reSource Chat with LEAP / Lab for Electronic Arts and Performance (Daniel Franke, Kai Kreuzmüller, John McKiernan)

Lab for Electronic Arts and Performance (LEAP) is a non-profit interdisciplinary project for electronic, digital media arts and performance that aims to initiate the dialogue between art, science and technology. LEAP's central concept is based on experimental research in digital technologies and media, which shape and change our present and future society and stimulate new discourses, discussions and questions.

r: Why and how did you decide to found LEAP? What are the objectives of your space and your plans with content development?

L: [...] We three had worked together on a project in the past, which I suppose was a meeting point for our personal and different interests. Working on that project gave us the idea for the space, and the fact that we thought that there wasn't a space dedicated directly to this meeting point of a particular physical performance, digital technology and the influence of science. We had organised a workshop/exhibition format together - ''Operative Performances'' - where the central idea was the combination of art, technology and performance through the paring of physical performers and media artists to work together and develop a project over a week. We were searching for space for the second installment of the project where we wanted to [...] have no boundaries for the project [...]. This project developed into the idea for LEAP. We wanted to create a space where we could constantly show installations and performances relating to this field.

r: All of you is coming from different countries and backgrounds. Can you explain why you decided to create a space and art project here in Berlin?

D: This [workshop] brought us together. [...] I'm German; I lived in Dresden and Rostock and moved to Berlin 10 years ago. I studied at the University of the Arts, and did my final project at a space in the city where I met John. I had met Kai previously; we worked together on a commercial project producing music videos.

J: [...] We all have quite different backgrounds I suppose. I'm from Ireland, had lived and studied in Dublin and I have a background in performance and theatre. Before we worked together I was much more interested in public space and the interaction between the body and architectural constraints. I had worked in the theatre for a couple of years. In the past I had also worked with new music and sound installation pieces. [...] When I moved here and we started working together, we moved more towards objects from an installation point of view, not just this idea of empty spaces, which had traditional interested me much more. I think that's quite evident in our installations: making something [...] much more perceivable, I guess that's very important to Daniel, and taking this non-visual information and making it much more visible in a space.

K: [...] I have a background in marketing, PR and the cultural field. I think originally we are all quite influenced by the [transmediale] festival, and one of the reasons for founding the space – obviously on a different scale – was to [...] discuss a similar discourse and to show works which a lot of people in the city get the opportunity to see only once a year, [...] having something that was much more regular.

r: How do you relate with similar spaces in Berlin that work by crossing the field of art, science and technology?

L: [We don't necessarily] focus on the concept of other spaces. What's much more interesting [for us] is the network of artists and what they are doing. While we quite often show artists from outside of Berlin, what's fascinating about the public we get to our shows is that whenever you develop a concept, there's always very exciting feedback and reaction to the works, [...] people who have a direct understanding of the context of the show, questioning and interacting with the exhibitions. We find this more inspirational: the public that moves between [all] these spaces, [...] the creative scene rather than [...] a particular other space.

L: What are for you similar spaces to LEAP?

r: There are many spaces working with the so-called "media art", but I think your space has a pretty unique way of combining it with performance. I think a scene exists, [that's why I asked] if you feel part of that or not.

L: We wouldn't really describe it as media art. Media art is a wide field, it's really open. What we present is a special discourse, that's maybe the difference. [...] We have a lot of exchange with the artists actually and other curators, a bit more than with other spaces to be honest. In some ways that's more exciting, also in terms of other artists. [Not many artists] might narrow themselves working in a certain field, but a lot of spaces can focus on a particular discourse. A lot of the ideas we are working with, the technologies we are working with, are not limited to the idea of physical space. [...] We are just as influenced by artists that show [works] in a totally different system, [...] not in galleries or project spaces, but online or [...] in hacklabs.

r: I was thinking about places like Art Laboratory Berlin or Supermarkt. There is a network of places that combine art, science and technology in Berlin. Do you feel related to any of them? You are working more in an international context than in a local one, but I think you are part of this network.

L: Of course. Perhaps people think of a particular type of work and then they associate it with a space. But we [prefer] much more to think of artists producing a work, the pure discourse rather than bringing it to the idea of there are 10 people doing something similar. [...]

r: In your opinion, what are the major problems and difficulties, if there are, of the art and cultural production field in Berlin?

