



MAP for ID

Experiences, Developments and Reflections

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“Intercultural dialogue is a process that comprises an open and respectful exchange or interaction between individuals, groups and organizations with different cultural backgrounds or world views. Among its aims are: to develop a deeper understanding of diverse perspectives and practices; to increase participation and the freedom and ability to make choices; to foster equality; and to enhance creative processes.”

MAP for ID

Museums as Places for Intercultural Dialogue

This European partnership project, supported by the Lifelong Learning Programme of the European Union in the years 2007-2009, aimed to develop the potential and practice of museums as places of intercultural dialogue and to promote a more active engagement with the communities they serve.

The project has:

- Created a **research group** made up by the museums involved in the project: good practice case studies have been identified and analysed them with the intention of extracting the elements that make them commendable and transferable to other contexts;
- **Shared the outcomes of the research group** to European museum professionals via a written report and a conference (10 June 2008, Bologna);
- Involved umbrella organisations to further disseminate these materials and initiate and supported **30 new pilot projects at local, regional and national level** that have put the guidelines developed by the research group into practice;
- **Analysed and disseminated the outcomes** of the 30 projects through:
 - a **final conference** (13-17 October 2009, Madrid)
 - the **publication “Museums as places for intercultural dialogue”** S. Bodo, K. Gibbs, M. Sani (eds)
 - a **new publication** – one year after the official ending of MAP – to record the ongoing developments of intercultural activities inside the museums and research projects supported by MAP. **“MAP for ID. Experiences, Developments, Reflections”** M. Pereira, A. Salvi, M. Sani, L. Villa (eds.)



in collaborazione con





“Ornament is not a sport practised with lines”.

Working hypothesis for a documentation record of demoethnoanthropologic heritage

Luca Villa

Background

The European project *MAP for ID – Museums as Places for Intercultural Dialogue* helped creating a network of museum institutions engaged in the development of innovative practices of interpretation and display. The project, aimed at developing new languages for the representation of museum collections in an intercultural key resulting from participatory modes of collaboration with audiences, took many different strands due to the specificity of the museums involved and of the selected projects. In the case of non-European ethnographic heritage MAP for ID holds a particular significance, as we are dealing with objects which entered the

museum world through connections, relationships, misrepresentations established and performed by collectors. Artefacts, in other words, were classified in the framework of European cultural and semantic categories not necessarily recognised in the place of origin, to the point that their meaning often radically changed. Further errors and misrepresentations were caused by the displacement of some ethnographic collections to other museums and permanent collections, and the subsequent documentation work carried out by staff with no specific competence in the objects' cultural context of origin.


In this light, the strategies adopted by many MAP for ID pilot projects with a view to representing a

given culture – whether dominant or minority, local or “other” – through the use of storytelling and first-hand cultural knowledge, where visitors are invited to interact in order to learn about different points of view and in some cases to question their own, are highly beneficial for extra-European heritage. Since in this case it is not possible to draw from residual cultural experiences, changes occurred in European societies can help explore these practices through the cooperation of “new citizens”. There is a growing body of good practice examples in museums across Europe, including Italy (as shown in the papers published in this volume), whose key concern is to promote the direct involvement of audiences and cultural mediators coming from the places where the objects on display originated. These projects share the same goal of giving an alternative interpretation of ethnographic collections – one that better responds to contemporary age, and is not limited to a historical or historicised perspective. These practices, at least judging from the positive feedback of museum professionals involved in some of MAP for ID pilot projects, could provide a useful model for any Italian museum preserving and displaying ethnographic collections, and willing to respond to the growing presence of second-generation immigrants, whose multiple identities pose a complex challenge in terms of cultural rights, recognition and representation.

The documentation record

The model presented in this essay¹ is intended as a useful tool for those institutions interested in making an impact on the present through their historical collections – as should be the case with any

ethnographic collection. In fact, wherever possible, anthropology is a science working on present culture. In this sense, the documentation record described in the following paragraphs is nothing more than an interlocutory evolution from one way of conceiving ethnographic collections to another. The way it was conceived values the experience of three fundamental actors: those who collected the artefacts, those who subsequently put them on display, and those who, today, can help us expand our understanding through first-hand knowledge of the use and significance of objects. The first two sections of the documentation record, therefore, refer to the *context of appropriation* and to the *context of display* of the artefact: in the former, essential information is provided on the collector, on his/her expertise regarding the cultural traditions represented in the collected artefacts, and the motivations for documenting those traditions through the collection of tangible objects (in this case, information drawn from catalogues and bibliographic references on the cultural context in which the collector operated is essential); in the latter, the focus is on the different ways in which the object was represented over time (through visual documentation such as historical pictures and relevant bibliography). The third section of the documentation record, referring to the *context of belonging*, throws light on the individual memory of the storyteller, rather than the collector or museum professional – the “storyteller” being the cultural mediator who reflects on the function and meaning of the object from his/her own perspective, generating a new sense of “belonging”. This section may also turn

MAP for ID DOCUMENTATION RECORD	
SIDE A	
IMAGE	TECHNICAL DATA
 <p>FIG. 9</p>	<p>Museum: Ethnographic Missionary Museum</p> <p>Collection: Capuchin friars Emilia-Romagna</p> <p>Inventory number: India-260</p> <p>Definition: Dancing Ganesha</p> <p>Other definition: Nritta Ganesha</p> <p>height: 17,1 cm. length: width: 6,8 cm. (base) thickness: - circumference: - other: -</p>
HISTORY OF THE OBJECT	
FOR THE MUSEUM	<p style="text-align: center;">Context of appropriation</p> <p>From the handwritten inventory of the Capuchin friars' Indian Museum (1912): "Brass figure of Ganesa (goddess of wealth)"</p>
	<p style="text-align: center;">Context of exposition</p> <p>From the Guide to the Indian-African Museum of the Capuchin friars in Imola (1977): "Small sculptures representing Indian deities, such as goddess Kali". Label associated with the present image. Guide compiled by Father Celso Mariani, in collaboration with Father Cirillo Pisi, missionary in India for 34 years, and Antonio Corbara.</p>
FOR THE STORY-TELLER	<p style="text-align: center;">Context of belonging</p> <p>"In every Hindu household there is a small shrine, a place to perform <i>pujas</i> [ceremonies of the Hindu ritual, <i>author's note</i>]... I make my daily <i>puja</i> also in Italy. I take a shower, because in our tradition we usually take a shower in the morning and then perform the <i>puja</i>... Every day I pray for about five-ten minutes, we meditate, we pray and then make the <i>puja</i>, we light incense sticks and candles... and then we pray to the deity... We have three or four [in our home shrine in Italy, <i>author's note</i>]... Lakshmi, Ganesha, Shiva".</p>
Date	<p style="text-align: center;">Biographical note on the story-teller</p> <p>Born in Bhopal (Madhya Pradesh, India), he is forty and has been living in Italy, Bologna, with his wife and a 6-year old daughter since 1998. He is an Ayurvedic doctor.</p>

