

10 Year anniversary welcoming speech by Professor Philip Dean

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Welcoming speech of Professor Philip Dean, Director of the Media Lab of the University of Art and Design Helsinki, at the Media Lab's 10-year Anniversary, in the TV studio of the Media Centre LUME, Thursday 16th September 2004.

In 1993 Finland was in the middle of a crippling economic crisis. This was not a fertile time for development within the public sector.

However for a few years we had been witnessing certain changes within the art and design professions related to our university. Computers were playing an increasingly important role in the processes of professional creativity. Computer aided design, CAD, and Computer aided manufacturing, CAM, Together known as 'CAD-CAM' were becoming commonplace in advanced companies in areas like industrial design, architecture, fashion and textiles and within the publishing sector. electronic publishing systems were set to revolutionise the industry, not only in the print houses but, most clearly for us, within the graphic design industry.

My personal introduction to all these developments came through my work in photography, within the department of photographic art here and as technical editor of the Finnish photographic art magazine, *Valokuva*. Certain trends could be discerned, computers were becoming cheaper, and through the introduction of graphic user interfaces also easier for non-computer people to use.

I blame the artist and ART theoretician Victor Bergin for getting me involved in all this. At a significant photographic art event in Tampere during the Spring of 1986 Victor had shown his conceptual photographic work, large-format combinations of photographic images, based on particular paintings from the early 1900s, combined with simple graphic elements and typography. At the event we had time to discuss this work in the context of contemporary British photography of the time and, of course, in light of the overt interest in the post-modern at that time. Victor had a considerable international reputation as an artist and writer and I expected that it might be difficult for a young and rather inexperienced artist like myself to find a common wavelength.....

His message was rather simple and surprising...."Buy a Mac" he told me. Victor was familiar with the 'peoples' computer' from his time spent in the USA. He was convinced that, for young photographers and other artists, the computer was about to become an essential tool.

Sometime later I did what I was told. I guess I should be thankful for the advice.....or I might not be standing here today. On the other hand my "state of the art" 25MHz Mac Plus with a 10 inch black and white screen, 'massive' 1Mb of internal memory and an internal 820kb floppy drive, an external 20 Mb hard drive plus a rather noisy Matrix printer set me back well over 12 000Mks, which was quite a few months wages in those days. The purchase contained a programme called *HyperCard*. With HyperCard

one could build ones own 'programmes' which were more like virtual stacks of cards which could be linked to each other and enhanced with various functionalities – This was my first experience with interactive multimedia, in the late 1980s. For myself, like for so many young photographers and graphic designers of that period, our quest became to push this technology to the limit, to find out whether these new machines could help us to produce a new kind of art, something that was based on images, text or stories, typography and linking these somehow within a new media form, we wondered also whether moving images might be possible toosoon CD-ROM technology arrived and it seemed that this technology was becoming very interesting and something that art and design education should probably take this all very seriously.

Within TaiK at the beginning of the 1990s there were several pioneers who had introduced computers to various departments. Those I knew were Pekka Koponen in the department of Art Education – Pekka was teaching multimedia, Hypercard, PageMaker version 1 and the department had made considerable investments in Mac Plus computers which were also connected by wires that ran along the ceiling between the staff members' rooms on the 6th floor. He has built the first computer network in our university, state of the art Apple-Talk that allowed data to be shared between people at a transfer rate of several kilobits per second!

On the other side of the house the late Hilikka Sillanpää-Suominen had made considerable steps to ensure that the department of textile design was able to teach and research CAD-CAM methods within their curriculum.

In photography I had established the computer aided photography lab, CAP, with the considerable support of my head of department Sakari Sunila in the early 1990s. Sakari had also seen the future, so to speak. In 1990 we investigated the high end of photography in the USA, visiting Kodak's headquarters, the George Eastman House and the Institute of Technology at Rochester, *the Mecca* of photographic science, as well as Polaroid and other companies and institutions. We saw where things were going and we invested in a digital photographic printer that cost the department over 120 000mks. As that was more than the department's equipment and materials budget in 1990 the device was leased. But it allowed us to get going and to show we were serious. In those days the images still had to end up on paper in order that they would be taken seriously by the photographic community.

I applied for money from the Swedish Hasselblad foundation and with a grant of 200 000mks the cap lab moved out from behind the chemical cupboard and took over a studio space of its own.

Up in the art department an artist, Åke Mortengren, was in charge of a new lab hidden behind the silk screen printing facility in this case. (interesting how these initial developments were always hidden away!) One Mac upgraded to the famous 50Mhz FX version, a scanner and a crude printer. There were not too many students using this lab but the ones that did were there for long periods of time. It was there that I met Heidi Tikka. At about this time we started working with an interesting new tool that, for the first time allowed us to work with 'full colour' photographic images. This was Photoshop version 1.

