



Intermedialities in Policy Making & Funding

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Abstract. This article considers the intermedial way of working (working across media) from the point of view of a funding agency. The Mondriaan Foundation is an important funding body in the Netherlands for visual arts, design and heritage. The project applications received by the foundation are increasingly intermedial; they mirror a changing cultural field in which collaborations between neighbouring disciplines, fields of knowledge and experts from these fields increase. The article considers the role of new media within this transformation and outlines the ways in which the foundation deals with intermediality when it comes to the assessment of applications.

Introduction

The Mondriaan Foundation is a Dutch funding agency for visual arts, design and cultural heritage. It was founded in 1994 to stimulate visual arts, design and cultural heritage. The primary goal of the foundation is to increase interest in, and demand for, contemporary visual arts, design and cultural heritage. The foundation is committed to strengthening the international position of contemporary visual arts and design, and accomplishes this by offering financial support to enable institutions, both national and international, to reach their audience and extend that reach. The Mondriaan Foundation supports activities within the Netherlands such as acquisitions for museum collections, activities in the field of cultural heritage, publications and magazines, programming for artist run spaces, art and design projects, exchange programs and an art purchase scheme for private individuals. All these types of funding are based on the premise that visual arts, design and cultural heritage are presented to a small or large, a specialized or broad audience. Presentation and audience reach are thus at the heart of the foundation.

The Mondriaan Foundation has an annual budget of approximately € 23 million. Every year more than 1500 applications are processed and some 800 projects get funded. Over one third of the projects supported by the foundation take place abroad.

Besides the daily practice of funding, the foundation also actively innovates/reforms policymaking by organizing debates and publishing books on pressing issues such as the effects of subsidies on the art market, the ways in which (heritage) museums build their collections and most recently, folk culture.

Intermediality

It is important to start by stating that the term intermediality is never used within the foundation or by people applying for funding. If the phenomenon of intermediality, working across media, is addressed, it is with the more common term interdisciplinarity. Nevertheless, intermediality, in the broad definition given by Irina Rajewsky, is experienced within the foundation as well. She states in her article *Intermediality, Intertextuality, and Remediation: A Literary Perspective on Intermediality* that: “intermediality may serve foremost as a generic term for all those phenomena that (as indicated by the prefix *inter*) in some way take place *between* media. »Intermedial« therefore designates those configurations which have to do with a crossing of borders between media” (Rajewsky 2005, 46).

Many of the project applications we receive are intermedial in the sense that they might be based on research, in collaboration with universities or R&D labs for example, and may result in an exhibition, lectures, workshops, sometimes a conference where artists and researchers present their findings side by side, or a publication, often with independent, stand-alone qualities. These projects seamlessly combine theory with practice, contemporary art with cultural heritage, the shaping of a critical discourse with the presentation of the latest developments in arts and design. Intermediality is not only encountered on the level of project design, the artists or designers working within projects will often cross boundaries between media as well.

New Media and Intermediality

New media technology, and digital technology in particular, have pushed intermediality to new levels. New (and often digital) technologies facilitate collaborations, combining material, linking archival material to contemporary

sources and much more. Lawrence Lessig describes this development in *Remix* (2008), a book on copyright laws and how they are challenged by digital technologies. Without wanting to go into the copyright discussion, the transformation Lessig describes is useful in outlining just how important new media technologies are for intermediality. Lessig outlines a historical transformation of entertainment technologies from Read/Only (RO) to Read/Write (RW), from watching, reading and listening to remixing, sampling and performing. Although it has been argued convincingly that reading, listening and watching are not passive forms of consuming culture, there is a difference between RO culture and the more hands-on RW culture in which users manipulate culture to create their own content. An important point Lessig makes about this shift is that it has been facilitated by technological developments. Remix culture has been given an immense boost with digital technologies that make remixing both easy and cheap. He writes: “If in 1968 you wanted to capture the latest Walter Cronkite news program and remix it with the Beatles, and then share it with your ten thousand best friends, what blocked you was [...] that the production costs alone would have been in the tens of thousands of dollars. Digital technologies have now removed that economic censor” (Lessig 2008, 83).

