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MUSEAL COMMUNICATION

By *Dario Evola*

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It. *Comunicazione museale*; Fr. *Communication muséale*; Germ. *Museale Kommunikation*; Span. *Comunicacion museal*. The concept of museal communication comprises three areas: architectural communication; internal communication, that is, a museum's "itinerary" and structure; and communication of content, or rather *mission*. Each of these aspects can be the object of specific procedures. In short, we will deal with the communication of content and, specifically, with art museums considered as a cultural and aesthetic paradigm.

ORIGIN AND MEANING

The institution of a museum as a collection intended to have an expository value has been practised since classical antiquity, since the Greco-Roman world, with *pinacotheca* and collections of statues. Until the modern world of the 18th century no distinction was made between typologies of collections, with pieces from *antiquity* included alongside *mirabilia*. In parallel with the establishment of art as history of art, the museum became a place of knowledge and an apparatus for the perception of art. With Winckelmann, the birth of aesthetics as a science of sensory knowledge and the re-establishment of Fine Arts Academies (seats of collections of artworks-functioning as a creative laboratory) modern museums were established, understood as places for the collection, enhancement and study of art. Examples are the Louvre-Musée Napoléon (1793-1803), the British Museum (1759), as the first encyclopaedic national museum, followed by the European national museums of the 19th century (Evola 2018). From its inception, the Louvre has had a communicative mission, recognising in art a pedagogic mission of educating the citizen (Hooper-Greenhill 1992), but also that of establishing art as history and as a form of the spirit.

Vivant Denon organised the first didactic exhibition hall arranging a collection of paintings by Raphael in an "itinerary" and in a chronological order, aiming at highlighting their creative evolution (Schubert 2000).

But the model of reference, the paradigm of a museum as organisation and as communication organised in an exhibition's "itinerary", is undoubtedly the Capitoline Museum (Mottola Molino 1991), which opened to the public in 1734 with a communicative vocation, thanks to the publication of illustrated catalogues from 1741 and the possibility for artists to freely copy its works. The original models, however, are the collections donated by Pope Sixtus IV to the people of Rome in 1471, with the aim of demonstrating the appropriation of the Roman world by the Church State, and the Medici collections opened to citizens in Florence. The Pio Clementino Museum (the origin of the Vatican Museums) established the basis of the three principles of the Universal Museum defined by ICOM (International Council of Museums): education, study and pleasure.

MODERN MUSEUM IN THE AGE OF COMMUNICATION

Alexander Dorner was the first who, in Hanover in 1923, anticipating installations on the experimental wave of the Bauhaus, broke the paradigm of the museum as a chronological narration, with an exhibition curated by the artists themselves capable of creating a new relationship with the public. American museums, following the ideas of Alfred Barr with the MOMA from 1929, are laid out on the criteria of communication, organised by schools and movements and inaugurating monographic exhibitions. Significant innovations were the institution of a press office and the use of glass in architecture symbolizing a new relationship with urban space. One example is the Guggenheim in New York which, in 1959, with its organisational and structural complex, opened a new phase in the communicative relationship between work, artist, space, critics and the public.

Following the Second World War, André Malraux offered a new perspective on communication and, above all, the museum gaze, prefiguring an "imaginary museum" founded on the photographic image, on the possibility of creating connections and relationships linked to the works through images, as an unprecedented "cultural montage". The photographic gaze opens to the "non-visible". The museum separates and juxtaposes through a work of "spiralling metamorphosis" (Malraux 1951). However, in the 1960s, Marshall McLuhan also prefigured a museum as a technological *mass medium* (Capaldi 2018). Krzysztof Pomian coined the expression *semiophore* to indicate an artistic object as a carrier of signs and, at the same time, a mobile object, in order to define the mobility of gaze and of sense, which museal objects constitute, in the concept of *collections* (Pomian 2003). For a stimulating update on the concept of "museal object" and the communicability of its "aura", see the essay *Pezzi da museo* ("Museum pieces") by Maria Vittoria Marini Clarelli (Marini Clarelli 2017). A documented reading, but with a critical focus on the ambiguities of technological communication for the museum and the risk of a prevalence of "technological fetishism", can be found in studies carried out by Francesco Antinucci (Antinucci 2004). As far as the problem of museal communication is concerned, the question of models of communication is fundamental. A museum cannot limit itself to a horizontal and inclusive, linear and one-directional communication, with results and effects preordained by curators. The model cannot be that of the television or traditional pedagogy. One should not forget that museums contain and exhibit cultural objects subject to individual interpretations by active subjects, even though belonging to an

“interpretative community”. The point of view of a “horizontal”, and generically “inclusive” extension of the public, as proposed in the 1970s by Pierre Bourdieu (Bourdieu & Darbel 1969) is no longer sufficient. In Italy this notion enjoyed a lively international debate in the framework of Montecatini’s conferences on art criticism from 1978 to 1980, in the years of the Beaubourg experiment (Mucci & Tazzi 1982), which is still an important cultural testimony to a now very distant critical and analytical horizon.

