

## Institutional Practice: Interview with Peter Westenberg

<http://creatingcommons.zhdk.ch/institutional-practice-interview-with-peter-westenberg/>

PW: 00:24 Constant is an association for arts and media. We're working from Brussels since 1997 and we're active in the fields of art and technology. We have a perspective that is fed by feminism, free software, open source, and also copy left practices.

00:47 „licenses“ (subtitle)

PW: 00:47 So creative commons as a license is interesting because it set a whole, it made visible, let's say, the open content license. It is a popular license. It's easy to apply. It's out there. you can find stuff on YouTube, resources that are commonly available and that are very popular. So in that sense, it's very good that it makes a practice visible. And it introduces also the possibility to go a bit beyond that. And so we made a work in collaboration with Media Lab Prado in Madrid, which is questioning the, let's say, the process of production from the perspective that the artist knows already that his or her work is going to be remixed in the future.

PW: 01:30 So, if you apply a license to an artistic work, to the code, or to the sources of which it is based, how would it then change the design process or the creation, the creative process, if, you know, if you keep into account that everything has to be re mixable? And those experiments are really important, because it goes a bit beyond, let's say, the formality of applying a license, but it discusses beforehand: what does that mean? So it takes as a starting point, a reality of sharing objects, parts of the objects, even the sources on which the object is based. And I think, you know, old licenses such as the non-military use license, I think is still an inspiration. It's actually just to say, you know, what are the conditions that you want for your work to be functioning? And so, as a way to influence the future context of your work. I think that's, it's interesting, it's an interesting one. Like it's not only ad hoc, or not only document based or object based, this kind of work with – in our case, the free art license, because we use the free art license for almost everything – but it's also discussing the larger picture. What are the social elements that are important? What is the, let's say, the vision on culture on the long term that is involved?

02:56      **„situations“** (subtitles)

PW:      03:02      And what we try to do, is set up situations in which artists and art practitioners of various disciplines can come together and speculate, experiment, test scenarios around the future of technology and how artistic practice is involved in that. So how we organize is, that we set up what we call work sessions. And these are bringing together people and other agencies, machines or softwares, technologies, all kinds of elements basically, to, together reflect on how could you approach certain topics. And so, that those are deliberately super, let's say, radically multidisciplinary, because we feel that making a break in your way that you are used to do things is super important, and it's very productive to have time to share thoughts, experiment together with other people for that. And so, if we, we usually describe that as a situation, like setting up a situation or a constellation, yeah. In which several elements are brought together to cross feed each other, cross breed on each other.

PW:      04:18      So that's, I think, our approach to make small collisions, between aspects, of socio-cultural aspects, political aspects of our society, and see if they can crash in a beautiful way, let's say. And from there, from this conflict or the rubbing off between two ways of working, two perspectives, yeah, something new can arise, let's say. And that's also the the challenge or the invitation to people who are into such a work session.

04:48      **„organisation as a form“** (subtitle)

PW:      04:54      So the work that we do as Constant is, also in its organizational level, is a kind of an experiment with how, let's say, how you shape organizations. And I think, like, if we talk about how is that related to artistic practices or the artistic side of a practice: it goes hand in hand. I mean, the organizational form, if you think about let's say an artwork in the traditional way, it's being produced and that work is part of the aesthetics that the work has, will have, right? So you can't really separate the preparation process, the production, the creative process, or the organizational part of it from the aesthetics that you might consider to be present. So for us, I think that's very important. We can really enjoy the speciality of a specific way of organizing, for example.

05:50        „**human aspect**“ (subtitle)

PW:        05:51        The precarity of our type of organization is really in the human aspect. So, we are always watching out for disruptive fights for unrestorable relations between the people who are involved in projects. And that's something that is precarious and difficult work. But I think is very essential, if we talk about the infrastructure of our organization, it's in the relational sphere somehow. So, one aspect, which I already mentioned, but maybe I can expand on a little bit, is the fact that we are very much human based. Our work is inspired by, let's say, human activity. And so I think one of the Achilles heel in the organization is the availability of the right persons. So I mentioned, like having a fight, it's usually a very disrupting thing, so, something that you should prevent. I mean, being in good health is important. Having a community that can back up, having, let's say, younger people than us around us that could do the same job is an aspect of that. And I think, another thing that we have, a as kind of an internal rule, is that the people who are doing research and organizing the projects, so the artists in the core team, can maximum work half time for Constant. And when, we do that because the artistic practice, that each of us has, is super important as a resource to feed actually the work that goes on in the projects. So that's another one, its like, it's a very fine line between only wanting to offer half of the money for the probably full time job you are doing anyway. So yeah, that's where I think the limitations let's say are, but they are also self chosen. So for us it's a challenge. It's a challenge to set limits, to say, look, we are a small organization, we want to be a small organization, because our type of work is not possible to remain, to have the same flexibility and improvisation capacities if you grow.

08:04        „**commons**“ (subtitle)

PW:        08:09        I think it's super important, if we think about digital culture and the internet, the networks that we have available, to think about what is the stuff that we want to make available to everybody, and really to try to prevent too much, let's say, reappropriation of the unliked sort. And for that I think it's important also to put some, let's say, counter parameters, right? So the commons, the discussion about the commons is in that sense, I think, very helpful, because it makes visible an approach, a desire that people have, to, yeah, resources which are shared with large communities. One thing that I think is also interesting to think about is how these resources then can be managed? So can we think of, let's say, a collectivity, or collective ways of managing goods? Because you could say that, like, if you talk about this approach of commoning resources, that

somehow it's quite often objects oriented. So we talk about files that are made available, but the processes go behind it, that I need in order to maintain them, and also to thrive of them. I mean, if you think in terms of gardening, to have things grown, etc. We need to think also about the management part of the the larger picture, let's say. And that's something that I think would be very interesting to bring into the discussion.