

Chapter 3

Communicative Potential in Interior Experience: Museography and Interior Design

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ABSTRACT

The spatial experience is always related to time as well as to movement: the impact of interior spaces can be largely controlled by the project, and the perceptual implications can be very different. The museography is a disciplinary field where the spatial experience is combined with the communicative requirement, which can be confirmed but even contradicted by formal and spatial choices, because “it is impossible to avoid communicating.” Space is always emotional and communicative, so at the educational level, the design approach of museography is very significant. The chapter illustrates the disciplinary background and several cases, highlighting the power of display solutions that can be very incisive on interiors students.

INTRODUCTION

The museum is an institution that has been significantly transformed over the centuries.

Its own definition has been and still is continuously re-pondered. At present, according to the ICOM Statutes, “A museum is a non-profit, permanent institution in the service of society and its development, open to the public, which acquires, conserves, researches, communicates and exhibits the tangible and intangible heritage of humanity and its environment for the purposes of education, study and enjoyment” (ICOM 2007). Yet, after a little more than a decade, this definition has already been radically questioned as an expression of a certain Western culture and outdated vision: in 2017 the ICOFOM (the International Committee for Museology of ICOM) initiated a global, academic debate on it and its endeavor led to acknowledge “the considerable differences in notions of what a museum is across the world and in different linguistic contexts. In today’s world of global migration and demographic shifts, public expectations of museums are ever-changing” (Brown and Mairesse 2018).

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Communicative Potential in Interior Experience

The Committee on Museum Definition, between 2017 and 2019, collected almost 270 definitions in view of the 25th ICOM General Conference in Kyoto (September 2019), but the proposal ICOM supported consisted basically of a refinement of the previous definition, which was not in fact overcome. Instead, the intense Kyoto debate has birthed a totally revolutionary proposal, which says: “Museums are democratizing, inclusive and polyphonic spaces for critical dialogue about the pasts and the futures. Acknowledging and addressing the conflicts and challenges of the present, they hold artefacts and specimens in trust for society, safeguard diverse memories for future generations and guarantee equal rights and equal access to heritage for all people. Museums are not for profit. They are participatory and transparent, and work in active partnership with and for diverse communities to collect, preserve, research, interpret, exhibit, and enhance understandings of the world, aiming to contribute to human dignity and social justice, global equality and planetary wellbeing”. Its radical diversity from previous definitions generated a split between those in favor and those against (some pointing out how a complete museum mission emerged, relating to its active role in civil society, the others criticizing the excessively political tone neglecting the traditional functions of the museum), so it was not approved and the debate still proceeds intensively.

This means that the museum is a live institution (or simply space), which evolves with society and history, being part of them and not their mere observer or custodian, and which can only be studied and set up through the collaboration of different disciplines. Of course, it wasn't always like that. When the modern museum was born, the issues to be addressed were of a basic and very concrete nature. In the nineteenth century, when the public museum broadened considerably in the western world and particularly in Europe, attention was focused on the building qualities: the first to propose a museum architectural typology was Jean-Nicolas-Louis Durand, outlining both a plan layout and architectural properties (Durand 1802).

The focus on the museum's interior design is therefore more recent, as a specific approach focused on spatial, exhibition and communicative solutions, aimed at making the museum visit fruitful and involving.

The point of attention has progressively shifted to the sense of the museum's mission: the spaces must be engaging and support interpretation, which however should be an active response from the visitor and not just an undeniable proposal from the curator.

The museographical project offers a privileged point of view on the communicative potential of spaces as well as their ability to induce and modify behavior. The effectiveness of a museographical project strongly depends on the *atmosphere*: this concept has had alternating fortunes in the history of architectural theory, but in the 21st century it has again been taken seriously by designers and critics, contaminating with other disciplinary fields such as psychology, physiology, cultural anthropology and neuroscience.

The qualities of an interior space devoted to exhibition, therefore, present inspiring occasions for reflection, in-depth study and design exercises and experimentations. Students who engage with the design of interior spaces should always have at least one experience in this field, as the involved concepts can be applied, albeit in a less intense and evident way, to all other fields of interior architecture.

In the vast literature on museums, the attention specifically devoted to *museographical* aspects is nevertheless quite marginal: on the contrary, much more emphasis is placed on *museological* approach which, although fundamental and crucial, does not exhaust the museum's design problems, since it is not specifically addressed to “how” but to “why”. This underestimation often generates misunderstandings and can seriously affect the visit, then this chapter stresses the role of museography.

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