

ART, CULTURE, KNOWLEDGE AND DEMOCRACY

Debate about the role of Information Technology around the Love Difference Table, 8 - 9 June 2005, Island of San Servolo, Venice

Moderator:

Giuliana Carusi Setari, President Dena Foundation for Contemporary Art, President of Cittadellarte-Fondazione Pistoletto

Participants:

Ambasciatore Umberto Vattani, Secretary General of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs

Achille Bonito Oliva, art critic

Michelangelo Pistoletto, artist

Juan Carlos Gentile, member of Hipatia

Gilberto Gil, Minister of Culture of Brazil, and musician

Paula Le Dieu, Director of Creative Commons International

Juan Carlos De Martin, Public Lead Creative Commons Italia

Claudio Prado, coordinator for digital policies of the Ministry of Culture of Brazil

Senatore Fiorello Cortiana, elegate of the Senate of the Republic of Italy to the UN World Summit on Information Society

Ambassador Umberto Vattani:

"It's very nice to meet around this table that presents the Mediterranean Sea as something unique. If you look at the edge of the land the relative position of each can be seen, and so also the distances. Uniting it, a sea that unites instead of separating is represented - we owe this to the genius of Michelangelo Pistoletto. I think that today's discussion is important because man discovers in art reconciliation in his relationship with his peers, in person to person relations, in interpersonal relationships; in his relationship with nature, often subject to exploitation and degradation without limits; his relation to politics, because even in politics there needs to be respect for others; in his relationship with the economic system, so that man doesn't just become a cog in the wheel of production. All these concepts and ideas are fundamental in the search that Michelangelo Pistoletto and his collaborators have started at Cittadellarte and with which we would like to compare ourselves."

Juan Carlos Gentile:

"We find ourselves here thanks to Michelangelo, who - manipulator of codes - has understood that the code is art. Thanks to his artistic impulse, us programmers take in and understand the beauty that there is in knowledge, that is within the code. The code is beautiful. What is happening today is very important because it represents the first real contact: the informatic code seen from an artistic point of view. To obtain the code we have today we have had to base ourselves on other codes. Closing down the current code would be like hiding all other works of visual art in the world and displaying just a tiny fraction of them through a key hole."

Gilberto Gil:

"My political agenda, my political territory, my movement, everything that I consider temporary and that I think is a real challenge is contained in the prospects of the new opportunities given by digital culture, of creating strategies of transformation that concentrate on the here and now.

Today, digital culture is a movement that fights to divulge the ethics of hackers, of sharing information and knowledge in favour of a process based on collaboration for the construction of a new concept of citizenship. It is in this way that the Internet was founded, and it is in this way that free software was founded. I am an enthusiastic supporter of free software and of the extensive use of the internet as a democratic means to access information through an interactive process of exchange and sharing, that I sustain is the most intense, the most radical, the most innovative within the sphere of the manifestation of freedom of thought and the expression of creation. Digital culture is an important political battle to fight in the field of technology, of economy, of social and cultural life. The issue we are confronting now is another fundamental battle of our times: that of cultural diversity, that through the new digital means, through the internet finds a habitat that allows it to guard and develop itself, inverting the threat of consumption of a globalised and pasteurised culture. The present-day scenario of digital culture can signify a real change with respect to the forms of production and distribution of human subjectivity that is in this way capable of transforming the very concepts of civilisation and development from how they have been seen until today.

The question we ask ourselves here is: can there be a deeper and more libertarian impact than this? What is truly fascinating about the movement of digital culture is that it draws its origins from society itself, and not from the government, businesses, political parties, from associations or from other forms of traditional social representations."

Giuliana Carusi Setari:

"But how can this liberty of knowledge be recognised in the institutional sphere and build within the sphere of politics structured by a minister?"

