



Art Education in Cyberculture Times. Aesthetical and Ethical Challenges.

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Abstract

Cyberculture is a concept which can be applied not merely to cyberspace issues, new media and the internet, but also to deeper changes in human development and participation in current culture.

Manuel Castells defines cyberculture as 'the real virtuality' where digital content creation, scientific and technological innovation are blended together. This kind of interactive, real time, and digital space is often a mirror platform for real world culture content. It can be also regarded as a mirror for patterns, ways of feeling, reacting, thinking, and also the values of contemporary humans.

People of all ages are engaged in using computers, smartphones, and digital cameras. Active new media users who generate content are motivated by the same drive as artists; namely, the creative will. The important point to note is that our presence in the digital world has ethical consequences.

Users become creators of digital images, films and graphic designs where they depict their or someone else's life. Phenomena such as performances using new media technologies, multimedia installations, including interactive installations, software art, virtual reality, digital music, and many others varied artists activities, can be a part of our everyday sensual experience.

This forms the background for my art education research aims. My main goals are focused on a holistic approach to cyberculture which I understand as the 'sensual environment' of human's creative activity. I would like to find out how important is freedom is in cultural development and also to determine the role of active users digital artistic activity within it. These questions are especially important for education through art. The autonomy and the consciousness of creative possibilities should be underlined in the context of power, copyright and business.

1. Introduction

Cyberculture is a complex concept encompassing theories, ideas, and dreams from Information and Communication Technologies, culture studies, literature and arts. This approach can be helpful, thanks to the possibility of the movement between disciplines and merged issues of cyberspace, new media and arts into one theoretical framework. This cultural perspective makes it possible to look deeper into changes in human development and the participation in culture that is taking place now. In Manuel Castells [2005] opinion, in cyberculture times, not only concepts but also all of society is changing:

'The network society is a hypersocial society, not a society of isolation. People, by and large, do not fake their identity in the Internet, except for some teenagers experimenting with their lives. People fold the technology into their lives, link up virtual reality and real virtuality, they live in various technological forms of communication, articulating them as they need it. [...] However, the domination of the media space over people's minds works through a fundamental mechanism: presence/absence of a message in the media space. Everything or everyone that is absent from this space cannot reach the public mind, thus it becomes a non-entity.' [Castells and Cardoso 2005, p. 14]

In this context, in my opinion, there is a great need for change of the approach to art education. In addition it is not enough to consider considering art education only as skills required to make images, objects, and artefacts. Skills required to create and understand visual or audiovisual information which can be easily communicated become crucial abilities of everyday life. Fostering people for audiovisual communicability and active participation in cyberculture is new challenge for art education.



2. Definitions

Manuel Castells in the book 'The Rise of the Network Society' underlines that 'real virtuality' (which is a synonym for cyberculture) is a most important but new model of culture. In this model two qualities are important: space of flow of information in integrated communication systems (cyberspace) and the new 'scope' of time in which history, presence, and future are connected.

Changes in the culture, from local or national culture to cyberculture, are definitely related to the growth of the Internet and especially the World Wide Web. In Piotr Zawojki's [2010] opinion Eugene Gorny's definition of the development of cyberculture rightly divides them into two stages: 'cyberculture 1' and 'cyberculture 2'. Gorny underlines, that in the first stage understanding of cyberculture was based on dualistic ideology in which opposition between online and offline was the most important feature. In the second stage online and offline worlds are considered to be connected and inseparable. In this kind of environment holistic 'world-pictures' can be created and virtuality is the instrument of reality.

Zawojki adds to Gorny definition:

'[...] cyberculture can therefore be understood as a specific set of practices which refer to the use of digital media to create a new model of a culture based on the synergy what is online and offline.' [Zawojki 2010, p.100]

To better understand what those definitions mean we have to look closer into the meaning of words like 'world-picture', 'holistic' and 'synergy'.

A 'world-picture' conception comes from Martin Heidegger's philosophy and is associated with science and usually refers to a theoretical view of the external world.

The terms 'synergy' and 'holistic', in my opinion, have similar substance in Zawojki's and Gorny's definitions. These authors are trying to emphasise the role of the interactions between all elements of cyberculture from online and offline worlds. With such an understanding there is the possibility to explore more about the phenomena of cyberculture, which has a very broad range. This holistic approach can give a better result than the sum of approaches from individual scientific disciplines researching cyberculture.

In Zawojki's description of cyberculture we can find one more definition which is related to the synergy and holistic concept: syntopy. In this concept the value comes from the 'reunion' of independent parts, into the whole cyberculture. In syntopy the relationship among the parts, that is, how they are interconnected is the most important. In Zawojki's opinion cyberculture is based on syntopy of art science and technology. The cyberculture phenomena – this synergic, holistic, syntopic meeting of art, science, technology – gives us a new perspective on digital content creation, scientific and technological innovation and human creative activism. From this point, researching art education can take a different turn.

3. Ethic – human actions aspect

The dissemination of ICT in many fields of human activity has brought new challenges for art education. Our active presence in cyberspace and the perpetual production of visual and audiovisual information is increasingly linked with the creativity of a single user. In the social media 'picture' our private world becomes a part of an overall 'word-picture'.

