

Prabir Purokayastha:

Honestly speaking I was also quite terrified when I realised I had to come and perform in front of an audience who are really performers. So that made me decide that I will depend on a technological prop, the power point, so that I can at least break free from the constraint of having to compete with people who are much better at it than I am. The other part of the thing that I would really like to speak on, or why I am really here, is that we are all fighting in some sense battles of different kinds. And we all think that they are different battles in some sense, I find technology and science, the battle of appropriation of knowledge its not fundamentally very different from the knowledge, from the appropriation that you have also in culture and this is an attempt for me at least to come and link up with a set of people who we have been in contact with, but much more in terms of taking, and is it that we can give something back. Because those who are familiar with the people's science movement would know that effectively we have borrowed very heavily from cultural groups, with our programmes with what we call the jathas, and all that has gone into our work. So its time that we also think about how to link up in different ways and some of the things we are doing that may be of interest you, we are trying to build community radio stations at very low cost. Much lower cost than what would otherwise be available commercially. We have actually developed the technology within the groups in that sense to do that. We are also talking about an area which is of interest to us now which is that how we can link up in terms of what we call the creative commons and the knowledge commons. How do you bring these two relatively different words together and is it possible to look at knowledge and culture in somewhat similar terms and do we have a common battle against what we see as the global forces, the forces of global capital. This is really where we are..... slide show.

The first slide is what I am not going to speak about. That is something you know much better than me. So basically this is something that as I said you know much better than me, this is not something I need to speak about.

Can we have a little light now we go to the next.

So what we really have at the moment, is that the sphere of communication is expanding. But what is shrinking is really ownership. So you have a very very narrow set of corporations who control from what would be your sphere of what is, what is being communicated as well as to what is being communicated with. The artefacts to which the communication takes place in radio stations, in television stations and so on. So this is a shrinking world. The number of corporations every year which are there in the entertainment industry merge. The number of corporations who own the technology merge and you have much fewer numbers than you had in the past.

Next.

So what is it that you do in terms of cultural, culture of resistance. Basically you have to confront this issue of really small set of people who today control the industry as a whole.

Next

Now I would like to not talk about what you have already talked about from last two days. I am really going to talk about my area which is really look at culture as cultural artefacts. In that sense it perhaps is really not, doesn't relate to the area you are involved with. But in the larger sense, you will excuse me if I go into this issue that basically if we look at culture as artefacts if we look at these artefacts as products, that

how are they produced, how are they reproduced, how are they distributed as any other artefact. Not because they are any other artefact. But if we look at it like that then what are the set of things we look, we should look at.

Next.

Now this is really the theme of what I am going to saying, we are looking at culture as production, reproduction of artefacts.

And next.

And I am really specifically looking at what is it that technology does to the process of production, reproduction and in distribution. Not to the idea of just analysing it but does it give us possibilities or opportunities or openings which we can utilise today to fight this monolithic global capital which seems to have taken over and making it very difficult for us to be able to intervene culturally or otherwise into what is the sphere of communication.

Next.

Now of course my favourite, all of you know Walter Benjamin, art in the age of mechanical reproduction. Click again please. And this is mass reproduction leading to mass culture of a certain kind. Now really I want to ask the next question. What happens if from mechanical reproduction you come to digital reproduction. What are the set of issues you face with that?

Next.

Now the other issue that is there is that if you look at cultural artefacts till now, its almost entirely been in a broadcast form. Even if you look at books the ones we have printed, it is the author broadcasting as it were to a number of people who will read it. Of course television is very clearly broadcasting. Cinema is very clearly broadcasting. It's a one way communication.

Next.

