MUSEUM SEMIOTICS:
a new approach to Museum Communication

Thesis submitted for the degree of Ph.D.
Department of Museum Studies
University of Leicester, Faculty of Arts

April 1992

Maria de Lourdes Parreiras Horta

UMI Number: U632526

All rights reserved

INFORMATION TO ALL USERS
The quality of this reproduction is dependent upon the quality of the copy submitted.

In the unlikely event that the author did not send a complete manuscript
and there are missing pages, these will be noted. Also, if material had to be removed,
a note will indicate the deletion.

UMI®
Dissertation Publishing

UMI U632526
Published by ProQuest LLC 2015. Copyright in the Dissertation held by the Author.
Microform Edition © ProQuest LLC.
All rights reserved. This work is protected against
unauthorized copying under Title 17, United States Code.

ProQuest®

ProQuest LLC
789 East Eisenhower Parkway
P.O. Box 1346
Ann Arbor, MI 48106-1346

LIBRARY LEICESTER UNIVERSITY

7S01128616

X 7S 1978050

ABSTRACT

MUSEUM SEMIOTICS: a new approach to Museum Communication

Maria de Lourdes Parreiras Horta

Thesis presented for the degree of P.H.D., Department of Museum Studies, Faculty of Arts, University of Leicester,1992

The research explores the theoretical possibility of a **semiotic approach** to the Museum phenomenon, seen as a process of **communication** and **signification**, and the consequences on the determination of the social function of museums, in its semantic and pragmatic levels. It proposes a new discipline for the field - that of 'Museum Semiotics', as a theoretical background and a tool for the understanding of museums as 'semiosic spaces', acting in the cultural process through their 'communicative actions'. PARTS I and II propose the basic assumptions and premises for the study of the specific **Museum Language**, defining its terms and concepts, and considering museum objects as bearing a 'sign-function', as 'signifying units' used in the construction of messages and 'discourses', manifested or hidden in museum exhibitions. The mechanisms of the process of sign production and of sign interpretation in the Museum context, the concept of **'museality'**, the Museum **'mythological speech',** the interplay of codes and the interaction between emitters and receivers in the museum communication process, are explored here. PARTS III and IV propose and develop a preliminary model of analysis of exhibition 'texts' and of their specific 'rhetorics', applied in a particular **case study**, the exhibition on 'Buddhism, Art and Faith', held at the British Museum (1985), in order to detect the multiple ways in which the public 'reads' a Museum message, and all the elements working in this process. PART V presents the conclusions and insights on Museum Communication, on exhibition production and evaluation, on Museum Education, and on new fields of research opened up through the approach of Museum Semiotics, proposing a strategy for changing the conditions of communication, through **open** and **aesthetic** texts, which may encourage the visitors to recover their **freedom of decoding'**.

FIGURES and TABLES

Tables:

PART I - HYPOTHESIS

CHAPTER 1 : INTRODUCTION - a preliminary approach to Museum Semiotics.

1.1 - **Aims** of the Research
1.2 - **Justification** of the Research
1.3 - Museums as **Communication** and **Signification systems**
1.4 - **Thesis proposition:** the Museum Language and Speech - the process of Museum Communication
1.5 - **The semiotic approach** : usefulness and limits
1.6 - **Theoretical sources** and review of literature

CHAPTER 1 : INTRODUCTION - a preliminary approach to Museum Semiotics

1.1 - Aims of the research

The aim of this research is to explore the theoretical possibility of a **semiotic approach** to the Museum[1] phenomenon, seen as a process of **communication** and **signification**, and the consequences on the determination of the social function of museums, in its semantic and pragmatic levels. Through this preliminary exploration we intend to contribute to the development of Museology, as a scientific field, and not as a mere 'technique' or a diachronic study of museums' history. Trying to break new ground in museological studies and philosophy, we propose a new discipline for the field - that of 'Museum Semiotics', as a theoretical background and a tool for the understanding of museums as 'semiosic spaces', acting in the cultural process through their 'communicative actions'.

The intention of this work is to introduce an initial order (even if provisional) in the heterogeneous mass of 'signifying facts' happening in the Museum context, to propose a method and a terminology that may help museum professionals and workers to reach a deeper level of awareness of their 'competence', their role and responsibilities in the complex interaction between museum institutions and society. At the same time, and as a result of that, this study may serve to clarify museological work, as a tool for the analysis and for the building of its main

[1] The term 'Museum' will be written in upper case when referring to the idea of the museological institution in general terms, and in lower case when referring to 'museums' in concrete terms, as particular institutions bearing this name all around the world.

performances - museum exhibitions - for the better understanding of the mechanisms of these semiotic processes and the evaluation of their effects on the public.

Our aim is to identify and try to define the specific **language** of museums, in order to make it recognized by both ends of the communication process - the 'emitters' and the 'receivers', the museum 'authors' and their active 'reading public'- and, hence, to make it better used and developed through the many possible museum 'speeches'.

1.2 - Justification of the research

The reasons for the development of this research may be found in trying to find the answers for many different questions, ranging from a private professional order to those social and political ones which come to the forefront of any debate on museums and their place in the present world.

The recent developments and proliferation of these institutions, the appearance of new forms and features that could hardly be called 'museums', according to the traditional definition[2], the increasing use of sophisticated technological devices and the growing interest of the public in spending extended leisure time in such cultural and recreational spaces, brought museums and museum professionals into a 'crisis of identity' (ICOFOM, Muwop,1986,1987,1988,1989). Museology itself comes under discussion, as a scientific basis for the museum profession, this one put under increasing pressure (Van Mensch,1989:9-20).

---

[2]In article 3 of the statutes of the International Council of Museums, a Museum is defined as 'a non-profitmaking, permanent institution in the service of society and of its development, and open to the public, which acquires, conserves, researches, communicates, and exhibits, for the purpose of study, education and enjoyment, material evidence of man and his environment'.

In developing countries, yet should be even more crucially than in the First World, the social role of museums is being questioned, as the possible justification for their subsistence and survival. The main and more frequent questions may be on: What are museums? What are their specific function or roles in present societies? What is Museology? Is it a 'science' or a 'discipline'? What is a museologist? What is a museum professional? What is the educational potential and the effectiveness of museum exhibitions? What is the theoretical basis for all these activities and functions?

In order to answer these questions, this research is an attempt to start digging into the field from inside, looking in a 'microscopic' way to the intrinsic nature of the museum experience and the museum phenomenon, in order to detect the internal structure, the mechanisms and the basic elements of this cultural process, as it presents itself at the moment, in a universal perspective.

Despite the variability of its forms and contents, the museum phenomenon, seen through a synchronic perspective, shows universally the same intrinsic and specific nature, which we could define as standing at the frontier between Logics and Poetics, in the fluid space between these two fields of human experience, and changing unendingly from one pole to another. From this synchronic approach that we propose here, diachronic studies could be developed for the total construction of the Museum theory and history.

Through this sort of 'immanent' criticism, worked within the 'economy' of the process itself, it is possible to reach the surface and extra-museological levels of this dialectical and dialogical interaction between museums and society. It is thus also possible to reach the political level of this interaction, on which the ethical responsibility of museums and of their professionals will be enhanced.

Through their scientific and 'competent' discourse, museums have been, throughout their history, some of the major mechanisms of reproduction - as 'communication media' - of the dominant structures and ideologies in society. The theory of 'communicative actions' proposed by the philosopher Jurgen Habermas (1989) for the emancipation of the human species through the removal of all tutorship, may provide a good basis for the new role of museums in modern societies.

According to Habermas, what is worthwhile in pre-modern societies is not the best argument, but that which supports the hegemony of authority, based on tradition; modernity has opened up this space where 'communicative actions', based on a consensus within the community, may develop freely. Modern museums should strive to become such kind of spaces, where men may dialogue and install a process of democratic discussion, as far as the traditional arguments and 'competent speeches' will give way to new 'communicative interactions'.

Decoding the Museum codes and deconstructing their 'mythological' speeches, with the help of Semiotics methods and tools, may be a sort of a 'micro-action', a tactic of social action, as proposed by Habermas, which may contribute for that modern man may construct dialogically, in interaction with his peers, his own destiny; something that modern societies, chiefly in the Third World, do need more urgently.

1.3 - **Museums as communication and signification systems**

As social institutions, and as anyone of them, museums rely basically and by their very nature on the process of interaction between human beings - thus, on a communication process, verbal or non-verbal; as cultural institutions, the process of communication that takes place within their walls is not a merely physical or sensorial one, but, as any act of communication, it involves mental exchanges, or what Roman

Jakobson (1963) has called 'relations de renvoi' (relations of 'remittance', or of 'referral'), based on the infinite process of **semiosis** - the generation of meanings, and the very essence of cultural processes.

There cannot be a process of communication without a system of signification, based on codes and rules, socially conventionalized, and on the use of **signs** - verbal, visual, aural, sensorial or concrete - in order to mention things or states of the world: what we commonly call 'languages'. Would there be a specific Museum Language, at the basis of their communicative action? What would be these codes and rules, the specific system and structure of their signification and communication processes? How do museum objects acquire the value of **'sign-functions'**[3] and how do they perform these functions, in what level of effectiveness and of understandability?

Whilst communication and culture may also happen in an individual level, as far as we reach the social level they require two ends in the process: 'emitters' and 'receivers'. How does this dialectical and dialogical interaction between museums and society, museologists and the public, takes place? With what potential effects and roles?

To understand museums as **signification** and **communication systems** we have to use the models and concepts of Communication and Semiotics studies, in order to identify the codes and rules, the nature and the structure of these systems, as well as of the signs used in these semiotic processes, as 'things representing other things', and arranged in meaningful sequences to construct and to communicate the Museum message.

---

[3]The concept of 'sign-function' is proposed by Umberto Eco, in *A Theory of Semiotics* (1979:48-50), for the discussion of the notion of sign and of a theory of codes. See chapters 2, 3 and 4, in this research.

The study of the Museum code, or language, could throw some light on the origins of the Museum 'myth' and of its 'sacralizing' power, at the basis of the 'authority' and the 'tradition' of its hidden 'speeches'.

As Eco points out, 'there are cultural territories in which people do not recognize the underlying existence of codes, or if they do, do not recognize the semiotic nature of these codes,i.e., their ability to generate a continuous production of signs'(1979:6). This is probably the reason why the Museum's semiotic capacity and the nature of its specific language have been for long ignored and not taken into consideration by communication and semiotic researches.

1.4. - Thesis proposition: the Museum Language and Speech - the process of Museum Communication

The main purpose of this research is to investigate the process of communication which takes place in the Museum context, and which cannot exist without a **system of signification**, with specific **codes** and **rules**, socially accepted and conventionalized: what we could call the Museum Language. At the basis of this system we consider **museum objects** as signifying vehicles, bearing a **sign-function** produced and interpreted (codified and decodified) by museum 'emitters' (curators, museologists, educators, designers, registrars, etc.) and museum 'receivers' (mainly, the 'public'). These **signs**, arranged in meaningful structures, according to different cultural codes, in paradigmatic and syntagmatic chains, as 'words' in a sentence, will be the 'cultural units' responsible for the construction of the Museum **discourse**[4], or **speeches**, standing for the 'expression-

[4]We are using Eco's definition of 'discourse' as 'the equivalent of a 'text' on the expression plane' (Eco,1979:187).

plane' of the **messages** , or the 'content-plane'. Museums can be thus seen as **communication-media**, supporting this cultural process of mental exchanges which bears in itself an 'infinite productivity' (Kristeva,1968).

In their main 'performances', or communicative 'acts' - **museum exhibitions** - museums produce **texts** [5], manifested in concrete **discourses**, which require a work of sign production and of sign interpretation based on the framework of references of emitters and receivers, and determined by different cultural and institutional codes, reflecting different **ideologies** or mental perspectives. The 'style', or the 'forms' of these museological expressions will be defined by the use of different **'Rethorics'**, a kind of art, in the words of Roland Barthes, of 'constructing and arranging signs in order to convince and to move the audience' (1988 g:53).

As Eco points out, signs are **social forces** and their study is a **social practice**, in as much as it may modify and clarify their power and action in society (Eco,1979:29,65).

1.5 - The semiotic approach: usefulness and limits

The original definition of Semiotics, as 'the science which studies the life of signs in society', the 'Semiology' proposed by Ferdinand de Saussure (1916), departing from Linguistics studies, has been further developed by other scholars, schools of thought, in many different areas of research. All have contributed to the expansion and scientific

---

[5]We are using the term 'text' in the sense used by Iuri Lotman, as 'any communication registered (or given) in a given sign-system (...) from this point of view we can speak of a ballet, of a theater play, of a military parade, as well as of all other sign-systems of behaviour as "texts", in the same measure as we apply this term to a written text in a natural language, a poem, a painting '(Lotman,1979:126).

organization of the semiotic field, which is still in the process of evolution and elaboration.

Umberto Eco in his 'Theory of Semiotics' (1979:9-14), gives a full account of the limits and thresholds of this complex area of investigation, from the more 'natural' to the more complex systems of communication: from zoosemiotics, which studies the communicative behaviour of non-human (thus, non-cultural) communities, to medical semiotics, kinesics and proxemics, musical codes, the formalized languages of algebra, chemistry, mathematical structures and electronic computers, secret codes, until even the attempts to detect a 'cosmic and interplanetary system of communication', as the same author suggests.

There are some fields, however, which do concern us more directly here, amongst all those areas of study which have been approached from a semiotic perspective: the 'system of objects', studied by Baudrillard (1968), 'plot structures' and text analyses (Barthes,1988,e; Todorov, 1966,1978; Greimas,1971,a,b), cultural codes (Ivanov and Toporov,1979; Todorov,1966; Lotman and Uspensky,1981), the semiotics of theatre and aesthetic theories (Veltrusky, Honzl, Bogatyrev, Brusak, Mukarovsky,1976), mass- communication researches, and of course, Linguistics, the 'mother' or 'daughter' science, according to different theories. All these disciplines will fall inevitably within the scope of Museology, seen from the same theoretical point of view.

The semiotic approach is a tool for the critical analysis of **how** museums communicate meanings, and not of **what** they mean through their communicative process. We intend here, using this approach, to look **at** the Museum language, and not **through** it, to attend to the **system** and not to the **product** of museum texts. In this process, we will be able to detect the institutional nature and codified structure of the Museum **discourse**, proposing an elementary model for the study of the

processes of **sign production** and of **sign interpretation** and all the labour and operations involved in these semiotic processes. This will give us a set of parameters or guidelines for the analysis of museological **'competence'**[6], or **'power'**, as well as of museological **'performances'**, or **'acts'**, on the level of pragmatics - museum work, exhibitions, activities and events, and their possible effects on the public.

1.6 - Theoretical sources and review of literature

The extent of the theoretical field explored in the development of this research, and the limits of length settled for this dissertation, will force us to summarize the review of literature, and to mention here the main sources specifically related to the subject of Semiotics and Museum Communication. A more extended review is presented in the Appendices, as a possible guide for other investigations.

Main theoretical sources

The main theoretical sources in the development of this research were the works and concepts of Umberto ECO and of Roland BARTHES in their studies on semiotics and the interpretation of cultural processes. Taking these two authors as a constant referential point of departure and of development of the subject, we have gone through many different paths of exploration, which have led us to other sources in semiotic theory and to other fields of study and

---

[6]The concepts of **competence** and of **performance** are taken here from N.Chomsky's ideas on respect to **language**, as an acquired capacity of human beings of using communicating devices, based on cognitive structures, and of actualizing these capacities and structures in concrete **performances**, or **speeches**, according to particular circumstances and contexts (Chomsky,1965,chap.1).

research, sometimes reaching the boundaries with co-operative disciplines which contribute to this field, sometimes crossing these boundaries to explore some specific aspects, which seemed relevant to our approach: communication studies, chiefly on visual expressions and on mass-communication, perception and cognition studies, sociological and anthropological analyses, studies on linguistics and the literary phenomenon, and studies on Theatre and the dramatic arts, the aesthetics of visual arts and the studies on material culture and cultural phenomena, were some of the fields we have gone through, along this road.

From Eco's **Theory of Semiotics** (1979) we have assumed the basic and broad concepts proposed by the author for any semiotic research, adopting his definition of terms and the structural models for this study, which he designs as two different fields: a **theory of codes** and a **theory of sign production**, at the basis of two discriminated categories, the **process of signification** and the **process of communication.** His main proposition for the analysis of culture as a **communication process** supports our proposition of museum work as a **signification** and a **communication** process.

Eco's theory of codes allows us to detect the system and the structure of museum codes in their syntactic, semantic and pragmatical aspects, manifested or **hidden** in the Museum communication process; his concept of **meaning** as a **cultural unit** allows us to see museum objects as bearing a **sign-function**, thus carrying **meaning**, as **cultural units** inserted into a correlation of semantic fields and axes, according to semiotic laws.

From his theory of sign production we have the models for the definition of a **typology of signs** (verbal/non-verbal, symbols, icons, indices, replicas and doubles, 'super-signs' and other possible categories), mainly based in Peirce's

semiotics, and for the exploration of the different modes of sign production and of sign articulation.

From Eco as well we have assumed the model and the challenge he proposes for the development of a specific semiotic research - that on the Television message (1983), applying this proposal for the analysis of a specific Museum message - the case study developed in Part IV, in this research.

From the works of Roland Barthes, mainly from his **'Eléments de Sémiologie'** (1987), and the **'Semiotic Challenge'**(1988 d), we have taken the philosophy and the model of 'reading' messages and discourses, of deconstructing 'texts' and 'speeches' in a critical way, starting from the 'signifiers' to reach 'signification'. His studies on the 'Structural analysis of narratives'(1988 e), taken in the multiplicity of forms they may occur, gave us the basis and clues with which to work out museum 'narratives,' using a deductive method that helps us to reach the implicit system of units and rules governing their production.

Barthes's analyses of literary texts, and his conceptions on the literary 'function', gave us the basis to propose the different roles of the Museum language and 'speeches', supporting the 'museological function' that we tried to define.

His lessons on the 'Old Rethoric' (1988 g) have been most enlightening for the analysis of the construction of museum discourses, of this 'kitchen of meanings'(1988 f), which he explores along his 'Aventure Sémiologique'(1988 d); his theory of 'Myth today', developed and explored in his 'Mythologies'(1985), has been a fundamental source for our analysis of the 'Museum Myth' and its sacralizing power.

Other fundamental sources on the field of Semiotics were Pierre GUIRAUD's **'Semiology'**(1975), from whom we borrowed the idea of the 'polarity' between Logics and Poetics, working at

the basis of the ambiguous nature of social codes and human communication. From Roman JAKOBSON, one of the leading theorists on structural linguistics, we have taken the main basis for the study of Communication Theory in the understanding of language. In his '**Essais de Linguistique Générale**'(1963) he uses some of the basic principles of this theory to explain the process of verbal communication, enhancing the complementarity of linguistics to cultural anthropology. The need to develop semiotic studies in order to analyse and compare different semiotic systems, and the role of the **poetic function** (1963 a) as the 'essence of language' (1965), were some of Jakobson's propositions which deeply influenced our approach to the Museum experience.

Another basic author for semiotic research is Louis HJELMSLEV, who developed the model of the sign in its constituent elements of 'expression' and 'content', at the basis of a sound linguistic theory, in his '**Prolegomena to a theory of language**' (1975). Tzvetan TODOROV's work on the 'categories of the narrative'(1966), and on the 'genres of discourse'(1978) has given us the model for the analysis of the exhibition presented in the 'case study'. Noam CHOMSKY (1965,1966,1975) is another referential author on the study of the problems and the mysteries of human language, from whom we have borrowed the notions of 'competence' and 'performance' in human communication.

Still in the field of semiotics we have profited from the ideas and the work of scholars like Algirdas Julien GREIMAS (1971,a,b,1975,1976,1981)), Jacques DERRIDA (1982 a,b), and Julia KRISTEVA (1967), who proposes the expansion of the semiotic field and demonstrates the 'isomorphism' of semiotic practices with the other complexes of our universe. Derrida's concepts on the 'dissemination of meanings' throughout the text, seeing language as a 'freeplay of differences' giving rise to 'effects of meaning', were quite

fruitful for our analysis of museum texts; Greima's studies on the semiotics of scientific discourses, and on the syntax and the grammar of socio-linguistic communication, provided this research with enlightening insights on the nature of museological work and on the responsibilities implied in the development of an 'academic discourse' on this field, as a 'meta-linguistic' discourse, in itself.

In the understanding and exploration of the pragmatics of the semiotic field, and its application in Museum Semiotics research, we must refer to the contribution of some leading brazilian semioticians as Decio PIGNATARI in his studies on the theory of **'Information, Language and Communication'** (1988), and on **'Semiotics and Literature'** (1987), J.TEIXEIRA COELHO Netto in his analysis of the **'Semiotics of Architecture'** (1984), Lucrecia D'ALESSIO FERRARA (1981), and Julio PLAZA (1987), who explores the problems of **'Intersemiotic translation'.**

All these leading semioticians refer to and acknowledge the fundamental principles of the two 'fathers' of Semiotics, or Semiology studies - Charles Sanders PEIRCE (1931), in his explorations of the sign's classical model and typology, and Ferdinand de SAUSSURE (1916), in his distinction of 'Langue' and 'Parole', language and speech, with all the theoretical aspects deriving from these postulates.

Another important theoretical source for the study of the Museum phenomenon, chiefly for the understanding of its educational potential, is the work of the soviet semiotician and psychologist Lev Semenovich VYGOTSKY (1978). His sociocultural theory of higher mental processes, as well as his 'developmental method ', made a powerful impact on the theoretical foundations in this field. The relationship of thought and language and the concept of mediation in human-environment interaction, through the use of tools as well as of signs - these seen as 'psychological tools', created by

and changing with societies according to their level of cultural development - is a basic issue for the understanding of the mediating character of the Museum system and language. His ideas on the 'internalization process' of culturally produced sign-systems, bringing about behavioural transformation, is fundamental for the understanding of the educational and developmental role of museums. Vygotskian perspectives have been approached and developed by many scholars, among which the work of James V. WERTSCH (1991) and his edition of essays by different authors (1985), stand as a relevant referential source. Other relevant sources in the field of cognitive psychology, memory and perception studies are referred to in the Appendices (see LURIA,1982; KOSSLYN,1980; VERNON,1968,1974; BERGER,1984; WILLIAMSON,1983; GREGORY,1979,1980).

Semiotics of Art and of Theatre

The study of the semiotics of art and of the theatre, developed by the Prague School scholars (see Matejka and Titunik,eds.,1976) has been most useful and important for our understanding and exploration of the Museum art and spectacle. Among the major sources we may point out the studies of Jindrich HONZL (1976 a,b) on the dynamics of the sign in the Theatre, and the hierarchy of dramatic devices; of Jiri VELTRUSKY (1976 a,b,c) in his studies on the construction of semantic contexts, and on the dramatic text and dialogue, as components of Theatre. These studies gave us the concepts and clues for the analysis of the essence of museological performances, of the active role of the audience in the perception of the multiplicity of meanings 'staged' on the Museum space, of the intersection of different semiotic systems working simultaneously, and allowing an ideal situation for the study of 'contrastive semiotics' and of

'intersemiotics translation'. Veltrusky is also responsible for the analysis of the pictorial sign, and of the semiotic potential of the material properties of signs (1976,d).

Other authors from which we have borrowed some key ideas and explanations, in this same group, are Karel BRUSAK (1976) in his studies on Chinese Theater, Jan MUKAROVSKY (1976,a, b, c) in some articles on the essence of visual arts, on some aspects of the pictorial sign and on poetic reference, Otakar ZICH (1976), in his studies on the aesthetics of dramatic arts, and Petr BOGATYREV (1976,a, b, c, d), in his semiotic studies of folk arts and costume and of folk theatre, all extremely relevant for museological studies.

Communication theory

Our basic guide in the broad field of Communication Theory has been the introductory book on the subject by John FISKE (1982), where we could find the basic concepts and the different models of communication processes and theories, their implication in semiotic studies and on the analysis of signification and culture, on ideology and meanings. Another basic source was found in John CORNER and Jeremy HAWTHORN (1983), in their introductory reader to Communication studies.

For this 'socio-cultural' approach of communication studies we have taken a lot from mass communication research, seeing museums as bearing many features of the mass-media, and looking for the influence of these media in the production of messages and texts today, as well as in the reception mode of modern audiences. An introduction to mass communication theory has been found in Denis McQUAIL (1986). Other approaches who explored the relations of media, society and culture, were found in Colin CHERRY (1983), Erving GOFFMAN (1983), Elihu KATZ, Jay G.BLUMLER and Michael GUREVITCH (1983), Colin McARTHUR (1978), Stuart HALL (1977), among others.

Turning to the field of pragmatics, we must refer to the work of Dan SPERBER and Deirdre WILSON (1986), who propose a new approach to communication studies, based on the 'principle of **relevance'** and on the role of **inference** and of **ostension** in the process of verbal communication. Another fundamental work in this subject is Gail E. MYERS and Michele Tolela MYERS (1988), on the dynamics of human communication, stressing a 'transactional' view of this process.

Museum Communication studies

In the specific field of Museum Communication, the amount of articles and essays available in museological literature makes it impossible to list all the relevant work already published on the subject (see Loomis,1975; Griggs,1984, Screven,1984, Lawrence,1991). Most of these studies, however, have focused the 'quantitative', rather than the 'qualitative' side of communication, and the many researches on visitors' behaviour and levels of attention (Screven,1974 a; Elliot & Loomis,1975; Palmer,1975; Peart,1982; Prince,1983; Falk,1985; Gardner,1986), on public reactions towards museums (Alt,1983; Merriman,1989,a,b), on effective exhibit designs and labels readability (Parr,1962; Wittlin,1968; Shettel,1968; Screven,1974,1975; Alt,1977; Borun,1977,a,b,1980; Sorsby,1980; Stansfield,1981; Miles & Tout,1979; Miles,1984,1988; Griggs,1981,1984), provided us with useful data and information about some of the elements implied in the museum communication process.

Very few articles or studies have yet focused the nature of this particular experience, from the perspective of signification and of meaning production (Skramstad,1978; Harris,1978; Taborsky,1982,1990; Cuisenier,1984; Annis,1986; Pearce,1986,1989,1990; Hooper-Greenhill,1989,1990,1991;

Shelton,1990; Lawrence,1990; Ames,1990; Dufresne-Tassé,1991; Volkert,1991; Hein,1991).

Museum Semiotics

The first studies which can be referred to as pointing out the process of signification happening in museum exhibitions are Duncan CAMERON's article (1968), 'A Viewpoint: The museum as a communications system and implications for Museum Education', in which the author enhances the **referential** function of the museum communication process, the objects seen as the 'primary medium' of the exhibition message. This article was assessed by Eugene I.KNEZ and A.Gilbert WRIGHT (1970), in 'The museum as a communications system: an assessment of Cameron's viewpoint', in which the authors point out the **reference** element of the message as the 'primary feature' of the Museum's educational role. Some of the basic elements of the Museum semiotic situation are already tackled in these two studies, as points of departure for further theoretical explorations.

The first specific reference to the semiotic nature of the museum phenomenon we could come to know was the article of Robert HODGE and Wilfred D'SOUZA (1979), a semiotic analysis of the Western Australian Museum's Aboriginal Gallery, in which the authors propose museum exhibitions as one branch of the mass media; through this analysis, the authors detect the main functions and contradictions of the displays, and the interaction between linguistic, visual and ideological codes along the 'historical narrative' presented to the public.

A second study to be mentioned was that of Manar HAMMAD (1987), a 'Semiotic Reading of a Museum', more specifically the National Museum of Modern Art, at Beaubourg, Paris, in which the author explores the way of 'reading a space', as

much as the visitor would do. This semiotic study of a spatial and museographical arrangement proposes that the setting of a work of art influences it, and thus determines to some extent the way in which it is appreciated. Another study on the semiotics of the museum space is John PEPONIS and Jenny HEDIN's (1982) analysis of the Natural History Museum, in London, and more recently, Eilean HOOPER-GREENHILL's (1990) study of the 'spatialisation levels' in museums, based on Foucault's theories, focusing the social, ideological, economic and cultural factors that interact in the museum system and activities.

Another basic paper, unpublished, dealing specifically with the Museum language and its logical semiotic nature was that of Petr SULER (1983), a Czechoslovakian author, who proposes the analysis of the exhibition language according to the two axes: the syntagmatic plan and the system plan.

One of the first formal and explicit propositions of the semiotic nature of the Museum, as a 'system of signs' and as a cultural sign in itself, was made by Jorge GLUSBERG (1983), the Argentinean museologist who proposes the theory of 'hot' and 'cool' museums, and who emphasizes the need of semiotic theory for the development of museological science. The need of museological criticism as a way to change museum institutions in laboratories of creation, as open spaces sensible to the needs of their public and environment, and the consideration of the museological 'para-media' (the media, public information systems, the critics, the publications) which work together to transmit the museum message, are some of the important new theses formulated by Glusberg, opening up the field of Museum Semiotics research. Some other few explorations of exhibitions as 'signifying practices', dealing mainly with the aspects of artefact analysis, and already tackling a semiotic and linguistic approach, have come to light in the sphere of the Department of Museum Studies,

at the University of Leicester: Dr.Susan M. PEARCE's series of articles on 'Thinking about things: approaches to the study of artefacts'(1986), retaken in 'Objects in structures' (1989) and 'Objects as meaning; or narrating the past'(1990), propose a systematic model for the study of material culture which offers a sound basis for a semiotic analysis of museum work; Dr.Eilean HOOPER-GREENHILL's essay on 'How objects become meaningful, or a new communications model for museums' (1991) is another recent attempt to understand the process of museum communication under the lights of semiotic studies. Edwina TABORSKY's article on 'The Discursive Object'(1990) is a sound and challenging contribution to the field. John REEVE's interpretation of the 'Buddhism,Art and Faith' exhibition, 'Leading the Public to Nirvana?'(1985), is an innovation in the field of exhibition analysis, focusing on signification, interpretation and communication aspects, in a specific situation.

Another approach to the specificity of Museum language (le 'langage muséal') and its natural links with the language of 'spectacle', the exhibition as a mediating tool, and the role of semiotic studies in defining the problems and the nature of this specific language is proposed by Andre DESVALLÈES (1987,1988). Other authors who share his ideas and propositions on the 'mise en scène' of cultural objects are Jacques HAINARD and Roland KAEHR, in a series of catalogues and publications of the Musée de la Ville de Neuchâtel, Switzerland (1982, 1984, 1985, 1987, 1988, 1989, 1990), a theoretical work expressed in a series of concrete exhibitions. A recent exhibition on '700 years of food in Switzerland', produced by Martin R. SCHÄRER (1991) at the Alimentarium, in Vevey, was a concrete demonstration of the potentiality of the museum medium and language, in different possible display designs.

Other sources are Jean DAVALLON (1983), Jean François BARBIER-BOUVET (1983), Charles PERRATON (1987), Bernard SCHIELE and Louise BOUCHER (1987). The 'Cahiers' of the EXPO-MEDIA group (1982) are another rich and inspiring source for the observation and the exploration of the Museum Semiotics field.

From all these sources and other unpublished museological papers it has been possible to travel throughout this 'aventure musémiotique', towards the unending limits of the Museum language, speech and myth. We are most grateful to all these 'leaders'.

CHAPTER 2 : BASIC PRINCIPLES

2.1. - **Museum Semiotics**

Culture as communication: the process of semiosis

Museum objects as signs

2.2. - **Museum Communication**

The process of communication: the Museum language

Verbal and non-verbal systems

The expression of contents

Language and speech: the Museum discourse

The concept of 'museality'

CHAPTER 2 : BASIC PRINCIPLES

This chapter will propose the basic assumptions and premises for the study of **Museum Semiotics**, defining its terms and concepts and showing the usefulness of semiotic studies for the understanding of the museum phenomenon and experience, proposing the concept of museum objects as bearing a 'sign-function'[1], as words of the Museum Language used in the construction of messages and 'discourses'.

2.1 - Museum Semiotics

A **sign**, in its barest conception, is something which represents something else. It is thus a **mediating psychological and intellectual tool.**

To re-present is not merely to 'present' or to deal with reality as it manifests itself. Representations are mental constructions, produced by the 'mind's eyes', of the perceptions of the material and existential 'continuum', which is segmented and classified, thus understood and appropriated by our brain, in an abstract process, as a means to intervene, to control and to interact with reality. To re-present implies a **mediation**, since it is not a direct relation. In order to interact with his peers, at the basis of social organization, man needs **tools**, natural or artificial, physical or psychological, as much as he needs tools to intervene in

[1] The term 'sign' bears different interpretations according to the different theories on semiotics, in different authors. The definition of the concept of 'sign-function', assumed in this research, is that proposed by Umberto Eco in his *Theory of Semiotics* (1979:48), in substitution to the more limited concept of the term 'sign'. It will be explored and explained in chapters 3 and 4 of this dissertation.

nature. Since human knowledge, thought and communication are involved, there is the need of mediation. This cannot happen without 'symbolization', a process of mental representation which allows mental exchanges, of concepts, ideas and signs.

Museums can be seen as **mediating** spaces, or structures, using their collections as **mediating tools** for mental and cultural exchanges, thus as **communication media**, supporting a continuous production of signs and messages.

Culture as communication: the process of semiosis

According to Umberto Eco 'the whole of culture should be studied as a **communicative phenomenon** based on **signification systems**' (1979:22). For him, every aspect of culture, taken as a 'cultural unit', becomes a 'semantic unit', inserted in 'systems of signification' organized in structures according to semantic fields and axes: natural languages[2], gestures, rituals, myths, legends, behaviours and relationships of production and value are systems of signification which allow a continuous process of communicative exchanges, through the use of signs, or of different 'signifying vehicles' (Eco,1979:29).

The example given by Eco is useful to explain this concept of culture as a communicative process: when a pre-historic man used a stone to split the skull of a baboon, 'there was as yet no culture, even if he had in fact transformed an element of nature into a tool'. For Eco, 'culture is born when:

---

[2]The concept of 'natural languages' is widely and generally used in linguistics and semiotics to refer to 'verbal language', that which is based on oral-gestural expression, and which is the opposite to 'formal', or 'artificial languages', as, for instance, Morse codes, traffic signals, deaf sign-language, computers' languages, etc... All these kinds of languages, including those called 'natural' (English, French, Spanish, regional dialects, etc.) are obviously, 'cultural languages'.

(i) a thinking being establishes the new function of the stone (irrespective of whether he works on it, transforming it into a flint-stone);

(ii) he calls it "a stone that serves for something" (irrespective of whether he calls it to others, or out loud);

(iii) he recognizes it as "the stone that responds to the function **F**" [i.e.'splitting things'] and that has the name **Y** (irrespective of whether he uses it as such a second time: it is sufficient that he recognizes it)'(1979:22/23).

These three conditions result in a **semiotic process** of the following kind (Figure 1):

Figure 1

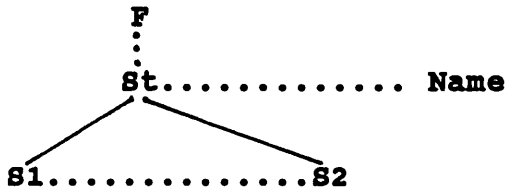


Fig.1 - The semiotic process **(Eco,1979:23)**

After having discovered and used the first stone (S1), our prehistoric man comes upon a second stone (S2), which he recognizes as another occurrence, or a 'token' of the same general model, or 'type' of stone (St). He is able then, by a mental process of abstraction, to subsume the second stone, along with the first one, under an abstract type (St) of stones that refers to the possible function (F) of 'splitting'. Our man can thus regard the two stones as 'sign-vehicles', or as significant forms, **referring back to** and **standing for** F (the function), as tokens of the type St.

The possibility of giving a 'name' (or a 'grunt', in the case of our Australopithecine) to the type-stone, in order that he might be able to communicate his findings to another of his kind, gives rise to the birth of language, which,

according to Eco, adds a new dimension to this semiotic situation (1979:23).

This mental capacity and process of 'referring to' something through another thing that 'stands for' it, is what Roman Jakobson (1963) has called 'relations de renvoi' (relations of 'remittance'). This basic process of human communication, these mental exchanges at the roots of cultural processes, is what Charles Sanders Peirce defines as the process of **semiosis.** For Peirce, the doctrine which he called 'Semiotic' was that of the essential nature and fundamental varieties of possible 'semiosis'(1931:5.488). 'By semiosis', he explains, 'I mean an action, an influence, which is, or involves, a cooperation of three subjects, such as a **sign**, its **object** and its **interpretant**, this tri-relative influence not being in anyway resolvable into actions between pairs' (1931:5.484)[3].

This statement may be better understood by Peirce's classical definition of a sign, as '...something which stands to somebody for something, in some respects or capacity...'(1931:2.228); these 'capacity' and 'respects' will define the 'interpretant'[4] of the sign, this 'other something', which is actually another 'sign' or mental representation provoked by the sign in somebody's mind, and which will be determined by the context in which the sign is used, as well as by the frame of references, or the mental encyclopaedia of the user. This mental encyclopaedia, stored in human minds, is filled up by signs, concepts, ideas and visual imagery, deriving from former experiences and knowledge, accumulated and registered in human memory.

---

[3] My emphasis.

[4]The definition of the 'interpretant' proposed by Peirce (1931) is very complex and supports different approaches; see chapter 3 for the development of this discussion.

To use again Eco's basic example, the 'capacity' attributed by our Australopithecine to the stone implement encountered a second time was that of being 'good for splitting'. To him, that stone was the 'sign' of the type of stones corresponding to the possible function of splitting things, in 'respect' to that possibility. Somehow, someday, he could have given another 'interpretant' for that same stone, seeing it as good in respect to the capacity of splitting somebody else's head. The stone/sign would then have acquired another sign-function, that of a weapon, soon after our prehistoric man happened to commit his first crime.

The frame of references is thus established in human minds as the result of experiences and the knowledge acquired through them, organizing these experiences in different categories, by distinction and opposition, according to a structured code, which will be activated and applied according to different situations and contexts. The relativity of signs, their variability and unprecise nature, which does not bear one only 'fixed meaning' or 'signified', like in a dictionary, becomes clear from these statements. This polysemic quality of any sign, even in the most 'conventional' signification systems, is what leads Peirce to speak of the fundamental varieties of '**possible semiosis**'.

Any sign, thus, has a material or sensory **form**, perceived by the senses, which is its '**signifier**', in Saussurian semiology, or the '**sign-vehicle**' for the sign. This 'something' will stand to somebody for 'something else' - the 'signified' (in Saussure's equation), or the 'referent' of the sign. The meaning this 'referent' will acquire is determined by the 'interpretant', the 'reference' suggested by the sign to somebody, or chosen by somebody, to interpret that sign in a given situation, or context, in 'some respects or capacity'.

We have thus another basic diagram (Figure 2) to represent this triadic relationship, on the basis of Peirce's semiotics:

Figure 2

Fig.2: The sign's triadic relationship

The semiotic process is continuously productive and extremely complex, being the object of investigation of other sciences besides that of semiotics, as for instance psychoanalysis, social psychology, perception studies and cognition theories. In a more radical definition by Charles Morris (1938), another leading theorist of the doctrine of signs, 'something is a sign only because it is interpreted as a sign of something by some interpreter...' (Eco,1979:16).

Eco expands the possibility of generation and interpretation of signs, considering their **mediation** quality as independent of their nature or communicative intention. Even stones, or natural phenomena can 'stand for' something else, to somebody, insofar as this relationship is mediated by an 'interpretant' (Eco,1979:15). **Meanings are in human minds, not in things themselves.** There is signification as far as human beings attribute meanings to things. This attribution, in Eco's view, is a mental work of **sign production**, and of **sign interpretation**, a subject which will be better explored in chapters 3 and 4 of this research.

Museum objects as signs

In the process of museum communication, museum objects are interpreted as signs of something else, for museum emitters and/or receivers, on the grounds of the previous social convention that supports the idea of museums, as places where cultural 'values' (artistic, historical, scientific, technological or natural[5] items) are collected, preserved and transmitted to present and future generations, because these items are considered to be 'significant' and 'meaningful' for a given culture, in a given time.

The 'system of objects' in contemporary societies, studied by Baudrillard (1968), and its exchange through symbolic forms analysed by Bourdieu (1970), shows very clearly the complexity of these relationships and interrelationships among different social codes and systems of meanings.

Not every object coming into the museum is a sign. Whereas some will undoubtedly have been acquired because of their already recognized nature as 'cultural signs', others will have been brought to, or offered to the museum, by naive donors who bring in their personal or private signs; others may have been found, for instance, through an archaeological excavation. At the moment they are found or brought to the museum, by archaeologists or even by curious children, these objects are potential signs, rather like relics in grandma's attic or in Aladdin's cave, and may be endowed with meanings by the museum's curatorial staff or by the archaeologists themselves.

---

[5] 'natural' items or phenomena included here as 'cultural values' once they are considered in their relationship with human life, the environment, and human intervention on it, as well as with human knowledge and scientific interests, as in the case of science or natural history museums, eco-museums, natural parks, zoos,etc.

In many museums the process stops there, and what we have is an accumulation of things, which have a semiotic potential but not a **semiotic function.** Just like a flash of light that enhances a theater performance, or a sound, that provokes a special reaction, these objects must be considered first of all as mere 'stimuli', rather than 'signs'. It will be the 'semiotic competence', in Eco's terms, of the emitters and the receivers of the museum message that will recognize in these displayed 'stimuli' a possible effect, corresponding to a foreseeable reaction, or meaning, they would like to elicit.

It is only by the work of **sign production**, or when there is a **sign-function**, that the stimulus is the **expression** plane of a supposed meaning, as its **content** plane.

Taken out of their primary context, in which they had possibly another sign-function, objects acquire a new function as soon as they are 'musealized': a first and primary sign-function in the museum context, that of being 'museum objects'. As socially conventionalized cultural signs, museums endow their objects, or their 'sign-vehicles' with an intrinsic 'semantic marker'[6] (distinctive significative features): the sacralized quality of being museum pieces. This sign-function of the museum object, standing for 'museality'[7] itself, and referring back to the museum institution and to its particular codes, throws a shadow, or a reverberation on any other sign-function which these objects may now perform.

Coming back to the diagram in Figure 1, we have then another superposed diagram, shown in Figure 3, in which 'stone 1' is the 'museum-stone 1' (Ms1) and the second stone is the

---

[6]See chapter 3, p.68,ff. for a definition of 'semantic markers'.

[7]The concept of 'museality' will be proposed and explored through this research. It refers basically to the specific 'quality' or 'essence' of the Museum language, its 'poetic function', its codes and rules.

'museum-stone 2' (Ms2), corresponding to an abstract category of a 'museum-stone-type' (Mst), and standing for different functions, denoted by different 'names' and determined by the many museological codes, referring to or connoting different 'interpretants'.

Figure 3

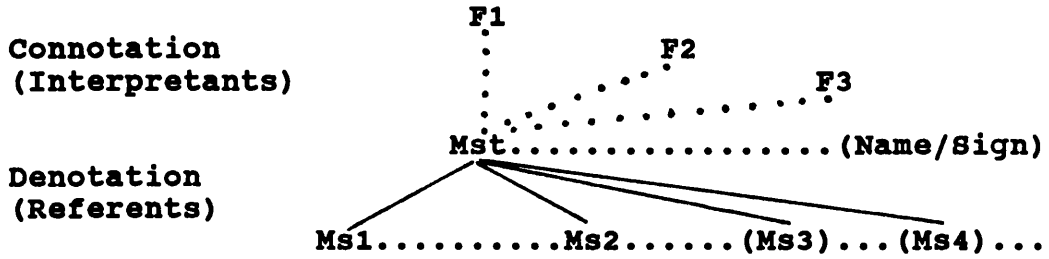


Fig.3 : The Museum's semiotic process

In this basic model, 'stones' (Ms1), (Ms2), (Ms3) etc., in a series of many other units, would thus be the first stones in a collection of 'museum-stones type' (Mst), standing as sign-vehicles for many different functions (F1), (F2), (F3),etc., in the codified structure of the Museum's signification system, of its academic or scientific theories, or even for the 'mythological' and implicit function: that of standing for 'the richness and completeness of the museum collections'.

The name given to these 'type-stones' may well be a new one: 'Lord Stein' type, 'Quarrybank specimen' or simply 'prehistoric tools', according to the systems of categorization and classification. These names will determine the sign-function and the sign-use of the sensory concrete signs (the museum objects), their articulation in the syntagmatic chain of the exhibition, or their organization in paradigmatic structures, in catalogues, files, or even in the storage system.

The interpretation of these signs, their connotations in a productive chain of meanings, is not, however, totally under

control from the part of the emitters of the museum messages, a phenomenon which will be better explored in a more detailed manner in chapter 5.

2.2 - **Museum Communication**

The process of communication: the Museum language

The possibility of giving a 'name' to things or states of the world gives rise to the birth of language, as Eco explains through the example of the Australopithecine (1979:23). Having made an arbitrary choice to denote an 'abstract type', our prehistoric man had next to create another 'grunt' to denote those stones which were not good for splitting. Through a system of differentiations and oppositions, 'splitting/not for splitting', man created the system of language, based on an arbitrary system of signification, which we can call a **code**, or **codes**.

A **code** would then be the correlation of the 'stones' with their 'types' and 'functions' (of which the 'stones' are the **expressions**, or **'sign-vehicles'**), and simultaneously, with the system of 'names' used to denote these types and functions, in a communicative process. Before the birth of language, man could have used other conceptual or cultural codes, like gestural or facial expressions to differentiate the stones one from another. Basically, codes are a question of choice and of distinction, of correlating things according to a given organized system.

In the museum context, stones or any other kind of objects are organized in structures, according to specific semantic fields and axes which supposedly correspond to their signification and functions in their primary context: those of their first and primary use in a given original culture or situation. However, in actual fact, collections are made and

structured by collectors, curators and museologists, corresponding, more often than not, to their own systems of meanings and to their vision of the world.

The representation in Figure 1 was actually a one-sided representation of a complex system of relationships in which the stone implements could be inscribed: the relationship of 'functionality'. But in fact the stone tool has not only that particular function. It may have many other functions, values and uses, changing with its evolution, and may acquire new ones in a given cultural system (including that of changing into a 'weapon'). It may also acquire an 'exchange value', as soon as it is changed into a 'commodity', in an economic system.

The representation in Figure 3 shows how an object, or many objects, can be signs of many different functions, according to many possible perspectives, which correspond to different 'interpretants' of the sign. To use again one of Eco's examples, an automobile can be seen from many different perspectives and viewpoints: the **physical** level, the **mechanical** level, the **social** level, the **economic** level, the **semantic** level (as a 'cultural unit'); the same would be pertinent for any kind of object we may have, from garments to paintings, from arrows to pieces of sculpture. We could add to this range of 'interpretants' the **museological** level, in which the role of the object as a 'museum piece' could be analysed (the 'master piece', the 'rarest', the 'oldest' object, the 'highlights' of the collections).

In this process, every 'cultural unit' turns out to be a 'semantic entity', as proposed by Eco (1979:27), as soon as it enters into a system of oppositions and relationships with other semantic units in a signification and communication process. This would be the same as in a game of chess, in which one piece has its specific meaning and function, but has its 'total' meaning determined by its location and possible

moves in relation to the other pieces on the board, at any given moment in the game. Contextual position - as the order of words in a phrase - changes the meaning of an expression.

The absence of other pieces in the game, at that given moment, also contributes to the potential meaning the other pieces may acquire. 'Gaps' in a collection are a constant worry for collectors and museums, in this unending effort to inventory the world. A semiotics of 'absence' could well be developed in respect of museum collections, with fruitful results for a critical analysis of societies, past and present.

The hierarchy and the position of signs, or 'semantic units' in a given system, the presence and the absence of these units in a signifying chain which compounds and expresses that system,are also significative elements for the understanding of a given code. As Barthes points out, language is a system of 'values', constituted by a number of elements, which are in themselves a 'standing for' relationship and, at the same time, a 'term' of a broader function, in a differential relation to other correlative values (Barthes,1987:18).

This is a vital point to be considered when examining the museum language as manifested in exhibitions, or chiefly in the museum systems of classification of their collections. Each object in a museum 'stands for' another object, idea or situation, in a given cultural system, and has a 'value' in itself; at the same time, it is a 'term' in the system of values of the museum code, or signification system, which does not necessarily correspond to that given original system.

In the process of sign production, in the museum context, these signs, stripped of their original determined functions and conventional significations, are open to all forms of use and constructions chosen by the museum emitters, being at the same time subject to all kinds of decoding and interpretation

from the part of the public, including the 'aberrant decodings' mentioned by Eco (1980). What normally occurs in this process is a 'lateral shifting' of the sign-function, from its primary context to a new, museological one, as it is shown in Figure 3. Through this mechanism, and using the same material 'signifiers', or objects, it is possible to build up as many texts or discourses we may want, from the nearest to the farthest 'interpretants' of their original signification. This 'semiotic competence',or 'power', of the museum language supports the possibility of the creation of 'myth', in the sense Barthes (1985) has explored, according to the museum's (or the curators') ideology[8]. This point will be further developed in chapters 4 and 5.

The museum language is thus basically the arrangement of concrete 'stimuli', endowed with a sign-function and structured according to the semantic fields and axes of the museum code and the curators' systems of signification, all reflecting and based on a given cultural model.

Verbal and non-verbal systems

To propose a **code** is to propose a correlation between **'semantic units'** and **'expression units'**. In the linguistic semiotic system, contents are translated into words, which are without any doubt the most powerful semiotic device that man has invented, as Eco points out, determining basically communication and even thought, as what has been called 'primary modelling systems' (Eco,1979:172). Despite this, we know by experience that there are many contents that cannot be translated into one or more 'verbal' units, like for instance, when we want to describe a painting, or even to define deep feelings.

[8]See chapter 4, p.100, on the construction of 'myth'.

There is a set of contents which are only translatable by non-linguistic semiotic systems, which have functioned and been used well before the birth of language. Eco supports the suggestion of Garroni (1972:259-309), that 'there is a set of contents conveyed by the set of linguistic devices (L), and a set of contents that are usually conveyed by the set of non-linguistic devices (NL); both sets contribute to a subset of contents which are translatable from L to NL or vice versa, but such an intersection leaves aside a vast portion of 'unspeakable' but not 'unexpressible' contents (Eco,1979:173) (Figure 4):

Figure 4

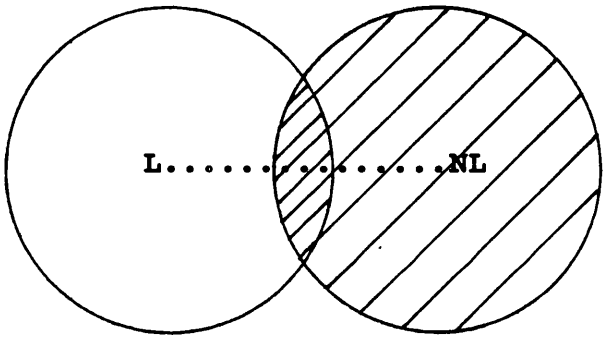


Fig.4 : The intersection of linguistic and non-linguistic systems (Eco,1976:173)

It is in this area (shown in Figure 4) that the specificity of the museum language and the nature of museum signs must be posited and defined. In the museum expression system, 'semantic markers' and their 'interpretants' have to be not only verbal devices, but must rely basically on organized and structured perceptions, which construct and deconstruct the exhibition 'discourse', leading to the meanings of 'texts' and messages.

In this construction or deconstruction (interpretation) of museum exhibitions, it is not sufficient to rely on scientific criteria, on period or stylistic classifications, or on the names of authors or makers inscribed in labels or files; the main basic element of museum language, manifested

in museum 'discourses' or 'texts', must rely on the concrete 'stimuli' which reach the field of perception of emitters and receivers, and which are organized and structured according to previous experiences and to the mental encyclopaedia of the users of these signs.

Museum signs have both an inner structure and a relation to their content which are not the same as those of verbal signs. The interaction and intersection of forms, textures, materials, colours and lights, and sometimes even of sounds and smells, 'framed' or not by linguistic signs, will actually be the essence of the museum experience[9]. The invention, production and interpretation of museum signs is an experience more akin to the 'aesthetic' than to the 'scientific' or rational one, what justifies the consideration of the possible existence of a museum 'art'.

The expression of contents

Hjelmslev (1975) expands Saussure's dichotomy of the sign's structure - the 'signifier' and the 'signified', proposing, in a famous equation, the four elements which can be defined 'operationally' in the two basic terms of a sign, or 'semiotic function': the '**form**' and the '**substance**' on the plane of the **expression,** and the '**form**' and the '**substance**' on the plane of the **content.**

The 'substance of the content' corresponds to the plane of ideas, or thoughts. The 'substance of the expression' corresponds to the material or sensory components of any expression, like for instance the sounds in verbal language, the 'phonemes' in linguistics terminology. In museum language, this 'expression substance' is the material component of museological signs: wood, glass, fibers,

---

[9]See J.Veltrusky (1976,d) for the analysis of the semiotic potential of the material properties of signs.

pigments, clay, metals, paper, or even light, as in holograms, for instance.

The 'form of the expression' are the words, or 'morphemes' in verbal languages, notes in musical expressions, 'bits' in electronic languages, numbers in mathematical expressions, or, in museum language, the form of the objects, artefacts, works of art and of any other material expressions which can be used or produced in the system. This form of the expressions, as 'units' of language, or as 'groups of units' in a complex sentence, will necessarily correspond to the form of contents, in order to express them.

What is the 'form' of a content? Hjelmslev explains this point: there is a common factor in all languages besides the principle of a **structure**, encompassing the semiotic function and all functions derived from it - a principle that is common to all languages, but that is differently 'executed' in the different languages. This common factor is a **value** which can only be defined in its relationship with the structure of language, and that is **sense** (Hjelmslev,1975:57).

Because of this intrinsic relationship, 'sense' can only be analysed in a particular way, in each different language, since it is differently organized and articulated in each one of them. Every language establishes its frontiers and segmentations in the "amorphous mass of thought", in emphasizing different values in a different order, or in different axes of gravity. (Hjelmslev,1975:57).

These different ways of segmenting thought from its unlimited 'continuum' is what Hjelmslev calls the 'forms of the content'.

'In the same way as the same grains of sand can make different drawings, (falling on the ground from a same hand), or the same cloud (in the sky) may constantly assume new forms, the same sense is formed or is differently structured in different languages. It is the semiotic function of a language, and the functions which derive from it, that determine its form. Sense becomes, each time, the substance of a new form, and has no other possible existence besides that of being the substance of a given form'.
(Hjelmslev,1975:57).

From the whole 'spectrum' of colours, different languages isolate arbitrarily the different 'colours' and their designations. We know there are differences in many other cases, in different cultures. Eskimos have four or five different names for 'snow', corresponding to its different physical stages: fresh, melting, frozen etc... The same happens with the concept of 'time', in different cultures.

The same can be posited in regard to the plane of expression. Phonemes and morphemes, words and expressions, vary as much as the material expressions of culture, in the different cultural languages, according to different segmentations and articulations of the sensory continuum of sound and matter.

The presence or absence of distinctive traits in an expression, the different grades of emphasis and value of these features have a specific meaning, dictated by the use of specific substances (sounds, materials, traits, movements, light, electronic waves, and so on) in specific forms of expressions. It is easy to identify the work of a painter by the materials and pigments he uses, as well as by the characteristics of his brush movements on the painting surface. A piece of pottery will have a specific 'meaning', in relation to the place and time of production, and the culture to which it belongs, according to the material, the elements and specific features of the production process which

differentiate it from other 'pottery languages' (what is commonly called 'styles').

These characteristics of form and substance, on the plane of expression and on the plane of content, will be dictated by specific cultural **codes**, formal and conceptual, or structural, in the different social systems. When these codes are forgotten or unknown, as in the case of past or foreign cultures, or when there is a complex content which is actually an 'aggregation' of many content units, as Eco suggests, the meaning of an expression will only be grasped by the sign's 'microscopic texture' (1979:188). This point will be further analysed in chapter 3.

Language and Speech : the Museum discourse

The central concept in Saussure's semiology is the basic dichotomy of language systems, mainly in verbal ones: the basic distinction between '**Langue**' and '**Parole**', which can be translated as 'language' and 'speech'. This idea stems from the multiform and heterogeneous nature of language, considered by Saussure, from which he could extract an **object of study**: a pure social object, a system of values and conventions necessary for communication, indifferent to the substance of its signals, and which is 'language', in relation to which 'speech' is the purely individual aspect of language, the realization of the rules and possible combinations of signs'(1916,1949 ed:36/37).

For Barthes, language is a social institution, an autonomous product, a game with its rules, that we can only play through a **learning process**. It is a 'collective contract' through which individuals may communicate with each other. Speech is the individual act of selection and actualization, the combinations through which the speaking subject may use the codes of language in order to express his personal

thoughts; it depends on psycho-physical mechanisms that make possible the externalization of these combinations. We could call 'discourses', these developed 'speeches' (Barthes,1987:18).

In this dialectical process, 'there is not language without speech, and there is not speech outside language...language and speech are thus in a relation of reciprocal understanding', says Barthes. According to this view, it is possible, then, to propose a method, or a model for the analysis of museum 'discourses' (or 'developed speeches'), as manifested expressions of museological 'texts'. It will also be possible to analyse the role of museums in the formalization of cultural patterns, as institutional spaces for the reproduction and the 'speaking' practice of the different cultural languages, and contributing to the insertion of individuals into the dominant cultural systems, through their exhibition discourses.

According to Barthes, language is not a **vehicle** nor a **tool** for communication, it is actually a **structure**, which supports a 'praxis': the construction of 'texts'. (1983:187).

The semiotic 'competence' or 'power' of the museum language will manifest itself through a labour of sign production, the structuration of these signs in paradigmatic and syntagmatic chains, in meaningful 'texts', and of sign interpretation in the dialectical process of museum 'performances' or 'acts': museum exhibitions and programmes of activities. Through this communication process language 'facts' are transformed into speech 'acts'.

The concept of 'museality'

Tzvetan Todorov (1966) proposes to redefine the object of literary research, as the study of 'literality' and not of 'literature'. In the same sense it is possible to justify the

concept and the study of 'museality', redefining the object of museological research, and proposing the study of the 'virtual qualities' of museum works and discourses, which make them possible. Only in this way, we believe, will it be possible to develop a science of museology (as Todorov proposes in respect to literature); for this purpose, one must not limit oneself to the 'description' of works or texts (what could not be the object of a science), but to identify the traits and the specific qualities of 'museality', which distinguish this particular domain from other possible fields against which the many museum texts could be checked, as those of history, anthropology, aesthetics, psychology and so on.

How would this be possible, or how to detect among multiple significations perceived through out the discourse, those which belong to 'museality', to the proper capacities and nature of the museum language? Todorov suggests this can only be grasped in the study of concrete works. In this study, there is one only danger: to fall down into a 'taxonomic frenzy', as Barthes points out, that is to try to apply models and categories, or determined structures, for text analyses, and to forget we are dealing with the domain of language where in principle, every 'code' ceases, and that is the domain of 'speech'(Barthes,1988,g:85).

Models and structures are thus mere strategies that can be used in order to make possible the understanding of language mechanisms, in their infinite productivity. In this research they will be used in order to make possible the definition of the concept of 'museality', its function and productivity manifested through concrete museum works.

PART II - ANALYSIS

CHAPTER 3 : THE PROCESS OF SIGNIFICATION

CHAPTER 3 : THE PROCESS OF SIGNIFICATION

This chapter will explore the mechanisms of the museum language and of museum signs, the logical process involved in the construction of meanings and of signification, the nature of the Museum's semantic context and the basic models for the understanding of the process of sign production in the construction and the deconstruction of museum expressions, in meaningful museological texts.

3.1 - The system of Museum Language

For Saussure, language is a system of pure differentiations, and the slightest variation in the form of the expression (the changing of a phoneme or a letter in a word) will correspond to a change in meaning, or content. Barthes proposes a revision of the Saussurian theory of language in a concept which may better explain the nature of museum language (Barthes,1987:34). Being purely a 'negative' system (a system of differentiations and oppositions), as proposed by Saussure, language would not be apprehensible outside speech. He proposes to consider a third element in the pair Language-Speech: that of a 'pre-significant' element, a 'matter' or 'substance' that would be the necessary support of signification, and which occurs in non-verbal semiotic systems. This third element (the 'materiality' of the signs) would explain why there may be systems 'without execution' or with a 'poor speech', as in the case of a 'technological' language, the fabrication of an automobile, for instance, in which there is a very limited possibility of variation of the articulated units, or the language of fashion, of house

furniture, or of culinary systems. These systems are generally 'spoken' by other languages, mainly the written texts about them (or yet graphics, formulae, descriptions, receipts, rituals, etc.).

Barthes gives a 'genetic' explanation of the origin of these systems: if, in such systems, language needs a 'matter' (and not only 'speeches') as a support for signification, that is because they have in general a utilitarian origin, and not a purely signifying one. This fact is unknown to the verbal linguistic system, in which the expression substance (the sound) is taken as immediately signifying something, and serving only to signify.

We can thus recognize, according to this approach, three planes, and not two, in the museum language: the plane of 'matter', the plane of 'language' and the plane of 'use' (of 'speaking'). The basic elements of museum language, the materiality of museum signs, and their original 'functionality' in their primary context, play a first and inevitable role in the production and interpretation of museum messages and texts.

In the social system of objects, each object is the sign of its own function, standing for its 'use' in the social semiotic code, as 'cultural units', as Eco proposes (1979:66,ff). A house, as a cultural unit, stands for 'a place for living in', an automobile, for a 'transportation mechanism', besides all the possible connotations these mechanisms may imply in the social codes. Their basic primary 'function' is always present in their use, in what Barthes calls their 'fonctions-signes': 'once there is society, any use is changed into the sign of this use' (1987:44). The raincoat, for instance, is the sign of the function of 'protecting the body against rain', but its use is inevitably associated or connoted with a certain atmospheric condition.

In modern industrialized societies, objects are made according to models, they are executions of previously established patterns and in this sense they can be seen as 'words' of a technological and social language. Once their function and use is transformed into 'signs', in the process of universal semantization, society can again 're-functionalize' them, in a sort of 'recurrent' or 'second functionalization' which is actually a 'second language': the re-presented function belongs to a second semantics (generally disguised), which is that of connotation and of 'myth'. In Barthes' proposition, there is an 'anthropological value' in the 'fonction-signe', which is primarily the very place where the relations between the 'technical' and the 'signifying' are established (1987:45).

Recent studies on material culture start to develop artefact analysis from a semiotic and linguistic approach, seeing objects inserted in structures which correspond to the mechanisms and operations of verbal language, produced and developed in a parallel axis of signification (Pearce, 1986,1987,1989,1990). The determination of the 'fonction-signe' of artefacts by the raw material with which they are made, according to an original mythical structure, is explored by Pearce (1990) through the specific example of the Inuit of the central and western Arctic. The archaeology of meaning proposed in this study for the analysis of artefacts, seen as the 'parole' of a specific cultural language, demonstrates that the plane of 'matter', or the substance of cultural expressions may be already determined by a system of signification, most often hidden behind the plane of social use.

In the museum language, this 'semantization' of cultural objects is yet more complex. In the museum context, the 'use-value' of these elements is abolished from the start. Taken out from their utilitarian order, and from social use, their

'fonction-signe', their original sign-function is immediately weakened, and may be easily substituted by a second functionalization, re-presented on the museum stage according to the museological symbolic order, of a second, third, or in fact, unlimited instance of connotation.

The material and concrete evidence of culture is the basic element of the museum system of language, the 'semantic units' which are organized to construct coherent and meaningful messages. These material elements are not, however, 'pre-significant' elements, as Barthes suggests in respect of other non-verbal semiotic systems. Precisely because they are 'significant', they have been collected and inserted into the museum system of objects: the collections. As soon as they are 'musealized', or inserted in a taxonomy of classification, their 'fonction-signe' is thus recognized, according to a museological 'thesaurus' ('families' or 'categories' of objects and specimens, based on morphological and functional codes). The plane of 'matter' is thus inserted into the 'plane of language' of the museum system, and much like in the verbal system of language, this matter will be taken as 'immediately significative'. In this sense, the museum language is based on 'positive' elements, the material objects and items, endowed with a primary meaning, and which will work as language units (words, syntagms, sentences) according to their contrasts and differentiations, or their 'pertinence'[1] in different paradigms.

---

[1] The concept of 'pertinence' (or 'relevance', in English), designates basically the property of a linguistic element (the 'phoneme') that distinguishes it from any other comparable elements, and that makes possible its definition and its use in communicative acts. This property has been designated as 'pertinent traits' (A.J.Greimas et J.Courtés,1979:275). For the application of this concept in communication studies see D.Sperber and D.Wilson (1986) and E.Hooper-Greenhill (1990) for a specific museological approach.

The 'execution' of the museum language in museum speeches starts with the 'presentation' of positive values, and develops itself through the syntagmatic correlation of their variations and oppositions, in the plane of 'use'. These 'present' units of language, selected from a whole repository of other possible units, take on their 'first value' in relation with the 'absent' units in the message. How much is a piece of the 'True Cross' worth? (Hindle,1978) The value of an object is proportionally equivalent to the absent values to which it refers itself. The 'metaphysics of presence', in the words of Barthes, together with that of 'originality', are the basic axes of the museum system of signification. What is 'present', what can be seen, is thus 'true' (like 'seeds of proof', proposed by rhetoricians, to be disseminated in discourses). The past, or what is no more there, is confirmed and justified by what is there, or is 'still there'.

The museum language is thus, much like the musical system of expression, a basic system of positive and negative values, of intervals and notes which make up the melody strings. Silence has actually the same value as sound. What is not presented in an exhibition may sometimes have a more striking signification than what is there in front of our eyes. Besides this 'positive' value, museum signs will stand for many other signs, in the semiosic process of the exhibition, referring to or mentioning, or connoting other objects, facts, phenomena, in their museological 'sign-function'. The museum language will work, thus, or will be 'executed' through a 'double absence' mechanism: what is not selected and what is referred to, and the 'presence' of 'ghost objects' is not such an abstruse thought, or an impossible phenomenon, as one may generally think (see chapter 11, p.309).

The selection and the articulation of museum signs, in 'internal' and 'external' relationships, are thus the two major processes at work in the plane of 'use' of the museum

language. It is in this plane that their 'semiotic potential' will be fully grasped, in its full 'order'. This construction will require the use of many different codes and subcodes (see chapter 5), which will organize them in order to express different contents and to provoke different reactions and behaviours.

3.2 - **The nature and structure of museum signs**

How does a 'sign' function?

Every time there is a correlation between an element of an expression plane (the form) and an element of a content plane (the content), conventionally and transitorily posited, or recognized by a given society, there is a sign-function. As Eco points out, there are not signs, properly speaking, but only **'sign-functions'**, since these correlations are only transitory and changeable (1979:49).

The two **functives** of the sign's correlation (the expression and the content) may enter into different relationships, according to the sender's or the receivers' will, and to the code implied in this process. Therefore, as Eco says, 'the classical notion of sign dissolves itself into a highly complex network of changing relationships' (1979:49). These changing correlations derive from the very process of sign production and of language use.

According to Jakobson's theory (1963), the basic processes of language are those of **selection** of one term among many other possible ones, from an associative field, and of **combination** of the selected terms in meaningful relationships. Whenever we select one term from the expression field, in order to correlate it with another term of a content field, we are actually working on an unlimited field of matter and of content which Eco calls the 'continuum' of expression

and of content. This 'continuum' is the total reality of which and in which we speak: the world, the raw materials, ideas and thoughts, which must be 'shaped', in limited 'forms' (of expression and of content) in order that we may 'signify' them, speak about them and communicate them (Eco,1984:18/19). Through this proposition, Eco reformulates Hjelmslev's concept of two separate 'continua', one for the expression and one for the content (Hjelmslev,1975). In his sign-function model (Figure 5), in the light of Peirce's semiotics, the **matter** or the **continuum** about which and through which signs speak, is always the same (Eco,1984:18/19):

Figure 5

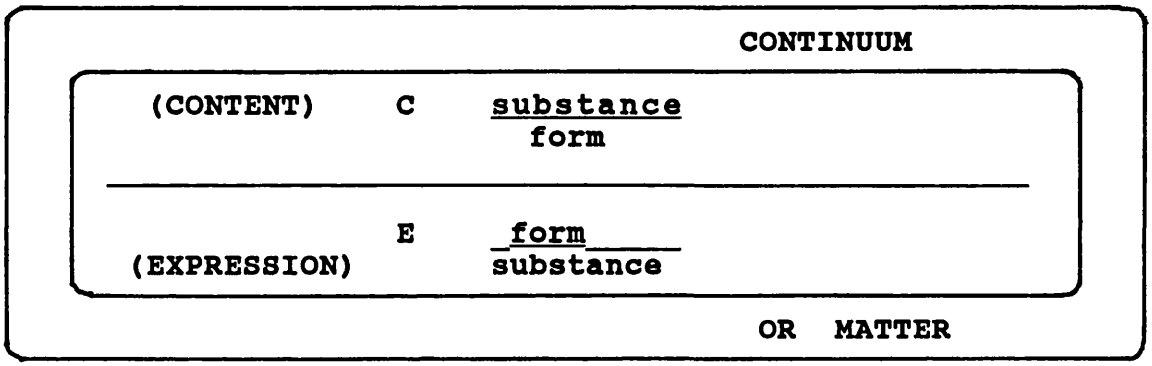


Fig.5 : The sign-function's model **(Eco,1984:19)**

Every formalization of an expression or of a content is actually a reduction, an impoverishment of that 'continuum', of reality in itself, since we can only speak about it through fragments of it. This is a vital point to be considered in relation to museum exhibitions or expressions: what we have 'represented' on the museum stage is in fact a 'reduced' reality, a 'condensed' reality, a 'fragment' of it, and not a 'mirror' of the real world or of cultural processes.

Thus, we can only speak of fragments of reality through other fragments of it. This 'fragmentation' is the actual process of sign production, through which we cannot refer

back to the totality of the thing represented, or spoken about: in order to represent something we must **select** some **pertinent** features of the content proposed, and to translate them into corresponding **pertinent** features of an expression, according to a given intention, and based on a code which must be shared by other individuals with whom we want to interact.

These pertinent features are not concrete physical features, but 'abstract constructs' ('forms'), or 'types' of expressions and of contents, which will be manifested or expressed through 'tokens', the material 'signifiers' in Saussure's dichotomy. These mental constructs, the abstract 'forms' of contents, are what Eco calls 'cultural units', which are formulated in our minds by a previous 'semiosic process', through which we 'fragment' the continuum of reality, and attribute sense to given particular features.

Eco quotes an interesting passage from Peirce, which suggests a 'whole new way of understanding real objects' (Eco,1979:165):

> *"Confronted with experience, (...) we try to elaborate ideas in order to know it (...) these ideas are the* ***first logical interpretants*** *of the phenomena that suggest them, and which, as suggesting them, are signs, of which they are the (...) interpretants" (Peirce,5480).*

These observations refer to the process of sign interpretation and understanding, which is primarily based on **perception**, defined by Eco as the '**interpretation of sensory disconnected data**, which are organized through a complex transactional process by a cognitive hypothesis based on previous experiences' (Eco,1979:165). This is what happens, in Eco's example, when crossing a dark street, and seeing an imprecise shape on the sidewalk. Before one adjusts the attention and evaluates the sensory data, one immediately

wonders 'what is it?', or better, 'what does it mean?', until one finally recognizes that it is a 'cat'. Through perceptual mechanisms worked out in the brain, we apply to an imprecise field of stimuli the cultural unit previously known as a 'cat'.

This operation is actually the correspondence between a **token** and a **type**. The recognition of the type is made possible because previous experience had already linked an expression-unit with a given content-unit. Eco explains this mental operation as a 'mapping' process of selected pertinent features, whether of content or of expression, which takes place both in the production (or invention), as well as in the interpretation (or decoding) of signs:

> *'If one views a type (whether of content or of expression) as a set of properties that have been singled out as pertinent, the token is obtained by mapping out the elements of the original set in terms of those of the token set' (Eco,1979:245).*

Eco's diagram in Figure 6 represents this process, where the **x**s represent the pertinent properties of the type and the **y**s non-pertinent and variable elements of the token expression:

Figure 6

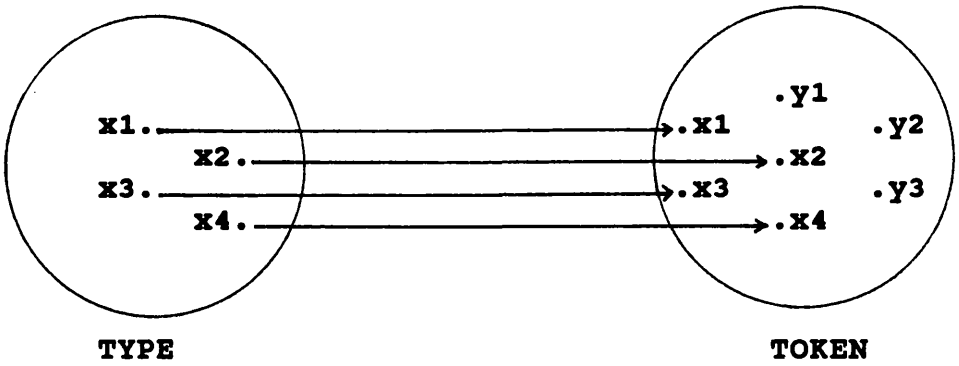


Fig.6: Correspondence between a 'token' and a 'type' (Eco,1979:246)

The identification of the pertinent features of a token (x1, x2, x3, x4), corresponding to the pertinent features singled out in a given type (or 'cultural unit'), is based on the previous knowledge of the cultural codes which determine these features, both of expression and of content, in a given social 'encyclopaedia'.

It is easy to recognize a token-expression which reproduces a very conventional type, well known to the users of a given social and cultural code. The bottle of Coca-Cola, or the mere visual sign for it, is highly conventional and widespread, being easily recognized, despite its slight variations. When the type is not defined by a previous convention, or when this convention is unknown to the interpreters, the identification and interpretation of the sign's pertinent features, and of their corresponding contents will be more difficult. The interpreter will have to look, in this case, for **meaning cues**, borrowed from other systems, 'mapping backwards', through inference and similitude rules, until he is able to detect the meaning of the perceived stimulus, or the type to which it refers.

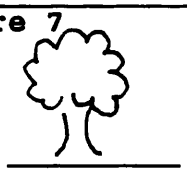
The same basic mechanisms take place in the museum situation, when the visitor is confronted with a varied field of visual, aural and tactile stimuli. Confronted with sometimes unexpected or yet unseen items, the observer must make 'an effort after meaning' (Vernon,1974:71), and reconstruct and reorganize the sensorial data in order to identify the object, confronting it with his stored reservoir of mental images. When this image is not found in the memory background of knowledge, the second immediate movement is to look for the 'name' of it, to search for the denomination of the item in the labels, so looking for a 'translation', in another symbolic system (an 'intersemiotic translation), of the 'meaning' of the stimulus.

The problem in the museum communicative situation, or in the use of museum language, is that most often different dictionaries or encyclopaedias are used for the translation, which do not always correspond to those of the original culture which produced the cultural signs, or those of the receivers' ordinary systems of reference. In general, the 'codebook' used in museum discourses is that of the curatorial and scientific codes according to which the signs are used. This fact will respond to the 'aberrant' encodings and decodings, overcodings and undercodings suggested by Eco (1983).

The sign's logical mechanisms

There is more to a sign than the famous Saussurean equation, shown in Figure 7:

Figure 7



'signified'

arbre **'signifier'**

Fig.7: Saussure's model of the sign's structure

According to this model, a 'sign' is the totality of the two values, the 'signifier' and the 'signified', which is actually another sign, or representation of the first one ('arbre') translated into another system (the drawing of a tree). That is why Peirce says that the 'interpretant' of a sign is another sign, his theory being concerned not so much with the structure of the sign but more with the sign's continuity in an infinite process of semiosis.

Every 'representamen' (the 'signifier', or the concrete support of the sign, perceived by the senses), in Peirce's semiotics, corresponds to another 'representamen' of another kind, a 'mental icon' presented to our mind as a response to the first one, and which bears at least some of the pertinent features of the first sign ('in some respects, or capacity'). This second 'representamen', for Peirce, is the 'immediate object' presented to our mind by the sign, and which refers to, or is a 'fragment', of the 'dynamic object' of which we speak through the mediation of the signs, thus, of the dynamic 'reality' upon which we can act. The 'immediate' object is the shaped 'fragment' of this reality, the 'form' of a given content, expressed through the form of a given expression.

These propositions can be used to explain the nature of museum signs. Any object or artefact is the result of a human thought or idea manifested in a concrete form through a human creative action. It is actually the shaped fragment of an expression continuum corresponding to a shaped fragment of a content continuum. Museum objects are thus 'representamen', or 'immediate objects' presented to our eyes and minds to represent these ideas, processes and thoughts. An object is already a semiosic act.

As James Deetz defines an 'artefact', it is 'that segment of man's physical environment which is purposely shaped by him according to culturally dictated plans' (1981:25). As soon as he expresses himself through a creative act, shaping matter according to an abstract form of a given content, in order to satisfy a 'need' (an 'utilitarian' object, a tool, or an 'expressive' item, a work of art), man creates a mental representation of this object, which will be transmitted to others, used by others, recognized and eventually reformulated by others, and will thus constitute a 'cultural unit', in Eco's terms. The 'culturally dictated

plans' are the codes which govern the cultural life and expressions of a given society, changing with it, and determining changes in expressions and contents, in the 'world vision' of a given group along time. Objects or any other human expressions are already semiotic products, a sort of crystallized reflections of thought.

The constant redefinition of the 'dynamic object' of reality, by successive 'interpretants', or 'immediate objects' is, as Eco proposes, a way to interfere and continuously change and restructure the world (Eco,1984:33). This is actually a cognitive process which can be learned and explored through the experience of museological expressions and work.

The 'interpretant'

'The interpretant is not the interpreter', proposes Eco, in the light of Peirce's semiotics. 'The interpretant is that which guarantees the validity of the sign, even in the absence of the interpreter' (Eco,1979:68). So, it could be said, the interpretant is the meaning of a museum object, even when the museum is closed. It is the 'what', in the answer to 'what is it?', even if we cannot answer it (or if we have to decipher it). We know, however, that there is not a single meaning in a sign, and that there are many possible answers to a question.

To use a well known example in museological literature, attributed to an american museologist, 'what is the meaning of a stuffed tiger in a museum?'. Just 'a stuffed tiger, in a museum', would reply a follower of the 'referential theory'. A child could otherwise respond :'a tiger who ate too much'. Both answers would be **'interpretants'** for the sign-unit 'stuffed tiger' (whether in its verbal expression or in its museological one), as two **definitions** for the same

representamen. The representamen, or the sign-vehicle, in the case of the stuffed specimen, denoted two different things, in the two cases. The 'interpretant' can also be a behaviour, a gesture, a sound, a verbal explanation, a drawing or any other sort of representamen provoked or suggested by the sign. The 'interpretant' is a **response** to the sign.

'The interpretant is another representation which is referred to the same "object" (Eco,1979:68), that to which the sign refers. The different **denotations** and **connotations** elicited by the sign, in our case, were determined by the **semantic** and **syntactic 'markers'** of the 'representamen' (see following sections for a discussion of these concepts).

The properties of the semantic unit 'tiger' (the ferocity, the hungry animal, the living animal) were 'blown up' by the child, confronted with its verbal expression; these same properties were 'faded out' by the first respondent. This latter has selected some of the 'syntactic markers' of the sign-expression, determined by the 'grammar' and the rules of combination of museum language, which do not admit the display of living animals in showcases, and by other features like the stuffing process, the rigidity of the body, the glass-eyes. At the same time, the 'semantic markers' of the expression 'stuffed tiger', denoting already a 'stuffed referent', as well as the semantic context of 'the Museum' (which is not that of a Zoo), allowed him to 'disambiguate'[2] the question. As Eco remarks: 'the interpretants can be complex discourses which not only translate, but even inferentially develop all the logical possibilities suggested by the sign' (1979:70).

---

[2]'Disambiguation' is an expression used by Eco (1979:110,ff.,130,139-42), meaning the choice of one interpretation for an ambiguous expression, among the many possible ones. See also A.J.Greimas and J.Courtés, Dictionnaire Raisonné de la Théorie du Langage, Hachette,1979:91.

The concept of the 'interpretant' is a relevant notion, as it explains the continuous process of culture, of translating signs into other signs, definitions into other definitions, words into icons, icons into new images and definitions, which explain, develop and interpret human expressions and ideas. 'The idea of the interpretant makes a theory of signification a rigorous science of cultural phenomena, while detaching it from the metaphysics of the referent' (Eco,1979:70).

3.3 - **The referential fallacy**

Signs are the 'mental tools' which we use to make statements or judgments about the world, or to mention or to refer to things or states of the world. There are signs which do not refer to concrete objects or phenomena, whose 'cultural units' do not have a material existence, and are thus 'purely cultural'. The object of a sign may well be an idea, a concept, a process. This proposition points out to the question of the 'referent' of the sign, to which Eco refers as the 'referential fallacy' (1979:58).

In the well known triangle of Ogden and Richards (1923), proposed to explain the sign's structure, we have the 'symbol' (the 'sign', or the 'signifier' in Anglo-saxon semiotic tradition) which denotes a 'referent', the object of which we speak, and which connotes a 'reference', or what others would call a 'signified' (see Figure 8).

