Symposium
OBJECT - DOCUMENT?

Beijing, China
September 1994
Symposium

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This scientific symposium of the ICOFOM Annual Conference in Beijing deals with a museological core problem: the material world.

ICOFOM Study Series 23 publishes the papers of the symposium. They discuss things, objects and documents, their interrelationship, their relation to man, and their function in the collection and in the exhibition.

The authors and the discussions during the symposium tried to find definitions and answers to questions like: Is every thing an object? What is the difference between an object and a document? Is every document an object? What is a museum object? What is a museum document? What is collected - things, objects or documents? For which reasons? What happens exactly when an object becomes a document? Do objects and documents change physically? Symbolically? Does the object-object or object-man relationship change? How? Which aspects, functions etc. of things are preserved? Can a document loose the quality of a document and become object again? Why? How?...

The present volume also includes the analysing summaries which were presented at the beginning of each session as well as a final summary and appreciation of the very lively discussions.

Our meeting in Beijing was greatly enriched by the contributions of our Chinese colleagues, to whom we address our warmest thanks for the excellent organisation of our conference.

May all papers in this collection provoke a stimulating discussion!

Martin R. Schärer
President of ICOFOM
THE OBJECT IN A MORE GENERAL CONTEXT
While trying to finalize my comments for this summary of the papers presented and given to my analysis, I have thought of our visit, yesterday morning, to the Forbidden City, and found it a good model, or a metaphor, for representing the problem we will start to discussing now...

Seeing the Palace today as a museum, we looked along the succession of gates and courtyards, expecting at any moment the appearance of the so called "Museum Objects"... There were very few of these (movable) objects, and the whole moment was indeed "the object" to be seen, understood and admired. The whole "city" was a major object in itself, open to our exploration. But the main object of this museum, the "key" object, as one can say, was not there, or yet, was hidden from our eyes behind the curtain of time - this was the "Emperor", as an object of veneration, as the center of all directions, as the invisible power that justifies all those constructions and spaces. The Emperor, as an "object" of this museum, was not the Qing or Ming first or second emperor, but the concept of the "Emperor", that which sustained Chinese culture and life for many centuries.

All the courtyards, all the gates, all the decorations and symbolic figures on wall and even on the roof, the incense burners and the marble staircases, all elements in this great architectural object derive and are linked to the concept of the Emperor and his significance in Chinese culture and philosophy in the past centuries of its history.

As well as there are no Emperors without subjects, there are no "objects" without their subjects as well, and the whole space of the Forbidden City can be seen as a model, a metaphor of social life and off all
the interactions taking place across those successive courtyards, bridges and gates.

The Emperor in the center of this illusory, or mythical space, encircled by the walls built by his own subjects, is, in a way, the reason as well as the "object" of the social life of that community, of that enclosed universe. He is the subject and the object at the same time: a symbolic object which catalyzes and structures that society, as a "reference", a center towards which every action is directed, giving "harmony" to the daily routine of thousands of individuals, as the head of a dragon, controlling its thousands of feets; a symbolic "subject", leading his people through successive generations, as a representation of themselves as a group, as a society with a strong and unique character. The dragon lies then in its people's cage, in its own realm, as a powerful object of its subjects, as a "value", a powerful value of social structuration.

The emperor and his palace are not standing here as the real historical figures who built that concrete historical monument we have visited. I am taking them now, as you have already guessed, as an image of the organization of social life, and also, in a more precise context, that our discussion, as an image of museums (with their objects and functions) and society, and of their interrelationship.

In order to analyze the papers proposed for discussion, relating them to the problem of objects in a more general context, I have thought this idea was a good structuring model through which we could approach the many observations and points of view expressed by the different authors in this conference.

The metaphor will also be useful in a different level of abstraction, in order to discuss the field of Museology as a specific discipline, building its own methods and theory. In this case we could see the Palace Museum as a metaphor for our "forbidden city" of museum theory (to which not every lay being is admitted, but only the supposed "priests" of this sacred kingdom), and analyze the gates, courtyards and bridges, decorations and allegories which we have been building in more recent years, in different places, from different perspectives. You must have noticed, yesterday, how many different views of the Forbidden City one could have, looking from every different position or point of view.
Taking the model to refer to Museology, as the field of museological theory, we can also discuss what, in this case, is the "key object", the "Emperor" ruling this discipline of studies, the objective center of its interest.

We can thus try to extract from each one of the papers analyzed some observations that will refer to one, or to both of the aspects mentioned here, getting some provocative ideas and concepts on the object of Museums, in a more framed context, of the discipline in itself, or yet on museum objects, in theirs symbolic and key value for the society who collected them, preserved them and used them, as a guarantee and a support of its own structures.

Starting with Peter van Mensch, I will quote his quoting of Jean Gabus, who said: "the object as a witness can convey the knowledge it holds if we know how to question it...

What questions could be made to museum objects, to the object of Museum and to the object of Museology, in order to grasp the knowledge they hold on...

Again it is Peter van Mensch who quotes an old Chinese philosopher: "any object has a logic of its own and that logic should be grasped by man's intelligence..."

In order to grasp the secret of these three kind of objects we are referring to, the first question to be made is that about the logic of each one of them, the logic in terms of internal and external structures and relationships, in a more broader context than that of the limited walls of our institutions.

That is, I think, the logic we would propose for this summary of the 6 papers presented to this meeting - those of Bezzeg, Maranda, Scheiner, Stransky, Trak and van Mensch.

In order to keep the logic of this symposium, I will not tackle here the problem of the internal logic of museum objects, in their intrinsic nature, transformation, uses and musealization. Despite being approached
by many of the authors mentioned above, especially by van Mensch who proposes a possible model of artefact analysis, in an integrated methodology for museological work, I will leave this aspect for other analysts of the different papers presented here, and will try to find the logical links and arguments presented for the study of objects in a more general context, for the object of Museum and of Museology itself.

This time I will mention another old Chinese fable which tells of the sages pointing to the Moon, as the object of their inquires, but who are actually looking to their own fingers. This is something useful for us to remember in this discussions, while we wait for the approaching of the full moon of the Autumn solstice. What we are discussing here is the direction of our different pointing fingers, and we must not pretend we will be defending what the moon is like...

Quoting again van Mensch, who quotes S. Weil... "We see things not as they are, but as we are..."

As I have now looked may be too much to my own fingers, and to the way I have read these papers. I will first of all take again the proposals of van Mensch in his enlightening paper, and mention his model for the study of Museum work, centered in the idea of the object, in relation with the other basic parameters that form, according to him, the content of museological consideration (p.111). According to this proposed model, the author visualizes the interrelationships of these parameters as a globe with four spheres: the innermost circle is the place of the object, seen as a methodological reduction of cultural and natural heritage; the second sphere, around the first one, is the place of the basic functions of museum work - preservation, research and communication. Nothing more easy to relate to the "Forbidden City metaphor", with the object as the Emperor, the sovereign of museum activities, around which, and because of which, all the function shave heir origin and reason. The civil servants of the museum staff have their existence submitted to the existence of their "emperor-object" - their objectified "sovereign", what could give good reason for the points made by Maria Bezzeg, when she speaks of "object-fetishism. would that be the case of van Mensch? In order to save him from this condemnation we may jump one step further to his third sphere of the model, where he puts the institutional form in which the function are implemented. If ins the institutional form of the Beijing Palace we can find the structure of an ancient kingdom, in van Mensch's model we can
find the discussion and the dialectics of the traditional form of museum institutions and the new museological parameters, based on a broader vision of material culture, as proposed by James Deetz... that part of our material environment that we shape according to culturally dictated plans... (in van Mensch's version of this definition we 'modify' matter according to culturally determined behaviors but this "modification" of Deetz original words, even it applicable to the case of artefacts, reduces the potential of creativity of human genius, as well as the cultural patterns (plans) which determine behaviors. Behaviors are determined by patterns of culture, as much as artefacts are. Behaviors are 'motion objects', or 'body facts' or yet 'mentifacts' as mentioned by van Mensch, quoting Duncan Cameron.

Besides this broader vision of cultural objects, as not limited to material things, the third sphere of van Mensch's model expands the range of institutions sharing the role of museums, refers to as 'heritage institutions'; there are equally socialment, according to these two authors.

This leads us to the 4th sphere of the model of the basic parameters for Museums and Museology, and this is the level of their relation with society as a whole. The palace Museum model proposed here is a good way to explain this outer sphere of the concentric circles, where people are allowed, and from where they proceed in the direction of the inner center.

Tomislav Sola mentions a similar model, in which 'heritage' itself would be at the center, and the museum institution would be just one among equal planets around...

The idea of the outer courtyards of the Forbidden City, with the many pavilions at both sides is again a good suggestion of what is being proposed here... museums would be one of the many "pavilions" in this Heritage City, heritage itself being the center of all action.

The category of museum objects, in this new model, would lose a lot of its power near the Emperor's banquet hall. The priest of museology would have to share their privileged seats around the throne (of material and cultural heritage) with the high-priests of other disciplines.
It is T. Sola again who expands these ideas on the role of objects in a more extended perspective, as quoted by van Mensch, considering that whether going from inside to outside (in the traditional object-oriented methodology) or going from outside to the inside (as in the community oriented new museology), theory and practice aim at the systematic combination of the values of objects (the innermost sphere) and human beings (the outermost sphere).

In our example, we have verified personally that we can visit the Forbidden City from a south-north route, or from a north-south way, or even transversally, without disturbing the richness and the integrity of the whole construction. From the point of view of the Moon, the Forbidden City is a network of interrelationships of space, meanings and social relationships.

In this discussion of the object-document dialectics, Stransky points out the need of a "shift of meaning" in our approach to museum work and objects... "The specific character of what we use in museum can only be found in the shift of meaning, i.e., in the value of transformation of reality "an sich" into reality "for us", into cultural reality. In his opinion (p.66) we should try to find the specific character of the museum appropriation of reality, mainly because we have to do with ontological elements of reality.

Stransky's paper discuss the limitations of viewing museum objects as material things or yet as sources of information. He proposes that we may have the possibility of learning the reality and of identifying ourselves with it (a holographic theory, as he says), relating this process to the theory of collective memory and 'morphic resonances' of R. Sheldrake. As a final remark, he questions our way of approaching museum objects; "if we don't prove the specific character of our approach to reality, we will not be able to prove the specific character of what we hide and occasionally display in our museums". Again the problem of museum work and of deafening and analyzing museum objects is seen as a problem of man's relationship with reality, and not with things or with institutions in themselves.

On this same line of thinking, other papers propose the same point of view of objects as the intersection of human intelligence and the material world. As Lynn Maranda says about the museological core problem, which she sees as being the material world; "Objects are items of existence which are a part of a network of meaning and are given specific
ascription as to how they relate to other objects and other material of the universe. In this sense, objects are physical points of evidence of a particular set of knowledge... and what we ascribe as knowledge is really a process that involves a relationship between mankind and the universe...

Maria Bezzeg also focuses in her paper the dialectics between material and spiritual culture, mentioning G. Lukacs' theses, and his proposition that "the material and the spiritual sides of reality exists in an indissoluble unity..."

Would this be the reason for our difficulties in defining the nature of museum objects and the specificity of museological work? Would this bethe secret or the mystery we could not yet solve, on how to explain to ourselves and to the public the ambiguity of the material we have to work with, an ambiguity which is at the background of the fascinating power of museum exhibitions and environment? The same difficulty that we will find when trying to describe to our friends and family the feelings we had and the incredible vision of the Forbidden City.

Would Museology, and Museum objects, be forever enclosed in a forbidden territory? Where in this territory can we find the keys for capturing what some authors suggest as the quality of "museality", as Tkac proposes, for instance, quoting the definition of this term as proposed by Stransky (p.99)?

These questions are tackled by T. Scheiner in her paper, exploring the relations of Man, Museum and objects, and their possible manipulation as arguments or instruments in social life. "Every objects", she says, is in itself memory and document of the history of mankind. Its own existence reflects the previous or simultaneous existence of specific processes of culture, of intersocial relations and of the various possible degrees of relationship of Man with himself and with the environment.

Developing these ideas on the lights of J.Baudrillard, Scheiner explores the signic potential of museum objects, and questions the value for the observer of the musealized object. Would it be a sign in itself, or a catalyst of the true sign - the mental representation of an instant of conscience? In Scheiner's analysis, the concept of Museology, as well as the object of Museology expand themselves outside of the Forbidden City of
museums and of human centrality. She proposes us to look outside the Palace gates, and to bring the Emperor to the level of Nature.

The shift of the center of scientific interest, from Man to the Universe as a whole, to planet Earth, may be perceived in Museology by the radical broadening of the concept of "object".

"Mountain, silex, frog, waterfronts, stars, the moon (...), everything is object, with due fluctuations", as Hainard says. But Man himself is still, simultaneously, the subject and object of the museum; as we could put it, in our fable, Man is still the Emperor. But an Emperor looking outside the white walls of his magnificent palace.

As Scheiner proposes, to finalize, every object recalls every man's relation with life, death and the world. It enhances the search for transcendence (total and free expression of the self), the constant battle with the unconscious. It is in itself a symbol of totality. And she continues: "Fragments are not enough, the museum now wants totality, interaction, interfaces. The museum wants to listen to the Music of the Universe... Let's now listen to the Music of other ideas and minds, in this conference...

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Symposium OBJECT - DOCUMENT
Theme THE OBJECT IN A MORE GENERAL CONTEXT

Analysing summary

Presented papers of Maria Bezseg (Hungary), Lynn Maranda (Canada), Tereza Cristina Scheiner (Brasil), Ibvnek Stranský and Vladimir Tkač (Czech Republic) and Peter van Menach (Netherlands) give the relative diversity of approaches to the museological explanation and significance of the 'object', concerning different museological experience in the countries of the participants. The level of elaboration is more theoretical and general without a possibility of direct application to the practice of museological institutions.

So Maria Bezseg tries to make a balance between the "material world" and the spiritual side of reality thinking that the notions 'object' and 'document' are not sufficient enough to use them for the purposes of museology. The term 'object' is not general enough and at the same time not sufficiently concrete. The category of 'document' does not precisely express the specificity of a museum's mode of being. She establishes the notion 'museal document' that means a typical item representing humankind's general level reached in a certain epoch or an outstanding item documenting old and new phenomenon of a given period. The
categories of a museum's mood of being function irrespective of whether the concerned people realize or ignore this fact. Her thoughts are on the line of Stransky's notion of 'museality' but developed in a specific way.

Vladimir Tkač in a summerized way develops the notion of 'museality'. He denotes the relationships from an object to the monument. Using the criteria of museality he states that a general object with cultural values becomes cultural property. In this relationship he inserts a museum object or 'museumium' between a document and a monument. As well he establishes the term 'manifestation' as the interaction between the man and cultural property. These manifestations can be authentic and non-authentic. They result with authentic and non-authentic documents. Qualities of the authentic documents form museality which in the original environment realize the 'monument' and in an artificial environment the 'museumium'. Only after expert museological analyses and documentation they become 'historic monument' or 'museum object' known as 'cultural heritage objects'. The non-authentic documents carry the manifestation through records as 'iconicum', 'texticum' or 'exacticum'. The Tkač's system is very consistent and it is on the directions of application of museology as a theory and methodology to the cultural heritage at all.

Z. Z. Stransky is on the same line as M. Borzeg. Explaining the term 'object' on the gnoseological approach to reality and the term 'thing' on the ontological approach he states that for the museum phenomenon is more adequate to speak of gathering things. Elaborating the term 'document' he thinks that it is too general. He suggests the term
'museum documentation' with the ontological orientation. Using K. Popper's the 3rd World (of culture) he states that museums gather monuments, a legacy for the future. Similarly to Tkač he accentuates the differentiation of monuments "in situ" and "in fondo". At last he repeats his concept of museality with the statement that a thing in the museum is not just a thing. Nothing especially new, except the widening the scope of museality to the cultural property at all and a little decline from the term 'object'.

Lynn Maranda elaborates the material world as a museological core problem. She accentuates the difference in meaning of 'museum objects' and 'museum documents' in relation to things, objects and documents in a general sense. The former create a knowledge causing the museum perspective to evaluate the relationships between the material world, objects and documentation. Pointing the difference between documents as objects and objects as documents she interprets a museum documentation and the evidence that is interpreted by the objects. Stating that changes in explanation and meanings change the importance of objects with no physical change of an object she underlines shifts in the museum perspective. In spite of no mentioned the term 'museality' she deals with such a notion saying that 'the core problem of the museum in the material world is that it is an observer of the same world which it is recording'. It means that museums discover, preserve and hold the knowledge within selected items of the material world using them parallel as objects and documents to enshrine those facts for the future.
Tereza Cristina Scheiner deals with the meanings of museum objects. She states that the 'culture of objects' influenced the development of an idea of museum. In the museum the original function of the object is to be a document of the real world. In the museum it can be the argument of an intentional discourse or the instrument of academic tendencies of interpretation. The development of the idea of museum today to the great universal system changes the role of museum objects as well as the notion of 'reality'. Deeper secrets contained within a significance of museum objects are the discoverable meanings of them. Using some semiological ideas she states that 'the object is not a document of reality, but a pretext, a semblance - primal link of a sequence of individual perceptions and interpretations'. It is between the individual and the world.

At last Peter van Mensch gives a system of a methodology of museology based on the museum object. Basing his approach on the Jean Piaget's 'genetic epistemology' and on the Edwina Taborsky's 'industrial syntax' he poses the object in relation with cultural and natural heritage, museum and society. An object is the sumtotal of physical characteristics, function and meaning. A structured approach to the information value of objects is the cornerstone of a museological methodology. Analysing the development of a notion 'museum object' he gives the categories of objects as well as the categories of museum objects. Considering that a museum object is the source of information he gives him the characteristic of a data carrier explaining the approach of the subject matter disciplines as 'closed' and museological.
approach as 'open' to limitless information contained in the object. In the museological context the object can be the source and the medium. Both functions depend on the model of the information structure of objects in which he denotes its structural, functional and contextual identity. The significance of museum objects can be identified in four aspects of the culturally specific meanings: practical, aesthetic, symbolical and metaphysical. At last giving to museum objects meaning of 'semiotheses' he accentuates their cultural and symbolic values. Insisting on the connection the physical characteristics of museum objects with their function and meaning he indirectly recognizes a museum object as a document.

Summarizing the expressed ideas about the object in a more general context all the authors think that the notions 'object' and 'document' are too general and not enough meaningful to apply them in the museological context. The terms 'museum object', 'museum document', 'museal document' and 'museum documentation' with various nuances in meaning are dominant. Almost all the authors accept the concept of the museum object as a document. The nuances are in the interpretation of what can be documented by the museum object. The idea of widening the scope of museality as a significance of the museum objects to the objects of cultural (or natural, not too much expressed) heritage 'in situ' or outside museum, or in the 'authentic' environment, reveals that the museological theory can be applied to the world of humankind's heritage in general. The documentary and information qualities of the material world 'in situ' and 'in fondo' can be the object of research, protection and
communication, so the term 'museum reality' needs to be widened to the 'museal reality'. Relations between the significant objects of the material world as a human heritage and the environment or 'reality' in which they live or are intended or preserved to live are not theoretically enough elaborated. This problem is now matured to be elaborated in detail in one of the next conferences.

Zagreb, 9 September 1994
On the fundamental problem of museology

Mária Bezzeg

By way of preliminary distinction I should like to point out that the "material world" is not a subject covered by museology. If we were of the one-sided opinion that in our world everything is material then it would be nonsensical to use this adjective. With the distinction between material and spiritual culture /hence using "material" in this contraposition/, on the other hand, we would exclude those documents of spiritual life which doubtless have a well-established place in the field of museology. The problem is further elucidated by taking one of Georg Lukács important theses into account. As he puts it, the material and the spiritual sides of reality exist in an indissolvable unity.¹ Therefore "material world" is not a really essential perspective here. Think of documents of voice, moving pictures or written works. Museums collect such items not so much because they are of material substance, but owing to the fact that they are important documents relating to the life of human communities.

The really basic subject of museology specifies
the discipline itself. Museums collect, preserve, elaborate and exhibit their relevant items /the majority of museology experts would agree with this, I think/. These items are the outstanding and typical /that is museal/ documents of humankind's life /its past and present/. What one considers to be the fundamental specificity of museology can be perceived in every detail of one's activity /I mean the ways one organizes the collection, preservation, elaboration and exhibition of the relevant items/.

Expert literature is almost united in its opinion of "objects" in the context of museums. This is a consequence of two characteristic perspectives. One might be named object fetishism, the other in its turn as absolutization of the concept of object. The object fetishism presupposes that museums collect, preserve, elaborate and only exhibit objects in the usual sense of the term. This view is a hasty overgeneralization of a doubtlessly significant moment of contemporary museology leading to an "ontological corollary" about "museums as such".

The appearance of object fetishism is the most important modification in a museum's mood of being since the emergence of museums, ephemeral phenomenon as it is in its history. It was caused to a great extent by thinking through analogies. The opinion that libraries collect books, archives collect written documents, therefore
museums collect objects came about on the basis of an analogy. This would be their specifying feature. The history of museums, however, has proven this idea to be false. After the emergence of libraries and archives museums did not get rid of the books and written documents already in their possession, and they readily continued to collect books and written documents of interest and value.

The history of collections prove that object fetishism was phenomenon previously unknown. Everything that was considered valuable was thought worth collecting. Those people involved in earlier times did not even use the notion of "object". Robert Hubert alias Forges in his catalogue /1664/ speaks about the things of sea, earth and air.²

Object fetishism came about in the thoughts of curators, museologists and was then erected to a fundamental principle of museological practice. In the everyday experience of museums it could not be, however, an overarching operational rule.³ Nowadays, on the other hand, it has been challenged by the changes in a museum's mood of being. In this context the most important aspect is that social expectations of museums have changed. Contemporary people are not only curious about rarities or the results of sciences, they are also eager to know
how our ancestors lived in different times. To have documented this is possible only by means of the most diverse /written, visual or tactile/documents of humankind’s life.

A further reason for the overwhelming use of the notion of "object" is the concept’s absolutization, its application being pushed past the valid limits of its reference. In this sense everything that is to be found in museum collections is an object. But a text, photo or voice recording are, in the usual sense of the word, not objects. From a philosophical point of view each entity can be, of course, considered as an object, the concept of "object", however, for the purposes of museology fails to offer an adequate and essential definition. The term "object" is not general enough and at the same time not sufficiently concrete. It does not cover many items belonging to museology, neither does it express the fundamental difference between objects in museum collections and those of everyday use.

Objects, books, photos, stuffed animals, minerals etc. collected in museums are, in the most immediate sense, related to the life of humankind, they cannot be treated separately. Each of them are documents of past constellations of being. Today it is approximately true that the most diverse items are put together in
museums because they document different phases in the life of humankind.\textsuperscript{4}

The category of document appears in the most ancient times. As Lukács maintains: "... very important moments of being used to unveil their genuine nature in their first and most primitive appearance, while their 'developing higher' generally may conceal this original essence."\textsuperscript{5} Think of objects used by the heroes of old, of their weapons, which were preserved, respected and adored because they were documents of people of relevance to the life of the given communities and therefore they could not be substituted by copies. The experts began to treat whole collections (at least in tendency) and not only those relics of outstanding figures as documents only in the contemporary period.

A piece in a museum collection is a document taken from the original life setting, it is a testimony to something, independent of its material. It is a document from humankind's life.\textsuperscript{6} The category of document, however, does not express precisely enough the specificity of a museum's mood of being. As we know people endeavour to preserve documents of their activities in the most diverse domains of social existence (think of the radio and television archives etc.) but the function of these documents varies to a very considerable
extent. In our case we have to do with museal documents. Museal documents exist in reality even if we do not realize it. Because "museal" means outstanding and typical document of humankind's life - and among a lot of documents there are outstanding and typical ones, too. Of course, it has a special emphasis if it is in a museum or any other collection. It is not the same as before. It takes on a new function, a function of memory. It becomes a reminder of something. Museologists /we use this word in Hungary to describe curators/ recognise this feature, and collect these special documents. Their task is to put these documents into their original life setting by way of research. Through a process of investigation of different branches of knowledge these documents become sources of disciplines, but in museum exhibitions they appear today as documents, but these are, however, much richer and much more articulated documents.

"Museal" does not, of course, have the same reference and sense as "museum". There are a lot of museal documents outside museums, too. Museum document may only mean, on the other hand, a document in a museum. The English language does not know the word "museal" as adjective yet. This only means that development in the museum field in the English-speaking world has not raised this problem yet. In Hungary we have been using this term for a long
time. Even our act on museums from 1949 uses the expression "museal reminders".

Though the phenomenon we are talking about can also be found outside museums, nobody can say that museums are not the most important things in this complex. These are the institutionalized form of this special approach of humankind to reality. Museums have specialists for solving this given task. A museum’s mood of being is very closely connected with a collection’s mood of being, which is, in a sense, a much broader complex than a museum’s mood of being.

"Museal document" is the most general category for the most special thing in our field. It means a typical item representing humankind’s general level reached in a certain epoch or an outstanding item documenting old and new phenomenon of a given period.

The categories of a museum’s mood of being function practically in a spontaneous way irrespective of whether the concerned people realize or ignore this fact.

The impact of a museal document upon man is described with great eloquence by Stefan Zweig in his "The World of Yesterday". As he writes, "the influence exerted upon me by a sketch of one of Beethoven’s works is not at all marginal. I mean the density of those signs put on the paper, the motives reflecting spiritual tensions and yet unsettled
quest for expression, the fragments later maintained or rejected. All the spiritual eruptions of his demonlike overtensioned personality tremble in these pencil signs. This physical concentration eradicates even to me his past emotional burdens. The optical experience turns to spiritual excitement, and I stare at such enigmatic papers with the same fascination and love as others look at masterpieces of painting."

Notes

3 Cf. "I could not resist my eternal temptation and already on the third day I went over to the British Museum to see the exhibited manuscripts. There was a handwritten text on the execution of Maria Stuart." Stefan Zweig, The World of Yesterday /in Hungarian translation/, Európa, Budapest, 1981, p. 345. Think also upon the photos and written documents of contemporary exhibitions.
4 Cf. Although "officers were assigned a specific subject to document -such as medical care- and all objects were supposed to be specifically related to the Navy, the officers returned with anything and everything." Nina G.Taylor, Adding to Collections: Specimens of Ancient Hair, Modern War, Artifacts of War: Navy Museum, Museum News, Sept/Oct 1991, p. 33.
5 Lukács, op.cit., p. 38.
6 Cf. ICOM Statutes Article 2 - Definitions 1. "...material evidence of people and their environment." Although the word "people" does not convey the same sense as our "humankind", the just quoted idea is similar to our conception.
Mária Bezzeg

Sur le problème fondamental de la muséologie

Le monde matériel n'est pas un sujet étudié par la muséologie. Le sujet principal de la muséologie spécifie la discipline même. Les musées collectionnent, conservent, traitent et présentent les documents les plus significatifs et typiques de la vie de l'espèce humaine.

Un objet dans la collection d'un musée est tiré de son milieu original. Il témoigne indépendamment de sa matière, une signification spirituelle. C'est un document sur la vie de l'humanité. Des documents muséal existent dans la vie courante, bien qu'on ne remarque pas toujours ce fait. La caractérisation "muséal" signifie qu'un document a une importance accentuée et une qualité typique de la vie de l'humanité, et parmi ces nombreux documents, il y a aussi des objets prééminents et typiques. Un objet, à travers sa présence dans un musée ou une autre collection, acquiert un rôle spécifique. Il n'est pas identique à ce qu'il était auparavant. Il remplit une nouvelle fonction, celle de la mémoire. Il évoque quelque chose. Ces documents se transforment par le processus de recherche dans les
différentes branches du savoir, aux sources des disciplines fondamentales. Dans le cadre d’une exposition, ils apparaissent aujourd’hui comme documents, mais en tant que tels beaucoup plus riches et articulés.

Le "Document muséal" est la catégorie la plus générale pour la chose la plus spéciale dans notre branche. C’est un objet typique évoquant le niveau général d’humanité atteint dans une période concrète, ou un objet prééminent, documentant phénomènes anciennes et nouveaux d’une certaine période.
A MUSEOLOGICAL CORE PROBLEM: THE MATERIAL WORLD

Lynn Maranda

1. Things, Objects, Documents, and Perspectives

The universe is the totality of existence and all knowable things have been in existence prior to the perception of human cognition. Molecular and planetary phenomena are estimated to be billions of years old while the human animal, at best, one million years old, and modern man, ten thousand years old. With this perspective as a backdrop to the discussion of the paper, it is seen that everything that is knowable is already in existence and that therefore what we ascribe as knowledge is really a process that involves a relationship between mankind and the universe. This thought is instructive when setting out to define the notions of things, objects, and documents.

Things are defined as those items which are perceived to have an existence but which have no further properties or knowledge ascriptions attached to them. The meaningful aspect of a thing is that it exists. Even an item which has no specific relationship but which has been forgotten by a user will refer to the item as a thing, denoting that it exists but that the detail of its meaning does not come to memory.

On the other hand, objects are items of existence which are a part of a network of meaning and are given specific ascription as to how they relate to other objects and other material of the universe. In this sense, objects are physical points of evidence of a particular set of knowledge.

Continuing with this thought that the difference between thing and object is the consequence of a directed application of the human intelligence, this direction is termed perspective and is the way that the mind focuses its resources when selecting and ascribing meaning. The nature and shape of perspectives change and are influenced by other qualities of knowledge and are as well influenced by its own processes of investigation and fact-finding corroborative exercises.

Documents are those physical evidences that are brought forward by the extension of the perspective as it proceeds to make meaningful mapping of sense and logic over the objects of discovery or collection. In fact, documents are the result of that process where mankind would make sense of the known totality of the objects in the universe.

2. Museum Objects

A thing, being an item that has no specific meaning, is therefore in the museum context, an item of existence that is not collectible. For example, when a 'thing' which cannot be identified, has no provenance or accompanying information, in fact, about which nothing is known, is offered to the museum
for acquisition, it is rejected. Nor is it possible to collect all the things in the universe for that would be an impossible immensity and gives reason to why museums operate within a collecting mandate selecting objects of relevance and importance. In support of the relevance of the collecting policy, documentation is prepared, assembled, and established. As might be expected, a change in the perspective of the latest human knowledge creates a change in the definition of what is collectible and what has meaning for museum exhibition. What might have been considered merely a thing, with a change of perspective becomes an object ascribed with special meaning.

3. Museum Documents

Museum documents comprise a body of evidence that supports the perceived importance of a collection. Such documents include: field or other data (notes, letters, photographs, tape recordings, receipts, appraisals, etc.) which accompany objects at their point of acquisition; subsequent research findings; catalogue, inventory, evaluation, loan, exhibition, conservation/restoration, publication records; and so forth.

4. Museum Perspective

Collectable objects with their attending documentation are amassed into the assemblage of a collection and this is done under the parameter of the museum perspective. This perspective says what is worthy to be housed, catalogued, and exhibited and what is not. In a broad sense, some perspectives become the working title of particular institutions such as aviation museums, maritime museums, or anthropology museums. But even under these special circumstances, it may not be physically possible to collect and house all objects that might qualify for inclusion. In these cases, some degree of interpretive value would have to be made on a professional basis while maintaining a consistency with the overall perspective. Guidelines detailing such parameters as appraised value, cultural, social, historical, etc. significance, age, aesthetic qualities, condition, size, relation to the existing collection, etc, are usually included within the collecting policy to assist in the acquisition of objects by narrowing the field of inclusion. These guidelines, however, are themselves subject to the dominating museum perspective.

5. The Core Problem with the Material World

Everything that is knowable in the world already exists and existed prior to human evolution - except for the sciences based on the humanities - and the recognition of aspects of the existence of things by the human awareness is what is termed knowledge. Which is to say that knowledge is that process which translates knowable functions and things of the universe into a 'language' contrived and directed by the human mind. The major functioning of the universe has not altered for billions of years whereas the human perception of this functioning, changes with the absorption of ever widening
range of facts and evidence of knowledge. Mankind is not itself discrete from the universe, for it is a part of the natural evolution, and therefore the behaviour of this animal is itself included in the natural ordering of the universe. This in turn means, that the human ability to structure an advance into knowledge and to analyze evidence to make predictions is in itself a phenomenon created by universal development. In other words, the product of the human awareness — the categorizing of phenomena which already existed — means that the universe is undertaking to translate that which already exists into another quality of existence known as knowledge. Why the universe, through the willing cooperation of mankind should want to establish another category of existence by recording itself as it functions is moot, but very interesting to consider. It is this universe looking at itself for linguistic definition that is the core problem of mankind and the purpose of knowledge. The problem is that as the human awareness does the chore of inverting physical existences into the realms of knowledge, the expansiveness of what could be included becomes proportionately very large and difficult to handle. The core problem is that as more things become objects, the documentation of each object becomes more extensive.

A corollary to this thought is that knowledge in itself is an item of existence, and as mankind has become aware of this proportion and aware of its responsibility in evolution, the polemic of what is collectable and what is not has become exaggerated, for most phenomena and events of the universe have become meaningful objects replete with our wonder and amazement. What once was considered the stuff of things, such as the soil of archaeological digs, has now come to be considered with significance as the current technologies would glean more corroborative evidence to substantiate the [archaeological) findings. It is this pressure, the expansion of the inversion of the existing universe into the frame of human intelligence, that is causing the museum perspective to evaluate the relationships between the material world, objects and documentation.

6. Documents as Objects

With the rise of museology as a discipline, there has been an examination of the processes of museum work and as such, a review of the kinds of documentation that museums do. This means that there has been a raising of the level of knowledge to a sphere where museums themselves and the processes they undergo are subject to analysis and are considered as objects of specialized knowledge. Therefore, specific documents pertaining to items in the collection are themselves objects of museological study. It is quite conceivable that every known document can be ascribed with this objectivity.

7. Objects as Documents

For an object to become a document means that the object must carry within it corroborative evidence that is interpreted and seen to support the existence of other objects in the collection. It happens all the time in the sphere of
comparative methodology, whereby objects with little documentation are supported by the existence of a similar object already included in the collection. More interesting are those objects that become documents by suggesting the existence of other objects either through their function, design, pictorial characterization, or other attributes.

8. Shifts in Perspective

The shift in perspective is the first cause for a change in an item's status as either object or document. Shifts can occur with an evolution of new technology, with a re-examination of existing documents, with the inclusion of new objects in a collection, but it is the case that with the shift in perspective and that emphasis of cognition, the integral value of an item's collectability is reassessed.

When an object is known to carry documental attribute, that is, that it can explain the existence of other objects in the collection, it does not lose its previous condition of being an object but carries with it as well the second meaning as a document. There is no physical change as the object contributes its worth as a document but it does suggest that there is a difference in the mental approach to what is being observed.

With the growth of knowledge and the passage of time, historical representations of human thought have become collected as objects for the study of that evolution, and so with the passage of time and the acquisition of greater scientific evidences, there has arisen a study dedicated to the functioning and purpose of museums, and thus the documents housed in these institutions become in themselves documents to the larger study.

It is of interest to consider, in a very broad sense, that life is that organizing phenomenon that works against the tide of entropy or the dissipation of energy in the universe. As mankind is a product of life, so too its actions and intents also are grounded to the fundamental urgency of life-activity. To complete the thought, it is seen that the activities of the human mind as well are working against the dissipation of universal energy, and this amazing phenomena of human knowledge is a construction leaving a recorded legacy of how it is that the universe operates. Not that the universe needs to know, because it is doing it, but as mankind is part of the universe, it is a reactive response to the loss of entropy and an inversion into a unique realm of existence, and that is thought. The point being that whatever has occurred in the universe whether it be the 'big bang', the building of Babylon, or the establishment of museums, the capturing of those existences into a human perspective places that capturing into a special realm of existence called thought. And as these thoughts, it is suggested, have a real existence, they are themselves subject to be treated as physical objects which occupy the main bodies of the collections.

Further, by the working definition that documents explain the existence of other objects in a collection, it is to be expected that documents that can no longer supply evidence for
the inclusion of objects, would lose their credibility. If such a document had been an object in a collection, it would naturally fall back safely into this object category providing that other documents could lend support for its inclusion. A situation that would give rise to such a condition would be where new contradictory information cancels the previous validity of a document and as such the loss of its usefulness.

9. The Core Problem

The core problem of the museum in the material world (which is a subset of the problem of the acquisition of human knowledge in general) is that it is an observer of the same world which it is recording. Its interpretations of universal histories, its translations and observations are done within the universal forces of evolution by the human intellect achieving a particular quality of existence called knowledge. We, as humans, observe that knowledge itself is a part of that same material world, and further, it is quite possible that the motives to expand our knowledge base, to make meaningful connections between things, and to understand the working of complexities that in the conduct of their own existence do not need to be understood by us in order to work, that this human motive is driven by the universe itself. Thus our cognition of things, objects and documents are not static but are in a flux of evolution as the universe is in dissolution, and what we perceive as permanent records are more akin to markings which indicate the scale of human acquired perspective. As the universe has dissipated, knowledge has risen and the facts of the material world's existence has inverted into document. Museums have in their own tradition held the passage and dissipation of previous cultures and have attempted to hold the knowledge of those existences in the static, permanent condition of collections to enshrine those facts for the future, and for the expansion of human knowledge.