L: A lot of the positives of Berlin are also its negatives [...]. We have the space, which we would never have in any other city, that's a positive. [...] It's now changing, but we can still be in such a central location. That takes you to a particular point though, [...] before it starts to get problematic, especially [...] if you want to progress.
[...] The budgets for the visual arts in terms of the Hauptstadtkulturfonds are quite small [...]; they are larger when it comes to dance and theatre. [...] [If the focus is] on newer technologies, funding is even more problematic. [...] One of our works was recently caught in customs, and I read an article by Peter Weibel about how customs treat art. [...] They treat new media art and electronic art a lot different from [other art]. [...] [This is a bit how Berlin treats art in its funding.] They spend a lot of money on fine art, but not new art. This also brings us to how you go about accessing funding. What do you

describe your project as, if you're an artist who wants to put a particular show on, do you apply to it as a theatre producer, or as a visual artist? And what are your chances of getting it? [Another problem] in the cultural production in the city is to change people's perception in terms of what they should or could look at. If you speak of community like before – it's a very big city, so of course it relies on a community of followers. [...] In a city of the size of Dublin, Amsterdam or Stockholm, there's a very strong cross-cultural, cross network and cross-disciplinary interest and support. [...] At some point people could see it as naive [...]; people [...] support your project, because it's something new, something different. [However] that input is very important. [...] Somebody [with a different eye] from a much more physical performance background or somebody who works in an office [...] [can] question what you're doing sometimes. Whereas quite often Berlin has an audience of acquiescence, people who know each other support the projects. Sometimes that's a little bit stifling. It's great to shock people – [...] Still, in Berlin you can do whatever you want, you can find a [space], you can produce art, you can show it, and you have the audience. [...] But the moment where you try to move to a professional setup and really make a living of it, [...] that's really difficult, to make something that lasts. Of course, the established places which [exist] for longer and [have assured] funding, they also need the impulses of the 'new'. For instance we were very excited with KWs recent collaboration together with FEED. [...]

r: How do you see the importance of a network that can join politically and artistically independent spaces working in the field of art, activism and digital culture? Is that needed in Berlin? Is that possible?

L: I think these connections happen typically [by themselves]. When there's the need, people find a way to connect. [...] I think it's organic somehow. [...] It's maybe more about giving it a stage, [give people who are interested in this the chance to learn and read about it, rather than the spaces having to interact all the time in a micro-network. In my opinion

it's better to have a presentation stage, like transmediale for instance. [...] The problem is that forming a network [...] changes the communication strategies. You impose a structure for how people should behave and talk, and already you lose the spontaneity and the room for experiment and discussion. It's a very political structure. [...] It can be quite regimental. [...] That's probably the case with having a network in forms of meetings. Having a network as a concept is of course an interesting idea. [...] By putting the structure in place, you close some people out of it, because the platform is set in stone. [...]. It's somehow enforced networking. [...] Some of the artists or curators I get in touch with, they might not have any interest in the structure of a festival like transmediale or a network like reSource, but they are open to discussing purely the ideas. [...]

r: I see the reSource as a context of interaction, not creating instructions. There's a mailing list, people who meet regularly every month and there is the idea by some people of the network to create a platform. Alongside, there is a curatorial strategy: an ongoing programme of events, which precede and follow transmediale festival. It's not that the reSource is only a platform; it's the practical exemplification of a broader concept of networking. In your opinion, in which ways reSource transmedial culture, and the transmediale festival in general, can contribute in forming a more critical and collaborative status for the art scene in Berlin and its translocal relations?

L: It's similar to why we started this space: the city needs a place like this to be open the whole year, not only once a year. Not an exact extension of transmediale, but something like a framework [...] to have discussions and workshops [...] to work on certain topics and [...] have exchange. [...] Before the reSource started, we had the idea that it would give the opportunity to artists to develop projects through galleries/project spaces, under the influence of the festival. [...] And maybe they would be given the opportunity to show [these projects] in the festival itself or at least apply. [...] [We also thought it would be a continuation of the

festival] debate on a more than once yearly basis. [...] [I mean for us,] there's a constraint. We conceptualise an exhibition, and what would be fantastic would to be always able to add a roundtable discussion or presentation [to that], this could be a possible collaboration with the reSource where they would provide debate, speakers or reaction to a particular theme. Sometimes it's interesting to have this outside perspective, outside of your curation. [This would be] another voice on top of the exhibition. Perhaps it's possible that a couple of institutions apply or give you the information in advance, knowing what you're looking for with next year's show. […] Let's say the theme is being released and we know that in the next four months the concept of these [other] shows [at partner institutions from the network] could be sent to you.

r: Like a test field for transmediale.