Figure 8

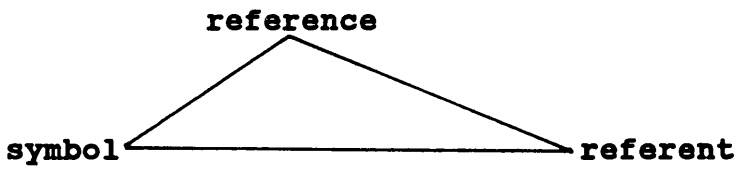


Fig.8: Ogden and Richards' model of the sign-structure(1972:32)

The idea that the 'referent' is the actual object designated by the sign is questionable, and gives rise to misleading concepts. If the sign is 'qualified' by the object it denotes, or designates, one would never be able to understand the sign 'unicorn', since a unicorn does not exist. When somebody says 'unicorn', he may be referring to a 'class' of fantastic animals created by people's imagination. Or it may be referring to a linguistic sign, the word 'unicorn', which is in a dictionary, or yet to the figure present in the British Coat of Arms.

The way we 'use' signs, or refer to them in a communicative expression is what we must consider as the 'reference' of the sign. It is actually the 'sense', or 'meaning' of the sign, in some respects or capacity, according to a given code. The way in which the sign is presented, or re-presented to our thought is what Peirce calls the 'interpretant' of the sign. Signs do not in fact refer to 'real' things or phenomena, but to 'cultural' units accepted by a social code. As the codes change, and the 'representations' change in people's imagination, signs also change and vary in their multiple functions.

The 'referent' of a sign, the thing it denotes, is thus actually determined by the 'reference', or the 'interpretant' proposed to it, when we 'use' the sign. It is the 'function'

of the sign, in a given context or situation. Unicorns are valid and 'true' referents of these signs in the context of a legend or mythological narrative. They will be unacceptable referents, or 'lies', in an exhibition on 'mammals'. They would have to be 'decoded' according to heraldry codes, when appearing in a coat of arms, in order that the meaning to which they refer to will be grasped.

The context and situation, as well as the 'background knowledge' and the needs and intentions of emitters and receivers, will also determine the sign's 'meaning'.The photograph of an Amazonian Indian, in an exhibition about the people of that region, will not refer to the individual represented in the photo, but to the whole group of people to which the exhibition is referring to. The same photograph of the same individual, in an exhibition about 'the hidden people of the Amazon', will acquire the meaning of an exotic human specimen, rarely seen and largely unknown, what may be true in the context of London or of another first world capital, while standing as a general widespread 'type' for the population of that huge area. This is a vital point to be considered, once we cannot analyse 'signs' in themselves, but only in the 'texts' in which they are inserted, in their 'communicative situation'.

The fundamental aspect of the nature of museum objects in the museum communication process is their duality of roles, as 'signs' of the museum language, in a museological expression or text, referring to other things, facts, events or ideas, and as 'interpretants' of other signs, ideas and concepts in the universal cultural text. There is, however, a main and misleading problem in the 'speeches' of the museum language, or in the plane of 'use' of museum signs: the expression of the sign (its 'signifier') is confounded with its 'referent', with the thing it denotes.

As concrete and visual signs, presented to the receivers of museum messages, museum objects are normally taken as the first and immediate 'referents' of museum expressions, in a self-referential mode of existence. A chair, presented in a museum showcase, stands for 'this chair', or for the equivalent expression 'this is a chair'[3], or yet, with the help of the label, 'this is a 17th century chair'. As the 'immediate objects' presented to our eyes and minds, their presence obscures all other possible 'referents' of the signs' expressions, and limits the range of 'interpretants' which may be suggested to the viewers; their 'sign-function' is thus weakened and framed, by force of their materiality and by the authority of museological taxonomies. As a consequence of this 'naive' mode of perception, their quality of expressions, or of 'sign-vehicles' is changed into that of crystallized and fixed contents. From the category of 'objects' these items are changed into 'subjects', like 'proper names' which refer to a unique and singular entity: that which is in front of our eyes, sufficient and ineffable. If it could speak, the object would say 'I am a chair', or better 'I am a museum chair'. From 'tokens', in their variability and with their non-pertinent features, these objects are changed into 'types'. We reach then the semiotic situation in which the token is the type, and through the 'mythologizing' or 'musealization' process, is almost 'personified', with a proper name : 'the British Museum marbles', 'the Louvre's Pieta', the 'Berlin Torso', the 'Birmingham Buddha', and so on.

---

[3] See Eco (1979:167) in respect to the function of the copula /is/, as a metalinguistic device, establishing an 'equation' between the content of a linguistic expression with the content of a perceptual act, and meaning: 'possesses some of the semantic properties of'; in museum language this function will be assumed by labels and showcases, meaning both "this" and "is", as it will be developed in chapter 5,p.114.

The 'dynamic object' of reality, of which these objects are signs, even if only as fragments of it, is thus excluded from the museum discourse. The **referential** function (see chapter 5) of the museum sign (as 'all chairs like this one', or as 'this is the type of chair used in the 17th century') is abolished in these first 'immediate encounters' with the materiality of the 'signifiers'. The denotative and connotative aspects of the sign-function are limited to factual statements, as for instance the objects' immediate 'owners' ('this is Napoleon's chair', or 'museum collection n...') and to other sorts of information which may be found in the labels. In this superficial mode of approaching and using museum signs, the 'referent' takes the place of the sign, in an immutable and fixed role, in what has been posited by Eco as the 'referential fallacy', which consists in 'assuming that the "meaning" of a sign-vehicle has something to do with its corresponding object' (1979:58,ff.).

Extensions and Intensions

Eco proposes another model for the understanding of the structure and the functioning of signs[4], shown in Figure 9:

Figure 9

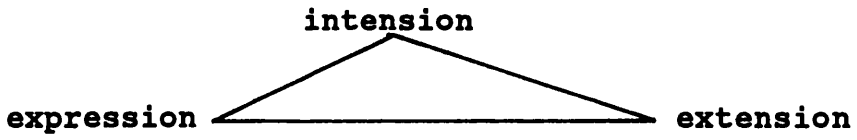


Fig.9 Eco's model of the sign's structure (Eco,1984:10)

[4] This proposition is a reformulation of another famous triangle, that of G.Frege (1892), which proposes the terms 'Zeitung/Sinn/Bedeutung' for the sign's structure, explored and expanded by Eco (1984:10).

According to this logical formulation, the 'extension' of an expression is its 'condition of truth', the class of all the objects in the universe to which the expression could be applied, of what results that the expression is 'true'. To give a practical example of this concept, applied to the museum situation, if we arrange a series of butterflies in a showcase or gallery, under the heading of 'Butterflies', the expression will be considered 'true', in its 'extensional' aspects. It would be sufficient to introduce a crocodile in the row of specimens to change the expression into a 'laughing' and surrealist proposition (it could be also suggested that the expression would be a 'lie'), and this expression would be at least a logical nonsense[5]. The same museological expression, in the context of the Dali Museum, at Figueras, could be however acceptable, once its 'intensional' aspect, the 'postulates of signification', would validate the 'extensional' condition, which, in the surrealist code, disregards the fact of whether 'this is the case' or not.

The 'intension' of a sign's expression will correspond to the 'interpretant' suggested by it, according to a given code, and to a given context in the communication. This point refers us to the discussion proposed by Eco on 'modal logics', which concerns the changing conditions of truth, and the notion of 'possible worlds'. This discussion is relevant not so much in the study of signs, but chiefly in the study of texts (Eco,1984:13).

When we produce a sign, or an expression, in a communicative act, we are producing 'statements' or 'judgments' about the world or states of the world, whose

[5]'The possibility of lying is the **proprium** of semiosis just as (for the Schoolmen) the possibility of laughing was the **proprium** of Man as **animal rationale**', says Eco. 'Every time there is possibility of lying, there is a sign-function' (1979:59).

'conditions of truth' are limited by the 'possible world' in which and of which we speak. These 'possible worlds', or yet 'worlds inside worlds', are ruled by their own laws, by their specific postulates of signification, which do not necessarily correspond to the 'real' world in which we live. The 'referential' or 'extensional fallacy', stressed by Eco, is that in which we take for granted that the 'object' to which the sign or the expression refers has an immutable and fixed 'truth': the one we attribute to it according to our possible world.

This point is of crucial relevance in the analysis of museological texts, when referring to other cultures than our own, or to past and distant cultures, in space and in time. A Yoruba mask is a sign which refers to demons and devils, as cultural units taken as existent in that culture, and its use in rituals and dances bears a sign-function, standing for those supernatural entities, who provide human beings with their powers. In a museum of modern art, these same masks will lose their 'immediate objects', referring to themselves as 'forms' or 'sculptures' which will have as 'interpretants', or 'reference', the paradigms and canons of modern art. In their sign-function, in the exhibition text, their form and the substance of their expression would be no more than 'citations' of another 'text', that of Art History and of aesthetic codes; in their 'extensional' aspect they will refer to other works or forms of expression, by Picasso or Mondrian.

Museum narratives and the signs they use must be analysed and considered according to the 'worlds of reference' they presuppose or postulate as 'true', seen as 'possible worlds' inside the whole world of cultural life.

Denotation and Connotation

The term 'denotation' is normally understood as that to which a sign refers, or denotes. As it was pointed out, there are signs which do not have a concrete 'referent', or which do not correspond to a real state of the world (as far as we know it). 'Connotation' is generally related to a vague and imprecise idea suggested by the sign, normally based on emotions and feelings. 'The difference between denotation and connotation is not (as many authors maintain) the difference between "univocal" and "vague" signification, or between "referential" and "emotional" communication, and so on' (Eco,1979:55). Both terms actually correspond, in semiotic terms, to **signification**, or to the **meanings** communicated by the sign-functions. As such, denotation and connotation will be dependent on the **codes** which govern signification and communication.

In Eco's theory, denotation would be the **first** and **immediate** signification of a sign, culturally established and conventionalized by a cultural code, and upon which connotations will rely (1979:85). It can thus be seen like the first 'definition' of a word in a dictionary.

Denotation and connotation are **semantic properties** of the cultural units (or 'sememes') to which the signs refer or suggest. The difference between the two terms is that connotation is a semantic property of a 'sememe' conveyed by a first denotation, and developing from it. It is 'a meaning aroused by the signification of the content corresponding to the supposed referent'; denotation is, in its turn, a 'cultural unit' or 'semantic property of a given "sememe", which is at the same time a culturally recognized property of its possible referents' (Eco,1979:86). If the sign of a unicorn denotes a legendary being and connotes 'middle-ages' or 'magic powers', or the figure of a mermaid connotes

'fishermen', 'shipwrecks' or 'the sea', these properties have nothing to do with real events, causes and effects.

'What constitutes a connotation as such is the connotative code which establishes it', says Eco (1979:55). Connotation always relies on a primary signification, settled by a dominant and generalized code of denotation, as other multiple significations the sign may suggest or refer to. Translating these ideas to the museological field , the denotation of the 'chair' in the museum showcase, in the example given above, is immediate (a case of 'ratio facilis', in Eco's terms), once the chair is an 'intercultural unit'. The connotations it will suggest may be many, ranging from personal experiences to the knowledge the viewer may have on 'furniture styles' or historical periods, and according to what is also suggested by the labels and the whole context of the exhibition. But is it possible to ask what is the denotation of the 'Mona Lisa'? Is it a real woman, the model of Leonardo, is it a specific painting on canvas, or is it a museological and artistic 'myth', which connotes /the Louvre/, /fakes/, /smile/ or /robbery/?

It has already been pointed out that a single sign-vehicle may become the functive of several sign-functions, insofar as several codes may be intersected in its production or interpretation. Due to a social established convention, a scholarly training (as that of curators, for instance), or a system of expectations 'deeply rooted in the patrimony of common opinions' (Eco, 1979:56), a first denotative code may be correlated with more than one connoted systems, allowing the sign-function to entertain several connotative functions, in a same situation or context.

This is the case that will be demonstrated in the analysis of the case study, in this research. The image of the Buddha, in the British Museum exhibition, plays simultaneous and different roles, in a multilevelled message.

Sometimes, 'a single sign-vehicle can become the expression of several contents insofar as several codes make it become the functive of several sign-functions (although connotatively linked)' (Eco,1979:57), thus producing a complex discourse. The sign is no longer a sign, but a whole 'text'.

3.4 - **The semantic context**

It is not very difficult to make an exhibition of 'whales'. It would be sufficient to go into the storage area and look for one of these big specimens. It would not be difficult to find it (more especially if we are in a natural history museum). Even in an art museum, there would be no risk for us to mistake it for a portrait of a big fat lady (insofar as we are not Salvador Dali). Nonetheless, there would be a remote chance that we would look twice to the portrait. This possibility would not occur only by chance, or by coincidence. This mysterious impulse has been for long explored and studied by Freud and his followers, as psychic mechanisms of 'condensation' or of 'projection', and the relationship established in a remote area of our brain, between the two 'objects', would not be a total nonsense. It is actually possible to find something in common between the whale and the fat woman: both are living beings, of the animal species, mammals, of an impressive size, with a lot of fat on their bodies, and while apparently calm, they may eventually become furious and aggressive. Why do we not, in fact, mistake the two ideas?

The reason is found in the propositional hypothesis postulated by semantic studies, semiotics, linguistics, cognitive theories, perception and memory studies, on the segmentation of our world vision according to different

semantic fields and axes, where we situate, in different positions and oppositions, the semantic units (or cultural units, or 'sememes') through which we understand reality and speak about it. This point has been already developed in the precedent chapter and will be retaken here in order to explain how a 'sememe' can be mapped out and analysed, and how does it work in the whole semantic space, in dynamic relationships, making possible signification and communication to take place.

How to define a 'sememe'

The **'sememe'** is a bundle of **pertinent** distinctive semantic properties (of meanings and of correlations) which make up a cultural unit (or a **semantic model**, or a **type**), according to a given system of signification, i.e., according to a given **code**. It is the 'form' of a content, which must be expressed through the form of an expression, in such a way that it will be distinguished from other sememes in a sufficient and understandable way, for the sake of good communication. This means that in order to produce an expression, or a sign-vehicle, that may reasonably correspond to a given content, one must reproduce, in a certain way and in a certain level of fidelity, the pertinent features of the 'sememe' envisaged. In order to do this one needs to know the exact position of the 'sememe' in a given semantic field, or axis; the system of positions and of oppositions will be directly related to its pertinent features, and not to the 'sememe' as a whole, which is only the result of a network of presences and absences of these features, (as the components of its 'meaning').

The meaning of a sign, or of a cultural unit, is thus translated into the positional value of the sign in a given

system[6]. As Eco proposes, a 'cultural unit cannot be isolated merely by the sequence of its interpretants. It is defined inasmuch as it is **placed** in a system of other cultural units which are opposed to it and circumscribe it' (...) 'it is the relationship between the various terms of a system of cultural units which subtracts from each one of the terms what is conveyed by the others' (Eco,1979:73).

The sememe's structure has the format of an encyclopaedia entry, and not that of a dictionary. Even a dictionary will give us the different meanings of a word, as conventionally taken by individuals, according to different circumstances or contexts. The encyclopaedia will give us the whole system of references and of crisscrossed entries in which the expression can be found. There are different sorts of 'whales' (including a geographic region), as well as of 'tigers', as it was suggested earlier in this chapter. The normal competence of a layman will probably understand "whale" as a very disconnected 'sememe', with properties such as "fish" and "mammal", together with other superimposed qualities and connotations. For a zoologist, the sememe /whale/ will have a univocal and hierarchically organized structure, in which some properties will depend on primary ones, as Eco's demonstrates (Figure 10):

---

[6]See Hjelmslev's classic example (1943), mentioned by Eco (1979:73), of the French word /arbre/, which covers the same area of meanings as the German word /Baum/, while the word /bois/ is used either to indicate what the Germans call /Holz/ or a portion of what they call /Wald/.

Figure 10

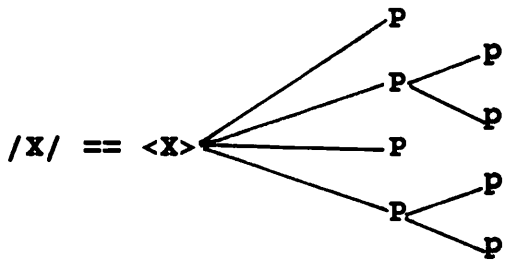


Fig.10: Basic structure of a 'sememe' **(Eco,1979:112)**

The interpretation and the disambiguation of a 'sememe' is only possible by the analysis of its position in a given system, in opposition to other 'sememes' in the same system or in other different systems, or semantic fields. In order to do this, one must start from the compositional analysis of the 'sememes' structure, identifying the pertinent features, or the elements which compound this structure. These elements may be semantic units (called 'semes', in semantic analysis) as well as syntactic features, or properties of the sign-vehicle, which determine its combinational possibilities, in different semantic axes. This analysis will make possible to justify the different choices of 'meanings' attributed to the sign, the different denotations and connotations that make up a 'sememe's alternative', in complementary or yet mutually exclusive 'readings' (Eco,1979:95).

Eco proposes a semantic model for the compositional analysis of a 'sememe', which will be reproduced in a resumed version, in Figure 11[7]:

[7] Eco's revised semantic model is based on the model of semantic memory proposed by M. Ross Quillian (1968), which he calls the 'Model Q', and which is based on a mass of nodes interconnected by various types of associative links (Eco,1979:122).

Figure 11

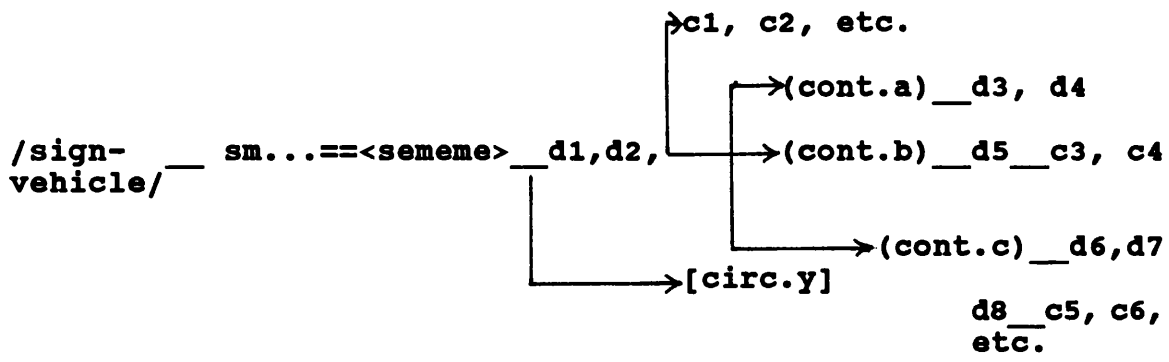


Fig.11: Semantic model of the sememe's structure (Eco,1979:105)

This diagram of a hypothetical sign-function represents the compositional structure of a 'sememe', as 'encyclopaedia', and shows how meaning is constructed, or deconstructed, according to different possible 'readings' of the sign. The reading of this graphic representation can be a set of 'instructions' for interpretation which happen in our minds when producing or interpreting a sign, as Eco explains (1979:105):

- 'sm' -as the set of syntactic markers of the sign-vehicle; - '**d**' and '**c**' - as possible denotations and connotations;
- (cont.) - as **contextual selections**, working as instructions like : 'when you find the 'sememe' in question contextually associated with the 'sememe' <a>, use the following **d**s and **c**s' (as for instance, when you find the 'sememe' <whale> contextually associated with the 'sememe' <Bible>, use the denotation <big fish> and the connotations <Jonas>, <Faith> etc.);
- [cir] - as **circumstantial selections**, giving instructions as: 'when you find the 'sememe' in question circumstantially accompanied by the event or the object

"Y", use the following **ds** and **cs** ' (as for instance, when you find the 'sememe' <whale> circumstantially associated with the 'sememe' <harpoon>, use the denotation <death whale>, and the connotations <Eskimos' way of hunting>, <species in extinction>, and so on).

This model should not be seen as two-dimensional, but as a polydimensional network of intersections, like the branches of a tree, in such a way that denotation 5, in a given context, may correspond to connotation 6, according to a given circumstance, an occasional situation in which the sign may be syntactically linked to another unit in the system.

Syntactic markers

Syntactic markers are the special features of the expression, or of the sign-vehicle, which must also be considered in the definition of a sign-function. They belong to the expression plane, and not to the content plane (Eco,1979:90). These syntactic markers are also determined by a **code**, which governs a set of combinational rules. A 'stuffed tiger' is acceptable as a museum expression, and a living tiger in a showcase would be unacceptable, according to the museological code.

The different sorts of cultural codes, whether social, scientific, aesthetic and so on, will determine not only the combination of the signs in an expression, or text, but also their organizational possibilities, in a given context. In museum language, paintings will be acceptable if syntactically combined with vertical supports (as walls, panels, etc) and would be quite unusual when presented lying on the floor. An automobile hanging from the ceiling would be a 'syntactic aberration', provoking different connotations in the sign's interpretation.

As Eco points out, the expression plane has a 'privileged status', since an expression unit can be defined in itself, or analysed in its 'articulatory formants' (1979:91). A chair can be analysed in its formal structure as having four legs, a back, two arms, being made out of wood, or metal, or gold. The 'sememe' /chair/ will have as 'semantic markers' < for sitting>, <a piece of furniture>, <an artefact>, correlated with the 'expression markers' <with legs>, <with a back>, <with a seat>. It is possible to find a chair without legs, made from a single block of carved wood. But in the case it has no back, the formal expression of this piece of furniture would rather correspond to the 'sememe' <seat>, which is different from that of <chair>.

It is thus possible to develop a compositional analysis of a sign in its expression plane, through its 'deconstruction' in more elementary units (as 'legs', 'arms', 'back', and so on) which actually correspond to 'semes', or the units which compound a 'sememe'. The presence or absence of these units, and the way in which they are 'articulated' in an expression will determine the right situation of the 'sememe' in question in a given semantic field. According to the axis in which the sign is considered, some of these features will be **pertinent**, while others would not. The sharped edge of an axe is a pertinent feature of this object in the context of an exhibition of 'cutting' or 'splitting' tools. The colour or the material of the handle will not be pertinent elements in this semantic axis, while being so in the context of a design presentation, or in a demonstration of the technological evolution of this kind of tools.

Non-verbal languages can also be seen as systems of 'double articulation', in which signs can be analysed in their articulatory formants, as in the case of artefacts, of traffic signals, of heraldry, of technological engines and

even of 'natural' items (see Eco,1979)[8]. There are signs, however, which do not admit the identification of more elementary units in their structure, as in the case of abstract paintings, for instance, or any other kind of expression which actually correspond to what Eco calls 'fuzzy' signs, being actually 'texts', rather than 'signs'. In this case, the elementary features , as colours, lines, shapes and materials, even if possibly distinguished as units of expression, do not bear a 'content' in themselves, while contributing to the construction of the sign's meaning as a single and total 'whole'.

The analysis of the sign's structure cannot escape the consideration of these formal features of the expression, which can be analysed in themselves, as well as in their intersection and combination in a sign-function, a text, a context and in the circumstances in which they may occur. The normal procedure of description and detailed analysis of museum objects, taken as the basic model for the object's identification and classification in the museum system, derives from and supports the need for understanding and situating the 'meaning' of these objects in the universal semantic field.

3.5 - **The museum coded context**

There may be yet **coded contexts** or **coded circumstances** which may induce or 'entail' certain specific denotations or connotations. This is the case of museum spaces, where the context will already produce, among the possible semantic markers of a 'sememe', the denotations <museum object>, <rare specimen>, <authentic>, <original>, and the connotations <old

[8] In verbal language, words are considered as elements of 'first articulation', compounded by 'phonemes', which are 'second articulation' elements. See Eco's discussion and exploration of this subject (1979:228 - 237).

age>, <economic value>, <wealth>, <beauty> and so on. The circumstantial position of a given item inside a special showcase, strongly lit, or arranged together with another item or group of items, will also denote and connote particular semantic 'values': <the most important>, <the rarest>, <the topic of the show>, <a model type>, or <belonging to a class>, <specifically related to a given other item>, and so on. This is the basis of some important **codes of museality**, especially of the **museographic**, or the **design code**, which will be referred to in the next chapter.

As socially conventionalized spaces according to the present cultural codes, museum settings have a strong influence in the way we perceive and understand things, creating a coded context which impregnates all objects and signs with the qualities of 'uniqueness', of 'exemplarity', of 'economic value'[9],and so on, as it will be explored in the case study.

The concept of 'whale', in the context of Disneyland, or of a fairy tale, will acquire a totally different semantic structure than that explored earlier in this section. As Eco points out, 'Disneyland and the world of fairy tales, in general, is a 'revised semantic model' within which the usual denotative and connotative properties of a 'sememe' are upset - though not at random, but following the rules of a complete semantic restructuring' (1979:110). This same upsetting of codes can occur in children museums, for didactic and motivating reasons, as it may also happen in an ethnographic museum, as [redacted] was the case of Eduardo Paolozzi's exhibition,

---

[9] see Eco's proposition of a 'theory of settings' (1979:105,ff.), according to which external circumstances may be also subject to semiotic convention, and in this way would enter into the compositional spectrum of a 'sememe', as 'coded connotations', or 'contextual' and 'circumstantial' selections. See also E.Hooper-Greenhill (1990),'The Space of the Museum'.

held in 1985, in the settings of the Museum of Mankind, in London.

The exhibition, entitled 'Lost Magic Kingdoms and seven paper moons from Nahuatl', proposed a total disruption of the museum codes, using the objects of the collections in a most unusual set of arrangements and juxtapositions, and totally disregarding their primary functions or meanings in the ethnographic and anthropological perspectives. The artist's intention, in his own words, was 'to counteract and perhaps contradict our tendency to isolate phenomena and impose a separateness of the object... the arrangement and juxtaposition of the objects and sculptures suggesting another philosophy... an endless set of combinations, a new culture, in which way problems give way to capabilities.' (Paolozzi,1985:7).

These 'capabilities' proposed by the artist could actually be the awareness of the polysemic and ambiguous nature of any sign and of the freedom and richness of the museum experience, once the authority of museum codes is questioned and challenged. The semiotic potential of these unexpected juxtapositions and free associations of 'things' was fully explored, provoking uneasy and intriguing feelings upon the usual visitors of the museum, through the challenging of current expectations and of 'normal' museum language, and being more easily accepted and enjoyed by young visitors. The intrinsic nature of museum signs has been undressed through this sort of 'naked' and pure primary language, which is that of Art, revealing the artificiality of museum discourses.

The important question to be made on this point is that of the so-called Sapir-Whorf hypothesis, on how far the form of communicative systems may determine the world vision of a certain civilization (Eco,1979:79). For Eco, 'it is enough

to assume that (...) there exists a fairly close interaction between the world vision of a civilization and the way in which it makes its own semantic units pertinent' (1979:79). The responsibility of museums in shaping 'world visions', through the pertinentization of their signs, is a relevant point to be deduced from this assertion.

The different modes of sign production and of construction of museum discourses, building up 'models' of the world, through their specific rhetorics and often 'mythological' narratives will be explored in the following chapters (4, 5 & 6).

CHAPTER 4 - THE PROCESS OF SIGN PRODUCTION

4.1 - The labour of sign production

Symbols, icons and indices: categories of sign-functions

Replicas and doubles: the translating process

4.2 - Modes of sign production

Signs produced by recognition

Signs produced by ostension

Signs produced by replication

Signs produced by invention

The production of 'myth'

CHAPTER 4 - THE PROCESS OF SIGN PRODUCTION

This chapter will explore the process of sign production in the museum context, the categories of signs and the modes of their production in the creation of exhibition 'discourses'. The mental operations taking place in this process, their logical and poetic aspects in the recognition or the invention of signs and in the correlation of expressions to contents will be explored here, in order to clarify the process of sign production and of interpretation in the museum situation.

4.1 - The labour of sign production

The work of sign production is that of 'inventing', or 'discovering' signifiers, or 'representamen', for signifieds, or 'contents' (as much as the work of sign-interpretation is that of 'discovering', and sometimes 'inventing', signifieds for 'representamen'). This work is based on the proposition of a **code**, through which the correlation between 'semantic units' and 'expression units' can be posited and understood.

In verbal language, this correlation is fixed by convention. In non-verbal semiotic systems, this correlation is loose and tenuous, according to the social codes and the context of the communication. Traffic signals are based on a highly conventional established code, accepted and recognized universally in western modern societies, but that may be unknown in the roads of the Amazon area or in the rural paths of India. When the convention does not exist, or is lost forever, or is unknown, the labour of sign production (and of sign interpretation) in the process of communication is more complex and difficult to take place.

As Eco points out, when the content-type is complex, or actually is an aggregation of many content-units, not previously coded by the present cultural codes, the transformational operation of these contents into expression units and their possible correlation will be equally complex, sometimes only detectable through the sign's 'microscopic texture'. 'If the expression, as stimulus, is able to direct attention toward certain aspects of the content suggested, the correlation is then posited, and could even be recognized as a new convention' (Eco,1979:189).

The process of sign production in museum language is a complex process, in that it must refer to different and varied cultural units, which correspond in general to aggregations of contents, originated from the most different and possible cultural codes, and which must be inserted into the codes of 'museality', in order to build up the museum narratives and discourses. The correlation between contents and expression units is normally limited and determined by the primary sign-functions of the objects and items in the collections, and by the 'materiality' of these signs, which bears in itself a semiotic potential, interfering strongly in the process. The variability and imprecise nature of these material units, and their articulation in logical relations in the structure of exhibitions is what can be seen as the 'polarity' between Logics and Poetics in the process of museum communication[1].

The logical and intellectual work of correlation, of proposing contents through material expressions, will be challenged most of the time by the poetic, or emotive effects produced in the participants of the process, through the reverberations and non-logical effects of the material

[1]See Pierre Guiraud (1975) in his analysis of the relations of signifiers and signifieds, in a more or less conventional and constraining mode, and the differences between 'logical' and 'expressive' signs, based on logical or poetic codes.

components on the minds of the users and the receivers of the message, and through the 'free' connotations they will provoke.

What happens when we produce a sign or a string of signs? This question posited by Eco (1979:151) may be applied or translated into the museological work of sign production and of sign articulation, in the construction of exhibition texts and narratives.

As an example of this situation, one can imagine a 'naive' museologist (or a 'lazy' one) is asked to prepare an exhibition on artefacts of a given culture, from those existent in the museum collections. His basic and simple task would be that of selecting, among the whole bulk of things in the storage area, the three-dimensional occurrences which would bear on their labels the name of that given culture, and of displaying these items in 'artful' arrangements in the museum showcases. But if he asks the designer to produce a simple poster or advertising for his show, this latter will have an 'extra-work', of inventing a 'type' of sign which would correspond or suggest the subject of the exhibition. If the designer is not equally 'naive', and would not choose the easiest way of doing his task, by using the printed word 'artefacts' in the poster of the exhibition, he should have to create an image, or to choose among the images of all the items exhibited, one which would best 'represent' the features of the human workmanship focused by the displays. Thus, as Eco points out, 'there are different sorts of signs, some of them entailing a more laborious mode of production than others' (1979:152).

The kind of 'naive' exhibition suggested above could be considered as the simplest and barest mode of sign production, through an 'ostensive' way of communication, similar to that created by Jonathan Swift for the inhabitants of the island of Laputa: these little people would carry a bag containing

all sorts of objects they would like to refer to, and would simply show them to others every time they would like to mention these things. It would be easy for them to refer to 'apples' or 'fishes', but it would be rather difficult to refer to the fact that those apples were not yet mature, or that those fishes were caught by 'X', at the time the sun was just rising. At the same time, even if they could speak, there would be no words able to describe to somebody the taste of apples and fishes, or the warmth of the sun's rays[2].

According to Eco (1979:157), the concrete labour of producing signs is based on a triple process: a) the process of shaping the expression-continuum; b) the process of correlating that shaped continuum with its possible content; c) the process of connecting these signs to factual events, things or states of the world. These processes are strictly intertwined, he points out, and one must realize that 'what are commonly called types of sign are not the clear-cut product of one of these operations, but rather the result of several of them, interconnected in various ways' (1979:157).

One must also realize that there are signs that can express better abstract relations, and this is the case of the so called 'symbols', and others that are more useful to refer to things or states of the world, as is the case of 'icons' and 'indices'. These categories of signs, proposed by Peirce (1931) in his classical trichotomy, are widely accepted and can be used in order to discriminate different kinds of 'mentions' of things and states of the world, as far as they immediately presuppose a 'referent' as a 'discriminant parameter'. They are however criticized by Eco as 'naive' categories for the analysis of the process of shaping the

---

[2]This point refers us back to the problem of verbal and non-verbal semiotic systems, discussed by Eco(1979:173), and to Garroni's proposition on the intersection of these two semiotic systems, mentioned in chapter 2,p.35.

expression continuum and of correlating expressions with contents. Being practical devices, just as the notions of 'sign' and 'thing', they can be used in a general way to refer to types of signs, but cannot satisfactorily explain and justify all the many and complex operations involved in the processes of sign production and of sign interpretation (Eco,1979:178).

Symbols, icons and indices: categories of sign-functions

According to Peirce's categories (2.275,292), '**symbols**' are signs which are arbitrarily or conventionally linked to the object they refer to. They can be more or less 'motivated' by this object, like the 'Cross' as a symbol of Christianity, motivated by the instrument of the death of the Christ. In the same way the 'Sickle' and the 'Hammer' are symbols of the communist party, based on Marxist philosophy and motivated by the tools of the working class. Being arbitrary and conventional, these symbols may change with the changing of social codes or can be either aberrantly decoded, as far as the prevailing codes are ignored or forgotten. In the museum world, the 'Mona Lisa', or the 'Greek Temple' are current symbols of these institutions. The relation of a symbol to its content is always based on a code which must be known by its users in order to be understood.

A '**icon**' is generally described as a sign which is clearly 'motivated' by (or 'isomorphic' to) its object, based on a similarity with the thing it refers to. According to Peirce, a sign is a icon when 'it may represent its object mainly by similarity' (2.276). For Morris (1946)[3], a sign is iconic 'to the extent to which it itself has the properties of its denotata'. Eco demonstrates in his studies how far

[3]Charles Morris (1946), *Signs, Language and Behavior*, quoted in Eco,1979:192.

these statements are from defining the iconic sign. A portrait of a person bears, to a considerable extent, a similarity with the real person portrayed, but the texture of the canvas, the colours and the shades on it, the lines which define the image are far different from the real texture and colours of the skin, of the three-dimensional features and the capacity of motion and speaking of a real being depicted or photographed. It does not have, actually, any of the properties of the object it refers to, or stands for. What provokes the effect of similarity, and makes us recognize in the portrait the person we know, is a mental process of abstraction provoked by perceptual mechanisms, or yet by a perceptual convention which confronts the visual image in front of our eyes with the visual image we have stored in our memory .

According to Eco, the 'iconic experience' is provoked by the same perceptual mechanisms as the ones involved in the perception of a real object, but the nature of the stimuli is different in both cases, and what makes us correlate the two images is the fact that there are previous expectations, or models, or codes, ruling the coordination of perception: 'iconic signs do not possess the "same" physical properties as do their objects but they rely on the "same" perceptual "structure", or on the same system of relations (one could say that they possess the same perceptual sense but not the same perceptual physical support)' (Eco,1979:193). The link between the two stimuli, the iconic sign and the real object it represents, is actually the cultural unit established by a cultural convention, as a 'mental image' recognized by emitters and receivers. This is the reason why one can identify the animal cat when seeing a drawing of it.
On the basis of 'previous learning', we see as one and the same perceptual result what are in fact two different perceptual effects.

The third category of signs proposed by Peirce in his trichotomy is that of **'indices'** or **'indexes'** (2.283,2.285), taken as physically connected with their object: like imprints, fragments or products of an agent, for which they stand for. Museum objects fall in this category, as far as they are the result of human action, or at least a fragment of material culture, working as evidence of the cultural process. Being **made** by man, they bear the **imprint** of their authors or producers, like footprints left by somebody on the ground. The process of recognizing or identifying the agent of these products, in the sign's correlation process, may seem at first the easiest one. It is, however, a case of **'ratio difficilis'**, in the distinction made by Eco on the different kinds of type/token-ratio, that is, the relation of an expression to its content (1979:183).

A footprint is a mere **perceptum**, as far as one can see the agent of it, a person or an animal, at the moment the imprint is left on the ground. But as soon as the agent is gone, the mark on the ground will be an **indexical** sign for this agent, referring not to a foot or a paw, but to the human or animal being who left his trace on the place. The sign will thus refer to a complex content, which is not similar to its physical features, and which will require a lot of mental elaboration in order to be fully identified, much like in a detective case. What makes this kind of signs apparently more easy to understand is the notion of their direct link with their objects, of their 'proximity' with the thing they refer too; the strength of their appeal lies in the idea of 'authenticity', of 'originality', which pervades them. This idea is one of the 'codes of museality', which determine the quality of museum signs (see chapter 6).

These qualities of museum signs, as 'indexical devices', or yet as 'pointers' (like arrows in a road signal), make them often misleading signs, usually taken as 'mirror images' of

the things and events they represent. As Eco explores, mirror images are not signs, but mere virtual images which do not stand for something, but stand 'in front' of something or somebody (1979:202).

Museum objects can be used as signs in all these different categories, according to the perspective through which we choose to analyse them : as symbols, icons, or indices. As Eco points out, the 'notion of sign is untenable when confused with those of significant elementary **units** and **fixed** correlations' (...) 'sign-functions are the frequently transitory result of processual and circumstantially based stipulations' (1979:216). What we must consider thus, in order to understand a system of signs, is not a 'typology' of signs, but the different modes of producing sign-functions, which can be grammatically isolated units (one single object, one single stimulus, one single word) or yet more 'global textual units', assuming a large-scale sign-function (such as a painting, or a whole setting, or a group of objects): the sort of 'macro-units', proposed by Eco, which have a significant function, but which cannot be decoded in isolated 'grammatical' units (1979:217). These 'macro-units' usually correspond to what the author calls 'fuzzy-concepts', an intersection of concepts, images and ideas coming to our minds, as it happens when we are confronted with a portion of the whole 'reality'. They are actually 'texts' which must be read in order to be understood.

Replicas and doubles : the translating process

The translation of a content into a concrete expression (the production of tokens for types) in any system of language implies a basic problem: that of the **replicability** of the signs, in order that they may be used as communicative devices, as many times as one may need to express ideas and thoughts. Eco develops a useful discussion on this problem

(1979:179). A word may be replicated an infinite number of times, without losing any of its 'sign-values', despite the phonetic or graphic variations which may occur in its sign-vehicle. Paper money is a replica of a general type which cannot be indefinitely replicated, due to legal restrictions, and fake money, while being also a replica, does not bear the same 'sign-value' as the legal one. From a semiotic point of view, says Eco, the fact that a hundred dollar bill is counterfeit does not matter (this would be a problem for Treasury authorities). Every copy of the hundred dollar bill stands for the equivalent value in the social economic system of the addressees, no matter if it is a case of 'lying'. The perfect replica of Michelangelo's **Pieta** is another example of signs which keep their semiotic properties, despite being considered as 'fakes' (Eco,1979:179).

This discussion is important for the understanding of sign-production in the analysis of museum signs. The problem of fakes and replicas provokes a great deal of troubles and theoretical discussions in the museum world. Semiotically speaking, (or thinking), any object which renders each nuance of the material texture and form of the original one, with the maximum fidelity, could also possess its semiotic functions. Museologically speaking, this is hard to be accepted. The reason for that stands in the qualities of 'authenticity' and of 'originality' attributed to museum objects, as already mentioned, as related to the positive significant value of the 'presence' of the original things, which stand as 'indexes' and 'evidences' of material culture. This is one of the traditional and conventional rules of the codes of 'museality'.

In a museological semiotic perspective, the problem may be posited as a matter of a 'legal' and a 'semiotic' investiture, in a hierarchical scale. Original museum objects can be seen as 'legisigns',in Peirce's (2.243,ff.) categories,

, as far as they are invested with a legal value by modern social codes, and bearing, among others, the **semantic markers** of 'authenticity' and 'originality', which do not necessarily imply the marker of 'uniqueness'. There may be, in a museum collection, or in different museums, two bronze sculptures made from the same original cast. The same may happen in the case of engravings, or porcelain vases from the same producer, or of whatever kind of object which is not a 'single' product of a maker. All these objects will bear the same semiotic potential, or properties, of their 'doubles', since, in this case, they have been produced with the same material component, under the same conditions and procedures. As it can be developed from this discussion, the problem of signs and of meaning in the museum context is relevant not only for the understanding of the processes of signification and of communication, but also, and maybe yet more deeply, for the conservation and collecting policies and procedures.

Museum objects are replicas of types of objects not by a process of reproduction, but by a process of **substitution**, which allows the emitters of museum messages to choose, among the collections, different objects to play the same sign-function in an exhibition or any other museological text.

The problem of 'originality' or 'authenticity' stands in a secondary place, from this perspective, and a produced replica, a photograph, or a hologram may sometimes have a stronger semiotic function in the structure of the exhibition than the original item itself. Their semiotic 'functionality' and power will be the same as those of original 'museum-pieces', according to their type/token ratio, and to the level of **transformation**, or of **translation** of expressions and contents they will make possible, in the communicative situation.

The point is that, whether using a drawing of a cat, a stuffed tiger, the image of Buddha, an aborigine's portrait,

a scale model of a village or a reconstructed workshop of a forger, we are actually making semiotic translations, in different modes and degrees of similarity, of signs into other signs, of percepts into concepts, of concepts into expressions, of cultural units into new cultural units. This process of transformation, by abstraction and by similitude, of percepts into concepts and these into expressions is demonstrated by Eco in the diagram in Figure 12:

Figure 12

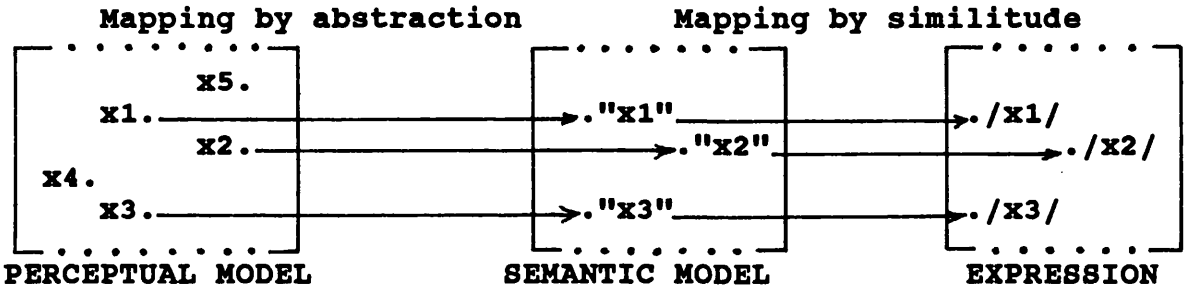


Fig.12: From percept, to concept, to expression: the transformation process (Eco,1979:248)

Whether we use an exact replica or 'double' of the thing represented, or make a 'stylization' of its pertinent features, or yet we create a new expression (a drawing, a painting, etc.) for the same content which we want to communicate, we must go through this basic process of abstraction and of formalization, of expressions and of contents, in order to produce or to interpret signs. In the museum context, the process of interpreting museum signs (the physical percepts, the objects and other items) goes through the same mechanism, linking the perceived object with a mental image stored in the mind (or, in the absence of it, trying to

construct one through comparison and 'abduction'[4]) and successively connecting it with an expression (normally the verbal form, the name of it, which usually is already given in the labels).

In the case of a creative visitor, an artist, or simply a child involved in an activity, the expression may be a new one: a painting[5], a sketch, a drawing of the object, what would constitute a new 'interpretant' for the sign. The process of creating a new formal expression for a given thing is the same as that of finding a name for it. Sometimes the expression found for the percept may be simply a mental image of another thing, or even an idea, an 'interpretant' for the perceived stimulus or sign.

4.2 - **Modes of sign production**

Eco describes four basic modes of producing signs in a communicative act, which can also be applied to the production of museum 'utterances', or discourses: **recognition, ostension, replica and invention.**

Signs produced by **recognition**

In this first mode of production, a given object or event, already existing or produced (by natural causes or human action, intentionally or not) comes to be taken by a

---

[4]The term is taken by Eco, as proposed by Peirce: 'abduction is a case of synthetic inference " where we find some very curious circumstances, which would be explained by the supposition that it was a case of a certain general rule, and thereupon adopt that supposition" (Peirce,2.624, Eco,1979:131).

[5]The problem of painting, as an aesthetic text, or as an 'invention', as a mode of sign-production, will be discussed extensively by Eco (1979:250,ff.) and will be tackled later in this chapter.

sender or an addressee as the expression of a given content (Eco,1979:221). The correlation of the 'expression' to the content may already exist, by a previous coded convention, or may be posited, as a possible correlation, by the sender or the addressee, in a communicative act.

This is the case of most museum signs and expressions, when emitters and receivers **recognize** in the selected and collected objects or natural items a given content, according to particular and specific codes, whether generally accepted ones, scientific systems, or either individual and idiosyncratic codes of signification.

In every case of **recognition**, there is a **presupposition** of a cause or agent which produced the object or event, based on previous experiences or on coded systems of knowledge or belief. In this process, one must first of all **learn** how to recognize the pertinent features (as imprints, symptoms or clues) which distinguish the objects from other occurrences, according to given codes and rules (Eco,1979:222). When the objects or events are new or not previously coded in a cultural system, the work of sign production or of sign interpretation will be an act of 'deciphering' more than one of recognition, and will imply a complex inferential process (the **abduction** of an hypothetical rule) which may lead to the possibility of code-making. This is the case when trying to identify the author of an anonymous work of art, as a painting or a sculpture, for instance, through the examination of the pertinent features of the work: the materials, the texture and shapes, the brush strokes, the pigments,etc... comparing and checking them against known features of known artists, in order to 'deduce' the original possible authorship, the 'school' or period to which the work may be linked.

Recognition is thus a process of 'mapping backwards' from the particular features of given occurrences, or tokens, in order to detect the pertinent features of a 'model type',

which is thus identified (see Figure 12, p.89). This logical mechanism of abstraction is always based on a **presupposition** that there is an underlying code or system of signification at the basis of any manifestation, and an implicit **intention** of signifying and of communicating something through the given expression or manifestation. If this intention of communicating is not **recognized** and accepted by emitters or receivers, communication is impossible.

Signs produced by **ostension**

This is the case when an object or an event, produced by man or by nature, intentionally or not, is **picked up** and shown as the expression of the class of which it is a member (Eco,1979:225). This is the most elementary mode of signification in museum communication, through the presentation of items to the public in order to communicate messages and contents. Actually, as Eco remarks, this is the most elementary act of **active** signification, used in a first instance by two people who do not share the same language. In this case the object is disregarded as a token, and is taken as the expression of a more general content. Eventually, the act of **ostension** may be accompanied by a 'pointer' (an arrow, or a pointing finger), which emphasizes the communicative act, and meaning 'this', or 'is' in relation to the object referred to. In museum communication, the role of the pointing finger is taken on by the frames, showcases, lights and sometimes graphic signals which reinforce the ostensive act of communicating through concrete and visual signs.

In any act of communication through ostensive language (like that invented by Jonathan Swift), there is always, as proposed by Eco, an implicit or explicit **stipulation of pertinence** (1979:225). It is only a previous stipulation which makes clear whether when showing a given thing, like a chair,

for instance, one is meaning that given 'chair', or simply 'chairs'. When the ostension is reinforced by a pointer, the meaning is naturally directed to that specific thing, taken as the immediate referent of the sign.

Ostensive acts of communication are always mentioning or referring acts (Eco,1979:225), and the distinction between 'expression' and 'referent' is a rather difficult exercise. The presentation of a chair, in an exhibition, works in a double way: as the conventional expression of the cultural unit 'chair', which already exists in the cultural repertoire, or as the 'intensional description of the properties recorded by the corresponding sememe' (Eco,1979:226). In this case, in order to interpret it, or to reproduce it, one must recognize the pertinent features present in the sememic composition of that cultural unit (see Figures 10 and 11, chapter 3, pp.70,71). The chair is taken as an ostensive sign used to describe or to refer to the properties and features of the cultural unit <chair>: the shape, the number of legs, the presence of a back and a seat, etc. It can also be the case in which one wants to refer to 'that particular chair', shown in the showcase, and pointed out as a particular example of a given type of chair (used by somebody, produced by some maker, in a specific period or place), and in this case one must again detect, or map, the particular properties of that specific expression, which distinguish it from other occurrences. This is a case of 'ratio difficilis', since there is no previous model determining the shape of the expression according to its specific content.

Ostensive signs can be used as 'examples' or as 'samples' of a given class, as Eco explains (1979:226). When an object is selected and displayed in order to signify the whole class of objects to which it belongs, it is a case of an **example** . This process is actually a rhetorical device used in the production of a message, and in this case it may be classified

as a **'synecdoche'**, of the kind 'member for its class'. This is the most usual sign-function played by museum objects in museum exhibitions. Objects are collected and displayed as examples, or tokens of types, according to different taxonomies and classifications. It may also happen that a part of the object, a fragment of the whole thing is used to represent the entire object, and the class of which it is a member (like a fragment of a ceramic vase, a piece of textile, a head of an arrow,etc.). Again the signifying correlation of the expression to its content will be based on a 'synecdoche', of the kind 'part for the whole', and according to Eco, this will constitute a choice of a **sample** (1979:226). A choice of a lancet to mean 'surgeon', of a harpoon to mean 'fisherman', would be a kind of a **'metonymical'** sample, as well as the choice of a cross to signify 'The Church' would be a case of a **'metaphorical'** and a **'metonymical'** sample.

It is again a logical mechanism of abstraction and of recognition that will make possible the identification of the pertinent features of the ostensive sign presented to the addressee, according to a given code, in order to determine the meaning and the way in which the sign is used.

Signs produced by **replication**

The notion of replica, already discussed above (pp.86,ff.), is relevant in the understanding of the communication process.

Every replica is a token accorded to a type (Eco,1979:183). Irrespective of the particular features the expressions may possess, it is the 'type' which dictates the pertinent features, or the essential properties that tokens must demonstrate, in order to correspond to a given 'content'. Museum objects are 'replicas' of cultural units not by a process of mere reproduction of their pertinent features, but actually by a process of 'substitution', in a sign-function, in a 'standing for' relationship to their types. They may be

considered as 'doubles', replicas or partial replicas according to their type/token ratio. This correlation is established on the level of the expression features, and it is possible to differentiate several degrees of fidelity in the reproduction process, from the absolute duplicate (in which every nuance of the original object is reproduced, according to the same production process, in the token expression), to the more synthetic reproduction of only some of the pertinent features of the model, disregarding the others.

In replicas, the particular differences in the expression token do not matter, provided that they do not affect the recognizability of the pertinent properties of the type (Eco,1979:182); thus, the reproduction may be made according to different spatial or material parameters, as for instance, in the building of a scale model, or a cast replica of an original.

The problem of using and understanding signs produced by replica is closely related to the different 'scales of iconicity' as proposed by Eco in his analysis of sign-production (Eco,1979:191,ff.).

In any case, whether original objects are replicated in different levels of fidelity, or whether they are used as 'examples', or 'replicas' of a given type of objects, their use in museum texts will imply the procedures of **ostension** and of **recognition** as the basic mechanisms of museum language, which must be learned and understood by emitters and receivers.

Museum communication is fundamentally based on visual perception, interpreted by a mental process of abstraction and of recognition of forms and shapes stored in the memory reservoir of visual imagery. When visual perception is impaired, in the case of visual disability of the receivers, recognition may be possible by other kinds of stimulation, as

through tactile perception, for instance, or yet aural and verbal stimuli. In another case, as when the visual repertoire of the receivers is limited, due to a poor background knowledge (as it happens with children, or uneducated people, or yet when the receivers are confronted with unknown objects or contexts) the possibility of recognition of ostensive signs, icons and replicas will be also limited, enhancing the need of learning processes in the activation of correlations and of recognition, and in the increase and enrichment of the public's visual and conceptual repertoires.

Signs produced by **invention**

This is the most difficult mode of producing signs, which is present mainly in aesthetic texts. In this case, the sign-producer must propose (and the sign-interpreter must identify) a **correlation** between expression and content which has not been previously established by a convention (Eco,1979:245). This is a case of 'ratio difficilis', in Eco's terms, and sign production by invention is quite different from the other categories mentioned above. It is easy to recognize or to understand signs produced by recognition, replica or ostension because previous experiences and coded conventions already proposed the correlation between types and tokens. The type already exists, in these cases, as a cultural unit.

In any of the preceding cases, one is 'mapping' from something 'known' and the transformation procedures, from perceptual models to semantic representations, and from these to new expressions, are also governed by 'mapping conventions'. This process makes possible the recognition of the image of the sun in its graphic representation as a circle and many divergent rays, the identification of a known person in a caricature portrait, or the reading of a road map. 'The main problem arises', says Eco, 'when trying to determine how it is possible to map onto an expression continuum the

properties of something which (because of its cultural oddity or formal complexity) is **not yet culturally known**' (1979:249). The difficulty is not how to represent a man with ten eyes and seven legs (since it is easy to infer the unknown elements from the addition of known ones, as the same author explains). The real puzzling problem, proposes Eco, is how to represent a **given man with two eyes and two legs.** How to represent a given individual and his peculiar character and personality, in its 'unique' way of being, and make a 'portrait' of this being, in a way that the addressee would grasp this 'uniqueness' without knowing the real person? Or yet, how to represent the special atmosphere and subtlety of Gainsborough's landscapes and characters, which nobody has seen before the artist's eyes? (Eco,1979:249).

This is the difficulty presented to museum emitters when trying to focus or to explain unknown cultures or different cultural codes, like those of Buddhism, for instance, as it will be explored in the case study in this research. How would it be possible to explain the 'uniqueness' of this religious universe and of its 'artistic' or expressive manifestations, which defy and challenge western cultural and religious codes, in a way that people would grasp a pale shadow of these phenomena? The difficulty will remain almost the same when trying to describe known cultures and phenomena, but the decoding process can be somehow easier, when based on shared and previously known codes.

This is the problem of paintings and other aesthetic texts, which are much more than signs, or cultural units, but which are actually whole **discourses.** In this semiotic process, something is 'mapped' from something else which was not defined and analysed before the very moment of 'mapping' took place. The convention and the correlation of the sign's functives, both the expression and the content, are posited at the very moment in which expression and content are invented. This process is, in fact, an ...

activity of **code-making** as Eco proposes and explains through the following diagram (Figure 13):

Figure 13

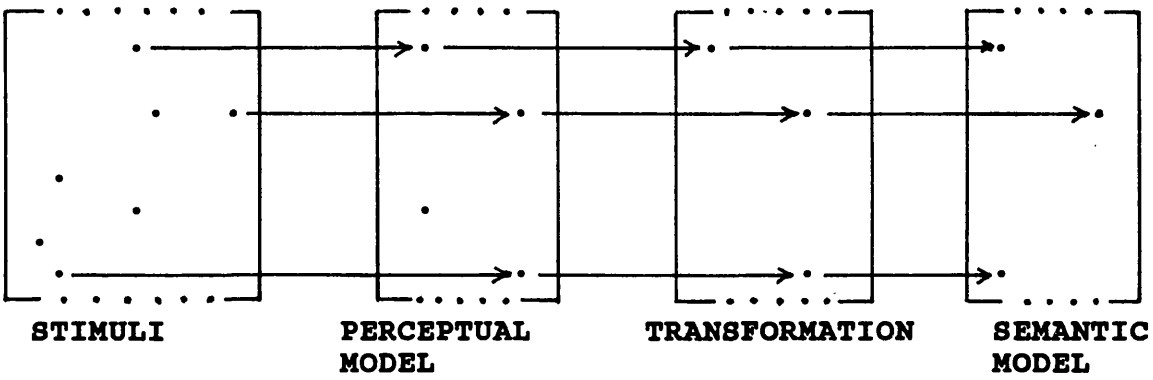


Fig.13: The transformation process in 'invention' (Eco,1979:253)

In this diagram, Eco demonstrates a process of **moderate invention**, as different from that of **radical invention.** In the case of moderate invention, the sender projects directly from a perceptual representation of a given field of stimuli, and through a process of transformation, creates an expression-form corresponding to a given semantic model (proposed according to the artist's codes). From the **sender**'s point of view, a perceptual structure is seen as an already 'coded' structure which is perceived only by the artist's eyes. The sender therefore **proposes** rules of correlation which must be grasped by the addressee. But from the latter's point of view, the result is an expressive structure, which he must 'map backwards', inferring its codes and rules, until he is able to reconstitute the original percept. Sometimes, as Eco points out, the addressee **refuses to collaborate**, and consequently the convention fails to establish itself (1979:252). The addressee must be helped by the sender, with the help of some **clues**, as for instance some coded units or

stylizations, in order that he may grasp the convention proposed.

Thus, as Eco suggests, as in the case of paintings, invention can never afford to be entirely the fruit of an **inventive transformation.** Communication is made possible by a series of **adjustments**, which establish the correlation between the sender's and the addressee's codes. The content-plane resulting from this interaction, lying between the original percept only known by the artist and the testable expression presented to the observer, is not a mere 'unit' of signification, but actually a whole 'text', which must be read and explored. This exploratory labour of code-making and code-interpretation is actually the essence of aesthetic labour and texts. The raw material of the continuum, perceptually organized by the artist, becomes gradually a 'new cultural arrangement of the world', offering itself to the addressees as the starting point for new sign-functions and interpretants, in what Eco calls the 'semiosic spiral' (1979:254).

As Eco proposes, **radical invention** has been present at all the great innovative moments in the history of painting, as in the work of the Impressionists, for instance, whose addressees had never 'perceived' things in that way, and thus refused to accept the artists' codes. In such cases of radical code-making, of a violent proposal of new conventions, the rules of the game may sometimes be accepted after a long period of time. But in fact, 'no one ever really witnesses cases of total radical invention, nor indeed of total moderate invention, since texts are maze-like structures combining invention, replicas, stylizations, ostensions and so on'. 'Semiosis never rises **ex-novo** and **ex-nihilo**', and 'no new culture can ever come into being except against the background of an old one' (Eco,1979:256).

The exhibition of Eduardo Paolozzi at the Museum of Mankind, in London, already mentioned as a case of upsetting of conventional museological codes, can be seen in some way as a case of **radical invention** in museum expressions, provoking all sorts of discussions and debates, and a great deal of bewilderment. It has yet only been possible, as an expression, against the background of the old established codes, which the artist has tried to counteract and to challenge. The effect on the receivers has been particularly powerful, the more strongly and conventionally those codes are accepted in a traditional museum context. The objects could be explored in a different way as far as there was a previous established convention about their 'meaning' and possible relationships. Thus, Paolozzi's exhibition stands as a text halfway between a radical and a moderate invention, proposing new codes and correlations from the starting point of the old ones.

The production of 'myth'

There is yet another mode of sign-production which is not mentioned by Eco in his categories, but which can be related to the phenomenon he calls 'aberrant decodings'[6], involving another kind of operation, determined by its 'intentions' more than by the 'labour' it requires. This mode of production of meaning is based on the process of 'code switching', mentioned by Eco, and which may result in a process of 'code making', insofar as the 'new conventions' are inserted into the social 'competence'.

[6]Eco uses the expression 'aberrant decodings' for any decoding of a message which does not correspond to the intentions of the sender (1980:132).

These are the signs produced by **illusion**, or by 'stealing', referred to by Barthes (1985) in his theory of 'myth today'.

The mechanism through which 'myth' is constructed is that of a second signification system, a 'stolen language', applied to the first primary one. The sign, as an amalgamation of an expression and a content, is taken again as the mere expression of another content, which together build up another sign. This final term of an expression will become the first term of a greater system, of which it is only a part, as Barthes proposes in the following diagram (figure 14):

Figure 14

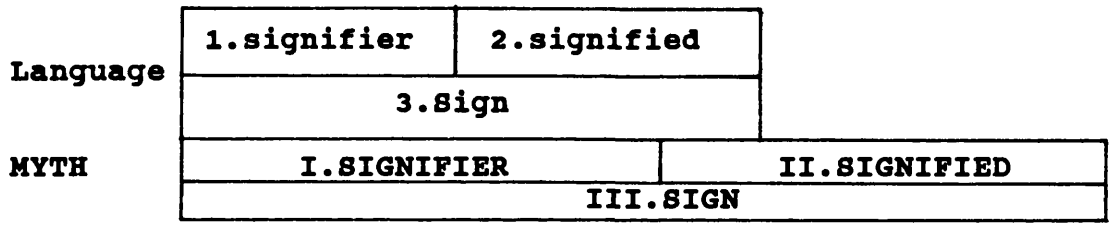


Fig.14: The structure of 'myth' (Barthes,1985:115)

As the author explains, the formal system of the first significations is shifted sideways, and what we have are two semiological systems, one of which is 'staggered' in relation to the other. It is worth calling attention to the fact that what 'myth' gets hold of is 'language', in whatever mode of representation being used, whether verbal language, photography, painting, posters, rituals, objects,etc. (Barthes,1985:114). 'Myth' sees in these forms of expression the raw materials only, and however different they may be, they are reduced to a mere signifying function, as a 'language-object' subjected to a 'metalanguage', which is that of myth. In the museum 'mythological speech', the same 'lateral shifting' takes place, in the production of

discourses (see chapter 2): a Yoruba mask is no more a Yoruba mask, but the raw material of Picasso's portrait, the Buddha is not The Buddha, but a token of the type of Gandharan sculpture.

This process of 'transcoding' is apparently innocent, and works on the basis of 'illusory perceptions', made possible by the ambiguous and polysemic nature of concrete, visual signs. This kind of production never works, however, on the level of signs, but on that of discourse. The repeated use of this 'mode of speaking' will, at the end, establish new 'coded conventions', or 'myths', accepted by societies as 'possible truths', in the place of 'probable lies'.

In the production of 'mythologies', all the different modes of sign-production are involved, as those of **recognition**, **ostension**, **replication**, and **invention**, since 'myth' needs a 'matter', a first set of 'signifiers' and 'signifieds' to nourish its power. The 'stipulation of pertinence', necessary for the **recognition** and the **disambiguation** of meanings, is always lacking in these ambiguous perceptual situations, which can never be 'settled' by the receivers of the message (see chapters 9,10,11, the CASE STUDY).

To communicate is to concern oneself with 'extra-semiotic' circumstances, which are always present at the background of any communicative situation. The events, or the 'world of facts' may happen independently of the social codes then prevailing, and the structure of these codes may be upset by innovatory propositions, by the production of new 'sign-events', and of new 'cultural units'. These new 'cultural units' may actually modify the previous codes and the pre-established semantic fields, as soon as they are introduced into the social competence (see Eco, 1979:158). This increased

competence is the only tool for the 'demystification' of 'myth'.

The exploration of the many and different 'interpretants' of the signs of museum language, their use in an innovatory way, challenging the previous established codes and rules, is a way to open up the minds of the users and to provoke different behaviours and attitudes in relation to the signs of culture, a strategy and an instrument which may contribute for the development of individuals and societies in the present cultural process.

CHAPTER 5 - THE PROCESS OF COMMUNICATION

CHAPTER 5 - THE PROCESS OF COMMUNICATION

The process of sign production and of sign interpretation in museum communication can only be studied 'in situation', i.e., in the '**messages**' proposed and received, mainly through the channel of museum exhibitions. PARTS III and IV of this research will propose a method of analysis of these communicative situations, and a case study of a specific museological text. In the present chapter, the process of museum communication, the interplay of codes and the interaction between emitters and receivers of the museum semiotic situation will be proposed and analysed.

5.1 - The interplay of codes

As Jakobson remarks in his 'Essais' (1963), the fundamental reality towards which the analyst of communication must direct his attention is that of **interlocution.** There is no emitter without a receiver, and every individual discourse presupposes an exchange. Dialogue is at the basis even of 'internalized discourses', as the researches from Peirce to Vygotsky have demonstrated (Jakobson,1963:32). Any communication would be impossible, says Jakobson, in the absence of a certain 'repertoire' of 'preconceived possibilities', or of 'pre-fabricated representations'. These possibilities and representations are what in semiotic studies are taken as the 'interpretants' of the signs, or what in perception studies is seen as the 'schema', or 'schemata', kept in every individual mind. These are the basis for the elaboration and the use of **codes.** Every time we try to communicate with others, we make use of this repertoire of

images and representations, of a common core of mental schemes which allow us to encode and to decode ideas and messages.

The more distant we are from the other person, in space or in time, socially and culturally, the bigger effort we must make to adjust our way of speaking and of understanding, in order to find a common vocabulary and to communicate. Nothing, in the domain of language, says Jakobson, is private: 'everything is socialized' (1963:33).

The study of museum communication must lead us to share and to socialize this special language, through the knowledge of the codes and of the mechanisms of exchange which are necessary to it. The basic elements of this interchange, the emitter, the receiver, the message, the code , the context to which it refers and that in which it happens, will be the basic points on which one must focus the attention, in order to understand how and why communication takes place.

The museum semiotic system is a complex interplay of codes and subcodes which interact in a unifying structure, which may be compared to that of the Theatre. The concept of mutual interrelationship and interaction of heterogeneous semiotic systems within a single unifying structure, as developed by the Prague school theorists, mainly by Otokar Zich (1931) and Jiri Veltrusky (1941), would be the basic concept for the understanding of the museum semiotic system, as it offers, as Veltrusky points out on the Theatre, the 'optimal conditions' for a comparative study of different sign systems operating simultaneously. In his studies on dramatic art, Zich claims that all its components, whether verbal language, pantomime, music, dance, lighting, architecture, costumes, etc., must be studied in their mutual relationship and interaction.

It is possible to borrow this approach in the development of museum semiotics. The 'dramatic nature' of museum exhibitions - through which a narrative sequence is performed

by the artefacts and works of art, to an audience, with an intention of transmitting a message, achieving a response and involvement and provoking changes and reactions - is not yet fully explored by museum 'authors' and analysts. As Veltrusky proposes, each system participating in the unifying superstructure of a work of dramatic art should be analysed not only in terms of its own signifying means and the corresponding system of signification, but above all in their total interaction leading to a new **semantic potential.**

> *'If not all, at least several semiotic systems combine, complement and conflict with one another in dramatic art.* ***The same reality is referred to, either simultaneously or successively, by signs as different as, for instance, speech, picture and music.*** *None of them can denote that reality in its entirety; each has a different meaning even though they all refer to the same thing. In this sense theatre offers an opportunity to study in optimal conditions - almost as in a laboratory - both the* ***common*** *and the* ***distinctive features*** *of different semiotic systems, or to put it differently,* ***contrastive semiotics'***
> *(Veltrusky,1942)*[1].

The same complex semiotic situation may be found in the museum context, where 'reality' is represented by signs as different as paintings and drawings, sculptures, architecture, artefacts, photographs, graphics and written words, music, lights and sounds, simultaneously or successively, as in a 'laboratory', or 'kitchen of meanings', where an infinite number of experiences and results may be developed and obtained.

---

[1]My emphasis; this unpublished text of J.Veltrusky is quoted in L.Matejka and I.Titunik (1976:281/282).

The Museum codes and subcodes

Despite the variability of the elements which may be used to convey museological messages, and the introduction of new resources and devices in exhibition techniques and effects, it is possible to define three basic **codes** supporting the museum communication process, and which, together with auxiliary sub-codes, will be based and reflect an underlying 'structural matrix', that which can be called the 'Museum Code': these are the **Iconic** code, the **Linguistic** code and the **Design** code.

The **ICONIC** code structures the correlation of the objects, artefacts and other concrete or visual items, linked in syntagmatic chains of materials, forms and functions, to a semantic system of cultural units and concepts to which they refer, as signs of signs, as things representing other things or ideas;

The **LINGUISTIC** code structures the correlation of the iconic signs with the notions and concepts they denote and connote, helping basically to 'frame' the semantic fields intended by the emitters, as well as helping the decoding process, as a 'metalinguistic' device. This code, based on the elements of the verbal semiotic system, normally acts as an **intersemiotics** translation of the referents and references of the concrete visual system, and sometimes directs the decoding process towards the 'preferred meanings', or 'preferred interpretants' of the signs. As a 'primary modelling system', the **linguistic code** normally controls and limits the 'multiaccentuality'[2] of museum discourses; it can be also the major tool for the construction of 'myths', due to the ambiguity and polysemic nature of the iconic signs, and the more codified nature of verbal signs.

---

[2]A term coined by Volosinov (1973) in order to show how the **meaning** of signs is not fixed, but develops from the **dialogic** interaction of social relations, being able to change according to the circumstances of their use.

The **DESIGN** code, or the **museographic** code, structures the correlation between the two first codes in the level of expression and in the level of discourse, supporting the construction of museographic sentences and structuring the exhibition in its best understandable arrangement. It can yet convey meanings on its own, and communicate specific messages, through the spatial rhetoric of the Museum Code. This code is normally taken as a 'subsidiary' one, and its semiotic potential is underestimated or misused. It is, however, one of the most powerful communicative devices of the museum language, acting as a 'bridge', or as the 'contact channel' between emitters and receivers, allowing or defending the interaction between the two poles of the communicative situation in a subtle way. Its power is so effective that it may even 'obscure' the **iconic** or the **linguistic** codes. It will depend, basically, on the '**montage code**' which governs the exhibition 'structural matrix', in the level of discourse.

Each of these three main **codes** can be seen as constituted by different **subcodes**, working in an intersected way. Eco calls these **subcodes** as 'supplementary lexicons' used in the encoding and decoding processes of communicative acts (Eco,1980:137-140).

The **iconic** code, as constituted by a set of concrete and visual elements, the objects and items in the collections, is in correlation with another set of units of a verbal taxonomy, or 'nomenclature', established by the curators and specialists, which is linked to another set of notions and concepts, governed by other academic, scientific, aesthetic or cultural **codes.** These latter, imposed on the set of items as a specific 'pertinentization' of the semantic field, do not always correspond to the original codes governing the

production and use of the objects and items collected[3]. They can be thus seen as **subcodes** which interfere and influence in the encoding and decoding of iconic signs, according to **iconological**, **mythological**, **aesthetic**, **technological** or **belief** and **behavioural** systems, determined by social and cultural traditions.

The **linguistic** or **verbal** code can be seen as being constituted by a set of words linked, as in a dictionary or an encyclopaedia, to a set of concepts and meanings, determined by different languages and 'idiolects'(languages restricted to specific groups), and which correspond to different cultural codes and systems of signification. The **subcodes** involved in this verbal encoding and decoding process may be, in Eco's model, the **emotional** or **expressive** subcodes, specific to the emitters or receivers of the messages, the **stylistic** or **rhetorical** subcodes, generally determined by the collective or institutional 'idiolects', the **specialized** or **academic** subcodes, normally called 'jargons', and which constitute the so-called specific 'idiolects', the **metalinguistic** subcodes, appearing in labels, texts or catalogues, in order to explain scientific or specialized terms of the 'idiolects' involved in the message.

The **design** code is constituted by a set of material elements (walls, columns, panels, showcases, glasses, fabrics, papers, etc.) linked to a spatial system already determined by an **architectural code**, which together must work in correlation to the first two codes of the museum semiotic system. The **subcodes** working together or sometimes autonomously in the museographic code may be: the **stylistic** or **period** subcodes, referring to 'styles' in architectural

---

[3]See chapter 3, pp. 54, 63, 64, on 'extensions' and 'intensions'.

and interior design, through time and space; the **acoustic** subcode represented by the effects of sound and music (which signs may play an autonomous semiotic function in the text, as for instance, the registered voice of a given character); the **light** subcode, using light effects as a 'vectorialization' (directing, or pointing out) device, enhancing an object or area, or as a dramatic resource, creating a given atmosphere or a signic performance, representing movement or actions; the **graphic** or **signalization** subcodes, using maps, diagrams, symbols and graphic signals in order to enhance and facilitate the decoding of the message structure; the **colour** and **textural** subcodes, used in an emotional or expressive mode or either referring or connoting periods and styles; the **smelling** and the **tactile** subcodes, used in an expressive, emotive, referential or yet facilitating mode in the communication.

The **subcodes**, as structures or systems with an internal cohesiveness, acquire their semiotic nature insofar as they are related to other systems referring to a same 'structural matrix', or major system of relations and signification. The semiotic function of a set of words and a set of images can only be grasped at the moment their capacity for mutual transformation is established against the same underlying structure of meanings. It is in their interrelationship that a **code** is settled and works. In the same way, different codes must intersect and work together, on the basis of a same underlying structure, in order to compound a **hyper-code**, like the Museum Code, for instance.

The predominance of the iconic code, of the linguistic or verbal code, or yet of the museographic effects and devices in an exhibition may in fact change the meaning of the message, giving it a different quality, and changing the **functions** of the communication.

The semiotic analysis of museum messages will help us to distinguish the **expressive** codes used in the communication,

the **semantic** codes which underlie them, to detect the way each system of sign-vehicles is related with given contents and meanings, and the way each one of these systems relates with the others, in internal and external relationships. The interplay of these different systems of expression and of contents and the rules which govern this interaction will account for what is suggested as the **'codes of museality'**, and which will demonstrate, generally, a long standing and almost universal configuration.

5.2 - The functions of museum communication

The classical model of the communication process, as proposed by Jakobson (1963), sketches the basic elements of this interaction (Figure 15):

Figure 15

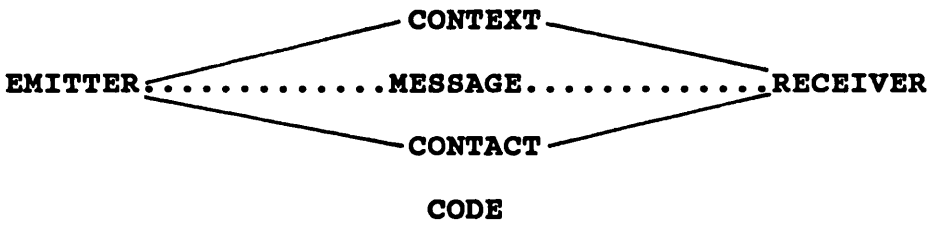


Fig.15: Jakobson's model of the communication process (1963:214)

On the basis of these fundamental elements, Jakobson proposes the **functions** of any communicative act (1963,213-220). Every one of these factors gives rise to a different communicative function, and it would be difficult to find a message with one only of these functions. The great diversity of messages will depend on the different hierarchy between these functions, and according to the predominance of a given function, the character and the structure of messages will differ.

The orientation towards the **context**, or the **referent** of the message, is the dominant role of the so-called **denotative**, **cognitive**, or **referential** function.

The orientation towards the **emitter** gives rise to the **emotive** or **expressive** function of the communication, revealing the attitudes of the speaking subject in relation to the content of the message.

The orientation towards the **receiver**, the **conative** or **injunctive** function, gives the message an imperative or exhortative mode, which is quite different from mere declarative messages.

The emphasis on the **contact** between the two poles of the communication process is played by the **phatic** function, which serves essentially to establish, to maintain or to interrupt communication. It will serve as well to verify the level of contact, whether the 'circuit' works well or not ('Hello, can you hear me?'), or yet to call the attention of the receiver, to keep him awake.

The **metalinguistic** function is oriented towards the **code**, or towards language itself. This is a specific quality of scientific language, but it is also very common in everyday language. Every time emitters or receivers find the need to verify whether they share the same codes in the communication, they make use of the metalinguistic function of language ('What do you mean by that?', or 'Do you understand me?' are typical manifestations of this function). Metalinguistic messages are taken by Jakobson as 'equational sentences', a sort of translation of the sign-vehicles into other sign-vehicles in order to facilitate or to clarify the communication.

The last function proposed by Jakobson (1963:209-248), and most extensively studied by him as the true 'essence' of language, is the **poetic** function, also called by Eco as the **aesthetic** function of messages and texts, as applied to any

kind of art (Eco,1979:262-276). This function is directed towards the **message** in itself. Despite being the main component of the art of language, or Poetry, its study cannot be limited to poetic texts, but can be applied to any kind of semiotic systems which produce ambiguous or self-focusing texts.

All these functions are manifested and can be analysed in the museum communication process, according to different levels of hierarchy and predominance, giving rise to different 'styles' or 'genres' of messages and discourses, and supported differently by the several codes and subcodes of museum language.

The **referential function** in museum discourses is mainly manifested through the **iconic code**, which immediately refers to things, either in themselves, or representing other things and ideas. This function is also performed by the **linguistic code**, whether written (in headings, labels and texts) or spoken and heard, manifested in mere statements or declarative messages, of an informational character. The showcases can be another subtle referential device, working as a 'pointing finger', or an 'arrow', directing the attention to what is inside them (**'this'** object... **'this is** the object...'... **'this** is a **museum object'**).

The **expressive** or **emotive function** is mainly manifested in the 'rhetoric' of the exhibition discourse, chiefly expressed through the **linguistic code**, full of evaluative and qualifying accents ('this masterpiece', 'this rare specimen',etc.). It is also manifested through the **design code**, in the special and dramatic arrangements of the showcases, spaces, 'styles' and 'décor'. The lighting and acoustic sub-codes contribute to the expression of the feelings and attitudes of the emitters in relation to the contents they want to transmit. The structure of the

exhibition, the 'modes of the narrative' in Todorov's[4] terms also convey the emotive and expressive aspects of the communication. The mere selection and the combination of the items, in the **iconic code** may as well demonstrate the attitudes of the emitters in relation to the message, and their personal 'choice' towards the collections, but generally this expressive side of the emitters is hidden behind a supposed 'objectivity' and 'scientificism'.

The **conative** or **injunctive function** relates to the kind of attitude of the emitters towards the receivers, in the museum situation, and is chiefly expressed by the **linguistic code**, which works in an authoritave manner, admitting no doubt in its statements, and imposing a 'preferred reading' of the message. This function may easily manifest the 'ideological closure'[5], or 'framing' of the messages, determining the choice of the objects in the **iconic code** and the mode of their arrangement and their syntax in the **design code**. It is a predominant function in the kind of 'didactic exhibitions', or 'interactive displays' which subdue the receivers to the strength and the authority of the message.

The **metalinguistic function** of museum messages is mainly manifested in labels and texts which try to explain the academic and scientific codes which govern the structure and the content of the exhibition. The **linguistic code** used in the labels usually refers to the codes and not to the referents of the messages (a role which is played by the catalogues, sometimes including a 'glossary', a metalinguistic device

---

[4]See chapter 6, p.154,ff. on Todorov's modes and aspects of the narrative.

[5]'Closure' in the sense given to the term by Gestalt psychologists, referring to the way we fill in the gaps within a perceived whole, overlooking any interruptions. The term is used in media analyses referring to the textual strategies which encourage viewers or readers to make sense of texts in a particular way, thus an 'ideological closure'.

referring to a first metalinguistic discourse). Educational guided tours also play a direct metalinguistic function, translating codes and messages. This function can also be seen as a **metadiscourse**, reinforcing and strengthening the first one.

The **phatic function** in the museum communication process is mainly represented by the **design** or **museographic code**, which appeals most directly to the senses of the receivers, working efficiently to keep the feeling that 'there is more to come' in the next room, or to suggest the idea of the importance of what is being said. The sub-codes of **lighting, colours, smells or textures**, the **spatial connotations** that may be provoked by these museographic devices may also contribute to the dramatic effects which keep, or awake the audience's attention.

Traditionally, museum messages have explored all these functions of the communication process, without a real awareness of their role and power, and focusing mainly the upper side of the communication's diagram: the Context, the Message, the Emitters and the Receivers (see Figure 15).

The focus on the **codes** and on the nature of the **contact**, in the museum communicative experience, only recently has been a matter of attention and discussion from the part of the emitters of museum messages. Studies on the effectiveness of labels, or on the design of 'educational exhibits', have focused mainly on the 'referential' and 'cognitive' aspects of museum communication, on the 'phatic','conative' and 'metalinguistic' competence of the exhibitors.

The study of the **poetic** or **aesthetic function** of the museum communication process may contribute to a greater awareness of the communicative power of museum **messages.**

The 'aesthetic' function of museum messages

The 'poetic' or 'aesthetic' function is defined by Jakobson as the accent put on the **message** itself (1963:209).

Aesthetic messages are seen by Eco (1979:262) as 'ambiguous and self-focusing texts'. Ambiguity is defined as a mode of violating the rules of the code, in different degrees. Not every form of ambiguity necessarily produces an aesthetic effect. The importance of ambiguity, however, is that, according to Eco, it functions as a sort of introduction to the aesthetic experience: '...when, instead of producing pure disorder, it focuses my attention and urges me to an interpretive effort (while at the same time suggesting how to set about decoding) it incites me toward the discovery of an unexpected flexibility in the language with which I am dealing' (Eco,1979:263).

The notion of 'cool' museums, proposed by Glusberg (1983), would correspond in a certain way to this idea, as the kind of settings in which the ambiguous nature of the messages is not 'preferentially' and 'exhaustively' decoded to the visitors.

The unusual arrangement of a set of objects, in different sorts of relationships and in unexpected correlations, as happened in Paolozzi's exhibition, already mentioned, will acquire and produce an aesthetic effect (or a poetic effect) insofar as it will lead the public to reconsider the 'coded relationships' usually accepted, and to explore the multiple possibilities of new correlations proposed by the artist.

Eco mentions a characteristic of aesthetic texts singled out by the Russian formalists, and which is the so-called 'device of making it strange' ('priem ostrannenja', in Sklovskij, 1917):

> *'In order to describe something which the addressee may have seen and recognized many times, the author*

unexpectedly uses words (or any other kind of sign) in a different way. One's first reaction is a sense of bewilderment, of being almost unable to recognize the object. Somehow the change in the expressive device also changes the content. Thus art "increases the difficulty and the duration of perception" and describes the object "as if one were seeing it for the first time" so that "the aim of the image is not to bring closer to our understanding the meaning it conveys but to create a particular perception of the object" (Eco,1979:264).

An aesthetic text is thus **self-focusing**, once it directs the attention of the addressee towards a particular perception of its **shape**, first of all, and consequently to a reconsideration of the previous coded correlations of expressions and contents. The specific ambiguity and self-focusing quality of museological messages start at the level of the **matter** of the museum language: the physical qualities and shape of its sign-vehicles, of the objects and items used as expressions of multiple contents, and the mode of their arrangement in different correlations.

