AISTHESIS

Discovering Art With All The Senses

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SOMMARIO

CULTURE, LANDASCAPE AND THE HERITAGE IN THE CONSTITUTION

Vito D'Ambrosio

On the subject of the environment, the Italian Consitution contains the barest of statements, beginning with Article 9, the shortest on the twelve Fundamental Principles:

"The Republic promotes cultural development and scientific and technical research. It protects the environment and the historical and artistic heritage of the nation."

This unusually bald statement gives rise to a number of considerations: the first, and most central, is that the constituent assembly was bent, at all costs, on avoiding a repetition of what had happened under the fascist regime, which had taken upon itself not only to skew cultural research and development but even the way they were taught.

Moreover, and this was a completely new departure, the Constitution assumed responsibility for protecting the landscape of the country and its historical and artistic heritage – notions that were still fairly hazy at the time. Two rapporteurs – the Latin scholar, Concetto Marchesi, a communist, and the budding young professor, Aldo Moro, a Christian democrat – were appointed to produce a first draft. Marchesi was in fact responsible for the article as it appears in the final version of the Constitution; he restored the original wording which had actually been deleted. What is undeniable, however, is that a vision of culture emerges which is, in a certain sense, "utilitarian". In other words, culture is considered less for its instrinsic value than as an asset to be propagated and kept free.

It may have been at the insistence of Calamandrei (there are no minutes of the meetings) that the word *culture*, which had been deleted from an earlier reading, was reintroduced in support of that concept which led to the second paragraph (see the blow-by-blow account of the origin of the entire article in the historical reconstruction undertaken by Tomaso Montanari in his commentary in the Fundamental Principles series – one slim volume per article – published by Carocci in 2018). Calamandrei was clear in his own mind that the development of culture would bolster the democratic stability of the Republic (see again

Montanari's observations and reconstruction), but in reality there is no trace of his vision in the text of the Constitution. By proclaiming that it is the responsibility of the Republic to promote the development of culture, the text undoubtedly implies that it is an asset of great value, but this remains an intuition, (almost) self-evident, not an explicit statement.

Of considerable interest, in my view, is the mention of scientific and technical research, placed on a different level from culture. To put it bluntly, in those few words we can discern a distant echo of Crocean theories, from whose "humanist" approach the constituent assembly was trying to safguard the position of science - a different sort of asset, though its development needed to be watched over nonetheless. It was certainly no easy task to decide on the body which was to be responsible for overseeing and developing scientific and technical research, whether the State or the future Regions. In this article the leading role was entrusted to the State, but it was already apparent that it would sit uneasily with Article 117, and the strenuous defence of the article (still referred to as Article 29) was mainly conducted by Marchesi. The problem was further complicated following the reform of the entire Title V of the Constitution - carried out in accordance with the 2001 constitutional law, - which delineated, or rather, botched, a messy separation of roles.

As regards the second paragraph, it should be pointed out that the wording, "the Republic protects", is used only four other times in the entire Constitution (Articles 6, 32, 35, 37, in the first paragraph of each; see MONTANARI, OP CIT. p.50). After an initial lengthy period during which the whole of Article 9 (and then more specifically the second paragraph) was accorded little more than token value, in more recent times both scholars and the law have assigned ever greater importance to this principle. The earliest effective confirmation of this came in 2006 when law 152 approved a number of general regulations concerning the environment. Meanwhile, at a European level, the "European Union Charter of Fundamental Rights" (Treaty of Lisbon, approved in 2007 and brought into force in 2009) assured the "citizenship", in a bare provision, of the concept of sustainable development as the principle underlying the protection of the environment. [Art. 37. Protection of the environment: a high level of environmental protection and the improvement of the quality of the environment must be integrated into the policies of the Union and ensured in accordance with the principle of sustainable development].