MAP for ID DOCUMENTATION RECORD	
SIDE B	
CORRELATED IMAGES	DATA
See fig. 8	Picture taken in Varanasi in 2009
CORRELATED HISTORIES	
<p style="text-align: center;">Context of appropriation</p> <p>From <i>The anthropologist's profession</i>, by Marc Augé (Bollati Boringhieri, 2007): "A substantial part of the early ethnology has been missionary: this doesn't mean it was short-sighted or blind, but moved by an aprioristic notion channelling analysis in a certain direction... Results have been brilliant at times, as in the case of Jesuit missionaries in China, but always inscribed in the perspective of a religious universalism, i.e. opposed to the spirit of a scientific perspective".</p> <p>According to archive information, the Capuchin friars' collection of Bologna and Romagna was started around 1910. Although missionaries in India (1890-1970) used documentation records, no trace of them was left neither in the archive, nor in the above-mentioned inventory, which confirms the substantial lack of interest on the part of missionaries of that time in understanding the local religious culture. With specific reference to Hinduism, this lack of awareness is witnessed by the missionaries' correspondence with Italy, as shown by statements such as: "... so diverse in theory as well as in practice, that it doesn't have neither [a univocal, <i>author's note</i>] symbol of faith, nor [a univocal, <i>author's note</i>] ethical code. As for God, they say that you yourself are God, or that you are part of God, or that you are neither God nor part of God, but your existence is eternal" [Zelatore, December 1915, p. 116]</p>	
<p style="text-align: center;">Context of exposition</p> <p>From the Ethnographic Missionary Museum's catalogue record compiled by Luca Villa (2009): "The image of dancing Ganesh can be referred to the better known figure of Shiva <i>Nata-rajā</i> ("Lord of dance"), whose features are somehow drawn on in this artefact: the hair bun (<i>ġatamukuta</i>), signifying mourning and indifference in this world; the lower right hand in the <i>abhaya-mudra</i> gesture dispelling fear (coupled with <i>varada-m</i>, the gesture of bestowing gifts); the foot resting on Ganesh's vehicle (<i>vahana</i>), the mouse or <i>mushaka</i>. Otherwise, a hand is holding the <i>ankusha</i> (a goad for driving elephants), one of his most typical attributes, and the lotus flower, with which he is not always associated. The traditional figure of Ganesh (god of plenty), seated and with a fat belly, is here reversed into a dynamic representation which, due to the kind of ornaments and physical conformation, may be referred to Southern India's religious art". For an explanation of Ganesh's mythology, see: Dallapiccola, A. L., (2005), <i>Induismo. Dizionario di storia, cultura, religione</i>, Milano, Bruno Mondadori Editore, pp. 93-94.</p>	
<p style="text-align: center;">Context of belonging</p> <p>From the novel <i>The music room</i>, by Namita Devidayal (Neri Pozza, 2009): "My attention was caught by a shrine resembling a dolls' house, almost hidden in one corner of the room. It contained all deities of the Hinduist pantheon: tiny brass and silver idols of infant Krishna, Ganesh, Saraswati and Laxmi, a couple of silver coins and the figure of a half-naked saint in meditation. The small statues had been polished and decorated with a touch of kumkum. Each one had in front a handful of fresh jasmine flowers, whose fragrance faintly hovered in the air. On top of the shrine, an orange bulb flickered, shaped so as to resemble a flame. I was immediately enchanted by it" (p. 15). "Dhondutai polished the small statues with a soft white cloth, and then put them back in their place one by one. Seating next to her, I whirled a sandal wood stick so as to obtain the yellow paste with which we soon would have smeared the idols. By the end of the week, they were all destined to float in the ocean's depths, homebound. In spite of her decision not to leave Bombay, Dhondutai was determined to give them back their freedom, in case something happened to her. All but two of them, to tell the truth. One of the excluded was Ganesha, which my teacher would go on venerating and washing every morning. The second exception was a tiny flattened image of the goddess" (p. 297).</p>	

Translator's note: the quotations from Marc Augé and Namita Devidayal were translated from the Italian version of the respective texts, as the original version was not available.



FIG. 1

out to be a useful tool to monitor the epistemological dynamics in multicultural societies in case a cooperation between more actors is promoted, as envisaged in the goals of MAP for ID.

Classifying memories: theoretical elements for the definition of documentation records

Pilot projects carried out in the framework of MAP for ID, all documented in the publication *Museums as places for intercultural dialogue: selected practices from Europe*,² can be inspiring for any reader, let alone professionals in the field. So here I am asking myself how would an immigrant coming from Kachchh (Gujarat, India) have reacted if, as part of a MAP for ID pilot project, he had come across a terracotta sculpture of an elephant (FIG. 1) which had belonged to the indologist Giuseppe Tucci, and was subsequently bequeathed by his wife Francesca

Bonardi to the International Museum of Ceramics in Faenza along with a rich collection of terracotta and ceramics artefacts Tucci had collected in Asia. Surely he would have reconnected the sculpture to the *palkhi* elephant which, on the occasion of a child's birth (in particular in the case of the firstborn),³ local potters give to the child's family in exchange for money or material goods. With a hint of excitement, he would have remembered stories regarding the birth of relatives and friends, providing valuable information on customs, rituals and traditions which are particularly important for the work of documentation officers and anthropologists, but are also meaningful for museum operators in order to develop new display and education strategies. From the information gathered on these collections based on the personal notes of Francesca Bonardi when the artefacts were bequeathed to the Museum, it looks like the sculpture in question was bought in the Makran area, in Pakistan, thousands of miles from Kachchh. And yet, the similarities between objects of both areas are so evident as to lead experts to hypothesise a common origin. Although Pakistan is a Muslim republic and India's population is predominantly Hindu, one of the bibliographic references just quoted (see note 4) highlights how both Gujarati Muslims and Hindus attach the same importance to this tradition of the *palkhi* elephants at a child's birth. What story would a Pakistani citizen would have told, then...

The playful dispute on the real origin of the *palkhi* elephant leads us to ponder the positive or negative value of stories triggered in immigrants or Italian

citizens by the encounter with museum objects. This is an important question, all the more so if we consider that we don't have detailed information on all museum artefacts' actual provenance: are "cultural mediators" a resource, or do they run the risk of creating confusion?

Before providing a brief overview of the scientific bibliography available on the subject, I would like to clarify my position. If I had had a chance to speak with an Indian citizen during the documentation campaign of ethnographic collections in the Emilia Romagna region promoted by IBC – Institute for Cultural Heritage in 2008, I would have correctly identified the portable shrine representing Venkateshwara (FIG. 2) preserved at the City Museum of the Middle Ages in Bologna (Francesco Lorenzo Pullé's collection). It would have been sufficient to check in Crispin Branfoot's volume on pilgrimage in India to come to a more accurate recognition;⁴ but an exchange of views with someone who could actually visit Tirupati shrine (Andhra Pradesh, India), to which the worship of this particular form of Vishnu is associated, would have certainly enriched my perspective. For the time being, suffice it to say that the feedback from individuals who are aware of the meaning and cultural value of museum objects without necessarily having specific professional expertise, has a positive impact on the work of "experts". It is worth remembering what Clifford Geertz wrote in his essay *Art as a cultural system*, which reads: "And such placing, the giving to art objects a cultural significance is always a local matter; what art is in classical China or classical Islam, what it is in the Pueblo southwest or highland



New Guinea, is just not the same thing, no matter how universal the intrinsic qualities that actualize its emotional power (and I have no desire to deny them) may be.⁵ "A theory of art is thus at the same time a theory of culture, not an autonomous enterprise", the American anthropologist observes.⁶

As anticipated in my opening remarks, one of the reasons why it is sometimes so difficult to find the necessary information to identify an artefact is the small amount of detail available on ethnographic collections in museum archives: "Ethnographic objects are in fact decontextualised 'pieces' of culture used in a metonymical way" – writes Maria Luisa Ciminelli with reference to the definition "ethnographic fragment" coined by Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett to replace the term "ethnographic object" – "re-presenting a (visible) part signifying the (absent) whole".⁷ According to Krzysztof Pomian's definition, collected objects are in fact