I should have said in the slide itself that we are really looking at the internet as a possibility of breaking from the broadcasting module. So I'll come back to this issue of broadcast and internet multi-cast later. Now, if you look at reproduction, copying. Now copying used to be done by hand as you know for books. They were called well, codex, codices, codexes, codecese, they were called rolls if they were rolled up. But what were the...how many were being printed? Roughly I would say if you look at all the evidence, its probably one book a person. To copy one book you needed one person so Reading Abbey accumulated the manuscripts of 300 books over a period of something like 80 years. It became faster a little later. They would do it say in about twenty-four months produce 200 books if you put a manufacturing mode. But nevertheless the numbers are very small. And if you look at what happens at the printing press you get something like 9 million fifty years after the printing press appears. And per year you are probably producing at the most a couple of thousand copied books a year. So you really get this enormous increase in scale of production of printing that you get. Well today Harry Potter one year is 12 million books. So that is a lot more than what was there in one year of all the books in the world fifty years after printing. So you can see the scale at which the reproduction has gone up. And obviously as the technology has become more and more, has become faster, you produce more in less cost, what happens to the cost of these books.

Next. Next.

This is roughly the cost of a book was about fifteen hundred pounds in 13th century. I have costed it by taking figures, converting it and bringing it to today's terms. That terms it was something like 20 pounds. But if you take it by the ratio of what it would buy today, it is about fifteen hundred pounds. That is why when there was war, the list

of pillaged, the things that they plundered and looted, books found a pride of place because they were expensive items. Really, really expensive items. So that was books then.

Next.

So what happens when the book reproduction becomes that much easier? Before that copying, there was no really the concept of a copyright did not exist. Because after all you copied masters, when you copied you wanted to tell you had copied Aristotle or somebody. You were not writing your own stuff. There was a virtue of ascribing even your own works to your masters. That was basically that's what for instance major schools did. They ascribed all their output to their guru. So that was at that time copying was in that sense...the issue of copyright, plagiarism was quite different. But soon after you get the printing press, the issue comes up of course this is a marketable commodity. And you get the copyright which comes up. There are a lot of battles over copyright. But what do you see?

Next.

From fourteen years to what you now have as an extension of copyright in the US for instance, ninety-five years. So the whole expansion of copyright is taking place. So what was given as a monopoly to the author to reproduce, the rights of reproduction were given to the author, which he or she could give to the publishers. This right was restricted in the belief that it should be given for a certain period after which it should go into public domain. And it should be reproduced freely to increase the larger capacity of society to read, write, think and so on. So this limited monopoly has now been extended. It's also called the protection of the Mickey Mouse act because Walt Disney has been the main propagator of expanding this. As Mickey Mouse's copyright tends to expire, this copyright act gets pushed back in the United States. So that's really one of the major campaigns in the US is 'Free Mickey Mouse from Walt Disney.' So..

next.

Ya, now one of the interesting things that has happened is that software is also under copyright. Though its completely different in the sense, software really becomes obsolete in about five years. But nevertheless software also comes under copyright. That is the only other right that has existed apart from patents. And since software was thought not to be patentable in those days, therefore it came under copyright. Now there are some interesting things that happened in software. There was a whole set of people who said we would like to produce together and we would like to make our own available to everybody. These are some crazy guys who said we want something called the freedom to write code, to give code, and let others change the code as they want. They defined it in that sense under the freedom charter. This is the free software foundation. But what they did to protect this was a very interesting concept. They said there is right now only public domain and there is copyright. There isn't anything else. So under copyright if I do something called copy left which is I give the copyright and I say that if you use this work of mine, my software, you are allowed to make any change you want. You can even sell it, but you have to give it under the same licenses that I have given you. So in that sense it is not a violation of copyright, it is an extension of copyright. Its still copyrighted, but as a contract whoever uses that copyright part for his or her own work, modifies it, or change it, then cannot privatise it any more. He has to give it under the same licenses. Which means it's a kind of viral license. Once you get infected, you have to infect everybody else. So that was the concept of what is called the new public license. The GPL license which makes it in that sense not possible to privatise this again. You see the

problem with public domain software is, I put it in public domain. Somebody makes a minor change in it and says now it is copyrighted because I have the right to do what is called the last.... Change.... So public domain software in that sense cannot be protected from further privatisation. But in the new public license, the advantage of the GPL license therefore protected this, that if once you have taken from the commons you have to give back to the commons. You cannot privatise it any further. So I think in that sense it was a very, very simple extension the bridge instalment did, creating what is called the GPL license. And followed by that the creative common license which is really in some sense borrowed very heavily from the GPL license but with significant differences.