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Un problème fondamental en muséologie: Le monde matériel — Sommaire

Le problème qu'entraîne la présence des musées dans le monde matériel est fondamental: les musées se trouvent à la fois observateurs et archivistes de ce même monde. Leurs interprétations des histoires universelles et leurs observations sont réalisées par l'intellect humain, borné par les forces universelles de l'évolution, mais atteignant une qualité particulière de l'existence, soit celle de la connaissance. En notre qualité d'êtres humains, nous admettons que la connaissance elle-même fait partie de ce même monde matériel et, de plus, qu'il est tout à fait possible que les raisons menant à l'épanouissement de notre fond de connaissances, à la création de liens significatifs entre les choses et à la compréhension du fonctionnement de complexités qui, dans le fil de notre propre existence, n'ont pas besoin d'être comprises par nous pour fonctionner, ont pour cause ce même univers. Notre connaissance des choses, des objets et des documents n'est donc pas statique mais fluctue, tout comme l'univers est en dissolution. De plus, les éléments que nous percevons comme étant enregistrés en permanence sont plutôt des coordonnées qui dénotent simplement le niveau acquis de perspective humaine. À mesure que s'est dissipé l'univers, le savoir a augmenté et les faits de l'existence d'un monde matériel se sont transformés en documents. Les musées ont, à leur façon, retenu le passage et la dissipation des cultures antérieures et ont tenté de maintenir la connaissance de leur existence au moyen de collections permanentes et statiques afin de conserver ces faits pour le futur ainsi que pour l'expansion du savoir humain.
Museology has a tradition of working with categories of representation which are developed from material culture. Based on such interpretive frame, a set of theoretical constructions was elaborated, using as background the study of the object understood as "thing thrown against, existing outside us" (Larousse), a passive and fabricated thing, almost nothing natural: the object as "an element of the outside world, fabricated by Man and which he must assume and manipulate" (Moles).

This is a conotative relationship that has permitted the understanding of aspects such as the notion of inventory, deriving from the understanding of sets of objects, possessed and/or used by specific groups of individuals in diverse societies. Some sets of objects may be inscribed "in the framework of everyday life" (ibid.); others pertain to ritual - the rituals of pleasure, of war, of religion...the rites of contemplation. The analysis of the inventory of objects vinculated to specific groups, in specific times and places, as well as of the various forms of relationship between individual, social group and object, has been helping specialists establish, with relative clearness, some relations between the dynamics of cultural processes and the products derived from them.

Such characteristic is emphasized by Semiology itself, which understands the object as "a vector of communication in the socio-cultural sense of the term (...) since it is inscribed in the level of the messages that the social milieu sends towards the individual, or reciprocally, that the Homo faber projects towards the global society" (ibid.). We are thus, in major or minor degree, inserted within a culture of objects, where the "idea of collection, of arrangement, of series, of exhibiton" (ibid.) is continually invoked.

It is not difficult to understand how a "culture of objects" might have influenced the development of an idea of museum, which is very specific of the occidental world, specially from the Modern Age, when the rise of the bourgeoisie gave way to a multiplication in the quantity and variety of objects fabricated, possessed, used and exchanged by common men.
Man and the object: from the world within to the outside world

Every object is, in itself, memory and document of the history of mankind. Its own existence reflects the previous or simultaneous existence of specific processes of culture, of intersocial relations and of the various possible degrees of relationship of Man with himself and with the environment.

Materialized symbol of the self, the object illustrates every trip of the human mind: the animus, the anima, the shadow, the double, the attraction of opposites, the hero within. It recalls every man's relation with life, death and the world. It enhances the search for transcendance (total and free expression of the self), the constant battle with the unconscious. It is in itself a symbol of totality. Materialized symbol of nature, it illustrates the course of mankind throughout planet Earth.

The object allows a broader understanding of the possible, existing system of significances in each social group, in each given time, helping with its "Gestalt", with its own existence, to prove the dynamics of such processes.

A bigger understanding of those relationships is made possible when a "plan of rationality" (Baudrillard) is defined for each object or set of objects, specifying aspects of implicit coherence between form, space, material, colour, finishing, design, function - only perceptible through detailed analysis. "Such analysis is essential, since it gives us the elements of a coherence never experienced, never possible through practice" (ibid.). Another dimension must be searched as well: the coherence between the external, material qualities of the object and their inner significance - the "secret soul of things" (Jung).

Analyzing objects from their inscription in plans of rationality has been the task of Anthropology, of Semiology, but, to a given extent, the task of Museology as well. Because it is from the theories of cultural production and from the understanding of the chains of relationship between Man and the object, mainly as seen through the light of Semiotics, that Museology builds its own theory of objects.

We herein include the most diverse dimensions and relations - from the objects "found" in the "inner museum" of each individual, up to the set of objects countersigned by international cultural agencies as "Patrimony of Humanity". Everything concerns the museum, everything is, simultaneously, instrument of memory, document of the presence of Man on Earth and mirror of the importance that Man bestows himself.

Specificities of function, differences between unique objects (linked to the rituals of contemplation) and serial objects, between "style" objects and the industrialized multiples must be taken into account.
The fundamental function assigned to the object in each social group, in each moment of the history of Mankind must also be emphasized: from the "primordial function of vase" (Baudrillard), pertaining the imaginary - where the object is valued as representation of a given world concept, and where the making of the object symbolizes culture as transubstanciation of nature, to the "idea of a world no more given, but produced, dominated, manipulated, inventoried and controlled" (ibid.) through a series of processes - and where series of objects are themselves the representation of reality.

Museum and Object

Let us mention the museum, where the original function of the object as document of the real world becomes intertwined with its role as sign of a very specific, and never occasional discourse. We could speak about a new functionality, if we consider as functional "that which adapts itself to a new order or system". The possibility of "going beyond its function towards a second function, of becoming an element of game, of combination, of calculation, within a universal system of signs" (ibid.) turns the object into an element of primordial interest for the museum.

It is possible to identify various degrees of relationship between museum and object. But, first of all, it would be necessary to identify the museum as a category for analysis, from which several sub-categories could be built.

Considering the object as "fabricated thing", we shall start such analysis by the possible degrees of relationship between the object and the traditional museum, in its most orthodox form: that of a musealized architectural space, containing collections.

Such museum implies the existence of a set of specific functions - represented by the figures of the collector or collection man, whose work is to establish relationships between reality and the object, to fulfill his task of populating the museum with things, based on specific criteria of selection; of the researcher and the curator, who analyze, decodify and study every object, to establish the degrees of relationship it presents with society - in order to define in which category it will be included, in the museum microcosm; of the conservator, who manipulates the object over time, assigning to it qualities of perennity; of the exhibitor or interpreter, the "man of arrangement, who is not an usuary, but active informant of ambience, and (...) who disposes of the space as of a structure for repartition, holding, through such control, all the possible relations of reciprocity and the totality of roles that the objects can assume" (Baudrillard).

All of them must contribute to the development of a "museological" language and discourse, founded in reality but which make use of the objects as main instrument.
Every object has a characteristic of "domesticity", which the act of collecting emphasizes. In a collection, the object is subdued to our wills and desires - which makes it a "perfect mirror, no more projecting images of the real, but only the desired images" (ibid.). And the museum makes use of that domesticity to offer the world an idealized mirror of itself, where the objects are instruments no more of the will of a single individual, but of a group of individuals, that assume to speak for Humanity.

The traditional museum maximizes the sense of collectionism to its broader extent. Taken from the real world and elevated into the category of "collection piece", the object, inside the museum, becomes integrated into a microcosm where its function will be to become "poetry, unconscious and triumphal discourse" (Baudrillard). Over its original rationality a "concocted" rationality is imposed by the museum, making of every object an instrument of the museological discourse. Such instrumentation surpasses the sense of abstraction assigned to the object in private collections - triumph of the love for possession, elaboration of the individual search for absolute singularity and for the rational sense of order.

Once populated the museum, the rituals of object processing are religiously followed: registration, classification, development of catalogues, organization in technical reserves. Measured, evaluated, manipulated, the object sees itself deprived of its original "signic crust", to be adequately included in a new complex of significances, inscribed into the systematic universe of collections. It is an arbitrary, yet not absolute universe, where is made possible (and even common) the superposition of several categories of analysis, which reveal the polysemic nature of the object.

The object gains, though, an unquestionable greatness: that of being sign and symbol of cultural processes. It is in the museum because it belongs to the world, because it represents a specific place, a fact, an idea, a sentiment, a time. Because, not being possible to musealize people, we musealize the things into which people are represented. And, because time does not stop, we musealize fragments of time, frozen in the form of objects.

Let us remark here another essential characteristic, that of the relationship between the object and its own temporality: to collect means to rescue from time, to maintain over time, to make (in a certain way) stop time. There is an attempt on the part of Man to continue or to survive in the objects - they "assure the continuity of life" (Baudrillard). It is not enough, thus, that museums collect and retain objects: it is necessary to immortalize them. Conservationism is not, thus, mere action of Man over the time of the object: it is, rather, a tentative action of Man over his own time - over finitude, in search of immortality.

Ancient objects (fragments of a mythological time); "authentic" objects (evoking the Father as creator); objects of everyday life (Man in privacy); unique objects (possessiveness as a form of power); objects in series (memories of the Homo faber); automatized objects (the gadget, the robot - the absolute slave); exploratory objects (control of the enigma); elements of nature elevated into the category of objects (nature controlled, systematized, objectified). Man goes to the museum in search of himself and all he finds is materiality.
Object-argument or object-instrument?

But every collection has also an element of non-relationship with the world where it comes from. "Totalization by means of the object always brings, though, the seal of solitude: it does not respond to communication, as well as communication does not respond to it" (Baudrillard). Considering that, what would be the possible dialectic relationship between man and the object, inside the space and the time of the museum? Which possibilities will have, in practice, the museologist, to communicate "the emotions of life through inanimate objects" (Gabus)?

This is a question with a difficult response, if we consider that each exhibition circumscribes itself within a very specific relational context, created by the museum. It is the museum's responsibility to define the desired degrees of relationship between the levels of content of the object and its levels of expression, thus elaborating systems of significance that are compatible with its own cultural purpose.

A possible proposal would be to expose the object, not as a sign in itself, but "enslaved by the will of the museologist, submitted to a subtile dialectics where unusual forms of arrangement establish new relations between object and theme, theme and object" (Hainard).

The object is here used as the argument of an intentional discourse: adapted to a contextual environment, displayed, manipulated as polysemic element, "disturbed in its balance of cultural stereotype" (Thévoz), the object in exhibit is in itself objectified, reduced to the condition of token of desire, of knowledge, of power.

In such process, we risk reducing the object to a mere instrument of academic tendencies of interpretation. The museum itself may become used as an instrument of specific discourses, elaborated in different instances of knowledge: historicist discourse, folklorist discourse, aestheticist or political discourse - until it becomes fragilized as an agency capable of producing its own discourse, a specific communication language. Looking for references into the cultural systems which gave birth to specific objects may minimize the risk, but not to the point of eliminating it - and here resides the great contradiction of the musem: if the object documents reality, in what consists such reality?

Considering that, facing phenomena, "conscience produces a sign, a thought, as irrefusable mediation" (Santaella) between the individual and the world; and if the simple act of looking is in itself loaded with interpretive meanings, which would be the value, for the observer, of the musealized object? Would it be a sign in itself, or a catalyst of the true sign - the mental representation of an instant of conscience? If we believe in that, then the object is not a document of reality, but a pretext, a semblance - primal link of a sequence of individual perceptions and interpretations. Some believe that truth, beauty or reality are in the eyes of the beholder.
Fundamental representation of parcels of reality, the object might as well be understood as a sign, from which other signs generate. That means reality is never perceived as from itself, but always through its representations or mediations, through a given "signic crust" (ibid.) between the individual and the world. Thus understood, the object in the museum is simultaneously icon, index and symbol, sending us from sign to sign, in a way only limited by our own perceptual limits.

Document of reality - the object?

... But we must not forget that the field of analysis of Semiotics is immense, to the point of considering life itself as a language of communication - if we interpret as such the order of genetic codes from ADN. We would understand, though, as sign, from the binary language of machines to the stimuli of nature, as perceived by Man: "the language of flowers, of the wind, of the sounds, of the signals of energy emitted by the body, even the language of silence" (ibid.), being the absence of phenomena also understood as full of significance.

What would be, then, the true document of reality? The object as a creation of Man, or the immense plurality of signs generated by nature, by life itself, by the presence of Man over the environment?

A rock is a document of geological processes over time and space, as well as the various forms of life are document of biological processes. The human body, human behaviour, language, gesture and memory themselves - what are they, if not signs as strong as the objects?

...So let us forget the object, to take a look into other signs, into other representations that influence the museum. Because not only of objects the museological universe is populated, but also of multiple elements of nature (biotic and abiotic) that, isolated or considered as a whole, remind us of vast signic chains. And of images, forms, smells, sounds and gestures, all of them full of significance so far.

*The museum is in itself a microcosm*, a systemic universe where relationships originate from combinations of all those signs - and the museum language will be, thus, a synthesis of realities taken from the world and from the realities of the museum. And as we admit for the museum the possibility of a proper language, it is possible to search for the understanding of the various levels of such language, express though the aesthetic, technical and political discourse it elaborates.

*Therefore, pretending that the object be elevated to the cathegory of maximal representative of museological discourse is denying the multiple messages contained in this universe - thus reducing the museum to the expression of a simulation of itself: a substitute, not an original.*
It is not possible anymore, for today's museum, to understand as object only the fabricated thing, ostentation of Man as center of himself, as center of the Universe. Nor it is enough to believe that small parcels of nature (the stone, the bone, the shell, the bird), objectified as "pieces of collection", systematically classified and contextualized into exhibit spaces, may truly represent reality. Examples of nature put under the service of Man, such elements promote only a fragmented understanding of reality, from absolutely rational criteria, not compatible with the actual state of scientific knowledge.

The museum of today wants more: it wants to understand Man out of himself - not in the center, but as a mere element of the great universal system. The shift of the center of scientific interest, from Man to the universe as a whole, to planet Earth, may be perceived, in Museology, by the radical broadening of the concept of object: "mountain, silex, frog, waterfonts, stars, the moon (...) everything is object, with due fluctuations" (Hainard). Thus we understand the botannic garden, the zoo, the aquarium, the biodome, the national park.

From the body as object (the "double" objectified) - the mask, the statue, the picture, the mannequin, we jump into the understanding of Man himself, simultaneously as subject and object of the museum: museum of territory, musealized county or neighborhood, ecomuseum. Fragments are not enough, the museum now wants totality, interactions, interfaces. The museum wants to listen to the music of the Universe.

We do not refer anymore to the action of collecting objects from the world, to populate the museum - we talk about musealizing small parcels of the world, where everything is a document: nature, man, fabricated objects, memories, emotions. To the shrinking of the sense of collecting we interpose the broadening of the notion of inventory - the museum is no more concerned with inventoring objects, but with inventoring the neighborhood, the county, the landscape, the life stories (oral memory). From the macrocosm to the microcosm, from the planetary to the fractals, everything is an object, in search of the total museum. The significance of conservation has also been modified: what is the meaning of preserving the object in search for immortality, if all mankind is under menace of extinction?

The museum turns also, today, into another new dimension of reality: the fantastic reality of the virtual images, only existing in the human brain. Oniric images, hypertexts, imagetic representations of sound, color and time, everything sends us into an inner universe exemplified in practice by TV, cinema and photography, by the multiple resources of animation.

Where is reality? In the universe as totality, on the memory of planet Earth (nature and landscape), within society, inside our hearts and minds, in the object ... or in the memory of the computer?
Reality can be understood from every sign, from all phenomena. It is partially inside ourselves, partially in the world. Its enormous complexity cannot be apprehended by any human mind, on any given time - but some aspects of it can be perceived even through the observation of a museum object, be it created by man or by nature.

Museum objects are certainly documents of something. They have evident significances, but they contain deeper secrets as well. It is up to us to learn how to understand those secrets. Take an object. "Think about its significance. Then, fixed rules will reveal themselves. But, if you are not the right person, the significance will not be revealed" (I Ching).

Tereza Cristina Scheiner
Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, May/June 1994

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OBJECT - DOCUMENT
or do we know what we are actually collecting?

It is very sad when someone does something without knowing what he or she is actually doing and why.

Museum workers would probably get excited if I suggested that what I have said above is applicable to them and to their work. I am as far from that, though, as far I am from conjuring up problems where they do not exist, or from offending or even causing damage to anyone. Nevertheless, I think that it extremely important for every field of science to introduce a system into its knowledge and bring this way its logic up to the requirements of the present time and of the phenomenon which it studies.

It is up to each of us to judge what the present situation of museum professionals is, though.

From this point of view, I see the selected topic as appropriate, even though those who suggested it may have not realized the consequences of such a choice - which does not mean that I blame them for that.

Let us get to the point, though.

Do we have objects in museums?

The audience's answer will sure be positive. But is it something special that we have? Do not the others have it too?

We normally employ terms "object" and "thing" as if they were identical. The term object, however, is based on the gnoseological approach to reality while the term thing is based on the ontological approach. We use the term object as something that becomes an object to a subject and that is therefore opposed (not politically, of course) to it. It is the object of our cognitive intention. Such an object does not necessarily need to be a thing or something visually perceivable. It can be a notion.

For example, we speak about the object of cognitive intention of museology and it is not identical with the object as part of an exhibition.

On the other hand, a thing is something that makes part of the visual reality of matter. From the ontological point of view, it does exist even though it is not the object of our cognitive intention. Apart from things, also animals and man, i.e. living beings, have the same ontological nature. These beings could also be regarded as things if their remnants are considered. Both the categories, however, can be regarded as objects if we focus our attention on them.

As a result, it appears to be more adequate and opportune for the museum phenomenon to speak of gathering things and working with them.

What is, in this context, the meaning of the word document?

The term has been derived from the Latin: "documentum" which was derived from the verb "doceo", and therefore it was originally conceived of as an instrument of instruction. E.g. "Documentum esse" meant "to serve as a proof", "documentum dare" meant "to produce a proof".
The term "documentation" derived from the above Latin term means activity, such as document gathering.

The concept of documentation was first used in 1903 by Paul Otlet, one of the founders of the Institut international de bibliographie. According to him, the term should include: library science, archive and museum science. After World War II, this term was suppressed as a result of the spread of information science. This discipline now uses the broader term "information source". Even though this term covers also material objects, information science concentrates only on such sources or media which serve to fixate the results of conscious human activities aimed at information preservation and diffusion. Information scientists therefore say they do not have a term for material information sources.

Our hope is there: the material sources are our domain! How often have we heard this from our colleagues - geologists, anthropologists, historians, art historians, numismatics and ethnologists employed in museums.

Do the terms font and document mean the same, though? Usually, we see them used as synonyms.

In my view, there is a substantial difference between the two terms. A source is any source of our knowledge, a source from which we scan information to eventually fixate it on an artificial medium. The source as an object of cognitive intention is interesting for a research worker only to the extent in which it satisfies as a source of information. Otherwise the source loses attraction and is seen only through the prism of the above quality. Then it is not surprising that in a number of museums one can see research workers who are gradually losing their interest in sources which they have gathered, e.g. by research, once these fonts have been "exploited". In their view, these sources have played their role and that's it.

Sticking to the concept of source as information science maintains it, it is difficult to grasp the difference between source and document because, for information science, document is the information vehicle, i.e. its source. The only difference could be seen in the fact that information science regards document as an intentionally created information vehicle, whereas a source can be anything, i.e., also what has been intentionally created by man.

The terms document and documentation began to be used in museums at a relatively late stage, mainly in connection with the documentation and information science, i.e. in the recent decades and as a result of computerization. These sources have influenced the conception of documentation as fixate creating, i.e. documents about identification of museum objects. Only in the second half of this century the term began to be used in collection gathering. It began to be used first in the former Soviet Union and in its satellite countries where the campaign of "documenting the construction of socialism" was started. However, it was not an isolated phenomenon, as the existence of the Swedish SAMDOK system, or some efforts at "collection covering" of the "black whole" of the present.
I have studied this problem and I came to the conclusion that if we use the term "museum documentation" in the sense of collection gathering, it is not identical with the cognitive approach of the information science. Our aim is not only to gain just the information source (the material source), but to understand the way the information source becomes a direct or indirect witness of a phenomenon which it should or could represent or stand for.

While the information science operates on the gnoseological level, the museological approach is ontology focused.

If we succeed in proving by further research that this approach is correct and defend the specific character of our approach to reality, it will be beneficial for us. But this will solve only part of the problem anyway.

The concepts of document and documentation themselves are rather vague. Even if we introduced the term museum document, nothing would change if we do not simultaneously define the characteristics which help us to distinguish this document from others.

These characteristics cannot be the same as the identification characteristics on which other sciences engaged in museums for source-heuristic reasons focus. They must be characteristics which distinguish the elements of reality from others alike. Nor can it be something that would change the essence (e.g. physical or chemical) of these elements because this would turn the proper elements into something else.

This is possible. Here we can resort to Karl Popper's theory of three worlds. By means of the World No. 2, i.e. the world of our thought, emotion, fantasy and creative effort, we create a new world of the physical world. The World no. 3, the world of culture, the world which is ours and for us. And that is what we do in museums by collection gathering and presentation. This transfer of elements of the World No 1 to the World No 3 depends on the knowledge of these elements and on the role they play in the primary world. This does not transform these elements into new ones, into elements of cultural reality, unless they correspond to the criteria of cultural values.

This shift of meaning therefore depends on the evaluation of the known reality and its elements, i.e. on valorizing the gnoseological knowledge through axiological approach. This is, in my view, the basis for linking other sciences applied in museums with museology.

Now you may say that I have just confirmed that what we are talking about is in fact cultural heritage or, to be more exact, that museums gather monuments. This has brought us to other terms which are widely spread in the world of museums today.

The term cultural heritage is nowadays used so vaguely that it is becoming misleading. The characteristics which we can read in the UNESCO documents do not seem to throw more light on the problem.

What we preserve in museums can be globally denominated as part of cultural heritage - for those who will like this better than the term museum. But as I tried to point out elsewhere, it is necessary to bear in mind that even though
we more or less draw upon the collections which our predecessors gathered in museums, we not only take this heritage over, intervene in it and reevaluate it, but also exclude some of its elements. We lay much greater a stress on the creation of a "new heritage". This is not a mere heritage but a legacy. Therefore we should speak of how museums help to create the contemporary legacy for the future generations, a legacy which contains the reevaluated legacy of our predecessors as well. Orientation on heritage is therefore less important here than orientation on the present with regard to our legacy for the future.

The concept of cultural heritage is closely connected with the concept of monument. The latter, as well as the former concepts contain emotional charge and that is why they have the due "impact" on the broad public, mainly the less informed one.

A monument, in the broadest and very vague sense of the word, is something worth remembering. From the practical point of view, though, this term is used in a narrower sense as something denoting a concrete part of reality. As early as two years ago I pointed out the need to differentiate the monument approach, which is "in situ" oriented, and the museum approach, which is "in fondo" oriented. It is the fund, i.e. the collection structure, what makes the distinction of the two approaches possible. When we cannot preserve a monument "in situ", the only hope for it is the museum, i.e. its existence "in fondo". This in itself speaks of something even though we still have not mastered its theory into detail - and museum staff - with all due respect to their work - still have not found their promised land of theory (which they may not mind unless they have strong nationalistic feelings).

Let me finally sum up what has been said above. First of all, if we use the term object, we mean that something has become the object of our cognitive intention. Such object does not contain any specific museological information.

If we use the term document, then we must become aware of the terminological hegemony of the information science. As I have explained, we are able to arrive at the definition of the specific character of the museum-documentation approach to reality. Ontological orientation is extremely important here. The term document itself, though, is too general and does not bear any explicit museum characteristics.

The specific character of what we use in museums can only be found in the shift of meaning, i.e., in the value transformation of reality "an sich" into reality "for us", into cultural reality.

At first sight, this throws us "into one basket together with cultural heritage" or identifies us with the world of monuments. But these are just some problems which cannot cover the whole area which fascinates us so much.

Nevertheless, we see the way which we should take, much broader a way than the terms cultural heritage and monument imply.

In my opinion, we should try to find the specific character of the museum appropriation of reality mainly
because we have to do with ontological elements of reality. These elements - according to the "pars pro toto" principle or, if you will, according to holographic theory - give us both the possibility to learn the reality and to identify ourselves with it. And this moment could be related to the theory of collective memory and "morphic resonances" of R. Sheldrake.

And last:

If we do not prove the specific character of our approach to reality, we will not be able to prove the specific character of what we hide and occasionally put on display in our museums. Objects in museums can be utilized as sources in many ways. We can conceive them of as mere things and display them as such, we can appreciate them from the semiotic point of view, but we will not be saved if we turn them into mere exhibits.

Either all what I have been talking about really represents a specific value which I call museality and then the thing in the museum is not just a thing, or we do not prove this and then - then we should admit that the introductory sentence of this paper applies to us, too.
On the Relationship

OBJECT – DOCUMENT – MUSEALIUM – MONUMENT

Vladimír Tkáč

The serious issues dealt with by museology and museum theory include:

1) When is an object worth becoming a museum exhibit?
2) What is its value for the museum?
3) When is an object an original collection item and when a mere secondary document?
4) Which objects are musealia and which are monuments (movables or realties)?
5) When is a collection complete and when is it incomplete?

I dealt with the assessment of museum objects in my conference paper delivered in Athens in 1993. I suggested 10 criteria of Museality as the basis for the decision about the value of an object for the museum. The suggested criteria included authenticity, cultural value, frequency, information capacity, documentability, historicity, aesthetic quality, preservability, condition and material value.

The relationship between Object, Musealium, Monument and Document is shown by the following diagram:

General Object possessing a certain Cultural Value becomes Cultural Estate¹. Cultural Estate includes abstract and concrete products and products of nature with cultural value for the society. The interaction between man and Cultural Estate can result in Authentic or Non-Authentic Manifestation². If Cultural Estate carries Manifestation of
either kind it becomes Document, Authentic (Authenticum) or Non-Authentic, respectively. Authentic Document possesses certain qualities, which, taken together, can, after assessment, create the reason for permanent possession of the Cultural Estate as a Manifestation carrier. These qualities together form Museality. Some of these qualities are obligatory (authenticity and manifestation - document qualities, cultural value - cultural estate qualities, preservability), some are variable (they vary in frequency of occurrence, documentation, historicity, aesthetic quality, condition, and price of the material from which the object is made). Preservability as an obligatory quality can be achievable in the original environment, then the object is Monument; or in an artificial environment, then the object is Musealium. Both Musealium and Monument, after expert museological analysis and documentation, are included in the collection or monument funds and become Museum Object or Historic Monument, respectively. Internationally they become Cultural Heritage Objects. Non-authentic documents carry Manifestation through record. They can either represent the original object - Iconicum, or communicate information by means of a language code - Texticum, or even by means of another exact, extra-linguistic code - Exacticum.
1) Cultural Estate, according to the UNESCO agreement from 1970, is the estate significant for a country and a certain branch of science or culture. BENES J., Muzeum a sbírky (Museum and Collections), Praha 1977, p 84.

2) Manifestation must be related to a certain past phenomenon. It is authentic if its carrier was part of the phenomenon. It is non-authentic if its carrier was not part of the phenomenon. Authentic manifestation need not yet be true, even though the probability is very high. There are other circumstances supporting the true character of a manifestation. On the other hand a non-authentic manifestation can be true but the probability is much lower.


4) According to Z. Z. Stránský Museality is a quality of sensual perception of reality, of such cognitive and value-creative worth that the society is objectively bound to preserve, against the nature of change and decay, its carriers, and use them, with regard to this new quality of theirs, in the scientific, cognitive and culture-creative process. Úvod do muzeologie (Introduction to Museology), Brno 1980, p 39.


6) In these terms Museality can be considered a system of selected qualities of Musealia and Documents (obligatory authenticity, cultural value, informativeness in the
context of the relevant subject, and preservability, and variable – frequency of occurrence, documentation, historicity, aesthetic quality, condition, and price of material).

7) Museum is, according to Stránský, a material, direct carrier of Museality, a witness of reality which it represents by its very existence = museum collection object. Úvod do muzeologie, Brno 1980, p 39.

In the context of the above-mentioned considerations Museum can be considered Cultural Estate, a carrier of Authentic Manifestation, preservable in artificial environment, and possessing certain other features of Museality. Monument then is the same estate, preservable in the original environment.

8) The concept of Cultural Heritage is the integration of all the above-mentioned aspects - 1) value-creation (cultural estate value acquisition), 2) manifestation (manifestation of past phenomena), 3) preservation (reason for and ability of being preserved), and 4) documentation (completion with non-authentic documents).

Vladimír Tkáč, Opava, February 1994
Towards a methodology of museology

Peter van Mensch

A necessary prerequisite for the possible contribution of the theory of museology to the actual operation of museums in practice is a usable methodology. This, however, is still an underdeveloped aspect of museology. Museological methodology should enable us to describe and understand museological phenomena. It should also provide the basis for (re-)integrating the different specialisms within the profession. As far as conservation and exhibition design are concerned, separate methodologies have already been developed, and the application of methodologies within the field of research derived from subject-matter specialisms is well established. Equally, there is the tradition of applying sociological approaches within museology. A specific museological museology which encompasses, or at least integrates these methodologies and methods is, however, lacking. The aim of this paper is to elaborate (a part of) a proposal for such museological methodology.

Behind the following approach is the 'genetic epistemology', developed by Jean Piaget. This epistemology proceeds from the premiss that observable reality is the only knowable reality and that knowledge about this reality is constructed through the interaction between the individual and his environment. The constructing is characterized by the building of more and more complex abstractions. Scientific knowledge, as expressed in a scientific theory, tries to translate daily experience into formal constructions to gain more control over observable reality. Such 'symbolic generalizations' form the core of the disciplinary matrix, i.e. the paradigm.

As the Canadian museologist Edwina Taborsky has explained, there are two main specific methods for dealing with images of social heritage and social consciousness: the 'oral syntax' and the 'industrial syntax'. In the oral syntax storage of social images and knowledge is not achieved by the abstraction of heritage from daily historical interaction, but is an action performed at the time of usage. The industrial syntax separates man and heritage by creating a symbol in particular concrete form which is stored. The concept of museology advocated here is based on Taborsky's industrial syntax.

Although this approach is strongly 'object-based' the object is not the only basic parameter. It is always the object in relation with the other basic parameters that forms the content of museological consideration. Despite the apparent diversity as to theory in museology there seems to be a high degree of unanimity concerning the basic parameters. Usually three parameters are given: collection, museum (as institute and/or building) and public. The basic parameters of New Museology are usually presented in opposition to those mentioned before. They are: heritage (instead of collection), territory (instead of institute and building) and population (instead of public). The long-term program of the ICOM International Committee for Museology is also based on the interrelati-
onship of three basic parameters, which seem to be a compromise between traditional and new museology: cultural and natural heritage, museum institute and society. Society produces and uses its heritage; the museum institute fulfils an intermediary role. By distinguishing institution/institute and functions it is suggested to extent the number of basic parameters to four: heritage (collection, object), functions (activities, responsibilities), institution (institute) and society (community, public, visitors).

We can visualise these basic parameters and their interrelationships as a globe with four spheres. The innermost sphere stands for the object, seen as the methodological reduction of our cultural and natural heritage, i.e. that part of our material environment which our ancestors considered worthy of preservation for future generations. As Stephen Weil has pointed out, concepts and relationships and not things alone lie equally at the heart of museum work. The term 'object' as used in the context of this paper should be understood as the sumtotal of physical characteristics, function and meaning, and contextual relationships see hereafter).

The second sphere refers to the functions. There seems to be a consensus of opinions as to the complete range of activities concerning the preservation and use of our cultural and natural heritage. Opinions do differ, however, as to their grouping. In this paper all activities are grouped into three groups (called the basic functions of the museum): preservation, research and communication, preservation and communication being 'museological functions'. The third sphere concerns the institutional form in which the functions are implemented. The traditional museum is by definition the institute in which all functions are implemented, but only in relation to tangible, movable objects, usually excluding books and other written and printed documents. If we follow Deetz's definition of material culture (see hereafter) other institutes come within our scope too. According to Tomislav Sola this sphere concerns a wide range of 'heritage institutes'. All these institutes can, in view of their objectives, be seen as social-cultural organisations. They serve the interests of social development. That brings us to the fourth sphere, which relates to society as a whole.

A similar model is given by Sola. Like in our model he places the heritage in the centre. Referring to the replacement of the Ptolemaean model of the solar system by the Copernian model, he suggests to establish a system of heritage care 'in which the heritage itself would be at the centre, and with the museum institution as just one among equal planets around' rather than putting museums at the centre of the heritage which Sola considers to be the prevailing spiritual pattern. Whether going from 'inside to outside' (i.e. the traditional object-oriented methodology) or going from 'outside to inside' (community-oriented methodology or New Museology) museological theory and practice aim at the systematic combination of the values of objects (the innermost sphere) and human beings (the outermost sphere). In this respect Ashworth and Tunbridge use the term heritage in an explicit meaning referring to both the
idea of some modern value inherited from the past as well as a legatee for whom this inheritance is intended. The inescapable implication is the existence of a market. Heritage is brought into being and maintained for a legatee, it implies a type of preservation ultimately determined by those whose heritage is being presented. The specificity of museology as theory and museum work as practice lies in the combination of the second and the third spheres. The first sphere belongs to the subject matter disciplines. Museology focusses on certain aspects only. The fifth sphere belongs to social sciences. Museology again focusses on certain aspects.

Summarizing, a possible integrated methodology of museology can be based on the following four starting points:

- **Field of action.** There is a special relation of people to their physical environment. In this connection the term museological context has been introduced, being the particular conceptual and material context in which objects acquire a special meaning, based on cultural rather than economic value.

- **Form of action.** The museological context materializes in an institutional form, with the museum as typical example.

- **Pattern of action.** The special relationship manifests itself in a characteristic set of activities which form the components of the museological institutes. These basic museological activities are: preservation (including collecting, conservation, restoration, documentation) and communication (including exhibition and education).

- **Object of action.** These activities create and use a selected part of our material environment which we usually refer to as 'heritage' with the object as unit of action.

- **Purpose of action.** The action serves in moulding the consciousness of the society through which it can stimulate communities within the society to link together past and present in the perspective of the future, and to identify themselves with indispensable structural changes and calling forth others appropriate to their particular socio-cultural context.

**museology and objects**

An object may be defined as the smallest element of material culture which has a recognizable and recognized function in itself. As museology is concerned with the preservation and use of a selected part of our material environment, a structured approach to the information value of objects is the cornerstone of a museological methodology.

A general frame of reference is provided by James Deetz' definition of material culture. Deetz defines material culture as 'that sector of our physical environment that we modify through culturally determined behavior'. This interpretation of material culture does not limit itself to tangible, movable artefacts, but includes 'all artefacts, from the simplest, such as a common pin, to the most complex, such as an inter-
planetary space vehicle. But the physical environment includes more than what most definitions of material culture consider cuts of meat as material culture, since there are many ways to dress an animal; plowed fields; even the horse that pulls the plow, since scientific breeding of livestock involves the conscious modification of an animal's form according to culturally derived ideals. Our body itself is a part of our physical environment, so that such things as parades, dancing, and all aspects of kinesics - human motion - fit within our definition. Nor is the definition limited only to matter in the solid state. Fountains are liquid examples, as are lily ponds, and material that is partly gas includes hot-air balloons and neon-signs. (...) Even language is a part of material culture (...). Words after all, are air masses shaped by the speech apparatus according to culturally acquired rules'. The use of such a broad definition does justice to the current 'domain extension' which can be found in museology as well as in museum practice. This domain extension includes an increase in the types of artefacts concerned, but also an upwards pushing tendency in the scale in which elements of our material environment are preserved and communicated.

categories of objects

Traditionally distinction is made between artefacts and naturalia, artefacts being "superorganic" elements of material culture', and naturalia 'inorganic and organic elements of nature'. The distinction between artefacts and naturalia, however, is not always clear. As taxidermy is a craft, a stuffed animal is an artefact. A piece of rock, collected by a geologist, is an artefact too: isolated from its original context and moulded to the scientists' wishes. As such, naturalia are included in Deetz' definition of material culture. Consequently naturalia will not be treated separately in the following.

Next to artefacts another category of man-made objects is usually referred to as mentifacts. While artefacts and naturalia comprise to concrete, perceivable things, the term mentifact refers to abstract data, without regarding its physical carrier. In a similar way Koch distinguishes 'Uberreste' (objects) and 'Traditionen' (written materials) as two main categories of historic resources. An alternative distinction is made by Huchard. He distinguishes between 'objet culturel materiel' and 'objet social', the former being artefacts, the latter referring to myths, language, dance, songs, music, rituals, etc. In this paper the emphasis will be on artefacts, despite present tendencies to extend the concept of museum object.

An elaborated typology of artefacts falls outside the scope of this publication. Useful classifications are provided by Chenhall, and more recently by the Arts & Architecture Thesaurus. The Arts & Architecture Thesaurus distinguishes between two main categories: artefacts with a primarily utilitarian purpose and communication artefacts created according to aesthetic, conceptual, or symbolic principles. The following chapters refer to the first category mainly, i.e. artefacts
that had a primarily utilitarian purpose before their musealization. As will be discussed later, these artefacts become communicative artefacts in the process of musealization. Musealized objects are by definition communicative artefacts. However, for a better understanding of their information potential it is necessary to consider their pre-musealised state of being.

Next to the concept of object in general, a key position in museology is occupied by the concept of museum object. According to Razgon the first attempt to define museum objects is made in Soviet Russia in 1955. Definitions as given by Schreiner and Stransky go back to this first attempt. The term musealium for museum object was coined by the Czech museologist Zbynek Stransky in 1969. The term became soon widely used. In his contribution to the ICOFOM 1985 symposium Stransky summarized his concept of musealium. He points out that objects and museum objects are ontologically coincident, but are different from a semantic point of view. Museum objects are objects separated from their original (primary) context and transferred to a new, museum reality in order to document the reality from which they were separated. A museum object is not just an object in a museum. It is a collected (selected), classified, conserved, and documented object. As such it has become either a source for research or an exhibit when put on display.

The late Klaus Schreiner advocated a rather strict concept of museum object. In his opinion museology should restrict itself to artefacts in museums. A similar narrow approach is advocated by, for example, Anna Gregorova. Like Stransky and Schreiner she considers a museum object as a document, documenting not only its own existence, but also a certain activity, phenomenon, or function in wider connections. In this philosophical thought everything that exists could become a document. In fact, 'the entire Globe becomes a continuous museum'. However, Gregorova does not take this idea to the extreme, she rather concentrates on the part of our material environment which is formally preserved in museums. Maroevic, on the other hand, advocates a broader approach although he also uses the term musealia. But more emphatically so than Schreiner and Gregorova, Maroevic wants a broadening of the scope of museums, including more sectors of our cultural and natural heritage, coming close to Deetz' definition of material culture.

