
Introduction

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Biographical notes: Lily Díaz is Professor of Design and leader of the Systems of Representation research group at the Media Lab of the University of Art and Design Helsinki, Finland where she conducts research and development projects for the European Union and for the Finnish Funding Agency for Technology and Innovation (TEKES). Her most recent works in the area of digital cultural heritage include Map of Mexico 1550 and Digital Carta Marina. In 2004, her work was awarded First Prize at Nabi Digital Storytelling International Competition of Intangible Heritage organized in line with the International Council of Museums, ICOM 2004, the Korean National Commission for UNESCO (KNCU), and UNESCO. She has also designed tools such as Image and Map Annotation Notebook (ImaNote) and the Soft Ontology Layer (SOL). (See: <http://sysrep.uiah.fi>)

Maurizio Forte, PhD, is full Professor of World Heritage at the University of California, Merced and Professor of “Virtual Environments for Cultural Heritage” at the “Master of Science in Communication Technology-Enhanced Communication for Cultural Heritage” (TEC-CH) at the University of Lugano. He has coordinated archaeological fieldworks and research projects in Italy as well as in Ethiopia, Egypt, Syria, Kazakhstan, Peru, China, Oman, and Mexico. He was author and Scientific Director of the two first public virtual museums in Italy, the Virtual Museum of the Scrovegni Chapel in Padua (2003) and the Virtual Museum of the Ancient Via “Flaminia in Rome” (2008). He is editor and author of several books including *Virtual Archaeology* (1996), *Virtual Reality in Archaeology* (2000), *From Space to Place* (2006). Topics of his activity are: virtual heritage, cyber-archaeology, epistemology of the virtual. His work was awarded by the “Best paper award for the cultural merit” at the VSMM conference (2002); E-content Award, (2005, Milan, Italy); Best paper award at the VSMM 2008 conference.

In The UNESCO ‘s statement intangible heritage includes

“living expressions and the traditions that countless groups and communities worldwide have inherited from their ancestors and transmit to their descendants, in most cases orally.” (from the UNESCO portal. In the ICOMOS Ename Charter (<http://www.enamecharter.org/>))

One of the focuses is the “safeguard the tangible and *intangible* values of cultural heritage sites in their natural and cultural settings and social context”. Typically the definition of ‘intangible’ is correlated with not physical items, such as, for example, a language, an oral tradition, or a dance. It is a formal way to include all the main intangible categories, to save and communicate them to the future generations. In particular these intangible items are classified by specific individual identifications, so, in short, they become objects of knowledge like the tangible ones. In ontological and ecological terms we could say there is a common awareness of intangible and tangible: both categories identify and classify specific ‘objects’ of heritage: ‘that’ dance, ‘that’ oral tradition or poem, ‘that’ ceremony and so on. The repertory of intangible becomes very similar to the repertory of tangible: typologies, classes, documentation, and archives. What is the way to validate this intangible heritage? Do we use the same guidelines, methods, approaches? And how do we classify it as heritage? How will our consciousness of heritage evolve in the digital post-modern era?

Typically a case of heritage is perceived, elaborated and processed by space and time and by global communities. The way in which this process is constructed changes according to the communication systems of the post-modern societies. Actually the digital systems assimilate, distribute and transform a great amount of information and, probably, in this sense, we assume that they are able to spread more intangible values and contents. In effect, it is not just a problem of quantity of information but of properties/relations of information.

In other words, there is an upper level of intangibility where we have to focus attention and study the ecology of informational and communicational relations coming from any meaning of heritage. These categories of intangibility come from the feedback and interaction (difference) of the cybernetic process: every perceptual act creates an informational difference and a new knowledge. In the domain of cultural heritage we have to move from an aesthetic-taxonomical approach to an ecosystemic model of culture. Some significant terms are: intangible, ecology, feedback, e-learning, virtual communities, web, ecosystems. The comprehension of any heritage evolves in a different sphere of interpretation and learning, because of the density of information produced by the global communities and by the feedback between organisms and ecosystems. There are so many evolving processes in the digital metabolism of the web, of the digital communication and on the reciprocity of the media.

From these premises, this publication tries to analyse the chaos of the ‘intangible factor’ in the era of the virtual communication, where everything does not really exist but it seems potentially existing. This intangibility passes through several fields and applications: culture, cyber culture, economy, tourism, virtual communities, enaction, virtual reality.

In the digital era a remarkable phenomenon is represented by the acceleration of the information process and by the immersion of the experience: we are totally embodied in digital ontologies. This embodiment crosses different levels of experience and starts the creation of new forms of communities based on diverse time and space consumption which we define the ‘embodied communities’. These embodied communities consume ‘dense’ information, construct meanings by reciprocity and feedback, and finally interact within continuously changing simulation’s scenarios.