At the same time a colourful character, a pioneer of computer animation in Finland, Antti Kari was working in TaiK laying plans for a new department whose basis was closer to Hollywood California than to Rochester New York. IMI – the computer imaging institute – was formed in 1992 and took on 8 MA-level students to study 3D computer animation and design. The effort was expensive and money was short. Other departments were unsure of the benefits such investments would provide. The technology

was complicated and slow to learn. In fact for a long time all we saw were the demo programmes sent with the Silicon Graphics workstations that were purchased. Students planned 15-minute animations and, after a year or so, some had even managed to produce a minute or two at low resolution. The tools were not user-friendly. One needed to understand UNIX and have programming skills. It seemed that with those demands - and with the general dilemma that an animation would be created with a keyboard and a mouse – it might be too optimistic to expect to train people in this field within a 2-year programme.

CAP moved downstairs to the 3rd floor in the same space as IMI. It was felt that some synergy would be gained from this move. In reality the worlds of 2d and 3d imaging were quite separate – and in terms of investment the extra dimension required an extra zero in the price tag of the equipment needed!

Before long we saw how Photoshop started to break the barriers between photographers, graphic designers, typographers and pre-press technicians.....Or DID IT? Well, to be honest it was all a bit messy and it took a while before our education was organised and people started to find the best uses for this tool within their own work. Within industry there was considerable concern – the new tools clearly broke the existing agreements on employment and the roles and tasks of individuals within, especially, the printing sector. Within Photography there was a particular backlash within certain sectors that was based on the ideas that, because of the existence of these tools within editorial offices, photographs could no longer be trusted to be showing *the truth*. The debates were amusing – many of us who had studied the real history of photography knew that deception had been one of the key methods within photography since its earliest years as a creative medium. But, of course, the deceptions were easier to make digitally and, for many of us, the general idea of doing away with the darkroom was a very promising proposition towards improvement in the quality of our lives.

So, now that I'm about half way through my tale, let's go back to 1993.

In the midst of the economic depression there is increasing debate about the development of a future in which the basis for economic operations will rest in information – its generation, use, access to it and new possibilities to communicate in real time on a global scale. Politicians and theoreticians start to expound the virtues of the information society. It was, of course, quite clear that this development had been made possible through the development of computers, computer networks and related software tools. It was also clear to many that this movement, from a heavily industrial society to an information society, would also include the necessity for development of cultural aspects and that, despite the technocratic boom of the time, it was unlikely that the iterated development of technologies alone would provide a sustainable base for any society in the long term.

With the awareness of the existence of certain, media labs, within academic institutions and commercial ones too, in which human aspects related to computing as well as aspects of creative content for digital media were being researched - we set out to find a model for a media lab within this institution. Having been given the responsibility of leading this effort I worked with Kari-Hans Kommonen, Pekka Koponen, Isto Männistö, Yrjö Tuunanen and some of the TaiK computing pioneers mentioned earlier, to create a plan for a Media Lab here. It was hard to find an exact model from the places we visited. TaiK is not part of a campus university with a wealth of other scientifically-driven faculties, with computer scientists and cognitive scientists in near proximity and employed within the same institution – with relatively easy potential for internal collaboration.

The main message we learned from our research of media labs was that we needed to build an interdisciplinary facility – one in which both staff and students would be drawn from a wide range of artistic and scientific backgrounds. We wrote plans, we sent them to our superiors for evaluation. the Rector began to understand the needs and we were told that our plans would have to be “sold” to the ministry of education as a development project. the plans had to be, in the Rector’s words, Crystal Clear. With our working group we began to polish up the “Crystal Clear” text.....

Today we celebrate 10 years of MA education and research in new media within the Media Lab.

This afternoon’s seminar has, I hope, given you all some insight into the nature of our education and research, into some of our central themes of interest as well as into some of the key individuals in our current staff. Therefore I thought it unnecessary to deal with our current operations here in any great detail in this presentation.

More insight into our faculty can be found from the current issue of the TaiK journal, *Arttu*, published this week and, of course, by reading our anniversary book, *Medialaboratorio 10v* which we are about to launch here after my speech today.

But a few words are surely necessary to give credit to those who have helped us get this far....

and another few words, perhaps, to state where we believe we are, in our development at this important milestone in our brief history.

Back in the early years there were others in Europe who were thinking seriously about the need to develop new education and research within art and design institutions specifically, in order to tackle the emerging – New Media.

In those early years collaboration with CITE, and especially its director Tom Evans, was essential for us to understand the new field we were moving into as well as, through the early research efforts of cite, to understand how related industry saw all this and their needs for new forms of education. Having joined CITE in 1995 our relationship enabled the development of the European Media Masters programme, the first trans-European masters programme in new media which was the work of 9 art and design institutions in 7 European countries. I am thankful to all concerned in the work of EMMA as it is much easier to be a pioneer when you have a good team than when you have to work alone.