L: That's one side, and the other is to open [up] direct discussion between a larger body, some[thing] like a festival, which could have these connections to speakers and lecturers. That would also help the spaces, if some support from the festival goes to those exhibitions [throughout] the year, where transmediale can test the festival [theme]. transmediale would be there the whole year, and not just once a year. [You could have] four shows a year. I know that you have shows at Kunstraum Kreuzberg / Bethanien, which come one hundred percent from you, but if you had shows which in some way are a reaction to thematic of interest to the festival, obviously it could be different. By that there is an interaction: somebody is sent or suggested, it could be just purely the case that the spaces invite somebody to talk, so a particular philosopher is invited to talk by transmediale and the reSource. You host the presentation or a lecture on this theme – in conjunction with these other exhibitions: an […] exchange of intellect and a connection that maybe some of these younger spaces just don't have.

r: We're opening the festival throughout the year with different events that are also the preparation of the festival theme. But I think what you are advocating is that this would be not only curated

by us, becoming a way to outsource or distribute the programme. Is that what you think is missing? Right now the reSource is organising events every two months that are curated by me, where we invite speakers to present topics, which relate to the festival programme but are also connected to the spaces' interests. We're doing one at Kunstraum Kreuzberg /Bethanien soon. At the same time there is an open meeting every month for the different spaces that want to participate in the network, which is not usually curated by us. Each space or curators decide what they want to present in what kind of format. In that sense, we are trying (see also the pre-festival weekend of partner events, reSource 003: P2P Vorspiel, for example).

L: The strength of having a festival of international quality is not to have people here in Berlin talk to each other. It's about having that exchange between you and the spaces in Berlin. That is the strength of the reSource project. That could be the strength of transmediale having their foot on the ground for the whole year. […] I think internationally […] for these community-based projects […] to grow, in terms of the resource it has to come directly from the concept of the festival.

r: I think what you're saying is really important. In August, we will try to ask all the other spaces having a similar approach to you to meet and discuss about the Vorspiel [our pre-festival weekend]. Until now this has always been done by each space having events independently. Instead, this year, it could be something more strongly organised by the spaces together, sharing their programme and ideas. Since the festival call is already out, we thought we could find a way to collaborate in synergy and create a Vorspiel that is not just about each space working alone. Although I can already say about the funds that transmediale doesn't have the possibility to finance external events.

L: Everybody is missing money obviously... […] But we mentioned the idea of a board, [maybe this would create a way that we attract brands/sponsorships together with

people from transmediale,
people from other projects
and from the city. [They could
build] a board where they could
decide about funding initiatives,
for instance for exhibitions […]
every two or three months, not
like with [other funds] like the
Senate where you have to apply
a year in advance, which makes
is quite difficult. So if you had
people from different angles to
decide really quickly on small
funds, that would be quite
helpful.

**r: This requires a collaborative
effort. As transmediale, we
could be the ones creating a
context for these interactions,
but then there would be
different positions.**

L: If you function as the head,
you don't have to do the work.
[…] Traditionally if people get
funding, [it's more] likely that
they get funding again. […] The
strength to this possible
funding side of the reSource
or transmediale […] is the fact
that if it functions like a seeds
programme, I know other
festivals that have something
similar. They develop works that
would possibly happen in other
locations over the course of the
year. Perhaps somebody from
the festival could on a part-time
basis work together with either a
volunteer or a selected group of
the reSource network or
whoever wants to sign up for
it. [They could work] in terms
of sponsorship, not funding,
sponsorship which only applies
then to these reSource funded
exhibitions. It doesn't have to
cover the whole exhibition […], it
could be one speaker [or] it
could be one artist. […] The
festival doesn't have to do this
work, but it can be supporting
this goal, the goal that works will
be created under this thematic
of the next festival for possibly
a category [that would apply to
them]. The shows take place in
these spaces, where the spaces
as always fund themselves. [If
this funding arm of the festival
would work on it] once a month,
it's a possibility to apply to this
pot.