

n.e.w.s. at Basecamp, summary

Submitted by [Renée Ridgway](#) on Mon, 2008-09-22 20:53

On Tuesday 16 September, n.e.w.s. was presented at [Basecamp](#). Joining us from various places in the world on Skype audio: Aharon from Brighton, Prayas from India, Magda from Brighton, Stephen from Paris, and Mia from London via IM. Scott, Mary, Garrett and I were in Philadelphia. It was great to have everybody online, even in the wee hours of the morning for some. We were able to facilitate a two-hour conversation about n.e.w.s., the goings-on so far and some of the problems that need improving as well as supporting its experimental and discursive nature. In this blog entry I will try to rehash some of the keys issues and explain how we structured the conversation. There will also be a soundfile and Skype chat on the site if you want to listen to and/or read the conversation.

I structured the meeting through collecting all the comments and feedback so far by the contributors, as well as visitors to the site. With a list of complaints, compliments and confusing elements I read off the outline at the beginning of the evening, after first explaining n.e.w.s.

1. Technical possibilities
2. Books? or blogs for long texts
3. Moderation/contributors
4. special n.e.w.s. section or the event calendar
5. Poll- use it well- so what's after cultural diversity... this month's question?
6. Tagging- deli.ci.us
7. Asian Biennales- next month's online symposium

We then addressed each topic individually with each attendee expressing her or his opinion about each particular issue.

However, what seems to emerge as the key issue in our discussion, besides the planned technological improvements, is the concept of 'we'. Taking the coinage of 'critical mass' as a term we could further develop, who are 'we' at n.e.w.s. and how do we go about doing this together, or not? How can we write books, comment on others texts, express our ideas, make decisions collectively if 'we' are not together on this? Stephen 'explicitly argues in favor of more developed texts, including much more extensive use of visual and sound material. This is not a plea for long-winded blather, but of laying the groundwork for serious discussion and coauthorship.' In which way will the collective be formed and under which criteria?

The questions of adding to the list of contributors to the site also comes up with 'we'. Right now, the structure of n.e.w.s is based on 'curatorial positionings' by different people from around the world where each author has their own blog entries, yet receive comments from anyone who is signed up as a 'user'. That means, anyone with a valid email address can contribute to n.e.w.s., in the form of comments. Though the position statement suggests that we let anyone become a contributor who wants to, it is currently based on a three-time trust model. Questions have arisen as to whether we need to have a three-time trust instance, as well as not letting others join until a period of time has gone by. Also since n.e.w.s. bases its model on remuneration for content in a 'Web 2.0' economy, how would new contributors be paid and what kind of distribution model would we are supported by the enthusiasm and generosity of invisible people worldwide. are you invisible?

need to be put in place?

Within this framework exists the 'we'. 'How do 'we' write texts together when we don't know each other? ', one of the first questions raised by Stephen during the discussion. This basically falls under the writing of collaborative texts within the 'Book's at n.e.w.s. and some people's objections to unknown others editing one's text. So for right now, 'Books' are still for writing texts together, to be seen as such. But by the end of the conversation we had decided to break down into smaller groups, which then could focus on certain topics already suggested, i.e. 'Plausible Artworlds, Cultural Diversity'. Prayas is working on changing the structure of the 'blocks' at Drupal to facilitate this.

How is the structure of n.e.w.s. so far, working, not working? Mia states that 'essentially I think this means we need to pay more attention to the status of comments and see them as part of the fabric of a collaborative text, rather than as the secondary noise around a finished essay.' This is a plea for the reading the blog as a composite of essays as well as comments, that this 'thread' is a [collaborative] text in itself and should be read as such. Furthermore, many contributors have expressed the desire to work on the 'books' and want to be collaborative. See above about our first suggestion for resolve.

Which brings us to the question of moderation. Still unresolved, it seems 'we' have disparate views on the definition of moderation, what it means, what it could mean in relation to n.e.w.s. Weng had been the moderator, behind the scenes and in particular, for the launch at n.e.w.s. at The Substation in Singapore. His summary is on the site and implicit is his approach is 'the lack' of moderation; a conscious choice to let things happen, let 'threads' of discussion involve organically, including various disagreements. But what was brought up by others involved is someone to bring these strands together, to sometimes intervene and to react by directly addressing issues or discussions. Or that moderation only occurs for events, like this one. Yuliya had suggested in her comments to assign moderation; this could be on a rotation schedule for a week, or month, etc. Hopefully, in the comments that follow this blog entry this issue can be taken up and resolved over the coming weeks.