“sign bearers”. In other words, they are entrusted with the representation of one given culture for the benefit of a museum audience, as if they were symbolical and perpetual ambassadors of that culture itself – at least judging from the obstinacy with which they are exhibited, often for longer than a century. No one seems concerned with their current meaning, let alone with the meaning of these objects within the framework of their culture of origin. The history of the object as it has been catalogued and displayed to the public over time is therefore indispensable to understand the reasons why it has been transformed into a “museum object”, especially in case a museum decides to keep the display of its ethnographic collections unaltered. In Ruth Benedict and Christopher Burghard’s Steiner words: “*Distinctions between categories of art, artefact, and commodity are projections of individual experience that reveal, in the end, far more about those who collect objects than those who produce them*”. Therefore, the meaning of an ethnographic artefact must also be established through the history associated with the object in the cultural *milieu* in which it has been told, through the experience of the collector, “*in both individual and collective memories*”.⁸

However, the will to define the meaning given to artefacts from a polysemous point of view, along with claims on the original provenance of objects, have convinced many museums to adopt restitution strategies for their collections where possible – as is the case with native populations’ artefacts in the North-American context. This practice overcomes the argument of the definition of the objects in the

context of appropriation, at least when restitution of collections coincides with the creation of new museum institutions run by source communities. These policies increase the opportunities for reconstructing the meaning of “*individual and collective memories*” through new “*projections of individual experience*”, considered more authentic. Although new displays are often complementary with the original museum displays before restitution – even if they sometimes seem at the opposite ends of the spectrum –, the overall result comes close to excellence in any case, as shown in James Clifford’s essay *Four Northwest Coast Museums: Travel Reflections*⁹ (provided that the audience is willing to go through the four collections the way the essay’s author did!). And yet, a question arises also in this case: who can guarantee that contemporary source communities actually know the original meaning and use of objects? In other words, are we sure that the memory of cultural experiences triggered by objects is still alive after decades, if not centuries? Carlo Severi recently touched on the issue of memory in a fascinating essay. Many of his observations may help us find an answer to the previous question. The memory of images – the focus of Severi’s essay – may be extended to, and hold the same significance for the objects drawn from ethnographic collections, as “*the image as a material trace highlights (here) the mind’s work, a series of mental operations associated with the image*”.¹⁰ To corroborate his thesis, the Italian scholar quotes elsewhere in the text Robert Vischer, according to whom the act of seeing may never be considered neutral or passive, but is always

informed by the observer's perspective as opposed to the perception of that which is observed. The act of perceiving inevitably implies the projection of one's own hidden appearance.¹¹ Therefore, while on the one hand every image, every object evokes the memory of cultural traditions, on the other every individual offers a personal vision of that object, increasing the possible points of view through which all of us can examine its meaning. The previous question may be answered with these words, as (see note 5) more versions of the same tradition do not confuse, but rather enlarge the perspective from which we look at a cultural phenomenon. Having cleared away the original conception of "primitive arts" – widely adopted by collectors, but certainly not by anthropologists, who know that the features of one given culture are the result of an interaction between different experiences shared at a social level and followed one upon the other over time –, contemporary personal memories necessarily refer to the traditions of the past, often changed in the present. These remarks provided the starting point for the development of the documentation record described in this essay.

Documentation issues: practical experiences for the definition of the documentation record

Like the previous examples mentioned in this essay, the following ones are drawn from the experience I personally developed carrying out documentation work of extra-European artefacts preserved in some Italian museums. These examples highlight the mistakes made in defining the exact meaning of often forgotten (not only because of these

inaccuracies) objects. Far from wanting to emphasise the oversights of other scholars – the first inaccuracy mentioned in this essay, regarding Venkateshwara's portable shrine (*FIG. 2*), is the result of my own work! –, I will try and illustrate the motivations leading me to develop the documentation record as it is through a number of examples showing the reasons of these mistakes.

Context of appropriation

The City Museum of the Middle Ages hosts most of the extra-European collections preserved in Bologna. When I discussed the opportunity of reviewing the documentation records produced during the ETNO's census¹² with reference to artefacts of Indian origin preserved at the City Museum with the staff of the private company entrusted with the documentation campaign of extra-European collections promoted by IBC in 2008, I was aware of the mistakes that can be made in analysing these objects. Therefore, I was not surprised to notice that a common container widely used in Eastern India (*FIG. 3*) had been *transformed* into a "hood for hawks" of "Persian" origin. In my view, the documentation officer entrusted with the recognition of this object did not have the necessary tools to carry out an accurate work. Firstly, his work was prior to the actual documentation work – the term "census" used to define the ETNO project's preliminary survey was in fact referred to collections as a whole, rather than to the individual artefacts. Secondly, he had to deal with little archive information and a misleading documentation record compiled at the end of the previous century, according





FIG. 3



FIG. 4

to which the object in question was said to have belonged to the marquis Ferdinando Cospi (one of the most famous Italian collectors in the seventeenth century), whereas it came from the above mentioned collection of Francesco Lorenzo Pullé.¹³ This is further proved by a similar artefact coming from the same collection, and today preserved at the Museum of Anthropology of the University of Padua (FIG. 4).¹⁴ The Padua collection's inventory (artefacts were bequeathed to the University's Institute of Anthropology by the collector's son, Giorgio, in 1941),¹⁵ compiled on 31 October 1958, marked "two terracotta pipes (India)" (FIG. 5) with number 6328. It is in fact a kind of pipe commonly used in India, often linked with ascetic practices and the use of psychoactive substances (*bhang* or *marijuana*), but also widespread among the local population for smoking tobacco. Similar mistakes are often due to the lack of accurate archive information. The correct definition of an object's *context of appropriation*,

therefore, allows us to avoid major oversights which may divert that object's fate towards an almost certain oblivion. While it is widely accepted, at least in principle, that documentation is a constant work in progress, we all know that things work differently, and the collections preserved in a museum are not monitored frequently enough. The examples chosen to illustrate this point are not accidental: in fact, since the very first inventory in 1903, the Pullé collection was not recorded appropriately and in sufficient detail, as shown in the documentation found in the archive of the City Museum of the Middle Ages in Bologna:¹⁶ enough to absolve the person who, after the many displacements of the collection, was responsible for cataloguing artefacts whose origin and composition was barely known (see note 17). For this reason, it is crucial to highlight the initial definition of objects since they first entered a museum – i.e. the *context of appropriation* –, also in case documentation records and inventories compiled in the past are available.

Context of exposition

The “Scarabelli” Archaeological and Natural History Museum in Imola hosts some extra-European collections which over time were confined to the museum stores and nearly forgotten. During the above mentioned documentation campaign, I came across other examples of problematic documentation work. The most significant concerns a palm leaf manuscript (FIG. 6) of alleged Javanese origin,¹⁷ whose acquisition circumstances were unknown. In this case, however, research on the object’s *context of appropriation* was particularly fruitful. The central part of the palm leaf, in fact, presented two holes which indicated the leaf was part of a bound manuscript, although the complete text was nowhere to be found in the Museum. Only a comparison with the guide to the “National Colonial Exhibition” held in Imola in 1927 allowed to reconstruct the manuscript’s history as well as to go back to its first *context of exposition*.¹⁸ The bound manuscript was subsequently retraced in the collections of the Ethnographic Missionary Museum of the Capuchin Friars in Imola. Franciscan friars were among the first participants in the 1927 exhibition, although the artefacts presented by them, according to the authors of the exhibition guide, “*should not have been part of a National Colonial Exhibition, since the places represented have nothing to do with our Colonies. But when we saw the magnificent Oriental artefacts preserved by the friars we could not resist the temptation of displaying them, convinced as we were that the visitors would not be displeased. This is why we decided to call these galleries Extra section*”.¹⁹ At the heart of the exhibition was the Ethiopian collection of General Carlo



FIG. 5

Manara, who ended up bequeathing many of his artefacts to the “Scarabelli” Museum. This explains why Capuchin friars deprived themselves of a piece from their collections, why it ended up being part of the ethnographic collection of the city museum in Imola, and why it was displayed on the particular occasion of a colonial exhibition. We should also add that, contrary to what is stated in the documentation record compiled in 2003, the manuscript’s calligraphy is not Javanese, but rather resembles a South-Indian, if not Burmese, handwriting style. This mistake was made following a further, albeit “virtual”, display of the palm leaf in question. In 1981 an article was published on the journal *Atti dell’Associazione per Imola storico-artistica* (see note 19), where the object’s origin is misattributed. As observed in the introduction to this essay, the section of the documentation record called *context of exposition* should also comprise similar bibliographic references, which are essential in order to accurately reconstruct the history of an artefact.

