

Response to Globalisation lecture by Andrew Keen

I have always been a believer in the potential of the Internet and find myself proudly among the anonymous army of infinite monkeys (as Keen describes us) who use our passion and commitment to share our ideas, experiences and expertise and contribute somehow to the progress of our global society.

We believe Internet - although the technology in itself is neutral – can: provide more equal chances for people to get informed on issues that matter to them wherever they are. Information that is vital for their health, education and personal development. And be enabled to communicate with everybody that they want to communicate with.

The countries in the South have seen their relative contribution in the world of sciences diminish. Not because they produce less than before! The scientist in the North have been given much more opportunities to disseminate their ideas and research results. Unrestrained access to the Internet is important to ensure all regions of the world, all cultural perspectives and languages are being heard or at least stored in our collective memory.

The United Nations have defined in Article 19 of the Human Rights Declaration the right to information and communication. And many monkeys with me believe we are also entitled to appropriate the technologies required to inform and communicate.

But it is logical that media like the Internet also bring social seeds to us all. An expression a Pakistan scholar taught me in 1986. But these same social seeds - containing hidden cultural, political and economical messages – not only influence the lives of people in the South, their stories and perspectives from the South will also influence our lives. We need their input as much as we need open discourse. Not only the scientists but all who are interested and committed to a global society of equal people.

Prins Claus of the Netherlands has always enchanted me with his open and warm attitude towards globalisation. One of his most esteemed contributions is his analysis that all we can share many things with the developing countries in the South. But the most important contribution is diversity. Diversity of ideas, policies, information. All that is enabling people a wider and more open perspective on their own life and their own potentials and common future. That is providing the basis for empowerment for emancipation, for social change.

Mr. Keen keeps on stressing only professionals should be enabled to inform others. He questions whether the 2 billion people joining the Internet in next decade according the UN will be media wise enough to withstand the negative side-effects of the open Internet culture. "*They hardly can read or understand*", he feels the context that is required to grasp the truth is hidden in the garbage. Even active censoring the content of e-mail between students is being promoted by him. To help them grow up as decent citizens, as law abiding consumers, willing to consume information provided by a class of mediawise experts and pay for their intellectual property.

But it is not either media professionals or Internet amateurs! This is about transparency and avoiding influence by political power play, ideological steering and commercial interests! The real appropriation of intellectual property is done by those trying to gain profit from exploiting cultural expressions through copyright schemes only favouring the companies that lease the intellectual property.

If I listen to my colleagues, to students with whom I discuss lectures, to my children with whom I discuss almost anything. Aren't they essential part of my social cultural intellectual capacity? Has their contribution to my knowledge not been essential in terms of either presenting supportive information or pointing out to me weak arguments in my intellectual products? Or shared with me contradictive opinions and facts? Forcing me to improve, optimise and innovate my intellectual skills and products constantly.

The moment I write down the essence of my ongoing intellectual debate I can expect to be rewarded for the time having done so. Intellectual labour. This comes with the job, like scientists or journalists. Perhaps I have seen it as an investment asking others to pay me for presenting this knowledge product. Reproducing it on my own through lectures, consultancies. These take time for which I am being paid some of the times.

If Mr. Keen wants to see Wikipedia authors be rewarded financially (not by virtue) he hits the nerve of it all: they haven't ask to be paid! My children have not, my students have not, my colleagues have not. They have contributed in the open discourse on which all knowledge is based: a dialectical exchange of views, opinions and information. More essentially: of expertise and experience from my intellectual environment to whom they belong, to whom I belong.

But should I be rewarded eternal commercial rights to exploit the outcome of a social intellectual construct? Should all those who use products of my intellectual labour pay me? Students who learn, readers how enjoy perhaps? This audience? You Mr. Keen? Should every author of a TV play or melody get a financial reward for every time their creative or intellectual labour was reproduced and distributed?

The creative class or the creative elite say: "Yes!" The global publishing companies like Time Warner, Reed Elseviers say "No, only our shareholders"! The people say: "Not if we can get it free". Meaning no costs for them or the authors to enable them to use or simply enjoy their creative products. That is a moral issue: I agree to that with Mr. Keen. It is indeed about the commercial monopoly over intellectual labour.

