linear logic of a public-private partnership with the cyclical logic of an ecosystem, which has no well-defined goal, but regards the collaborative process itself as the result.

Moreover, in an ecosystem different actors meet and interact with each other and then go their own way, but in so doing further disseminate specific information about their encounter within the system. This can be compared with the way Alj's succeeded in bringing together 500 volunteers to move a sand dune. Over time, the work has lived on in the stories, anecdotes, and memories of everyone involved. Moving the dune did not end when the physical action was completed, but has since led an infinitely transmuted life in many different forms, through many different channels.

Similarly, a public-private partnership ideally would leave room to connect and interact with, for example, knowledge and educational institutions and programs. These can produce information and new knowledge about a relevant partnership between public and private parties and therefore can ensure the story of this partnership is not hijacked by the private party for its own underlying aims. A tripartite linkage between public, private, and knowledge parties would achieve a dynamic equilibrium.<sup>12</sup> This would then be tuned to a specific lifespan, creating enough time and space for natural growth and decay to occur within the partnership. From this decay raw material would emerge, creating new links between the three parties. However, we must realize that this would require thorough long-term planning and could not be resolved with quick wins.

<sup>12</sup> Knowledge party not only stands for traditional educational institutions and organizations such as colleges and universities, but also for cultural institutions and organizations with educational programs such as Witte de With Center for Contemporary Art or the Jan van Eyck Academie.

In conclusion, further research into public-private partnerships in the cultural sector should lead to greater attention to wisdom, strength, and beauty in the design of innovative scenarios for sustainable tripartite models. The minimal result that the scenarios for these models should achieve is to overcome fundamental moral and practical objections. Designing these scenarios requires a multidimensional vision that could be provided by an interdisciplinary platform with a variety of experts from the public and private sectors. What it boils down to is that professionals should work together on scenarios for models of public-private partnership that are based on an underlying cyclical principle.

We need models that have more to offer than just accommodating the stream of capital and knowledge that flows from corporations to art and cultural institutions. We need models that can withstand private investors who are in the process of gradually taking over public facilities and, in so doing, are stripping governments of their sovereign privileges; models that guarantee the integrity of public parties and empower them; models that, in combination with knowledge parties, provide new information about public-private partnerships and create spin-offs, which in turn result in further public-private partnerships. Now is the time for a paradigm shift in the way we look at the aim and functioning of public-private partnership models in the cultural sector – a partnership model, which, with health, blessing, and prosperity, can literally move mountains.

*Suki de Boer is an external PhD and does research at the Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam on art-related corporate activities of large multinationals in Europe. In addition, he is developing a plan for a consultancy boutique that will focus on innovating public-private partnership in the cultural sector. On a day-to-day basis he coordinates projects and events at Droog design.*

Jeanne Gaakeer

*What is the 'what'? When embarking on disciplinary cooperations we need to consider the 'whatness' of each discipline, its foundations and methodology, because conceptual choices made on both sides have direct consequences for*

direct consequences for the form and content of the resulting interdiscipline, and thus for its success as a new ‘what.’

**Maria Lamslag**     **With Maite García Lechner**  
**On Cultural Policy and Interdisciplinary Approaches**

*Maite García Lechner (1976, Boxtel, the Netherlands) has worked as Program Manager at the European Cultural Foundation since 2009. Born to a Spanish father and Dutch mother, she grew up in both countries. During her career, she has continued to base herself in different parts of the globe, working within various professional settings that have each centred around culture.*

**Maria Lamslag:** Currently, you are working for the European Cultural Foundation in Amsterdam. What is this organization, and what does your current position entail?

**Maite García Lechner:** Our foundation strives to bridge people and democratic institutions by connecting local cultural change-makers and communities throughout the European continent. We try to achieve our advocacy agenda by reaching out to myriad partners across Europe, through our awards, grant schemes, joint collaborations, targeted advocacy actions, and policy influencing. I, for example, manage an action-research program related to culture’s contribution to the commons. Among other things, we give attention to topics such as Europe’s moving communities, the reappropriation of public space, social justice, alternative economies, and digital innovation. A second example of our work is the grants program, where we offer individuals travel grants, build long-term partnerships, and dedicate regional grants, such as one in the Western Balkans.