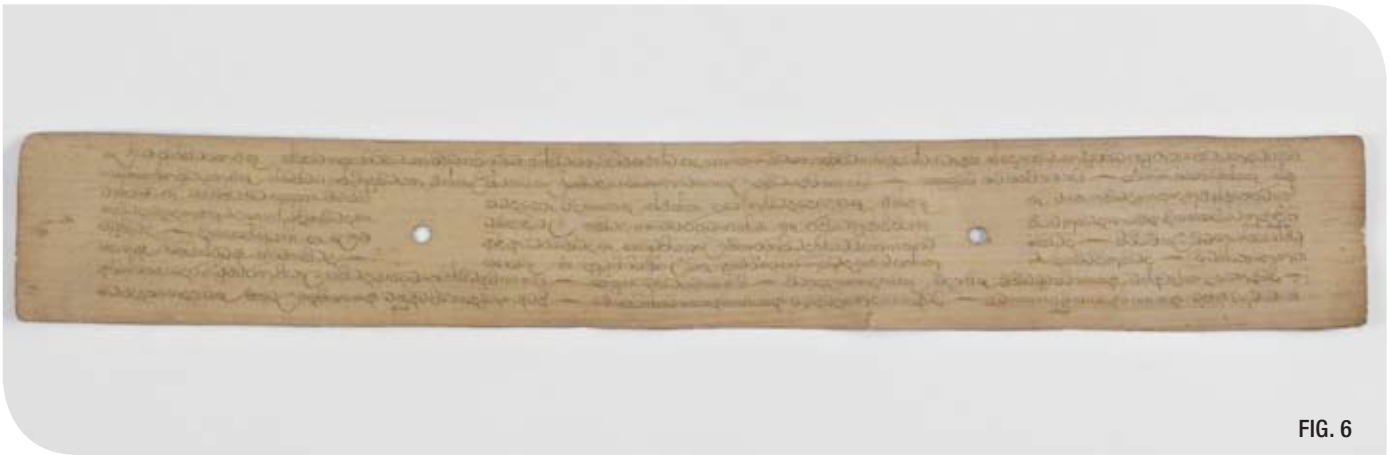


FIG. 6

Context of belonging

The object I selected in order to highlight the third and last section of the documentation record is an alabaster *linga* or *lingam* (transl. “male member”, emblem”) (FIG. 7) which belonged to the Pullé collection and is today preserved at the University Museum of Palazzo Poggi in Bologna, where, on the occasion of the last documentation campaign carried out by the staff of University Museums (1973), it was described as an “oil lamp-shaped candlestick in painted alabaster” and forgotten in the museum stores. Let us now imagine we could travel back in time – at least as far as the 1930s, when the object was on display – and ask a visitor of that period what exactly a *linga* meant. Would a documentation record including information on the *context of belonging* have been useful in order to avoid a Hinduist object of worship being turned into an “oil lamp-shaped candlestick” forty years later?

As you would expect, at the time it was not so easy to run into a citizen of Indian origin in Bologna. Therefore, with a view to highlighting the importance

of the section *context of belonging*, I decided to quote the observations of Ezzelino Magli, a Bolognese doctor who travelled around the world in the 1930s due to professional reasons. His comments may come as close as possible to what we would expect a cultural mediator to say today about that artefact, its history and value: “When, on the other hand, Shiva is considered as a reproductive force, he dismisses his human features and takes the peculiar and symbolic form of a *lingam*, often erected in solitude, but also represented with Yoni (the union Hindus call *pindī*). I have to say that, in their simple and stylised workmanship, these symbols are not in the least obscene or disgusting; they may be viewed as shocking and vulgar by someone ill-disposed, while someone with a scholarly disposition has better chances of uplifting his mind to higher notions such as the reproductive forces of nature and the sources of life. But the uneducated masses of believers have a rather more uninspired way of reasoning, and find it easier to recall the following ancient legend, handed down by the famous penitent Vyasa in one of his



FIG. 7



FIG. 8

18 *Purana*. According to this legend (*linga purana*), one fine day Shiva was so drunk on intoxicating drinks that he went on happily enjoying his marital rights in spite of the fact that other deities and personalities had come to visit him in his heavenly abode. The outrage was great, all the more so in a country like India, where even today it is considered highly inconvenient to kiss a woman in public,

however innocently (among Parsi-Zoroastrian this is even prohibited by religion). There were so many protests that Shiva and his wife Durga died with embarrassment.

One moment: the legend ends with a spicy and particularly intriguing detail: the two consorts decided indeed to put an end to their lives, but wanted to die by wearing themselves out in the extreme performance of the same act in which they were caught. And Shiva, in the language then spoken in paradise (I suppose it was Sanskrit, the celestial and literary language which was never alive nor dead), said more or less: 'If our death must come, so be it, but it will have to create a new form of life: the lingam'. There is the origin of sacrifices, feasts and the erection of that peculiar monument in temples, homes and streets. And there is the persisting worship of this primitive idol, which until today has managed to keep its esoteric character as a symbol..."²⁰ (FIG. 8).

Magli's merry tale invites us to think of the richness of personal stories that we can collect from those individuals who have a direct knowledge of the objects preserved in our museums. Each story is nothing but an image fixed in memory: we should ask ourselves whether it is right to transplant it in our memory as well.

- ¹ Bodo, S., Gibbs, K., Sani, M. (eds.), (2009), *Museums as places for inter-cultural dialogue: selected practices from Europe*, published by MAP for ID partners, Dublin (http://www.mapforid.it/Handbook_MAPforID_EN.pdf).
- ² See Perryman, J., (2000), *Traditional pottery of India*, London, A & C Black, p. 81, referring to Lodai potters; Shah, H., (1985), *Form and Many Forms of Mother Clay. Contemporary Indian Pottery and Terracotta* (catalogue of the exhibition), New Delhi, National Crafts Museum, p. 165, fig. 385. Perryman states that this custom is shared by Hindu and Muslim communities.
- ³ Branfoot, C., (2006), *Pilgrimage in South Asia. Crossing Boundaries of Space and Faith*, p. 54, fig. 47, in Barnes, R., Branfoot, C., *Pilgrimage. The Sacred Journey*, Oxford, Ashmolean Museum.
- ⁴ Branfoot, C., (2006), *Pilgrimage in South Asia. Crossing Boundaries of Space and Faith*, p. 54, fig. 47, in Barnes, R., Branfoot, C., *Pilgrimage. The Sacred Journey*, Oxford, Ashmolean Museum.
- ⁵ Geertz C., (1983), *Art as a cultural system*; Italian translation (2001), *“L’arte come sistema culturale”*, in *Antropologia interpretativa*, Bologna, Il Mulino, p. 122.
- ⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 138.
- ⁷ Ciminelli, M.L., (2008), *D’incanto in incanto. Storia del consumo di arte primitiva in Occidente*, Bologna, CLUEB, p. 90. See also Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, B., (1991), *Objects of ethnography*, in Karp, I., Levine, S., eds., *Exhibiting Culture. The Poetics and Politics of Museums Display*, Washington, Smithsonian Institution Press, pp. 386-443.
- ⁸ Benedict, R., Burghard Steiner C., (1999), *Unpacking Culture: Art and Commodity in Colonial and Postcolonial Worlds*, Berkeley, University of California Press, p. 19. See also Stewart, S. (1984), *On longing: Narratives of the Miniature, the Gigantic, the Souvenir, the Collection*, Baltimore and London, The Johns Hopkins University Press.
- ⁹ Clifford, J., (1997), *“Four Northwest Coast Museums: Travel Reflections”*, in *Routes: Travel and Translation in the Late XX Century*, Cambridge, Harvard University Press; Italian translation (1999), *Quattro musei della costa nordoccidentale: riflessioni di viaggio*, in *Strade. Viaggio e traduzione alla fine del secolo XX*, Torino, Bollati Boringhieri, pp. 139-184.
- ¹⁰ Severi, C., (2004), *Il percorso e la voce. Un’antropologia della memoria*, Torino, Einaudi, p. 55.
- ¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 26.
- ¹² See Salvi, A. (ed.), (2007), *Lo sguardo altrove. Il progetto Etno e il patrimonio culturale extraeuropeo in Emilia-Romagna*, Bologna, Istituto per i beni artistici, culturali e naturali dell’Emilia-Romagna.
- ¹³ My observations were not taken into consideration by those responsible for the project’s implementation, mostly due to the lack of additional economic resources.
- ¹⁴ My PhD thesis focused on the collections of the Indian Museum in Bologna, founded by Francesco Lorenzo Pullé in 1907, and closed down in 1936. Artefacts from its collections were displaced several times, which means that it is now very difficult to retrace their original extent and composition.
- ¹⁵ According to an inventory dated 28 October 1941, about one hundred objects were bequeathed: Indian ethnographic metal objects (55); ethnographic