But what if a blue collar worker demanding also a fair share of each extra product he is making? What if companies would be forced to share extra income gained by cheaper (re)production and lowcost global distribution? (That is exactly what the Internet is doing for these companies) It would undermine the capitalistic principle: the exploitation - as carefully described by Marx - would cease to exist. All who produce would benefit from the prosperity that was gained.

So why do multinationals support the creative class of authors, scientists and not the labour class of blue collar workers? Why did the US joined the Asia Pacific Economic Conference only after countries like China and Indonesia promised to respect, endorse, maintain, guard infringements on intellectual ownership? (I believe in some Asian countries even death penalty is nowadays used to stop pirates of IPR?)

Why? Because the products of the creative class are products of an elite and need to be protected, fostered, monopolized. Not to protect the creators but the exploiters of intellectual property.

An example: There are medicines to suppress the outbreak of AIDS for HIV infected people. But only after countries like India and Brazil abused the intellectual ownership the licenses to produce these medicines in the South became affordable. They needed just a fair price. People are willing to pay for time, for unique experiences, for services, for products, but at a fair price. The market value should not be artificially kept high through Intellectual Property Rights (IPR).

I respect the intellectual ownership, I do not and shall not steal the economic potential of other peoples creative or intellectual labour by selling their products (unless they have released them as Open Source or Open knowledge and have made me agree to respect their Intellectual property license).

But as citizen I also claim the right to share what I enjoy, what has inspired me, what triggered me and hopefully others too. To lend a book to a friend and since no lending is required with digital media to give them a mailed copy. I am not a pirate, I am not stealing, I do not harm the intellectual ownership, but I disrespect the profane morality that all shall only hear, enjoy, be enchanted after having paid their dues to those who own these rights for ever.

I am willing to pay the artist to see their unique pieces of work in an exhibition, But Hey! access is free as they want to sell. Some will buy their unique piece of work. So be it. But still they let me enjoy it for free! And some musea let me enjoy for a fair price and enable me to experience great pieces of art which I never could afford myself. I do not even want to own them!

Like their creators I want these wonderful self expressions of artists to enchant me, amuse me, as it probably was ment to by the artists. They shared their creative geniality by leaving behind great contributions to the culture of our society. And by appreciating them with many we include them into our culture for centuries to come in great respect of their contributions.

But wouldn't artists be stopped from writing Hamlet, painting Mona Lisa, composing the Brandenburg Concerto, if I would listen to them without paying - even centuries after their death?

People are not charged for creativity, they have to pay for the monopoly of reproduction and distribution. And since the Internet has diminished dramatically the costs for individual reproduction and global distribution the owner of the IPR have a serious problem. They call us pirates, we see us as lovers.

The financial position of van Gogh, Mozart or Shakespeare was not their drive. Remember Mozart and Van Gogh died poor. Their benefactors were willing to pay for them to create new pieces of art and be amused. And Shakespeare wrote plays to be performed before the people. I am certain either of them was NOT afraid of the Internet!

But the Internet behaviour of the people is not the immorality. The global system of abusing scarcity to gain profit and divide people in either being a producer or a consumer is immoral. We used to call that system capitalism. But it seems a large portion of the entrepreneurial guild is no longer capable to control the monopoly of the means of reproduction and distribution to exploit one half the world selling cheap labour and natural resources with an exceeding profit to the other half.

The Internet - paid for by all its users - has created a global platform, forum or bazaar where we can snoop, detect, select all the beliefs we have condensed into it via our self expression of daily pictures, profane thoughts and tacky homevideos.

Even van Gogh, Mozart and even Shakespeare were part of the army of monkeys and have found ways of expressing themselves that still enchant us through the centuries. But their masterpieces of art were not simply enabled by their sponsors. Or commercial agents promising eternal fame and fortune when they would sign a contract renting their intellectual ownership to global publishers who would reproduce and distribute their priceless art, music and sonnets for centuries to come.