However, it is important to bear in mind that the protection of the historical and artistic heritage of the Italian nation – suggested as long ago as 1519 in tha famous letter sent by Raphael and Baldassare Castiglione to Pope Leo X (see excerpts in Montanari, op. cit, pp.53-54) – has been woefully neglected, as witnessed by the appalling destruction wrought by frenzied urban development driven by greed. (On the whole question which saw “protection” shading off into “development”, until it was virtually ignored under the pretext of transforming the country’s cultural heritage into “the oil” of Italy, and on the slight improvement in the situation recently, see Montanari, op.cit. especially pp.53-58; with specific reference to landscape which ought to be considered in tandem with heritage, pp.59-end, together with the harsh criticism contained in chap. 4, entitled, and not arbitrarily, “The current situation and the (non) implementation of Article 9). This, too, could form a seperate chapter in an account of the “Non-implementation of the Constitution” (a subject on which nine meetings were held in Ancona in 2018 to mark the 75th anniversary of the Constitution; the proceedings were published the following year).

MANKIND AND ART: AN INESCAPABLE RELATIONSHIP

Fernando Torrente

Psychologist – Psychotherapist

I'll start by mentioning a memorable experience I had visiting the temple at Segesta in Sicily.

To reach the temple – whose colonnade is still intact, together with the sacred area it encloses – you need to leave the road and follow a dirt track. It was a beautiful day: all around was silence, broken only by the bleating of sheep and the sound of their bells in the distance. You had the feeling of withdrawing from the modern world and, as it were, moving back in time. Then you arrived at the temple. Touching the columns, you had a sense of the swathes of time that had passed over them. The silence and the air of the place (aura or genius loci, if you like) moved you to imagine what it would have been like when it used to be visited by people who sought contact with the divinity.

Obviously we can sense this "aura", the spirituality of a place, in many churches, when conditions are right and they are not invaded by swarms of roudy visitors who may enliven a trip to a market but deaden our capacity to feel in places intended for meditation.

Many places and many museums have their unique "aura", and it is a pity when a spacious, imposing museum reserves a tiny space for exhibiting a few tactile reproductions in an area which looks at best like a classroom.

Beauty and wonder

I have begun by talking about receptiveness to atmosphere so as to make the point that imagination needs to be joined to sensory perception, and it is the combination of the two which enables us to fully appreciate a place or a work of art. This is because together they awaken memories, reveries, attaining that feeling of wonder which, in my view, needn't

necessarily accompany our experience of beauty as it is ordinarily understood – beauty, which, as history shows, can anyway change its canons from one age to another.

We now come to the way in which we can enjoy a “traditional” artwork, in other words not an installation.

But first a small point: the fact that touch, as the language philosopher Marco Mazzeo points out, is the victim of a paradox. It is so basic that we tend to take it for granted: for the sighted, contact with a work of art takes place mainly though gazing, looking, in a word through sight.

Skin filters the outside world: it is the most extensive sensory organ.
For people who cannot see, touch is the most important sense. It is a sense which is often undervalued despite the fact, as the French psychoanalyst Didier Anzieu points out:

“Even before they are born, cutaneous sensations introduce infants to an extraordinarily rich and compex universe, one which is as yet diffuse but which awakens the perception-consciousness system, lays down a global and episodic sense of existence and provides the possibility of an original psychical space.

Through the maternal contractions and expulsion from the vagina at birth, the infant undergoes a complete body massage which activates his sensations.

Bodily contact is a prerequisite for survival. The skin is like a second brain. Millions of nerve endings send messages to the brain where, in the first year of life, they are processed as sensations, images, perceptions, thoughts and words. Skin protects, contains, circumscribes and, at the same time, allows contact with others and receives and responds to an infinite number of stimuli. It is the organ which filters the outside world and responds to it.

The skin is undoubtedly the sensory organ which covers the largest area. Physical contact between mother and child, for example, causes great pleasure to both. Besides, we need only think of the pleasure of being caressed and caressing, of the erotic pleasure we feel in contact with another person, due in large part to the skin.