One step further is waiving the concept of museum institute as frame of reference. In this view museology should include the whole field of cultural and natural heritage. In this connection the term museological object was introduced, preliminary defined as: 'any element belonging to the realm of nature and material culture that is considered worth being preserved, either in situ or ex situ, or by documentation'. This proposal was rejected by Schreiner being too wide a concept. In his opinion, museology should not deal with the complete cultural and natural heritage, '... that would end in a diluted general
categories of museum objects

The term 'museum object' refers to what the late Japanese museologist Soichiro Tsuruta has called primary museum material, as opposed to secondary museum material which comprises models, copies, audio-visual materials, graphics, etc., and also guidebooks, postcards, posters, etc. Usually secondary museum material refers to exhibition material, i.e. material that supports the message of the exhibit (Schreiner: auxiliary material). As such secondary museum material is not a category of museum objects in a strict sense. It is not considered having documentary value. Nevertheless, the importance of didactic materials as documents recording the development of scientific theories or the development of museum work should not be underestimated. This potential source value extents to copies and reconstructions, documenting not only the original object, but also the history of perception and the social role of copies.

The term primary museum material should not be confused with the term primary documents which is used by Stransky and others. As documents museum objects (in the sense of primary museum material) are direct (authentic) witnesses of cultural and natural phenomena. However, not everything can be fixed in the form of material memory through the collection of objects. Phenomena exist which do not project themselves directly into material reality. Such phenomena can only be indirectly documented. These documents have been called secondary documents, for example books and archive material. In Stransky's opinion secondary documents should not be considered to belong to the sphere of museology (at least not as primary museum material), and as a consequence libraries and archives should not be considered as museological institutions. According to this view, secondary documents are just a 'vehicle of information', while objects are 'sources of information'.

The late Brazilian museologist Waldisa Russio held an opposite view. She speaks of 'temoins materiels directs' and 'temoins materiels indirects'. Indirect witnesses are in fact what elsewhere has been described as primary documents. Russio gives the example of a vase used in ritual. The vase only documents a part of this ritual and concomitantly only communicates indirectly the traditions connected with this ritual. To Russio direct witnesses are photographs and films. In the present paper no distinction will be made between primary and secondary documents, neither between direct and indirect witnesses. Every object is considered to be a source of information, i.e. a document.

In the following no distinction will be made between categories of objects based on 'subject matter'. In practice, however, different traditions have been developed as to the maintenance and use of different categories of objects. The categories concerned are: artefacts (including naturalia), documents (archivalia), books, buildings, living organisms. The different approach towards each category is reflected in
different specialized institutes: artefacts - museums, documents - archives, books - libraries, buildings - historic preservation, living organisms - botanical and zoological gardens. The relation between object category and institute is not exclusive. A museum may contain artefacts, documents, books and even monuments (open air museums). An archive may contain some books and artefacts. And a building may contain artefacts (historic houses).

object as data carrier

'The object as a witness can convey the knowledge it holds if we know how to question it', writes Jean Gabus. He quotes an old Chinese philosopher saying: 'Any object has a logic of its own and that logic should be grasped by man's intelligence'. In general, objects are seen as data carriers in the context of certain disciplines, in museum literature usually referred to as 'subject matter disciplines'. These disciplines, like art history, archaeology, anthropology, natural history, etc. have developed their own lines of approach as to the information content of objects. These approaches are usually directed to only one aspect, and might be described as 'closed'. In museology an 'open approach' should be developed. An essential concept in museology is the object as limitless source of information. In this respect, Tomislav Sola uses the metaphor of the hologram: 'The objects have inscribed in themselves the genetic code of either nature, or of civilization and culture. Every object is like the contains the character of the whole'. But he warns against reducing the object to its (physical) data: 'Numerous museum objects in museums today are known only as beautiful objects. They have lost all trace of the real, inherent, meaning they used to have due to their function, and to the intent and ambition that created them'.

In museum/museological literature some methodological approaches have been proposed, based on a structured analysis of the object as data carrier. Influential models originate from the field of material culture studies. Until recently history, as an academic discipline, has paid little attention to developing a specialism of artefact study. The growth of the number of cultural history museums and the professionalization of museum work has promoted the development of adequate methodologies. Especially in the United States material culture studies and museum work are strongly interwoven.

Artefact analysis in an integrated methodology

The aim of museology as academic discipline is to abandon the subject-matter approach in museum work in view of the multi-faceted use of objects in the museological context. This multifaceted uses boil down to a two-fold approach: the object as source and the object as medium. The data embodied in objects and their contextual relationships are almost infinite. In conservation and registration the full information potential of objects should be optimized. In this respect the archival world uses the term 'use-independent retrieval'. In order to obtain this it is necessary to develop a model of the information structure of objects, rather than a model of
research procedures.

The model is based on the distinction of four 'levels' of data, i.e. four properties:

1. the physical (structural) properties (structural identity),
2. the functional properties and significance (functional identity),
3. the object's relationship to its context (contextual identity),
4. documentation.

The first three levels of data refer to the object in a certain stage of development. The term identity is used here to denote a state of being. It is a theoretical construct, serving to mark the different aspects of the object 'synchronously'. This set of three aspects is to be completed with a 'diachronic' set of characteristics which reflect the successive processes of information gain and loss. 'Documentation' is the form in which information about former stages of development is available.

The life history of an artefact starts with an idea. In the model the idea of the maker is referred to as conceptual identity (= conceptual object, nucleus, mental conception). This idea is related to the conceptual context of the maker, i.e. his/her culture and, on a higher abstraction level, the world of ideas in Platonic sense. This conceptual identity is, in fact, the potential object. By choosing the material (matter) and the technological process this potential object is realized (genesis). The concept (conceptual identity) thus expresses itself in form (structural identity) and function (functional identity).

The information value of an object is the result of a historical process. The schematized sequence of stages and processes is: invention - conceptual identity - realization - factual identity - use - actual identity. The factual identity refers to the realized object with its structural and functional aspects. It is the sum total of the characteristics of the object as it was intended by the maker, just after the production process has been completed. During its life history the object changes. In general its information content will grow, although quite often an erosion of information occurs. The result of the accumulation of information, on all levels, constitutes the actual identity, i.e. the object as it appears to us now. The diagramme gives a detailed model of the structural and functional characteristics in a diachronic perspective.

The historical process includes where, when and how the object was made, by whom and for whom and why, and successive changes in ownership, condition, and function. Part of this is reflected in the information content of the object itself. Another part is handed down through tradition. This has been called non-intrinsic information, or simply documentation. In this respect Huchard distinguishes between the 'objet culturel
materiel', i.e. the physical object, and the 'objet materiel socialise', i.e. the object together with the social activities connected with it. The museum object is the preserved 'objet materiel socialise', the object with its non-intrinsic information.

Significance

Biographies of objects can be written from a physical, technical, economic or social point of view. Within each context a specific range of roles is played, which is socially and culturally recognized. Roles and their relationships change according to the nature of the context and, of course, the perspective of the beholder. The change of meaning as result of musealization is a complex phenomenon that only can be understood in connection with the complete range of meanings that objects can have in a given society. Meaning, or value, is not intrinsic, it is based on response. Without an interpreter there is no sign. "We see things not as they are, but as we are" (Weil). In this respect is it useful to distinguish between the 'conceived object' and the 'perceived object'. The conceived object relates to the factual identity, it is the set of meanings as intended and experience by the maker. This meaning is not necessarily the same set of meanings as experienced by later users (the perceived object). The perceived object relates to the actual identity.

The culturally specific meanings of an object can be grouped according to the following four aspects: practical, aesthetic, symbolical, metaphysical. Practical meaning refers to the physical use of the object and is related to the main physical characteristics. Usually the maker has added some aesthetical dimension to the object. In some occasions the object has a meaning that refers to something outside its own reality: a happening, an abstract idea, etc. This has been called symbolical meaning. The metaphysical meaning goes one step further. This meaning refers to a possible relation to a supernatural world. In one of the preceding paragraphs two categories of artefacts were mentioned: artefacts with a primarily utilitarian purpose and communicative artefacts created according to aesthetic, conceptual, or symbolic principles. As to the first category the practical aspect is the most decisive meaning to denote the functional identity of the individual object. The other meanings are additional. As to communicative artefacts either the aesthetic, the symbolic or the metaphysical aspect is the most decisive.

Context transforms involve shifts in the relative importance of the different meanings. Generally speaking, objects as commodities lose value as they age, but at a certain period of time they might begin to move into the category of antiques and rise in value with time, i.e. a decrease in practical meaning goes together with an increase in aesthetic or symbolical meaning.

The use value of objects varies with the perceived quality of its structural and functional properties. In general there is a gradual functional degradation caused by physical, technolo-
gical and psychological obsolescence. Degradation usually leads to elimination from the primary context. Until a century or so ago, obsolescence was a purely physical phenomenon. The physical process of ageing literally determined the useful life of the artefact. Current concepts of technological obsolescence are a direct result of the industrial revolution, since an increasing number of objects is becoming economically useless without reference to any residual physical utility, because they could be replaced by new, more effective or more fashionable models. In addition mention could be made of psychological obsolescence, when objects become visually unpleasant. Several authors have pointed at the increasing speed of the functional degradation in our contemporary Western societies. This 'ageing-rate' is for example very high in consumer goods like clothing and cars, but also in art.

Semiophores

Eventually, the object moves into the sphere of the singularly worthless to that of the expensive singular. In this respect Krysztof Pomian divides the material world into two categories of objects. The first category is formed by the objects in use, i.e. objects in the primary context with a predominantly economic (practical) value. For the second category he introduced the term 'semiophore'. These objects are withdrawn from their economic use and attributed with some cultural, symbolic value. Gluzinski makes a similar distinction between a thing (the actual real state of being of an object) and a symbol (referring to a 'para-onto' situation, i.e. a situation 'outside our actual temporal-spatial coordinates').

The transformation from thing into symbol, from object into semiophore, involves the disappearance of the practical meaning and the confrontation of the individually perceived value with the socially perceived value. This confrontation takes place in the market of art and antiquities, which functions as a 'tournament of value'. Singularity is confirmed not by the object's structural position in an exchange system, but by intermittent forays into the commodity sphere, quickly followed by reentries into the closed sphere of singular 'art'. The definition of semiophores (i.e. the process of singulatization), is very often controlled by the dominating social groups within society. The objects concerned are converted 'upwards' to a higher sphere of exchange, exclusively dealing with 'symbols'. This process starts with a form of private singulatization, and usually leads via the acceptance of this value by a small group to a general socially perceived value. The latter is formalized by 'public institutions of singulatization', like historical commissions, panels deciding on public monuments, neighbourhood organizations concerned with 'beautification' and museums.

Conclusion

For many museologists the institutionalization of the perceived social value is the main focus point of museological theory and/or museum theory. As the Polish museologist Wojech Gluzinski has said: 'Museum's essence (...) is not based on
technical or institutional aspects and certainly not on spatial ones (building) but is in the first place a matter of meanings which in a system of culture represent all things that make up a museum,...'. As a key role is played by artefacts, there is a need to connect the physical characteristics of objects with their function and meaning. In this paper an attempt was made to explore a possible useable methodology. The basic assumption is that such methodology is useful for conservation as well as exhibition work. Museum objects are documents as well as exhibits. The complexity of this situation calls for an unifying approach. May this paper contribute to the acceptance of such approach.
II

ROLES AND FUNCTIONS OF THE OBJECT
My analysing summary concerning the given papers will include a series of questions, proposals for discussion, which I find nearest to my 'museological' heart. These questions are mainly aroused by the definitions given to the concepts thing-object-document in the paper by Maria Horta and some ideas put up by André Desvallees.

I'm grateful to Maria Horta, who had taken the time to analyse the main terms of our home subject: thing, object and document, because I personally have felt guilty having used in my contribution only my English dictionary, and the experience of the given words provided by my own language and the daily museum work.

Although we museum people mostly find the basic terms and concepts of the profession so self-evident, nearly needless to discuss about, it really is healthy every now and then to re-evaluate them, and consequently analyse the daily work we are doing in the museums. There will always be opened up new aspects to the old story of museums, as has been seen throughout the history of the committee. But as we know very well there seems to be some assumptions we ever get rid of.

As we noticed in the paper by Maria Horta, definitions given for
a thing are more or less materialculturalist by nature. Referring to the definition for material culture by James Deeze - quoted so often by museologists - the material culture - which is the main concern of the museums - means that part of the physical world that we have shaped according to a culturally dictated plan. This definition goes in the line of the traditional museum concept, which - I would like to say most of the profession still hold. A thing as such is a neutral concept to me - but any thing or anything entering to a museum collection is not, it will turn to an object. Now I would like to remind you about the ideas of Susan Pearce, quoted by André Desvallees in his paper concerning influences of modernity in the field of heritage action. Now I mean the meta-narratives of museum business - one of which being the idea of objective reality and discourse of scientifique knowledge and understanding - museum diciplines, in which the profession firmly rely on.

According to a definition object is anything placed in front of the subject, anything exposed to human knowledge and experience - I would like to add referring to the institutional theory of art - anything exposed to human appreciation, evaluation and interpretation within the framework of certain social institution. Would it be possible to draw a conclusion that there are only "institutional" objects in the museums. Is there any other choice, we may ask? As museums are object-orientated (repositories for concrete three-dimensional objects) I wonder, if the conclusion could also be expressed in this way: museum approach to the world around us is not objective as we so often suppose but the most subjective one within the
perspectives of the profession.

But, could it be possible that what I have just said is only valid as art museums are concerned? Is the institutional approach possible only within the context of art?

Culture is what is carried in the minds of collective groups of people - how could we then reduce material culture to its mere material aspects, asks Maria Horta, which is a most interesting question as museums as principal repositories of cultural heritage are concerned. Is the museum profession still to be accused for the well known phenomenon of object 'fetishism', although the ideas for example of the new museology are reaching all over the museological world - (now we have to ask ourselves as museologists - how far from the daily museum reality is this our museological world, we might have the theory but they (I'm one of them) have the practise). To continue the idea of reduction I would like to ask, how can we reduce material culture to the aspects known and appreciated only by the specialists, by us and those of our kind sharing the same norms and values? Things, objects or documents, whatever we might have in our museums are not there to create culture but to communicate it, and not THE CULTURE but the variety of cultures.

In fact I would be interested in stressing the potentials of the neutral "thing"-world outside museums as a resource along with the "object"-world inside them, the world defined for example by the special museum disciplines related to the profession (now I don't refer to museology). Information and meaning contained in an object are not fixed or crystallized in it. It cannot be read like a book. Maybe, you dont know the language - or rules, how
to use the language. If you don't know the rules you are not able to play the game. Now I would like to remind you about the game theory and the concept of culture as some kind of way of life by Ludvig Wittgenstein included in his late philosophy, that has been very popular among the authors of the institutional theory of art and cultural studies. I'm not yet very familiar with his texts, but I suppose that the ideas of his late philosophy could be usefull as some of the be basic questions of the museum profession are concerned. A nut is a nut is a nut, says Deetz - what makes of it a typical representative of the species/ an object is an object is an object - what makes of it a typical representative of current life? - a document? To be able to play the game, to interprete, to decode the message, the mental image or mental thing beyond the museum object, our audience have to know the language we are dealing with, which is starting from the choices (starting from preservation up to communication) and reflecting the concept of culture/ or the western, more or less comfortable, way of life, that of ours. But I'm afraid that we cannot be sure if the culture reflected in the language we professionals are sharing - more or less - is still valid in the postmodern society.

Modern museum system is only about 200 years old, still we take it for granted. Somehow I find it too an easy approach for the profession to stick to our 'specialists' choice of museum-object - let it be material or not - as the testimony of the total heritage. As well it is too an easy approach to exlude other things than 'material culture' outside the museum concept and the profession.

In the paper by André Desvallees I found the lines of Stephen E.
Weil, who says that we perceive objects in a mesh of experience, objects only have meaning for us through the framework of the concepts and assumptions. We see things not as they are but as we are. To be able to be a document a thing, or let it be an object, have to be contextualized to be able to free the energy - to provide it with an opportunity to be "the real thing".

To finish my analysis I would like to ask one more question: if we really need all those three-dimensional objectes in the institutional sence of the concept - to keep our culture or cultures alive? As I already mentioned, the object orientated museum as we have got it is only a two hundred years old system, this what we have got, cannot be the final development - otherwise there won't be use for museology in the field of daily museum action.

As André Desvallees notes in his paper the debate about the distinction between object and document cannot have an end, because it intrinsically is the essence of museum. Still I hope that the debate going on for example in this ICOFOM meeting will not forget the actual museum work and the alternative approaches there are needed in the field in order to survive as Tomislav Sola might put it.

Päivi-Marjut Raippalinnna
OBJECT AND DOCUMENT
(AS CATEGORIES OF STUDY WITHIN MUSEOLOGY)

Annalitic summary by
Tereza Cristina Scheiner - Brazil

The analysis of the papers produced by ICOFOM members, for the Annual Meeting of our Committee in Beijing, China, 1994, reveals some very interesting perspectives for the study of museum theory. Considering that the construction of such a theory must be preceded by a careful and detailed exam of the ideas that are behind the words, we should start by considering the idea of object and the idea of document, as presented by the authors. In such a way, two main approaches can be perceived:

a) one that emphasizes object and document
b) other, that considers object as document

On a first and more general level, we have analyzed the relationships between object and document. Here two theoretical backgrounds can be easily identified: that of Philosophy (herein including Semiology, and/or Semiotics) and that of the sciences and scientific disciplines that deal with material culture (Archaeology, Anthropology and related disciplines). Both deal with the relationship between Man, Nature and Reality. According to such backgrounds, we find the following ideas of object:

1. For those using Philosophy as a theoretical background, the object is perceived as "an atom of human experience" (Bellaigue), or as a "tangible expression of Man's material and spiritual world" (Decarolis). "Materialized symbol of the self, (it) illustrates every trip of the human mind (...); materialized symbol of nature, it illustrates the course of mankind through planet Earth" (Scheiner). As "a dismembered part of a hologram, it contains the character of the whole" (Decarolis, after Sola). In the metaphysical sense, it "signifies a point in a long continuum of space and time, in relation to man and his environment" (Shah).

The ideas of such authors reveal a holistic approach to museum theory, as a tool to better develop a comprehension of the nature and functions of the object. Some of them believe that, "before being museological, the debate about the distinction between object and document is phylosophical: it not only concers the nature of the object, but the nature of visible reality", where specific postulates - like the opposition between spirit and nature, in a space where time does not exist - must be taken into account (Desvaliès).
The influence of occidental thought is clearly noticed in some of those authors, which relate their analyses to philosophical materialism, reminding that "the notion of object is relatively recent, and that, up to these times, we used to think of things - things of nature and things of culture" (Bezzeg). "Things become objects when they reveal the action of Man over material world" (Watteyne).

Nevertheless, when considering the terms "thing" and "object" we must be very careful, since we are using two different pathways: "the term object is based on gnoseological approach to reality, while the term thing is based on the ontological approach. We use the term object as something that becomes an object to a subject and that is therefore opposed to it" (Stransky). So, we must take into account that "things are not always material" (Horta), and that "all knowable things have been in existence prior to the perception of human cognition" (...) ; thus, "what we ascribe as knowledge is really a process that involves a relationship between mankind and the universe" (Maranda).

A perception is thus developed of the individual as "subject" of the communication process. According to this point of view, "an object is anything thought of, anything placed in front of a subject" (Horta). "It is in the eye of the beholder", completely influenced by "the images that make part of our mental universe - our inner self" (Horta, Scheiner). In such sense, it is "a convention, a creation of the spirit, a product of the human mind, which means only what one wishes it signifies" (Desvallés). "Man needs a process of reflection to recognize things as objects". (Watteyne). "What gives a sense to the object, if not the eye?" (Bellaigue). A strong influence of semiology and the semiotics can be perceived in such ideas.

"The relationship between Man - subject of knowledge - and the object - as part of reality, is a characteristic of the museological fact" (Decarolis). It is on the grounds of such relationship that museology will be able to develop some of its theoretical roots. The study of reality itself is equally important: "to understand the object in the reality of the museum, one must understand the object as a document of reality" in a much broader sense (Maroevic, quoting Stransky).

2. Archaeology and Anthropology serve also as an important background: from the studies of society and culture derives the notion that "the object is part of the material culture, a cultural trait" (Bellaigue, Horta), and represents "tangible expressions of Man's material and spiritual existence" (Decarolis, Watteyne). Shaped by Man according to culturally dictated plans (Horta), "they have inscribed in themselves the genetic codes of nature, civilization and culture" (Decarolis). "Objects are physical points of evidence of a particular set of knowledge" (Maranda), related to cultural processes; they are "a narrative record of the aspirations, values attitudes and emotions" of society (Shah).
Both backgrounds complement each other, leading the authors to the following pathway: that of establishing a correspondence between object and document.

Starting from the notion that "a document is a written record, evidence of facts and situations, (...) it remains to be proved that an object can be regarded as a document" (Maroević). If we consider the concept of document as related to its origins, i.e., proof of something, we may find out that not only written things are records or documents of reality: language, for example, can be also a document. And, furthermore, if we analyze the concept of document on the grounds of the information science, it may be to find out that "information science concentrates only on such sources or media which serve to fixate the results of conscious human activities aimed at information preservation and diffusion (...) information scientists, therefore, say they do not have a term for material information sources" (Stransky).

But for us, museum specialists, "objects are significant sources of information, and, at the same time, significant media/means of transfer of data/information" (Bellaigue, Maroević, quoting Mensch). On what grounds should we develop a museum theory related to the object?

One of the proposals is to avoid using a reductionist approach of the theories of material culture, taking into consideration not only the properties related to matter and form, but a broader perspective, as found in Deetz, Pearce and other authors (Horta). The functional properties of the object and its relationship to the context (environment) are, thus, to be taken into account (Maroević, quoting Mensch). Using this model, it is possible to reconstruct the object's biography, specially in what refers to its fundamental identities: conceptual, factual, actual - as in Święcimsky - and structural - as in Mensch (Maroević).

But "it is easy to appreciate the physical qualities of the objects, (yet) not always their symbolic message". (Decarolis). Which leads us to the following question: "at what level do we make the distinction between object and document?" (Desvaliés).

Here rises the second proposal: to analyze the object inscribed in "plans of rationality", as proposed by Baudrillard, or as making part of an extremely complex network of signification chains, in which the museum occupies a very peculiar place (Scheiner). It is vital to understand the cultural significance of the object: "when charged with collective significance, objects become documents" (Watteyne). "A plan of expression and a plan of content" should also be considered, the first related to the material aspects of the object, and the latter, concerning the special way in which meaning is constructed (Horta). "The withdrawal of an object from a signification chain implies deleting a sign from a code of the cultural discourse" (Decarolis).
The several contexts to which objects are related will then be decodified: not only the "physical and cultural context" (Desvalléès), but also the evolution of contexts, from the act of creation to musealization. This evolutionary approach identifies a "primary context, characterized by functions of production and use, an archaeological context, understood as a depository of objects and a museological context, related to the protection of objects, and where the focal point is the documentary value of the object" (Watteyne).

In such process, it is fundamental to establish a link between the world conception of the subject (observer) and the context of the object. We must not forget that ideas - and not only artifacts - are in the heart of the museological enterprise. There, everything is object, everything is document (Desvalléès). The recognition and valoration of the documentary value of the object is one of the foundations of museality (Watteyne, quoting Stransky), and as such, must serve as a basis for the development of a methodology that takes into account: the field of action; the form of action; the pattern of action; the object of action and the purpose of action (Mensch).

Another proposed model (Watteyne) emphasizes the following relationships:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Thing/Object/Document/Museum Object/Communication (Exhibition)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Meaning/Reflection/Choice/Selection/Neo-Semantization/Trans-semantization</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The museum object may exist as document as long as the unity between Material + Form + Meaning has been preserved, or satisfies the society where the object is. (Maroevic). It is up to us, museum specialists, to be aware of the cultural and symbolic values we need to recognize, enhance and communicate to society within the realm of our experience. Because, "when an object is taken into a museum, it has assigned to it a supplementary significance" (Watteyne) - thoroughly attributed by the museologist, it is fundamental to make a choice between a traditional museology and a "museology of rupture" (Desvalléès), which considers all possible forms of dialectic relationship between museum, reality and society. In that case, the object will not be the main source of information, but will be understood as a part of the immense plurality of signs generated by nature, by life itself, by the presence of Man over the environment, in a specific microcosm - the systemic universe of the museum (Sheiner). As in contemporary art, where "we have to face the fact that a great part (of the evidence) is not supposed to be objects, but processes" (Raippalinna).

The "rituals of musealization" (Bellaigue), intentional and full of significances, originally ascribed to the museum as a place (or a site), are now understood as existing far beyond the museum institution: they are assigned to the museum phenomenon, and exceed the object to encompass other manifestations of the dialectic process between man and reality.

Beijing and Rio de Janeiro, sept./nov. 1994

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Man is flooded with second-hand information which has been processed, arranged and commercialized and he wants not to be given but to be left free to choose for himself the first-hand information that he wants.

Hugues de Varine

INTRODUCTION

From very remote times man has felt the need to preserve his material possessions. To this effect he has organized, in a more or less systematic manner, collections that throughout time have become documents which are important sources of knowledge and information. The capacity to communicate through these documents is a feature peculiar to mankind and its use and preservation have played a fundamental role in the development of civilization.

One of the prominent features of the 20th century is the expansion and exploitation of communication media. The information and communication revolution comprises the tremendous technological advances made in human capabilities to encode, record, reproduce and disseminate information. Its processing cuts across many disciplines, technologies and activities which make an impact in every field of human endeavour. The long-term effects are difficult to forecast and the remaining human task is that of finding ways to make information systems serve mankind as well as possible.

Automation and cybernation are two of the many terms that have been coined and are being used in human progress for controlling nearly every kind of activity, including libraries, archives and museums, where documents are kept in an environment favourable for picking up and disseminating knowledge, thus enabling men to get to know and understand their past, appreciate their present and visualize the future. Material culture reflects social and mental culture and has, at the same time, an enormous impact on them.

Museums, as centres of interpretation, conservation and exhibition, establish a special relationship with the cultural products they shelter. They work with the authentic values that have formed man's universe and its reality at a given time and space; they contribute to every cognitive process, facilitating the access to knowledge through the three-dimensional language of the object, which should be considered a great equalizer among its competitors.
The most essential and effective communication medium for dissemination of original, first-hand information in the museum is the exhibit, where the object -primarily through visual perception- plays an important role, being the link between emitters and receivers, according to certain semiotic patterns. In order to analyze its symbolic operativeness, it must be approached taking into account the variables of space and time.

The problem of visual perception is to understand how man organizes, transforms and structures all the information received in the way of data. The meaning transmitted by the object -which in many cases has been removed in time, place and circumstances from its original context- is much more subtle than any other communication medium.

Objects represent tangible expressions of man's material and spiritual existence, offering a unique, multiple sensual experience. The real dimension in which they live is confined within the moral dimension they must signify.

Many material and immaterial activities have taken place around them in a pluridisciplinary way. Whether or not correctly used, they constitute museum's potential force and as Cameron says, "their power is so strong, that ethical responsibility for their use must be taken into special consideration among museum workers".

THE UNIVERSE OF OBJECTS

There exists a long philosophical debate with respect to the object. In short, three main currents may be distinguished: objective realism, which subordinates thought to the object; subjective idealism which, as of Kant's times, subordinates the object to thought and finally, the phenomenological current, which as of Husserl's philosophy, rejects the separation between the mind and the thing. Even nowadays there is a permanent shifting among both the realistic and the idealistic positions.

"We have for ever lived the splendor of the subjects and the misery of the objects. It is the subject who makes history...the subject individually or collectively...the subject who is conscious or unconscious..." (Jean Baudrillard).

Even though the ideal of metaphysics is that of a subject-world, this subject is at the same time creator and creature of the object. Subject and object are final terms of a purely conceptual analysis, and for Baudrillard "...human beings and objects are related and in this complicity the objects gain density, an emotional value which has been called presence".

William James, in his pragmatic writings, deals with the nature of reality in terms of the reality of physical objects ordinarily understood, differentiating this point of view from the scientifical and philosophical one. This philosopher repudiates the dualism that considers the world of physical objects and the world of values ontologically distinct.

Logicians and epistemologists have developed the concept of logical form and discovered its relevance to the problems of symbolic expression and communication.
All objects have a logic which should be understood by the human mind", expressed
Chang Fan Li, and it is interesting to note -as Jean Gabus said- that in Chinese
calligraphy, the object was so important that became an ideogram and a sign of the things,
revealing their logic and their laws, so as to find the way to wisdom.

"It is of essential importance to study the nature of museum objects. They have
inscribed the genetic codes of nature, civilization and culture. Every object is like the
dismembered part of a hologram: it contains the character of the whole". (Tomislav Sola)

It is through the object in itself that a preceding being is remembered throughout time.
All objects are entrusted with a power which arises from the plurality of interpretations
they may deserve and on which they depend to exist as such. This power is relative and
may vary considerably according to the context and the subject who takes possession of
them at a given moment. Each and every object is the testimony of the way in which it was
created: a handicraft expresses tradition; an industrial product, the degree of sophis-
tication of technology.

As part of the world which surrounds us, the object is apprehended so as to be able to
transform it into an image, an idea, a concept, considering it in relation to the social,
historical and cultural context from which it comes, always recalling the subject who has
selected it and the scenario it is meant for.

Man's conceptual and symbolic thought is always projected on the cultural product,
which has a spatial location and a strength of communication that memory images do not
have. But sometimes this special communication through the language of the object is less
understood than other media. It is easy to appreciate the physical qualities of the objects,
but not always their symbolic, codified message. If it is not possible to show their context
as well, additional information may be needed and presented graphically, through
subsidiary verbal messages which can, by no means, be compared with the three-
dimensionality strength of the object itself, carrying the first-hand, original message.

Meanings are only potential and liable to disappear unless coded and retained in
language. Therefore, humans have developed and learned complex systems of languages
to interpret the signals received from the senses. This has enabled them to recognize the
objects they see, understand their messages and comprehend the signs received, which are
irreducible elements of communication and the carriers of meaning.

When a significance is granted to an object, values are being assigned and this deep,
cultural action turns them into signs and symbols -into museum objects. The withdrawal
of an object from a signification chain implies deleting a sign from a code, a link of the
relational chain that will not be included anymore in the cultural discourse.

From a semiotic point of view, and following Saussure's theoretical thought, a sign is
divided into two parts: a signifier and a signified, being signifier the object that calls to
mind a concept or signified. The relationship existing between both of them is
conventional, it must be learned. Thus, it is necessary to learn how to interpret signs
when talking of signification structures which correlate, through conventionally
established rules or codes, a signifier and a signified.
Therefore, it is worth mentioning that for their musealization objects must be icons and symbols of a person, situation or of a momentum in time and space. In this case "the daily prose of the objects becomes poetry, an unconscious and glorious discourse..."-says Baudrillard- "the liking for objects that represent the past is related to the passion to form collections. Is it nostalgia for the origins or an obsession for authenticity? The objects bring us closer to a given time and space that is more or less distant. The more remote in time, the nearer they seem to Nature and Divinity..."

An object that belonged to somebody who was famous or powerful has a special value. The fascination with respect to a handicraft relates to the fact that it was made by someone whose work is still stamped on the object. It is the fascination for what it has been created and that is thus unique, since the time of creation is irreversible..."What specifies the museum-object in the first place is its myth and authenticity coefficient... Such an object is a legend, an evasion of everyday life...nothing alters its inherent specificity, neither time nor styles; neither the fact that it is real or false, valuable or not".

From Jean Baudrillard's point of view, all objects have two functions: that of being used and that of being possessed. The strictly practical object is assigned a social status; the object that is abstracted or devoid of its use, is assigned a subjective status. It becomes part of a collection; it is no longer a chair, bowl, tapestry, sculpture. Instead, it becomes an object classified by man and no longer specified according to its function.

A collection can be defined as a more or less complex organization of objects which refer one to another and make each one sufficiently abstract so as to be recovered and possessed by the subject.

M. Rheims says in La vie étrange des objets that the keenness to form collections is a sort of passionate game, because the pleasure of a collector comes from the sense of possession of the absolute singularity of each object.

The single object is then the symbol of a series of objects and it summarizes the whole species, as the proclaimed term of a whole paradigm, the emblem of the series. The symbolism of the object summarizes a chain of meanings in only one of its terms. Baudrillard considers that each object is half way between its practical specificity, which represents its function, and its absorption by a series-collection where it is converted into part of a reiterative discourse. For him, the non-musealized object is functional and the musealized one is consummate, with a myth of origin and a symbolic value, referring not to the real time, but to the cultural signs and traces of time which is recovered therein.

A process of compulsive acculturation and of magic appropriation leads civilizations towards antiques, wishing to seize in the ancestral contours of the objects the myth of their origins. All antique objects are assigned values just for having survived, thus becoming signs of a previous life. This is the historicity of the antique object notwithstanding its systematic function as a sign. Thus, when the object is taken to a museum, it leaves aside its function and becomes a sign. The practical objects that are not part of a museum collection, are signs of our current domain; the others, are signs of a previous realm...
To conclude:

The museological fact is, thus, the product of the deep relationship between man, subject of knowledge, and the object as part of the reality he belongs to. This object, whose indivisible nature is due to the internal relations of its virtual inalienable constituents, is an expression of life. The interplay of identity and diversity of forms is a major factor in its dialectical structure.

An object exists out of our mind; when we speak about objects or things we connect them with the idea they represent. Their different values are transmitted in a synchronic or diachronic manner, being the meaning conditioned by culture, history and society. The testimonial and documental nature of the object is closely related to the meaning of its symbolic message.

Waldissa Russio said, referring to this topic, "...the peculiar testimonial nature of the object may be found in the remains and traces of the relics from the past, and it is related to the information conveyed, that is to say, to the message".

Collecting objects for museum purposes is a fundamental way to preserve and disseminate natural and cultural heritage, generating knowledge and social development but, above all, it is the most suitable way to document the diversity and uniqueness of our own culture through the musealized object.

This musealized object must be both a testimony and a document. As a testimony, it is the evidence, proof, justification, certainty and truth of a determinate event or thing in a specific time and space. As a document, it is the living evidence needed to reconstruct the history in a given moment. Its whole intrinsic information added to the flow of extrinsic, context information, make a testimony and a document out of a museum object.

*It can be said that a museum-object is a testimonial document.*

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OBJET OU DOCUMENT ?

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De même que le débat sur les limites du musée, le débat sur la distinction entre l’objet et le document, et donc sur les limites de ce qu’est l’un, de ce qu’est l’autre, et de ce qu’est l’un par rapport à l’autre n’a pas de fin, ne peut avoir de fin, car il est partie intrinsèque de l’essence du musée. Rappelons en effet que ce débat agita les milieux muséaux français et allemands au début du 19ème siècle et qu’il se trouve résumé dans l’évolution de la position de Wilhelm von Humboldt entre le moment où il visita à Paris, en 1799, le Musée des Monuments français d’Alexandre Lenoir, dont il écrivit à Goethe qu’"on [y] apprend à mieux comprendre et à mettre en rapport ce que la lettre morte de l’histoire communiquée de façon imparfaite et incohérente" et celui où, en 1833, il écrivait, à l’intention du Roi de Prusse, à l’occasion de la programmation du Musée de Berlin (devenu l’Alte Museum): "Dans les activités secondaires des musées, on peut très souvent se passer des originaux et se contenter de gravures et de moulages car il s’agit beaucoup plus de l’interest scientifique que purement artistique. [...] Une telle collection n’a rien à voir avec les buts principaux du musée".

1. Sans doute faut-il d’abord définir de quoi on parle, et il semble qu’on puisse se servir du texte de Humboldt comme première approche sémantique. Les vrais objets doivent être des originaux (sous-entendu des objets d’art), alors que ne sont que des documents les objets secondaires, tels que reproductions et substituts en tous genres, moulages mais aussi gravures et, depuis le siècle dernier, photographies ou films. On constate immédiatement ce que cette distinction a d’absurde, d’une part parce que le support - gravure ou film - n’a rien à voir avec la qualité et qu’il existe désormais des musées de la photo et du cinéma, d’autre part, parce que, non seulement Humboldt avait connu et apprécié le premier Musée des Monuments français, qui avait plus d’exigences d’expression que d’authenticité, mais surtout il connaissait au moins l’existence du Conservatoire des Arts et métiers, dont les machines originales étaient noyées dans les modèles réduits. Quels sont donc les "buts principaux d’un musée"? Si à la fois le C.N.A.M. et le M.M.F. étaient reconnus comme des musées, et si étaient considérés comme objets de musée tout aussi bien les substituts conservés au C.N.A.M. que les "installations" de Lenoir au Musée des Monuments français?

Mais avant d’être muséologique, ce débat est par essence philosophique, dans la mesure où il concerne la nature de l’objet et, au-delà de l’objet, la nature de la réalité visible. Nous ne reprendrons pas tout ce débat, qui remonte à l’origine des religions, à l’origine des philosophies et même à l’origine de la physique. Sauf d’en rappeler quelques postulats qui sont admis par convention avec le concept de musée.

Le premier est que la réalité physique que nous appréhendons avec le musée, et avec l’objet qui en est la principale matière, cette réalité se situe dans un espace hors du temps qu’il prétend fixer, puisque le temps n’existe pas.

