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REPRODUCTIONS, RELOCATIONS AND DISPLACEMENTS OF CULTURAL HERITAGE

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Abstract

Recent developments in the technologies of reproducibility have made it possible to experience visits to heritage sites and artifacts at a distance. These reproductions imply a rearrangement of the space of reception of heritage. This phenomenon can be called relocation. We shall argue that it is a common element to the processes of “patrimonialization” and “mechanical reproducibility”. Making-heritage implies a rearrangement of the space around an artifact, this rearrangement also takes place during its mechanical reproduction. In this paper we will discuss some forms of relocations of heritage and see how these phenomena have always been at the heart of practices of valorization of traces of the past. The analysis of a case of virtual reconstitution of an archaeological site will help reveal some of the current trends in this field.

Keywords

Virtual Environment, Relocation, Remediation, Technical Reproducibility, Patrimonialization, Digitalization, Displacement

1. Introduction

The aim of this contribution is to create deeper links between two apparently distant phenomena that nevertheless display a “family resemblance”. The first is patrimonialization - the act of safeguarding entities in order to transmit them by giving them a value and a meaning linked to a past¹. The second is *relocation* - a concept originating from media studies, theorized by Francesco Casetti and used to explain the migration of artistic experiences in other places from those for which they were originally conceived. We shall develop some ideas about the concepts at stake in this field: the notion of relocation, of patrimonialization but also of mechanical reproduction which is at the heart of these issues. We will then use the analysis of a case of digital reproduction where immersiveness was the aim of a modification to the physical conditions of a patrimonial experience. More specifically, we will discuss a virtual visit of an archaeological site involving a digital experiment and work carried out by students in digital communication and computer science. This particular case should enable us to better understand some of the issues at stake in the field of the relocation of cultural

heritage. More specifically, it will highlight a dimension that is at the heart of some contemporary trends, namely the remediation of distance. One of digital reproduction's most common current goals is to overcome various kinds of distance. This dimension thus seems to be declined according to different modalities that depend on the forms of distance that we wish to overcome. We shall thus go on to discuss patrimonialization, relocation, reproduction, reconstitution, remediation and so forth.

2. Mechanical Reproduction and Relocation

Relocation intervenes in the consultation of a work or a document when these undergo a reproduction aimed at enhancing its accessibility. A technical reproduction necessarily implies a disruption of the spatial conditions in which we access the content. Once reproduced, an artifact loses its material anchoring in a given unique place. It can then be indefinitely reinstated in other environments and each time undergoes a rearrangement of the here and now that made it significant. The very idea of media as derived from the conception following on from Benjamin's work (Benjamin, 1939; Miège, 2017: 21) implies a

¹ The term “patrimonialization,” initially used in Francophone studies, refers to the historically situated projects and

procedures that transform places, people, practices and artifacts into a heritage to be protected, exhibited and highlighted (Gillot, Maffi, Tremont, 2013).

possibility of making the experience "portable". It thus becomes accessible in several places and at different times. This practice of reproducibility is at work in the digital environment in that digitization is de facto a technical reproduction. From this point of view, the heritage field is at the heart of digitization practices because the digital version of a document allows its accessibility without degrading the original material support. This responds to a need for conservation as well as transmission in the documentary field. Reproductions of archives have always existed but the digital era has made this a massively adopted practice. The question of relocation is thus obviously at stake in the field of digitization of patrimonial documents. Digitization also often implies dissemination on the web, and dissemination is often the objective of digitization. The conditions of reception which had often carefully thought out by curators can thus be overturned by a copy of the document that can be displayed everywhere, independently of the place of its conservation.