The event calendar at the top right on the site is intended to be used by all contributors to add events, just like one would add a blog entry or page. Yuliya raised the issue of having a 'special "news" page, where all contributors can add important news from their part of the world, or maybe just some information (why not critical?) within interesting events all over the world, which contributors are thinking about.' Put to the discussion, it seems it should not be a separate page as such, but either use the 'event' calendar and add them as 'events' or have a section with specific links, though many were not ok with having a section of links. Links already appear in texts added by contributor and comments by users. Is there a way to aggregate these?

We then addressed the taxonomy and tagging at n.e.w.s. Mia pointed out that what needs to be changed is that no 'titles' of articles should be used as a tag. Rather, thought needs to be given to the specific taxonomy and shared vocabularies being developed at n.e.w.s. Prayas is investigating del.icio.us, whether this is right for n.e.w.s.. Please see the technology page at 'Shaping n.e.w.s.' for more info. We are building a taxonomy and this can be consciously built up and developed.

As for the poll, well, the 'Cultural Diversity cake' poll needs an exit strategy. What will replace it? A question where yes / no answers will be beneficial to a larger discussion. What about whether we decide to eliminate the term 'post-colonial' from our vocabulary, echoing the Guangzhou Triennial statement and directing up to the last crucial comments?

As Yuliya mentioned, 'the discussion around some exact events, like Asian Biennials,' and 'more concrete cross-points on the blog' is a concern

expressed by many contributors so far. This is why we have come up with the next event, scheduled for the 14-18th November at n.e.w.s. The particular topic for discussion is still open but we are structuring the forum right now around a central theme of the Guangzhou Triennial: 'Farewell to Post-colonialism — Towards a Post-Western Society?' n.e.w.s. contributors have already touched upon certain issues encircling 'post-colonial' and 'post-western' discourse through 'world art' frameworks, along with getting rid of 'cultural diversity'. How can we rethink these terms not from one perspective, but the many at n.e.w.s.?

Finally, the question of sending out newsletters monthly is crucial for wide readership and potential contribution to n.e.w.s. There will be a mailing going out in the coming days announcing the posting of the minutes from the Basekamp presentation as well as announcing the above-mentioned forum in November. And a planning for the coming months. But Aharon brought up a crucial issue at n.e.w.s. How can mailings work, where we receive daily, or at this point, weekly emails announcing comments at n.e.w.s., or immediately when we receive response to our posts and comments? Prayas, Aharon, I hope you guys can take this from here, I would appreciate your fine-tuning on finding a structure that could work for us in this place in time.

Lastly, Inti's comment on our 'imagined community', directly addresses the 'we' of n.e.w.s. 'Since the beginning, I find a bit useless to write so much on the technical aspect of n.e.w.s., or the system, rather than the potentiality for knowledge construction. As in the XIX century, it is through writing and its publication (mechanical or digital) that an "imagined community". It must, however, be borne in mind that there is no 'technical' as a separate entity to that of 'content' at n.e.w.s. Rich also brought up this question in his feedback. They both feed each other and through technical possibilities, some known, some yet to be developed, we can find diverse ways of generating content, outside of only 'the word'. Content finds 'its visibility and agency' in different media and through being online, sharing time. Only maybe we need to slow down that time.

I see I am pushing 1500 words so I will stop here. There is more about this particular discussion at n.e.w.s. but I am doing this from memory and trying to focus on the larger issues. I hope people also will take the time to read the parallel IM discussion that occurred simultaneously while we were on audio and to comment on the above. And a new question for the poll?

[Link to the transcript of the skype chat](#)

Submitted by [Prayas Abhinav](#) on Fri, 2008-10-03 18:43

The transcript of the text chat (skype) which was happening at basekamp concurrent to the voice conference can be accessed at:

[basekamp.pdf](#)



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