A Reply to Fulvio Mazzocchi's "Diving Deeper into the Concept of 'Cultural Heritage' and Its Relationship with Epistemic Diversity"

Aleksandra Łukaszewicz, Szczecin Art Academy, Poland,
aleksandra.lukaszewicz.alcaraz@akademiasztuki.eu

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Fulvio Mazzocchi's article "Diving Deeper into the Concept of 'Cultural Heritage' and its Relationship with Epistemic Diversity" (2022) presents a very well-weighted and interesting proposal on cultural heritage. Here, I want to praise the way Mazzocchi approaches tangible and intangible cultural heritage as essentially intertwined, transcending the classical European dualisms of mind and matter, culture and nature.

Defining Cultural Heritage

Initially, Mazzocchi presents a brief history of gradual development in defining cultural heritage—based on documents regarding cultural heritage from UNESCO—starting from the material assets having some specific artistic features or values for the culture of humankind (the Venice Charter 1964, the UNESCO Recommendations of New Delhi 1956), recognizing apart from the cultural heritage also the natural heritage that needs to be protected (World Heritage Convention adopted in 1972 by the General Conference of UNESCO), and acknowledging the existence of intangible heritage apart from the tangible (the Washington Charter from 1987, the Paris Recommendations from 1989, the Burra Charter from 1982, the Krakow Charter from 2000, and Intangible Cultural Heritage Convention, ICHC, adopted by the General Conference of UNESCO in 2003).

According to the ICHC, "intangible heritage encompasses, among others, knowledge systems, arts and crafts, rituals, and social practices, together with tangible items like instruments, objects, and living spaces, which are linked to their accomplishment" (Mazzocchi 2022, 395). In this perspective, Mazzocchi's argument that the cultural diversity of knowledge should be recognized as a value which needs to be protected, because it can serve as an adaptive resource for dealing with reality in the future (without designing yet a specific set of norms and rules that should be followed for the realization of this idea), I consider to be valid.

The aim of my reply to Mazzocchi's article is to:

> 1. Support his point of view on epistemic diversity, analyzing it on the discursive level in reference to Richard Rorty, and on the metaphysical level in reference to Ludwig Wittgenstein;

> 2. Pose additional questions on the lack of criteria for recognizing which epistemic systems will help us to deal with the future, and how;

> 3. Show that this lack of fixed criteria is a condition shared to a certain extent also with other newly acknowledged fields of cultural heritage, for example virtual artworks—pointing at the fixation on materiality of cultural heritage in the Eurocentric perspective (which is slowly eroding, to humanity's common good.)

1. Development of Understanding of Cultural Heritage—From Pure Materiality to Embodied Epistemic Systems

The very first definitions of cultural heritage included in the Venice Charter (1964, Introduction) followed UNESCO Recommendations of New Delhi from 1956 and 1962, focusing on historic and artistic characteristics of material heritage, and on natural settings and man-made environments having cultural or aesthetic meaning. After the recognition of the existence of both cultural heritage as well as natural, an emphasis on the necessity of preservations of natural settings developed. The Convention Concerning the Protection of World, Cultural, and Natural Heritage (adopted in 1972 by the General Conference of UNESCO) merged the necessity to preserve both cultural and natural assets for future generations, approaching natural heritage as encompassing:

> … [N]atural features (i.e., physical and biological formations), geological and physiographical formations, as well as areas representing the habitat of threatened species, together with natural sites, all of which are also of outstanding universal value from an aesthetic, scientific, or conservational point of view (Mazzocchi 2022, 394).

This undoubtedly commendable development in defining the idea of heritage inspired positive critique of being Eurocentric, focused on materiality and judgements of professional experts, which stimulated its further development. Such can be seen in the Washington Charter (1987) and the Paris Recommendations (1989) which took aboard both tangible and intangible assets, declaring the necessity to consider and safeguard both. Next, a very important step was the adoption of the Convention for the Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage (Intangible Heritage Convention, ICHC) by the General Conference of UNESCO in 2003, stating that indigenous communities should be involved in the process of preserving their intangible cultural heritage, and that it is important to keep vitality in these cultural systems and not approach them as fossils, but as submerged in a process of constant transformation and dissolution (Łukaszewicz Alcaraz; Glowaczewski 1999, 3-9).

The development of reflection on cultural heritage shows that "heritage is embodied in people, and its creation and maintenance depend on the social structure" (Mazzocchi 2022, 395), which allows one to trace visible tensions between what is local and global, without reduction of one to the other. This also allows Mazzocchi to focus more on the plurality of knowledge systems, constituting part of the definition of intangible heritage.