COMMUNICATION AS AESTHETIC EXPERIENCE

The role of the museum is that of offering aesthetic experiences capable of inducing spectators to produce sense, to configure gazes, through the use of communicative strategies that take into account cultural feedback and are capable of stimulating new ones. Every visitor simply responds in an individual fashion. The “modern” model of a museum as an encyclopaedic container is no longer sufficient. For an updated debate, see the volume curated by Simona Bodo that brings together international experiences and points of view (Bodo 2003). The theories and practices of communication experienced a decisive turning point following the 1960s. Marketing theories were applied for purposes outside those of business or advertising, and museum communication also made use of some marketing strategies, turning its attention to people rather than to “things”. In 1983 ICOM instituted an *International Committee for Marketing & Public Relations*. The ICOM ethical code is available on the website <http://www.icom-cc.org/>. Museal marketing is understood as a specific managerial process and a governance capable of allowing a museum to carry out its mission in a responsible fashion, for an efficient identification and preparation and for the satisfaction of its users. A museum today envisages a complex organisational structure of new professional figures, such as people responsible for its website, its information services, its marketing, promotional and fundraising activities, its press office, its library and multimedia resource centre and its documentation centre, a registrar in charge of the moving of artworks, a staff member handling collections, a curator, a conservator, an exhibition designer as well as staff for mediation and education services and for welcome services. Museal communication makes extensive daily use of technological means. Websites and information *kits* replace printed material. A visit to a museum is enriched by an internal communication that comprises a wide range of instruments, such as audio guides, touchscreens, smartphone apps, interactive and hyper-textual approaches, 3D images and computerised hyper-texts. The impact with social media is also relevant. Some museums incorporate the use of multi-sensorial instruments, refining a technology already envisaged in the 1920s. IT instruments allow museal executives to study the movements and reactions of their public, evaluate their attitudes, tastes and behaviour in such a way as to improve the design of exhibition projects. Graphics and educational components become essential communication elements.

NEW TECHNOLOGIES

A museum is increasingly configured as a complex IT organism, an out-and-out *mass medium* and the product of the work of a team no less elaborate than that of a theatre, cinema or television production.

Academic training in cultural heritage also has to take into account the technological element in its training curriculum, integrating it with historic-critical and philological skills, aspects that are fully present to those responsible for the security forces in charge of safeguarding cultural heritage. The technological and IT aspect is also of great relevance to archaeological museums, not only in order to allow for reliefs, but also for fascinating non-invasive "virtual reconstruction" itineraries which, while fully respecting finds and sites, can also allow for a full enjoyment by making use of "enhanced reality". Significant examples of this are the Santa Maria Antiqua complex in Rome and the Egyptian Museum in Turin, which have been able to avoid a nowadays often too widespread kitsch effect and technological fetishism that risks transforming museums into amusement parks. A careful televised popularisation, appropriate to technological languages, is clearly beneficial for the promotion of museums and cultural sites in a possible collaboration with academies and universities.

CULTURAL DIVERSITY

Museal communication also envisages an aspect of research aimed at cultural diversity, to a new communicative process of the museum that involves a part of aesthetics as a philosophical and phenomenological discipline, with attention paid to current processes of *métissage*, of new and future epistemological models, carriers of new and diverse cultural paradigms (Contini 2013) and new social narratives (Amselle 2016). The museum is also a paradigm and elaborator of multiple identities that do not only concern the world of artistic experience, but also that of the experience of diversity and of cultural and social "dislocation". Thanks to technological languages, the museum can investigate and construct fascinating original narrative systems that are also capable of opening new horizons of gazes and enquiries. One can look at the work of *Studio Azzurro* and the *Museo della Mente* (Museum of the Mind) in Rome. The work of artists who work actively in museums are also significant: Christian Boltanski works on the theme of collective and individual memory, Thomas Struth investigates the behaviour of the public and relationships with the works through photography, and Antoni Muntadas interrogates international experiences and the concept of *translation* in the context of *visual and cultural studies* correlated with the aesthetic experience of the museum. Communication is an aspect of the system of culture and of art, but also a foundation of processes of knowledge and of the aesthetic experience of which the museum is one of the main actors. Communication plays a determining role in establishing major museums as *brands*, which ensure the commercial and symbolic function of collections and for contemporary collectors, as well as for the international circulation of their works.

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