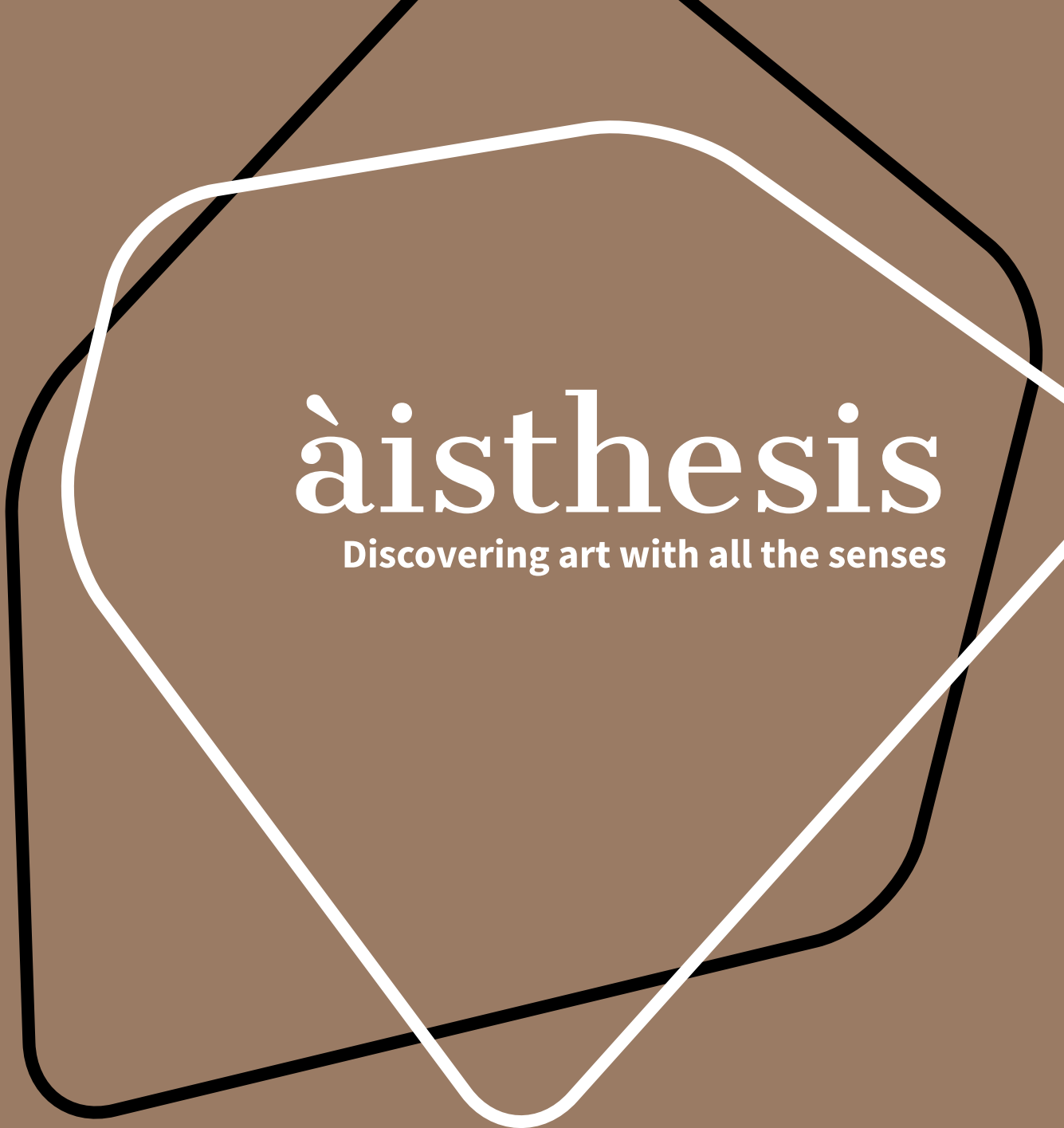




àisthesis

Discovering art with all the senses

Recorded online journal

www.museoomero.it

Issue 31 – Year 12 – November 2025

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Towards the universality of languages

