

Art Museums in Modern Society

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Edited by

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INTRODUCTION

Different books have different paths to meet their audience. Some of them are straightforward and find immediate appreciation because of their clear goals and topics. Others have complicated ways to reach for their readers because the subject discussed in them is not established as a field of study. The volume presented here is one of the latter type. Being on the cutting edge of academic research, it connects different areas of cultural and educational studies. It also includes some points of philosophy, aesthetics, and sociology. One could say it is a weak point of the book because its area of research is unclear. This is exactly what happened to the book when it was offered to various publishers. However, others see the weak point as its strength because of the perspective the book opens to professionals of different disciplines. It could be a reference book for various special fields in the Humanities, from educators to philosophers. It would be a reasonable question to ask why the book is a useful resource. Another such question is how can the materials of the book be applied.

This volume concentrates on the process of transformation that is happening with art museums and their role in the modern world. The multidimensional research considers art museums from the perspectives of their social disposition, personal development, and educational practices. The book embraces modern perspectives in Museum Studies as part of an international process where museums' activities are transforming from established practice to the most innovative actions. The volume compiles a vast range of references and observations in different areas of the Humanities. It concentrates on the process of transformation that is happening with art museums and their role in the modern world.

The book includes three parts where museums are considered as parts of different spheres in society, in personal life and in education. The first part, "Changing the Paradigm: New Roles of Museums in Modern Society", surveys the horizon of a social perspective on museums' role in modern world, objectively analyzing the new societal roles of modern museums. The transformation modern museums have to accept is rooted in the new challenges which society offers to museums: a transformation from being sets of collections into places for social gathering.

Dr. Mariselda Tessarolo with her article "The Museum as a Meeting Place between Artist and Audience" presents a permanent question as to

where an artist could meet his or her potential audience. From the historic perspective, cathedrals and social places were such meeting points. At this present time, the arts exist either inside museums or out on the streets, producing graffiti images or grander entertaining centres. Dr. Tessarolo, following the tradition of establishing museums as places for dialogue and for the exhibition of cultural heritage, considers the peculiar social bond between a museum and the region where that museum exists. Expanding the vision of the traditional bond, the author analyses new types of bonds between museums and regions. A new socio-cultural environment, full of unpredictable spontaneous activities, can hardly be programmed and planned. Recently, with the tremendous development of the tourist industry, it has become the real issue for popular historic sites, including famous museums and galleries. Museums present a selection of what a given society considers to be best. Art is a “social fact” and inserts itself in the social memory, which allows a historical-dynamic relationship to be established with its end users. In this sense, it is a true “social contract”. From the author’s perspective, the modern museum paradigm has changed because the audience and its demands from museums have changed too.

In the second chapter, Dr. Ilaria Riccioni, University of Bolzano-Bozen, in her article “The Social Turn of Institutions: Museums as Social Spaces, Memory Builders, and Social Discourse Stimulants”, considers the museum phenomenon from its historic and functional perspectives. She points out the enormous changes which have happened to the museum, reflecting changes in society over centuries. These changes are always related to education, culture, social issues and community. Nowadays, from its traditional “container role”, the museum has opened up its function into a dialectical one. The kind of museum that Futurists wanted to destroy has really come to end, leaving space for a completely different relation to culture and audience. From the education space widely claimed in the 1970s, the actual role of museums has turned out to be a relational one with the community, in strict relation with the social needs of the inhabitants, their identity, and cultural knowledge. Museums have become cultural centers, promoting culture in many ways: spreading knowledge on special issues, collecting research, promoting global-local arts, being laboratories for education, and fostering the relation between arts and landscape. The chapter goes through the changed dialectical relation of museums with contemporary society.

Dr. Ekaterina N. Shapinskaya in the third chapter considers “Museums Facing the Challenges of the Digital Era” in the context of a cultural transformation in this era. Though museum collections have become available to broad audiences due to new digital technologies and the

expansion of virtual space, it is not to be taken for granted that this means growth in the mass audience's interest in classical heritage. Interactive programs, though popular with visitors, are often purely entertaining, thus lowering the educative potential of museums. Another problem is the growth of consumerism in museums' activities today, which concentrate to a large extent on souvenir production, often overshadowing the value of the original. These problems are common to all cultural institutions of the postmodern era and can be solved only by the combined efforts of cultural producers, researchers, and educators.

Dr. Boris A. Stolyarov from the State Russian Museum applies a philosophical approach to rediscovering traditional museum settings, such as seeing the museum as a place of education. In the chapter "Fine Arts in the Museum Setting as an Artistic Model of Metacognition" he sees this as a new turn, exploring the museum phenomenon in terms of metacognition. The current world expands its boundaries to the global scale, and museums are responding to the process in their unique ways. This chapter describes modern museum practices as a combination of educational and scholastic perspectives. Answering to modern challenges for art museums, the author sees museums as places for supporting morale, cultural heritage and a tolerant environment, as well as for developing imagination, thinking and cognition. The issues modern museums experience nowadays could be overcome through the approach of creating metasubjects that lead to metacognitive knowledge. The author sees these new terms as a resourceful way to include art museums in the modern socio-cultural environment.

