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ARCHITECTURE OF HOPE

books have called a general feeling of being control, the feeling that we are no longer able to control and express our own culture as a collective framework of meaning. We are inclined to feel as strangers in our own culture and everyday environment. Every reference to humanity is immediately identified as dangerous, alien and strange. That is why fear, uncertainty and insecurity have replaced issues like unemployment and prosperity at the top of the political priority list for decades now.

The new disorder and the importance of continuity

There is more in our present-day culture than fear or uncertainty alone, but they undeniably dominate our politics and culture. In a book I published almost ten years ago I described our condition as the 'new disorder', by which I essentially referred to George Bush's famous 'new world order'. In that book I opposed politicians, urbanists, architects and designers who defined their task as creating unity and order. I opposed them not because I fear disorder, but because they overestimate themselves and their abilities. I cited Jane Grey who said that 'the biggest fear in the myth of modern cities is the fact that I feel us to a hope for only while we should learn to live with conflicts. Instead of creating order or claiming to do so, politicians and other professionals dealing with the condition of our everyday culture and environment should try to identify strategies and tools to deal with the reality of disorder, conflict and hybridity. Rather than chasing the modern myth of harmony, communication and consensus, we should try to agree to disagree. There is no harmony better in a fixed, closed national identity than in the thousand blossoming flowers of multiculturalism. While this is easier said than done, there are still several possibilities here. In my book I introduced one possible way out of the hellish battle between authenticity and purity on one hand and hybridity and disorder on the other: the notion of *continuum* as an alternative for the uneasy separation between progress and tradition, or between globalization and national identity.

Continuum is a form of 'weak thinking'. It is weak in the postmodern sense of the word, if enables us like to escape false universalities like that of an empty modern cosmopolitanism. It also tries to escape the dark notion of a pure identity, a true origin or essence. *Continuum*, in contrast to conservatism, starts with the acceptance of the severe discontinuity of our everyday world and experience. This discontinuity is the result of rather unresolvable forces, substantiated as the globalization process, but also of the explosive force of these processes in that same world. The result of present, the eternal present of instant gratification, identity. *Continuum* tries to break with this instantaneity of our experience by constantly evaluating together in the moment of renewal and progress. This is done not from a feeling of nostalgia, but out of necessity to accommodate to the new disorder, the reality of a discontinuous experience. *Continuum* is a politics of redemption and redesigning. It is a politics of remembrance and restoration, not an escape into a fantasized past of harmony and unity, but a restoration of the fragile continuity of our everyday experience. *Continuum* takes into account that we are dealing with fragments, with left-overs and half-forgotten remnants

of earlier attempts to accommodate to the disorder of modernization. But these left-overs and fragments are the only evidence we have that modernization is a durable process. In this way durability becomes the central value of a postmodern, hybrid and globalized society. And the fact that it has become a serious issue (and not just in ecological or environmental terms) could be taken as an important sign.

Redescription, re-telling and redesigning are the terms philosopher Richard Rorty used or introduced to identify the present-day role of philosophy. It is an ironic role; it is the role of an intellectual who constantly feels she is locked up in the wrong vocabulary, in someone else's language game. She lacks the self-assurance of the metaphysician who is able to refer back to our origins or foundations. She even lacks a notion of what it means to live in a wrong or right vocabulary. That is exactly our position now: in the middle of a disorderly culture of hybridity, without the self-assurance of the modern planner or politician confident in his vanguard position in the project of progress and renewal. We know we cannot leave modernity behind us because doing so would mean repeating what modernity has always done: renew itself. We can only become aware of the irony of that situation; it is not possible to renew something that is quintessentially a process of constant renewal itself. We have ended up in a situation in which the idea of renewal has lost its attraction because it has lost its real meaning. The only way to save or restore something of its original meaning is to turn it upside down: to renew is to restore, redescribe and redesign. That is only possible when, in addition to being consumers of imagined communities or imagined lifestyles and political citizens of crumbling nation-states, we are able to develop into cultural citizens, i.e., into people who actively engage their own local, everyday culture and who are confident enough to see themselves as co-authors of that culture. Cultural citizens may and do use the imaginative power of the new, global mediascape, but only to be more actively present in their own local life world. Only then will the ecology of fear be replaced by a new ecology of durability or continuity. Our flexible mind must be capable of achieving that.

- 1 Francis Fukuyama, *The End of History and the Last Man* (Free Press, 1992). This book was the sequel to his article 'The End of History?' which appeared in the summer of 1989 in *The National Interest* (no. 16).
- 2 Richard Sennett, *The Corrosion of Character, The Personal Consequences of Work in the New Capitalism* (New York & London: Norton, 1998).



Malchusen, Berner Oberland, August 2006.
Photo: Ernst Toppo

LOST IN ORIENTATION

Bernhard Sturm

Bernhard Sturm makes the case for cross-cultural navigation design for websites. He argues that web designers should know themselves and their audience when they work in a cross-cultural environment.

It all started with a visit to Sony Ericsson's multinational website (www.sonyericsson.com). Sony Ericsson presents its products according to their geographical availability as they are not all globally available. A visiting user is requested to select 'your region'. At first sight this seems a brilliant and off-need navigation concept for multilingual websites (think of the flags representing language selection), but in reality this navigation approach poses a couple of tricky questions about the identity of the visiting user: what is 'my region'? What happens if I am Swiss, but live in China. Should I select Switzerland as my country although I won't be able to buy my preferred product in China where I currently live? Or should I select China as my country although I don't speak or read Chinese (the only language in which information is presented when you select China). The bottom line is that in a post-cultural, globalized world local identity seems to matter regardless of any streamlined multinational corporate identity based upon the user.

Yet in the context of web design how does local identity matter? According to sociologist Manuel Castells we are part of a network society in which each individual is connected by information technology to one another. Our identity is shaped and reformulated by participation in this network society and as a consequence we no longer see our identity in the traditional context of culture, but in multiple contexts. As a member of this network society I conclude that 'I am many' and therefore I might have a multitude of identities. This is particularly true for members of a hybrid society such as migrants whose multiple identities often clash with each other.

When it comes to web and navigation design these hybrid identities are often not addressed and a design mono-culture is superimposed by global corporations or governmental bodies. This leads to visual and contextual misunderstandings and people are left behind because they don't feel addressed by the (visual) message.

The obvious question is: how can this be prevented? In order find an answer we will take a look at a different online solution: the online versions of the multinational news broadcaster Al Jazeera.

Al Jazeera maintains its news website at www.aljazeera.net in two language versions: Arabic and English. They do so in English because since 2006 Al Jazeera also broadcasts news in English via a news desk located in Doha, London, Washington D.C and Kuala Lumpur. Al Jazeera started its English website in March 2002 (the beginning of the Iraq war) and relaunched it in November 2006.

What is most striking about the Al Jazeera website is that although both versions can be accessed from the same URL (www.aljazeera.net), they utilize a complete different design and hence seem to be different versions. At first one feels compelled to verify that this is actually the same company maintaining both language versions of their website as the differences are not only visual, but also concern content. In fact Al Jazeera is deliberately using a different image-language as well as a different information structure on both websites.

The cultural awareness of the two language versions of Al Jazeera online news services has also emphasized by Mustafa Saouq, Director of Al-Jazeera Centre for Studies: 'Al Jazeera feels it is tested in



A traditional restaurant in Doha, Qatar, in the Middle East. The building is a blend of traditional and modern architecture.