The sensorial stimulation provoked by the **direct view** of the objects 'adds something to our conceptual understanding' (Eco,1979:265). When looking at a concrete, real object, one can be led to perceive the **inner structure**, or the **microstructure** of the material elements which compound it, what opens up the possibility of detecting the pertinent elements of these materials, in a further segmentation of the continuum, in a **more basic** form of the expression, in Eco's terms (1979:265).

The museum experience, when reaching the level of an aesthetic experience may increase the understanding of cultural expressions, through the exploration of their basic expressions and contents, in a **particular mode of perception** which may lead emitters and receivers to a **reassessment** of established codes, to the proposition of new ones, and to '**a**

new type of awareness about the world and cultural phenomena'(Eco,1979:261).

In this process, 'the addressee becomes aware of new semiosic possibilities and is thereby compelled to rethink the whole language, the entire inheritance of what has been said, can be said, and could or should be said'...'art not only elicits feelings but also **produces further knowledge**', as Eco points out (1979:274).

Museum messages as an open form

Any conversational interaction is based on a competence of the speakers and on a process of coding, undercoding and overcoding which make communication possible and effective. The analysis of any communicative situation must consider not only the codes used in the interaction, but also extra-semiotic circumstances, such as the context, the settings, previous experiences and knowledge, or emotional and idiosyncratic factors that intervene in communication. At the basis of this process, there is a transactional relationship between emitters and receivers, which starts with presuppositions and hypotheses from both ends of the communicative act, who must recognize an intention of communication in the transaction, and must select and identify the code or codes being used in the specific situation.

When considering museum messages as **open texts**, or as 'aesthetic' texts, one has to analyse the nature of this process of multiple readings and interpretations. In order to interpret a sign, or even to produce it, one has to consider the 'conditions of signification of a given message' (Eco,1979:128). The activity of sign production and text interpretation implies a continuous work of 'extra-coding'. The interpreter of a text must constantly challenge the existing codes and to elaborate interpretive hypotheses, in

a more tentative, comprehensive and prospective form of codification.

There is not a rule or model that allows one to determine how texts will be produced and interpreted, in a given situation, besides the basic implicit recognition that there is a significative structure in the message, supported by different and varying codes. The communicative situation, in the museum context, is thus a complex transactional and active process, which must be understood in its mechanisms and rules, but which cannot be controlled or predetermined.

Eco proposes that a message is a 'source of information', which constitutes actually a 'reduction of information' from a given source. The 'information of the message', as he suggests, is 'a value depending on the richness of possible choices; the different coded readings of the 'sememes', along with the manifold contextual and circumstantial interpretations, constitute multiple choices which can even be reduced to a binary selection' (Eco,1979:140). The information of the message is only reduced when the addressee selects a definitive interpretation; when the message is an aesthetic text, opened up to multiple senses, this informational quality of the message remains **unreduced** .

The interplay of the various codes, the intertwined circumstances and presuppositions, abductions and inferences made by emitters and receivers, make the message an empty form, able to be filled up by the most different and possible meanings.

As Eco suggests in a specific 'model' of interpretation of messages by an addressee (1979:142), the **message expression as source of information** is rather a different thing than the **message content as interpreted text.** In this process, one has to consider the private codes and ideological biases of senders and addressees, the expression and content ambiguities of the message, as well as the aleatory connotations and the

interpretive failures of the interpreters. This complex interaction will also depend on the knowledge the addressee should supposedly share with the sender and the real patrimony of his knowledge (the codes and subcodes involved), as well as the actual circumstances orientating or deviating the presuppositional effort made by the addressee.

Considering this complex situation, the information of the message is actually a range of probabilities, a 'vast if not indeterminate probabilistic matrix', and the 'aberrating decodings' made by the receiver should not be seen only negatively, but as a 'betrayal' of the sender's intentions. What one usually calls 'message', says Eco, 'is rather a text, a network of different messages depending on different codes, sometimes correlating different expressive substances with the same content (...), sometimes making different contents depend on the same expressive substance' (Eco,1979:141).

When the addressee does not succeed in decoding the sender's codes, or in correlating them with his own private or group subcodes, the 'message' is received as 'pure noise'. The orienting and deviating circumstances represent the complex of biological, economic and external factors that intervene in the process of communication. 'They are almost like the presence of "reality"... which flexes and modulates the processes of communication'.. The question proposed by Eco on this subject is that posed by Humpty Dumpty to Alice: 'The question is who is to be the master', in this game of words and meanings. (Eco,1979:150).

This point will lead us to the discussion of the **functionality** and **control** in the process of communication, and to the many possibilities that may be considered in this interaction.

5.3 - **The dynamics of museum communication**

Models and definitions

Communication is a process of regulating human activities and interaction with individuals or with the environment through mediating devices. This process starts inside everyone's symbol-processing centers, and is thus 'intrapersonal', being the subject of psychological and cognitive studies, as a mental process of managing data and information which will determine individual behaviours. The development of mediating processes are at the basis of higher mental functions, as Vygotsky (1978) and Luria (1982) have demonstrated in their studies, and the use of signs and symbols, as **psychological mediating tools** in the production of meanings, is at the basis of individual and social growth and evolution. This 'intrapersonal' communication is what semioticians call the process of **semiosis**.

> *'The locus of meaning is intrapersonal, while the locus of action is interpersonal'.*
> *(Cronen et alii.1982:71)*

The 'coordinated management of meaning' is at the basis of 'interpersonal' communication, which is a 'transactional' process between people and their environment, according to the definition of Gail and Michele Myers, in their studies on the dynamics of human communication. According to these authors, the behaviours of people 'are the most evident parts of interpersonal communication'. The way people act and relate to each other must be examined as well as the words they use, since 'people tend to make up their reality about each other, and then communicate in relation to that internal perception' (Myers & Myers,1988:7).

Even if considering museums as bearing many of the features of mass communication - in which one or few emitters communicate to a very large number of receivers, through

different kinds of media, without a direct feedback or a face-to face context - recent changes in their concept and social role may lead us to look at the principles of interpersonal communication, as basic for the understanding of museum communication.

Mediated communications tend to be studied, in recent researches, as a two-way process, due to the increasing use of interactive systems, and no longer as before, as a one-way transmission, in which the receivers had no way to 'talk-back' to the senders or the sources of messages. Different models and definitions have been developed by scholars and researchers of communication, in an effort to explain the mechanisms of the process. These models actually define communication according to the specific point of view of their authors, and to the aspect of the process they want to emphasize (Myers,1988:9).

The classical model developed by Shannon and Weaver (1949), reflecting the needs of the Bell Laboratories to develop their telephone industry, was basically grounded on the theory of information, and tried to find out how an information source could get a message to a destination with a minimum of distortion or noise. Social science researches have tried to develop models which would account for the intentions of the senders and the impact of messages on the recipients. Marshall McLuhan claimed that communication studies were distorted by too much attention to the 'senders-messages-receivers' focus, excluding the essential aspect of the **medium** of the process (1967). Psychologists tend to work out the internal and external relations in the process of communication, focusing the sender and the receiver ends and their drives, motivations and behaviours. Katz and Lazarsfeld (1960) explored the **effects** of communication, stressing the role of senders, as opinion leaders, in influencing receivers, more than the direct messages in themselves, in the 'two-step

flow' model which they built up. Lasswell's classical model of communication: 'Who/ says What/ through what Channels/ to Whom/ with what Effect' (1960), introduces the relevance of the **channels** as well as of the **effects** in the communicative process.

The transactional model

The transactional model of communication, proposed by Myers and Myers (1988) stresses the aspect of 'purposeful relationships' in communication, thus broadening the view of this interactive process in the consideration of an extra-communicative level, that of the intentions, purposes, and finalities of senders and receivers at both sides of the communicative situation.

Communication is thus considered not in the simple performance of communicative acts, but in its role and function in social life. These authors quote Schutz's view of a 'three dimensional theory of interpersonal behaviour', stressing the attention to interpersonal **needs**, in peoples' relations to each other:

> *'The term "interpersonal" refers to relations that occur between people as opposed to relations in which at least one participant is inanimate... An interpersonal situation is one involving two or more persons, in which these individuals take account of each other for some purpose...'*
> *(Schutz,1966:14).*

Another assertion of the transactional nature of communication comes from Barnlund, who proposes that communication 'is not a reaction to something, nor an interaction with something, but a transaction in which man invents and attributes meanings to realize his purposes...' (Barnlund,1970:47). This definition actually stresses and

focuses the **semiotic** nature of any communication, seeing the process not in itself, but as a **need** of human relationships.

This **transactional** view of communication, as a complex **purposeful** relationship between human beings seems to be the more fruitful and suitable model to be applied for the analysis of the museum communication process (with relevant implications for educational practices).

There is yet a specific aspect in this process, which must be considered as adding a new dimension to the problem: the museum communication process implies the relationship of two or more people, with the participation of one or more **inanimate** elements in the interaction. This three-dimensional model of communication proposes the triadic relationship between the emitters, the objects and the receivers of the museum message, which actually corresponds to the **semiosic process** in itself.

Museum communication can thus be seen as a process which could be redefined as a semiosic communicative process, when **somebody means something to somebody else, through the use of signs, in a specific context or situation, and in a purposeful relationship** .

The model of transactional communication, proposed by Myers and Myers (1988:14) is based on two basic assumptions, taken from Miller and Sunnafrank's conceptual perspectives on communication: the first assumption is the notion of the '**functionality**' of any communication process, in that the 'basic function of all communications is to control the environment so as to realize certain physical, economic or social rewards from it...'(Miller and Sunnafrank,1982:233); the second assumption is that on the **centrality of control** of the participants in the communication process...'we assume that whenever people communicate with others, they make predictions about the probable consequences, or outcomes, of their messages... typically, communicators remain blissfully

unaware of the predictions they are making until such predictions are disconfirmed' (Miller and Sunnafrank, 1982:224,225).

These two main points will be basic for the analysis of the museum communication process and of its social role : the intentions and needs of emitters and receivers, the 'functions' attributed to this interaction, and the self-centered process which determines communication acts, on the basis of individual and social codes, leading to predictions of outcomes and responses that do not always correspond to those on the receivers' side.

Effective communication interaction requires that emitters and receivers share a common code and recognize each others' intentions and motives, in order that their needs may be fulfilled. The different codes and systems of signification must be recognized and understood, through the use of decoding or translation mechanisms, in order that the production and the reception of meanings and information may happen in the same 'zone of meaning'. This is a difficult process, since human minds cannot be under control, and mutual knowledge requires an effort and an intention of both parts to take place. The ideas of Sperber and Wilson (1986) on the creation of 'mutual cognitive environments', and the studies of Vygotsky (1978) on the 'zones of proximal development', are crucial points to be considered in the study of museum communication.

As Jakobson points out (1963:93/94), the study of the communication process must consider the two distinct and essential aspects of language, at both ends of the process: the codifying process, from the part of the emitter, which in its basic model goes from meanings to expressions, from signifieds to the signifiers in the production of discourses, and the decodifying process from the part of receivers, which takes an inverse direction, from expressions towards meanings,

from the signifiers to sense and symbols. Despite any 'feedback' process between emitters and receivers, the hierarchy of the two aspects is constantly being inverted in the communicative situation, and both elements are complementary and essential in the process.

> *'Communication is now seen as a **transaction** in which both parties are active. The parties are not necessarily equally active - that is more likely in the case of interpersonal communication, but less so in the case of mass media and their audiences - but to both parties the transaction is in some way **functional**. It meets a need or provides a gratification. To a greater or lesser degree information flows both ways'*
>
> *(Schramm,1983:14).*

The principles of transaction

Myers and Myers' model of transactional communication can be usefully applied to the museum situation. In their discussion, the authors propose a number of principles about communicating which are important to be considered in this specific case. These principles are related to their definition of communication as an **'ever-present, continuous, predictable, multilevel, dynamic sharing of meaning'** (Myers and Myers, 1988:27).

The first principle : **'you cannot not communicate'**, relates to the idea that communication is inevitable, and it occurs whether or not we intend it to. The museum context, in this sense, is a communicative context, in which meanings are produced and exchanged even if not specially intended or perceived by the parties involved in the process. A flower vase, a beam of light turned on or off, a 'please don't touch', or the most scientifically produced label, will communicate a meaning to the visitors which may not be exactly that one intended by the museologists, designers,

administrators or curators. **'Communication is also not random'**, and we do it, or understand it for some reasons, even if we are not always aware of our intentions. Museum work is a social work, and museum activities are social activities which call for the responsibility of those who work and practice it.

The second principle : **'Communication is predictable'**, as far as we know the organizing principles implied in it. To increase the 'predictability' of our messages on the behaviours of others, and thus to reduce the ambiguity of social relationships, is one of the major aims of communicating. This process can be learned and developed in the museum field, depending on how communication is seen and intended. Myers and Myers quote the studies of Galvin and Brommel on 'family communication' to make this point clear:

> *'When we talk about communication, we are dealing with symbolic acts to which we assign meaning through our transactions with the people around us. The meanings emerge through the use of symbolic acts as our interactions give us information on how to interpret the symbols. After each encounter with a person or object, we become better able to deal with similar situations, and our behaviour takes on certain patterns. The greater the repetition, the greater the probability of the assigned meaning'*
> *(Galvin and Brommel,1986:12)*

These statements can be rightfully applied to the museum situation, stressing the **coordinated management of meanings** implied in the process. The interaction of museum emitters with their receivers will determine the way signs and symbols are perceived and understood in the context, and will provide information about both ends of the communication. The emitters attitudes towards the public, through authoritative, equal and sharing, or yet invisible discourses will be, consciously or not, grasped by the public, which will react according to this perception. The public's expectations and needs, motivations

and interests, will also determine the reception or the rejection of the messages proposed, their behaviours and attitudes towards the museum and the cultural environment, being subject to change and development when this communication is adequate and purposeful. The familiarity with the museum context and codes will increase the probability of a successful interaction, of the sharing of meanings and of mutual and social understanding.

The development of the mutual capacity of understanding and communicating through the museum medium will be enhanced 'after each encounter' with objects, emitters and receivers, making both parties in the process 'better able to deal with similar situations'. The implications of these statements in the museum educational role can be explored at large.

The third principle: **'Communication is a"chicken and egg" process'**. It is not, thus, a linear process, that starts in our minds. 'We always tend to look at all our experiences and interactions', say Myers and Myers (1988:21), 'in relation to a starting and a stopping sequence, or as very clear beginnings and endings'. This way of 'chunking' experiences, of putting events or behaviours together in order to make sense of reality, is what is called in communication studies **'punctuating'** the interaction. Rhetoric and textual strategies are ways of punctuating our discourses, according to our own view of phenomena and to our approach to the subjects spoken about. The transactional view of communication sees this process as a **two-way system**, where senders and receivers are simultaneously receivers and senders, and where simultaneous 'punctuation' will provoke differences in perception and understanding: the so called 'aberrant decodings and encodings' proposed by Eco (1980).

Whenever we isolate a communicative act in order to analyse it, we are fixing an arbitrary beginning and an arbitrary end to what is necessarily a continuous process.

Communicative acts arise from past experiences and frames of reference, which are activated at the moment of communication, but which cannot be precisely defined or controlled. To understand the differences in perception and in 'punctuation' between the participants in the communicative process is a way to avoid misunderstanding and ineffective communication. It is also a way to make the process more 'predictable', once we recognize these differences and try to fill the gaps in the construction and the transmission of messages. The 'punctuation' of museum emitters is not always the same as that of the receivers, and could hardly be the same, in a context where few emitters speak to a differentiated mass of receivers. It is thus necessary to detect these different '**evaluative accents**' and to make them apparent in the process.

The fourth principle: '**communication occurs at two levels**', the 'content' level and the 'relationship' level. Watzlawick points out that 'communication not only conveys information, but...at the same time... imposes behaviour' (Watzlawick et.al.,1967:51). In this sense, we do not only convey contents through our communicative acts, but also imply a relationship in the process and provide information on how these contents should be interpreted[6]. As Myers and Myers explain, 'as I give you content, I also give you clues on the relationship level about the way I expect you to respond'(1988:22). This relationship may be expressed not only through verbal forms, or 'command' or 'report' expressions, but also in a nonverbal and contextual way. This aspect is seen by Jakobson as the 'conative' or 'injunctive' function of language.

In museum language, we may induce or impose behaviours and meanings, according to the evaluative accent we give to the elements of the exhibition discourse, both in the content

[6]See chapter 6, p.154,ff, on Todorov's aspects and modes of narrative.

level and in the relationship level. Through the accent or emphasis given to a particular piece of work, in the arrangement and disposition of objects, through a special light focus, a special 'frame', or even in a verbal form, in texts and labels, this accent is yet more explicit : 'this **is** a masterpiece... a **major** work...the **most important** feature...' Information in this case is imposed on the receivers, through this sort of factual statements which actually correspond to the emitters frames and codes of reference. In another way, behaviour is also induced and commanded, in less or more explicit ways, as for instance through the classical 'jargon' :'Please don't touch', or through the use of interactive devices or signalization codes. In both cases, a relationship is already proposed through the museum language and rhetorics, one of authority, of difference, and of respectful distance. Galvin and Brommel assert that you respond both to the content of the message and to the relationship implied in it (1986:128).

The fifth principle: **'transactions are between Equals or Up-and-Down'**. This point is intimately related to the above principle. If the relationship implied in the way messages are communicated is that between equal parts, acknowledging the intention of sharing information and contents, there is a better chance that communication will be effective and productive. The attitudes and behaviours of the receivers will respond to this 'complementary' transaction. This will require the recognition of differences and of distinct perspectives in perception and background knowledge of both parts. The creation of 'mutual cognitive environments', as proposed by Sperber and Wilson (1986), in which both ends of the communicative process make manifest their intentions and motivations, is a vital point in museum communication. [redacted]. With their authoritative and 'sacralized' discourses, museums take on a position of superiority towards

their public, which normally makes them feel unsecured and frustrated[7].

When thinking on the public and on the 'non-public', we may find very often, through public enquiries and their responses to museums, the feelings of uneasiness and inadequacy in relation to museum experiences, the connotations with Temples and Churches in respect to these institutions, which attest to the unequal relationship established through the museum communication process. Museums are thus generally seen as 'high-culture' places, where common people experience a sort of social ritual, while feeling at the same time they do not belong to that sphere of cultural life. Myers and Myers refer to relationships between equals or peers as 'symmetrical' transactions, in which the behaviour or communication of one person will produce a similar or corresponding behaviour or communication in the other, in a sort of 'reflect' or 'mirror' effect (1988:24).

According to Weaver, the analysis of communication 'has clarified the field in such a way that we are now ready, perhaps for the first time, for developing a real theory of the signified, and chiefly able to examine one of its most difficult and important aspects in the theory of meaning, that is, the influence of the **context**' (Shannon and Weaver,1967:28).

The uncoded determinants of communication

The mobility of the semantic space, which makes codes change constantly and processually, imposes at the same time on the activity of sign production and of text interpretation 'the necessity of a continuous extra-coding'(Eco,1979:129).

---

[7]See John Reeve (1985), quoting Illich et al., '*Disabling Professions*', Boyars,1977, on the disabling effect of some museum exhibitions.

In this sense, as Eco remarks, the 'very activity of sign production and interpretation nourishes and enriches the universe of codes' and of communication. Normally, according to the competence of emitters and receivers, it is possible for them to adjust their codes in order to form and to interpret given messages or texts. But there are some cases in which there are extremely ambiguous contexts or circumstances, which cannot be coded or which are unforeseeable or excessively complex.

It is possible to find an example of that in the exhibition on Buddhism, taken as the case study for the present research. The bowl carried by Buddhist monks as one of their few personal belongings is denoted in the labels of a photograph and a sculpture as a 'begging bowl'. In the Buddhist code, this is an object used to 'receive alms' which will assure merit to their donors. There is a clear 'preferred reading' in the labels, which is in accordance to the interpretation of the western non-Buddhist curators. But for the followers of the religion, this is an 'aberrant decoding'. Until this point,this is a problem of code-switching, which can be easily made after a better explanation of the two 'contexts'. But something else remains to be disambiguated in the situation: the **ideological connotation** attributed to the definition given in the labels. Is it good or bad to beg? If somebody on the street says :'Look at those youngsters, begging...' there would be more to the sentence than a mere denotation. As Eco points out, 'this kind of ideological connotative meaning must also be grasped, constituting as it does a part of the content of the expression' (1979:130), which can be decoded as such, even if this connotation was not intended by the emitters.

There may be also 'antynomical connotations'[8] which keep an ambiguous interplay in given situations or circumstances, as in the example given by Eco of the 'lion in the circus', and which could be extended to the case of the 'stuffed tiger in the museum'. The connotations of 'ferociousness' and 'savageness' keep jumping in the minds of the viewers over those of 'tamed' and 'captivity', what for Eco accounts for the 'pleasure' of circus performances, which have something to do with 'aesthetic' performances (Eco,1979:111). One could perhaps relate the 'pleasure of museum experiences' with the same 'antynomical' feelings in respect of the objects, such as the connotations of 'rare, valuable, hidden treasures', as opposed to those of 'many, at hand, visible and exhibited things'.

This is the limitation, in Eco's view, of the famous Saussure's dichotomy, 'signifier/signified', which can only account for a semiotics of signification, but not to a semiotics of communication. This limitation is due to the fact that we cannot exactly know what happens in human minds. Once there is communication, there is an emitter and a receiver, and what happens in their respective minds does not always coincide. In order that both sides may communicate effectively with each other it is necessary that their mental images, corresponding to a sign's expression, would coincide, or would occupy the same place in the same 'associative' or 'semantic' field. This coincidence may be yet facilitated, or induced, once the participants in the process will share the same codes, and will make explicit the code which is being used in a given communication, thus better situating their mental constructs, the 'interpretants' of the sign, in the same 'zone of meaning' intended in the process. What one must strive for,in a communication process, is at least an 'approximation'

---

[8]The term 'antynomical' is taken by Eco from the Italian, in the sense of a 'reciprocal opposition' (see Eco,1979:111).

of the forms of contents in both the emitters' and the receivers' minds.

The CASE STUDY in this research is intended to throw a small beam of light in the scenery of the museum spectacle, and to give some keys for this particular communicative situation.

CHAPTER 6 - THE RHETORICAL MACHINE : the construction of discourses

CHAPTER 6 - THE RHETORICAL MACHINE: the construction of discourses

This chapter will explore the principles and concepts which can be considered in the construction of museum discourses, and which can serve as tools for their deconstruction in the process of analysis. The lessons of the old Rhetoric, as proposed by Roland Barthes (1988), and the ideas of Todorov on 'meaning' and 'interpretation' (1966), will be useful for a more analytical approach of museum texts and discourses, and for the proposal of a model of analysis of these performances which will be developed in chapter 7.

6.1 - The rhetorical model

Rhetoric is the art and the 'technè' of giving form to the substance of expressions and contents, according to a given intention. The invention and production of sign-units that will correspond to content-units is ruled by the principles of a language structure. These basic principles, in Jakobson's view are: that of **selection** of signs from a whole repertory of knowledge and memory, based on their qualities of 'similarity' or of 'contiguity' (synonyms, antonyms), and their capacity of 'substitution' (a 'crown' for a 'king', a 'cross' for a 'God'...) inside a given code; the second principle is that of **combination** in a sequence or meaningful chain, based on a relationship of context, syntax and association in a given message (Jakobson,1963). These two basic modes of arrangement and relationships of signs in a communication process, of their structuration, according to the rules and the grammar of specific languages, as well as

to the intentions of the senders, will be the object of the rhetorical art and 'technè'. Different 'genres' of discourses will be produced in this way, different 'styles' or 'forms' of textual productivity will come out from the choice of different rhetorical strategies, or actually 'textual strategies', as for instance a poetic text, a dramatic text, a scientific or a political discourse, a symbolic or romantic text, a realistic or a didactic, persuasive discourse.

The museum language can profit from, or demonstrate, all these possibilities of communicative strategies, depending on the mode in which we produce, use and arrange the signs in museological performances. From the choice or the selection of objects, their sign-function in museological texts, their organization in structures and their combination in physical arrangements in exhibitions, through to the intended or unintended impact and effect on the audience's response to the messages, there is a rhetorical process which interferes and actually commands communication , and which bears in itself a proper 'meaning' which needs to be analysed and understood, if we want to define the role of museums in today societies.

Five principal operations are proposed by the 'technè rhetorikè', as Barthes explains, which are not, in his view, a question of the elements of a structure, but of the actions of a gradual structuration (1988:50). This is a kind of labour, with an active, transitive, programmatic, operational nature, and which can be detected in the structuration of museum discourses:

a)'**inventio**', or finding **what** to say; one has to find the forms of the contents, from a specific 'place' or 'Topics', the 'arguments' or 'proofs' which will be elicited in the discourse; this process corresponds to the work of 'sign production' in Eco's analysis of the semiotic system. In the museum rhetorical process, this stage will correspond to the choice or selection of the cultural units, from a given

semantic field (the 'place' or 'topic') which we want to explore and to communicate, according to a given intention and to a given cultural code, which dictate the paradigmatic relationships of expressions and contents.

b)**'dispositio'**, or ordering what is found; this is the arrangement of the major parts of the discourse, the 'composition', in syntagmatic chains, of ideas ('Res') and signs - thus, the structure of the discourse, built up in order to 'convince' and to 'move' the audience; the order of the arguments and the parts of the museum discourse, the exhibition 'structural matrix', will come out from this operation, as well as the choice and the intersection of the different codes, or semiotic systems, through which the message will be transmitted.

c)**'elocutio'**, or adding the ornaments of words, figures, images,etc... This is actually the 'enunciation' of the discourse, the true 'speech' of language, 'putting into words' ('Verba') the arguments found and structured in the two first operations; in the museum context, this would be the 'mise en scène', putting into exhibition form the structured text, performing the 'discourse'; it is at this stage that the well known 'rhetorical figures', as **'metaphors'** or **'metonymies'**, come into play, giving a 'style' to the text,in order to provoke different effects and reactions. The expression of the museum message through the concrete form of the exhibition, the production stage of the museum discourse is at stake here, and will attest for the 'competence' of the emitters.

d)**'actio'**, or performing the discourse for the audience; this stage may be related, in Barthes's view, to a 'dramaturgy of speech'; this would be the active and dramatic aspect of the museum discourse in its interaction with the public. An

exhibition only starts when the first visitor enters the galleries, and this interaction corresponds to that of a theatre performance, of a dramatic 'action' and the audience's response to it. This operation is in fact the 'text' in action, or in progress, the place where textual productivity actually happens. The role of the receivers and their interaction with the work will be dominant at this stage, while the emitters recede to the background.

e) **'memoria'**, or committing to memory the structured discourse; for the Ancients, this would be achieved through mnemonic devices and exercises, as a support for the fluency of the 'oratio' (speech); in the museum context, this can be seen as the ultimate finality of museum performances, in committing the cultural messages to the collective memory of societies, the 'operative' function of museum communication as a support for social action and behaviour in the minds of the public.

The rhetorical 'technè' was a method of building up convincing and persuasive discourses. 'Inventio' was taken more as a 'discovery', than as an 'invention'. 'Everything already exists, one must merely recognize it', says Barthes (1988:52), seeing it more as an 'extractive' notion than as a 'creative' one. A process related to that of sign production, of recognizing a given function in simple stimuli, and not the mere 'inventive' arrangement of these stimuli. Starting from the choice of a 'place' - the Topic - or subject from which the arguments or proofs for the discourse can be extracted, two wide paths would derive from 'Inventio': one logical, in order to convince, through these arguments or proofs, one psychological, in order to move the audience, thinking the message not in itself but according to its destination, to the mood of the hearers, in order to mobilize subjective and ethical proofs (Barthes,1988:53). To convince,

by logical reasoning, and to move, by mobilizing emotions and feelings, were the two final aims of the rhetorical art.

The dichotomy of convincing and moving the audience will also determine the structuration of the discourse: the first part, the **exordium** and the final part, the **epilogue** should appeal to the sentiments of the hearers; the two central terms, the **narratio** (relation of facts) and the **confirmatio** (the presentation of 'proofs' to persuade the public) should appeal to reason, through demonstration of facts and proofs. The presentation of objects in museum discourses, as 'proofs' of what is being said or related, works as an intrinsic confirmation of the 'truth' of the narration. The explicit confirmation of the arguments proposed are generally found in the labels or written texts in the exhibition, working as a 'metalanguage' which supports and explains the concrete discourse; this strategy was already proposed by Quintilian, who recommended the dissemination of 'certain seeds of proofs' in the narration, even before the proper argumentative part (Barthes, 1988:75).

These different parts of rhetorical structuration can be applied to the museum context, and can be fruitfully explored and developed in the analysis of exhibition discourses.

Two museological models

The operative and effective function of this rhetorical 'technè' can be a useful tool for the analysis and the production of museological texts. Even if we do not recognize this rhetorical structure in many exhibition texts, it is useful to know these 'techniques' and the results which they provide. The presentation of objects in a museum is not arbitrary, it obeys a certain logic, and it is not difficult to identify some basic schemes which govern these

arrangements, and which are present in any text produced in whichever kind of language, in what we commonly identify as the 'plan', or 'structure' of any given text. The linguistic system of natural languages, as 'a primary modelling system', gives its imprint to any 'secondary system' of language in a given cultural code, in a way which has been pointed out by modern semioticians as the 'isomorphism' or the 'homology' between different semiotic systems (Kristeva,1967).

The relation between the order of the 'dispositio', or the arrangement of 'Res' (meanings) , and the order of 'elocutio', the presentation of 'Verba' (words/objects) in the discourse, has always a theoretical bearing, as Barthes points out (1988:50). This would be manifested in the place given to the 'plan' in the construction of texts. Two different conceptions of museology could be similarly proposed from this assertion, and related to the 'status' of the compositional plan: the first one would start working from concepts, theories and ideas, in order to construct the exhibition message, choosing the objects that will support these ideas according to a 'grid' (the topics), in a fixed predetermined plan; the second one starting from the objects, then tracing back from this to the invention of the message and of the exhibition's form.

This second approach seems nearer to the Aristotelian model for the rhetorical 'technè', which proposes the structuration of the discourse as an active operation, as a 'discovery' of meanings and arguments, as a creative act of distribution of the materials (the 'proofs'), in fact, as a 'labour'(as Eco points out in regard to sign production), and then their connection in the structure of the discourse. The first model, as we may find very often in museum rhetorics, takes the plan as a **product**, a fixed structure, or a 'grid' to which the work will be connected: 'order' thus, is passive and created. The choice of objects is connected with the

'dispositio', the 'structural matrix' of the arrangement, which itself will be determined by the first structure or the basic grid: the concept or idea of the exhibition, and the theoretical text supporting it, determined in advance. The arrangement, the presentation of the objects in the 'elocutio', will use them as simple 'verbal forms' ('Verba') for the expression of the formal content. Their quality of 'Res'/meanings is just secondary in this case, as it will be seen in many exhibitions where objects are mere 'illustrations' of the curators' academic discourse. The order or the parts of this discourse is already given by the catalogue, prepared and structured according to the main concepts and ideas of the curatorial team, and not according to the 'proofs', or the evidence of the objects involved. A rhetoric of the product, (the 'major shows') and not of production is at stake here.

According to Barthes, it is the paradigm 'Res'/'Verba' which counts, the relation of complementarity, the exchange, not the definition of each term, which is relevant, thus enhancing the work of sign production and of sign interpretation in the semiotic process and situation (Barthes,1988:52). The 'reification' of the plan is criticized by Barthes and can be criticized in the same way in the traditional form of museum discourses, which often try to put a whole brilliant catalogue 'in vitro', and make the museum experience a simple (and obviously difficult) task of 'reading'. The museum communicative role is thus reduced to a mere informational role, depending highly for its effectiveness on the 'literacy' levels of the audience.

6.2 - **Meaning and Interpretation : the analysis of discourses**

Todorov (1966) proposes two preliminary concepts for the analysis of a discourse : '**meaning**' and '**interpretation**'.

The first concept, the **meaning** (or 'sense') of an element in a work is its possibility to be in correlation with the other elements of this work, and with the whole work itself. The meaning of a 'metaphor', for instance, is to oppose itself to another image or figure of the discourse, or else to be more 'intense' than it, in one or more degrees. Language is a matter of differentiations and oppositions. The meaning of a 'monologue', in a text, may be that of defining a 'character'. Every element of a work has one or many meanings, which may be settled and determined in the context of the work (Todorov, 1966:125).

It is not difficult to find the same elements in a museum discourse, as for instance the 'metaphorical' function of an object in an exhibition: a boat to represent life in the seashore, fishermen, travels, world 'discoveries'; a plough, as a metaphor for agriculture or peasants' life, a bowl to represent food, with more or less impact or intensity whether empty or full, in relation with the other elements of the presentation. Objects may work as 'monologues' in a museum discourse, whenever a special emphasis is given to some 'pieces' or elements of the exhibition, with special showcases and light effects, detached from the general series of the exhibition sequence, or 'narrative'. It has already been pointed out how signs can be entire texts, ready to be developed. In the same sense it is possible to establish a 'dialogue' between one or many objects, through the play of their meaning oppositions and contrasts.

The analysis of the relationships of elements in a work to the other elements and to the whole work , looking for the 'sense' they have and they induce or encourage the viewers or

readers to make, is a way of detecting the textual strategies, the 'closure'[1] of specific texts. The choice of elements and of rhetorical strategies working in the exhibition will reflect the emitters' ideology and particular codes. In this analysis it is thus possible to observe the way stories (or exhibitions) are construed to promote or encourage certain meanings, and to discard other possible meanings or representations, through the 'absence' of other elements, or through the closing and controlling mode of the enunciation. This closure will correspond to the 'preferred reading' implied in a work, or text.

The 'interpretation' of a work or text, as a second preliminary concept considered by Todorov, is a relevant concept for the analysis of museum exhibitions or texts. The interpretation of an element of a given work varies according to the individual, his ideological frameworks in a given moment of time and in a given social context. In order to be interpreted, the elements of a work are inserted in a system which is not that of the work itself, but that of the interpreter, or critic. These interpretations, however justifiable and pertinent, are no more than interpretations (Todorov,1966:126).

It has been pointed out that the meaning of an element in a work stands in the possibility of its integration inside the work's own system. What would be the meaning of a whole work? In Todorov's analysis, the meaning of a work would stand in its relationships inside a broader system, in relation to all the many works produced in a same 'universe', in a given period and social system.

In order to grasp the meaning of an exhibition, as a message and a discourse, it is necessary to relate it to other discourses, not only inside the museum field but in a broader

[1]See chapter 5, p.115, fn.5.

context of the social and cultural field in which it takes place. The exhibition on 'Buddhism, Art & Faith', held at the British Museum, in 1985, the case study presented in this research, would carry a different meaning if presented in Rio de Janeiro or in Tokyo, or in New Delhi, and the case study itself would certainly present different results and conclusions. It is an illusion, says Todorov (1966:126), to believe that a work may have an independent existence, standing for itself, as an 'index sui', without referring to other works, and to the sociocultural context in which they appear. Every work of art, literature or of any other kind, as well as museological works, are in a complex relationship with other works in the past and in the present, according to the different periods and inserted in different hierarchies and cultural codes. Thus, its meaning and interpretation vary according to these same factors.

History and Discourse

One of the main concepts which may be taken from Todorov's literary studies for the analysis of museum works is that of the two different aspects which may be considered in any text, chiefly in the kind of 'narrative' texts ('le récit'), as the object of the author's analyses. Dealing mainly with past and 'historical' subjects (whether in art, history or science museums), museological 'texts' can be seen as 'narratives' of cultural events and facts, through their accumulated 'treasures' and 'collections'. Even if the 'historical' perspective is not the main conceptual axis or focus of exhibitions or presentations, the presence and the use of 'collections' implies the idea of 'series' which develop or expand themselves along temporal or spatial axes. The mere description of these evidences or phenomena requires a 'narration', or a 'story'. Despite the different nature

these descriptions or presentations may have, whether in an argumentative or didactic way, or in a 'report' style, a 'scientific' style, or even in a 'poetic' mode of expression (as is much the case of art exhibitions), there is always present a 'storyline' or a 'discourse line' which must be followed in a sequence, in order that communication may take place, in a coherent way.

There may be exceptions, however, in the case when the elements or objects are presented in a 'bric-a-brac' of things, as in a grandma's attic, and when these elements do not , consequently, bear any semiotic function. This would also be the case of 'totally open'[2] texts, which may actually be a matter of a conscious intention of the emitters, and in this way, the text would yet bear a meaning, corresponding to an extra-museological discourse.

According to this perspective, in a general level, every museological work can be seen as having two aspects: it is at the same time a 'history' and a 'discourse'. It is 'history' in the sense it evokes a given reality, events which did happen in the past or in the recent present, and characters or people in real life. This same 'history' could be told through many other 'media' : a book, a film, an oral report, a theater performance, a television program; this 'narrative' is at the same time a 'discourse', once there is a 'narrator', or an 'emitter' who relates the 'story', and there is a 'listener', or a 'receiver' who perceives it. In this level, according to Todorov, it is no more the events which matter, but the way the narrator makes us understand them (1966:127). It is not easy to distinguish between these two aspects, the 'factual' part from its 'compositional'

---

[2] Every text or every sign is open to a number of potential readings, but normally 'prefers' one or more specific readings; see Eco's analysis of 'open' and 'closed' texts (1962, 1968, 1973).

arrangement in a work, but in order to understand the work one must at first try to isolate these two aspects.

The narrative as 'history'

The 'history' reported through a narrative does not correspond to an ideal chronological order. The order of the events in the narrative is in general far distant from the 'natural' order (Todorov, 1966:127). History is not a simple linear thread of events, and normally it is made of many threads which confound and interrelate themselves at different moments. The linear mode of presentation of facts is thus a pragmatic way of relating what has happened. History in this sense, in its 'narrative' aspect, is no more than a 'convention', says Todorov, it does not exist in the level of the real events. It is actually an abstraction, once it is always perceived and reported by somebody, who is the narrator or the reporter of facts and events. The way this 'story line' is construed and reported to other people will normally obey some conventional rules, in order to explain or to relate these facts in a clear and understandable form. This convention is so widespread and accepted, that normally it works as a 'rule', and any upsetting of the conventional order makes understanding seem difficult to grasp.

Every work must thus have a beginning, a succession of narrative sequences of events or facts, and an end. The inversion of the normal succession of these parts may have, in some cases, an intentional 'literary' effect, as in works of 'suspense' for instance. Lotman (1981,a) explores the semiotic and modelling value of the concepts of 'end' and of 'beginning' in different cultures, which will impregnate cultural languages, expressions and behaviours. The emphasis given to one or other aspect of events is a useful clue to explain the 'models of the world' construed by 'secondary

modelling systems' (myth, religion, museums, advertising and so on). The 'chronological' form of the contents, expressed in a discourse, reflects the nature of a given cultural code. The constructive unity of the world is given through the 'composition', and the value of its end and its beginnings, in the different 'models'.

The systems which emphasize the 'beginnings' are those which normally refer and speak of a 'golden age' or of 'those good old days'. Politically, as Lotman points out, the systems which 'exist' are those which can prove or invoke an ancestor (1981:232). The majority of historical texts, as the majority of museum texts, start with the narration of the origins and the beginnings. Objects or works which do not have a known origin, which do not bear a 'signature' or a 'mark', or which are not 'dated' are normally excluded from the selection system of museum language (dates, place of origin, name of author, special marks and inscriptions are fundamental elements of museum files).

The same principle is present in the values of 'authorship' and 'authenticity' in the museum hierarchical system. The 'syndrome of originality', as one of the 'codes of museality', is a general mark of the museum language and discourses, as much as of other modern social languages and specific codes as those of the Arts and Antiques market.

In social systems which emphasize the 'end', and do not mark the category of the 'beginnings', texts and discourses can take two directions, as Lotman suggests : some of them will have a 'progressive' look of history, as marching in a course of constant development. The future is seen as always better and desirable, attesting the unlimited potential of human creativity. These systems could manifest, for instance, the 'syndrome of Disneyland', a mixture of fantasy, utopia and science-fiction. Modern museological adventures, chiefly the kind of science centers, cultural-leisure centers (EPCOT

center, in the U.S.A., for instance), children museums , air and space museums, are definitely marked by this futurological and somehow 'fictional' perspectives, even if 'directed' to the past or to scientific explorations (the 'time-machine' of the Jorvik experience, in the U.K. is such an example).

There may be systems or languages which emphasize both the end and the beginning principles, as those which have a marked taste for 'ruins' and 'remnants', as manifested in 19th century' romanticism, or in modern western codes, in the industry of tourism and of 'souvenirs', or yet in the museums' codes, with their 'conservational' dilemmas.

The function of a work (of an artistic, literary or museological nature) is to settle limits on the unlimited nature of real 'texts'. This 'framing' capacity is the condition of any text: the concepts of 'beginning' and 'end' of a piece of work, the frame of a painting, the stage in a theatre performance, the spatial limits of an exhibition. These framed realities are seen, thus, as 'strange' or 'outstanding' in relation to the unframed reality of which they are particular fragments. They will work thus as 'models', in the conventional modelling space created within the frontiers of texts and discourses. Models which are most often taken as 'pictures', or 'mirrors' of reality, when they are nothing else than representations of it.

6.3 - **History as discourse: the museological narratives**

When analyzing these representations of 'histories' in museum narratives, one must not forget they are no more than 'speeches', or the actualization of a 'language' which is behind them and which makes them possible. In order to study the museum language it is necessary to consider the second aspect proposed by Todorov for the analysis of narratives : the aspect of the **discourse** in itself, as a real 'speech'

addressed by an emitter to a receiver. Three important points are made by the author (1966:138-151) on the processes of a discourse : the 'time' of the narrative, where the relationship between the time of the 'history' and the time of the 'discourse' is manifested and often conflict with each other; the 'aspects' of the narrative, or the way in which the history is perceived by the narrator, and the 'modes' of the narrative, which depend on the type of discourse used by the narrator to tell us the history of the events and facts.

The time of the narrative

There is always a displacement between the temporality of history and that of the discourse. The time of history is pluridimensional, and many events may take place at the same time, while the time of the discourse is a linear one. In any discourse, one must project a complex situation upon a straight line. This fact provokes a distortion of the representation in relation to 'reality', but this deformation may have actually aesthetic finalities. Todorov (1966:139) quotes Lev Vygotsky, who explores this idea in his **Psychology of Art** (1925):

> *' In the same way as two sounds, combining with each other, or two words, succeeding one another, will form a correlation which is entirely defined by the successive order of their elements, two events or actions combined with each other, give way, together, to a new dynamic correlation, which is entirely defined by the order and the disposition of these events'*[3]

One of the main components of the museum language, already mentioned in the preceding chapter, is the 'montage'

[3] Author's translation, from Todorov's quotation in French (1966:139).

code[4], which will encompass, in its 'temporal' aspect, many variations: from the successive enchainment of narrative sequences, or their entanglement in subordinated sequences, distributed inside the whole structure of the exhibition, or yet in the alternative mode of narration, when different threads are developed at the same time, and are presented alternatively.

Sometimes, besides the main 'stories', secondary ones may be present in the text, serving to explore or to better define a subject or an event. According to Todorov, one could consider a text as a succession of 'micro-narratives', enchained and intersected in the whole work (1966:140). This possible model of analysis proposes that every micro-narrative is composed by three (or two) elements which are always present, and which correspond to a number of essential situations in real life. One can apply this elementary model to museum narratives, in which the objects, as 'actants'[5] or 'characters' of the museum text are reported according to three or two constitutive elements, or essential attributes which are always present in this sort of elementary 'micro-narratives': these could be seen as the **origin**, the **form** and the **function** of each object or item in the museum discourse, either corresponding to the original contexts from which they have been extracted, or supporting the 'micro-mythological narratives' which insert these items in the museum context (the original 'owner', 'collector' or 'donor', and the formal and semantic taxonomies of the museum's codes).

Another aspect of the temporality of discourses is that of the relation between the time of the 'enunciation' and the

---

[4]See chapter 5, p.109.

[5]Greimas develops an 'actantial model' for the elements of a message, which will not be developed in this research, as concerning more specifically the field of structural semantics (Greimas,1971,1981).

time of the 'reception' of the message. The first one is an element of discourse, as far as it is introduced in the 'history'. This is the case when the discourse refers to itself, as a discourse, as for instance in exhibitions which report the museum work and research, its findings and explorations, or its conservational work (the museum's own history). Another case would be that in which the time of the 'enunciation' would be the unique temporality present in the text: for instance, an exhibition of the recent acquisitions of collections by the museum, or of works going on in the museum buildings and installations. This kind of unique temporality would not avoid the insertion of micro-narratives referring to the objects presented and to their trajectory before reaching the museum showcases and walls, or to the former aspects of the building, in a regressive perspective.

The time of the 'reception', taken by the receivers to 'read' the whole text, is irreversible, and normally determines the perception of the message. It may be considered as an element of the narrative as far as it is taken in consideration by the author of the text, or discourse. Even if it cannot be determined by the emitters of the message, since this is a power of the receiver, who may actually decide to see the exhibition in an inverted order, or to browse at random along the galleries, to stay for some minutes or for hours, it can be acknowledged and induced by the authors of the museum message, depending on the strength of the 'controlling' mode of the discourse. The spatial arrangement of the showcases and panels, rooms leading to other rooms, interactive devices and video presentations, resting areas, and the length of the show itself, determining a beginning and an inevitable 'way out', are some of these controlling modes which command and induce the time of the reception, and which may interfere in the perception of the discourse.

The 'aspects' of the narrative

While receiving a message or listening to a discourse, we do not only understand the contents presented, but actually develop, consciously or intuitively, perceptions about the person who performs them. This is a crucial point in communication studies, chiefly in those developed by 'transactional' communication research[6]. The term 'aspects' is taken by Todorov (1966:141) in its etymological sense, meaning 'look' or 'vision'. The author thus suggests that the **aspects** of a discourse refer to the relation between the narrator and the events or the characters reported and described in the discourse. This is actually the relationship of the emitter with his own speech. Three main kinds of aspects are thus proposed for analysis:

(i) 'the vision from behind' (narrator>events) : this is the case when the narrators, or emitters know more than what is actually presented to the eyes of the readers or receivers. They 'look through' the events, explaining what is not apparent, as if looking through the walls of a house, or through a character's brain, to explain his motives and reasoning. This is the classical form of 'historical' narratives, of history books or museum exhibitions, in which causes and effects are pointed out, in a didactic manner, and through which the 'superiority' of the narrator is enhanced in relation to the receivers.

(ii) 'the vision "with"' (narrator = events), in which the narrator is yet more hidden, letting the initiative to the signs and the events or things they refer to, and which he presents and articulates in the most 'objective' way as he

[6]See chapter 5, p.124, for a discussion of this model.

thinks it is possible. This sort of 'vision' of a museological text will lead to presentations where the history is told by the characters who performed or perform the events reported. Quotation of original texts, oral history reports, interviews and living presentations of artists and producers, period reconstructions and dioramas, films and recorded tapes, sound effects and all sort of resources and strategies can be used in this narrative mode (the Musée des Arts et Traditions Populaires, in Paris, is a good example of an effective use of these resources, as for example in the reconstruction of family or working spaces, through which the visitor is introduced by the recorded voice of the original owners or workers, supported by light effects).

(iii) 'the vision from outside' (narrator < events): in the museum field, this is the generalized convention supported by certain theorists, that 'objects speak for themselves'. In this mode of discourse, the invisible narrator limits himself to describe what one can see , listen, touch etc... through the classical resource of labels and headings. Objects and events are presented in a taxonomic order and a clean environment, in order to avoid any disturbance in their presentation. The intention here is to be as objective as possible, but this objectivity is not as absolute as it would like to be (Todorov,1966:142). This kind of attitude from the part of emitters speaks and betrays itself, revealing the taxonomic codes and the scientific and academic jargon used in these 'objective' discourses, which reflect the narrators' own codes and systems of signification. Their attitude towards the public and their 'vision' of the museum role itself is totally 'subjective', disregarding any other interest but their own interest in the curatorial task, and taking the public perception as supposedly corresponding to their own

capacities. The function of the museum is thus seen as a 'tautological' one, existing for the sake of itself.

The 'modes' of the narrative

These **modes** will correspond to the actual rhetorical strategies through which the narrator performs the narrative to his audience, according to given intentions. Two basic modes are pointed out by Todorov (1966:144) in the 'enunciation' of discourses: the **representation** and the **narration** of facts and events. These modes in fact correspond to the two concepts of 'discourse' and 'history'. Todorov relates these two modes to two different origins in literary texts : the 'chronique', or 'history', when the narrator is a mere observer relating the events, and producing a mere 'narration' of them, from outside; the 'drama', in which 'history' takes place in front of the audience, and there is not narration, but a true representation of characters, things and events, which stand for the real ones.

The **aspects** and **modes** of the narrative, working in a straight relationship in the performance of a discourse, will imply in themselves the 'image' of the narrator, which is often confounded with that of the author of a work. The narrator is that more or less visible figure who tells the 'story' to an audience. It may not necessarily correspond to the real figure of the author, to his conceptions and points of view, even if it is created by the author in his work. In most cases, museum exhibitions are produced by different 'authors', in the curatorial, design or educational staff. The voice that 'speaks' in the exhibition will be thus a joint product of different minds and points of view, and it may be often subdued by the higher voice of the institutional code and discourse. Intentionally or not, this problem may add more

difficulties, both for the analysis and for the reception in the complex situation of museum communication.

To define the profile of the museum narrator is a difficult task, when sometimes this voice does not present itself as a coherent and clear emitter of the discourse . One way to detect the narrator's image and role in an exhibition would be the 'appreciative level' of the discourse, through which one could better approach this fugitive figure (Todorov, 1966:146). The evaluative accent given to the elements and parts of the discourse, to objects, facts, personalities, and to the compositional aspect of these elements throughout the exhibition, the rhetorical strategies used to relate or to present the 'history' to the audience, is a way to define the character of the 'ideal narrator', which will at the same time impose the figure of the 'ideal receiver'.

These ideal images of the narrator and of the audience of a museum performance may be more or less distant from the real intentions and capacities of both real emitters and receivers of the communication proposed. The 'preferred reading' settled by the text may not correspond to the conscious intentions of the curators, designers, educationalists, nor to the motivations, interests and evaluative accents of the public. It will however indicate the codes and systems of signification prevailing in the institutional universe, and in a broader sense, as remarked above, of the dominant codes in a given society and time. The image of the narrator and that of the ideal 'reader' are intimately linked together, one determines the other, through the use of supposedly common and shared codes, being at the same time both determined by the dominant social codes and languages.

The evaluative accents of the actual 'reading public' will not necessarily correspond to the ideal responses expected or suggested by the narrator, differing and varying

according to individual codes and attitudes, and to different systems of signification and perception frameworks.

The identification of the real emitters and of the real receivers of the messages, through direct inquiry and analysis of the real communicative situation taking place in the museum space is another step leading to the comprehension of the museum phenomenon, of its power and role in society.

Barthes sees the 'rhetorical machine' as 'a network, a tree, or rather a great liana descending from stage to stage...' 'This network is a **montage'**, he says. Something like Diderot's machine for making stockings, which 'could be seen as a single and unique reasoning whose conclusion was the fabrication of the object...' In Diderot's machine, textile material was fed in at the beginning, and at the end it was stockings which emerged (Barthes,1988:50). In the museological rhetorical machine, what one puts in at the beginning are the raw materials of culture, facts, a subject, and different objects, and what comes out at the end is a complete, structured discourse, performed by the exhibition, and still paraphrasing Barthes, 'fully armed for persuasion' (1988:50).

CHAPTER 7 - Deconstruction of discourses: the analysis of museum exhibitions

CHAPTER 7 : Deconstruction of discourses - the analysis of museum exhibitions

This chapter will propose a model for the analysis of museum exhibitions, seen as the meeting point of an 'emitter' and a 'receiver', and requiring the consideration of the situation, the context and the codes of the communication process. The principles and models for this analysis will be proposed on the basis of Barthes', Todorov's and Eco's studies on the subject, and will take into consideration the exhibition as a 'process' and as a 'product' of museum language.

7.1 - The analysis of museum narratives

A museum exhibition is not the simple sum of objects and propositions. There is a basic concept in Linguistics for the structural analysis of narratives, which provides for the accounting of what is essential in any system of meaning, that is, its **organization**. The exhibition's narrative system can be seen as based on two fundamental processes: a process of **articulation** of its elements, in the level of **forms**, and a process of **integration** of its elements, in the level of **meanings** or **contents**. This would correspond to Todorov's levels of **discourse** and of **history**[1]. A discourse can be seen as the succession of sentences, which are the smallest segments that are perfectly and wholly representative of discourse. The sentence is the specific unit of discourse. Discourse itself is an organization of a set of sentences, operating at a higher level than that of the basic units. It

[1]See chapter 6, p.146,ff.

can thus be seen as the message of another language, as the object of a second 'linguistics', which would be that of rhetorics. The general language of museum exhibitions can be considered as the object of a semiotics of discourse, which will establish a typology of forms of these presentations, the 'tenses', aspects, moods and characters involved , and which will generate a specific museological 'grammar'.

It is thus necessary in this analysis to classify the enormous mass of elements which take part in the structure of the museum narrative, or the exhibition. A sentence can be described, linguistically, on several levels : phonetic, phonological, grammatical, contextual (Barthes, 1988:101). A museological sentence can be described in a similar , homological way, on different levels: material, morphological, grammatical, semantic and contextual levels. Each of these levels has its own units and correlations, which can be described independently, but no one level can produce meaning on its own. Each unit of a certain level assumes meaning only when integrated at a higher level.

It is thus possible to establish several **levels of description** and to place these different instances in a hierarchical perspective, as Barthes proposes (1988:101).

Verbal language is based on basic units of sounds, or 'phonemes', which in themselves mean nothing at all, but which are structured in words, or 'morphemes', whose meaning can only be fully grasped when inserted in a sentence or text. The museological language is basically formed by material or concrete stimuli, or 'signals', which assume meaning as soon as they are integrated in an object, or a work of art, or a technological engine, for instance, endowed with a 'sign-function' and playing a role in the exhibition's semantic system and structure. To 'read' an exhibition it is not enough to go from one object to the next, from one showcase to the next, but actually to project the 'horizontal axis' of

distribution and **concatenation** of the sign-units onto the 'vertical axis' of **selection** and **integration** of these units, on different levels. To understand the total meaning of an exhibition it is thus necessary to recognize in it different 'stages' of elaboration and of integration of the sign-units, since meaning is not 'at the end of narrative', 'it traverses it', as Barthes points out (1988:102).

In order to propose a model for the structural analysis of museum exhibitions, the model of description proposed by Barthes will be assumed, as in three levels, or instances: the level of **functions**, the level of **actions** and the level of **narration** (1988:103).

The **level of functions** will be taken in the sense proposed by Eco (1979), as that of the 'sign-functions'. The **level of 'actions'**, in the sense proposed by Greimas (1971), when speaking of narrative characters as 'actants', will be considered here in an analogical sense, taking the role of museum objects or elements of the exhibition, in their 'sign-function', as 'agents' of meaning, and as 'actants' of the exhibition spectacle, even if manipulated, from behind the curtains, by the authors of the museological 'script'. The **level of narration** is that of Todorov's level of **discourse** (see chapter 6). These levels of meaning must be considered in a progressive, integrative mode :' a function has meaning only insofar as it occurs in the general action of an actant; and this action itself receives its ultimate meaning from the fact that it is narrated, entrusted to a discourse which has its own code' (Barthes,1988:103).

7.2 - Levels of description

The **level of functions** will require the definition of the smallest segments of the exhibition's narrative, which actually correspond to the notion of the 'sign-function' in

Eco's terms (1979). The first criterion for the definition of these functions must be 'meaning'[2]. As it has been seen in the structure of the sign itself (see chapter 2), any element or segment in the exhibition's narrative and structure is a **functional unit**, as far as it is presented as a term of a correlation. There may be several types of correlations and functions, but a narrative, according to Barthes, consists of nothing but functions: 'everything in it, to varying degrees, signifies' (Barthes, 1988:104). Even the most insignificant object or element of an exhibition will have a meaning, even if only that of its redundancy or absurdity in the construction of the message. 'This is not a question of "art", it is a question of structure: in the order of discourse, **"what is noted is, by definition, notable"**[3] (Barthes,1988:104).

An exhibition narrative is not like 'real' life, where there are 'wasted'(overlooked) elements. Everything presented in the exhibition setting is there according to an intention, even if it is inappropriate, redundant or irrelevant to the main narrative. At the same time, the museum language is not like verbal or written language, which are 'fatally distinct', as Barthes points out (1988:104), and highly coded. In this sense museum language is nearer to reality, which admits only 'blurred communications'. In museum exhibitions, this 'blurring' is a natural consequence of the nature of the museum language, which is a complex interplay of different cultural codes, and which is not highly coded, as well as

---

[2] Propp defines the function as 'the action of a character, from the point of view of its signification in the course of the plot' (*Morphology of the Folktale*,1968:.21, quoted in Barthes,1988:103). Todorov defines the same concept: 'the meaning (or the function) of an element of the work is its possibility of entering into correlation with other elements of this work and with the work as a whole' (1966:125).

[3] My emphasis.

being dependent on the polysemic quality of museum signs, which are sometimes an aggregate of several contents, or as Eco proposes, are expressions of a 'content-nebula'(1979:138). The expression 'nebula' which 'blurs' the museum communication process, making the analysis and the precise distinction of its elements sometimes difficult to be made, can be seen as reflecting the 'galaxies of meanings' which must be grasped and decoded, on the basis of the many codes which support these meanings, and which are sometimes hidden, or lost, or yet unknown. This is actually, in a great extent, the reason and the pleasure of the 'museum's art'.

Every element or unit in an exhibition, when this is not a total randomness of things, is supposed to be meaningful and able to be deciphered and decoded. It is what an element 'means' which constitutes it as a 'functional unit', says Barthes, not the way in which it is said (1988:105).

The language of exhibitions, though often supported by verbal or written language, is not dependent as these ones on the strong articulation of its units (phonemes structured into morphemes, organized according to syntactic rules in sentences and periods). The narrative units in the exhibition will not be so strongly and systematically linked to the elements of the system; the functions may be thus represented by an individual object, or either by a group of objects (corresponding to a 'sentence') or by a whole sequence of sentences in the entire work. This is the case of dioramas, or of 'period rooms', of a model of a technological process, a worker's workshop, a ritual setting, a 'series' of objects, fulfilling a unique 'sign-function'. These complex signs correspond, in Eco's terms, to a 'cluster of meanings'(1979:62) which must be deciphered or deconstructed in order to be understood.

Sometimes the 'functional' units may be inferior to the sentence or to the sign, or the object itself : to give an

example taken from the exhibition on 'Buddhism, Art & Faith' (the case study in Part IV), the long earlobes of the image of the Buddha play a specific function, according to the Buddhist code, in the meaning of the image's expression, which in itself is a whole 'sentence' defining that divine entity. According to the curators' aesthetic code, dominant in the exhibition narrative, these elements have no meaning at all, while at the same time, the feature of the pleated robes involving the images' bodies correspond to a specific function which makes possible, together with other features, their classification in different 'art schools' of Buddhist expression (Gandharan, Gupta, etc...). In the same way, the 'mudras', or the different gestures of the hands of these representations, will play a 'cardinal' function when integrated in the vertical axis of the Buddhist religious code, while being the object of a mere description, on the morphological level of the curators' perspective. The same elements, or units, may thus have different functions or correlations, according to the semantic code envisaged by the authors or the 'readers' of the exhibition message, and to the mode of their integration across the different levels of the discourse.

A **functional unit** is a concept necessary to the whole story, or yet, to the whole discourse (Barthes,1988:106). It is possible, according to Barthes, to identify two major **classes of functions:** the first ones working on the **distributional** level, on the syntagmatic display of signs, and referring to complementary or consequential functions (the succession of facts, events, forms and concepts); the second ones working in the **integrative** level, and contributing to the

meaning of the story (or of the discourse), as 'indices'[4] of the characters' identity, of a specific atmosphere, etc.; these elements would be responsible for the attribution of 'qualities' more than of 'functions' to the segments of the narrative. Their functionality, for Barthes, is one of 'being', more than of 'doing'(1988:107).

The arrangement of a series of objects according to their formal aspect, for instance, in a series of 'variants' of the same 'type' of object ('tokens of types'), will enhance the formal quality of the abstract type proposed, or of the 'model' type concretely presented. This latter may have a 'true function', of being a unit or element in the succession of the narrative, or in its 'logical matrix'. This object will thus have a specific role, or sign-function, in the distributional level of the elements of the exhibition, it will 'do' something in the chronological or the logical structure of the message, according to its relation to the other elements of the work (as for instance, representing a 'new type' of object in an evolution of types, a derivation of a former type, or yet being the 'reason' for the appearance of other types).

These **distributional** and **integrative** levels may be analysed in whatever aspect focused by the narrative : the historical, technological, social, anthropological etc. The distributional level, or the correlation of the signs in a same plane (morphological, syntactic or semantic) will ultimately refer to the integrative level of paradigmatic relations established by the vertical axis of signification. Every 'step' or 'turning point' in the succession, corresponding to a sign-function in the horizontal axis of

---

[4] this term, in Barthes'terminology, does not have the same meaning as the term 'indice' or 'index' in Peirce's or Eco's semiotics, but it is possible to make a parallel between these different uses of the term, as conceptually related.

the exhibition structure, can thus be linked vertically to a 'higher' signified in the semantic system of the exhibition discourse.

In the exhibition on Buddhism, already mentioned, every different representation of the main 'character' of the narrative, the several Buddha images spread along distinct geographical areas, will correspond to a different aesthetic canon or formal 'style' in the exhibition art-historical code. According to the Buddhist Canon, every one of these representations are mere 'variants' of the same 'type' of concept, which in itself is an 'aggregation' of multiple contents, from the idea of the real founder of the religion, to the unlimited succession of cosmic Buddhas, or yet to the nature of 'buddhahood'.

The paradigmatic relations of the sign-functions established in their integrative level, or vertical axis of the message, refer to the 'signifieds' of the units, and not to the 'operations', or the 'dynamics' of the signs developed on the distributional, or horizontal level. These signs can thus be seen, in their paradigmatic sanction, as truly 'semantic units', and their meaning will only be grasped on the higher level of 'actions' of the signs, in the context of the narrative. In the distributional level, the functional units stand in a syntagmatic correlation with the other units that surround them in the sentence, on a same level of correspondence, and supporting the unfolding of the story in a complementary or consequential way: one leads to another, or implies another, or yet follows another. In this sense they can be seen as truly 'narrative units', in a chronological or logical sequence[5].

This classification of 'functions' into 'operational' and 'indexical' elements should already permit, according to

[5]See chapter 10, p.259, Figure 20.

Barthes (1988:108), a classification of narratives which can be also applied to museum exhibitions: there are certain exhibitions which are 'powerfully functional' (as in the case of most 'historical', or of 'social' or 'natural history' presentations), and some which are 'powerfully indicial' (as the majority of art exhibitions; science museums may present exhibitions with a double character, both functional and indexical, due to the strong nature of scientific codes, setting each functional unit in an immediate paradigmatic relation with specific concepts). It does not mean that the same exhibition may not present the two types of relations (they are necessarily present in any communicative act), but what normally happens is that one kind of 'functionality' generally predominates, or is more apparent in the discourse.

Another useful category proposed by Barthes (1988:108) for the classes of units in a narrative is the **hierarchy** of importance of the functions they play: some units may have a **cardinal function**, constituting veritable 'hinges' of the narrative (or of fragments of it), while others merely 'fill' the narrative spaces between the cardinal functions, and which he calls **catalyses**. A cardinal function, in the words of Barthes, inaugurates, or sustains, or closes an alternative, consequential for the rest of the story: it corresponds or refers to an 'action' performed by the sign, of a 'cardinal role' played by the sign in the narrative structure. These functions cannot be suppressed without changing the whole work. This point will be developed in the analysis of the level of actions, and this category of hierarchical functionality of the sign-units will be considered as pertinent to that level of analysis and not merely, as Barthes uses it, on the level of 'functions'.

Between two cardinal functions, or **nuclei**, it is possible to arrange 'subsidiary notations', which agglomerate around the 'nucleus', qualifying it or complementing it without

modifying its nature: the space 'can be saturated by a host of tiny incidents or tiny descriptions' (Barthes,1988:108). These elements have a weaker functionality, but nevertheless they participate in the 'economy of the message'. According to Barthes, they are 'zones of rest', or of security, or 'luxuries', which can be abolished from the structure of the narrative without altering its basic features; they cannot, however, be abolished without altering the discourse, since they participate in the form of the narrative, chiefly in the 'time of the narrative' as well as in the 'time of the discourse' [6];they extend, summarize, accelerate, anticipate, sometimes even mislead the discourse, as a sort of 'dilatory'[7] signs, well known in detective stories. They actually create a 'suspense' in the narrative thread, a pause or a delay between two actions. As Barthes suggests, catalyses constantly 'waken' the semantic tension of the discourse, and can be seen as corresponding to the 'phatic' function in Jakobson's categorization of communicative functions: it maintains the contact between the narrator and the receiver (Barthes,1988:109).

In the exhibition analysed in the case study, the space between two **cardinal functions**, as the first Buddha image inaugurating the opening section on 'the Buddha Legend', and the bald head of a monk, opening the section on 'the Transmission of the Canon', is filled by a series of units, such as paintings, small objects, photographs and texts which extend, complement and develop the narration around the first 'nucleus'. Some of these elements are in fact 'indicial' notations, qualifying the Buddha 'character' and justifying the consequential development of the proposition (both the 'formal' aspect as well as the 'historical' nature of the

[6]See Todorov's model, in chapter 6, p.151.

[7] A term used by Valéry and mentioned by Barthes (1988:109).

Buddha sign). They play, thus, a chronological function in the development of the 'story' and a 'logical' function in the development of the 'structural matrix' of the discourse. In any case, they could be reduced or abolished, without disturbing the next cardinal function in the sequence, the head of the monk which inaugurates a new subject in the narrative : the transmission of the Scriptures.

The functional 'syntax' which unites **catalyses** and **nuclei**, the 'grammar' of this combinatory system is proposed by Barthes as two types of relations. A relation of simple implication unites catalyses and nuclei: 'a catalysis necessarily implies a cardinal function to which it is attached, but not vice versa' (1988:111). The cardinal functions are united by a relation of solidarity, one implies the other, and vice versa. The link which unites two cardinal functions has a double functionality in the narrative: a relation of consecution (one comes after the other) and a relation of consequentiality (one implies the other, according to the logical matrix of the narrative). As Barthes proposes, the 'mainspring of narrative activity is the very confusion of consecution and consequentiality', and this 'squeezing together of logic and temporality is achieved by the armature of the cardinal functions' (1988:108/9). This 'armature' must be defined in the structural analysis of a narrative, in order to find out the internal logic of the whole work and chiefly to identify the paradigmatic oppositions of its functions. The oppositions and contrasts of the sign-functions in the exhibition's 'armature', the **montage code** of the work[8], may be seen as contributing for the dramatic context which may be created, in the **'level of actions'**, on the museum stage.

The analysis of the **level of actions** will try to describe the role played by the signs, in a **cardinal** function

[8]See chapter 5, p.109 and chapter 6,p.151,152.

or **nucleus**, in the construction of narrative, as the 'agents' or 'participants' in the construction of meaning, and that of signs in a subsidiary role, as in **catalyses**, as also contributing, in a complementary way, for the building of the whole context of the work. Museum objects, or elements of an exhibition, will be considered here as '**actants**' of the representation, much like the 'actors' on a theatre performance. The semiotics of the theatre will offer many clues and elements for the analysis of the dramatic context of a museological performance, and for museum semiotics.

Each object, seen as a 'character' in a narrative, can be taken as an agent of sequences of actions which are proper to it (to its nature, to its functionality, or to the sign-function it receives in the structure). As Barthes says, 'each character, even a secondary one, is the hero of his own sequence' (1988:119). It has been already pointed out that a sign in itself may correspond to a whole discourse, or a 'micro-narrative', or a whole sentence. It can perform the function of a monologue, in a performance, or it can enter into a dialogue with other signs, by means of contrasts and of oppositions, in an associative or semantic field. The intersection of these 'characters', or 'dramatis personae', in the museum stage, in alternative or intricate sequences of actions, is at the basis of the dramatic context which can be created or suggested by the exhibition text, corresponding, actually, to the 'script' of a theatre performance. The dynamics of the signs in the exhibition structure and performance can be thus explored in their mutual intersections and correlations, leading to a new semiotic potential.

The main point to be analysed at this level is the participation of the unit in a sphere of actions, along the narrative thread, whether in a 'cardinal' role, in the semantic level, whether in a subsidiary role of adjectives or adjuncts to the main 'subject' of the exhibition. These

relations and roles must be detected not only in the syntagmatic chain of the exhibition elements, but also in the paradigmatic structure which sustains it, and which supports the selection of the 'actants' within a same 'class' in a semantic field, and their possible substitution by similar or opposite 'characters'.

Keeping to the same example of the case study proposed, the Buddha image, as an 'actantial'[9] sign in the exhibition, performing different actions, as an 'historical figure', a 'metaphysical entity', or a 'philosophical concept', according to the paradigmatic structure of the Buddhist code, could be adequately substituted by other formal representations, as the 'Wheel', the 'Stuppa', or a 'deer', which would continue to play the same 'role', or 'action' in the message. In the semantic field chosen by the exhibitors in the museum, the Buddha image is no more the 'subject' of several actions, but the 'object' of another discourse, based on an art-historical academic code. The sign's action in this case is a manipulated and controlled one, showing itself to observation from all the possible angles, much like in a 'fashion' parade. It does not cease, however, to perform an 'action', in the exhibition show. As Barthes points out, 'since these categories can be defined only in relation to the instance of discourse, and not to that of "reality", the characters, as units of the actional level, find their meaning (their intelligibility) only if we integrate them into the third level of description', or what he calls the **'level of narration'** (1988:121).

The **level of narration** , in the exhibition analysis, is not concerned with the nature of the events or facts related in the exhibition work, but as Todorov proposes, with the level of discourse itself. As based on the structure of the

---

[9]See Barthes' discussion on the 'actantial relations' in the narrative (1988:117,ff.), based on Greimas' 'actantial model' (1971).

museum language, it can thus be seen as resulting from the two major processes of any language : that of **articulation** of the units, functions and actions (the distributional level), as explained above, and that of the **integration** of these elements in the total whole of the exhibition narrative. In the rhetorical strategy of the museum discourse, this level is the final stage of the operations, after the 'inventio' of units and functions, the 'dispositio' of these elements according to a 'logical matrix', the 'elocutio' of these signs in syntagmatic chains, to compound a meaningful text. There we reach the level of 'actio' in museum rhetorics, through which the discourse is actually performed.

Narration is not the simple transmission of a narrative, but as Barthes suggests, its role is to 'parade' it (1988:127). An exhibition is a 'parading' of meanings, a 'representation' of fragments of 'reality', framed and segmented between the end and the beginning of the show. It is not, thus, a mere 'vision' of things and objects, but actually an 'interpretation' of messages transmitted by a narrator to his audience, in an interactive communication which can only happen 'in situation'. To analyse an exhibition is not merely to describe it, but to consider it in its performative level, and to try to detect, beyond the implicit figures of the 'ideal narrator' and the 'ideal public', the role of the real senders and of the real receivers of these concrete situations.

As Barthes points out, every narrative (as every exhibition) is dependent on a 'narrative situation', 'a group of protocols according to which the narrative is "consumed" (1988:127). It is thus necessary to analyse not only the 'forms of the discourse', but also the 'codes' of the discourse and the 'context' in which discourse is performed, in order to account for the narrative situation, which, in the museum phenomenon and experience, will account for the

'museality' of the situation. What one has to find out, thus, in museum semiotic research, are the codes of 'museality', the group of 'operators' which organize and integrate functions and actions within museum communication. As Barthes points out, the 'author is not the one who invents the best stories, but the one who best masters the code whose use he shares with the listeners' (1988:126).

To understand and to define these codes of 'museality' is the best way to master the museum language and to share them with the museum public.

7.3 - Principles and arrangements of the analysis

It is possible to adopt, here, the basic principles and some basic operational arrangements suggested by Barthes for the analysis of narrative (1988:223), which can be useful for the structural analysis of museum narratives. These basic principles are:

a) the principle of **formalization**, or of **abstraction**, deriving from the Saussurian opposition of language and speech. According to this principle, it is necessary to consider each exhibition as a speech of a general language of museum exhibitions, which in itself may be homologically related to a general language of narrative (literary, filmic, theatrical, folkloric, oral, etc.). One cannot thus analyse a text, or an exhibition, in itself, but as a message referring to a code, a discourse which refers to a specific language, a 'performance' which refers to a 'competence'. On a broader or higher level, it may be yet seen as a 'text' which refers to the 'universal text' and to the codes of culture.

b) the principle of **pertinence**, which has its origins in phonology, as a study that tries to establish the differences

of sounds of a language, insofar as these differences correspond to differences of meaning. What one must analyse, according to this principle, in museum exhibitions and narratives, is the difference of forms which attest for differences of contents. These differences are **pertinent** or **non-pertinent** features. One must then try to detect the pertinent features of the exhibition, whether the units, signs, syntagms, functions and actions which are significant for the construction of the work, and which correspond to certain meanings or contents. These 'meanings' are not the 'full signifieds', or the 'lexical' signifieds of each element, but their intratextual or extratextual correlations, i.e., the correlation of each element with other elements in the exhibition, or with other elements outside the exhibition, in a given cultural system, which make possible the understanding of the messages. The 'pertinent' units are those which have a 'meaning' in the context of the exhibition and in the cultural context of which it is a reflection and on which it will reflect itself.

c) the principle of **plurality** refers to seeking to establish, not 'the' meaning or 'a' meaning of the text, but the 'geometric' site, the site of the possible meanings of the text. For Barthes, meaning is not a possibility, it is not one possible thing, but it is a plurality, in its very being (1988:228). In this sense, to analyse an exhibition is not to find out what it means, nor to make an 'interpretation' of it, looking for the text 'secret', but to look to the productivity of meaning it provides, in a concrete and specific way, to look for the intended meanings, for the 'preferred meanings', for the received meanings, for the 'galaxies' of meanings dispersed through it, and finally, for the 'meaning' of these meanings in the actual cultural context: the exhibition's purpose and role in the social code which originates it, in

its correlation with the paradigms of modern society and in its possible 'operative' function in changing and transforming these codes and paradigms.

The investigation of a text, or of an exhibition, may follow several steps, or **operational arrangements**, proposed by Barthes (1988:229), which are : the **segmentation** of the text, the **inventory** of the codes, and the establishment of the **coordination**, or the correlations of the units and functions identified in the different levels of the work.

The **segmentation of the text** in the smallest possible units (the sign-functions, the syntagms, the sentences), is a way of 'making a grid of the text', separating the fragments on which it is possible to work. Barthes calls these units 'lexias', or 'units of reading', and it is possible to arbitrarily define these 'working units of meaning'. In the museum situation, it has already been said that a sign-function is not always limited to one only object, but that it may be defined in a group or a series of objects linked by an 'interpretant' (to use semiotic terminology). It is yet possible to analyse the function of every object or item presented in the exhibition, and to try to define its role (cardinal or subsidiary) in the production of a sign-unit or of a string of signs. One can either choose to analyse these units according to the spatial organization of the exhibition, in its more obvious and common features, those of the showcases, spatial divisions or areas, rooms and galleries, in order to seek a first basic 'grid'. These areas, sections, and glass panels are one of the most embedded codes of the museum language, and even unrecognized, they work as basic 'framing' devices for the structuration of the exhibition narrative.

The **inventory of the codes** is the task of identifying the meanings, in the sense proposed above, or the correlations, the 'code-departures', in Barthes words, present in each 'lexia', or exhibition fragment. These codes of the narrative can be many, as for instance the 'chronological' code (the question of 'beginnings and ends', Todorov's 'time of narrative'), the 'geographical' code (implying spatial denotations and connotations), the 'historical' code, the 'art-historical' code, the 'scientific' code, the 'biological' code and so on.

Besides these apparent codes, one has to pay attention to the implicit codes of the cultural and social context which are referred to, in the 'history' and in the 'discourse' of the exhibition (the 'doxa', or the prevailing view of things), and which are responsible for the 'evaluative accents' both from the part of narrators and of receivers .

The 'museological' codes are another aspect to be noted, from the 'inauguration' rites, through to the museum 'jargon', the museological system of values and of signification, the imposed behaviours, the transactional relation, unto the 'way out'.

Finally the **codes of expression** of the museum language, at the basis of its communication process, which is actually a battlefield of intersected and simultaneous semiotic systems supporting the transmission of the message: the iconic, the linguistic and the design codes, and their multiple subcodes.

The **coordination of the units and functions**, managed by the codes above mentioned, is actually the true task of looking for meanings in these correlations, the analysis of the exhibition 'in process', with all the possible references internal and external to the work. As it has been proposed in the sections above, an object, or a 'sign-function' may refer to another unit in the exhibition, with which it is correlated

in a 'syntagm', while at the same time referring to another sign, or thing, or idea in the vertical axis of its paradigmatic field. This work of coordination, or of correlation is in fact the work of sign-interpretation, which must be carried on in two directions : that of the sign-consumption, in the receivers end, and that of sign-production, in the producers side.

It is worth here to call attention to the need of outreaching the museum's walls, in order to look for the real senders (and the real producers in the original context of museum signs) and for the real receivers of the communication, in order to detect the phenomenon of 'code-switching' which commonly takes place in the museum situation, giving rise to the creation of 'myth', as well as of 'aberrant encodings and decodings'. It is also possible to find out the element of **citation**, which is the case proposed by Kristeva (1969) as the notion of 'intertextuality', the text referring to other texts of history, of aesthetics, of science, of literature, of philosophy, of religion, of politics, and so on. Every text produced by man is in fact, as Barthes suggests, 'an almost illimitable reference to an infinite text, the cultural text of humanity' (1988:230).

7.4 - The Exhibition 'in process': a model for analysis

The production and the reception of museum discourses involves a labour from both parts of the communication process. This 'productivity' analysed by Julia Kristeva (1968) generates a product, a work, which will be inserted in the relationship 'reality=author=work=public', in an exchange process reduced in our modern civilization to the idea of 'consumption'. Productivity is hidden behind a representation, or a 'screen' which doubles the real and the 'authentic', and substitutes it by a 'discourse' : a secondary object in

relation to reality, as Kristeva points out, passive to be analysed, thought, evaluated and spoken about as a 'reified' substitution (Kristeva,1968:59). The notion of 'museality' proposed in this research, and the definition of the object of museology, not as a **product** but as a **process**, a 'translinguistic work' on the many cultural languages and cultural processes, makes thus necessary the analysis of the products of museum work and of their consumption, in the 'after-production' stage, if we want to reach their real 'productivity' and 'effectiveness'. This is the field of 'pragmatics', the study of the communication process through which languages are actualized in speeches, responses and reactions, in social life.

The model for analysis proposed in this research and applied to the case study presented in Part IV, was based, in its starting point, on the rhetorical model, the principles and suggestions of the levels of description, as proposed by Barthes, focusing the several steps of the structuration of a discourse : in this case, a museum discourse. These stages will correspond to the definition of the basic constituent elements of the exhibition, of its **organization** in a 'structural matrix', or a 'grid' settled on a given 'topic', and of the way this basic framework will be fulfilled with 'sign-objects' arranged in meaningful correlations,in order to build up a 'convincing and persuasive' exhibition discourse.

The analysis of the final stage of the performance of museum discourses, of the 'Actio' in the rhetorical 'technè', was proposed on the basis of Eco's model for an inquiry into the television message (1980), as the analysis of a work 'in process', focusing on the 'after production' stage of a communicative situation. Semiotic research is just an aspect of investigation, as Eco points out, if we want to determine

the real influence of messages on the public's behaviour, but it is essential, as he says, for answering the basic question:

'When I send a message, what do different individuals, in different environments actually receive? Do they receive the same message? A similar one or a totally different one?' (Eco,1980:131)

In the museum context, it is thus necessary to investigate the same question, with a single difference, that is, to consider different individuals in a same environment - the museum exhibition galleries. Would this fact contribute to the reception of the same message by all individuals? How much would the museum environment and the exhibition structure contribute to the homogeneity of the reception, and for which reasons? In order to analyse the museum message, according to Eco's model, it is possible to single out three basic aspects:

a) the intentions of the senders;
b) the objective structure of the message;
c) the reactions of the addressees to items a) and b).

What is urgent and important in this study, in Eco's view, is to understand not 'what the audience likes', but rather 'what in fact **the audience gets**' from a message (Eco,1980:131).

The conclusions of this case study will lead us to find out the 'communicability' of the exhibition, its effectiveness and productivity of meanings and behaviours, the transactional relations settled by a given museological code and speech, and the translation operations worked out by the educational staff in the support of the audience's interaction with the message, with all the problems involved in this process.

PART IV - CASE STUDY

CHAPTER 8 : THE BUDDHA IS NOT THE BUDDHA : a semiotic inquiry into a Museum message

8.1 - Levels of Description

The context

The situation: 'Buddhism, Art & Faith' exhibition

The research : methodology and tools

8.2 - The Analysis of the Message

First steps

Main basic structure

Description of sections

Segmentation of the text: units of reading

CHAPTER 8: THE BUDDHA IS NOT THE BUDDHA: a semiotic inquiry into a Museum message

This chapter will describe the context and the situation of the exhibition analysed as a case study in this research, as well as the methodology and the tools applied in this investigation. It will describe the different steps of this analysis, and the different segments in which the structure of the exhibition has been divided for the sake of this theoretical study. The analysis and the 'reading' of these units, as well as the responses of the public to this particular museum message will be developed in chapters 9, 10, and 11.