Dr. Raluca-Mihaela Levonian in the fifth chapter "When Art Meets History: Popularization Discourse and Persuasion in the Announcements Posted on Italian Museums' Websites" studies popularization discourse in terms of connection to the domain of humanities. The study fills a gap in understanding the new role of museums presenting collections in digital ways, analyzing twenty exhibitions presented on the websites of two Italian museums, the Musei Capitolini of Rome and the Bargello Museum in Florence. These museums have changed the style of the digital information placed on their websites and created texts which are a "hybridity of genres", informative and persuasive. These characteristics are considered as a new type of production by modern museums, in their way of existence in the modern world: popularizations plus advertisement. This chapter investigates how the announcements of the special expositions recontextualize a specialized discourse of art history and make it accessible to the general audience. The results show that, besides the employment of explanatory structures, the announcements of expositions also revert to narratives and to evaluative strategies. This is both to arouse visitors' interest and to

discursively construct the event as a unique opportunity for both education and entertainment.

The second part “School and Museum: Transforming Museums for Modern Educational Praxis” represents modern studies in museum education, when the combination of social perspective and personal development occurs. This part starts from understanding an individual’s scope, giving a personal perspective on using museum collections to generate individual aesthetic experiences and responses. Being on the edge of psychological, educational, and museum pedagogy research, the part analyses museums as a part of personal development. Educators from different countries and continents not only analyze the current situation but also offer programs, curricula and strategies applied in modern schools.

Dr. Elena Polyudova and Dr. Elena Olesina in the chapter “Reality of the Socio-Cultural Environment: Museums in the Discourse of Modern Pedagogy” consider an experimental model of socio-cultural environment that connects schools and museums in one educational space. The model implies interconnections between schools and museums on a constant basis. The experiment as a new educational strategy appeared as a reaction to the transformation that is happening in various socio-cultural institutions, including museums and schools. Although museums offer a plethora of educational programs of different formats, from traditional to innovative, these programs do not satisfy the need for new educational approaches that include students in the process of knowing the socio-cultural environment of a region. This environment is inherited, and can be understood through a special educational program that embraces all the possible agents of cultural diversity of a certain place. The program needs to be expanded into the entire living cultural space. In such a paradigm, a museum plays the important role of a liaison between the structured and rigid school system and the endless possibilities for exploring the world outside of school.

Dr. Elena N. Korobkova and Dr. Larisa M. Vanyushkina in the next chapter “Towards a Methodology and Practice for Using the Educational Potential of Museums for XXI Century Schools” investigate the problem of interaction between museum and school, the two most important institutions of cultural inheritance, whose missions are the same – the inclusion of a person into the «cultural code» of contemporary culture. The authors reveal the specifics of each institution and the unique ways of familiarizing people with culture inherent in each of them. The main focus of the chapter is Museum Pedagogy, created as a new direction of museum-pedagogical activity, allowing a museum to actualize its educational potential and support the connection between museums and schools. Modern practices in such connections are weak, as the authors claim, and lead the idea of

Museum Pedagogy to develop in new directions. The chapter proposes changes from the concept of modern Museum Pedagogy to a different type, the pedagogy of Museum Activity. The new concept considers traditional communication between schools and museums as a broad communication: from working at a museum exhibition to learning about the world outside of the museum. To establish the new concept, the authors define its essential characteristics and its application in the context of school and higher education.

Dr. Natalya D. Kareyeva develops the idea of educational implication through famous cultural objects presented in a city's historic environment. In the chapter "The Summer Garden as the Place of Enlightenment" she explains how the garden exists in the modern setting of educational and cultural programs in Saint Petersburg. Today, apart from sculptures, the whole design of the Summer Garden founded in 1704 by Peter the Great serves to educate its visitors, who can take a foray into the world of 18th century topiary art and amusements, immortalized in the Summer Garden. The present times require up-to-date solutions pertaining to the spatial use of the open-air museum. The chapter gives a picture of the most popular activities and festivals inserted into Saint Petersburg's sociocultural environment. In these festivals, visitors take part in various workshops: blacksmithing, pottery, fountain craft, astronomy, seamanship, culinary arts, weaving, and many others. Visiting the Summer Garden, adult guests can learn about the most famous regular parks of the world, go on a tour of the Red Garden, a vegetable garden with various vegetable crops, and attend lectures on the birds inhabiting the Summer Garden.

