

PETER J. SOS: A NEW FOLK ART

A NEW FOLK ART OR NARROWING THE GAP BETWEEN THE PRIVATE AND PROFESSIONAL PUBLISHING ON THE NET

Thesis:

In the last ten years a new type of Folk Art has been born. The gap started to narrow between the so called 'professional' and so called 'private' communication in the on-line world. The spirit of Web 2.0, which is simply the original idea of the on-line communications, made us content provider and content receiver at the same time. The technical, economical and social changes created a good environment for the revival of the Folk Art on a new level.

Easy Content Providing

The content providing was a 'professional' job in the first decades of on-line communication. The changes of the environment came from:

Technically:

- the commercialization of cheap writable and re-writable CD-ROM and DVD
- mid-range priced digital cameras, even in the mobile phones
- digital sound recording, mp3
- USB and FireWire plug-ins (everything to everything)

Economically:

- cheap tools - accessible for the middle classes and lower, as well

Infrastructural:

- blog space and video sharing service for free
- cheap on-line storage capacity (or for free)
- cheap web site builder software
- easy-to-use picture and video editing software (e.g. PhotoShop, etc.)

The Easy Content Providing has changed the old systems of the publishing industry. This became the most important change in the communication industry of the twenty-first century. The entire publishing industry

had to face the following challenges:

Former: separate creating and publishing

- Author - Publisher - Reception
- oLimited or zero feed-back possibility ('professional' critical opinions, published in 'official' or 'professional' media) Today: the creator can publish immediately
- Author, publishing on-line - Reception
- Instant feed-back, interactivity
- Changeable content
- If the content is "on", it remains there (or recordable). Nobody can erase a content once it was uploaded
- If the content is "on", it can be modified
- Several variations can exist on the Net at the same time - nobody knows which one is the "original"

The New Folk Art

The classic Folk Art required some key elements:

- a common cultural background
- a creative person with a good expression capacity
- a community as receptor and medium for others (other communities, or next generations)

In the good old times the community sat around the fire, or in the spinning room, and people told fairy tales and sang songs, etc. Nowadays, the virtual community sits at the displays, and people give and take the stories, pictures, drawings, and songs. Or they are simply chatting. The possibilities give the chance for everybody to express himself/herself

- This fulfills the ancient urge of mankind to create and to disseminate - just as in the "good old times"
- This is nothing else but a new dawn of Folk Art
- The urge is the old one, only the tools are new: story telling on-line, fine art and music with cameras, picture and music software, etc.
- The old Folk Art was performed to an immediate audience, the local community
- The New Folk Art is performed to the Net Communities across borders, and time zones
- In both cases you get instant feed-back

- The New Folk Art created its own genres, as well. Instead of the old-fashioned fairy tales, folk songs, and wooden sculptures we find in the on-line world new genres, and new arts. Maybe the most popular among the new genres is Fan Fiction. The number of participants is inestimable, but it must be over millions. What is Fan Fiction?
- On the fan sites of popular novels, movies, etc.:
- creative variations, new "parts", fantasy-games, drawings, and music, etc.
- authors' circles
- instant feed-back
- variations of variations

It created of course several new sub cultural virtual communities.

The other very popular genre is the .pps compilations. This is the world of .pps fantasy:

- PowerPoint slide shows
- Photos
- Fine arts
- Thematic compilations (from cars to hard porn)
- Interesting and weird things
- Nobody knows if the author was amateur or professional

The .pps world enhanced the activity of tourism marketing. The compilations of beautiful landmarks, sites, etc. serve the state or regional promotion. It is disseminated via viral marketing, and nobody knows whether the author is an enthusiastic amateur, or a professional hired by a local tourism agency. But as we see it, it is not too important - in the on-line world it has no relevance.

A very attractive example of the narrowing gap between the professional and non-professional communications is the primary news service. Today the world is full of pictures and videos of happenings, which were recorded by amateurs. But those records are not controlled. In the case of the 'London bombing' the news portals and small TV stations have shown records coming from the tube. Only BBC hesitated to broadcast those pictures, since those were not confirmed by other independent sources. BBC lost this battle in the news competition. Since this affair BBC has become less scrupulous against 'amateur' sources.

The most well known new genre is the blog (coming from the word weblog). There are bloggers who are professionals, and many others who are not. But where is the difference between them? It makes no sense to create a limit, since the basic philosophy of the on-line world is that every user can be content provider and receiver at the same time.

The bloggers are 'almost' journalists. Why almost? Because their posts are actual, and mostly periodical - but not neutral. While the general culture requires the neutrality from the newspapers, news services - the blogs are mostly a mixture of news and opinions. In Hungary Prime Minister Gyurcsany used his 'personal' blog as a political promotional tool. Sometimes he used it as an original news source. The first bird flu in Hungary was published on his blog one hour earlier than by the Hungarian News Agency.

The creativity of the New Folk Art artist is shown in a very spectacular way in the PhotoShop world. This is the art of free fantasy, but it is used by the professionals, as well. In Hungary in the last two election campaigns and referenda PhotoShop was used as a promotional tool. Party professionals created falsified documents for a negative campaign. Later the PhotoShop games became a popular movement: pictures served as caricatures about politicians of the opposite side, and about actual political issues. These were sometimes arrogant, sometimes sexy. The authors were of course unknown - they were folk artists.

The Meeting Points of Professional and Private Creativity: the Video-Sharing Portals E.g. YouTube, bought by Google. What does a video sharing portal give to its users?

- Breakout from the 2-3 MB file size limit
- Almost unlimited number of uploads
- Instant feed-back, opinions
- And what can give it to professionals?
- Dedicated viral marketing: contents over 2-3 MByte
- Ads among the private content
- Media buyers can follow the downloads of their videos
- Viewers' profiles for sale

Open questions

The possibilities of on-line communication raise a variety of new legal and ethical questions. The legislation is mostly backward and not up-to-date with reality. We have simply do not have the right answer to a lot of questions. Some of those questions are:

Copyrights

- Nobody knows, which contents are copyrighted, and which are not
- Copyrighted contents can be downloaded without any information for the copyright holder

- Nobody knows, which content is original, and which is modified or falsified
- You cannot follow the spread of your content (except if you pay it for)

Personal rights

- Lack of responsibility
- No author, no risk, no responsibility
- Easy to hurt the personal rights
- Everybody can upload false or stolen documents, pictures, videos, etc.
- If once a false content is on the Net, you cannot remove it any more (you do not know if somebody has downloaded and stored, and will reload again)

Cross-border racism:

- A "Hungarian" web site gives strong anti-Semitic and anti-Gypsy content...
- ...but the authorities cannot stop it, since the server is in the USA

- Political offences
- In Hungary it is forbidden to publish opinion surveys eight days prior to voting. But if you ask for a personal info, you will get it in e-mail. Afterwards these infos are sent in chain mails.
- In Hungary there is advertising stop 24 hours prior to voting. But you will get chain mails, info, etc. on-line, and the servers from abroad give you an actual political content.