Beyond the Modern Museum. A theoretical framework for a museal landscape analysis

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muséal*

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Beyond the Modern Museum. A theoretical framework for a museal landscape analysis

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ABSTRACT

Today museum studies have a duty to keep pace with the museum's perpetual renewal. This paper, then, aims to outline a new research path in order to grasp what are today the most significant categories and features of the contemporary museum. This will be done by bringing together the contributions of two disciplines so close to each other in subject and purpose, yet still so far apart in the academic discourse, namely museology and the sociology of art. Through the intertwining of theories and concepts of social aesthetics, the systemic approach, and new and post-critical museology, an attempt is made to develop a new research programme to observe museal landscapes. This will be applied to the city of Naples, in the belief that, while it is true that every community is in a class by itself, and therefore cannot be generalized, this is not true of this method which, on the contrary, could be fruitfully applied to a wide number of contexts.

Keywords: museum studies, post-critical museology, media studies, sociology of art.

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RÉSUMÉ

Aujourd'hui, les études muséales ont le devoir de suivre le rythme du renouvellement perpétuel du musée. Ce document vise donc à tracer une nouvelle voie de recherche afin de comprendre quelles sont aujourd'hui les catégories les plus significatives et caractéristiques du musée contemporain. Cela sera fait en établissant un pont entre les apports de deux disciplines si proches l'une de l'autre par leur sujet et leur objectif, mais si loin dans le discours académique, c'est à dire la muséologie et la sociologie de l'art. Grâce à l'imbrication des théories et des concepts appartenant à l'esthétique sociale, l'approche systémique, la muséologie nouvelle et post-critique, on tente d'esquisser un nouveau programme de recherche pour observer les paysages muséaux.

Mots clés: études de musées, muséologie post-critique, études de média, sociologie de l'art.

Introduction

Museums have been there through all the stages of modernity, escorting the human species on a never-ending journey across the borders of past, present and future. But just like their favourite subject, namely human culture, museums too are in a state of perpetual change. Modernity is no longer the fabric of society and, in the same way, the modern art museum is something from a bygone era.

Just as in natural sciences new phenomena call for new theories to explain them, the new format of art museums requires a new approach in order to grasp their complex nature and role in a broader societal context.

Therefore, the aim of this paper is to outline a new pathway capable of granting insights through the study and observation of the museum by looking at two areas that are closely related but separated in common academic discourse: museology and the sociology of art. From the field of museology, this research refers to new museology (Vergo, 1989; Macdonald, 2006) and post-critical museology in order to underline the most characteristic features and facets of

the art museum today. From the sociology of art, a wide number of approaches are taken into account, such as social aesthetics (Nisbet, 1976; Wolff, 1981; Griswold, 2012) and the systemic approach, ranging from the first, more structured theories (Danto, 1964; Becker, 1982; Bourdieu, 1983) to the more recent and fluid views (Luhmann, 2000; Latour, 2005; Van Maanen, 2009).

This paper, then, configures itself as a starting point, more than a finish line. The main goal is to take part in a perpetual debate fostering a new and cutting-edge research programme.

The approach resulting from this study is part of an ongoing PhD project and will be tested in relation to the city of Naples. Being characterized by its thriving cultural heritage, this city is our case study in order to prove the efficiency of the suggested approach, which could overhaul the way we look at the contemporary museal landscape, reconstructing it in a more thorough way.

The double evolution of mankind and artmaking. Why and how to study art.

In January 2020, the National Archaeological Museum of Naples (MANN), opened the doors of the Lascaux 3.0 exhibition. Devised in partnership with the French département of Dordogne-Périgord, the exhibition is a global itinerant translation of the 18,000-year-old archaeological site. The event at the MANN under the direction of Paolo Giulierini was a very significant one, inasmuch as it underlined the impact a site that has much to say regarding the relationship between art and the human species. According to Georges Bataille, Lascaux, with its 900 square metres of prehistoric paintings, could be identified as the manifestation of the birth of art (Bataille 2007). It is crucial here to recognize art as an activity peculiar to the human species, based on the synergy between communication and technique, defined as mankind's specific strategy to relate to the external world (Vattimo, 2014).

To observe art, then, is to observe mankind. To observe art through a scientific approach is, however, an extraordinarily complex task, for that art as an object of analysis is resistant to a static, fixed and universally accepted definition.