objects with different origins and backgrounds (38); Indian paintings on glass (4); pictures of Indian subject (3). The collection is currently being studied. I am indebted to Nicola Carrara for giving me access to the artefacts and the relevant archives.

- ¹⁶ Archivio Museo Civico Medievale di Bologna, Cartone IV, fascicolo 33 bis (1903-1933).
- ¹⁷ See Geraci, G., (1981), *Appunti sui materiali delle vetrine ‘orientali’ del Museo Comunale di Imola*, in “Atti Associazione per Imola storico-artistica”, Imola.
- ¹⁸ Further examination is needed to establish its exact geo-cultural origin.
- ¹⁹ *Guida Catalogo, Mostra Coloniale Nazionale, Imola 24 nov – 8 dic 1927*, Imola, Tip. Baroncini & F., (s.n.).
- ²⁰ Magli, E., (1935), *Cimeli d’Oriente. Divagazioni su di una collezione indo-cino-giapponese (posseduta dall’autore)*, Bologna, Libreria L. Cappelli, pp. 21-22. For a myth drawn from the *Kurma Purana* regarding the origin of *linga*, where Shiva is represented as an orthodox hermit, see Davis, R.H., (1995) *The Origin of Linga Worship*, in Lopez, D.S., *Religions of India in Practice*, Princeton, University Press, pp. 637-648.

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Foto dell’autore

Fig. 1 Museo Internazionale delle Ceramiche (MIC), Faenza. Foto IBC

Fig. 2 Museo Civico Medievale, Bologna. Foto IBC

Fig. 3 Museo Civico Medievale, Bologna. Foto IBC

Fig. 4 Contenitore, India nord-occidentale, Museo di Antropologia. Foto dell’autore (su concessione dell’Università degli Studi di Padova)

Fig. 5 Chilam (pipa), India, Museo di Antropologia. Foto dell’autore (su concessione dell’Università degli Studi di Padova)

Fig. 6 Museo Archeologico Naturalistico “Scarabelli”, Imola. Foto IBC

Fig. 7 Museo di Palazzo Poggi, Bologna. Foto dell’autore

Fig. 8 Varanasi, Uttar Pradesh, India. Foto dell’autore

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“Ornament is not a sport practised with lines”. Working hypothesis for a documentation record of demoethnoanthropologic heritage

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The museum as experience

Strategies and tools of museum communication¹

Elisabetta Pozzetti

“It is mere ignorance that leads to the supposition that the connection of art and aesthetic perception with experience signifies a lowering of their significance and dignity. Experience in the degree in which it is experience is heightened vitality. Instead of signifying being shut up in one’s own private feelings and sensations, it signifies complete interpenetration of self and the world of objects and events”²

John Dewey’s words perfectly reflect the reasons why I decided to engage in a research – at times thrilling, at times disappointing – on whether and how museums are able to encourage an active aesthetic

experience, rather than a passive one. Far from being only mental constructions, such museums do exist, but are still relatively few, while the notion of the museum as a place where individuals can experience something absorbing, exciting and worth remembering is far from being widely accepted and practised.

My research work, therefore, is only partially connected with the European project *MAP for ID – Museums as Places for Intercultural dialogue*³, but somehow shares with it some common concerns in that it explores the museum’s identity and the tools it employs to engage in a dialogue with its potential audiences. My aim was to deconstruct the museum’s structure, by identifying its vital parts – which I will try to highlight at least in part in the following pages

– and by metaphorically “cutting off” obsolete and infertile practices.

The appeal of cultural institutions is built through an effective, clear and coherent visual identity; it is strengthened by the peculiarity of its architecture; but ultimately, it puts down roots in individual consciousness through the insights, suggestions and interactions an exhibition space is able to activate in the visitor’s imagery.

The journey undertaken in this research takes many different strands, all indispensable to reach the final destination. For the museum to be a place where the visitor can live a unique, amazing and unrepeatable experience, there has to be a highly complex, well planned and flexible backstage.

The museum as generator of emotions

A good starting point is the definition of “museum” developed by ICOM (International Council of Museums) in 2004,⁴ concisely and effectively outlining the fundamental pillars of a museum’s *raison d’être*: a scientific mission, carried out through research and conservation, as well as a more dynamic, visitor-centred mission, aimed at involving actual and potential audiences. Communication and display become indispensable parts of a museum’s life, in order to prevent research and conservation from becoming sterile, self-referential practices.

There are three complementary goals underlying an accurate, well thought-out display: the goal of research, and therefore the opportunity to delve into a subject or discipline; the goal of education, aimed at promoting the individual’s cultural and civil growth; and the goal of enjoyment, the pleasure not only to

“stroll through an unusual place”, but also to stop and reflect, to be in a space which gradually becomes an extension of our vital space. Museums, therefore, should be rethought as generators of emotions, amazement and insight; places which are able to create, enhance and renew the visitor’s experience, so that he/she may conceive the museum not so much as a place to visit once in a lifetime, but rather as a place where to regularly spend one’s own leisure time. Neil and Philip Kotler⁵ have identified six typologies of experience: recreational, socialising, educational, aesthetic, celebrative, emotional. In my view, the latter typology is crucial to determine the visitor’s satisfaction and sense of ownership: an absorbing, evocative or provoking display can challenge our views and initiate further levels of perception and growth.

Developing the museum’s visual identity as an “open system”

Museums can fulfil the promise of an unforgettable experience through a brand or corporate image which clearly unfolds in all communication materials, whether institutional or external. One of the key challenges for the museum today is to evolve from a “self-referential system”, exclusively devoted to the safeguard of collections, into an “open system” developing services and tools aiming at personal, community and social growth. By enhancing accountability and conveying as much (quantitative and qualitative) information as possible, the credibility and reputation of the museum proportionally increases as a live, “within-reach” institution.

