



## #BWPWAP

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# **EDITORIAL**

**#BWPWAP**

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In referring to the cancellation of Pluto's planetary status in 2006, #BWPWAP (Back When Pluto Was a Planet) – the 2013 edition of the transmediale festival – interrogates techno-cultural processes of displacement and invention, and asks for artistic and speculative responses to new cultural imaginaries. In light of this, the conference and workshop *Researching #BWPWAP* took place in November 2012 in Lüneburg, Germany, organised jointly by Leuphana University of Lüneburg, Aarhus University and the reSource transmedial culture/transmediale. The call for participation focused on Ph.D. researchers and other participants to speculate on BWPWAP as a pretext for presenting their research and even to further reflect on its circulation as a meme.

This newspaper presents some outcomes of this process, and like the conference and workshop, can be interpreted in the context of a research culture that has been significantly destabilized by network culture and digital media. If the planet Pluto didn't exactly fall prey to an epistemological break or a scientific revolution, but rather to a mundane administrative procedure – a redefinition of what constitutes a planet – then what does this say about contemporary research culture? Certainly, much research culture has shared Pluto's fate: conferences reduced to networking events to foster cultural capital, and scholarly communications reduced to impact factors measured by grant givers. In other words, research is not just about measuring the performativity of a single researcher (the peer-reviewed journal system), but also the processes of questioning, investigating, speculating, and sharing between peers in a broader sense.

#BWPWAP captures a time and space when art and digital culture was researched outside formal academia. Festivals like transmediale around the world have for decades been engaged with research

practices and have functioned as a crucial focus for the sharing of ideas between practitioners, critics or theoreticians. In addition, network culture contributes to and transforms research culture, forcing it out of its closet and, if not into the solar system, then at least beyond the walls of the academy, thereby threatening some of its conservative precepts. Many universities are embracing practice-oriented Ph.D. projects (framing research as practice), and an increasing number of practitioners are using universities as contexts for their practice (framing practice as research) – but is this enough? With this pretext, the newspaper asks what kinds of technological and artistic practices might produce radical effects for an institutionalized research culture? How can we save research from itself?

Accordingly, the scope of the newspaper extends far beyond the festival and academy, and into a speculative research environment that engages with a wider constellation of ideas and readers; beginning with a glossary of terms and organised around key newspaper-like subheadings: debate, economy, technology, living and education. That it takes the form of a newspaper, and includes short articles, helps to serve our main purpose: to register the confusions and conflicts between knowledge production, research, and self-organisation. If research is necessarily part of a matrix of power and knowledge, then we aim to expose this by its awkward and casual setting. If research remains a powerful force in shaping our understanding of the world and the institutions through which we operate, then we wish this to extend this to include non-traditional methods, to open speculations, actions, interventions – and to expand the range of possibilities into the far reaches of outer space.

*Aarhus/Leuphana, January 2013*