**ML:** You describe your work as a bridging of people and democratic institutions. With this, what kind of gap are you seeking to fill, and why is it necessary?

**MGL:** Our work departs from the notion of culture as a key contributor to an open, democratic, and inclusive Europe. The so-called ‘democratic deficit’ is as prominent as when the term was first coined in the 1970s. People feel disengaged from or not represented by democratic institutions. As an independent foundation, we are in a unique position. We try to work according to the model of ‘catalytic philanthropy’ by engaging directly with partners and stakeholders from different sectors in our projects. Together, we want to improve the effectiveness and outreach of our mission. However, we also acknowledge the crucial need to collaborate with policy- and profit-making organizations. While these parties may also have an interest in instigating social change through culture, as a foundation we are less dependent on the whims of voters and the demands of the market. Therefore, our independent position allows us to connect to and navigate between civil society, political bodies, and the commercial sector.

**ML:** There seems to be a growing consensus concerning the relevance of working cross-sectorally. Is this something you have experienced? And, if so, from where do you think it comes?

**MGL:** Cross-sectoral partnerships and interdisciplinary approaches indeed seem to be increasing. Artists nowadays, for example, frequently work in several fields, instead of specializing in one medium. Undoubtedly, this will be driven by politics and financial urgency. Because of austerity measures, which led to cuts to arts and culture throughout the whole of Europe, people are being forced to consider how to create more impact with fewer means. However, at the same time, I believe this trend is also explained by the fact that we are now in the middle of a remix culture. In general, people are less likely to think in strict categories. So, not all cross-overs come out of pragmatic motives, but also out of ideals.

From my professional experience, for example, I frequently see how people use culture as a means to instigate change, to express resistance, to cope with the world, or to question it. One concrete example is the legal toolkit for public space that architect David Juarez developed in the form of an interactive website ([www.publicspace.tools](http://www.publicspace.tools)). The project empowers citizens across Europe in the active use of public space, facilitating their involvement in the legal realm by creating accessible tools with a clear interface, hosted on free software.

Yoeri Meessen

*Where does learning to cooperate in a non-linear way begin? It begins with trust.*

**ML:** What, for you personally, is the importance of culture, and what potential do you see in culture’s capacity to make social impact?

**MGL:** For me, the importance of culture is obvious. Culture can translate feelings, good or bad, of specific communities into an artistic product. Whether this is a protest song by Bob Dylan or Beyoncé, the modernity- and war-glorifying movement of Futurism, or George Orwell’s *Animal Farm* (1945), which, in his words, sought “to fuse political purpose and artistic purpose into one whole.” Culture is also about society, and not simply artistic products.

I also want to contribute more to this in a meaningful way. Given the current global agenda, my idealism grows stronger, and I feel that now more than ever I would like to resist the disruptive developments our societies are facing.

ML: Does this wish for more active involvement point to your motivation for applying to Witte de With's *Across the Board* program?

MGL: I enrolled in *Across the Board* because I think it is always important to educate oneself and to keep building your network. I was especially attracted to the fact that the program gathers people from business, the arts, and policy. I genuinely believe in the power of cross-sectoral work and, at this point, I am particularly interested in learning more about business and the 'for-profit' sector. For me, that is still a different world, one from which I can gain valuable insights, but also to which I feel I can contribute significant value.

The value created as the outcome of such crossovers goes two ways. Maybe the biggest added value the cultural sector contributes to others is its curiosity, and a certain degree of boldness – a mentality not just to 'think outside of the box,' but to examine by doing. To make it work anyway.

ML: Reading your résumé, I see you moved from performing arts to medieval iconology, and then to becoming a strategic program manager. Can you tell me more about the path that led to your current position?

MGL: My first career aspirations were in dance and performing arts. After high school in Spain, I applied to study at the Toneelacademie Maastricht. I didn't manage to get past the first selection year, and moved to Amsterdam. By then, I decided I wanted to be a journalist, but took the advice to specialize in a field of interest rather than studying journalism. I enrolled in the University of Amsterdam's art history program, from which I graduated in 2003 in the specialization of Medieval art history.

