

Souillac II - Final Report - 6

An International Virtual Faculty on Art and Science

Recipe for a Virtual Faculty of Art and Science

Take the 24 most articulate, open-minded and brave scientists from all disciplines and all continents and the same for 24 artists of the same level and create a Virtual Faculty of outstanding intellectuals that dare see their work in a wider context, dare speak out clearly and yet have an outstanding status amongst their peers.

Invite them to join a Virtual Faculty where each will give one lecture every year on themes connecting their own work with a wider science/art perspective. The lectures are given via teleconferencing and are available to interested institutions and individuals all over the planet.

For instance, one day a week, say every Thursday, for the 24 weeks of the academic year, a tag team probing the same subject from two different angles will be available to the audience:

Example:

10 - 11: Scientist lecture (on-line)

11 - 12: On-line chat (text only) with scientist, open to everyone.

14 - 15: Artist lecture (on-line)

15 - 16: On-line chat (text only) with artist, open to everyone.

One benefit of this activity will be the educational and research-relevant material delivered to all interested institutions, be they in the realm of art or science or any other curiosity-driven human activity. Another benefit will be the resurrection of the intellectual, previously so apparent in the European tradition: the independent, free thinker with a wide audience of interested individuals; a highly skilled and hard-working person with a deep insight into his or her own field with a deep feeling for other intellectual walks of life.

At a manageable cost, a truly international circle of curiosity-driven minds can be established to the benefit of the many.

A Background to Virtual Faculty of Art and Science

There is general agreement that we have been living through and continue to live through a period of profound change manifest everywhere in western civilisation, socially, politically, culturally, intellectually, philosophically and psychologically. This transformation has been most apparent in the arts and the sciences of our

century and it is there we must look to discover the meaning of that change and its consequences for our society. These tandem sources of knowledge have, consciously and unconsciously, been giving us clues throughout most of century as to where we are headed.

Given the great dispersion of knowledge today, the lack of links between the various kinds of information available through different approaches to understanding, a point of focus is essential to bring unity to such a program. Such a point can be the idea of a new organisational space for western society, a space that has been the subject and object of much artistic and scientific invention since the end of the 19th century. Every society has at its core an image, an image of itself, of how it operates, of how it relates to other things around, an image which contains a schema describing the way that society functions.

It is obvious that during the course of the 20th century that schema, for western and probably world civilisation, has changed in profound and fundamental ways from the mechanical schema of the clockwork universe to something not yet fully defined. That schema is the organisational space referred to above. It is, as well, a visual space, a communication space, an imaginary space, an intuitional space, the way in which we see things operating.

By exploring art and science, separately and as an ensemble, it is perhaps possible to begin to understand that space and how it works and thereby find directions for the future evolution of our society. This is the principal objective of the faculty. Since few people are looking at this change in how reality is defined, the number of teachers and guides that can help through this exploration is limited. Many of the people are themselves unaware of the part their work plays in the overall transformation confronting us. No one is certain about the direction in which this is leading which means that by attempting to teach it, we are participating actively in the discovery of what we are looking for.

By making the most efficient use of the communications tools now available, we can bring together people from different disciplines to add their part to the overall construction of the new space and to work with students and teachers from several different academic disciplines to actually build it together.

Target:

Art schools or faculties, engineering schools, science faculties, research centres in both the arts and sciences, and many others.

Tools:

On-line video-conferencing, minimally one ISDN connection bridging interested sites with the transmitting institute, for direct presentation and discussion, Internet for chat sessions, preparation and follow-up.

Affiliated Institutions:

Mindship Copenhagen, Denmark
Mindship Intl., University of Maine, Orono, ME, USA
Leonardo, ISAST
Laboratoire de Langage Electronique, Paris, France

Project Budget:

Funding would be in two steps, the first, an initial grant to permit the preparation of a detail project and the first year's program. The second step would be to fund and execute that first year with both public and private support.

First step: (estimated budget, 85 000 ECU for one year preparation):

- Prepare the objectives
- Identify the topics
- Identify the faculty
- Identify the participating schools
- Identify support institutions
- Work out a technical audit
- Identify public, private and industrial partners
- Identify funding
- Prepare a detailed budget for year one

The critical problems here are:

1. Choosing the 48 people
2. Persuading them to participate
3. Deciding on working languages and solutions to on-line translation
4. Finding moderators for public debates
5. Counselling Faculty members about to lecture.
6. Creating a manual on delivering lectures
7. Creating a manual for institutions on how to use the VF in their activities
8. Locating physical homes for the VF
9. Finding fully compatible and transparent communication systems

Second step: (estimated annual budget, 350 000 ECU):

Operational costs for year one:

- Pedagogical Organisation
- Communications

- Equipment
- Administration
- Faculty salaries
- Administrative salaries

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