3. *Patrimonialization and Relocation*

However, the heritage field is inherently specific compared to other contexts where digitization is carried out on a large scale. The act of patrimonialization implies in itself a reorganization of space independently of reproductive practices. It is aimed at enhancing the accessibility and thus the transmission of an entity and the fact of transforming an object into a patrimonial entity will modify the topological conditions of its reception. The need to preserve the entity also implies a form of isolation from contemporary space and time to allow for its material preservation. From a semiotic point of view, Pomian has called this new object resulting from patrimonialization a "semiophore" - a "carrier of meaning" in etymological terms. Its primary function of use gives way to a purely semantic value, that of becoming a trace of a past event (Pomian, 1999). The new object resulting from revalorization will be interpreted as a sign and it will no longer be used according to its original usage function. This re-semantization is thus accompanied by a shift or displacement of the conditions of reception (Zucconi, 2018). For instance, the heritage object discussed by Pomian

no longer has a place in the house where it was used and is instead in a display case, exposed to the public of today and preserved to prevent its material degradation or, in other words, conserved (Pomian, 1990). In Walter Benjamin's terms, which are extremely useful in this context, exhibition value is privileged over cult value (the value of worship). A work of religious art, for example, will be exhibited in a museum in order to be seen by the public and will no longer be a means of worship for devoted users. The entity thus becomes an object that serves to signify a past, from an artistic or other point of view. It carries a memory, it is a "mnemophore" in Bruno Bachimont's reading of the subject, and in this sense must convey a shared meaning: its resemantization must be able to convey a common memory (Bachimont, 2021).

Technical reproduction and the act of patrimonialization thus seem to converge on one point namely a reorganization of the space which aims to enhance the accessibility of the object. A painting is photographed to make it accessible to those who will not see it in the museum. Similarly, Greek bas-reliefs are exhibited in a museum to make them visible to the national public and to preserve them from degradation for example. This ambiguity of heritage deserves to be studied. On the one hand, relocation is problematic because it de-semantizes and re-semantizes, giving a new context and therefore a new meaning to the object of the past that one wishes to transmit. On the other hand, heritage is in itself a relocation, if only temporal as patrimonialization means displacing one thing from the present to the future². In other terms it means making it accessible for coming generations by preserving it in its material terms. This in itself is a kind of relocation because it brings about a form of recontextualization.

The most important issue when we speak about recontextualisation is not the shift that the artifact undergoes in material terms but the shift in meaning that the material shift brings about. These displacements imply the refashioning of meaning which thus affect the reliability of the artifact as a trace of the past. In archival practices a problem of integrity implies the impossibility of relying on the authenticity of the record and the same can be said about all heritage artifacts. A displacement or reproduction means touching the

² "La question de l'archive n'est pas une question du passé. [...] C'est une question d'avenir, la question de l'avenir même, la

question d'une réponse, d'une promesse et d'une responsabilité pour demain" Derrida, 1996, p. 60.

material integrity of the object and thus its authenticity and reliability (Duranti, 1995; Bachimont, 2000).

The different entities we are talking about will, however, imply different issues in terms of relocation and reproduction. The conditions for the production of meaning can be questioned but it will be necessary to analyze the modalities of historical semiotization of an entity on a case-by-case basis to understand if and how relocation affects its scope. Let us take an example. The effect of meaning of a street work cannot do without the place of its production - the neighborhood and the wall where it was drawn - whereas the reading of a digitized document exhibited online can be sufficient for its function of trace, under certain conditions of editorialization. We may then affirm that a collective memory anchored in visual or textual documents can benefit from being shared through mass media in order to be transmitted and thus exist in the community. This is not always the case, of course (Treleani, 2017), but under certain conditions, the accessibility and circulation modalities of the patrimonialized entity may be acceptable.