During these years, I dropped my journalistic ambitions, taking up my first job at the Netherlands Institute for Cultural Heritage (now known as Rijksdienst voor het Cultureel Erfgoed) after graduating. The most thrilling projects I worked on consisted of coordinating a huge conference about collection mobility in Europe, with policy makers, museum directors, and curators from all over the European Union. After this project, I moved to the United States upon being offered a research position at Princeton University's Index of Christian Art. However, the academic world was far too solitary for me. When I returned to the Netherlands, once again I worked at the Rijksdienst voor het Cultureel Erfgoed as assistant curator on various projects, as a policy officer for SICA (now known as Dutch Culture), and at the Brakke Grond, where I contributed to their twenty-fifth anniversary program. In 2008, I took up the position of Grants Officer at the European Cultural Foundation, where I continue to work to this day.

ML: From your personal experiences in these different fields, and in light of the European Cultural Foundation's interdisciplinary undertakings, do you think there is such a thing as a success formula for cross-fertilization?

MGL: There is not one but many recipes, which all depend on the context in which one is operating. For example, are you talking about interdisciplinary collaborations within the field of art, about cross-sectoral collaborations, crossovers between profit and non-profit, or about government and NGO collaborations? Moreover, what is the geographical context? The Netherlands, Europe, the world? All this leads to different approaches or 'formulas.' However, I guess there are two core principles to ensure all of the present knowledge

is optimized. First, to make sure that everyone has the same level of knowledge, either by chance, or by dedicating time and effort during the collaboration to get everyone on the same page. Second, expectation management: make sure the rules of the game (how we are going to collaborate) are shared and agreed upon by all parties involved.

ML: You don't see any danger in interdisciplinary works, then? For example, in the loss of expertise, or too much bureaucracy?

MGL: Not at all. As long as the appropriate conditions within which to cooperate are created and respected, intersectoral work can be very powerful. Again, one has to be aware of the context, limitations, and knowledge bases of all committed partners. I am sure that, as far as this goes, the cultural sector is no different from the governmental or business sector.

*As an independent contractor, Maria Lamslag (1988, Harderwijk, the Netherlands) works on research and stories for (documentary) films, photography, and journalism. At Kunsten '92, a lobby organization for the Dutch arts and culture sector, she works as a project manager.*

Richard Sennet, quoted by Yoei Meessen

Community life is easy.  
All it takes is finding  
people who think like you  
do. Cooperation is hard  
because it is about learning  
to live with people who  
think differently.

### Colophon

This publication concludes the first pilot edition, and serves as prologue to the second edition, of *Across the Board*, a platform for cross-sectoral professional development at the intersection of arts, business, and politics.

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Image contribution	Gabriel Lester
English copy-editors	Rosa de Graaf, Eleanor Weber
Design	Kristin Metho with Alessandro Carosso
Publisher	Witte de With Center for Contemporary Art

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## Across the Board

Concept  
Coordination

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## Acknowledgements

Witte de With would like to thank all contributors to this publication, the visiting tutors, and the participants of the first edition of *Across the Board*, and we would like to thank ABN AMRO's Het Culturele Hart, Kunsten '92, NVTC, Platform Beeldende Kunst, Rot.Jong, Heleen Alberdingk Thijm, Leendert Bikker, Rob Defares, Bram de Jaeger, Marlof Maks, Rune Peitersen, Ilona Roolvink, Jaurana Verschuren, Marianne Versteegh, and Lise van Zaalen for their input and support preceding and during the realization of the project.

*Across the Board* is supported by the Mondriaan Fund and the Pauwlof Fund. Witte de With Center for Contemporary Art is supported by the city of Rotterdam (DKC) and the Ministry of Education, Culture and Science (OCW).



 Gemeente Rotterdam



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*Across the Board* is a long-term platform for professional development through cross-disciplinary exchange. Led by visiting tutors – significant agents in the fields of art, business, and politics – a select group of promising professionals works together to locate (and re-evaluate) shared values between their respective domains, and to confront the opposing philosophies and methodological frictions that arise through such exchanges. With *Across the Board*, Witte de With sets out to trace a more pluralized and nuanced trajectory for cooperations across the public, private, and cultural domains. This publication concludes the first pilot program, and serves as a prologue to the second year of *Across the Board*.

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Edited by Docus van der Made and Yoeri Meessen.

The question of how  
we take responsibility  
for plurality defines  
how we shape our society.

