

### III. Impression of the expert-discussion 26-27/4/07

What follows is the summary of the open discussion on User Generated Content, held between experts at the meeting of minds, based on the notes of Hans Martens (reporter) and Ann Laenen (chair).

The first part of the discussion focussed on **the impact of the empowerment of users on traditional media and on the quality of content available on the Internet.**

#### *1. Is it about enabling or about filtering?*

At Lulu.com everyone can publish his/her book; there are no criteria. So there is quality as well as a lot of crap online, but that is not a problem, because as Bob Young sees it Lulu readjusts the free market. It is the market that decides what will be printed/sold and what will stay unknown. Why should only the publishers decide what is good to be marketed? Indeed some books will never be sold on Lulu but the writer at least has had the chance to publish. If you then do not let people know you published, chances are slim that one would find your book. Which in fact is not new, because when looking at traditional publishing, lots of books end up in the dustbin just after publishing.

But from the traditional publishers and media point of view there are challenges to be highlighted here of course, because according to Paul Gerhardt, the biggest question for the BBC at the moment is to decide how user generated content finally will be disseminated. In the middle of that debate YouTube started. Here no filtering. Everything can be posted online. This is a philosophy that is hard to handle for the BBC because it challenges the idea of the 'professionally trained collaborators'. The way to address this challenge is to open up your organisation explains Paul Gerhardt. With the Creative Archive the BBC illustrates this openness; users work with the available material and their creations can be shown, e.g. on YouTube. But the openness can even go further: through Open Production or Production as Open Source Initiatives the BBC wants to offer the possibility to create a pool of raw content of which different types of products might emerge as a result of an open collaboration process.

Doesn't a digital atmosphere ensure that people behave more expressively? (Jan Bierhoff) Dick Rijcken replicates to this that one creates as such individuals that express themselves. Other people can then read these creations, but it is not a necessity. What counts is that you create 'expressive' people and that is a value in itself.

It is in any case naive to think that open source the solution is through whom everything will work, and that everything delivered is quality. Clo Willaerts describes it as a kind of an 'open' train everyone wants to catch, but it is unlikely this will just work like that.

#### *2. Quality or mediocrity?*

According to John Buckman two to three percent of what Magnatune releases is at professional level. These are the productions that get marketed. This raises the question about the definition of what can be seen as 'professional level'. One can use criteria such as production quality, timing, commercial value etc... Which, during the course of the discussion lead to the issue of commercial companies fetishizing the label 'quality' in order to sell their products (as Dick Rijcken calls it) rather than looking at the intrinsic value of quality. As such the free market principle is a good principle, because nobody has to decide what quality says Bob Young. Nico Verplancke on his turn sees here a shift in the role of the publisher. In the early days the publisher decided what would get marketed, nowadays he plays a softer role in a sense that he now facilitates rather than decides what will hit the market and what not. Free market though can also lead to mediocrity. For Ana Pejcinova there is a risk that 'meaningful' quality might disappear. Bob Young adds to this that it is a misinterpretation that there is 'a free market' and 'a quality definition'. In fact there are several sub-segmentations with activities on different levels and different parameters. It is not because an artist is successful today, that s/he will be remembered later on. Clo Willaerts elaborated on this thought by illustrating that indeed it is nonsense to say that the best clips on YouTube are those that are most viewed. They are exactly - almost per definition - representing

the average. Paul Gerhardt refers to film history. In the beginning people could earn money by filming everyday life issues. But in the mean time, outside the commercial circuit people were busy developing narratives. Compare it today with YouTube. This is the start of a new type of User Generated Content. One cannot predict today how it will evolve.

### *3. New processes of selection and filtering: can you rock it up?*

The selection machine as altered. If you are really good on something, you will get famous quicker on a larger scale. Whereas one had to pass via the traditional media (TV, radio, newspapers...) it is now possible to use the online tools offered by the Internet and mobile communication. So yes, you can rock it up, but you still need the right combination of skills and timing, and last but not least you have to be able to be heard in the social realm. Indeed it is a combination of talent, competence and social networking. Arne Van Peteghem elaborates on this by saying that quality just starts with the selection process. You exist once you exist in the social market. There is not such a thing as quality that just exists beforehand; it starts to exist through selection. Nico Verplancke describes it as a kind of collaborative meaning. How important you become, depends on the niche you act in and the way you are perceived as well as criticised. Stuart Nolan warns for the fact that this can also blunt creativity. When you are looking for an editor, you constantly have to correct and adapt your work. Once you find an editor, the process stop. You think you are on the right track and you don't question yourself any longer. And at that very moment there is your wife telling you that she doesn't like it at all.... ;-).

