

XVII International Congress on Dry Stone

“Dry stone perspectives: challenges after the UNESCO inscription”

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DRY STONE AND ART: FROM MATERIAL TO IMMATERIAL.

Some reflections from the exhibition "The third paradise"

by Michelangelo Pistoletto in Bari

Introduction:

The following notes were written some time ago, when the UNESCO Convention on Intangible Heritage was recently signed and there was still no talk of being able to nominate dry stone for this recognition. Despite this, the reflections set out below and arising from the art exhibition of Master Michelangelo Pistoletto in Bari, entitled "The third paradise", which at the time had suggested to me the need for this Heritage to have such recognition, are still valid today and serve to strengthen the task of conservation and enhancement to which we are called today.



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The art of building with dry stone has been declared an intangible heritage by UNESCO.

Building with dry stone is an "art" of building, a popular, historical and recognized expression that continues over time. The art of building obviously has a different meaning from that of "art" as we know it in contemporary culture: art as an intellectual expression and, in fact, fixed within categories of culture that have never dared to compare human, popular and traditional "know-how" with the more "austere" one of "art" generally understood.

For the first time the rapprochement between these two aspects of culture was attempted by a great contemporary artist, Michelangelo Pistoletto, in a project called "Third Heaven", a contemporary art project that traveled through a series of cities and countries of the continent.

What is it about? A cultural reflection on the relationship between man and nature, on the very meaning of man's role in his world and on the relationship that he himself has had and must have in the future.

What is the "Third Heaven"? It is the fusion of the first and second Paradises as we know them; the first is the Paradise of Adam and Eve, where life is totally regulated by nature, the second is the artificial Paradise, developed by human intelligence through a process that has now reached global proportions. A Paradise made by artificial needs, artificial products, artificial conveniences, artificial pleasures and by all other forms of artifice. A real artificial world has been created that, in its sprawling progression pollutes, ruins, strains the planet and causes irreversible processes of extinction. The danger of a tragic collision

between these two "spheres" is now announced in all human expressions. The project of the "Third Paradise" finds its meaning in the duty to lead artifice, that is science, technology, art, culture and politics to give life back to the earth. The "Third Paradise" means the passage to another level of planetary civilisation, indispensable to ensure the survival of humanity, it is the "new myth" that leads everyone to assume their personal responsibility at this historical moment.

The "third Paradise" takes on its physical consistency in the "new sign of infinity": three circles, the central one of which represents the womb that generates the third Paradise itself. This artist's gesture constitutes the work of art and, as such, must, as it goes along, confront nature, mankind and the traditions in which it is to be expressed. From this concept we can see it drawn with a stick in the sand of a Mediterranean beach or with a plough in the fertile ground of an Eastern European countryside.

But it is in the noblest and oldest activity that man practices that this sign can take on its true meaning: the art of building. Thus the sign of the Third Heaven takes the three-dimensional form of a wall. The artist's performance in Bari had to combine his sign with the one that man has used in the construction of the landscape: the dry stone wall.

We had to prepare a dry stone wall in the place of the exhibition: a room on the second floor of the Federal Castle of Bari, an important historical monument.

The difficulties related to the construction of this wall are obvious. Working in a monumental environment with all the precautions that this

must entail: the impossibility of carrying out a real building site on the spot (we were in the room of a castle on the second floor), precautions to be taken in relation to the accosting of different materials, some of which (such as the tiled floor of the room) are protected as Historic Monuments, without neglecting, moreover, the problem of a considerable weight to be supported on the floor.

We carried out load tests in advance in relation to the weight to be distributed on the floor, then we made a 1:1 scale medium template of the wall to be built, placed just on the ground, and proceeded to the construction working the bulk of the stones outside the castle, in a space provided for this purpose, transported with a crane on site and here finished and placed in place through the medium template.

The structure thus built should have been "worked on" (as in other cases) by the artist with the help of old sheets, lights inside, etc., as usual in the execution of "poor art" works. The artist, on the other hand, at the moment of the completion of the wall found that it was sufficiently expressive in itself, thus renouncing to bring his own projectual "interpretation", admitting in fact that the material expression of the building rendered in totality the basic idea of the project. He gave up the idea of intervening personally on the work, leaving the rest of the work to its surroundings, the decoration with metal panels, photos of women (the "generating" element) and the voice of a famous Italian singer (Gianna Nannini) with her voice and her song "Mama".

