

The Museum of Digital Human Kind

Renato Parascandolo & Michele Melega

World 3 Editorial Office

Italy

I would like to thank the PNC and the Governors of Berkeley and Stanford for allowing us to share with you our experience of building a cross-cultural virtual museum, the World3 Museum. This conference might be for Rai, the platform for future possible partnerships with many of the academic institutions which are here represented.

Although everyone recognises the inevitability of a rational comparison of cultural experiences in the world, the meeting between different civilisations has been, and is still, marked by a levelling of customs and expressive forms, or by the loss of historical memory: each civilisation exchanges its defects, its worse aspects, rather than its virtues.

Such impoverishment leads to spiritual desertification and to the loss of the highest cultural and religious particularities of each people. On the other hand, and like the other face of the same coin, there is an increase in manifestations of intolerance, which give rise to ever more strident political, economic, ethnic and religious conflicts.

It is these reflections which have given rise to the idea of World3, an enterprise which aims to bring together the best that the different civilisations have produced, as the inevitable premise of an authentic encounter between peoples and cultures on the road that could lead humanity to overcoming its current contradictions, and recognising its essential unity based on shared values.

This project is not born with the intent of creating an archive of the testimony of primitive civilisations, nor simply to construct a "virtual" museum", but to unfold the map of the world and to recognise the universal stories in the plurality of their voices and their cultures.

The Museum

The World3 museum has a multimedia structure. The works that comprise it will be distributed through all available means of communication: television, video cassette, CD Rom, the Internet, radio, books and notes, compact discs etc.

This original way of interpreting multimedia will consider the entire international system of communications as a single great "integrated network", similar to an orchestra, in which understanding, knowledge and communication unfold as in a polyphonic composition based on the overlapping and superimposition of autonomous elements. Following this metaphor, each medium of this great network is like an instrument in an orchestra. The multimedia work is thus conceived as a musical composition, which assigns each instrument a part, based on its specific characteristics.

World3

According to the philosopher Karl Popper's famous definition, World3 is the field of cultural objects produced by human ingenuity, as opposed to that of material objects (World1) and that of mental states (World2).

World3, therefore, encompasses languages, philosophical systems, physical laws, works of art, mathematical theorems, architectural masterpieces, poetry and music. This Museum of Digital Humankind will make the loftiest manifestations of thought and art available to all the citizens of the world.

However, the goal is not to reconstruct the Library of Alexandria for the computer age. The disease which tends to infect computer archives, that of excess, must be taken into account. An unending mass of documents, without any hierarchy, disorients and atrophies critical judgement. Counteracting this tendency is a difficult and delicate, but unavoidable, task, which is why we have chosen to create a highly selective archive of the works which best represent the genius of humankind according to universal, shared criteria.

The Council of Forty

The construction of this cultural crossroads has been entrusted to an international council of forty eminent personalities from the five continents. Men and women of great "wisdom" for whom science, culture and art are closely connected to their respect for universal ethical principles, common to all great civilisations, and to their respect for the Rights of Man, and thus not limited to a merely specialist conception. This international committee of experts or "sages" which has chosen the works for the World3 museum, constitutes the council of Forty which meets every year in Naples and Venice, to assess the results so far attained and to select and approve new multimedia publishing projects in harmony with the inspiration and purpose of World3.

Each of the Forty has indicated ten works which in his or her opinion are most representative of the different civilisations in the fields of the visual arts, architecture, the sciences, philosophy, literature, music, history, the theatre etc. The texts and comments that accompany the four hundred works will be translated into the major languages of the world: Arabic, Chinese, English, French, German, Italian, Japanese, Russian and Spanish.

The hermeneutic bridges

The word "museum" inspires a sense of something static, of conservation. World3, on the other hand, wishes to be the starting point for new multimedia works, for cultural and scientific projects and initiatives, in which young people from all over the world will participate and co-operate.

One clearly can not assume that to encourage the spread of culture it suffices to deposit artistic masterpieces and works of genius in a data bank and make it available to all. Linguistic barriers and, even more importantly, epistemological chasms impede the understanding of these works. The great distances, by no means bridged by schools or the mass media, that separate civilisations, individual arts and disciplines make anything other than a trivial, reductive understanding of works from other traditions extremely difficult.

This is why it was deemed necessary to offer the four hundred works of the World3 Museum with a series of interpretative links: the "hermeneutic bridges". Thus we have entrusted the task of constructing introductions, explanations and interpretations of the individual works to scholars from the different linguistic areas. The goal is to make the works comprehensible to "visitors" from the various cultural traditions.

For example, The Divine Comedy, translated into each of the major languages of the world, will be accompanied by introductions and explanations in each language. There will be a presentation by an American literary critic for Americans who wish to understand Dante Alighieri's masterpiece and another by a Japanese critic for the Japanese public etc. The same applies to mathematics, music or architecture. A multitude of hermeneutic bridges will bring the chosen works alive and make them easier to assimilate.