In the process of developing a museum’s



visual identity, it is important to carefully identify the graphic style, chromatic code, logotype and lettering style. Once the brand identity has been outlined, it should be adopted in all the museum's communication tools, through an on-going consultation process between curators, graphic designers and the audience's expectations. Whether it be a logo, a slogan, or both, this identity should have an impact on the audience's imagery, and convey a notion of the museum as a potential producer of knowledge and enjoyment. Communication is based not only on paper, digital and audiovisual tools, but also on the subtler persuasive power of professionals specifically in charge of promotional activities, as clearly stated in the national Charter on Museum Professions.⁶ There are many ways in which a museum can monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of its projects, and one of the most important is the visitor's feedback. Audience surveys are an iterative research process, and they are regularly carried out in a number of museums, in particular scientific museums, employing social science research methodologies. It is a work in progress, which requires to constantly reformulate research questions, re-examine results, and start the whole process all over again. At the Victoria & Albert Museum in London, for example, the visitor research cycle is used within the framework of gallery development projects. Juliette Fritsch, Head of Gallery Interpretation, Evaluation and Resources at the V&A, distinguishes between three different phases of evaluation: front-end, formative and summative. Alongside these three steps, meta-

evaluation may be done at any stage of project development.

An interesting experiment was carried out in the United States from 2000 to 2005, and published in 2006.⁷ In order to assess the quality of display development projects, a voluntary group of curators, educators and exhibit designers planned visits to a number of expositions trying to identify the common criteria needed to evaluate and judge all their components. The goals of this exercise were to develop as much an accurate and critical view as possible, to understand what needs to be done, and how, to make museum exhibitions more effective and communicative, and to create a tool with which anyone of us may in turn become a "judge". The outcome was a Framework (see *FIG. 1*) made up of different parts and phases: before, during and after the visit, or in other terms "first step", "call-outs" and "assess the aspects".

The importance of words

In order for the visitor to experience an aesthetic or ecstatic emotion, concrete and tangible tools must be employed. Best practices can provide a guidance as to how to develop an external communication (labelling, systems of signs within and outside the museum, ...) which is mirrored in internal communication through a coordinated development of printed information (leaflets, brochures, small guides, catalogues, etc.), merchandising, education materials (whether printed or in digital format), and the work of public relations staff. Communication should be understood as a function which is inherent in the museological and museographic project

FRAMEWORK

Assessing Excellence in Exhibitions from a Visitor-Centered Perspective

Use this Framework to talk with your peers about excellence and improve your professional practice.

1
First Meeting

Gather a team of six to 10 museum professionals and meet for at least two hours to become familiar with the Framework and to come to a common understanding of procedures before judging an exhibition.

You will be rating and discussing an exhibition regarding its level of achievement for four different Criteria. Is the exhibition:

Comfortable? Engaging? Reinforcing? Meaningful?

- 1. Comfortable**
An excellent exhibition helps the visitor feel comfortable—physically and psychologically. Good content opens the door to other positive experiences. Lack of comfort prevents them.
- 2. Engaging**
An excellent exhibition is engaging for visitors. It entices them to pay attention. Engagement is the first step toward finding meaning.
- 3. Reinforcing**
In an excellent exhibition, the exhibits provide visitors with abundant opportunities to be successful and to feel intellectually competent—beyond the “wow” of engagement. In addition, the exhibits reinforce each other, providing multiple means of accessing similar bits of information that are all part of a cohesive whole. Visitors are confident on their way to having meaningful experiences.
- 4. Meaningful**
An excellent exhibition provides personally relevant experiences for visitors. Beyond being engaged and feeling competent, visitors find themselves changed, captivated and affected, in immediate and long-lasting ways.

Ratings are based on two different kinds of data:

Calendry: your experiences to the exhibition as a visitor
Aspects: the evidence you found that supported each Criterion.

At the end of the first meeting, pick an exhibition to visit.

Exhibition Title _____

Institution _____ Year Visited _____ Date of Visit _____

FIG. 1

itself, rather than something additional. Particular care must also be taken of the museum website, as today the first contact with the potential visitor very frequently happens via the Internet. Communication also takes place through labelling and information panels in museum displays, which are often either too long or too concise, difficult to read because the printed text is too small, or because it has faded in time. In some cases they are difficult to read due to physical barriers between the exhibit and the visitor, while in others a bad lighting in a showcase prevents the visitor from reading correctly and without effort. Quite often, who prepares these texts is not concerned with who is reading what, from which distance and within which time framework. The Italian language, moreover, is clearly affected by what Francesco Sabatini, honorary president of the

Accademia della Crusca, defines as “ciceronismo”.⁸ Three key elements for writing effective information materials can be outlined: the readability of content and graphics; the overall intelligibility and the use of clear terms; the coherence between text and display. The common prejudice according to which “visitors never read, anyway” must be proved wrong. As opposed to reading a book or a newspaper, in fact, reading a museum text is a collective experience, often closer to a conversation than to the act of reading. Recent research carried out by recording visitors’ comments of written texts⁹ shows how, in expressing their opinions, individuals use the words they just finished reading, and the average amount of text they read is around 100 words. Single visitors or couples read more, while parents enjoy reading to their children. Reading museum texts is also a way of socialising (visitors are inclined to share the act of reading and interact with the person next to them), while the museum or exhibition curator becomes “it” (“it says that ...”). Anne Sophie Grassin¹⁰ analysed the eye movement called *jouglage* (i.e. juggling), describing the constant move of the visitor’s gaze from the label to the object, and explaining why a label should be as close as possible to the relevant object. The information provided can vary according to the following typologies: nominative, descriptive, explanatory, contextual. Every level is enriched by the former, in a hierarchic structure which makes the layers of meaning regarding the object ever more explicit and multi-faceted. For a more immediate visual recognition, different typologies of information are often conveyed through different formats and media.



FIG. 2



FIG. 3

Some museum professionals and scholars, such as Marisa Dalai Emiliani,¹¹ maintain that a museum may exist without resorting to any textual information. More in particular, Dalai Emiliani identifies as a best

practice model the German museum Kolumba (FIG. 2-3), which ranges from mediaeval art to applied arts and contemporary art by avoiding any sort of written information (in fact, the visitor is provided with a brochure containing basic information and suggested reading). The objects from the Middle Ages silently engage in a dialogue with contemporary artworks, thereby creating a mystical, timeless atmosphere. In short, the museum doesn't resort to written word in order to comment the objects, but lets the objects to speak for themselves.

With regard to the effectiveness of using textual information alongside the objects on display, it is worth mentioning the view of Sylvia Lahav, an English researcher who has been involved in the education programmes of some major museums in London for the past twenty years. During a conference held in 2008 at the Victoria & Albert Museum,¹² she showed two significant short videos, "How do the paintings look?" and "Describing paintings": at the end of a museum visit, visitors are interviewed and asked what they remember, and how they would describe what they have just seen inside the museum. In Lahav's opinion, "museum is space in the space": in other words, space is a key element in the museum visit, an entity interacting with the objects, the textual information and the visitor, and intensifying our vision. The lack of written information on the object implies a higher degree of interpretation and a more "personal", passionate effort on the part of the viewer; the silence created between the object and the visitor is crucial in order to establish a relationship, a dialogue.

