

Collaborative Change

Seminar in the framework of PhotoIreland Festival 2011

Organized by GradCAM, in association with Dublin City Council Arts Office

July 13&14 2011, Wood Quay, Dublin

To change something, build a new model that makes the existing model obsolete.

Buckminster Fuller

Many thinkers and practitioners in the field of Peer-to-Peer Theory, Creative Commons, Open Source, Crowd Funding and Collaborative Consumption claim that our digitally networked society is seeing revolutionary shifts in behaviour. These changes have begun with the rise of the Internet, survived the dot-com crisis and keep spreading, regardless of economic development. On the other hand, the global financial crisis has certainly accelerated the renaissance of traditional practices such as lending and bartering, since complex trading instruments have fallen into disrepute.

Platforms based on participatory and commons-oriented paradigms seem to invade more and more social, economic and cultural fields. These movements claim for more social justice, sustainability and collaboration, "so that the whole weight of the collective intelligence of humanity can be brought to bear on the grave challenges we are facing", as P2P-Guru Michel Bauwens has put it.

Technological and economic changes stand at the beginning of the shift from property to access: The Utility Computing approach has turned what was previously a need to purchase products (hardware, software and network bandwidth) into a service. This repackaging of computing services became the foundation of the shift to models where all of the technology is in the "cloud" and accessed over the Internet as a service. Distributed architecture without the need for central coordination, with participants being at the same time both suppliers and consumers of resources is not only the basis of the Internet, it seems to become the basic model of our (western) society.

Open-access policies are also part of a rapidly growing movement in academia to develop new modes of scholarly publication. Universities, schools, and R&D departments are establishing open-access policies to make their research more accessible to scholars, educators, policymakers, and citizens worldwide. While the concept of Open Source and free sharing of technological information existed long before Computers (example, cooking recipes), it was in the late 1980s that the term gained importance. Today, the practice of sharing of source codes is increasingly being applied in other fields of endeavour, such as biotechnology. Open design is the application of these methods to the creation of physical products, machines and systems. On the one hand, for low-tech solutions such as the RepRap 3D-Printer and on the other, as a framework for developing advanced technologies that might be beyond the resource of any one company or country.

The new interest in microfinance in developing countries is backed by theory and practice over the centuries, a good example being the well-documented activities of the Irish loan funds from the early 1700s until the 1960s. At their peak just

before the “Great Famine” in the late 1840s, approximately 20% of households were borrowers from the loan funds annually, making this one of the most successful microfinance institutions in history.

Finally, Collaborative consumption represents a fundamental change in the relationship between producers and consumers, from sharing a garden with a neighbour to renting out a parking space. According to the authors of the thought-provoking book *What is Mine is Yours*, the rise of online social networks, a renewed belief in the importance of community, pressing environmental concerns, and a widespread questioning of the health of an economy dependent on buying and selling are moving us towards decentralised ideas based on openness, sharing and peer-to-peer collaboration.

These processes are also taking grip of the art world where many start (or keep) perceiving cultural values as a common good, instead of an exploitable resource. Collectives are seen by many as an alternative economic model, a sustainable principle of (art)production, where process, experience, authorship, responsibility and success are shared. They are convinced that this model has serious advantages in the current context of local and global crisis. Some festivals and centres have already responded to this new trend by inviting photography collectives to meet, debate and show their work. Another example of sharing information and access to self-made products is the Artists’ Books Cooperative, a distribution network for print-on-demand photobooks.

The seminar Collaborative Change, co-organized by PhotoIreland and GradCAM in Dublin, will investigate the possibilities of the collective models in production, consumption, and ownership, both in the art and non-art fields. New business models have flourished, while others have failed. Open Source software, housing and agriculture cooperatives, credit unions, artists’ communities, and Wikipedia are examples for implementations of such ideas, some of them are old, others new. Speakers will come from diverse disciplines such as Economics, Art, Information Science, Sociology and Politics. The findings will be published in a document that will be sent to decision makers in these fields.

A set of projections will include documentary films like *The Take*, where Argentinian workers take ownership of their factory, and Garvan Gallagher’s *The Hidden Garden*, documenting a community garden in the North Inner City. The talks will also incorporate a follow-up review on past artistic events like the Upstart poster campaign.

Requested speakers include Michel Bauwens, a Belgian Peer-to-Peer theorist and an active writer, researcher and conference speaker on the subject of technology, culture and business innovation; Yann Moulier-Boutang, a French philosopher and economist, and director of the Journal *Multitudes*; Gergely Laszlo, artist and founding member of Lumen Photography Foundation in Budapest; and Claudi Carreras, curator from Barcelona, organizer of the photography collective encounter E.CO.

Contact: info@photoireland.org, +35 3876856169, www.photoireland.org