4. *The Politically Sensitive Dimension of relocation*

In addition, one dimension of this phenomenon must be considered. It could be said that relocation has a negative connotation and criticism of it is very often severe. The African statuettes looted and locked up behind glass in a museum are an example where patrimonialization means exhibiting by "relocating" the artifact, with the consequences on the cult value of the work that Walter Benjamin had put forward concerning technical reproducibility. Patrimonialization means preserving an object in order to transmit and thus make it accessible. One consequence of this search for accessibility can be spatial displacement. A recent event is worthy of mention at this point. The Bolognese street artist, Blu, known for his monumental graffiti scattered around several world cities, erased all his works from the city of Bologna in 2016 as a provocative Dadaist gesture. He opposed the city council's idea of "taking down" some of his works to exhibit them in a museum in Bologna, the Palazzo Pepoli³, as part of an exhibition on street art. The act of the

city council was judged as an act of colonial plunder by the Bolognese writers' collective Wu Ming⁴ - precisely like the gesture of removing the African masks from their context. It was defended by the deputy for culture of Bologna city council as a patrimonial gesture, aiming at preserving works exposed to the weather and to other hazards. Blu had already erased a graffiti in Kreuzberg district of Berlin, following the gentrification of the zone and its submission to the real estate speculation. By his destructive gesture he denounces a form of relocation which desemantizes works whose inherent meaning depends on their given topological context (street art is obviously anchored in a place). This gesture of relocation is not however a gesture of technical reproduction but an act of patrimonialization. It is an act with the goal of profitability through a paying exhibition or the tourist exploitation of political works but that otherwise complies well with the criteria of heritage making - to preserve, make accessible and above all transmit through a communicational process that gives value[4]. This phenomenon was politically sensitive in the cinematographic field as well. A whole series of criticisms of off-screen films - viewing on television or on cell phones - or, on the contrary, of "off-film" works, i.e., opera performances or soccer matches screened in cinemas, are a demonstration of this. In 2010, the French Society of Film Directors, for example, launched a campaign in cinemas against the "off-film", claiming that these screenings occupy theatres by preventing the screening of less visible films. This political dimension of relocation and the criticisms associated with it make it possible to underline a broader problematic context involving the profitability of artistic forms that are unprofitable by definition, colonialism, the industrial reproduction of artistic experiences or, again, tensions between distributors, producers and authors that technical innovations only exacerbate. The phenomenon of relocation can thus be seen as a symptom making sensitive questions related to the fields involved emerge.

5. *The Relocation of the Frame of the Experience*

Even if the concept has already been used and explained above, it is now useful to make a linked

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<https://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2016/mar/17/street-artist-blu-destroys-murals-in-bologna>. The

exhibition at the Palazzo Pepoli took place in 2016 and was called: "Street Art : Bansky & Co, l'Arte allo Stato Urbano".

⁴ <https://wumingfoundation.tumblr.com/>

digression concerning the notion of relocation to understand a subtlety that will be useful to us later. Francesco Casetti uses the term relocation to define the migration of an artistic experience to a different place than the one for which it was conceived (2015). This phenomenon is becoming exponential with digital platforms. Casetti, a film theorist, analyzes relocation in the realm of cinemas. Approaching the issue through the prism of the notion of experience allows him to see the migration of the filmic object (what the experience is) in the cinematic realm but also to take into account the migration of the frame of the experience, i.e., how films are viewed. The home cinema is an example according to Casetti. The remediations in virtual reality of the cinemas are also a migration of the frame in another environment topologically and in terms of mediation. Relocation is easily understood as a displacement of an object from one place to another but it is also therefore necessary to add the possibility of moving an experiential frame and not only its object. These relocations are moreover obviously also remediations, in the sense intended by Bolter and Grusin (1999), that is to say representations of a medium by another. The relocation of the frame of the experience shows that technical reproduction is not just at work in copies of artifacts but can also intervene to reconstitute modalities of experience. In the domain of cultural heritage the subject of meaning or what was originally called "aura" by Benjamin is an important issue that is at stake. Can we affirm that we can explore a work of art by the bias of a reproduction meaning a migration of the aura? (Latour and Lowe, 2011; Buchli, 2009).

