

Interview with Geert Lovink on September 13th 2013.

Jeroen Ruyter: We are the project team working on creative industries. We started a week ago. And we would like to exchange ideas about creative industries, as you know a lot about creative cities.

Shubhojit Mallick: We would like you to start by defining creative industries and how are they different from un-creative industries/ industrial sector.

Geert: Well, the concept of creative industries has a very specific history in 1990s in UK and has a lot to do with the rise of new labour under the leadership of Tony Blair. This was done to make a distinction between old labour and new labour. Old labour was closely connected to trade unions and was closely connected to the working class in England with a very specific party culture. So it was all about the organization of people, organization of labour and about the emancipation of workers. But, it fell in decline as the output of England fell significantly after Second World War, because England lost its empire and industrially speaking lost a lot of resources because by then the whole process of decolonization had set in. So it was witnessed for example, that textiles sector moved to south east asia and Ship building moved to Korea.

In Amsterdam also, shifting of industries happened, but to a much lesser extent because Netherlands is kind of smaller.

When Margaret Thatcher came to power in '79 she launched a whole set of liberal policies which essentially started this movement for creative industries. These policies were against the trade unions and moved towards establishing London as a global financial centre. It was very focused on de-regulation of the banking sector and to make London as a big financial sector and a place driven by Real Estate. You would therefore find that real estate has had a huge impact on creative industries. Real estate especially took off due to privatization.

Privatization was important for infrastructure and deregulation of finance, selling mines and involvement of the state in steel manufacturing. All of this happened in 1980s.... And in response to that, the New labour regulations came up under Tony Blair. After the end of the Cold War, in 1989, new policies started to emerge in response to harsh policies of Thatcher.

Blair tried, to create a more positive image of the future England and the creative industries are important new age examples, where 'they' thought England could go. This is given by certain development in 1960-70s that were happening. And that was the rise of the so-called Cultural Industries. Now, there is a difference between cultural and creative industries. Cultural industries are centralized sectors and are tied to regulations. They are what we call old media. Ex: broadcasting, television, radio, theater, contemporary arts (heavy government involvement.) All of these are centrally regulated.

Margreet Riphagen: So they are not creative industries??

Geert: No, not really. Of course that's a definition question, but these are cultural industries because they are regulated and are a fixed group of industries. So you don't think immediately of startups, freelancers etc. Cultural industries are conglomerates of larger entities. In that story pop culture also plays a huge role because pop culture is channeled through central systems like radio, TV printing industry. Think of England in 60s and 70s, you think of Beatles and endless production of new stars and new productions.

So the creative industries start with the idea that there should be more to it than just production of pop culture or fashion style and should be done in a more entrepreneurial basis.

Creative industries are essentially a product of 1990s think tanks of UK. Now, you can ask whether creative industry revitalizes the city ?? Or should all these entrepreneurial activities be used as a vehicle to revitalize the decaying city ?? Because in 1960-70s people moved out of the cities and industries shut down. You could find a lot of abandoned harbours or abandoned factories etc. Creative industries are deeply connected to the revitalization of inner cities. This concept of revitalization can be seen at the Amsterdam harbour too if you've been there.

Margreet: We haven't been to the harbour yet.

Geert: you can clearly see that in 1980s the whole harbour was shut down as there was no economic activity and it was destroyed. Now it has been revitalized to be the most expensive area with high real estate.

And the person who has done most research in creative industry domain is Richard Florida, who is the ideologue of the creative class. He is not speaking about the creative industries, he's no labour background and for him it's all about the entrepreneurial activity. It's not about a change of policy and the state has nothing to do with it. In that sense; he's a classical neo liberal American.

Margreet: Have you heard about him ??

Chorus: No...

Geert: Ok, And he wrote the book called Rise of the creative class in 2002. But the original, first policy document in UK; goes back to 96-97 when Labour was in power and they developed this idea that the state should create this ecology and a kind of framework for smaller companies and newer products to move in.

Jeroen:: So the city in this sense is really important for the creative industries?

Geert: Yes, I would say so. City policies are becoming indistinguishable and this is also the case here in Amsterdam. You cannot talk about creative industries without talking about what people in city hall are already doing.

Jeroen: If you see the creative industries as an entrepreneurs, they should not be depending so much on the government and what's the difference between

Geert: This is an ideological statement to say that they should not. Others would say that there are no entrepreneurs without the proper frame works and they cannot operate.