By the analysis between the various and interesting contributions of this publication, it emerges a revolutionary aspect: the capacity of mind-body to be embodied even in the cyber space of virtual heritage. This attitude can show the potentialities of the global

virtual embodied communities to be enacted in the information process. The term ‘enaction’ was introduced by Bruner (Bruner, 1968) for defining the knowledge coming through action and constructed on motor skills. Then the concept was re-elaborated by Francisco Varela which designed a new cognitive model,

“based not on the metaphor of the computer as in classical cognitivism, but instead on the metaphor of living organisms.” (*Enaction and Cognitive Science*, <http://liris.cnrs.fr/enaction/index-en.html>)

This approach is based on the assumption that the cognitive activity is ‘embodied’, so not separated from the body perception and operated in a specific context.

If the embodiment is linked on the level of engagement, the embodied communities should learn and transmit more information and in a shorter time. Basically, they should perceive in a relational way; hence this intangible heritage should be part of an enactive process.

“Perception implies action, or better inter-action between the subject and the environment, or among subjects. Knowledge is hence a process, intrinsically interactive, communicative and social. This implies that the value and the meaning of cultural heritage do not run dry within itself, but start with the relationship with an observer.” (quoted from the contribution of Elena Bonini in this publication)

Who is the observer in the case of heritage? The engagement of global communities in the construction of processes of interpretation and identity opens a new panorama of observed heritage.

In this frame is it really possible that embodied communities can generate enactive societies? Can we imagine a future of artificial societies where heritage belongs to the cyber space?

This embodied and enactive approach characterises all this volume: interpretation heritage becomes a collaborative process able to construct relations and worlds of information, tangible or intangible, anyway perceivable. Maybe we are close to design this cultural process of learning, interpretation and communication, Heritage 3.0.

Digital matter and Intangible Heritage

In the last three decades computers and new media technology have increasingly played an important role in the cultural heritage sector. The scope of this role has been vast and deep reaching into aspects of recuperation and conservation, as well as into the tasks of interpretation and dissemination. As a result of such continued and increasing engagement there has been a shift in the role of heritage institutions from being repositories and keepers into that one of convergence points and even potential information and communications hubs. This has recast our idea of heritage itself in a new light.

A point that is central to all the essays in this anthology is how heritage is more than sum of all of its physical characteristics. Pregnant with meaning, both the physical and the intangible heritage operate as a locus gathering potential multiple sightings and discourses. Experience, reflection and memory fuse in this locus, ready to unfold and unravel their narratives upon contact and engagement. These features enable – one could even say lure – the inter-actor into participatory, metaphoric and emotionally invested journeys.

In this new landscape of the information economy, intangible heritage stands to play an increasingly important role and this demands our attention and careful thought. The collection of essays included in this issue is an attempt in this direction. As an early contribution in the field of intangible heritage, it is an initial incursion that we hope propitiates dialogue.

A certain thematic emerging from the contributions themselves is apparent in the anthology. The beginning three essays by Bernardette Flynn, Helena Bonini and Sarah Kenderdine deal with the topic of embodied knowledge and the technology mediated experience. Whereas Flynn's essay deals with the performative aspects of interpretation, Bonini's piece focuses on the role of learning as a process based on the embodied experience of heritage. Kenderdine presents us with examples of the complex networks of meanings and interaction engendered through the experience of a novel advanced information technology system.

The experience of journey and actual visit afforded through the digital virtual dimension is the topic of the next two essays by Susan Hazan and Maureen Thomas. A guided tour through an avatar of the cultural heritage institutions in Second Life is the subject of Hazan's contribution. Thomas' narrative presents us with the use of an onsite interactive installation as a way to supplement and extend the visit in the museum by revealing intangible aspects of heritage that are not readily apparent from material artifacts.

The piece by Andrea Granelli, Roberto Pone and Barbara Marcotulli and that by Elizabeth Bartley and John E. Hancock bring to the forefront notions of audience and spectacle central to the experience of heritage. Whereas Granelli et al. focus on the organisation and realisation of a project intended to further develop intangible heritage experience to visitors of the eternal city of Rome, Bartley and Hancock pay attention to the problematic of capturing the attention and imagination of audiences to cultural heritage exhibitions through the use of immersive virtual reality environments. The perspective of the real landscape is not lost but rather enhanced in Saper's essay that describes an imaginative visit to a diversity of artists' sites throughout southeastern Florida.

As new practices and artifacts emerge from the digital dimension, new definitions of what constitutes intangible heritage will emerge. In the final essay Gabriele Guidi, Bernard Frischer, Ignazio Lucenti, Janez Donno and Michelle Russo describe their work of translation into digital format of the physical replica of the Gismondi model of Rome and propose that intangible heritage is that which is embedded into a shape and revealed by a digital technique.

The issue concludes with brief examples of dissertation abstracts by selected students from the Media Lab at the University of Art and Design Helsinki. This contribution intends to bring to the foreground the role that art and design practice stands to make to this burgeoning field of cultural heritage.

Reference

Bruner, J.S. (1968) *Toward a Theory of Instruction*, 1st ed., W. W. Norton, New York.