

Contents, containers and free knowledge. Dedicated to those who are not satisfied with a glass

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Containers determine the shape of contents. This is not hard to believe: all you have to do is pour yourself a glass of water. Things become more complicated when it comes to education, art and funding.

The *project* is the container that in the last half century has most influenced contemporary production. Everything has become a project. With the progressive transformation of the funding systems, institutions have been forced to reason in terms of aims, objectives, activities, expected results, target, assessment, budget and time schedule. Once, a theatre was just a theatre, and was given funds to just work as a theatre. Today, a theatre carries out educational projects, international cooperation activities, cross-cultural and interdisciplinary programmes. Today? Perhaps, it would be more appropriate to say “yesterday”, given that start-ups, kickstarters and new definitions of profit-making and non-profit-making activities are currently changing the way we organise our contents so as to adapt them to ever-changing containers.

Even *contemporary African art* is a container. It looks like a drawer that one can open and fill with a little bit of everything. If we take a look at the exhibitions and publications dedicated to contemporary African art, we find an incredible heterogeneity of approaches, where the artists selected are almost never the same. Talking about *contemporary African art* and presenting these authors as *African artists* has however had a significant impact on how this production has been perceived and analysed.

Let’s now talk about primary school books. A textbook necessarily has a limited number of pages and divides knowledge into subjects, chapters and paragraphs. Dedicating some space to the French revolution and some other space to the independence of Cameroon has an impact on our mindset and on how we see the world. Thinking of education as a conveyor belt is obviously different from thinking of it as a suitcase.

Let’s go back to the glass of water. For those who have studied the lesson in their primary school books, it won’t be difficult to remember the famous water cycle. Sea, clouds and rain help us develop an environmental awareness, but are also a good image for re-thinking contents. What if contents, just like water, could move around and change shape? This is actually what free knowledge is about. There is no rational explanation for why people spend hours and hours writing an encyclopaedia when there are already so many, or make new maps of territories already mapped, except for the fact that, by making this material available under a free license, those contents will be free. Free contents can be used, remixed, modified,

updated, integrated, corrected, sold and analysed by everyone, and lawfully. Even artists, cultural institutions, critics and researchers can contribute to free knowledge.

But what will they get out of it? We don't know. What we know is that making some contents available under a free Creative Commons Attribution/Share-Alike License increases authors' visibility, because license requires that the original creator be given credit in any copies of the work. We also know that this kind of license is viral, because whoever uses those contents must adopt the same license. Finally, we know that contents may contribute to Wikipedia and therefore reach a very large number of people. But we still don't know many things. The question we can try to answer is instead: why not? In some cases, there are some clear advantages in not making contents freely available, but if the hesitation is "who knows, maybe one day I could sell my graduation thesis or the picture of my installation and become rich", well, it's time for you to have a glass of water.