8.1 - Levels of Description

The context

The choice of the BRITISH MUSEUM as a field for exploration and development of a semiotic research on the Museum Language and the Museum Communication Process was motivated by the character and nature of this institution, which can be seen as a sign, in itself, for the Museum Institution through time and history. One of the 'great museums' of today, the BM[1] has the 'distinction of being the first national, public and secular museum in the world, which, following the principles laid down by Diderot and the encyclopaedists of the 18th century, had the temerity to aim at universality, belonged to the nation, and, at least in

[1]from here on the British Museum will be referred to as BM, and the British Library as BL.

theory, granted admission to "all studious and curious persons" (Caygill,1981:3). Although having no longer the scope envisaged by its founders and the original 'cabinet of curiosities' being changed into an advanced museological institution, playing a leading role in the development of museum science and techniques, as one of the greatest organizations in the museum world, it is still possible to detect some of the strong features of its original nature. 'It still aims to encompass the whole span of world culture' (Caygill,1981:4), as the names and the organization of its departments may prove, and chiefly as it is well demonstrated through the kind of 'major exhibitions', or 'encyclopaedic shows', like the 'Buddhism, Art & Faith' exhibition, periodically held.

Having today a reputation of being a 'somewhat staid, conservative and ultra-respectable institution' (Caygill,1981:5), the British Museum was a good model for exploration of the nature and language of these organizations which have a 'consecration' power, a rhetorical speech of authority and legitimacy, a strong and clear usage of some of the most traditional codes of 'museality', in a 'primary modelling role' in the museums' universe.

The semiotic study of the British Museum, as a sign of the museum concept and form, which should start with the analysis of its architectural features, would be the scope of another research on the field. It may serve as well as a source of data for a diachronic study on the historical development of these particular 'media' of communication and of 'institutionalized' discourses and their rhetorical strategies. It has been found, at the same time, as the perfect ground and framework for a synchronic study of the museum semiotic mechanisms and productions, which could be developed through the analysis of a given specific discourse: that of the exhibition 'Buddhism, Art & Faith'.

The situation: 'Buddhism, Art & Faith' Exhibition

This 'major exhibition' held by the British Museum and the British Library in London, from July, 25th, 1985 to January, 5th, 1986, was chosen as a good 'laboratory experience' for the analysis of the museum language and communication process, as an appropriate 'case study' from which to work out a basic deductive model for the understanding and the formulation of some principles, codes and rules which govern the system and the practice of what is proposed to be the Museum Language. The concept of 'museality' and the specific mechanisms and codes implied in it could be clearly grasped from this semiotic exercise, however limited and artificial the research may be, providing many insights on this specific communicative 'situation', and opening up many fields for further exploration.

The show was held during 161 days, in rooms 67 and 74 of the Prints and Drawings Gallery and Oriental Gallery II, now reformulated into a new spatial structure of galleries in the North Wing of the BM. It was attended by 223.340 visitors, an average of 1.387 people a day. Visitors could see 422 items on display, ranging from paintings on silk and paper, sculptures and carvings, fragments, manuscripts and printed texts richly illustrated, to ritual objects, scrolls and books, and as auxiliary materials, maps and diagrams, as well as large coloured photographs, and explanatory texts and labels.

A fully illustrated catalogue edited by Wladimir Zwalf (1985) and written by other 14 contributors from the staff of the BM and the BL, including two outside experts, was sold to the visitors. This contained an extensive introduction to the theme and long explanatory texts before each one of the 36 sections of the exhibition; this publication presents some maps of

South and Central Asia, a bibliography and an Index/Glossary of terms.

A carefully prepared 'teacher's pack' distributed for students and teachers on special 'Study Days' and guided visits presented a plan of the exhibition (see Appendices), showing the main sections and a copy of the introductory texts seen in the panels of each different section. According to this material it is possible to conclude that the original plan proposed in the catalogue has been somehow changed by the installation of the displays.

The leaflet largely distributed to announce the show contained some indications about the nature of the experience, which have been useful for the semiotic analysis of the intentions of the senders of the message and their evaluative accents upon it.

The physical space was constrained by the limitations of the original Prints and Drawings Galleries, with fixed showcases and panels, walls and circulating spaces which have been a considerable problem for the designers' team, who had to adapt the proposed structure to the existing one. Only the lights and the background surfaces of the showcases have been specially installed for the show, together with the large photographic panels. There were no visual aids or signs to guide the way to be followed through the exhibition, besides the numbering of the showcases and the headings of the explanatory texts at the beginning of each sequence or section.

All items were displayed inside glass showcases along the walls, or were distributed to form some central areas, together with panel divisions. Some major pieces, like sculptures or tapestries were displayed outside the cases, in central areas or against the walls. At the entrance hall, on the first floor of the building, an introductory section on Zen Buddhism, designed in order to call the attention for the major show, was followed by some other showcases and major items along the

main north staircase, developing in an ascensional route around the gigantic marble of Amithaba, the Lord of the Western Paradise.

Getting to the end room, visitors had to come back through the same way through the galleries, getting out through the entrance door, which caused a lot of crowding and confusion in the exhibition's area. Right to the entrance on the main floor, a small bookshop selling the catalogue, books and publications, slides and postcards, was an immediate attraction to those entering the room, and consequently provoked a lot of 'noise' for those groups gathered around the introductory panels, for the beginning of the gallery talks.

These are the main aspects which compound the picture of this semiotic situation which will be further analysed in this study (see photographs in the Appendices).

The research: methodology and tools

In order to develop this semiotic investigation on the museum discourse and message, after the definition of the basic principles and concepts proposed for the study of the Museum Language, the research work has been developed in three different and successive phases:

a) **the analysis of the Message**, through a preliminary model proposed on the basis of Barthes', Todorov's and Eco's contributions to these kinds of studies (see chapters 6 and 7). This analysis encompasses three levels of approach, which correspond to the three first 'stages' of structuration of discourses in the rhetorical model: the 'Inventio', the 'Dispositio' and the 'Elocutio' of a discourse.

The **first level** of analysis focused on the structure and the elements of the exhibition text, looking for the different 'isotopies', or semantic fields which could be found in it,

the segmentation of the text into units or segments of meaning, and the analysis of their functions and roles inside the basic 'grid' dictated by the main 'topics' (the exhibition 'plan');

The **second level** of approach focused on the codes of expression of the message (the iconic, the linguistic, the design code and their subsidiary lexicons), their hierarchy and intersection in the exhibition 'semiotic battlefield'. ~~in this same instance~~ The research has also tried to detect the semantic codes implicit and explicit in the message, governing its expression, as for instance the art-historical code, the chronological, historical and geographical codes, as devised by the academic and museological dominant codes of the emitters of the discourse.

The **third level** focused on the correlations of units, functions and actions in the discourse, looking for the 'structural matrix' and logical operations at the background of the displayed message, for the rhetorical strategies and the dissemination of meanings which could be detected from the exhibition discourse.

The **basic tools** used in this phase of the research have been: the detailed observation and study of the exhibition in itself, of the catalogue and all sorts of printed materials, and the interviewing of the main emitters of the message. The curators, both from the BM as from the BL, the designers' team, and the educational staff were interviewed, trying to check their intentions, their personal views on the show, the difficulties and obstacles encountered along the process, and their own evaluation of the whole event.

b) **the analysis of the reception** of the message, through an ~~public inquiry~~ evaluation made with the use of questionnaires distributed at random among the visitors, and containing a set of questions devised to get some clues on the way the message has been grasped, interpreted and understood. The problems on 'getting

the Message' will be discussed in chapter 11. This sample material will throw some lights on the aspects of meaning and interpretation, on the 'form' of the Message and of its expected or supposed contents, on public attitudes and behaviour in relation to it. The analysis of Press articles referring to the exhibition has been another focus of observation, reflecting some of the findings made in the first and second phases of analysis.

The **basic tools** used for this analysis were the answers to the questionnaires ~~applied to~~ used with the public, and the direct observation of the visitors' behaviour in the exhibition space, the attendance of 'study days' and of guided tours, along with some discussions, talks and special interviews made with some of the visitors, most especially with 5 Buddhist monks and nuns who were available to express their views on the subject. A set of questionnaires developed and applied to a group of students, before and after the visit to the exhibition, by the educational staff of the Natural History Museum and of the British Museum Education Office[2] has been most useful for complementary observations and insights.

c) **the analysis of the data** collected through the first and second operations, in order to conclude from these findings the level of effectiveness and of 'communicability' of the exhibition, the mechanisms and the problems involved in its production and in its consumption, the role of translators of the educational staff, supporting the communication, the transactional relations established in this specific situation, as well as the public reaction to it. From this analysis it is possible to conclude as well, the appropriateness and the usefulness of the semiotic approach

---

[2] Coordinated by John Reeve (BM), Alison Whyman and Sheila Gore (NHM), to whom we are most thankful for allowing us the study of this material.

to museum messages, and to check the pertinence and the relevance of the model and of the concepts proposed in this research for such study.

The **tools** for this analysis have been the first studies made on semiotics and communication fields, the data collected throughout the research, as well as further studies developed on the subject long after the exhibition ended. The new and more extended insights acquired through this period of study and elaboration of the material would have been impossible at the time the field research was made, but would certainly have changed the tools for its exploration and development 'in situation'.

8.2 - The Analysis of the Message

The analysis of the exhibition in its after-production stage, that is, as a 'text', ready to be consumed by the receivers, and as a 'discourse' performed to an audience, must necessarily be made through a process inverse to that of its construction. One must start from the 'Elocutio', from the finished product as it is presented before the receiver's eyes, and then, from this point on, try 'mapping' it backwards, in a process of deconstruction. This is necessary in order to reach its basic form, or structure, the 'Dispositio' of its basic contents and meanings, proposed through 'Inventio": the subject, the ideas, the arguments and proofs intended by the emitters to be communicated to their audience.

First steps

The first step in this process will be the analysis of the first 'functional unit' of meaning in the whole work presented to the public: this is the **title** of the exhibition,

'BUDDHISM, ART AND FAITH'. The 'exordium'[3] of the discourse opens up the 'speech' of the Museum language, announces the subject matter and the 'place' from which it will be derived - 'Buddhism', and the two main **topics** which will be approached along the discourse: that of Art and that of the Religion.

The **message** is thus 'framed' and situated in a given field of the museum's storehouse of objects and of knowledge. This frame will determine the selection of the items to be presented, the content levels - or text 'isotopies' - which must be transmitted, and the **dispositio** of the discourse, the basic **plan** or **grid**, which constitutes the exhibition **structural matrix**. This basic proposition, stating the aims of the discourse, bears already a 'meaning' in itself, referring to the emitters' and the institution's codes and systems of signification, of their particular 'world vision'. This is projected on to the subject matter, on its formal and conceptual aspects, and on its 'real' living manifestations ~~along~~ through time and history. This point will be further developed in the analysis of the 'level of narration'.

This basic statement, which determines what the exhibition 'is about', already suggests to the audience the nature and the kind of items which will be presented in the message: Buddhist objects and productions which manifest the 'Art' and the 'Faith' of its followers. It works as well as a trigger of the public's expectations and interest, as a promise to knowledge about this intriguing and mystical universe.

The conjunction 'and' establishes an implicit relation between these two aspects, widening the scope of the message, which intends to encompass both levels of approach : the material manifestations of Buddhism, its material evidence serving as a 'proof', or as 'examples' of what can be said,

---

[3]The 'exordium' was the introductory piece of discourse, in the rhetorical model.

or will be said about its metaphysical aspects, about the nature and the character of its 'faith'. 'And' also means, 'in addition to', distinguishing two kinds of different things: Art 'plus' Faith. This 'surplus' suggests an enrichment, an 'extra' to be provided to the public, as well as to qualify the show. A third meaning for this expression 'and' is that of a result, a consequence of some action ('Wait **and** see'). In the case of Buddhism, the order of the elements should be inversed, the 'art objects' being the result of a 'faith'. An 'aberrant decoding', even if unconscious, may have happened at this inaugurating spot (from the part of emitters and that of the receivers).

The second basic step will be the analysis of the **structure of the text**, as it is presented explicitly through the codes of the Museum language : the **iconic**, the **linguistic**, and the **design** codes. The analysis of the 'Dispositio' of the discourse, the plan or the basic grid of the exhibition, may provide a better idea of the contents of the message and of the **form of the narrative**. One has to proceed, thus, to a **segmentation** of the whole text in order to detect its organization and the articulation of its main 'units of meaning'.

This segmentation was already proposed in the extended catalogue (another kind of 'text', prepared in advance and meant to 'support' the reading of the exhibition with more extensive information), and has been projected on the exhibition form with slight variations, chiefly in the last part of the show. The analysis of the main segments and of their further segmentation in 'periods' or 'sentences' may show how far this proposed message will be from the 'intended' or 'preferred' message of the curators.

Main basic structure

The structure of the exhibition can be clearly perceived through the **headings** of each section (reproduced in the working sheets prepared for teachers and students, see Appendices.3),in a total of 36 sub-titles, distributed in 77 showcases. The whole 'text' could thus be divided into five main sections, focusing four 'main topics', or 'themes', with an Introductory section (see Appendices.2: Plan of the Exhibition). The **main basic structure** can be proposed as follows:

* - Introduction - (entrance hall, a/b/c)
1 - The History of Buddhism - (1st room/1)
2 - The Spread of Buddhism - (1st room/2)
3 - Buddhism's Art History - (1st room/3)
4 - Buddhism's Art History - (2nd room/4/5/6/7)
5 - Zen Buddhism - (ground floor entrance)

Description of sections: * - Introduction

This section, presenting the exhibition's title - 'Buddhism, Art and Faith' - at the entrance hall, summarizing the contents to be presented and offering a basic 'guide' for its reading, was the first attractive point of contact (a 'phatic spot') with the public, where people would gather for the beginnings of lectures and guided talks around the educational staff, or either spontaneously, at their first 'encounter' with the exhibition's situation. The place was arranged as a 'niche' of red panels, serving as a background to the first and main 'character' of the performance, a stone sculpture of the Buddha Image, working as a 'sign' for the whole discourse, in all its possible levels of 'reading'. A sign for The Buddha, a sign for the Doctrine and the Faith, a sign for its aesthetic expressions, a sign for the Exhibition - thus, a first 'super-sign', in a main **cardinal function**, inaugurating the two parallel discourses, or

narrations: that of Buddhism, and that of the Museum's Narrator.

Two verbal textual units, in the panels at each side of the image, introduced the subject, the first basic concepts of Buddhism, and the History of Buddhism, displaying a map of its geographical developments. The headings were:

(1) **Buddhism**
(2) **The History of Buddhism**

A third verbal textual unit, at the space leading to the beginning of the exhibition, in the first room, started the 'narrative' :

(2.a) **The Beginnings**

It worked as well to introduce the exhibition, and as a first 'statement of intentions' for the work that should be presented, chiefly for the special section on Buddhist Scriptures, prepared by the British Library:

> *'The **first section** of the exhibition illustrates the diffusion of Buddhism throughout his area. This exhibition presents **documents and objects,** mainly from the resources of the British Museum and British Library, illustrating the many **forms of Buddhist belief and art.** The **section on the transmission of texts** is intended to **show the continuity and differences** that characterized the development of Buddhism. It aims to **make clear,** early in the exhibition, **how doctrine and belief evolved** and to **provide a background for the wide range of forms and concepts found in the Buddhist arts'**[4].*

1 - The History of Buddhism

The first section started focusing the **Early Cult Monuments** (3), the sacred site at **Bodh Gaya** (4), **The Buddha Legend** (5) and its early and traditional literature, the **Jatakas** (6), or 'birth stories'. This section has been developed with 6 sub-sections, in 7 wall- showcases, in the first main area of the exhibition (see Plan:1), displaying fragments of stone reliefs (scenes from the life of the

[4] My emphasis.

Buddha), small objects (mainly reliquaries), photographs and illustrated manuscripts. Two major items, a big 'Drum Slab' from a stupa at Amaravati (Cat.nº13) and a 'Railing Pillar' from the early Tree shrine at Bodh Gaya (Cat.n.4) were displayed on free bases at the right side of the entrance to this section. Some big coloured photographs showing buddhist monks today complemented this area.

2 - The Spread of Buddhism

The second section was concerned with the diffusion of Buddhism through **The Scriptures and their transmission** (7) , **The Collection of the Canon** (8), and **The Spread of Buddhism** (9), and the division of the Creed in two main religious schools, **The Mahayana** (10) and **The Varayana** (11). The transmission of the Scriptures and the **Independent developments in** (a) **Sri-Lanka and South-East Asia**, (b) **Central Asia, China, Korea and Japan**, (c) **Tibet, Mongolia, China**, complemented this section prepared by the British Library, clearly differing from the main exhibition in the material presented (mostly manuscripts, scrolls and illustrated books) as well as in the approach and the intentions of the authors, stated in the Introduction to the show. It could be actually seen as 'an exhibition inside another exhibition', as the analysis will demonstrate, showing no links with the other sections, and even duplicating the 'narrative thread' with a 'side-track' on the philological aspects of the material, while giving more information about the philosophical aspects of Buddhism through the extended labels.

This section was developed through 6 sub-sections, with 15 wall-showcases, occupying the second major area of the first gallery (see Plan:2). Some enlarged photographs on standing panels (monks in temples), a marble sculpture of a Buddhist monk (Cat.n.233), a relief showing the Buddha preaching (Cat.n.141) and small items like stamps and

fragments of sculptures introduced some attractive 'light-spots' between the succession of rows of bookcovers, scrolls, manuscripts and illustrated books.

3 - Buddhism's Art History

The third section inaugurated the main 'subject' of the show: Buddhism's Art History through its successive manifestations along the religion spreading route, from India to the Far East. Beginning with the **First Buddha Images** (13), and focusing the major 'styles' and 'schools' of Buddhist production, as **Gandhara** (14) or **The Gupta Age** (15), this section took on the major thread of the 'narrative', showing the different forms of expression of Buddhist practice and cosmic universe in the different regions where it has developed through its history: **Kashmir** (16), **Eastern India** (17), **Nepal** (18), **Tibet** (19), **The Deccan and South India** (20), **Sri Lanka** (21), **Burma** (22), **Thailand and Cambodia** (23), **Indonesia** (24). The sequence was followed with the developments in Central Asia and the Far East,in the next section.

The theme has been developed in the third main area of the first gallery (see Plan:3), with 36 showcases distributed along the walls and at the central area. The dominant item, from this point of the exhibition on, was the representation of the Buddha Image and of its many variations and transformations, in different expressive forms and materials (sculptures, reliefs and paintings). An almost life-size bronze sculpture of Tara (Cat.n.210), standing on a pedestal in the central area, a votive stupa (Cat.n.147) and some hanging banners of Mandalas (Cat.n.165) and of Mahakala (Cat.n.193), the ferocious Tibetan protective entity, were the central attractive items of this section.

4 - Buddhism's Art History: the Far East

The fourth section of the exhibition was actually a continuation of the precedent one, focusing on Buddhist expressions in China, Korea and Japan. This section occupied the second main gallery, with an introductory intermediate gallery between the two main rooms (see Plan:4).

In the first area, the thematic geographical segmentation of the text goes on in the two large wall-showcases containing different sorts of elements (fragments of sculptures, shrines, moulds and architectural pieces, wall-painting fragments and some small bronze and wood images, all representing the same character: the Buddha and its many 'emanations'. This part of the exhibition showed Buddhism in **Central Asia** (25) and in **China** (26), referring to **Chinese Buddhist Thought during the Tang Dynasty** (27). A large embroidery hanging on the wall, representing the Buddha and two disciples (Cat.n.311) and big coloured photographs of the Caves of Yungang and of monks in meditation, together with some maps of the region, complemented the walls.

The second and larger room at the end of the exhibition area, still devoted to Buddhism in the Far East, presented a succession of different topics, in a non-structured way, showing no links between each other besides the common origin of the items displayed (China, Korea and Japan). A special central area showed a series of prints and printed books arranged in lower showcases. The proposed thread beginning in section 3 was lost at this point, in a wide mixture of themes and approaches: **Buddhism and Far Eastern Printing** (28), **Popular Buddhism in the Far East** (29), **Ritual Implements** (30), **Sino-Tibetan Art** (31), **Esoteric Buddhism** (32), **Arhats, Monks and Religious Teachers** (33), **Buddhist Heavens and Hells** (34).

The original geographical distribution of the material, as proposed in the catalogue (where one should find Korea and Japan at this point of the 'script') was changed into a vague

distribution of the items according to the materials or either to the 'themes' ascribed by the headings of text panels. At the far back area of this gallery, a less overcrowded space constituted a sort of final, or culminating point to the show, displaying some major large sculptures along the walls, centered by a big seated Avalokitesvara and a large fragment of a wall painting, representing three Bodhisattvas, dramatically enhanced by a golden light. This space offered a resting point for the public, and by its disposition could somehow suggest an altar or 'niche', as a closing point to the exhibition. A small lateral room, in this same gallery, presented some Japanese prints on the **Nichiren** sect and its founder's life (35).(see Plan: 5, 6, 7).

5 - Zen Buddhism

The fifth section, on Zen Buddhism, was displayed at the ground floor, at the entrance hall to the North Wing of the British Museum, in a total disruption of the logical sequence proposed by the exhibition structure. Being physically separated from the rest of the show, this section seemed also conceptually distant from the main exhibition, and was easily missed by the public. Its role in the main 'narrative' will be discussed in the appropriate section. Built up mainly with large coloured photographs, showing real landscapes and aspects of modern Japan as a background for Zen activities, this section was not included in the catalogue, despite the presentation of many original objects related to Zen, or Chan Buddhism, in the main galleries.

Segmentation of the text : units of reading

For the sake of analysis the text will be divided into 'units of reading', or '**lexias**', corresponding basically to the sub-sections described in the structure of the exhibition (see Grids: I/II/III, pp.200-205). Each 'topic', defined by a sub-heading, will correspond to one or more showcases - the design strategy used to support the physical structure of the text. These segments can actually be seen as 'short-discourses', or 'short narratives' inside the three main ones which are explicitly expressed throughout the whole work, as proposed in the structure suggested above:

I) The History of Buddhism; II) The Spread of Buddhism; III) Buddhism Art-History.

The structural plan, or 'grid' proposed for the whole exhibition tries to demonstrate the main units of meaning in the different codes of expression used by the emitters, and their interfaces and intersections on the horizontal and vertical axes of the 'structural matrix'.

The 'units' of reading in the **Linguistic code**, as a 'primary' structural model for the work, are numbered (1 to 36) and are represented by the sub-sections' headings. The complete verbal texts in each sub-heading may be found in the reproduction of the work-sheets, in the Appendices.3.

The 'units' of reading in the **Iconic code** are the concrete and visual signs which could be found in the displays, as 'types' of objects or either as 'tokens' of types which played a 'functional' role in the narrative and in the main discourse. These functional units, marked in the plan, may constitute, in some cases,'ideas' or 'concepts', as it will be discussed in the analysis of the 'lexias', as for instance the 'legend' of Buddha's life, the concept of 'the Buddha', or the 'spread of Buddhism'.

The criterium used for defining these units was that of the 'meaning' they support in the text according to the proposed matrix intended by the emitters, or to the different 'isotopies' which could be found through the analysis. Their interpretation, or 'reading' will be explored in chapters 9 and 10.

The 'units' of reading in the level of the **Design code** will be defined by the showcases, panels or free areas in which the **iconic** signs have been displayed, in a 'framed' and ordered sequence, either in groups of items of the same kind or linked through a sign-function, or individually, in an 'iconic monologue', more or less connected with the units in the showcases. All subsidiary material, such as maps and photographs introduced in the text panels or in the labels will be considered as 'units' of the Design code, in their explanatory or 'illustrative' role, as 'metalinguistic' museographic devices, or as 'intersemiotic translations' of the linguistic or the iconic signs (see Grids: I, II, III, in the following pages).

Some photographs of the exhibition showcases and displays are shown here, in order to facilitate the 'reading of the units' developed in chapter 9.

GRID I

* INTRODUCTION				
L C	2.The History of Buddhism			1.Buddhism
I C				the sculpture of
D C	Map			red background (photograph of Buddhas and

horizontal axis > > >

I - THE HISTORY OF BUDDHISM				
L C	3.Early Cult Monuments			
I C	Drum slab	Railing Pillar	photograph of stupa	reliquaries
D C	standing on sock light spot	standing on sock light spot	showc.nº 1 yellow background	showc.nº 1 yellow background

horizontal axis > > >

II - THE SPREAD OF BUDDHISM			
L C	7.The Scriptures and their Transmission	8.The Collection of the Canon	9.The Spread of Buddhism
I C	The First Sermon (relief)		manuscripts
	Head of a monk (fragment of sculpt.)		scrolls
	manuscripts, fragments		
D C	showcases nº 8, 9 & 10 pink background/ light spots Map / photo of monk with books		showcs.11 & 12 pink background light spots/Map photo of relief

L C = Linguistic Code I C = Iconic Code D C = Design Code

2.a The Beginnings

The Buddha

panels Bodhisattvas)	light focuses

4.Bodh Gaya	5.The Buddha Legend	6.Jatakas (Birth stories)	label
stone reliefs (Life of the Buddha)	stone reliefs (Life of the Buddha)	illustrated books(Life of the Buddha)	photo of Buddhist monks
showc.nº 3 yellow background	showcs.4 & 5 yellow background	showcs.6 & 7 yellow background	central light spot

10.The Mahayana	11.The Vajrayana	12.Transmission of the Scriptures and Independent Develop.
The previous lives of the Buddha (illustrated book) Life of the Buddha (coloured print) Buddha & Bodhisattvas (slab relief) manuscr./scrolls	scrolls and manuscripts (**incantations, tantras**) stamp with text of an incantation	Buddha's life illustrated manuscr. Gold plates manuscripts Monk (marble sculpt) standing with bowl (inserted in panel)
showcs.13,14,15,16 pink background light spots photo of shrine	showcs. 17 & 18 pink background light spots	showcs. 19 to 23 pink background light spots Map/ photo of the Bodhi Tree/ photo of row of monks(panel)

GRID II

III - BUDDHISM'S ART HISTORY.(1)			
L C	13.First Buddha Images	14.Gandhara	15.The GuptaAge
I C	**Footprints** (photo of a relief) **Buddhas & Bodhisattvas** (photo of sculptures) **The Buddha** (stone sculpture)	**Bodhisattva** (stone sculp) **Head of Buddha** (painted stucco)	**Buddha preaching** Assault of Mara (relief)
D C	showcs. 24, 25 & 26 yellow background light spots	showcase 27 yellow background photo/Map	showcase 28 yellow background photos in text

horizontal axis > > >

L C	19.Tibet	20.The Deccan and South India	21.Sri Lanka
I C	**Gayadhara** (painting) **Kanakavatsa** (painting) **Mahakala** (painting) **Ritual implements** (bronze objects)	Buddha images (sculptures)	**Tara** (sculpture on pedestal) The Buddha (bronze) stupa (model) The Procession of Tooth Relics (watercolour)
D C	showcs.48 to 55 yellow background Map/ photos (View of Pagan)	showcs.56 to 59 yellow background. Map/ photo (stupa)	showcase 60 yellow background. Map/ photo (temple)

L C = Linguistic Code **I C** = Iconic Code **D C** = Design

16.Kashmir	17.Eastern India	18.Nepal
g **Bodhisattva** (sculpture) a The Buddha (sculpture) **Avalokitesvara** (sculpture)	The Buddha (relief) Descent at Samskaya (relief) Mahabodi Temple (model/photo)	**Mandala** (painting) **Maytreya** (gilt bronze) **Vajrasattva** (gilt bronze) **Samvara,Vasudhara** (gilt bronzes)
showcase 29 yellow background light spots	showcs.30 to 34 yellow background light spots/photos in text	showcs.35 to 40 yellow background light spots/photos Map

22.Burma	23.Thailand and Cambodja	24.Indonesia
Monk (wood sculpt) **Ritual texts** (manuscript) **B.Cosmology** (illust.book) **Mara soldiers** (relief slabs)	Buddhas and model stupas (stone/bronze) An explanation of meanings(manuscript) **Diagram of the World** (painting on paper)	Buddhas and Bodhi-sattva (stone and bronze sculptures) (**'mudras'**)

Code

PHOTOGRAPHS:

This selected sequence of photographs of the exhibition galleries and showcases illustrates the 'units of reading', segmented in the preceding 'grids', which will be analysed and explored in the next chapter (chapter 9):

Lexia n. 3: 'Early Cult Monuments'.....p.207

a) the 'Drum slab' and the'Railing Pillar', fragments of a **stupa** building (see p.225);
b) photograph of a **stupa** at Sanci, and text panel in first showcase (see pp.226, 227);
c) reliquaries and sacred deposits found at the Mahabodhi temple (see pp.228, 229, 309);

Lexia n. 5: 'The Buddha Legend'.....p.208

a) text panel, and stone reliefs from a **stupa** building (see pp.230-233);
b) series of stone reliefs depicting the Buddha legend (see pp.231-233);
c) photograph of Buddhist monks on central panel (see pp.233-234);

Lexia n. 7: 'The Scriptures and their Transmission'...p.209

a) the 'First Sermon', stone relief, and introductory text panels (see p.236);
b) 'Head of a monk', fragment of sculpture, scrolls and manuscripts (see pp.236-240);
c) marble sculpture of a monk, inserted between two enlarged photographs (see pp.240,241);

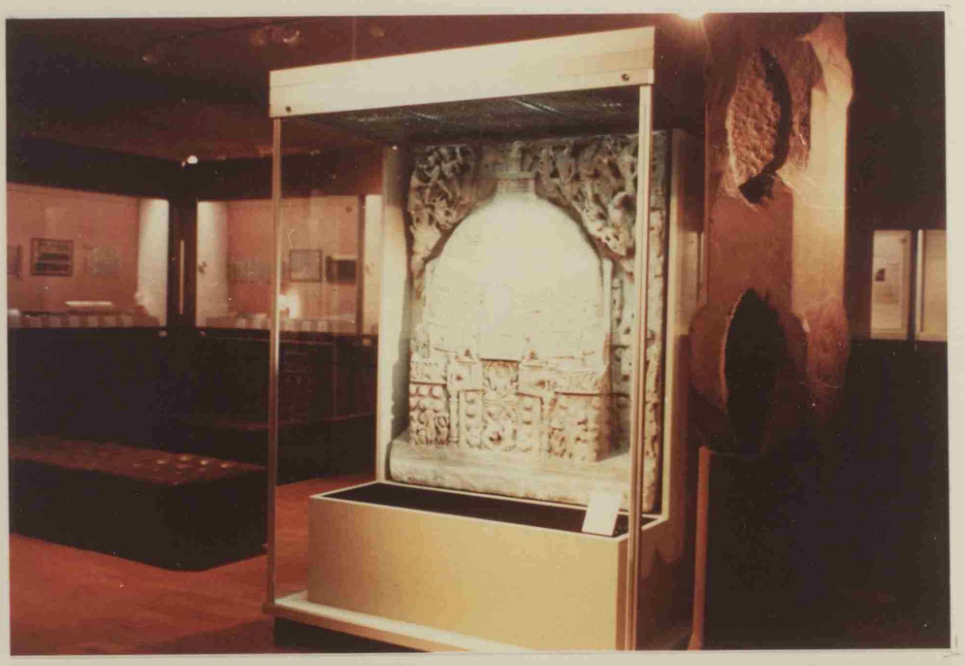
Lexia n. 13: 'The First Buddha Images'.....p.210

a) introductory showcase with text panel, a stone sculpture of the Buddha and enlarged photograph (see pp.241-248);
b) enlarged photographs of 'statues at excavation site' and of the Buddha's 'Footprints'(see pp.241-243);
c) sequence of Buddha images, from the Gandhara school (see pp.244-249);

Lexia n. 29: 'Popular Buddhism in the Far East'.....p.211

a) scrolls, banners and printed diagrams, books and maps (see pp. 249-254);
b) sculpture of a Zen monk (Sesshu Toyo) and Samurai sword blade (see pp.251,252);
c) 'the difficult road to Nirvana'... visitors at the end room of the exhibition (see chapter 11);

Lexia n. 3: 'Early Cult Monuments'



A)

B)

C)

Lexia n. 5: 'The Buddha Legend'

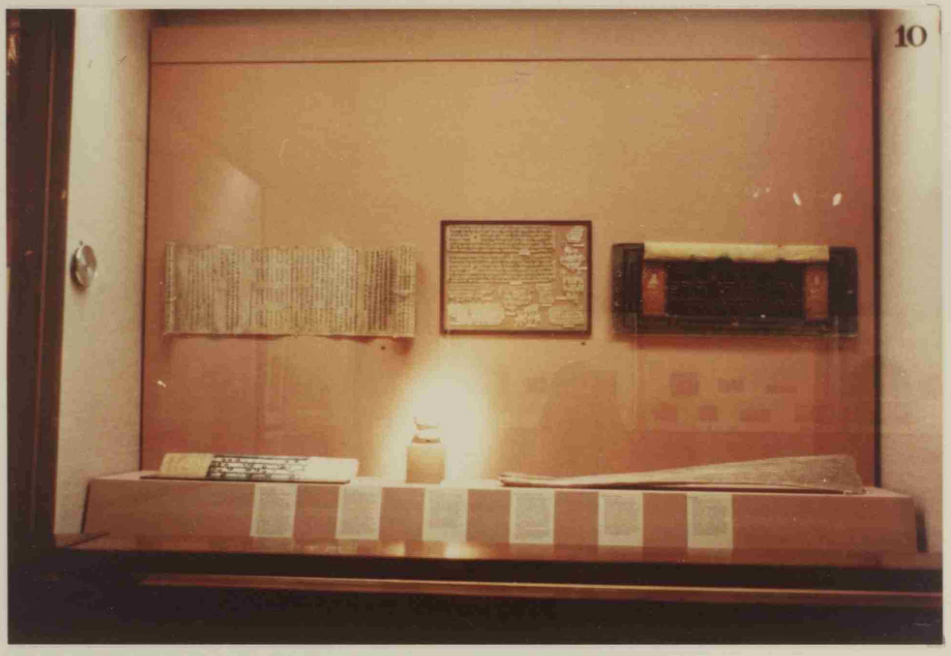
A)

B)

C)

Lexia n. 7: 'The Scriptures and their Transmission'

A)

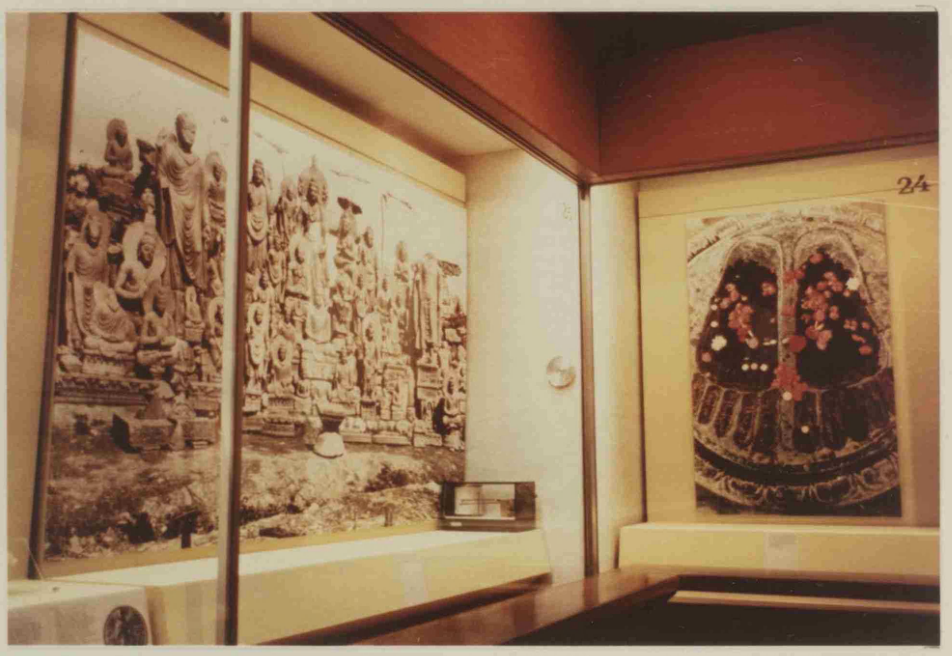


B)

C)

Lexia n. 13: 'the First Buddha Images'

A)



B)

C)

Lexia n. 29: 'Popular Buddhism in the Far East'

A)

B)

C)

CHAPTER 9 : READING OF UNITS - codes, functions, actions

9.1 - On Buddhist signs

9.2 - The Buddha's 'sememic tree'

9.2 - Reading of units

I - The History of Buddhism

II - The Spread of Buddhism

III- Buddhism Art History

CHAPTER 9 : READING OF UNITS - codes, functions, actions

9.1 - On Buddhist signs

The sign of the Buddha image, the stone sculpture standing at the introductory hall, as a 'super-sign', encompassing multiple significations, and 'standing for' the whole exhibition, as a **first cardinal functional unit**, is a good starting point for the analysis of the signification systems working at the basis of the exhibition discourse. Working as an 'announcement' and as a 'resumé' of the whole work to be presented, it can be linked, horizontally and vertically, to the subsequent unfolding of the narrative and to the two paradigmatic axes along which the exhibition 'text' could be 'read': 'Buddhism, **Art** and **Faith**'. It plays, thus, a double function, as a 'referent' for the verbal sentence stated by the Title (thus, the 'full referent' of the 'discourse'), and as a 'sign' for the whole 'history' narrated by the 'discourse'.

Buddhist expressions are signs of a non-verbal language, which is conventionally used by the followers of this Faith to signify and to communicate abstract and complex spiritual concepts, sometimes playing the 'sign-function' of 'standing for' Buddhist precepts and practices, as in the case of 'mandalas', or of narrative reliefs and illustrations, which help the believer into the way of concentration, meditation and devotional meritorious acts. Their 'signic function', 'la fonction-signe' in Barthes (see chap.3,p.45), is that of their use in the religious context in which they have, in fact, a multiple functionality: to **express** abstract concepts in concrete forms, to **preach** the doctrine of the Enlightenment

and the 'Four Noble Truths', to **teach** and to **inform** individuals on these preaching and concepts, working at the same time as **tools** for gaining merit (through their production and reproduction, contemplation and veneration) and as **helpers** on the way to Nirvana[1].

All these symbols and signs stand thus for the Buddha himself, in his metaphysical and human natures, as a teacher, a preacher, a saviour and guide, as an example to be followed. At the same time they may 'stand for' the idea of the Bodhisattvas (the Buddhas-to-be), those who help people to attain 'buddhahood'. Another function, deriving from the development of the doctrine in more humanistic ways, was that of 'standing for' the saviour and protecting deities emanating from the Buddha in his metaphysical and cosmic aspects.

These images act thus as 'media' between the entities and their devotees, supporting the transmission of healing, protective and beneficial powers, from 'gods' to humankind.

The same multiple role is performed by the sacred texts, scrolls and books, paintings and illustrations and all graphic conventional signs which decorate them. These texts serve to **compile** the body of Doctrine, the Dharma, to **transmit** it to others, **expressing** in verbal and graphic form the concepts of the faith, and at the same time serving as tools for meditation, concentration and wisdom. The recitation of **sutras** and **mantras**, ritual texts and sentences or sounds, allied to movements and ritual gestures, or to the sound of sacred instruments, is one of the main religious performances in the practice of Buddhism, providing salvation and enlightenment, slowly or instantly (in the Vajrayana tradition) to their practitioners. To copy or to repeat these texts was a sure way of gaining merit and becoming free of rebirth, which explains the activity of monasteries, with sometimes more than one

---

[1]The concept of 'Nirvana' is not originally Buddhist, and was already a basic idea to Hinduism and other local ancient religions.

thousand monks producing careful and rich copies of the sacred texts, an activity which promoted the development of printing methods in the Far East. These texts are actually a good example of the semiotic nature of language, through the translating process, in different linguistic systems (pali, uyghur, sanskrit, chinese, etc.) of the same contents and of their many 'interpretations'.

The 'interpretants' to these linguistic signs will change according to local philosophies and traditions which interpret their meanings in different ways, with slight and subtle variations, giving rise to different sects and collections of texts. The changes in the expressions will correspond to changes in the contents of the Doctrine, to which previous metaphysical and cultural codes will contribute for its expansion and spread. One can clearly see through the developments of Buddhist expressions, how far original cultural, religious and formal signs will be integrated and absorbed into the different local manifestations of Buddhist Faith, giving rise to different formal expressions, to new concepts and ideas, new entities and deities, new attitudes and behaviours in people's minds.

These new incorporated signs and concepts do not always have a religious origin, but may reveal social, political and economic codes dominant in the regions where they occur (for instance, the figure of demons and gaolers in charge of tortures in the hells, dressed like chinese officials and bureaucrats). The ferocious aspect of Tibetan deities, like Mahakala, may have its origins in the country's traditional fight against chinese rulers and invaders[2].

---

[2]The continuing political problem was manifested in the event of the exhibition itself, from where Tibetan items have been taken back by the lenders, as a protest against the mention of Tibet as a present region of China.

The use of the Buddha 'iconic' signs, or representations, in this Exhibition, will vary according to the situation, the context of the 'unit of meaning' in which they are inserted, as well as to the intentions of the senders and of receivers of the exhibition message. The 'extensional'[3] aspects of the Buddha sign will be many, according to the 'intensions' , the 'interpretants' suggested by its use in different postulates of signification.

The Buddha image may refer thus, in its 'extensional' aspects, to the historical Sakyamuni, or Siddharta Gautama, to the cosmic Buddhas (Maitreya, Amithaba) in the five cardinal points[4], to the former Buddhas who preceded the present 'manifestation', to his many powers (as the Saviour, the Healer, the Compassionate, the Teacher), to his many emanations, which manifest these qualities and powers, to his previous lives as a prince, a Bodhisattva, an ascetic, a wandering monk, or yet as animals, in different legendary situations. All these 'referents' will correspond to the 'intensional' aspects of the sign, determined by the Buddhist code, to its 'postulates of signification': the Buddha as a spiritual and religious entity, manifested in human or spiritual forms. The 'sign-language' of the images' hands may be useful clues for understanding their silent message, if one knows this basic 'iconic' code.

According to the 'intensions' of the signs postulated by the signification systems of the museum emitters, the 'extensional' aspects of the Buddha images will be totally different: they will refer to 'museum objects', to 'archaeological findings', to pieces in a collection of works of art, to 'tokens' of types of Buddhist sculptures or

---

[3]See chapter 3, pp.63,ff, for the discussion of 'extensions' and 'intensions', and Eco,1984:10, 1979:60-66.

[4]The Center was the fifth and main cardinal point in many oriental cosmologies.

paintings, to 'types' in a system of classification, in an art-historical taxonomy applied on these objects. They may thus be selected or arranged as a 'Gandharan Buddha', a 'Gupta type', a 'classical Chinese-Lamaist figure', a 'Burmese Buddha', a 'Matura specimen', a 'Buddhist Baroque work', an aesthetic achievement of Indian Antiquity, a 'typically Roman' statue, a 'rare example' of a 'transition style', a recent gift by a given donor, a similar specimen to that in another museum and so on. The specialized language written in the labels gives the elaborated and complex parameters for these classifications, situating the items in these intricate fields or perspectives, if one is able to dominate these 'academic' codes:

> *"135. Buddha*
> *Kashmir (?). 7th-8th century AD*
> *Terracotta. Height 20cm. OA 1861. 7-28.1*
>
> *This head is still close to the Gandharan stucco tradition dated to the 4th and 5th centuries, but must belong to the later clay production known from sites in Kashmir of the so-called Buddhist Baroque, from Afghanistan and the presumed site of Kaniska I's stupa outside Peshawar. The purchase of this head at Peshawar in the last century as part of a larger collection of unknown provenance leaves its attribution open to considerations of style.*
>
> *WZ "*
>
> *(Catalogue,BMP,1985:102)*

The Buddha is not 'The Buddha', but a museological work of art, inserted in the semantic field of the curators' and specialists' codes, and referring to aesthetic canons and formal models.

The Exhibition must be 'read', thus, through the two paradigmatic axes which determine the sign-functions of the items displayed, through the paradoxical struggle settled by the structural matrix which supports the text : the paradigm of Faith, and that of Art, stated in the title of the show.

9.2 - The Buddha's 'sememic tree': deconstruction of the Sign

In the first paradigm of the religious axis, the sign of the Buddha 'stands for' any other representation of the same 'type', as a 'token' of the conceptual and representational type of the central 'character' of Buddhism, as conventionally accepted by the Buddhist codes. In this sense, it may be substituted by any other sign standing for the same concept, by other images and representations, as for instance the Wheel, the Deer, the Stupa, the Footprints. In the earlier decades of Buddhist development, no human form would stand for the Buddha, in accordance with the principle of the illusory nature of reality, of the immateriality of Truth, and the concept of 'non-being' proposed by the Doctrine. The Buddha concept would thus correspond to a 'zero degree' of matter or reality, a state equal to Nirvana, which all beings should strive to reach. It has been, thus, represented through 'symbols' - the Wheel, standing for the motion of the Doctrine and of change in spiritual evolution, the Deer, referring to the First Sermon preached in the Deer Park, the Stupa, (originally a burial mound), referring to the Buddha's death, and lately the Footprints, representing his wandering life as a preacher.

The first Buddha images in human form appear in the first centuries BC and AD, as a result of the development of the religion and of the formalization of the concepts, responding to the need of a growing devotionalism, when the idea of the Buddha acquires a 'divine' and supernatural quality.

The representation of the Buddha, in its classical 'model type', reaches thus the level of a whole 'text' : as a concrete manifestation of an abstract model, and as a model in relation to the real world in which it is inserted, as a project of a way of life proposed to all individuals. As signs, and as conventional symbols accepted by the followers of the religion, these representations are actually semiotic texts which must be 'read' according to a specific 'grammar'.

In this sort of 'iconic writing', every 'trace' is a 'distinguisher' of different meanings, a 'signifier' for 'floating signifieds', or better, for a 'galaxy of meanings' which come out from their expression and reading in the different verbal and formal languages of the regions where the Faith has been spread and communicated.

The 'semantic markers'[5] of these signifieds have been multiplied in these different religious expressions - the qualities, the powers, the cosmic nature of the Buddha, absorbing many semantic and expressive features of local deities and beliefs. Hinduism and Vedhism, the Tantric esoteric rituals of Tibetan and Nepalese shamans, Taoism and Confucionism, and other more primitive religions dominant in all Asia have given the background layers to the Buddhist Creed.

The 'syntactic markers' apparent in these varied formal 'grammatologies' correspond to, and indicate, these complex conceptual meanings and characteristics. It is hardly possible to construct thus a 'sememic tree', or a sememic composition of the Buddha sign, to detect the bundle of distinctive features, and the system of positions and oppositions which may be found in it, and which distinguish it from other signs and concepts. A rough sketch may be tried, however, in a synthetic manner, as a possible approach.

The relation of the expression to the content, the two 'functives' of the sign's correlation, will be a different one, in the two paradigms of the exhibition's field : the Buddhist Code and the Museum's Code. In the context of Buddhism, the image of the Buddha, as a sign-vehicle for multiple denotations and connotations, can be 'decoded' through a possible 'compositional tree', as shown in Figure 16:

---

[5]See chapter 3, p.67 ff.

Figure 16 - The Buddha's sememic tree (1)

```
/the Buddha image/ = 'syntactic markers' == < The Buddha >*

/sign-vehicle/     =  'semes'            == < sememe >

(Expression)       = (features)          == (Contents)
```

```
* <The Buddha>
<sememe>
  ...d.1. .The Enlightened...
            ...c.1... Nirvana
            ...c.2... Buddhahood
            ...c.3... Sakyamuni

  ...d.2. .The Saviour...

            .(contex a: with disciples)
              ...d.5... Sakyamuni
              ...d.6... The Preacher

            . [circ.x : with lotus]
              ..d.7.. The Compassionate

  ..d.3. .Cosmic Buddha...> c.4... Amithaba
                         ...> c.5... Maitreya

  ..d.4. .Sakyamuni....
            ... c.6... The Prince of the
                       Sakya family
            ... c.7... The ascetic
            ... c.8... The founder of the
                          Religion

            .[circ.y :with the 'myrobalan]
              ...d.8...The Healer

            . (context b: on a book cover)
              ...d.9...The Doctrine
```

d.= denotations; c.= connotations; circ.= circumstances)

'syntactic markers' = human figure, oriental features, top knot, facial expression, 'mudras'(hand gestures), sacred signals, monastic dress, lotus flower, etc...

The list of expression features of the Buddha image may be considered as the articulatory formants, or 'semes', which together compound the Buddha's 'sememe'. Each one of these units of meaning correspond to a content, or to 'semantic markers' which characterize the sign, contributing for the determination of the sign function, in a given semantic field. The different hand gestures - the 'mudras' - will indicate different denotations, opening the way to different connotations of the Buddha sign: as a Preacher, a Saviour, a Protector, a Healer, or at the moment of his Enlightenment. The monastic garment and the absence of jewelry will work as a distinction of the Buddha image from that of a Bodhisattva, always represented in princely manners. The long earlobes, the top knot and other 'sacred' marks in the body of the image will indicate the Buddha's divine nature, as 'signals' of 'buddhahood'. These marks can be seen as 'indexical' or 'indicial' signs which attest these supernatural qualities of the Buddha.

As 'syntactic markers' of the sign-vehicle, these features will also determine the possibilities of combination of the Buddha signs with other signs, according to the rules of Buddhist language : it is thus possible to combine or to associate the Buddha image with those of disciples or of Bodhisattvas and attendants, in a hierarchical arrangement, as it is shown in many of the items in the exhibition (triads, plaques, paintings and book-covers). It would be, however, 'heresy' to combine or to associate the Buddha image with those of warriors, of dancers, or with a musical instrument, a sword, a table plenty of food: these would be 'syntactic aberrations', in Buddhist codes.

With the development of the Creed and the multiplication of Buddhist cosmological entities, one will find representations of other divine entities, as 'emanations' of the Lord, or as representations of his powers, like, for instance, the figures of Acala (with a sword and a rope), of Avalokitesvara (with crown and jewels, as a Bodhisattva), of Vaisravana (in splendid armour and followed by heavenly troops), of Manjusri (holding a lotus, an arrow and a bow). These images combine and articulate different expressive features, extrapolating and upsetting the pure original 'grammar', and creating all sorts of new representations, including even a 'feminine' aspect of the Buddha's essence, as the Chinese Guanyin, the Japanese Sri (the goddess of good fortune), or the Tibetan green Tara (a personification of compassion).

In the particular circumstance of the Museum context, the exhibition on Buddhism, the Buddha image has different denotations and connotations, different syntactic and semantic markers, as it can be demonstrated through another compositional tree, shown in Figure 17:

Figure 17: The Buddha's 'sememic tree' (2)

```
/Buddha Image/ = 'syntactic markers' == <sculpture/painting
                                         of the Buddha>  *
<sign-vehicle> =     < semes >       == <sememe>
(tokens)       =  (formal features)  == ( formal types)
```

```
*<sculpture/
painting of
the Buddha
                 ...d.1... a Gandharan Buddha...
                            ...c.1...early images
                            ...c.2...Eastern Indian
                                     style
                            ...c.3...Graeco-Roman
                                     tradition

                 ..d.2... a Mathura Buddha...
                            ...c.4... first images
                            ...c.5..." heaviness "

                 ..d.3... a Gupta image...
                            ...c.6...traditional school
                            ...c.7...classical perfection

                 ..d.4... a Kashmir Buddha...
                            ...c.8...Buddhist baroque

                 ..d.5... Buddha...c.9..a Bihar version of
                                        a Sarnath convention

                 ..d.6 .. Buddha...c.10... a Silla-period
                                           bronze
                            [circ.x :casting faults]...c.11...
                                     'hollow-casting technique'

                 (context b: British Library exhibition)...
                            . d.7... illustrated manuscript
                                      ..c.11... Burmese script
                                      ..c.12...earliest surviving
                                                 book
```

```
'syntactic markers' = materials, body posture, face traits,
                      treatment of robes, decorations,
                      attributes (halo, lotus, flames,etc.)
                      colours, shapes
```

In the museum context, the Buddha images and all other expressions, as paintings, scrolls, texts, books and objects are used as 'examples' of particular 'types' of artistic, formal or stylistic expressions, in two different semantic fields : that of the Art-History and that of Bibliophily and Philology. These formal expressions have a double role in the museological text: that of 'referents' of the verbal signs of the written text, on panels and labels, and that of 'indexical' signs of the 'artistry' and the 'variety' of image production, writing styles, languages and book production of Buddhist origin.

The 'signifiers' of Buddhist language are used, in this museological 'writing', as signs standing for other signifieds, in the curators' semantic fields, in a 'mythological' speech which 'steals' the original signs, to construct with them another discourse. These original signs are however present and named in the text, according to their former code : The Buddha, Bodhisattva, Avalokitesvara, Padmapani, Amithaba, Maitreya. As Barthes points out, 'myth does not abolish the original concepts but deforms them, to serve its intentions. It is a type of "stolen language", a speech defined by its intention much more than by its literal sense' (Barthes,1973:117).

9.3 - Reading of units

It would not be possible, in the limits of this dissertation, to proceed to the analysis of each one of the 36 segments of the exhibition structure. One can thus select some of them, considered to play a 'cardinal function' in the whole work and in each one of the three main 'narrative threads', in order to look for their intertextual and

extratextual relations, and the functions of the units which compound them, in syntagmatic and paradigmatic chains and axes. In each reading of 'lexias' the level of functions and actions of the signs and units, as well as their role in the level of narration, will be suggested.

I - The History of Buddhism:

Lexia n. 3: 'Early Cult Monuments' (see p.207)

The first narrative thread of the Exhibition, 'The History of Buddhism', introduced by the text at the entrance hall, developed itself in the first two showcases, focusing the 'Early Cult Monuments' of Buddhism. This segment was centered on the **stupa** monument, represented by the two **first functional signs** in the narrative sequence - a 'Drum slab' (Cat.n.13), and a 'Railing Pillar' (Cat.n.4). These items were fragments of a real stupa, working as 'indexical' signs, or as 'proofs' of the first monumental expressions of the Faith. The 'Drum slab' was one of the many carved plaques covering the stupa drum along the processional path of the worshippers, depicting scenes of the Buddha's life. This particular piece showed a representation of the stupa itself, working thus as 'a sign of a sign', standing for the whole monument in a metonymical relation - a part standing for the whole, in the exhibition's text. It was at the same time an 'icon', a 'representation' of the real thing, a 'reduced' reality in two-dimensional format. It played thus a **cardinal function** in the narrative sequence, complemented by the 'Railing Pillar', another fragment in a metonymical relationship to the represented whole. These two items worked together performing one and the same 'sign-function', standing for the stupa, that

is, for the 'early cult monuments' of Buddhism, already referred to by the verbal sentence in the section heading.

The **referential** function of these iconic signs was explicit and supported by the coloured enlarged photograph, displayed inside the showcase, of the stupa n. 3, at Sanci, in India, another iconic representation of the 'real thing', as a 'design strategy' for the visual understanding of the referent, establishing a link between the fragments and the 'idea' of the stupa.

The other items displayed in the sequence - reliquaries, small jewels and precious stones found in one of these pieces, model stupas as reliquaries and an inscribed slab of a relic casket -worked as complements, as **catalyses** to the first **nucleus** - the stupa sign. These items, found inside stupa buildings, played a complementary role, as 'indicial' signs, 'qualifying' the main one. As 'referents' of the stupa's function, as a sacred and devotional monument, they were shown here as 'examples' of the kind of objects usually found in these buildings. The model stupas, as reliquaries, played a double role, as 'replicas', in smaller size, of the real monument, 'standing for' it in an 'iconic' function; at the same time, they had a more basic 'sign-function', that of containing the relics of the Buddha or of his disciples. 'Relics' - as ashes, pieces of bones, of hair, or pieces of costumes - are 'indexical' signs standing for the saints they belonged to. The caskets, or reliquaries which contained them, took over this original 'sign-function', acquiring thus the 'signic quality' of their contents. All these complementary items can thus be seen as 'semes', or as articulatory formants of the main 'sememe' - the stupa, as the sign for Buddhism. The sacred deposits (jewels and precious stones) found in some of these caskets, worked as 'signs' for the devotional acts

and for the symbolic and transcendental function of the stupas[6].

The stupa's meaning in the Buddhist code was summarized in the text panel of this segment:

> *'...commemorated the Master, his predecessors and disciples... before images were worshipped, the Buddha and his death were symbolized by the stupa (originally funeral mounds)... building and worshipping a stupa were an acknowledgment of the Doctrine as well as acts of devotion. The merit so gained brought rewards in a present and future life'.*

The **linguistic code** works here as a metalanguage, in order to explain what the eyes cannot see, that is, the transcendental meaning and the symbolic role of the stupa's concrete sign, or of its many representations.

The first paragraph of this textual unit of meaning reveals, however, another 'code departure', different from that of the Buddhist paradigm:

> *'Although Buddhism began in the 6th century BC, its **oldest surviving remains** go back to the 3rd century BC, following an emperor's conversion and patronage.'*

The **chronological code** (already present in the first introductory panel) attests, early in the exhibition, the 'scientificism' of the discourse. The value of the 'beginnings', stated in a precise manner, and with a scientific 'relative precaution' (...'although'...) is fundamental for western 'academic' codes. The 'history' to be narrated starts with the proofs of its 'truth' : the early

---

[6]The way these items have been perceived by the public has given rise to an unusual case of 'illusory perception', as illustrated in chapter 11, p.309.

cult monuments found through archaeological and historical studies (the historical code mentions an 'emperor', a 'historical', thus, a 'true' figure). These monuments, or better, their signs or representations, play thus a **first cardinal function** in the two paradigmatic axes of the exhibition: as **'proofs'** of the museological discourse (the first **'codes of museality'** starting to work here), as well as **'proofs'** of the Faith, attesting for the strength and devotion of its followers.

The reading of the detailed labels reveals a little bit more of the two parallel discourses starting at this initial segment of the exhibition:

'5. Reliquary in the form of a goose
Gandhara, from Taxila. 1st century AD (?)
Crystal. Height 3,2 cm; length (max.) 10 cm.
OA 1867.4-27.2

This hollowed goose has a circular body with projections forming the head, neck, wings and tail. The wings and tail have incised lines and cross-hatching; the bottom of the body is pierced with two pairs of small holes. When found the goose contained an inscribed gold plate, now lost, which has been translated as meaning that a relic of the Buddha was placed in the goose by one Sira for her parents' benefit in a future existence.

WZ '

(Catalogue,BMP,1985:28)

'9. Reliquary
Gandhara, from Bimaran, Afghanistan. 1st-2nd century AD
Gold set with garnets. Height 6.5 cm. OA 1900.2- 9.1

This famous object was found in a ***stupa*** *inside an inscribed stone box, now also in the British Museum. Framed by arcades formed with the Indian pointed arch are the Buddha and the gods Indra and Brahma shown twice and separated by a worshipper whose head-dress, earrings and armlets suggest a Bodhisattva. Between the arches are eagles and, above and below, garnets. The inscription refers to relics of the Buddha dedicated by one*

Sivaraksita; if the coins found near by were contemporary, the reliquary would be of the 1st century AD and its Buddha image perhaps earlier than Kaniska I's reign. The resemblance of the Buddhas on this casket and Kaniska I's gold coin (n. 121) appears close.

WZ

(Catalogue,BMP,1985:29)

The formal descriptions, in a minutely detailed way, attest the importance of these items according to museological and stylistic codes and reveal the evaluative accents of the 'ideal narrators' of the exhibition (the curators and specialists), emphasizing the forms and materials more than the 'meanings' of the objects; in the second example (n. 9), the label refers explicitly to the Museum and its collections. The archaeological references and historical notations which help to date and to classify these objects are other examples of the codes of 'museality' which pervade the whole text, at the background of the institutional discourse.

'14. Sacred deposits
Eastern India, from Bodh Gaya. Early centuries AD (?)
Gold and sapphire. Length of strung flowers and conches 13.5 cm. Given by Sir Alexander Cunningham. OA 1892.11 -3.13-20;22;24

During the restoration of the Mahabodhi temple in 1880-81 a ball of clay was found below the Enlightenment Throne inside the temple. It contained coins, gold, silver, precious and semi-precious stones. This selection consists of coin impressions made into a pendant, gold flowers, some with a central sapphire, imitation conches, and patterned discs and buttons. The coin impressions are taken from an issue of Huviska (2nd century AD), and the silver punch-marked coins also found are older but could still have been current in Kusana times. A stratification is reported, but the level at which the deposit lay cannot be dated since a redeposition during one of many rebuildings and restorations in antiquity is possible.

WZ '

(Catalogue,BMP,1985:31)

The difficulty in understanding these intricate and specialized verbal segments on the part of the public is evident, and will be responsible for special and interesting perceptual problems, as it has been detected through the research[7].

In the **level of actions**, in the narrative sequence, the stupa is an **agent of meaning** through the paradigmatic axis of Buddhist Faith. In the paradigm of the Museum's codes - that of Art-History and Aesthetics - these crystal reliquaries and all other subsidiary items mentioned above will keep the role of 'actantial' signs, introducing the formal and the 'rarity' or 'oddity' parameters, which will govern the academic discourse.

Despite the architectural relevance of the stupas among the artistic achievements of Buddhism, in the perspective of the authors of this museological text, the formal and the emotional appeal of these eye-catching and curious items was more easily and immediately caught by the visitors.

Lexia n. 5 : The Buddha Legend (see p.208)

In opposition to the first 'unit of meaning', the second segment starts with a 'doubt', or better, an 'enigma'. The verbal text says, in its first paragraph:

> *'There is no good reason to doubt that a Buddha called Siddharta Gautama, of the Sakya clan in the Nepalese Terai, was a historical figure.'*

The second **functional unit** in the narrative, as a second **cardinal sign** in the horizontal axis of development of the 'history', is marked by a fundamental opposition between **'facts'** = 'early cult monuments', and **'legend'** = 'the Buddha legend'.

---

[7]See chapter 11, p.309.

The rhetorical strategy of the linguistic code, introducing a 'doubt' and at the same time denying it ('there is no good reason for that'), inaugurates an ambiguity in the discourse, which will not be resolved until the end of the show.

It is not difficult to perceive here the 'ideological closure', the 'framing capacity' of this fragment of the work, in setting the limits to the reading of the text, in a 'preferred' way. The audience is led here to distinguish the 'factual' narrative - that which is ostensively presented in the showcases-from the 'fictional' one, presumably told by these Buddhist expressions. The way certain meanings are constructed and encouraged, and other possible meanings are discarded, through the absence of other elements, or through the closing and controlling mode of enunciation, is very clear in this segment of the text.

Since the Buddha's history is a 'legend', there is no good reason to consider it as the primary focus of the narration. What matters here are the historical proofs of facts, dates, and concrete objects presented in the showcases, not what they really 'mean'. The opposition between natural/supernatural, facts/rumour, truth/mystification, is an old 'mythic theme' in western philosophy. 'To argue aggressively in favour of "facts alone", to insist on the triumph of the referent, is to cast suspicion on signification, to mutilate reality's symbolic supplement!' (Barthes,1988:271).

The series of stone reliefs displayed in showcases nn.4 and 5, fragments coming from stupas, seen as 'examples' of Buddhist 'narrative reliefs', constitute actually a whole text, a 'micro-narrative' inside the main one, the History of Buddhism. They could be read, thus, in the manner of a 'comic book', as fragments of a major text, like scenes of a Buddhist Bible, and referring, as 'signifiers', to one only

'signified': the Buddha's life. A sequence of the narrative starts here, positing an enigma: 'was it true, or not?'. Every step in the sequence - 'The meeting with Dipamkara', 'The dream of Maya', 'The birth and return of the Infant', 'The Great Renunciation', 'The First Sermon', is a step in the composition of a whole picture, that of the concept of the Buddha, for which every scene brings a new 'semantic marker' to the composition of the whole 'sememe'.

We have thus here a series of 'iconic signs', referring to an abstract model, each form corresponding to one aspect of the complex content. In the Buddhist code, this segment can be seen as a fundamental segment, an 'original segment' which will be repeated throughout the whole Buddhist 'Text', as a basis for the Faith, attesting for the human and the supernatural qualities of the essential Being. Besides the iconic aspect of these signs, their symbolic aspect is a fundamental quality of their sign-function. This symbolic quality was rejected by the narrators of the exhibition, despite the literal description of each scene of the story in the labels; this 'preferred reading' was present even in these 'micro-narratives', where the 'story' frequently slides sideways, in favour of the dominant referential code:

> *'16 ... this **damaged slab** shows the **haloed** prince riding with his wife and children and bending down to give something to an aged Brahmin whose disciple, with a waterpot, **raises his right hand** in astonishment.' (Catalogue,BMP,1985:33)*[8]

[8] My emphasis.

The description reveals the curator's eyes and the precise registration of the formal features necessary to distinguish this particular slab from others in the collection, and which must be adequately registered and inserted in the classificatory system of the museum files.

> *'18 ... the **slightly curved shape** of the fragment shows that **it comes from a small stupa;** the scenes must be read from right to left, following the direction in which the worshipper walked round it.'*
> *(Catalogue,BMP,1985:33)*[9]

Again, the emphasis is on the form of the expression, on the origin of the item, in a hierarchical position in the museum's code of signification, while the reference to the function and meaning of the object slides to the background.

The emphasis on the museological (or archaeological) **facts** (the items, dates and origins) shows the 'scientific codes' assumed by the narrators, pursuing the discourse of the 'real' and not that of 'fable'. The value given to facts is an act of 'censorship', in Barthes' words, against the **signifier**, it is a rejection of the 'other scene', 'that of the unconscious' (Barthes,1988:271).

The 'other scene' is however present to people's eyes and minds, to their previous expectations, as well as in the faces of the young monks portrayed in the large coloured photograph facing the exhibition's showcases, and looking ahead, to another 'reality': another 'strategy' of the 'design code', meant by the designers of the exhibition in order to bring a little bit of 'life' to the show. This photograph, as

[9] My emphasis.

an **iconic sign** for the real practitioners of the religion, refers to another 'fact', displaced by the exhibition discourse. For these individuals, as well as for the real ones entering the galleries in their yellow robes, the Buddha Legend is much more than a fable, it is actually a fundamental and transcendental 'reality'.

This 'lexia' can be seen as in strict relationship with the precedent and the following ones (n. 4 - Bodh Gaya, n.6- Jatakas) where the items would refer to the same **cardinal function** in the narrative : the Buddha's life, in its historical and metaphysical significations. In the vertical axis of integration, all the items displayed in these sections referred to the same paradigmatic code: Buddhism and its Faith History. In the horizontal axis of distribution of the units, they could be linked by consecution and by consequentiality, one scene leading to another, translated in different material and forms (reliefs, illustrations), and closing the first main sequence of the narrative thread.

On the perspective of the second paradigmatic axis of the exhibition's structure, the second main 'isotopy' of the text - Buddhism's Art History - this 'lexia' can be seen as a formal introduction to the 'iconography' referred to along the discourse, which will be retaken in 'lexia' n. 13 - 'First Buddha Images' - and in all the following sequences in the horizontal level of the 'reading'. In the vertical axis of signification, the aesthetic canons and taxonomies, this section works as an introduction to Buddhist art expressions - as 'early Buddhist narrative sculpture'- in their still primitive and less elaborated forms of representation.

The next narrative sequence, on the 'Spread of Buddhism', as a development of the 'history', started in 'lexia' n. 7 , 'The Scriptures and their Transmission', constituting actually

an exhibition inside the main one, a narrative inside another narrative, prepared by different 'authors', or different narrators, according to different intentions.

II - The Spread of Buddhism:

Lexia n. 7 : The Scriptures and their transmission

(see p.209)

This segment of the narrative thread, on the History of Buddhism, can be seen as an independent development of the preceding ones, playing a **cardinal function** in the structure of the exhibition, and encompassing a whole sequence of units, from this lexia until n. 12. This section has been produced by the British Library specialists and philologists, and the perspective from which the items have been approached reveals different intentions, the basic ones stated in the introductory panel at the entrance hall :

> *'...It aims to provide, early in the exhibition, how Doctrine and Belief evolved and to provide a background for the wide range of forms and concepts found in Buddhist Arts'.*

The section was formed basically, and almost exclusively, by scrolls of manuscripts and books, containing the Buddhist Doctrine. All these written and graphical signs, thus, referred to a same complex signified: the Doctrine, or the **Dharma** of Buddhism. The rare and unknown languages in which these texts have been written and copied was a first major obstacle for the fulfillment of the first intentions of the emitters. The long and detailed labels, meant to 'translate' or at least to 'clarify' these meanings, considered as a necessary 'background' for the understanding of the Buddhist

Arts, have been actually another major obstacle for the public, when trying to get the meaning of these expressions.

The first **functional unit** of this segment, the one more easily grasped by the receivers among all that abstruse 'writing', was the iconic representation of the Buddha's **First Sermon** (Cat.n.141), a stone relief which a more attentive observer could recognize from the previous items displayed in the preceding showcases. Next to it, in the following showcase, another three-dimensional unit, the **Head of a monk** (Cat.n. 127) would catch the eyes of the beholder, in a first 'unit of meaning' produced by this display, subtly enhanced by direct beams of light (an effective play of the Design code). These two iconic signs could actually summarize the whole narrative sequence, on the **Transmission of the Scriptures** and the **Collection of the Canon.** In the text panel, a photograph of a monk with books worked as an auxiliary sign meant to make explicit the links between the two 'units'.

The main 'signified' of this whole sequence, the 'preachings' of the Buddha (the Doctrine, the Buddha's Text) communicated to his disciples, the monks, set the Wheel of the Doctrine in motion, according to the religious code. The books, manuscripts and scrolls were the mere 'media' for this transmission, for this religious process of communication. The 'text', the message of the Doctrine, the 'content' of Buddhist Faith has been yet denied to the visitors of the exhibition.

The manuscript of the **First Sermon** (Cat.n. 29), the textual version of the Buddha's first formulation of his Doctrine according to the Tradition, displayed next to the relief of the Buddha preaching, was described in the label in a specialist's jargon, disencouraging any tentative to know what it was all about:

'29. The First Sermon
Burma. 18th -early 19th century
*Manuscript of **Dhammacakkappavattanasutta** in Pali. Black Burmese script. Palm leaf, silvered with black lacquered decorated margins. 6 folios. 8 x 52 cm. OMPB Or.12010/J*
*The **Dhammacakkappavattanasutta**, or 'turning of the Wheel of the Doctrine', is the Buddha's First Sermon after his Enlightenment and contains the fundamental principles of his teaching, expressed succinctly in the Four Noble Truths.The marginal and outer cover decorations on the manuscript show the earliest iconographic representations of the First Sermon, the Wheel of the Doctrine (**dhammacakka**).*

PMH '

(Catalogue,BMP,1985:42)

Again the museological, or bibliographical code, attesting the place of origin and the date (the chronological code disregarding the 'time of history'), the morphological features of the material and of the 'script', the precise measures and number of 'folios', the taxonomical registration number, and the astonishingly difficult title in Pali (the 'canonical language of Buddhism'), demonstrate the curators' 'vision' of the narrative. This 'vision from behind', in Todorov's model[10], looking through the text in order to show what is significant in the librarians' system of meaning, enhances the 'superiority' of the emitters in relation to the receivers, in a good example of the 'disabling effect' suggested by Illich (1977)[11].

The written elements of the Buddhist text are inserted into the curators' system, which is not that of the original work. This fact reveals at the same time the kind of vision

---

[10]See chapter 6, p.154.

[11]See J.Reeve (1985) quoting Illich et al. in *Disabling Professions*, Boyards,1977.

from 'outside', in Todorov's terms, betraying a kind of objective and scientific attitude of the narrators in relation to the items. The accurate description, in a specialized jargon, disregards the public's ability to decode the 'informative' labels. The metalinguistic code used in these labels, translating the manuscripts titles and their contents, refers actually to another code - that of Buddhism - as an 'extra-textual' reference to the religious text (the fundamental principles of the Buddha's teaching,or the 'Four Noble Truths'), whose 'contents', yet, remained hidden.

Despite all the knowledgeable information given in the labels and texts on the evolution of the Creed (The Collection of the Canon, in lexia n. 8), through the translations and interpretations of the original Canon in the different regions, the written signs of the Buddhist Doctrine remained inaccessible to the majority of the visitors, faced with the linguistic barrier of the academic code. The curators' vision of these texts was actually the same as that of the BM's curators in respect to the 'works of art'- an aestheticized look, the look of collectors and of experts on the material element of the Buddhist language, an exaltation of the 'utterances', of the 'signifiers', and a lateral shift of the 'signifieds'. It was not by chance that the inquiry made on the public's attitudes towards the exhibition revealed that only 5% of the visitors have read the labels, and that most of them could only concentrate and read carefully the first 10/11 showcases, in the first twenty minutes of the visit[12].

'35. The Book of exalted utterances
From Dunhuang, Gansu province, China. 5th- 6th century AD. ***Pothi*** *manuscript of* ***Udanavarga*** *in Sanskrit.Slanting Gupta script. Ink on paper. 12 folios. 9 x 37.5 cm. IOLR Ch.vii.001A*

[12]See chapter 11, p.284.

*The **Udanavarga** is a Sarvastivadin compilation, attributed to Dharmatrata (1st century AD?), of popular ethical verse maxims. It significantly overlaps with an old north-west Indian (Gandhari) **Dharmapada** and the Pali canonical Dhammapada which belongs to the Khuddakanikaya or Minor Tradition, the collection of mainly verse texts not considered as spoken by the Buddha but sufficiently ancient to have entered the Canon before the first schisms. The script suggests a scribe from Kucha.*
JPL' (Catalogue,BMP,1985:44)

The **Rules for Monks** (Cat.n. 36), a manuscript displayed near the **Head of a Monk** (Cat.n. 127), one of the functional units in this narrative, were kept hidden from the curiosity of the readers, who remained ignorant of the kind of exigencies demanded by monastic life, besides the reference to 'Expiation' and 'Confession'.

'36. Rules for Monks
From Kucha, Xinjiang province, China. 5th or 6th century AD
*3 folios from **pothi** manuscripts of **Vynayapitaka** in Tocharian. Slanting Gupta script. Ink on paper. 5 x 29.5 cm and 7.5 x 35 cm. IOLR Hoernle Ms 149* x/5, x/3, x/4
*The three folios are from two different manuscripts, two consecutive folios (108,109) being from the second manuscript. They comprise Tocharian versions of the **Vynayapitaka** of the Sarvastivadins, the first leaf being from the **Pratimoksa**, the consecutively arranged rules of conduct for monks (rules 71-85), while the other two leaves provide a text similar to the **Suttavibhanga** of the Pali Canon, a rule embedded in the narrative which gave rise to it and a commentary following it. The rules covered by these two folios comprise the end of the section on Expiation and the beginning of that on Confession.*
Tocharian, or Kuchean, the language of northern Xinjiang around Kucha, formed an entirely independent branch of the Indo-European language family, lost for 1.000 years until the manuscript discoveries in the 1890s. JPL'
(Catalogue, BMP,1985:45)

Another manuscript (Cat.n. 38) with the same title, attests to the **codes of museality** :...'the earliest dated manuscript, found at Dunhuang, written only fifty years after the first cave temple was excavated...', and at the same time reveals the living element contained in these works:...' and the copier, a monk, apologises for his hand-writing hoping that no one will laugh at it...' It was, in fact, hardly possible not to laugh at the incredible 'writing' of the authors of this bibliological text.
As it could be read in the label to the 'Treasure of the Higher Doctrine', *'even the Sautrankikas, however, needed answers to the basic questions posed in the Abhidharma controversies...'* (Cat.n.42,p.49)[13].

In the next following lexias the unending succession of scrolls and manuscripts was a repetition of the same communicative situation: all signifiers (despite the formal differences of the translations in different languages, and the content differences due to the schisms in different Buddhist sects) would refer to the final signified of the Buddhist Faith - the Doctrine of the Buddha, and to the basic 'referent' of this Doctrine - the monks and faithful believers who produced these meritorious and devotional acts.

At the far end of this section, a three-dimensional signifier - the marble statue of a monk (Cat.n. 233) - stood as a sign for the practical aspect of all this Doctrine: its consequences in human life, and the 'human model' devised by this abstract Faith. The 'dynamic object' of reality, which all these textual signs referred to, was effectively suggested

---

[13] Abhidharma : the Higher Doctrine of philosophical rationalization of the Sutras (Buddha's sermons) which forms the third of the three Pitakas (collections) of the early Canon. The other two are the Sutrapitaka (collection of the sermons) and the Vinayapitaka (collection of monastic rules).

to the readers through the insertion of this sculpture between two enlarged photographs of a row of monks, with their alms bowl and yellow robes: a strategy of the Design code to 'blow up' the frozen signifier into the living reality of Buddhist Faith.

III - Buddhism Art History:

Lexia n. 13 : The First Buddha Images (see p.210)

This segment inaugurated the main 'narrative thread',from the perspective of the museum curators: the paradigmatic axis of Art History and of Aesthetics, dominant in the discourse.

Two large photographic reproductions were the starting **functional units** in the extended sequence, developed along 36 showcases, in a geographical and stylistic 'pertinentization' of the material: the **'Footprints'**, and **'Statues at excavation site'**.

The image of the **'Footprints'** - a stone relief, and a symbol of the Buddha before the representations in human form, and the image of a large number of statues of Buddhas and Bodhisattvas 'excavated' at Lokyan, in Pakistan, were actually two photographic 'interpretants', or 'references' of the double and ambiguous function played by the Buddha Image, in this particular museological discourse.

The **'Footprints'**, standing for the symbolic nature of these representations, as signs and symbols of the transcendental nature of the Buddha, seen from the 'intensional' aspects of Buddhist codes, keep a metaphorical relation with the Buddha's image, standing for his long wandering across India to preach his Doctrine. At the same time, they stand as 'iconic' and as 'indexical' signs of the presence of the Buddha, in a metonymical relation with the

'agent' of these footprints, as signs of his presence at a given place. In order to understand these abstract relationships one has to know the iconography of Buddhist codes; an example of that is given in Figure 18:

Fig.18: Metonymical relations

footprints > > > feet > > > human being

conventional features > > the Buddha's feet > > The Buddha

Fig.18: Metaphorical relations

feet > > > the Buddha's footprints > > >

to walk > > > the Buddha's wandering route

Figure 18 : Decoding the Buddha's Footprints (metonymical and metaphorical relations)

The second photograph of a large collection of **statues**, shown at the **excavation site** where they have been found, stands immediately for the 'archaeological' nature of all these items, as objects of research and study, denoting this specialized activity, the outstanding achievement of archaeologists and researchers, and connoting the 'original' and 'authentic' quality of the items, now in the Museum collections. The connotative links are not difficult to be found, as suggested in Figure 19:

Fig.19

statues at excavation site

- D.1 > archeological findings >
  - c.1 > archaeologists
  - c.2 > expertise
  - c.3 > salvation work
- D.2 > collectors' pieces >
  - c.4 > original / authentic items
- D.3 > Museum collections >
  - c.5 > works of art
  - c.6 > rare specimens

Figure 19: The museological decodings

This 'photographic' sign gives rise to several denotations and connotations, according to the 'reading' one may choose, among which some may refer to questions not answered by the exhibition: as for instance, the original function of so many statues at a same place, the reasons for their burial in underground layers throughout the centuries, or else the reasons and the justification for these excavating activities (besides that of 'knowledge's sake') and for the transferral of these original items to museum collections worldwide.

The exhibition implicit message, starting more clearly from this point on, is a conventional justification for some of these questions, 'naturalizing' the answers through the generally accepted and authoritative Museum code (to collect, to preserve, to study and interpret, and to display cultural significant items, for the intellectual enrichment, education and enjoyment of people). The political, social and ethical codes of modern societies are nevertheless being questioned today, in a sort of 'archaeological excavation' of the traditional 'codes of museality', through the deconstructive criticism of their discourses and actions.

The first three-dimensional iconic sign in this sequence - a stone sculpture of **The Buddha** (Cat.n. 123) - inaugurated the succession of Buddhas and Bodhisattvas, and of their many formal variations along the spreading route of Buddhism, from Eastern India through Kashmir, Nepal, Tibet, the Deccan and South India, Sri-Lanka, Burma, Thailand, Cambodja and Indonesia, until finally reaching Central Asia, China, Korea and Japan.

All along this extended sequence of 'lexias', the Buddha Image and its 'emanating' or 'derivating' representations of other divine entities were no more the 'agents of meaning', but the objects of the discourse, the referents of a metalanguage which spoke of a first one - the Buddhist Language - and which took hold of its 'signifiers' to communicate different 'signifieds' : the art-schools, the shapes and materials, the techniques of Buddhist expressions.

The original hierarchy of values in which these expressions were once inserted was abolished, in favour of another hierarchy - the realm of forms and of aesthetic values preferred by the 'ideal' and the 'real' narrators of the exhibition. The 'exchange-values' offered to the public in return for their attention, interest and admiration, were the 'quality', the 'exceptionality', the 'rarity' and the 'beauty' of these objects, and the 'surplus' of all the knowledge provided about them. The items displayed were in fact the 'coins' in this institutional, academic and social realms of the western cultural 'common market'.

The stone icon of the Buddha, displayed next to a small head and to some coins, was linked to these items in a horizontal relationship in which what matters is the 'form' of the representations, their stylistic, historical, regional features. In a vertical, integrative axis, these objects were

signs of formal 'types' of the Buddha image, presented in a succession of 'tokens' or 'variants' of some exemplary models. The reading or the decoding of their sign-function in this specific academic context required a 'semiotic competence' from the part of the readers, which has been taken for granted or presupposed by the authors. The 'iconographical subcode' of Buddhist representations was supposed to be known, at least in its basic (visual) vocabulary; some new terms and names of the hundred or more new entities which appeared successively on the displays were given a summary description in the labels, just to be put immediately aside, to give place to the transcendental aspect of their forms, inserted in specialized taxonomies.