An answer to this everlasting issue could be attained through shifting the focus of the analysis to a mediological standpoint and by questioning not what art *is*, but rather what art *does*. In order to do that, as we will see, we need to focus on the distribution domain. Through the distribution domain the work of art is made disposable, and the organizations which engage in distribution give art a place inside its community or society (Van Maanen, 2009).

Among these organizations, there are museums. In the same way art escorted the human species on its complex evolutionary journey, changing both in form and substance, the art museum too has been anything but still, adapting its formats and paradigms to fit with human culture. The museum, now more than ever, is a complex medium, that enables an articulate process in which

many different actors meet while they achieve a tangible expression of the techno-cultural nature of human utterance.

The Artworld arises. A new way to look at the work of art.

Recently museum studies have dominated a significant part of the academic discourse, by drawing strength from the increasing inclusiveness of the museum visiting practice. The definition of 'museum' itself (ICOM, 2019) has been the subject of debate and discussion, assessing the need to make explicit the complex cultural and social role of this public body. With its definition as an organization acting in the service of society, which is committed to a process of continuous communication,¹ to study the museum today is to study not just a simple institution or business, but rather a medium. Hence, this topic calls for a multidisciplinary set of concepts and knowledges to avoid omitting any of the many significant issues and features. Thus, this paper relies on the assumption that the best way to analyse the museum is from a mediological standpoint, with the ability to combine means, methods and notions of disciplines so close on a factual level, yet still so distant in the academic discourse, such as museology and sociology of art.

The first step of this paper was to emphasize the potential of art studies in order to comprehend the nature of human communication. The second step was to assess the need for a shift of perspective, focusing the discussion on what art does rather than what art is. The third step, then, involves weighing up the domain of distribution and its crucial role in signifying the museum as a medium.

Acknowledging the effectiveness of a distribution-focused analysis implies the recognition of art as a complex and multidimensional ecosystem, consisting of multiple elements and the relationships between them. Historically a topic of discussion in philosophy and aesthetics, theory of art had to wait until the second half of the 20th century to be studied in its own right. This resulted from the need for a systemic approach in the study of artistic processes.

The research paths arising from this demand were therefore fundamental in defining an artworld, a concept without which it would be impossible to understand the role of the museum as the link between the production and the fruition of art. The expression "artworld" was coined in 1964 by Arthur Danto, in response to the need to rethink artistic theories in order to better frame the new movements flourishing during the second half of the 20th century. Thus, the idea of an artworld came to the aid of art theory scholars who were facing many issues, such as the artwork stripped of its mimetic role towards reality, or the artwork formally representing an everyday object. Today, we use 'artworld' to describe the ecosystem inhabited by artists, museums, organizations and

1. Museum definition 2007 version, International Council of Museums (ICOM).

audiences. All these actors engage in multiple relationships which perpetually renegotiate borders and boundaries of the ecosystem itself, debating and furthering art's development (Danto, 1964). The artworld, by acknowledging art as a statement about reality rather than a piece of it, enables on one hand the communicative vocation of art, and on the other culture's cumulative disposition, by admitting for example abstract art as an unreachable goal if not through a journey across the many steps of art history and theory.

Through the artworld concept then, Danto succeeded in shifting the focus of the signification of the artistic object. From now on, the artwork would be observed not on the basis of some alleged inherent properties but rather by relying on its contextual placement in a space made of relations and conventions: the artworld.

In the latter half of the 20th century the systemic approach was introduced, among other artistic theories, inflecting itself from time to time in a philosophical context (Danto, 1964), a sociological one (Bourdieu, 1983) or even an economic one (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983; Becker, 1982). All these contributions make clear that to understand art is also to understand the dynamics of the organizations which engage in it and the principles which rule its relationships with the social and economic environment (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983). Among them, at least two have to be further explored: Becker's pragmatic institutional approach and Bourdieu's field theory.

Becker's perspective is based on the need for an extensive empirical understanding of the artworld in order to complete the discourse previously only carried out in philosophical terms. In making a difference in Becker's argument are essentially two key concepts: collaboration and conventions. According to Becker, the very same connotation of "artist" and "artistic" relies on the concepts of collective activity (collaboration) and shared narratives (conventions).

Collaboration and conventions are then responsible for shaping the artworld itself, which is the network of people whose cooperation, organized via their shared knowledge of conventional means of doing things, produces the kind of artworks the artworld is noted for.