It is evident, too, that it is impossible to live without skin, without touch; moreover, as early as antiquity, flaying was seen as something terrible, the stuff of legends and myths like Apollo and Marsyas".

Touch. Perception and presence of the whole body

The hand is the principal organ of touch, especially for a blind person for whom it takes on a perceptive, exploratory role without foregoing its executive function.

Thus we can say that while touch is assigned to a specific and clearly localized organ – the hands – it also involves the perception and presence of the whole body.

In other words, touch is a complex sensory system which thrives on the tension between two polarities: one diffuse and extensive, usually called somatesthetic, and the other focused and local, known as haptic perception.

It is precisely through the haptic mode that touch is able to perceive forms in an accessible way; so it is only through the hands that we can explore objects in their concrete, simultaneous three-dimensionality.

In fact, haptic exploration in conjunction with kinesthetic exploration allows us to grasp most of the properties of an object and thus to enjoy works of art.

But as I pointed out earlier, enjoyment of a work of art, for the sighted and non-sighted alike, relies, I would argue, on a combination of different senses together with the imagination which the piece kindles in us.

This is not the place to dwell on how an artwork is explored through touch, on the preparation needed to enjoy it to the full, on the technical aspects of reproductions, nor on the differences between touch and sight, nor on the fact that visual-motor coordination will be replaced by bimanual coordination and ear-hand coordination: all this would require another article and it is not what I want to stress here.

What I do want to point out is something else: that in certain cases a work of art, whether looked at or explored with the hands, produces the same sensations, the same emotions of beauty, joy, sadness, unpleasantness. But there are other artworks which can be

experienced in a very different way, and I would cite the example of one which the artist Piero Gilardi invited me to touch: The hurricane.

The work shows the devastating effects of a hurricane on a tropical forest, with obvious consequences for nature and animals. Tactile exploration at once reveals the dramatic nature of the scene; trees uprooted and flattened, foliage battered, and birds flung to earth. The scene is one of untold violence, and although it is explored analytically by means of touch, you nonetheless have the impression that the sensation conveyed by it all is immediate, instantaneous, as quick as a glance.

However, the same work analyzed by a sighted person makes a very different impression because all the violence and drama of the scene is softened, almost annulled by the brightness and vivacity of the colours chosen by the artist. At this point, if we want the non-sighted person to have a complete experience of the work, as the artist probably conceived it, we need to supplement tactile exploration with the spoken word and offer a narrative of the piece.

We think we see where we should only feel

But despite this I feel that what is a source of wonder and amazement for the sighted person need not neceessarily be so for those who cannot see, otherwise we risk a form of psychological subjection which obliges the blind to accept the point of view of the sighted willy-nilly.

To conclude, I would like to quote from Johann Gottfried Herder, writing as long ago as 1778: “We think we see where we should only feel; in the end we see so much and so rapidly that we no longer feel anything, and are no longer able to feel anything, because feeling is always the guarantor and basis of seeing. In all these cases, sight is only a shorthand formula for touch. Sight is dream; touch truth”.

In addition I would like to put forward a theory which is perhaps a bit bold but which I hope may be useful in provoking thought and initiating discussion.

As well as our conscious ego we have an unconscious ego which, for example, for Jung is not only the repository for what we repress of the “family novel” (personal unconscious) but also a collective unconscious, the seat of archetypes which in themselves are not

representable but which are manifested in archetypal images, dreams and phantasies. And this “ancient” substrate which is at work within us is something that the blind and the sighted have in common, and hence a common inner base, but it is also something we share in our perceptions of the outer world, and so maybe when it comes to experiencing a work of art and feeling amazement, the distance between the blind and the sighted is not as great as a preliminary analysis might have suggested.

But this, as I say, is a hypothesis to think about and discuss.

A final thought concerns installations which, in some cases, already involve all the senses and can therefore be enjoyed by the sighted and blind alike without mediation due to reproductions, but this is an argument that would need to be developed at greater length than we have space for here.