A cultural heritage design manual for the extended training of future technicians

by **Gabriella Cetorelli** (Ministero della Cultura – Comitato Unico di Garanzia) and **Luca Papi** (Consiglio Nazionale delle Ricerche – Dipartimento di Scienze Umane e sociali, patrimonio culturale)

In 2018 - after a long journey begun in 2008 with the adoption of the *Guidelines for the elimination of architectural barriers in places of cultural interest* (Ministerial Decree 28 March 2008) - a new vision of the concept of valorizing cultural heritage was spread, through the adoption of the **Plans for the Elimination of Architectural Barriers in places of culture**, which directed museums, monuments, monumental complexes, state archaeological areas and parks open to the public, to carry out preventive analyses in order to design actions, services and itineraries dedicated to enjoyment for the greatest number of visitors. These requirements were incorporated into the **National Recovery and Resilience Plan**, which, within the aim of the objectives identified by the European Union, through €300 million in funding to the Ministry, recognized the fundamental role of training of heritage professionals. Therefore, it was a matter about filling a technical gap because until then there wasn't work that summarized, in a textbook format, the aspects of “**planning for all.**” This need was accepted by the **National Research Council** - Department of Human and Social Sciences, Cultural Heritage, in collaboration with the **Ministry of Culture** - General Secretariat. They promoted the drafting of the first *Design Manual for Accessibility and Expanded Use of Cultural Heritage. From the Functioning of People to the Functioning of Cultural Places*. The Manual was published by **CNR Editions** and drafted in digital (freely available at the institutional website) and paper versions, following the basic principles of accessibility. The volume was presented at the **National Research Council Headquarters** on April 12, 2024, and at the **Spadolini Hall of the Ministry of Culture** on December 11, 2024, attracting widespread interest among academics, professionals, and operators. It is the collaborative work of a group of **35 researchers**, with experts, scholars,

and technicians: an authoritative representative of Italian culture about this field. They were driven by a common goal: placing the visitor of heritage at the center of attention, surrounded by appropriately designed cultural sites, like the sun and planets in Copernicus's heliocentric theory, representing a new **humanism based on values**. An innovative methodology was used; it was founded on **interdisciplinarity** and the **integration** of different knowledge and fields of expertise. The work is divided into **eight chapters**, beginning with the **functioning of individuals** understood as a complex system (based on the *International Classification of Functioning, Disability and Health*), ending with the **functioning of cultural venues**, understood as material and immaterial "spaces". This is followed by a phase relating to **accessible design**, explored in various "architectural" contexts, considered in the broadest sense of the term: physical, sensorial-perceptual, cultural, cognitive, and technological. The "**right to beauty**" is embodied in the presentation of exemplary design cases in unique and valuable cultural heritage sites, as well as in the illustration of pilot projects which provide occasions for thought and discussion. The meeting with heritage audiences happens within the historical *excursus* that led to the implementation of the **Plans for the Elimination of Architectural Barriers: perceptual, cultural, and cognitive barriers** in cultural sites. Furthermore, the vision extends to accessibility and expands enjoyment of **UNESCO World Heritage Sites**, which have been playing a leading role in the recognition of culture as a "global public good", through the presentation of case studies. This is followed by a section on **facilitators of cultural sites**, presented through a detailed glossary, designed to ensure consistency of intent with the proposed objectives. Then, a broad and detailed **analysis of national, European, and international regulations** regarding accessibility and expanded use is presented: a valuable and essential tool for consultation, knowledge, and study for those wishing to approach the culture of hospitality. Therefore, the Manual presents itself as *an ongoing* tool that, far from seeking to establish fixed points and conclusions, intends to initiate virtuous development models for the heritage of the future. The centrality of this work is based on the principles of *Universal Design*. From this perspective, the functioning of cultural places is the prerequisite for designing consciously and responsibly accessibility, not only to overcome barriers but, above all, to support functional change, based on the new needs manifested by social complexity.

