

NEW GENERATION OF ROBIN HOODS: CULTURAL AND TECHNOLOGIC PIRACY

Ali Halit Diker

Who does culture and its products belong to? We are in a path society becomes more open, cultural resources are shared and distributed freely. But free as in free speech, not as in free beer as it is stated in Free Software Foundation's website.

"Property is theft!"

Pierre-Joseph Proudhon

COLLECTIVE CULTURAL PRODUCTION

Culture is produced and distributed by community itself without the need of any organization, corporation and any political entity through centuries. As Meral Özbek stated in her book "Popüler Kültür ve Orhan Gencebay Arabeski" this form of collective consciousness lies beneath what we call popular culture today. The best examples of this model of cultural production are minstrels and their master-apprentice relationships. It can be observed, some of the main facts in this type of production are that they are emerged against the pressure of power; they are traveled on the grapevine and become legends by passing through generations. Through this process of re-telling and re-production the original work is modified and is re-shaped with the period it is re-created. Thus there might be diverse versions of the same product.

One of the stories which is told in Turkish folkloric culture is Köroğlu whose fight against Bolu Bey became a legend and who became a symbol of fight for freedom. Another story which is more global - thanks to popular culture - is Robin Hood who is claimed that he lived during the reign of King of England, Richard Lion-Heart in Sherwood Forest. The known roots of the Robin Hood legend takes us back to 15th century. The most common version is the one that Robin Hood stands against the Nottingham sheriff who takes advantage the lack of power with the help of Hereford bishop while Richard Lion-Heart was at war. Robin Hood is an outlaw who steals from the rich and gives to the poor, he is just and anti-clerical. He is commonly described that he comes from a social class called 'yeoman'. Yeoman class is more or less the same as today upper middle class. This class doesn't own a land but they're also not peasants. They are in the middle of both classes[1].

Robin Hood; he's a folk hero who fights for justice and freedom. The moral of the story is more or less about the equal and just distribution of resources. While doing this Robin Hood was marked as outlaw but it is only because of the paradigms defined by the holders of power. On the other hand, people needs this mythological hero. It seems normal that this story emerged during a period of oppression. There are two discourses in this analogy. One is about how the story is created and spread and the other is the moral of the story itself. Culture is a resource which has to be distributed just and equal to the society.

PRODUCTION OF MASS CULTURE

Actually this collective consciousness is not totally rejected but especially during last 30-40 years are about exploiting this collective consciousness with copyright laws and regulations[2]. Culture became an industry, a market and an area of commerce because of the capitalist system. Even though popular artists which are promoted as social heroes are puppets of big corporations. They become richer with intellectual property and copyright laws while they are also making the companies richer. The main problem is not that only companies benefit from these rights they are also becoming cultural monopolies. Intellectual property rights functions just for the sake of capitalists who are controlling information, technologic and artistic production. Another side effect of these property rights is academic development is also monopolized by corporations and corporate entities. The most of the academic institution are sponsored by companies and their research are formed by the companies' interest. The board of trustees of academies consist of legal entities, CEOs and corporate managers who simply controls local or global economies. This is a reminiscence of the Church's position during Middle -or Dark- Ages. The most important sources of knowledge were holy texts and they were not open to public. The only privileged people to exploits these texts was a small group of elites. As a matter of fact almost all of the middle and low class wasn't even literate so today's capital and economic power were in the hands of clerics and noble class like feudal lords. Maybe after the invention of printing press the distribution o these cultural resources became more democratized. Today, new technologies offer much more powerful medium than printing press. There are much wider opportunities for resistance and freedom with the internet. It is true that internet also became widely commercial but people are also discovering the alternate uses of this platform. In an era that culture is widely commercialized maybe it is best to use tactics such as Robin Hood's hit and run; small but effective.

COMMERCIALIZATION OF CULTURE / ACCULTURATION OF COMMERCIALISM

Today, multi-national corporations run most of the cultural entities such as museums and galleries and this is only a strategy to expand their customer profile[3]. And there is no such a thing as confidentiality nor cover. Maybe this is the transparency of evil Baudrillard mentions. Most of the investors of art or associates of galleries and museums specifies these investments are business strategies or backs up their other investments[4]. With these investments art market can survive through economic recessions[5].

Contemporary art works' conversion values are on stock markets. The most important art centers of the world are also capitals of finance such as New York, London, Dubai and Istanbul[6]. Capital's intervention and control of art does not include only art objects; like Stallabrass writes; it also includes the sales of images, sounds and words[7]. This creates a cycle of commercialization of cultrre and acculturation of commercialism.

POPULAR CULTURE AND HIGH CULTURE

Especially Andy Warhol and Damien Hirst are among the most popular names who are aware of this cycle. Non of them denies that art is business.

DISTRIBUTION AND CONVERSION VALUE OF POPULAR CULTURE

Popular culture products have specific conventions, adress a very large audience, simple, quickly consumed and do not need to much investment. They are more or less like replicas or cheap productions.