2. Epistemic Diversity in Light of Richard Rorty's Ideas of Contingency and Irony, and Ludwig Wittgenstein's Definitions of Language

The acceptance of epistemic pluralism is necessarily anti-Eurocentric, or even anti-Anthropocentric, recognizing the possibility of various knowledge arrangements and their relations to the reality of specific settings and communities. It is very well and wisely said by Mazzocchi that there are many knowledge pathways developed somewhat independently and not reducible to one another, or put normatively: "there are different ways of being epistemically successful" (402), or there are "plurality of ways of knowing (e.g., knowledge pluralism) that are expressions of different yet still existing and vital socio-cultural niches" (401). Cultural diversity then involves genuine epistemic diversity that should be protected

for human common good, although there exists no singular valid criteria for epistemic success, nor only one correct way of rationalizing the world.

Acceptance of such epistemic plurality requires a relativist point of view on systems of knowledge embedded in various cultural, historical, and environmental contexts. This must be possible to self-relate in argumentation, and Mazzocchi's perspective passes this test—it presents itself as the perspective and not the fully objective part of the truth. As a theorist he suspends his own culturally-shaped beliefs and takes them "ironically" as Richard Rorty would say it: that is, not resigning from one's own beliefs, but not trying either to enforce them on others by treating them as universal and absolute truth.

Knowledge systems as argued by Mazzocchi are analogous to a deep extent to the discourses and vocabularies as described by Richard Rorty. In *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity*, Rorty writes that "what matters in the end are changes in the vocabulary rather than changes in belief, changes in truth-value candidates rather than assignments of truth-value" (47-48) that should be approached as coherent worldviews and ways of expressing them, helping us to operate in the world. The developments of science and philosophy are, from Rorty's perspective, innovations in our descriptive capabilities, in what we can say and think, but not the constant discovery of the objective truth. This is similarly taken up by Mazzocchi, who argues further that certain knowledge arrangements and/or systems of beliefs are culturally valuable, historically meaningful, embodied in contemporary communities, and that they should be valued both intrinsically for themselves and for their value emerging from contribution to cultural diversity. This value he calls "epistemic diversity" can be seen as an emergent feature, ensuring "a greater adaptive ability to the entire humankind" (401).

The descriptive thesis of knowledge pluralism is that there is a link between cultural diversity and the multiplicity of knowledge pathways, that epistemic diversity can be taken up in two ways, either:

> 1) Weak, there are many knowledge pathways developed somewhat independently and not reducible to one another; or
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> 2) Normative, "there are different ways of being epistemically successful" (402). They form together a kind of "a polycentric space, (i.e., an archipelago made of multiple epistemic islands … [with] multiple epistemic traditions, which all are legitimate and credible in their own right" (402) and should be protected for the common good according to Mazzocchi.

A knowledge system in this light is not just representing the outer world, but is an interpretable system of dealing with it. Unlike Wittgenstein's *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, where each word, phrase, or sentence is representing something (Wittgenstein 1960), it is rather more similar to the consideration developed in *Philosophical Investigations* (Wittgenstein 1953), where each word, phrase, or sentence is treated as a tool for doing something, for exerting some action onto the world and others in a kind of a language game embedded in social and environmental relations. Mazzocchi is in a way moving the reflection on another meta level, where systems of knowledge are treated as tools for achieving something, and

can be perceived also in combination as "an archipelago made of multiple epistemic islands" to be protected. The whole system of knowledge then can be perceived to a certain extent as a toolbox for dealing with something—for example, with natural surroundings, ancestors, or technological functionality, depending on how we set our objectives.

3. The Lack of Criteria for Recognizing which Epistemic Systems Help Us Deal with the Future

The main point of the article by Mazzocchi is that we should preserve cultural diversity also in the field of knowledge: that is, we should not just mind existence but also preserve epistemic pluralism and diversity, because it assures more adaptive forces for the future (in which we do not know what awaits us.) Feeling that the world of our beliefs is shaking in its foundations. Mazzocchi engages himself theoretically with the past in light of the future. Of course, neither Mazzocchi nor anybody else can tell yet which knowledge pathways can serve us better in the future, because nobody knows what exactly is awaiting us. However, plurality, diversity, and interconnectedness of knowledge may help us deal with problems emerging along the way as we move forward.

For these problems, there is the need to support epistemic diversity in various knowledge paths including beliefs, approaches, and practices to assure the needed epistemic resources for dealing with an unpredictable future. This shows off Mazzocchi's deep openness to the Other, holding a different system of beliefs and distance from his own position, but it does not offer any kind of criteria that might be useful in thinking about the future and how to adjust to it on the epistemic level. This situation we can acknowledge positively, stating that there cannot be these kinds of (fixed) categories, and we should instead rely on the dynamics of life and evolution not to impose solutions but to support potentiality as a resource for adaptation to changing circumstances; and negatively, calling for more formal arrangements of the forms of protecting epistemic diversity, for example by UNESCO conventions.