6. *Digital Reconstruction as Relocation*

A spoon, a jewel, an administrative document, a manuscript, an archaeological ruin, a church, a painting or a newspaper kept in the legal archive of periodicals do not seem to be subject to the same problems of integrity and authenticity of media. Relocation therefore implies different issues for each support, but what about digital reproduction? The digitization of a document impacts its spatial reception but what about digital reproduction in the field of street art or of archaeological sites? A current trend enables us to develop the idea. In the museum and architectural field, for at least twenty years, practices of "heritage valorization" (Baujard, 2019 and Gawin, 2019) based on the virtual reconstruction and

remote visit of historical places or exhibition sites have been carried out. These are indeed forms of digital reproductions of heritage objects and could better be called "cultural beings" according to the terms used by Yves Jeanneret (2014) but they are less easy to "digitize" than a handwritten document. These reproductions are immersive digital environments used to visit disappeared or distant sites with exhibitions mixing virtual and physical elements - what we call today mixed reality or XR: Extended Reality (Enhuber, 2015; Buell, 2017). In these cases we have reconstructions of experiences that aim to reproduce the artifacts but also the conditions of perception of these artifacts: the immersive setting aims to immerse the visitor in a perceptual environment where the reconstruction reproduces the experience in its entirety, at least from the sensorial point of view.

It is now useful to take an example to help us grasp the stakes of the relocation of heritage experiences. We will therefore analyze the experience of a virtual visit of an archaeological site. In spite of the existing history, these practices remain today experiments because of the adjustments of the virtual techniques and the adaptation of museum policies to digital developments and organizational constraints. We will therefore take an example of virtual realization which will be analyzed in its development, thus observing the process of its conception in the back and forth process between the museum institution that commissioned it and the academic entity that produced it. A great number of cases of reenactments and virtual visits exist in the museum field. Precisely like the technical reproductions analyzed by Walter Benjamin, immersive experiences are forms that have taken on a life of their own, outside of the reproduction of a given experience. Just as cinema is no longer the reproduction of a theatrical play according to Benjamin's analysis during the 1930s, immersive experiences have been able to acquire an autonomy and independence from the sites they were initially supposed to reproduce. Several examples of immersive works such as the realizations of the Atelier des Lumières have been able to demonstrate the acquired autonomy of the techniques and aesthetics proper to immersive environments. We are however interested in the phenomena of "patrimonialization" and reproduction aiming at making a site accessible in

a way that shifts with regard to its topological context.

We are now going to discuss how remediation of distances is the objective that emerges as such a production advances (see Treleani and Zucconi, 2021). This involves finding a remedy to a distance and overcoming the obstacle of the physical non-proximity between subject and object of the perception. The immersive medium is thus used in the primary sense of enabling the creation of absent things or environments. This absence can be the fruit of a lack of spatial or temporal proximity. In the theory of the media the remediation of distance is one of the reasons why the technical devices used by the cultural industries actually exist. Reproduction is the answer to the desire to make things closer namely things that should be physically distant from a spatial or temporal perspective. They may have disappeared because they belong to the past or are geographically elsewhere. Distance can be manifested geographically or historically. Remediating distance is thus a question of establishing a form of contact or of communication with separated points or of making elements of the past emerge (a photograph lets us see a distant place and also makes a memory of a past emerge). This temporal dimension only strengthens the links between relocation, remediation and patrimonialization.

7. *The Immersive Remediation of Caemenelum: Relocation and Diachronic Reconstruction*

The project was born at the Université Côte d'Azur and more specifically within the Master Degree in Digital Communication (ICCD) course under the initiative of Marcin Sobieszczanski (2015). The Museum of Archaeology of the City of Nice is located on the site of Cimiez, a hill overlooking the city where the Roman city of Caemenelum was located⁵. The site includes thermal baths and an arena. In its rooms the museum exhibits objects, statues, jewelry, utensils which probably come from the city of Caemenelum and were the subject of centuries of looting and

modifications. The site of the baths in particular has undergone several changes; a baptistery was built on one of the buildings of the baths in the 5th century. The management of the museum has signed an agreement with the Université Côte d'Azur to carry out experiments aimed at allowing digital immersive visits. At the time of writing in April 2021, two experiments have taken place. The first led to the creation of a virtual tour using an HTC Vive headset. A 3D reconstruction of the Frigidarium of the Northern Baths was created using the Unity software and two 360 videos filming the actual site⁶. The visit aimed to reconstruct the path of a bather (hot and cold rooms, small market in the thermal baths, meeting places, etc.). Materially, the public could make appointment to take the visit in the cultural mediation room of the museum.