Tate Britain has devised an interesting solution:

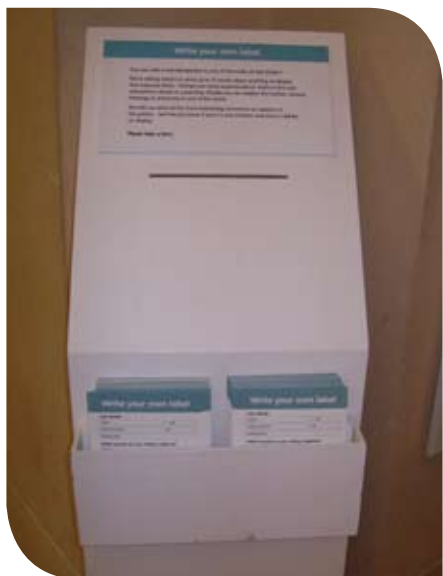


FIG. 4

the visitor can find a number of “desks” inside the museum (FIG. 4), conceived as a writing desk in the upper part, and as a dispenser in the lower part with forms to be filled in. Visitors can write, integrate, modify museum labels, in a way that encourages not only interaction, but also active participation. Forms are periodically analysed and evaluated, and changes eventually introduced in exhibition spaces. Always at Tate Britain, there is a stand at the museum entrance where visitors can choose a leaflet according to the kind of experience they want to have: whether they are in a hurry, they love mystery, it rains outside... (FIG. 5-6-7). There are as many different ways of visiting the museum as the life experiences, of visitors, their motivations and the time available. In a certain sense, all written information should respond to the different needs and expectations of differing audiences. This is the opinion of Beverly Serrell,¹³ when she suggests

that the point is not to ask how long should a label generically be, but rather how extensive that *specific* label, associated with one or more objects, or with an idea, should be. In other words, it is not possible to generalise, also because artworks and museum objects themselves require us not to do it: everyone of them has its own uniqueness, its own life, and its own story.

Summing up, written information can be a precious “ally” of museum objects. Words are tools helping us to engage in a dialogue with the object, through a variety of cognitive levels and learning styles. The potential of written information in terms of winning the reluctance on the part of some audiences and of developing a more “seductive” approach is significant. By wasting this opportunity, by approaching it in a superficial and inconsiderate way, the museum ends up widening the gap not only between the visitor and the object, but also, and more significantly, between the visitor and the museum itself.

Looking for a “pretext”

In the words of Marco Dallari, art can become a pretext to experience an aesthetic “event” in a way that reflects the spirit and gaze of every viewer and unveils the inexhaustible treasure of stories held in each museum object, provided that the latter is not treated aseptically, or illustrated by a label resembling the instructions of a medicine. To enter a museum means much more than visiting a place permeated by the culture of classification and explanation; it means experiencing a place pervaded by the culture of



FIG. 5



FIG. 6



FIG. 7

suggestion and story-telling.

Whatever the strategies and tools it chooses to employ, it is therefore crucial for the museum to restart telling stories, and turn itself from a dusty repository of objects into a place in which a community identifies – a place in which this community believes and invests.

Ralph Appelbaum is one of the exhibition planners

who confronted the issue of innovative strategies in museum displays: among his key works, the Holocaust Museum in Washington, the new galleries at the American Museums of Natural History in New York, and more recently the Newseum in Washington (FIG. 8-9-10). Appelbaum writes: “The museum operates as an agent of ethical and social change, not only as a meeting place to run into the beautiful objects on display”¹⁴

To conclude, display spaces, embracing and containing every act of communication, are an integral part of museum communication. Objects on display draw their meaning and power from being part of a collection as well as from their claim for authenticity, but also from the imaginative re-elaboration on the part of the visitor. Their aura and magic, the aura and magic of display spaces or of the entire museum, are the result of a shared creative process taking place in this potential space; it is not by chance that the very word “communication” derives from *communis agere*, doing together.



FIG. 8



FIG. 9

The museum as an unreproducible space

There are four key elements that interact, or should interact, in the planning of a museum: the collection, the building – its potential and its limits – which will house it, the target user, and the staff in charge of planning and running the museum, from curators to exhibition planners, down to communication and public relations staff.

One case study worth mentioning in this respect is Studio Azzurro's, a group of artists conceiving the museum as a place of experience and encounter between the tangible and the intangible, the visible and the invisible. Studio Azzurro's model is so exemplary because they have managed to reconcile their artistic work with the application in a museum context first of *video-settings*, and subsequently of *sensible environments*. Their intention was to create an encounter between different knowledge systems, and to encourage the visitor to take an active, participatory role, thereby becoming co-protagonist

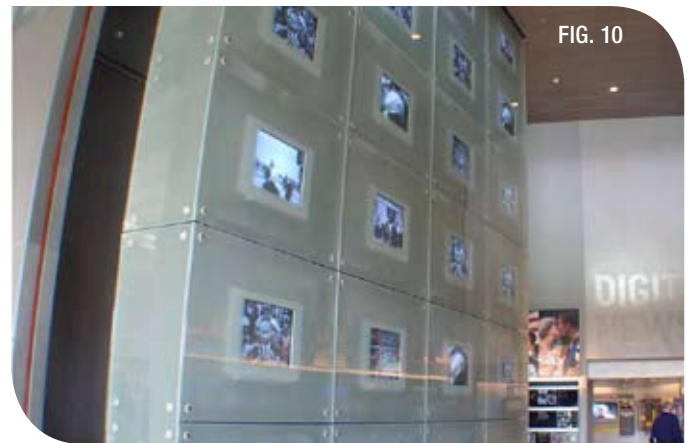


FIG. 10

in a system exploiting and amplifying all its cognitive and sensory potential. The uniqueness of this experience lies in the fact that, in order to facilitate this dialogue, technological devices in display spaces are invisible, but can be experienced through so-called "natural" interfaces, for example through touch, voice, breath... The emotive, sensorial dimension is

therefore encouraged. Moreover, environments are conceived for a collective rather than individual use, so that a dialogue is not only established between an individual and a machine, but also between individual and individual, thereby promoting a relational system favouring encounter and exchange. The art work becomes an experience, more than a given representation; it becomes a “container” *within* which – and no longer just *in front* of which – the viewer is actively involved. A story no longer to be read, but to be experienced. An anthropological aspect is also called into play: the observation and comparison of behaviours in the interplay between the real and the immaterial, springing from a performative spontaneity and triggering unexpected reactions and new rituals in the audience.

The possible future of the museum lies indeed in this ability to involve, to elicit the transformation of museum spaces from static and “dormant” places into a live organism breathing in unison with the public. It’s a radical change, requiring a new outlook on planning and management issues. A space rich in visual surprises and sound effects is needed, generating “happenings” rather than a mere sequence of interactive devices. The museum must be an unreproducible place, where each opportunity to experience a given content in that form, in that time framework and with those persons is unique.

Another aspect which may be significantly enhanced through the application of new technologies is the oral culture that so far seems to have been excluded from museum practices, but can on the contrary play a crucial role in many cases. An interesting example

is provided by the Museum of the Resistance Movement in Fosdinovo, a project by Studio Azzurro: the stories told by old partisans flow not only through words, but also through their magnified faces, reproducing and amplifying their emotional state. Similar situations (although in varying forms and with different results) are being experimented in other museums such as Graceland, Elvis Presley’s house in Memphis, Tennessee; here, the visitor is provided with an audio-guide offering, alongside more traditional explanations of Elvis’ life, some of his songs, the daily noises in his home, the stories told by his sister, Lisa Marie. Another example is the Mercedes-Benz Museum (*FIG. 11-12-13*), opened in 2006, where visitors can test the prototypes and the most recent car models, interact through different displays and see from countless angles the environments they are crossing, whether high or low, communicative or contemplative. The Centre of German Emigration (*FIG. 14-15*), opened in Bremerhaven in 2005, allows the visitor to experience directly the life of the many migrants who, in the course of two centuries, left for the Americas and other parts of the world, to re-live the different legs of their journey on a transatlantic liner, and to learn about some of the 7 million migrants’ names preserved in the Centre’s archives. A human gallery ideally continuing with the dialogue of today’s migrants with the museum, creating a bridge between the past and new generations. Somewhat less creative, but equally effective and interactive is the work of Laboratorio museotecnico Goppion, another Italian group who has been collaborating with prestigious museum institutions



FIG. 11

for years. Their mission is to create in each individual circumstance a homogeneous working group formed by professionals who are able to respond to the needs of the museum and to interact with the museum scientific and technical staff, thereby helping their professional development.