Le second est que, les religions et la métaphysique des civilisations indo-européennes et judéo-chrétiennes opposant l’esprit et la matière, la réalité physique était considérée comme une donnée contingente, l’important étant l’esprit. Partant de cette séparation, la science moderne, isola la matière pour mieux l’étudier et donner inconsciemment naissance au matérialisme en même temps qu’elle renforçait l’intérêt pour les vraies choses ("real thing") et donc pour le musée qui en détient des spécimens. C’est ce point de vue qui fut mis en cause par ceux qui se sont désignés comme postmodernes. Voici par exemple comment Suzan M. Pearce résume cette manière de voir: "Par essence, la modernité était concernée par le développement des méta-récits qui faisaient les discours grâce auxquels on définissait et on exprimait les réalités objectives et les vérités éternelles. Ceci reposait, à l’origine, sur la croyance - et c’était une croyance - selon laquelle il existait une réalité objective, que les êtres humains en faisaient partie en tant qu’individus essentiels et qu’ils pouvaient ainsi l’apprécier à sa juste valeur. Cela engendra le discours de la connaissance
et du savoir scientifiques auquel on a abouti grâce à l'intervention de la raison humaine sur les phénomènes du monde naturel qu'elle observe, pour lesquels les musées et leurs collections sont perçus comme les dépôts principaux de témoignages fondamentaux. Le plan taxonomique de Linné ou la théorie de l'évolution de Darwin furent des méta-récits typiques de ce genre. [...] Notre relation complexe avec les objets - en tant que producteurs, que propriétaires et que collectionneurs - est elle-même un modeme méta-récit caractéristique, et ainsi, à sa manière, elle est notre façon d'essayer de comprendre la culture matérielle et notre intérêt pour elle. Le point important est ici que, dans un monde matérialiste de marchandises, les musées modernes, qui croissent et vieillissent avec le système capitaliste, sont également matérialistes dans le sens le plus profond”(1).

Il faut savoir que, lorsqu'on regarde l'histoire du musée sur la longue durée, et toutes disciplines confondues, l'objet est une convention, une création de l'esprit qui ne signifie que ce qu'on veut lui faire dire. On pourrait dire que, par rapport au document, il n'a pris de véritable valeur autonome qu'à partir du moment où une valeur marchande a été ajoutée à sa valeur esthétique ou scientifique. Jusqu'alors on faisait des copies sans exigence d'authenticité car le souci de l'original n'avait pas du tout l'importance qu'il a prise. Ce qui comptait alors c'était le sujet - ou l'idée. La dimension patrimoniale qui a été donnée récemment à l'objet s'est substituée à celle du témoignage recueilli dans une perspective de collection scientifique. Mais, lorsque l'on approche la question sous cet angle patrimonial, comme lorsqu'on considère l'objet comme matière de recherche, il est d'abord un document d'étude avant d'être un signe visuel que l'on expose - avant d'être un objet d'exposition. Par contre la valeur affective qui lui est donnée à partir du moment où il devient matière de collection transforme bien tout ce qui est conservé en objet sacré - en relique - (voir Jean BAUDRILLARD et Bernard DELOCHE(2) et, lors de sa muséalisation, toute la confusion vient de là.

2. La question centrale est de savoir à quel niveau se fait la distinction entre l'objet et le document.

Pour distinguer les différentes catégories de médias utilisés dans la communication muséale - et non pas pour instituer une hiérarchie -, en 1968 Duncan F. CAMERON a défini les "vraies choses" comme "des choses que nous présentons telles qu'elles sont et non comme des modèles, des images ou des représentations de quelque chose d'autre. Ce sont les oeuvres d'art et les artefacts des musées d'anthropologie, d'art ou d'histoire. Ce sont aussi les spécimens des musées d'histoire naturelle et les phénomènes démontrés dans les musées de sciences physiques". A propos de la dernière catégorie, CAMERON a d'ailleurs précisé que "par exemple, le pendule de Foucault dans son espace muséal n'est pas un artefact, pas plus qu'il n'est une vraie chose à mon sens, mais c'est plutôt le mouvement du pendule qui est la vraie chose. Le musée présente le mouvement du pendule et c'est ce mouvement qui doit être "reçu" par le visiteur si nous voulons communiquer avec lui. Je propose de nommer le mouvement et les autres phénomènes semblables des cinéfacts"(3). Il s'agit là de quelque chose qui n'est pas un objet en soi quoique visuel, mais qui, au même titre, doit être considéré comme un "média primaire".

Doit-on assimiler le point de vue de CAMERON à celui HUMBOLDT et assimiler la collection d'objets de ce dernier aux vraies choses? Certes non puisque, même si CAMERON propose une catégorie pour désigner les phénomènes techniques qui sont

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induits par la vraie chose, mais ne sont visibles qu’en fonction d’un processus (ici dynamique), on remarque qu’il ne rejette pas comme secondaires les modèles (i.e. les substituts: moulages, maquettes, photographies et tous ceux inventés depuis vingt-cinq ans), même s’ils ne sont pas considérés parmi les vraies choses.

Par contre, CAMERON qualifie aussi de vraies choses des catégories d’objets que HUMBOLDT avait placés parmi les documents: artefacts des musées d’anthropologie, d’art ou d’histoire et spécimens des musées d’histoire naturelle. Sauf d’admettre qu’il ne voulait parler que du musée qu’il était en train de programmer, pour HUMBOLDT, l’intérêt scientifique n’avait rien à voir avec “les buts principaux du musée”. Autrement dit les musées scientifiques n’avaient pas à exister.

On se rend compte par tout ce qui précède qu’il s’agit, la plupart du temps, d’une distinction purement arbitraire, faite par certains des conservateurs pour donner plus de valeur à ce qu’ils privilégient parmi ce qu’ils conservent, ou à ce qu’ils conservent au regard de ce que d’autres conservent.

Il n’est pour s’en persuader que de prendre quelques exemples, même dans des cas limites. Les responsables et les visiteurs de la Glyptothèque de Munich ou de l’actuel Musée des Monuments français de Paris considèrent les plâtres conservés et exposés comme aussi importants que toute autre muséale originale. Et pourtant certains conservateurs, suivant HUMBOLDT, les considèrent comme des documents secondaires.

De même, la maquette que l’on a réalisée, d’une église, d’un palais, d’un pont ou d’une maison rurale, qui est la seule manière d’exposer des constructions dont la dimension excède l’échelle des salles de musée, seront considérés par certains comme des objets à part entière, par d’autres comme de simples documents. Comment saurait-on par exemple attribuer une valeur muséale différente aux maquettes d’atelier réalisées pour le futur roi LOUIS-PHILIPPE, que conserve le Conservatoire des Arts et métiers, et aux dioramas, aussi pédagogiques, construits pour les expositions du Deutsches Museum de Munich au début du 20e siècle? Pourquoi regarderait-on différemment les modèles de machines réalisés au 18ème siècle par l’ingénieur Jacques VAUCANSON et d’autres modèles construits présentements dans n’importe quel musée d’histoire des techniques? Et l’on peut ajouter aux exemples de moulages, de maquettes et de modèles réduits ceux de photographies, de cinéma … et même de gravures puisque HUMBOLDT les met dans le même lot.

Allons plus loin en entrant dans les Musées d’Histoire naturelle. Si l’on s’en tenait à la distinction de HUMBOLDT, ne devrait-on pas considérer qu’un tel musée ne conserve que des documents et non pas des objets? Toutes les collections d’un musée d’histoire naturelle sont d’abord destinées à la recherche. Elles sont donc des documents de travail. Et en effet, pour l’exposition destinée au grand public, depuis la fin du siècle dernier, on doit “fabriquer” des modèles “présentables”, lesquels ne sont plus ensuite considérés comme des documents pour la recherche.

Ce constat nous conduit donc à une absurdité puisqu’il nous ramène à ce clivage entre, d’un côté, les musées de chefs-d’œuvres esthétiques et, par ailleurs, tous les autres. Trèves donc de hiérarchie de valeur. On ne peut vraiment retenir une distinction fondamentale entre le principal et le secondaire dans les catégories de collections qui déterminent la nature ou la discipline des musées, ce qui est secondaire pour les uns pouvant être primaire pour d’autres, et inversement.

3. Par contre l’idée de complémentarité entre ce qui est exposé et ce qui sert à l’expliquer ou à le mettre en valeur permet-elle d’avancer de meilleurs critères de distinction? Dans cette hypothèse on peut voir apparaître au moins deux catégories de documents:

a) La partie de documentation (écrite ou enregistrée, parlée ou sonore) recueillie avec les collections (il s’agit là de la documentation du contexte in situ) qui, au moins en un premier temps. ne pourra jamais être considérée autrement que comme complémentaire et
non exposable, mais qui est d’un secours fondamental pour l’évocation, la reconstitution ou la restitution du contexte in vitro.

b) Les éléments de mise en exposition - supports matériels de présentation, appareil signalétique, compléments sonores et audiovisuels, décors de mise en espace consommables - du moins ceux de ces derniers qui sont considérés comme non récupérables et ne pouvant être éventuellement assimilés ni à des expôts, ni à de vraies choses (il s’agit là de la documentation du contexte in vitro).

S’agissant de cette seconde catégorie, il s’agit pour l’essentiel des documents que Duncan F.CAMERON place parmi les médias secondaires utilisés dans la communication expographique, et auxquels il s’en est ajouté un grand nombre depuis 1968: “les médias imprimés tels que l’étiquette, la voix enregistrée et quelques médias conventionnels quoique non verbaux tels que le diagramme, la photographie et le film. Ces médias secondaires doivent servir uniquement à faciliter le décodage des messages primaires qui sont transmis par les artefacts ou les kinétifacts. Ils doivent aider à la traduction sans être eux-mêmes cette traduction puisque cette dernière détruirait alors le besoin d’une expérience directe avec les médias primaires que nous croyons être les plus efficaces” (4).

4. Les objets ont de toute façon besoin d’être documentés. Le muséologue américain Stephen E.WEIL remarquait récemment que “les artefacts et leur entretien - qu’il s’agisse d’œuvres d’art, d’artefacts historiques ou de spécimens d’histoire naturelle - se trouvent au cœur de l’entreprise muséale. […] Mais nous devons rester prudents. Mêlée à cette affirmation se retrouve la croyance - certainement pas universelle, mais entretenue par un assez grand nombre pour avoir de la signification - que les objets ont (et le jeu de mots est délibéré) une certaine réalité “objective” - qu’un artefact peut d’une certaine façon s’exprimer par lui-même, avec seulement l’aide la plus minime. En même temps, on peut voir le musée à titre de médium neutre et transparent - une lentille claire, propre et non déformante - permettant au public de se retrouver face à face avec un artefact, dans sa pureté et sa fraîcheur”.

Et Stephen E.WEIL ajoute: "Pour nous les artefacts n’existent pas seuls. Nous les percevons à travers un ensemble d’expériences. Dans un musée ou ailleurs, les artefacts n’ont de signification pour nous que dans le cadre des concepts et des hypothèses avec lesquels nous nous abordons. Nous voyons les choses, comme l’a observé l’anthropologue David Pilbeam, non pas comme elles sont, mais ‘comme nous sommes’” (5).

Mais, si l’objet a besoin de contexte, il est au moins deux sortes de contexte. Le premier est le contexte didactique, celui qui sert à expliquer l’expôt (non seulement le rappel des précédents, mais aussi historique, technique, esthétique), en plus, ou à la place du contexte d’environnement lorsque ce dernier fait défaut. Le second comprend à la fois le contexte physique et le contexte culturel d’environnement (en particulier social et économique), lesquels peuvent être partie du précédent ou exister en tant que tels.

Pour ce qui concerne le contexte didactique, les besoins ne sont pas forcément les mêmes pour les objets d’art et les objets de simple patrimoine, dans la mesure où certaines œuvres d’art n’ont jamais eu de contexte physique d’environnement, ou l’avaient perdu avant même d’entrer au musée. La question se pose alors de savoir si la bonne méthode didactique exige qu’il leur en soit attribué, par substitution (donc par évocation) ou si l’œuvre doit être présentée nue. Mais certains estiment aussi que le contexte didactique est également

(4) id.loc.pp.263-264.

superflu. Les contextes physique et culturel sont ce qui permet de replacer l’objet dans son environnement, le fragment arraché à la réalité, dans son environnement d’origine. Tout d’abord au niveau de l’information, afin de le mieux connaître. Pour cela nous n’avons qu’à nous souvenir de ce que conseillait déjà QUATREMERE DE QUINCY il y a presque deux siècles. "Ne nous dites plus que les ouvrages de l’Art se conservent dans ces dépôts. Oui, vous y en avez transporté la matière; mais avez-vous pu transporter avec eux ce cortege de sensations tendres, profondes, mélancoliques, sublimes ou touchantes, qui les environnait. [...] Déplacer tous les monuments, en recueillir ainsi les fragments décomposés, en classer méthodiquement les débris, et faire d’une telle réunion un cours pratique de chronologie moderne; c’est de son vivant assister à ses funérailles; c’est tuer l’Art pour en faire l’histoire, ce n’est point en faire l’histoire mais l’épitaphe. [...] Aussi le véritable amour de l’antiquité vous dit de séparer, le moins possible, ses véritables débris, des lieux, des circonstances et de l’ensemble d’accessoires avec lesquels ils sont en rapport".

Mais le contexte didactique peut aller physiquement beaucoup plus loin que l’apport d’une démonstration gestuelle, d’un commentaire oral, de la distribution ou de l’exposition de documents, écrits ou dessins, qui seraient offerts aux visiteurs et notamment aux enfants. Si l’on veut éviter au maximum les inconvénients signalés par QUATREMERE DE QUINCY, il peut s’agir de remettre en situation les objets qui ont été suffisamment documentés, de recréer, pour le public, afin qu’il les connaisse et les comprenne mieux, l’environnement dont on a précédemment recueilli scientifiquement les éléments (a et b). La difficulté ne tient pas trop à la recréation des éléments physiques (qu’il s’agisse de restitution ou de reconstitution), mais à celle des éléments culturels - tout ce qui est plus difficilement visualisable.

Sans doute la question du complément documentaire, que l’on met généralement dans la catégorie pédagogique, n’est pas sans faire débat. Sans même remonter au début du 19e siècle et à LENOIR, j’évoquerai celui qui eut lieu pendant la première moitié du 20e. Rappelons nous Marcel PROUST en 1918 : "Mais, en tout genre, notre temps a la manie de vouloir montrer les choses qu’avec ce qui le sert dans la réalité et par là de supprimer l’essentiel, l’acte de l’esprit qui les isola d’elle. On ‘présente’ un tableau au milieu des meubles, des bibelots, de tenture de la même époque [...]". Paul VALÉRY, au contraire, en 1923, comme QUATREMERE DE QUINCY, reprochait aux musées de séparer les œuvres de leur contexte: "Peinture et sculpture, me dit le démon de l’Explication, ce sont des enfants abandonnés. Leur mère est morte, leur mère Architecture. Tant qu’elle vivait, elle leur donnait leur place, leur emploi, leurs contraintes". Theodor ADORNO reprochera à VALÉRY de considérer que "l’art est perdu lorsqu’il n’a plus de place dans la vie immédiate, lorsqu’il est privé du contexte qui lui assignait sa fonction et en fin de compte: du rapport à l’usage éventuel". Georges SALLES (1939) ira dans le sens d’ADORNO en estimant que, pour être éducatif, un musée n’en doit pas moins avoir la présentation la plus dépouillée: "Lorsque des objets possèdent une valeur plastique, ils

détient une telle force suggestive qu’il est plus aisé de la rendre perceptible que d’en détournir l’attention. […] Au lieu de jeter le discrédit sur le contact sensible il suffira de le justifier en lui restituant sa féconde réalité”(11). Walter BENJAMIN semble par contre lui avoir fait le procès inverse, en 1940, en lui reprochant d’avoir pris position contre la solution du complément pédagogique, et en s’étonnant qu’il “féodore le danger ‘de trop sacrifier à l’aise du visiteur ou au confort de l’objet d’art’, en négligeant ainsi ‘l’incommodité opportune qui provoque leur rencontre et amorce le débat”(12). En effet,

Sur une position convergente quant aux objectifs, mais divergente quant aux moyens d’y parvenir, dans son texte de l’exposition "Le Salon de l’ethnographie" (1989), après avoir balayé la croyance en l’objet-témoin et à la réalité "objective" dont parlera Stephen WEIL, Jacques HAINARD précisa que ce qui compte dans l’exposition ce n’est pas la nature des expéts, mais ce qu’on veut dire et comment on le dit: "L’exposition est d’abord un langage auquel l’objet participe au sein d’une mise en scène, d’un décor, et le langage de la décoration constitue aussi le langage de l’exposition. L’objet y est pensé en terme de décor, l’objet est décor comme le décor est lui-même objet de l’exposition". Il faut en outre constater que, si l’objet devenu expot est utilisé comme des mots dans une phrases, il n’en perd rien de sa force - un mot reste toujours un mot, et sa force dépend de la place qu’il prend dans la phrase, selon qu’il est mis en valeur, parfois seul, ou qu’il est perdu dans une énumération: "L’exposition s’articule ainsi sur trois langages qui se partent entre eux, l’idée, l’objet et le décor. Tour à tour ils interviennent, l’objet mis en valeur dans le décor qui par moment est tout, à d’autres moments l’objet s’exprimant comme le solo de flûte du concerto”(13). Le décor dont il est question peut être considéré comme un contexte matériel ou comme un contexte culturel.

Nous en revenons ainsi à la question du contexte et de savoir si le contexte est un document complémentaire ou bien est aussi essentiel que l’objet central, si l’un a plus d’authenticité et de nécessité que l’autre, ou si les deux sont à traiter à égalité. Un postulat s’ajoutant à cette question: le musée dans l’ensemble de sa fonction doit-il être traité d’un point de vue différent de l’exposition, si l’on considère que cette dernière est aussi essentielle que la conservation (d’ailleurs HUMBOLDT ne faisait pas la distinction).

C’était rejoindre par la pratique les distinctions auxquelles des sémiologues comme Roland BARTHES et d’autres étaient parvenus, non seulement entre la langue et la parole, entre le signifié et le signifiant, mais aussi entre le signe et le symbole et la mise en évidence que le sens non seulement pouvait n’être pas le même pour celui qui avait vu naître un objet et celui qui le regardait des siècles plus tard, mais aussi que, plus généralement, sa vision était subjective. En effet, une fois retrouvés suffisamment d’éléments pour replacer un ensemble dans son époque, il faut ne pas oublier que chaque époque à sa vision d’un ensemble (la ruine évolue dans son ensemble: il suffit de regarder les monuments vivre), mais que le regard lui-même change, qui apprécie chaque élément. Chaque époque a sa vision des choses et nous ne les voyons ni comme Charles V, au 14e siècle, ni comme Louis XIV, au 17e. Il est donc nécessaire d’une part de bien préciser à quelle époque on se réfère, d’autre part d’indiquer, si possible, l’évolution des conditions sociales et économiques et bien sûr du goût.


Consciemment ou non donc, à défaut d'une objectivité qui ne saurait exister, tout le monde est conduit à manipuler, et tout le monde est à même de produire des détournements de sens! "Dès lors, renchérit Jacques HAINARD, l'objet précieux ou banal peut être soumis à une lecture autre, à un questionnement qui lui redonne du sens en l'inscrivant dans un univers autre que celui qui oppose le beau à la laideur, l'art à ce qui ne l'est pas [...]. Une muséologie de la rupture offre à tous ceux qui regardent des objets la possibilité d'investir leur savoir et d'être incités par irradiation à la relativisation."[14].

Même les musées communautaires ne sont pas à l'abri de l'erreur de croire que l'objet parle seul, convaincus qu'ils sont souvent que les étrangers à la communauté appréhendent les sens avec autant d'évidence que les membres de leur communauté, lesquels ont vécu avec les objets qu'ils exposent.

Ce débat sur le contexte-document est fondamental et pas seulement formel car il en rejoint un autre: le musée doit-il privilégier les idées ou les choses? Dans l'article déjà cité Stephen WEIL a récemment rappelé à ses collègues l'importance de cette question: "Nous ne devons jamais oublier que les idées - et non seulement les artefacts - se trouvent aussi au cœur de l'entreprise muséale. La réalité n'est pas les artefacts seuls, ni simplement les idées tirées des artefacts, mais plutôt ces deux aspects pris ensemble"[15].

Tout est objet, donc, et tout est document. Je donnerai, pour conclure, trois derniers exemples. Je prendrai le premier dans l'art contemporain. Lorsque la pérennité d'une œuvre se limite à la feuille de papier sur laquelle un artiste a dessiné le plan de son installation et que tout ce qui constitue l'œuvre doit être rassemblé et mis en place spécialement pour visualiser cette œuvre dans l'exposition, les données sont inversées et le second devient le premier pendant que le premier devient second. Je prendrai le second exemple pendant la Révolution française, lorsque deux coupes sculptées presque identiques, du Trésor de la Couronne, constituées de différents minéraux, furent déposées en 1796 l'une au Louvre, l'autre au Museum d'Histoire naturelle[16]. De même, si nous prenons de nos jours le fragment de lune qui se trouve au National Air and Space Museum de Washington, s'agit-il là d'un document permettant d'étudier le minéral particulier dont il est constitué, et dans ce cas il devrait plutôt figurer dans les séries du Muséum d'Histoire naturelle, ou a-t-il une fonction métaphorique pour exprimer un certain nombre de choses concernant le premier voyage des hommes dans la lune, et alors, devenu un objet de musée incontesté, il tend à devenir aussi relique-objet de vénération. Tel est le danger.


OBJECT OR DOCUMENT?

André DESVALLÉES, Paris, France

Just like the debate about the limits of museum, the debate is endless about the distinction between object and document, therefore about the limits of the one in relation to the other it cannot have an end because it is intrinsically the essence of museum.

Let's remember that in fact this debate shook the French and German museum milieu at the beginning of the 19th century and was summarized in the evolution of the stance of Wilhelm von HUMBOLDT between the moment he visited in 1799 the Paris Musée des Monuments français of Alexandre LENOIR, when he wrote to GOETHE about it that "we learn there to understand better and to connect what history dead letter transmits imperfectly and incoherently" and the moment he wrote for the King of Prussia in 1833, on the occasion of the Berlin Museum programming (which became the "Alte Museum"): "In the subsidiary museums activities we can very often do without originals and be content with prints and casts because we deal more with scientifical than purely artistical relevance. [...] Such a collection has nothing to see with the main ames of a museum".

To begin with, we no doubt have to define what we are talking about and it seems we can use the text of HUMBOLDT as a first semantic approach. The real objects have to be originals (i.e. works of arts) while secondary objects are only documents, like reproductions and substitutes of all kinds, casts and also prints and, since last century, photographs or movies. We can immediately note how absurd that distinction is, on the one hand because of the difference of support - print or movie - has nothing to do with the quality, and photo and movie museums now exist; on the other hand because not only HUMBOLDT known and appreciated the first Musée des Monuments français, which was more demanding for the expression than for authenticity, but above all he knews at least the existence of the Conservatoire des Arts et métiers, where original machines were swamped in models. Then what are "the main ames of a museum"? If both the Conservatoire des Arts et métiers et the Musée des Monuments français were acknowledged as museums, and if substitutes kept in the Conservatoire as the "installations" of LENOIR in the Musée des Monuments français were considered just as well as museums objects.

But before being museological, this debate is by essence philosophical, in such a way as it concerns the nature of the object, and beyond the object, the nature of visible reality. We won't start this debate all over again as it originates in the beginnings of religions, philosophies and even physics. Except to remind some of its postulates which are conventionnally accepted together with the museum concept.

The first one is that the physical reality we apprehend with the museum and with the object which is its main matter is situated in an out of time space which it pretends to set as time does not exist.

The second one is that, since indo-europeans and judeo-christian civilisations religions and metaphysics set mind against matter, physical reality was considered as a contingent data, the important thing being mind - or idea. Hence this parting, modern science isolated the matter to study it better and unconsciously gave birth to materialism while it reinforced interest for the "real things" and then for the museum which keeps specimens of it. This very point of view was questionned by those who had pointed themselves out as "postmoderns". For instance, this is how Suzan M.PEARCE summarizes this way of seeing: "In essence, modernity was concerned with the development of meta-narratives, overarching discourses through which objective realities and eternal truths could be defined and expressed. At bottom this rested on the belief - and it was a belief - that the objective reality existed and that human beings as essential individuals shared in it could therefore appreciate it. This gave rise to the discourse of scientific knowledge and understanding arrived at by the operation of human reason upon the observed phenomena of the natural
world, for which museums and their collections were perceived as the principal repositories of primary evidence. Linnaeus's scheme of taxonomy or Darwin's theory of evolution were typical meta-narratives of this kind. [...] Our complex relationship with objects as producers, owners and collectors is itself a characteristic modern meta-narrative, and so, in its way, is our effort to understand material culture and our interest in it. The important point here is that in a materially-oriented world of goods, modern museums, which grew up and grew pld with the capitalist system, are equally material-oriented in the most fundamental sense"(1).

When we look at the history of museum in the long run and in joining every discipline, we have to know that object is an understanding, a mind product which means only what you will make it signified. In relation to the document, we could say that object acquired its true self value only when a trade value was added to its esthetic or scientific value. Copies were made without authenticity requiring till then, because care of the original was not so important as it later became. Then the important thing was the subject - or the idea. Patrimony dimension which has been given to the object, from the works of arts, is substituting itself to the witness which was collected in a scientific collection prospect. But as we touch on the question from this patrimony angle and also as we consider the object as a matter of research, it is first a study document before it becomes a visual sign to be exhibited - before being an exhibit object. However the emotional value which is given to it from the moment it becomes a matter of collection indeed transforms all conserved things into a "sacralized" (in French: "sacralisé") object - into a relic(2). Then, when it is "museal-become" ("muséalisé"), all the confusion arises.

2. The central question is to know at what level we can perceive the distinction between object and document.

To distinguish the different categories of media which are used in the museum communication - not to institute a hierarchy - in 1968 Duncan F. CAMERON defined the "real things" as "those things which we present as what they are not as models or images or representations of something else. They are the art and artifacts, or man-made objects of the anthropological, art, or history museum; they are the specimens in the natural science museum; they are the demonstrated phenomenas of the physical science museum". About the last category Cameron specified moreover: "For example the Foucault Pendulum in its museum setting is not an artifact, nor is it a real thing in our sense; but the motion of the pendulum is a real thing. We present the motion of the pendulum and it is the motion of the pendulum which must be "read" by the visitor if we are to communicate with him. The motion, we suggest, is a kinetifact"(3) (the underlining is mine). There it is something which is not such an object, although visual yhing, but as such has to be considered as a "primary media".

Must we to confuse CAMERON's with HUMBOLDT's point of view and to make the "objects" collection of the last one similar to the "real things"? Certainly not, even if CAMERON suggests a special category to design the technological phenomena, which are reals things but are only "read" in connection with a process (here dynamic), since we can note he doesn't put as secondaries the models (i.e. substitutes: castings, skale models,

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photographs, all of them invented in the last twenty five years), even though they are not considered as the real things.

On the other hand CAMERON describe also as real things categories of objects that HUMBOLDT had located as documents: artefacts of anthropological, art or history museums and specimens of natural science museum. Except if you acknowledge he only wants to speak of the museum he was programming, for HUMBOLDT the "scientific interest" had nothing to do with "the main aims of the museum". In other words the scientific museums were not fit to exist.

Hence we can understand that there is most of the time a purely arbitrary distinction, made by some curators to give more value to what they give greater place to what they keep, or to what they keep compared with what others keep. To be convinced we only have to take some examples, even bordeline cases. Persons in charge and visitors of the Munich Glyptothéque or the present Paris Musée des Monuments Français deem the kept and exhibited casts as equally significant as any other original musealia. Yet in HUMBOLDT's wake, some curators consider these things as secondary documents.

In the same way, the model we have made of a church, a palace, a bridge or a country house, which is the only way to exhibit buildings whose size exceed the scale of museums rooms, shall be considered as full objects by the ones, as documents by the others. For example how can we grant a different museum value on the one hand to the workshops models which were made for the future king LOUIS-PHILIPPE and now kept by the Conservatoire des Arts et Métiers and on the other hand to the as well educational dioramas which were built in the beginning of the 19th century for the Munich Deutsches Museum exhibitions? Why should we direct a different glance to the models of machines that the engineer Jacques VAUCANSON built in the 18th century and other models which are built now in any history of technology museum? And we can add to the examples of casts, models and scale models those of photography, movie ... and even prints since HUMBOLDT put them in the same batch.

Let us move forward by going inside the natural history museums. If we'll leave it at the HUMBOLDT distinction, should we not have to consider that such a museum only keeps documents and not objects? All the collections of a natural history museum are first intended to research. They are working documents. And in fact, for the exhibition intended to the general public since the end of the last century we have to "make" models "to be displayed" which will not be considered afterwards as research documents.

Then that report leads us to a nonsense because it brings us to this separation between on one side aesthetic master pieces museum and all others on the otherside. Enough with value hierarchy. We can really accept a basic distinction between the main and the subsidiary in the collection categories which determine the nature or the discipline of the museums: what is subsidiary for some can be primary for others and conversely.

3. On the opposite, does the idea of complementarity between what is exhibited and what helps to explain or highlight it, allows to put forward better distinction criteria? In this assumption we can see at least two categories of documents appear.

a) The part of documentation (piece of writing or recording, words or sounds) which is collected with the collections (there is the documentation of the context in situ), at least in at first, will never be considered differently from complementary but is a basic help for evocation, rebuilding or restitution of the context in vitro. If this part has to be exhibited, it's for itself.

b) The elements used for an "exhibiting" (in French: "mise en exposition") - displaying equipment, signaling instruments, additional sounds and audio-visuals, consumable interior decoration for space displaying - at least those which can be considered as non retrievable
and can't be assimilated either to exhibits, or to real things (this being documentation of the context in vitro).

About this second category, there are almost the documents Duncan F. CAMERON locates among the subsidiary medias which are used in exhibit communication and which have been very much enriched since 1968: "these include print, as in the museum label, the recorded voice, and some conventional but non-verbal media such as the diagram, photograph, and film. The subsidiary media should serve only as aids in decoding the primary message being transmitted through the artifact or kinetifact. They should aid translation, but should not be translation, for translation obviates the need to experience the primary medium which we believe to be most efficacious"(4).

4. Anyway, objects have to be well-informed. The American museologist Stephen E. WEIL remarks that "objects and their care - whether these be works of art, historic artifacts, or natural history specimens - lie at the heart of the museum enterprise. [...] Though, we must be careful. Interwoven with this assertion is the belief - by no means universal, but held broadly enough to be significant - that objects have (and the pun here is deliberate) some "objective" reality - that a museum object can, with only the most minimal help, in some way speak for itself. "Allied with this is a notion of the museum as a sort of neutral and transparent medium - a clear, clean, and undistorting lens - through which the public ought be able to come face-to-face with an object, pure and fresh." And Stephen WEIL adds: "For us, objects do not exists alone. We perceive them in a mesh of experience. Whether in a museum or otherwise, objects only have meaning for us through the framework of the concepts and assumptions with which we approach them. We see things, as the anthropologist David PILBEAM has observed, not as they are but 'as we are'"(5).

But if the object needs this context, there are at least to kinds of context. The first one includes the physical context and the cultural context of environment (particularly social and economical) which can both be part of the former or exist on their own. The second one is the didactical context, which is used to explain the exhibit (not only as a reminder of anterior historical contexts, but as well technical or esthetical contexts ...), in addition to, or instead the environmental context, when the latter is absent.

About the didactic context you do not necessarily have the same needs for fine art and for single heritage objects inasmuch as some pieces of art never had physical environmental context, or had lost it before they came inside the museum. The question is then to know if the good didactic way require to attribute them a context by substitution (then by evocation) or if the piece has to be displayed naked. However some also think that the didactic context is superfluous too.

The physical and cultural contexts allow the object to be replaced in its environment, the fragment torned from reality to be replaced into its original environment. Firstly on the information level, in order to know it better. To do that we only have to remember what the French art lover QUATREMERE de QUINCY already recommanded nearly two centuries ago: "Do not tell us any more that Arts objects are to be conserved in storage. Yes, you have stored here the material; but have you been able to store this procession of tender, profound, melancholical, sublime, or touching sensations which surrounded them. [...] To move all monuments, thus pick out the broken up fragments, to methodically classify its pieces, and make of such a reunion a practical course of modern chronology, is like following one's own funeral; this is killing Art to build its history, this is not making its

(4) Id.loc. p.36.
history, but its epitaph. [...] That's why real love of Antiquity tells you to avoid as much as possible separating the real fragments from the places, circumstances et various accessories to which they are related"(6) (my underlining).

But the didactic context can lead physically much further than a gestural demonstration, an oral comment, an handing out or exhibition of written or drawn documents which would be offered to the visitors, notably children. If we want to avoid at the most the consequences which QUATREMERE de QUINCY indicated, we do have to put into situation the objects which have been enough documented, to "re-create" the environment of which have first been scientifically collected the data (a and b) so that the public knows and understands them better. The difficulty doesn't depend too much on the re-creation of the physical elements (either restitution or rebuilding), but on the cultural elements which are difficult to visualize.

No doubt the question of generally putting the subsidiary document in the pedagogic category is rising a debate. Without even going back to the beginning of the 19th century and to the confrontation between QUATREMERE de QUINCY and Alexandre LENOIR (7), I could evoke the debate which took place during the first half of the 20th century. Let us remember Marcel PROUST in 1918: "But, in any style, our time has the habits of willing to show the things only with what surround them in the reality and to delate by that the basic essentials, the mind act which isolated them from it. We 'display' a picture in the middle of furniture, bibelots, hanging of the same lime f.. }. ('). On the contrary such as QUATREMERE de QUINCY, Paul VALÉRY in 1923 blamed the museums with separating the works from their context:"The Devil of the Explanation told me: Painting and Sculpture are forsaken children. Their mother Architecture is dead. As long as it lived, it gave them their place, their use, their constraints"(9). Theodor ADORNO will blame VALÉRY to consider that "Art is lost when it has no more place in the immediate life, when it has been deprived of the context which allocates it its duties and finally: of the relation to the possible use"(10). Georges SALLES (1939) will go the same way as ADORNO when he is estimating that, as well as being educative, a museum nevertheless must have the barest display: "When the objects own a plastic value, they hold such a suggestive strength that it is easier to make it perceptible than to distract attention from it. [...] Instead of casting discredit on the sensitive contact it will be enough to justify it by restituting its prolific reality"(11). On the other hand in 1940 Walter BENJAMIN seems to have put it in the opposite when he blamed him to have come down against the pedagogic complement answer and he was surprised that he "denounce the danger 'to sacrifice too much to the

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visitor’s or art object’s comfort’, by leaving so ‘the appropriate awkwardness which bring their encounter and begin their debate’.”

Standing on a converging position as for the objectives but on a diverging one for the ways used to reach them, in the next he wrote for the exhibition *Le salon de l’ethnographie* (“The ethnography show”) (1989) after having put aside the belief in the witness-object and in “objective” reality about which Stephen E. WEIL tell us also, Jacques HAINARD explained that what is important in an exhibition is not the nature of the objects exposed, but what it means and the way it is said. “The exhibition is in the first place a language when the objects participates with in a setting, a scenery and the language of decoration is also the language of the exhibition. The object is thought about as part of the scenery, the object is scenery as the scenery itself is the object of the exhibition”. We moreover have to notice that, if the object, when turned into an exhibit is used like words are used in sentences, it nevertheless keeps all its strength - a word always remains a word and its strength depends upon its place in the sentence, whether it is highlighted, sometimes alone, or lost in an enumeration: “The exhibition is then articulated around three languages talking together: idea, object and scenery. Each in their turn, they intervene, the object highlighted in the scenery, which is the whole sometimes, at other times the object expressing itself as a flute solo in a concerto”(13). The scenery we talk about can be considered as a material or a cultural context.

This leads us back to the question of context and to know whether context is complementary to the object or if it is as essential as the central object, whether one has more authenticity and necessity than the other, or if they are both to be treated equally. A postulate rises in addition to this question: is the museum, in the entity of its function, to be considered from a different point of view from the exhibition, if we consider that the exhibition function is as essential as the conservation function (HUMBOLDT himself did not make the distinction).

This a way of joining back together the distinctions which semiologists as Roland BARTHES and others had made, not only between language and speech, between signified and signifying, but also between sign and symbol and in bringing forth that the meaning could not be the same for the one who had seen an object being born than for the one who was looking at it centuries later, but also, more generally, that its vision was subjective. Indeed, once a sufficient number of elements have been found to replace a whole into its epoch, we must no forget that each epoch has its own vision of a whole (a ruin evolutes in its whole: we only have to see how monuments live), but that the way to look changes as well, which appreciates each element. Each epoch has its own vision of things and we don’t look at them as Charles V did, in the 14th century, or as Louis XIV in the 17th century. So it is necessary, on the one hand, to say precisely which epoch we are referring to, on the other hand to indicate, if possible, the evolution of the social and economical conditions, and of course, of the tastes.

So, consciously or not, beyond an objectivity which could not exist, everybody is lead to manipulate, and everybody is able to produce these deviations of meanings! “From then on, explains Jacques HAINARD, the precious or ordinary object can be submitted to a different reading, to a questioning that gives it back a meaning by inscribing it in a universe different from the one that opposes beauty to ugliness, art to what is not art. […]”

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museology of rupture offers to those who look at objects the possibility to invest their knowing and be incitated by irradiation to relativization*14.

Even community museums are not protected from the belief that the objects speaks for itself, convinced as they often are that the strangers to the the community apprehend the meaning as evidently as the members of the community, who have lived with the objects they exhibit.

This debate about the document-context is fundamental, and not only formal because it reaches another one: must the museum favour ideas or things? In the article already cited, Stephen E. WEIL recently reminded his colleagues the importance of this question: "we must never forget that ideas - and not just things alone - also lie at the heart of the museum enterprise. Reality is neither objects alone nor simply ideas about objects but, rather, the two taken together*15.

Every thing is object, and everything is document. To conclude, I will give three last examples. I'll take the first one in contemporary art. When the durability of a work of art is limited to the sheet of paper on which an artist has drawn the map of its installation and that everything constituting the work of art has to be put together and installed specially to visualize this work of art in the exhibition, the data are reversed and the second become the first while the first become the second. I'll take the second example during the French Revolution when two nearly identical cups of the Crown Treasure constituted with different kinds of minerals were deposited for the one in the Louvre, for the other in the Museum d'Histoire naturelle*16. In the same way, if we take now the fragment of the moon which is exhibited in the National Air and Space Museum of Washington, are we faced to a document allowing us to study the particular type of mineral of which it is made, in which case it should be displayed in the Museum of Natural History, or has it a metaphorical function of object-witness to express a certain number of things concerning the first voyage of men on the moon, and then, evidently becoming a museum object, it tends to become as well a relic-object of veneration. Such is the danger.