Next.

Ok. Now we were talking about really mechanical reproduction, is really analogue reproduction. That means whatever is there you copy it.

Next.

Now it has centralisation of reproduction. Copies were made from a master. And copying led to transmission. This is mechanical reproduction or analogue reproduction.

Next.

Now if you come to digital reproduction, now that the copies are perfect. That means there is no transmission loss. Its completely decentralised because every time you read anything on a computer it is actually a copy. Whether you know it or not the computer actually takes a copy of it and plays it. So it is a copy. Also the copying can be done by any PC. So it is distribution is the internet. Copying is perfect. And the copying can be done by a community as a whole. So therefore the whole issue of control over reproduction, which is where copyright came from, is something which is much more difficult with the digital reproduction. This is where really the battle has all been about, what is called peer-to-peer copying, peer-to-peer transfer of files and this whole issue what our children are using limeware, kaza, napster is what it started with. All this is because it is impossible to centralise reproduction as you could earlier. Therefore the legal part of copyright has actually become much more important. Because now its to the legal right suing people, suing the users, suing the community, that they can get the money. Increasingly the copyright as a form, particularly in a whole range of things like music is becoming very difficult to sustain.

Next.

Next

Now there is one interesting thing I would like to bring to your notice. Which is that the kind of economy we get when we have this kind of monopoly is very similar to the kind of monopoly that you get for instance that you get in pharmaceuticals. In the software industry. So basically when you talk about monopoly over reproduction you also find that is what they called blockbuster economies. That means the publishers or the pharmaceutical industry is really interested in say, really those which make lots of money. They are not interested in the number of products the people might want to diversified set of products. You might have different diseases that is not what they are interested in. They are interested in the block buster Harry Potter and in the case of medicine the Viagra. So you don't have medicine.. there is no major discovery for tuberculosis or malaria for the last five years. You have three blockbuster drugs Viagra, Cialis and so on for erectile dysfunction. Now that is the blockbuster drug. I am not by any means saying it is not important. All I am suggesting is that's where the money is. That's where people can pay for that, malaria people can't pay. This is the poor man's disease. Tuberculosis is poor man's disease. So the pharmaceutical

companies are not interested in those which are not blockbusters drugs. In the same way the music companies, the film companies and the publishing industry is not very interested in the small print runs, small number of copies they will sell. They are really interested in the 12 million copies, one author, that's it. I am done for the year and I get all my profits. This is the nature of the economy. And it comes from, next, comes from what we call monopoly rent. The monopoly rent gives it this huge money. And the second best really doesn't count. The windows operating system, the second operating system nobody knows unless it's the free operating system like Linux. Similarly its not so pronounced for writers, artists, performing artistes and so on. But nevertheless the commodity market of culture also produces a kind of blockbuster economics. Which is very different where labour really goes into the product. Where it is not the monopoly rent that produces the economics, but it is actually the labour content of the goods.

Next

Now the creative commons license, coming back to this, was really a copy of the GPL license but really many more licenses than one. Software one license, that's it. People have got this GPL license. There is a GPL-lite that it is called but it is a kind of library that is put into other categories. But here it is you could give it saying that I give it to you for non-commercial use. I can give it to you saying that well you can make changes and you can also use it for commercial uses if you want and I can give it to you saying you are free to change it. So there are different kinds of licenses that you can provide. And I was talking to some authors about this and they were saying that look there are certain kinds of books we would like to give it free. Doesn't matter. We don't want any money out of it. Certain kinds we don't want. So, there we would like to have the money. So different authors also want to use different kinds of licenses for the same, for their outputs. So its not one kind of license but the last concrete commons there are twelve licenses, but there are really the three main categories of licenses that are there. So a lot of people felt that the creative commons is giving your authorship free. That's not true. You can say I retain the commercial rights to what is going to be produced. So you cannot print my books and say well you know, see, see creative commons license. But my creative commons license says that you have to pay me if you want to produce. If you want to just use it download it, read it, that's fine. So its really a kind of bringing back into, through the creative commons what used to be known in copyright as fair use. I don't know if you are familiar with perhaps the concept of fair use in copyright, which is if you did it for yourself it is not a violation of copyright. So in that sense it is really bringing back what fair use used to be in copyright. But the interesting part about the creative commons is that it allows for different kinds of requirements that people may have. It is not just one license and giving away my product free.