Our aesthetic participation in cyberculture has ethical consequences. To understand this process, in my opinion, we have to focus on the ethical dimension of creativity. According to Shoshana Ronen one of the first philosophers who noticed the relation between ethics and aesthetics was Friedrich Nietzsche. He defined the world of his times as the 'world after God's death' which in Nietzsche opinion is not a catastrophe but is in fact a challenge, an opportunity for humanity [Ronen 2002].

In our time the virtual environment in users of the internet and of mobile technologies become creators of digital images, films, and graphic designs but this is also the space in which values are created. Contact with global cyberculture reinforces the idea that values are not absolute or universally applicable. Different people and different nations, have very different ethical systems.

'[...] the morality Nietzsche actually calls for is a perspectivist morality; humans will create values, will give meaning to things, in an endless process of creation and becoming.' [Ronen 2002, p. 117]

The meaning of the perspectivist approach in communication between different cultures and nations in cyberspace is rising. The need to understand different people is strictly related to the ability to visualise processes, problems, and prospects in diverse cultures and societies. In the subsection 'Ethics and Aesthetics Are One and the same' Ronen asks: in what way the product of a man of ethics is like the product



of the artists? She find the answer to this question in Frederic Nietzsche and Ludwig Wittgenstein claims:

'The link between ethics and aesthetics is the one that is between art and life.' [Ronen 2002, p.131]

To adapt this concept for the requirements of for cyberculture there is a need to find the link between ethics and aesthetics in practice. A hybrid concept between this two areas is necessary. I propose my work in progress definition: Applied E-aesthetics. This kind of hybrid can be helpful to create and to understand cybercultural components such as identity, race and ethnicity, nationality, family, history, language, gender, economy, ecology, technology, philosophy, aesthetics, politics, ideology, values, religion, migration. Understanding can be the beginning of 'ascending' of man.

'That man is the creator, the legislator who creates his own values out of his authenticity. [...] When ethics become a creative act of man it encounters aesthetics.' [Ronen 2002, p.119]

This kind of interactive, real time, and digital space is often a mirror platform for the real world culture content. It can be also treated as a mirror for patterns, ways of feeling and reacting, thinking, and values of contemporary humans.

4. Aesthetic issues

People of all ages are engaged in using computers, smartphones, and digital cameras. Active cyberculture creators who generate content are motivated by the same drive as artists; namely, the will of creation. Phenomena such as performances using new media technologies, multimedia installations, including interactive installations, software art, virtual reality, digital music, and many others varied artists activities, in use today can be a part of our everyday sensual experience. In this experience the relationships between seeing, sensing, and knowing is fundamental for perceptual, emotional and logical presence in cyberculture.

Lev Manovich [2006] underlines the twofold origin of computers. According to him the computer is both a calculating machines and a movie projector. If we look at the questions of ICT education through the perspective of Manovich's 'parents' of contemporary computing we can consider two different approaches to learning with ICT support. Traditionally computer science education and audiovisual arts education were separated. That explains why a focus on Applied E-aesthetics competencies from an ICT perspective is meaningful for redefining approach to art education. In my opinion when we consider possibilities for art education in cyberculture times understanding of this twofold origin of computer is crucial to understand potential which art can have today in education. ICT users should face up to being users as well as creators of values. But how to visualise values? Answers to this question can be found with Graeme Sullivan who claims:

'As an intellectual and imaginative process, visualizing problems involves representing thoughts and ideas using the symbolic properties that something created or constructed can stand for something else. The elements involved are inference and meaning: We represent something by giving it form, and we infer that it can carry meaning.' [Sullivan 2010, p. 209]

The ability to create in the field of digital media with broad and deep understanding for individual artistic expression, evaluate the creative process and its products and to communicate this evaluation using domain-appropriate criteria, reflect upon and convey the experience of participating actively in individual aesthetic and creative experiences. I'm looking for design possibilities for parallel to traditional ICT education and art education, ways of switching people of all ages to actively participate in cyberculture. We need to have skills to be able to use Applied E-aesthetical knowledge which can be easily taught and built up and linked with knowledge from different areas of human cognition.

5. Conclusions – research challenges

Applied E-aesthetic can be consider as a research challenge. There is interesting document in which some aspects of cyberspace, are included namely UNESCO 'Media and information literacy curriculum for teachers'.

'This document combines two distinct areas – media literacy and information literacy – under one umbrella term: media and information literacy.' [2011, p.18]

Freedom of creation with a critical attitude to power, copyright and business, are elaborate in UNESCO document. But in environment of cyberculture there are also teaching needs which are not included in this document. Topics from range of Applied E-aesthetic like:

- understanding the influence of existing digital content of cyberspace and possibilities to independent action according to its own ethical rules,
- the articulation of ideas on the nature and substance of the cyberculture, symbols and data complexity, underlying process and structure of visual and audiovisual data, the ability to read data visualisation as artistic experience,
- the selection and application on a regular basis of those aesthetic elements that translate significant ideas into cybercultural messages,
- the understanding of the technical and aesthetic limitations and potentials of the mediums,
- development of personal way of seeing things in general, and transfer this into personal style of digital creation,

are specially dedicated to creative and artistic needs of cyberculture creative users. It is worth to focus on breaking the technological boundaries in teaching e.g.: digital sound and image, interactive, algorithmic, networked, augmented and included this topics in art education.

References

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