Still they have a quite large market and can benefit from intellectual property and copyright. Lately agreements like ACTA which are supported by RIAA and MPAA intervenes the distribution and even alteration of these products. Sometimes these intervention goes as far as the violation of privacy. Some of the planned precautions of ACTA might include limiting the blank CD and DVD production and even the installation of spyware to the blank CDs and DVDs to control the customers actions of sharing and distributing art works[8].

DISTRIBUTION AND CONVERSION VALUE OF HIGH CULTURE

High art, on the other hand is an illusion outside this realm but it also has its own conventions such as obscurity, boredom and lack of sentimentality and these; so called virtues creates its own market[9]. Corporations that invest in popular culture or high culture seems to do this because they want to address two different types of consumer. For example Fender -especially American Fenders- is a brand that is used by qualified musicians and sold at high prices. On the other hand, there's Squier which addresses to customers which has average or a little more than average income.

Maybe the only difference of high culture and popular culture consumption shows itself on the area of collecting. Even new media art has its price which is simply against its nature because they are easily reproducible. But again, the sales do not only include objects; it includes images, sound and words. Also an art piece owner does not only have higher social status because of his or her money but because of his art collection and taste.

SPONSORSHIPS AND MUSEUMS

The collections of museums or personal investors are exhibited by sponsors according to local or global economic and political conjuncture. Art seems that it is free but still it is oppressed by conventional apparatuses of power. Its controlled by visual and audial ideologies (It's another issue that if they even exist anymore).

INTELLECTUAL PROPERTY AND APPROPRIATION

Copyright was first established to protect the rights of creators of some books, paintings and maps, then its use expands quickly [10]. The exact point of its emergence is to protect the author but in time it includes alteration and publication and this enables companies and corporations to exploit artists and even its own employers with such contracts that gives them the right to any use and publication of the work or invention. So companies gain much more profit than the creator. One of the turning points of copyright history is AT&T's block to source codes of its software[11]. This causes trouble among computer scientist. Especially among academic researchers. Then Richard Stallman found Free Software Foundation because he did not have access the source code to improve his artificial intelligence project ,so he took the first step through Open Source movement and Creative Commons and Copyleft licenses[12].

Slowly but surely commercialized culture is blanced with these models. Cultural production and products seem to circulate more freely. In a society that culture is produced autonomous, it is produced not for the masses but by the masses, everybody is both the author and the hero of this Robin Hood legend.

THE WORK OF ART IN THE AGE OF DIGITAL REPRODUCTION

As photography emerged movements which are more expressive in painting, digital reproduction provided masses to explore new ways of production to express themselves. New mediums and new platforms -such as internet- provided alternative ways of sharing and distribution of products. According to Vaidhyanathan this model of production and distribution got human creativity closer to how it has always worked[13].

INTERNET AND CULTURE SHARING

Internet is one of the platforms that human sociability occurs the most. An average internet user might not be considered very conscious of this but it can be said that especially social networks triggers an intense sharing culture. This burst of sharing might be an unconscious or subconscious reaction to an enforced and controlled culture. Especially modified, remade or altered versions of some copyrighted products are essential among these shared reproductions.

RE-PRODUCTION AND DISTRIBUTION OF ARTWORK IN INTERNET ART

Actually the methods used in internet art works are substantially common in postmodern art.

One of the best examples that can be given for appropriation is Michael Mandiberg's *aftersherrielevine.com*. With downloadable high resolution pictures, their framing instructions and authenticity certificate everybody can have an image which has cultural value with has no or negligible financial value. The downloadable images are the one that Sherrie Levine photographed from Walker Evans' exhibition catalogue.

Another example is MTAA's *On Kawara Update*. The work imitates *On Kawara's* black on white oil painting which only have the date it was painted on internet browser. When you click on the date some Google Ads appear on the screen. The work both questions artist labor and it's connection with art market. What happens if a code does all the work? Another feature of the work is that its source code is licensed GNU General Public License and downloadable. So anyone who visits the site has the right to create its own version of this artwork.

Even though it might not be considered as internet art *The Droplift Project* is another interactive experience which attacks intellectual property rights in a Robin Hoodesque way. *Münyap* in Turkey and *RIAA* in the US are monopolies on copyrighted music. *The Droplift Project's* website there are more than 20 songs which are composed with the re-use of some copyrighted material like TV show and radio jingles, popular songs etc. They are downloadable and there's also a sticker for album, a front and a back cover with a barcode. You prepare your CD just like the ones sold in big music stores. You go put it in shelf and then wait it to be sold. It's not illegal according to the First Amendment and the Fair Use of the Copyright Act but still the artists can be sued by the copyright owners.

ALTERNATIVE LICENSING

Among this type of re-production, sharing and guerilla activities there are also alternative licenses such as Creative Commons and Copyleft which are widely used in arts and design. Open Source and Open Culture is becoming a part of societies daily part routine. Some articles on Wikipedia can be used as academic resources, Open Access Journalism provides transparent and objective news sources. These systems might create their own spaces of resistance against monopolies.

CULTURE PRODUCTION OF MASS

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