'123. Buddha
Gandhara, from Takht-i-Bahi. 2nd century AD
Schist. Height 1.04m. OA 1899.7-15.1

The angle of the right forearm and rough projection at the armpit where a strut supported the lost hand show that this Buddha was in the gesture of reassurance, offering protection to the worshipper. The left hand holds an end of cloth from the robe, and the lower undergarment can be seen above the lost feet. There is a noticeable moustache on the upper lip, and the broken halo has traces of an ancient repair. In type this Buddha is reminiscent of that on the Kaniska coin (n. 121).
WZ '

(Catalogue,BMP,1985:93)

'121. Coin
Gandhara, from Ahin Posh stupa, Afghanistan. c.AD 100
Gold. Diameter 2 cm. C & M India Office Collection no.289

Gold coin of the Kusana King Kaniska I showing on its reverse an image of the Buddha identified by an inscription in Bactrian reading **Boddo**. *The symbol beside the Buddha is Kaniska I's personal mark. The Buddha is shown in a sculptural style, wearing monastic robes and making the gesture of reassurance.*

This is the earliest relatively datable image of the Buddha in the Gandharan style. Certain of its features support the attribution of the famous Kaniska reliquary (cf.no.8) to the reign of Kaniska I; it also places the Buddha images on the bimaran casket in an early Kusana context. When compared with the Mathura-style Buddhist sculptures from central India, dated to Kaniska I's reign, this Gandharan-style image creates a clear picture of the relative development of these two schools.

The use of this coin design by Kaniska I testifies to his involvement with Buddhism and supports legends in later Buddhist literature of his erection of monuments and assembling the Third Buddhist Council in Kashmir.

JC '

(Catalogue, BMP,1985:92,93)

The examples above are sufficient enough to demonstrate the nature and the contents of the Museum's speech dominant in the Exhibition. All the many codes which work together at the basis of the Museum's code can be detected from a more thorough analysis of these textual units in the labels. The linguistic code is a 'primary modelling system', controlling the reception of the message, setting the 'frame' for the preferred reading intended by the authors. The secondary system of signification is, however, always present, or denoted, as a mere formal distinctive feature which helps to identify the token and the type. The first signification of the sign, in its original system, is not considered as 'pertinent' to the discourse.

In order to understand the sign-function of the units in the academic semantic field where they are inserted, one has to look for the sign's 'microscopic texture', as described in **n. 123** (above):

'*... the angle of the right forearm, the rough projection of the armpit,... the lost hand and the lost feet,... the broken halo and the traces of ancient repair...*', are all 'signifiers', or 'clues', for the many significations grasped

by the curators' eyes: the formal, textural, material values which are significant markers in the museological system dominant in this exhibition.

The 'map of the route', easy to be followed in the Catalogue, could not be adequately translated by the Design code, since it has been strictly controlled by the curatorial team. Designers and Educationalists have not been involved in the structuration of the work.

The items were linked in the horizontal level of distribution of forms and materials, and some labels made cross-references to other items displayed in the preceding or subsequent showcases. If the devoted reader would like to follow all these links, denotations and connotations in the authors' minds, he would be certainly lost in a labyrinth of crossing paths within the exhibition space, which would certainly result in a physical and mental chaos, in an unending and frustrating search for references and links. The educational lecturers have actually guided their groups according to their own route, which involved a criss-crossing path, looking for a more coherent and clear path.

The chronological code has been disrupted along this thread, and the objects' dates - the 'time of history'[14], in Todorov's terms - were disregarded, in favour of the 'time of the discourse' - an abstract route along the geographical distribution of the items, where one could find objects from the 4th/ 5th centuries AD near to other items from the 18th/ 19th centuries; chronological information has been considered relevant only when supporting the museological, the archaeological, the historical codes, granting 'scientific' support for the statements:

[14]See chapter 6, pp.151,152.

*'...This is the **earliest relatively datable image** of the Buddha in the Gandharan style. Certain of its features support the attribution of the famous Kaniska reliquary (cf no.8) to **the reign of Kaniska I**...'*
(see above, n.121).

The scientific precaution is made clear in this sentence, connoting the 'expertise' of the scientists.

In all subsequent lexias in this long section, objects lose their sign-function, the forms are emptied of their multiple meanings, and are fulfilled with aesthetic and value connotations, now changed into institutionalized denotations - 'the giant Birmingham Buddha', the 'celebrated Sultangang Buddha', the 'surviving seated Bodhisattva', the 'Burmese Aksobhya of the Pagan period', the 'Kaniska reliquary'...

As signs of the museum language, these items can be seen as 'indexical' or 'indicial' units, their formal qualities 'qualifying' the Museum speech, the high level of its objects and the richness of its collections. As 'indexes', they point out to the agents of these expressions, no more the Buddhist agents, but the curators who manipulate them in skillful and expert exhibitions. This show can be thus classified as 'highly indicial', to use Barthes' types of narratives[15].

Instead of a 'parading' of meanings, of a dramatic context played on the Museum scene by the actors of this religious spectacle, standing for the real 'characters' and authors of the Buddhist 'Text', the exhibition presented a parading of forms, of visual and linguistic **information**, to be hardly digested by the audience - an almost impossible task.

The presentation was most of the time excessively redundant, with the repetition of the many tokens which could

[15]See chapter 7, p.168.

only be distinguished one from another by expert eyes. The Design code used to arrange and to articulate these 'units' has been totally controlled and determined by the dominant code. The succession of items was sometimes arranged like melody notes on a scale, an arrangement meant to be 'seen', but whose 'sound' was not to be heard. The audience's eyes were not 'deaf', however, as it will be demonstrated in Chapter 11.

Lexia n. 29 : Popular Buddhism in the Far East (see p.211)

The last lexia to be analised in the structural matrix of this exhibition, in a synthetic and arbitrary 'reading' of the units, can be seen as playing a disturbing role in the oppressive calmness of this museological situation.

In the level of **actions**, in this narrative, this part of the show 'explodes' the regular systematic taxonomy meant by the planned structure followed in the Catalogue. It seemed that a total museographic chaos has been installed in this second and final gallery, where it was difficult to find a common link between the sub-sections and items (mostly from China, Korea and Japan).

This whole amount of different items were yet connected by one basic idea expressed in the title of this 'lexia': 'Popular Buddhism in the Far East'. What these apparently disconnected items revealed was actually the practice of Buddhism, the religion and the faith, as lived and reported through all those objects, paintings and prints. This idea (however unintended), playing a functional role in the structural matrix of the work, was represented by different aspects of this practice, in its multifaceted ways, from concepts, to their consequences in people's behaviours, attitudes and beliefs, actions and productions.

Every object or item in this section played a functional role in the composition of the varied and rich picture of the living religion. This role escaped the curators' control, insofar as it is not possible to control or to put limits on real life. Every unit in the showcases stood for itself, in its primary sign-function (that of its use), as a proof, an 'indexical' sign for the practice and the life of the religion. In a similar way, every one of these signs stood for different 'interpretants', for different 'intensions' and 'extensions' which could be meant by the different perspectives from which they could be envisaged. There was not one **cardinal sign** in this sequence, but all of them were connected by intricate links, the concrete and complex links of real life.

There were printed books and maps - to guide the pilgrims in their annual festivals and pilgrimages (Cat. nn. 338, 403, 404, 412, 413), or to help them to reach **Nirvana** more rapidly, through the printed repetition of rows of Buddhas or of Bodhisattvas, (Cat. nn. 328, 329, 341). The need to reproduce **sutras** and **mantras** contributed to the development of printing in the Far East. The development of popular fiction and the secularization of Buddhism was indicated by illustrated books with woodblock prints, as in n. 411, 'a novelist's dream', or in n. 404, 'Pilgrimage to the six temples of Amithaba', both from Japan. As the label informs on this late item, '... *improvements in economic conditions during the Edo period, together with the development of communications, enabled farmers and merchants to participate in pilgrimages hitherto the preserve of the upper class'* (Catalogue, BMP,1985:281).

The popular aspect of Buddhism was portrayed in all the items, and even in the simplification of the Doctrine, providing an easier understanding of its principles and

precepts through visual aids, as in n. 406 -'Ten Worlds Diagram', a coloured woodblock print that *'explains the Avatamsaka sutra to the layman, and depicts the six worlds of rebirth and the four offering escape...'* (Catalogue,BMP,1985:282).

'Arhats, Monks and Religious Teachers' (lexia n. 33) would advise and guide the devotees, explaining the wonders and the horrors of 'Heavens and Hells' (lexia n. 34), and would perform ceremonies and rites, many from 'Esoteric Buddhism' (lexia n.32), for which 'Ritual Implements' were an essential tool (lexia n.30).

The **'non-canonical sutra of filial piety'** (Cat.n. 398), printed in Japan, reveals the rise of popular sects, strongly marked by the Confucian ethic related to familiar responsibilities, with illustrations of children's debts towards their parents and the punishments for breaches of filial duty.

The economical aspects of Buddhism are well demonstrated in the **'portrait of a respectable townsman and merchant'**, a wooden painted 'realistic' portrait (Cat.n. 364), and by the **'Asakusa Kannon Temple's festival'** (Cat.n.422), a colour printed image depicting the annual festival and merrymaking that attracted thousands of visitors, for the satisfaction of shopkeepers who coherently honoured Kannon (the Bodhisattva Avalokitesvara).

Another meaningful item was the portrait of **Sesshu Toyo** (Cat.n.365), a small sculpture of a Zen monk considered one of Japan's greatest painter. The valorization of the arts, as typical of Zen's attitude to life, results in the valorization of the individual artist, who starts to sign his works and to be portrayed.

Zen Buddhism, the last section of the narrative thread, is represented in some showcases by the products and tools of secular activities which are valued by this sect as bearing a 'spiritual enhancing' nature, like the '**Samurai sword blade**' (Cat.n. 374), depicting 'Acala' : '*... the impassivity behind his ferocious aspect was the spiritual attitude to which swordsmen aspired.*'

'**Zen view of the nature of life**', (Cat.n. 399), is an example of Zen book production in the monasteries, and is signed with the personal seal of the monk Tenkai, demonstrating the individualization and humanization of Buddhism in Japan. The political involvements of Buddhism in the regions where it spread, like the hierarchical importance of the Samurais, the ruling military class in Japan, in the 14th/15th centuries, was demonstrated in some of these items, like in the '**Sutra of the Ten Kings**' (Cat.n. 103), depicting the kings of Hell, and their attendants, dressed as Chinese officials with black ear-flapped hats. Some missing objects in the showcases, 'returned to lenders', also attest in a subtle way the political involvements which pervade, in the same way, museum exhibitions and their public discourses.

There was no section on **Zen Buddhism** in this gallery, despite the presentation of so many items of Zen production. Most probably because of its popular appeal, this section was installed at the entrance hall, at the ground floor of the BM North Wing. There, no objects could be displayed (for safety reasons, probably), and the section on Zen was limited to beautiful coloured photographs of modern Japan. Zen's view of the nature of life, even if corresponding to the beauty of the images displayed, has been lost in the crowded space of the last upper gallery.

The popular appeal of Buddhist practice and faith could not be controlled or limited by the curators of this exhibition, neither by the designers' team who confessed their difficulty in displaying those varied items in the showcases, unable to grasp the complex net of links and relationships, the 'galaxies of meanings' conveyed and suggested by these expressions.

At this point, the 'academic speech' has been broken, and taken over by the objects semiotic power, in a revolutionary way that could be equated with the spiritual revolution provoked by Buddhism along its route in the different countries, subverting ancient codes and rules (as for instance, the Indian system of 'castas'), with its message offering salvation to all. The museum's academic code was subverted here, much against the will of the emitters. It was actually reduced to the information given in the labels, which kept to the same museological codes, and of which a good example was that of n. 400, **'The Moon Goddess'**:

> *'400. The Moon Goddess*
> *Japan, Yota temple, Kagawa prefecture, 1407*
> *[**Gatten zuzo**], woodblock print on paper. Outline and black areas block-printed, colours applied by hand. Mounted as a hanging scroll. 1.09m x 41cm. OMPB Or.80.c.2*
>
> *One of the great landmarks in Japanese block-printed Buddhist iconography, this is one of a set of twelve large prints representing the Guardian Deities,of both Chinese and Japanese iconography, commissioned by Zoun, abbot of the Kokuzoin or Yota temple in the island of Shikoku, and dedicated to the temple. This print is not dated but that representing Brahma (Japanese Bonten) bears a printed colophon naming the printer and block-cutter, Shoyu, and dating the whole set clearly to the twenty-first day of the third month, 1407.*
> *The goddess holds an orb representing the moon, containing the crouching hare, traditionally associated in Eastern mythology with the moon. KBG '*
> *(Catalogue, BMP, 1985:276)*

It is possible to detect here all the 'codes of museality' dominant in this exhibition : the **museological code** (*'one of a set of twelve large prints'*), the **art-historical code** (*'one of the great landmarks in Japanese block-printed Buddhist iconography'*), the **historical code** (*'commissioned by Zoun, abbot of the Kokuzoin, or Yota temple'*), the **geographic code** (*'in the island of Shiskoku*), the **chronological code** supporting the **scientific code** (*'the print is not dated... and dating the whole set clearly to the twenty-first day of the third month, 1407'*), the **philological code** (*'that representing Brahma ...bears a printed colophon naming the printer and the block-cutter...'*), with reference to an 'unseen' item in the collections, the **iconographic sub-code** (*'Japanese Bonten'= 'Brahma'*), the **mythological sub-code** (*'the goddess holds an orb representing the moon, containing the crouching hare, traditionally associated in Eastern mythology with the moon'*).

The meaning of this sign, in Japanese Buddhism, is however much simpler than all that, and could be found hidden in this obfuscating museological sentence : *'(the series...) representing the Guardian Deities, among which is the Moon Goddess'*. This particular semiotic reading may be a good example of the Chinese proverbial sentence which tells of the sages pointing to the Moon, and looking at their own fingers.

After this exhaustive and long 'narrative', or better, this highly didactic series of sentences and illustrative discourse, the final point was reached with relief, in a sort of resting area, proposing to the visitors the listening of the large images' silent speech. It was perhaps too late in this situation, when the 'time' and the 'conditions of perception' of this nebulous and fascinating content were more than exhausted (see p.211,c).

CHAPTER 10 : CORRELATION OF UNITS AND CODE DEPARTURES: the role of the linguistic, iconic and design codes

CHAPTER 10 - CORRELATION OF UNITS AND CODE DEPARTURES: the role of the linguistic, iconic, and design codes

This chapter will analyse the two basic paradigmatic axes which intersect one another in the exhibition structure, creating ambiguous and paradoxical effects, and the role of the Museum expression codes in the communication of the exhibition message. The level of 'history' and 'discourse' will be focused in the study of the exhibition narrative, showing the articulation of the units, functions and actions, and the 'montage code' of the work's structural matrix.

10.1 - The paradigmatic axes

Through the reading of some of the 'lexias' playing a cardinal function in the structure of the exhibition it is not difficult to notice the two basic paradigmatic axes which intersect one another throughout the whole text, in a paradoxical struggle between the two major sources of perception of the message : the axis of the **Buddhist Code** and the axis of the **Aesthetic Code** which dominates and controls the discourse.

This exhibition can be, thus, seen as an undecidable situation, similar to the 'Necker Cube'[1] of perception studies, through which an impossible object is constructed.

---

[1] The celebrated **Necker Cube**, described by the Swiss crystallographer L.A.Necker in 1832, has been discussed by psychologists ever since; it is a case where the line drawing of a cube, as perceived by the retinal image, can be viewed from either of two very different positions, and there is no available information for the brain making a choice. The same case occurs in the well known figure/background problems, such as the two vases or two profiles, or the old lady/ young lady's faces (see Gregory, R.L.,1970).

As a 'representation' of Buddhism, the exhibition builds up a picture of a still living religion, followed by millions of people in the world, and older than Christianity. As a picture, it is,however, a 'projection', a flat representation in the two-dimensional space of the 'here' and 'now' of the Museum context. The ambiguity of the situation is, thus, inevitable, due to the lack of 'depth clues', provoking the paradoxical illusion of one 'picture' constantly overlapping another, without the possibility of the viewer making a sure choice.

The lack in 'depth' is the lack of 'distance', of the 'horizon of the past' against which History is seen in the present, and of 'perspective clues' which could help to solve this ambiguous situation: these perspective clues would be in fact the 'stipulation of pertinence' necessary for the understanding of any act of 'ostensive communication', as well as for the 'recognition' of the signs in their multiple functions, in different semantic fields[2]. In the picture constituted by this exhibition - as in any kind of picture, or representation - a 'double reality' is presented: there is the actual material that compounds it - the objects displayed in the showcases - and there is an 'absent reality' which is referred to, that of Buddhism, the Faith's history and practice, requiring a higher process of abstraction, in order to be perceived.

'Perhaps man's ability to respond to absent imaginary situations in pictures, represents an essential step towards the development of abstract thought... Pictures are perhaps the first step away from immediate reality, and without this, reality cannot be deeply understood' (Gregory,1970:32).

The ambiguous situation in this exhibition's picture of Buddhism, attested in the title dichotomy - Art & Faith -

[2]See chapter 4, p.90, on 'recognition'.

could be clearly observed through the reading of some 'lexias'. It is yet possible to trace a parallel notation of the simultaneous sign-functions played by the items, in cardinal or subsidiary roles, as 'nuclei' or as 'catalyses'[3], in the two vertical paradigmatic axes of the exhibition text, as it can be demonstrated on the two first 'lexias', or 'units of reading' in the narrative sequence (see Figure 20):

[3]See chapter 7, p.168.

Figure 20: Intersection of paradigmatic axes

Paradigmatic axes: →	Faith		Art	
Lexias	Functional units: **N** = nuclei, **C** = catalyses			
n. 3: Early Cult Monuments	**N**	**fragments of stupa** (symbol of Buddha)	**N**	**architecture** (architectural fragments)
	c	reliquaries/caskets	c	glass/ metal artecrafts, jewelry
	c	sacred deposits	c	idem,idem
	c	inscribed fragments	c	historical evidence
	c	model stupa	c	architectural shapes/decorations
n. 5: The Buddha Legend	**N**	**The meeting with Dipamkara**	**N**	**Buddhist narrative sculpture** (early productions)
	c	The dream of Maya	c	Buddhist iconography
	N	**The birth and return of the infant**		idem
	c	The presentation of the bride		idem
	N	**The Great Renunciation**		idem
	c	Emmaciated Bodhisattva		idem
		and so on...		and so on...
↓ ↓		↓ ↓		↓ ↓

Through this synthetic diagram, it is possible to verify how the same item plays a different function in the two axes, as for instance the 'fragment of stupa', in a **nuclear function** in the axis of Buddhism, as a symbol for the Buddha and a statement of the Faith, and as an 'example' of the early architecture of Buddhism, in the axis of the art-historical code envisaged by the curators. The 'Emaciated Bodhisattva', playing a subsidiary, or complementary role to the 'unit' of 'The Great Renunciation' - a fundamental step in Buddha's life - works as a 'catalysis' to the main 'unit' of Buddhism's iconography in the museological axis.

The correlation of the units in a functional, actional role, in the two parallel sequences, as steps in a succession of events (the Buddha's life), and of facts (Buddhist productions on display), can be developed in the analysis of the whole exhibition text, which would not be possible in the limits of the present work.

Faith and Art are simultaneously displayed in the showcases, and the choice of the 'preferred reading' is up to the receivers of this museological message. The analysis of the **code departures** present in each lexia and in the whole work has been already suggested in the first readings of some of these segments (see chap. 9): the Buddhist Code, almost inaccessible to western minds, and the art-historical, bibliographical and philological codes of the narrators, equally inaccessible to lay people.

The 'codes of museality' are less easy to grasp and to detect, in their innocent mythological mode of speaking: the 'syndrome of originality', the 'metaphysics of presence' of those hundreds of objects, the rarity, the authenticity, the exceptional quality of the collections, their numerical codes, the owners and donors, the care and the value of materials, the 'expertise' of the curators and the 'scientificism' of

their discourses, the encompassing knowledge in their scholar achievements, all these parameters reinforcing the authority of the discourse.

The evaluative accents in respect of the items and of the exhibition itself, as explicitly declared in the promotional leaflets distributed to the public (see Appendices) reveal as well the pervasiveness of the Museum institutional codes, showing the 'world vision' of the exhibition 'ideal narrators':

'This major exhibition, drawn mainly from the rich collections of the British Museum and the British Library... Among manuscripts in the exhibition are outstanding Indian and Nepalese miniatures on palm leaf, Burmese folding paper books with sometimes naive and always colourful illustrations of edifying tales and vivid Chinese scenes from beyond the grave... Remarkable are an exquisite ivory carving from Kashmir, a monumental stone Buddha head from Java, a wooden priestly portrait figure from Japan, rare bronze Buddhas from Pakistan and Chinese paintings recovered from one of the famous Dunhuang caves by Sir Aurel Stein, who also found there the huge embroidery with an over life-size Buddha which dominates the entrance to the Far Eastern section.'

In the press-releases, the exhibition is referred to as 'the most comprehensive exhibition of Buddhism to be staged in this country, with more than 400 exhibits...' The myth of the 'Great Museum' is subtly reinforced through these rhetorical devices.

This vision will not always coincide with the vision of the real authors, interviewed during this research, and who were sometimes frustrated and unsatisfied with the results of their work (one of them being himself a Buddhist).

The role of the **linguistic code**, of the **iconic** and the **design codes** should be more carefully analysed in this chapter, as the expression systems serving and supporting the enunciation, the 'Elocutio' of the Text. In the analysis of their functions and effectiveness, it will be made clear the

hierarchy of these semiotic systems in the transmission of the message, the struggle taking place at this 'semiotic battlefield', where the majority of the public will feel lost and unhelped, as it will be checked through the analysis of the questionnaires, in chapter 11.

10.2 - The role of the linguistic code in the construction of the narrative

The linguistic expression system used by the narrators of the show plays a 'primary modelling' role in the narrative, framing and controlling the reading of the message, and weaving the intersected threads of the two paradigmatic axes, in an **expressive**, a **referential**, and a **conative** or **injunctive functions**[4].

The **referential function** denotes the concrete objects, as referents of the verbal academic discourse, explores their material microstructure (the 'matter' of the iconic language), and induces the readers to construe meanings according with a preferred frame of reference, in a 'natural' and imposing way. The linguistic code is the main tool for the construction of the Museum's myth:

> *'Myth has a double function, it **points out** and it **notifies**, it makes us **understand something**, and it **imposes** it on us' (Barthes,1985:117).*[5]

> *'232. Buddha*
> *Burma, said to be from Mandalay. 19th century*
> *Wood, lacquered and gilt and set with coloured mirror-glass.Height 1 m. Given by Mrs.Ballantine.*
> *OA 1923.3 -5.1*
> *His face marked by the gentle expression of the Mandalay style, this Buddha stands with both shoulders covered and*

---

[4]See chapter 5, p.112-119, on the functions of communication.

[5] My emphasis.

an ornate cascade of decorated cloth falling from his left shoulder. His left hand pulls the lower part of the robe outwards, while the excess cloth of the tightly wrapped arm above curls almost into a roll. His right hand holds the myrobalan. A floret marks the middle of the decorated band between the forehead and the hair, and the feet stand on a lotus with opening petals in the Indian tradition of the lotus base. WZ '
(Catalogue, BMP,1985:168)

The redundant description, in this label, of what the eyes can see, does not account or give any clue for the decoding of the mysterious word 'myrobalan'. The verbal translation of visual signs (an intersemiotics translation) directs the attention of the viewer to what must be preferably 'understood' in the object.

The verbal units, both in panels as in labels, while pointing out to the **forms** of Buddhist expressions, notify the audience about the historical character of these objects, and about the Faith's history, along the geographical route of its expansion. The iconographic subcode is decoded succinctly to the lay people, and references of the main 'ideas' of Buddhism are given in the major texts. All these 'informations' are given in a 'dictionary mode', similar to the glossary at the end of the Catalogue. The symbolic character of Buddhism's expressions is dislocated, and their 'contents' are treated as mere 'data', as 'semantic adjectives' to the signifiers of the formal discourse.

The **injunctive** function, or the **conative** role of the linguistic expression, imposes the 'preferred reading' of the text through the scientificism and the authority of its elaborated terms, on the basis of the codes of museality: the origins, dates, extratextual and intertextual references, quotations of authorities in the matter, of archaeological excavations and other museum collections, donors and bequests. The eyes of the beholder are guided through the detailed descriptions of forms, shapes and marks, and the minds can

only be subdued to this imposing authoritative discourse. They could not be, however, totally controlled, as the questionnaires will demonstrate, not only due to the freedom of decoding of individual perceptions, to the undercoding and overcoding processes present in any communicative act, but also due to the active 'reading' of the receivers ; the barriers posited by the lack of background knowledge (presupposed by the curators), by the academic jargon used in texts and labels, as well as by the length of the verbal units, the excess and the strength of the visual information (leading to 'museum fatigue'), were probably the main reasons for the weakening and disturbing effect of the verbal code in the transmission of the message. From the child's 'big fat golden chap' to the curators' 'Mandalay style head' (see chapter 11), there was a big gap to be filled in this semiotic situation, sometimes only possible through a 'cryptographic' task:

> *'42. The Treasury of the Higher Doctrine*
> *From Dunhuang, Gansu province, China, 13th - 14th century*
> *Bound volume containing a Uyghur commentary, with some Chinese, on Sthiramati's commentary on Vasubandhu's* ***Abhidharmakosa****. Ink on paper. 164 folios (each folio double). 17 x 13 cm. OMPB Or. 8212/75 (Ch.xix.001)*
> *Vasubhandhu, who lived probably in the 5th century AD, belonged to the Sautrantika school whose doctrines were based solely on the* ***sutras****, rejecting the interpretation in the Sarvastivada* ***Abhidharma*** *(...) Although found in the walled-up library, this and other late volumes were added by the priest-in-charge between the discovery in 1900 and Stein's visit in 1907. JPL'*
> *(Catalogue,BMP,1985:49).*

After the first five lines, the reader would certainly give up this task, as the majority of the people visiting the exhibition has done. The incredible amount of presupposed knowledge expected from the 'ideal receivers' of the message

contributes to the reinforcement of the image of the 'ideal narrator', and for the frustrating, or 'disabling' effect on the real, 'english-speaking', ordinary visitors.

The **expressive** function, or the **evaluative accents** of the verbal units, clearly reveal the signification system and the frame of references of the authors of the discourse:

> *'261. An explanation of meanings*
> *Thailand. c.1830-50*
>
> *.....Thirty eight cover leaves are lavishly decorated in gold and lacquer painting with rows of* ***devas*** *(heavenly beings) seated between ceremonial fans and surrounded by rich foliate decoration. The central cartouche contains the title of the work. The wooden cover boards are delicately inlaid with mother-of-pearl in a foliate pattern.*
>
> *HG*
>
> *'*
>
> *(Catalogue, BMP,1985:185)*

The title of this label could be changed to 'an explanation of forms',and the only 'meaning' explained here was that of the word 'devas'; the meanings of the 'content' remained unknown, inside the mother-of-pearl cartouches. The emphasis on the signifiers displaces signification, abolishes meaning, in this mythical metalanguage.

> *'In order to gauge the political load of an object and the mythical hollow which espouses it, one must never look at things from the point of view of signification, but from that of the signifier, of the thing which has been robbed...' (Barthes,1985:145)*

The system of references and values, expressed through the linguistic code, will be projected on the system of objects, governing their choice and their arrangement in the 'dispositio' of the work. The linguistic code 'naturalizes' the use of these objects and determines the nature of the iconic code (and of its iconographic subcodes), the meaning

of their arrangement in taxonomic rows. 'Myth' takes hold of all expression, in a natural, museological way.

'...it cannot rest until it has obscured the ceaseless making of the world, fixated this world into an object which can be forever possessed, catalogued its riches, embalmed it, and injected into reality some purifying essence which will stop its transformation, its flight towards other forms of existence. And these riches, thus fixated and frozen, will at last become computable.' (Barthes,1985:155)

'128. Buddha
Gandhara. 4th-5th century AD
Bronze. Height 41 cm. Given by P.T.Brooke Sewell,Esq.
OA 1958.7 - 14.1
Presumably once making the gesture of reassurance, this rare example of a Gandharan bronze has a face of great individuality with its youthful open-eyed expression recalling the vivid later stucco sculptures. The ridged garment continues the Western realism in the Gandharan treatment of drapery but also contributes, with the large feet and hands, to a certain heaviness. If the dimensions were sufficient proof, this bronze might be one found by Cunningham at Manikyala. WZ'
(Catalogue, BMP, 1985:96)

In this work of overcoding, or of extra-coding of Buddhist expressions, imposing on them the 'surplus' of their aesthetic qualities and art-historical 'meanings', the narrator is naturally prey of 'aberrant decodings', as for instance in the case of the 'alms bowl' (Cat.n.376), or 'begging bowl', in the curators' terminology. This object, one of the few and most characteristic belongings of a Buddhist monk, is seen, in Buddhist codes, as having a multiple functionality - useful for drinking water or for eating, in their wandering life, the bowl served as well to 'receive' gifts and donations from pious followers of the religion, who would acquire merit and salvation through this kind of devotional acts. Monks are not supposed 'to beg' for any material thing, and they are forbidden by the Doctrine to

demonstrate interest for, or to keep with them any material possessions.

Another significant aspect of the role of the linguistic code emerges from the content analysis of the main texts in the showcases. In the analysis of the first **eleven** panels, comprising the introductory section, from 'Early Cult Monuments' until the 'Vajrayana' ('lexias' nn. 1 to 11), the information given through 34 **paragraphs** reveals the following distribution of the 'thematic categories' (found in the whole exhibition) of Faith, Faith History, Art and Art History (Figure 21):

Figure 21

Faith ..... : 9 paragraphs
Faith History .... : 22 paragraphs
Art & Faith ..... : 2 paragraphs
Art..... : 1 paragraph

Fig. 21: Thematic categories in the Exhibition

From these data one could surprisingly conclude that the main function of the **linguistic code** has been that to tell the 'History', to carry on the narrative on this 'historical' religious phenomenon, and to explain it to the visitors. This superficial look to the verbal units in their first articulation of meanings is easily changed by the analysis of the labelling units, the second articulatory elements of the Discourse. As it can be detected from the examples given above, it is through these units that a 'metalanguage' expresses itself, setting the perspective frame, the 'label' according to which the meanings must be understood. This metalanguage is the language of the Discourse, performed to the audience, a 'discourse on History', that of Buddhism, and a 'discourse on Art', the Art History and the Aesthetics of Buddhism, in which the objects are the mere referents, the

proofs, the examples and illustrations of artistic 'values'. There is no explicit reference to Art (besides one or two paragraphs) all through the exhibition, no explanation of the essence or the 'meaning' of this Art, of its symbolic character. There are, yet, hundreds of mentions of 'styles' and 'schools', of adjectives and qualities attributed to these objects, seen through an aestheticizing, curatorial 'look'.

The rhetorical strategies of the Text are evident through this 'hidden speech' which 'naturalizes' this particular look, as the preferred and dominant vision of all these evidences of Buddhism experience. The antynomical[6], ambiguous connotations pervade the whole work, provoking a lot of 'noise' in the communication. As Eco suggests (1979:142), it was perhaps that 'noise' which provoked an unpleasant feeling in the audience, an intriguing and paradoxical feeling, that may, at the end, have opened up the minds of the public (as it has done to the researcher's mind), in search for the 'other scene' presented on the museum stage. This unconscious scene, the background scene against which the exhibition and all those objects should be seen, was suddenly present to consciousness.

10.3 - The role of the Iconic Code in the construction of the narrative

As it has been pointed out on the Linguistic Code, the **Iconic Code**, working as another semiotic system in this communicative situation, was dominated by the strength of the verbal system, being used almost as a **subcode**, referred to by the first one, and serving to justify it and to illustrate it.

---

[6] See Eco, on the 'pleasure of the circus', 'being precisely due to this ambiguous interplay of antynomical connotations, which means that the circus performance has something in common with an aesthetic message' (1979:111).

The objects did not play a functional significative role in the curators' discourse, besides that of being the 'objects of the discourse'. These items have not been considered as 'agents' of meaning, but as 'objects' of meaning.

In the axis of the Buddhist Code, these sculptures, paintings and illustrations, objects and implements of devotion are the main actors of the 'other scene' represented in the exhibition. As it has been said in the preceding chapter' ('On Buddhist signs'), they are 'icons' of a spiritual reality, as well as 'indexes' of a living, historical faith. Standing for concepts and principles, for the Truth and the Path of Buddhist salvation, their semiotic power was stronger than that of the verbal discourse which tried to control it. Their arrangement in successive rows did not weaken the force of their function, in triggering the curiosity of the viewers, open to multiple 'interpretants' and interpretations.

The excess of redundancy in the repetition of the Buddha images and their variations only helped to reinforce the idea of a basic 'type', which was not the 'formal type' of the curators' system, but that present at the background, at the unconscious levels of people's imagination and expectation. The 'cultural unit' universally known as 'The Buddha', as a mental image better known in the figure of the 'Buddhai' (the fat laughing being connoted to 'good luck') was subtly enriched by the impact and the variety of so many representations. The story of the Buddha could be 'deciphered' from the coloured 'comic books' of illustrated manuscripts, with the help of the information in the labels. Even if this task has been sometimes a 'cryptographic' work, due to the lack of knowledge of the pertinent codes and subcodes, the iconic narrative provided a glimpse, an idea, of the complexity and the richness of all that was there to be known.

The symbolic aspect of these images made itself apparent through its apparent lack of sense, through its strangeness and oddity, for the western minds and eyes. The **phatic** and the **poetic** functions of this exhibition have been sustained by the iconic language of Buddhist expressions. The impact and the attraction provoked by these 'visual enigmas' kept the visitors' eyes, long after they were dominated by the 'museum fatigue'. One could not actually stop looking at these images, in an 'effort after meaning' (Vernon,1974:71), in that exhaustive perceptive situation[7].

The codified nature of the characters and attitudes of these images, similar to those of a No Theatre, could only be duly appreciated and understood by those knowing the original codes[8]. For the western spectators, it was only the wish of understanding, of grasping a pale image of those codes that sustained the interest and the attentive search for knowing 'what that was all about'.

All sorts of 'aberrant decodings' could happen in this situation, and even cases of 'illusory perceptions', detected in the research, due to the excess of written and visual information, not clearly transmitted, in a labyrinth of different appeals. The diacritical mode of arrangement of the items, the repetition of very similar images, or the sudden introduction of a quite bewildering figure, without any

---

[7]M.D. Vernon (1974:71) explains the role of **inference** in perception, and mentions Bartlett's studies (1932) on the perceptual process of relatively ambiguous material, seen in short intervals of time, when the observers generally make an 'effort after meaning', trying to identify unknown forms and shapes, and usually connecting them with 'real things'.

[8] In Chinese theatre, the characters, costumes, gestures and music are signs for codified meanings, known for centuries, and the pleasure of the spectacle is to see, again and again, a 'text' one knows 'by heart'. The pleasure of the spectators is in watching the 're-presentation' of a story already known (see Brusák,1939, 'Signs in the Chinese Theatre').

semantic link between them, was a challenge for the receiver's active role in the interpretation of these signs - a process similar to that of filling up a 'cross-words' game in an unknown language.

The difficulty in the decoding process led to frequent 'undercodings' of signs and images, or to a tentative 'transcoding' of the meanings into the codes of Christianity, in an impossible 'parallelism': the 'haloes', the 'hells' and 'paradises', the monks, the preaching attitude of the Buddha, the ritual implements, favoured these comparative mechanisms.

The basic **iconic language** of the Buddha's hands, the '**mudras**''alphabet of sign-language has not been translated to the public, but is referred to in many of the labels and descriptions. This sign-language was a major resource for the Educational Officers and Lecturers in charge of guiding the visitors along this difficult road.

The **iconic code** in the curators' axis of signification was actually a skillful exercise of classification, of selecting and distributing the items in given positions and differentiations in the art-historical semantic field. As it has been said above, the 'speaking elements' of the iconic discourse were taken as 'semes' of the formal units, or 'morphemes', in the curators' discourse. The 'mudra', or gesture of reassurance, or of protection, is a mere formal element which compounds the whole figure of the Buddha image, its features and texture helping to distinguish the 'art-school' which produced it. The 'pertinent features' perceived in the material stimuli are not the same as those of the Buddhist Code. The perceptual model proposed by the specialists corresponds to a different 'semantic model', to a formal aesthetic model applied to the objects, in order to classify them.

The limitations of the **iconic sign**, in its variability, unprecise and ambiguous nature, make it unable to represent

immaterial relations, outside a highly codified system of representation, which makes it an easy 'prey' for Myth. Even when inserted in such a codified system of contents, iconic signs do not lose their semiotic power, floating on the borders of the aesthetic experience and the logical, rational one. These frontiers are those between Logics and Poetics, where open aesthetic texts are situated, ready to be 'read' from multiple perspectives.

This sensorial, sensible experience which is at the basis of the pleasure and the need of museums, can be easily manipulated by the Museum academic and scientific discourse. Trying to get control of it, museum speeches often empty this experience through the projection of arbitrary, taxonomic categories, which, however plausible, pertinent and generally accepted by social dominant codes, do not allow the visitors their freedom of decoding.

In the transmission of the preferred or intended message, the 'ideal narrators' built up an 'ideal receiver' who should be a passive, attentive reader, and hopefully as knowledgeable as themselves. The management of the **iconic code** in this exhibition attests, in the same way as in the **linguistic code**, the 'mythical' language of the institutional codes. The richness of the collections is 'paraded' to the public in these 'major shows', which reinforce the Museum's prestige and authority in the cultural world, and is presented as a natural and adequate result of expert museological work. As Barthes says,

*'what the world supplies to myth is a **historical reality**, defined, even if it goes back quite a while, by the way in which men have produced or used it; and what myth gives in return is a **natural image** of this reality... myth is constituted by the loss of the historical quality of things: in it, things lose the memory that they once were made...' (Barthes,1985:131)*

10.4 - The role of the Design Code in the construction of the narrative

'In passing from history to nature, myth acts economically: it abolishes the complexity of human acts, it gives them the simplicity of essences, it does away with all dialectics, with any going back beyond what is immediately visible, it organizes a world without contradiction because it is without depth, a world wide open and wallowing in the evident, it establishes a blissful clarity: things appear to mean something by themselves'
(Barthes,1985:143).

The organization of the complexity of Buddhism's universe into a systematic row of flat panels and showcases, with neutral backgrounds and a soft 'blissful' clarity was an evident consequence of the previous systems of reference and of signification of the Museum Code. The Museum **ideology** acts economically. The exhibition has been installed in a space formerly used for the Prints and Drawings displays. The flat plane of these displays could only admit a flat and linear disposition of the items, according to the Catalogue structure prepared in advance.

The systematic organization reflects the structural 'dispositio' of the Text. The numbered showcases, of roughly the same size, and the set of central panels used basically to separate the main areas, supported a discourse without contradiction, without any going back, and free from all dialectics (besides the criss-crossed references suggested in the labels). The lack of 'depth' in significations was visually translated in the lack of reference clues, of a dialectic arrangement of the items, of a tentative link between some objects, displayed in the simplicity of their 'essences'.

The drama and the conflicts which permeate the History of Buddhism were not present in that museological parading of meanings, built more in a 'chronique' style, or a 'report'

style than in a dramatic narration. The taxonomy of the collections and files was reproduced in the presentation, which was nothing else than a 'make up', or a 'cosmetic treatment' (in the words of one of the designers), trying to break up the monotony of this 'catalogue in vitro'.

The 'order of things' should not be disturbed, and should correspond to the analytical 'gaze' of the curators. The design of the exhibition should be like a good clean table, supporting the 'anatomical explanations' given to the public, and the light should be sufficient for the examination of the 'skin texture' of some of those 'dead bodies' on display [9]. The light was not always sufficient, however, for a good reading of the labels, as claimed by some visitors.

The efforts of those responsible for the design code have given a major contribution to the work, by trying to introduce some 'depth' in the established order. The use of large coloured photographs, showing the living scene of Buddhism today, as a background for the verbal and iconic text inside the showcases, or either at some strategic spots along the galleries, played an important **expressive** and **phatic** role in the main discourse. These images, as another kind of **iconic signs** of a 'framed reality', responded for the introduction of 'depth clues' in the flat perspective of the show, opening up a look at the 'horizon' of present Buddhist life, of monks preaching, writing, meditating, performing rituals and reciting 'mantras'.

The ability of speaking without words in the museographic expression system is well demonstrated in the display of a marble sculpture of a monk (Cat.n.233), set between two large photographic panels showing a real row of monks in almost the same posture. The 'stone icon' gained life, inserted, as a

---

[9] See Hooper-Greenhill, E., 'To open up a few corpses' and 'Looking at Museums with Michel Foucault', papers, unpublished, Department of Museum Studies, University of Leicester,1985.

visual bridge, in the perceptual field of the viewer, who could make the immediate connection between the lifeless figure and the vividly portrayed ones, between the 'sign' and that for which it stood for.

In another showcase ('lexia' n. 9), the bald head of a monk was expressively lighted, in an effective use of the lighting subcode, breaking the coldness of the manuscripts. The use of light enhanced spots has given some warmth and rhythm to the visual sequences.

The formal order of the items could only be displayed in seemingly formal displays, the shapes and sizes of the items composing another picture, if one could abstract oneself from the linguistic and the iconic denotations and connotations. 'Lexia' n.24 (Indonesia) was actually a 'melody string' of silent formal shapes. The use of neutral backgrounds, in different colours, for the main sections of the text, could be seen as a mere 'signalization' device, intended to make clear the exhibition's structure. The excessive role of the linguistic and the iconic codes has totally neutralized this intention, which was only noticed by 'professional' eyes.

The role of the **Design Code**, in this exhibition, was totally subdued by the work's 'structural matrix', limited to the task of constructing the visual sentences from their material, morphological and grammatical aspects, and of connecting those items in the distributional level of the text. The insertion of the photographic references was a tentative intrusion, from the part of the designers' team, in this extremely closed text. As Barthes points out (1988,e:99), there is an **homological relation** between 'sentence' and 'discourse', a formal nature of correspondence, and the distribution of the material in the museographic sentences could only correspond to the integration of the items in the curators' vertical axis of signification: that of Aesthetics and of Art. The 'Elocutio' was in accordance with the

'Dispositio' of the whole work, in the rhetoric of this museological speech.

10.5 - The level of 'narration': History and Discourse

The analysis of the level of narration is concerned with the discourse in itself, in its 'performative' aspect, constituting the 'Actio' of the rhetorical 'techné', the exhibition 'in progress', as presented and consumed by the public.

One has thus to analyse the 'forms' of this discourse, the implicit and explicit codes governing its performance and the public's behaviours, its interaction with the receivers and with the emitters themselves, the context in which it happens, and the 'museality' of the situation. The level of narration requires the analysis of the **system of museum narratives**, as it can be explored through one specific case.

From the analysis of the articulation of the units, functions and actions in the distributional level, and of their integration in the total whole, it is possible to detect the **montage code** used in the performance, corresponding to a 'structural matrix', and attesting for the 'competence' of the emitters in this museological speech[10].

The two main narrative threads , **The History of Buddhism**, its origins, legend and developments, and **The Spread of Buddhism**, in its geographical dispersion , are actually told, in this exhibition, through the signs of Buddhist 'expressions' - objects, scrolls, texts, paintings and sculptures (the 'iconic' code). This 'history', narrated to the audience, has a 'form', and a 'content', which can be represented through the following diagram (Figure 22):

---

[10]See chapter 5, p.109, chapter 6, p.151,152, and chapter 7, p.170, on the **montage code.**

```
Figure 22
                                          Content     signifieds
 'History' > Buddhist 'expressions' >------------>
                                           Form       signifiers
```

Fig.22: The 'iconic' narrative

The analysis of the level of **discourse** will demonstrate, however, that the narrative will refer to another 'history', or to one preferential aspect of Buddhist expressions: that of their **form**, disregarding the aspect of the **content.** We have thus another diagram, superposed on the first one (Figure 23):

```
Figure 23
 'History'                                Content
 ---------> Buddhist expressions > -----------
'Discourse'..................... >   Form     > Art history
```

Fig.23: 'History' as Discourse

What one has, thus, performed by the exhibition, is a discourse on 'forms', and as a consequence of that, a narration of another 'history', that of Art, which takes place on another level, of a sensorial, abstract, aesthetic nature, detached from reality and developing itself in the mythological space of the museum universe. Buddhist expressions are no more the essential subjects of Buddhist history, but the objects of an Art history, manipulated and explored by the curators. A history projected on another history, in a mythological superposition that can be demonstrated through another diagram (Figure 24):

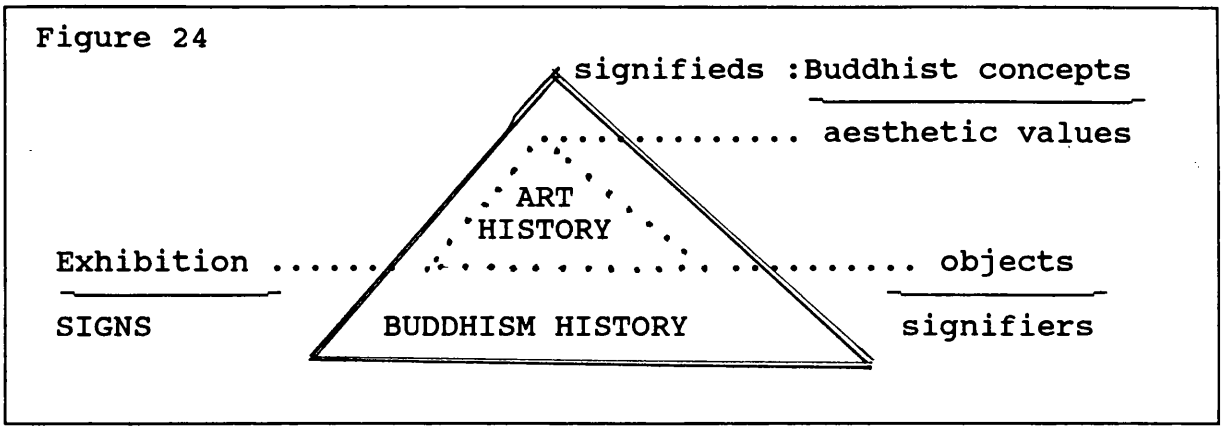


Fig.24: The superposition of 'History' and 'Discourse'

The exhibition is in fact a 'frame' imposed on the main subject of Buddhism, as a museological 'sign', standing for museological values. The objects are the sign-vehicles which support the 'meaning' of this 'sign': the aesthetic values of museum collections, and all their deriving connotations in the codes of 'museality'. The exhibition is actually a sign for the Museum.

The signs of Buddhist language, their signifiers in different materials and forms, standing for the concepts, the principles and the practice of this Faith, are shifted to an external space, outside the exhibition text, where in fact they belong, in their basic sign-function.

The narrative structure has actually two levels of reading: the apparent, superficial level of the objects, showcases and text panels, where the Faith History is reported, in a sequential mode (the majority of texts tell about the Faith history and developments, as it has been demonstrated in the preceding sections). The second level of the narration runs across the label units, as it has been shown in the analyses of the lexias, carrying on the metalinguistic, scientific discourse on the Art and the Art History, illustrated by all those items (Figure 25).

Figure 25

1st level = Iconic Code/Linguistic Code > FAITH HISTORY
[design code]

2nd level = Labels (metalinguistic code)> ART HISTORY

Fig.25: The levels of 'reading' the Discourse

Playing with the signifiers, and not with signifieds, the syntax and the grammar of the museum language could be, thus, free of historical or temporal constraints.

The **time of the narrative** is the present **time of the discourse**. Everything happens in the 'here' and 'now', and the references to the 'horizon of the past' are limited to 'the beginnings', to the origin of those objects before entering the museum atemporal space. The chronological 'time of history' is abolished from the start, and the items produced through many centuries may coexist peacefully in the showcases' paradise. The only 'time' which matters is the 'museum time', registered in every label, in the 'OA' - Order of Acquisition - and in its numerical sequence. Taken out of real time, these items acquire a 'birth certificate' as soon as they enter the Museum or the Library universe.

The **time of the reception**, following the **time of the narrative**, was equally an 'impossible time'. The amount of time necessary to read all the labels and texts, and to have a quick look at every item would be more than 6/7 hours[11], obviously requiring more than one visit to the show. Considering the time necessary to read the whole Catalogue, as a presupposed condition for an adequate understanding of the exhibition, it is easy to conclude that the museum time, or the exhibition text was an unending experience. The 'disabling' effect provoked a feeling of unjustified 'guilt'

[11]See chapter 11, Table 2, p.284.

in many visitors, who would assume their own 'fault' for not having read or seen all the labels and showcases. The relation of the narrator with the work itself was of the kind proposed by Todorov[12] as 'the vision from behind'. Every reference to an object or item in the exhibition was backed up by a wealth of information and of extra-textual references. The 'look' of the authors was that of specialists, seeing through and beyond the apparent surfaces in order to reach a higher level of appreciation. Mentions to other authors and to other pieces, absent from the presentation, reinforced the image of authority and of knowledgeability of the 'ideal narrators'.

This academic superiority of the emitters in relation to the receivers of the communication explains the **mode** of the presentation, which was not a 'parading of meanings', a representation of a dramatic context, but a 'parading of information' about Buddhism Art and Faith History. The discourse was not a true 'narration', but a rhetorical 'demonstration' of the knowledge and the richness of the British Museum and the British Library.

The way the visitors received this message and interacted with it will be further analysed in the next chapter, on 'Getting the Message'. The results of the data collected through this field research will enrich and complement the theoretical and analytical study made on the subject, and will surely open up other fields of investigation, from the starting point of this semiotic research.

---

[12]See chapter 6, p.154.

CHAPTER 11 - GETTING THE MESSAGE

CHAPTER 11 - GETTING THE MESSAGE

This chapter will describe and analyse the semiotic inquiry on the exhibition, developed as a case study of the process of communication in museums, in order to investigate the complexity and the modes of interaction of the public with a museological message and to propose a model for research and evaluation of museum works and concrete performances. The principles and the parameters for this analysis, proposed in the preceding theoretical chapters, will govern the aims and the evaluation of the inquiry, looking for 'meanings' and 'interpretations' produced in the communicative situation, and trying to detect the different modes of approach and of reading the museum message, in a qualitative, rather than quantitative, statistical or behavioural aspect. The basic aim of this investigation is to find out how the public gets the message, in the museum situation, in how many different ways, and how far these received messages coincide or differ from those intended by the curators.

11.1 - **Collecting the data**

The inquiry was developed during five week days, in the two weeks before Christmas, 1985; 105 questionnaires were applied to the visitors, chosen at random while they were leaving the exhibition main galleries. From this total, **83** responses were collected, and **22** people refused to answer the questions. The aims of the research were explained to the visitors as a private inquiry related to an academic dissertation. The reasons given for refusing the questionnaire can be listed as in Table 1:

Table 1	
'no time'.....	7 people
'feeling insecure'.....	4 people
'not interested'.....	1 people
'language difficulties'.....	9 people
'Christmas shopping'.....	1 person

Table 1: Reasons for refusing the questionnaire

From the 83 answers, 11 were given by people attending the 'study days' promoted by the Education Office of the BM; 72 answers were given by common visitors, with no help at all for the 'decoding' of the message. The total answers corresponded nearly to 10% of the daily visitors on a week day (around 750/850 people). The answers by oriental or non-european visitors (not 'english speaking') have been marked, but no consideration of sex or age of the respondents was specially made. One child, accompanying his mother, insisted on responding to the questions. The rest of the interviewed were all adults.

Besides the questionnaire, some oral interviews have been made with some visitors, who were willing to discuss the whole matter, chiefly after returning the questionnaire. Among them, five Buddhist monks and nuns (all English citizens), provided useful information and comments on their particular reception of the exhibition and on the differences in philosophical and religious codes which were at stake in this situation. An informal talk with a lady visitor, looking for a specific object she would like to see again, provided an unexpected insight into the problems of perception and interpretation in this museological situation, as a case of 'illusory perception', which will be discussed in this chapter.

The time of reception of the message

The incredible length of the exhibition was also checked through the questionnaires and visitors' behaviours, some of them looking tired and confused when leaving the show, and it could be measured,in our own experience of the visit, as shown in Table 2:

Table 2		
Looking at objects	: 422 items > 20" each	> around **2h40m**
Reading labels	: 422 labels> 30" each	> around **3 hours**
Reading texts	: 125 paragraphs > 30" each	> around **1 hour**
Minimum 'reading' time in order to see the whole exhibition:		around **6h40m/ 7 hours.**

Table 2: The time of the reception

The average visiting time ranged from 40 to 90 minutes. After the first 20/30 minutes, attention decreased rapidly, as demonstrated through the questionnaires. Most people admitted having read the texts and 'some of the labels' of the first 10/11 showcases, giving up after that by 'tiredness', 'fatigue', 'lack of time' or 'information overload'. The time span needed to look more or less attentively to these showcases (see chapter 8, Grid I, n.1 to 9) would be 20 to 30 minutes.

Reading the labels

The reading of the labels, or of 'most of them', presented the following figures, seen in Table 3:

Table 3	
Reading 'some' labels.....	94% to 95%
Reading 'most' or 'nearly all' labels.....	5% to 6%

Table 3: Reading of labels

This percentage will vary according to differences in background knowledge, as the analysis will demonstrate.

The questionnaire

The questions proposed in order to check the level of reception of the message (intended or not) and the interaction of the visitors with the exhibition were:

BUDDHISM ART AND FAITH

1. *What is the message of Buddhism?*
2. *From which elements of the exhibition could you get this piece of information?*
3. *Do you have any special background knowledge on Buddhism?*
4. *Which type of objects did you spend longest looking at?*
5. *Could you list up to 5 objects that you liked best?*
6. *Why did you like them?*
7. *Have you read all the labels? Why? Why not?*
8. *What is a Bodhisattva?*
9. *How can you distinguish the image of a Bodhisattva from that of the Buddha?*
10. *Did you feel you learnt anything from the exhibition? If so, what?*
11. *Would you give another title to the exhibition?*
12. *Did you have any special difficulties with the exhibition?*

These questions were proposed bearing in mind Eco's proposition for the semiotic inquiry on a TV message (Eco,1983), in order to check 'what the audience gets from a message', or yet, how the message, previously analysed, has in fact been received in a selected sample situation, in a

same environment - the Museum space, and under the same conditions of reception - the Museum experience.

A first set of questions were devised in order to check the **communicative situation**, or the **narrative situation**, considering the **channels** of communication and the visitors' interaction with the emitters' discourse:

Question 3 was meant to verify the 'commonality' of the codes between emitters and receivers, as the level of background knowledge may suggest.

Question 2 aimed to detect the main **sources of information** in the reception of the message: the **linguistic**, the **iconic**, the **design codes**, as well as the overall context of the exhibition.

Question 7, on 'reading the labels', was intended to check how far the **linguistic** code and the **academic stylistic** subcodes have been relevant for the reception of the message, the difficulties and problems brought to the whole experience by the 'controlling' mode of the verbal code and the level of frustration from the part of the receivers, faced with the specialized 'jargon' of the emitters.

Question 4 was meant to check the role of the **iconic** code in the perception of the message, the attractive power of the iconic **signs** and their effect on the reception of the message.

Questions 5 and 6 intended to develop the prior question, checking the level of **visual perception** and of **identification**, or **distinction** of the units and the level of **contact** and of **emotional involvement** of the public with the iconic signs.

Question 12 was proposed in order to detect the reactions of the receivers towards the exhibition 'discourse', in a critical or passive mode, accepting or rejecting the museological situation, and the level of frustration or of satisfaction in this communicative experience.

This same question was proposed in the interviews with the 'real emitters' of the exhibition, whose answers would explain, in a certain way, the problems in communication pointed out by the public. The educational staff would also

contribute to explore this complex situation and to point out the ways through which the problems would have been overcome.

Another set of questions was devised in order to check how the message (intended or not) had been actually received, in how many different ways, the reasons for the **effective** or **frustrated** communication, and how far the visitors had accepted or rejected the proposed message of the emitters, or had either projected freely on the exhibition their own ideas and feelings.

Question 1, 'What is the message of Buddhism?', was meant to verify how far the **basic concepts** and **principles**, proposed in the introduction of the exhibition, and through the sign-function of objects and documents, had been grasped by the public. The nature of the answers can attest for the level of abstraction and for the 'semiotic competence' of emitters and of receivers, as well as for the acceptance or the rejection of the 'preferred reading' of the 'narrators' discourse.

Questions 8 and 9 tried to develop this point, by checking the level of perception of signs/concepts, in the ability to distinguish one 'signifying unit' from another, very similar (Buddhas and Bodhisattvas). The competence of 'decoding' the **iconic code**, and of management of the **academic code** proposed by the authors of the text can be accessed through this analysis.

Question 10, on the nature and the amount of 'learning' in the situation, will help us to verify how far 'meanings' and 'information' had been got from the experience. One can thus check the amount of 'information' received by the public, in a passive or purely 'cognitive' mode, as well as the 'galaxies of meanings' which could arise along the active interaction with the exhibition.

Question 11 was meant to access the level of 'agreement' with the proposed message, the sharing of the codes and the homogeneity of the signification systems between emitters and

receivers, or either the level of 'rejection' and of 'decoding' of the 'mythological speech' hidden in the 'museality' of the situation. The answers related to the 'title' of the exhibition will show the 'preferred reading' made by the public, demonstrating the many 'different readings' which were possible along it.

The variety of answers collected through this questionnaire is not to be taken as 'statistic data', but rather as a sample of the 'productivity' of the exhibition 'text'. The concern here is not with computable results or findings, but with detecting some perceptible clues for the exploration of the field, as 'indicial signs' of the operative function of the museum language, in triggering multiple meanings and opening up the windows and the wings of people's minds.

11.2 - **Analysis of data**

Level of background knowledge

The answers to **Question 3** allows us to differentiate the total number of interviewed people (83) in three main groups, shown in Table 4:

Table 4		
Group A > No background knowledge >	47 people	(57%)
Group B > some background knowledge>	31 people	(37%)
Group C > special knowledge >	5 people	(6%)

Table 4: Levels of background knowledge

Group B refers to some background on Buddhism mainly through some **reading**, **travelling**, or through a **special interest** in religious studies, or anthropology and social manifestations. Six people in this group attended the 'study days', and one person was of Asian origin.

The 'special knowledge' **Group C** was represented by two ordained Buddhists, one person who attended Vipassana meditation courses in India, another involved with the 'Friends of the Western Buddhist Order', and one university 'scholar'.

Level of reception of basic meanings

The analysis of the answers to **Question 1** allows us to detect the number of people who could 'grasp' the basic message and the cases of total failure of communication (no answer) in this respect (Table 5):

Table 5			
Group A.1	> Failed communication	> 19 people	(40%)
Group A.2	> Grasped the meaning	> 28 people	(60%)
Group B.1	> Failed communication	> 2 people	(5%)
Group B.2	> Grasped the meaning	> 29 people	(95%)
Group C	> Total reception	> 5 people	(100%)

Table 5: Levels of reception of basic meanings

This point will be further developed in 11.3.

Sources of information

The analysis of **Question 2** makes it possible a further rough distinction between those who could grasp the general meaning of the exhibition, according to the different **sources of information** acknowledged - the **Linguistic** source, the **Iconic** source, or **all the elements** of the exhibition, as shown in Table 6:

Table 6		
Group A.2.1	> Linguistic source	> 11 people
Group A.2.2	> Iconic source	> 5 people
Group A.2.3	> All elements	> 5 people
Group A.2.4	> None	> 5 people
Group A.2.5	> Lectures	> 2 people
Group B.2.1	> Linguistic source	> 4 people
Group B.2.2	> Iconic source	> 5 people
Group B.2.3	> All elements	> 7 people
Group B.2.4	> None	> 13 people

Table 6: Sources of information

This question does not apply to **Group C**, the five people with a high level of knowledge and/or practice on Buddhism.

Those who mention the **Linguistic** code, the written information as the basis for their first answer about the 'message', refer to 'brochures, texts, labels, scripts, information boards...'

The group who acknowledged the **Iconic** code as the source of information refers to 'objects, paintings, sculptures, the expression and the attitude of the figures...' and to 'the Buddha, the easiness and the quietness of the face, the attitude and the manner it exposes to me'...'I didn't read, I only looked the expressions of the figures'.

The third group refers to '**all the elements**' of the exhibition as a source of meanings and information, as 'objects and written elements, maps, photographs, brochure and information cards (labels?), introductory prints and the first ten displays, the first elements, large statues and their descriptions...'

Those who did not answer this question demonstrated a kind of 'rejection' to the exhibition 'medium', stating they ... 'think they knew that before'... or simply, 'none' (elements).

Modes of interaction

Obviously, all people were subjected to the simultaneous semiotic systems working at the exhibition, receiving the varied 'inputs' of the different stimuli, whether verbal, visual, spatial, two-dimensional and three-dimensional, and were exposed to the subtle codes of 'museality'. The reference to one specific 'source' of information, in order to answer a 'cognitive' question, relating to a specific and complex 'content', may suggest the different **modes of approaching the communicative situation:** a 'rational', or 'intellectual' approach, looking for the verbal expression on texts and labels in order to support the 'explanation of meanings'; an

'emotive' or 'aesthetic' approach, rejecting the intellectual attitude and looking for the 'feelings' of meaning; a more 'open' and 'less controlled' approach to the whole museological 'experience', looking for the 'meaning' of this particular situation. This last attitude, denying the 'conative' or 'injunctive' function of the discourse, may reveal a subtle reaction against the 'disabling effect' and the feelings of inferiority resulting from the cognitive and sensorial overload provoked by this museum 'spectacle' (...'Think we knew this before...').

The recognition of one main source of information is, however, an indication of acceptance, or of rejection, of the rules of the 'game' of the Museum Code. It may as well be the case that this acceptance, or rejection, would include the filling up of the questionnaire, unconsciously seen as one more 'institutional tool', to which one is expected to give the 'right answer', in this conventional situation. As Eco remarks, any semiotic research must consider the effects it leaves on the exploration field (1979:29).

A significant aspect to be noticed in this rough sketch on the sources of information, is the predominance, in **Group A** (no-background), of the **linguistic code** as a support for communication, the equal level of reference to the **iconic code**, in both groups, the higher level of reference to **all the elements** of the exhibition, in **Group B**, as well as the predominance, in this same group, of the self-confident approach in relation to the communicative situation, rejecting the exhibition as a major source of knowledge, and attesting 'they knew that before'.

Reading the labels

The level of **reading the labels** (see Table 3) also differs from one group to another. In **Group A.2**, only **2** in **25** people inform having read 'most of them' or 'nearly all'. The majority of people invoked the lack of time to read 'all', the excess of information, the cognitive overload, the excess of details, 'detracting from the images'. One person refers to the museum context: '... when you think this is just a small part of the whole Museum...'. Two people declare their 'selective mode' of seeing the exhibition: 'not all exhibits interested me'. Many in this group declare openly their 'lack of interest' in the subject, and one person assumes his own fault for not reading all labels: 'perhaps too lazy...'. Some people declare their attempts to take it all, and their frustration : 'I've tried at first, just too many, too much information at one time'... and some demonstrate their 'effort after meaning'...'to try and learn about the faith behind the art', as the reason for reading the labels.

Only **2** people in **25**, in **Group B.2**, declare having read **most of the labels**, and one of them justifies the fact: 'to get more background information'. The majority of people in this group invokes 'lack of time' for not reading the labels. Two of them make complaints on the low level of light, or of the labels. Some express their preference towards the 'images': 'a picture is worth 1000 words', or 'I prefer looking at the objects when I am at the Museum' and declare the intention to 'read' the Catalogue later, at home; another succinctly describes what he gets from the written information: 'words, words, words...'.

One visitor assumes a critical look in relation to the discourse: 'I felt the scripts were too concerned with Rhetoric rather than the actual workings of Buddhism... unable to be digested by those with little background in the

religion'; another summarizes the critical situation of reading the labels: 'too many, too small, too detailed, no breakfast, no coffee', and a third one echoes the same feeling: 'How could you? too much detail...'. The external circumstances interfering in the process of communication were pointed out in chapter 5.

Group C, the five people with specialized knowledge on the subject, explain the reasons why they hadn't read the written information, pointing out to some of the fundamental problems in the exhibition discourse, and denouncing the Museum 'mythological speech': 'they didn't seem to say that much - mostly factual information about the objects, or a very superficial look at the colourful Buddha families... sometimes too glib to be true'; 'by and large I found them (labels) uninformative and distracting from really looking at the thing itself. Also they seemed to describe what I could already see, adding a few historical details, rather than place things in very much of a context'; another explains the exhibition ambiguous problem, and his level of frustration : 'Its the old difficulty of the difference between an exhibit and a spiritual aid. I found little feeling of spirituality - no music, incense, etc. to help settle and prepare the mind'. This visitor declares here the 'preferred perspective' according to which he has 'settled his mind' in this ambiguous situation.

11.3 - **The galaxies of meaning: the reception of the message**

Perception and Interpretation

The answers to **Question 1** cannot be checked against a given 'correct' model. To a nebulous content, a nebulous perception will correspond, showing the galaxies of meaning which may arise from the complexity of Buddhist expressions and signs. The inquiry intention here has been to explore this range of different 'interpretants', their insertion in the same 'zone of meaning' - the spiritual concepts behind 'representations', and the capacity of the viewers in grasping the 'semiotic power' of the images, standing for abstract and fluid signifieds. It is possible as well to get a measure of the distance, or the homogeneity, of the meanings grasped by the public in relation to the concepts and the general vision of the curators, proposed through the exhibition discourse.

Taking the different groups suggested, it is possible to compare and to analyse the different attitudes and responses to this fundamental question, a 'double question' in fact: the 'message of Buddhism' and the 'message of the Exhibition':

Group A.1 - those who gave no answer to the first question (a case of 'failed communication' in terms of the proposed message) explain, in some cases, the reasons for this failure : ...'not sure', 'no idea', 'don't know', 'I could not get it'; one person makes clear the reasons for his inability': 'I couldn't get much of it, mainly because it seems to be a completely different world from mine, very difficult to understand...'. This difficulty applies to all people who visited the show. Different cultural backgrounds and unshared codes will make communication impossible, if there is not clear information or proper translation of language, signs and codes.

Group A.2 - Those who could get the message, in this group, give synthetic responses, clearly based on the general 'collective consciousness' of Buddhism: 'to be good', 'to attain higher place', 'Enlightenment', 'otherworldliness', 'tranquility', 'inner peace', 'way to Nirvana', or simply 'it's just like a religion'. Usual 'connotations', related to religious matters, more than precise 'denotations' are expressed here.

There are yet many cases of more elaborated responses, which can be checked in their level of approximation with the curators' speech. Those who acknowledge the 'written source' as a basis for their answers, may use or repeat the terms used by the emitters: 'morality, concentration and wisdom', 'to attain Nirvana, Perfection and Enlightenment', and would even mention the 'cycle of rebirths'. These expressions appear frequently in the first texts summarizing Buddhism. Nevertheless, in this whole group (28 people), only two people admit having read most of the labels. Despite reading the first texts and labels, people in this group, with no background knowledge, were only able to reach the meanings of the written or visual expressions on a surface level, and the majority of them will project 'freely' their own prior assumptions on the subject. Sometimes, a totally different message will be 'emitted' by the receivers, as was the case of the young boy, who found the message 'not a very good one: perfection is never reached'. This is a case of an 'aberrant', yet lucid response.

People in this group who indicate the '**iconic code**', or yet '**all elements**' as a source of information were able to give more 'personal' and 'open' interpretations of the message. A chinese lady says this is a 'message of a certain faith and self-revelation', transmitted 'from the Buddha, the easiness and the quietness of the face, the attitude and the manner it exposes to me'; another person 'found the message

a way of peace in **almost** resignation from active life', explaining that this was the 'attitude of many statues and paintings'. This person could grasp a 'message' not explicit in the emitters' intended one: 'the syncretism with other religions and local culture'.

The five people in **Group A** who somehow 'rejected' the exhibition message, either by 'lack of time' or by 'thinking they knew that before', give more personal conclusions to the 'ignored message': 'to learn to control ourselves more than the body normally allows', or 'it's just like a religion'. In a certain way, these people are very assertive about their ideas on Buddhism, and take the chance of the questionnaire to communicate their **own message** : 'by following Buddha's suggested way of life, not only are you on this earth more fulfilled and contributive to all, but a road to possible Enlightenment is reached'. This assertive mode of responding to the communicative situation will be noticed in many answers from the two other groups, acquiring as more strength as more knowledge is involved.

Group B.1 - the two people who gave no answers to **Q.1** seem to have quite different reasons for the lack of contact, or of communication with the exhibition, and for the **non-reception** of the 'message': the first person, a European, explains his attitude towards the situation - 'Came looking for Chinese banners, but couldn't find them'; feeling frustrated in his expectations or specific interest, he 'only looked to whatever caught his eyes', and was attracted by the 'birth of Buddha and his lifetime, before the first images began to appear'. This information reveals, however, that the general basic structure of the exhibition was perceived, and its basic approach was grasped (the different sections and the formal, referential perspective of the discourse). It may also account for the 'attractive power' of iconic signs, 'catching the eyes' of the visitor, despite his frustration, but not

being able to establish a communicative interaction, due to the 'refusal' of the receiver.

The second person, in this case, was a Japanese lady who declares her familiarity with Buddhism since her early childhood, spent some time looking at a 'statue of Buddha', 'on the back of the corner', but who keeps a cold distance from the communicative situation. In any case, she declares having learnt something from the exhibition (Q.10): 'she was **glad** to have **such an opportunity** in a foreign country'. This answer may show a sort of 'emotive response' to the **fact of the exhibition** rather than to its **content** or **message.** The 'message' this visitor actually received was that of the 'social fact' of an exhibition of her original culture in a major European museum (somehow responding to the Institution's 'implicit message').

Group B.2 - some interesting facts can be pointed out about this group of **29** people who 'grasped the meanings' of the basic message:

a) the great majority of people have not taken the **written information** as the main source for the reception of contents (only 2 have read 'most of the labels' and 4 indicate the written source).

b) we have, in general, a different approach to the exhibition, showing more confidence and easiness in responding to the situation and in 'communicating' with the emitters and with the 'objects'.

c) the answers show a more interactive and critical attitude, receiving and expressing it more freely, and in different levels, the 'message' more in accordance with their **expectations, feelings, moods and signification systems.**

d) it is in this group that it is possible to find the **greatest variation** in the **level of identity** with the formulations, or 'intended message', of the emitters : from the **perfect reception**, the **acceptance** of the proposed message,

to the **different** or **particular** reception of the exhibition potential messages, or even to the **total rejection** of the 'intended' or 'explicit' message, in more or less clear ways.

The four people basing on the **written sources** their answers to the questions cannot avoid using some **terms** present in the introductory panels : 'the individuals are responsible for their own **salvation**'...'freedom from material being, freedom from **rebirth** to **Nirvana**'... 'spiritual **Enlightenment** through prayer, humility, **meditation**, free from **desire**, material greed'. One person clearly expresses her confusion to know 'where to start', stating that some labels were not very **helpful**, 'assuming a knowledge of gestures and positions' she did not have. These people seem to have looked for **help** in decoding the Buddhist codes as well as in decoding the exhibition discourse, which they 'accept', or 'take for granted' in principle.

The five people who took the **iconic code** as the source of information give simple and personal answers to the first question: 'uplift, spiritual teaching'...'thoughtfulness / prayer'...'Love, Wisdom'..., 'attainment of Nirvana'..., and one person declares the double source of his knowledge :' from the peaceful Buddhas, small sculptures, calmness, and from the knowledge of teaching'. Others attest for the 'visual perception' and for the 'emotional response' to the situation : 'from the treatment of the Buddha and the way people are meant to respond'... 'from the expressions on the Buddhas' and monks' faces', or 'I didn't read, I only looked at the expressions of the figures'. Another refers to the 'artistic elements'. As objects do not 'speak for themselves', it is clear that the observation of the iconic signs provoked interpretations corresponding to previous basic knowledge of Buddhism's concepts and attitudes, and to general basic attitudes related to 'spiritual matters'. The 'recognition' of forms and of 'artistic elements' (the 'treatment of the

Buddha', 'small sculptures') attests for the 'acceptance' of the emitters' system of reference.

The seven people taking from **'all elements'** in the exhibition the source of information and meaning could be considered a sort of 'ideal receivers group', or as the 'perfect clients' in the 'ideal narrators' minds (or for museum people all over the world): they seem to have captured the 'message', that 'pervades all elements'... 'from the entire context'... 'from various aspects through the entire exhibition'... and 'mainly from the explanations and the labels' as well as 'from the pictorial elements in the exhibition'; the 'message' is received in a personal and consistent way, from the **objects** and from the **information** received: 'that all beings can be saved from suffering'... 'progression through experience, oneness'... 'you become happy in Nirvana when you live following the rules of the Buddha'... 'Life does have a purpose. There is an ultimate goal - perfection of the spirit...'

Among the **13** people who somehow 'rejected' the exhibition as a source of information (**Group B.2.4**), three visitors show clearly the acceptance of the 'preferred reading' of the narrators. The first one refuses to answer **Q.1** : 'I don't think the exhibition addresses itself to this'. Being in perfect accordance with the emitters' significance system, he gets the intended message, as 'a greater **appreciation** of the **variety** of Buddhist **Art**'. He spends long time looking at the 'Buddha **figures** from the various areas', and enjoys mostly the **manuscripts**, because 'they were entirely **new**' to him. He is also able to distinguish the **formal** expression of the Buddha from that of a Bodhisattva and the exhibition fulfills his expectations 'because it was so **comprehensive**'.

Another person knows the answer to the first question, but does not think he would have got it from the exhibition alone; his knowledge, very superficial, comes from his

interest in 'religion as a whole'. Nevertheless, he learns from the experience 'the extent of the spread of Buddhism', and enjoys 'the stupas and their **development** in different countries'. We have here the reception of the intended message in a superficial level, from a particular perspective - 'I am interested in the spread of human knowledge and the ways in which this is done' - but nonetheless consistent and in accordance with the main proposed 'content'.

The third person rejects the first question, which answer - 'to live your life correctly, i.e., right thinking, speech, action,etc.' - was not taken from any element of the exhibition but 'from reading books on Buddhism and the life of the Buddha'. For him, the exhibition was not 'meant' to answer this, but, as he could learn, 'much on the **visual arts** of the Buddhist religion'; he is specially interested in 'bronze and wood representations of the Deity' and thinks the 'title' of the show 'sums up the essence of it'; he looks longer and enjoys the 'japanese reproduction in camphor wood' as it is very '**unusual**, spiritual, **elongated** and a **tour-de-force of carving** - Pity, it is not the **original**'. The exhibition has 'widened his **knowledge** of Buddhism'. We have here a perfect case of a perfect reception of the curators' message, a perfect 'sharing of codes' and coincidence of signification systems, according to the 'codes of museality'.

The five people in this group who 'rejected' the intended message show a particular and special reading, which in some cases reflects the 'archetypal' models of museum visitors. They are 'familiar' with the subject and don't have time to read the labels ('no more difficulties than with most exhibitions'), having limited patience 'to read small print in dim light'. One person knows 'the head' which interested him most, but does not recall its particular name; he enjoys the **objects**, because they 'arouse a feeling of devotion and clarity of mind - a meditative state, in other words'. The

signifiers of the signs do not have any **referent**, any 'extension' or 'intension' here, working as mere **stimuli**, as vague signs standing for vague 'feelings', in the 'content nebula' of the user's mind.

One visitor assumes a playful attitude in respect to the 'spectacle', seeing the Bodhisattva in a 'dancing mood' and getting the 'atmosphere' as learning experience (Q.10). Another denounces the exhibition's **event**, and makes her own evaluation of it as 'a positive way to be open in an occidental country'. Her view of the whole performance, or her particular 'reading' of it is expressed in the proposed title to the show: 'Tolerance and Expansion of a religion : the Buddhism'. One has here an interesting mixture of an unintended and an intended aspect of the 'message'.

One person in this group reaches the **highest level of rejection** of the proposed message. She is able to have a critical look at the exhibition, while enjoying and receiving the **signs'** multiple messages. She looks to Tibetan bookcovers ('a special interest and reading on Tibet) and to photographs of **modern Buddhists**; however, she 'must declare her colours', in that she is an anthropologist, and her interest is in 'social manifestations more than in technical craft details'. She finds the exhibition 'interested in the **relics** too much, and not in the **meaning** of Buddhism in the true sense: 'To me it was all too orientated to **Art History**. I found it very confusing. **Terminology** was not explained'. This person is able to take the objects in their **sign-function**, according to her particular perspective as an anthropologist. She is able to denounce the 'mythological speech' that has been pointed out throughout this analysis. 'I felt the scripts were too concerned with **Rhetoric** rather than with the **actual workings of Buddhism**, unable to be digested by those with little background on the religion'.

Another person in this group goes farther in the denunciation of 'Myth', introducing here the **political** aspect of the discourse: 'The Autonomous Region of Tibet is **only part** (about 1/6) of what the Tibetan government in exile refers to as Tibet - an oversight from you or are you following the Chinese line? Shame!'. The visitor uses the questionnaire to question and criticize the emitters of the discourse, showing an attitude of 'equal relationship' in the context of the 'great Museum'.

Group C - the 'special knowledge' group of five people demonstrate a total reception of 'both messages' presented in the exhibition, and there is one only case of total acceptance of the 'official discourse'. This was the case of the university 'scholar', who sees the exhibition under the 'lights' of 'academic thought'. He does not see 'one only single message' in Buddhism (criticizing the question) and does not think this level of information can be got from an 'exhibition of statues,etc...', 'unless the accompanying notices go into it'. He denies the role of exhibitions in transmitting abstract contents, and reinforces the importance of 'academic' studies, or of the 'written' information for the adequate transmission of contents and ideas. Nevertheless, he accepts the exhibition of 'statues, stupas and paintings' as very good for 'didactic purposes'. He enjoys these statues, stupas and paintings, the 'small, intricate bronze sculptures and statuettes', as well as the 'large gold statues', for their 'beauty, craftsmanship and artistic language', in the same way as the curators did. He is frustrated, however, with the section on Thailand and other S.E.Asian countries which look '**rather small**'. He makes no mention of 'meanings' besides that of the 'complexity' of Buddhism, and for him the 'aesthetic point of view' and the 'didactic' use of the items justify the whole experience.

The other four people in this group demonstrate a totally different perspective, as it could be expected from monks and nuns, and of 'believers' of Buddhism. Their 'preferred' and 'opposite' reading of the exhibition may attest for the many ways in which a message, in a same environment, can be received differently by different persons, nonetheless consistently, as Eco suggests (1980). Being western people, they have been able to decode the 'western civilized code', making a 'double reading' of the discourse.

'It is possible to be free in this life from the sources of sorrow, i.e., from craving, aversion and ignorance' - this answer is more a 'statement' than an explanation of meanings. This visitor admits that this piece of information could be found in the 'written elements' (which he has **read**), but says these elements would be **dispensable**. He likes the Buddha statues because he 'finds in their smiles the secret of an attitude to life that could lead to peace and enlightenment'. He is able to define 'what is a Bodhisattva', but is unable to describe its 'formal, aesthetic aspects'. He suggests another title to the exhibition, which is more like a 'preaching' : 'Buddhism - a way to happiness'. He has a critical look on the show : 'I found little feeling of spirituality - no music, no incense, etc... - to help settle and prepare the mind'. This person takes the signs of Buddhism in their **primary sign-function**, as 'spiritual aids', and points out the ambiguity of the exhibition problem : 'There is the **difference** between religious or spiritual aids - which these exhibits are - and an **exhibition** of them'. His critical look does not forget that he is at a **museum**, and he compares the experience with other similar ones : 'There is no **atmosphere**, like in some **American museums**, where you have a whole room or space of meditation. The music, the **meditation through hearing**, is lacking, as well as **incense** - the smell, everything that creates an atmosphere'. This visitor

acknowledges the potential of sensorial stimuli, used with a semiotic purpose, in the **effectiveness** and **communicative power** of museum experiences. Clearly, his **expectations** on the museum situation are not the same as those of the curators of the Institution: 'Also, there is too much writing; these informations you could take **from any good book**' (the Catalogue, for instance).

The most important remarks are made on the aspect which is latent along the whole show: 'Buddhism is also very **political**, nowadays, in Sri-Lanka, Tibet. This is not mentioned here'. 'Nothing about Zen Buddhism, which I think is a **form** which appeals more to the West. Nothing about centers for meditation and for learning about Buddhism here in London and throughout England'... Buddhism **today**, as a **living religion**, was the general claim and interest of many visitors, kept hidden and forgotten by the 'mythological speech'.

Two people in this special group were Buddhists, showing very particular and special 'readings' of the exhibition text. One of them reaches the highest level of perception of the 'Museum Myth': 'some of them (labels) have been written from a **certain perspective** that (she) personally may not agree with'... ' as coming from a particular **viewpoint**, one has to lay aside quarrels and disagreements with the information **as it is presented**'. In fact, this visitor shows a Buddhist attitude towards 'reality'. She freely projects the meanings she would like to find in the message, ignoring the intended or explicit one: 'Do what is good, cease to do evil and control the mind'; for this same reason she has 'no complaints' in relation to the exhibition.

The other 'ordained Buddhist' fails, however, in 'controlling his mind'. 'At no point could (he) forget that (he) was in a **Museum**' (Q.12). He shows his dissatisfaction' with the situation, and makes severe critics on the

exhibition, including on the 'design' aspect : 'Very few elements in the exhibition (Q.2) contributed to the reception of the Message of Buddhism - self-transformation resulting in spiritual liberation (Q.1)'. 'The emphasis in captions seemed primarily **historical** and **aesthetic**'. The aesthetic appeal is not rejected, nevertheless, when he chooses 'the Lohan', the 'seated Avalokitesvara', the 'large wooden Buddha's head' and the 'small Manjughosa', 'incorrectly labelled as Mansjuri' (Q.5). After 'correcting' and defying the curators' knowledge, he justifies his choice of these objects 'as **representations** of a spiritual ideal' and finds them 'the most **accessible** of the exhibits', showing an awareness of the different codes and of the difficulties in the decoding process from the part of 'lay people'. 'Perhaps', he admits, 'I found them more aesthetically appealing than the rest as well' - submitting himself to the 'materiality' of iconic signs, playing a major attractive role in the exhibition, beyond any 'conventionality'.