It should be stressed that the translation of the sign of infinity by the artist is carried out through certain material expressions of man (the gesture, the plough, the art of building, etc.) which obviously assume an

"immaterial" character, since they are based on the experience and history of man himself, defining certain categories of human activity as true "treasures" of culture. This is how the art of dry-stone building is recognised as a "work of art". Knowing how to "interpret" nature through its materials for the needs of mankind, while respecting the balance that must be maintained in the construction and development of the landscape, constitutes the expressive force, whether conscious or unconscious, of dry-stone works and gives the "builder man" the nobility of spirit that makes him an artist in his own right. His knowledge, his "savoir faire", the modest display of his tools and, above all, the gestures he transmits in his work speak to us of tradition, history and beauty as we see them in a painting or in a monument.

All this evokes the fact that we dwell on different concepts, such as uniqueness, authenticity and identity.

Uniqueness, authenticity, identity

We live in a world in which the various communication and information technologies privilege a kind of perpetual present, without return to the past and without imagination of the future. (Marc Augè)

Space is where things are and Time is what gives life, what makes them still there when we look at them.

By saying: "things are" or "they are there", we convince ourselves that they "exist", and what "exists", we think, must be, without worrying in any way about our perception or experience of it. The Coliseum is in relation to Rome without any care for the Romans, Monalise smiles

regardless of whether the Louvre is open to the public or not, and the river Po runs equally well even if no one wades in it: they are all supposed to have their place and remain what they are.

Space is the medium in which things maintain themselves or, if necessary, change their position; Time is the medium in which they must maintain their identity so that they do not disappear as "things" and be reduced to mere temporary appearances.

They need to preserve their identity and must remain the same individuals, otherwise they cease to exist.

Halfway between space, time and images, there are people and the objects they produce. These can be defined as traditional when, over generations, they are realised in a continuous way and, in the place where they are, are known at least by a proper name. They are passed on through the family or by familiar acquaintance and are characterised by the passing on from one generation to another, from father to son, from hand to hand, and it is the act of delivery that gives meaning to the word "tradition" (from trans + dare). It makes no difference the location, the size of the place, nor the duration of the continuity (two generations or more), and nevertheless the quality of the name by which it is known (of "learned" or popular origin, invented or modified by the imagination), because the name given to it - the name recognised and used by the people - is always true: its presence in the community lexicon is in itself proof of the local connection and is proof of a relationship based on

memory and identity. It is not only the result of an adaptive response to environmental pressures, but also a cultural product, man-made.

They are a "repository" of knowledge and skills, they are products of man and, if you can read the alphabet of time, "documents".

They constitute a collective heritage of knowledge, gestures and habits, held by local communities, which cannot be liquidated or expropriated by any expression of public authorities or privatised, nor patented.

Heritage is preserved and given value if the context in which it was formed and evolved is preserved and valued. Outside this context, starting from the priority of the role and interests of the actors in the dynamic conservation process in which they are the protagonists, there remain objects that collectors, museum lovers, the exercise of good feelings or purely technical and archaeological information support.

This collective heritage is an integral part of the notion of identity, of the sense of "being" in the world and of objects; it tells us that the world around us is a product between the state of nature and the work of man. The image that we arrest is made from a combination between the texture of nature, which is material being, and the transformation applied by the hands of man through the intermediary of techniques generated alternately by the needs of man himself. Behind this process lies the very meaning of "culture".

However, cultures are not a fixed and invariable entity, but the result of historical, plural and composite processes, and within them there are different and even contradictory elements. Cultures always have a relational character, since they are constituted, act, and survive only in relation to history and in the comparative relationship with different cultural systems.

From all that has been said before, we can deduce that:

"Identity" only exists in inevitable relation to "diversity" - No identity can be built without otherness, no present can be built without past and future. (Marc Augè)

"Identity" is composed of a multiplicity of belongings (not exclusive, if not a copy)

"Cultural identity" is not simply the geographical origin of a person or a group.

But above all, identity belongs to the world of the "life" of those "who exist" within the capacity of judgement, of operativeness, of choices: in a word, those who "are" and who work from a projectual continuity and in coherence with the history of those "who have been".