Chapter XI includes an interview with Silvia Mascalchi and Anna Soffici, Curators of the Educational Department, The Uffizi Gallery, Florence, Italy. Chapter XII - Interview with Sandra Jackson-Dumont, Head of the Department of Education, Metropolitan Museum of Arts, USA. Chapter XIII - Interview with Boris Stolyarov, Director of the Department of Education, the State Russian Museum, Saint Petersburg, Russia. Chapter XIV - Interview with Michelle Steen, Public Programs Manager, the Crocker Art Museum, Sacramento, California, USA. To hear the voices of practitioners who work at museums, Dr. Elena Polyudova, organizer and editor of the volume, has decided to run this series of interviews. The interviews were designed to represent the art museums of different countries and continents. The requests were sent to various museums. However, not all of them provided a response. With those who answered, it took a long time to establish contacts with curators and representatives and to organize ways of communication.

All the interview questions were the same and asked about each museum's definition of museum education; also about the museum's educational activities, and its strategies to prepare new coming professionals who are supposed to work at the museums in the educational field. The questions were formed based on the perspective of education in museums. The scope of enquiry meant that the most important aims were to enquire not only about how museums understand museum education, but also about the kind and types of activities that are current for the modern art museum environment. On the one hand, the interviews could be considered as a picture of modern art museum education. On the other hand, they are the starting point for extensive research about the directions a modern art museum expects to go in the development of its educational activities.

The volume offers interviews from Italy, Russia, and the USA. It is interesting to mention that the scales of museums are different. There are the world-level museums that do not need to be presented, like the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, USA; or The Uffizi Gallery, Florence, Italy. Another type is museums of the national level, like the Russian Museum, Saint Petersburg, Russia. A regional museum is also presented in the interview from the Crocker Museum of Art, Sacramento, USA. This scope allows us to analyze the responses in terms of seeing the museums' approaches in museum education as an exemplification of their philosophy. Some of the interviewees mentioned that the interview helped them to think about their museum's educational philosophy one more time and verbalize it in concise statements. Overall, these approaches show the philosophy of Art Education, Museums Studies, and Museum Education in each country. The extensive questions about the methods of using a museum's collections as well as methods of preparing new personnel create a vivid picture of how art museums perceive their mission in the current world, how they describe their goals and strategies; and also of what challenges they have, and how they deal with the issues.

While the volume was finalizing for editing and printing, the extreme situation of COVID-19 has struck the world. The process of preparation allowed Dr. Polyudova to ask a new set of questions, to see how museums could survive the challenge of being in the hard circumstances of the pandemic and quarantine. Due to the importance of the issue, the COVID-19 questions were placed at the beginning of the interviews. These chapters could help educators and curators not only to find the essence of museum education in different countries, but also to see how art museums react to the most acute of current problems.

The multidimensional research presented here considers art museums from the perspective of their social disposition and from the perspectives of

personal development and educational practice. The main purpose of the volume is to research fields where changes are current. Art museums are avant-garde in their attempts to adjust the world cultural heritage to modern society's needs and demands.

PART I.

CHANGING THE PARADIGM: NEW ROLES OF MUSEUMS IN MODERN SOCIETY

CHAPTER ONE

THE MUSEUM AS A MEETING PLACE BETWEEN ARTIST AND AUDIENCE

MARISELDA TESSAROLO

This was how the new nations began to look at themselves in the mirror of their own beauty and their own history: a beauty and a history constructed over the centuries and that an epochal event now showed in all their magnificence and political, ideological and symbolic value... (Ragusa, 2011, p. 48)

Introduction

Cultural heritage is a set of tangible assets accomplished in specific historical periods and located in a specific space where culture itself may be understood and create its own myths and main topics. The ways that may be chosen for its upgrading and promotion must be part of a wider process, so “cultural heritage” means a complex of actions of conservation and transformation performed by material and immaterial institutions, of narratives and interpretations that may be transmitted from generation to generation (Calabrese, Ragone, 2016, p. 49). A correlation between these elements serves to identify the heritage as such, and to make it the object and subject of the narratives by institutions, media and individuals coming into contact with it. In order to understand the value of cultural heritage and communicate it, the essential component is to be found in the relationship. The specific spatiality of the place where the assets are rooted may be considered a trans-place, meaning an anthropological place that goes beyond local and global dimensions. The mapping of a place becomes dynamic thanks to the connection of information, and images of the collective cultural memory belonging to that location. A place is such if it is a place of identity, if it is historic and relational, and the carrier of an unceasing overlapping of specificity, location and temporality, as well as of interpretations and relations (it affords collective and individual identities

as well) (Augé, 1992). Italy has an extremely rich cultural heritage, so much so that it is often difficult to appreciate it. In the current historical period, conservation is not enough and experimentation is needed with a view to the valorisation and communication of such heritage.