In this case the "commitment" of the institution was to build a link between the objects inside the museum and the site outside. Some parts of the site are also inaccessible to the public. The students working on the project therefore scanned some objects, including a statue that is one of the symbols of the site - Antonia - which was in a niche of the Frigidarium which is still present today but currently empty. These digitizations appear in the visit and the user can move the objects in order to place them in the places where these objects were at a certain time⁷.

It is understandable that in the intentions of the museum institution, through the instructions of its director Bertrand Roussel, the objective of the immersive environment was to overcome a physical obstacle namely the difficulty of visiting certain places and that of connecting objects exposed in glass cases for conservation reasons with ruins outside. The virtual visit thus allows objects to be united through a kind of playful fictionalization which is almost a serious game (the user can move the statues and artifacts with joysticks). An immersive 360 degree video documentary and involving a mediator explains the use of the place by the Romans of the time. The main point of the experience remains the 3D reconstruction of one of the emblematic places of

⁵ The city of Nice, Nikaia, was founded by the Greeks, the Phoceans. Caemenelum was then founded by the Romans on the heights next to Nikaia to dominate it.

⁶ This work was carried out by the 2019/2020 class of UCA's Master ICCD and by two interns supervised by Frédéric Alemany in the framework of the association Le Hublot.

⁷ This research is linked to a project funded by SATT Nord and led at the University of Lille by Christophe Chaillou, Christl Lidl and Matteo Treleani (MAVII: Médiations Audiovisuelles Immersives et Interactives, 2019/2021) aiming at developing a Unity plug-in to facilitate some interactions for creators in a research that mobilized a back and forth process between art students, computer science students, and artists/creators. See also the thesis written by Maes Manon (2018).

the site: the Frigidarium. We thus obtain a digital space which is a simulation (O'Donnel, 2015) of ancient buildings. In order to remedy the spatial distance - the distance between the exterior and the interior - we were thus obliged to remedy the historical distance through a digital reproduction. This reproduction is more or less philologically reliable. However, clearly we cannot know the real degree of authenticity and can only rely on researchers' assumptions. In spite of the immersive objective of the experience which aims to erase the feeling of historical distance, the visit thus needs to keep a form of critical distance so that the user does not accept the reconstruction as authentic. Any reconstruction is a form of fictionalization. The project thus decided to exhibit drawings, maps, and photographs of the excavations, supposed to show the documents that led to the realization in this way and thus applying a form of mediation which should keep the user at a critical distance from the immersive experience.

We could affirm that this reconstruction is in part a form of relocation. The reconstruction aims at achieving a reinstallation in the original place. It is thus a relocation that follows an original dislocation (that of the objects scattered on the site or of the historical time having had material effects on the buildings). This example of relocation recalls certain elements of a well-studied case namely the copy of Veronese's *Wedding at Cana*. This work was reproduced and repositioned in the refectory of the convent of San Giorgio in Venice (seat of the Gini Foundation) in the place the artist had initially intended for the work and from which it had been torn. According to Latour and Lowe (2011), this operation is an example where the aura seems to detach itself from the material support of the work. Despite the fact that the work is a copy, the conditions of perception reconstituted in the place of origin mean we have a more reliable description of the work than the one "accessible" in the Louvre. In this case we have a reproduction of the work with a relocation in the original site of the experience.

