

Killing a culture softly: Corporate partnership with a Russian museum

Mary Leigh Morbey*

*Institute for Research on Learning Technologies, York University, 1032 TEL Bldg., 4700 Keele Street,
Toronto, ON, Canada M3J 1P3*

Received 20 May 2006; received in revised form 19 August 2006; accepted 27 September 2006

Abstract

Information communications technology provides a way on the World Wide Web for national museums to represent the cultural artefacts they house. Framed by the notion of cybercolonization, a colonizing of cultures and cultural institutions by computing ideas, this on-site case study of the State Hermitage Museum, St. Petersburg, Russia examines computing ideas shaping information communications technology developments within the museum and, particularly, its current IBM sponsored website <<http://www.hermitagemuseum.org/>>. The paper will illuminate subtle cybercolonizing influences by Global IBM evident in the website structure, design, targeting, esthetic choices, cultural content realignment, IBM corporate e-business underlay, and American English branding. The notion of cyberglobalization, an adapting of global cyber processes to local circumstances, is offered as an avenue to address colonization present in the Hermitage-IBM website. The case study offers museum professionals an illustration of the underlying assumptions about information communications technology (ICT) ideas, interaction, and appearance in the development of museum websites.

© 2006 Elsevier Ltd. All rights reserved.

Keywords: Museum website development; Information communications technology; Underlying assumptions; Culture; Multi-national corporation; Cybercolonialism; Cyberglobalization

*Tel.: +1 416 736 2100; fax: +1 416 736 5913.

E-mail address: mmorbey@edu.yorku.ca.

The question remains, however, will Russia be able to stop the march of Bill Gates' aesthetic imperialism, the way she previously froze out the armies of Napoleon? (Manovich, 1998, p. 13)

1. Introduction

In our 21st century world, information communications technology (ICT) is becoming a normal component of museum life. ICT holds the potential to strongly influence culture and cultural institutions (Bowers, 2000, 2001, 2006; Parekh, 2000) and subsequently how a museum represents itself online. This is particularly so as national museums develop websites that can transform how we view and understand the cultural artefacts they house. We are only beginning to discover the unresearched assumptions about ICT ideas, models, interaction, and appearance in computing developments, observes ICT user-interface designer Aaron Marcus (2006). Identification and consideration of these assumptions is an important and necessary challenge in building museum websites.

The question of website development by a national museum, and how this might alter how the site viewer understands the museum and the cultural artefacts that it houses, has led me to exam website development in the context of the State Hermitage Museum, St. Petersburg, Russia. My on-site field investigation, along with ongoing updates, is reported in this paper and focuses upon the second Hermitage website launched in 1999 in partnership with the computing powerhouse, IBM. The research at the Hermitage has led to studies of website developments in other national museums, although that work is not elaborated here.

My investigation focuses on ICT ideas that can potentially alter what a museum is about online, namely computing ideas that direct the website development and relate to economics, culture, and access to ICT possibilities. One might ask what do computing ideas have to do with access? ICT access exists when the needed computing hardware, software, expertise, and connectivity are available, and when the conditions surrounding the website development choices are conceptually, structurally, financially, and legally “open” to bring forth the representation the particular museum wishes to have of itself on the web. The way these access components are formulized in a website development are immensely important to what the site looks like and what it communicates to the onscreen viewer (Marcus, 2002, 2006).

To explore how ICT changes the ways that a particular museum represents itself on the web, this case study of the Hermitage asks how are influences originating in computing ideas giving shape to website development by the museum? Two ideas are helpful in understanding what is taking place on the second Hermitage website. The notion of cybercolonialism illuminates the colonizing, the “taking over,” of the Hermitage site development by computing ideas initiated by IBM, and guides the examination. In light of the study findings, the notion of cyberglobalization, an adapting of global cyber processes to local circumstances, is offered as a way to address colonization in the context of the Hermitage website. The study takes the position that no idea or influence is neutral, and therefore ideas are value-laden and direction shaping (Bowers, 1988, 2000, 2001, 2006; Franklin, 1999; Morbey, 1996, 2000; Morbey & Granger, 2002).

The case study is comprised of an examination—historical, philosophical, and contextual on-site field work—of ideas underlying ICT shaping of the museum's current

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/1011670>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/1011670>

[Daneshyari.com](https://daneshyari.com)