Therefore, the manual is not merely a set of technical guidelines but represents a journey of interdisciplinary research and reflection with the aim of guiding through the path to **universal accessibility**. The value of this work lies precisely in this vision: an open participatory culture, in which diversity becomes wealth and accessibility is not a constraint but an opportunity for the growth of society as a whole.

In this sense, we decided to present the work in multiple “**languages**,” launching a shared journey that places at the center the individuals, their rights, and their ability to experience culture in its various forms.

It all began with a careful observation by Professor **Aldo Grassini**, President of the “**Omero**” **State Tactile Museum in Ancona**, who, upon receiving a paper copy of the Manual, pointed out that it was impossible for the visually impaired to read. This impulse told us we needed to get back on track.

The Manual, an expression of present-day concerns, was presented, as mentioned above, in April 2024 at the **Marconi Hall of the National Research Council**. A few days later, in May 2024, **Legislative Decree 62/2024** was enacted confirming the vision presented in the volume. It adopted a bio-psycho-social approach to disability. It also recognized the “**Individual Life-Plan**” as a subjective right, understood as a duty of public institutions, settling the person with disabilities at the center of social action. The aforementioned law also introduced a significant terminological update in the language of disability, replacing stigmatizing terms still in use with a *person-first* approach.

Given the relevance of the topics covered, it was decided to create an *addendum* to the volume, focusing specifically on aspects of language applied to disability which must be used thoughtfully, attentively, and respectfully. This resulted in a *Policy Brief*, published by National Research Council in October 2024 (freely downloadable from the institutional website), drafted by the authors. Therefore, in this journey aimed at overcoming cultural barriers, Professor Grassini’s impetus has shown us that it was the time to move from “**the language to the languages**.”

Coming back to Legislative **Decree 62/2024**, we focused on an aspect of the law that defines the Life Project as a path for achieving one's goals and aspirations, helping processes of **autonomy** and **self-determination**.

These themes also encompass the relevant areas of education, understood as a fundamental human right, as stated in our **Constitution**. A **universal education system** is a crucial tool for creating an equitable, participated, and democratic society.

Therefore, the possibility of extending the aim of education to multiple languages can enable all heritage technicians to effectively become protagonists and interpreters of universal planning.

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*To achieve this goal, numerous Institutions were involved, in particular: the Italian Library for the Blind “Regina Margherita” in Monza, represented by its President, Professor Pietro Piscitelli, who, together with his talented staff, edited the **Braille** version of the Manual; the Foundation - Officina dei Sensi in Ascoli Piceno, represented by its Director, Dr. Mirco Fava and Dr. Lucilla Boschi, who, with expert collaborators, produced the Italian **audiobook version** of the work; the University of Macerata, represented by its Rector, Professor John Mc Court, Professor Elena Di Giovanni, and Professor Francesca Raffi, for the **English version** of the volume; the National Institute for the Deaf, represented by its President, Dr. Angelo Raffaele Cagnazzo, and the Association of Italian Sign Language Interpreters, represented by its President, Dr. Maria Dellino, for the **Italian Sign Language version** of the volume; the Institute for the Deaf of Turin, represented by its Director, Prof. Enrico Dolza, and Dr. Nicola Della Maggiora for the **International Signs version**.*

These versions are complemented by the **paper and digital versions in Italian** edited by the authors.

This has led to the creation of the unique Technical Design Manual, both nationally and internationally, translated into seven different versions, each with different “languages”. It was presented on September 18, 2025, in the prestigious Sala della Crociera in the Palazzo del Collegio Romano, home of the Ministry of Culture.

In this project, we aimed to integrate **Accessibility** into the themes of **Equal Opportunity and Research**, combined with Experimentation.