### *4. Users and non-users: two different worlds*

Loïc Le Meur refers to the Le Monde - blog, where today's Pro's did not seem to succeed to get the communication going. The Am's did succeed, but once it started they left Le Monde because they were not interested any longer. There are two different worlds here, difficult to combine. Though Dick Rijcken illustrates with the 3 voor 12 - project that a combination of both worlds is possible. The Ams want to work under *the 3voor12*-label. They are gently coached, exactly to level the gab with the Pro's, and in such a way that the Pro's slowly adopt them.

But Loïc Le Meur experiences an even bigger gab between users and non-users, a divide that partly has to do with the global character of the Internet. It is very difficult to define quality in both worlds in the same way because it means something different for users and for non-users. A lot of traditional/classical cultural institutions want to bridge with web 2.0.

### *5. The user is the filter?*

Paul Gerhardt replies that users themselves search for organisations providing filters. Question is where will be these organisations trusted by users come from? Will they evolve from the traditional channels or will they emerge within the new digital space? And if they emerge from this space, which format will they have?

Debbie Esmans questions that if the user becomes the filter, how will we then take care of the fact that everyone has the skills and the tools to filter? And what is the role of classical institutions, policy and education?

Dick Rijcken marks that these digital developments also tackle traditional marketing. Through user generated content the relationship with your audience becomes very fluid.

Bettina Geysen adds to this that it stays marketing. There is still a relationship with your audience, but as Bob Young says it changes marketing fundamentally, certainly if you focus on the intellectual property rights.

### **Which fluently interlinks with the second part of the discussion concentrated on copyrights.**

Content is used and re-used. Copyrights were not so fixed in the early days as they are now, maybe we should go back to the essence of copyrights questions Ann Laenen. When asked to the participants of this meeting of minds how long copyrights should last, 5 to 7 years seemed to be reasonable.

## 6. How useful is Creative Commons?

The problem with copyrights says John Buckman is that it is: all rights reserved. The idea behind Creative Commons is to replace copyrights through contract rights so that you can decide for yourself, which rights you want to keep and which ones you want to give away, and how you want to commit yourself.

In the debate on copyrights one detects more and more a polarisation between 'full control' and 'public domain' according to Paul Gerhardt. One big lesson the BBC learned from the Creative Archive project is that you have to make a difference between the big institutions and their stakeholders on the one hand and individual artists (most of the time victims of the big institutions) on the other hand. It is important to get in contact with both parties and to get in a dialogue with them.

The example of the fashion industry was raised as an example of how productive a non-copyright business can be. It is exactly because there is no copyright on the design of clothing that the fashion industry is so productive and successful. The way designs are copied stimulates creativity and asks to create new things fast. This liberty and competition result in a very quick evolution and a big diversity.

In the early days passwords were asked in ICT. At a certain point the passwords were crossed out, because the market share grew due to the piracy and copying of certain application. (Bob Young) This is why Bill Gates could say that piracy was good to Microsoft.

Paul Gerhardt raises the example of a few archaeologists, which collected on VHS all archaeological footage that had been broadcasted by the BBC. They did what finally the BBC started to do by itself, and they did it even better. As specialists they had more knowledge about the content and they classified the material in a meaningful way. As such the BBC would then later legitimise what they did long before the broadcasting institution did.

It is interesting to offer Amateurs the tools to organise themselves. It is because they want to specialise themselves as amateurs that this can lead to interesting outcomes as for instance the sci-fi community *Prisoner* as Dick Rijcken illustrates.

According to John Buckman Creative Commons offer him the possibility to access markets that were not accessible in the past. Piracy forces you to look for ways to challenge piracy - read: in fifteen minutes I have all I want.

## 8. Property rights in the public sphere

Ana Pejcinova wants to get rid of the 'model' track. She wants the discussion to hit the subject of intellectual property rights again. Evi Werkers adjusts that user not always know what their rights are. There is no clarity about property rights.

Bob Young ironically marks that copyright has been developed for economic purposes; more precisely to give Dickens the chance to write a new novel.

According to Dick Rijcken public media is ready to give content away for free, but the problem is that the producers they hire are not paid enough to do so, thus the producer has to find other (commercial) ways to get paid for quality productions. Maybe it would be better if the public broadcast companies would broadcast less, but pay more for qualitative productions and as such create space to give footage away for free.

Paul Gerhardt adds to this that public broadcasting is not 'open access'. It still stays limited. It is not public content. According to the law they can broadcast it, but that is also about it. It is the responsibility of a public broadcast company, not to stop at the level of broadcasting but go further. They must be ready to go further into the public story.

John Buckman offers the alternative solution of: registration right. But he underlines that artists are also scared when 'open source' it at stake. To them the scarcity of products is sometimes good, because then they can ask a lot more money and be paid for a new project.