Pragmatism and empiricism are, then, the cornerstones of Becker's theory, in which he tries to outline a schematic list of the artworld's characteristic activities in their broadest sense. Besides the artist's core activities, such as the elaboration and the execution of the idea, Becker also points out some supporting activities, in particular regarding distribution, reception and consumption, engaging in an argument which recalls the Marxist concept of the product obtaining its completion in consumption (Corrigan, 1999). Every action is therefore bound to the other following a structure explainable in terms of a bundle of tasks (Becker, 1982), which again underlines the cooperative aspect. Such collaborations are made possible through the conventions which – under the form of shared practices and knowledge – constitute the conditions of existence of any collective action. Indeed, they both legitimate

materials, forms, and dimensions and make possible the relationships between artists, distributors and audiences. Thus, artworks always bear the marks of the system which distributes them (Becker 1982).

Even if it is open to a certain amount of criticism, Becker's approach is crucial since it opens the museum field to the observations of many activities involved in the artistic process, and considers the problems of the function of art in society: it connects the organizational aspects of the artworld with the substantive question of the value of art reception for audiences and for the culture they live in (Van Maanen, 2009).

The adoption of a systemic perspective in the study of art and the focus on the distribution domain – that is to say on the museal organization – opens up multiple and innovative research paths. However, this is not enough, as it is necessary to contextualize the distribution domain itself. Just as the artistic ecosystem takes the shape of a complex blend of different elements, so it is also to be contextualized in a broader setting, which in turn is conditioned by many processes, actors and relationships. A very significant step in this direction was made by Bourdieu, with his field theory (Bourdieu, 1983), whose main purpose was to elaborate a theoretical construct capable of explaining the artworld's complexity and to reveal the underlying structures and mechanisms, beyond the simple enumeration.

In Bourdieu's theory, field, habitus and capital play a main role in the artistic process. The field can be described as a structure of relationships between social positions, occupied by specific agents, who aim to gain, maintain and manifest a specific symbolic capital, relying on other forms of capital and on a shared cultural corpus (the habitus). Thus, Bourdieu proposes to approach the artistic field as a structure of objective relations, which could be described through a series of general principles regulating the distribution of capital, the strategy of conservation, subversion and recognition of the field's laws. The heuristic proficiency of Bourdieu's theory lies in the possibility of putting into the background the individual action stressing the structural relations between different social positions instead. Therefore, if on the one hand the study of artistic processes cannot be reduced to only aesthetic-philosophical speculation, it cannot be limited to just the examination of the time-space context either.

Among the other theories there are two similarly narrow ones that recur in art studies. The first is the "art for art's sake" viewpoint, which considers the artwork as an isolated and closed object in itself. The second is the external reading of the artistic product, which does not go any further from observing the social conditions of the artwork's context of production. In order to avoid both of these limited perspectives, artistic processes must be observed in relational terms.

For this reason, Bourdieu introduces the notion of external forces into the artistic theory. By including the literary and artistic field inside the broader

field of power, indeed, he facilitates a research pathway built on the recognition of multiple domains, actors, forces and relationships involved in artistic processes. Moreover, Bourdieu contextualizes such processes in a much wider situational territory, which in turn is shaped by encounters with different agencies.

Still acknowledging a certain level of autonomy (regarding the rules which govern the field), the contextualization of the artistic field explains its dynamics in terms of balance between autonomous and heteronomous influences. Therefore, in the analysis of the museum, one cannot avoid turning to the political, cultural and economic landscapes by which it is surrounded, nowadays more than ever, as museums are increasingly characterized by their social role. It is in fact the distribution domain which develops itself as a space of encounter between the inside and the outside, a dimension in which both a connection and a clash occurs between the different forces joining the game. A passage through which, in the end, art can get its societal start (Van Maanen, 2009).

After the modern museum. A new way to look at a new museum.

In the modern scenario the museum used to play the very same role on a cultural level that the factory played on a social and productive level. Public space par excellence, historical, cultural and artistic institution imperative in any true modern metropolis, the museum debuted on the urban landscape towards the end of the 17th century. Beyond its embryonic forms and its primitive ancestors – think about the widespread private Renaissance collections or the far more ancient centres of cultural production and preservation – museums came to life in the early days of the Industrial Revolution, of which they embody and organize philosophies and dominant narratives, such as the ideology of progress and the encyclopaedic worldview.

The term museum, not as an institution dedicated to the study of the Muses but rather as a modern institution devoted to cultural progress, was used for the first time, according to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, in 1683, referring to British historian and alchemist Elias Ashmole's collection (Vergo, 1989). After Ashmole's collection was described as public, the next logical step was to designate it as a museum, just as happened for some more famous cases such as London's British Museum. To define the museum as an accessible area, a common good and a main actor in preserving and handing down cultural heritage is not an isolated phenomenon. In fact, it marks a line of continuity with other social processes occurring during the 18th and 19th centuries: the rise of the ideology of progress, the diffusion of scientific principles and the emergence of a new socio-political actor, namely the metropolitan population.