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*15 WEIL, op. cit. n.5, p.48.

*16 See: GEORGEL, Chantal, "Introduction" to La Jeunesse des musées. Exhibition catalogue. Paris, Musée d'Orsay, 7 février-8 mai 1994, p.29 (ill.) and notes p.366, n°8 "coupe en jade 'à la sirène'" (Inv. MR 185) and n°9 "coupe en jade 'à l'aigle'" (Inv. A.47).
"The link from things to objects to subjects to documents to Museums, and what they’re all about..."

(in honour to James Deetz)

Maria Horta - Brazil

There is no better way to start this discussion than quoting James Deetz 'classical definition of material culture, in his book 'Small Things Forgotten', as 'that part of the physical world that we have shaped according to a culturally dictated plan' (Deetz, 1984:25).

It is possible to explore this definition in order to enrich the debate on the core problem of Museology, Museums, and on what they’re all about.

Anticipating any conclusion, we may refer again to Deetz, in the conclusion of his paper on 'the links from Object to Person to Concept', to 'our duty as custodians of that which we, as a species, have stacked on this planet' (including museums themselves). 'We must not only preserve it but also find reasonably imaginative and creative ways to share it with other people. That is what I think the museum is all about' (Deetz, 1984:34).

In order to share our ideas and comments effectively in this symposium, it seems necessary to define the meanings we can have in common for the words things, objects, documents, subjects, and museums. In an international debate, we may be easily mislead by the different concepts attached to different words, in different languages. If our aim is to communicate our ideas, we must necessarily get to a 'consensus' on the level of meaning on which we are using these words and concepts. Most probably, Chinese ideograms that convey these same meanings will incorporate other 'senses' which are not present in our western conceptual frames of meaning for the same words.

What do we mean by the word 'thing'?
Looking through a French dictionary, one can find the word 'chose', as equivalent to 'thing', and originating from the Latin. 'causa': that which determines the existence of something, which determines an event, or yet, agent, reason, motive,
origin, beginnings. According to the Latin root, the meaning of 'thing' would thus be at the 'origin' of an 'object', at its background, as the reason, the motive, the beginning of any 'object'. The object, as an event, happening in time and space, would depend on 'things' to exist... Objects, in their 'firstness' (to use a semiotic term) are things... What kind of things? Could any kind of things be 'museum objects'?

If we take the 'materialculturalist' approach, the first part of Deetz' definition is a valid explanation for 'things': 'that part of our physical environment'... But, if we look through an English dictionary, we'll find out that things are not always material... the word 'thing' accepts more than that, as 'everything that exists, in an inanimate form, real or apparent, or any "object", one's personal belongings, or still, a matter, an affair, an action, a subject, a question, an idea'... (e.g. 'he knows everything', 'you did the right thing', etc.). Thus, sound, light, thunder, atmosphere, water, fire, love, hate and death, clothes, jewels, the Sun, stars and ideograms can be referred to as 'things' that we know as existing. Can all these things be 'museum objects'?

Some of my colleagues would say, of course no! Some others would say yes!

From my part, I'll join the second group of people. Why that? What do we mean (or do I mean) by the word 'object'? To the first group of people, supporting a 'materialculturalist' approach, an 'object' is something described by Deetz as 'that part of our physical world that we have shaped'... something which has a matter and a form, shaped by man, thus, the same as an 'artefact'. Since there is no object outside culture, we may agree with Deetz' definition in its last term... objects are shaped (by man) 'according to culturally dictated plans'. Objects are things made by man, as much as rolling stones are things made by the river...

Sharing the point of view of the second group of people, I keep looking through the dictionnaries, for a definition of 'object'. In the French volume, I find:

'objet' - from Latin 'objectum' - 'chose placée devant', thing placed in front of...

In the English version, I find:

'object' - something that can be seen or touched', but also, 'a purpose, the aim of an action, the reason of a
thought, the motive of a feeling; in a grammatical sense, in both dictionaries, there is an 'object' as opposite to a 'subject', a term of a statement designating the being or thing on which action is exerted; in a figurative sense, an object is anything given to the spirit, an intention, a goal; in philosophical terms, an object is anything thought of, and opposite to the thinking being...

According to these extended meanings, an object is anything placed in front of a subject, of human eyes and senses, or in front of human intelligence and feelings. In this sense, even a grain of sand, the rings of Saturn, the Buddha legend, the Amazon forest, the Atom's explosion, the DNA molecules, the smell of green papaya or a Chinese ideogram can be 'museum objects', as far as I find the means to expose them to human knowledge and experience.

If we adopt a reductionist approach, the above propositions cannot have a place in museological thinking and practice. From this point of view, museums and museology have nothing to do with things other than 'material culture', or with things that cannot be measured, weighted, stored, cleaned or repaired in our offices or laboratories...

An exhibition like 'Les Immatériaux', held in Paris and proposed by the philosopher Jean F.Lyotard, should not be considered as an 'exhibition', but as a mere philosophical exercise, through concrete form...

This would perhaps be a reductionist view of Material Culture studies. It is possible to have a broader approach on the theme. If we consider again Deetz' propositions, in the same article that supports our reasoning: speaking of the way the human species has shaped the environment, Deetz makes certain considerations that apply directly to the museum business, and lists the kind of concerns that constitute themes in the study of the humanities, and how far these themes relate to museums, as: 'all forms of expressive culture shared by a group, whether the group is familial, ethnic, occupational, religious or regional. The forms of expression include a wide range of creative and symbolic forms, such as custom, belief, technical skill, language, literature, art, architecture, music, play, dance, drama, ritual, pageantry and handicraft. Even language, proposes Deetz, is an expression of material
culture. Language invests a substance, air, with attributes that are culturally determined. It is a very transitory material; you cannot pile words on tables, or exhibit them for the viewing public. They are nonetheless patterned objects that reflect structured human modification'(Deetz,1984:26). The use of words in the work of many contemporary artists reinforces this idea, and could extend this debate. According to anthropologists, culture is what is carried in the minds of collective groups of people (Deetz, 84:24).

How could we then reduce material culture to its mere material aspects? When this kind of approach is privileged by museologists and museum experts, the well known phenomenum of 'fetichism' takes place, and objects take the place of subjects in museological grammars. The human 'subject' is then 'submitted' (in the original Latin sense of the word, 'subjectum', 'submitted to', or in the English meaning for the word 'subject' - to a King, a Queen, or a State), to the 'object', or better, 'The Thing', which is now the origin, the reason and the final aim of museum activities. Things/objects that are curated, catalogued, mended, restored, exhibited, packed, shipped out or kept in storage. A fine critique of this phenomenum is made by Roland Khaer, in 'Le rheaker que tout le monde attend', in 'Objets Prétextes/Objets Manipulés', edited by J.Hainard, at Neuchatel. The manipulation of the idea of 'museum object' is such that this object does not even need to exist, as a justification for museum activities.

Coming back to our materialculturalists, as quoted by Deetz, how can we explain the proposition of Henry Thoreau, calling an arrowhead a 'fossil thought', or Henry Glassie's statement that 'the only reason to study the artefacts is to get at the people behind them'...

'In an interpretation', says Deetz, 'we need to look at the object as it resides in the mind before the mind drives the muscles to create and produce it in the real world'(1984:27). We have to look to the 'mental image', or the 'mental thing' which lies behind the objects, to the original 'thing', which is not material, but is nonetheless 'real'...(think of the Coca Cola's slogan, the 'real thing', suggesting that's the only 'true' thing you have to buy).

Here we come to the third term of our proposition,
or chain of words/concepts. The role of the **subject** (person) in his relation to the **object**, or to the thing placed in front of his eyes and mind. According to the dictionary, a 'subject', in English language, is something that one studies, writes or talks about, a member of a State, or in a grammatical sense, the person or thing that governs a verb. In the French or the Portuguese versions, the same meanings apply, originating from the Latin root. But the grammatical sense of this word, in these two languages, has been extended to the 'living being to which one refers and whose name is unknown'. In this sense, we may talk of museum visitors as 'subjects', in the same way as we can talk of a child watching an ant's trail, as a 'subject' in relation to his 'object'.

In philosophical terms, a subject is the 'knowing spirit', in relation to the object which is known. It is in this sense that Roland Khayeer (1984:9) says: 'C'est d'abord le regard qui constitue l'objet - avec effet de retour- plus que toute autre qualite propre et peut-être éphémère'. In an approximated translation, 'it is the eye (the act of looking), first of all, that constitutes the object - with a returning effect- more than any other particular or perhaps ephemeral quality (of the observed 'thing'). The eyes and the mind of the beholder determine the transformation of a 'thing' into an 'object' of knowledge, of admiration, of desire. Susan Pearce's collection of essays, 'Objects of Knowledge' (1990) is an example of how the idea of 'museum object' is constructed and constituted by the different minds and different approaches, in museological thinking. The same happens through our ICOFOM seminars.

Because of this virtual, necessary process, the ambiguity and the fascination of the museum phenomenon and of museum objects, the 'museality' of these concepts, are rather difficult to explain. We never know whether we are dealing with things or with objects, or yet with ideas and concepts, one aspect always overlapping the other, infinitely. That's the reason for J.Deetz provocative words to some of his colleagues, archaeologists: 'You never know whether you have dug up a nut, rather than a typical representative of the species'(Deetz, 1984:27).

A nut is a nut is a nut is a nut... what makes then of it a 'typical representative of the species', able to be included in the long row of museum nuts?
Here we get to the fourth term of our proposition... the notion of document and how it relates to things and objects. Once again we may have some clues for this question in the dictionary: 'Document' - from the Latin documentum - that which serves to instruct'. Or yet, 'text or object serving as proofs or attesting something, constituting an element of information... (e.g. historical documents, photographic documents etc...)

How can an 'object' become a 'document'? Is any object a document?

What we usually call 'documents' is primarily a 'thing' - a piece of paper or a three-dimensional form. The act that constitutes these things as documents is the same act through which we constitute these things as objects - that is the act of looking at these things with the mind's eyes, and thus processing all the information and meanings they may carry.

In the analysis of an object, there are two planes that must be taken in consideration: the plane of the expression and the plane of the content. Any object (or thing, changed into an object as far as it is in front of a knowing subject) is a 'cultural unit', or a 'semantic unit', carrying an amount of information in both the planes - that of the expression and that of the content (see Eco, 1979). The analysis of the material aspect of an object, of its form of expression, is the first step in order to reach the form of its content. The form of expression is the material, the texture, the shape, the weight, the colours on it; the form of the content is rather difficult to define. This proposition, suggested by Hjelmslev in his analysis of objects as 'signs', in semiotic terms, can be explained as the special way in which meaning is constructed through a given sign, word or object, in a given context or situation, in a given culture and language.

The way in which different cultures, or different languages, segment thought, in order to differentiate things and concepts, is what we may call the 'forms of the contents'.

We can easily verify this idea in this paper, in the different meanings attached to corresponding words, in different languages. In every language the form of the content of the words (things, object, subject, museum, etc.) and of objects as well, may vary, and it is necessary that we know the whole semantic structure of a language and of a culture in order
to understand them. The study of museum semiotics is an excellent tool to help us understand these concepts. A given concept corresponds to a given particular form of content, expressed through a particular form of expression (word or object).

The relation of a subject with his 'object' - of study, of knowledge, of love or of desire, can only be settled when the eye of the beholder changes a given thing into a source of information, of suggestions, of evocation, of creative thought. In this sense, objects are changed into 'signs', as 'vehicles of meaning', in semiotic terms. If this mental process does not happen during this encounter of the subject with the object, museum objects are nothing else than 'things', which have a semiotic potential but not an effective 'semiotic function'. In fact, they have no meaning at all besides that of being 'things'.

The information and meaning contained in an object are not fixed and crystallized in it. It is the mind and the perception of the observer, the subject, which will endow the object with meaning. In any object, tangible or non-tangible, there is a whole universe of information. The perception of these data will vary in time and from subject to subject. That's why concepts change and the dilemma of conservation work in museums generates so much debate. Sometimes the information on the plane of the expression, is not as relevant as that on the plane of the content. A magical or religious object, for instance, will not lose its meaningful content even if it is reduced to a fragment, in its material aspect. What should be preserved in this object? (Think of 'relics', for instance). The material or the knowledge of its supposed powers?

The 'alchemic' process of transformation of things into objects, into documents, into concepts that enrich the universe of subjects and of culture, and the knowledge of this process, is according to my view, what museums are all about...

For a better definition of museums, look through all ICOFOM encyclopaedic papers, in recent years, in different languages. You will certainly verify how much the 'form of the expression' and the 'form of the content' of these things called 'museums' change throughout time and space. But this would be another discussion...
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Le lien entre choses, objets, sujets, documents et Musées, et à quoi servent-ils, finalement. (en hommage à James Deetz)

MARIA HORTA – BRAZIL

La discussion doit commencer à partir de la célèbre définition de James Deetz au sujet de la culture matérielle, comme "cette partie de notre monde physique que nous avons modelée selon des plans determinés culturellement" (1984:25).

On discute alors les différents sens attribués à ces mots - choses, objets, sujets, et documents - d'abord après les différents dictionnaires, en langues différentes : l'Anglais, le Français, le Portugais et le Latin. Il faut bien avoir la notion, dans un débat international, des variations des significations et des concepts attachés aux mots.

Le raisonnement qui conduit le texte présenté est celui pris par Roland Khaer (Objets Prêtextes-Objets Manipulés, M.E. Neuchatel) qui dit : "C'est d'abord le regard qui constitue l'objet - avec effet de retour - plus que toute autre qualité propre et peut-être éphémère" (de cet objet).

On propose alors que l'objet dépend, pour "être", d'une "chose" et d'un "sujet" qui la regarde. Pour cette exploration mentale, on distingue deux plans de l'analyse - le plan de l'expression et le plan du contenu, d'après la théorie sémiotique de Hjelmslev et Umberto Eco. Comme conclusion, on peut penser que n'importe quelle "chose" (même immatérielle) peut être prise comme l'objet des musées, autant qu'elle soit exposée au regard de l'intelligence humaine, par des recours muséologiques et muséographiques. Au moment où on constitue l'objet, le document est aussitôt constitué, par le même raisonnement.
THE MUSEUM OBJECT AS A DOCUMENT

A general definition of the museum object was given some time ago by the Czech museologist Z.Z. Stransky (1970:35), who said that an object that lives in the reality of the museum is to be considered a document of the reality from which it has been taken. The museum object is at the same time a piece of heritage, that is, a real object whose form and material documents the reality in which it originally appeared, in which it lived, and together with which it has reached the present time. But equally, the museum object is also regarded as a central concern of both museological theory and museum practice and their interrelationship (P. van Mensch, 1989:94). Through its life in a reality, the museum object accumulates a certain number of data that characterize it and stores them in its physical and semantic structure. The data accumulate in the object with the passage of chronological and historical time. The documentary value of the object, and thus also its potential museality, evolve as long as the object lives. They are "read" or discovered through special thought processes and are then, as parts of a message, communicated to the recipients in a special museological environment.

According to dictionary definitions, a document is "a written record, written evidence of an event, state or agreement, proof of something, living example" (B. Klaič, 1974: 300). A document is thus relied on to prove something, to serve as evidence of events, situations and states. On the one hand, it mediates time through its physical structure and materiality, and on the other hand it conveys meaning through writing. It is only through a careful reading of the document that one gets to its true understanding. It remains to be proved that an object can be regarded as a document, since in this case writing is absent and verbal language is replaced by the language of forms and the speech of materials making up the object.

Many students of material culture have studied the documentary properties of objects and thus also the properties of the potential and real museum objects. The prevailing view now is that there are four key properties of objects (S. Pearce, 1986):

1. material -- raw material, structure, construction, technology of manufacture, design,
2. history -- description of purpose for which it was intended, its use, and events with which it was connected or in which it participated,
3. environment -- spatial and partly societal relations affecting the object and imparting their characteristics to it,
4. significance -- emotive and psychological messages emitted by the object.

Susan Pearce thus holds that the object expresses its message through its physical properties, in which case it becomes a kind of document of the reality in which it lived.
In proposing an integral methodology for the museological study of museum objects, Peter van Mensch formulated two approaches to the object -- one which sees the object as a source of data/information and the other which sees it as a medium or means of transfer of data/information. This, together with his distinction of three levels of data obtainable through the analysis of museum objects, completes his model for the museological study of museum objects. The three levels of data are the following:

1. **Physical or structural properties**, including material, construction and shape of the object (object hardware),

2. **Functional properties**, having to do with the use, usefulness and importance of the object and making up its significance and value (object software),

3. **Relations with the context**, having to do with the physical and conceptual environment in which the object resides.

In this way, we gradually approach the possible reconstruction of the object’s biography, with the object providing evidence about itself and the events surrounding it. This requires a collaborative effort involving museology and one or more fundamental scientific disciplines. The documentary approach to the museum object is directed towards the sign bearer, that is, towards the material side of the object, and is most closely connected with the fundamental discipline which helps us with the reading of the object’s language. The idea of the museum object which thus evolves is the one that Peter van Mensch has defined as a reflection of its fundamental identities: conceptual, factual and actual (P. van Mensch, 1989: 90).

Summarizing the problem of identity, one can only say that questions having to do with the possibility of study of the relations and meanings of identity remain open and largely dependent on the types of objects whose identities are to be studied. J. Swiecimski uses the term 'conceptual object', which is exhibited through an authentic object, provided two conditions are met: the maker’s imagination and the receiver’s imagination. Without the two kinds of creative imagination, it is hard to imagine that the idea could ever become reality (J. Swiecimski, 1982). R. Arnheim, who focused on the material work of art, held that the material art object "is not so much a replica of the mental concetto as a continuation of the shaping and inventing that began in the artist’s mind" (D. Dutton, 1983: 236, quoted in P. van Mensch, 1992a: 154). A work of art is certainly an object of material culture whose meaning, message and significance goes well beyond that of other artifacts and requires a particular kind of emotive and intellectual involvement. In this sense, the documentary and museological character of an art work is much more richly stratified than is the case with other artifacts.

In contradistinction to the static identities, such as the conceptual identity preceding the appearance of the object and the factual identity representing completed phenomena in chronological time, the actual identity always goes with the changing present time, closes the upper limit of the object’s life span, and makes possible the extension and change of its properties. P. van Mensch (1989: 90) therefore identified two more identities in the category of properties of objects: the structural and the functional identity, which cross in time with the conceptual and the factual identity and in contact with the actual identity fix the structural and functional appearance of the
object in the present time, in which the chronological and historical time fuse with the informational, documentary, communicative and societal time. We should not forget that the museum object becomes an INDOC (information/documentation) object, because it contains and transmits information and documents different forms of reality through which it has passed. In the context of a museum, it behaves as an object which transmits messages contained in its documentary structure. That part of the museum object which is in the function of a document serves as a sign bearer, the sign being systematically built into the object’s physical structure from the moment of its creation and surviving in time despite possible variation of its interpretation.

Structural identity refers to the sum total of physical properties of the object that we can recognize with our senses, possibly with the help of some aids. These properties may be grouped according to three principles: intention, perception and development (P. van Mensch, 1992a: 155). The principle of intention reveals to us the conscious and unconscious effects produced by the object’s maker through his/her shaping and the choice of technology for the manufacture of the object. The principle of perception distinguishes between the material as sign bearer and the message or meaning expressed by the material. Development refers to the changes, deterioration, damage, restoration, and other interventions on the object in the course of its life. Structural identity opens up new possibilities for the interpretation of the object as sign, especially in the interrelationship of the material, form and meaning. Peter van Mensch has an interesting idea concerning the relationship between the primary (factual) and the secondary (developmental) data about the object (and thus also, naturally, the relation between the factual and actual identity): he notes that an object may remain the same object even when the sum total of the properties of its structural identity is changed. Even if its entire physical structure is changed, the object may remain the same painting, same church, etc. on the basis of its spatio-temporal continuity (P. van Mensch, 1992a: 156). If this hypothesis is proved correct, this would mean that the idea of an object is the decisive factor, while the material is just the envelope enabling us to perceive and experience the object. This, of course, goes counter to the thesis of unity of the material, form and content and poses a number of questions which are critically important for the documentary value of objects. Generally speaking, interventions to restore an earlier stage of the object’s structural identity (such as the removal of the patina from an object, the removal of the yellowish varnish from old paintings, the gluing together of fragments to reconstruct a broken object, the insertion of missing parts or fragments, etc.) significantly change the documentary value of the object. New relations are established as the documentary properties of the object are diminished. Regardless of how much the object’s actual identity must be regarded as a changeable phenomenon, returning the object to the past is an arbitrary human act which integrates the past into the present in an essentially new way. The object as a document thus becomes more complex, and we become more acutely aware of the need to keep track of the changing identities of the object, faithfully recording all data and information having to do with its structure and changes in its appearance. Such documentation will often preserve those forms of the object’s identity that have been irretrievably lost. This will help us to keep the documentary properties of the object alive on a different level -- the level of information that is not physically linked with the object.
**Functional identity** is the second axis along which the object’s life and development can be observed. Besides physical decay and social, occasionally also ideological, obsolescence, we now recognize technological and psychological obsolescence as factors resulting in the object being excluded from use. Such an object can be used again, but only if it is adapted or modernized. Changed, it may change contexts, switch from one context to another, and in a new context find its justification in a new function. In such cases, the object is not yet a museum object, but an object which continues to accumulate documentary values through use.

Changing the mode and form of its use in the primary context, the object may find new uses -- with or without the change of structure or form. However, the structural identity often suffers a discontinuity in this case, when the object is only partly used for a new function, when part of the object is used as a new object, or when several objects appear in a new combination. Examples of this kind are easily found in grouped works of art (ensembles) in which relations between the individual pieces change over time (for instance, changing arrangements of paintings and sculptures on altars, furniture and furnishings in rooms, changing frames on paintings, etc.). The most drastic interventions interrupt the structural (and also functional) identity, so that we can no longer speak about the same object. Thus, when the material of an object is used as raw material (when metal objects are melted and used as metal, when buildings are demolished and the obtained material is used as secondary building material, etc.), we no longer have the object as a document, and such cases are not the subject of our present concern. The object, and therefore also the museum object as a document, exists only as long as the integral unity of the material, form and meaning can be said to have been preserved, that is, as long as there is a whole based not merely on the material component, but also on purposefully shaped and usable matter.

The relation between the functional and structural identity of the object is a vertical link holding together its conceptual, factual and actual identity, making it possible for us to regard the emergence, life, history and development of the object, or group of objects, as a product of human intention and of the circumstances in which it came into being and in which it lived. In this sense, the object is a document of its own development and all the external influences that affected it. Museum objects have a special purpose. They are carefully protected and studied so that they can provide evidence of the course of the chronological and historical time in the life of the object and its surroundings and to serve as a source of knowledge about human creativity, culture and civilization and about the social and natural processes that determined the appearance and present state of the objects whose development has been frozen in the museum reality. The museum context and function give a new documentary meaning to the structure of the three stable and temporally determined identities of each object.

We have already noted that objects live in contexts. Peter van Mensch (1992a: 161) defines the context as a special 'plane' which provides the meeting ground for the environment and the sets of relations that appear or apply in this environment. Classifying the contexts as primary, archaeological and museological, he assumes that each is a combination of a physical and a conceptual environment. The physical environment represents the spatial component and the conceptual environment the social component, both of which are present in the chronological and social time.
The primary context is the most frequent type of context. It is determined by the functions of production, use and maintenance of the object. The primary context is the background against which the active life of objects takes place, with objects being for the most part treated as commodities. Precisely because they are commodities, they often change their purpose, owner and/or state, with the consequent increase or decrease of their significance. The object's biography evolves in the primary context, in which the object acquires the properties that will later make it a document of a particular reality (i.e., particular context), from which it will be taken into a museum. All changes taking place within the primary context may be considered the continuation of the object's social life and its preparation for the transfer to the museological context. Durable objects, because of their great survival capacity, become transhistorical and acquire a potential museological value. A parallel is here in order with objects situated in open-air environments, for which the characteristics of duration and change are more pronounced, but which can also acquire transhistorical value and thus also the social value that makes them worthy of protection. This analogy with immovable cultural heritage shows that museological theories are in fact applicable to all heritage. To sum up, then, the primary context is the environment in which the object prepares for transition to the museological context, accumulating the documentary value of the surrounding environment, absorbing it physically or conceptually into its own structure, and readying itself for the arbitrary human choice that will give it special social value.

The archaeological context represents a temporary or permanent depository of discarded objects. Regardless of whether it is stable (inaccessible, under ground or under water) or unstable (in depositories), it is a potential find of objects whose actual identity was frozen at a given historical moment, its functional identity interrupted, and its structural identity subject to change/decay in the absence of normal maintenance. The object acquires practically no new documentary value in the archaeological context: in this context, the object is either preserved or it decays. However, the passage of historical time in which the object takes no part makes it increasingly a historical document, owing to the growing tension between the historical and chronological time evolving within the object. The chronological time flows, while the historical and social time remain still. That is why the transition from the archaeological to the museological context is a logical and almost inevitable consequence of the accumulated value.

The museological context is the context of protection of objects, involving also intensive study and communication of their values. Once they are in the museum, objects no longer serve their normal purpose; rather, their purpose and use is informational and communicational. Useful or discarded objects thus become museum objects and specimens of cultural heritage. This is the context in which a climate is created, both intellectually and materially, in which the object becomes dominant, with the values of all its identities being studied, evaluated and presented. The same can be said, only in a more complex situation, of cultural monuments in the open, where the concern for the valuable spatial structures takes the place of the concern for the museum space in the museological context.

Changes of context are as a rule unidirectional -- from the primary to the archaeological and museological context, and from the archaeological to the museological context. Changes within the primary context itself may speed up or slow down the
movement towards the other two contexts. All of the changes of context mentioned here are in the function of preservation of the object’s documentary value, irrespective of whether they are made consciously or as a result of social change.

A change from the primary to the archaeological context is due to functional degradation. However, an object’s social death is not necessarily its physical death. Discarding waste is a conscious act of removing an object from the current cultural systems, notes Peter van Mensch (1992a: 164). Therefore, both discarding and preserving are cultural options. Changes from the primary and archaeological contexts to the museological context presuppose the institutionalization of the museum context, because the change requires specialists who will help the users in this process. With their solid knowledge of fundamental disciplines, and motivated by the documentary and informational properties of objects, these specialists select the objects that will become museum objects. Musealization is the process of transition from the other contexts to the museological context. It can also take place in open spaces, involving cultural heritage, but with a differently conceived museological context.

The influx of objects into the museological context is much more intensive than the outflow, with the speed and direction of the flow depending on various social factors (economic, political, military, cultural). Research can prove what practice has already shown, namely, that the influx of objects into the museological context -- regardless of whether it is a museum, private collection, protected cultural property, or cultural heritage in the open space -- exceeds the capacity of both the profession and society, in terms of space, cost, or organization, to absorb them. This will necessarily result in an increased outflow of objects, using new criteria of evaluation and returning some objects from the museological to the primary context, where, freed from the aura of museum objects or important specimens of cultural heritage, they will again become commodities. But they will introduce a new element into the material world of objects of daily use -- objects that serve the needs of a human living environment enriched by history and tradition.

The focal point of concern in everything said here is the documentary value of the object, which Stransky calls the foundation of museality. Stransky then goes on to say that the degree of documentary value is directly proportional to the degree of informational fit between the phenomenon which is documented and the preserved object as a document (Z.Z. Stransky, 1974: 36). He recognizes that musealization involves a loss of information on the level of the context (primary or archaeological context), and the significance of the object as a document therefore depends on the balance between the primary and secondary data and the degree of compensation through adequate documentation for the lost physical and contextual data.

Placed in the museological context, the object is both a witness and a testimony (P. van Mensch, 1992a: 175) of its primary or archaeological context and all its identities. As a witness, it is active in playing its documentary role, serving as a source of data for documentation and study; as a testimony, it is a primary document of a given time, space, event, or society. It is in the tension which develops in the object between the witness and the testimony that we must look for the source of all its documentary values.
References


Résumé

L'OBJET DE MUSÉE EN TANT QUE DOCUMENT

L'objet du musée est l'objet du patrimoine qui par son matériel et par sa forme documente sur la réalité dans laquelle il a été créé, dans laquelle il a vécu et avec laquelle il est entré dans le présent. Les propriétés de l'objet constituent les caractéristiques de la valeur documentaire. Les qualités les plus importantes en sont: le matériel, l'histoire, l'environnement et l'importance de l'objet. L'objet est la source et le transmetteur d'informations. L'idée de l'objet du musée reflète ses identités fondamentales: les identités conceptuelle, réelle et actuelle et celles qui présentent leur enchaînement vertical dans le temps et dans l'espace: une structurale, l'autre fonctionnelle. Étant donnée que les objets existent dans un contexte, ils sont aussi des documents d'un contexte primaire, archéologique et muséologique. Le contexte primaire est le plus fréquent. C'est dans ce contexte que les objets s'emparent de leurs propriétés du document. Dans le contexte archéologique il se produit une tension entre le temps historique et le temps chronologique, donc, les propriétés documentaires reposent, tandis que dans le contexte muséologique l'objet exprime et communique ses valeurs du document et protège ses identités acquises. Les changements du contexte se produisent régulièrement à sens unique et se dirigent vers le contexte muséologique. Un objet dans le contexte muséologique devient le témoin et le témoignage du contexte primaire et archéologique, aussi bien que la source des informations pour la documentation et pour la recherche. L'objet muséologique est le document de la réalité vécue.


Ivo Maroević
"OBJET - DOCUMENT ?"
OU
"CHOSE --- OBJET --- DOCUMENT ?"

"Vus de trop loin, entrevus de trop près, les objets ... sont toujours prévus par ceux qui les manipulent avant de les livrer aux regards des autres. Ils sont ce que celui qui les a choisis nous en livre, nous en laisse, nous en cache.

Telle est l'image (du musée, ndla) et son enjeu impossible : un entrechat pervers, un entre deux. Le reste du monde étant relégué en réserve, en suspens, en position de retrait."

Jacques CHARLIER. Artist.

1) Lexique non muséologique

Chose : élément indéterminé.
Objet : élément précis.
Document : élément qui transmet ou dont on extrait une ou plusieurs informations.

2) Tribulations des "chooses" qui traversent le temps

1er tableau

Il était un lieu, il y a 30.000 ans. Un homme prit de la matière, que nous nommons ivoire. Il la transforma, l'utilisa, en élabora une infime partie en un petit rond percé. La majorité de la matière resta chose, que nous appelons déchet, une minorité devint objet, que nous appelons perle, pendentif, pendeloque.

Il était un autre lieu, tout proche du premier, il y a 30.000 ans. Une femme trouva de la matière, au bord de la rivière. Sans la transformer physiquement, cette femme passa un fil par le trou que comportait la forme de cette matière. Cette chose que nous appelons coquillage, trouva une nouvelle fonction, elle devint objet.

Deux années plus tard, de l'union de l'homme et de la femme naquit une petite fille. En signe de gratitude pour ce don de la nature et symbolisant la fertilité de leur union, l'homme et la femme confièrent à la fillette l'un la rondelle d'ivoire, l'autre le coquillage. Ce symbole, elle le porta à son cou.
Les deux objets étaient devenus documents car ils matérialisaient et exprimaient une signification pour chacun des trois : union, fertilité, filiation.

Mais la fillette fut dévorée par un lion des cavernes. Ni le père, ni la mère ne tentèrent de retrouver le collier. Perle et coquillage n'étaient plus portés. Le fil "documentaire" et "objectif" était cassé.

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2ème tableau

Bien des saisons plus tard, un jeune homme se repose au pied d'une falaise. Une rivière creuse son chemin tumultueux entre les rochers. Il perçoit deux formes bizarres à ses pieds, parmi les restes d'un repas de fauve. Intrigué, il les ramasse et les met dans le repli de sa tunique.

Le soir, au coin du feu, il reprend ces deux choses et les tourne dans tous les sens. Qui pourrait lui dire ce que sont ces deux choses ? Jamais il n'en avait trouvé ailleurs. Un Esprit pourrait s'être réfugié à l'intérieur. Pris de peur, il voulut les jeter au feu.

Soudain, il arrêta son geste. Son bras resta figé en l'air, la main serrant les deux choses. Et si l'Esprit en sortait ? N'avait-il pas eu si peur, y avait-il eu des lunes, en jetant une autre chose inconnue dans le feu ? L'Esprit de cette chose se fâcha si fort qu'il lança une gigantesque flamme qui faillit le brûler. Jamais plus, s'était-il dit, il ne donnerait au feu autre chose que du bois ou des os d'animaux.

Vif comme l'éclair, il ouvrit la peau qui lui servait de sac à médicine, y posa les deux choses et la referma tout aussi vite.

Epuisé, il s'étendit sur sa couche. Il ne trouvait pas le sommeil, se tournant et se retournant. Il ne cessait de penser à ces deux choses minuscules. Bien sûr, cette coquille, il en avait vu d'autres; il en avait même mangé l'intérieur ce jour où, affamé, il s'était arrêté au bord d'un lac en quête de gibier. Mais celle-ci, celle-ci qu'il avait ramassée, il la pressentait différente. Et ce petit rond blanc ? Il lui devinait une ressemblance avec la coquille. Et pourtant, la forme, la matière, le poids sont très différents. Mais oui, bien sûr : un trou, un petit trou. Coquille et rond blanc ont un trou, un petit trou, mais un trou ...

Peut-être la fleur jaune du lac, dont il suce la racine lorsqu'il ne parvient pas à dormir, peut-être la fleur jaune du lac avait-elle aussi endormi l'Esprit des deux choses ?

Il réveilla le feu en lui donnant des brindilles. Enfin, il pouvait à nouveau observer les deux choses, comme il guette un renne avant de lui lancer sa lance.

Oui, chacune de ceux deux choses a un trou. Oui, le coquillage est bien semblable à ceux qu'il a mangés, ... le trou en plus.

Le rond blanc lui faisait peur. N'était-il pas le chasseur le plus courageux du clan ? Pour se donner du courage, il serra la dent de lion - son totem - qui pendait à son cou. ... Qui pend à son cou ... ! Son totem vient de lui parler ! Le trou de la dent de son totem, le trou de la coquille, le trou du rond blanc ... ! Des trous comme les fait si bien son frère dans le bois, dans les cornes de renne, dans les os, dans les dents, dans les défenses de mammouth. Ces défenses dont il admire la blancheur, surtout de la partie encore enchassée dans le crâne. Cette blancheur si aveuglante, comme la neige fraîche sur laquelle luit le soleil quand il fait si froid.

A nouveau, son totem lui parlait. La blancheur des défenses est la même que la blancheur du petit rond.

Un autre avait, comme son frère, travaillé une défense de mammouth. Avec la même adresse que son frère, un autre avait percé ces deux choses à l'aide d'un perçois à la pointe si aiguë mais si solide. Et lui, il avait trouvé ces deux choses lors de sa halte au pied de la falaise. Juste avant, sur l'autre rive, il avait cru percevoir son totem, le lion des cavernes.

Les deux choses sont donc des objets. Un autre leur avait donné une partie de son Esprit, en les fabriquant. Et lui, grâce à son Esprit-totem, les a retrouvés, les a compris. C'est décidé, il les gardera.

Satisfait et rassuré, il referma son sac à médecine. Le feu crépitait et la brillance de la lune annonçait une journée calme, juste avant son retour au clan.

3ème tableau

Lorsque de retour au clan, il put enfin montrer et raconter sa découverte aux sages du clan, il demanda à l'homme qui entend les Esprits d'imposer ses mains sur ces deux objets.

.../...
Par leur présentation au clan, les objets étaient devenus sacrés. Ils étaient reconnus comme porteurs d'un esprit, tout comme la dent de lion porte l'Esprit de son totem, tout comme le boyau torsadé qu'il porte au cou signifie son appartenance au clan. Ces deux objets signifient désormais son courage dans la solitude, car il a réussi l'épreuve de la solitude durant toute une lune. Mais ces deux objets signifient aussi l'appartenance de son clan à un groupe d'humains dont l'Esprit perdure dans les objets qu'ils fabriquent.

x

x  x

4ème tableau

1890. Un savant creuse la grotte où il avait découvert de nombreux ossements et silex taillés. Il cherche des ossements humains qui lui permettraient, enfin, d'être reconnu par ses collègues et, surtout, d'être financé dans ses recherches et publications. Plongé dans ses réflexions, il ne voit ni la dent, ni la coquille, ni le rond blanc que son coup de pelle rejette dans les terres de remblai. Sous ses pieds, il vient d'apercevoir un crâne humain.

Nos deux choses, devenues objets puis documents, d'un coup de pelle, retournent dans l'oubli dans lequel elles étaient plongées depuis 30.000 ans.

Revivront-elles une nouvelle vie d'objet, voire de document?

x

x  x


Nos trois choses sont exhumées. Inventoriées, documentées, étudiées, elles rejoignent d'autres objets dans les réserves du musée.

x

x  x
1994. Le Musée National d'Archéologie organise une grandiose exposition intitulée "L'art mobilier préhistorique, expression de la pensée". Le choix des objets est fait de manière très judicieuse afin de documenter la pensée de nos ancêtres. Dent de lion, coquille et rondelle d'ivoire cotoient les plus prestigieux bâtons percés décorés, coiffes de coquillage, plaquettes gravées, ...

2010. Un savant démontre que la rondelle d'ivoire n'est rien d'autre que la régurgitation d'un fauve. Le trou est la résultante de l'attaque des acides gastriques dans l'estomac du fauve. Quant au trou de la coquille, sa configuration milite en faveur d'une origine naturelle de la perforation.