Gilberto Gil:

"In Brazil we have already gathered a lot of experience on the issue of free software, digital inclusion and the creation of autonomous areas for thought, production and creation. This mobilization of intelligence and sensitivity is penetrating even the folds of government itself. It is a fascinating experience – not only the federal government but some local administrations, too, are making digital culture a strategic issue. I'm talking about free software, free internet connections and free computer services. The unrestricted use of what digital multimedia distributes has raised what from some aspects is a very important almost explosive issue: intellectual property and copyright. Article 27 of the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights states that "Everyone has the right freely to participate in the cultural life of the community, to enjoy the arts and to share in scientific advancement and its benefits. Everyone has the right to the protection of the moral and material interests resulting from any scientific, literary or artistic production of which he is the author". These two sentences are carried into every national constitution in the western world. But the clash between them is highlighted by the new digital distribution of intellectual property and it is undeniable that digital distribution is an exceptional way of rendering access more democratic. One of the aspects of the digital distribution of intellectual creativity is that it can distribute everything that is or that can be produced.

Cultural diversity – a dying breed in the twentieth century – will not only be able to survive but will even be stimulated. Everything produced locally whether it be words, pictures or sounds can be made available to cyberspace by just a few clicks for every cybercitizen everywhere in the world. We ask ourselves whether this is not what every government in the world has been struggling towards. In any case, the digital distribution of intellectual property is practically impossible because it is against the law – the law in all these free countries prohibiting what it should be encouraging, namely democratic access to knowledge. As regards intellectual property rights, we in Brazil, have given our active support to the creation of the creative commons. Creative commons is a simple model for licensing copyright which introduces flexibility into the old inadequate system. We in the Ministry of Culture are in the front line in placing the issue of digital culture in the public eye, with society and government both at national and international level – cyberspace is an international phenomenon in which national boundaries lose their meaning. I feel that placing these issues in the public eye is a basic requirement for our Ministry."

Paula Le Dieu:

"We are faced with a new creative dominion: the sea is where everything came from, where organisms came together to create life. From this virtual thought process on the table before us shaped like the Mediterranean Sea, what we have to do is recombine, recreate – how it was in the beginning – these new creative dominions. Creative Commons is a digital dominion, a toolbox that enables us to recombine new technologies and recreate starting from new inspirations. What has to be done is to combine three languages: firstly that of the law, secondly that of the creator of the 'Net and thirdly the language that can be understood by everyone. We try to assure those who are able to understand and we try to be creative in order to be able to recreate just as the sea did."

Juan Carlos De Martin:

"Creative Commons was set up in 2002, when the explosion in the use of the Internet and digital technology was at its fullest, in order to provide a legal tool for recombining and reusing creative material. The author voluntarily releases his or her digital or physical contents placing them under a licence that allows them to be used within the limits set by the author, but to all intents they are free. So instead of the work coming into the dominion of copyright in the usual way which sets narrow constraints on its dissemination and copy, it enters into a commons, and English word meaning public asset. In creative terms this means creating a cultural heritage that everyone can draw from to create new creativity. In this historical moment, Creative Commons deemed that it was particularly important to strengthen the role of these "creative commons" because the digital revolution has produced a movement that tends to restrict access to cultural heritage almost like a knock-on effect. By offering licences, Creative Commons seeks to provide a legal tool for encouraging at least some creators to release their contents for others to make free use of them without fearing legal repercussions. Creative Commons works, therefore, are being increasingly circulated over the 'Net and can be copied legally in accordance with the terms of the licence."

Giuliana Carusi Setari:

"I would like to ask Claudio Prado, who coordinates the digital policies of Brazil what has been done, is being done and will be done in order to make this dream of democratic access to information come true?"

Claudio Prado:

"In Brazil we are working on a project called 'pontos de cultura' (points of culture), authentic workshops that aim to launch the processes for providing access to the technology to those who have never had it. The digital divide raises two enormous barriers that block access to technology. The first is the lack of training on how to use the machines and the second is their price. When we get to communities cut off from technological access, we teach them how to take a computer apart and put it together again, transforming "digital refuse", the machines we no longer use, into hi-tech instruments. The government is committed to supplying a multi-media kit, broadband access and funds granted yearly. The aim is to

foster interactivity by using broadband for Internet and create interaction with other tools like texts, images, sounds, audiovisuals and software projects. We feel that in order for digital inclusion to happen you can't just consider the computer but every opportunity it provides. We have also launched a project for the autonomous, independent construction of common platforms linking all the points of culture, to foster interaction and information exchange.

We are presently assessing the first stage of the project but in future the ministry hopes to suggest this experiment in Mediterranean countries together with Love Difference, and to talk about it at the next World Summit on Information Society in Tunis."