

## Documentarisation and post-modernity: documentary collections and communities of imagination

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One of the characteristics of post-modernity, with its increasing patterns of urbanisation and migration, is the need for each person to re-define a novel material environment making it possible to sustain the imaginative powers required to have continuous access to cultural works as well as exercising one's own creativity: this has become a prerequisite for adapting successfully to the surrounding territory. This material environment is becoming increasingly private, specific and mobile. The home environment is extended by instruments giving mobile access to works of all kinds which appeal to the active imagination at both individual and collective level, making everyday life more meaningful and giving people scope for reinforcing their sense of identity by joining new virtual transnational communities sharing a common imaginary space (Appadurai).

The advantage of documents is that they can go on being *re-documentarised*, which gives both individuals and collectives a hitherto unequalled degree of autonomy. In a previous study (Zacklad 2005), we described documents as semiotic productions which are transcribed or recorded on a perennial *documentarised* substrate giving them attributes which make them re-usable. Documents do not consist only of written texts, since they also include multimedia productions of all kinds, such as graphic and photographic works, audio and video cassettes, CDs, DVDs, video games, etc., as well as objects manufactured for artistic purposes, liturgic objects, and instruments which have been dissociated from the practical ends they were intended to serve and used for more semiotic purposes (see S. Briet).

Documentarisation can be carried out in two different ways, namely on internal or external lines (Zacklad 2005). In the first case, the material basis of the substrate is adapted to give users access to the various parts of the semiotic content, based on a given editorial scheme. In the second case, the material basis of the substrate is adapted so that the content can be classified and stored in collections or archives. In this context, a process of re-documentarisation occurs when beneficiaries are able to re-work the semiotic contents, depending on their own interpretation and whether the material is approached on internal lines (extracting parts of musical pieces and re-combining them with other extracts, or making annotations in a book suggesting different ways of reading that book, for example) or using the external approach (putting together a collection, archives, or a community's catalogue in which the combined resources of several collectors are listed).

To analyse re-documentarisation practices properly, it might be necessary to review all the private documentary collections forming the personal material environment of the actors, which contributes to shaping the contours of their selves in the open, changing societies generated by contemporary forms of globalisation. In the first step towards achieving this aim, it is proposed to roughly classify personal documents into six broad categories, based on the contents of the archives drawn up at people's homes using the various personal digital storage devices available:

- Administrative documents (the proof of administrative and commercial transactions);

- Cultural documents:
  - Leisure activities (novels, music, films, photos, various artistic interests);
  - Current affairs (newspapers, magazines, etc.);
  - Liturgical practices (books and objects relating to religion);
  - Intellectual topics (encyclopedias, scientific publications, books in the fields of philosophy and the human sciences);
- Technical information about the use of tools and machines, and practical information of various kinds (manufacturers' instructions, recipe books, etc.).

The success of the integration process seems to depend directly in communities of imagination on the ability to set up collections of leisure oriented cultural documents, which digitization has made even easier nowadays. Generally speaking, collections have always had two functions: a cognitive function associated with the need to define corpuses of works by the same author or by different authors pursuing similar esthetic goals, and a social function corresponding to the need to define the contours of communities of imagination: by pooling works of certain kinds, they create a reference corpus reflecting the development of the collective imaginary space in question.

The development of digital documents has made it easier for each actor to draw up hybrid collections of leisure oriented cultural documents focusing on his own favourite topics and use them to join a whole range of communities of imagination. The possibility of developing many different collections in this way makes the post-modern citizen an enlightened amateur and an eclectic believer who permanently re-shapes the frontiers of his self and his level of participation in communities of imagination defining his identity. A documentary collection can therefore be said to be an instrument which can be used both by communities to define the basic representations shared by their members, and by individuals to systematically explore selected imaginary spaces by investing in some of them with various levels of consistency, perseverance and loyalty.