Jeroen: How did the whole creative industry come into being?

Geert: The critical thinkers of the Frankfurt School from 1930 and 1940 were the first to really theorize this. There is a chapter in that difficult book where they wrote about culture industries and that was written in 1943/1944 and came out here in Amsterdam in 1947. It almost disappeared as a book, rediscovered in 1960's and start to become an input in neo marxist or critical cultural studies curricular in 1970's and 1980's. They wrote it in a very critical way when they moved from Germany to USA. In California they were with a large group of immigrants and they had a close tie to Hollywood. A lot of german immigrants worked in the film industry and they were really in that scene of film makers. However, they were being confronted with the way that Hollywood film industry worked at that time and they could very closely observe how this monopolistic culture industries were operating. Hollywood specially in the 1940's and 1950's was one of the first very large conglomerate of productions studios. These first observations travelled over time and arrived here on 1970's and 1980's. Then it became policies in 1990's and they were reformulated until the complete industry had been set up and regulated.

And I do not know exactly who invented the word 'creative industry' but I think this is a complete mistake. This is not an industry as we know.

Shubhojit: So if we concentrate in creative city (not in creative industry) in Amsterdam, what would be two or more factors that can improve or affect this creative city?

Geert: I would say subcultures. This is why this for instance the squatter movement in Amsterdam is playing an important roll now. What we see very often in cities is that they died when young people have no access anymore to space. Spaces became so expensive that you cannot do anything or even be on the streets and that is when the city dies. I believe also that a lot of people in Amsterdam still believe in the city - and many other places. Young people should be given in somehow access to cheap space. This is the key idea. Some people says that it is all about student housing, other say that it is about to get young people into the city and start to work on the idea of cheap hotels for young tourists. Some others say that we need to make sure that these houses will be take back again. Others say to rearrange the empty offices and this is a very big movement starting to take shape. These are kind of very traditional and also very dutch ideas about creative industries: creating the spacial environment for people come together and start doing stuff.

Jeroen: So if it is really important to come together and starting doing stuff, do you think there is a lot of connection between the different creative professionals in the city? Do they know how to find each other? Is there a network for this professionals?

Geert: No, there is enough network for bureaucrats. Do not mix them up. But Amsterdam is quite

small, it works quite well and if it has a kind of small islands of semi independent subcultures because this is how it works. If you go to Berlin or London, this works the same but in a large scale. It starts to work the best if people left alone in certain environment where they can start to build up a certain ecology, certain set of relations that people start to know and work with each other and organize festivals together. You have to create kind of the right environment and then leave them alone.

Jeroen: How would be this right environment?

Geert: If you go to the new-west is quite relatively far away from the center - even further of Westerpark. There the rent is cheap and there is a lot of empty building and office spaces or even strange spaces. There is also where the refugees camps and in churches and others transitional spaces available there. And that is for instance an environment where things are most likely to happen.

Margreet: How do you think the creative industry will look like in 10 years from now?

Geert: What we can say is that overtime the art is playing less and less in this roll. That is something that worries a lot the insiders. It becomes an environment that is more and more entrepreneur, heavily guided by politicians and researchers. It is a distinct area to grow but the question of what the rol of artist is very unclear. It is my estimation that they will start to build up their own companies, they will start to be bigger and bigger but they will not employ any artists or even designers. So what is the creative element of this is very questionable. There is any space to do something.

Jeroen: But in your point of view, do we need artists?

Geert: Yes, we need artists.

Enrico: Do you think that technology is changing the artistic ecology?

Geert: Yeah if you look at curriculum in school there is no space for artists. So there's a whole bunch of creative industries but without artists. I think in a long run this is not really possible and they will create also an environment of conflict - that is unavoidable. Artists are going to fight against to creative industry and of course this is also about money because who is creating money in the creative industry? They are no artists. This creative industry is very traditional and also the business model. It looks fancy from outside but the business models are very traditional. That is creating a new conflict at the moment that it seems unavoidable. In education or everywhere, the all funding structure in Netherlands is based on this conflict.

Shubhojit: Do you think the current conflict between the artists and the industry is because we think the artists should be in the cultural industries domain?

Geert: No. Because many people would say we can have creative industries without artists. We don't need them. Why bother?