MUSEUMS AND THE DIGITAL REVOLUTION

Christian Greco

Director of the Egyptian Museum of Turin

Today we find ourselves steeped in the so-called digital revolution which has already radically transformed our cognitive approach and hence our working methods. In archeology, photogrammetry and 3D modelling allow archeologists to document the entire excavation process and reconstruct contexts even after they have been removed. We can reproduce a sarcophagus with submillemetric precision by recording all the stages of production and reuse.

Non-invasive diagnostic imaging makes it possible for us to look inside a sealed receptacle and unwrap mummies virtually. Accurate analyses enable today's scholars to observe the fibres of a papyrus and thus help recompose ancient documents.

Moreover, digital communication allows us to create virtual working environments where scholars the world over can compare data and confer.

All this makes it easier and quicker for scholars to carry out their work. But does it follow that the role of the humanist is becoming subordinate? Quite the reverse. The data we collect are more and more detailed and complex, and call for a level of interpretation which is ever more exacting. The scientist and the humanist need to collaborate even more closely, pooling their respective expertise in an attempt to unravel the complexity of the contemporary world. What it amounts to is an increased synergy which goes beyond the dogmatisms of the individual disciplines: deciding on a shared semantics and developing a truly multidisciplinary approach are the only ways we have of facing the challenges of the future.

As a result, there is speculation as to the future role of museums – whether they are institutions destined to disappear, smothered by the exponential growth of science and technology, or whether some future is assured. In attempting to offer an answer, we need to bear in mind, when rethinking the future role of museums, that the main reason they

were founded was to house objects from the past so that they might be preserved and handed down to later generations. Despite all the changes that have come about over time, it is undeniable that our experience of museums still revolves around finding ourselves in the presence of artworks, archeological remains or documents of social history.

Changes will continue, there will be more and more of them. Various organizational and architectural solutions will be devised to meet the needs of the present. There will undoubtedly be new forms of cultural enjoyment. Out task, however, will remain the same: to improve the visual, aesthetic and intellectual experience of every visitor who comes face to face with an artefact from the past, by providing all the information needed to enrich their understanding. So the future of museums is, as it always has been, research.

Perhaps by thinking about all the work of researching and curating the collections, we may be able to understand the role of the digital revolution in museums today, not least because of the immense amount of work which has been carried out in this direction since the 1990s. Museums have equipped themselves with digital cataloguing systems which not only allow them to incorporate all the information contained in the paper archives but enable them, at the same time, to interrelate a wealth of information regarding how pieces were acquired, besides determining the provenance, the materials and date, by linking up the iconographic data, the photographs, drawings, and available bibliography for every single exhibit. This colossal undertaking has involved carrying out scrupulous inventory checks, photographing, drawing and carefully measuring the thousands of exhibits held in storeage, but it results in a deeper knowledge of the heritage in our care.

In the space of twenty years, digital inventory tools have become indispensable in all routine aspects of curating, and they have also served to give an important boost to research. Over time, museums have developed their own websites, enabling them to share information about their artefacts and thus make it possible for scholars and anyone interested to undertake research, gather material, and learn the results of recent diagnostic investigations and restoration work.

Since the beginning of the century, new technologies have started to play a key role also in the exhibition areas. Films, videos, multimedia tables have begun to proliferate in

numerous museums keen to offer new ways of enjoying artworks, ways that involve more active public participation and visitor involvement. One example is the COMPASS project (Collections Multimedia Public Access System) at the British Museum, which started in 1997. The aim of the programme was to improve the visitors' experience by making the collections more accessible, providing more information so that they have a better idea of the cultural context of the exhibits, and encouraging them take a more active part. Since 2002, installations have been placed in the museum's reading room. The terminals had the appearance of open volumes, with an interface which, also in terms of dimensions, resembled those of a book. The content was partly derived from the digital inventory system but the texts had been deliberately rewritten so as to prove more accessible to a wider public. The question of accessibility has in fact become more and more central to communication with the public. It has led a number of museums – starting, indeed, with the British – to set up an Interpretation Office, in other words a department of cultural intermediaries able to translate the specialized content produced by curators into written texts which everyone can understand.