Naturally, the hermeneutic bridges do not consist solely of a series of written commentaries. Multimedia technology allows the works to be accessed in various ways: Don Quixote, for example, could be approached through its motion picture version even before it is read; the theatrical version of Oedipus Rex could be watched while following the text in

translation or in its original ancient Greek; one could listen to a Beethoven symphony while following the notes of the score or passages from films dedicated to the composer. Several television cameras, positioned in museums or in the vicinity of monuments selected by the Council of Forty and connected via the Internet, could create a stimulating continuity between the virtual and the real visit.

In short, the works which make up the World3 Museum will be approached by different levels so that they become accessible to those from other cultures and other civilisations.

The architecture of the World3 museum

The World3 museum has not been conceived following naturalistic criteria. As opposed to factual reality, which requires choices to be made, virtual reality permits a multiplicity of configurations of the same object. In this case one must imagine a polymorphic architecture, structure and internal organisation of the museum and the routes through it.

The overall plan of the work contemplates projects, has many editions as there are means of communication: series of video cassettes, of television programmes, CD Roms, printed editions etc., each complete in itself but to also integrable with other version in different media. For example, the Internet version could be visited through "pavilions", each named after one of the "sages", with a specific architecture and different environments and routes through them. Obviously, each visitor would be able to choose the language and signs on the pavilions and works.

Each of the "sages" presides over his or her pavilion and guides the visitors, welcoming them and indicating the works they have chosen and the reasons guiding their choice. They may also receive questions, requests for more information and comments from visitors to their pavilion via e-mail.

But World3 can also be visited by geographic location. In this case the pavilions will gather the works together according to their provenance, independently of when they were produced and the nationality of the "sage" who chose them.

A third means of access is through a historical journey. In this case the museum would be arranged by century and each pavilion would house the works of a particular period, independently of place of origin.

A fourth itinerary follows them by affinities between the works: one can move through

the realm of ideas, where one encounters the great texts of philosophical and mathematical thought or the realm of representation, where one could find with the visual arts, literature, music, the theatre etc. In the realm of life one finds history and the description of relationships among people from politics to ethics and religion. The realm of nature contains scientific observations and reflections and the realm of objects includes monuments, manufactured objects, tools etc.

A further criterion is that of apparent causality; the works follow one another by free hypermedia association, and the visit to the museum is presented each time as an ever changing adventure.

Monuments and Squares

Many of the chosen works are extremely difficult. It is unthinkable to exclude monuments of knowledge such as Einstein's "Theory of Relativity" or Hegel's "Phenomenology of the Spirit". There probably will not be many visitors who will venture directly into reading these texts, but they will nevertheless be visible to all, like monuments in a square.

And monuments surround benches, statues, gardens, cafés and fill the space around them. These "urban furnishings" are what we have called "hermeneutic bridges".

Adorning and embellishing the square like a stage with multimedia "hermeneutic bridges" means making them attractive to visitors who, attracted by the surroundings which serve as a preparatory function, will find themselves, sooner or later, lingering in front of the original monument, and visiting it.

Patrons and Partners

World3 is produced by RAI EDUCATIONAL with scientific advice from the Italian Institute of Philosophical Studies.

World3 is the natural successor to the Multimedia Encyclopaedia of Philosophical Science, a work born in 1987, which the eminent German philosopher Hans-Georg Gadamer presented in the following way: "I believe that the initiative taken by RAI, to give new life to the dialogue with the great philosophers of the past and to include this dialogue in its programming, is a magnificent idea". Produced by RAI EDUCATIONAL in collaboration with the Italian Institute of Philosophical Studies and the Institute of the Italian

Encyclopaedia, this Encyclopaedia brought together the most authoritative philosophers and scientists of our time. It is recognised by and enjoys the patronage of many prestigious institutes, both national and international: the President of the Italian Republic, the Supreme Pontiff, the President of the European Parliament, the President of the General Assembly of the United Nations, and UNESCO, which distributes it worldwide in many languages.'

Project and executive director

Renato Parascandolo

Rai Educational

The Council of Forty:

Karl Otto Apel	Germany
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Pina Bausch	Germany
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THE ITALIAN INSTITUTE OF PHILOSOPHICAL STUDIES

The scientific direction of World3 has been entrusted to the Italian Institute of Philosophical Studies, one of the most prestigious cultural institutions in Europe, which has operated from Naples since 1975. The aim of the Institute is to promote not only philosophical studies, but all those studies that can contribute to bringing cultures and societies together, organising meetings between scientists, historians and philosophers from all over the world, in a spirit of international co-operation. Its goal is to reconnect the humanities with the natural sciences and with all the various forms of artistic expression, because only a renewed unity of knowledge and a solid cohesion of the theoretical world with the practical and civil world can unleash the intellectual and moral energy needed to confront the great and pressing problems of modern society. The Institute has taken on the responsibility, among others, of indicating the personalities who constitute the "Council of Forty".

RAI EDUCATIONAL

RAI EDUCATIONAL is a new sector of RAI, the Italian State television, born out of what is now a need widely recognised within the company to put the means of mass communication at the service of culture, social growth, of learning and of permanent education. This Department has a multimedia structure, exploiting the various media, from terrestrial to satellite television, from radio to the Internet, from video cassettes to CD Roms and books, availing itself of the most diverse expressive means at different levels of sophistication. RAI EDUCATIONAL has regular contacts with schools, universities, cultural institutions, publishing houses and public and private cultural centres in Italy and abroad.