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The age of Digital Culture



(*La Grande Conversion Numérique* by Milad Doueïhi, Seuil, Paris, France, 2008, 271 pp.)

One of the challenges of the contemporary world refers to the emergence, in the context of proliferating information technology and digital technique, of what Milad Doueïhi calls the 'numerical culture'. The author deals with this new culture not as a utopia, but as an already existing reality to which each of us participates as even 'chance' users of the working tools online and, in general, of everything that makes us interconnect in an increasingly global world. The numerical culture should be regarded not just like a simple use of such instruments but as a literacy process meaning the development of new discursive skills resulting from the interaction of the public and the private sphere with a numerical environment.

The changes brought about by the numerical culture do not refer only to a new environment, whence the classical values and categories are questioned, but also to the emergence of a new 'numerical competence' which would be redefine the entire socioeconomic world. This is why one speaks of the emergence of the numerical culture as a process of 'conversion' where not only a new perspective on the past is on offer, but also a new outlook on the current and future events and achievements. This means that the numerical culture introduces new categories and radically changes the approaches on the world as compared to the classical culture called printed. Therefore, the issue at hand is a fracture between the old cultural realities and our new *savoir-lire* which proposes the re-thinking

of the classical notions of identity, work of art, author, copyright, communities, property or archive.

This fracture can be easily seen when the transformations developed in the transmission of the numerical and printed culture are analysed. If the printed page is a relatively fixed given fact, belonging to an author and functions as a closed work, without the possibility of further intervention from someone else, the numerical page is characterised by virtuality and dynamism. It can be modified or reproduced in a different context, introducing thus a kind of discontinuous reading, fragmented, and de-contextualised reading. The classical distinction between author and reader is thus rendered void, which in turn has its consequences on the copyright laws discussed in terms of digital rights management.

The emergence of an increasingly powerful numerical environment in our daily lives has determined the transformation of the concept of identity. The numerical identity is recommended ads being polyphonic, trans-jurisdictional and founded on biometrics. It is the result of the presence of man in the numerical environment, which refers to the post-humanist idea of the interaction of the human being with the products of technology with a view to improving human existence. In the numerical environment, man is re-thought not only from the point of view of his identity but also from the one of his belonging to a community no longer made up of national or political criteria. Discussing the numerical cultural creations known as 'blogs' allows for the theorisation of a flexible public sphere which is exclusively the creation of spontaneously created community within which one can speak of a kind of virtual citizenship.

Last but not least, numerical technology has changed the ways of storing and archiving cultural products. The possibility of extending local archives with the online ones or of changing the index of cataloguing documents and the emergence of their new searching / browsing criteria, which have resulted in a refinement of research modalities are as many expressions of the numerical culture joining the exploration of new, previously unknown, cultural spaces.

Consequently, the work *La grand conversion numerique* calls the readers' attention on this new cultural reality we are living in and which is marked by the tension between its universalising dynamics and the impossibility of parting with the specific regional or local experiences, of the various cultural voices that make themselves heard within this numerical environment.