Archives incorporating museum objects:
The case of performing arts

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Performing Art is a specific type of artistic creation of exclusively temporal nature, that all it leaves behind is indirect evidences. Many of these evidences might be individual art works per se, like models of the set and drawings of the costumes. Others, like costumes and scenery items, may entirely bear the features of museum objects, and need to be described, kept, exhibited and publicized accordingly. There might be individual intellectual products that have been produced or participated in the performance, like a piece of music, a translated text, a libretto. Finally, there is a wide range of items of documentary nature: notes of the director or the choreographer, versions of the set and the costumes of different acts, material related to the preparation of the program and the posters, bureaucratic documents, tickets, photographs and possibly video tape of rehearsals, press announcements, interviews and reviews, photographs and comments about specific performances. All the above material comprises dispersed traces of the stage production, which stand between museum collections and archives and are usually treated differently, according to the collection they belong to. If the collection is about a painter, who was occasionally involved in the theater as set and costume designer, it is possible that the works are curated as paintings and the reference to the performance is limited to description fields. If the collection is about the history of an organization, like a theater company or a dance school, it is possible that performance productions are described as part of the annual repertoire to which other elements, like names of actors or classes of dancers refer to. Furthermore, if there is an active collection of redistributed theatrical costumes, the reference to theatrical roles and specific acts within a play might be one of the main prerequisites of the documentation system, which should also be able to describe combinations and modifications of items (Bonora, P.; Ossicini, Ch.; Raffa, G. (2006) p. 3). In conclusion we would argue that the performing arts sector is characterized by a much wider variety of perspectives, in which the material left behind should be treated and should be described, compared to other collections of cultural items.

Another much discussed special feature of performing arts regards the transitory nature of the final product, which is actually intangible (Abbot, D.; Jones, S.; Ross, S. (2008) p.5; Le Boef, P. (2006) p.2, chapter 2; Doerr, M.; Le Boef, P.; Bekiari, Ch. (2008) p. 6). The loss is inherent in the process of the performance and there is no final version which can be seen. The artistic context intended to be conveyed to the audience is an articulated idea, a concept that is expected to be expressed during the several performance events. It consists of a combination of the artistic works and the products of many collaborators, some concrete and others intangible, some pre-existing, others reformed and others produced for the specific play. Consequently, much of the remaining items are traces of a creative process of a non-linear character, as the members of the creation team work independently or together, in several different stages, often interacting with each other. This predefined combination is expressed repeatedly, yet each time in a unique way, during a series of performance events for a certain period of time and then disappears for ever. The loss of the actual intellectual product is mainly due to the fact, that it is highly based on the interaction of several

temporal elements - like speech, sound, movement and light - not possible to be entirely captured. From the above, it is apparent that the performance production is an articulated creative process much more complicated and demanding in its description than the execution of an architectural design or an industrial plan, because of its multiple creators and the absence of a stable final product to refer to.

One should really wonder as to what is actually attempted to be documented in the case of performing arts, as long as the final product is profoundly lost and only its memory survives in peoples' minds. Are there any common characteristics that a performance work bears with other physical or conceptual works? Does a performance work have similar descriptive features with a physical artwork, like a painting or sculpture? Even though the remaining traces are physical items, some of which might be considered as artworks, the staged work as a whole apparently cannot be described in terms of physical consistency. Could it be described in similar ways with a conceptual work, like a work of literature or a piece of music? Conceptual objects, words, images or music exist through their physical or electronic carriers, which determine their substance. Furthermore, the permanent character of the physical carriers allows the creators of the conceptual objects to define and authorize their work. Both the above features are not applicable for the performing works, which by nature have no physical carrier, no final version, no permanent substance, and often not an individual creator (the stage director is not exactly considered the creator of the performance work, his role is often only coordinating; for the development of the role of the stage director see *http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Stage_director*). A performance work is expressed only through predetermined events, leaving behind only limited traces that give an idea of what happened, like the ashes of a fire.