Of course, mindful life and evolution are not perceived just on the biological level, because evolution encompasses what is natural and what is cultural as two moments of the same process (biology is culturally informed, culture is embodied, and human persons are biological and cultural simultaneously). Culture also includes what is technological, complicating the differentiation of tangible and intangible heritage (to which issue I come back in the last paragraph of my response), allowing for further questions that may be posed to Mazzocchi's view on epistemic diversity and the need of its preservation. The questions are on the status of the knowledge generated by means of operation of NLP algorithmic technologies, and within that the GPT3 language model (Maciąg 2022).

The GPT3 language model allows for generating texts, as answers to general questions, briefings of the texts presented, drawing conclusions on the basis of provided data, etc. reaching substantive level of human texts or even exceeding it. Therefore, it is reasonable to ask about the status of knowledge produced in this way: can epistemic agents such as the GPT3 language model construe an epistemic system as such, or are they only adding portions of knowledge to the human type of knowledge? Who owns this new knowledge being produced? Should this new knowledge belong to the common heritage of humanity or of transhumanity, of some community of algorithms? And should it be protected? The kind

of framework Mazzocchi is proposing is not giving us tools for responding to these questions, though it allows us to ask them justifiably.

With technological aspects of contemporary cultural reality there appears one more set of problems. One of them results from transcending the differentiation on tangible and intangible cultural heritage by virtual artworks—both digitized objects, secondarily uploaded to the digital space, and digital-born three-dimensional objects created by artists and meaningfully existing in some virtual space like Museum of Other Realities, described as an immersive multiplayer art showcase in VR.[1] The artworks one perceives while walking through the Museum of Other Realities, which are accessible from any place in the world by VR headset and a free online application, are immersive. The perceiver may walk around the artworks, get closer to and farther from them, go inside them, change their shape, and activate sounds with hand movements, sensing them in a certain respect. These artworks are neither material nor immaterial. They are materially different from physical objects in everyday life, being elaborated through a matter of digital rather than physical characteristics. It is reasonable to say then that though they are material in some sense, they should belong to intangible cultural heritage. However, their intangibility is only a relative category, because when they are considered from within the physical space they can be treated as intangible— yet considering from within the virtual space, they are tangible and can be touched or moved in this space.

However, putting aside the sensible mode of existence and of experiencing virtual artworks, it is important to stress that physical intangibility of virtual artworks goes hand in hand with the fact that they do not occupy a specific physical space that may be claimed as belonging to a certain national group (von Schorlemer 2020, 43). This is the difficulty of recognizing their affiliation to some country, which UNESCO recognizes as one of the challenges faced by digital cultural heritage (UNESCO 2015). Nevertheless, UNESCO in the Charter on the Preservation of Digital Heritage, already recognized the need to protect digital cultural heritage that consists of "unique resources of human knowledge and expression" such as "cultural, educational, scientific and administrative resources, as well as technical, legal, medical and other kinds of information", provided that these resources were created digitally or converted into digital format from existing analogue resources" (Art. 1 2009). These resources are considered of enduring value and importance to humanity, though there are various problems related to the specific requirements for preservation of this kind of cultural heritage.

Cultural heritage, at the end of the day, is the cultural heritage of humanity as such, and if there is a need to redefine traditional concepts of materiality, community, property, and others, in order to get a grasp on this expansively growing kind of cultural heritage, this is what should be done. Nevertheless, there are also other questions that appear along the way and I shall pose just one more of them. If in the process of creation of virtual artworks there are involved apart from humans also another agents, like algorithms, or robots, should these artworks pertain to cultural heritage of humanity or of transhumanity—that is, persons

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[1] https://www.museumor.com.

embodied in bodies that are not just individuals of the homo sapiens species, but functioning on social, cultural, and ethical levels as persons—or some even wider community?

Extrapolating Mazzocchi's questions on cultural heritage, especially on epistemics, related to a specific group, we ask then: to whom should we ascribe the appurtenance of certain technological, algorithmic knowledge formations and certain virtual artworks, and who should evaluate them—communities, countries, humanity, transhumanity or at the end of the day, international institutions? This is a problematic situation, because the ownership of part of humanity's cultural heritage in the form of some knowledge system cannot be easily ascribed to a certain group, though it can be objectified, privatized, and commodified by private companies owning software for preservation and access to this part of the cultural heritage (von Schorlemer 2020). Unfortunately, these problems exceed the possibilities of this paper, opening it up to future development also in other fields, like in the case of including into cultural heritage artworks created and/or existing in virtual environments (Champion 2014), that—due to other reasons—also are difficult to manage by individual countries, causing them to slip outside of the regulations on cultural heritage.

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