The iconic message

Questions 4, 5 and 6 were devised in order to check the level of **perception** and of **involvement** of the receivers with the 'iconic message' presented at the exhibition, in an **ostensive** mode of communication. The majority of the answers in Groups **A** and **B** will refer to general 'types' of 'signifiers', or to different categories of concrete expressions, without their **identification** or **distinction** as 'signs', or as 'cultural units' in a given system. The general answers to Q.4. (the objects most looked at) mention the 'statues of Buddha', 'texts', 'manuscripts', 'paintings and sculptures', 'scrolls', 'jewelry', 'woodcarvings', 'photographs', 'books', 'stone reliefs', 'fabrics', 'mandalas', 'figures in meditation', 'monks', 'temples', 'big

images', etc... The **forms of the expression**, as well as their **substance** seem to predominate on the surface level of the receivers' 'short-time' **memory**, after experiencing the overwhelming amount of visual and sensorial 'stimuli' along the visit.

The **response** to these varied stimuli is also described in vague terms (Q.6): 'intricate workmanship', 'histories of past time', 'they were beautiful', 'they are old', 'pleasing to the eyes', 'aesthetically pleasant', 'dynamic pose', 'very dramatic image/colours', 'very elegant, peaceful image', 'impression of calmness'. There is a clear response, in these answers, to the predominant **code** working at the exhibition discourse, and 'controlling' the reception: the aestheticizing look, the museological value, the sensorial impact of the items. Some 'readings', yet, escape control: a malaysian visitor mentions Borobodur, Kashmir, because he 'likes to see the scenes and the buildings', showing an individual and emotive response to the exhibition.

Some visitors would acknowledge the structural **taxonomical** and **geographical codes** proposed by the emitters: 'Kashmir ivory', 'Tibetan bronze', 'Thailand and Sri-Lanka stupas', 'Chinese exhibition', 'Oriental Buddhism', 'Thai pictures', 'Borobodur', 'Tibetan book covers', 'Collection of the Canon', 'Gandhara standing figure'. Very few could mention precise items, acknowledging their identification and/or recognition among the whole 'storage' of images and objects, as for instance :'statue of Thai monk with alms bowl', 'Samvara statue of Man and Woman embracing with feet', 'Gold reclining Buddha with stones', 'small Manjusri statue', 'two large Thangkas of Mahakala and Heruka', 'the Japanese merchant prince', 'large marble Avalokitesvara', 'seated Guanyin (China). One person 'draws' the image he was impressed with, not knowing its name : 'a wooden figure, very relaxed posture' (the seated Guanyin).

Those who could refer to precisely identified items could give more precise reasons for their interest: 'because they expressed an inward control and acceptance', 'interesting to see the ways in which message has been put across through different art forms', 'they all mean very differently to me, however they all stir up my emotion, my fear, my faith and my suspicion' (mentioning different items). One person mentions the sculptures of 'Jo' and of 'a monk', and enjoys them because 'they seem to know why they were made'. Another mentions 'the craftsmanship and obvious skill needed to make them'. The person who chooses the 'scripts of Buddhism' remarks 'the languages that Buddhism was translated into at such early time of civilization'. Every answer given in a more precise way reveals a specific kind of 'approach' to the objects, a given 'stipulation of pertinence' in the reception of the message, which may or may not 'agree' with the signification system of the emitters.

It is not possible, in the limits of this work, to explore every case of reception and of interpretation found in the 100 questionnaires applied. What is made very clear from the different answers and explanations is the variety of responses and of 'interpretants' given to the concrete iconic signs, the 'galaxies of meaning' arisen from their observation, and the different levels of 'signicity' recognized by the receivers in these objects.

The 'ball of clay'

In the work of observation of the attitudes of the receivers at the exhibition galleries, one case may account for the unexpected effects, most of the time impossible to be verified (one cannot enter into people's minds), provoked by the museum experience. This was the case of the 'ball of clay', which was being looked for by a visitor, in her second visit to the exhibition. She asked the researcher for help, in order to find it out, explaining that this 'ball of clay' had deeply impressed her, because of the symbolism of the 'sacred deposits' found inside it. It was not difficult to 'decode' the problem of this 'lost object', which was not, in fact, presented in the exhibition. In a given showcase (lexia n.3 -'Early cult monuments) there were shown some reliquaries and some pieces of jewelry found inside one of them (see p.207,c). The written text placed in the background provided the information:

> *'...During the restoration of the Mahabodi temple in 1880-81, a **ball of clay** was found below the Enlightenment Throne inside the temple. It contained coins, gold, silver, precious and semi-precious stones...' (Cat.nº 14,p.31).*

This fact can be seen as a case of 'illusory perception' of a 'ghost object', an 'imaginary sign' built up in the visitor's mind, in face of an excessive and confusing information, and resulting from the simultaneous reception of linguistic and iconic signs, in a stressful communicative situation. The emotive response to the idea represented by the fragments, the 'contrast', in the visitor's terms, between the precious stones and the 'mud' in which they have been deposited, has 'filled the gap' of the absence of the concrete signifier - the 'ball of clay' construed by the visitor's imagination.

Margaret Vernon explains this perceptual phenomenon :

'When they are unable to perceive clearly, people tend to fill out or make inferences from their immediate perceptions by using their reason or their ***imagination****... Even in cases in which* ***desire*** *and* ***emotion*** *appear to modify perception, it is never quite certain whether it is the immediate perception which varies, or the* ***use*** *which the observer makes of it' (Vernon,1968:241).*

The perception of the different objects in this exhibition was directly related, in the visitors answers and reasons given, with the **use** they made of them, as 'objects of knowledge', 'objects of pleasure', or as 'objects of devotion', as the questionnaires and the interviews may reveal.

Decoding, overcoding, undercoding

Questions 8 and 9 were intended to verify more precisely the level of decoding, overcoding or undercoding of signs in this exhibition, and the 'semiotic competence' of the receivers in **distinguishing** or **recognizing** two very similar units playing a major role in the narrative: the **Buddha's** and the **Bodhisattva's** images. The lack of knowledge of both codes, the 'spiritual' and the 'aesthetic', will be apparent in the answers. Only **9** people out of the **83** answering the questionnaires were able to distinguish the representation of both 'entities', in their conceptual and formal aspects.

The answers range from simple 'guessing' to unprecise 'elaborations' of some concepts and ideas found in labels and texts. Interpretations are many times given through analogies with Christian signs and concepts. The wide range of 'interpretants' proposed by the visitors will again indicate their basic frames of reference (formal, spiritual, intellectual, emotive etc...). We will present here some

examples, since the multiplicity of answers does not allow a more thorough discussion of every case:

Q.8 - What is a Bodhisattva?

'A living embodiment of Buddha.It's only a guess!'

'Buddhist monk'

'This is the bald stone guy sitting down with the yellow robes'(child answer)

'An embryo Buddha'

'A being delaying entry to Nirvana in order to help other mortals'

'A semi-Buddha who intervenes on behalf of those less advanced'

'A priest's attendant/ lay-priest'

'Incarnation of Buddha?'

'a) an archetypal Buddha figure; b) an enlightened being on the path to full Enlightenment'

'According to the information given in the Exhibition a person who delays his own enlightenment for the sake of others. This is incorrect'

Q.9 - distinction from Buddha's image

'Did not have time to distinguish'

'Buddha has 6 arms'

'Bodhisattva is emaciated' (see Cat.n.362,p.248)

'Bodhisattvas have a halo round their head'

'They are usually bejewelled etc... whereas the Buddha is depicted as a monk'

'In terms of artistic features, I'm not sure'

'Depends upon what country of origin the image comes from'

'I think it is the way they stand or sit'

'Buddha looks so aristocratic'

'Buddhas are usually yellow. These Bodhisattvas are bald' (child)...'That big fat golden chap!' (orally)

From some of the answers it is possible to suppose that many visitors have been aware of the distinction between the images only after reading the questionnaire. The only reference to the physical traits of the Bodhisattva's image was made in the label to Cat.n. 124 ('Padmapani' - haloed and with turban, princely figure). An explanation of the meaning of the term 'Bhodisattva' was given in the introductory panel, as 'saviour entities', and only nine times more, in the panel texts. From the uncertainty of the majority of the answers in relation to the two ideas and representations, it is possible to conclude that the 'academic stylistic subcode' has not been grasped by more than 4% of the visitors. A process of 'undercoding' is at stake here, giving way to 'aberrant decodings', or to 'free imaginary overcodings'.

The amount of learning

The assessment of 'what has been learnt' from the exhibition, or of 'what has been actually got' from the communicative process is again another 'open ended' question (Q.10), which can not be measured in quantitative terms. It is possible yet to detect the amount of 'information' and of 'meaning' registered by the visitors in relation to the proposed, the intended and the unintended messages which have been explored along this case study. These answers may also reveal 'particular perspectives' and the different frames of reference at the basis of people's responses.

In the single and quick answers given to the questionnaire one can only expect to find out a 'synthesis' of the multitude of meanings and information received or

understood. However, by the same fact of having to 'summarize', one might suppose the visitors have registered what has been thought to be the **main** information or meaning they have received through the experience. The visitors being already 'saturated' and 'overwhelmed' by the exhibition, short of time to leave, we may assume here they gave a first and immediate answer to the question, revealing what would be at the **surface level** of their consciousness and memory at the end of the show. Of course, there is the case of some visitors who felt more motivated (by anger, or by enthusiasm) to give more elaborated responses, justified sometimes on the back of the page, allowing a more precise and extensive feedback on their feelings and thoughts about the exhibition.

Some people, while not realizing that any 'learning' took place in the experience, indeed indicated in their answers to other questions how far they absorbed meanings and information, feelings and emotions, in relation to the 'message' or to the 'myth' of the discourse. The reasons for the lack of communication, or the failure in the contact with the exhibition will be analysed at the end of this chapter.

'Did you feel you learnt something from the exhibition? If so,what?

From the **28** answers given to this question, it is possible to list the main **contents**, ordered according to their frequency (Table 7):

Table 7

Group A

- Spread of Buddhism	mentioned 7 times
- Visual/Aesthetic information	5 times
- History of Buddhism	4 times
- Datelines	3 times
- Different types of culture	1 time
- Different 'types'	1 time
- Countries where Bud. survives	1 time
- Buddhist beliefs	1 time
- Scriptures & their transmission	1 time
- Different sects	1 time
- Types of writing	1 time
- Art appreciation	1 time
- Some general knowledge	1 time

Table 7 : The amount of learning

The same main contents will appear in the answers of **31** people in **Group B**, in more elaborated enunciations:

'A better understanding of Buddhism', 'Japan Esoteric Buddhism', 'something of the range of Buddhist beliefs and practice', 'a little bit, that there are such differences in the countries', 'the development, geographically and chronologically, of Buddhism', 'a greater appreciation of the variety of Buddhist Art', 'wider aspects, from different cultures, of spiritual expressions & cross-cultural influences', 'what is essential for Buddhism', 'I didn't know about Buddhism in Japan or influence on printing technique'.

Group C does not seem to have 'learnt' a great deal from the exhibition. Besides the university 'scholar' who learns the importance of statues, stupas, paintings, etc., for 'didactic purposes', the other people do not think they have learnt something, 'because I already knew a lot about Buddhism', or because 'I was impressed by the "Faith" aspect, i.e., so much evidence of faith in terms of the practice of writing out manuscripts', or at least that 'the art of imaginative exhibition design seems pretty dead !'

While in **Group A** we have about **17** people who could get the 'historical' content of the proposed message, **8** people who could grasp the art-historical, aesthetic approach, and **3** people more concerned with the 'faith' or 'cultural' aspects of the message, we can see the predominance in **Group B**, of the intellectual, informational, and 'preferred' reading meant by the narrators of the show. One person could grasp the cross-cultural and spiritual aspects of the 'history' of Buddhism. The mention to the 'visual arts' is more precisely made in two answers, and the exhibition 'structural matrix' is acknowledged by a visitor, who learns the geographical and chronological development of Buddhism.

Nevertheless, other answers in **Group B** reveal a more 'emotive' response to the show, some of them assuming and accepting the 'mythological speech', taking as their own fault if they have not 'gleaned' too much of it :

- *Three cheers B.M.!*

- *So glad to have an opportunity in a foreign country!*

- *A great deal. Excellent, interesting exhibits.*

- *No, probably because I did not stay long enough!*

- *Not really, but this is due to the lack of time and I am sure another visit is needed to really glean anything from it.*

One person, in **Group A**, was able to grasp a non-intended message behind the discourse surface, and that was *'the **tragedy** that the artists who created these works intended them for local use, not as "museum pieces" in a faraway Christian Land'*. The 'naturalness' of the Museum myth and codes is clearly denounced here.

Levels of interaction

(Q.11)- Would you give another title to the exhibition?

This question is a good thermometer for evaluating the level of acceptance or of rejection of the proposed message, and the different perceptions of the whole work, according to the different frames of reference of the audience. As happened in the other questions, responses are more precise and critical the higher the level of background knowledge of the receivers is.

- *'Depends what you think is Faith...'*

- *'It was more Faith preaching than Art'.*

- *'Perhaps the word Faith could be dropped as the exhibition has more learning towards Art than Faith'.*

- *'Relics and Art of Buddhism'.*

- *'Buddhism, a world Faith'.*

- *'Buddhism, an overview'.*

- *'Faith (Religion) is Art'.*

- *'Tolerance and Expansion of a Religion'.*

- *'No, this seems to sum up the essence of the Exhibition'.*

- *'No justification for the inclusion of the term Faith. "Buddhist Art in the British Museum" would be more accurate'.*

It would not be possible to explore here all these different views, or 'readings' of the exhibition, denoting multiple levels of interaction with the communicative situation, accepting or rejecting the institutional rhetoric and discourse. It is clear, however, from the analysis of all the answers to the inquiry, that the majority of the public felt dismayed, intrigued and frequently frustrated, while trying to cope with this ambiguous picture of the Buddhist

universe. The reasons for this fact can be more clearly understood in the analysis of the main problems or obstacles to the communication process, which could be detected in this specific museological performance and situation.

Obstacles to communication

The last point to be examined in relation to the communicative situation proposed and performed by the exhibition was checked through the answers to **Question 12** - the main difficulties with the exhibition. In a general survey we can list the basic reasons for the 'noise' in the process, as shown in Table 8 a),b) (see pp.328/329). These reasons were:

1.Lack of confidence in their own ability.
2.Lack of interest or motivation.
3.Cognitive overload.
4.Lack of knowledge of codes used.
5.Lack of time.
6.Submittance to 'myth'.
7.Different frames of reference.
8.Lack of a clear exhibition structure.

All these elements working in the communicative interaction of emitters and receivers will be apparent in the answers to the questionnaire, more explicit or implicit in the different questions. Reasons nn. 1, 3 and 4, listed above, will explain n.6, pointed out as 'submittance to myth' - the unquestioned acceptance of the Museum codes and the submittance to the 'preferred reading' of the narrative, without the sufficient knowledge of the 'academic codes', or of the Buddhist codes, in order to be able to 'disambiguate' the problem or to 'decode the enigma', what led some visitors to a stressful and frustrating situation. Reason n. 7 may be at the background of this 'disabling effect', and explains why so many questions have been left 'blank'. People in this situation said they felt they have 'learnt something' from the

exhibition, but could not say 'what', would not give a different title to the show, had got the information mainly from the written source and liked some of the objects 'because they are a branch of Art'.

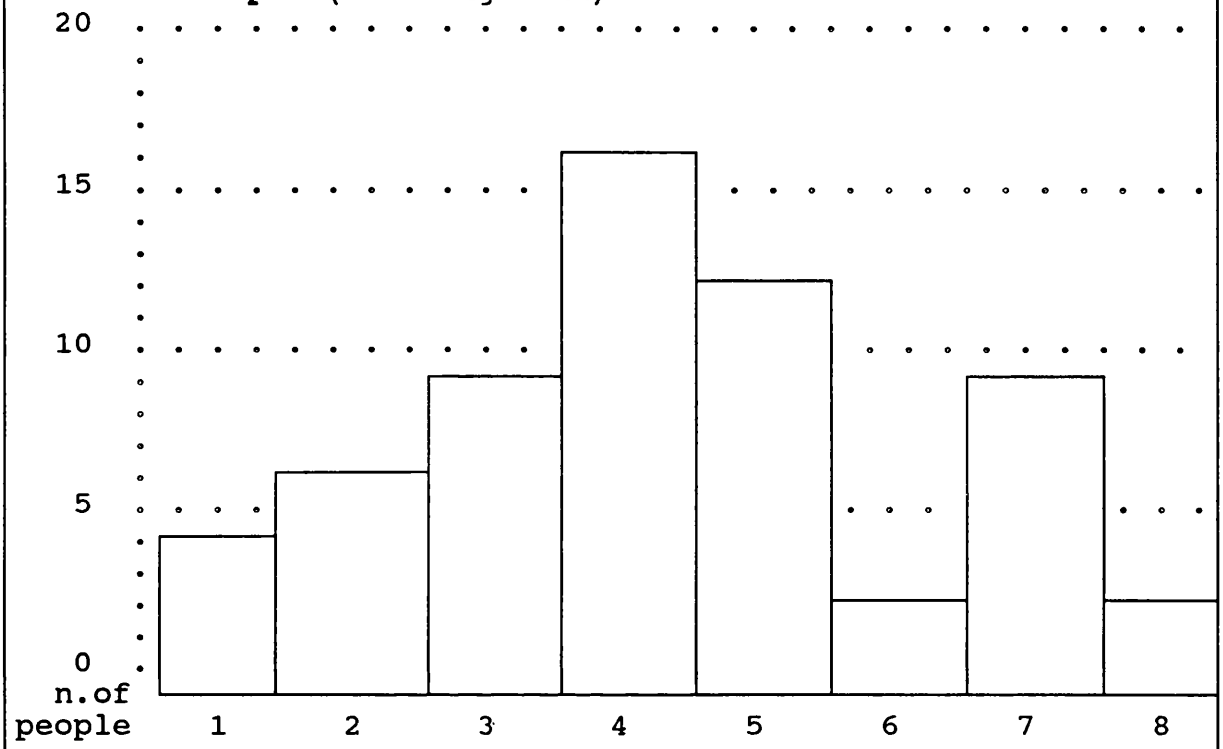
One person pointed out what she thought was the main **question** on the exhibition: 'There seemed to be no attempt to explain the nature of Faith in Buddhism. Perhaps the assumption is that it's the same as Christianity (which it is **not**). The prime interest seemed to be in **'objects'**,(as 'curios'), rather than in **communicating the nature and purpose** of Art within the Buddhist religion, which seems to be the purpose implied in the Exhibition's title'.

In this particular answer, this person gave explicit answers to the implicit questions and intentions of **the questionnaire.** Some of the answers related in this chapter have given to this research the particular approach and the perspective clues with which to interpret, or to 'decipher', the exhibition **enigma.**

We can only be thankful to all these anonymous visitors, without whom we would not have reached some kind of 'enlightenment' on this particularly rich experience.

Table 8 (a) Failure of communication

Group A (no background)

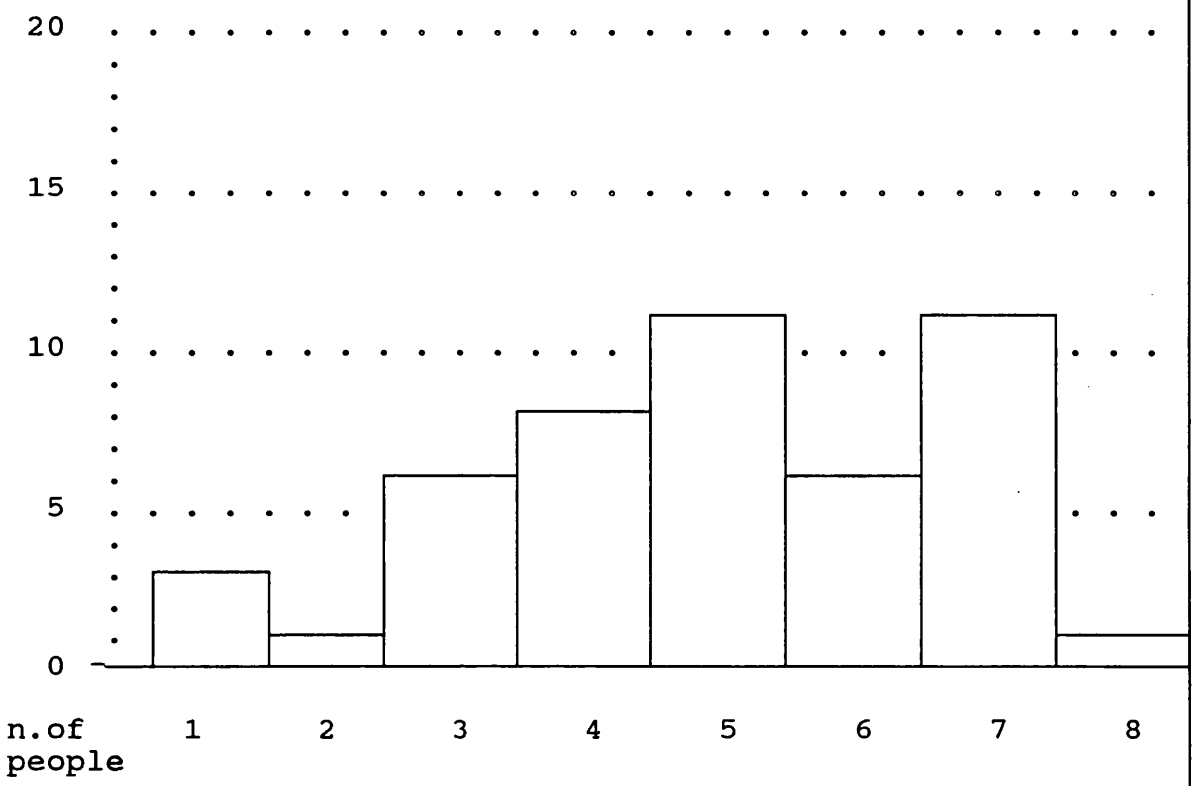


REASONS:

1. Lack of confidence in their own ability
2. Lack of interest or motivation
3. Cognitive overload
4. Lack of knowledge of codes used
5. Lack of time
6. Submittance to 'myth'
7. Different frames of reference
8. Lack of a clear exhibition structure

Table 8 (b) Failure of communication

Group B (some background)



REASONS:

1. Lack of confidence in their own ability
2. Lack of interest or motivation
3. Cognitive overload
4. Lack of knowledge of codes used
5. Lack of time
6. Submittance to 'myth'
7. Different frames of reference
8. Lack of a clear exhibition structure

PART V - CONCLUSIONS

Appendices

Bibliography

CHAPTER 12 - CONCLUSIONS

The Museum Semiotics approach

Insights on **Museum Communication**

Notes on the process: the readers' active role

Insights on **Exhibition production**

Insights on **Museum Education**

Insights on **Exhibition Evaluation**

Insights on **new fields of research**

Limits of Museum Semiotics

Final propositions

CHAPTER 12 - CONCLUSIONS: Museum Semiotics, an open field

The well known 'cliché', 'a whole is much more than the sum of its parts', can be applied to the analyses made in this 'case study'. As much as we try to capture the nature of this 'communicative experience' represented by the exhibition on 'Buddhism: Art & Faith', what results from it is a pale 'nebulosa' of the galaxies of meaning disseminated along the process of sign production and of sign consumption, in the minds of emitters, receivers and interpreters (including that of the researcher). The 'productivity' of this museological performance cannot actually be framed in the limits of this analysis. Would this be an utopian task, that of trying to find out the 'secret' or the 'essence' of a museum exhibition, the 'site' of its possible meanings?

Despite the limitations of telescopic lenses, scientists have never given up the challenge of counting and measuring the stars, and to find out more about their nature and constituent elements.

What one may discuss, here, as well as in any kind of systematic research, are the tools and the principles used in the exploration task, and the limited insights one may have in the development of such a challenging work. Even if limited to the angles of vision permitted by our own resources and perspectives, there are some clues to be noticed and registered in this work, resulting from the observation, through a 'microscopic' mode, of some 'fragments' and 'bits' of the experience, which may influence our 'telescopic' view of the real phenomenon. This view is not only an 'approximation' of the observed thing, but is also a 'reduction' of its real features, a point which must be born in mind in any research or interpretation study.

The Museum Semiotics approach

The semiotic 'lenses' chosen for this approach to the museum phenomenon and communication process have proved to be useful and adequate for the purposes and intentions set at the beginning of this research : the 'curiosity' and the 'need' to explore the museum experience, in order to understand its deep mechanisms, the nature of this process, its levels of 'communicability', and from that to reach its social role and the effectiveness of its 'action'. The dimension and the complexity of the problem envisaged through this exploration may only lead us to conclude that a lot of further studies must be developed on this subject, opening the way for new findings and conclusions, from the small pieces and limited data which could be gathered along the process.

The semiotic approach to the museum experience allowed us to see it under new lights, which are far distant from the traditional concepts and principles governing museum productions and analyses of museum communication. Through this new way of analysis, museum exhibitions are seen as 'open' texts, providing to their users and producers the pleasure and the excitement of engaging themselves in the cultural process, as active 'agents', 'critics' and 'participants'. The production and the exchange of meanings taking place on the museum stage enhance the value of museums as privileged spaces of 'social interaction' and as unique instruments of individual growth and of social development.

The lessons which can be taken from this sort of investigation may contribute for a greater awareness and understanding of the communicative potential of museum exhibitions and work, of the problems and mechanisms involved in exhibition production, of the specific nature of Museum Education, under these new parameters, and of the

responsibility of museum professionals (curators, designers, educationalists, evaluators) in the development of their work, which is basically a 'social work'.

As Eco proposes, 'there is a sign every time a human group decides to use and to recognize something as the vehicle of something else' (1979:17), but, he continues, 'the interpretation by an interpreter, which would seem to characterize a sign, must be understood as the **possible** interpretation by a **possible** interpreter'(1979:16). The idea implied in this postulate is basic for the theoretical approach we are assuming in this research, as well as for the conceptual redefinition of museums and of a theory of Museology.

Since human thought, knowledge and communication are involved, there is a semiosic process. Of course, other interpretations of the museum phenomenon are also possible, to other possible interpreters - from sociological, psychological, psychoanalytical, historical, aesthetical, literary, economical, political, industrial, architectural, technological and whichever possible perspectives.

Insights on Museum Communication

On the basis of the theoretical propositions developed in this research, and verified through the CASE STUDY, it is possible to say that the process of Museum Communication is basically performed by museum exhibitions, seen as the classical vehicles of transmission of museum messages, as a **process** and as a **product** of museum work. These messages correspond to the 'speech' of the Museum Language, as texts, or discourses on the expression plane of communication. The

narrative discourses of museum exhibitions build up representations on cultural reality, according to specific cultural, social and institutional codes.

In this process of communication there is an 'implicit narrator', an ideal figure who 'speaks' the curators' texts, and an implicit 'ideal receiver', who is actually the 'public', to whom the discourse is addressed, in equal or sometimes unequal relationships. These relationships are 'transactional relationships', according to the model proposed in this research, providing the opportunity for the emitters' and the receivers' active role on the process of sign production and of sign interpretation.

This process of communication is actually a triadic relationship between emitters - objects - receivers, a 'loving triangle' in which the objects will play a fundamental role of mediation and of signification. The polysemic nature of museum signs, their variability and multiplicity of contents, and the different perspectives or frames of reference through which they can be interpreted, account for the 'galaxies of meaning' which are disseminated through the exhibition. The material aspect of museum signs, as a first element of the Museum Language, may also have a semiotic potential and generate meaning, insofar as it is inserted in a system of signification of a given cultural code, or of the exhibition itself.

The museum context is a 'coded context' which may entail or induce certain specific denotations or connotations, based on the authority and the tradition of these institutions in present social systems, in the western world. Beyond, or behind the explicit messages proposed through exhibitions, there is a 'hidden discourse' which is that of the Museum Institution itself, which is seldom recognized or identified by the public or by museum professionals and critics. The rhetoric of the museum system may lead us to detect the

ideological systems which govern museum work and performances in a given society.

Semiotic research may provide us with the clues with which to decode the specific 'codes of museality' proposed through out this dissertation, helping the denunciation of 'myth' in the traditional form of exhibition discourses. This semiotic model of analysis will make possible, at the same time, the definition of what is the 'essence' of the Museum Language, of its 'poetic' and 'aesthetic' function, which account for the 'surplus' of the museum experience.

The reception of museum messages from the part of the audience is a process which cannot be controlled, but which can be directed, or suggested, insofar as there will be a 'stipulation of pertinence' of the codes, of the extensions and the intensions of the signs used in an 'ostensive' mode of communication, and insofar as these codes and stipulations will be shared and grasped by the receivers.

Notes on the process: the readers' active role

From the analysis of the data collected in the case study, on the multiple ways of 'Getting the Message', it is possible to point out some of the mechanisms involved in this process:

a) on the grounds of basic presuppositions and background knowledge, the users are engaged in a process of **abstraction**, from percepts to concepts, from objects to signs, and to 'sememes', or 'interpretants', 'mapping backwards' from the perceived structure of the exhibition and of its items, their possible 'contents'.

b) sometimes the users refuse 'to collaborate' or to engage themselves into the communicative process, projecting

freely on the 'message' the meanings they would like or expect to find.

c) this process of abstraction is actually based on **recognition**, through logical mechanisms, of the supposed 'meanings' of the signs in relation to the known 'cultural units' stored in peoples' memory and minds, as a result of previous experiences. Whenever the 'content' or either the 'expression' are new or unknown, there is no **recognition**, but a process of **inference**, or of **abduction**, based on known units and experiences.

d) whenever the correlation of signs and units is posited according to different or unknown codes, a first effect of 'strangeness' in relation to the situation takes place, leading to the questioning of the codes, the known ones and the unknown ones, in an 'effort after meaning' in order to detect the possible 'correlations'. When this effort fails, and there are no 'clues' for the correlating process, communication does not take place, leading to frustration or to a distant and cold attitude from the part of the receivers. **Motivation**, **interest** and **emotional** features of the receivers will strongly support this 'effort'.

e) when the 'expression' is already known, according to known codes, the process of **recognition** is immediate, even if 'aberrantly decoded' in relation to the emitters' intentions. The 'doxa', or the 'dominant collective codes' working in the situation, may sometimes introduce 'noise' in the communication (e.g. the popular western idea of the Buddha, in the figure of the fat laughing 'Buddhai', or yet the 'hippie' phenomenon of past years, interfering in the 'recognition' of Buddhist expressions in the exhibition analysed in the case study).

f) when the 'expression' is a new one, bearing some 'similarity' with a known one, of which the 'content' is already known, the process of **recognition** follows a two-step

flow: from 'percept' to 'sememe' (by similarity or contiguity) and then to the new expression (e.g. the Bodhisattva inferred from the Buddha image and concept, in the same case study).

g) when both 'expression' and 'content' are unknown, the perception and reception of the message will be searched along different paths, according to the users' motivations and interest, and their acceptance of the communicative situation. The context and the 'modes' of communication (the level of relationship established between emitters and receivers) will determine the effectiveness or the failure of the process (see chapter 11, Table 8, pp.319/320). In an 'unequal relationship', the receivers will usually make their own particular 'reading' of the message, ignoring the emitters' 'injunctive' discourse.

h) when the 'expression' and its 'content' are known, according to a given socially accepted code, but are used in the exhibition in a different context, as in 'metaphors', for instance (the Buddha image standing for Buddhist 'Art'), the message will be grasped insofar as there will be a **stipulation of pertinence** of the sign's use. When this stipulation is not clearly posited, the ambiguity of the expression will introduce more 'noise' in the communication process, leading to multiple and 'aberrant' decodings of the message ('Buddhism': Art or Faith?).

i) the interaction of **need**, **context(set)**, and **stimulus (signs) structure** will be at the basis of the receivers' active role in the communicative situation, promoting or blocking their **semiotic competence** in relation to the experience.

Insights on Exhibition production

The **selection**, the **articulation** and the **integration** of the signs, or elements of the museum discourse, are the fundamental mechanisms of what can be called the Museum Language, generating a specific grammar, and based on expressive codes which can be pointed out, basically, as the **iconic**, the **linguistic**, and the **design**, or **museographic** codes. The intersection and the hierarchy of these codes will respond for the exhibition semiotic potential, leading to a productivity of meanings in the space and the time of the exhibition, in a sort of 'semiotic battlefield'.

The consideration of museum objects as performing sign-functions in the construction of exhibition texts will lead to the exploration of the semiotic power of these different codes and of their subsidiary 'lexicons', supporting the conscious production of meaningful discourses. The awareness of the 'semiotic competence' of the audience, of the mechanisms involved in the 'reading' process, pointed out above, and of the specificity of the Museum Language in the management of different semiotic codes, may contribute to the effectiveness of the communication, avoiding the 'disabling effects' resulting from the 'cryptographic task' of decoding academic or scientific codes, or from the tiring and tedious effort of reading an encyclopaedia 'in vitro'.

The rhetorics of museum exhibitions, their **montage code**, which governs their 'structural matrix', organizing the contents and the successive enchainment of the narrative, will respond to the 'communicability' and the 'effectiveness' of the discourse, in its capacity to persuade and to move the audience; the 'form of the contents', their intratextual and extratextual correlations with other cultural codes and texts, may account for the 'meaning' of the exhibition, in the broader context of social and cultural systems.

The creative and purposeful juxtaposition of museum signs, their opposition or contrasts in a museological 'sentence', may be responsible for new 'effects of meaning' in the minds of the receivers, leading them to challenge or to re-examine existing dominant codes. In this sense, it is possible to speak of a 'Museum Art', of a 'competence' of museum emitters in the creation of a diversity of exhibition 'forms', which may bear a 'poetic', or 'lyric' nature, a 'narrative' or a 'dramatic' style, a 'report' or 'critical' vision on the subject presented to the public.

The recognition of museum exhibitions as 'open texts', or as 'aesthetic texts', in their pluri-semantic nature, may change the relationship between museum authors and their active reading public, to whom it will be allowed their 'freedom of decoding'. In this way, the traditional authoritative and injunctive discourse of museum emitters, in their 'controlling mode' of proposing statements about the world and about cultural facts, will give way to a more democratic and dialogical interaction with their public.

The awareness of the semiotic nature of museum exhibitions, of the mechanisms and processes of sign production and of sign interpretation is essential for museum curators, educationalists and producers, if they want to explore the full potential of the Museum communicative power. This awareness is also of fundamental importance in order to evaluate the responsibility of museum agents in the construction of their discourses on the many cultural languages, chiefly on minority or unknown cultures, which are easily misinterpreted or disregarded as specific signification systems, when subjected to the academic perspective of the museum system.

When codes are not shared between emitters and receivers, it is possible at least to search for a 'mutual cognitive environment', in which both parts of the process recognize and

are aware of the mutual intentions of communicating, and of the many obstacles to the process. The intentions to communicate must be made clear to the public, through the clarity and the homogeneity of the codes used, the explanation of the exhibition 'structural matrix', of the frames of reference chosen by the narrators, the disambiguation of complex contents and the stipulation of pertinence of the exhibition signs, looking for a clear and coherent message.

In the exhibition analysed in the case study, we can see an example of an 'impossible communicative situation', similar to the impossible figures of perceptual illusions. The ambiguity of the two 'isotopies' of the proposed text - Buddhism as Art, or as Faith - could not be solved by the receivers due to the lack of clues and of defined perspectives of approach. The lack of a clear structure in the exhibition, and the pervasiveness of the ambiguous approach to an already 'nebulous' theme, were one of the main obstacles for the effectiveness of the communication. Besides this fact, the 'ideal narrator' of the message was actually a 'multivoiced speech' produced by 15 different curators from the BM and the BL. The long interviews with the curatorial staff of both Institutions may explain some of the problems detected through out this research in this complex communicative situation. Different kinds of expertise, of points of view, lack of sufficient contact between those involved in the preparation of the work (designers, educational staff), changes in the curatorial staff, and the structural organization of the Institutions themselves, could not support an 'homogeneous' approach towards what should or could be said and exhibited. The conceptual 'clashes' resulted consequently in an intricate and confusing structure of the performance, difficult to be 'digested' or understood by the public, who had as its only saviour guides the educationalists in charge of the gallery talks and study days.

The role of the educational staff of the B.M., as 'translators' of this museological message, was a major tool for the establishment of a 'mutual cognitive and communicative environment' in that exhibition. Choosing another 'structural matrix', different from that proposed by the curators and designers, in order to build up a more coherent and easy 'narrative thread', and starting from the explanation of basic concepts and principles necessary for the decoding of the 'iconic language' of Buddhist signs (e.g., the 'mudras' sign-language), these 'semiotic translators' would consider the basic knowledge of their audience in their explanations of meanings and significations. In their interaction with the public, they proposed comparisons with known codes and popular assumptions on the subject (e.g., Christian and Jewish basic ideas), situating Buddhist 'phenomenology' in the temporal and historical universe where it did happen, and answering all sorts of questions proposed by the visitors. The references and the knowledge of Buddhism today were also a subject of discussion in this interactive process, attending to the primary expectations and interest of the public. This interaction was a balanced one, in an equal relationship, that promoted and facilitated communication.

By sharing their extended knowledge on 'Art' as well as on 'Faith' aspects, and by their familiarity with the collections, educationalists were able to reach the 'zones of proximal development', in Vygotsky's terms (1978), as a way to help people to understand and to know what could seem 'unknowable' and 'ungraspable', in this rich museum experience.

This revolutionary theoretical proposition, discussed in Vygotsky's studies on the development of higher mental

processes, and on the links between learning and development in children, refers to the distance between the **actual developmental level**, as determined by independent problem solving, and the **level of potential development**, as determined through problem solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers.

This proposition can be also applied to the problems of **cultural development** in societies, and could be usefully taken, as fundamental for the understanding of the museum educational role, both with adults and children.

'Human learning presupposes a specific social nature and a process by which children grow into the intellectual life of those around them' (Vygotsky, 1978:88).

By equating the use of signs with the use of tools, in human activities, Vygotsky developed a deep study on the links between these two mediating devices. Like tool systems, sign systems develop and change with society.

'The internalization of culturally produced sign systems brings about behavioural transformation and forms the bridge between early and later forms of individual development' (Vygotsky, 1978:7).

The capacity of using abstract auxiliary signs to govern his movements is a major step in child's development of higher mental functions. In this process,

... *'children are capable of reconstructing their perception and thus freeing themselves from the given structure of the field'... 'with the help of the indicative function of words, the child begins to master his attention, creating new structural centers (" centers of gravity") in the perceived situation'* (Vygotsky, 1978:35).

It is possible to take Vygotsky's theories on the internalization process of perceived stimuli, and on the role of visual imagery in memory and thought processes, in order to explore the use of museum concrete signs in the development of children and adult higher mental functions. This is a field

open to exploration, if we accept the tools of semiotic theory for the development of this task.

The receivers' active role discussed in the precedent paragraphs will be another subject of exploration in Museum Education activities and programs, which will require the 'semiotic competence' of museum educators in their interaction with their public. From this point of view, Museum Education will not be reduced to a mere task of transmission of informations, a pedagogical or didactic role of 'teaching' established concepts and propositions, but will actually be changed in a mediating work, a developmental work of fostering individual and social capacities and memory.

> *'The spider carries out operations reminiscent of a weaver and the boxes which bees build in the sky could disgrace the work of many architects. But even the worst architect differs from the most able bee from the very outset in that before he builds a box out of boards he has already constructed it in his head. At the end of the work process he obtains a result which already existed in his mind before he began to build.'*
> (Karl Marx, **Capital**, quoted in Vygotsky,1978).

The fundamental role of Museum Education would be thus, in this perspective and theoretical frame, that of enriching and extending people's 'furniture of the mind' (Allison, 1986), through the exploration and knowledge of the materials, the forms and the contents of museum signs.

Insights on Exhibition Evaluation

The great majority of researches and models of exhibition evaluation focused, until recently, the 'quantitative' rather than the 'qualitative' aspect of museum experiences. Pragmatist and behaviouristic approaches usually concentrate on the 'measurement' of the levels of attention, of labels readability, of exhibits 'holding power', of the length of time spent in the exhibition space, of interaction with different educational devices, of the movements and the

attitudes of the visitors along their way through exhibitions (see Griggs,1986, Screven,1984). On the basis of these researches and studies, there is a basic principle borrowed from the school system, which is the measurement of the 'amount of learning' acquired after exposure to museum exhibitions. The importance of these studies is not to be disregarded, even if subjected to intense discussions in the Museum Education field (Hein,1991, Lawrence,1991).

As George Hein points out, however,

> ... *'a museum experience is most often a small part of a child's life, overshadowed by many other experiences'. 'The majority of these studies involve measuring learning by paper and pencil tests after a period of instruction', says Hein, but 'this does not tell us much about the nature of the museum experience'* (Hein, 1991:54).

The model of exhibition analysis proposed in this research aims to explore and to investigate the nature of this experience, not in its 'quantitative' aspects of learning and behavioural changes hypothetically resulting from a visit to a museum.

> *'Testing, based on pedagogic notions of learning, will inform us of the extent to which museums have acted like schools, but it cannot discover the unique role that museums can play'* (Hein,1991:54).

It is this 'unique role', the 'museality' of this situation, that the investigation developed in this study aims to demonstrate .The specific nature of museums, seen as 'semiosic spaces', offering the opportunity for the generation of multiple meanings, in a creative interaction between emitters- objects- receivers, can be better understood and evaluated through this new kind of research, with more fruitful results for the understanding of the way people perceive, understand and interact with the concrete reality and with cultural expressions. The studies of Piaget, Vygotsky and Luria on the development of logical thinking patterns may be the references for this kind of research.

Lotman's studies on language teaching have shown the mechanisms of this process, whereby adults are usually introduced to an unknown language by means of rules, while a child, on the contrary, is trained through a continuous exposure to pre-fabricated 'strings of language', which he is expected to absorb even though not completely conscious of language rules (Eco,1979:138). Children usually learn by a process of undercoding, of grasping more 'macro-units' before understanding single units and their regulating codes. The more 'scientific' the mind and societies become, the more they will tend to codify contents, and to attribute more analytic rules to common codes, in a process of overcoding (Eco,1979:138,139).

Museum experiences may be seen, under a semiotic approach, as spaces where the exposure to cultural languages may contribute for the development of children and adult thinking, and for promoting changes in their way of seeing the world. The investigation of the nature of these alternative educational environments (as opposite to the traditional school settings), will allow us to change the way of producing and of evaluating museum experiences, and to look for new ways of promoting a 'long term involvement with the world of objects', as Hein (1991) proposes.

This involvement and the pleasure of these experiences cannot be 'measured' in quantitative terms, but can be proposed as a desired outcome of the Museum intrinsic 'educative nature', as a tool for the development of adult and children capacities and creative spirit. The differences in children and adult approaches to museum exhibitions can be clearly analysed from these observations. The museum communicative situation is a good laboratory experience for the detection and the developing of these competencies and processes.

In this sense, different kinds of exhibition evaluation started, in recent times, to focus their attention on the social aspects of the museum experience (Merriman,1989) and on the signification and psychological/cognitive/emotional mechanisms which take place in visitors interaction with this experience (Dufresne-Tasse,1991). In respect to Museum Evaluation research, it is important to remember that this kind of study aims to investigate the **social world**, and not the **natural world.**

Insights on new fields of research

The investigation of the museum semiotic nature, of the qualitative and the essential characteristics of the museum phenomenon and experience, the laws which govern their processes and productions, their causes and effects, requires the formulation of principles and concepts which are specifically relevant to this field. In museological research, paraphrasing Vygotsky, 'one has to create one's own Capital' (Vygotsky,1978:8)[1].

The ambiguity of museum messages and the switching codes of the museum language would require a deeper analysis of the perceptual problems and processes involved in the museum communicative situation, which have been only superficially approached in this research. Further studies should be developed from this starting point in order to analyse perceptual and cognitive problems, the role of emotive factors and of individual needs and backgrounds in the process of perception and interpretation, which were not in the scope of

[1]Vygotsky' quotation is taken from unpublished notebooks referred in the editors' preface to *Mind in Society - the development of higher psychological processes*, edited by M.Cole et al. 1978:8.

the present work, but which must necessarily be developed in order to duly explore the nature of the museum experience.

A further exploration of each one of the different semiotic systems interacting in the museum communication process is also necessary, if their particular and mutual effectiveness are to be better understood, and if the specific 'codes of museality' are to be duly analysed, in a universal perspective.

The attention to the special conditions of communication, to the concrete and empirical situations in which signs and texts are produced, out of social signification systems, the recognition that signs themselves are the product of social divisions and of power struggles, in which the definitions of one class or group or people prevail over those of other groups, are essential steps for any critical analysis of communication, texts and discourses. Rhetorical analyses may be useful tools for the study of a semiotics of discourse, in the identification of the social relations of signification, of different meaning and expression systems, which must be taken into account in the interpretation of any communicative act.

The meaning of the present research on museum semiotics can only be duly accessed when considered in relation to all the many studies in the museum field, and would certainly acquire a specific meaning when considered in the social, political and cultural context of a developing country, where it has been produced. It can be differently analysed in relation to the broader field of semiotic and communication studies, or of cultural studies in general.

A diachronic and a synchronic study of museum works and texts would thus be relevant and necessary for the understanding of the museum phenomenon and experience as they manifest themselves in particular cases and specific productions, in order that the meanings and the specific

character of each one of these manifestations may be properly grasped, what can open the field of studies of 'comparative museology'. This study is relevant not only for the definition of the different museological 'grammars', or systems of museum language, along time and social contexts, showing their change and evolution in paradigmatic and syntagmatic structures, as for cultural and social studies in a broader sense.

As Lotman proposes, one of the fundamental characteristics of culture stands in its relationship with its signs, or in its 'signicity' (Lotman,Uspenskii,1981:45). It was not in the scope of this research to develop such study, but to propose a basic and preliminary model, based on the application of semiotic research, for the analysis of museum texts and discourses, which may be useful for such 'comparative' studies, from a synchronic and a diachronic perspective.

Limits of Museum Semiotics

What would be the limits of our approach? We do not intend to say here that Museology is **only** communication and signification, but that, paraphrasing Eco on his conception of culture, Museology and museum practice should be studied **as** a communicative phenomenon. To put forward Eco's theory from a museological perspective, we could say that the whole of culture **can** be studied 'sub-speciae museologica'.

The extended concept of museums developed recently by museological studies and by emerging new forms of these institutions - as for instance of eco-museums, integrated or 'total' museums, neighbourhood or community museums, 'heimat' and territorial museums, outreaching the traditional museums 'under roof', or 'between walls' (Desvallés,1987), supports and justifies this idea.

The analysis of cultural processes, taken as communicative processes in different cultural languages, translated into museological 'texts', is thus the field to be explored by Museum Semiotics. In this view, we can accept the proposal of modern semiotics, chiefly the ideas of Julia Kristeva (1967), on the expansion of the semiotic field, and demonstrating the 'isomorphism' of semiotic practices with the other complexes of our universe.

If Museology is a specific discipline, using material from different fields of studies, with its own method, and a precise object of studies, we must necessarily define this method and this precise object, in order to distinguish it from other disciplines, including that of Semiotics.

This specific object of Museology could be defined through its 'surplus', i.e., that which differentiates and distinguishes Museology from its borderline disciplines and establishes its limits and frontiers of action, basing the inclusion or exclusion of the various studies from its broad field: this precise object could be defined as **the study of cultural processes and phenomena with the aim of preserving their expressions and contents, in order to communicate them to society, and to commit them to social memory, as a support for social development, understanding and action.** 'Committing to memory' (Memoria) was actually the last and final operation of the rethorical 'techne' of greek and roman orators, the end and the purpose of any rethorical discourse, aimed to convince or to persuade the audience, and to move it to action.

The museological field is determined by this basic postulate of **preservation** and of **transmission** of the memory on these facts and processes, in order to support further

action, and under this aspect, the transmission of cultural heritage is again a communicative process.

'One cannot do theoretical research', says Eco, *'without having the courage to put forward a theory, and therefore, an elementary model as a guide for subsequent discourse; all theoretical research must however have the courage to specify its own contradictions, and should make them obvious where they are not apparent'* (1979:7).

The semiotic model of investigation was proposed, in this research, as a guide for our own and for other subsequent discourses, as a parameter on which to base, deductively, the studies and the pragmatics on the field.

The specific nature of museum signs, the specific nature of the museum context and the variability of its circumstances would be enough to prove the specificity of our theoretical research, in which the pragmatic level must be as important as the semantic one; by saying that, we are already pointing out a specific weakness or perhaps a contradiction in our work. While developing the research on the basis of our previous experience in museum work, and concentrating our efforts in one specific 'case study' - the exhibition on 'Buddhism, Art & Faith'- in order to verify the validity of our proposition and the obstacles to its applications, we have not explored enough the field of concrete and diverse museological experiences, and verified all the possible occurrences and variations of the proposed model. We may be accused of lack of investigation on the pragmatic level, in the analysis of different museum 'speeches' or 'discourses' that would support our theory; we can say, therefore, that what we are proposing is an 'elementary model' from which, we believe, a whole range of studies could be developed, opening up a vast field of exploration for museum investigators and practitioners.

From this basic and preliminary approach, synchronic and diachronic studies should be possible, in order to explain and to understand the general language of museums today and along

their history and different manifestations, in its semantics (conceptual codes), syntactics (special styles and modes) and pragmatics (social role and functions).

The boundaries of Museum Semiotics, as the semiosic phenomenon itself, are fluid and difficult to limit; the studies on Communication and on Perception may deepen and widen this exploration. Studies on cognitive processes, on aesthetics and poetics, may help us to dig more into the field of human experience. Going deeper into this field, we may find the possibility of applying the findings of Psychoanalysis and of Social Psychology in the understanding of the semiotic phenomenon, and it would be actually possible to analyse, through their concrete manifestations and behaviours, the emitters' and the receivers' unconscious and subconscious inputs, manifested and responsible for many different 'frames of mind', for multiple encodings and decodings of messages, which take place at the museum context. Museum exhibitions and expressions are a good example of what Derrida calls 'collective texts', based on this interplay of subjective and collective forces, which determine social interaction. The understanding of these forces, crystallized in museum signs, reduced and condensed in the museum phenomenon, is a form of contributing to the development and enrichment of social life, and for the construction of a more democratic society, free of all 'tutorship' and better prepared for mutual understanding.

Final propositions

The exploration of the continuum, or the 'matter' of cultural expressions, allows one to better understand it. The museum experience, when reaching the level of an aesthetic experience, provides a good opportunity for increasing this understanding, for an increased knowledge of the

'culturalization' of matter in the process of sign production and of artistic expression. A study of this kind is, for Eco, indispensable for the reverse process: through removing many phenomena from the realm of 'creativity' and of 'inspiration', and restoring them to that of 'social convention', this study allows one to understand that 'only when all that can be coded has been coded that actual innovation and real insight into the expressive possibilities of a given communicative medium can occur' (Eco,1979:269).

This assertion can be applied to the study of museum language and texts manifested in different forms of exhibition and display, and in which what is usually seen as resulting from a 'creative inspiration', or as an 'imaginative display' is nothing else than the product of new social and museological conventions. New 'styles' in exhibition display can generally be related to new dominant features in industrial design, home decorative fashions, shops and showroom settings, film industry and its 'special effects', advertising and even book publishing and graphic design, according to the evolution of social 'taste' and trends.

Communicative experiences show us that the communicative process may actually subdue the external circumstances, insofar as circumstances are constantly translated into a universe of coding, while at the same time communication produces behavioural effects which contribute to the changing of circumstances (see Eco,1979:150). What Eco proposes is that the circumstance may become an 'intentional element of communication':

> *'If the circumstance helps one to single out the subcodes by means of which the messages are disambiguated this means that, rather than change messages or control their production, one can change their content by acting on the circumstances in which the message will be received. This is a "revolutionary" aspect of a semiotic endeavour. In an era in which mass communication often appears as the manifestation of a domination which makes sure of social*

*control by planning the sending of messages, it remains possible (as in an ideal semiotic "guerrilla warfare") to change the circumstances in the light of which the addressees will choose their own ways of interpretation. In opposition to a **strategy** of coding, which strives to render messages redundant in order to secure interpretation according to pre-established plans, one can trace a **tactic** of decoding where the message as expression form does not change but the addressee rediscovers his **freedom of decoding**'.*
(Eco,1979:150)

This **strategy** could be fruitfully applied in the processes of museum communication, in order to reach a more democratic and enriching role of these institutions in social life and development. Any exhibition, as a complex network of messages, may be read and decoded as **open** and **infinite** cultural texts, as far as the circumstances in which they are transmitted and communicated may help the public to grasp the many codes and possible isotopies they manifest, and to assume its **freedom of decoding**, in an interactive process of communication with the senders.

Insofar as museum exhibitions are conceived and structured to aim reaching an aesthetic quality, thus bearing the 'self-focusing' quality of poetic texts, their structural arrangement becomes one of the contents they may convey (and maybe even the most important one). The rearrangement of the codes will entail the proposal of new coding possibilities, which will enrich the senders' and the receivers' experiences. As Eco points out, 'not only do competencies allow performances, but performances also establish new forms of competence'(1979:272). By sensing the 'surplus' of expressions and of contents, and by trying to 'abduce' their correlating rules, through hypotheses, confrontations, rejected and accepted correlations, judgments of recognition and of strangeness, the receiver of the museum messages engages himself in a creative process which is akin to that of an aesthetic experience.

This process produces, according to Eco (1979:273), three kinds of results :

a) *'existing codes are focused and submitted to change or partial revision;'*

b) *'the relation between accepted content-systems and states of the world is frequently challenged;'*

c) *'a new type of "conversational" interaction is established between the sender and his addressee.'*

The process of museum communication can be thus posited in its richness, complexity, and 'operative' function, which make possible its effective role in social and cultural processes.

In Eco's proposition, *'the semiotic approach is ruled by a sort of indeterminacy principle: insofar as signifying and communicating are social functions that determine both social organization and social evolution, "to speak" about "speaking", to signify signification, or to communicate about communication* ***cannot but influence the universe of speaking, signifying and communicating'*** (Eco,1979:29).

While speaking about the Museum's way of 'speaking' and of 'communicating', we hope to contribute to the field of Museum Communication and Signification, and to influence in some extent this universe.

APPENDICES

1 - Leaflets of the Exhibition

2 - Plan of the Exhibition

3 - Teachers' pack

4 - Press reviews

5 - Theoretical sources (extended review)

BUDDHISM

ART AND FAITH

This major exhibition, drawn mainly from the rich collections of the British Museum and the British Library, is devoted to Buddhism, one of the great world religions, and illustrates the wealth and variety of Buddhist beliefs and art.

Buddhism grew from the teachings of the Buddha, 'the Enlightened One', who lived in eastern India between 563 and 483 BC and preached an answer to human suffering. He taught that by morality, concentration and wisdom a man could achieve *nirvana*, the end of the painful cycle of rebirths caused by wrong action and its retribution. Buddhism became for a time the dominant religion in much of Asia. Active today chiefly in Sri Lanka, Burma, Thailand, Korea and Japan, its remains abound in India, Pakistan, Nepal, China, Central Asia and Java.

As the religion spread, its scriptures were copied and translated. Many works on display are lost in their Indian originals and survive only in Tibetan, Chinese and lesser-known languages. These texts were written or incised on palm-leaf strips, paper, precious metals, cloth, baked clay and stone. Among manuscripts in the exhibition are outstanding Indian and Nepalese miniatures on palm leaf, Burmese folding paper books with sometimes naive and always colourful illustrations of edifying tales and vivid Chinese scenes from beyond the grave. Printing in the Far East, usually from woodblocks, became effective in spreading the word: on display are printed scholastic texts and mystical spells and a Tibetan printing board engraved, naturally in reverse, in skilful relief on both sides.

The exhibition also contains a wealth of Buddhist sculpture in stone, stucco, terracotta, ivory, wood and metal as well as paintings on cloth. Remarkable are an exquisite ivory carving from Kashmir, a monumental stone Buddha head from Java, a wooden priestly portrait figure from Japan, rare bronze Buddhas from Pakistan and Chinese paintings recovered from one of the famous Dunhuang caves by Sir Aurel Stein, who also found there the huge embroidery with an over life-size Buddha which dominates the entrance to the Far Eastern section.

The words on the pedestal of a bronze preaching Buddha in the exhibition aptly express the purpose of so much Buddhist art: *may the merit of this work bring salvation to the donor's parents and all living creatures.*

25 July 1985 – 5 January 1986
closed 24–26 December and 1 January
Monday–Saturday 10–5, Sundays 2.30–6

Prints and Drawings Gallery and Oriental Gallery II
(Rooms 67 and 74), North Entrance, British Museum,
Montague Place

Underground: Holborn, Tottenham Court Road, Russell Square
Bus routes: 7, 14, 18, 19, 22, 24, 25, 29, 38, 55, 68, 73, 77a, 134, 188

a major
BRITISH MUSEUM
BRITISH LIBRARY
exhibition

Printed by Gavin Martin Ltd, London SE27 0HQ

BRITISH MUSEUM
BRITISH LIBRARY
exhibition

British Museum Publications

Buddhism

Art and Faith

Exhibition Catalogue

BUDDHISM: ART AND FAITH
W Zwalf

400 of the finest examples of Buddhist art over the past 2,000 years from paintings, sculptures, manuscripts, woodblock prints and pottery in the British Museum and British Library are described and illustrated.
In introductory chapters the author discusses the history of Buddhism and the diverse art it inspired in India, Japan, China, Tibet and Indonesia.

Paper £12.50 (£14.25 inc post & packing)
Special price for visitors to the Exhibition only £8.95 1432 4

Books for Teachers and Young Readers

THE BUDDHIST WORLD
Anne Bancroft

A lively introduction to the history, traditions, beliefs and customs of Buddhism and its importance in today's world.

Published by Macdonald Educational

Full colour Hardback £5.50 (£6.00 inc post & packing) 356 07524 9

ANANDA IN SRI LANKA A story of Buddhism
Carol Barker

A beautiful picture information book describing the everyday life of Ananda, a 12-year-old boy living in a small village in Sri Lanka. It shows him at home with his family, at school, in the paddy fields and at the temple, and explains the basic principles of the Buddhist faith and how it permeates every detail of the villagers' lives.

Published by Hamish Hamilton

Full colour Hardback £5.50 (£6.00 inc post & packing) 241 11266 4

/.....

46 BLOOMSBURY STREET · LONDON WC1B 3QQ · 01-323 1234

British Museum Education Service

BUDDHISM

ART AND FAITH

a joint British Museum/British Library exhibition at the British Museum (North Entrance, Montague Place), 25 July 1985 – 5 January 1986.

PROGRAMME OF EVENTS

Evening lectures at 6.15 pm in the Lecture Theatre (No tickets required)

17 October Prof Richard Gombrich
The Indianness of Buddhism

24 October Dr Tadeusz Skorupski
Symbolism in Buddhist Art

31 October Prof Roderick Whitfield
The Introduction of Buddhism in China

Wednesdays
Gallery talks at 11.30 am (Please assemble at the North Entrance)

2 Oct Pat Bahree
The Life of the Buddha

9 Oct Pat Bahree
Buddhist Art in India

16 Oct John Reeve
An Introduction to the Buddhism Exhibition

23 Oct Victor Harris
Buddhist Art in Japan

30 Oct John Reeve
Buddhist Art in Tibet and Nepal

Lectures at 1.15 pm in the Lecture Theatre

2 Oct Pat Bahree
The Buddha Image in India

9 Oct Pat Bahree
The Buddhist Stupa at Sanchi

16 Oct Henry Ginsburg
Buddhist Art in Thailand

23 Oct Jessica Rawson
Chinese Buddhist Cave Temples

30 Oct John Reeve
From Stupa to Pagoda: Buddhism Across Asia

Thursdays
Gallery talks at 11.30 am

7 Nov John Reeve
An Introduction to the Buddhism Exhibition

14 Nov John Reeve
Buddhism in Tibet and Nepal

21 Nov Pat Bahree
From India Eastward: the Changing Image of the Buddha

28 Nov Victor Harris
Buddhism in Japan

Lectures at 1.15 pm in the Lecture Theatre

7 Nov NO LECTURE

14 Nov Tristram Riley-Smith
Buddhist Art and Artists of Nepal

21 Nov Youngsook Pak
Pagodas in China, Korea and Japan

28 Nov Angela Hobart
Images of Buddha in Java

British Museum Education Service

BUDDHISM
ART AND FAITH

a joint British Museum/British Library exhibition at the British Museum (North Entrance, Montague Place), 25 July 1985 – 5 January 1986.

PROGRAMME OF EVENTS

Wednesdays

Gallery talks at 11.30 am (Please assemble at the North Entrance)	*Lectures at 1.15 pm in the Lecture Theatre*
5 Dec Angela Hobart The Buddha Legend	5 Dec Angela Hobart Buddhism and Royalty in Cambodia
12 Dec Angela Hobart The Dissemination of Buddhist teachings	12 Dec Angela Hobart Buddhism in Burma
19 Dec John Reeve On the Silk Road to China	19 Dec Frances Wood Buddhism in China
26 Dec MUSEUM CLOSED	26 Dec MUSEUM CLOSED
2 Jan John Reeve An Introduction to the Buddhism Exhibition	2 Jan Youngsook Pak Buddhist Art in Korea

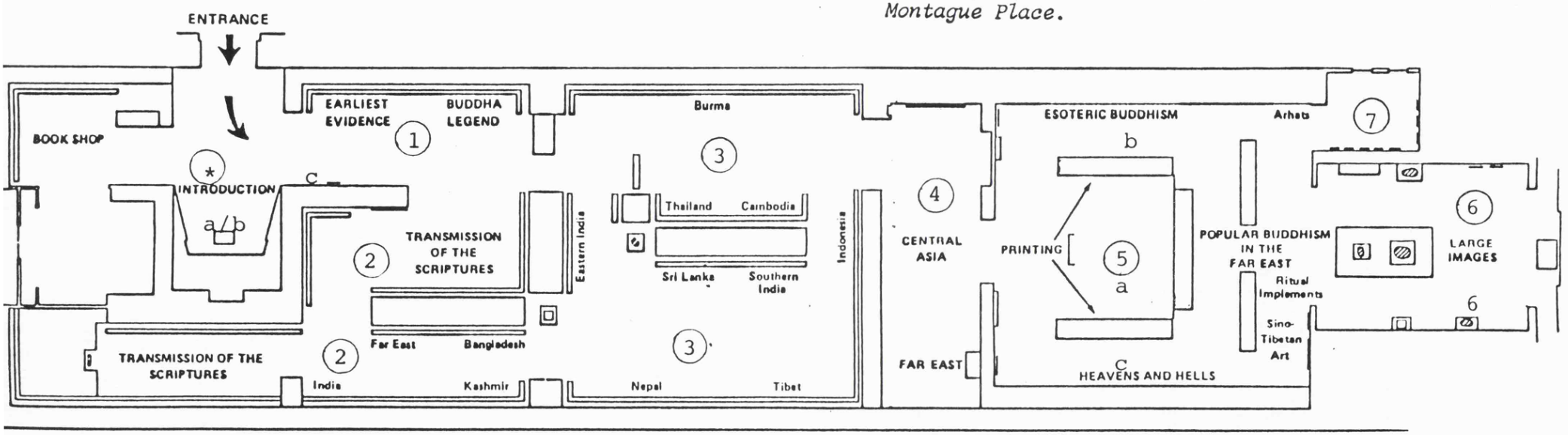
Saturdays

llery talks at 11.30 am	*Lectures at 1.15 pm in the Lecture Theatre*
5 Oct John Reeve An Introduction to the Buddhism Exhibition	5 Oct John Reeve From Stupa to Pagoda: Buddhism Across Asia
4 Jan John Reeve An Introduction to the Buddhism Exhibition	4 Jan John Reeve Buddhism in Tibet

Talks with sign-language interpretation funded by the British Museum Society

Buddhism: *Art and Faith*

Rooms 67 and 74:
access from North Entrance,
Montague Place.



PLAN OF THE EXHIBITION

BRITISH MUSEUM

Education Service

Buddhism *Art and Faith*

A joint British Museum/British Library exhibition at the British Museum (North Entrance), Montague Place, 25 July 1985 - 5 January 1986.

TEACHERS' PACK

This is the first edition for use by teachers visiting the exhibition. A further version will be available by October, when we have had chance to devise teaching materials and to provide more background information.

Please contact us to book your visits and to suggest how we can help you. A video on the exhibition will be available to help you prepare your visits, and it may be possible to arrange an introductory talk on the exhibition.

We hope you enjoy your visit to the exhibition and find this pack useful.

John Reeve
Head of Education

BRITISH MUSEUM Education Service, Great Russell Street, London WC1B 3DG
Telephone 01-636 1555 / ext. 511

BUDDHISM AND FAR EASTERN PRINTING

Buddhism contributed to the development of printing, one of the great cultural achievements of the Far East.

The earliest surviving examples of woodblock printing in the world are all Buddhist texts, ranging from the small *dhāraṇī* rolls printed in Japan (AD 764-770) and Korea to the fine printed prayer sheets and the magnificent *Diamond Sutra* printed in AD 868 and found at Dunhuang in China.

For Buddhists one method of gaining merit was to repeat prayers and charms and this may well have promoted the development of woodblock printing. Monks used to copy manuscripts laboriously by hand but far more copies could be produced if they were printed. The colophon to the *Diamond Sutra* explains that it was printed for 'universal distribution' as an act of merit on behalf of the donor's parents.

Many woodblock editions have illustrations, some finely cut and carefully printed, others in cheap popular editions are often simple and mass-produced. The art of calligraphy did not die out with the invention of printing and, particularly in Japan, editions were printed from manuscripts written by famous calligraphers.

POPULAR BUDDHISM IN THE FAR EAST

In many ways distant from the ascetic renunciation of the historical Buddha, popular Buddhism in the Far East presents a mixture of local deities, temple fairs, funeral ceremonies and places of pilgrimage mainly for the edification of lay-believers.

Local festivals became Buddhist festivals, the ancient lotus leaf and artemisia lantern festival turned into the Buddhist All Souls' Day when temples burnt a paper boat of the Buddhist law, offerings of dried fruit were put out in basins to feed the Hungry Devils and Maudgalyāyana's filial rescue of his mother from hell was re-enacted.

A strong theme is the compassionate Bodhisattva Avalokiteśvara who provides babies for the infertile, security from bandits and deliverance from flood and fire.

Holy mountains, dedicated to a particular deity, became places of pilgrimage, pilgrimages that were the more enjoyable for the beauty of the surroundings and the grandeur of the temples.

RITUAL IMPLEMENTS

This small display represents some of the wide range of implements and temple furniture used in the worship of the Buddha in China, Korea and Japan.

The main categories are boxes to contain *sūtras* (copies of the scriptures), censers, water sprinklers and *vajras* and bells for use in esoteric rituals.

A number of early Far Eastern implements survive in the Shōsōin, the treasury of the Tōdaiji temple at Nara in Japan and in a number of other Japanese temples. These items together with censers and sprinklers illustrated in the banner paintings from Dunhuang offer a reasonably complete historical series.

Seated Maitreya, Seoul, Korea (7th Century bronze).

BUDDHISM IN THE FAR EAST

Buddhism reached China through Asia along the Silk Road linking China with the West, leaving its mark on the oasis kingdoms along the route. In China it spread rapidly, helped by the invention of printing. In countries like Japan and Korea it often merged with the practice of existing religions. The spread of Buddhism to the Far East and the distinctive national forms it developed are illustrated in this section of the exhibition.

CENTRAL ASIA

The transmission of Buddhism to the Far East took place along the Silk Road, the trade route linking China with the West across the deserts of Central Asia.

A lively traffic between China and the West, particularly during the early centuries AD, carried Chinese silk and other merchandise by land or partly by sea to ports in modern Pakistan and India to connect with the Roman Orient. Indian Buddhism travelled northwards and flourished, during much of the first millennium, in the oasis kingdoms of the northern and southern branches of the Silk Road in Xinjiang. These branches converged at the Chinese frontier station of Dunhuang where Buddhist cave chapels and monasteries have yielded statuary, wall painting and a huge cache of manuscripts and paintings of the highest textual and artistic importance.

The dry desert conditions of Xinjiang have preserved such perishable materials as wood, textiles and paper along with clay and stucco sculpture. The remains reflect Indian, Iranian, Classical and Chinese influences and show the various elements that went into the creation of Far Eastern Buddhism.

BUDDHISM IN CHINA:
Cave Temples

While literary evidence suggests that Buddhism reached China during the 1st or 2nd century AD, the earliest remains date from the 3rd and 4th centuries and these are followed by great cave temples.

The first Buddhist figures of the 3rd and 4th centuries are very modest, comprising a few moulded appliqués to decorate jars and some designs on bronze mirrors. In the 4th and 5th centuries some members of the non Chinese dynasties of the Liang and Northern Wei were ardent patrons of Buddhism, founding temples and commissioning images among other pious works. Foreign monks, translators and craftsmen were employed on occasion to instruct the Chinese in the correct practices.

While wooden temples and images have all but perished, large cave complexes decorated with images convey the sculptural and architectural styles of the period. The most spectacular examples are found at Dunhuang, Yungang and Longmen, some showing evidence of influence from Central Asia in the style of their images and in their architectural settings. Huge rock-cut images dominate chapels and rock faces and dense rows of niches contain figures in relief.

CHINESE BUDDHIST THOUGHT DURING THE TANG DYNASTY (AD 618-907)

The Tang dynasty saw the height of Chinese intellectual interest in Buddhism, and three of the principal schools concerned themselves with adapting and developing the Doctrine.

The Tiantai sect, founded by Zhiyi (AD 538-97) and the Huayan, founded by Fazang (643-712), both engaged in classifying the Buddha's teaching and also submitted ideas on the relationship of phenomena to the underlying Absolute. The Faxiang school was concerned with the workings of the mind, which it believed was solely responsible for fabricating the phenomenal world, it was criticised by Huayan followers and failed to survive the persecution of 845.

The rigorous nature of Tang Buddhist thought posed a considerable challenge to Confucianism and eventually forced the latter into expanding its ideas on metaphysics

BUDDHIST HEAVENS AND HELLS

Among the schools of Far Eastern Buddhism, Pure Land offered the most attractive and immediate benefits to its followers. Believers who recited the name of the Amitābha Buddha would be reborn out of lotus buds in Sukhāvatī, the Western Paradise.

The historical Buddha had declined to comment on what *nirvāna* actually was, but in Far Eastern Mahāyānism the reward for piety was often understood to be rebirth in a paradise peopled by gods and *apsarases* (heavenly attendants), a more concrete salvation than *nirvāna*.

Belief in heaven was paralleled by belief in a series of hells presided over by underworld courts, ultimately modelled on the Chinese civil service, which meted out specific punishments related to specific crimes. Both heavens and hells were frequently represented in paintings and illustrations in China, Japan and Korea.

LARGE IMAGES

including a Chinese wall-painting showing three forms of Avalokitesvara, a pottery Chinese lohan, and large wooden sculpture.

NORTH STAIRS

Buddhist art including (from top to bottom): Gandharan art, a crowned Buddha probably from Bodh Gaya, a Chinese paradise scene, the giant Chinese Amitabha Buddha (AD 585), Korean paintings of guardian kings, and the recently-acquired 700 year old Chinese figure of the bodhisattva Guanyin.

e bronze Great Buddha, Todaiji Temple, Japan
metres high)

at the North Entrance:

ZEN BUDDHISM

The Buddhist school that emphasised the importance of meditation above all other religious pursuits was known as Chan in China and Zen in Japan.

Chan flourished during the Tang dynasty, dividing into two rival sects, 'Northern' and 'Southern', the latter gaining dominance under the master Shenhui (670-762) who advocated instantaneous as opposed to gradual enlightenment. A distaste for elaborate metaphysics, an apparent iconoclasm towards religious images and rituals, and the use of the *gong'an* (Japanese *Koan*) riddle were some of the features of Chan.

In Japan Zen found favour with the samurai governments of the 13th to 19th centuries. Temples were built throughout the country by the Ashikaga *shōguns* between the 14th to 16th centuries. Zen aims at direct enlightenment, and does not rely on the scriptures. Only the essential *Heart Sūtra*, which tells of nothingness (Japanese *Kū*), the ultimate truth, is recited daily in Zen monasteries. Ways to enlightenment include the arduous study of secular activities, such as arts of the Nō theatre, Tea Ceremony, and Kendō (swordsmanship), as well as the contemplative monastic life.

SINO-TIBETAN ART

Tibetan and Nepalese forms of Vajrayāna deities were first introduced into metropolitan China during the Mongol Yuan dynasty.

The Mongols established their suzerainty over Tibet through a settlement negotiated in the 1240s by the high ranking lama Sa-skya Pandita. His nephew and successor 'Phags-pa subsequently became spiritual advisor to the first Yuan emperor Khubilai Khan. 'Phags-pa brought Nepalese craftsmen to the court at Dadu (Beijing) in order to decorate and furnish newly erected lamaistic temples. They worked in their own idiom and their alien influence is vividly recorded in the stone reliefs at the Juyong guan gate near Beijing, and at Feilai feng, Zhejiang province.

The Ming and Qing dynasties did not obtain the same military grip on Tibet as had the Mongols, and their courts patronised lamaism as much for political as religious necessity. The third Ming emperor Yong'le (r. 1403-24) was an active sponsor of Tibetan Buddhism and a number of fine lamaist gilt bronzes bearing his reign mark survive. The manufacture of lamaistic images continued into the Qing, with very large numbers commissioned by the Qianlong emperor (1736-95).

ESOTERIC BUDDHISM

Far Eastern Esoteric Buddhism derives from Indian Tantrism and holds that the power of deities can be compelled by human agency and Buddhahood attained in this world.

The basic text, the *Mahāvairocana Sūtra*, was held to have been transmitted directly from Mahāvairocana, the Buddha from whom all things emanate. This concept made it possible to adapt other religions to Esoteric Buddhism and to absorb fierce and animal forms of deities, attributes and ritual objects of Hindu origin.

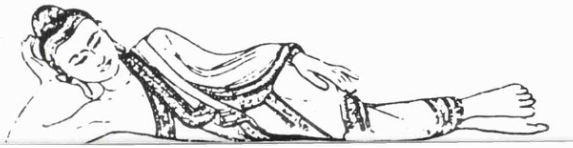
Forms of Esoteric Buddhism were common to Tibet, China, Korea and Japan. In Japan today it thrives with a following of more than ten million. Mahāvairocana was readily identified with the Japanese Shintō sun deity Amaterasu, and this formed the basis of a syncretic relationship with Shintō, the native deities assuming Bodhisattva status. The unity of the priest with Mahāvairocana is achieved by enactment of the 'Three Mysteries', *mudrā* (gestures with ritual implements), *mantra* (recitation of formulas with magical power), and systematic contemplation of the complex *mandalas* representing the phenomenal and ultimately real worlds in a lavish altar setting.

ARHATS, MONKS AND RELIGIOUS TEACHERS

Paintings and sculptures of enlightened men known as *arhats*, or *lohans* in Chinese, made up a significant genre in Far Eastern Buddhist art.

In Hīnayāna Buddhism, *arhats* were deemed to stand at the summit of a hierarchy of four stages or levels of enlightenment or sainthood. In the Mahāyāna Buddhist teaching of China and Japan *arhats* or *lohans* became part of an elaborate cult. Regarded as virtuous historical figures, sixteen, eighteen or at times five hundred individuals were venerated. Sixteen *arhats* were said to have been present at the Buddha's death. Sets of paintings of the sixteen or even five hundred were popular in China during the Song (AD 960-1279) and Yuan dynasties (AD 1280-1368). Such paintings were exported to Japan where they were widely copied. A famous set of paintings of sixteen *lohans* is in the temple of the Hōryūji at Nara in Japan.

A related genre of painting depicted famous monks and religious teachers. The Chinese monk Kuji (known in Japan as Jion Daishi (AD 632-82) was a favourite subject. Most popular of all, were paintings and sculptures of Shōtoku Taishi, a royal prince whose legendary influence contributed to the establishment of Buddhism in Japan.



Burmese Buddhas, 19th Century

The Buddha walking, Bangkok (14th Century bronze).

BURMA

Buddhism in Burma has a long history from at least the 5th century AD and continues an unbroken tradition and living faith to the present.

Buddhism first appeared among the Pyu (5th-9th centuries) whose capital was Śrī Kṣetra and the Mon of Lower Burma who were conquered in 1057 by Aniruddha, founder of the Burman Pagan empire (destroyed 1287). Pagan's magnificent temples, sculptures, wall-paintings and bronzes belong to the golden age of Burmese Buddhist art and architecture. Subsequent art styles are called after Burma's changing dynasties and capitals, those of Toungoo, Ava, Amarapura and Mandalay.

Few manuscripts survive from before the 18th century. Texts were preserved by monks and scholars incising them on palm leaves. There were also two types of folding book, one of blackened paper for writing, with white steatite, court records and accounts, the other, of natural-coloured paper, was mostly used for illustration in glowing colours and rich gilding. Popular subjects were the Buddha's life and court scenes. In the 19th century British rule and printing diminished patronage of the arts and manuscript production.

THAILAND AND CAMBODIA

Buddhism has been prevalent in Thailand and Cambodia since the beginning of their histories. Few Buddhist monuments survive from before the 12th century but much stone and bronze sculpture has been found from earlier periods.

The earliest Buddhist sculpture was imported from India and dates from the 4th and 5th centuries, but soon local styles flourished. In Thailand the culture of the Mon people prevailed first, but Cambodian influence was strongly marked from the 11th century as the Cambodian empire expanded. From the 14th century the arrival of the Thai, who migrated from the north into the whole of modern Thailand, led to the growth of a distinct Thai style.

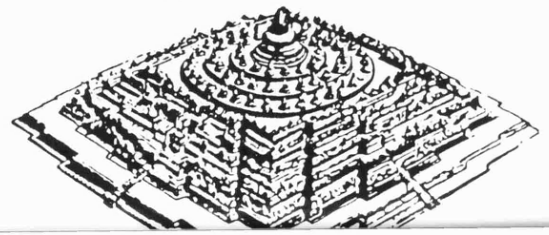
The palm leaf manuscript traditions of India were used in Thailand and Cambodia into quite recent times. Another writing medium was the folding book, made from the bark of a local bush *(streblus asper)*. Buddhist texts were sometimes illustrated, and popular subjects were the birth-tales of the Buddha, forest scenes, Buddhist cosmology and the legend of the monk Phra Malai.

INDONESIA

Together with Hinduism, Buddhism made a great cultural impact on Indonesia and in Java especially has left magnificent monuments.

By the 8th century the previously established Hīnayāna had given way to Mahāyāna and Vajrayāna and the great monuments of Central Java (8th-10th centuries AD) illustrate Vajrayāna beliefs and pantheons. This was a period of great creative activity inspired partly from peninsular and partly from north-east India. The huge terraced structure of Borobudur was the largest of the distinctive temples laid out according to a ritual plan and displaying the Javanese achievement in relief carving and sculpture in the round. Metal casting also flourished and many small bronzes survive.

In the 10th century the Javanese capital was moved eastwards and Buddhism gradually merged with the Hindu Śiva cult. Under the Singasāri dynasty (1222-92) however, Buddhist stone sculpture again reached a high peak. Buddhism was also active in Sumatra. Islam, using the same trade-routes as Indian culture, succeeded it in the 16th century.



Borobodur, Java (8th - 9th Century)

TIBET

Tibet, now a secularised Autonomous Region of the People's Republic of China, was until recently a distinctively Buddhist country administered largely by monks.

Though introduced in the 7th century AD Buddhism made its fullest impact after the 10th century when the Buddhist culture of eastern India and Kashmir was avidly absorbed. The mystical practices of Vajrayāna were studied and followed and a variety of sects coexisted, each deriving from an Indian tradition. Monasteries were numerous and the larger were places of higher study and the initiated monk or teacher, the lama, enjoyed great authority. Many monks were held to be incarnations, or emanations, of Buddhist deities and eminent holy men.

While based on Indian and Nepalese models Tibetan metal images and paintings developed stylistically distinct forms partly on account of the Chinese influence also present from an early date. Tibetans spent generously on books, statuary, ritual implements, paintings and ceremonies to acquire merit for themselves or another and no house or tent was without an altar and religious furnishings.

THE DECCAN AND SOUTH INDIA

Some of the most splendid Buddhist monuments of India are the cave temples and *stūpas* of the Deccan.

Along the west coast of the Deccan, the northern part of peninsular India, numerous, often magnificent, Buddhist monuments were dug out of the rock between the 2nd century BC and the 8th century AD. *Stūpas* were enshrined in long apsidal halls imitating free-standing wooden structures now lost; some of these halls have wall paintings and beside them are rock-cut monasteries. On the east coast, in the open, were *stūpas* and monastic complexes, especially on the Krishna delta, such as Amarāvatī. Sculptural influences reached out to Sri Lanka and South-east Asia.

In the south the city of Kāñcī was long a centre of Buddhist scholarship. Literary references to Buddhism in the south are numerous but the monuments are less well-known. Nāgapattinam, a seaport on the south-eastern coast, has yielded hoards of bronzes belonging to monasteries maintained for South-east Asian Buddhists. Amarāvatī, Nāgapattinam and Kāñcī survived as Buddhist centres until the 14th-15th centuries

SRI LANKA

Sri Lanka, Buddhist since the 3rd century BC, adopted different phases of Indian Buddhism before becoming one of the chief centres of the conservative Theravāda school.