Describing events is not innovative to the cultural and humanities sector. To the contrary, it could be argued that a significant part in the description of cultural products is based on the research of the historical and artistic events that generated them. Especially in the sector of historical archives, the main research concerns the unfolding of unrepeatable historical events, through the examination of the available documentary material, which could assist to reconstruct and understand the happening. However, a historical fact is open to many interpretations, and the evidences are used to support different approaches and possible different versions of what happened; to investigate people's role, to evaluate the circumstances and define the consequences. As a result, during the documentation process, the focus is on the description of the documentary items and on their reference to the events, not to the plan of the events, as is the case with performances. The documentary items are described in order to reveal aspects of the event and its dynamic, which, contrary to performances, develops in independent, uncontrolled and often arbitrary ways, altering or overturning guiding lines and plans. In contrast to that, the description of material of the performing arts makes a constant reference to the performance plan, as most of the items are drafts of elements incorporated in the plan, objects participating in the execution of the plan, or pre-designed memorabilia, incapable to enlighten the dynamics expressed in the actual performance. What occurs during each performance of the same production could be argued to be pretty much the same, as long as it can be seen as a repetitive effort to communicate the same message through the same media. Even though there is no doubt that each performance is a separate event, the manipulative way in which it is produced make it look more like an instance of the overall production (Le Boef, P. (2006) p. 3).

At this point, it might be worthwhile to examine the documentation approach to other objects that participate in repetitive events, like the ceremonial religious objects - Communion spoons and chalices, clerical dresses etc. Although the purpose of the creation of ceremonial objects is also tide to a predefined event, a repeated ritual with conceptual and symbolic annotations, those objects are treated in museums as individual works, while their reference to the event they participate is limited to information about their usage. In most cases, the actual event to which the ceremonial objects participate is disregarded, either because it is a well known procedure, e.g. the Holy Communion, or because it is not possible to describe. The contributors of these kinds of ceremonies are rarely mentioned, and the approach shifts from the procedure to the participated objects and their creation. Costumes, settings, melodies and speech are combined in many manifestations of life and their remnants comprise a significant part of our cultural heritage: religious rituals, weddings, fests, dinning, playing games, they are all kinds of procedural repeated events, based on a more or less predefined plan, much like performances.

What then is the important distinctive element between the performances and other events? If not the predetermined, highly controlled and repeatable ways in which they develop, is it maybe their artistic nature? Do their reflecting and executing an artistic concept provide them with special properties? Perhaps the distinction between performance and other rituals stands on the innovative idea, the artistic vision behind the plan, enforced by the improvised nature of the stage production, which lasts for a short period and intends to disappear leaving behind mostly ephemeral documentary items, drafts and adaptations. We have to admit that certainly the idea, the essence, the spirit of a theatre, musical or dance performance is what attracts the interest of the user. It is not the event, but the intangible work of art or entertainment that the event of the performance unfolded, what we are trying to approach, through the various physical and conceptual components that served this inspiration (Abbot, D.; Jones, S.; Ross, S. (2008) p. 3). One could argue that in the case of performing arts, the event acts as the actual carrier of the conceptual object, the artistic work, like a book or a painting carries the artistic idea of its creator/s. Maybe the event of the performance is the carrier of an artistic creation in a similar way that a canvas holds the artistic expression of a painter and a musical score carries the artistic expression of a musician. In that sense, a series of performances of the same show are actually carriers of the same idea, developed to form a concrete production schema by the director, the crew and the cast.

Looking at the bibliography about the modelling of performing arts a most interesting article by Martin Doerr, Patrick Le Boeuf & Chryssoula Bekiari, presented in the 2008 Annual Conference of CIDOC in Athens (see bibliographical references) suggests the following modelling of performing arts within the model developed by the International Federation of Library Associations (IFLA), entitled the FRBR model : a Performance Event (the happening) *performs a* Performance Plan (the "how") *which realizes a* Performance Work (the "what'). The Performance Plan *is a* Self-Contained Expression (a set of signs that will be conveyed) that i*ncorporates* Expressions of other Works (texts, translations, musical notations and other pre-existing material, scenery, costumes, lighting effects and other "by-products" (Le Boef, P. (2006) p. 7). The above schema relates to the CIDOC Conceptual Reference Model (CRM) through the entities E7 Activity, E90 Symbolic Object, E29 Design or Procedure and E89 Propositional Object.