In literature, there is a phenomenon called *"air doubles"*. This is the construction of false, copies that are used by authors to facilitate the development of the plot. Typical is the case of Homer who often uses

these stratagems. In particular, in the Aeneid, when Turnus, king of the Rutuli, by the will of the gods has sounded the death knell in the duel with Aeneas, Homer, through the figure of Juno, invents a "secondary Aeneas", a copy of which lures the king to a boat. Here Juno frees the moorings, takes him away from the battle, and from his death, while the fictional character created by Enea dissolves. Well, this created double character, this "air double" is in every respect like the original; it is a perfect copy, the same appearance, the same boldness, the same behaviour. Except for one thing: this Enea here says crazy, uncoordinated things, which is commonly considered a mindless subject, "sine mente". The copy is, in fact, identical to the original (so much so as to smear the subject in deception), except that in the latter particular. It is very interesting to note that Homer, in the use of these literary tricks, calls these people with the name of "Afradès" and always positions them as belonging to the realm of the dead, determining an inevitable confrontation with the world of the living, of those who are endowed with spirit "cum mente".

Man's architectural heritage is, like all other expressions of his creative activity, an autograph art, not an allograph. This means that it cannot be reproduced without losing its specific meaning, which unambiguously identifies it with the material and the time (Benjamin's "here and now").

And 'here the distinction that separates each object from its replica, from its copy. Goodman wrote in 1968: "counterfeit is the object that claims to have the production history of the original."¹ What Umberto Eco called

¹ Nelson Goodman – Language of art. An approach to a theory of symbols – Hackett Publishing C°, Indianapolis/Cambridge, 1976

"produced with the intention of giving the impression of someone who is considered indistinguishable from another who is unique.

An object is considered authentic when, in addition to "being" it is identifiable and true.

All art, all human expression, must not only "be" identifiable, but also be "real", authentic, and therefore belong to the sphere of "life", which is in contrast to that of "death", of the possibility of "continuing", as opposed to the condition of "stopping".

The certification of relics, for example: they are called "**authentic**" and they tell us that, in addition to existing, these objects, these fragments, are "**exactly**" the "object that we adore", and not only the image or its representation, and yet they do not belong, as you can imagine, to the sphere of death, because in these objects the history, the traditions, the habits and the customs of the peoples continue to live.

So the notion of **identity** is associated with the notion of **authenticity**.

The Krakow Charter (2000) on the principles for the conservation and restoration of the built heritage contains both definitions:

-with the word *Identity* is understood the common reference to the present values, which are generated within the framework of a community and the past values identified in the authenticity of the monument.

-with the word "*authenticity*" is understood the set of its essential characters, historically determined, from the original to the present situation, due to the various changes that have occurred over time

-storage and archiving themselves do not only mean collecting but making choices and considering strategies for cataloguing, collecting, organising.

The word archive is always associated with an idea of authenticity and truth. Things contained in archives assume the status of authenticity immediately. The same claim to authenticity that historic parts of the city have over modern parts and that landscapes must have in territorial development planning.

Once we have defined what is real and how real are the objects that man builds, we need to understand what relationships they establish with culture, with the complexity of knowledge and experiences that structure society. It is a question, in a word, of understanding the mechanisms and relations between the material being of an object and the immaterial of its conception and implementation. I mean that a physical object exists as a product of man, but the history of its production passes through a series of processes that are not purely physical: knowledge, experience, gestures, words... If I see a dry stone wall I realise that the object exists, it is in a place and therefore material. Yet I cannot help but wonder about its origin, the culture that produced it, the complex of immaterial factors that contributed to its existence.

All this inevitably raises the question of the link between the material object and the immaterial culture that produced it. It is in this sense that we find a new meaning to the value of dry stone.

The reality in which things are and persist is so deeply rooted in our way of thinking, that it seems absolutely essential. Berkeley, who asked whether a tree, falling through the thickness of the forest, makes a sound, suffered indignation and was ridiculed as a fool. But Berkeley had touched a nerve. He had understood that concepts such as 'tree' and 'falling' and 'making a sound' contain, as part of their integral parts, relations; the relations between the tree, the act of falling and the sound as an effect (regardless of whether there might be anyone to listen to it), to know each of these relations, the knower had to pose them.

It is essential to identify the different parts in order to understand their relationships. When we speak of "dry stone", we are indicating a material (stone) and an action (dry) that indicates a "way" of building, a use, and therefore not materially tangible: an immateriality.

The World Convention for Intangible Heritage as an opportunity for valorisation

The 1972 World Convention on the Intangible Cultural Heritage laid the foundations for the recognition of cultural heritage and its commitment to protection by distinguishing between natural heritage, monuments and mixed properties.

