

UN WSIS Contributory Conference on ICT & Creativity

Workshop Session 6 : eCulture, Creative Content and DigiArts. (June 3, 2005)
Speaker : Ricardo Mbarak
Title : Art and New Media. Strategies for an eMulticulturalism.

Abstract:

“All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights. They are endowed with reason and conscience and should act towards one another in a spirit of brotherhood.”

Human Rights Charter, Article 1.

We believe in the unity of human gender. But we also believe in the singularity of each and every person. The singularity is the base of difference, of multiculturalism and of “communautarisme”. The unity of human gender facilitates the agreements between people. It helps us to find a common denominator and to use a common language where everyone can access everyone. But the human mind, although it is individual, it is also universal. Consequently, the world is pulled between these two principles as if we all want to be one but at the same time we want to be unique.

The individual or the person, without the culture which distinguishes him from the others, does not exist: If you remove from the person his language, his religion, his color, his habits, his beliefs, his family, this means that we already erased this entire person. Therefore in spite of the globalization and the opening, each person is attached to a specific part in this world, although he is a member of the whole humanity.

The Information and Communication Technologies modified the time and the space of the relations and the communication by expanding (with the virtual) our access to the real. Internet shows a real image of the physical space, as sites, territories, time, communities, etc. In this way we could define Internet as connected people instead of connected machines. Internet is a human invention, all that exists in it has got its own source in the different realities of people, and hence the emphasis on the human being and the mixture of his subjectivities form an e-world, where e-communities and e-cultures exist. The Self and the Other, with all the differences in the way they think, are the atoms, and the body cells of this virtual world, in other words, they are the units of the Information and Communication Society.

In order to make an e-cultural “diversity and pluralism” emergence, the Information and Communication Technologies should harmonize between the universal and the particular, and not to sacrifice the cultures in favor of only one world and universal culture, which is not clear until now, but it is surely ignoring the private individual, the intimate and the home, on both scientific and emotional levels. This “désacralisation” of the singular, throws us in an amorphous world without a clear specificity. I do not preach the intellectual balkanization or isolationism, but I also do not preach the total loss of the intellectual and cultural identity. The cultural richness rises from a contact between the various cultures. As example, in Lebanon there are 18 different cultures but they are not contradictory, because they simply created the Lebanese culture.

Creative contents in the e-world is a result of not only the exchange of information about our different cultures, but also the construction of a new e-culture which is different from where we started our exchange; an e-culture not “driven and imposed by outside forces and regulations”, but a result of the creative impact and contact between the cultures. In this sense, each content is far away from being totally affiliated to other cultures, as well as it does not aim to affiliate other cultures to it.

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Thus, the remedy to bridge the gap between the rich and the poor, between the connected people and the offliners, and to build a creative content for a new e-culture is a responsibility for everyone:

I invite the poor countries to welcome and accept the e-culture and not to refuse it by remaining in a historical cyst of happiness, afraid of any innovation; in other words, everyone should be proud of his culture because this is what bans fears from dialogues and exchanges.

As I invite the rich countries to work politically, juridically, and economically to establish a universal and global development that touches all the people and all the individual, materially and spiritually (by the instruction, the cultural development, etc.). This creates in everyone the curiosity for knowledge and research.

Besides this, developed countries should not judge others according to what they are themselves, or to consider others' cultures as inferior to theirs.

This is how dialogue can establish international standards and criteria to evaluate how and when e-culture could "strengthen cultural diversity and pluralism" and to decide what cultural differences should stay and what should go, because without these standards, the societies will be closed in a time when we are more and more in need to be open and connected. Changes can be done starting from a dialogue that needs to cover the rights of everyone, with a will to find agreements without the received ideas that the parties have about others. Thus, governments would implement in their educational systems a culture of dialogue; and this will certainly affect the e-culture content for each and every society, without having one accusing the other of being a traitor or an evil.

To remain in the Lebanese example in building a creative e-culture, I would point out a second gap that exists between pure technology and art as a creative field. Common credits would solve this problem in order to give a possibility for art students and science students to share experience so that artists would create needs for technical advancements and development. On the other hand, technology embodies within it new codes and new aesthetical territories to be concurred by aestheticians and artists, in order to develop a new language specific to this new medium. This purpose imposes somehow the necessity for team work. The industrial model of production could be a model to be followed to construct such teams in the creation field. This is what many research and creation labs are initiating. And universities, educationally speaking remain very appropriate contexts for such labs.

So artists are invited, specifically, to elaborate local social and political issues that reflect and develop this or that environment. I believe not only in art history, but also in art geography; not only in e-culture history, but also in e-culture geography. So to see how art is reflecting society, we need to have an overview on specific icons that our generation shares today as part of their common geographical and historical context. The keyword I always point at is the link between new media and art is "socio-politic".

It is imperative to create writing procedures specific to the new media which, by the innovation and the richness of its possibilities, is today the object of reflections, researches and process of creation in the artistic field. This new media although it is the same in the whole world, it is used differently in this or that territory after being affected by the local socio-political context. Artists should observe how their environment is using the Information and Communication Technologies, and then use these local codes as raw materials to build new judgment criteria, new meanings and new questions... for example, a Missed Call in Lebanon communicates a totally different message than does a Missed Call in France.

Thank you