To my understanding the main differentiation in the above modeling is between the conceptual content of a performance (Conceptual Object) and the performance itself (Activity). However, what the Work and what the Plan stand for, are a bit confusing: why the comments on a performance are about the Work, whereas the music, the stage setting and the translation of the play are incorporated in the Plan? Does the Work represent the act of stage directing and the Plan the production? Where does the content of the program belong to? Looking at the scope notes of the CRM the apparent distinction between E89Propositional Object, where Work belongs, and E90 Symbolic Object, where Plan is also part of, is that "propositional objects" are meaningful things (ideas), whereas "symbolic" might also be recognizable structures (signs). But again it is not easy to distinguish elements of the stage production that consist of pure ideas, not incorporating signs that promote the adaptation to the performance procedure: even theatrical plays, incorporate instructions of how to be performed. In performing arts the conceptual work and the plan are difficult to be seen apart, as they often develop together. Another consideration is the use of property P14 *carried out* by (performed): in the CIDOC CRM scope-notes no mention was found to Symbolic Objects (such as Plans) *carried out (performed) by* Activities, but only to Activities *carried out (performed)* by Actors - people or groups (CIDOC CRM (2010) p. 41; Doerr, M. (2006) p.13). Does this imply that a performance plan is treated similarly to being an activity? It is worth examining.

The reason of conducting the above examination is that, in documenting the material of performing arts there is often a need to draw a clear distinction between objects describing the concept, proposed by the director and the other members of the creative team – set and costume designer, composer, light designer, graphic designer etc-, and what was finally implemented in the production. What is being developed during the rehearsals and what has been actually implemented in the production may vary significantly, even though often, due to the temporality and the essence of continuity of the whole process of preparing a performance, the stage of development of each element is not sufficiently documented. Yet, the final product is of great importance to documentation, because usually this is the main reference point to the following performance events. The final product is defined by the final elements of the performance plan: the scenery, the costumes, the music, the texts as decided by the stage director, accepted by the producer and being prepared by the stagecraft; the final instructions about the happening - how the acting, dancing or other performing should be performed, how the light and sound should interact etc. This core of material corresponds to the actual production and is regarded as not only the definite plan to be applied, but as the prototype of the performance itself.

The corpus of the final product is represented and outlined on the printed program, the posters, the press-release. The program provides a record of the production, gathering all the important elements to remember, the collaborators, the cast, and often texts about the directors' vision, images of the important moments on stage etc. To this corpus of information have direct or indirect reference all of the material to be documented: people, organizations, material and immaterial works, clippings, even theater repertoires and annual programs of artistic schools.

Finally, it might be useful to point out that museum traveling exhibitions, the well known "shows" bear certain similarities to performing arts, to the point that exhibitions

are also temporary, predefined events, based on an idea, implemented by many collaborators and realized in many places. Exhibitions, like performance events have participant objects, and leave behind documentary material, like exhibition catalogs and reusable material, like texts, images and physical staff.

Conclusion

Even though it is well understood that capturing a product of performing arts is not possible, due to its transitory nature, curators and archivists are asked to document the remaining traces that consist of a variety of physical items, some of them artworks. The distinctive features in the description of such items concern, a) their close relationship with the artistic process that led to their production, a process which includes the development of the idea and the various stages of its implementation, and b) the heavy spatio-temporal information that need to be described, in order to document their participation in several different preparatory, rehearsing and performing events. The development of a method, to clearly describe the prototypical performance reflected in the Performance Plan, and its complicated referencing to the individual items of the performing arts, is of major importance to the documentation procedure.

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