A spoken English translation of the Manual is planned shortly, by the **Foundation – Officina dei Sensi of Ascoli Piceno**.

Finally, the aim is to create innovative consultation stations for the Manual, located nationwide, to promote the transversality of useful languages for the universal design of cultural sites and the training of future technicians.

Sound caressing form: the accessible experience of the Ferragamo Museum

by Chiara Fucci

In last years, the **Ferragamo Museum in Florence** embarked on a profound transformation, aimed at making the museum experience increasingly inclusive and multisensory. Its commitment to **accessibility**—traditionally understood as overcoming physical barriers— became a **true laboratory of cultural research** for the museum, where technological innovation intertwines with listening to visitors and a broader view for the public. The project dedicated to blind and visually impaired people, developed in synergy with the Italian **Union of the Blind and Visually Impaired** – Florence provincial section, gave rise to an exemplary model of aesthetic accessibility with an immersive audio guide in Dolby Atmos® and a tactile path designed to explore the *Salvatore Ferragamo 1898-1960* exhibition.

From sound to space: the voice which shapes the imagination

The accessible audio guide was created in collaboration with the **Libero Accesso Association**, which edited the texts, and under the supervision of the UICI, ensuring that the language, pacing, and descriptions met the needs of a visually impaired audience. The true innovation, however, lies in the use of Dolby Atmos® technology used for the first time in a museum setting for accessibility projects.

In this system, sounds move in three-dimensional space: voices, instruments, environments, and background noises surround the listener, creating a sense of physical, almost tactile, presence. It's no longer simply a matter of "hearing a description", but of **inhabiting a soundscape**, where each element contributes to reconstructing the proportions, materials, and atmospheres of the artworks.

The audio guide is accessible free of charge through the Bloomberg Connects App, an international platform that brings together multimedia content from leading cultural institutions. In this way, the exhibition virtually opens up to the world,

reaffirming that accessibility is not only a right, but also an opportunity to expand the dissemination of knowledge.

Touching the form: the tactile path and the body of memory

Along with the audio experience, the museum introduced a **tactile experience** allowing visitors to explore a selection of **shoes** from the **Ferragamo Archive**. The reproductions accurately restore the details of the original models created by Salvatore Ferragamo, transforming touch into a vehicle for a material and intimate narrative. Blind and visually impaired visitors, accompanied by mediators and museum staff, can experience **the brilliance of the fashion company's founder**, not only through words and sounds, but also through the texture of the materials, the weight, the curvature of the heel, and the softness of the leather.

The experience is completed by a tactile map of the exhibition spaces, designed to encourage visitor autonomy and created by the company 3Discover. The first visit, organized with the UICI, had an enthusiastic participation, demonstrating a genuine need for sensory experiences.

A new culture of accessibility

For the Ferragamo Museum, this project represents much more than a simply one-off initiative: it is the manifestation of **a shift in institutional perspective**. Accessibility has become an integral part of museum design and staff training, transforming the team's approach.

The collaboration with associations and specialized organizations led the museum to question what "inclusion" truly means: not to adapt later, but **to design experiences** from the outset to take into account perceptual, linguistic, and cognitive diversity.

As director Stefania Ricci emphasizes the museum, despite being a corporate institution, aims to be a "place of culture open to diversity and sustainability," in line with the definition of a museum proposed by ICOM in 2022. The challenge is to ensure that Ferragamo's legacy—its artisanal attention to form, body, and

movement—can engage with increasingly diverse audiences, without losing its identity but enriching it with new sensorial dimensions.

Accessibility as a form of beauty

The creation of the Dolby Atmos® audio guide and the tactile tour mark an important step in the renewal of Italian museums toward a concept of “**accessible beauty**”.

In the enveloping sound and the explorable form, the Ferragamo Museum rediscovers its vocation as a place where **creativity meets the human**.

For true innovation — as this project demonstrates — is not just the use of cutting-edge technology, but the ability to put technology at the service of listening, empathy, and participation.