Next.

Now this is something you may not want to do with your product. You may say well I don't want this. So you shut, you say no right to re-mix my painting. Can we go now to that....

But you could have this for instance.

(video clip)

That is taken from Lawrence Lessing's ...

Can we go back to the...

Now that's really creative use. That's really creative use. That you could give people, ...you have come back to the first one.... Ya. This is the interesting part is that if you look at the copy left movement or the creative commons movement, what is

interesting is that there are already 60 million such licences available on the internet. And this is what is called the lowest bound. Probably the numbers are much bigger, but last counted on the internet by somebody is minimum seems to be 60 million. That's pretty large. Out of that 70% is non-commercial use. So its not really in that sense, it's the Mona Lisa kind of use that was there. That you couldn't really change it but it was for non-commercial purposes. And the part which really was in that sense you could change, you can see that the different kinds of things there is 12% and 18%, you could print it, you could use it commercially and the last the 12% I think you could use it free. Ys the 12% was free. You could do what you wanted. Now just imagine really all the film makers who have shot their films and probably they use about 5% of that. This could go into the digital archives and we could have a whole number of people who want to make films then use that to make films crediting from where they had got the stock. What a difference it would make to them. They wouldn't have to really go out and shoot a lot of things again. Now I would think that this is the kind of world we are entering into, to me...

Next

Its not so much the distribution that I am really so much interested in. Yes, reproduction and distribution will happen. It is not possible for copyright to continue in the old way. But what I think is interesting and what really interests me is the possibility of producing communities who are creative communities.

Next

Creative communities who will question this issue. Whose copyright is it? At the moment authors, singers, musicians, feel if they copyright. But really, except the biggies, a few big stars, most of the authors, most of the singers, they really are not benefiting from the copyright. Its really the publishing companies who are. So is it possible to give back to the creative community in that sense.

Next

Is it possible to give back to the community what is, what in that sense really belongs to them. That's what I really think the promise of creative commons is. Can you build a creative community around it who will say my scripts belong to the creative commons. You cannot use it commercially. You want to produce a play go ahead. If you make money out of it, well then you have to give us something. Now it does also introduce a certain kind of problems. That if we have community productions that people get together over the internet. Hopefully Sudhanva's and Sameera's net India theatre forum would also provide collaborative platforms for this, then who owns what is produced. Then do you have the situation of the death of the author in that sense, particularly for films and so on. Writers will still survive because they have this pen and they write or a PC, but that's ok. But when you have large things coming what will happen to it. I am not sure we have clear answers to this question. But I think the possibility of collaborating over very large spaces, over large networks is very real. And that potential is there today and I think it also exists that we have common struggles in which we as people who are science and technical activists work with you to see what it is that we can do together. Some of the legal battles are even common. They are not even ...against copyright. Today you are finding something on software patents but you may not realise but what is being attempted can be patent software which does image compression. And every bit of downloading you do of an image from the internet uses certain kind of image compression. So, if you just add the money that would be needed to do that, what is it? It's a huge amount. A DVD player, actually the patent royalties are about 20\$ and the production cost is also about 20 \$. That's really the level of money that goes out through patents and a lot of it goes

to image compression. Well that's what.....and the fact that mpeg has patent's protection, that India is now trying to get patent protection through the back door. They failed it in Parliament. These are all important battles we are fighting. You may not be aware of it, but it is something of concern to you, but copyright patents and software are all issues that concern you in different ways. Not maybe as theatre activists but certainly as cultural activists. I think I am running out of time. Am I right? I think I will end it here. That's it.