Et nos deux documents, déjà redevenus objets après leur exposition, redeviennent, pour certains, et pour un certain temps, de simples et anodines choses.

Un jour, peut-être, un nouvel esprit les investira. Quant à la dent de lion, bien mise en valeur dans une vitrine, elle est toujours accompagnée d'un Esprit. Parfois, il fait craindre les enfants, souvent il les fait rêver ... Les adultes, eux, ne le perçoivent même pas.

3) Interprétation du texte "Tribulations de choses qui traversent le temps"

Dans le premier tableau, l'ivoire et le coquillage n'étaient que des choses. Par leur transformation physique ou par leur nouvelle fonction, ils sont devenus des objets. D'objets ils deviennent documents dès l'instant où ils sont chargés d'une signification collective pour le père, la mère et la fillette. Dès la mort de cette dernière, disparaît la matérialisation du symbolisme et de l'action humaine.

.../...
Le lion des cavernes ne fait pas de différenciation : il ne reconnaît ni la portée symbolique ni l'origine anthropique de ce qui pend au cou de la fillette.

Dans le deuxième tableau, l'homme qui ramasse les deux choses doit mener un processus de réflexion avant de reconnaître les deux choses comme des objets, comme des artefacts. Il les pressent comme chargés de signification et les conserve donc.

Dans le troisième tableau, les objets sont reconnus par la collectivité. Cette reconnaissance s'accompagne d'une double signification : l'une vis-à-vis de l'individu qui les utilise, les porte, désormais, l'autre vis-à-vis de l'espèce humaine qui les a fabriqués et qui leur avait donné un sens. Le clan ne peut pas retrouver ce sens et le transforme. Les objets sont devenus documents.


Dans le septième tableau - 2010, cette signification est démentie par le savant. Il les ramène à l'état de choses, de par leur origine naturelle selon lui.

Pourtant, l'ivoire a été transformé tant par l'homme que par la nature (l'estomac du lion des cavernes). Quant au coquillage, il ne conserve aucune trace de transformation. Une étude au microscope à balayage électronique pourrait détecter les traces d'usure du cordon de suspension. Cette étude apporterait la certitude matérielle que ce coquillage, transformé par la nature, a été utilisé comme objet par l'homme. Dans le cas de l'ivoire comme dans le cas du coquillage, aucune technologie ne pourra restituer le sens (l'Esprit) qui accompagnait ces objets lors de leurs vies antérieures des premier et deuxième tableaux.

4) Extension au processus de muséalisation

Qu'est-ce qui, dans le processus de muséalisation, différencie une chose, un objet, un document ? Ces transformations sont-elles inhérentes à l'objet, à sa nature ou à son essence ?

Une chose devient objet lorsqu'elle devient porteuse d'un rapport entre l'homme et la réalité : un projet ou une idée est matérialisée au sein de l'objet.
L'existence de la chose s'accompagne d'une essence de l'objet. Ce dernier acquiert une signification, la chose est sématisée.

S'il entre dans le musée, s'il est conservé dans un musée, c'est qu'il y a une motivation bien précise déterminée par la pratique culturelle du conservateur. Cette motivation donne une signification supplémentaire à l'objet. Il est néo-sématisé. Rares, jamais à mon avis, sont les cas où la signification donnée par le créateur et la signification donnée par le conservateur sont identiques. Il y a toujours quelque chose en plus, ou en moins. L'objet est devenu muséalia (Z. STRANSKY).

Le changement de statut de l'objet vers le document se fait lorsqu'il y a communication. Cette communication trans-sématisé l'objet. Il y a interaction entre la pratique culturelle supposée du créateur, la pratique culturelle vécue du concepteur de la communication et la pratique culturelle voulue chez l'utilisateur du musée.

Cette trans-sémantique est active. Elle ne s'applique pas qu'à l'exhibit (Z. STRANSKY), à l'objet exposé, mais également à tout acte de communication ou de transcription : publication dans un catalogue, "documentation" dans une fiche d'inventaire, photographie, utilisation interactive, ... Seuls certains aspects de l'essence de l'objet sont mis en exergue par la communication, jamais sa totalité (son intégrité sémantique).

Dès lors, lorsqu'un objet devient muséalia, puis document, parfois exhibit, n'est-ce pas, fondamentalement, plus le sens donné à la réalité par le muséologue, et non celui donné par le créateur, qui est le fondement du processus de muséalisation ?

5) **Lexique muséologique**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chose : élément indéterminé.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Objet : élément matérialisant un projet ou une idée.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Objet-muséalia : chose ou objet muséalisé, non-sématisé par son insertion dans le musée.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
English Summary.

"Seen from too far, caught a glimpse from too near,
Objects are always foreseen
By those who handle them
Before delivering them to the look of the others
They are what the one who has chosen them
Deliver to us, leave to us, mask to us.

Such is the image (of the museum) and its impossible stake:
A perverse mixture, a "between two".
The rest of the world being banished
To the deposits, in suspense, in set back position."

Jacques CHARLIER
Artist.

The text "Tribulations de choses dans le temps" and its interpretation couldn't be summarized. Please excuse me for that.

In the processus of musealisation, what is the difference between a thing, an object and a document? Are these transformations inherent in the object, its nature or its gist?

One thing become object when its become bearer of a relation between man and nature. A project or an idea is materialized inside the object: the thing is "semantized".

If it come in and be conserved in a museum, it's by a motive well precise, by the cultural practice of the curator. This motive is giving a supplementary signification to the object. The museum's object is neo-semantized, it's become a muselia (Z. STRANSKY).

Object become document when there is communication. These communication "trans-semantise" the object. Trans-sematisation is active. It's apply not only to the exhibit (Z. STRANSKY) but too to every act of communication or transcription: publication in a catalogue, documentation in an inventory card, photography, inter-active using, ... Only several aspects of the object's gist are held account by communication, never the whole semantic integrity.

Ever since, when an object become musealia, then document, sometimes exhibit, isn't it, basically, more the meaning gived to the reality by the museologist, and not the meaning gived by the creator, what is the base of the musealization processus?

Museological lexic.

- Thing: undetermined element.
- Object: element materializing a project or an idea.
- Object-musealia: thing or object musealized, neo-semantized by insertion in a museum.
- Document: trans-semantized object. Only some aspects of its semantic integrity are communicated.

Damien WATTEYNE.
III

SPECIFIC ASPECTS AND VIEWS OF THE OBJECT
Analysing summaries of the papers by Bellaigue, Raippalinna, Shah, Sylla and Tripps

Mária Bezzeg

I had to analyse five papers by authors from different parts of the world /Africa, India, Finnland, Germany and France/. This is a vitally important point as thinking always reflects the reality and development of a given territory.

In making this analysis my point of view was how the authors deal with the question of "object-document".

Abdoulaye Sylla has written a paper titled: "Objects and documents in Africa". For him object is what we would call an object in the everyday sense. He uses the word document to describe the calligraphic system. As he puts it "the document is a privileged substrate of object, or if preferred its extension, plays an important role in the diffusion of information concerning the object in question."

From his paper it is implicit that he considers oral traditions, masks and sculptures /i.e. objects/ to be documents, too.

He puts - in his examples from the life of traditional Africa- "the symbiosis of object and document is given
in an informal way". The old traditions tend to disappear, that is why he thinks a redynamisation of traditional African signs is necessary, and it would be good to introduce this system into museums. With the help of this "the museum, as a kind of open book, offers a great chance for Africa in awakening the people's consciousness".

The determination by the given territory is very interesting in this case. There is no conventional writing in Africa, products of which are generally called documents all over the world. Sylla, according to this prevailing view, calls the special African callygrafic system document. He also notices that objects and oral tradition often function as documents because they play an important role in the diffusion of information. /He emphasizes this feature of the document./ In his English Summary he even puts: "In the traditional Africa object and document have the same aspect." He sees a very important link but he thinks that this is only because of having no conventional writing.

Anita B. Shah's approach to the question -as the title also indicates /Object in space and time/ - is a historical one. I think such an approach is always of vital importance. She stresses the "witness" character of the object and explains: "Objects must be viewed from the holistic point of view of time, space, culture and the people who
used them, in order to gain a wider perspective...

I find Anita B. Shah's explanation of the selection of objects for museum display a little misleading. As she puts it: "When an object is selected for museum display, whether it is modern art or an old Indian sculpture, it immediately acquires, through the action of being singled out, certain attributes of "specialness" with which it is not normally invested." It is very important to stress that it is not the museologists who give attributes of specialness to objects. The objects are selected by museologists because they originally possessed certain attributes of specialness. To perceive, to understand these attributes of specialness from the side of museologists is no less important or complex a task. Museologists have many means at their disposal to stress these attributes in an exhibition, and so help visitors to understand.

Anita B. Shah, herself, writes about the decoding of meaning and significance of various objects. Consequently she admits that objects originally possess various attributes of specialness.

The author speaks very precisely when she says that reception is determined by the "whole lot of life time experiences" of the given visitor.

I think it very important that she sees museums as
objects embedded in a given society. For example: "What the museum collects also reflects the cultural trends of the society to which it belongs and caters."

Towards the end of the paper objects are also mentioned as "sources and mediums of communication." The author did not mentioned the category of document but -as I mentioned- she stresses the "witness" character of the objects - and this is fundamental.

In Anita B. Shah's approach we can notice Marxism as background. /I hope in this circle, at a scientific conference this statement does not have a negative connotation as it would have in the former socialist countries./ Think of her historical approach to the problem, looking at a complex as part of a bigger complex. As I well know, in developing countries, Marxism had great influence in some of the universities and research institutes.

Päivi-Marjut Raippalinna's contribution /A work of art in art museum - an object or a document/ is art museum orientated. Raippalinna firmly maintains "that every thing /be it functional or not, aesthetic or not/ when musealized, will rather be an object of institutional appreciation than a true document of human life." If something is treated as a work of art, because it genuinely is, its basic essence will not be destroyed. Concerning Raippalinna's
thesis we can ask why the things in museums make an impression on people. Is it because they are works of art or sources of archaeology? Or, is it rather that modern day visitors to museums come into contact with artefacts from life before them. Why is it that mostly museums collect works of art and not other types of institution? Though works of art are indisputably special as the activity which creates them is, itself a special one. I am reminded of Georg Lukács' thesis according to which humankind, through its history has developed three moods of being for coming to terms with reality: namely everyday thinking and practice, art and science. Works of art with all their specialities are parts of human life. In the broadest sense of the word they are documents, testimonies of human activity of the highest order.

For the author the "matter of contextualization is the one, which makes the difference between an object and a document." As for the context she asks: "If the true context of an art museum could be considered as the art world, could it be wrong to claim that the true context of any other museum is that of the "museum world"?" Don’t you think that the true context of an art museum is, above all, determined by the categories of museology /collecting, preserving, elaborating, presentation/.

If I understand fully, Raippalinna believes the
object to be of a higher order than the document. For her, private collections can be considered as documents/documents of private and personal devotion to art/ and "they can be exhibited as true documents without strains of so called objectivity which is implicitly involved in public collecting." It seems after the activity of experts, that of museologists with objects, they lose their original basic characteristics /i.e. they are museal documents/.

I think she uses the term document in two senses: 1/ as something giving information about something/"An object can be transformed to a document by re-evaluating museum activities."/ and 2/ as evidence or proof of something.

From the point of view of museology it is a great leap forward when the author puts: "we could try... to get rid of the stubborn object belief of the profession." She speaks about that "a great part of contemporary art is not supposed to be objects, rather it is processes, flows of interactive ideas and actions."

Manfred Tripps in his paper "Too much to read, too little to see - Exhibition techniques and the 2-D syndrome..." draws our attention to a very dangerous phenomenon. Though this paper was written before 1989 /we can find
a remark on the existence of the GDR/, what it is about is of vital importance today from the point of view of museology and not only in Germany. Namely: the overwhelming use of the technical media and design techniques and almost complete lack of original, authentic material /technical, cultural historical objects and works of art.../ in exhibitions. This phenomenon in Germany came about because political experts in culture and education had been directing their attention to museums and exhibitions. They were founding institutions with which they intended to pursue "historical politics". /Remember the similar intention of Soviet politicians and politicians of the former socialist countries./ These institutions call themselves "Houses" /House of the History of Baden-Württemberg in Stuttgart/. They did not have own exhibits, they were without a self-defined function. These Houses were regarded by politicians "as centres for providing meaning and identity that are both effective and easy to look after."

Tripps very clearly perceives that exhibitions based on the 2-D principle /i.e. didactic and design/ can not meet with such a success from the point of view of the visitor as the great historical, art historical exhibitions did in the 70's and 80's which were held on the principle of presentation of authentic exhibits.
The author is fully aware that authentic and original objects are the most important specificity of museums. It is not enough that he writes about the reasons original material influences the visitor and why they have enormous success when he says: "the confrontation with authentic and original objects allows those experiences which firstly, arouse the visitor's curiosity, secondly, lead him to ask questions and thirdly, provide him with new insight." These words can be said about a lot of other things, consequently this is not specific to museums.

I would like to react to the thesis that "political history cannot be presented in museum form", because sources of political history mainly are written material and photographs. /Tripps quotes Michael Stürner, one of the initiators of the ideas for the shaping and management of the Berlin Museum./ Behind this thesis above all we can find phenomenon of object fetishism i.e. only the three dimensional objects /in the everyday use of the word/ are real museum materials, written texts and photos are of a non museum kind. In the 60's and 70's there were great discussions on this topic in Hungary, and, today it is mostly accepted that different kinds of original documents /objects, written texts, photos, fims, video tapes etc./ are very important from the point of view of museology.
Mathild Bellaigue and Michael Menu have written a paper with the title "Seeing and Knowing" /Object-document?/. By way of a preliminary distinction, the authors give the definition of object and document. According to them "object" means that which is put before or in front of. "Document" means that which serves instruction. The definition of "object" seems to be a philosophical one which is not relevant to museology, because the point is exactly three dimensional objects. As for the definition of "document", we can know from Stransky’s paper it means in this sense "to serve as a proof". And it is of vital importance from the point of view of museology.

I can not agree with the statement: "In its real environment the object is ... unexistent, perhaps." It raises the question: does reality exist independent of our consciousness? If the answer is affirmative, we can not accept this statement.

The authors explain: "Reestablishing the original value of the traces means to make them symbols and sometimes emblems. It is to make them more than simple documents, testimonies and proof." I think, if we speak about exhibitions, it is true that symbolic presentation is characteristic, but in collections this question does not come up. Furthermore, as for museology, we can not
speak about "simple documents". These are "special" documents i.e. outstanding and typical documents of the life of humankind.

It is an interesting question when the authors speak about: "... a chef-d’œuvre resists plain and didactic approaches of interpretation." As for the didactic character of many of today’s exhibitions, it is only a transitional specificity which has to be overcome by the different territories of museology. We can see a strong movement in this direction.

The authors made a very important observation when they said: "Objects are vivid if they turn to be "resonants"." I would remind you of the important connection of social being, that the material and the spiritual sides of reality exist in an indissoluble unity.

An excellent part of their paper describes the new physical and technical possibilities of investigation. By means of natural scientific investigation we can learn more and more about the life of people who lived in the distant past. The authors clearly see what these investigations are about. They are to show the relationship between humans today and those who lived long ago. /"... the traces left by humans on the objects, in particular on art-works secure for these objects a well-
established contact between their creation and a man of today."

In conclusion the authors put: "...by facing objects we meet in fact with ourselves". This is a metaphorical formulation of the specificity, according to which, members of humankind living today visiting museums meet with the documents, testimonies of the life that humanity lived before us.

I would like to say some words about the determination by the territory and culture. In some parts of the papers written by colleagues from the West - except the paper by Manfred Tripp - we can observe the influence of epistemology which is a very characteristic feature of Western scientific cognition.

In the end: I am fully aware that our opinions differ as, naturally, the development of our respective countries and our museums differ considerably. Only the future will show which tendency is the stronger in its spread throughout the world.
"Objet-document ?"
ou

le Voir et le Savoir

Mathilde BELLAIGUE, Michel MENU
Laboratoire de recherche des musées de France, Paris

Le schématisme de la question, son ambiguïté, le contexte muséologique dans lequel nous sommes évidemment censés nous trouver, en même temps que la définition de la muséologie à laquelle nous sommes parvenus au sein de l'ICOFOM - à savoir l'étude d'une relation spécifique de l'homme au réel - tout cela nous fait obligation de revenir à l'étymologie :

"Objet" : "ce qui est placé devant".
"Document" : "ce qui sert à instruire" ; ...

Au sens propre, l'objet s'isole au sein d'un ensemble : l'étoile dans une galaxie ou la galaxie dans un amas de galaxies... Isolé et en soi, l'objet ne dit rien, c'est l'atome, la monade. Le document, lui, apparaît au sens commun comme porteur d'une information, quel qu'en soit le support (papier, parchemin, terre cuite, pierre, bande magnétique, disque optique ...).

Partir de ce fondement étymologique impliquerait que les objets soient présents devant nous (ob-) dans leur matérialité en elle-même muette et qu'au contraire les documents aient la parole.

L'ellipse "objet-document" nous engage à examiner la relation mutuelle des deux entités, allant jusqu'à leur fusion (suggérée) qui permettrait à l'objet d'exister devant nous en tant que "document", au sens premier, mais également au sens second d'attester, d'être une preuve (deuxième sens de "document : tout ce qui sert de preuve, de témoignage").
De l'objet dans le musée on a peut-être tout dit, puisque l'acception commune tient ce dernier pour un conservatoire d'objets, et c'est bien cette fonction du musée qui justifie le cérémonial de leur entrée dans les collections. L'objet dans le musée s'inscrit dans le processus général de la communication : il relie les gens entre eux dans l'enceinte même du musée, il abolit la distance entre le spectateur et l'espace d'où provient l'objet, en même temps que - paradoxalement - il accroît cette distance par le rêve et l'imaginaire (mettons-nous, par exemple, en situation de contemplation devant un grand totem des Nouvelles-Hébrides...). Il en est de même en ce qui concerne le temps : les œuvres des artistes magdaléniens de Lascaux nous semblent parfois proches, par de possibles parentés avec celles de certains artistes contemporains, et pourtant leur réalité nous apparaît infiniment lointaine.

Peut-on assurer qu'une éternelle part d'inconnu ne tiendra pas toujours en échec la connaissance absolue ?

Ce cérémonial d'entrée des objets au musée s'apparente au rituel qui entoure les objets sacrés, les reliques, les instruments du culte qui ont pour fonction de relier l'homme au divin. Les objets dans le musée, eux, ont pour fonction de relier l'homme à l'homme à travers le temps et à travers l'espace. Poursuivant la comparaison, est-il excessif alors de souligner la différence profonde de motivation : dans le premier cas, une croyance, une foi, et l'obscurité de son cheminement, dans le deuxième, la recherche de la lumière de la connaissance ...

Mais ce qui nous intéresse également ici c'est le passage de l'objet de son monde réel à ce monde codifié et qu'il faut bien appeler artificiel qu'est le musée.

Situation et statut de l'objet en "milieu réel".

Dans notre environnement quotidien, l'objet, élément du réel, a une fonction identifiable (quelle que soit sa finalité, il fonctionne). Il a une valeur d'usage ou d'échange. Il est utilisé et usé par l'homme - ou par la nature - souvent voué à disparaître. A l'opposé, l'homme veut parfois le rendre pérénne et l'entretient alors pour lui conserver son intégrité. Dans une telle situation et en l'absence de tout musée, l'objet fait alors - déjà - figure de patrimoine à sauvegarder. Les motifs peuvent en être religieux, idéologiques, esthétiques, économiques, manifestant que l'objet atteste de - ou vaut - quelque chose. Il est profane ou sacré, c'est son statut. Nul contexte particulier n'est nécessaire, il suffit à l'objet d'être, d'être devant (objet), en présence de l'homme dans la relation spécifique qui justifie l'existence et la fonction de l'objet. Les exemples existent évidemment par milliers : de l'objet usuel qui s'use effectivement et disparaît (ou se recycle), aux instruments culturels et reliques à préserver (idoles, masques, sépultures...), à des monuments, à certains sites ou éléments de la nature à sauvegarder, à
L'homme-idole même (ainsi de l'homme-Lénine transformé par le régime soviétique en objet de culte).

Le passage des objets de leur milieu réel à la situation artificielle du musée (ou au rang de "patrimoine mondial" s'il s'agit de biens immobiliers) est bien au coeur de la muséologie car il implique leur transformation sémantique radicale, même si leur aspect physique peut demeurer le même. Transporté, transplanté, éventuellement transformé, ou transfiguré, l'objet en question change de valeur et de statut. Tel qu'en lui-même, croît-on, le voilà pourtant écarté, soustrait, isolé de son milieu d'origine ou, là même, "mis en valeur". Au musée, ou in situ, mais en quelque sorte "monumentalisé", il sera contemplé pour lui-même, pour ce qu'il symbolise et - en principe - pour ce qu'il signifie.

Car désormais, pour signifier, cet objet va nécessiter un autre environnement, c'est-à-dire une contextualisation différente. Dans les pires des cas il arrive que l'objet perde à jamais sa signification première : c'est ce qui arrive à certains vestiges trop vite arrachés à un site archéologique par pillage ou ignorance. C'est pourquoi la vérification des modèles avancés en archéologie ne peut se fonder uniquement sur les vestiges issus de la fouille et qui, au moins dans une large mesure, ont été détruits par diverses formes d'altérations, souvent naturelles mais aussi humaines. La fragmentation des vestiges, leur trop rapide transfert les privent de sens. Le phénomène est le même pour des pièces ethnographiques lorsque, par exemple, pour des raisons esthétiques ou de curiosité elles deviennent des valeurs du marché.

Au cours de son existence, l'objet a donc subi des changements de vocation, de statut mais aussi de forme. Ces changements mêmes parlent du temps qui a passé, de l'évolution des modes de vie et des accidents de l'histoire. Notre fraternité avec les choses est peut-être ce vieillissement partagé : traces d'usure sur un outil quotidien, érosion des pierres, patine d'une maison, mais aussi d'une statue de bronze, ou ce halo doré qui se pose lentement sur des tableaux que nous aimons, ce sont là stigmates de la vie qui marquent les visages de pierre ou autres comme les visages de chair. Toutefois, à condition que l'on puisse gommer ces déformations induites par le temps, l'objet continue de représenter la réalité du passé, celle qui permet de "découvrir la vérité derrière ce matériel légendaire", comme dit Freud.

**Situation et statut de l'objet au musée**

Le musée est un autre monde, un lieu où l'on veut effectivement parler du réel alors qu'en fait c'est un lieu d'artifice. L'artefact y entre à un stade d'intégrité physique donné. Marqué par le temps, puis inventorié, enregistré, donnant lieu à examen, analyse, étude, restauration, conservation et mise en valeur, il va se figer. Tous les ans, au Musée du Louvre,
Mona Lisa est examinée : les rites d'ouverture de son caisson, de la mesure de la fissure du support de bois et de l'hygrométrie constituent un cérémonial. Tout cela confère à l'objet la distance qui désormais le séparera de nous, de ses anciens utilisateurs, ou adorateurs. Il quitte le royaume des choses et prend place parmi les objets-témoins - ou les "objets de valeur". C'est au musée qu'il prend officiellement son statut de document, de preuve, d'objet de délection. C'est là qu'il va acquérir une valeur autre (celle de son exemplarité ou de sa rareté mais aussi sa valeur symbolique).

Si la situation et le statut de l'objet sont les mêmes à l'intérieur de tous les musées (en France tout au moins), communs à tous les objets quel qu'en soit le type (l'inaliénabilité en est la marque la plus caractéristique), sa vocation apparaît dans les faits différente selon le muséologue et aussi selon le type de l'objet. L'artefact figurant dans une série propre à démontrer une évolution technologique n'est pas appréhendé de la même façon que l'œuvre d'art. A celle-ci il arrive pourtant de prendre figure de "document" à l'appui d'une connaissance historique... Ou bien tel chef-d'œuvre replacé parmi les œuvres de la même époque (ou de la même école) ne sera pas perçu avec les mêmes résonances sensibles ou esthétiques que s'il est isolé et présenté en tant que chef-d'œuvre... Quant à l'objet ethnographique, il peut informer sur une pratique religieuse ou profane ou bien devenir objet d'art primitif si on l'isole et présenté en tant que chef-d'œuvre... Les exemples sont multiples et nous les connaissons. Dans tous les cas, il s'agit pour le muséologue de miser chez le public soit sur un mécanisme de reconnaissance de références soit sur l'émotion artistique. Et c'est bien le muséologue qui a là le pouvoir sur l'objet (sans parler d'un pouvoir sur le visiteur).

Désormais dis-tangé, dis-tancié, fragmentaire, isolé, rendu différent par ce passage, l'objet n'en est pas moins le support de la mémoire. Mais il possède aussi sa part d'oubli. Dans son milieu réel, celle-ci est inaperçue, inexistantne peut-être. Dans le musée, elle apparaît d'évidence (par manque de documentation parfois), mais le musée va s'employer à la gommer : la mémoire y est systématiquement - et artificiellement - réveillée (c'est, par exemple, la mise sous vitrine du casque, de la lampe et du pic du mineur, accompagnés de quelques blocs de charbon, etc). Cette situation est évidemment particulièrement visible dans les musées d'ethnographie et d'arts et traditions populaires dans lesquels on peut voir que, "fait de mains d'homme, l'objet artisanal garde imprimées réellement ou métaphoriquement les empreintes digitales de celui qui l'a façonné. Ces traces ne sont point la signature de l'artiste, elles ne sont pas un nom, ni non plus une marque. Plutôt un signe, la cicatrice presque effacée..." (Octavio Paz).

Car tout artefact conservé (dans le musée ou in situ) l'est en tant que trace d'une culture, d'une civilisation, d'une emprise de l'homme sur son milieu, de sa "marque". Le problème muséologique par excellence, c'est donc bien la gestion et la re-connaissance de ces traces. Vestiges de notre passé, elles sont ce qui matérialise la mémoire, particulièrement...
lorsque celle-ci nous fait défaut, ce qui la requiert et l'alimente. Elles sont aussi ce qui subsiste dans un espace physique ou mental qu'elles modèlent ou qu'elles marquent, les empreintes d'une culture ou, à l'échelle historique, d'une civilisation. Tout espace est porteur de ces traces (ou de leur destruction... ce qui est aussi une trace). Les effacer, c'est nier la mémoire, donc l'identité, ce qui peut aller jusqu'à l'anéantissement d'une communauté. Les exemples sont quotidiens : à terme on s'apercevra que la destruction systématique du patrimoine culturel de l'ancienne Yougoslavie en constitue le drame le plus durable. Car les secours apportés dans l'urgence à une population désespérée et décimée ne lui rendent ni les signes matériels de son identité ni les repères de sa mémoire et cela, entre autres, la rend vulnérable à toute volonté étrangère d'assimilation.

Valoriser les traces, c'est en faire des symboles, parfois des emblèmes. C'est en faire, plus que des documents, des témoins et des preuves.

**Au-delà du document : le sens de l'objet**

Au musée, objets et documents se situent au cœur d'une démarche d'interprétation. Tout le monde est toujours en train d'interpréter, c'est une caractéristique humaine. On interprète en termes de connaissances (ou de préjugés), de l'évolution du savoir, de canons esthétiques tributaires de l'évolution du goût ou de la mode. L'appartenance de l'œuvre d'art à un seul homme, fût-il génial, correspond à la vision romantique de l'artiste-démiurge qui façonnerait une matière inerte au fil de son imagination. En réalité, l'œuvre se révèle au cours du temps, s'éloignant de l'artiste. Ainsi l'histoire a-t-elle joué un mauvais tour à Voltaire : il pensait que la postérité retraiterait de lui surtout son *Hennia* et ses tragédies, mais ce sont ses *Contes* et sa correspondance qui ont assuré sa survie littéraire.

L'objet, ce fragment de réel mis au musée, y devient porteur d'information ou d'interrogation. - Et d'ailleurs quelle information ? puisque par son entrée au musée l'objet change de valeur. Est-ce à dire que ce "document" est faussé ? Ne serait-il qu'évocateur du réel mais dans un contexte tellement autre que sa signification en serait complètement changée (*traduttore = traditore*) ? C'est là que le mot "re-présenter" prend tout son sens : l'objet devient symbole, message, interprète. Il est tout cela au moment même où le développement des techniques de communication nous submerge d'informations souvent schématiques, primaires. En lui-même immobile et silencieux (hors de tout décodage muséographique), l'objet, s'il nous raconte une histoire, s'il nous "documente", nous pose également des questions, ne serait-ce que par ce changement de valeur : à quelque domaine qu'il appartienne, cet expatrié possède une signification, des liaisons contextuelles potentielles, un impact, et tout cela d'une complexité telle que le musée unidisciplinaire ne lui suffit pas. Le
musee s'en sert comme non pas comme d'un producteur de culture, mais comme d'un revelateur d'identite, de changement, de question, de conflit, de solidarite. C'est dire que la signification de l'objet evolue, ce qui plaide pour une conservation dynamique.

Cette polysémie de l'objet, de "l'objet-signe", est par excellence celle de l'oeuvre d'art. Cette derniere aurait-elle au musee un statut special par rapport aux autres artefacts ? Faut-il l'abstraire du "commun" des objets comme semble y pousser la classification des musees ? Car il existe une segregation certaine oeuvres d'art / objets ethnographiques, musees d'art (ou de "beaux-arts") / musees d'ethnographie. Qu'est-ce qui nous vaut ce cloisonnement ? Serait-ce qu'avec l'oeuvre d'art nous sortons du domaine du concept, de l'explication, pour entrer dans celui de la sensation ? En effet, comme le disent Deleuze et Gattari, "on peint, on sculpte, on compose on ecrit avec des sensations. On peint, on sculpte, on ecrit des sensations". Certes il demeure que, meme si l'histoire de l'art etudie les conditions de l'apparition du chef-d'oeuvre, le situe dans l'histoire, l'entoure d'un maximum d'informations qui trouvent leur place legitime au musee ("documents" par excellence), le chef-d'oeuvre, lui, resiste a l'interpretation, fuit le didactisme. Son efficacite n'appartient qu'a lui-meme et au regard de qui le contemple. Elle subsiste comme celle d'une substance restee active malgre le temps. Le reste n'est qu'anecdote. A la difference de tout autre objet de musee accroche a une chronologie et a un lieu, le chef-d'oeuvre reste indefiniment contemporain et universel.

Car qu'est-ce qui donne un sens a l'objet sinon le regard ? Le musee est le lieu possible de la contemplation, c'est une partie de son essence : les objets n'y ont de prix que s'ils sont contemples et vus, "resonnants".

Cette vision esthetique, emotionnelle, ce regard d'amateur (au sens de connaisseur et au sens d'amoureux), qu'il s'agisse de l'historien d'art, du conservateur, du collectionneur ou du visiteur eclairé, existe pour qui sait en jouir. Disons qu'ils sont par excellence ce qu'il faudrait que nous, museologues, sachions susciter.

Vers de nouveaux documents : le regard de la science sur l'objet

Jusqu'a la fin du siecle dernier, la connaissance que nous avions du patrimoine artistique et archeologique de l'humanite se fondait sur l'appréhension visuelle des formes, sur des donnees historiques, stylistiques, et sur l'exégese qu'en faisaient les historiens d'art. L'oeuvre d'art s'ecclaireait uniquement de ce qu'on savait de l'époque, des circonstances sociales et culturelles de l'apparition de l'oeuvre (commande, memeat, ateliers, ecoles - ou solitude du createur), des relations entre cultures, entre pays, entre artistes, des emprunts eventuels des uns aux autres. Les ecrits d'artistes - grands traites (Vinci, Cennini, Durer, Palissy), journaux
autobiographiques (Delacroix), livres (Kandinsky, Klee), correspondances (Van Gogh) - mais aussi leurs apprentissages, leurs collaborations (Masolino-Masacio), leurs admirations ou leurs compagnonnages (Van Gogh-Gauguin) ; leurs découvertes de matériaux ou de procédés nouveaux ; les écoles ou mouvements successifs ; les textes et catalogues de leurs marchands ou de leurs collectionneurs (Vollard, Guillaume, Barnes, Kahnweiler) ; tout cela, dans la mesure ou nous y avions accès, constituait jusqu'à il y a peu nos seules sources de connaissance de leur œuvre et la "documentait". Le matériel était considérable, certes, mais aujourd'hui, au regard des méthodes d'investigation à notre disposition, il nous paraît insuffisant.

Quant à la connaissance des objets archéologiques, elle reposait sur l'observation du site, de son environnement, de la stratigraphie des fouilles, l'observation stylistique comparée, la découverte et le déchiffrement d'écritures, les rapports ou journaux de fouilles, les documents historiques.

Dans les deux cas, le savoir et l'interprétation étaient d'ordre plutôt "littéraire" au sens où l'on parlait de disciplines littéraires et de disciplines scientifiques (ce qu'aujourd'hui nous appelons sciences humaines et sciences exactes).

Progressivement, depuis une cinquantaine d'années se développe de plus en plus efficacement la connaissance scientifique des objets et des œuvres grâce à la science des matériaux et aux sciences physico-chimiques appliquées au patrimoine culturel. Révéler, dévoiler, ex-pliquer (déplier) d'autres aspects intrinsèques de l'objet fait apparaître d'autres documents jusqu'alors invisibles.

Cette nouvelle ouverture est apparue grâce aux techniques d'examen et d'analyse de plus en plus performantes et répandues, aux méthodes d'optimisation de la recherche en sciences physico-chimiques et en science des matériaux, et au rapprochement - encore trop peu fréquent - des chercheurs des deux domaines cités plus haut. De là est née ce qu'on pourrait appeler "la science au service de l'art", laquelle permet en premier lieu l'amélioration de la conservation et de la restauration, en second lieu la possibilité d'approfondir et de préciser la connaissance du patrimoine culturel. Ce sont l'histoire de l'art et, de façon plus vaste, l'Histoire tout court qui en bénéficient.

En 1980, on parlait encore de la "vie mystérieuse des chefs-d'œuvre" (exposition au Grand Palais, Paris - commissaire Madeleine Hours, alors directrice du Laboratoire de recherche des musées de France). Quatorze ans après, certains "mystères" sont éclaircis par la science - mais d'autres ont surgit.

L'analyse de la technique s'appuie sur l'examen des objets à l'aide de l'ensemble des outils de la science contemporaine. La technique est un mode de dévoilement : "Toute techne a pour caractère de faire naître une œuvre et recherche les moyens techniques et théoriques
de produire une chose appartenant à la catégorie des possibles et dont le principe réside dans
la personne qui exécute et non dans l'œuvre exécutée" (Aristote, L'Ethique à Nicomaque).

Prenons pour exemple l'étude de l'art paléolithique : enfouies dans la matière, altérées
par le temps, les empreintes laissées par l'homme sur les objets, en particulier sur les œuvres
d'art, assurent un lien subtil et tenu entre l'homme du Paléolithique supérieur et l'homme
daujourd'hui. Ces traces sont révélées de multiples manières par les méthodes de laboratoire
et contribuent à dévoiler les pratiques technologiques et les stratégies des hommes
préhistoriques dans leur relation avec leur milieu naturel. En marge du problème de la
signification de l'art préhistorique, on cherche à retrouver dans certaines de ces manifestations
les systèmes techniques de production, l'utilisation des divers matériaux et des outils qui sont,
parmi d'autres facteurs, des témoins de l'organisation sociale. Ici, les analyses physico-
chimiques, les observations avec les méthodes mises au point au Laboratoire de recherche
des musées de France, associées étroitement à celles de l'archéologie, dévoilent certains
aspects de l'économie préhistorique.

En cette fin du XXème siècle, les techniques d'examen et la science des matériaux
nous permettent de pénétrer au cœur de la matière et du geste créateur qui a traduit
l'inspiration et les décisions de l'esprit - même s'il faut admettre avec modestie que notre savoir
restera probablement toujours en-deça du mystère de la création. Ce qui est conservé, ce n'est
pas seulement le matériau, mais ce sont aussi les intentions de celui qui l'a façonné et qui a
rendu la matière expressive. A l'apogée de la peinture magdalénienne, dans la grotte de Niaux
(Ariège - France), nous avons mis en évidence, par les méthodes physico-chimiques, tous les
aspects qui concourent à la réalisation d'une œuvre : le dessin préparatoire traduit une préconception élaborée de la figure, tout comme en témoigne, pour la matière-peinture,
l'association de tous les ingrédients (pigment, charge, liant) propres à assurer couleur,
cohésion, adhéson et conservation, et constituant ainsi de véritables "recettes". Les artistes se
démarquent alors de la simple représentation, ne se contentent plus des couleurs naturelles
rouges et noires fournies par les oxydes de fer et de manganèse : ils élargissent leur palette,
ils mélangent différents matériaux et obtiennent de multiples nuances ; ils jouent avec l'outil qui
répand la peinture, en dominant l'épaisseur de la matière plus ou moins diluée. On perçoit alors
mieux le processus de création d'une œuvre.

La science des matériaux, alliée à l'archéologie, tente de découvrir la relation entre
l'artiste et les ressources naturelles ; cette relation témoigne de sa culture, de ses facultés
d'innovation, de sa maîtrise technique, de ses sensations, de ses fantasmes... L'analyse des
matières et des techniques vise à retrouver l'origine des matériaux et la stratégie
d'approvisionnement des Préhistoriques. Plus encore, nous recherchons les procédés de mise
en forme, les façons de travailler qui attestent de la permanence immatérielle de l'art et de la
présence transfigurée de l'artiste.
De plus, la science actuelle permet un réexamen des faits : rechercher les techniques inventées et connues par l'homme et celles qu'il a mises au service de son art. Mais, et poursuivant l'exemple de la préhistoire, la science des matériaux préhistoriques induit en même temps des interdits : on écarte ainsi des hypothèses non fondées, échafaudées par associations, par comparaisons non validées avec des sociétés dites primitives ou encore par des expérimentations ingénues.