And in this dialogue between art, touch, and sound, Ferragamo fashion is transformed into a **shared experience**, a multisensory narrative inviting every visitor, sighted or otherwise, as part of the same story.

A Natural History of Touch

an enjoyable book by Laura Crucianelli to help us understand ourselves better.

by Maria Manganaro

It is the largest of our organs, the only one with weight and extension (9 kilos by two meters). It is the sense that connects us directly with others, that distinguishes us from others, that helps us become autonomous. Yet, it is the one we pay the least attention to, despite having awarded the **Nobel Prize in Medicine to David Julius and Ardem Patapoutian in 2021**, during the pandemic, when social distancing deprived us of hugs, handshakes, and pats on the back.

Recently, Laura Crucianelli, professor and coordinator of the Cognitive and Affective Neuroscience module at Queen Mary University of London, recently published a popular book so interesting and engaging that it was named one of five finalists for the Galileo Literary Prize. Published by Utet, “A Natural History of Touch,” just under one hundred pages, effortlessly delves into the vast universe of studies and discoveries regarding the unique sense based on reciprocity: the effects of caresses, light and violent touches, taboos, the consequences of touchscreens, and even the effects of cinema on our skin.

The Italian neuroscientist has been studying **affective touch** for years; it’s the way we perceive ourselves and others from the moment we are born. In fact, we are among the few animals born prematurely, so we need someone to move us, feed us, cover or uncover us. That someone is usually the mother, who, by caressing her belly, voluntarily establishes contact with the fetus. The fetus senses the intention of the touch and responds with observed and verified movements. Caresses are extremely important in the first months of life, even crucial for the **child’s survival and balance**.

Experiments conducted in orphanages since the 1990s demonstrate that children deprived of emotional contact experience cognitive, emotional, and social difficulties; difficulties that a supportive family environment can alleviate in the

long term. Therefore, touch can have a restorative, as well as comforting and **fulfilling function** establishing healthy contact with the outside world and with one's own self. "It is the first sense with which we come into contact with the world and the last to leave us", Laura Crucianelli summarizes in the introduction.

It's been demonstrated that touch on the skin can release **oxytocin**, the anti-stress hormone that generates feelings of calm and well-being when we hug a friend or pet our dog. Given the reciprocity of touch, the effect is diametrically opposite when the touch is violent and unwelcome, as evidenced by child abuse and other incidents. These unwanted effects are sometimes caused by cultural legacies capable of eliciting strong reactions, such as the MeToo movement, or are the result of pathological distress such as anorexia.

Thus, a nonverbal but strong form of **communication passes through the skin**: a slow, delicate touch speaks the language of love and tenderness, while a quick, firm tap on someone's shoulder is intended to attract attention. But touching a person isn't permitted everywhere. The author devotes an entire chapter to the customs that distinguish and define both the culture of different countries around the world and the attitude of certain people who, like Trump, when they shake hands don't extend own hand but force the other person to lean toward them.

The neuroscientist tells the embarrassing situations she encountered during the first fifteen years of her life abroad, between Sweden and the United Kingdom: "I would spontaneously touch someone's shoulder lightly for asking permission, and I received dirty looks in return, suggesting I had crossed an **invisible physical boundary and not only a physical one**". In crowded places, Laura Crucianelli observes that, to make room, Northern Europeans prefer to use backpacks or shopping carts rather than brush against one another. And pandemic aside, Swedes in line leave at least a meter between those in front and behind, even at the bus stop, where, once they've boarded, they avoid sitting next to anyone else as much as possible. Often, touching each other more or less times is a **cultural issue**. While in Italy it's normal to greet someone with a hug and/or two kisses on the cheek, in Japan a curtsy from afar is appropriate. A series of studies from the 1960s even calculated the frequency with which couples in love touched each other in public places: "In Puerto Rico, an average of 180 times per hour. In

Paris, 110 times, in Florida twice, and in London, never”. More recent research demonstrates how climate conditions influence behavior, generating societies: in Nordic countries, structured “to survive adverse weather conditions that require more time to dress, procure food, and plan for the harsh winter.” Meanwhile, at latitudes closer to the equator, people have more time to devote to **social interactions, outdoor play, and physical contact**.