Culture is a process that creates order; it is a system in which only the cultural creations and norms necessary for the self production of the system itself hold validity (Bauman, 2002, p. 129). When rules seem to be hazy and therefore difficult to comprehend, we need to realize that what is taking place is a crisis situation requiring a change because the “old regulating concepts” no longer prove to be useful. Therefore, it is time to discard the old paradigm and to develop a new one, allowing the “normality” of what the ancient paradigm declared to be an anomaly and a deviation from the rule to be seen; now, on the contrary, exceptions become marginal again and marginal phenomena become exceptions again (Ivi, p. 130). In any case, ascribing an organic structure to culture highlights inequalities and differences that are considered as factors characterizing every civilized society, and which are therefore positive factors for the development of culture. The need for culture to be geographically analysable in local cultures raises the issue of regionalism, and there follows the importance of the ethnicity of cultural traditions, seen as a natural resource for social groups.

Art was not always appreciated in the same way as it is now. Duby (1977) traces the flourishing of culture, starting from the earliest days of capitalism in the sixteenth century. He reconstructs the human and cultural fabric surrounding the works of art of that period, considering them in their globality, the whole fabric by which they were generated. The masterpieces emerge not as objects of contemplation, but as the authentic expression of particular religious and political ambiances: for the glory of God at first, later for the power of princes and finally for the pleasure of the wealthy. The museum therefore comes last, after the monasteries, cathedrals and stately palaces.

Towards the middle of the nineteenth century, when the new national States achieved their independence and realised that monuments could cunningly support political power, thus measuring their strength as their own, the monument became a new instrument of power, one that monopolized strength and created modern institutions (Ragusa, 2011, p.48). This observation relates to the consolidation of national states between the nineteenth and twentieth centuries and the construction of a “tradition”, and to the growing attention to the protection and flourishing of bodies and institutions devoted to it. It is important to remember that the art-loving public is never a single body, nor a definite one, because it changes in

composition due to various causes that must be taken into account from time to time. This means there is not a single type of viewer, but a set of types due to their *habitus*. Participation in culture does not have a constant value but rather is temporally limited, and this is why research needs to be constantly updated.

1. The cultural event and material culture

What is beautiful seems to be subjected to a syndrome that may be detected through specific needs. Such needs are set by harmony, which allows the expressive power affecting the emotional sphere to be grasped, and by the symbolic attitude, which evokes values capable of mobilizing people. In short, what is harmonious and expressive is easily understandable to everybody, while grasping of the symbolic requires a verbal comment, which is equivalent to socialization mediated by language (Demarchi, 1983). Nothing may be defined as “good” if it is not related to a “need”. Participation in a cultural good implies a sense of belonging that is manifested by the will to “provide work” and a need to own and maintain the goods (Barbano, 1980). Panofsky (1973) also takes the viewer’s point of view and distinguishes three spheres of meaning. The first relates to recognition of the object, the second to recognition of the world of images and allegories, and the third allows the world of the values that are represented to be iconologically interpreted. Subjectivity leads a person to a specific way of acting that merges into the *sensus communis* ascribed by the group to a specific object or group of objects, and finally to the meaning ascribed to a hypothetical ideal in a symbolic model of action (Weber, 1960). Such specification seems to fit the relation between individuals and cultural assets, a relation that should use human resources to uncover the meanings of artistic symbols. Human action provided with meaning is also that which leads the subject to understanding, and this word is singularly appropriate to what is enjoyed, even though enjoyment is difficult to translate, for feelings as well as for art.

The meaning of the term “communicate” is vague, in any case (share or exchange something); but thanks to communication, over the course of history man has woven relations that have allowed him to build and rebuild the social world. Communication initiatives in the field of art are known as “cultural events”, an expression around which the production of conveyed meanings gravitates. An event is a moment of socialization with new possible relational forms and new visions of the real world. In the words of Berger and Luckmann, it is a social product and at the same time a factor of social change (1969, p. 125). Its other peculiarity is that it joins the relation

among social actors as well as that among actors and reality. The word “mediate” means making accessible to experience and at the same time constraining the experience to a certain mode, because accessibility does not have stable forms, but rather is constantly reshaped by changing proportions and generating forms of reality that are always new. An event may take different forms: exhibition, concert, show, staging; and the actors involved are the artist/author and the viewer/audience.

In today’s society, consent is the main instrument of investment and the proposal of culture becomes a service including several viewers. The cultural product is the means of attaining well-being and the cultural event provides an answer for the need of identification, that leads to sharing collective rituals and raising the sense of belonging. The cultural event (the museum, staging etc.) offers the possibility of identifying and generating meaning, which is the result, or the ability to relate products in a social interaction that allows the organization of oneself and the world. If we accept the sense given by cultural psychology of a shared, challenged, negotiated narrative (Mantovani, 2003, p. 8), culture itself takes the form of the narrative constructed over the course of life. In this biographical flowing, the event may represent a moment when, through a narrative negotiated with other participants, a specific situation takes place in which principles and abstract norms are made tangible and legitimised (Ivi, p. 10). The experience of participating in a cultural event exceeds the time borders of the organizational context and widens the meanings disseminated in the experience to the whole personal life. An event is such because it is structured in order to be a particular moment in the life of an individual who extends his/her being, and is testified by the very existence of those who took part in the event (Bassetti, 2011, p. 19).

