

### III

## THE VALUE OF IN-BETWEENNESS

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*Attila Bujdosó*

I have been working at *Kitchen Budapest* for three years now. I often face those very moments when people ask about what I do. *Kitchen Budapest* is a media lab, and I work there – I always start my compact and somewhat simplified answer. I try to avoid saying too much or too little because people have a tendency to ask more questions in return. And that usually means that I get into a conversation which takes at least half an hour and I stay trapped by explaining what *Kitchen Budapest*, or KIBU as we call it, is actually doing.

The explanation is charged with a peculiar mixture of frustration and excitement because I feel it is partly undefinable. I can say that my work constitutes from being a researcher, artist, thinker, curator, coordinator and cultural broker, all at the same time. But I believe it is more important to tell is what *Kitchen Budapest* actually is. Well I would easily tell if we, at KIBU, had a common agreement on what it really is.

We usually call it a media lab but often use different terms, like innovation lab or pop-up lab. Ironically, the term we use most often is the *most vague*. So by explaining my understanding of *Kitchen Budapest* I also paraphrase my notion of the media lab. I feel that the core value of *Kitchen Budapest* is its indefinability. It's outstanding excellence derives from and is strongly related to the embarrassing fact that it really takes half an hour to explain.

Media lab considers public aspects of knowledge. Before diving into this, we have to take one step back. First of all, we need to be a

naive enough dreamer to believe that *knowledge is power*. If we possess this belief, then the media lab can be a tool to empower people. The question is not where knowledge can be found - we believe it is here, it is everywhere. And it is widely and evenly distributed, all around - on the contrary to Gibson's imagined future. We don't want to say where it *is* because we don't want to pretend to know where it is. And we do so to be more allowing. Knowledge is diverse and many people possess it. We do not want to be more specific than that, never.

But what we experience is that knowledge has a certain structure that feels very rigid. It feels actually steady in the same way as architecture. It is deeply rooted in our cultural history and the existing fields derive from the former practices of knowledge creation and distribution. Both architecture and the structure of knowledge are very slow mediums to progress. Any piece of architecture, any building can be defined both by its walls and its spaces. The structure of knowledge is not any different: it is built up from fields... or from boundaries, depending on how we look at it.

The structure of knowledge is full of boundaries that lie in the existing differentiation between disciplines; the traditional non-overlapping definitions of art and science; the contrast between cultural and business; the strict division between public and private; the exclusive interpretations of academic and non-academic; the borderline between organizational working models and participation of an individual; the distinct roles of producer and consumer, teacher and student, amateur and specialist; the detachment of learning from doing; the separation of experimentation from production.

We experience way too many of these boundaries. We often feel that they are of high resistance, most of them are really hard to cross. And the reason for that is quite simple: because they are established. Because they are there.

In that sense, the most basic but probably the most important feature of a media lab is to draw attention to the existence of these kinds of boundaries. All these boundaries limit the free flow of knowledge. They limit the access to knowledge, and thus are counter-forces to something at which we are aiming: enabling *limitless* potential for individual and collective growth.

Media lab is a testing ground for new ideas. It is a special condition, an open and allowing environment for experimentation. Media lab is not only about content, it is also about ways of doing, so it explores new forms of collaborations. It is deeply inspired by the digital era so it adopts the logic of internet, new technologies and networked society. At the same time it applies a critical approach towards media and technology. It is able to connect resources, it enables development of capabilities on different levels like awareness, understanding and skill.

When I talk about *Kitchen Budapest* as a media lab, what I usually try to highlight is its primary mission to dissolve the aforementioned boundaries. Media lab is a device to work in-between the different practices. Media lab is a space of the in-between.

*Text based on a discussion with Marcos García and Jara Rocha (both at Medialab Prado) that took place during a mind-walk in Budapest, at the first LABtoLAB meeting in December 2009.*

#### ABOUT KITCHEN BUDAPEST

##### *The spicy innovation lab*

*Kitchen Budapest*, opened in June 2007, is a new media lab for young researchers who are interested in the convergence of mobile communication, online communities and urban space and are passionate about creating experimental projects in cross-disciplinary teams.

##### *Research fields*

What happens to the net once it meets the urban space? How does private space relate to the saturating wireless networks? Where does user created content gain authority? How does our use of cities alter as we get more and more real time feedback of its dynamics? What makes a home smart? Street-smart?

We would like to rethink and remix the possibilities of new media in our everyday lives and to argument connections between new technologies and our society.

*Lab*

KIBU offers a research lab space downtown Budapest, a basic grant for a dozen researchers, equipment and a dynamic workflow where sharing and helping is essential, and the freedom to capitalize any good idea.

Being sponsored by Magyar Telekom (MT), the leading Hungarian Telco, there is a direct path where ideas and prototypes get reach larger audiences, in case MT and the project group finds ways to do so. Our aim is to build a platform where ideas are materializing and some end up in cultural context, some in the market.