Cet exemple - comme bien d'autres qu'on pourrait donner d'autres époques et sur d'autres types de biens culturels - plaide en faveur de l'interdisciplinarité de la recherche, c'est-à-dire de la nécessaire alliance des sciences de l'homme et des sciences de la matière, sans que l'on puisse décider une fois pour toutes de l'antériorité des unes par rapport aux autres dans la démarche : tantôt les données historiques s'éclairent par l'analyse scientifique, tantôt cette dernière pose à l'historien la question nouvelle.

Ainsi l'histoire voit surgir des pans nouveaux : environnements et savoir-faire des artistes et des artisans, souvent oblitérés par l'importance donnée à l'esthétique ou au style de l'oeuvre, sont soudain mis en lumière ; la provenance et la fabrication des matériaux, leur circulation ainsi que celle des artefacts, soudain révélées, sont autant de données nouvelles sur les créateurs, leurs rapports avec la société, leurs quêtes de matières premières, les échanges commerciaux, l'utilisation et le statut des objets.

De ces nouveaux documents, directement issus de la conjonction harmonieuse de l'art et de la science, on ne saurait alors imaginer que les musées du XXIème siècle ne fassent pas le plus large usage en les présentant autour des objets concernés.

Conclusion

Toute œuvre pour exister et pour rayonner a besoin d'une communauté humaine qui la reçoive et la sauvegarde. Sans une sauvegarde fidèle, réfléchie, qui n'est pas un culte, l'œuvre tombe dans l'oubli. Bien plus, toute œuvre n'existe que dans un dialogue avec celui qui peut - qui désire - la recevoir, sans ce dialogue, l'œuvre tombe en déséchère.

Dans le musée, comment rendre sensiblement, émotionnellement et intellectuellement éloquente cette présence "muette" de l'objet ? Comment marier harmonieusement le Voir et le Savoir pour qu'ils progressent ensemble ?

Dans une culture et une éducation qui, en Occident, ont surdéveloppé la démarche intellectuelle, on n'insistera jamais assez sur l'importance de l'approche sensorielle que privilégie au musée la fréquentation des objets. Véritable aventure que cette démarche, puisque c'est par elle que peuvent s'éveiller en cascade les échos et les références sensibles,
affectives et mémorielles qui sont la première mobilisation de l’imaginaire (on pense évidemment à Proust). Nous avons tous une expérience personnelle dans ce domaine, tant il est vrai que dans notre rencontre avec les objets, il s’agit avant tout d’une rencontre avec nous-mêmes.

Alors si la muséologie peut emprunter à la science son approche descriptive, ne peut-elle emprunter à la poésie une approche globalisante ? Celle-ci procède en effet d’une certaine condensation du langage, qu’il soit littéraire ou plastique. Il n’est que de relire Gaston Bachelard : la conscience poétique est une conscience “imageante”.

Finalement ces œuvres d’art, ces objets, ces documents, du passé ou du présent, s’offrent à nous sur fond de néant : ce qui reste sous nos yeux est une ruine, et qui porte témoignage d’une ruine en même temps que d’un édifice qui n’est plus. Et pourtant “les hommes ne diffèrent, et même n’existent, que par leurs œuvres. Comme la statue de bois qui accoucherait d’un arbre, elles seules apportent l’évidence qu’au cours des temps, parmi les hommes, quelque chose s’est réellement passé” (C.Lévi-Strauss).

Est-il plus forte justification à l’existence des musées ?

Paris, avril 1994

Remarque : Le travail sur l’art préhistorique a été entrepris par Michel Menu avec Jean Clottes, conservateur général du patrimoine, et Philippe Walter du Laboratoire de recherche des musées de France.
Object-document?

or

Seeing and Knowing

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Abstract - Such an ambiguous question should drive us towards helpful etymology: "Object: that which is in front of us". "Document: that which helps to teach: proof, testimony."

Does the object only stand still and mute in front of us, or has it - as a document - something to tell? Is it "readable"?

The object - artefact - has to be examined in two different positions: in its genuine environment, and inside the museum. In between both, its passage from that real world to that artificial world changes its value, its meaning, its status and sometimes its shape. All that happens through a formal - museal - ritual. The artefact then belongs to a world of communication - between people, between past and present, between distant spaces -. It becomes a proof, bears testimony of something that exists or has existed, and which is a trace. Dealing with heritage is to take care of those traces. Whatever be the artefact (ethnographical, artistical, etc.) its appearance and meaning may be gazed at, enjoyed, deciphered through the interplay of senses, feelings and intellect. Only such a global approach will account of its plenitude even though we shall never penetrate the mystery of artistical creation.

But there is today a further knowledge which now can be provided thanks to the advance of material sciences (physics and chemistry) and analysis techniques: examples taken from the study of paleolithic art show here the fantastic benefit History can take from that multidisciplinary approach even for a civilisation which did not leave any written "document".

All that should change the face of the 3rd millenary's museums.
A WORK OF ART IN AN ART MUSEUM - AN OBJECT OR A DOCUMENT?

Päivi-Marjut Raippalina

My approach to the symposium theme "Object - Document" is that of a small, Nordic country with quite a short history of independence and national culture. My country is also a country of small museums, but still with the problems equal to those of bigger countries with bigger museums. As my professional context is that of an art museum, my contribution will also be art museum orientated, yet I hope that some of my ideas could also be applicable to the "museum world" in general.

An institutional approach

Every thing entering a museum will become an object as soon as it will be accepted into a museum collection or displayed within museum context. While being accepted the thing will be conferred the status of museum object by those with special qualification and authorization within profession. The lines above sounds like the institutional theory of art by George Dickie, which means an essential core of the passionate discussion around the art institution or art world system in the field of philosophy and sociology of art. This discussion and theorization, published in several volumes since the sixties, is mostly unknown to our museum people, or at least it has been ignored even by those working in art museums. The same has happened with a recent (1990) book, "On The Museum Ruins", by Douglas Crimp, which was mainly addressed to art museums. After a short period of irritated discussion, the basic problems raised up by Crimp were forgotten without any further need for professional re-evaluation.

The starting point of Dickie is to define a work of art, which in the classificatory sense is 1) an artifact (like most museum objects are), 2) a set of aspects of which has had conferred upon it the status of candidate for appreciation by some person or persons acting on behalf of a certain social institution (the artworld). Although there has been a lot of arguing around the institutional theory of art by Dickie, which owes a lot to the ideas of Arthur C. Danto, the direction for the analyses of the art object, he has shown, is indisputable. A thing, a work of art, as an art museum object can only be fully conceived wit-
Dickie's point was, as well as that of Danto's a few years before him, how a thing, an object, for example a ready-made by Marcel Duchamp (Fountain 1917) or Picasso's bluepainted tie turns into a work of art, how it will be conferred the status of an art object, which means becoming an object for appreciation and evaluation according to the complex and sometimes even irrational laws of the art world. And I would like to claim that this is the world that also art museums make an essential part of.

In the search of the context

Museology has often ignored, or at least excluded, art museums, mostly because of "the artness" or aura (Theodor Adorno) of an art (museum) object. This is why I would like to concentrate on art museums and I would even like to say that in fact other museums could try to learn something from art museums, at least what is written about them in terms of art institution. I'm afraid that art museums are not the only museums guilty of misuses (Tomislav Sola) in the field of heritage action. This is why I will insist that every thing (be it functional or not, aesthetic or not) when musealized, will rather be an object of institutional appreciation than a true document of human life. If the true context of an art museum could be considered as the art world, could it be wrong to claim that the true context of any other museum is that of the "museum world". This matter of contextualization is the one, which makes the difference between an object and a document.

Maybe a work of art is already an object even outside the museum institution. This objectness is related to the fact that any product by a person who deserves to be named as an artist, can be conceived as a work of art only within a certain framework, that of the art world. Arthur C. Danto defines this context as an involvement in a special atmosphere, as an acquaintance with history and a certain theory of art. A German sociologist Peter Bürger uses the term autonomy to express his concept of the context of art in western society. This autonomy, 'objectness' or even 'fuctionlessness' of art was made possible only after the break of modern society at the end of the eighteenth century, when the fields and value systems of the truth, beauty and the ethics were separated from each other. At the latest this happened in the field of heritage action along with the birth of modern museum system. When art museums are concerned the same could be told by using the concepts of modern art and the ideology of art for art's sake (l'art pour l'art). Since the times of Edouard Manet art has been autonomous and produced for museums (Douglas Crimp). Since those days a work of art could only be an institutional object without direct relationship to a receiver. The realm of art was excluded from daily life and separated into the field of expertise (Bourdieu, Habermas). How on earth could we claim a work of art in a museum to be a document, or if it is considered to be one, what will it tell us about reality, the "lifeworld" ("Lebenswelt") in the sense given by Jürgen Habermas?
An object or a document - blood, sweat and tears

After this there is another question arising. Is there any other museum object free from this kind of miscontextualization, although it had been a true part of human daily life. In Sweden there has been going on for some time a documentation project of current life (SAMDOK, Samtidsdokumentation). It was created to fill the gaps and balance the distortions within collections of cultural historical museums, because it was found out, by analyzing the existing collections, that a museum object was at least fifty years old and documented life of the upper social classes. We all know that blood, sweat and tears are excluded from the museum collections and exhibitions. The documental level of museum objects and collections provides us with a partial thruth, it is a distorted document so to speak, even outside art museums.

But how to make it any better? To start with, we could try once again - to get rid of the stubborn object belief of the profession. Art museums could be in the vanguard of the new approach, at least as far as contemporary art and culture are concerned. We have to face the fact that a great part of contemporary art is not supposed to be objects, rather it is processes, flows of interactive ideas and actions. In a way we have returned to the beginning. Art is ready to be part of society and community, but are we?

An object can be transformed to a document by re-evaluating museum activities. At first, there are collections and acquisitions that should undergo a thorough analysis. As my specialization stays within an art museum, I have to discuss art collections. At first I have to question myself and my colleagues, what our collections are documenting about. Museums can claim justification for their choices by hiding behind their expertise. Still it remains questionable if the choices are relevant in the context of the total heritage, let it even be art. Anyhow, a collection is able be a document, a document of private and personal devotion to art. This can only be the case, when private collections are concerned. They can be considered as documents, and they can be exhibited as true documents without strains of so called objectivity which is implicitly involved in the public collecting. Museums haven’t got the right to create art or cultural history. A work of art or a collection without previous provenience is not a document and if used as a document it is only able to verify itself and respective institution as a part of the art world system.

I would like to encourage (art)museums to start the real documentation, by using for example advanced data technology to preserve and communicate our multicultural heritage. Would it be too provocative to say that to acquire should stay only as a hobby of private art enthusiasts? Museum acquisitions can only be done in order to document the many expressions of the visual world, not to establish one’s personal taste for art in the name
of representational objectivity. Instead museums could encourage private collecting and public acquisitions (outside the museum establishment) to "decorate" and to "fill" public buildings and spaces with (contemporary) art, so that he or she could face art along his/her daily life and activities, not in The Temples of Art. Museums may have their collections, but they should be more responsible for their true capacity to act as the collective memory of the society.

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Literature:

fifth printing, 1989 Minneapolis.
Résumé

OBJET D’ART COMME OBJET MUSÉE - OBJET OU DOCUMENT ?

L’aspect institutionnel

N’importe quelle chose devient un objet lorsqu’elle est faite un morceau d’une collection de musée ou elle est exposée dans un contexte de musée. Dans le processus de changement il s’agit de la définition d’une chose dans un certain système de référence, qui peut être comparé par exemple avec la théorie d’art institutionnalisée par Georg Dickie et la définition d’un oeuvre d’art y incluse: du point de vue de classification un oeuvre d’art est un artefacte (tout comme un objet de musée), auquel une ou plusieurs personnes à l’intérieur d’un système sociale particulier, le monde artistique, ont accordé une position d’appréciation éventuelle, grâce à ses qualités particulières.

Maintenant on doit se poser la question si la muséalisation d’un objet peut être comparée avec l’institutionnalisation de l’art. Je voudrais prétendre que n’importe quel objet devient, dans le contexte de musée, plutôt un objet d’une évaluation institutionnelle qu’un document authentique de la vie humaine. Si les musées d’art et la définition d’art qui y a lieu ne peuvent être compris que dans le système de référence du monde artistique, pour ainsi dire, serait-il inexacte de prétendre que n’importe quel objet de musée ne puisse être décodé dans le contexte du "monde de musées"?

En cherchant le contexte

Mais est-il possible de débarasser un objet de musée du danger d’une fausse connection contextuelle? Par exemple en Suède on a étudié l’enregistrement de la culture contemporaine dans des musées de l’histoire culturelle et on a constaté qu’un objet de musée a cinquante ans en moyenne et qu’il représente de la culture de la classe privilégiée. Les musées peuvent baser leur politique d’acquisition sur l’expertise qu’ils représentent, mais malgré cela leur choix peuvent être mis en doute, s’ils sont observés comme partie d’un héritage culturel totale. Malgré tout un oeuvre d’art ou une collection d’un musée d’art peut être un document, mais cela exige de nous autres professionnels de musée une nouvelle attitude à propos des oeuvres d’art et des collections d’art privées comme objects de musée. Un oeuvre d’art comme un objet autonome peut quère documenter rien d’autre que soi-même comme partie du "monde artistique", les collections d’art collectionnées des oeuvres autonomes peuvent quère documenter rien d’autre que notre participation au "monde artistique", à notre capacité d’utiliser "la langue" et interpréter (comp. Arthur C. Danto).
De l'objet ou document

Je voudrais encourager des musées d'art à la documentation réelle et extensive, par exemple par bénéficiant de l'informatique, qui évolue tout le temps. En même temps je serais prêt à laisser la création des collections d'art "autonomes" aux personnes privées. L'acquisition d'art et l'autre activité d'enregistrement des musées doit premièrement documenter les phénomènes de la culture des beaux-arts vivants et variés, présenter des appréciations différentes et donner aussi des possibilités aux interprétations qui sont hors de l'ordinaire. Les musées peuvent, par contre, encourager des particuliers et le secteur public à acheter de l'art, pour que l'art se répandisse et grandisse partout, dans les coeurs des personnes, non dans les temples d'art!
OBJECT IN SPACE AND TIME

ANITA B SHAH

The museum is a place of memory and a place for conserving heritage. Through its collection of objects it provides reference points to its visitors. Objects are witnesses of time and space which the museum presents to its audience. This show helps the changing society to organize its contemplation of the past. An object in the (metaphysical sense) signifies a point in a long continuum of space and time in relation to man and his environment. A 'cultural' object is a product of human creativity and portrays the ideas, values, artistic ability, concepts, philosophies, style of life, in short, the civilization of man at a particular point in time and space. Every object is given certain connotations by the people who use them. An object is not a piece of matter existing by itself and is interpreted not simply for itself but in terms of what the society wants it to be. The object thus is a witness of a point in space and time and has various meanings and messages recorded in it.

Objects have historical, social, symbolic, religious, cultural and psychological messages embedded in them. When an object is selected for museum display, whether it is modern art or an old Indian sculpture, it immediately acquires through the action of being singled out certain
attributes of 'specialness' with which it is not normally invested. The act of selection implies a measure of specialness of interest or value. By investing objects with attributes which separate them from their original context, we also imply that they have a message which is of more than individual concern.

The museologist gives the object a formal status by decoding its meaning and significance. The museologist decodes the objects for the museum to portray broad social motives and ideals. The museologist strives to express through objects not merely what is, but also helps the onlookers to visualize what it might be ... the ambition, hopes and struggles of humanity. The aim is to use objects which are symbols of a vision to convey a message of broad human significance by arousing and capturing the audience's interest by ensuring conditions for the best possible understanding and reading of them.

Objects must be viewed from a holistic point of view of time, space, culture and the people who used it, in order to gain a wider perspective of it, so as to increase the visitors' appreciation and understanding. An object should be effectively developed by antecedent research and conservation. The value of the object lies not only in its monetary value but also in the knowledge and information built up about it which underpins its value to the community. The museologist must therefore decode objects
with a critical, informed and objective view, documenting through them issues of environment and social relevance so as to make them more understandable and relevant to the people of present and future.

The museologist strives to bridge the gap between the object and the museum visitors. The object is a narrative record of the aspirations, values, attitudes and emotions of the community. In the Indian context, let us take a popular museum object 'Natraj'. What does it signify? According to old scriptures as Natraj is the image of the dancing Shiva, king of dance, conceived by the master sculptor Sthapathi as early as the 9th century. This image has reigned supreme in Indian civilization from Chola times, to the present day as the epitome of beauty and symbol of mysticism. The Natraj depicts the Ananda Tandavam - dance of bliss, it represents the eternal cycle of creation, preservation and destruction. It also signifies 'Cosmic Balance' making it the finest example of a concept which merges metaphysics & physics, art and science. It portrays a tradition in which a dancing deity has inspired philosophy and mystic symbolism as well as some of the finest poetry. Natraj is carved in wood and stone, cast in bronze and various metals & in various mediums including paintings by nameless artists and craftsmen, yet their art continues to live in their works amazing the beholder.
When kept in a museum the "Natraj" becomes a museum object removed from its original context. But it does not lose its capacity to convey the messages inherent in it to the visitor. Each visitor will interact to it in his or her own way. He will look at it from his own perspective bringing into the museum experience a whole lot of life time experiences. An artist may look at it from an aesthetic point of view, a philosopher may search for the underlying mystic symbolism given to its form, whereas a simple rural visitor may be inspired with devotion and religious sentiments by it. Thus the "Natraj" conveys different messages to different people. Similarly, different objects convey different messages to various people depending on their interest, background and their frame of reference. The visitor is an individual molded by his heredity and environment and influenced by the space and time in which he lives.

Museology denotes the method by which the museum establishes a dialogue between the object and the visitor. Museology can guide the museum on how to use these objects to convey the professed meanings that are inherent in the object. Museums that put strong emphasis on museological theories can be recognized by the quality of their exhibitions. Museology has become more and more interdisciplinary in its approach and focus on objects has also considerably broadened. Its recognition of the importance of social sciences as windows onto culture and
human behavior as important aspects has impelled it to address the topic of object more sensitively. Museology should eventually focus on how to empower the objects to speak. The crux of museum communication lies in bridging the gap between the object and the public. The ultimate purpose of any museum is to educate, entertain and enlighten the visitors through the medium of objects.

The museum's various policies are based on the formal status it gives to its objects. The acquisition and conservation policies of a museum are closely related to the formal status granted to the object by it. The museum's goal is to deal with the dynamic and the changing, rather than the exact definitive situation. Through objects the museum acquires the material part of culture of a people's life styles at a particular point in time. What the museum collects also reflects the cultural trends of the society to which it belongs and caters. The museum professionals must therefore view museum objects with a critical, informed and objective view, so as to convey through them issues of environment and social relevance to the present generation, keeping in view their perception of how relevant it is in the context of their lives. Thus museums must focus on objects as sources and mediums of communication for the benefit and knowledge of current and future generations.
Thème: Objets et documents en Afrique

Abdoulaye Sylla

I Introduction

Support privilégié de l’objet, sinon son prolongement, le document joue un rôle déterminant dans la diffusion des informations relatives à l’objet.

Néanmoins, souvent la ligne de démarcation est difficile, sinon impossible à établir, car le document lui-même est un objet spirituellement et matériellement conceptualisé par les artisans de nos pays considérés comme dépourvus d’écriture standardisée.

II Réalités africaines

Terre de rencontre par excellence, sinon de brassage de civilisations, où la faculté d’accorder les différences a toujours constitué le maître mot, l’Afrique, aujourd’hui à la croisée des chemins, se débat dans d’énormes difficultés.

"Terra incognita" d’après les chroniqueurs d’avant le XXe siècle, l’Afrique s’est progressivement présentée aux autres continents, avec ses propres valeurs traditionnelles, anéanties souvent par l’incompréhension et l’intolérance de certains, ou conservées par d’autres, afin de la dévêtir de sa personnalité.

Pour certains ethnographes occidentaux, les sociétés Africaines sont des "sociétés de questions, mais pas de réponses" où l’être humain nait, grandit et meurt dans un infantilisme primaire.

De nos jours, les données ont véritablement changé, nous passons d’un subjectivisme dicté par les rancœurs accumulées par les élites africains des premières années d’indépendance, à un objectivisme des réalités actuelles.

L’Afrique se reveille péniblement, après quelques années de rêves cauchemardesques, pour entrevoir les lueurs d’un nouveau monde.

Donc, à travers ces quelques lignes, nous allons tenter d’aller à l’école africaine pour une certaine maîtrise du sujet qui nous concerne.

III Afrique traditionnelle ancienne

Dans l’univers multiforme et multidimensionnel de l’Afrique traditionnelle, nous avons pu déceler trois phases essentielles:

1° l’entrée de la vie, par la naissance;
2°) la concrétisation de la vie, par le mariage;
3°) la sortie de la vie, par la mort.

1. Naissance et baptême

Autrefois, la naissance était regie par des règles strictes, que tous les villageois étaient obligés de respecter.

Par exemple, la naissance des jumeaux revêtait un caractère particulier. Pour ces êtres exceptionnels, des rites spéciaux étaient organisés.

Chez les bamananw du Mali, des représentations matérielles leur étaient dédiées, en vue de pérenniser leur âme.
Dans la plupart des cas, certains signes cabalistiques ou idéographiques expressément tracés sur les parois des grottes, les cases, les masques et les statuettes, rappelaient à l’ordre, les villageois.

Ces formes de transmission, apprises à tous, ne peuvent elles pas être assimilées à l’écriture conventionnelle universelle?

En tout cas, il est indéniable que les traditions orales constituent une force capitale dans les relations interpersonnelles en Afrique.

L’objet, source d’événements majeurs, recèle en lui des messages que seuls peuvent décoder les initiés. Ne ditons pas "plus un homme possède de signes, plus il est savant". La connaissance des éléments de la création est faite non seulement de la connaissance du signe, mais des éléments qui le constituent".

Malheureusement, de nos jours, les événements ont négativement évolué, transformant radicalement les concepts anciens, les submergeant souvent, sans proposer de nouveaux.

Les traditions anciennes s’épuisent, faisant apparaître avec regret des imbrications maladroites.

Les fondements de nos connaissances anciennes, véhiculées par des signes distinctifs d’organisation de nos sociétés traditionnelles, subissent des effets dévastateurs.

Donc, il est à se demander, où va l’Afrique?

2. L’enfance traditionnelle africaine

La rue, cette grande et incommensurable entité géographique, sert de lieu d’apprentissage et de distraction de l’enfant dans le milieu traditionnel.

C’est dans ce monde que se forment, sous la surveillance des ainés, tous les jeunes du village. Etre considéré par les anciens comme de l’"argile", l’enfant était obligé de se conformer aux règles regissant la société. Tout en lui doit transparaître le "chacun pour tous, tous pour chacun".

Ainsi projeté dans la vie, après l’éducation parentale, au service de tous, il est astreint à une organisation sociétale précise, à savoir: respect des anciens, des rites et des règles conformes à la vie communautaire.

Glanant par ci par là certains aspects saillants de la vie, L’enfant en compagnie de son groupe d’âge, s’imprègne des réalités quotidiennes.

A cet âge, vu la précarité de la transmission, le degré d’assimilation n’est pas une règle stricte.

3. Initiation traditionnelle

Dans certains milieux africains, la formation est formalisée à partir d’un âge précis.
Une fois cet âge acquis , par exemple, chez les bamananaw du Mali, avant la circoncision, tous les enfants sont regroupés dans une première association dénommée ntomoton.

Dans cette association enfantine, des règles strictes sont prescrites, à savoir le renforcement des liens entre eux, et le regroupement autour d’un idéal commun.

Les regroupements sont d’ordinaire organisés une fois par an, au cours desquels, les officiants, sous la supervision de leurs ainés, sont confrontés à des rites de passage. En ces circonstances, nous assistons à plusieurs manifestations, au cours desquelles chaque enfant fait la démonstration de ses connaissances. Pour couronner le tout, les sacrifices sont offerts aux carrefours, aux autels et aux grands arbres pour lutter contre le mauvais sort.
Les masques, portés lors des cérémonies rituelles, se signalant par des cornes et des figurations animales, ont des significations particulières, que seuls peuvent décoder les initiés.

4. Circoncision excision

Phase cruciale de la vie africaine, la circoncision ou l’excision, permet d’aguerir le/la postulant/e, face aux dures réalités de l’existence.

Du début de la retraite, hors du village, jusqu’à la sortie de la case sacrée, le jeune est astreint à des corvées très pénibles, dirigées par un responsable désigné par les grands initiés.

De telles retraites conventionnelles, permettent de raffermir définitivement les liens entre tous les officiants.

Dans ce monde, aux rugueurs extrêmes, des séances spéciales ponctuées de chansons symboliques sont organisées à l’intention de tous les néophytes.

C’est au cours de la circoncision, que les dogon procèdent à l’initiation des jeunes, par l’entremise des anciens idéogrammes et au renouvellement d’autres sur l’auvent de la grotte.
Chez les Touaregs du Sahara, le tifinagh, cette écriture très ancienne, à codage précis, dont la targuia (femme tamacheck) a la maîtrise, est enseigné aux jeunes.

L'excision, pratique réservée aux jeunes filles, de nos jours condamnée par la médecine moderne, perd du terrain, d'où la coupure avec un cordon ombilical traditionnel.

5. Société initiatique conventionnelle

Une fois l'étape de la circoncision/excision, franchie, le nouvel être humain se voit offrir toute une panoplie d'activités. S'étant ainsi dévêtu de sa forme ancienne, pour adopter une nouvelle enveloppe, il/elle continue allègrement sa vie.

Ainsi nanti d'une parcelle de confiance, il amorce dès lors, le sentier de la connaissance réelle.

L'initiation, quoi qu'on en dise, est sans conteste la grande école africaine, où tout est enseigné aux jeunes.

Regroupés hors du village, avec des nouveaux prénoms, portant exclusivement un cache sexe sous le torse nu, le nouvel homme s'évertue, sous la surveillance des ainés, à mieux connaître la nature. De la connaissance des arbres utiles, aux cris des animaux et des oiseaux, tout leur était interprété.

Durant toute la durée de la retraite des initiés, il est formellement interdit aux non initiés de les approcher.

Au cours de cette phase importante d'apprentissage des dures réalités de la vie, les grands initiés leur enseignent le déchiffrement de certains signes conventionnels.

6. Mariage traditionnel

Passage obligé pour tout homme qui se respecte, le mariage a toujours constitué et constitue une étape importante dans l'affermissement de la vie.

Dans certains milieux traditionnels, le mariage est marqué par plusieurs solennités, dont la plus signifiante reste sans conteste la reclusion nuptiale.

Durant ces quelques jours de retraite, les conjoints apprennent discrètement à mieux se connaître, sous la surveillance expresse d'une dame de compagnie. Celle-ci a pour rôle d'apprendre à la nouvelle mariée, la maîtrise de l'équilibre familial.

Dans certaines sociétés africaines, les filles ou femmes de même âge se concertent pour aller badigeonner à l'aide de kaolin et de bouse de vache, l'intérieur et l'extérieur de la case des nouveaux mariés.

En cette circonstance, les tracés de signes idéographiques sont confiés aux femmes âgées.

7. Vieillesse

Etre âgé dans la vie traditionnelle est une véritable chance que souhaitent tous. C'est à ce groupe d'âge que sont confiées les grandes décisions du village.

Chef de village, de culte, de famille, le dernier mot ou la dernière décision lui revient, au cours de toutes les réunions engageant la responsabilité de la communauté.

L'âge, leur ayant conféré une assise quasi certaine, il est toujours fait appel à leurs compétences.
Chez les dogon par exemple, les communications étaient établies entre les villages à travers l'interprétation de bâtonnets que s'envoyaient les différents chefs. Une fois en possession de ce moyen de communication, le destinataire comprenait automatiquement le contenu du message.

8. **Mort en Afrique traditionnelle**

La philosophie africaine nous enseigne que "si on accepte de venir, un jour en ce monde, on est obligé un jour de s'en retourner dans l'au-delà".

D'où l'acceptation de la vie dans la mort, et de la mort dans la vie.

Ainsi donc, les rites mortuaires ou funéraires ont toujours constitué des événements extrêmement importants.

Dans la plupart des cas, lorsqu'une personne meurt, ce sont les pleurs et les hurlements des femmes qui installent une atmosphère lugubre dans le village. Une fois l'enterrement accompli, et au-delà de la tristesse que la séparation physique engendre, des manifestations sont organisées, auréolées de sacrifices, pour faciliter la transmission des âmes auprès de celles des ancêtres.

L'annonce de la mort est d'ordinaire faite au grand public, par l'entremise des coups de fusil et des sons codés de tambours.

Chez les Senufo que se partage la Côte d'Ivoire, le Burkina Faso et le Mali, le mort est d'ordinaire exposé sur un lit mortuaire, et à chaque enfant est confiée la tâche de le couvrir de sa couverture comme présent.

Dans la mort, certaines couleurs primordiales sont utilisées, c'est à dire le noir et le blanc. Le noir symbolise la mort, la profondeur de l'au-delà, son côté insondable. Le blanc, c'est la vie, la pureté de l'âme, le caractère limpide de l'âme. Une telle exhibition rituelle révèle aux vivants le rôle qui leur est dévolu dans l'existence.

En Afrique traditionnelle, certains interdits sont imposés. Par exemple, les albinos, les bossus, les femmes stériles, les femmes mortes par suite d'accouchement sont enterrées en des lieux spéciaux. Ces endroits se caractérisent par leur contexture particulière.

L'apparition des masques et statuettes commémore le rôle joué par le défunt dans son existence terrestre.

Par exemple, chez les Sénoufo, les croyances veulent qu'une canne soit rémise au défunt, qui se déplace de sa maison au cimetière. Pour effacer les traces de ses pas impurs, des danses masquées sont organisées pour conjurer le mauvais sort.
Conclusion

De tels exemples, où la combinaison de l'objet et du document se fait d'une manière informelle, n'est-il pas temps de redynamiser les signes conventionnels africains?

Certes, de telles démarches faciliteront l'alphabetisation fonctionnelle, gage d'un développement harmonieux, mais vont-elles dans le sens des intérêts des maîtres de ce monde?

Donc, l'Afrique, à la croisée des chemins, où certains des documents privilégiés ont été détruits, ou métamorphosés au gré des souhaits de l'extérieur, aussi bien que de certaines contraintes internes, vit avec un certain complexe forgé par les vicissitudes de la vie.

Objet ou document, l'ambivalence existera toujours en Afrique, tant que certaines ambigüités ne sont pas levées.

Dans ce sens, ces livres ouverts que sont les musées, constituent une grande chance pour l'Afrique, en vue de l'éveil des consciences.

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SUMMARY

In the classic museum in Europa, object is important, because in the communication with the general public, he supports all the ideas, but document in this continent, where the majority of the people is educated can be necessary.

But in Africa, sometimes in the Museum; it's by force to privileged the object, because the majority of our public is illiterate.

About this idea, it's so necessary to know that in our traditional organisation, like circumcision or initiation, the old generation learn to the young people some calligraphic system.

It's why, I want to explain that in traditional Africa, we hase our proper writing. In this way, it will be very good to study that system, and introduce it in the Museum organisation.

In the traditional Africa, object and document have the same aspect.

Abdoulaye SYLLA
Musée National du Mali
BAMAKO
Manfred Tripps:

TOO MUCH TO READ, TOO LITTLE TO SEE - EXHIBITION TECHNIQUES AND THE 2-D SYNDROME: A Contribution to Current Discussions about "Museology and Museums"

In a world which, created and sustained by modern information technology, is becoming increasingly dependent on second-hand experience, i.e. experience which has been filtered by the information and communication media, the museum is, in my opinion, seriously threatened by the influence of political interests as a result of its employment of the new media to aid the didactic presentation of permanent and temporary exhibitions. This danger presents itself in the form of two-dimensional superficiality and the prevalent 2-D syndrome and derives from a questionable alliance between didactics and design.

Encouraged by the success in the foregoing decade of the great historical exhibitions like "The Age of the Staufers" in Stuttgart in 1977, "Tendencies of the Twenties" in Berlin in 1978, the twenties exhibition in Munich in 1980, the Prussian exhibition in Berlin in 1981, "The City" in Brunswick and indeed the 1986 exhibitions, "Industry and Life in Nuremberg" or "Frederick II" in Berlin etc., political experts in culture and education have been recently directing their attention increasingly to the museum and its medium, the "exhibition". As a consequence of this, they are now founding institutions with which they intend to pursue "Historical Politics". These institutions resemble museums but call themselves, somewhat self-depreciatingly and helplessly, "Houses". Lacking their own exhibits and thus without a self-defined function they are regarded by politicians "as centres for providing meaning and identity that are both effective and easy to look after". Planned as "Houses of History" [in Bavaria and Baden-Württemberg, for example] or even of "German History" [Bonn], this kind of "weed" in the museum landscape is intended, on the basis of the 2-D principle [i.e. didactics and design], to produce what exhibitions and museums are only able to achieve with the greatest
effort and by employing the full range of their art-historical, cultural-historical and technical-historical collections.

There is no doubt that exhibitions and museums have provided material for reflection on history, technology and the environment etc. and given such reflections their direction. By means of the visual presentation of original exhibits they have succeeded in involving a wider public in current discussions on such subjects as new historical conceptions and historical interpretations, new perceptions and interpretations of traditional and modern fine art.

The important historical and art-historical exhibitions of the last decade have proven that if, in accordance with the requirements of educational entertainment and entertaining education, original exhibits [technical, cultural-historical objects and works of art, for example] are properly presented by means of carefully employed media, then serious discussion of significant problems, areas and phases of German and European history and art history, for instance, is possible. In connection with the history of art, this ranges from the great Nuremberg Dürer exhibition via the Darmstadt "Jugendstil" exhibition, "Nancy 1900" [Munich], "J.C. Schlaun" [Münster], "Dream and Reality" [Vienna] to the recent Toulouse-Lautrec exhibition in Tübingen, to name but a few. Great historical exhibitions like, for example, the Türken-Louis exhibition in Karlsruhe, the Turkish exhibition in Vienna or the exhibition on the "People's Democratic Movement" in Rastatt, have provided not only on-site historical education, they have also formed the core of a general discussion which has taken place within the general public and in the mass media. They have made a contribution to overcoming a resistance to discussing historical questions which had continued for a number of decades and have helped to bring about a truly fanatical interest in history. However, all of the great historical and art-historical exhibitions of the last two decades which I mentioned as examples above did not, and therein lies the reason for their enormous success with the public, conform either museologically or technically to the 2-D principle, but on the contrary held by the principle of presenting authentic exhibits. At the same time, they rightly did not shy away
from employing staging and dramatic techniques as means of interpretation. As in the recent inter-disciplinary exhibition "The Renaissance in South-West Germany" in Heidelberg, they have each uncompromisingly constructed their presentations as explorable learning environments, not by using design techniques but by employing the spacial materials and concepts provided by architecture and stage environments in order to make the three-dimensional objects from the authentic historical and art-historical world into spacially near though historically and art-historically unfamiliar aids in the encounter with the past. In contrast to those exhibitions and museum presentations in which the few authentic exhibits are overpowered or even killed off by design and the new media, and are hardly noticed anymore by a public which is overwhelmed by the reading matter, the confrontation with authentic and original objects in the former type of museum allows those experiences which firstly, arouse the visitor's curiosity, secondly, lead him to ask questions and thirdly, provide him with new insights.

Let us turn now to the "Houses" which, as I mentioned above, have been instituted or are being planned by the politicians, and their exhibitions of "Historical Politics". First of all, it is of course, praiseworthy of a state government like that in Baden-Württemberg to try to explore new ways of encountering the past. This, it is intended, will be achieved with the founding of a "House of the History of Baden-Württemberg" in Stuttgart, which aims "by means of visual materials" to contribute to "a better understanding of the history of Baden-Württemberg", which, it appears, will be attained by means of a choice of historical didactics apparently going courageously and unconventionally beyond the mostly narrow curricular confines of history teaching in schools and colleges.

Historical-political interventions of this kind, however, can be observed in other places, as I pointed out in my introductory remarks. Thus, the "House" planned in Stuttgart places itself by dint of its declared didactic aim in the same category of institution as other foundations in Munich, Bonn and Berlin. The critic is unlikely, however, to discover any other parallels: the pro-
posed house in Berlin, which incidentally is the only one in this group to call itself a museum, is in fact a proper museum of national history, conceived as a counterpart to the Zeughaus Museum in the eastern part of the city, now a part of the GDR. To what extent this gift of the West German Chancellor to the Berliners on the occasion of the 750th anniversary of the city will really be an institution engaged in research, in building up collections and in organising exhibitions can only be reliably assessed when the museum experts have been consulted. One thing, however, is already apparent: the Berlin museum is centrally concerned with authentic, original materials. In contrast to Stuttgart, where it is intended that the 2-D principle be followed, the Berlin museum will not succumb to the 2-D syndrome and render its presentation techniques useless.

Similarly, comparisons with Munich and Bonn seem inappropriate. "The House of Bavarian History" in Munich is not a "House" in the sense defined in my introduction but rather a team or staff whose members put on temporary exhibitions on themes and subjects of contemporary relevance: "Max Emanuel", "The Wittelbachers", "The History of Industry" - all of them important historical exhibitions which have until now always aroused great public interest both within and outside Bavaria. This derives from the fact that "The House of Bavarian History" always constructs its exhibitions around original materials and authentic articles from the past which are temporarily placed at its disposal by other collections and museums. The concentration of the Munich institution on art and cultural history should be mentioned especially here.

Quite different from Munich is the "House" planned in Bonn: it is intended to present the history of Germany and thus concentrate primarily on modern history, documenting the historical genesis of the Federal Republic from the political, social and cultural points of view. Thus, not only will the political system of the Federal Republic be explained but over and above this historical insights into the changing cultural face of post-war Western Germany will be given by means of a form of documentation that consists not only of visual displays and T.V. monitors, but also makes extensive use of authentic visual materials and objects from
the 50s, 60s and 70s. For this purpose Bonn plans its own collection of objects from contemporary culture.

