

# From remix culture to collective creation

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The ability to generate information and produce culture spreads through the net. With the digital universe comes the «user-creator», who can participate in constructing culture. And in his wake, with the coming together of thousands of individual efforts, collective creation emerges, completely subverting the established way in which culture is organised.

It may be that culture is made from the stuff of the spirit, but its underlying materials are much more mundane: paper, canvas, magnetic tape... the fabric of culture is its human embodiment. The possibilities that humans have for making culture and taking it apart, in order to actively participate, create and transmit it, have always depended on the material stuff that supports culture, and that make new worlds possible in each new period, while forgetting other worlds as it evolves (from an oral to a written culture, from amanuenses to the printing press, from text to audiovisual and from analogue to digital culture...).

Material elements shape culture, which moulds itself as a liquid takes the form of the recipient that contains it. Each new knowledge machine has provoked small or large revolutions in culture (in the way it is accessed, created, transmitted, etc. from the printing press to video, passing through photocopiers and walkmans, radio and TV...).

The emergence of the digital environment has provoked a radical change in the material nature of culture. Before now, cultural works

were immutable and immobile due to legal and technological imperatives. Their underlying material nature (in the form of books, paper, vinyl, cassettes, etc.) meant that it was extremely difficult to transform, re-mix or re-create works.

Changing a novel meant re-writing it, transforming an audiovisual work required many skills...traditional formats barely lend themselves to transformation (a printed book, a vinyl record, a video tape...) and make it very difficult to circulate the new works. Even when someone was able to re-create a work, subsequent distribution was difficult.

Internet and new digital technologies break with the material limits that encapsulated culture and open up a new world of possibilities by giving users the power and possibility to creatively participate in culture.

The immutability and immobility of culture is blown apart by the emergence of the digital universe.

Culture floods through the arteries of the digital universe. Once it is weightless, culture is transmitted as though it lacked a material base. Once a creative work is digitalised, it loses (in theory, though not necessarily) its condition of immutability. It can be transformed, modified, copied, altered... whether it is an image, a song, a novel, an audiovisual work...

This liberation from material ties transforms

the way culture is organised. It subverts the concepts of cultural object, author, audience...When a work loses its condition of immutability, the distinction between creator and audience, producers and consumers of content, breaks down. Citizens are transformed into users of culture when they have the capacity to change and re-create it easily through digital technology. An army of potential creators emerges, made up of people who can go beyond simply consuming culture, and participate in constructing it.

The digital universe creates a horizontal space of creativity in which citizens can participate in the creation of culture by remixing it.

We always build on the base of the past, recovering it, remixing it. The remix is perhaps one of the most powerful sources for creation. Remixes are adaptations of novels for the theatre, symphonic poems inspired by literary works, film versions of literary works, remixes of cover versions, visual collages made using other works.

But the digital universe quickly comes up against restrictions imposed by law - the intellectual property laws created in a period when culture was materially immobile and immutable, which are now being applied to another period in which technology has completely transformed the preconditions. This produces the irresolvable paradox in which we live.

To end the immutability of culture implies seizing part of its power of control from cultural producers, who are seeing how this transition makes the financial potential that they can extract from culture fade away. This is why cultural producers attempt to maintain the orthodoxy of the commercial roots that seriously limit the use of culture, and try to do it through technology and through the law. They try to do it by promoting restrictive

legislation that doesn't allow the re-creation of works, and imposing technologies that gag and suppress potentially creative uses of creative works through anti-copy systems and use-restriction technologies (*Digital Rights Management -DRM- systems*).

They are two paradigms of culture that are completely at odds with each other. One simply sees culture as a commercial object from which it can extract full financial benefits. The other sees it as a space for open participation, in which users can participate by constantly re-creating works, thus participating in the remix culture.

And it's these open participation spaces in which culture is re-made that have produced one of the most fascinating phenomena to emerge from the Internet: collaboration. The practice of creativity, which until recently was limited to a minority, is now within the reach of many. And the Net puts the army that was previously outside the enclosing walls of culture in contact with each other so as to unite their creativity.

In a digital universe that allows minds to be connected, efforts to be combined, and cooperation to develop, an unprecedented explosion of creativity takes place. In a space where anybody is potentially a creator, collective creation suddenly emerges.

It's true that collaborative production of knowledge has always existed. Early European book publishers would place a final note at the end of their works, asking readers on the continent to notify them of any corrections they could make. But the scale of the collective, creative projects that are developed in (within) the digital universe is much larger than anything that has come before. And this collective creation inevitably leads us to the re-mix, re-creation culture, which brings with it the emergence of a new mutable and changing culture.

Collective creation crystallises in very different environments within the digital universe. In spaces that are formally designed for co-operation, and in others that aren't. The results can include software programs originating in open software communities, encyclopaedia articles in *Wikipedia*, news in the blogosphere (the sum of web logs), etc

Behind these forms of creation lies a new challenge to traditional forms of culture. These new environments, projects, spaces... place users at their centre. Users simultaneously become producers and targets of knowledge, and works are created in a continuous flow, without aspiring to become immutable objects, always subject to the possibility of being modified.

The collective creation that emerges in these open, free participation environments represents the distilled essence of the digital universe, and a challenge to traditional forms of producing and distributing knowledge.

The author has been removed from his privileged position and replaced by a new type of user-creator. Creative works lose the sacred character that made them immutable, untouchable. The next step is to subvert the hierarchy of knowledge. Users can participate as creators, but the collectively created works in which they take part can also challenge those made by professionals, by established cultural producers.

The ability to produce information and knowledge and to create culture is spread through the Net, leaving the knowledge hierarchy in shreds. Readers produce information, users create software and modify it. The major projects that crystallise around collective creation processes challenge the hierarchy of the production of knowledge. The net allows creative users to emerge, and the union of thousands of individual efforts leads to the emergence of collective creations that

completely subvert the established organisation of culture. The time of the remix culture has arrived.



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