Creating new content based on a mix of existing content has thus become easier and cheaper than it used to be with analogue technologies. Digital technologies not only facilitate remix culture, they also facilitate intermediality. It is easier and cheaper nowadays to work between boundaries, to literally combine media and make the results of these collaborations visible and accessible. The Netherlands Council for Culture states in her 2003 advisory report, *From ICT to E-culture*, that new media technology “stimulates the blending of various forms of presentation” and “makes the boundaries between disciplines and domains more permeable and gives rise to new crossovers” (Netherlands Council for Culture 2003, 21).

Effects of Intermediality

What we have noticed within the Mondriaan Foundation is that it often makes no sense to try to characterize the project applications we receive in terms of one central discipline. How do you characterize a project that, for example, combines old cinematic material with contemporary visual art, cutting-edge web design with an experiment to engage audiences in new ways? Such projects are as much about archival material or contemporary visual art as about new media. One response to a changing cultural field was a temporary funding scheme called the

Interregeling for e-Culture projects. Between 2001 and 2008, different Dutch funding agencies collaborated within the Interregeling. The word “inter” in the name of the program referred to a changing cultural field in which collaborations, interdisciplinarity and the defying of one simple label, were becoming more common. The Interregeling was specifically targeted at e-Culture projects, projects that in one way or another aimed at renewing the cultural sector by means of, or aided by, digital technologies, or that experimented with the possibilities of the digital in the cultural domain.

The Interregeling was a temporary funding option and the program ended in 2008. The option to fund interdisciplinary new media and e-Culture projects is now integrated within existing funding structures.

International Discussion

The effects of new media on the cultural field are also discussed in an international setting. Since the mid-nineties, international partners such as new media organizations and networks have gathered artists, policy makers and academics in workshop settings to discuss trends and developments in new media and make policy recommendations on how to fund new media projects. In 2008, one of these sessions took place in Singapore, in conjunction with ISEA, the International Symposium of Electronic Art. The Singapore summit was organized by the Asia Europe Foundation (ASEF) and the International Federation of Arts Councils and Culture Agencies (IFACCA). The 50 participants – artists, practitioners and policy makers from 26 different countries – worked in parallel groups to discuss issues, case studies and formulate recommendations (the full report can be accessed at: <http://media.ifacca.org/uploads/ASEFReport2008.pdf>).

Most of the recommendations centred on the need for funding options for international exchange projects and a flexible policy that could easily accommodate changes within the field of new media. The Mondriaan Foundation has internationalization as one of its policy priorities. This means that international exchange projects are welcomed and encouraged. A new funding scheme for the development of projects, which started in 2009, has room for experimental projects, out of the box ideas, or the establishment of (international) networks. This funding scheme is aimed at providing organizations the time and money to develop such projects. Especially international projects are often time consuming and expensive to set up. This is a highly flexible form of funding with a very short assessment process; it has been designed with input and feedback from the field.

From Multiple Disciplinary Committees to a Single, Integrated Assessment Process

Another response to the growing number of intermedial projects received by the Mondriaan Foundation is the decision to work, from January 2009 onwards, with a single project committee. Before 2009, there were separate committees for visual arts and design projects and for cultural heritage projects. The new interdisciplinary committee deals with all the project applications the foundation receives. The committee is a mixed group of external advisors: curators, critics, journalists, researchers, artists and directors of cultural institutions. They are also selected on the basis of their all-round knowledge.

Applications are assessed on the basis of four criteria that reflect the primary goal of the Mondriaan Foundation to increase interest in, and demand for, contemporary visual arts, design and cultural heritage. We look at how projects distinguish themselves (added value), how they engage and reach their audiences (audience reach), whether the partners involved are professional (excellence) and at the ways in which the project impacts society in terms of content, project design or audience reach (relations to society). These four criteria are used for the assessment of all the project applications; there are no separate criteria for intermedial projects. Because the criteria are not medium-based, intermediality does not pose a problem in the assessment process.

Conclusion

Intermediality is an aspect of a changing cultural field in which collaborations have become easier and more common, in part due to digital technologies. Not only do cultural organizations increasingly work together with partners from outside the cultural field, but heritage, ethnographic or contemporary art museums also work together more often. To answer to these practices, the Mondriaan Foundation has adapted its assessment process in terms of knowledge, experts, criteria and staff. Needless to say, this does not mean that intermediality is a requirement to apply for funding. Based on the positive feedback from the field, the applicants and the advisors, we will continue working with an interdisciplinary committee and an integrated assessment process.

References

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