Shubhojit: So do you think that artists don't belong the cultural industry group?

Geert: No.

Margreet: Do you also mean the designers with that?

Geert: Yes, designer are supplying a very interesting roll here. This is because their position is more ambivalent. The split goes precisely through the community of designers. For the artists, their decision was already-made, they are out. But for the designers, at the moment it is less clear. I would say though if you look at direction of technology, design becomes more and more a template it becomes more and more automated. So automation of design is a serious problem. Also for these designers who are still working inside the creative industries. So in the long run I think they will also be outsourced... but outsourcing is another issue.

Margreet: Do you have suggestion how to avoid it? How do we bring or hold the creative industry together?

Geert: I think the issue of space is still important, especially in Amsterdam. So that is always a good starting point. Issues with space are always spot on in the sense that a lot of conflict and a lot of the interesting stuff happen here in Amsterdam about definition or redefinition of space. If you start there, if you just start in the neighborhood somewhere, you will be right in the middle of what is happening. All the tensions, all the problems, all the future solutions you will find them there. The other thing about what is the position of the art in creative industries, it is maybe a bit more difficult because a lot of people do not want to talk about it. They live in a kind of face of denial. Also because all the funding model are now running out. You could say that all budget cuts have already been made. So a lot of people have to find new survival strategy. That in itself is interesting. But how to come up with a solution? Very often a solution could be where you kind of bring people together. For instance young people who go to the Art Academy let them meet professionals, so they meet the future unemployed artist.

Enrico: The creative industry is a big community with professionals from all kinds of different backgrounds like entrepreneurs, artists, designers, etc. Don't you think this big community can re-organize themselves?

Geert: Yeah I strongly believe in local solutions. But as I said, especially here in the Netherlands you cannot really talk about small solutions without involving the issue of space and the organization of space. Maybe thats also a tradition in this country, in other countries this is less of an issue. But here in the Netherlands almost all kind of problems in society will ultimately find a spatial expression. This problem is also very much the case in what you are studying. I don't

say you have to become architect or something. But in every conversation you will end up talking about the spatial aspect.

Margreet: Geert, would it be interesting for the team to see how the creative industry is involved in other countries for example in Germany or France?

Geert: Well, a lot of people study how this is standing in Berlin now of course. Berlin is the capital of Europe. I mean people do not go to London anymore because they cannot afford it and Berlin is even much cheaper than Amsterdam. So a lot of people look at what is going on in Berlin and Amsterdam and Berlin traditionally have very close ties and exchanges. Unfortunately I have to say that is not the case with Paris for instance, there is not a lot happening there. Paris is already becoming way too expensive and way too exclusive and in that way it rules itself out as a creative city. So it would make more sense to watch what is happening in Berlin then in Paris.

Jeroen: Can you recommend a few influential people in the creative industry? People that will give us some more insights in the creative industry in Amsterdam.

Geert: Of course we can arrange that. It is the question in what direction you want to go. Once you decide that, we can easily get you into contact with interesting people. But you have to be careful because before you know it you'll be in a very small circle of bureaucrats. I am serious, is that what you want? You know the creative industries and creative cities are bureaucratic terms. They were not invented by activists, artists or people who live in a neighborhood so these are a kind of meta-constructs. Many people even doubt there is something like the creative industries. Because its a small branch, the economical output is very small and the actual amount of people who work there is very small as well. Economically speaking a lot of people are talking about it but the actual size of the industry is tiny.

Jeroen: Isn't that a definition problem again as well?

Geert: Definitely, you can make the industry as big as you want. Some people will include all hairdressers as a part of the creative industries. This is no joke. For example in Amsterdam they said the hairdressers are not a part of the creative industries but in Rotterdam they said we include them.

It sounds like an absurd discussion but In fact it's quite the same with IT. I would never include computer programmers in the creative industries, they got no creative potential whatsoever but other people say they are the heart of the creative industries. They say the engineers are leading the way for creative industries.

So you need to solve these things first. Once you've done that, you can define the direction.

And then we will help you make to contact. But I would say go on and make a tour of the city. Sebastian can take you around and show you other important buildings, places, co-creation spaces that are used by the creative industry. Obviously on a day that it doesn't rain. Because

otherwise you're gonna be so depressed....

Jeroen: Does anybody have more questions? We would like to thank you for this interview, we think it was very fruitful.