The history of its monuments falls into two main periods, named after successive capitals, that of Anurādhapura (until the 10th century AD) and Polonnaruva (1070-1236). During the first period the greatest influence was from the eastern Deccan but Gupta and north-eastern Indian elements were later also present especially when the Mahāyāna school inspired gigantic rock carvings and bronze castings of various deities. After a period of South Indian rule (993-1070) a revival at Polonnaruva produced major monuments and established for a time the preeminence of Sri Lanka among the Theravāda countries of South-east Asia.

From this period Theravāda has been the only form of Buddhism on the island. Popular practice has become mixed with Hindu and local beliefs and in the 18th and 19th centuries even the valid ordination of monks had to be renewed from Burma and Thailand. The recent Buddhist arts can be colourful and attractive but have become increasingly confined to a limited traditional repertoire.

Tara: gilt bronze
from Sri Lanka, 10th Century

(Exhibition: 210)

BODH GAYA
(Eastern India)

The shrine of the Buddha's Tree of Enlightenment underwent many vicissitudes and was repaired and enlarged by pilgrims and donors seeking merit.

The simpler tree shrines seen on stone reliefs at early *stūpas* were succeeded, perhaps around AD 600, by a building resembling the present Mahābodhi temple. A rectangular structure surmounted by a tall central tower and four corner chapels, it enshrines a Buddha image in the earth-touching gesture symbolising his spiritual victory. In the 7th century the temple's Buddha image wore a crown and jewels, features increasingly usual to represent divine Buddhas. The monasteries surrounding the temple have disappeared but numerous small votive *stūpas* still cluster beside it.

There were Burmese restorations in the 11th, 13th and 19th centuries and a thorough rebuilding took place in 1880. The present Tree of Enlightenment, claimed and worshipped as descendant of the first, after having stood up beside the tower and chapels, was replanted at the foot of the temple and behind it, next to an ancient carved slab representing the Throne of the Buddha's Enlightenment.

NĀLANDĀ
(Eastern India)

Of the great academic monasteries of eastern India and Bangladesh, now mostly destroyed, perhaps the largest was the excavated complex of Nālandā in Bihar.

Nālandā was internationally famous with thousands of students, rigorous admission standards and a curriculum ranging beyond strictly Buddhist subjects. The excavated remains seem to justify the architectural splendours described by the Chinese scholar Xuan Zang (602-664). Its most celebrated student and already highly accomplished, Xuan Zang tells of huge images and tall buildings. The excavations have revealed Nālandā to have been a complex of temples, with remains of large stucco figures, and monastic buildings consisting of quadrangles each lined with cells giving onto a central courtyard. These quadrangles sometimes had two storeys of cells and when they burned down or decayed were rebuilt to the same plan. Although overshadowed later by Vikramaśīla, probably another, more recently excavated complex to the north, Nālandā, even after the Muslim invasions (1197), continued to offer tuition during the 13th century and perhaps later.

NEPAL

Nepal has well-established Buddhist traditions preserved from ancient India but over the centuries religious practice has merged with that of Hinduism.

The Buddhist remains of Nepal, excluding the sites associated with the Buddha himself on the Indian border, are all in the Kathmandu valley where sculpture, *stūpas* and monasteries attest the past importance of Buddhism. There are now, however, no monks; instead two castes, descendants of monks who married, live in and around the old monasteries, performing mixed ceremonies and still making images according to Indian traditions and in conservative styles.

Buddhism in Nepal adopted Gupta sculpture which evolved not unlike that of eastern India and inherited the Indian Vajrayāna traditions and iconography. Nepal's craftsmen and painters were active and influential in Tibet. The Buddhist architecture is a mixture of the Indian legacy and local adaptation with imposing *stūpas* with great painted eyes below the finial.

KASHMIR

Buddhism and its art persisted in Gandhara after a period of destructive invasion and in Afghanistan and Soviet Central Asia until the Islamic conquests. It survived longest in Kashmir.

Gandhara was overrun and ravaged in the late 5th and early 6th centuries by Central Asian invaders. Its Buddhist art was succeeded by the styles of the Swat Valley (Pakistan) and Kashmir which were linked with those of Afghanistan and Soviet and Chinese Central Asia. Indian influence of Gupta type was felt everywhere.

The art traditions of Kashmir produced Buddhist work in terracotta, wood, ivory and metal. Metal sculpture was especially abundant and may have persisted until the Islamic period began in the 14th century and longer in Ladakh, a region of Tibetan culture and still Buddhist. One of the last Indian Buddhist centres, Kashmir increasingly followed Vajrayāna practice and images accordingly grew more complex as they represented popular and fierce protector deities and those used in meditation.

EASTERN INDIA

Although Buddhism began in eastern India in the 6th century BC its most abundant remains date between the 7th and 12th centuries AD when eastern Indian Buddhism was again influential.

The site of the Enlightenment, Bodh Gayā must always have been a major centre but it was the establishment of great monastic universities like Nālandā, perhaps founded by the Guptas in the 5th century AD and Vikramaśīla, founded by the Buddhist Pāla dynasty (AD 750-1150), that gave eastern India a fresh importance. Buddhist studies were actively pursued and the monastic universities received students from the whole of Buddhist Asia. The arts of painting, stone and metal sculpture flourished and greatly influenced Tibet, Burma and Indonesia.

Eastern India, Bangladesh and Orissa, closely related in their arts, also saw the development of Vajrayāna Buddhism with its active mystical cults directed to spells and the symbolism of fierce deities sometimes shown in sexual union. This mysticism was taught at the monasteries and images of the complex Vajrayāna deities were produced there as well as texts describing them.

EASTERN INDIA
Manuscript Illumination

Manuscripts written and illuminated in monasteries such as Nālandā exist from the late 10th century, the text most usually copied being the Perfection of Wisdom.

Manuscripts of this text are illuminated (normally in a cycle of 18 miniatures but other patterns do occur) with transcendental Buddhas (the Jinas), Bodhisattvas and other divinities, and the Eight Great Events of the Buddha's life. This abstruse scripture had by this time acquired a semi-magical significance and was more worshipped than read. The miniatures added to it do not illustrate the text, but serve as visual embodiments of the deity meditated on by their painter-monks, and bestow spiritual merit on their donor and his family.

Although it is possible that the wooden covers of palm-leaf manuscripts were painted before our earliest dated survivals, it is unlikely that the leaves were. Everything about them proclaims their experimental nature. The art reached a peak of technical perfection in the late 11th century, but was effectively destroyed at the end of the 12th, when the monasteries were sacked by the Muslim invaders.

THE FIRST BUDDHA IMAGES

The first human images of the Buddha were made in the first centuries BC or AD in response to a devotionalism which emphasised the Buddha's supernatural character.

Although the early *stūpas* already show the growing importance of devotion in Buddhism, human images of the Buddha and Buddhist deities appeared late; the Buddha was previously represented by symbols, such as footprints, while a tree, a wheel or a *stūpa* stood for the Enlightenment, the First Sermon and death.

The origin and date of the earliest Buddha images have not been finally settled. It appears likely that the central Indian school of Mathurā using Indian prototypes evolved Buddha images which were exported to the north-west and south-east and copied. Since in Gandhara (Pakistan) the Buddha image was carved in the local Graeco-Roman style, it was long thought that the earlier image worship of the West had inspired the first Buddha images. By the reign of the Kusāna emperor Kaniska I (about AD 100) Buddha images existed in the different Gandharan and central Indian styles.

GANDHARA

The prolific Buddhist art of Gandhara was, by its geographical situation, highly influential as Buddhism began its expansion into Central Asia and the Far East.

Gandhara, the ancient name for the Peshawar valley in Pakistan, became, between the 1st and 6th centuries AD, the centre for a hugely productive Buddhist art. It absorbed the Hellenistic heritage of oriental Greek art and remained open to Roman influences without losing an intimate connection with the styles and iconography of central India.

Under its Kusāna rulers, Gandhara was a transit region for trade between India and countries to the west and east. Its prosperity was reflected in the large number of *stūpas* and monasteries founded and richly endowed with sculpture. This included not only Buddha images and narrative panels but also ornate, princely figures – Bodhisattvas or saviour deities whose worship marked a fresh development in Buddhism. While the impact of the Gandharan styles on India was small, in Afghanistan, Central Asia and the Far East, as Buddhism expanded along the trade-routes, it was crucial.

THE GUPTA AGE

Buddhist art reached a peak of classical perfection under the northern Gupta dynasty (AD 320-550) and its influences spread far beyond the empire.

Art under the Gupta dynasty, which ruled northern India, served all the Indian religions but the Buddhist achievement was particularly striking. The two chief centres were Mathurā, where Buddhist images retained something of an outward-looking robustness, and the new Buddhist workshop at Sārnāth, near Benares, famous as the scene of the First Sermon. Here a highly spiritualised and introspective Buddha image, evolved towards the end of the 5th century AD, was characterised by a smooth and subtle modelling.

The Gupta style influenced Gandhara and Central Asia in painting and sculpture and can be traced in Chinese Buddhist art; to the south it was closely paralleled in peninsular India and affected Sri Lanka. The Sārnāth style lived on in Bihar and Orissa and was particularly tenacious in Nepal; it can be felt also in the arts derived from eastern India in Burma, Thailand and Indonesia.

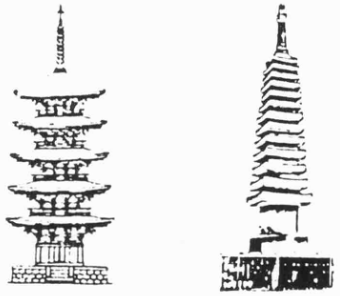
TRANSMISSION OF THE SCRIPTURES AND INDEPENDENT DEVELOPMENTS

Tibet, Mongolia, China

Buddhism reached Tibet from India in the 7th century where it evolved into a uniquely lamaist form, which was also exported to Mongolia.

The lamas, spiritual teachers and reincarnations of previous priest-rulers, exercised both spiritual and, after struggles with the Tibetan ruling dynasties, political power. The Tantric Vajrayāna school has been the predominant form of Buddhism and the inspiration behind the art, ritual objects and dances and ceremonies of Tibetan lamaism. The work of translating the Buddhist scriptures into Tibetan ceased in the 14th century, when Bu-ston arranged the *bKa'-'gyur* (scriptures) in 108 volumes, and the *bsTan-'gyur* (commentaries) in 225.

During the 16th century, the Mongols were converted to lamaism by Tibetan missionaries, and religious and monastic life in Mongolia followed the pattern of Tibet. Shortly afterwards, the Manchus (a northern tribe, neighbours of the Mongols) conquered China and the ruling house of the Qing dynasty fostered lamaism as part of its patronage of Tibet and Mongolia. Many of the buildings in the vast Summer Palace of the Qing at Chengde are built in the Tibetan style and Tibetan and



Wooden temple pagodas in Nara, Japan

Central Asia, China, Korea & Japan

The Kusāna empire (1st-3rd centuries AD) united India with Central Asia, and Buddhism was transmitted along the routes which linked India with the trans-Asian trade route between China and the Mediterranean.

Buddhist manuscripts were thus brought into Central Asia and translated into local languages and, above all, Chinese. Buddhism entered China early in the Later Han (AD 25-220), brought by a variety of different missionaries. Over the succeeding centuries, all the major Indian schools of thought were introduced, and the great work of translating the *sūtras* into Chinese was carried out in different centres. The Chinese Canon retains the traditional threefold division, and as published under the Ming (AD 1368-1644) contains 1662 separate works, many themselves compilations.

Faced with the varied and conflicting schools of Indian Buddhism and the opposed requirements of monastic Buddhism and Confucian family duties, the Chinese both tried to arrange the Indian doctrines into a system of periods and hierarchy of texts and also, reacting against excessive scriptural study, stressed an almost word-less way to enlightenment.

From the 4th century Buddhism began to enter

Sri Lanka and South-east Asia

The Sthaviravāda or Theravāda, the only surviving school of the Hīnayāna, was slowly driven from northern India southwards, but still held fast to its original conception of the Buddha and to its Canon.

At an early stage, its original Canon was translated into the language we call Pali, which derives from the word in the commentaries used to denote the original text. The school took firm root in Sri Lanka, to which Buddhism had been introduced in the 3rd century BC by Mahinda, son of Aśoka.

Buddhism had been introduced into South-east Asia very early, and the archaeological survivals are both Hīnayāna and Mahāyāna. But from the 13th century onwards, Theravāda Buddhism predominated, striking firm roots at the level of both court and people in Burma, Thailand, Laos and Cambodia, involving close monastic contact between these countries and Sri Lanka.

A set of very ancient commentaries was written in Sri Lanka in old Sinhalese, which have not survived, but which were used by the Indian Buddhaghosa in the 5th century AD for his own commentaries in Pali. A further set of sub-commentaries dates from the 10th century onwards. Thereafter commentaries and manuals in this

THE MAHĀYĀNA

In the 1st century AD, a new school of Buddhism arose in southern India, calling itself the Mahāyāna or Great Vehicle transporting all beings to *nirvāna*, beginning a whole new sequence of canonical texts in Sanskrit.

The aim of the earlier tradition (which the Mahāyānists disparagingly called the Hīnayāna, Lesser Vehicle), i.e. ***nirvāna*** for oneself in the shortest possible time, was now thought selfish; instead, the aim was Buddhahood, first becoming a Bodhisattva who, indefinitely postponing his own ***nirvāna***, helped others on the way. In the earliest Mahāyāna texts the Buddha laid down the path of the Bodhisattva, the six (later ten) Perfections to be acquired over countless lives, and the ten stages through which he progressed towards Buddhahood, the last of which was omniscience and all-seeing compassion. The great Bodhisattvas such as Avalokiteśvara and Mañjuśrī have all reached this stage and actively intervene to help mankind.

In Mahāyāna cosmology, the infinite number of worlds all required Buddhas and Bodhisattvas to teach the way, offering hope that all could reach these heights. In the meantime the worship of the known Bodhisattvas and Buddhas could not but help the individual on his own path to ***nirvāna***.

THE VAJRAYĀNA

Incantations (*dhāraṇī* and *mantra*), originally perhaps magic spells, occur in some of the Mahāyāna texts from the 4th century, and were later linked with ritual and meditational techniques in a series of works called *tantras*.

The initiate in these works meditates on one or other aspect of the Buddha in order to achieve union with him. This system of esoteric Buddhism is the Vajrayāna, the Thunderbolt-Vehicle, the *vajra* representing unbreakable reality, the symbol of the Ādi (Primal) Buddha Vajrasattva or Vajradhara, the Being or Holder of the Thunderbolt. From the Ādi Buddha's meditations emerged the five Jinas or Conqueror Buddhas, and from them emanated in turn entire families of divinities, many of them terrifying. These served as personified symbols of one or other aspect of the Buddha and the Doctrine. The adept conceptualises them, literally enclosing them within *mandalas*, cosmic and magic diagrams from which they cannot escape, rendering the malevolent ones harmless, and identifies himself with them in his meditation techniques.

The Vajrayāna system reduced the long hard path to spiritual self-awareness to more 'instant enlightenment', over sixteen lives in one text, and for the adept of the Higher Tantra, in the course of one life.

Stupa at Anaradhapura, Sri Lanka.

The Buddha at Polonnaruwa, Sri Lanka

THE SCRIPTURES AND THEIR TRANSMISSION

The Buddhist Canon contains a vast collection of texts assembled over fifteen hundred years, involving most of the ancient languages of southern and eastern Asia.

The Canon or *Tripitaka* (meaning Three Baskets) began with the collected sermons of the Buddha and the rules of monastic discipline. Slightly later was added a third set, interpretations of the Buddha's words, as the original united church divided into eighteen sects. Each sect had its own threefold Canon in one or other vernacular language of northern India or Sanskrit. With the development of the Mahāyāna school, a whole new set of scriptures was composed in Sanskrit and became canonical, since they were claimed as the Buddha's words.

As Buddhism expanded into Central Asia, some of this authoritative material was translated into such languages as Khotanese, Tocharian, Uyghur and Soghdian. Buddhism entered China early in the Later Han (AD 25-220), and over the next millennium a vast number of texts were translated, often more than once. From China Buddhism was introduced into Korea (4th century) and thence into Japan (mid-6th century); both regarded Chinese texts as canonical. Buddhism was introduced into Tibet in the 7th century. The Tibetan Canon was completed in the 14th century, and translated into Mongolian by 1749.

THE COLLECTION OF THE CANON

The earliest texts agree that on the Buddha's death five hundred monks assembled at Rajgir to fix the Doctrine and the monastic rules.

Those present when the Buddha spoke remembered what he had said; the others approved it as authentic. The Doctrine was preserved in the collection (*pitaka*) of the Buddha's sermons (*sūtras*) called the *Sūtrapitaka*, and the monastic rules (*vinaya*) in the *Vinayapitaka*. The original Canon must have been in Māgadhī, the presumed language of eastern India where the Buddha lived. The Buddha had insisted that monks preach in the local language rather than the hieratic Sanskrit, so that monks from elsewhere in India translated the early Canon into their own tongues.

The sacred texts remained unwritten for several centuries, being entrusted in parts to groups of monks for memorising. They were first written down in Sri Lanka in the 1st century BC. It is the Theravāda tradition of Sri Lanka and South-east Asia, using Pali as its canonical language, which has preserved the most ancient and authoritative version of the early scriptures.

THE SPREAD OF BUDDHISM

As Buddhism spread outwards, it proved impossible in a non-hierarchical church to keep control of the Doctrine, and repeated schisms resulted in eighteen separate schools by about 50 BC.

The schools differed from one another in their interpretation of certain parts of the Doctrine, and they justified their interpretations in works of *abhidharma*, philosophical restatements of the basic doctrines, which collectively form the third division (*Abhidharmapitaka*) of the threefold Canon, the *Tripitaka*.

Also part of the same expansion was the popular cult of the Buddha as a semi-divine and then divine figure, which made easier the conversion of the less sophisticated. Those sections of the *Vinaya* containing the Buddha's biography were expanded by many schools to include marvels and miracles; his former lives as a Buddha-to-be were worked up in the long series of *jātakas* (birth-stories); new lives were written in the metres of classical poetry; and the *stūpa* cult was intensified in order to convert the less sophisticated who lacked any relish for Buddhism's philosophical or moral subtleties.

BODH GAYĀ

The Buddha achieved Enlightenment under a tree at Bodh Gayā in Bihar and the site has been continuously worshipped probably ever since.

The tree standing today at the foot of the present commemorative Mahābodhi temple is honoured by Buddhists from all over the world as the descendant of the pipal *(ficus religiosa)* beneath which the Buddha gained his supreme insights. The emperor Aśoka probably visited it in the 3rd century BC and by the end of the second, to judge from relief carving, a pillared pavilion with an upper storey of roofed galleries surrounded the Tree and Throne of Enlightenment (a stone slab).

Nothing of this structure survives but railing pillars enclosing the site date from the last century BC and carry donative inscriptions. Soon after a deposit of coins and jewellery was made at the foot of the Throne, now inside the temple sanctum beneath a seated Buddha image. The deposit may have marked a construction or repair in the early centuries AD before the present temple was built.

THE BUDDHA LEGEND

There is no good reason to doubt that a Buddha called Siddhārtha Gautama, of the Śākya clan in the Nepalese Terai, was a historical figure.

Buddhist tradition and devotion have so embroidered the facts of his life, probably to be dated between 563-483 BC, that one can today speak only of Buddha legends. They agree, however, that he was born in the Lumbinī Garden in Nepal, reached Enlightenment at Bodh Gayā, preached a First Sermon at Sārnāth, near Benares and died at Kuśinagara in north Bihar. The first three sites have remains from the late centuries BC; the Lumbinī Garden is identified by an inscribed pillar of Aśoka. Traditions plausibly describe the Buddha as an itinerant preacher instructing a growing following in and around south Bihar and kings he met occur in non-Buddhist sources.

Carvings from the 2nd century BC onwards attest the growing importance of the legendary and miraculous Buddha story. First represented only through symbols, by the early centuries AD the Buddha was carved in human form and nowhere was his legend so abundantly illustrated as on the monuments of Gandhara (Pakistan).

Stone head of the Buddha from Borobodur, Java (8th - 9th Century)

JĀTAKAS

Carvings on the oldest Buddhist monuments demonstrate the early popularity of *jātakas* (birth stories) which tell of the many virtuous lives by which the Buddha earned his Enlightenment.

The belief in rebirth as applied to the Buddha produced the *jātaka* literature. A collection of stories adapted from the common stock of Indian folktales, it tells how, as a Bodhisattva or being progressing towards Buddhahood, he passed through a succession of lives, sometimes as an animal and sometimes as a human. *Jātakas* also illustrated specific virtues called Perfections. Originally six (generosity, morality, renunciation, wisdom, energy and patience), they were later expanded to ten by the inclusion of truthfulness, resolution, love and equanimity. The cultivation of Perfections in Mahāyāna Buddhism, which offered the way of the Bodhisattva to all, connects the *jātakas* with the popular developments in the last centuries BC that led to the Mahāyāna.

Buddhism: *Art and Faith*

This booklet contains the text of the information panels: please refer to the exhibition plan in this pack.

BUDDHISM

The message of the Buddha, 'the Enlightened One', called Buddhism after him, has, throughout its history, offered salvation from impermanence and rebirth. Proclaimed out of compassion, it has always been open to converts and by its adaptability has made its path widely accessible.

Buddhism denied that the individual had any soul or stable essence and held that ignorance and desire caused him to perform acts which brought about rebirth and retribution. This repeated process, considered inseparable from pain and sorrow, could be ended by morality, concentration and wisdom. *nirvāṇa* was attained and rebirth ceased. Later developments held the world and *nirvāṇa* to be essentially the same. An Absolute was defined as Consciousness. Doctrine and Buddhahood and salvation lay in realising unity with it.

By merit any man could, for a time, gain happier existences. He worshipped the Buddha as a superior or eternal omniscient being, and saviours – called Bodhisattvas – whose aim, an ideal open to all, was to delay becoming a Buddha in order to help others to that state. The widespread belief in Buddhas ruling paradises, accessible by grace and faith alone, or in mystical powers, compelling deities to confer material and spiritual advantage, were among the adaptations which, beside monastic disciplines, characterized Buddhism's varied appeal.

THE HISTORY OF BUDDHISM

Buddhism has been followed in much of Asia and survives in different forms dictated by historical conditions.

After spreading in the late centuries BC throughout historic India and into Sri Lanka, Buddhism reached the Far East through Central Asia from Kashmir, Pakistan and Afghanistan and followed the sea-routes from India into South-east Asia. Introduced into China in the 1st-2nd centuries AD, Buddhism flourished there from the 5th century to the 10th and was then increasingly overshadowed by Confucianism; in Korea since the 4th century and Japan since the 6th it has survived vigorously.

In historic India Buddhism's long decline was hastened by Muslim invasions and conversions and after AD 1200 it was generally absorbed into Hinduism. In Nepal it lived on, and flourished in Tibet into this century. Burma, Thailand and Cambodia follow the same school as Sri Lanka but Buddhism disappeared from Indonesia by the 16th century.

Buddhism failed to spread westwards. Clement of Alexandria (about AD 150-216) and St Jerome (AD 340-420) knew of it but resemblances with Christianity are probably accidental. Buddhism has a small following today in the West but is widely studied by Western scholars.

EARLY CULT MONUMENTS

Although Buddhism began in the 6th century BC its oldest surviving remains go back only to the 3rd century BC following an emperor's conversion and patronage.

Most of historic India was first united under the Maurya dynasty (about 324-187 BC) and its third ruler, Aśoka (273-232 BC) became a Buddhist. This is recorded on his stone inscriptions. As a result of his patronage and the increasing use of durable building materials the oldest surviving Buddhist monuments date from this period.

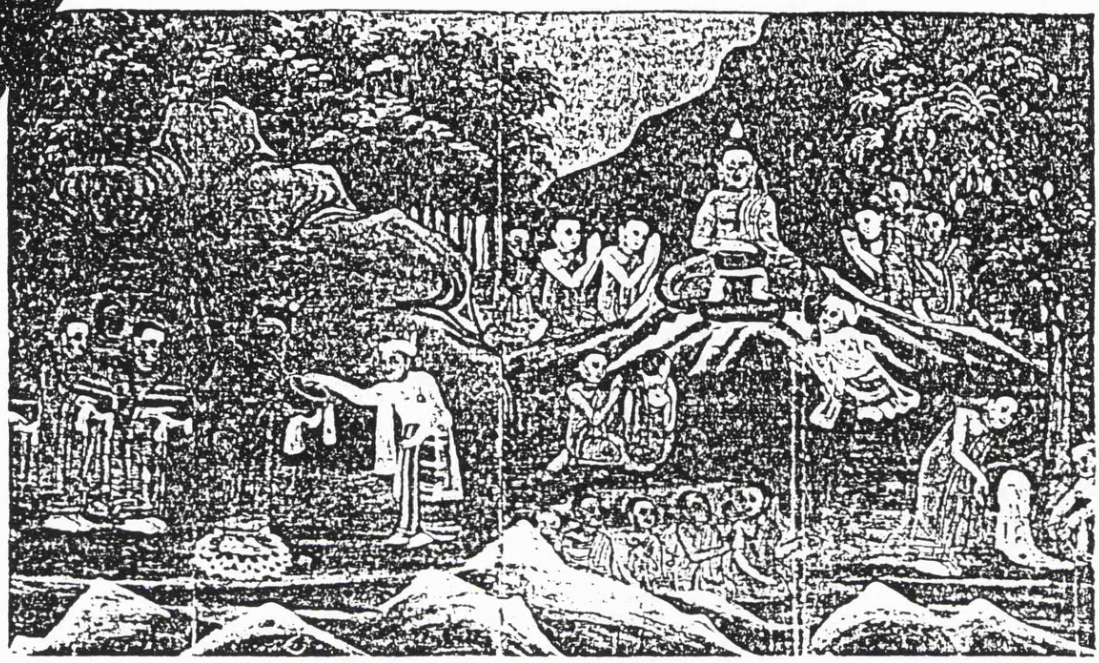
The most important of these were the *stūpas*, solid, domed structures, originally funeral mounds, that contained relics and other offerings and commemorated the Master, his predecessors and disciples. The emperor Aśoka is said to have built many throughout India.

Before images were worshipped, the Buddha and his death were symbolised by the *stūpa*. At his death the Buddha reached *nirvāṇa*, the end of the chain of painful existences and highest goal of Buddhism. Building and worshipping a *stūpa* were an acknowledgement of the Doctrine as well as acts of devotion. The merit so gained brought rewards in a present or future life.

The stupa at Sanchi

The line illustrations are reproduced by kind permission of Faber and Faber from 'Oriental Art - A Handbook of Styles and Forms' (1979)

Exhibition catalogue numbers are given where relevant.



Signori, il Nirvana

di FRANCESCO RUSSO

"Buddismo: arte e fede". Con questo titolo il British Museum espone centinaia di opere provenienti da una cultura che ha ancora tanto da insegnare all'Occidente

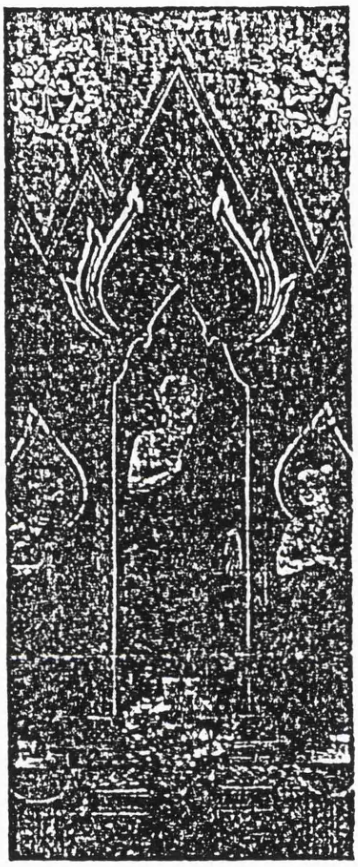
Londra. Poco dopo la morte del principe Gotama, circa 2 mila anni fa, la visione religiosa che fulmino il Budda sotto il "fico del risveglio" cominciò a diffondersi in Asia per predominare in tutto il continente, sia pure in tempi diversi e con le eccezioni del vicino Oriente e del nord sciamanico. Oggi in Birmania i buddisti sono più dell'82 per cento della popolazione, in Thailandia, dove la loro è la religione ufficiale, il 90 a Sri Lanka, il 69 nella Corea del Sud, il 37 nel Laos, il 58 nella Kampuchea, l'88 nel Vietnam, il 55 nel Giappone, dove il buddismo spesso è in simbiosi con lo shintoismo, il 75 per cento. Nelle sue formulazioni più intellettuali il buddismo continua a guadagnare cultori in America e in Inghilterra. Sicché, la grande mostra di arte buddista che il British Museum di Londra ha appena inaugurato si giustifica ampiamente non solo per l'importanza intrinseca di questa religione, ma anche per il suo immenso interesse storico e culturale.

Intitolata "Buddhism: Art and Faith" ("Buddismo: arte e fede"), la mostra fa posto a ogni paese con un patrimonio culturale e artistico buddista, dall'Iran al Giappone, dalla Mongolia all'Indonesia: circa 400 oggetti provenienti dal British Museum, dalla British Library, da collezioni di Oxford, Cambridge ed Edimburgo saranno esposti sino a gennaio.

Ma forse sarà opportuno qualche preliminare richiamo ai principi essenziali del buddismo. È una dottrina salvifica che identifica esistenza

...lferenza e ravvisa la liberazione ...dolore nel risveglio, nell'illumi...zione ("bodhi"), cioè nella perce...ione dell' "an-atman", l'irrealtà dell'ego. Non è che si debba mortificare, spegnere la carne: la piaga da estirpare è l'illusione dell'ego, di un'esistenza personale. Come si produce quest'illusione, che genera l'attaccamento alla vita, fonte infinita di tribolazioni? L'aggregazione temporanea di sostanze fisiche ("Skandhas") accende quei fuochi fatui — idee, passioni — che scambiamo per una personalità: il filosofo inglese David Hume, negando un ego distinto dai processi mentali, elaborò una dottrina affine al buddismo, Pirandello intuì qualcosa di simile. Il "Nirvana", cioè l'estinzione dell'illusione dell'ego, è per il buddismo Hinayana, o meridionale, un obiettivo che si consegue attraverso discipline ascetiche: il buddismo "Mahayana", o settentrionale, pone l'accento sulla meditazione: il "Nirvana" è il lampo che ci rivela il nostro essere nella realtà assoluta, la nostra essenziale "buddità".

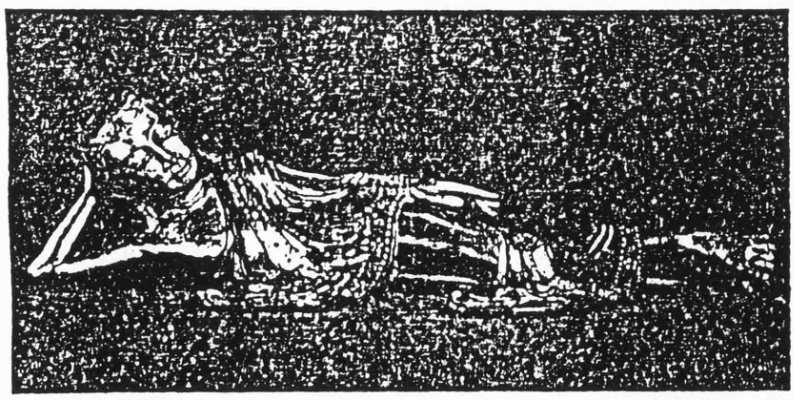
È buddista l'indifferenza del monaco mendicante Pindola, che quando un lebbroso gli gettò nella ciotola, insieme a una manciata di riso, un proprio pollice, mangiò anche quello, perché un asceta buddista non rifiuta nulla, come è buddista il frenetico volontarismo di "Hagakure", il manuale del Samurai (1716), nel quale si legge: «Il metodo del samurai consiste nella disperazione. Dieci o più uomini non possono aver ragione di un disperato. Il senso comune non serve a nulla nelle grandi imprese. Semplicemente, diventare pazzo e disperato». Così, arte buddista è la spada del samurai come la ciotola che esprime povertà, solitudine, rinuncia. Non meno svariata è la funzione dell'icona del Budda: può essere un modello di spiritualità proposto alla ricerca interiore come divinità o idolo da propiziarsi con preghiere e offerte.



Organizzata secondo un criterio ingegnosamente geografico e cronologico, la mostra comincia dall'impero indiano del buon re Asoka (273-232 a.C.), giudicato da H.G. Wells uno dei sette uomini più grandi della storia. Sconvolto dagli orrori della guerra, Asoka si convertì al buddismo e all' "ahimsa" ("non-violenza"), istituì ospedali per gli uomini e per gli animali, diede avvio all'evangelizzazione del Dekkan e di Ceylon. Sebbene Siddharta Gotama fosse vissuto due secoli addietro, i primi monumenti buddistici risalgono ad Asoka, che fece edificare circa 84 mila stupa, strutture rotonde con cupola che erano tombe, reliquari, santuari, simboli architettonici del Budda e del Nirvana. ?

La mostra presenta una quantità di oggetti provenienti da stupa di Asoka, ma l'immagine del Budda appare per la prima volta nella scultura di Gandhara, regione negli odierni Pakistan e Afghanistan. Qui il buddismo si esprime in forme d'arte influenzate dalla Grecia e da Roma. Episodi della vita del Budda sono

>>



Alcune delle opere esposte alla mostra del British Museum. Il Budda in una statuetta birmana e, in alto, in un dipinto thailandese su stoffa. A destra: due soldati birmani di Mara su ceramica dipinta. Nella pagina accanto: la figura dorata del Budda, accompagnato dai discepoli, in un dipinto birmano. Sotto: la ceramica smaltata cinese di un giovane lohan.

cenati in bassorilievi che a prima sta paiono frammenti della Roma imperiale. Verso il principio del V secolo le incursioni degli unni bianchi troncano la cultura di Gandhara, così come quella indiana della dinastia Gupta (320-550 d.C.), che produsse Budda di una perfezione classica. Mentre il Budda di Gandhara ha la grazia voluta e languida della decadenza ellenistica, l'arte Gupta presenta il Budda in ardite stilizzazioni: è un asceta che si muove a passo di danza, con una sinuosità che irradia energia spirituale. La veste leggera copre entrambe le spalle e aderisce diafana al corpo (il "drappeggio bagnato"), la capigliatura è ricciuta e sormontata da una piccola protuberanza.

L'invasione musulmana, la contropropaganda dell'induismo, la concorrenza del giainismo ed altre cause, non tutte chiarite, concorsero al declino del buddismo in India. La corrente Mahayana (ovvero "settentrionale" che pone l'accento sulla meditazione) si rifugiò nel Kashmir e nel Nepal, quella Hinayana (ovvero "meridionale" che predica le dottrine ascetiche per raggiungere il Nirvana, cioè l'estinzione dell'illusione dell'ego) emigrò nello Sri Lanka, convertito nel terzo secolo della nostra era da Mahinda, figlio di un nipote di Asoka. Mahinda piantò nell'isola una talea del fico alla cui ombra il principe Siddharta divenne il Budda: attecchì una pianta che ancora oggi verdeggia e sarebbe l'albero più antico del mondo. Questa sezione della mostra è di un interesse cruciale: non solo per il rigoglio dell'arte religiosa di Ceylon, dove ancora oggi 20 mila monaci buddisti esercitano un'influenza sociale considerevole, ma anche perché, dopo secoli di trasmissione orale del pensiero di Budda, qui furono redatte, in lingua pali (un idioma letterario dell'India settentrionale preferito da Budda al sanscrito troppo associato all'induismo), le prime scritture buddistiche: il "Tipitaka", o "Triplice canestro", che è il canone del buddismo Hinayana.

Da questo faro del buddismo, missionari singalesi portarono il verbo Hinayana nella Birmania, in Thailandia e in Cambogia. La mostra documenta abbondantemente le diverse arti buddiste di quei paesi, più quella dell'Indonesia, dove però a partire dal XIII secolo prevalse l'influenza musulmana sbarcata coi traffici marittimi. In Birmania, nel giro di tre secoli, la dinastia pagana elevò 3 mila templi, dei quali 2 mila sono rimasti. Luminosa, bianca e dorata, la pagoda è in ogni villaggio l'edificio più alto, proclama ovunque la presenza del Budda, celebrato in innumeri cerimonie che coinvolgono dall'infanzia ogni cittadino.

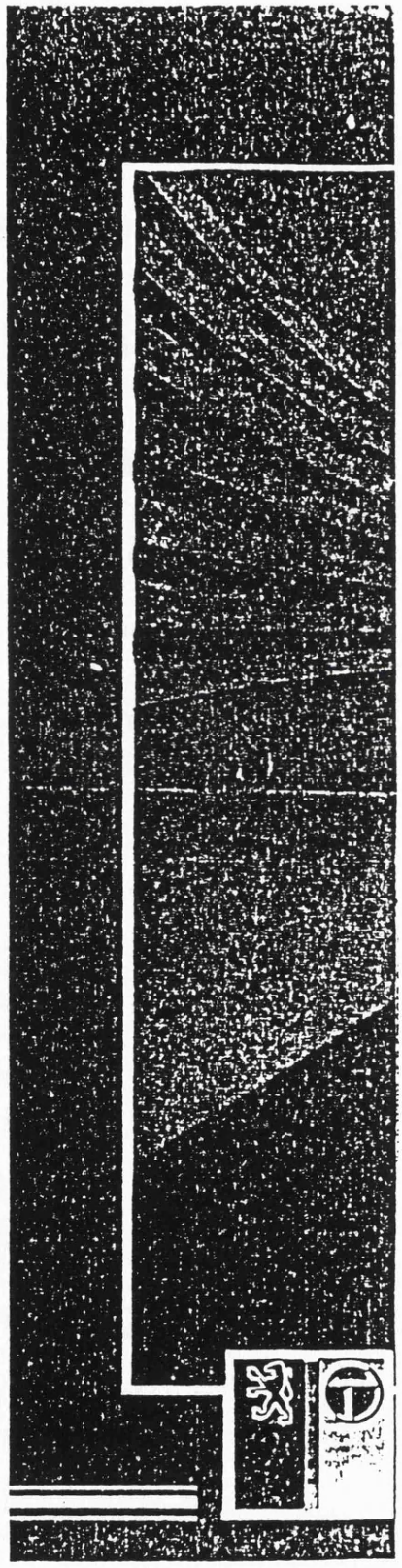
Non meno copiosa l'arte religiosa del Tibet. Qui i monaci buddisti o lama — un quarto della popolazione in circa 3 mila monasteri — erano insieme alla nobiltà la classe più ricca e influente, in una teocrazia con un pontefice supremo al vertice. La fornitissima collezione di testi antichi del British Museum illustra i meriti del Tibet nella diffusione del buddismo. Furono i chierici tibetani a preservare le scritture indiane scampate all'annientamento del buddismo indiano da parte degli invasori islamici, dal 1206 in poi.

In Cina il buddismo arrivò lungo le carovaniere dell'Asia Centrale in un periodo avanzato della dinastia Han posteriore (tra il 23 e il 220 d.C.) e colmò il vuoto lasciato dal confucianesimo, trascinato da quella dinastia nella sua caduta.

E la mostra non tace una grande scoperta cinese: l'impeto evangelizzatore del buddismo diede impulso in Cina alla tecnica della stampa, che fu elaborata per la disseminazione dei sacri testi. Il primo libro stampato del mondo è cinese, una copia del "Sutra di diamante" (868 d.C.), sei pagine più una piccola illustrazione. Il solo esemplare conosciuto si trova al British Museum.

Ma uno degli aspetti più seducenti del buddismo cinese è il suo laicismo. Nel sesto secolo l'indiano Bodhidharma varcò l'Himalaya per predicare una dottrina basata sul Mahayama: fu denominata Dhyana, meditazione, parola indiana che in cinese divenne Chan e in giapponese Zen: non occorre macerarsi con pratiche ascetiche e lo studio delle scritture, la percezione della propria buddità è uno scatto mentale non necessariamente frutto di assidue meditazioni. Nondimeno, la leggenda vuole che Bodhidharma meditò otto anni davanti a un muro nella posizione del loto, sino a quando le gambe gli si atrofizzarono; e che una volta, incollerito per essersi appisolato durante la meditazione, si recise le palpebre, dalle quali germinò la piantina del tè, il cui infuso tiene svegli i monaci buddisti durante le meditazioni.

FRANCESCO RUSSO



whatever your beliefs there should be something here to interest everyone. British Museum, Bloomsbury, WC1 (636 1555), open Mon-Sat 10-5pm, Sun 2.30-6.00

The religion inspired incantations, manuscripts, sculptures and paintings. And, being sacred, extra

Asia-century Japan that graphically illustrates hell, with demons let loose on hapless humans. This is a copy of a 13th-century original in the

come on materials from palm leaves and paper to precious metals and baked clay.

This excellent show runs until January 5.

FWP

INTERNATIONAL PRESS-CUTTING BUREAU
Lancaster House,
70 Newington Causeway, London, S.E.1

Extract from
Watford Observer.

26 JUL 1985

The art of the Buddha

THE wealth and variety of Buddhist beliefs and art are illustrated in a British exhibition running until January 5.

The 400-plus exhibits that make up the most comprehensive exhibition ever to be staged on Buddhism in this country are drawn mainly from the rich collections of the British Museum and British Library.

Buddhism grew from the teachings of the Buddha, "the Enlightened One", who lived in eastern India between 563 and 483 BC and preached an answer to human suffering.

He taught that by morality, concentration and wisdom a man could achieve nirvana, the end of the painful cycle of rebirths caused by wrong action and its retribution.

Active today chiefly in Sri Lanka, Burma, Thailand, Korea and Japan, its remains abound in India, Pakistan, Nepal, China, Central Asia and Java.

As the religion spread its scriptures were copied and translated. Many works on dispaly are lost in their Indian originals and survive only in Tibetan and lesser-known Chinese languages. These texts were written or inclsed on palm-leaf strips, paper, precious metals, cloth, baked clay and stone.

Among manuscripts in the exhibition are outstanding Indian and Nepalese miniatures on palm-leaf, Burmese folding paper books with sometimes naive and always colourful illustrations of edifying tales and vivid Chinese scenes from beyond the grave.

Printing in the Far East — usually from woodblocks — became effective in spreading the word. On display are printed scholastic texts and mystical spells and a Tibetan printing board engraved, naturally in reverse, in skilful relief on both sides.

The exhibition — Buddhism: Art and Faith — also contains a wealth of Buddhist sculpture in stone, stucco, terracotta, ivory, wood and metal as well as paintings on cloth.

Remarkable are an exquisite ivory carving from Kashmir, a monumental stone Buddha head from Java, a wooden priestly portrait figure from Japan, rare bronze Buddhas from Pakistan and Chinese paintings recovered from one of the famous Dunhuang caves by Sir Aurel Stein.

He also found there the huge embroidery with an over life-size Buddha which dominates the entrance to the Far Eastern section.

The words on the pedestal of a bronze preaching Buddha in the exhibition aptly express the purpose of so much Buddhist art — may the merit of this work bring salvation to the donor's parents and all living creatures.

FWP

INTERNATIONAL PRESS
CUTTING BUREAU
Extract from:
LONDON WEEKLY DIARY
OF SOCIAL EVENTS.

- 4 AUG 1985

Buddhism: Art and Faith

Buddhism, the dominant religion in many parts of Asia, grew from the teachings of Buddha, "the Enlightened One", who lived in India between 563 and 483 BC. Enlightened is what visitors who know nothing about it will be if they go along to the British Museum's new show. In the most comprehensive exhibition ever staged on Buddhism in this country, with more than 400 items drawn from the museum's own holdings and those of the British Library, the wealth and variety of Buddhist beliefs and art are explained. The exhibition—open until next January—also has a major collection of sculpture as well as ivory carvings and paintings on cloth.

FINANCIAL TIMES 27/7/85

Exhibition

The enchantment of the Buddha

"Amitabha" at the British Museum

Buddhism: Art and Faith, at the British Museum until 5 January, 1986, is a magnificent exhibition which nobody should miss. It deserves to be a milestone in the growth of understanding and appreciation of Buddhism in this country.

If anything can explain the complexities of Buddhism's protean development since 483 BC when Siddhartha Gautama, the historical Buddha, died in Nepal, it will be this exhibition. The catalogue is a model of lucidity, while the overall design, maps and photographs are excellent. Hot from the street, visitors encounter the calm of Zen Buddhism, a clever introduction since Zen and motorcycles remains for many an automatic, if rather confused, mental association.

The stairs become an ascent of temple steps, past gigantic Buddhas, bells and the delicate Gandharan friezes. For once I could almost have done with a sound-track of chanting monks. Imagination must furnish it richly stimulated by the great variety of objects which evoke Buddhism among princes, scholars, ascetics and peasants. It is impressive indeed, to realise that the exhibition comes almost entirely from the British Museum's and British Library's holdings.

Neither literary nor artistic monuments of Buddhism survive from before the middle of the third century BC when the Indian Emperor Asóka converted and began to build the great *stupas* or memorial mounds. Yet another three centuries passed before representations of Buddha started to appear. Up till then he had been suggested by footprints, or symbolised by a standing woman (his mother), a tree, a wheel or a *stupa*.

One of the fascinations of the exhibition is to follow the variations which the image of Buddah has taken across the centuries and in so many cultures. However, perhaps the strangest guise was that he took at the beginning in the art of Gandhara. In the temples of the Peshawar Valley in Pakistan and Afghanistan the figures are in a style which anyone will recognise as classical. For here on the trade route leading to the Mediterranean, India met the legacy of Greece.

However, the Buddha we usually think of is the seated figure, feet crossed before him, with pendant ear-lobes and the cranial bump of wisdom. Yet there are a further 32 major and 80 minor marks to learn before one recognises the Enlightened One, or Buddha. With only the subtlest changes, the sculptors make Buddha welcoming, stern, reassuring or sublimely withdrawn. Even a 19th-century Burmese sculpture, gawdy with mirror-glass, is an inspirational work which shows Buddha reclining with the most elegant calm to await death.

This is an excellent exhibition for the children's summer holidays. Such is the array of objects, from brilliant scrolls of monsters to silver prayer-wheels, that even children particularly prone to museum collapse should find amusement. Both charming and even gently edifying are the scenes from Buddha's preparatory lives, when he was born as animals as well as humans.

Such is the story on a Sri Lankan palm leaf, of Buddha's life as a golden deer in the herd belonging to the grossly carnivorous King of Benares. To avoid the misery of the chase, the deer drew lots for the slaughter. When a pregnant doe took the short straw, Buddha came forward to take her place, and the King saw his error—and presumably became vegetarian.

With so much to learn, many visitors will be glad to follow up with the lectures on Buddhist art and belief which will take place at the British Museum in August and October. But Buddhism flourishes at large in Britain today, and it

is possible. t
than Wimble
most flambova
places of wor

Uposatha
temple. Inau
although onl
terior being
vivid frescoe
Buddha. The
young Thai
volunteered
dazzling jewe
ing.

This brillia
gold temple
the austere d
sionary monk
rigours of th
and breakfa
rather than
begging-bowl
and answer
growing nu
terested in
nice though
of the umpi
chanting th
guess is that
exhibition
Museum has
many more c
be inquiring
that serenity
abiding impre
able show.

Pat

2 AUG 1985

Gods of a gentle faith

2313

IN a mythological Japanese forest, the Tengu — goblins with outlandishly long noses — were suspended between heaven and hell. On one of their flights they passed the Blood Pond into which miscreant women were pushed by demons.

So runs one of the legends, proving that the threats to non-conformists are as apparent in the comparatively gentle faith of Buddhism as any other belief, but it also has aspects of indisputable delicacy and finesse, as is found in Buddhism: Art and Faith, at the British Museum, the most comprehensive exhibition of Buddhism to be staged in this country.

More than 400 exhibits are drawn mainly from the collections of the British Museum and British Library, richly reflecting every aspect of the faith.

At least the teachings of Buddha, who lived in eastern India between 563 and 483 BC, gave the illusion of being able to rectify an unruly life, since each life was seen as one of a series conditioned by the moral value of deeds performed in a previous existence.

The religion inspired incantations, manuscripts, sculptures and paintings. And, being sacred, extra effort went into their realisation, as this show reveals. But the image of the Buddha himself took longer to surface, his presence at first indicated merely by footprints.

When he did take shape in India he had characteristic calm, an inscrutable sense of permanence often sealed in the lotus position. He appeared from the first a self-contained mystic rather than retributive judge. And from India come some of the finest bronzes.

But man's fears and sadistic inclinations produced some awesome variations, like the Samvara, a Heruku form of Aksobhya, with 12 arms and four heads, which trampled on beings, stretched an elephant skin behind him and had such gruesome appendages as an axe, a severed head and a noose.

In China the Lokapala is vigorously portrayed in gilt bronze: the nine-headed, 18-armed Defender of the North, his accompanying objects ranging from a skull and a toad to a tortoise and a pearl.

And there is a scroll from 18th-century Japan that graphically illustrates hell, with demons let loose on hapless humans. This is a copy of a 13th-century original in the Seisbu Raigoji temple and represents the sufferings of rebirth in the Six Worlds in the Pure Land teachings of the Kamakura period.

The Thais had a clear idea of Buddhist cosmology and a painting from around 1820 shows a stack of pavilions stretching skywards containing divinities — the many levels of heaven. Below are animals in magical forests. There are five continents and an ocean encircled by a double serpent and further down levels of hell, reserved or specific types of punishment.

In the West, however, Buddhism retains its image of non-violence and a patient passing through traumas to peace. Paintings from China, in particular, convey more fortunate manifestations of the faith. Especially fine paintings on silk were found at Dunhuang in the eighth century AD. Here, paradise abounds, packed but preferable to the glimpses of hell.

As Buddhism spread the scriptures were copied and translated. Many works on display are lost in their Indian originals but survive in Tibetan and lesser known Chinese languages. They come on materials from palm leaves and paper to precious metals and baked clay.

This excellent show runs until January 5.

FW
EP

INTERNATIONAL PRESS-CUTTING BUREAU
Lancaster House,
70 Newington Causeway, London, S.E.1

Extract from
Watford Observer.

26 JUL 1985

The art of the Buddha

2313

THE wealth and variety of Buddhist beliefs and art are illustrated in a British exhibition running until January 5.

The 400-plus exhibits that make up the most comprehensive exhibition ever to be staged on Buddhism in this country are drawn mainly from

THE ARTS

Jch Russell Taylor

Galleries

Monumentally mysterious

Buddhism: Art and Faith
British Museum

Symbols of Power at the Time of Stonehenge
National Museum of Antiquities of Scotland, Edinburgh

It is often hard enough trying to assess the significance in art of some philosophical, religious or political system we understand reasonably well, whether we accept its tenets in their proper sphere or not. We can take refuge, of course, in saying that what matters artistically is not how much the basic ideas mean to us, but how much they meant to the artist, how effectively they triggered him or her into artistic creation.

You do not, we may say, have to be a Roman Catholic to appreciate Bernini, a Communist to appreciate Eisenstein, a Nazi to appreciate Riefenstahl, a Jew to appreciate Chagall, and so on. Indeed, in each case it may actually help if you are not, since that way the role of association, the taint of preaching to the converted, will be kept at a respectable aesthetic distance. Or so we say. But where are we when something even more alien intrudes on our calculations? Where are we – and where should we be – with a show like the British Museum's and British Library's combined operation **Buddhism: Art and Faith** (until January 5)?

It is, probably, the sort of show it is best to go into knowing either everything or nothing. For those of us who know nothing, it contrives to be extremely helpful, giving a crash-course in the origins and development of the body of belief and some good clues to the way it has shaped the art of several major Asian cultures. For those who know everything, it brings out and puts together the Buddhist masterpieces of the two relevant national collections, and is not too pushy about forcing information on those who already know it, so that the labels can be conveniently ignored. (In one or two instances you have to crouch on the floor with some source of illumination you have brought in with you in order to read them anyway.)

If nothing else, one's knowledge of what Buddhism was and is, and of how it is represented in painting and sculpture and manuscript in important sections of Britain's national patrimony, should be immensely enhanced by a visit to the show.

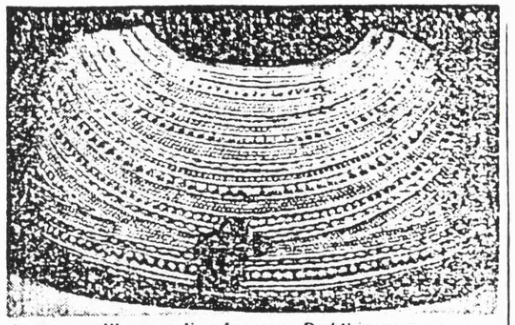
But what then? How would we react to the art, as art, if all this information were denied us? And how, if at all, does the intake of information improve and refine our aesthetic response? These are much more difficult questions to answer. I had best at once come clean, and say that for me the show was informative but rather dull. So many benignly smiling Buddhas sitting or standing in monumental immobility which presumably represents philosophical calm face-to-face with the Infinite. So many almost indistinguishable figures of disciples or even of displaced deities from previous religions which have somehow been absorbed into the Buddhist world-view. Though there are of course local variations depending on date and country of origin, the overriding impression is one of uniformity, which speaks well, no doubt, for the efficacy of Buddhism as a system of beliefs and a way of life, but does not make for the most exciting art.

That, possibly, is the point. Art, as such, is sublimely irrelevant to the Buddhist world: each individual work is purely functional, like a kitchen-pot, made for a particular use in channelling the activities of the mind, and hardly at all for its own sake as an independent work of art, following its own rules and exerting its own self-sufficient appeal. That at least is the impression one receives, and the message which seems to come over from the works and the catalogue's detailed explications of them.

Perhaps the other side of my opening equation applies: if you do not need to be a Catholic to appreciate Bernini, maybe you do need to be a Buddhist to appreciate most of the works here, or to understand fully the ways in which you are not meant to appreciate them. Western, non-Buddhist visitors quite possibly arrive with their minds cluttered with irrelevant expectations, and are berating totally admirable kitchen-pots for not being the finest, most impractical Sèvres porcelain, applying the standards of the striving, individualistic West to the fatalistic, non-competitive East, which strives for nothing except ultimate extinction.

Given all that, it must also be admitted that there is quite a lot to enjoy, if for all the wrong reasons. Local variations in the doctrine introduce a number of colourful aliens like the Tantric *heruka*, fierce manifestations of Buddhahood who tend to look a lot more like Hindu gods and demonstrate anything but philosophic calm as they trample on the less approved manifestations of the cosmos, to quite lively effect. Some of the pots and metal objects connected with Buddhist ritual are very beautiful, and the abstract stupa are often stunning in their grace and simplicity. The beginning of the tradition in representing the Buddha often produces a finely monumental effect, reducing mere humanity to its true, insignificant proportions – though here, admittedly, one is also aware that practical limitations of size restrict the proper representation of some of Buddhism's grandest artworks.

Towards the end of the period covered, the Japanese contribution becomes the most immediately appealing, if only because Buddhist subject-matter – legends and dignitories – particular – is firmly annexed to the conventions normal in Japanese art of the relevant period, so we are conscious of seeing a Japanese woodblock print or ivory or lacquered carving first and a Buddhist object only some time after.



A more readily appealing Japanese Buddhist portrait, in lacquered and painted wood, c.1700; and a cape of sheet gold found on a male skeleton at Mold in Wales

Scotland may not be all that exotic in relation to England – not, certainly, so much as Tibet or Cambodia – but there is still a faint feeling of strange breezes blowing north of the Border. And, though the strangest religious practices which currently occur there are probably confined to respectable Masonic lodges in Edinburgh, it still remains true that one can feel nearer to prehistory in the Highlands and Islands than one can anywhere amid the manicured fields and carefully tamed wildernesses of England.

For that reason, the present show at the National Museum of Antiquities of Scotland in Edinburgh **Symbols of Power at the Time of Stonehenge** (until October 13), seems somehow more at home and immediate there than it might nearer Stonehenge itself. In any case, the religion it evokes, though clearly native, is much more remote from us even than Buddhism and requires a much more violent mental displacement in order for us to empathize with it.

It has, of course, nothing to do with Druids, real or imaginatively revived. It was presumably – in so far as we can know these things – a species of nature-worship which depended heavily as all nature did on the movement of the sun and the change of the seasons. We can at least divine from the monuments left to us that these primitive peoples were skilled in astronomical observation and the uncanny atmosphere of a primeval stone circle through the changing lights of a day is vividly evoked in one admirable piece of reconstruction, the ultimate in audio-visuals.

The artworks which were associated with this remote society and its beliefs consist very largely, it seems, of symbols of power, many of them for personal adornment. There are wonderful, simple gold necklets, which must have separated the chiefs from the men, and there are necklaces in jet and amber (which the catalogue breaks down interestingly in terms of man-hours required for the making) and there are more mysterious objects, incised pebbles and the like, which mostly come from tombs and probably have something to do with the ancestor-worship phase of the religion before the gods put in an appearance to justify the territorial imperative.

The show is even given an unexpectedly contemporary perspective by featuring also a Bill Gibb outfit utilizing his recent Bronze Age range of motifs specially made for this exhibition. But finally, what makes the show memorable is not so much the light it throws on the Dark Ages as its tact in letting us continue to enjoy a sense of mystery.

John Russell Taylor

much of the background of ideological contention that led to the killing of the priest. Popieluszko preached a humane creed, adherence to a higher morality than the morality of the state; his support for Solidarity was based on a sense of justice that conflicted with the official administration of justice in Poland. Despite the best intentions of its director, the play becomes bogged down in the characters of the defendants and witnesses, in the black humour of the sequence of bureaucratic bungles. The wider issues are obscured by a pall of liberal goodwill: theatre, which can be one of the most subversive of the arts, disappoints when it is used not to provoke thought but to preach to the converted.

"The Biko Inquest" suffers from the same weaknesses but works better as drama, perhaps because there is less ambiguity about who represents "good" and who "bad". In "The Deliberate Death of a Polish Priest", three of the four officers charged with the murder elicit sympathy—did Piotrowski really see Popieluszko as an evil to be exorcised? Were Chmielewski and Pekala innocent dupes or were they cynically seeking career advancement? "The Biko Inquest", untrammelled by such questions, directs the emotions away from the characters and towards the system of which they are victims. The chorus of the African National Congress anthem, which replaces the final curtain, taps the audience's charged emotions.

Commitment to a chosen idiom is perhaps as important for the author embarking on a courtroom drama as commitment to a cause. Peter Weiss, in 1964, recognised the problem of creating a play from the transcripts of the Frankfurt war-crime trials and wrote instead a dramatic poem, "The Investigation", which dispenses with a courtroom setting, with named characters, with naturalism: it is a series of stylised witnesses and defendants recounting memories of Auschwitz to a judge. It is chastening and provocative.

Buddhist art

Tokens of devotion

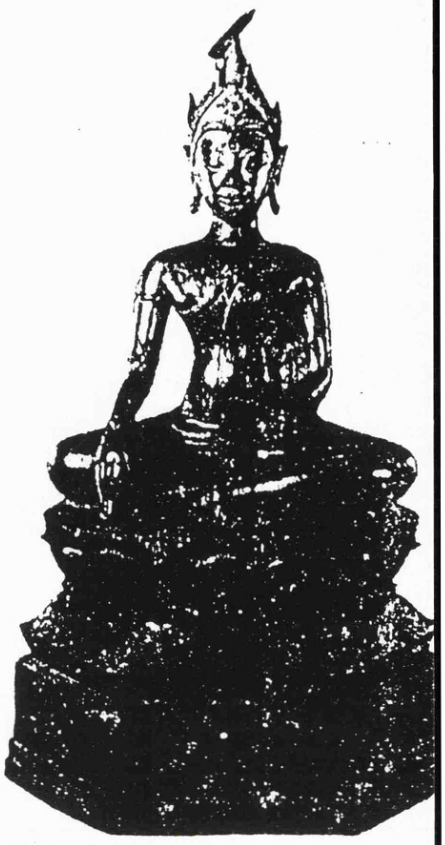
Religious beliefs have often been the inspiration and raison d'être for art: this theme is examined in the exhibition "Buddhism: Art and Faith", at the British Museum until January 1986. Over 400 items, including sculpture in stone, stucco, terracotta, ivory, wood and metal, miniatures and texts, reflect the different forms of Buddhism and the varying cultures of the countries of the East to which Buddhism spread from India.

The Buddha lived from around 563BC until 483BC but the earliest surviving remains relating to Buddhism, stone inscriptions, date from the reign of Emperor Asoka (273-232BC). Initially, the presence of the Buddha was represented symbolically by footprints. His death was indicated by the image of a *stupa*; an image which, like the church in Christianity, occurs repeatedly in Buddhist art and has several meanings. *Stupas* were venerated as tombs and represented the goal, the doctrine (Buddha's teaching), and the Buddha himself in nirvana. Examples of the beautiful reliquaries found in *stupas*—such as the crystal goose and the gold reliquary set with garnets—testify to the skill of Buddhist craftsmen in the first and second centuries AD.

Early images of the Buddha in human form from Gandhara show the influence of the Graeco-Roman tradition: this influence would have dated from the time when Gandhara was ruled by Greeks from Alexander the Great's colony in Bactria. In "Buddha and Bodhisattvas", the image of authority of a seated figure, flanked by two standing ones, used in imperial Roman art has been adapted (as it was in early Christian art).

If in form some of the early Buddha figures show western influence, the feeling is distinctly eastern; one of spirituality and remoteness. This is achieved partially by the Buddhas' eyes being half-closed in meditation, the ambiguous sexuality of the figures, the stylisation of the facial features and the simplification of the shape of the body, with its smooth, almost tubular limbs and the emphasis on the triangular. This quality of the supernatural combined with the natural characterises much Buddhist religious sculpture, as does the sensuality of such exhibits as Samvara, where two people are locked in a sensuous embrace, and Tara, in which the hips of the goddess suggest the swaying movement which finds its full expression in figures where the sinuous *tribhanga* (three bends) pose is used.

The exhibition is not only concerned with the public art of objects to decorate shrines and temples; much of it is devoted to Buddhist texts, many of which are lost in their Indian originals and survive only in Tibetan and lesser-known Chinese languages. Pilgrims travelled to India in search of new texts as Buddhism spread eastwards. Some of these pilgrims were translators, like the famous Xuan Zang (circa 602-664AD), who made a 16-year journey to India from China and returned with 657 titles in 520 cases. "The Heart of the Perfection of Wisdom" is a translation by Xuan Zang written in the diagrammatic form of a pagoda. The pagoda form refers to Emperor Wen in China who, in his *stupa*-building activities, emulated Emperor Asoka, the first great Buddhist



Spiritual and remote

ruler as well as the first important patron of the arts in India. Many of the texts are works of art in their own right, with their elaborate silver filigree and carved ivory manuscript covers. The writing materials, too, are of interest—ink on birch bark ("The Book of Kindred Sayings"), and ink on a chalk ground on silk, for example.

Often a text was commissioned as a pious deed to increase the spiritual well-being of the patron. (Similarly, a bronze preaching Buddha bears the inscription "May the merit of this work bring salvation to the donor's parents and all living creatures".) In some instances the manuscript itself was deemed protected by the depiction of the eight great events of the Buddha's life and in others the painters themselves shared in the spiritual advantage. The rather abstruse Mahayana philosophical texts were more widely worshipped, as the embodiment of wisdom, than read. The recitation of some texts was thought to ward off misfortune, danger or illness.

The Buddhist stress on earning spiritual merit by repeating prayers and charms did much to encourage the development of printing and may even have been largely responsible for its invention in China in the eighth century. The Scroll of Bodhisattvas, a ninth-century woodblock print, is covered in hundreds of individually impressed Buddhas or Bodhisattvas—every time an image was printed the person paying for the printing earned spiritual merit (a forerunner of the Catholic system of indulgences?).

FW
EP

COMMENTARY

The spread of devotion

Andrew Topsfield

Buddhism: Art and Faith
British Museum, until January 5, 1986

The riches of the combined collections of the British Museum and British Library have enabled them in recent years to mount several exhibitions of the first rank with little or no need to borrow objects from other institutions. *Buddhism: Art and Faith*, organized by the Departments of Oriental Antiquities and Oriental Manuscripts and Printed Books, is perhaps the most impressive product of this collaboration so far. Comprising more than four hundred items and filling both the Prints and Drawings and Oriental exhibition galleries, it is a wide-ranging survey of the sculptural, pictorial and manuscript traditions of Buddhism, as interpreted by the various Asian cultures which it has fundamentally influenced over a period of two-and-a-half millennia.

The exhibition sensibly deals with this diversity of cultures in mainly regional groups: it begins with early remains from *stupa* (sacred relic mound) sites in India and with a review of the major legendary events in the life of the Buddha as depicted in the Hellenistic relief sculptures of the Gandhara region. The largest single part of the exhibition shows the transmission of the scriptures, from the earliest surviving manuscripts to modern times, and another section illustrates the early development of the Buddha image in Indian sculpture. The remaining twelve sections are devoted to Buddhist art in the different regions of India, in Nepal, Tibet, Burma, Thailand, Cambodia and Indonesia, and in Central Asia, China, Korea and Japan. The effect is overwhelming in its richness and variety, as one passes from sculptures of monumental size to small, refined bronze and ivory figures, from Tang paintings on silk to splendidly gaudy late Burmese book illustrations. It is illuminating to see familiar pieces from the Museum's collection, such as the majestic gilt bronze Tara from Sri Lanka, given their proper prominence in this context, and to see a number of well-chosen loans from other British institutions, such as the impressive bronze Buddha, also from Sri Lanka, lent by the Royal Scottish Museum.

A bronze Buddha (left), seventh to eighth century AD, from the Deccan: and a thirteenth-century lacquered wood Amitabha from Japan. From the exhibition reviewed here.

The images were made for devotees. The formal beauty of the Buddha figures is inseparable from their palpable evocation of serenity, omniscience and compassion, the attributes of a perfected being: "As the great ocean has but one taste, the taste of salt, so does this Dhamma and Discipline have but one taste, the taste of freedom." It is a pity that the famous, large-scale, bronze Sultanganj Buddha at Birmingham was not available for loan, and that it was not possible to show more than one of the relief sculptures from Amaravati in the eastern Deccan. This large slab from the *stupa* drum itself depicts a *stupa* mound with its original railings, superstructure and detailed carvings under a sky thronged with heavenly beings. The Museum's Amaravati collection, which reached this country in 1860 and is of comparable importance to the Elgin marbles, is now kept in store and seen only by specialists.

The comprehensive display of manuscripts and (mainly Far-Eastern) printed works is especially valuable, as few of these are normally on view. The materials used for manuscripts include wood, birch bark, palm leaf, paper, silk, terracotta and gold. The languages represented are Sanskrit, Prakrit, Pali, Sinhalese, Burmese, Chinese, Japanese, Tibetan, Mongolian, Khotanese, Tocharian, Uyghur and Sogdian. Some of the oldest manuscripts of their types are shown, as well as some of the most beautiful. Among the most ancient are the earliest surviving Indian paper manuscript, a *Lotus Sutra* from Gilgit (sixth to seventh century), the earliest Tibetan manuscript (eighth century), the oldest Japanese printed documents (764–70) and the eighth-century Indian manuscript of *The Perfection of Wisdom in 100,000 Sections* found at Dunhuang. For many of these rare treasures the Museum and Library are indebted to the Central Asian scholar-explorer Sir Aurel Stein, who in 1907 was the first to realize the importance of the huge cache of paintings and manuscripts in a sealed cave at Dunhuang and who took away large numbers of them.

Among the most beautiful objects shown are the eleventh and twelfth-century Pala and Nepalese palm-leaf manuscripts and their wooden covers, with graceful depictions of scenes from the Buddha's life and auspicious figures of Bodhisattvas and protective deities. Even the later examples, though less fine, are attractively painted in glowing colours. There is a charming portrait of Captain Knox, in East India Company uniform and seated on a European chair, on the cover of the *Lalitavistara* manuscript which he commissioned at Patan in Nepal in 1803. Another interesting document is a wooden tablet written in Prakrit in the second or third century AD containing a letter from two Buddhist monks. They write that they have heard with sorrow of the death of a certain Anasena but "that is something beyond even the powers of a Buddha, or a Pratyekabuddha, or an Arhant or a Universal Monarch. All come to the same end. Care must be exercised how we go, virtuous acts performed and purity maintained."

These very various exhibits have been skilfully arranged within the existing case lay-out of the two galleries, without overcrowding and with an effective use of large colour photographs of monks and monuments to suggest the living context of Buddhist practice. It is likely that many will find the entire display too much to absorb at one visit; the necessarily lengthy explanatory labels alone take time to read. There is an excellent catalogue, with many colour illustrations (*Buddhism: Art and Faith*, edited by W. Zwalf. 300pp. British Museum Publications. £8.95 from the Museum during the exhibition, £12.50 elsewhere. 0 7141 1432 4). Its several authors write lucidly, informatively and with scrupulous scholarship about their demanding and sometimes abstruse subject matter. Buddhist works of art were often commissioned by their patrons or donors in order to gain spiritual merit for themselves, their families and all beings; in this way the organizers of this splendid exhibition must themselves have acquired considerable merit.

Art Review

BUDDHISM: ART AND FAITH AT THE BRITISH MUSEUM

Judging by the huge volume of its scriptures, Buddhism is a difficult religion. The Christian God 'in Celestial Panoplie all armed', the Doctrine of the Trinity, the Thirty-nine Articles of Faith, the listings of the Heavenly Hierarchies, and the intricacies of Eschatology and Hagiography are as nothing in complexity, it would seem, when compared even with the catalogue of stages of being through which whatever it is that finally expurgates itself of all impurity must pass to achieve that most desirable of states, total annihilation, the ultimate release from the suffering entailed in the terrible cycle of birth, death, and reincarnation that is the lot of all that exists in the universe.

This is crudely, but not I hope disrespectfully, to refer to a Faith which has inspired some of the most perfectly noble and serene images that divine art has ever produced in sculpture, painting, erature, and even embroidery, as is st ı in this exhibition by a splendid silk hanging discovered in the Dunhuang caves in Western China, dating back from the eighth century AD (Cat. No. 311), depicting against a background of rocks the Buddha standing upon a lotus preaching, flanked by disciples and Bodhisattvas also supported on lotuses, with angels hovering above scattering flowers, and the modest figures of the donor's family, male and female, ranged on either side below. A Tang dynasty masterpiece.

The British Museum and Library, which includes all the manuscripts and other works formerly in the possession of the India Office, contain one of the richest collections of Buddhist art outside those countries where the religion is professed; richer possibly, when one considers that all are represented in our national collection with almost embarrassing abundance. This exhibition, described as 'the most comprehensive ever to be staged on Buddhism in s country', and consisting of more than 400 exhibits, must support that claim. Mounted with admirable clarity, the various divisions illustrate the development and spread of the religion, from the birth of its founder to modern times.

Four introductory sections are devoted to the earliest surviving Cult Monuments; the Legend which developed round the barest of facts known about the life of Siddhartha Gautama (born in 563 and died in 483 BC) 'who by becoming enlightened (*buddha* in ancient Indian languages) discovered and taught a way to salvation'; the Scriptures which embody his teaching, together with their proliferation and transmission; and the development of the Buddha image, which only occurred much later, in the second and first centuries BC. The following twelve sections then show the different manifestations of the religion as it spread from its origins in Nepal and Eastern India throughout the Indian subcontinent and Ceylon, westwards to Afghanistan and eastward to China, Burma, Southeast Asia and Indonesia, and finally to Korea and Japan.

A rare Chinese Yuan dynasty *Bodhisotiva Guanyin*, 13th century, recently acquired by the British Museum

No vaulted image of a Byzantine Christ is more majestic than those of the Buddha found in the Tang dynasty frescoes and paintings at Dunhuang (Cat. No. 312) or in Ming dynasty Xingdang xian (Cat. No. 327). No Madonna of a Michelangelo *Pieta* is more serenely compassionate than the thirteenth century carved wooden figure of Amida, Japanese lord of the western Paradise, welcoming the souls of the blessed into the Pure Land (Cat. No. 358). The piety of the devout is as movingly communicated in the 10th-11th century large glazed stoneware figure of the 'austerely youthful' Chinese *lohan* ('one who has eliminated the causes of rebirth') — Cat. No. 295, and in a wonderfully inward-looking carving of the eighteenth century Japanese lay worshipper (Cat. No. 364), as it is in a Zurbaran saint.

The beauty of these works is universal in its appeal. At the same time there are oddities and grotesqueries, the normal adjuncts of religious art, such as the fearsome skull-bedecked visitors of retribution upon the souls of the wicked, and the delightful rainbow coloured elephants that roam the forest of fabulous Himavant and bathe in their lake, Chaddanta. An unforgettable impression remains of the marble figure of a young Burmese monk in his novitiate, begging bowl clasped into his willingly starved stomach, robe tightly wound about him, on his face an expression of absolute trust.

You will not need the catalogue, as exhibits are so well explained. But it would be foolish not to get it at the price offered (£12.50) and for the additional information it contains. *(to Jan 5)* PHILLIP WARD-GREEN

THEORETICAL SOURCES

(extended review of literature)

Our main theoretical sources in the development of this research were the works and concepts of Umberto ECO and of Roland BARTHES in their studies on semiotics and the interpretation of cultural processes. These two fundamental sources have been the point of departure of our exploration and application of this immense theoretical and philosophical field within the framework of this research: the Museum phenomenon and the theoretical basis of Museology, seen from a semiotic perspective. Taking these two authors as a constant referential point of departure and of development of our studies, we have gone through many different paths of exploration which have lead us to other sources in semiotic theory and to other fields of study and research, sometimes reaching the boundaries with co-operative disciplines which contribute to this field, sometimes crossing these boundaries to explore some specific aspects which seemed relevant to our approach: communication studies, chiefly on visual expressions and on mass-communication, perception and cognition studies, sociological and anthropological analyses, studies on linguistics and the literary phenomenon, and studies on Theatre and the dramatic arts, the aesthetics of visual arts and the studies on material culture and cultural phenomena, were some of the fields we have gone through, along this road.

Actually, what we have found out through the development of this work, was the multiple and infinite paths of exploration which are open for the better understanding of the Museum phenomenon and experience and for the construction of museological theory. As Eco suggests on respect to any semiotic research, we have felt like exploring a forest of

ideas and concepts, strongly intersected, intermingled and complementary in themselves, where one feels sometimes lost and unsure on which path to follow, going forwards and backwards while trying to draw an elementary map of it. What we have tried to do, at least, has been to leave some sign-posts along the road that may be useful for the next adventurers in the field.

Main theoretical sources

From the starting point, we have been driving on two wheels: Eco's works on Semiotics, for the understanding of the basic concepts on sign-systems, structures and code-systems, assuming his theories on communication and signification processes, and following his paths for the exploration of the field and the methodology for the research; and Barthes's works on the interpretation and the philosophy of these social and cultural processes, on the analysis of 'texts' and 'discourses' and the deconstruction of their production process, referring us back again to a basic semiological theory, not opposite to that of Eco, but revealing the traits of the Saussurean school, and focusing, in his late works, more on 'speech facts' than on 'language facts'.

From Eco's **Theory of Semiotics** (1979) we have assumed the basic and broad concepts proposed by the author for any semiotic research, adopting his definition of terms and the structural models for this study, which he designs as two different fields: a **theory of codes** and a **theory of sign production**, at the basis of two discriminated categories, the **process of signification** and the **process of communication.** His main proposition for the analysis of culture as a

communication process has been the basis for our proposition of museum work as a **signification** and a **communication** process. The study of the museological process and of its power in generating meanings must rely basically on the study of its **rules** (specific codes) and **processes of sign production.**

Eco's theory of codes allows us to detect the system and the structure of museum codes in their syntactic, semantic and pragmatical aspects, manifested or **hidden** in the Museum communication process; his concept of **meaning** as a **cultural unit** allows us to see museum objects as bearing a **sign-function**, thus carrying **meaning**, as **cultural units** inserted into a correlation of semantic fields and axes, according to semiotic laws.

From his theory of sign production we have the models for the definition of a **typology of signs** (verbal/non-verbal, symbols, icons, indices, replicas and doubles, 'super-signs' and other possible categories), mainly based in Peirce's semiotics, and for the exploration of the different modes of sign production and of sign articulation, actually, of a 'rethorical' labour implied in the construction of museum discourses (a point further developed from the work of Barthes).

From Eco as well we have assumed the model and the challenge he proposes for the development of a specific semiotic research - that on the Television message (1983), applying this proposal for the analysis of a specific Museum message - the case study developed in Part IV of this research - the exhibition held by the British Museum in 1985 on 'Buddhism, Art & Faith'. The objective of this research, following Eco's model, has been to detect basically the **intentions of the senders, the objective structure of the message and the reaction of the addressees to the two first**

items. In this analysis, it is possible to detect the structuration of the Museum discourse in different semantic fields and axes, the codes and subcodes working according to a specific Museum system of signification and communication, and the ideology and the frame of references implied and manifested through the exhibition 'text' and 'performance'. The response and the 'reading' of the public, the main contribution of this applied research for the understanding of the Museum semiotic phenomenon, has been studied and evaluated by means of a direct inquiry near the visitors, using a written questionnaire. This analytical tool proved to be useful for the detection and the confirmation of many theoretical points we make in our study, including of the 'aberrant decodings' that may happen in the museum context and communication process, as proposed by Eco.

From the works of Roland BARTHES, mainly from his **'Eléments de Sémiologie'** (1987), and the **'Semiotic Challenge'** (1988 d), we have taken the philosophy and the model of 'reading' messages and discourses, of deconstructing 'texts' and 'speeches' in a critical way, starting from the 'signifiers' to reach 'signification'. His studies on the structural analysis of narratives (1988 e), taken in the multiplicity of forms they may occur, gave us the basis and clues with which to work out museum 'narratives', using a deductive method that helps us to reach the implicit system of units and rules governing their production.

Barthes's analyses of literary texts, and his conceptions on the literary 'function', gave us the basis to propose the different roles of the Museum Language and 'speeches', supporting the 'museological function' that we tried to define. His activity of criticism, attacking the 'doxa', or the prevailing view of things, and proposing the total freedom

of the 'text', supported our points on the role of the 'active subject' of any semiosic act, as well as on the critic's responsibility in this activity, from an ethical point of view, of recognizing his object as inseparable from the method given for its description - an idea which Barthes takes from Emile Benveniste (1966), and which is in accordance with the perspective of modern Physics. This critical activity is, for the author and philosopher, a 'pleasure' and a 'need', which one could find out, similarly, in the Museum experience and work.

From Barthes's **'Elements of Semiology'**(1987) we could take as well some basic definitions and concepts, chiefly on respect to Language and Speech, signs and signification, syntagms and systems of language and semiotic expressions, mostly based on the Saussurean line of thought, and which in his late works are disregarded by the author, in accordance with his philosophy of 'disintegration', which turns itself onto his own previous work.

Barthes studies on the **'Old Rethoric'** (1988 g) have been most enlightening for the analysis of the construction of museum discourses, of this **'Kitchen of Meanings'**(1988 f), in the author's words, which he explores along his **'Aventure Sémiologique'** (1988 d), and his many articles and essays. His theory of 'Myth today', developed and explored in his **'Mythologies'**(1985), has been a fundamental theoretical aspect for our analysis of the 'Museum Myth' and its sacralizing power. His **'Semantics of the Object'** (1988,e) is another basic essay with a definite impact on any museological theory.

The basic guide into this forest of ideas and thought which is Semiotics was Pierre GUIRAUD's 'Semiology'(1975). From Guiraud we have also borrowed the idea of the 'polarity' between Logics and Poetics, the two different modes of

perception and of expression of human experience, the objective and the subjective modes, working at the basis of the ambiguous nature of social codes and human communication.

From Roman JAKOBSON, one of the leading theorists on structural linguistics, we have taken the main basis for the study of Communication Theory in the understanding of language. In his **'Essais de Linguistique Générale'**(1963) he uses some of the basic principles of this theory to explain the process of verbal communication, enhancing the complementarity of linguistics to cultural anthropology, once 'language and culture imply themselves mutually', as he points out. The need to develop semiotic studies in order to analyse and compare different semiotic systems is another of Jakobson's propositions supporting our research on the Museum Language. The study of Poetics as an integral part of Linguistics (1963 a), in the search for the 'essence of language' (1965), is another aspect of Jakobson's work which gave us an insight into the nature of the 'Museum Art'. The role of the 'poetic function' amongst other basic functions of language, inserted into a hierarchy of values, and dominant in any kind of art expressions, opens up a broad field of investigation on the intersection of cognitive and emotive processes, of objective and subjective experiences at the basis of human perception of phenomena and communication. This idea is at the basis of our proposition of the Museum experience as standing, or better, 'swinging' on the frontiers between Logics and Poetics.

From Jakobson's fundamental work on structural linguistics we could learn the two main aspects of language mechanisms, that of **combination** and **contextualization**, and that of **selection** and **substitution**, these two main modes of arrangement of signs, already found in Saussure (1916), and

which can be also found in the Museum Language. The principles of **similarity** and of **contiguity**, behind these two capacities of any semiotic system, are basic to explain the codes and processes of Museum Communication.

As one of the leading exponents of the Linguistic Circle of Prague, the school of structural linguistics known since the 1920s as the **Prague School**, Jakobson has been also active in the Moscow Linguistic Circle, a group deeply influenced by the works of Saussure. Together with other scholars, like Sergej Karcevskij and Petr Bogatyrev, he left the Soviet Union in the early twenties to live in Czechoslovakia, and in 1926, was one of the founders and leaders of the Prague structuralism. The study of the semiotics of art, developed by many of these scholars, mainly their work on the Semiotics of Theatre, has been most useful and important for our understanding and exploration of the Museum art and spectacle.