The production of meaning may be defined as the orientation of the real that has the task of reducing complexity. “Meaning” may be defined as the basis of intentionality of awareness, or as the production of meanings. For Habermas (1986), action with meaning is a linguistic interaction and consequently a communicative rationality: there is meaning when an ordinary language is present that allows experiences to be transmitted among subjects. This is a fundamental process both for society and for the perspectives of meaning of the subject him/herself. The cultural event implies dialogue among the persons involved and takes place as a continuous merging of perspectives of understanding. There is, in fact, a continuous creation of meaningful connections, in which the creation and enjoyment of an artwork are not single events, but part of a social process involving the individual and society in a circular and repetitive way (Tessarolo, 2004, p. 148).

2. Why museums?

Although it belongs to a “difficulty” of the imaginary, art fits a limited category of facts that possess objective reality and, together with other human activities, allows the possibility of better understanding society (Francastel, 1969). Even today the world of art reflects its pluralism and its cultural fragmentation and is criticized for not providing an instrument of analysis among contrasting points of view (Crane, 1987, p. 142). A work of art represents such an immeasurable cultural value precisely because such work resists any division: the product that is created in fact retains its creator in its innermost self. As a social actor, the artist is part of a system of collective actions (the world of art) and, according to agreements that are generally shared, he/she possesses a special talent (Gallino, 1997).

The fragmentation characterizing current society does not prevent the construction of structures allowing it to appear as an organized set of individuals in reciprocal interaction. The close proximity between artist and viewer does not allow production models to be separated from enjoyment models. It must be considered that the viewer, or audience, is not necessarily a contemporary of the artist, although this may be the case in the short span of the life of both. The artist is a social actor who interacts with other actors, since his/her actions occur in response to norms and expectations, hardships and remunerations, demands and offers, all coming from social systems, meaning from networks of relations among people and from recursive activities that exist independently of the social actor. If we compare the responses given by artists and non-artists, we find that non-artists rely more on stereotypes. This means that those who experience their work “from within” do not regard it as something different from that of other professions (Tessarolo, 2014).

Art and society are one inside the other. It is therefore necessary to appreciate emerging sensitivities as signs of a society that is constantly being renewed (Ferrarotti, 2005). Social constructions, even the most cumbersome ones, regenerate but do not disappear, and in general the artist-genius is preserved by critics. Finally, one of the reasons why the definition of genius is still in use is that it avoids the embarrassment of affirming our inability to explain creativity in other terms (Tota, 1999).

Engaging in sociology means appreciating the significant interconnections that exist among social facts and among concurrent causal relations that become intertwined with daily action, understanding their origin and, on the basis of guided observations, their possible and likely development (Riccioni, 2008, p. 9).

There is an aesthetic differentiation or, as Langer would say, a peculiar symbolic form among different arts that is manifested in a concrete external existence, indicated by this author as painting, sculpture, literature, theatre, dance etc., each with its own “import”. Each of these finds a placement not just in society, and therefore in the urban spaces in which it originates, but also in a primary space such as a library, museum, theatre, and concert hall.

The museification of art, according to Gadamer (2001), is a typical trend of our times and would serve the purpose of neutralizing the potential for understanding, morals and education to be found in great artistic creations. This is precisely why the aesthetic experience is confined within the borders of a perfect place, separate from the world. What is thus accomplished is a “sterilization”: the monastery, cathedral and palace no longer have a prevailing moral or religious interest in what they represented until around 1500, and their place has remained empty. In the contemporary world, though, with the setting up of museums and thanks to new communication technologies, works from all times and all countries may be appreciated precisely because they are “collected” in museums. Critiques relating to the fact that museums offer a superficial experience are not completely realistic, not even if we consider that what is gathered in a museum reflects the choice driven by a specific taste. That taste follows a “historical rearrangement” that leads to it taking on an artificial and eclectic character, on the basis of the decontextualization of objects and their exhibition in a neutral space. Notwithstanding the critiques on its “unnaturalness”, the museum is an emblem of modernity (Carchia, D’Angelo, 2005). It is not only a collection made available to the public: the collections of courts and cities reflected the choice driven by a specific taste and mainly included works regarded as exemplary. Now a museum is a collection of those collections, and it remarkably finds its perfection precisely in the historical rearrangement, which in turn tends to become wider and wider. The decontextualization presented by a museum is not real, because an artist wishes to have at least one of his/her works in an important museum, and also because the viewing public knows where to go in order to contemplate an ancient or modern work of art.