FIG. 12



FIG. 13

An exemplary case study: the re-styling of the British Galleries

An exemplary case study is provided by the re-styling of some sections of the Victoria & Albert Museum in London: it is a work in progress which has been going on for the past ten years or so, with all the exhibition spaces being gradually refurbished in this unique museum. Why this example and not





FIG. 14



FIG. 15

others? Because it presents challenges typical of an historical museum (FIG. 16-17) – the same challenges Italian museums should face if only they were willing to start a process of “renewal” – and because, due to its specific spatial limits and conservation constraints, it cannot freely plan its exhibition spaces (like newly created museums), but must re-invent a given, predetermined space. In my view, the ability to re-invent itself is what makes a museum truly unique – its ability to question itself, to face new challenges,

to shape itself “around” the man of the 21st century. A “contemporary” museum should strive to capture the attention of this curious but hurried man, to inspire and amuse him, to enhance the quality of his leisure time. A philanthropic museum, in other words. The above-mentioned Laboratorio museotecnico Goppion started to work at the project in 1998. The three-year planning phase (re-styling actually started in 2001) can be retraced through studies and sketches based on a long-term experience of interactive experimentation and observation of the audience. A number of key goals were immediately set for the project: *conservation* goals – to pay particular attention to the conservation needs of displayed objects –, *display* goals – to make visible and accessible as many objects as possible –, *interactive* goals – to promote understanding and enjoyment in different audiences.

The experience of the museum visit may be defined polyphonic or polymorphous, as all senses are involved: not only the sense of sight, but also the sense of hearing – it is possible to listen to symphonies and music dating from a given period of history, or to a voice-over commenting on a particular object – and the sense of touch – the visitor is (finally!) allowed to touch replicas of the original exhibits and to assemble them by following the instructions and by using the materials provided, or to explore further routes through digital technology (FIG. 18-19-20-21-22). Education materials are also provided, from the explanatory panels and extensive labels to the exhibition folders available in the *Discovery Areas*.

Concluding remarks

The issues brought up in this essay, however briefly, were meant to show how, before talking about interculturality, it is necessary to re-think the museum's mission in order to make it more democratic and inclusive, an instrument of cultural, ethical and social growth.

The European project *MAP for ID* threw light upon museums which have long been engaged in this challenging process of institutional change, implementing projects based on a better knowledge of “new audiences” and a respectful awareness of the different cultural practices represented.

Only through the redefinition of its own identity in contemporary age can the museum meet the expectations and needs of today and tomorrow's audiences, considered no longer as passive consumers, but rather as a human heritage to be enhanced and integrated in the museum's life and narratives.

Only on this condition will the museum become a place where the visitor can live an amazing, unique experience, enjoy and even be moved: a place where life still flows in its mysterious and magnificent epiphany.



FIG. 16



FIG. 17



FIG. 18



FIG. 20



FIG. 21



FIG. 19

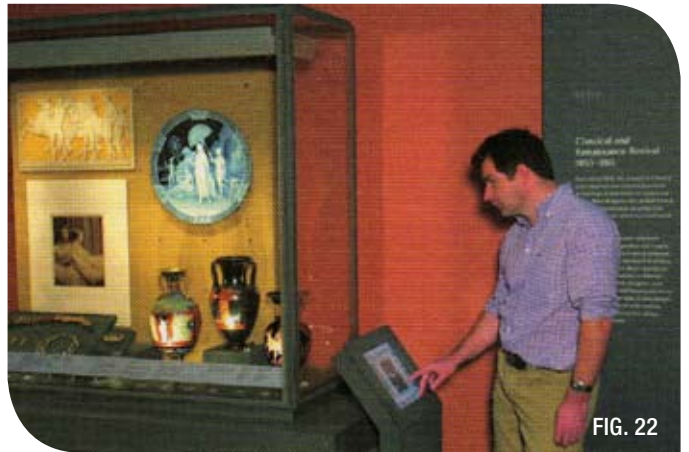


FIG. 22

¹ Part of this essay is drawn from the author's degree thesis in Historical and Artistic Heritage (University of Bologna, Department of Visual Arts, dissertation held on 31 March 2009).

² J. Dewey, *Art as Experience*, 1934; Italian translation *L'arte come esperienza*, la Nuova Italia Editrice, Firenze, 1973, p. 26.

³ See S. Bodo, K. Gibbs, M. Sani (eds.), *Museums as places for intercultural dialogue: selected practices from Europe*, Dublin, 2009; A. Salvi, M. Sani (eds.), *Dossier MAP for ID, Musei come luoghi di dialogo tra Culture*, in "IBC", XVIII, n. 1, January-March 2010, pp. 57-80.

⁴ ICOM's twentieth General Conference was held in Seoul in October 2004. One of the most important outcomes of this conference was the final document highlighting the museum's key role in conservation, research and education.

⁵ See N. Kotler, P. Kotler, *Museum Marketing and Strategy. Designing missions, building audiences, generating revenue and resources*, 1998.

⁶ The national Charter on Museum Professions, launched by the National Conference of Museums in March 2005 and published in June 2007, has been promoted by the Permanent Conference of Italian Museum Associations (AMACI, AMEI, ANMLI, ANMS, ICOM Italy, SIMBDEA). The working group was coordinated by Alberto Garlandini.

⁷ B. Serrell, *Judging Exhibitions. A Framework for Assessing Excellence*, Left Coast Press, California, 2006.

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⁹ P. McManus, *Curator*, 32 (3), 1989; G. Leinhardt, K. Knutson, *Listening in on museum Conversation*, Altamira Press, 2004.

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¹¹ See Marisa Dalai Emiliani's presentation "A museum without words" at the above mentioned conference '*The museum writes as it speaks*'. *Language, access and democracy*.

¹² See Sylvia Lahav's presentation "Looking or Reading? The Interpretive Bind" at the conference '*Fear of the Unknown: Can Gallery Interpretation Help Visitors Learn about Art and Material Culture?*', 19-21 November 2008, Victoria & Albert Museum, Hochhauser Auditorium, Sackler Centre, London.

¹³ B. Serrell, *Exhibit Labels. An Interpretive Approach*, Altamira Press, 1996, pp. 32-33.

¹⁴ R. Appelbaum, *Progettare il museo del XXI secolo*, in L. Basso Peressut (ed.), *Stanze della meraviglia. I musei della natura tra storia e progetto*, Clueb, Bologna, 1997, pp. 236-242.

Crediti foto

In apertura Mercedes-Benz-Museum, Stoccarda

Fig. 1 Frontespizio, Framework

Figg. 2-3 Museo Kolumba, Colonia

Fig. 4 Postazione. Tate Britain, Londra

Figg. 5-6-7 Create your own collection, espositore e depliant esposti. Tate Britain, Londra

Figg. 8-9-10 Newseum, Washington

Fig. 11-12-13 Mercedes-Benz-Museum, Stoccarda

Fig. 14-15 The German Emigration Center, Bremerhaven

Figg. 16-17 Allestimenti del 1936 e 1951. Victoria & Albert Museum, British Galleries Londra

Fig. 18-19-20-21-22 Riallestimento del 2001. Victoria & Albert Museum, British Galleries, Londra

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– nel Convegno *"Il museo scrive come parla"*. *Lingua accesso e democrazia*, tenutosi ad Arezzo il 17 ottobre 2008;

– nel Corso di alta formazione e specializzazione *Progettare il Museo: ideazione e comunicazione*, a cura della Scuola Normale di Pisa, tenutosi al Centro di Alta Formazione in Beni Culturali a Volterra dal 20 al 31 ottobre 2008;

– nel Convegno *'Fear of the Unknown': Can Gallery Interpretation Help Visitors Learn about Art and Material Culture?*, 19-21 novembre 2008, Victoria & Albert Museum, Hochhauser Auditorium, Sackler Centre, Londra.

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