CITE also led us into Europe, so to speak, in 1995 and immediately got us involved, as a partner, in a proper research project within the EU’s 4th Framework, entitled MAID, multimedia assets in industrial design. In my opinion the benefit of MAID to us was more in the experience than in the results of the project itself. As is typical of EU R&D the project was planned so far in advance that by the time it was eventually funded the technologies planned for development in the project were already becoming outdated. The world wide web was taking off and the majority of the efforts probably went to waste as the technological basis became defunct – out of date before the work was completed. But it’s hard to imagine that our later research efforts in the 5th and 6th framework programmes would ever have been possible without the experience of MAID and the general knowledge we gained from being involved in that.

Also very much related to the problems of rapid development as experienced in MAID - the lab has had

to cope with constant changes in the nature and creative possibilities of new media, as affected by rapidly developing technologies. In our early years it was common for staff to speak of tiredness and burn-out....brought about by having to teach what was, in effect, an uncharted area of study and to constantly update and revise the curriculum.

Thanks must go out today to all the staff of the lab (and for our long suffering families) through the years who have made such concerted efforts to develop our education, its content and teaching methods to the point where we have been able to gain a national award for the quality of our education, as a 'top unit' (Huippu yksikkö). Although I cannot mention everyone by name I would like to personally thank those professors here who worked closely with the MA in New Media programme through the years, Minna Tarkka, Raimo Lång, Heidi Tikka as well as Marjo Mäenpää who has led and coordinated our MA Muuntokoulutus programme since its inception.

The lab started to develop research efforts from 1995. Having sown various seeds for research in various areas through the years it has been a joint effort to learn how to cultivate the fruits of our first research projects. The strategic decision to practice research within thematic groups, a few years ago, also included the notion that, in order to create a sustainable system of education and research and to best share our expertise within the community of the lab, the various groups should attempt to lead some key focus areas of study in the MA programme.

At this point I would like to thank all those individuals whose efforts have resulted in the formation and continuing success of our research operations which, in 2002, for example, accounted for over 50% of the funded research within this university. It has been a pleasure to work with people like, Jyrki Rissanen, who did most of our work in MAID and continues to work with us as a researcher, with Kari-Hans Kommonen, Teemu Leinonen, Prof. Lily Diaz, Mika Tuomola, Lauri Mäkelä, Prof. Timo Honkela, Kristiina Jokinen, Prof. Mauri Kaipainen and all those who have worked as lecturers, our current full-time teaching staff, Teijo Pellinen, Rasmus Vuori, Antti Ikonen, Kai Lappalainen, Asta Raami, our part-time teachers and tutors, producers – Pipsa Asiala, for those who have worked in administrative tasks, people like Sinikka Alanko in our early years, her successor Anna Arsniva, for Rauni Palmén and Irma Lepistö who look after the figures and last but not least those multi-talented heroes of our resource management team, Pekka Salonen, Jon Nykänen - our first *sivari* who never left, Tommi Jauhianen and Ilpo Kari and the long list of assistants and *sivaris*.

I would also like to extend my thanks to all our external supporters, funders and collaborators, many of whom are represented here today. Your interest in working with us has been essential in the development of our work in the last 10 years.

Thanks to all our students through the years, for their patience, collaboration and willingness to accept their own pioneering roles as the first generation of new media professionals in a field where you are often expected to devise your own professional title. The quality of your work and the success with which it has been received is one of the main reasons we can celebrate here today.

And finally I would like to thank our administrators and bosses, the persons who have made so many important decisions in our support through the years and have trusted us at times when, maybe, many persons with more skeptical and inflexible attitudes would have sent us away to improve our plans, until such time that they were really 'crystal clear'. Our thanks go to all those working in the TaiK administration on 6th floor, but especially to our leader in the last decade, Rector Yrjö Sotamaa. Thank

you all for giving us the chance to prove ourselves.....

and thank you all for allowing us to remain the Media Lab – as 2 years ago it often seemed that we would be consumed by another faculty as part of the university's reorganisation process.

At that time we produced a considerable document in our defense – both in order to continue our work in our own way but also to state our view that a university like ours needs a Media Lab – a place where one can find the avant-garde of art and design – a lab where technology is not an end in itself but where people and their needs form the starting point for development - a place where experiments are supposed to take place all the time, to retain the 'new' in new media - a multi-disciplinary, multi-cultural research-oriented environment for sharing and building knowledge in new areas of art, design and production – a faculty whose nature defies to be defined as just art, or just design or as media - but which needs to embody all of these

Today we look back on 10 years work and i think we can be proud of what has taken place, for what has been achieved....so far. At the same time we can now look forward on the next 10 years and speculate on what's to come.

For many of us that is an easier task than it was ten years ago.

IN a few moments Marjo Mäenpää will explain how we've attempted to capture some thoughts and experiences from our first 10 years between the covers of our anniversary publication.

Honoured Guests.....Thank you for your attention and, on behalf of the Media Lab, welcome to our celebrations!