The observations that can still be found, the critiques of the museum and the other places with the same objective, relate to the disorientation of aesthetic awareness, the loss of meaning of art, the loss of the artist’s place in society and the meaning of his/her work. The very fact that art and the artist still exist shows that so do meeting points and landmarks, and the museum is certainly one of them. Nowadays the artist may be freer, although the space he/she occupies in society corresponds to his/her being

relegated to the restricted and protected space of an exclusive community, which however is no longer able to actually affect the rest of society.

Tota's hypothesis is that a new paradigm is taking shape for museums. Perplexities are related to the fact that a museum is an authoritarian instrument for the transmission/preservation of power, culture and art by a predominant hegemony. As sociologists, we can imagine that the social form is undergoing a transformation, from closed text to open text, with a change in institutional forms, meaning the way in which institutions understand their Model User, as well as in the curators' poetics, meaning the Model Visitor (Tota, 1999, p. 118; Eco, 1979). We are faced with a revolution, as documented by the experiences of dialogical museums, although the asymmetric relation embodied by such a mode of producing art and culture is not eliminated: the form has changed but the content has remained the same. The museum is an institution that is, by definition, something or someone speaking "in the place of": the cognitive delegation that must be reiterated by the audience every time they enter a museum is, after all, a delegation attributing power and authority to the museum (*Ivi*, p. 119). Dialogue, debate and discussion, however, serve to decrease the complexity of the system (Luhmann, 1986).

2.1 The museum's new aspects: dialogic museum and online museum

The dialogic museum is an improvement on the traditional one because it is closer to the contemporary visitor, who is used to acquiring knowledge from diversified media. The dialogical role of the museum may become real: a museum cannot be the monological seat of a collection, and the subjects may be seen in a dialoguing perspective in which they find themselves and are renewed. The point is the development of new perceptive paths, wider communication networks and a top-down type of relation. Transforming dialogue into a political device of "participatory museography" is not merely a rhetorical or demagogical trick, nor is it a romantic or wishful abstraction. Rather it is the shared, full recognition of otherness, of the indispensable presence of those who are part of our everyday experience, of the need to hear the voice of others in the cultural debate as well as in the strategy and practice of civil rights (Demma, 2018).

The host museum takes shape and comes alive if the evidence of the objects that are collected and arranged within a tight texture of analogies and differences, permanence and discontinuity, finally makes the presence of man visible – man considered in his duplicity as artist and viewer. In the end, the adoption of technology implies a global redefinition of the field to

which it is applied. Starting from a reflection on the role performed by information and communication technology in the cultural sphere, Antinucci (2007) focuses on the experience of the visit and the satisfaction of visitors in relation to the technological instruments available at the museum. With new information technologies, museums must reconsider themselves because the very assumptions upon which they originated have changed. For the moment, major museums take advantage of the Internet's potential to present their assets, and this is presented as an additional way to come in contact with the museum.

2.2 New policies for museums

Audience development and audience engagement are two perspectives from which museums may be studied. Both are relevant and both concern the public, its composition, the behaviours of fruition and spectatorship. The starting point could be how visitors obtain information, how artworks are given meaning and how they are set at the heart of the sociological reflection on communication. The sphere of study is interdisciplinary because audience development, for example, must take into account marketing cultural policies, given the need to face an increasingly complex market of cultural assets, as well as diversified modes of access to culture. Marketing may carry out a positive function for museums, especially by helping them to understand and relate to their specific audience, with a view to a stronger relationality and experientiality (Tota, 1999). This situation implies a degree of activism by cultural organizations, which need to include a variety of initiatives in their projects, from closed spaces to live events, so as to appeal not only to audiences that are already familiar with culture. Varying degrees of active participation by the viewers, of interaction and interactivity with production contexts are envisaged. The receiver, i.e. the public, is put at centre stage and a deeper knowledge of audiences is sought. The audience is therefore at the centre of studies on development and on engagement. The reference point is the widening of the pools of users by intercepting sectors of the potential audience that have difficulty accessing culture. The orientation of cultural organizations towards audiences stems from the need to better understand an increasingly complex cultural market, involving a very important aspect of the audience; that is, inclusion (Gemini, Paltrinieri, 2018, p. 11). The objective of audience development is therefore to widen the types of audience, considering those who are already part of the audience as well as those who are not. From the perspective of audience engagement, what becomes necessary is the individualization of processes targeting the

audience that already exists, in order to strengthen its sense of belonging (Maitland, 2000) and to try to reduce pockets of resistance.

3. Visitors and museum space

Sociology studying museums and art fruition in general gains its independent status by breaking free from the history of art and aesthetics, because it is not possible to imagine any art outside of society: art is a form of social activity with specific characteristics of its own (Heinich, 2004). This sociology is interested in the composition of the art audience, its behaviours, motives and emotions, and in other aspects as well, such as the artist's profession, for example. Art generates "aesthetic pleasure" and this is essential for development of the communication dimension and social dimension, without which it is hard to feel the same about the world as one does about one's homeland (Marini Clarelli, 2005, p. 16). Kant's sense of "being in the world" is a necessary aesthetic moment; it is not a subjective or private feeling, but a common feeling (*sensus communis*), understood as a feeling of the community, the need to aesthetically anticipate a shared meaning allowed by art fruition.