And climate is just one factor in defining a place’s identity. The scale created by **J.P. Henningham** in 1996 measures, with twelve questions, how socially conservative or liberal an individual is, with obvious implications for their lifestyle and their more or less use of touch. In this book, the extensive catalogue of **skin-themed** cases includes the tactile famine of constantly online teenagers, the sensation of being crawled over by a tarantula of a vintage James Bond, the pleasures of cooking, and much more.

Enjoy reading.

Linguistic identity: Esperanto, a great suggestion

by Aldo Grassini

(TedX Festival: Talk “the word”, Ancona, 27th September 2025)

The weight of the word? Consider these expressions:

“In the beginning was the Word”; “Words are stones”; “I give you my word”; “This is the last word.”

The meaning of a word is different for the speaker and the listener. It is the **epitome of a life experience**. Is the meaning of the word “home” the same for someone who lives in a skyscraper of New York and for someone who lives in a favela of Rio de Janeiro? Or even in Ancona, between those who have always lived in the Passetto district and those who have always lived in the Archi district?

Language is made of words. But if also words are problematic, imagine language! Language contains the experience of people. It always deserves **respect** and **dignity**. Offending a language is the same of offending a culture.

There are more advanced languages, more used for the number of speakers; but **there aren't superior languages**.

Language is the **identity of people**. Religion is not that identity (there are people who embrace different religions), nor territory (there are people scattered across multiple territories).

There are nations with different people and therefore different languages.

The dominant people impose their language in various ways. **The oppression of people very often begins with language**. One thing no one wanted to point out: in one of his peace proposals, Putin called for Russian to become the official language of Ukraine.

Language is an expression of a culture, a civilization.

English (today, we should say American English) is a **fast-paced language**, made up of many monosyllables, perfect for sports commentary.

French is an elegant **language in its meanings and sounds**. French People (especially women) express themselves softly; they pay great attention to form.

German is made up of long, often compound words. It is a slow (not in sounds but in concepts) and thoughtful language. It is the language of **philosophy**.

Italian is a language beloved by foreigners for its musicality. A vowel-based language, with clear, melodious sounds, made for singing; it expresses imaginative people who love the sweet life.

Italian is the language of **music** due to its vowel structure and the variety of tonic accents: truncated, flat, antepenultimate-stressed, and pre-antepenultimate-stressed words. Here's an example:

*“ Ei fu. Siccome immobile,
dato il mortal sospiro,
stette la spoglia immemore
orba di tanto spiro,
così percossa, attonita
la terra al nunzio sta ... ”*

Beyond any aesthetic consideration, **this is music**. Try translating the same musicality into French: it's impossible! antepenultimate-stressed words are missing, and the flat ones always end with a semi-vowel.

Italian is an **international** language in some contexts. The Pope's speeches in Italian are addressed to a billion Catholics, and, remaining in the realm of music, let's not forget that Italy invented Opera and its style of singing, which in less than a century, between the 17th and 18th centuries, conquered the World. All the World's great cities still have their own Opera Houses. Italian Operas are the most performed and almost always in Italian. The greatest Opera singers, even foreign ones, speak Italian and possess perfect pronunciation.

Of course, some of today's fashionable Italian singers write their songs in English. Together with language, you adopt the **rhythms, musicality, sound**, but also the **content** of a different culture.

McLuhan taught us that **the message coincides with the instrument**. Speaking a language means thinking in that language and transmitting the values and ways of life — in short, the culture — of that people. On the other hand, history has taught us that **the language of the masters always becomes the master language**. This is the essence of cultural colonialism, and the colonized people usually actively strive to resemble the more powerful people in every way, including the use of other people's language. **A national language has never been and never will be a neutral language.**

Italians (and not only) are today renouncing their identity. Young people are no longer having children and want to work abroad. **There seems to be no future for Italy.** In a globalized world, everyone tends to become “American”.