True art is priceless, it is an expression of a restless creative mind, not hindered by calculating worldwide sales for decades or centuries to come. And thanks to the slow appreciation of the people most artists will I am afraid.

Artists who did or do well have found the niche market that bought their unique pieces of art or were able to attract people willing to pay to hear Romeo and Juliet or some Stairway to Heaven in an overcrowded hall. Entrepreneurs, Mr. Keen, who want to use the Internet for old fashioned ways to create income on the creativity of others do have a serious problem. I believe you have experienced that.

People are willing to pay for time, as it becomes a scarce commodity. Professionals and experts that annotate content, evaluate information sources and knowledgeable products can save us time and should be paid. And people also are willing to pay for communication and other services that take them serious: not as consumers but as people with their unique private truth for which they are seeking confirmation as opposition. The Internet is providing them that platform.

And artists focussing on intellectual ownership and not on their own creative performance probably fear the future: a diminishing capacity to generate income of previous intellectual labour. Perhaps they should. But popular artists even Mozart or Rolling Stones gained more from their gigs and not their discs.

Mr. Keen want us to consume these intellectual and cultural expressions and products and forget we are all creators. But we are producers as we are consumers. And we see ourselves as such on the Internet.

But let us not forget some great promises a global Internet can provide to all of us: Internet can be used to foster and promote democracy.

But democratisation is a process downwards up. Like empowerment it is not something you can provide or ensure, people themselves have to feel empowered to see ways in which their voice, their vote, their thoughts for policymaking can be shared, brought together, combined to address political power and achieve social change or progress.

Dictators do not like the Internet. There are still governments who prefer to shut down or filter the Internet when unwanted information is spread or cultural expressions might disturb their notion of public order. Unfortunately we can't rely only on the free media and professionals who easily get arrested or silenced. Amateur contrubutions from Tibet, Birma, China, Zimbabwe learn us that the truth has many positions and interests.

When the Soviet Union fell apart the government controlled the national media and the small bulletin board systems kept the people informed on the developments fostering that way the call for democracy. People in former Yugoslavia reported on a daily basis from cities like Tuzla, Split and Srebrenica and it was most frustrating to see how the preparations for massacres were ignored by traditional media and the international community. We all still need to learn to trust the voices of people. And yes people tried to desinform, but were corrected by many fact reports revealing the truth of Srebrenica.

And even more personal there great opportunities now available of which people are very much aware: Mr. Keen blames people to seek confirmation and trying to be excellent which he thinks they are not.

Of course people seek confirmation of their own believes, but in the same way - thanks to the open communication of the Internet - we are all confronted with other opinions, others truths of other people. That helps us to evolve, learn and become.

And of course people want to feel excellent, that their skills and contributions are rewarded not by financial means but for their small contribution. Each of us is a diamond and often only few aspects of ourselves are reflected, appreciated or shared in the social networks of colleagues, friends and family. But we feel we are so much more: there are hidden aspects we like to find out about, unknown desires we want to see fulfilled. Secret passions we like to share with others. The networks we live in are often more rigid systems of believes, opinions and rules. We want to go beyond them. We can on the Internet which makes us feel more excellent and whole.

And finally I want to highlight three essentials vitamins the Internet is offering for us monkeys:

1. Education: The Internet - not only Wikipedia - but the thousands of professional, amateur, public and privately maintained resources offer a rich environment of informal education.
2. Emancipation: people feel they can learn and develop, can grow in close communication and cooperation with those they feel allied with. Internet can help them to achieve that.
3. Empowerment: people feel more informed and feel enabled to communicate, to contact others to cooperate, to contribute to policymaking and participate in decissionmaking. Being involved and informed on the issues that are faced with in their daily lifes.

Whether in a small village in Zimbabwe or in a shanty town in Rio de Janeiro.

All who use and feel the power of global cooperation and open communication and have a heart for the challenges globalisation is facing us with, know that we must ensure all global citizens - all infinite monkeys - must be enabled and given a change to join the Internet.

Michael Polman, April 8, 2008.