Regardless of the type of museum, each visitor places him/herself in front of displayed works with his/her own set of knowledge, experiences and expectations, making that person different from other visitors. The fellowship with others in society is found in the designation and search of the *sensus communis*, which allows one to look with one's own eyes – different from everybody else's eyes – and yet see what everybody sees, on the basis of what is shared among different persons and makes them similar. Durkheim notes that common awareness presumably progresses less than individual awareness and, in any case, it is altogether weaker and more vague. The collective type takes shape and its forms are more abstract and more indecisive. Individualism and free thinking have always existed: these phenomena do not have a beginning, but rather they develop unceasingly over the entire course of history. This does not mean that common awareness is in danger of disappearing completely; it consists more and more of ways of thinking and feeling that are extremely general and undetermined, which leave a margin and an ever increasing multiplicity of individual dissents. Although awareness is common, since it is shared by the community, it is individual from the point of view of its object. The situation of collective awareness is therefore extraordinary: while receiving all its strength from society, it does not connect to society but to ourselves (1971, pp. 182-183).

The arts' sphere of existence is peculiar and different for each kind of art, and what may seem an aesthetic differentiation was studied by Susanne Langer (1965) as the particular "import" that each art possesses and that allows a concrete external existence to be created, consisting in a specific location: library, museum, theatre, concert hall etc. The museification of art, in spite of being a typical trend of modernity, should not be understood in a negative sense as Gadamer does (2001). The shift to museums is not to be regarded as negative: a concert may well be enjoyed in the sitting room of a palace, but even better in a concert hall, in an auditorium conceived *ad hoc*. The aesthetic experience is located within the boundaries of a protected space for a better fruition, in a place that is not separate from the world but belongs to a world where art and its audience are "democratically" situated in "special" places that may be understood as heterotopias. Ancient heterotopias were replaced by modern locations, and such locations may also be non-places or counter-places. Among the most ancient there are gardens, museums and libraries, where time accumulates endlessly through the objects' space. Such spaces are containers of power and their social space is open to creativity and human action (Tessarolo, 2007a).

3.1 The museum as a meeting place between artist and audience

The museum is the place where the viewer meets the artist. It is a special place because it identifies with the *autoritas* that legitimately accepts the person considered an artist within its boundaries. The same is true of other places such as churches and cathedrals; when they wish to increase their patrimony, the great artists who are appreciated for their skill in that historical moment are called.

Museum visitors keep their culture and actively respond to the materials on display. Their visit is an "interpretation" of the exhibition that passes through their personal experience, values and perceptive skills. Museums are important places for displays and have become an institution (Tota, 1999). The most ancient effect ascribed to the museum is that of freezing a part of social history with the choice of objects characterizing the culture of a given historical period. The most modern aspect of the definition of a museum comes from Karp and Lavine (1991) who talk about "the poetics and politics of museum display", and these categories are more frequent in the sociological reflection. The educational and innovative value of art lies inside society and is accomplished through a specific language that narrates our history (Riccioni, 2008). Emotions that pass through an aesthetic medium have the task of strengthening group bonds and therefore social values and norms.

In a complex society where cultural pluralism is predominant, an increasing differentiation of cultural processes and initiatives taking place within society is accomplished. Such a scenario is fragmented because fruition of this particular historical time-period is characterized by a symbolic consumption that will develop further with the support of consumers and, since it is a cultural product, will also be an economic product (Tessarolo, 2004, p. 147). Fruition appears as a moment when the subject can claim his/her own artistic preferences, and the willingness to affirm one's own irrenounceable identity and individuality is no exception (Bassetti, 2011). The complexity of the modern age is in contrast with what happened in the past, when it was possible to speak of "taste" as a meaning shared by the client, the artist and the audience. Since taste was a "middle choice" category (Dahlhaus, 1980), it reflected the cultural scenario that existed before the desire to affirm individuality emerged, with the consequent thriving of proposals that constitute an artistic "deregulation", which in turn nonetheless has a strong social matrix (Verdi, 2005). In such hyper-segmentation of topics and lifestyles, consumers meet in niches of consent. Viewers paradoxically meet because they share exclusive and narrow preferences. Cultural products can not be "apprehended" if they are considered separately from the contexts in which they are created and consumed. In fact, the creation and fruition of a product (artwork or other) form part of a process involving both the individual and the society in which he/she lives (Tessarolo, 2015). The artist forms part of the audience because he/she shares the same symbolic processes, but places him/herself above the audience when giving shape to symbols that are socially shared: the artist's creation will be spread if it is legitimised by gatekeepers. The final success of a product depends on the audience who reinterprets the original meaning given by the artist to his/her work, following his/her expectations that, in turn, come from his/her cultural capital. In other words, viewers buy and appreciate goods to which they attribute meanings that are different from the meanings given by producers. Inputs from producers and consumers combine, thus causing a circularity and constant modifications. The specialization of cultural processes stems from the search for new structures, a search that, in turn, stems from the need for change and identification. Internal and external (national and international) minorities bring changes to society by introducing new elements from different cultures. What is slowly created is therefore a panmixia (Toynbee, 1949), i.e. a cultural promiscuity between the majority and various minorities. Such promiscuity brings great richness to the social context by highlighting the native traits, considered as instruments for discovering new market spaces. The various genres that are present in cultural events nowadays are no longer self-