“These tendencies may be reduced to four principal characteristics which cluster round the definition of a museum: the first is that

the collections on display should in some way contribute to the advancement of knowledge through study of them; the second, which is closely related, is that the collections should not be arbitrarily arranged, but should be organised according to some systematic and recognisable scheme of classification; the third is that they should be owned and administered not by a private individual, but by more than one person on behalf of the public [...]" (Vergo, 1989, p. 8).

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The museum, thus, offers itself to modernity as the most suitable version of the already established practice of collecting. The practice of collecting has changed following the modern pedagogic paradigm, emphasizing the semantic ritual value of things, the encyclopaedic project and the tangible manifestation of bourgeois luxury.

In addition, museums are deeply bound to other institutions, such as the World Expo between them they interweave the collectable object's sacralization and the commodified object's symbolic value (Abruzzese, 2000).

There's no doubt that the factory building was the epitome of modernity, around which – materially and metaphorically – the organization of society unfolded itself. From the second half of the 20th century the factory has been through some major developments, becoming fragmented and scattered. In the same way museums have undergone numerous changes connected to what many scholars call postmodernity (Lyotard, 1984; Jameson, 1991). Whatever one wants to call it, we're dealing with a redefinition of the typical modern narratives.

Politicians, rulers, artists, artworks, institutions and organizations: no one was spared in such an upheaval of aesthetic, social and linguistic dogmas. The same applies for museums too. For this reason, it is not possible anymore to make use, in museum studies, of frames and concepts that belong to an era which no longer exists. There's a need for something to fit the ever-changing landscape around us. The systemic standpoints introduced by Becker and Bourdieu could fulfil this need if combined with a much more flexible vision able to explain contemporary social models.

The main arguments we will focus on in this section are Latour's Actor Network Theory (Latour, 2005) and Luhmann's Social System Theory (Luhmann, 2000), in order to find a point of view from which we can observe the museum in its contemporary form.

Luhmann's social system is that set of relations which arises between what he calls communicative utterances (Luhmann, 2000) Therefore, a social system is autonomous and autopoietic, in the sense that it is made by its own processes. However, it is not isolated, as it engages in a so-called structural coupling with other systems (Luhmann, 2000) which allows them to perpetually associate

and to function through reciprocal interaction. Within this framework, the art system differs from the others in the types of communication which comprise it. These are the artistic utterances which rely on the ability to communicate in a material or perceptible form. The picture drawn in *Art as a Social System* is, then, a complex and compound one, in which the art system arises from the intertwining of different utterances such as artworks, the way they are distributed and displayed, and the dynamics springing from the fulfilment of their purpose. Thus, Luhmann's perspective allows us to observe the art system as a multidimensional machine and, at the same time, as a fluid organism, as its very same component parts are identifiable as processual. Moreover, resulting from this view, is again the effectiveness of the analysis of the distribution domain, the dimension in which the art system's objects are produced and offered, allowing the thriving of the system itself from utterance to utterance.

Strongly influenced by the modification of the modern paradigm is Latour's Actor Network Theory, which is shaped as a strategy to observe social processes without any *a priori* cognitive constraints. ANT's key concept is the network, which is described as an existing set of relations to be described and interpreted, a non-structured structure engaged in perpetual change (Latour, 2000). Such structures are characterized by some fundamental features: continual movement, an internal porosity and permeability, and the ability to be observed from various points of view.

To summarize, ANT offers some very effective concepts with which to understand the way artworlds organize themselves and function. In the first place, there is the articulation of the different levels of production, distribution and reception. These layers are in a condition of mutual and functional relationships between them and with what's around them. In the second place, actors not only produce actions significant for themselves, but which also affect each other's agency. Actor Network Theory then allows us to clarify the organization of the artworld on the various levels of production, distribution and reception and underlines the functional relationships between these layers. Moreover, there is the key idea of passage and its transmuting effect:

"It will be clear that the description of what happens with different groups of people when they go through the different types of passages the artworld provides, is also at the heart of the question of how art is made to function in a society. Conversely, the concept of passages challenges the artworld to think about how its translation centres function and possibly could be reorganized to generate other or additional effects" (Van Maanen, 2009, p. 103).