It slowly revealed a clear imbalance, as the sites on the World Heritage List of the masterpieces of humanity were, and still are, in relation to the monumental and material characters, in the vast majority, located in Western countries, while the living and essentially "immaterial" cultural expressions of the "South" of the world were not represented (considering as "Southern" expressions also all those, such as dry stone, which, although they also exist physically in the "Western" and advanced area of the world, constituted, in relation to their "noble" parents of history, the Cinderellas of culture).

In 2003, another Convention, that of the intangible cultural heritage, was signed. This Convention signs the access, with the same status as other goods, to all goods that constitute "the practices, representations, expressions, knowledge and skills - as well as the instruments, objects, artefacts and cultural spaces associated therewith - that communities, groups and, in some cases, individuals recognise as part of their cultural heritage" (article 2 of the Convention).

This intangible cultural heritage, transmitted from generation to generation, is constantly recreated by communities and groups in response to their environment, interaction with nature and history, gives them a sense of identity and continuity, and contributes to promoting respect for cultural diversity and human creativity" (same article of the Convention).

The extension of the notion of "material" to "intangible", although on the one hand gives access to the respect and enhancement of heritages that otherwise would not be physically and materially identifiable (and, consequently, one would not know what "physicality" one would have to safeguard), on the other hand, a series of considerations on all other products, such as dry stone, which, although physically and materially identifiable as built objects, would remain confined to the sphere of purely "physical" conservation. I mean that, even if we manage to maintain the physical testimony of dry stone, we can fear, as it happens in some regions, to lose its cultural characteristics, its practices, its compositional gestures, the very idea of the technique when, as in this period of history, it is no longer in exact symbiose (or apparently so) with the structuring and development of the territory. In other words, when it starts to become "old", not modern, no longer meets the functional requirements of the new structure of the agricultural and / or urban sector.

The great revolution of the Cultural Convention of Intangible Heritage is, as far as we are concerned, in the establishment, directly or indirectly, of the relationship between the being of physical objects and the culture that produced them. The paradigm is centred on the protection of the object of study, mediated by the activation of a class of experts and technicians, from a point of view centred on the practices of safeguarding and "cultural processes" and therefore also the social context of their production.

The object "Heritage" has become the "living" production of culture as it happens. Implementing the Convention means not so much, or not only, documenting and studying intangible cultural heritage, but creating the conditions that ensure that these practices continue to be transmitted in forms adapted to new historical and social contexts. The institutions themselves are given a mission and a role: that of being, above all, supportive of the initiatives of communities and groups that identify themselves as custodians and "producers" of the intangible practices that this protection must defend.

The idea of protection is thus presented as one of the most interesting proposals for overcoming the classic approach of cautious protection adopted until now for historical and artistic monuments, where "conservation" means the fight against degradation, disappearance or destruction.

If, until now, the action of institutions has been aimed at the recovery, study and preservation of the vestiges of the past, the application of the Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage necessarily implies a renewal of the objectives of the institution - from which it becomes necessary to develop new strategies of intervention.

All the complexity of rules and knowledge, which testifies to the local culture, is now in danger of survival and recognition, and it tends to be hastily dispersed over the years.

The progressive globalisation of the market, of communication and of knowledge, is opposed by the increasingly clear conviction that the culture of a region's identity represents the main ethical reference, the scope of local memory and the testimony of the historical and socio-economic diversity of any community.

Unfortunately, in the course of conservation and maintenance of the history of real estate, there is the risk of falling into banality, conceptual error, resulting in the loss and destruction of the elements that make up the identity of a place.

There is a need for a "strategy" that works towards the conservation of the objects of course, but in a clear way, underlining the importance and value of the cultures that produced them. All that wealth of experience, knowledge, objects, languages, etc. that form the backbone of their culture and structure, the intangible expressions of man, the importance of the assets that we have left.

Saving the immateriality of the act is saving the materiality of the object

The intangible heritage is often present, inscribed in the material heritage, in the material objects of daily life and ritual practices... saving the intangible heritage is not technically possible, if it is not concretized in a material heritage. This is reflected in the actions of the craftsmen, the voices of the actors, the posture of the dancers, and more simply in the behaviour of those who, every day, respect a certain number of customs

and adopt certain behaviours corresponding to unwritten rules, but inscribed in the minds of everyone. (Marc Augè) ²



The union between man's primitive "know-how" and the Paradise to be conquered gives the technique of dry stone construction the value of "art", giving it the meaning of "culture" and the message of hope as a "social product" and a system of communication and balance between nature and man.

² Marc Augè – La notion de patrimoine Immateriel – Conference on University of Estiu of Andorra, 28 juin 2008