

Sreten Ugričić
(National Library of Serbia)

CREATION AS DEMATERIALISATION

Abstract: I present two ideas of mine, as a stimulus for a different approach, opposite from the usual one, for a new way of thinking, in accordance with contemporary times and their cultural and technological characteristics: the idea on cultural heritage as a contemporary cultural production and the idea on the culture of dematerialization.

Cultural Heritage as a Contemporary Cultural Production

Cultural heritage is not in the past but in the present. It is not given to us, as a gift, it is our assignment, it is our task. Cultural heritage must be created, it must be taken out from the layers of the past, negligence and taking things for granted, it must be reanimated, presented and contextualized in a proper way. This procedure does not differ from the current cultural and artistic production of completely new works, texts, objects, performances etc. As a newly-created work looks for and takes its status within the scene, interpretation and institutional system, and of course within the market, so it must be with the cultural heritage artifact, since the perseverance only in the fact and status of the past cultural good is not enough; this is a mere starting point for the creation, establishing and interaction with the context. And the context can be varied:

- local, regional, international;
- historical, educational, artistic, religious;
- political, economic, tourist;
- institutional, non-institutional;
- media, technological etc.

In connection with that, the functional application of ICT and digitalization promises considerable advantages. It is an open domain for a multidimensional creating and distribution of the cultural heritage as active and interactive contents in all contexts. ICT and digitalization, in itself, as at this moment an “empty” technology and medium, prescribe the looking upon the cultural heritage as upon a creation. If we do not accept that challenge, we will find ourselves in a situation where we cover irrefutable values with another veil and redundant noise, instead of using the advantages of discovering and animating. The time in which the thing that was not in the papers and on television was considered as non-existent – is behind us. The time has come when non-existent is, above all, that which is not digital and on the network. And in relation to the previous technological paradigms, this one looks incomparably more potent; it looks immense. There, you may not dig out buried values, but there, you may only generate values. It is an opportunity one can hardly resist.

On the Culture of Dematerialization

For thousands of years culture had been established, maintained and developed through materialization. Now the direction of this process has been reversed – culture is

produced and reproduced, the culture becomes real and transformed and distributed, through *dematerialization*, in the form of information-communication technologies, media, networks, fields... Once, tools and artifacts were the forming elements of culture, and now culture has become the forming element of a technological and civilization change.

As, after Gutenberg, it prevailed over the oral-ritual paradigm, thus becoming immeasurably more powerful, now culture prevails over the written paradigm, becoming, as a digital culture, more powerful than the written one to the same extent the written one was more powerful than the spoken one.

Culture has realized and accepted that the virtual is more real than the physical, that the digital is more real than the analogue, that the electronic is more real than the tangible – according to efficiency, according to performance ability. Since efficiency is the only real standard. Since a sign, data, idea, value, knowledge are faster, more available, more penetrating, and, at the same time, more precise, more abundant, of higher quality – if they are presented in the dematerialized form of a numerical code, combination of imperceptible electric impulses, mental cipher (code).

Culture has always been but a prevailing of the imaginary over the given, of the spiritual over the material, of the intangible over the temporal. The output of the material one is limited, the output of the immaterial one is unlimited. Thus a code record is mightier and more far-reaching than its tangible, physical correlative. Of course, limitation is a code's inherent characteristic, too – a code is limited in its kind and can be cancelled by another code or anticode. One should take that into account. The technical protocols of the software, hardware and interface format migration and emulation are to provide us with the continuity of easy and safe access and use, in spite of the innate transience of the digital forms which are in a continual immanent transformation and conversion.

The code is put into operation logically. The matter is ruled by the laws of nature, the code by the laws of logic, the laws of thoughts. The natural laws cannot affect the mental laws. No external factor can transform a correct deduction into an incorrect one, or an incorrect conclusion into a correct one. Two plus two makes four both in war and in peace, both in youth and in old age, both at the freezing point and at the melting point, both at the bottom of the sea and at the top of the Himalayas, both on a stone and on paper, both on a screen and in an optical cable.

In an optical cable a thought is traveling at the speed of light. In the culture of dematerialization one applies an equation related to Einstein's one: $E=ic^2$. Energy is equivalent to the result of the multiplication of information and the square of the speed of light. One could say the formula means that if you accelerate enough the information, it turns into energy. We can conclude that in the culture of materialization the change of the state of things and of the world depended primarily upon the mass, upon the acceleration of the critical quantity, while in the culture of dematerialization the change of the state of things and of the world depends on information, more precisely on a code, mental cipher, on the acceleration of the critical quality.

The culture of dematerialization includes:

- Dematerialized forms of identity and authorship
- Dematerialized forms of creativity and art
- Dematerialized forms of realization and research, knowledge and education
- Dematerialized forms of conflicts and security
- Dematerialized forms of power, repression and control
- Dematerialized forms of irrationality, madness, illness
- Dematerialized forms of communication
- Dematerialized forms of capability, skills, competencies
- Dematerialized forms of goods, services, capital, work

- Dematerialized forms of publicity and sociability
- Dematerialized forms of politics
- Dematerialized forms of events (history)

The culture of dematerialization includes the dematerialized way of establishing and reproducing social relations and social hierarchy (order).

The culture of dematerialization includes the re-realized notion of contemporariness, which does not mean simply now, today or in accordance with the current moment, but: a simultaneous duration of many independent time orders. Maybe you believe it is dangerous and alienated, but I believe it is challenging and emancipatory, because it expands and deepens and accelerates the intangible but only real domain of our freedom.