

What is at stake in the interaction between media arts and cultural industries in Lebanon

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We present in this article the conditions for a productive interaction between media arts and cultural industries in the current Lebanese art and cultural scene, ranging from an established and conservative art, which refers to tradition and embraces the forms and contents of its time, towards a resistant art, which experiments with new forms and messages. The latter is a revolutionary art invoking novelty, in opposition to the first conception of art, specific to artists integrated into the milieu of instituted system. Indeed, conservative art in Lebanon is part of a vision, which considers that in art, as elsewhere, the end justifies the means, to the extent that money and profit participate in the very definition of art. In this sense, conservative art is based on a practice of repeating pre-existing forms of expression. Lebanese conservative art finds its value in economic criteria that prevail over symbolic ones. In other words, a work of art is valued according to the profit it generates. This conception of art forms the basis of an eminently conservative art, which governs instituted art and is akin to stereotyping, a major characteristic of the products of cultural industries. On the other hand, at the antipodes of the conservative conception, we see that artists in Lebanon have another conception or vocation of a social nature and whose outcome is to preserve peace, reduce social disparities, and facilitate dialogue between communities, cultures and religions, even to positively change the human being and the world. But we also observe that various avant-garde or even revolutionary practices can maintain a certain bellicose state depending on the territorial context. It should be emphasized here that this revolutionary thought of wanting to limit the definition of art to a framework that only summons symbolic values while ignoring economic values, even resisting them, seems to us today to be an obsolete definition, requiring a reformulation in line with reality.

Starting from the observation of these two conceptions of art and creativity in the Lebanese context, one can wonder where can be located a productive collaboration which would be based on equal opportunities between agents of resistant art and actors of conservative art who are more into the cultural industries. To answer this question, it should be noted that, at first glance, the divergence of these two antagonistic conceptions might seem problematic to us. However, this divergence is brought to disappear to introduce a fertile convergence, in the sense that the intermediate products under the aegis of an intermediate cultural policy constitute the fruit of a symbiotic collaboration, so that the latter implies a new ground possessing its own organizational model. In this hypothesis, resistant art does not lose its intrinsic value, its authenticity and its integrity and does not undergo a perversion in contact with established art and its commercial and conservative values. For their part, the actors of instituted art are not losers in contact with the world of resistant art, in the sense that the latter do not have to undergo an economic regression due to the non-commercial practice.

In order to try to answer this series of stakes, we hypothesize that the new Lebanese cultural policy would develop a neutral ideology, indifferent in some way to progressive and conservative issues, without this indifference posing a problem in the realization of creative products. To check the validity and limits of our hypothesis of neutral ideology, we will study what is at stake in the interaction between media arts and cultural industries in Lebanon.

At the origins of this article, a questioning is induced by my dual studies in visual arts and cinema majors, by my media arts and audiovisual practices, and by my work in Beirut as a university instructor in these two fields. It is a questioning about how media arts agents come into play in the world of cultural industries in Lebanon, and vice versa. It is, therefore, necessary to document and understand what could give rise to tensions and conflicts, but also to notice the negotiations between the different collaborators of these two studied worlds, starting from the idea behind the creative product, followed by its production, and ending with its circulation. Indeed, these two worlds share some similarities regarding the production of content with a strong social and creative dimension; and the tools of the digitization of information bring them closer together.

Evidently, what is central to such research is the articulation of three levels of analysis concerning what is involved in the interaction between the media arts and the cultural industries; that is to say:

- 1- The reality of the interdependence of the two worlds
- 2- The need for an intermediate zone between the two
- 3- The return effects of intermediation on the art world

From the start of the analysis, we can realize that due to the radical different nature of both worlds, any collaboration seems infeasible [2]. Nevertheless, we can observe in parallel that this incompatibility is not without exceptions. Artists in the recent history prove the fact that cultural industries have become the creative variable of artistic production. Indeed, these exceptions are a growing reality, reinforced by the proliferation of means for the digitization of information [2]. At this point of our observations and analysis, interaction between these two worlds become potentially fertile.