This, it appears from the planning conceptions, is not the intention of the "House of the History of Baden-Württemberg" in Stuttgart. Although there are indications that the staging principle and the employment of authentic exhibits will be given preference over 2-D, nevertheless, if one reads the commentaries on exhibition themes carefully and closely, then there is much talk of visual displays and texts, and very little of objects. There are proposals for lithographs and posters, maps and cartoons, video films and illuminated boards displaying statistical information. If objects are ever mentioned, then only those which can be found in every other museum of local history and culture: looms, farming implements and craftsmen's tools, carnival masks etc. It is the case here as with so many similar undertakings: the plans have been made by theorists, in this case by historians. Inter-disciplinary systems of historical information are being set up, but with a total disregard for visualisation and concretisation, because the politicians' advisers are not museum people and have no knowledge of museology.

One only needs to look at the design forms for the various themes: subject matter on the left, media on the right. The left column is full of historical maxims and precepts, full of catchwords; on the right, where the media are listed, there is much empty space. And what has been meagrely noted down sounds pathetic in its helplessness and officiousness: "Graphic designs with a uniform pattern for the individual time spans and main characteristics - to be made more specific through examples which recreate experience - population density in model form - simulation of seating arrangements in parliamentary sessions." One cannot help asking oneself whether these media or visual techniques recommended by the authors can possibly appeal to the "predominantly young people" which the planning report has in mind, and whether or not adult visitors can be offered something informative and interesting too.

Thus, serious doubts arise whether with this conception, which already at its present stage of planning puts burdensome reading
before visual enjoyment. can achieve the desired effect of being attractive. The fact that reading matter has been given priority over visual displays has structural causes: the predominance of political history, in the form of the history of the constitution and institutions, and connected with this the 2-D principle mentioned above. Michael Stürmer, one of the initiators of the ideas for the shaping and management of the Berlin museum, established very early on that political history cannot be presented in museum form. For this reason he was concerned to concentrate in the Berlin museum on a more broadly based cultural history. Stürmer, whose historical research into the concrete objects of the past has provided him with insights into the opportunities and dangers of cultural-historical exhibitions, has clearly recognised that when visualisation techniques are employed, history exhibitions resemble very much exhibitions of cultural history or the history of symbols in art and everyday reality. Political history is at a disadvantage here because it has to do with the development of ideas, decisions and decrees, in other words processes which do not reveal themselves in "authentic objects" or "museum exhibits" and cannot be preserved as "exhibits" for posterity. Accordingly, the transmission of political history must always remain somewhat colourless and meagre even in museums and exhibitions, because display objects simply do not exist. This means that the importance and significance of individual events, processes and causal connections must be established, emphasised and suggested to the visitor by means of textual presentation. This, in turn, is the reason why such presentations seem little more than collections of maxims and thus appear indoctrinating, but also the reason why exhibitions of this kind are only outdone in the school-masterish pathos of their argument by the occasional boredom created by the design. It is the 2-D syndrome which is responsible for this.

2-D: didactics and design: based upon this questionable combination, historical exhibitions in museums generally approach an aesthetic which has the attractiveness of a dental laboratory and no longer allow one to experience the fascinating strangeness and charm of authentic historical events and pictorial worlds. Didactics and design always run the danger of turning historical
presentations into modish cramming shows. However, whether this encourages interest in historical subjects and historical thinking in young or adult visitors is questionable: especially in view of the fact that such interest and thinking demands first of all that the visitors look at and interpret what they see, and that such acquisition processes cannot be replaced by design, however slick and jazzy it may be. Even if, for example, the results of the 1951 plebiscite or the 1987 census shine out in Psychedelic Saturday Night Light on a neon screen, the question of the attractiveness of the presentation forms is a very different matter: youth fashions and the aesthetic styles of design vogues quickly become outmoded. A combination of design and didactics, even a didactics of play and self-involvement as proposed in the paper of September 1986, will not attract and interest visitors in the way envisaged by the exhibitors. The reason for this lies in the fact that the technical media complex planned for the Stuttgart teaching complex, with its number games, lacks all connection to the authentic concrete world—in other words, the people who voted or were counted, the situation they were in, their feelings about and their attitudes towards such political events of the time as the census. Reality appears here merely as a collection simulated events or historical misinterpretations. In this respect the present didactic conception necessarily misses its goal.

This is exactly the point where the basic conceptual error of the Stuttgart institution seems to lie: encouraged by the successes of the great popular exhibitions of the last few decades to awaken interest in history and the acquisition of historical insights by means of modern visual aids, the people responsible have overlooked the fact that the successes of the museums and exhibitions were achieved under quite different presentation conditions, even though modern technology was employed. The effects were not achieved primarily by the use of the technical media and design techniques, but derived from the aesthetic charm and the sensual qualities of the original historical materials, the authentic transmission of historical experience through real objects, which were perceived as forming a contrast to the forms of experience offered by our modern media society. They were appre-
ciated too as contrasts to other forms of history teaching, such as the narrow form of history teaching found in schools and universities, as I mentioned above, or in the teaching halls of the “Houses of History”, with their greatly reduced didactic methodology and design forms, which as a rule sacrifice authenticity to the uniformity of experience provided by the media.

Museums should reflect on where the great successes I listed above derived from and be cautious in their employment of the new technologies in the presentation of their permanent collections and temporary exhibitions. If this is not done in museums and exhibitions, institutions whose success has always been and still is determined by the "triad of pleasure, instruction and liberation", but rather let themselves be guided with respect to the use of new technologies by the actions or planned actions of some of the "Houses", then sooner or later their presentations will be conditioned by design and limited by curricular considerations. Then, infected by the 2-D syndrome and domesticated in the truest sense of the word, each in accordance with its own particular character will dress itself up as if it were itself a "House of History". I regard it as one of the most important current tasks of museology and museums to prevent this from happening.

Notes

1 The term “Historical Politics” was coined at the recent historical congress in Trier.
3 Cf. a cabinet decision of 1st October 1984.
4 These consultations have just begun and are still in progress.
5 The criticism levelled by Henri Nannen against the plans for the Bonn "House of German History", namely that such "Museum archives or archive museums" create "frustration, satiety and boredom", can, in view of the designs for Stuttgart, only be supported and emphasised. Although compared with Stuttgart, what is being created in Bonn is an example of visual clarity and appeal.
6 The Prime Minister of the state of Baden-Württemberg recognised this very effect when at the opening of the Toulouse-Lautrec exhibition in Tübingen on 7th November 1986 he stated that exhibitions and museums with the "opportunities they offered for experiences that contrasted with those of the media society" were "indispensable".
IV

CONTRIBUTIONS FROM CHINA
Features and Values of Cultural Relics

by Ruan Jiaxin, Curator of China's Museum of Military

Cultural relics presuppose the existence, development and activity of museums; and museums are the sites where cultural relics are collected, preserved and studied as well as the places where the values of cultural relics can be realized. The two are interdependent and inseparable. The problems on which a museum worker often meditates are: What will a museum collect? How to get the most valuable collections? How to preserve and bring full play of the collections? The current seminar offers a forum for us to exchange our views. It will be very beneficial.

What is a cultural relic? Can we draw a demarcation line between a cultural relic and other things or give a scientific definition to this concept? This is a theoretical question being discussed for a long time in museology as well as a practical problem. I think we can understand a cultural relic either in a broad sense or in a narrow sense.

Broadly speaking, a cultural relic may be any object created by human beings in the social development or in the cause of recognizing and reforming the natural world, which has played a certain role in actual life and in return is a proof of the progress. In other words, except the materials in wildness or in globe unattatched by mankind, a cultural relic may be any thing which is constituted by man or has connection with human beings and the social development. A natural thing, once discovered, collected and studied by human beings, can also become a cultural relic. In terms of theory, the scope of cultural relics is limitless, it is not confined to the museum collections.

If so, aren't there cultural relics everywhere? Isn't the earth itself a big museum? In the long history, there are in deed great many man-made things which have witnessed the social development centred on human beings, each thing has its own significance in the research of mankind and natural world progress. Furthermore, people are initiating new things or cultural relics each day. So it is impossible to set the limits of variety, quantity, quality and time for cultural relics, stating which can be cultural relics and which can not be.

However, there is no need to worry. Actually, all the man-made things have been appraised and selected in the course of utilization and circulation. Some have been discarded and some replaced. Only a small part can be preserved and just a few of this small part can be museum collections. The task of a museum worker is to find the cream of these cultural relics, collect them, study them and exhibit them to the public.

Therefore, narrowly speaking or in a more accurate sense, a cultural relic is a historical or cultural relic with typical significance and important values (including historical value, scientific value and artistic value) and is dubbed as "cream" or "specimen" among the achievements in people's social activity, scientific research, production and artistic creation. In fact, people usually understand the concept of cultural relic in this narrow sense which refers mainly to museum collections.

In a narrow sense, cultural relics also cover a wide range and are in great variety. Most precious cultural relics comprise the ruins of living places of man's remote ancestors; the huge edifices in China, Egypt, Greece and the Roman Empire; paintings, sculptures and handicrafts in artistic museums; unearthed objects in history museums; fossils and specimens of animals and plants in natural history museums; meters and instruments in science and technology museums; rockets, airships and moon-mounting capsules in modern aerospace museums, and etc. Moreover, with the social development and the people's growing recognition of historical remains, the variety and quantity of cultural relics will augment. Various special museums and memorial halls have appeared, such as money museum, stamp museum, tea museum, silk museum, coal museum and even chopstick museum. As a result, the museum collections will have a broader range.

Besides, there are hundreds of thousands of private collectors in China and in the world. Their collections are more manifold and amazing. Many of them eventually contribute their collections to museums or set
up private museums. This tendency shows that the collection and preservation of cultural relics become more socialized. The more civilized and developed a society is, the more attention will it pay to cultural relics.

Cultural relics, which is considered as a common property of human beings, will be accumulated and passed on from generation to generation, reflecting the continuity, variety and regularity in the development of man-centred society and natural world. The reason why I emphasized "man-centred" is because all objects or cultural relics do generate and exist according to the need of man and are created by man.

Each cultural relic at first is a must of life and existence. So cultural relics and objects have many common characteristics. They must be materials; they must be created and collected by human beings; they must be embodiments of man's labour and inseparable from the actual life and social development. When an object is sublimed up to a cultural relic. It does not lose the common characteristics, but is added a mystical and sacred colour and endowed with some new features: (1) An ordinary object is mainly for practical use, but a cultural relic is used for the purposes of research, education and appreciation. (2) An ordinary object can be reproduced in mass and repeatedly in accord with the original shape, the reproduction does not affect the object's value; a cultural relic must strictly remain its initial shape and cannot be reproduced. No matter how similar is a replica to the original one, it can not be a cultural relic. (3) An ordinary object is a merchandise which can be traded in market, but a cultural relic belongs to museum collections out of the circulative range of common goods. The trade of a cultural relic is under strict control or is forbidden. So we can say that a cultural relic comes from objects but not all the objects can become cultural relics.

The same is the relationship between cultural relics and documents. In terms of research, all cultural relics (specimens) are documents. Because a cultural relic is also a carrier of knowledge, containing information of history, technology, humanity and nature. It is an objective substance reflecting people's scientific research activities. But cultural relics are special documents in museums, unlike the common documents in libraries and archives. Compared with written documents and audio-visual documents, cultural relics are more vivid, more concrete and more audio-visual. The common documents can be the indirect or second-hand research accomplishments, but cultural relics must be the direct and first-hand research objects. That is why a cultural relic possesses a special and more authoritative documental value (the scientific value of a cultural relic usually means its documental value), incomparable by other ordinary documents. Therefore, we can say that cultural relics are documents, but not all the documents can become cultural relics.

In what condition can a material (including specimens and documents) be a cultural relic? In short, only by the time when the value of this certain material has been discovered, proved and accepted by the public, can this material avert into a cultural relic. What factors can sublimine a material up to a cultural relic and decide its value? Such factors are as follows: (1) the material created first among the similar articles or with a typical significance; (2) the material witnesses a great historical event; (3) the material occupies an important place in science and arts; (4) the material has a close connection with an extraordinary historical event or a prominent historic figure; (5) the material with a magic colour in its formation and circulation; (6) the material with a long history; and (7) the material rare in quantity. A cultural relic may not contain all of these factors, but the more factors it possesses or more especially outstanding in one factor, the higher its value will be.

A cultural relic may have intensive value and extensive value. The intensive value is the intrinsic value of a cultural relic; while the extensive value is new value added to the cultural relic during the course of circulation.

Take a painting of an ancient Chinese artist for an example. The drawing itself is a rare treasure. If it was collected by the imperial palace and if an emperor wrote down a poem, signed his name and affixed his seal while he was appreciating the painting, a new value would be added to the original picture. If it embodied poems, signatures or seals of more than one emperor, the painting would have a much higher value.

Here is the second example. When the previous United States President Richard Nixon visited Beijing in 1972, He presented a rock from the moon to Chairman Mao Zedong. The moon rock, a space rock sample, has an intrinsic value for scientific research, such as the formation of the moon, its surface environment, its similarities and differences when compared with the earth. Furthermore, the rock was collected by the first American who mounted the moon, it is a proof of the earthmen's travel in the space and the direct contact with the moon. So the rock has an unprecedented significance in the astronautics and scientific histories and in the relationship between human beings and other stars. At the same time, the rock also reminds us the breakthrough of the Sino-US relationship after years of cold and hot wars, the historical meeting of the two world statesmen Mao Zedong and Richard Nixon. The origin of the rock and its circulation have attached astronautics and international political values to its inborn scientific value, making it an important rock sample with the highest "gold content" in the world.

Another example is the two pens used by the heads of the Chinese and British governments when they signed the Hong Kong joint statement. The pens are very common and can not become cultural relics in ordinary
conditions if not due to such an accidental and historical chance. Through these pens, the signatures of the premiers from the two countries have been left for ever on the solemn document with profound historic significance. This does not only enable them to enter the palace of cultural relics, but also become a treasure in it.

Such examples are too numerous to mention one by one.

The extensive value of a cultural relic often surpasses the intensive value, making it more rare and sacred. A museum worker shall pay special attention to the collection of such objects.

Cultural relics are of a rich variety and all-embracing. The above-mentioned are the general characters of cultural relics. In fact, a kind or even a piece of cultural relic has its own special feature and value. In addition, although the value of a cultural relic is objective reality, people may have different understanding of the cultural relic and its value because they have separated experience, ideology and sense of value. But that is a question in another category, out of the scope we are discussing now.

In brief, cultural relics are the historical cream, which demonstrate the glorious creative power, record the development of the mankind society and natural world, possess long-lasting charm and vitality. The social responsibilities of a museum worker is to collect and preserve cultural relics, carry out their values, let the people know the past, broaden their knowledge, enrich their imagination, stimulate and encourage them to create a more beautiful future while they study and appreciate the cultural relics. This shall also be the active role of a museum in the modern society.

Let us pursuit the target together.

Wish this seminar a complete success!

Thanks.
Paper for the 1994 annual meeting of ICOFOM

Cultural Relic and Material

by Shen Qinglin, Curator of the Museum of Chinese Revolution

On the occasion of the Annual Meeting of International Committee for Museology, I am delighted that the members of the Chinese museum circles have such a chance to discuss the issue of museology with their counterparts from international museum world. I wish the meeting success and all of you present here today happy in Beijing.

The topic of my speech today is "Cultural Relic and Material." It seems to be a common issue since they are just what museums preserve. We almost have dealings with them every day. If we take them into careful consideration, however, we would find that we are not fully aware of the meaning of the two concepts which remains to be further expounded.

The definition of Cultural Relics given by the Volume of Cultural Relics and Museums, China's Encyclopaedia goes like this: "The cultural relics refer to those historical objects as well as sites survived during the process of historical development of mankind." In light of the nature of cultural relics and the situation of China's preservation of them, the word of cultural relic is regarded in modern China as the overall term of all valuable historical heritage left behind in the course of social and historical development of Mankind, created by and related with human beings.

Now let us discuss the nature of cultural relics.

The first nature of cultural relics is that "the cultural relics are valuable material remains." The definition is based on two conditions. One is that cultural relics are valuable things. The other is that they are historical remains. The two parts complement each other and are mutually casual. Only those valuable things could be left and what has been survived are undoubtedly valuable. Since all the material heritage left by human being in history reflect a certain social phenomenon which could be either progressiveness and reflection of development of human history or backwardness and reflection of retrogression of history. As a kind of mark recording from different angles and directions the growth of human history. Such material heritage are all of certain scientific and historical value towards the studies on the history of human and social development. Being a cultural phenomenon, they are also of artistic value. It is hard for us to assume which funerary objects discovered from ancient tombs are cultural relics and which are not. We can only tell which are more worthy in terms of value of cultural relics and which are less valuable. Then, why are all human and historical material heritage left behind from ancient time cultural relics; It is just because all the said heritage have experienced historical sediments. In another word, they all have undergone historical selections. What people used in ancient time in their material and spiritual life represent a scene of society of that period. With the lapse of time., most of them have disappeared, only with small parts remained. Of them, the most are funerary objects. Things intentionally gathered by royal families and private collectors merely accounts for small proportion. The funerary objects are left not for they are viewed as cultural relics but because in ancient time people superstitiously thought the dead would ascend to the paradise after his or her death. Those funerary objects could be continuously used by the dead. Such historical sediment, therefore, is a natural but not man-made acceptance and rejection. The objective value is the criterion for the said acceptance and rejection. Royal families as well as private collectors gathered objects according to such criterion. So did the owner of funerary objects who also only chose objects he or she thought valuable rather than cultural relics as funerary objects for the dead.

The other nature of cultural relic is that it can be used as reference for historical studies. Generally speaking, the value of cultural relic today has been different from its previous use value. The "remains" I mentioned above has eliminated those objects people are still using! It is rare for today's people to use ancient water and wine utensils to contain water and wine. It is rarer for them to take ancient coin as the means of exchange today. So is the modern cultural relics. Since modern cultural relics are always connected with some historical events or figures, being of commemorative significance, then people treat them as relics. Before such significance are realized, the objects may
still be used. Once the significance is found, however, the objects will be preserved as relics and not used any more. What I said above are only common cases. There is an exception. Literature, for example, is the carrier of information. The use value of it is to transmit message. The scientific as well as historical values of it is to convey message, too. So, as a carrier of transmitting message its value remains the same and can be used as usual. But as cultural relic, it has been added a new value. Its binding, printing and texture have provided the binding art, printing technology and paper-making technology with new scientific, historical and artistic values. It is just because cultural relic is the material remains of human history that some countries have made lower limit specific regulations as to the age of cultural relics, that is only those valuable objects made before a certain year ago can be called cultural relics. Egypt, for instance, stipulates that only objects made one hundred years ago can be regarded as cultural relics. So does the United States. While in Greece, the year of 1450 is regulated lower limit dividing line. Nowadays, in accordance with the international practice, cultural relics generally refer to the objects with scientific, historical and artistic value which were made one hundred years ago. Such a regulation on the lower limit of the age of cultural relic has just reflected that the cultural relics need historical sediments.

Cultural relics, in China, are classified into historical relics and modern relics according to the dividing line between the Chinese ancient history and Chinese modern history. In fact, they are all historical relics. Modern cultural relics, particularly those formed after the founding of the People's Republic of China in 1949, have served different points from historical relics. Firstly, people pay much attention to the texture and uses of historical relics and place emphasis on the experience and social relation of modern relics. In China, historical relics are divided into several categories by their texture and uses, such as copper, iron, gold, silver and so on. The study on historical relics are mainly conducted in way of classified research which attaches importance to the differentiation between true and sham and division of history. Whereas the study on modern relics has not reached the stage of classified research yet though some of them may use the way of study on historical relics for reference. The value of historical relics depends to a large extent on the process in which they were formed as relics as well as their experience and the level of importance of the historical events and figures related with them.

Secondly, modern cultural relics are closer to our contemporary life so that their economic value is always not as big as historical relics. Comparatively speaking, there is few possibility that they are counterfeited. Although the differentiation between true and sham are still the main task of study on modern cultural relics, it is not as protrusive as historical relics.

Thirdly, since historical events and figures of modern time are near the reality, the sediments of some events have not finished yet. Therefore, the value of objects depicting these events and figures remains to be appraised. Through selection we can be aware of which are cultural relics and which are not. The standard for such selection is not subjective but objective because the value of relics is objective existence, not given by man's subjectivity. People only realized it step by step. As an evidence of China's communication modernization and a piece of valuable historical relic of modern time, the first steam locomotive appearing in China represents China's revolution in communication. Its value is just its internal value. While it is not found by people, it would be dismantled and melted. Once its value is realized by museums, it would probably be collected and preserved. The process of unification between the objective value of things and people's subjective realization is just the process of formation of cultural relics. It is more or less the same as the ancient royal family members and individual collected cultural relics. Several centuries later, the contemporary objects will become less and less. As a witness of history, its value will become more and more obvious as well. Such part of remains will be treated as historical cultural relics.

Fourthly, with the development of science and technology, some of articles of modern society were made of new materials, such as plastic objects, rubber objects, high strength alloy etc. They all need to be preserved in new methods.

Next let us look at the nature of "material" as well as the relation between materials and cultural relics.

The conception of "material" in a broad sense refers to all the objects which are necessary to human's material and spiritual production as well as material life and spiritual life. Among them are productive material, living goods, scientific research data, teaching material and so on. Productive material is the raw material with which people carry out their production. The shape of objects used as raw material has disappeared after production and has been turned into another form of objects. Living goods generally refer to food and daily used articles, necessary for the existence of human beings and their requirements for entertainment. After consumption, part of food have been absorbed by human body. Its original form has gone. The article, on the contrary, will not be absorbed at once and will take a long time to be naturally
damaged. Scientific research data and teaching material include books, newspapers, magazines and so on which exist in the form of writing. What we are discussing here is just museum material, that is material in narrow sense.

It is difficult for us to strictly distinguish between the cultural relics and material. Their similarities and differences can be summarized as follows. Firstly, all cultural relics are of material value, not only those in the form of writing but also those existing in physical form. Of ancient actual objects, some have inscription and some don't. The objects without inscription on it can also be used as reference material for research of ancient history. Generally we call them object material. A large quantity of unearthed cultural relics relating with science and technology have provided a wealth of material for the study of such specialized histories as astronomy, geography, metallurgy, agriculture, medicine, textile and so on, which have broken a lot of traditional standpoints. Not all the material, however, are of value of cultural relics. In our life, there are many books which may be major tools for our study but not all of them are cultural relics. Whether or not they can become cultural relics basically depend on whether the physical form of material can be used as an evidence of history. I would like to take as example the well known book "Compendium of Materia Medica" written by Li Shizhen, a famous Chinese medical scientist and pharmacologist of Ming Dynasty. The current edition of the book is only material not cultural relic. But the original one, as an evidence of history of Chinese medical development, is of value of cultural relic. In museum, we show it from the angle of cultural relic rather then that of material. The aim of visitors to museums is not to look up concrete contents of the book but gain a sort of evidence from viewing the exhibit displayed, which indicates that four hundred years ago Chinese medicine and pharmacology had already developed and reached a certain high level. Whether or not a piece of material can become and evidence of history basically depend on whether it is of value to scientific research. The greater the value is the more possible it is taken as cultural relic. Of many books in our life, therefore, only a part are possibly of value of cultural relic after a number of centuries. Secondly material exists mainly in shape of character. Its basic value lies in its contents of words. According to common practice, the term "literature" is often used to distinguish material from objects of cultural relics. Generally speaking, written material are only of value of reference for research without value of artistic appreciation. Cultural relics are different. Many of cultural relics themselves are artistic work. Although some of them were not art work when they were originally formed, the time feature of it can also be of certain appreciative value after several centuries. In the primitive society of China, for example, the productive tools and life household utensils with practical feature made by people for their survival were not artistic work at that time. The shape and pattern, however, is a kind of artistic form reflecting the period of that time and possessing a certain appreciative value. Thirdly, the use value of duplicated written material (including transcripts and copies) is not reduced in general. To scientific research, it plays the same reference role as the original did. But the duplicated objects from cultural relics lost its value of cultural relics. Of course there is an exception that is when the original literature has been stamped out, the transcript of the only existing copy will also be of value of cultural relics.

At last, I wish the meeting success again.
V

FINAL SUMMARY AND REMARKS
Object - document?

Summary and final remarks

Peter van Mensch

Being asked to prepare some concluding remarks at the end of the symposium 'Object-document?', I decided to make a rather provocative statement outlining the terminological confusion throughout the discussions. Indeed, for an uninformed outsider it must be rather puzzling to learn that an object in a museum is not always a museum object and might not even be an object but a thing. However, beyond the semantic confusion there seems to emerge the outlines of a specific museological look at museum reality. A closer look at the papers and the discussions shows a rather consistent theoretical framework. This framework 'even' allows to map out the differences of opinion and the conflicting views.

Instead of repeating the provocation of September 15, I decided to do justice to the intention of the discussion. The following summary is my interpretation of what has been said by the colleagues present at the meeting. I have tried to give a fair representation of the different views. The structure of the summary and the wording of what has been said is mine. I apologize for inevitable misinterpretations.

In order to avoid unnecessary confusion, I used the papers to establish a terminological framework. Of course, this is not the final word on this matter. The concepts and their relationships follow from the symposium, but should be confronted with other views within and outside ICOFOM.

In the first part of the following paper ('Basic terms and concepts') the names refers to the papers as collected in ICOFOM Study Series 23. The names mentioned in the second part ('From objects to documents') refer to the discussions in Beijing.

Preliminary remarks

It was interesting to study the papers and to follow the discussion. The authors and the
participants of the conference in Beijing came from many different parts of the world, bringing with them many different experiences. In addition the authors and participants show a wide variety of academic backgrounds and different levels of understanding of museological theory. Whereas the discussion on 'Museums and community' benefited from this diversity of world views, in the discussion on the present theme the disadvantages sometimes seemed to overshadow the advantages.

In this respect one recurrent cause of confusion in ICOFOM discussions is the unclear distinction between museology and museums. The responsibility of museums is something else than the subject matter of museology. This is not only a difference in abstraction level. To many members of ICOFOM (but not all !), museology is more than the study of museums and museum work. But it is easy to say that museology deals with the whole range of cultural (and natural) phenomena. Reality is different. We are not alone in this world, we have to accept that other disciplines (and other institutions) claim their rights. We have to accept the fact that other disciplines have their own approach to the topic of this symposium. For example, in the field of archive and library studies terms like document and documentation are already well defined. Even within the field of museum studies itself important initiatives are taken to define the basic terms (see, for example, the Arts & Architecture Thesaurus).

To conclude, it was surprising that most authors restrict themselves to cultural phenomena, disregarding natural phenomena. For the sake of clarity I will follow this line of thought. Nevertheless, I would like to emphasise the need to include natural phenomena in museological thinking.

Basic terms and concepts

I have to thank Maria Horta for bringing James Deetz' interesting paper to our attention (again). By combining Deetz' model with the papers of Maria Horta and Lynn Maranda a general frame of reference might be developed for the purpose of presenting the results of the symposium.
The key concepts involved are: thing, object, subject, document and museum object. This order is not accidental, it refers to the process of musealisation. And, as many colleagues have expressed, this process is at the heart of museology as academic discipline.

To define such basic notions as 'thing' or 'object' is a tricky enterprise. Having less than a nodding acquaintance with the field of philosophy I follow the line of reasoning as found among the written contributions to the symposium. The term thing is used to denote an item that has no specific meaning (Maranda, Watteyne). It needs a 'cognitive intention', a perspective, to become an object (Horta, Maranda, Stránský, Watteyne). An object is some-thing that has become part of a network of meaning and is given specific ascription as to how it relates to other objects and other material of the Universe (Maranda). According to many authors, objects are material (Shen) and as such be natural (naturalia) or man-made (artefact). Other authors include immaterial things: cultural traditions, crafts, or even concepts and notions (Bezzeg, Desvallées, Horta, Van Mensch). These terms refer to 'ontological categories'. Objects can be contemporary or can be the surviving remains of past worlds. For this last 'ontological category' the terms 'heritage' and 'cultural relic' have been used (Shen, Tkác, Van Mensch), but it is not always clear whether these two terms refer to ontological or axiological categories. In his paper Shen defines cultural relic as a historical object or site that 'survived during the process of historical development of mankind'. This suggests an ontological category.

An object can become the subject of special attention (as 'source' or 'font' in Stránský's terms). I deliberately use the term in a different way than Maria Horta and Su Donghai. I do not want to leave the human factor out, but in using this term in this explicit way I want to emphasise the intention that lies at the heart of the process of musealisation (Shen, Ruan). As subject the significance of an object is subjected to a narrowly defined, reductionist purpose. This purpose might be scientific research. Partly because of this special attention the object requires a quality as symbol, i.e. museality (Decarolis, Horta, Maroévic, Shah, Stránský, Tkác, Watteyne). As such, the object refers to - or is used to acquire an understanding of - phenomena outside itself on an ontological level (Stránský). This is the 'objet-témoi' (Desvallées), the object as document (Bellaigue & Menu, Bezzeg, Horta, Maranda).
Some institutes are specialised in working with objects, such as museums. Following the logic of the preceding paragraph museum objects ('musealia', Stránský) are objects as documents in the property of museums (Desvallées). There are also objects as documents outside museums, referred to as 'monuments' (Tkác) or 'museal documents' (Bezzeg).

Before an object as document becomes a museum object an authority decision is needed (Raippalinna). It might also be the result of the supply and demand mechanism of a market (Van Mensch). The transformation from object as document to museum object involves a form of re-contextualisation. The object becomes part of a collection and usually part of an exhibition (Raippalinna, Scheiner). Improving the quality of the object as document, i.e. the realisation of the information potential of the object, is related to improving the quality of the collection (Raippalinna). A complicating factor in the theoretical analysis is the fact that the collection itself is an object with the potential to be considered as a subject and eventually as an object as document (Maranda). In this sense 'museum collection' is a multi-layered concept.

Not all objects in museums are to be considered objects as documents. Some objects are used to support the communication process in exhibitions: subsidiary or secondary media (Cameron/Desvallées). Others are part of the furniture in exhibition rooms (such as show cases, chairs) or offices. According to the definitions given above, they are not to be considered 'museum objects'.

Distinction should also be made between objects as documents and documents. Usually, the term document refers to textual or pictorial representations of phenomena (Van Mensch), so-called indirect, interpreted testimonies, i.e. secondary documents (Stránský/Van Mensch), or non-authentic documents (Tkác), as opposed to objects as documents that have been associated with phenomena and are witnesses rather than testimonies, i.e. primary documents (Stránský/Van Mensch) or authentic documents (Tkác). However, according to Sylla this is - at least to African reality - an artificial distinction. Idiographic signs bridge the 'gap' between texts and objects as exists in the Western society.

Some authors mentioned knowledge about objects, acquired by indirect means. The
recorded knowledge is referred to as documentation (Bellaigue & Menu, Desvallées, Maranda, Van Mensch). Confusion arises where the term document is used for carriers of such recorded knowledge (texts, photographs, etc.) as well as for the objects themselves (Desvallées, Maranda). During the discussion the term 'museum document' was used for recorded knowledge, as opposed to the term 'museum object' which was used for the object (Maroévic). This implies that a museum object can be referred to as document, but not as museum document.

From object to document

It is important to consider the given concepts in a dynamic (diachronic) perspective. The transformation process from thing to museum object is sometimes described in terms of gain and loss. Gain, since the realization of the information potential of the object improves our knowledge (Bellaigue & Menu, Decarolis, Maranda); loss, since certain properties are neglected and/or lost in the process, like emotions, the 'blood-sweat-and-tears' (Quatremère de Quincy/Desvallées, Raippalina). But what exactly do we gain or loss? First, it should be noted that it is in the eye of the beholder. In any object there is a wealth of information and meaning (Decarolis, Desvallées, Scheiner, Shah). It depends on cultural intention (Decarolis, Horta) or scientific knowledge (Bellaigue & Menu) what part of the potential is realized.

To understand the dynamic aspect and to map out the gains and losses some authors have referred to models concerning the physical and semantic structure of objects (Maroévic, Van Mensch). Generally speaking, three categories of information are mentioned: the physical ('intrinsic') properties (Bellaigue & Menu, Decarolis, Horta, Maroévic, Van Mensch), meaning (Decarolis, Desvallées, Horta, Maroévic, Shah, Van Mensch), and context (Desvallées, Maroévic, Van Mensch).

The discussion circled around objects as potential source of knowledge (the object sensu stricto), the recognition of the potential of certain objects (the object as subject), and the realization of the potential (the object as document).
The potential is described either as information or as value. Among the ideas expressed two extreme views 'define' the spectre, an 'open' and a 'closed' approach. According to Hainard (quoted by Desvallées) an object loses its meaning when it loses its context, 'an object is the truth of nothing'. As such the object can be manipulated at will. On the other side of the spectre we find the view as expressed by the Chinese museologists (like Lu Jimin and Su Donghai). In their view the information potential of objects can be objectified into historical, aesthetic and scientific value. Both views relate to the 'perceived object', i.e. the object as 'we' see it. The potential is related to the explicit intention that made the object a subject. This approach is opposed by Shah when she stresses the importance of the symbolic/spiritual value of the 'conceived object', i.e. the object as seen by the maker and/or first users.

Whatever view one holds, the process of musealisation is a highly biassed process (Finn). The recognition of the information potential of an object (the object as subject) is not free of personal, social, ideological, etc. biasses (Desvallées). The conditions of collecting should therefore be recorded. This also involves the museum object as exhibit. Museums should make their interpretations transparent and make clear the subjectivity of them (Finn).

This is not the only bias involved in musealisation. Many objects did not 'survive' because of their utilitarian value, but because their are used to express social distinction (Gjestrum, Shen). Musealisation is a process and cannot be reduced to the moment of selection/collecting (Horta). The biography of objects can be described as a chain of contexts. Each context transform involves an assessment of values, i.e. a new interpretation of the object as subject (Van Mensch). This is partly a rational and partly an unconscious act (Scheiner). As a whole, the successive attribution of values during the life history of objects is part of the social discourse (Bezzeg, Horta, Ruan). This process does not stop at the moment of collecting. The discussion about the value of the object - and the bias involved - continues since our interpretation of history develops (Finn).

This also applies to art. The (economic) value of art is the result of the interaction between artists, art critics, art galleries and art museums (Sofka). This interaction
continues to influence the assessment of the value of 'the work of art as museum object'. As to archaeological objects the situation might be different. As Shen pointed out most archaeological finds in China are funerary objects. They are found as they were left and are not affected by a process of subsequent re-interpretations.

During the discussion different opinions were expressed as to the inevitability of bias. These differences are the result of a different interpretation of the diachronic character of the information value of objects. When Anita Shah stresses the importance of objectivity, she refers to the value of the object at its moment of creation ('conceived object', Van Mensch), disregarding the 'erosion' of meaning and/or the attribution of new meanings. In a similar way Chinese museology, being very much based on archaeology, seems to underestimate the fact that the object now ('actual identity', Van Mensch) may differ considerably from the object then ('factual identity'). In other words, the object as document is not only a witness of the historical reality of the moment of creation and first use, but also of subsequent realities, which may perhaps be more interesting for us (the moment of collecting being one of them). This notion is reflected in Ruan's distinction between 'intensive value' (related to the 'factual identity') and 'extensive value' (related to new values added to the object during the course of circulation).

As Marketta Makinen pointed out Shah's claim of objectivity in relation to the conceived object does not always hold true. Artists do not always want to explain their intentions (in any case, oral history is not a standard part of the documentation of art objects as museum objects). Each interpretation is subjective.

As document a museum object refers to something, but what a museum object documents is not unequivocal. Objects contain a multitude of meanings which need to be interpreted (Desvallées). The realisation of the information potential is the result of research (Shen) and presupposes an intention (object as subject). But where should this intention come from? Are objects in this respect a subject of the different subject-matter disciplines (history, anthropology, art history, etc.) or can objects be a subject of museology?

John Gjestrum referred to the practice of ecomuseums where objects are not collected by a
central institution. The owner/user is the curator of his (her) own properties and as such 'responsible' for the realisation of the information potential. The interpreted objects are available for study, exhibition, etc. Damien Watteyne mentioned that machines and even factories can be preserved in working condition. As Martin Schärer pointed out ecomuseums and 'working museums' share a similar approach towards objects as documents. As 'monuments' (Tkác) or 'museal documents' (Bezzeg) or perhaps 'museum objects' their information potential is realised without giving up the initial function ('factual functional identity', Van Mensch). It is a compromise between the 'conceived' and the 'perceived object'. A similar compromise might provide a solution to the ethical problems connected with religious and sacred objects (mentioned by Scheiner, Maroévic and Wall).

Concluding remarks

During the discussions we were confronted with two major problems, I think. Firstly, the comparison of different approaches was hindered by a lack of a proper understanding of the concept of value. Secondly, the purport of some statements can not be estimated since it is unclear whether their is a difference of opinion concerning the importance of the diachronic character of the information structure of objects.

Some participants have referred to Michael Thompson's Rubbish Theory (Maroévic, Schärer). His work is very interesting indeed (although it is a pity that he does not apply René Thom's Catastrophe Theory to a museum related situation). The main problem, however, is that Thompson does not define 'value'. Probably, value means economic value, which, in my opinion, is not a very fruitful approach. One may even doubt whether Thompson's Rubbish Theory holds true when we take into account other values. Shah, Schärer and Wang, among others have suggested to differentiate between different categories of value. The Chinese approach is to define categories of 'objective' value based on the potential of objects to meet our present needs (historical, aesthetic and scientific value). The other approach is to start from the meaning and significance of objects as 'subjective' categories. My own attempt is summarised in my paper as published in ICOFOM Study Series 23 (page 119). Important is to understand how these
different values change in connection with the shift of perspective from 'conceived' (as intended by the maker) to 'perceived' (as interpreted by subsequent users).

This continuous change of the information structure of objects (including their values) calls for a model encompassing synchronic and diachronic perspectives. The outlines of such models are published by, among others, Ivo Maroévic, Susan Pearce, Zbynek Stránský, and myself. It would perhaps be interesting, as a follow up of the present symposium, to discuss these models as contribution to a consistent theory of museology.
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