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By making use of the sociology of translation's vocabulary, ANT can answer a methodological issue arising from the observation of an unpredictable and hazy

society. The same notion of translation – the complex process which constantly mixes together a variety of social and natural entities, and thus also enables an explanation of how only a few obtain the right to express and communicate, representing the many silent actors they have mobilized – emphasizes the continuity in which the processes of changing and remodelling occur.

Therefore, considering the art system as a network in this sense – rather than as a fixed and stable structure following, for example, the Bourdieusian paradigm – the museum earns a paramount role as a centre of creativity, organization and distribution.

What the theories of Becker, Bourdieu, Luhmann and Latour have in common, is that they all feature a position useful to understand how the artworld's organization is vital for the functioning of art itself. Despite some differences, other common points emerge, which are very significant to the viewpoint of this paper. First, the assumption that art is not only something to look at but also does something, and it's in this sense that the sociologist must approach it. Secondly, the view that aesthetic production, distribution and reception are interdependent and, for this reason, in order to comprehend what art does – and how – one must look at all three domains, emphasizing the role of the actors, such as museums, that allow their functional relationship.

“To understand what art does and what makes art do something, it should be known how different types of art events [...] are conditioning different types of experience [...]. What could be expected from the sociology of art is that it formulates the significance of the organizational character of art events for the societal functioning of the arts presented.” (Van Maanen, 2009, p. 128)

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These events Van Maanen talks about are then crucial to ensure the functioning of art at an individual and a collective level, bringing organizational forms and their communication strategies into the foreground of a contemporary sociology of art. It will be clear how this idea suggests a research path based on the bridging between art sociology and museology, in order to grasp completely and extensively the observed phenomena.

“[...] So, the domain of distribution makes the work of art available – by using it in a particular way and in that sense changing it – creates the audience for it, and brings both together, three aspects to be studied by sociologists of art in detail. And by doing this, distributing organizations give art a place in a community or society, a

specific place based on the type of events they provide.” (Van Maanen, 2009, 128)

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Sketching a research proposal. Museology and sociology in the service of museal landscape study.

Given the aim of this paper – to delineate a new research path for museum studies based on the evaluation of the actual features and conditions of the object of analysis – each of the studies taken into account bestows a crucial insight. From Becker and Bourdieu, we draw the framework within which one must look at the artworld Danto first talked about. On the other hand, from scholars such as Luhmann and Latour we learn how to adapt these concepts to the contemporary era. Sociology of art then has told us why to look at art and how to do it, by highlighting the priorities of art studies and of the distribution domain even beyond museology’s own interests. At this point, we should turn to museology in order to evaluate which aspects of the main systems of the distribution domain have to be taken into account.

Post-critical museology is a new line of research which draws upon sociological theory and method and, in line with its characterization of the hybrid nature of the museum, is itself a hybrid (Dewdney, Dibosa & Walsh, 2013). The primary aim of the post-critical point of view is thus to avoid the remote position of analytical critique (Dewdney, Dibosa & Walsh, 2013) and to develop a position calibrated to the political, economic and social changes occurring on a global scale and accountable for a new way of looking at art.

The bridging between museology’s most recent contribution and the sociology of art and media studies’ more rooted and well-rehearsed theories is intended to provide a theoretical framework capable of covering the needs brought about by the contemporary museal landscape.

Such a manifold framework is essential in moving back and forth between the observation of the agents of exhibition (museums) and the objects of exhibition (works of art). Because, while museology and the sociology of art’s systemic approach stresses the relevance of the domain of distribution, social aesthetics and media studies uphold the need to focus on artistic expressions for what they are, represent and do. Also, the recent developments in new and post-critical museology allow us to grasp the most relevant topics in museum studies today, such as the social role of museums and their relationships with digital and information technologies. These major issues must be again investigated moving from the observation of the museum as an organism to that of the artwork as its elementary particle. More specifically, the social role of the museum is to be observed through both the policy adopted by the museum and the messages conveyed by its events and exhibitions. The relationship

with digital technology, in a similar way, lies in the technical dimension, on one hand, and in the aesthetic one, on the other.

Acknowledging the museum as something more than a public institution or a business means to stress its intermediary nature.

“Politicians represent their constituents, parliament represents the people, broadcasters represent public views and opinions [...] art museums represent the continuity of visual culture and all of these uses of representational means ensure the stability of the existing order and relationship between people and things” (Dewdney, Dibosa, & Walsh, 2013, p. 4).