Over the past twenty years, countless research projects have been devised to piece together the *disjecta membra,* or "scattered fragments" – namely grave goods and parts of monuments now separated and housed in different museums as a result of the circumstances in which they were acquired and added to the various collections. One such is the Digital Giza Project, conducted by Harvard University, which has gathered iconographical material, archive documents, information, excavation results, and then developed 3D models to digitally assemble the monuments of one of the world's most important archeological sites: the pyramids of Giza and the cemeteries surrounding them.

So, bit by bit, data banks have been built up and websites developed to the point where they function as fully-fledged virtual museums. In this way the context is restored and the archeological find is returned to life in its true historical settting.

Piecing together the *disjecta membra*, making our research results available to all, allowing access to iconographical and archive records, are also ways of getting past the question of ownership and creating an impossible digital museum.

What we will be able to achieve in the near future is not just the reconstruction of the original context, but a fully immersive experience which transports us back, physically, to a historical setting and allows us to traverse it in its various stratifications until we come to understand it as an authentic palimpsest continually modified by man, and its archeological remains, housed in museums, are the fragments of memory which time has preserved.

A glimpse into tomorrow's world is provided by some interesting experiments in digital innovation like, for example, the Teamlab Borderless of Tokyo, a museum without borders, without a preordained itinerary for visitors, consisting of digital artworks which communicate with each other, influence each other, and sometimes interconnect, surmounting the physical limits of the rooms in which they are located. In the exhibition areas, you are free to take a stroll, explore, discover different realities and create links with others. The suggestiveness of this innovative digital laboratory provides valuable insights into the direction that museological thinking may take in the coming years.

In the humanities, technological innovation and traditions of study and analysis going back thousands of years are bonding, pooling their resources in a way that is increasingly apparent in their commitment to devising lines of research which enable us to understand the relation between material and immaterial, to reconstructing contexts now lost, and to developing complementary narrative lines which make it possible for us to fully explore the historical development of a particular culture and its influence on the territory in question.

Museums are paying great attention to communication with and for the public; accessibility has become one of the main watchwords for these institutions whose aim is to weave themselves more and more closely into the social fabric in which they are embedded. A sea-change is also coming about in our way of conceiving visitor involvement: the index of success is no longer ticket sales and increased visitor numbers; the emphasis has shifted to what is described as community participation.

The new means of communication are performing an increasingly important role, not merely in terms of transmitting content, but in sustaining an ongoing dialogue with the public and garnering interesting ideas, food for thought which, in one way or another, can be useful for cultural programming. Careful thought is being given to the role that social

media have gradually been acquiring, and how they need to be incorporated in any case into a strategic cultural plan with well defined objectives.

What we have witnessed above all in the new millenium is an ever-increasing attention towards the public, a public which is increasingly interested, in a proactive way, in the activities promoted by museums; in fact, forms of involvement have been sought which have led to the notion of a participatory museum, a shared entity.

The intention is that visitors should take a purposeful, proactive part in programming, and co-curation ventures are on the increase.

This has given rise to a heated debate between those who fear that museums will “debase” their function and “pander” to the demands of the market and those who claim that museums are still too self-referential, inaccessible and impenetrable to most people. As a result, an attempt has been made to create a distinction between what are called “research museums”, the preserve of scholars and experts in the field, and “open museums” which invite the active participation of the public.

The truth is that by discharging the task of shedding more and more light on the evolution of the world and the history of the people who created the objects they preserve, museums are fulfilling their primary responsibility to continually hone the contact between people and experiences of all times. To do this, they need to resort to their most profound and refined form of listening, namely research.

AISTHESIS. DISCOVERING ART IN EVERY SENSE

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