Another basic author for semiotic research is Louis HJELMSLEV, founder of a sound linguistic theory and of the Linguistic Circle of Copenhagen, in the early thirties. His **'Prolegomena to a Theory of Language'** (1975) is one of the major works in linguistic theory and semiotic science. Also linked to the main streamline of Saussure's concepts, he develops the model of sign in the former theory, proposing the description of the two planes - the signifier and the signified - in four constituent levels, two of **substance** and two of **form**, on the plane of the expression and on the plane of the content. With this proposition the sign reaches the level of **functions**, of **relations** which formalize it semiotically. This is a crucial point for the analyses of the sign-function and of sign production and interpretation, in Eco's theory, and for the analysis of museum signs and expressions. Hjelmslev's theory and study of language is a

constant referential point in semiotic theory and research, opening up the field of structural semantics.

Other referential sources for this study, in the field of modern linguistics and semiotics, have been taken from the work of Tzvetan TODOROV on the theories of the symbol and on general semantics. His studies on the 'genres' of discourse (1978) are a good exploration in the field of literature and of poetics, and of the different kinds of narratives and discourses. Todorov's work on the 'categories of the narrative' (1966) has given us the model for the analysis of the exhibition proposed in the 'case study' of this research.

Noam CHOMSKY (1965, 1966, 1975) is another referential author on the study of the problems and the mysteries of human language, chiefly on the nature and the acquisition of cognitive structures, and on the interaction of language with other mental constructions. From Chomsky we have borrowed the notions of 'competence' and of 'performance', applied to museological work.

Still in the field of semiotics we have taken some ideas from the work of modern scholars like Algirdas Julien GREIMAS (1971,a, b, 1976, 1981), Jacques DERRIDA (1982 a), and Julia KRISTEVA (1967), who proposes the expansion of the semiotic field and demonstrates the 'isomorphism' of semiotic practices with the other complexes of our universe. Derrida's concepts on the 'dissemination of meanings' throughout the 'text', seeing language as a 'freeplay of differences' giving rise to 'effects of meaning', were quite fruitful for our analysis of museum texts; Greima's studies on the semiotics of scientific discourses, and on the syntax and the grammar of socio-linguistic communication, provided us with enlightening insights on the nature of museological work and on the responsibilities implied in the development of an 'academic

discourse' on this field, as a 'metalinguistic' discourse, in itself.

In the understanding and exploration of the pragmatics of the semiotic field, and its application in Museum Semiotics research, we must refer to the contribution of some leading brazilian semioticians as Decio PIGNATARI, in his studies on the theory of **'Information, Language and Communication'** (1988), and on **'Semiotics and Literature'** (1987), J.TEIXEIRA COELHO Netto in his analysis of the **'Semiotics of Architecture'** (1984), Lucrecia D'ALESSIO FERRARA (1981), and Julio PLAZA (1987), who explores the subject of **'Intersemiotic translation'**, all focusing the subject in its different aspects, under the lights of their personal experiences and the brazilian social and cultural context.

All these leading semioticians refer to and acknowledge the fundamental principles of the two 'fathers' of Semiotics, or Semiology studies - Charles Sanders PEIRCE (1931), in his explorations of the sign's classical model and typology, and Ferdinand de SAUSSURE (1916), in his distinction of 'Langue' and 'Parole', language and speech, with all the theoretical aspects deriving from these postulates.

Semiotics of Art and of Theatre

Among the major sources in this field we may point out the studies of Jindrich HONZL (1976 a) on the dynamics of the sign in the Theatre, and the hierarchy of dramatic devices; Jiri VELTRUSKY (1976, a, b, c) in his studies on the construction of semantic contexts, and on the dramatic text and dialogue, as components of Theatre. These studies gave us the concepts and clues for the analysis of the essence of museological performances, of the active role of the audience

in the perception of the multiplicity of meanings 'staged' on the Museum space, of the intersection of different semiotic systems working simultaneously, in a sort of 'semiotic battlefield', and allowing an ideal situation for the study of 'contrastive semiotics' and of 'intersemiotics translation'. Veltrusky is also responsible for the analysis of the pictorial sign, and of the semiotic potential of the material properties of signs (1973).

Other authors from which we have borrowed some key ideas and explanations, in this same group, were Karel BRUSAK (1976) in his studies on Chinese Theatre, Jan MUKAROVSKY (1976, a,b,c) in some articles on the essence of visual arts and on some aspects of the pictorial sign, and on poetic reference, Otakar ZICH (1976), in his studies on the aesthetics of dramatic arts, and Petr BOGATYREV (1976, a,b,c,d), in his semiotic studies of folk arts and costume and of folk theatre, all extremely relevant for museological studies.

Sociology and Material Culture

In the field of the sociology of culture, looking for the basis of our socio-cultural approach on Museum communication, from the perspective of semiotics, the main basic authors were Abraham A.MOLES in his studies on the **'Sociodynamics of Culture'**(1974), Jean BAUDRILLARD in his **'System of Objects'** (1973) and Pierre BOURDIEU in his 'Le Marché des Biens Symboliques' (1982). Ernst CASSIRER's classical work on Language and Myth (1946) gave us a deep insight into the role of these two aspects in the pattern of human culture. The role and the ethical responsibility of museums in the 'formalization' of cultural patterns, chiefly in the representation of other cultures different from our

own, could be clearly inferred from Ruth BENEDICT 's classical work on the 'Patterns of Culture' (1934), with an introduction by Franz BOAS, the eminent anthropologist and patron of modern museology, with whom Benedict has worked at the University of Columbia.

The symbolic use of objects of material culture in today's society, inserted into a social system of values, hierarchies and economical exchanges of wealth and power, deeply analysed by BAUDRILLARD and BOURDIEU, along with the studies of BARTHES and ECO already mentioned, is a crucial subject for the 'design' of the Museum 'myth' and 'power', which can be clearly 'deconstructed' and 'demystified' through semiotical analysis. Other sources in this field are the works of Andre LEROI-GOURHAN (1964,1965), from an anthropological perspective, providing information on human development from technological to linguistic abilities, in the effort to control nature and mind; among the studies on Material Culture developed by many scholars, in relation to Museology and the Humanities, we can point out the editions by G.W. STOCKING JR., **'Objects and Others, Essays on Museums and Material Culture'** (1985), Thomas J. SCHLERETH, **'Material Culture Studies in America'** (1982), Ian M.G. QUIMBY, **'Material Culture and the Study of American Life'** (1978) and Zipporah W.COLLINS, for the American Association of Museums **'Museums, the Humanities'** (1981), in which the ideas of Russel B.NYE and of James DEETZ, together with the views of SCHLERETH, deeply impressed and influenced our work.

Cognitive psychology, perception and memory

Another important theoretical source which gave us a deeper insight into the role of semiotics in the study of the

Museum phenomenon, chiefly for the understanding of its educational potential, is the work of the soviet semiotician and psychologist Lev Semenovich VYGOTSKY (1978), one of the brightest intellectual figures in the field. His sociocultural theory of higher mental processes, as well as his 'developmental method' - which actually reformulated soviet psychology in the early twenties, made a powerful impact on the theoretical foundations in this field, being recently better understood and recognized in the West, not only in psychology studies but also in semiotics.

The relationship of thought and language and the concept of mediation in human-environment interaction by the use of tools as well as of signs - these seen as 'psychological tools', created by and changing with societies according to their level of cultural development-is a basic issue for the understanding of the mediating character of the Museum system and language. His ideas on the 'internalization process' of culturally produced sign-systems, bringing about behavioural transformation, is fundamental for the understanding of the educational and developmental role of museums, chiefly in a society that seeks the elimination of illiteracy and the founding of educational programmes to maximize the potential of individual children.

Together with his students and colleagues, chiefly A.N.Leont'ev and Alexander R.Luria, the other members of what came to be known as the 'troika' in soviet psychology, Vygotsky formulated a whole theory on the role of signs in regulating human activity, based in the marxist theoretical framework, but most influenced by the work of Saussure, acknowledging some of the ideas of the Russian Formalists, and developing semiotic studies with Luria and Eisenshtein. From LURIA (1982) we could have more information on cognitive

development and structures, mainly on the problems of perception, generalization and abstraction, deduction and inference, reasoning and problem-solving and imagination, which have been most enlightening for the analysis of audience perception of museum texts and performances, as well as for the interaction process happening in Museum Communication. The deeper knowledge provided by these studies on human consciousness, in which the elementary feature, according to Vygotsky, is **mediation**, reinforces our view of museums as communication **media**, chiefly in their role of supporting individual development and children mental processes. Vygotsky and Luria stressed that mental development must be viewed as a historical process in which the child's social and nonsocial environment induces the development of mediating processes and the various and higher mental functions. Luria has emphasized that word meaning provides the child with the distilled results of the history of society (Cole, in foreword to Luria,1976).

Vygotskian perspectives have been approached and developed by many scholars, among which the work of James V. WERTSCH (1991) and his edition of essays by different authors (1985), stand as a relevant referential source.

Going further in the field of cognitive psychology and cognitive processes, we referred ourselves to the studies on Memory and on Perception. The work of Stephen M.KOSSLYN on 'Image and Mind' (1980), focusing on the role of visual imagery, or mental representations produced by the 'mind's eye', may contribute to enrich our understanding of associative and connotative processes, basic in the use and interpretation of signs: actually, the 'substance' and the 'form' of what Peirce defines as the 'interpretant' of a sign. Kosslyn's long standing interest and studies in semantic

memory and in developmental psychology led him to develop a 'representational-development' hypothesis, and he refers himself to the works of J.S.BRUNER, R.O. OLVER and P.M.GREENFIELD (1966), which claim that young children rely on imagery in their thinking more than adults do. The different effects of association strength, depending on whether imagery was used, and the behavioural consequences of using imagery in one's thinking, may be a strong support for the assessment and the clarification of the museum medium as a tool for mental development. These studies can be easily crossed with those of Vygotsky, Luria and with Piaget theories.

In this same field of Perception and Cognition, we referred ourselves to the basic work of Margareth D.VERNON on the psychology of perception (1968), and on **'Perception through Experience'** (1974), in which the author explores and investigates the influence of individual motivation and of personal aspects in the complex perceptual processes; in her studies, Vernon points out the subordination of perception schemes to identification, classification and codification processes, thus on higher cognition operations deeply dependent on learning, memory, attention, reasoning and **language.**

Another relevant work on the way we perceive and interpret signs is John BERGER's **'Ways of Seeing'** (1984), in which he explores the social role and the power of manipulation of visual arts and of publicity. This critical study supports the work of Barthes on 'myth' today, and points out to the authority of art and of the 'national cultural heritage' (preserved in museums) in glorifying present social systems, their priorities, hierarchies and unjust inequalities. The ethical side of the use of signs, whether

in mass-communication, advertising, as well as in museums, is stressed in this work.

The study of perception and interpretation in the field of mass-communication is developed by Judith WILLIAMSON, in 'Decoding Advertisements' (1983), in which the author stresses the relationship between **meaning** and **ideology**, while giving the basic tools with which to decode the hidden messages in social discourses.

The relation between perception, thought and language, and the physical and mental mechanisms present in this relationship, is explored by R.L.GREGORY in his two books on 'Eye and Brain' (1979) and 'The intelligent eye' (1980), which are basic for the understanding of the ambiguity of visual perception, of the way we translate 'images' in our brains, to decode them in mental perceptions; this is a clarifying point for the study of the Museum experience and communication.

Communication theory

Our basic guide in the broad field of Communication Theory has been the introductory book on the subject by John FISKE (1982), where we could find the basic concepts and models proposed by different authors on communication processes and theories, their implication in semiotic studies and on the analysis of signification and culture, on ideology and meanings.

From these studies on communication, in the perspective of semiotics, we have not taken any preferential 'model' of transmission and reception of messages, once semiotics emphasizes the 'text' and its interaction with its producing /receiving culture, as Fiske says in his conclusion: 'the

focus is on the role of communication in establishing and maintaining values and on how those values enable communication to have meaning' (1982,p.157).

We have not concerned ourselves so much with the efficiency and accuracy of the transmission, but with the process of production, use and interpretation of sign-systems, of the 'languages' used for communication, and with the 'breakdown' of these processes whenever social and cultural differences provide emitters and receivers with different frames of reference and meanings.

For this 'socio-cultural' approach of communication studies we have taken a lot from mass communication research, seeing museums as bearing many features of the mass-media, and looking for the influence of these media in the production of messages and texts today, as well as in the reception mode of modern audiences. An introduction to mass communication theory has been found in Denis McQuail (1986). Other approaches could be found in many authors who explored the relations of media, society and culture, as Colin CHERRY (1983), Erving GOFFMAN (1983), Elihu KATZ, Jay G.BLUMLER and Michael GUREVITCH (1983), Colin McARTHUR (1978), James CURRAN and Janet WOOLLACOTT (1982), Tony BENNETT (1982), Stuart HALL (1977), J.O.BOYD-BARRETT (1982), David CHANEY (1986), John CORNER (1986), David GLOVER (1984) and many others,among which we must outline the classical theorists of culture and communication, Theodor ADORNO and Max HORKHEIMER (1977), Walter BENJAMIN (1977), and Gillo DORFLES (1967, 1968).

The effects of mass communication processes and their role in the creation of 'myths', at the basis of the cultural industry today, are applicable to the Museum situation, inserted in the context of a consumeristic society, and reflecting social needs and expectations.

Turning to the field of pragmatics, to understand the communication interchange and reception modes, we referred ourselves to the work of Dan SPERBER and Deirdre WILSON (1986), who propose a new approach to communication studies, based on the 'principle of **relevance'** and on the role of **inference** and of **ostension** in the process of verbal communication. These principles can be extended to the museum communication process, based on an **ostensive** mode of transmission of messages and relying mainly on **visual perception**, in which 'inference' plays a major role. The creation of 'mutual cognitive environments', proposed by the authors, much in accord with Vygotsky's concepts on the 'zones of proximal development', is basic for the pragmatics of the museum field. The role of **context** and of contextualization is enhanced in this approach.

Another fundamental source in this subject is Gail E. MYERS and Michele Tolela MYERS (1988), on the **'Dynamics of human communication'**, stressing a 'transactional view' of this process, which we support in our approach to Museum Communication.

Museum Communication studies

In the specific field of Museum Communication, the amount of articles and essays available in museological literature makes it impossible to list all the relevant work already published on the subject (see Loomis,1975; Griggs,1984, Screven,1984, Lawrence,1991). Most of these studies, however, have focused the 'quantitative', rather than the 'qualitative' side of communication, and the many researches on visitors' behaviour and levels of attention (Screven,1974 a; Elliot & Loomis,1975; Palmer,1975; Peart,1982; Prince,1983; Falk,1985;

Gardner,1986), on public reactions towards museums (Alt,1983; Merriman,1989,a,b), on effective exhibit designs and labels readability (Parr,1962; Wittlin,1968; Shettel,1968; Screven,1974,1975; Alt,1977; Borun,1977,a,b,1980; Sorsby,1980; Stansfield,1981; Miles & Tout,1979; Miles,1984,1988; Griggs,1981,1984), provided us with useful data and information about some of the elements implied in the museum communication process.

Very few articles or studies have yet focused the nature of this particular experience, from the perspective of signification and of meaning production (Skramstad,1978; Harris,1978; Taborsky,1982,1990; Cuisenier,1984; Annis,1986; Pearce,1986,1989,1990; Hooper-Greenhill,1989,1990,1991; Shelton,1990; Lawrence,1990; Ames,1990; Dufresne-Tassé,1991; Volkert,1991; Hein,1991).

Museum Semiotics

The first studies which can be referred to as pointing out the process of signification happening in museum exhibitions are Duncan CAMERON's article (1968), 'A Viewpoint: The museum as a communications system and implications for Museum Education', in which the author enhances the **referential** function of the museum communication process, the objects seen as the 'primary medium' of the exhibition message. This article was assessed by Eugene I.KNEZ and A.Gilbert WRIGHT (1970), in 'The museum as a communications system: an assessment of Cameron's viewpoint', in which the authors point out the **reference** element of the message as the 'primary feature' of the Museum's educational role. Some of the basic elements of the Museum semiotic situation are

already tackled in these two studies, as points of departure for further theoretical explorations.

The first specific reference to the semiotic nature of the museum phenomenon we could come to know was the article of Robert HODGE and Wilfred D'SOUZA (1979), a semiotic analysis of the Western Australian Museum's Aboriginal Gallery, in which the authors propose museum exhibitions as one branch of the mass media; through this analysis, the authors detect the main functions and contradictions of the displays, and the interaction between linguistic, visual and ideological codes along the 'historical narrative' presented to the public. They point out as well the 'uncertainty about aims' and the 'unawareness of effects' from the part of the emitters of this museological message. The comments of George Henri RIVIERE to this article, presented as a lecture at the School of Human Communication of Murdoch University, Western Australia, outline the importance of the authors' contribution to the questions on the problems of the ethical responsibility of museologists in the representation of minority cultures, on the problems of terminology of museological terms, on the museographic problems in displaying the objects of culture **in vitro**, on museum taxonomy that classifies culture in conventional slices, on the problem of 'Eurocentrism' and of the dominant stratum in recognizing the existence of other strata, and on the underlying philosophical problem in the failures or efforts to overcome these problems.

A second study to be mentioned was that of Manar HAMMAD (1987), a 'Semiotic Reading of a Museum', more specifically the National Museum of Modern Art, at Beaubourg, Paris, in which the author explores the way of 'reading a space', as much as the visitor would do. This semiotic study of a spatial and museographical arrangement proposes that the setting of

a work of art influences it, and thus determines to some extent the way in which it is appreciated. The **status** of valid and recognized works of art is also enhanced by a process of spatial rather than verbal expression, and can be detected through the mechanisms that come into play in the museum setting.

Another study on the semiotics of the museum space is John PEPONIS and Jenny HEDIN's (1982) analysis of the Natural History Museum, in London, in which the authors propose a methodology and an application of architectural analysis to the spatial organization of museum exhibitions. The exhibition morphology and the relationships between spaces reflect the articulation of knowledge enshrined in museums, controlling simultaneously its transmission. The authors propose to reconstruct, thus, the link of the forms of enunciation of knowledge and of classificatory categories with the spatial organization of the galleries. The theoretical and pragmatical approaches developed by the authors are of major relevance for the study of the 'design' code of the Museum Language. More recently, Eilean HOOPER-GREENHILL's (1990) study of the 'spatialisation levels' in museums, based on Foucault's theories, focused the social, ideological, economic and cultural factors that interact in the museum system and activities.

Another basic paper, unpublished, dealing specifically with the Museum language and its logical semiotic nature was that of Petr SULER (1983), a Czechoslovakian author, who proposes the analysis of the exhibition language according to the two axes: the syntagmatic plan and the system plan, regarding the articulation of objects and the user's perception and involvement in the Museum communication process.

One of the first formal and explicit propositions of the semiotic nature of the Museum, as a 'system of signs' and as a cultural sign in itself, was made by Jorge GLUSBERG (1983), the Argentinean museologist who proposes the theory of 'hot' and 'cool' museums, and who emphasizes the need of semiotic theory for the development of museological science. The need of museological criticism as a way to change museum institutions in laboratories of creation, as open spaces sensible to the needs of their public and environment, and the consideration of the museological 'para-media' (the media, public information systems, the critics, the publications) which work together to transmit the museum message, are some of the important new theses formulated by Glusberg, opening up the field of Museum Semiotics research. Some other few explorations of exhibitions as 'signifying practices', dealing mainly with the aspects of artefact analysis, and already tackling a semiotic and linguistic approach, have come to light in the sphere of the Department of Museum Studies, at the University of Leicester: Dr.Susan M. PEARCE's series of articles on 'Thinking about things: approaches to the study of artefacts'(1986), retaken in 'Objects in structures' (1989) and 'Objects as meaning; or narrating the past'(1990), propose a systematic model for the study of material culture which offers a sound basis for a semiotic analysis of museum work; Dr.Eilean HOOPER-GREENHILL's essay on 'How objects become meaningful, or a new communications model for museums' (1991) is another recent attempt to understand the process of museum communication under the lights of semiotic studies. Edwina TABORSKY's article on 'The Discursive Object'(1990) is a sound and challenging contribution to the field. John REEVE's interpretation of the 'Buddhism,Art and Faith' exhibition, 'Leading the Public to Nirvana?'(1985), is an innovation in

the field of exhibition analysis, focusing on signification, interpretation and communication aspects, in a specific situation.

Another approach to the specificity of Museum language (le 'langage muséal') and its natural links with the language of 'spectacle', the exhibition as a mediating tool, and the role of semiotic studies in defining the problems and the nature of this specific language is proposed by Andre DESVALLÉES (1987,1988). In two of his essays on the subject, 'Un tournant de la Muséologie' (1987), and the unpublished paper 'La muséologie, est-elle encore adaptée aux nouvelles missions muséales? (1987), the author explores the changing concepts of museum exhibitions and of objects themselves, seen as 'exhibits' (in anglo-saxon terminology), and thus bearing an intrinsic meaning of communicating something, of signifying something in the exhibition message. The sliding turn of museum objects from material things, with an end in themselves, to elements of a new language, according to a determined syntax, and depending on a context from which they take on their meaning, is clearly detected by Desvallées, in the many examples he gives of experiences in French museums. Other authors who share his ideas and propositions on the 'mise en scène' of cultural objects are Jacques HAINARD and Roland KAEHR, in a series of catalogues and publications of the Musée de la Ville de Neuchâtel, Switzerland (1982, 1984, 1985, 1987, 1988, 1989, 1990), a theoretical work expressed in a series of concrete exhibitions, as for instance, 'Objets pretextes, objets manipulés' (1984). A recent exhibition on '700 years of food in Switzerland', produced by Martin R. SCHÄRER (1991) at the Alimentarium, in Vevey, was a concrete demonstration of the potentiality of the museum medium and language, in different possible display designs. Other sources

are Jean DAVALLON -'Un genre en mutation' (1983), Jean François BARBIER-BOUVET -'Le système de l'exposition'(1983), et Charles PERRATON (1987), who developed a study on the communication strategies in museums of science and technology. This study, published in the 'Cahiers EXPO-MEDIA' n.3, Paris, 1987, gives an account of the history of museums and the changes in their orientation and practice. It proposes as well a classification of museographic periods and of 'genres' of museological discourses. In this same publication there is another relevant essay of Bernard SCHIELE and Louise BOUCHER - 'Une exposition peut cacher une autre', on the 'mise en scène de la science au Palais de la Découverte'. This study focuses on the structuration work of museum exhibitions, the organizational axes for the building of the messages, enhancing the role of the producers of these museological discourses. The relations between the intentions and the actions of museum emitters, the linguistic and visual parameters of these 'speech acts' and the reactions and perceptions by the part of the public are analysed in detail in a work of research which we consider one of the most relevants in the field of museum semiotics. This analysis and study, in its general terms and basic assumptions, is closely related with the research we have developed in this dissertation.

At this point we must acknowledge the EXPO-MEDIA, a working group established in 1982, producing from their 'Observatoire', as they call their initiative, many texts and studies published in its 'CAHIERS', which aim to 'observe' and to propose a 'grid' for the description and analysis of exhibitions. After the initiative of Christian Carrier and Anne Marie Guigue, the group had as permanent members in 1985, when the first 'Cahier' has been published, the names of

J.F.Barbier-Bouvet, Yannick Courtel, Jean Davallon, Jean - Louis Deotte, Anne Decrosse, Hana Gottesdiener, Daniel Jacobi, Emmanuel Jacobi, Maurice Littoz-Baritel, Dominique Poulot, besides the contribution of French and foreign advisers for the development of research, like those mentioned above. The first number of the 'Cahiers' was dedicated to the analysis of an exhibition proposed by the philosopher Jean-François LYOTARD - 'Les Immateriaux' , an 'évenement exposition' held at the Centre Georges Pompidou in 1985, which can be seen as a challenge to the traditional concept of museum exhibitions, based on 'material' and 'visible' things.

From all these sources and other unpublished museological papers it has been possible to travel throughout this 'aventure musémiotique', towards the unending limits of the Museum language, speech and myth. We are most grateful to all these 'leaders'.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

BIBLIOGRAPHY

ADORNO, T.W. and HORKHEIMER, M.
1977 The Culture Industry: enlightenment as mass deception (abridged) from *Dialectics of Enlightenment*, Allen Lane, 1973, in J.Curran and others (eds.), *Mass Communication and Society*, E.Arnold, Open University Press, 349-383.

ADOTEVI, Stanislas
1972 Le musée dans les systèmes éducatifs et culturels contemporains, *Le Musée au service des hommes aujourd'hui et demain*, papers of the Ninth General Conference of ICOM, Paris, 19-30.

ADRIAN, E.H.
1963 The Human Receiving System, *The Languages of Science*, Grenada Lectures of the British Association for the Advancement of Science, Basic Books, New York, chap.6.

ALLISON, Brian
1986 Furniture of the Mind, unpublished paper, Leicester Polytechnic, Leicester, 16 pp.

ALT, M.B.
1977 Evaluating didactic exhibitis: a critical look at Shettel's work, *Curator*, 20(3), 241-258.

1979 Improving audio visual presentations, *Curator*, 22(2), 85-95.

1983 Visitors' attitudes to two old and two new exhibitions at the British Museum(NH), *Museums Journal*, 83(2/3), 145-148.

AMES, Michael M.
1985 De-schooling the museum: a proposal to increase public access to museums through their resources, *Museum*, 145, 25-31.

1990 Cultural empowerment and museums, in Susan Pearce (ed.), *Objects of Knowledge, 1, New Research in Museum Studies, an international series*, Athlone Press, London, 158-173.

ANNIS, S.
1986 The museum as a staging ground for symbolic action, *Museum*, 38, 168-171.

BADDELEY, Alan
1986 *Your Memory, a user's guide*, Multimedia Publications (U.K.) Ltd., first published 1982, Penguin Books Ltd., Harmondsworth, Middlesex, England.

BARBIER-BOUVET, Jean F.
1983 Le Système de l'exposition, *Histoire d'expo*, CCI, Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris, 13-17.

BARNLUND, Dean C.
1968 *Interpersonal Communication: Survey and Studies*, Houghton Mifflin Company, Boston.

1970 A Transactional Model of Communication, *Language Behavior*, J.Akin, A.Goldberg, G.Myers and J.Hewort (eds.), Mouton Press, The Hague.

BARTHES, Roland
1970 *L'Empire des Signes*, Les Sentiers de la Création, Editions A.Skira, Genève, Flammarion, Paris.

1974 *Le Degré Zéro de l'Ecriture, Nouveaux Essais Critiques*, Portuguese translation by H. Lima Dantas, A.Arnichand and A.Lorencini, first editions Ed. du Seuil, Paris, 1953 and 1972.

1979 *Système de la Mode*, Portuguese translation by L.L.Salvador Mosca, first edition Ed. du Seuil, Paris, 1967, Cia.Editora Nacional, S.Paulo.

1983 *Barthes: Selected Writings*, selected and introduced by Susan Sontag, first edition by Jonathan Cape Ltd., 1982, Fontana Paperbacks, London.

1983 a - Authors and Writers (1960), from *Essais Critiques*, Ed. du Seuil, Paris, 1964, English translation by Northwestern University Press, 1972; *SW*, 185-193.

1983 b - From *The Pleasure of the Text* (1973), English translation by Richard Miller, Hill and Wang, New York, 1975; *SW*, 404-414.

1983 c - The Imagination of the Sign (1962), from *Essais Critiques*, Ed. du Seuil, Paris, 1964, English translation by Northwestern University Press, 1972; *SW*, 211-217.

1983 d - The Plates of the Encyclopaedia (1964), from *Nouveaux Essais Critiques*, Ed. du Seuil, Paris, 1972, English translation by Richard Howard, Hill and Wang, New York,1980; *SW*,218-235.

1983 e - The Photographic Message (1961), first published in *Communications*, 1, English translation by Stephen Heath, Fontana Paperbacks, London, 1977; *SW*, 194-210.

1984 a *La Chambre Claire*, Portuguese translation by J.Castanon Guimaraes, first published Cahiers du Cinéma/Gallimard/Seuil, 1980, Editora Nova Fronteira, Rio de Janeiro.

1984 b *L'Obvie et l'Obtus*, Portuguese translation by Isabel Pascoal, first edition Ed. du Seuil, Paris, 1982, Ediçoes 70, Lisboa.

1984 c *Image - Music - Text*, essays selected and translated by Stephen Heath, first edition 1977, Fontana Paperbacks, London.

1984 d - The rhetoric of the image, first published in *Communications*, 4, 1964; *IMT*, 32-51.

1984 e - The third meaning, research notes on some Eisenstein stills, first published in *Cahiers du Cinéma*, 222, 1970; *IMT*, 52-68.

1985 *Mythologies*, selected and translated by Annette Lavers, first edition Ed. du Seuil, Paris, 1957, first English translation Jonathan Cape Ltd. 1972, Paladin Books, Granada Publishing Ltd., London.

1987 *Eléments de Sémiologie*, Portuguese translation by Izidoro Blikstein, first edition Ed. du Seuil, Paris, 1964, Editora Cultrix, S.Paulo.

1988 a *Le Bruissement de la langue*, Portuguese translation by Mario Laranjeira, first edition Ed. du Seuil, Paris, 1984, Editora Brasiliense, S.Paulo.

1988 b - Le Discours de l'Histoire (1967), first published in *Informations sur les Sciences Sociales*; *BL*, 145-157.

1988 c - L'Effet du Réel (1968), first published in *Communications*; *BL*, 158-165.

1988 d *The Semiotic Challenge*, English translation by Richard Howard, first edition in French *L'Aventure Sémiologique*, Ed. du Seuil, Paris, 1985, Hill and Wang, New York.

1988 e - Semantics of the Object (1964), Colloquium at the Cini Foundation in Venice; *SC*,179-190.

1988 f - The Kitchen of Meaning (1964), first published in *Le Nouvel Observateur*, Paris; *SC*,157-159.

1988 e - Introduction to the Structural Analysis of Narratives (1966), first published in *Communications*; *SC*, 95-135.

1988 f - The Structural Analysis of Narrative (à propos of Acts 10-II), (1969), first published in *Exégèse et Herméneutique*, Ed. du Seuil, 1971; *SC*, 217-245.

1988 g - The Old Rhetoric - an aide-mémoire (1970), first published in *Communications*; *SC*, 11-94.

1988 h - Wrestling with the Angel: Textual Analysis of Genesis 32:23-33 (1972), first published in *Analyse structurale et Exégèse biblique*; *SC*, 246-260.

1988 i - Textual Analysis of a Tale by Edgar Allan Poe (1973), first published in *Sémiotique narrative et textuelle*, Larousse; *SC*, 261-293.

BATESON, Gregory

1986 A Theory of Play and Fantasy, from A.P.A. Psychiatric Research Reports, 2, 1955, in R.Innis (ed.) *Semiotics, an introductory anthology*, Hutchinson, London, 131-144.

BAUDRILLARD, Jean

1973 *Le Système des Objets*, Portuguese translation Z.Ribeiro Tavares, first edition Ed.Gallimar, 1968, Editora Perspectiva, S.Paulo.

1982 The Beaubourg-Effect: Implosion and Deterrence, English translation by Rosalind Kraus and Anette Michelson, *October*,20, 3-16.

BENEDICT, Ruth
1934 *Patterns of Culture*, Portuguese translation by Alberto Candeias, introduction by Franz Boas, Editora Livros do Brasil, Lisboa.

BENJAMIN, Walter
1977 The work of art in the age of mechanical reproduction, first published by Jonathan Cape, *Illuminations*, 1970, in J.Curran and others (eds.) *Mass Communication and Society, 384-408.*

BENNETT, Tony
1982 a Theories of the media, theories of society, in M.Gurevitch and others (eds.), *Culture, Society and the Media*, Methuen & Co. Ltd., London, New York, 30-55.

1982 b Media, 'reality', signification, in M.Gurevitch and others (eds.), *Culture, Society and the Media*, Methuen & Co. Ltd., London, New York, 287-308.

BENNETT, T., GRAHAM, M., MERCER, C. and WOOLLACOTT, J.(eds.)

1985 *Culture, Ideology and Social Process*, Batsford Academid and Educational Ltd. and Open University Press, first published 1981.

BENVENISTE, Emile
1966 *Problèmes de Linguistique Générale*, Ed.Gallimar, Paris.

1986 The Semiology of Language, English translation by Genette Ashby and Adelaide Russo, first published in *Semiotica* I-12, 1969, *Semiotics, an introductory reader*, edited by R.E. Innis, Hutchinson, London, 228-246.

BERGER, Arthur Asa
1987 Semiological Analysis, *Media Analysis Techniques*, Sage Publications, 1982, in O.Boyd-Barret and P.Braham (eds.), *Media, Knowledge and Power*, Croom Helm, Open University, London, Sydney, 132-155.

BERGER, John
1984 *Ways of Seeing*, British Broadcasting Corporation and Penguin Books, London.

BERLO, David K.
1960 *The Process of Communication*, Holt, Rinehart and Winston, Inc.,New York.

BERNSTEIN, Basil

1983 Social class, language and socialization, from B.Bernstein, *Class, Codes and Control*, I, Routledge, London, 1971, in J.Corner and J.Hawthorn (eds).,*Communication Studies, an introductory reader*, Edward Arnold, London, 87-98.

BOGATYREV, Petr

1976 a Costume as a Sign, the functional and structural concept in Ethnography, first published in *Slovo a slovesnost*, 2, 1936, 43-47, English translation by Y.Lockwood, in L.Matejka and I.Titunik (eds.), *Semiotics of Art*, MIT Press, 13-19.

1976 b Folk song from a functional point of view, *Travaux du Cercle Linguistique de Prague*, 6, 1936, 222-234, English translation by Y.Lockwood, in L.Matejka and I.Titunik (eds.), *Semiotics of Art*, MIT Press, 20-32.

1976 c Semiotics in the Folk Theater, first published in *Slovo a slovesnost*, 4, 1938, 138-149, English translation by B.Kochis, in L.Matejka and I.Titunik (eds.), *Semiotics of Art*, MIT Press, 33-50.

1976 d Forms and Functions of Folk Theater, an abbreviated version of the first chapter of *Lidové divadlo ceské a slovenské* (Czech and slovak Folk Theater), Prague, 1940, 9-29, in L.Matejka and I.Titunik (eds.), *Semiotics of Art*, MIT Press, 51-56.

BORUN, Minda

1977 a Exhibit evaluation: an introduction, *The Visitor and the Museum*, The 1977 Program Planning Committee of the American Association of Museums, Seattle, Washington.

1977 b Measuring the immeasurable - a pilot study of museum effectiveness, The Association of Science-Technology Centers, Washington, DC.

BORUN, M. and MILLER, M.

1980 To label or not to label?, *Museum News*, March/April 1980, 64-67.

BOURDIEU, Pierre

1982 *Le marché des biens symboliques*, Portuguese translation by S.Miceli, S.A.Prado, first edition Centre de Sociologie Européenne, Paris, 1970, Coleçao Estudos, Editora Perspectiva, S.Paulo.

1986 a The production of belief: contribution to an economy of symbolic goods, extract from *Actes de la Recherche en Science Sociale*, 1977, 13, 3-43, in R.Collins and others (eds.), *Media, Culture and Society*, Sage Publications, London, Beverly Hills, New Delhi, 131-163.

1986 b The aristocracy of culture, extract from *La Distinction*, Ed. du Minuit, Paris, reprinted in *Distinction*, Routledge and Kegan, London, 1984, in R.Collins and others (eds.), *Media, Culture and Society*, Sage Publications, London, Beverly Hills, New Delhi, 164-193.

1987 Espace social et pouvoir symbolique, lecture given at the University of San Diego, 1986, in *Choses dites*, Ed. du Minuit, Paris.

BOYD-BARRETT, J.O.

1982 Cultural dependency and the mass media, in M.Gurevitch and others (eds.), *Culture, Society and the Media*, Methuen & Co. Ltd., London, New York, 174-195.

BOYD-BARRET, O. and BRAHAM, P. (eds.)

1987 *Media, Knowledge and Power*, an Open University Set Book, Croom Helm, and Open University, London, Sydney.

BRUNER, J.S., OLVER, R.O. and GREENFIELD, P.M.

1966 *Studies in Cognitive Growth*, Wiley, New York.

BRUSAK, Karel

1976 Signs in the Chinese Theater, English translation by K.Brusak, first published in *Slovo a slovesnost*, 5, 1939, in L.Matejka and I.Titunik (eds.), *Semiotics of Art*, MIT Press, 59-73.

CAMERON, Duncan

1968 A Viewpoint: The Museum as a Communications system and Implications for Museum Education, *Curator*, 11(1), 34-40.

1972 Problems in the language of museum interpretation, *The Museum in the service of man today and tomorrow*, papers from the Ninth General Conference of ICOM, Paris, 89-99.

CASSIRER, Ernst
1946 *Language and Myth*, English translation by Susanne K. Langer, first edition Harper and Brothers, 1946, original publication in German *Sprache und Mythos*, VI, *Studien der Bibliothek Warburg*, edited by Fritz Saxl, Dover Publications Inc., New York.

CAYGILL, Marjorie
1981 *The Story of the British Museum*, British Museum Publications, London.

CHANEY, David
1986 A symbolic mirror of ourselves: civic ritual in mass society, in R.Collins and others (eds.), *Media, Culture and Society*, Sage Publications, London, Beverly Hill, New Delhi, 247-263.

CHAO, Yuen Ren
1970 *Langage et systèmes symboliques*, French translation by Louis-Jean Calvet, Payot, Paris.

CHERRY, Colin
1983 What is Communication?, from C.Cherry, *On Human Communication*, MIT Press, Cambridge, Mass. 1957, 3-9, in J.Corner and J.Hawthorn (eds.), Edward Arnold, London, 9-14.

CHOMSKY, Noam
1965 *Aspects of the Theory of Syntax*, MIT Press, Cambridge, Mass.

1975 *Reflections on Language*, Portuguese translation by Isabel Gonçalves, Ediçoes 70, Lisboa.

CHOMSKY, Noam and RUWET, Nicolas
1966 *La Grammaire Générative*, Portuguese translation by Isabel Pascoal, Ediçoes 70, Lisboa.

COLE, Michael
1982 Preface to A.R. Luria, *Cognitive Development: its cultural and social foundations*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Mass., London.

1985 The zone of proximal development: where culture and cognition create each other, in J.V.Wertsch (ed.) *Culture, Communication and Cognition, Vygotskian perspectives*, Cambridge University Press, 146-161.

COLLINS, Zipporah W.(ed.)
1981 *Museums, Adults and the Humanities, a guide for educational programming*, American Association of Museums, Washington, D.C.

COLLINS, R. *et al.*
1986 *Media, Culture and Society, a critical reader*, Sage Publications, London, Beverly Hills, New Delhi.

CORNER, John
1986 Codes and Cultural Analysis, in R.Collins and others, (eds.),*Media, Culture and Society, a cultural reader*, Sage Publications, London, 49-62.

CORNER, J. and HAWTHORN, J.
1983 *Communication Studies, an introductory reader*, Edward Arnold, London.

COURTES, J.
1976 *Introduction à la sémiotique narrative et discursive*, Hachette, Paris.

CRONEN, V.E, BARNETT PEARCE, W. and HARRIS, Linda
1982 The Coordinated Management of Meaning: a Theory of Communication, in Frank E.X.Dance (ed.), *Human Communication Theory*, Harper & Row Publishers, Inc., New York.

CUISENIER, Jean
1984 Exhibiting meaningfully - the semantics of display in agricultural museums, *Museum*, 36(3), 130-137.

CURRAN, James
1982 Communications, power and social order, in M.Gurevitch and others (eds.), *Culture, Society and the Media*, Methuen & Co. Ltd., London, New York, 202-235.

CURRAN, J., GUREVITCH, M. and WOOLLACOTT, J.
1977 *Mass Communication and Society*, editors, E.Arnold, Open University Press, London.

1982 The study of the media: theoretical approaches, in M.Gurevitch and others (eds.), *Culture, Society and the Media*, Methuen & Co. Ltd., London, New York, 11-29.

D'ALESSIO FERRARA, Lucrécia
1981 *A Estratégia dos Signos, Linguagem/ Espaço/ Ambiente Urbano*, Ed. Perspectiva, S.Paulo.

DANCE, Frank E.X.(ed)
1982 *Human Communication Theory: Original Essays*, Holt, Rinehart and Winston, Inc. New York.

DAVALLON, Jean
1983 Un genre en mutation, *Histoires d'Expo*, CCI, Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris, 9-11.

DECROSSE, A.
1987 Muséologie des sciences et des techniques, approches linguistiques et sémiotiques, *Brises*, septembre 1987, 75-78.

DEETZ, James
1981 The link from object, to person, to concept, in Z.Collins (ed.), *Museums, Adults and the Humanities*, American Association of Museums, Washington, DC., 24-34.

DELOCHE, Bernard
1983 L'oeuvre d'art au musée, *Musées et collections publiques de France*, 161, 1983/4, 95-99.

DERRIDA, Jacques
1982 a Structure, Sign and Play in the discourse of the Human Sciences, from *L'Ecriture et la différence*, Ed. du Seuil, 1967, in Richard Macksey (ed.), *The Structuralist Controversy*, The John Hopkins University Press, Baltimore, 247-272.

1982 b Sending: on Representation, *Social Research*, 49(2), 294-326.

DESVALLÈES, André
1987 Un tournant de la muséologie, *Brises*, 10, Ed. du CDSH, Paris, 5-12.

1988 Vérités premières de Muséographie...et de Muséologie, *Scenographier l'Art Contemporain*, M.N.E.S., Savigny-le-Temple.

DORFLES, Gillo

1967 *Simbolo, comunicazione, consumo*, Spanish translation by Maria Rosa Viale, first published Ed.G.Einaudi, 1962, Editora Lumen, Barcelona.

1968 L'objet crée par l'homme; Formes et fonctions d'objet: contrastes et analogies, *L'objet crée par l'homme*, French translation by D.Panchout, first published by G.Braziller Inc., New York, 1965, Bibliothèque de Synthèses, Gyorgy Kepes (ed.), La Connaissance S.A., Bruxelles.

DUFRESNE-TASSÉ, C., DAO, K. and LAPOINTE, T.

1991 Quelques données sur le questionnement du visiteur adulte au Musée, unpublished paper, Université de Montréal, 26 pp.

DUNCAN, Carol

1985 Public Displays in a privatizing world, paper for the conference *Making Exhibitions of Ourselves: the Representation of Other Cultures*, at the British Museum, 1986.

DURRANS, Brian and KATTENHORN, Pat

1985 Representing India: Issues in the development of the 1982 Festival of India in Britain, paper for the conference *Making Exhibitions of Ourselves: the Representation of Other Cultures*, at the British Museum, 1986.

ECO, Umberto

1971 *La Struttura assente*, Portuguese translation by Pérola de Carvalho, first edition Ed. Bompiani, Milano, 1968, Ed.Perspectiva, S.Paulo.

1974 *Le Forme del Contenuto*, Portuguese translation by Pérola de Carvalho, first edition Ed. Bompiani, Milano, 1973, Ed.Perspectiva, S.Paulo.

1976 *Opera Aperta*, Portuguese translation by S.Uchoa Leite, first edition Ed. Bompiani, Milano, 1962, Editora Perspectiva, S.Paulo.

1979 *A theory of semiotics*, T. A. Sebeok (ed.) Advances in Semiotics, Indiana University Press, Bloomington, first edition 1976, Midland Book Edition, 1979.

1983 Towards a semiotic inquiry into the television message, paper given at the University of Perugia, 1965, English translation by P. Splendore, in J.Corner and J.Hawthorn (eds.), *Communication Studies, an introductory reader*, Edward Arnold, London, 131-149.

1984 a *Conceito de Texto*, Portuguese translation by Carla de Queiroz of a series of conferences at the University of S.Paulo, 1979, T.A.Queiroz, Ed.da Univ. de Sao Paulo.

1984 b *Semiotics and the Philosophy of Language*, Macmillan Press Ltd. Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire and London.

1987 *The Role of the Reader, explorations in the semiotics of texts*, first edition 1979, Hutchinson, London.

ELIADE, Mircea
1956 *Forgerons et Alchimistes*, Ernest Flammarion, Paris.

EXPO-MEDIA
1985 *Les Immateriaux,étude de l'evenement exposition et de son public*(au Centre Georges Pompidou en 1985), Cahiers Expo-Media, n.1, edited by Christian Carrier, Paris.

1987 *Ciel, une Expo! Approche de l'exposition scientifique*, Cahiers Expo-Media, n.3, edited by Christian Carrier, Paris.

FALK, J.H. *et al.*
1985 Auditing visitor behavior, *Curator*, 24(4), 249-258.

FISKE, John
1982 *Introduction to Communication Studies*, Methuen & Co. Ltd., London, New York.

GALVIN, K.M. and BROMMEL, B.J.
1986 *Family Communication*, Scott, Foresman and Co., Glenview.

GARDNER, T.
1986 Learning from listening - museums improve their effectiveness through visitor studies, *Museum News*, 64(3), 40-82.

GARRONI, Emilio
1972 *Progetto di Semiotica*, Portuguese translation A.J.Pinto Ribeiro, Ediçoes 70, Lisboa.

GERBNER, George
1983 Basic generalized graphic model of communication, from G.Gerbner, Towards a general model of communication, in *Audio Visual Communication Review*, IV.3, 1956.

GLOVER, David
1984 *The Sociology of the Mass Media*, in *Themes and Perspectives in Sociology* series, edited by M.Haralambos, Causeway Press Ltd. Lancashire.

GLUSBERG, Jorge
1983 *Museos frios y calientes*, Serie arte y comunicacion, 4, Museo de Telecomunicaciones, Buenos Aires.

GOFFMAN, Erving
1970 On the characteristics of total institutions, from E.Goffman *Asylums: Essays on the Social Situation of Mental Patients and other Inmates*, Doubleday, 1961, 3-12, in Peter Worsley (ed.), *Modern Sociology*, Harmondsworth, Penguin Books, 274-278.

1983 Introduction to *The presentation of self in everyday life*, Doubleday Anchor, 1959, in J.Corner and J. Hawthorn (eds.), *Communication Studies, an introductory reader*, E.Arnold, London, 150-161.

GOODENOUGH, W.
1964 Cultural Anthropology and Linguistics, in Dell. Hymes (ed.), *Language in Culture and Society*, Harper, New York.

GREENFIELD, Patricia M.
1984 *Mind and Media, the effects of television, computers and video games*, in *The Developing Child* series, edited by J.Bruner, M.Cole and B.Lloyd, Fontana Paperbacks, London.

GREGORY, R.L.

1979 *Eye and Brain*, first published in 1966, Weidenfeld and Nicolson, London.

1980 *The intelligent eye*, first published in 1970, Weidenfeld and Nicolson, London.

GREIMAS, Algirdas J.

1971 a *Sémantique Structurale, recherche de méthode*, first published 1966, L.Larousse, Paris, Spanish translation by A. de la Fuente, Editorial Gredos S.A., Madrid.

1971 b The interpretation of myth: theory and practice, in Maranda, P. and Maranda, E.K. (eds.), *Structural Analysis of Oral Tradition*, University of Pennsylvania Press, Philadelphia, 81-121.

1975 *Du Sens, Essais Sémiotiques*, first published 1970, Ed. du Seuil, Paris, Portuguese translation by A.C. Cruz Cezar and others, Editora Vozes, Petrópolis.

1976 Un accident fréquent dans les sciences humaines (Analyse d'un texte de Georges Dumézil); Pour une théorie des modalités, in *Semiotica do Discurso Cientifico; Da Modalidade*, Monografias de Semiótica e Linguistica I, Portuguese translation and edition by Cidmar T. Pais, DIFEL - SBPL, S.Paulo.

1981 *Sémiotique et Sciences Sociales*, first published E. du Seuil, 1976, Paris, Portuguese translation by A. Lorencini and S.Nitrini, Editora Cultrix, S.Paulo.

GREIMAS, A. and COURTES, J.

1979 *Sémiotique - dictionnaire raisonnée de la théorie du langage*, vol.1, Hachette, Paris.

GRIGGS, S. A.

1981 Formative evaluation of exhibits at the British Museum (NH), *Curator*, 24(3), 189-202.

1984 Evaluating exhibitions, in Thompson, J.M.A. et al. (eds.), *Manual of Curatorship*, Butterworths, London, 412-423.

GUINSBURG, J., TEIXEIRA COELHO NETTO, J., CHAVES CARDOSO,R.

1988 *Semiologia do Teatro*, editors, Ed. Perspectiva, S.Paulo.

GUIRAUD, Pierre

1975 *Semiology*, first published in French 1971, 'Que sais-je?' series, Presses Universitaires de France, English translation by George Gross, Routledge & Kegan, London, Henley and Boston.

1986 *La Sémantique*, 'Que sais-je?' series, Presses Universitaires de France, Portuguese translation by M.E. Mascarenhas, DIFEL, S.Paulo.

GUREVITCH, M., BENNETT, T. and WOOLLACOTT, J. (eds.)

1982 *Culture, Society and the Media*, Methuen & Co. Ltd., London, New York.

HABERMAS, Jurgen

1989 *The Theory of communicative action*, vol.1, Reason and the rationalization of society, English translation by T. McCarthy, Beacon Press, Boston, 1984, Portuguese translation Editora Tempo Brasileiro, Rio de Janeiro.

HAINARD, Jacques and KAEHR, Roland (eds.)

1982 *Collections Passion*, texts edited to complement and extend the exhibition with the same title, Musée d'ethnographie de Neuchâtel, Switzerland.

1984 *Objets prétextes, objets manipulés*, texts edited to complement and extend the exhibition with the same title, Musée d'ethnographie de Neuchâtel, Switzerland.

1985 *Temps perdu, temps retrouvé, voir les choses du passé au présent*, texts edited to complement and extend the exhibition with the same title, Musée d'ethnographie de Neuchâtel, Switzerland.

1987 *Des animaux et des hommes*, texts edited to complement and extend the exhibition with the same title, Musée d'ethnographie de Neuchâtel, Switzerland.

1988 *Les Ancetres sont parmi nous*, texts edited by J.Hainard, R.Kaehr and F.Sabelli, to complement and extend the exhibition with the same title, Musée d'ethnographie de Neuchâtel, Switzerland.

1989 *Le Salon de l'Ethnographie*, text edited by J.Hainard, R.Kaehr, F.Sabelli, J.Milliet and G.Minkoff, to complement and extend the exhibition with the same title, Musée d'ethnographie de Neuchâtel, Switzerland.

1990 *Le Trou*, texts edited to complement and extend the exhibition with the same title, Musée d'ethnograhie de Neuchâtel, Switzerland.

HALL, Stuart

1977 Culture, the Media and the 'Ideological Effect', in J.Curran, M.Gurevitch and J.Woollacott (eds.), *Mass Communication and Society*, Edward Arnold, Open University Press, London, 315-348.

1982 The rediscovery of 'ideology': return of the repressed in media studies, in M.Gurevitch, T.Bennett, J.Curran and J.Woollacott (eds.), *Culture, Society and the Media,* Methuen, London, New York, 56-90.

1985 Cultural studies: two paradigms, in T.Bennett, G.Martin, C.Mercer and J.Woollacott (eds.), *Culture, Ideology and Social Process*, Batsford Academic and Educational Ltd., Open University Press, London, 19-37.

HALL, S. *et al*. (eds.)

1980 *Culture, Media, Language*, Hutchinson, London.

HAMMAD, Manor

1987 Semiotic reading of a Museum, *Museum*, 154, 56-60.

HARRIS, M.

1979 *Cultural materialism: a struggle for a science of culture*, Random House, New York.

HARRIS, Neil
1978 Museums, Merchandising and Popular Taste: the struggle for influence, in I.M.G.Quimby (ed.), *Material Culture and the study of American life*, W.W.Norton & Co., New York, London, 140-174.

HASTORF, A.H., SCHNEIDER, D.J. and POLEFKA, J.
1983 The perceptual process, from *Person Perception*, Reading, Mass., London, in J.Corner and J.Hawthorn (eds.), *Communication Studies, an introductory reader*, Edward Arnold, London, 43-49.

HEIN, George E.
1982 Evaluation of museum programs and exhibits, *Museum Education*, Danish ICOM/CECA, 21-26.

1991 How do children behave in Museums?, *ICOM Education*, 12/13, CECA Committee for Education and Cultural Action, 52-57.

HINDLE, Brooke
1978 How much is a piece of the True Cross worth? in I.M.G. Quimby (ed.), *Material Culture and the study of American life*, W.W. Norton & Co., New York, London, 5-20.

HJELMSLEV, Louis
1975 *Prolegomena to a Theory of Language (1943)*, Madison, University of Wisconsin, 1961, Portuguese translation by J.Teixeira Coelho Neto, Editora Perspectiva S.A., Sao Paulo.

HODGE, Robert and D'SOUZA, Wilfred
1979 The Museum as a communicator: a semiotic analysis of the Western Australian Museum Aboriginal Gallery, Perth, *Museum*, 31(4), 251-266.

HONZL, Jindrich
1976 a Dynamics of the sign in the Theater, first published in *Slovo a slovesnost*, 6, 1940, 177-188, English translation by I.R. Titunik, in L.Matejka and I.R.Titunik (eds.), *Semiotics of Art*, MIT Press, 74-93.

1976 b The Hierarchy of Dramatic Devices, first published in *Slovo a slovesnost*, 9, 1943, 187-193, English translation by S.Larson, in L.Matejka and I.R.Titunik (eds.), *Semiotics of Art*, MIT Press, 118-127.

HOOPER-GREENHILL, Eilean

1983 Some basic principles and issues relating to Museum Education, *Museums Journal*, 82(2), 69-70.

1985 a To open up a few corpses, unpublished paper, Department of Museum Studies, University of Leicester,

1985 b Looking at Museums with Michel Foucault, unpublished paper for the conference *Making Exhibitions of Ourselves: the Representation of Other Cultures*, at the British Museum, 1986.

1989 The museum in the disciplinary society, in Susan Pearce (ed.), *Museum Studies in Material Culture*, Leicester University Press, 61-71.

1990 The Space of the Museum, *Continuum*, 3:1, 56-69.

1991 How objects become meaningful: or a new communications model for museums, in Gaynor Kavanagh (ed.), *Museum Languages: Objects and Texts*, Leicester University Press.

HORNE, Donald

1984 *The Great Museum - the Re-presentation of History*, Pluto Press Ltd., London and Sydney.

ICOFOM *MUWOP - Museological working papers*, unpublished papers for the annual meetings of the Committee for Museology, ICOM, 1986, 1987, 1988, 1989.

INNIS, Robert E.

1986 *Semiotics, an introductory anthology*, introduction by R.Innis, Hutchinson, London, Melbourne, Sydney, Auckland, Johannesburg.

IVANOV, V.V.
1981 The structure of signs in the cinema, 1970, Portuguese translation by S. Teles de Menezes and V.Navas, in *Ensaios de Semiotica Soviética*, Livros Horizonte, Lisboa, 241-246.

IVANOV, V.V., TOPOROV, V.N. and ZALIZNIAK, A.A.
1979 On the possibility of a typological-structural study of some modelling semiotic systems, first published in *Structurno-tipologuitcheskie islédovania* (Typological-structural researches), Academy of Sciences, Moscow, 1962, Portuguese translation by A.F.Bernardini, in Boris Schnaiderman (ed.), *Semiotica Russa,* Editora Perspectiva, S.Paulo,81-96.

JAKOBSON, Roman
1963 *Essais de Linguistique Générale*, translation and introduction by Nicolas Ruwet, Les Editions de Minuit, Paris.

1963 a - Linguistique et Poétique, first published in English as 'Closing statements: Linguistics and Poetics', in T.A.Sebeok (ed.) *Style in Language*, New York, 1960; *ELG*, 1963, chapter 11, 209-248.

1965 A la recherche de l'essence du langage, translation by Jacques Havet, first published in *Diogene*, 51, Gallimard, Paris, Portuguese translation by I.Blikstein and J.P.Paes, in *Linguistica e Comunicaçao*, Editora Cultrix, S.Paulo, 98-117.

1976 a What is Poetry?, first published in *Volné smery*, 30, 1933/34, English translation by M.Hein for *Studies in Verbal Art*, Ann Arbor, 1971, 20-32, in L.Matejka and I.R.Titunik (eds.), *Semiotics of Art*, MIT Press, 164-175.

1976 b Signum et signatum, first published in *Slovo a slovesnost*, 2, 1936, English translation by M.Hein for *Studies in Verbal Art*, Ann Arbor, 1971, 200-204 and 218-224, in L.Matejka and I.R. Titunik (eds.), *Semiotics of Art*, MIT Press,176-187.

KATZ, Elihu and LAZARSFELD, Paul F.
1960 *Personal Influence*, Free Press, New York.

KATZ, E., BLUMLER, J.G. and GUREVITCH, M.
1983 Utilization of mass communication by the individual, from Blumler, J. and Katz, E.(eds.) 1974, *The uses of mass communication*, Sage, Beverly Hills, in J.Corner and J.Hawthorn (eds.), *Communication studies, an introductory reader*, E.Arnold, London, 187-201.

KAVANAGH, Gaynor
1990 *History Curatorship*, Leicester Museum Studies Series, edited by Susan Pearce, Leicester University Press.

KNEZ, E.I. and WRIGHT, A.G.
1970 The museum as a communications system: an assessment of Cameron's view-point, *Curator*, 13(3), 204-212.

KOSSLYN, Stephen M.
1980 *Image and Mind*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Mass. & London.

KRISTEVA, Julia
1967 L'expansion de la sémiotique, *Informations sur les sciences sociales*, VI,5.

1968 La productivité dite texte, *Communications*,11, 59-83.

1969 *Sèmeiotikè, recherches pour une sémanalyse*, Ed. du Seuil, Paris.

LANGER, Susanne K.
1986 Discursive and Presentational Forms, from *Philosophy in a New Key*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Mass. and Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1942, in R.Innis (ed.), *Semiotics, an introductory anthology*,, Hutchinson, London, 87-107.

LASSWELL, Harold D.
1960 The structure and function of communication in society, first published in Lyman Brison (ed.), *The Communication of Ideas*, Harper & Brothers, 1948, 37-51, Wilburn Schramm (ed.), *Mass Communication,* University of Illinois Press, Urbana, 117-131.

LAWRENCE, Ghislaine

1990 Object lessons in the museum medium, in Susan Pearce (ed.), *Objects of Knowledge*, 1, *New Research in Museum Studies - an international series*, Athlone Press, London, 103-124.

1991 Rats, Street Gangs and Culture: Evaluation in Museums, in Gaynor Kavanagh (ed.) *Museum Languages: Ojects and Texts*, Leicester University Press, 9-32.

LEITCH, Vincent B.

1983 *Deconstructive Criticism, an advanced introduction*, Columbia University Press, New York.

LEROI-GOURHAN, André

1964 *Le Geste et la Parole -Technique et Langage*, first published Ed.Albin Michel,1964, Portuguese translation by V.Gonçalves, Ediçoes 70, Lisboa.

1965 *Le Geste et la Parole - la mémoire et les rythmes*, first published Ed.Albin Michel, 1965, Portuguese translation by E.Godinho, Ediçoes 70, Lisboa.

LEVI-STRAUSS, Claude

1986 Structural Analysis in Linguistics and in Anthropology, from C.Lévi-Strauss, *Structural Anthropology*, Basic Books Inc., 1963, in R.Innis (ed.), Hutchinson, London, 110-128.

LOOMIS, J.L. and ELLIOTT, P.

1975 *Studies of visitor behavior in museums and exhibitions - an annotated bibliography,* Office of Museum Programs, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, DC.

LOTMAN, Iuri

1979 On the problem of a typology of culture, first published in *Semeiotike, Trudi po znakovim sistiemam III* (Semeiotike, studies on the systems of signs III), University of Tartu, 1967, Portuguese translation by L.Seki, in B.Schnaiderman *Semiotica Russa*, Editora Perspectiva, S.Paulo, 31-41.

1981 a The modelling value of the concepts of 'end' and of 'beginning' (1970), Portuguese translation by S. Teles de Menezes and V. Navas, in *Ensaios de Semiotica Sovietica*, S.Teles de Menezes (ed.), Livros Horizonte, Lisboa, 231-236.

1981 b A dynamic model of the semiotic system (1974), Portuguese translation by S.Teles de Menezes and V.Navas, in *Ensaios de Semiotica Soviética*, S.Teles de Menezes (ed.), Livros Horizonte, Lisboa, 67-86.

1981 c The problem of the sign and of the sign system in the typology of culture before the XXth century (1979), Portuguese translation by S.Teles de Menezes and V.Navas, in *Ensaios de Semiotica Soviética*, S.Teles de Menezes (ed.), Livros Horizonte, Lisboa, 101-129.

1981 d What brings us a semiotic approach? (1980), Portuguese translation by S.Teles de Menezes and V.Navas, in *Ensaios de Semiotica Soviética*, S.Teles de Menezes (ed.), Livros Horizonte, Lisboa, 27-30.

LOTMAN, Iuri and USPENSKII, Boris

1981 a On the semiotic mechanism of culture (1971), Portuguese translation by S.Teles de Menezes and V.Navas, in *Ensaios de Semiotica Soviética*, S.Teles de Menezes (ed.), Livros Horizonte, Lisboa, 37-65.

1981 b Myth, Name, Culture (1973), Portuguese translation by S.Teles de Menezes and V.Navas, in *Ensaios de Semiotica Soviética*, S.Teles de Menezes (ed.), Livros Horizonte, Lisboa, 1981:131-158.

LURIA, Aleksandr R.

1982 *Cognitive Development, its cultural and social foundations*, first published in Russian by Nauka, Moscow, 1974, English translation by M.Lopez-Morillas and L. Solotaroff, edited by Michael Cole, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Mass. and London, 4th printing.

MALINOWSKY, B.
1972 The problem of meaning in primitive languages, in C.K. Ogden and I.A. Richards, *The Meaning of Meaning*, first published 1923, Portuguese translation by A.Cabral, Zahar Editores, Rio de Janeiro, 295-330.

McARTHUR, Colin
1978 *Television and History*, British Film Institute, London.

McLUHAN, Marshall
1967 *The Medium is the Message*, Bantam Books, New York.

1968 McLuhanism in the museum, *Museum News*, 46(7), 11-18.

McLUHAN *et al.*
1969 *Exploration of the ways, means and values of museum communication with the viewing public,* Museum of the City of New York.

McQUAIL, Denis
1972 *The Sociology of Mass Communications*, Harmondsworth, Penguin Books, London.

1977 The influence and effects of Mass Media, in J.Curran and others (eds.), *Mass Communication and Society*, E.Arnold, London, 70-94.

1986 *Mass Communication theory, an introduction*, first published 1983, Sage Publications, London.

MATEJKA, L. and TITUNIK, I.R.
1976 *Semiotics of Art*, MIT Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts and London.

MERRIMAN, Nick
1989 a The social basis of museum and heritage visiting, in Susan Pearce (ed.), *Museum Studies in Material Culture*, Leicester University Press, 153-171.

1989 b Museum visiting as a cultural phenomenon, in Peter Vergo (ed.), *The New Museology*, Reaktion Books, London, 149-171.

MILES, Roger S.
1984 Assessing the effectiveness of exhibitis, *Museums Association Proceedings*, London, 11-12.

1986 Museum Audiences, *International Journal of Museum Management and Curatorship*, 5(1), 73-80.

1988 *The Design of Educational Exhibits*, Allen & Unwin, first edition 1982, London.

MILES, R.S. and TOUT, A.F.
1979 Outline of a technology of effective science exhibits, *Curation of palaeontological collections: Special papers in Palaeontology*, 22, 209-224.

MILLER, G.R. and SUNNAFRANK, M.J.
1982 All is for one but one is not for all: a conceptual perspective of interpersonal communication, in Frank E.X. Dance (ed.) *Human Communication Theory*, Harper & Row Publishers, New York.

MINK, Z.G.
1974 The concept of text and symbolist aesthetics, Portuguese translation by S.Teles de Menezes and V.Navas, in S.Teles de Menezes (ed.) *Ensaios de Semiótica Soviética*, Livros Horizonte, Lisboa, 159-167.

MOLES, Abraham A.
1974 *Sociodynamique de la Culture*, first published Mouton & Cie., 1967, Portuguese translation by M.W. Barbosa de Almeida, Editora Perspectiva, S.Paulo.

MORGAN, J. and WELTON, P.
1986 *See what I mean - an introduction to visual communication*, E.Arnold, London.

MORRIS, Charles
1946 *Signs, Language and Behavior*, Prentice Hall, New York.

1986 Signs and the Act, from *Signification and Significance*, Cambridge, Mass. and London, MIT Press, 1964, in R.Innis, *Semiotics, an introductory anthology*, Hutchinson, London, 178-189.

MUKAROVSKY, Jan

1976 a Art as a semiotic fact, acts of the eighth international congress of philosophy, Prague, 1934, first published 1936, 1065-1072, English translation by I.R.Titunik, in L.Matejka and I.R.Titunik, *Semiotics of Art*, MIT Press, 3-10.

1976 b Poetic Reference (Dénomination poétique et la fonction esthétique de la langue), acts of the international congress of linguistics, Copenhagen, 1936, first published 1938, 98-104, English translation by S.Janecek, in L.Matejka and I.R.Titunik, *Semiotics of Art*, MIT Press, 155-163.

1976 c The Essence of the visual arts, lecture given in 1944, first published in *Studie z estetiky*, Prague, 1966, English translation by J.Burbank and P.Steiner, in L.Matejka and I.Titunik (eds.), *Semiotics of Art*, MIT Press, 229-244.

MYERS, Gail E. and MYERS, Michele T.

1988 *The Dynamics of Human Communication, a laboratory approach*, McGraw-Hill Book Co.

NATTIEZ, J.J

1966 *Problèmes et Méthodes de la Sémiologie*, Librairie Marcel Didier et Librairie Larousse, Portuguese translation by L.A.Rebelo, Ediçoes 70, Lisboa.

NYE, Russel B.

1981 The Humanities and the Museum: definitions and connections, in Z.Collins (ed.) *Museums, Adults and the Humanities*, American Association of Museums, Washington, DC., 5-15.

OGDEN, C.K. and RICHARDS, I.A.
1972 *The Meaning of Meaning, a study of the influence of language upon thought and of the science of symbolism*, with supplementary essays by B.Malinowsky and F.G.Crookshank, first edition by Routledge & Kegan Paul, Cambridge, 1923, Portuguese translation by A. Cabral, Zahar Editores, Rio de Janeiro.

OLSON, D. and BRUNER, J.
1987 Learning through Experience and Learning through Media, from D.R.Olson, *Media and Symbols: the Forms of Expression, Communication and Education*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago, Illinois, 1974, 125-150, in O.Boyd-Barrett and P.Braham (eds.), *Media, Knowledge and Power*, Open University, Croom Helm, London, Sydney, 226-250.

O'SULLIVAN, T. *et al.*
1985 *Key Concepts in Communication*, Methuen & Co., London, New York.

PAIS, Cidmar T.
1980 Systèmes de signes et systèmes de signification au-delà du structuralisme, *Acta Semiotica et Linguistica*, 4, Sociedade Brasileira de Professores de Linguistica, Editora Global, S.Paulo, 69-80.

PALMER, S.E.
1975 The effects of contextual scenes on the identification of objects, *Memory and Cognition*, 3(5), 519-526.

PAOLOZZI, Eduardo
1985 *Lost Magic Kingdoms and Six Paper Moons from Nahuatl*, an exhibition at the Museum of Mankind, British Museum Publications Ltd., London.

PARR, Albert E.
1962 Some basic problems of visual education by means of exhibits, *Curator*, 5(1), 36-44.

1969 Marketing the Message, *Curator*, 12(2), 77-82.

PEARCE, Susan

1986 a Thinking about things: approaches to the study of artefacts, *Museums Journal*, 86(1), 198-201.

1986 b Objects, High and Low, *Museums Journal*, 86 (2), 79-82.

1986 c Objects as Signs and Symbols, *Museums Journal*, 86(3), 131-135.

1987 Objects in Structures, *Museums Journal*, 86(4), 178-181.

1989 a Objects in Structures, in Susan Pearce (ed.) *Museum Studies in Material Culture*, Leicester University Press, 47-59.

1989 b *Museum Studies in Material Culture*, editor, Leicester University Press.

1990 a Objects as meaning; or narrating the past, in Susan Pearce (ed.) *Objects of Knowledge, 1, New Research in Museum Studies:an international series*, Athlone Press, London, 125-140.

1990 b *Objects of Knowledge*,1, *New Research in Museum Studies*, editor, Athlone Press, London.

PEART, B.

1982 Impact of exhibit type or knowledge gain, attitudes and behaviour, *Curator*, 24(3), 220-237.

PEIRCE, Charles Sanders

1977 *The collected papers of Charles Sanders Peirce*, Portuguese translation J.Teixeira Coelho Neto, from the original edition by Charles Hartsforne and Paul Weiss, Cambridge, Mass., Harvard University Press, 1931.

1986 Logic as Semiotic: the Theory of Signs, in R.E. Innis, *Semiotics, an introductory reader*, Hutchinson, London, 4-27.

PEPONIS, J. and HEDIN, J.

1982 The layout of theories in the Natural History Museum, 9H, 3, 21-25.

PERRATON, Charles
1987 Voir et toucher la science, éléments pour l'analyse des stratégies communicationnelles à l'oeuvre dans les musées de science et technologie, *Cahier Expo-Media*, n.3, edited by Christian Carrier, Paris, 15-66.

PIGNATARI, Décio
1988 *Informaçao, Linguagem, Comunicaçao*, Editora Cultrix, S.Paulo, eighth edition.

1987 *Semiotica e Literatura*, Editora Cultrix, S.Paulo, third edition.

PLAZA, Júlio
1987 *Traduçao Intersemiótica*, Editora Perspectiva, CNPQ, S.Paulo.

POSTMAN, Neil
1990 Museum as dialogue, *Museum News*, 69(5),55-59.

PRINCE, D.R.
1983 Behavioural consistancy and visitor attraction, *International Journal of Museum Management and Curatorship*, 2(3), 235-247.

QUIMBY, Ian M.G. (ed.)
1978 *Material Culture and the study of American life*, Winterthur Museum, Delaware, W.W. Norton & Co. New York, London.

READ, Herbert
1968 Les origines de la forme en Art, *L'objet crée par l'homme*, French translation by D.Panchout, first edition by George Braziller, Inc. New York, 1965, Bibliothèque de Synthèses, Gyorgy Kepes (ed.), La Connaissance S.A., Bruxelles.

REEVE, John
1981 Education in Glass-Case Museums, in *Journal of Education in Museums*, 2, Group for Education in Museums, London.

1983 Museum Materials for Children, in N.Hall (ed.), *Writing and Designing Interpretive Materials for Children*, Manchester Polytechnic.

1985 Leading the public to Nirvana? Interpreting 'Buddhism, Art and Faith', paper for the conference *Making Exhibitions of Ourselves: the Representation of other Cultures*, at the British Museum, 1986.

ROCK, Irvin
1985 *The Logic of Perception*, 'A Bradford Book', MIT Press, Cambridge, Mass:, London.

SALOMON, Gavriel
1987 The use of visual media in the service of enriching mental thought processes, *Instructional Science*, 9, Elsevier Publication Co., Amsterdam, 1980, 327-339, in O.Boyd-Barrett and P.Braham (eds.), *Media, Knowledge and Power*, Open University, Croom Helm, London, Sydney, 251-265.

SAUSSURE, Ferdinand de
1949 *Cours de Linguistique Générale*, first edition 1916, Payot, Paris, 4th edition.

SCHÄRER, Martin
1991 *700 ans au menu - 7 expositions exposées*, Alimentarium, Musée de l'Alimentation, Vevey, Switzerland.

SCHIELE, Bernard and BOUCHER, Louise
1987 Une exposition peut en cacher une autre, approche de l'exposition scientifique et technique: la mise en scène de la science au Palais de la Découverte, *Cahier Expo-Media*, n.3, edited by Christian Carrier, Paris, 69-214.

SCHLERETH, Thomas J.
1980 A perspective on criticism - guidelines for history museums exhibition reviews, *History News*, 35(8), 18-19.

1982 *Material culture studies in America, 1876-1976*, editor, AASLH, Nashville.

1984 Object knowledge: every museum visitor an interpreter, in Susan K. Nichols (ed.) *Museum Education Anthology*, 1973-1983, American Association of Museums, Washington, DC., 108-117.

SCHRAMM, Wilbur
1983 The unique perspective of communication: a retrospective view, *Journal of Communication*, 33(3).

SCHUTZ, William C.
1966 *The Interpersonal Underworld*, Science and Behavior Books, Inc. Palo Alto, California.

SCREVEN, C.G.
1974 a *The measurement and facilitator of learning in the museum environment: an experimental analysis*, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, DC.

1974 b Learning and exhibits - instructional design, *Museum News*, 52(5), 67-75.

1975 The effectiveness of guidance devices in visitor learning, *Curator*, 18(3), 219-243.

1984 Educational evaluation and research in museums and public exhibits: a bibliography, *Curator*, 27(2), 147-165.

1986 Exhibitions and Information Centres: some principles and approaches, *Curator*, 29(2), 109-137.

SHANNON, Claude E. and WEAVER, Warren
1949 *The Mathematical Theory of Communication*, first edition by the University of Illinois Press, Urbana, Portuguese translation by O.Agueda, DIFEL, S.Paulo, Rio de Janeiro, 1975.

SHAPIRO, Meyer
1986 On some problems in the semiotics of the visual arts: field and vehicle in Image-signs, first published in *Semiotica*, 1(3), 1969, 223-242, paper presented at the Second International Colloquium on Semiotics, Kazimierz, Poland, 1966, in R.Innis (ed.), *Semiotics, an introductory anthology*, Hutchinson, London, 206-225.

SHELTON, Anthony A.
1990 In the lair of the monkey: notes towards a post-modernist museography, in Susan Pearce (ed.), *Objects of Knowledge, 1, New Research in Museum Studies, an international series*, Athlone Press, London, 78-102.

SHETTEL, H. H.
1968 *Strategies for determining exhibit effectiveness*, American Institutes for Research, Pittsburgh.

1973 Exhibits - an art form or educational medium? *Museum News*, 52(1), 32-41.

SILBERMAN, Alphons
1981 *Communication de masse - éléments de sociologie empirique*, French translation by M.Perrot, Hachette, Paris, first edition 1969.

SKRAMSTAD Jr., Harold K.
1978 Interpreting Material Culture: a view from the other side of the glass, in I.M.G. Quimby, *Material Culture and the study of American life*, Winterthur Museum, Delaware, W.W.Norton & Co., New York, London.

SORSBY, B. D. and HORNE, S.D.
1980 The readability of museum labels, *Museums Journal*, 80(3), 157-159.

SPERBER, Dan and WILSON, Deirdre
1986 *Relevance : Communication and Cognition*, Basil Blackwell Ltd., Oxford.

STANSFIELD, G.
1981 *Effective interpretive exhibitions*, Countryside Commission for England and Wales, Cheltenham.

STOCKING Jr. George W.
1985 *Objects and Others - essays on museums and material culture*, editor, *History of Anthropology*, 3, University of Wisconsin Press.

STURROCK, John (ed.)
1986 *Structuralism and since - from Lévi-Strauss to Derrida*, Oxford University Press, first edition 1979.

SULER, Petr
1983 Nad skladbou expozicni promluvy (On the language of an exhibition), *Muzeologicke sesity* 9/83, Brno, 105-110.

SWINGEWOOD, Alan
1979 *The myth of mass culture*, Macmillan Press Ltd., London and Basingstoke.

TABORSKY, Edwina
1982 The socio-structural role of the museum, *International Journal of Museum Management and Curatorship*, 1, 339-345.

1990 The Discursive Object, in Susan Pearce (ed.), *Objects of Knowledge, 1, New Research in Museum Studies, an international series*, Athlone Press, London, 50-77.

TEIXEIRA COELHO NETTO, J.
1983 *Semiótica, Informaçao e Comunicaçao*, Editora Perspectiva, first published 1980, S.Paulo.

1984 *A Construçao do Sentido na Arquitetura*, Editora Perspectiva, first published 1979, S.Paulo.

TODOROV, Tzvetan
1966 Les catégories do récit littéraire, *Communications*, 8, 125-151.

1977 *Théories du symbole*, Portuguese translation by M.de Santa Cruz, first published Ed. du Seuil, 1977, Ediçoes 70, Lisboa.

1978 *Les genres du discours*, Portuguese translation by A.M.Leite, first published Ed. du Seuil, 1978, Ediçoes 70, Lisboa.

USPENSKII, Boris A.
1962 On the semiotics of Art, Portuguese translation by S.Teles de Menezes and V.Navas, in *Ensaios de Semiótica Soviética*, S.Teles de Menezes (ed.), Livros Horizonte, Lisboa, 1981: 31-35.

1974 History sub specie semioticae, Portuguese translation by S.Teles de Menezes and V.Navas, in *Ensaios de Semiotica Sovietica*, S. Teles de Menezes (ed.), Livros Horizonte, Lisboa, 1981:87-98.

VAN MENSCH, Peter
1989 Museum work as a profession, in P. van Mensch (ed.) *Professionalising the Muses*, AHA Books, Amsterdam, 9-20.

VELTRUSKY, Jiri

1976 a Dramatic Text as a component of Theater, first published in *Slovo a slovesnost*, 7, 1941, 132-144, English translation by J.Veltrusky, in L.Matejka and I.R.Titunik (eds.) *Semiotics of Art*, MIT Press, 94-117

1976 b Basic features of dramatic dialogue, first published by B.Havranek and J.Mukarovsky, Prague, 1942, English translation by J.Veltrusky, in L.Matejka and I.Titunik (eds.), *Semiotics of Art*, MIT Press, 128-133.

1976 c Construction of semantic contexts, first published by B.Havranek and J.Mukarovsky, Prague, 1942, English translation by J.Veltrusky, in L.Matejka and I.Titunik (eds.), *Semiotics of Art*, MIT Press, 134-144.

1976 d Some aspects of the pictorial sign (1973), in L.Matjeka and I.Titunid (eds.), *Semiotics of Art*, MIT Press, 245-264.

VERGO, Peter (ed.)

1989 *The New Museology*, Reaktion Books Ltd, London.

VERNON, M. D.

1968 *The Psychology of Perception*, Penguin Books, Harmondsworth, Middlesex.

1974 *Perception through Experience*, Portuguese translation by D. Moreira Leite, Editora Perspectiva, S.Paulo.

VODICKA, Felix

1976 Response to Verbal Art, first published by B.Havranek and J.Mukarovsky, Prague, 1942, English translation by R.Koprince, in L.Matjeka and I.Titunik (eds.), *Semiotics of Art*, MIT Press, 197-208.

VOLKERT, J. W.

1991 Monologue to dialogue, *Museum News*, 70(2), 46-48.

VOLOSINOV, V.

1973 *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language*, Seminar Press, New York.

1985 The study of ideology and philosophy of language, from V.N.Volosinov, *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language,*, in T.Bennett and others (eds.), *Culture, Ideology and Social Process*, Batsford Academic and Educational Ltd., and Open University Press, London, 145-152.

VYGOTSKY, Lev S.

1978 *Mind in Society, The development of higher psychological processes*, edited by Michael Cole and others, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Mass., London.

1979 *Thought and Language*, Portuguese translation by M.Resende, Ediçoes Antidoto, Lisboa.

WATZLAWICK, P., BEAVIN, J. and JACKSON, D.

1983 The impossibility of not communicating, excerpt of *Pragmatics of Human Communication*, Faber, London, 1968, in J.Corner and J.Hawthorn (eds.), *Communication Studies, an introductory reader*, E.Arnold, London, 23-25.

WERTSCH, James V.

1985 *Introduction to Culture, Communication and Cognition - Vygotskian perspectives*, Cambridge University Press, 1-18.

1991 *Voices of the Mind - a sociocultural approach to mediated action*, Harverster Wheatsheaf, London, Sydney, Singapore.

WERTSCH, J. and STONE, C.A.

1985 The concept of internalization in Vygotsky's account of the genesis of higher mental functions, in J.V.Wertsch (ed.) *Culture, Communication and Cognition, Vygotskian perspectives*, Cambridge University Press, 162-179.

WILLIAMS, Raymond

1983 Effects of the technology and its uses, from R.Williams, *Television: technology and cultural form*, Fontana, London, 1974, 119-134, in J.Corner and J.Hawthorn (eds.), *Communication Studies, an introductory reader*, E.Arnold, London, 174-186.

1985 The Analysis of Culture, from R.Williams, *The long Revolution*, Chatto and Windus, 1961, chap.2, in T.Bennett and others (eds.), *Culture, Ideology and Social Process*, Batsford Academic and Educational Ltd. and Open University Press, London, 43-52.

WILLIAMSON, Judith
1983 *Decoding Advertisements - ideology and meaning in Advertising*, Marion Boyars, first published 1978, London, New York.

WILSON, David M.
1989 *The British Museum - Purposes and Politics*, British Museum Publications, London.

WITTLIN, Alma S.
1968 Exhibits: interpretive, under-interpretive, mis-interpretive, in E.Larrabee (ed.), *Museums and Education*, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, DC., 95-114.

WOLF, R.L. *et al.*
1979 *New perspectives in evaluating museum environments: an annotated bibliography*, Office of Museum Programs, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, DC.

WOLF, R.L. and TYMITZ, B.C.
1978 *A preliminary guide for conducting naturalistic evaluation in studying museum environments*, Office of Museum Programs, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, DC.

WOOLLACOTT, Janet
1982 Messages and Meanings, in M.Gurevitch and others (eds.), *Culture, Society and the Media*, Methuen & Co.Ltd., London, New York, 91-111.

ZICH, Otakar
1976 Aesthetics of Dramatic Art (Estetika dramatickéko umeni), first published Prague 1931, L.Matejka and I.Titunik (eds.), *Semiotics of Art*, MIT Press.

ZWALF, Wladimir (ed.)
1985 *Buddhism, Art and Faith*, Catalogue edited by W.Zwalf, The Trustees of the British Museum and the British Library, British Museum Publications Ltd. London.