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Thus, the museum becomes at the same time a network and a link, a set of hypertexts which goes back and forth from the realm of producers to that of consumers, a distinction that in itself no longer makes any sense in the contemporary mediascape.

It is not a coincidence that a great number of the terms used to describe the museum allude to the digital world's vocabulary. As a matter of fact, one of the most characteristic features of the contemporary museum lies in its relationship with digital and information technologies. Software has in fact replaced a diverse array of physical, mechanical, and electronic technologies used before the 21st century to create, store, distribute and access cultural artefacts (Manovich, 2013).

The digital revolution has significantly influenced the museum's organization, fulfilment of purpose and perception, as Dewdney, Dibosa and Walsh stress in their argument:

“[...] The two most compelling forces identified that are bringing about global change are those associated with technological advance and the convergence in digital form of a unitary code of information, and the even greater accumulation and movement of capital and labour in urban centres across the world. Both processes produce cultural relativism and a general separation of people and ideas from historical forms of tradition.” (2013, p. 5)

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New media allow the museum to create new experiences and enhance familiar ones in unprecedented ways (Tallon & Walker, 2008), welcoming plenty of digital voices which enable many cutting-edge discourses. The art museum is increasingly becoming a far more meaning-rich environment for its users and

comprises a growing number of bottom-up processes. But digital technologies are not just instrumental tools or technical assistants, as they also involve new languages and aesthetics which obviously influence art museums. Thus, there's the need to observe digital media and their relationship with museums through a twofold perspective, alternating between channels and contents in order to draw a thorough picture.

There's no doubt that digitization has been one of the most important revolutions in contemporary history but there's much more behind the profound changes experienced by present-day museums. The remediation of modern narratives, ideas and institutions which has characterized the global scene since the second half of the last century has also made a difference in this context. This process had repercussions in the museal context, on the one hand highlighting the museum's social role – being a space of expression for consumers too – on the other sharpening the relevance of social and political contemporary issues in museum practices.

The research proposal sketched in this paper is part of an ongoing PhD project at the University of Naples “Federico II”. Thus, the methodology resulting from this study will be tested in application to the city of Naples which, as corroborated by MiBACT data,² stands out among other Italian cities for its rich and catalysing cultural heritage. Following the outcomes of the examined approaches, the aim of the project is to observe this metropolis' museal landscape, dealing with both the single institutions and their specific offerings, and the relationships they establish with each other.

The guidelines will be essentially twofold. First, the influence of information and communication technologies from both a technical and an aesthetic perspective. Second, the realm of the social, regarding on the one hand the social role of the museum, and on the other the effect of recently arisen social issues in museum practice.

More specifically, the importance of digitization will be weighed through the observation of what museums offer, using the tools and methods of media studies and the sociology of art, and through an evaluation of how museum practices have changed thanks to digital tools. This last question will be addressed by using qualitative interviews of museum workers and selected participants from the audience. The social dimension of museums will be observed through both their policies and politics and the communication undertaken in their exhibitions. Moreover, in line with the post-modern de-institutionalization of society, it is necessary to take into consideration also the emergence of new actors which are not covered by the classic definition of museum but which today present themselves as protagonists in the field; for instance, exhibition venues tied to academic research and self- or co-managed social centres.

2. Musei, Monumenti e Aree Archeologiche Statali, Ufficio di Statistica MiBACT (2019)

These sites are now main actors in the interpretive and creative arena and will be observed following the same methodology outlined above in relation to museums.

Conclusion

The museum environment is, following Bourdieu, a cultural field immersed in a broader field. From the perspective of Luhmann, it is a system engaging perpetually in a structural coupling with other social systems. Finally, according to Latour, it is a fluid and open network in constant communication with other elements and networks. It will be clear, then, that the most meaningful changes which have occurred in the social, cultural, technological and political environments, have also had a strong influence on museums.

Museum studies need, therefore, to change the focus and breadth of the analysis, by targeting not the single museum, but rather the museal landscape. Moreover, in order to observe the most important features of the contemporary art museum, previously mentioned, it is necessary to adopt a transdisciplinary approach making use of the most contextually meaningful concepts and frameworks – explained extensively above – in museum studies, mediology and the sociology of art.

The museal landscape of Naples will be the testing ground for this transdisciplinary approach, enabling us to observe complex communities that rely significantly on their artistic, historic and cultural heritage. The final aim is to demonstrate the flexibility of the methodological proposal. Such an approach, defined on the basis of changes both in the artistic museal landscape and in the social sphere in general, may also be fruitfully applied to other case studies.

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