sufficient universes. Instead, they have a meaning only if they are considered in their mutual dependence. In the light of these considerations, what is brought into question is the idea of cultural hegemony of one sector over others. The changes involving society are generated within society; they are necessary because each generation is different and has to find its own peculiar mode of expression. With this push for change, what looms at the horizon is a cultural promiscuity in continuous expansion, reflecting subjectivities as a principle of the post-modern age. The promiscuous space in the sense suggested by Toynbee is like the hybrid space of our contemporaneity, meaning a new form of social space where boundaries have been blurred or eliminated; and this allows for the creation of new spaces and new forms of socialization.

4. Studying museum visitors

Applying statistical methods to the study of attendance at fine arts museums is very important for measuring differences in behaviours as a function of socio-demographic stratification (gender, location, social environment, education and income level) internationally. Bourdieu and Darbel (1966) turned international studies around with their research in the 1960s, which opened new perspectives in the field of cultural practices and was configured as an innovative contribution both on artworks and on visitors. New concepts were introduced such as that of “cultural need”, an element appearing mainly in the social classes that were equipped for “cultural appropriation” and decreasing or not appearing in lower social classes lacking such means. It was shown that the fruition of culture and love of art mark an invisible and insurmountable barrier between those who belong to wealthy classes and those who do not. The museum reinforces a feeling of belonging for the first and exclusion for the latter.

In the same research, the results of a study of French museums were compared with those on Greek, Spanish and Dutch museums. There emerged three distinct modes of fruition, all tightly connected to the social class to which visitors belonged. Visitors from higher classes (the largest group) would rather visit museums on their own or with a competent friend, avoiding crowds and guided tours. Visitors from middle classes would read catalogues and choose guided tours, meaning they sought plenty of information. Finally, working classes would not go to a museum because they lacked the necessary social capital.

4.1 Museum visitors in Italy

The data collected by ISTAT for the year 2017 were published in January 2019. They refer to the Italian cultural heritage, with 4889 public and private museums and similar institutions open to the public in the country. There are 4026 museums, galleries or collections; 293 archaeological parks and areas; 570 monuments or monumental complexes. The year 2017 recorded the highest number of entrances ever (119 million, a 7.7% increase over 2015). The breakdown is as follows: 57.8 million visitors for museums, 15.5 million for archaeological areas, 45.8% for monuments; the higher increases were recorded for the second and third item.

Most museums are ethnographic or anthropological; 12.7% are archaeological and 12.3% display ancient art. On average, there are 27,000 visitors for each structure (although 28.7% of structures did not record more than 1,000 visitors per year). Rome, Florence and Venice by themselves attract 36.2% of visitors. Temporary exhibitions held in 2017 were organized by 43.7% of the structures and viewed by 18 million visitors.

Museum structures are present in one Italian *Comune* (municipal area) out of three (there are 2,371 in total). It is actually a widespread patrimony covering the whole country: 1.6 museums (or similar institutions) every 100 square kilometres, and about 1 for every 12,000 residents.

Unlike other countries, the museum offer in Italy consists of a significant number of structures that are small or very small in size, with a capillary diffusion around the country and representing the wealth of local communities. Their small sizes reflect on their organizational ability and scarce financial resources. In 31% of cases, staff includes 4 people at most; tickets may be bought online only for 2.9% of these structures, while 27.4% have access to public financing.

A crucial factor for the upgrading of such a pulverized cultural heritage is the ability of museum institutions to organize themselves into a network, to promote synergies through the integration of resources and services, so as to gain some advantage in terms of visibility and efficiency. In Italy 42.5% of museum institutions belong to networks or organized museum systems comprising a number of museums or institutions, with a view to sharing human, technological and/or financial resources (ISTAT data for 2017). 43.7% of them organized displays and/or temporary exhibitions; 48% have a social account; 64.7% performed educational activities; 67.4% rely on volunteer workers. The structures that may be visited with an admission fee and also free of charge are 34.4%, while those where the admission fee is the only possibility are 13.5%. In Italy 63.1% of the museum patrimony is public; 42% of museums are controlled by the local municipality, 9% by the Italian Ministry of Cultural Heritage and Activities.