A second experiment aimed to restore three eras of the baptistery. The current ruins were reconstructed using photogrammetry and the baptistery of the Christian era and the Roman Baths were reconstructed in computer graphics in three dimensions. In this second project, carried out by the class 2020/2021, the subject of historical diachrony becomes preminent. The remediation no longer aims to establish fictitious

links between distant places but instead aim to bring out the historical stratification of an archaeological site to show visitors the complexity that lies behind stones appearing to be ruins. The stones always have their own history, dating from different periods and several centuries have left a multitude of traces. The problem of a reconstruction is often that of figurativizing a past that is never unique - the so-called "Roman period" of Caemenelum lasts 500 years, for example. A reconstitution often leads us to think a singularity of the past instead of a dynamic process where an immensity of developments, destructions, reconstructions and uses can be spotted. To simplify matters, it was necessary to reduce the reconstructions to three emblematic periods (the Roman baths, the Paleo-Christian baptistery and the present ruins) but the objective of making time feel like a dynamic rather than a static state is found in the possibility of passing from one stage to another and of superimposing them.

In this case, a remediation of distances is still at work, but this time the distance is historical. What is interesting to note is the particular character of this rearrangement of space. The place changes even if we do not physically move from the geographical coordinates of the site. The temporality involved causes modifications to the functions, uses and architectural elements that surround us.

8. Conclusions: Distance and Immersiveness

Our study can be resumed in the following way. We started by analyzing the links between the phenomenon of relocation - the displacement of a work of art from one place to another - and the notion of patrimonialization. We have seen that these two phenomena are linked: "patrimonialization" often implies a displacement of heritage experience. The two processes aim in some way to enhance accessibility or more precisely to make a work or a site more effectively accessible spatially or temporally. Technical reproduction is therefore often at work in both cases. We relocate an experience that has been technically reproduced (the photo of the painting in a magazine) and we relocate heritage documents that have been digitized because they can be accessed from an apparatus other than the one initially intended for reading them. However, in the heritage field, the entities involved can be the most disparate. Often archaeological sites are thus valorized with specific techniques. The

analysis of an example of a virtual visit for an archaeological museum enabled us to highlight a third process which is often at play in this field: immersive remediation. Virtual reconstructions are carried out with the aim of showing the places as they were in the past to enhance the value of historical sites. The objective of the institutions in the case analyzed reveals itself to be that of the remediation of physical and temporal distances. Accessibility is thus always at stake from a broader point of view (one could speak of the accessibility of the past) and an immersive reconstitution makes it possible to visit a site in conditions of reception where the physical distance is remedied by immersiveness and the temporal distance by the reconstitution of the site.

The dichotomy between distance and immersion in the archaeological field is self-evident. The immersive environment is by definition a device which tends to abolish the perceptive distance between the user and the experience, at least from the point of view of the senses. These two poles are usually opposed and one of the risks of reconstitutions is often that of wanting to abolish the perceptive distance without taking into account the temporal distance that the user should nevertheless be able to feel and understand. Immersiveness is sometimes opposed to the needs of cultural mediation, proposing a kind of attraction for the senses but which makes critical distance difficult. We have seen two cases

where these immersive reconstitutions deepen the patrimonial experience. First of all, the example of re-relocation demonstrates how one can want to put objects back in certain places in order to show the changes that have taken place over time. Secondly, the reconstitution of three eras of the same place aims to bring out the diachrony of a site. Immersivity is intended to serve the remediation of the distance but actually seems to manifest this same distance by making user feel a certain vertigo linked to time and its constantly evolving dynamics. More generally, we can affirm that reproductions, displacements and relocations of cultural heritage seem to show the necessity to think heritage within a coherent framework independently from the medium used to enhance value. The interest of a virtual visit for instance is directly linked to the way it is integrated within a guided walk through a museum and linked to other documents exhibited by the institution.

The issues linked to digital technologies in the field of culture thus seem to highlight some key points in the domain of heritage. Relocation for instance is a problematic point in the field of heritage independently from the processes of mechanical reproducibility. In a non-deterministic perspective, we can therefore affirm that technique is not what produces change, but it actualizes ongoing trends and contributes to making them visible.

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