Advanced Mixed Heritage: A Visual Turn Through Digitality and Reality of Architecture

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ABSTRACT

Aim of the article is to reflect on how digital technologies and ICT are changing the way to analyze, visualize, and communicate architectural heritage. In particular, mixed reality apps favor the constant and ubiquitous combination of reality and virtuality. A new kind of advanced heritage grows, characterized by the mix of tangible heritage and digital heritage: Reality enriches with information and virtuality acquires new potentialities with its matching with reality. This process moves from the development of digital informative models made by 3-D and database complex models, characterized by real time manipulability, navigation and interaction. This context renews people’s relationship with images, allowing a sort of “visual turn” in built heritage field, where reality reaffirms its centrality, and the digital sphere opens to new opportunities in architectural heritage’s studying, computing, experiencing, and valorization. Follows a claim for transparency of information and computer-based visualization.

KEYWORDS


INTRODUCTION: MIXED MEDIA IN VISUAL CULTURE

Today digital applications and ICT renews the relationship between people and “images”. It has happened many times during centuries but now technologies profoundly influence it (Mitchell, 2017. Purgar, 2017). Mitchell (Mitchell, 1994) talks about a “pictorial turn”, that is a change of perspective in visual fields disciplines, according to a re-thinking of the postmodern “linguistic turn”: Not to oppose a visual paradigm to a verbal one, but considering their semiotics in a consubstantial way. In fact, in his work “Iconology” (1986), Mitchell proposed a parallel reading of “images” and “logos”, in a non-conflictual interpretation but in cohabitation. In this way, all media are “mixed media”. Mitchell (1996) questions on the effect that images have on the Homo sapiens’ anthropological constitution, producing what he calls the “iconic panic” of modernity, that is a fetishist obsession: Images produce increasingly macroscopic social reactions, often reactivating ancient fears and ecstasies.

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Today, what Mitchell prefigured seems to grow and develop, in particular according to the pervasive diffusion of advanced and ubiquitous applications. But in our current “on line” life (The Onlife Manifesto, 2015), the concepts of “digital natives” and “digital immigrants” (Prensky, 2001) blurs (Jenkins, 2007). Moreover, the philosophical line of new realism (Ferraris, 2012) is not unrelated to this context: New realism roots on postmodern lesson and hermeneutics, but at the same time reckon with reality and perception; the characteristic of perception of being “opaque”, requires the need to be represented, i.e. interpreted. In this context, the claim for “transparency” follows. And the “European Charter of Rights of Citizens in the Knowledge Society” (aka “The Charter of eRights”) of 2005 underlies this request for transparency (EUROCITIES, 2005).

The “Hyperreality” prefigured by Baudrillard (1976) – that is the substitution of reality by virtuality as something more real than reality – has developed, becoming “simply” a component of reality. People are shrewder in their relation with the digital sphere that surround us – what Negroponte called “digitality” (1995) –, i.e. the sort of “augmented reality” state that involves us. The relationship with technology re-news: Its outcomes are constitutive of reality and of our culture, and therefore they requires knowledge, understanding, and assessment. The claim for digital heritage preservation (UNESCO, 2003), and the statement of digital heritage as common heritage ratifies the value and cultural importance of this new kind of artifacts, and consequently their significance in our post-postmodern condition.

ICT and digital tools favor the growing of a new relationship between reality and digitality: Mixed reality, virtual reality, augmented reality allow the constant and ubiquitous possibility to enhance heritage with any kind of information. In fact, through common devices, people can enjoy their everyday environment, augmented by digital models. Technological simulacra do not substitute the real, but real and virtual mix together. The wording “mixed heritage” was already used by the “Operational Guidelines for the Implementation of the World Heritage Convention” (UNESCO, 2015) to define the characteristic of “sites”, where the work of nature and man are merged (in particular, it talks of “Mixed Cultural and Natural Heritage” at Art 46). Currently, a new kind of mixed heritage rises from mixed reality applications, made by tangible heritage and digital heritage. Reality enriches with info and virtuality acquires new potentialities thanks to its matching with reality (Figure 1).

Figure 1. Medieval Cathedral of Teramo. Digital surveying of the church.
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