In Italy, neologisms are no longer created. English ones are adopted. Every day, a certain number of Italian words are replaced with English ones for with no apparent reason. Titles, important concepts, even certain legal principles are expressed in English.

Beware: **a language without neologisms is a dead language**, and in a few decades (not many, unlikely) Italian language will be like Latin one: specialists will study it, but it will disappear from modern communication, except for colloquial use such as dialects. It will be the decline of a culture and a civilization. Furthermore, one of our most prestigious universities, the Polytechnic University of Milan, stopped using Italian language, and many other universities are tending to follow that example starting with some courses.

Losing a language means losing own identity, and we Italians have nothing to be proud of. While we cannot boast of any great military victories in our history (and I would say “fortunately”), we could nevertheless cite almost ten names (holding us tight) who gave a decisive contribution to World history: Dante, Petrarca, Galileo, Alessandro Volta, Cesare Beccaria (many do not know that he wrote “On Crimes and Punishments” and it is one of the three or four most translated works

in the World), Marconi, Leonardo, Raffaello, Michelangelo, Machiavelli, Leopardi, Pirandello, and yes, even De Sica and Fellini.

I've discarded a lot. And in music, I even cut further: we have Guido d'Arezzo, perhaps many don't even know him who he invented the possibility of writing music. Without him, the Western musical tradition might have ended up like the music of Ancient Greece, which we don't know because there was no way to write it down then. And then: Palestrina, Monteverdi, Vivaldi, the Stradivari family and the modern violin, Rossini, Bellini, Verdi, Puccini...

What do we have to do? **Let's throw everything away in the name of a certain concept of modernity, don't we?**

As we said, English is the language of speed and, since time is money, also the language of business, of wealth. Well perhaps because I'm old, but between Dante Alighieri and the control of Wall Street, I keep Dante!

We said that a national language has never been and never can be a neutral language. But what about Esperanto?

Esperanto is not the language of any specific people and cannot represent the model of any specific way of life. Indee, it is the language of a culture: **the culture of peace**, about which one cannot be neutral.

It's not true, as is sometimes foolishly claimed, that Esperanto seeks to replace all other languages. The opposite is true: its official name is "international auxiliary language," and it aims to be a tool for international communication among other languages, large and small, all of which must be respected and protected.

Esperanto is not the language of master people and cannot become the master language.

One final consideration. When asked what Esperanto is, some clearly poorly informed media communicators often reply that Esperanto was a wonderful project that unluckily failed.

But, please: Esperanto is **138 years old**. Who decided that 138 years is too long to achieve final victory, that is, becoming the universal tool of international communication?

If we consider that Esperanto has no political power behind it, nor any economic power to finance it; there is no state mandating its learning in schools; that it is a purely voluntary movement, and that, nevertheless, after 138 years, during which it was even persecuted during the Second World War by a blind nationalism that could not tolerate it. In short, after 138 years, it is still alive and well, it is in every country in the world, used every year as a working language on dozens, perhaps hundreds of international occasions, capable of offering translations of the most important works of all national literatures, but above all, it is used regularly by thousands upon thousands of people in every field of knowledge and in every situation of social life—well, considering all this, should we call it **a failure or a true miracle?**

Credits

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Discovering art with all the senses

Supports and publishes studies and research on sensory perception and the accessibility of the cultural heritage.

Recorded online journal – www.museoomero.it

Issue 31 – Year 12 – November 2025

Editorial and management offices:

Museo Tattile Statale Omero – Mole Vanvitelliana

Banchina da Chio 28 – Ancona

website: www.museoomero.it

Publisher: Associazione Per il Museo Tattile Statale Omero ODV-ETS.

Per il

ODV - ETS

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