These observations lead to analyse until which extent the two worlds are interdependent, and if the need for an intermediate zone between these two worlds is indeed the condition for media arts to become essential in the constitution of creative industries. This is after their interaction, and perhaps from their synergy, with the cultural industries. We therefore can study the multiple relations between the two worlds.

Initially, everything is in opposition, such as standard versus original, commercialization versus refusal of the market, conservatism versus avant-gardism. Nevertheless, a mutual interest marginally exists. First, it appears that the professionals of the cultural industries, for instance in Lebanon's TV stations, import from the aesthetics of media arts by integrating them within their productions [3], and vice versa, for instance with the work of the artist Walid Raad who imported photographs from newspaper archives [4]. However, so far, this relationship operate in the absence of any form of voluntary collaboration.

Thus, progressing in the analysis, we can observe that the relationship between the two worlds can have another form. This occurs when the professionals of both parties voluntarily attempt to collaborate, and thus enter into a dialectical relationship, setting up methods of intervention from one world to another, as shows, for instance, the intervention of the artist Ziad Saad in the TV program *Ayoun Beirut* [5]. The contradictory reality and the mistrust between the two worlds then shift when these two are winners in a context satisfying the priorities of each one. Indeed, every professional who borrows from a world does not just copy the content; he/she reconstructs, re-elaborates for his/her own account, and from imported material, new contents. In this sense, this import/export activity holds itself a creative dimension.

From there onward, we can aim to understand under what conditions this relationship could go beyond a dialectical form. In other words, to progress towards a dynamic and creative relationship. One condition proves to be essential: an intermediary mediator, or broker, must facilitate the interactions. This intervention give both fields' artists the opportunity to cultivate information and communication in a collaborative context.

This is why we believe it is essential to examine this intermediation zone. More accurately, we need to search for an organizational model adapted to this intermediate space.

First, we notice that the cultural industries are moving towards the informational brokerage model that is theorized by Pierre Moeglin [6]. In fact, traditional organizational models are unable to cope with the large volume of digitized information, leaving the user at loss in the big flow of information. Hence, the need for a mediator operating with custom-made strategies, arranging the supply and demand of information, while keeping the necessary neutrality; by that, we are actually describing the informational brokerage model.

At the same time, we notice that for their part, the media arts also tend towards informational brokerage model, especially in the presence of digital interactivity and participative devices. Notably when the artist tends to disappear and play the role of a broker while assigning to the public an artist role.

Therefore, we are interested in the artistic dimension and the feedback effects of intermediation on the art world. Here, we may need to state two assumptions: First, the mediatory activity between cultural industries and media arts, which can be equated with an artistic practice. Second, the rise of the broker contributes to the registration of media arts in the creative industries.

This is why we revisit historical arts notions in order to identify the creative industries one. Since postmodernism, it is evident that artistic activities oscillated between two poles: a conservative pole [7] and a revolutionary pole [8]. At the crossroads of these two antagonistic conceptions lays that of the creative industries, which thus develop a neutral ideology. This latter being one of the characteristics of the informational brokerage model of our hypothesis. This neutral ideology leads to an art of brokerage open to industrialized creativity. In addition, in order to establish brokerage as an artistic practice, we can refer to a number of examples of artists in the field of communication and digital art.

At this point, we can conclude with three questionings. The first questioning raised revolves around the redefinition of the creativity [9] through the analysis of the relationship between media arts and cultural industries. The creativity here is not about producing novelties from scratch. Creativity is, however, that which consists of arranging new elements in a new way: a creative and industrialized recycling.

The second questioning, in turn, directly concerns the academic world. Our research [10] can be used as a support to set up informational brokerage workshops.

The third questioning reveals itself as specific to my work as an artist. What art to produce? In my research [11], I explore a path that is neither that of art as a form of resistance, nor that of art subject to the air of time and the reproduction of dominant values. I explore a narrow path where artists feed on what exists and on the dominant values, in order to do something else, something new.

References and Notes

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