Elisa Bianchi

Sheer lunacy at the Laboratory of the Mind Museum at Santa Maria della Pietà in Rome

Abstract

In the 1950s the asylum institution of Santa Maria della Pietà in Rome acted as a social container, housing not only people affected by mental issues, but also severely disabled people, social misfits, poor people, outcasts, alcoholics, and after the war also many orphans; there were also people who were born there and spent their entire lives in the institute. In the 1960s, in the new location of Monte Mario, the psychiatric hospital counted 3000 patients. What happened must not be forgotten or ignored. The Laboratory of the Mind Museum project started from the collaboration between the director Pompeo Martelli and Paolo Rosa. The museum, built by Studio Azzurro, was inaugurated on October 7th 2008. In actual fact what needs to be narrated thanks to the exhibition does indeed concern the history of the former psychiatric hospital, but most of all the experiences of those who have lived in there and those who have for various reasons "glanced into" it. In this museum the Milan group, actively involved for over twenty years in artistic research, have developed an itinerary where the new technologies have been used to create a dynamic of interaction to allow the visitor to undergo a culturally formative museum experience. This is perhaps one of the best examples of what we define as "sensitive museography". In the itinerary of the museum interfaces and devices are invisible. Despite their apparent absence, the interactive installations draw in visitors by inviting them to take part in the museum's stories and to experiment with the different cultural models that gave rise to the prejudice on mental illness.

Keywords

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Japanese spaceships on the Pacific. Corazzi Elisabetta from England: looks like spinach, tall, narrow mouth, Y-shaped nose. A red and black flag, the 1957 fusion between Czechoslovakia and Copenhagen. The decoloring zodiac of the star. The invisible man armed with a cathodic buckle. [...] A bank refuelling on the uranium star for seventy thousand liras. Bars of gold, silver, nickel, copper, steel, alum, carbon, quartz, bronze. A magnetic actualisation station. Lost star, rising star.

Paolo Rosa, *L'osservatorio nucleare del signor Nanof*

Fig. 1 – Gazes, *Come in on the outside and come out on the inside*, Laboratory of the Mind Museum, Santa Maria della Pietà, Roma, 2008, © Studio Azzurro

Two eyes.

And another two. Then two more peer out from the behind the front desk, scrutinizing anyone who decides to enter. *Sguardi* [*Gazes, fig. 1*] is the first installation that greets visitors at the Museo Laboratorio della Mente [Laboratory of the Mind Museum] in Rome: a four-minute video, set in a loop, shows a succession of details from photographic portraits. These details are the eyes of those who were sectioned here, back when there used to be a mental hospital. Founded in 1550, the first unit was built in the heart of Rome, in piazza Colonna, designed to house homeless people, vagrants and other people who lived on the streets and were considered morally questionable and with deplorable customs, people whose sight was removed from the pilgrims who came to the city for the Holy City for the Jubilee.[1] In 1562, its use was extended to become a "hospital for poor foreigners and insane people"[2] until 1579, when the structure started welcoming

exclusively mental patients. Its inauguration in 1914 with about 600 guests in the new location in Monte Mario marked the final act of "marginalisation"; forgotten in the far outskirts on the city, the patients were sectioned off by unsurmountable fences which kept them from accessing the large surrounding park. In the 1960s, among "upset", "calm", and "grimy" patients in the two pavilions, number 18 reserved for criminals and number 9 for children kept in a state of forced inactivity, the psychiatric hospital counted 3000 patients[3]. It remained operative until February 28th, 1999. In collaboration with the Province of Rome, a first exhibition is set up in 1995: *La linea d'ombra* [*The shadow line*]. What happened must not be forgotten or ignored; it seems necessary to create a "place for information and formation"[4] against the stigma associated with mental illness. Five years later, the Museo Laboratorio della Mente [Laboratory of the Mind Museum] was inaugurated. In its first version, designed by the Cen-

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tro Studi e Ricerche ASL [ASL Center for Research and Studies] in Rome and the C.N.R. Istituto di Psicobiologia e Psicofarmacologia [C.N.R. Institute of Psychobiology and Psychopharmacology], the museum's layout presents both a historical-scientific area on the asylum. Here, visitors have the chance to experience through their own senses how perceptive and constructive abilities of the mind can lead to fallacious conclusions. On October 7th 2008, the new Laboratory of the Mind Museum was inaugurated in pavilion 6. Both seeing and seen.

Starting from the entrance, the intention of Paolo Rosa and of director Pompeo Martelli5, who designed the setting built by Studio Azzurro6 is clear: the aim is to create a simulation of roles. Upon entering, one has the impression of being examined by the former patients of the hospital and this dynamic immediately overturns the relation between the subject that sees and the object that is seen.

When Pompeo Martelli turned to the Studio, the group boasted over twenty years of artistic research. Studio Azzurro was founded in 1982 in Milano. In fact, a first group had already been formed in 1979 around the realisation of the film project *Facce di Festa* [*Party Faces*]. Paolo Rosa (1949-2013), Fabio Cirifino, and Leonardo Sangiorgi, who later went on to found Studio Azzurro, were all part of the group.

> Paolo Rosa: We never quite took to the term "Videoart". […] In the 1980s it was very popular and looking at the intervention and introduction of new technologies in artistic experimentation and vice versa, in other words the artistic experimentation that enters the world of new technologies, we thought that there was a deeper meaning than that of being simply a branch of visual arts. It wasn't "land art", "body art", "pop art", all terms with the "art" suffix that somehow defined currents of a great discipline; we felt that the atmosphere of research in connection with new technologies went beyond that and

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somehow lead to question the discipline itself, as well as the boundaries between the various disciplines.[7]

Also in 1982, designer Ettore Sottsass (1917-2007) asked the group for a collaboration to create a frame for objects in the Memphis collection; thus the first "videoenvironment" *Luci di inganni* [*Lights of deceit*] was born.

After barely a decade, the restless, light blue images were no longer satisfied with coming out of a frame to enter the one next to it, so the bodies started moving out of the monitor and being projected into space and, most of all, being touched. Passing through *Il giardino delle cose* [*The Garden of Things*] (1992), the group produced *Tavoli (Perché queste mani mi toccano?)* [*Tables (Why are these hands touching me?)*] in 1995, the first interactive videoenvironment, the first "sensitive environment". In 1995, Studio Azzurro is enriched by Stefano Roveda's IT contribution.

P. R.: At that point an aesthetic level that was very new and absolutely interesting for us to study was developed […] a change of focus in aesthetics. An aesthetics that was no longer connected with the product, with the work, with the piece of art that one was working on, but more on the relation one was building. It was no longer a question of how beautiful the work of art was, but of how beautiful the relation between the work of art and the person experiencing it was. It became thus a work of art that went outside itself; this is how I named a small paper on this topic, a paper that is not important in its definitive and defining form but that establishes a process, a dialogue.[8]

The studio continued throughout the years to promote a research that is free from the limits of individual disciplines (cinema, theatre, visual arts). They explored the possibilities of expression offered by new technologies and proved a strong sensitivity towards the aspect of par-

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ticipation, especially within museum itineraries. "[...] Day after day, year after year, step by step, desperately, we found a way to bring out those who were inside and bring in those who were outside".[9] *Entrare fuori uscire dentro* [*Come in on the outside and come out on the inside*] is the first section of the museum.

The expression means a sort of crasis between two statements of great significance that are useful for defining the institute's new identity. The former corresponds to the quote above through which Franco Basaglia attempts to describe the methodology used to create a contact between the asylum and society, the latter is the fruit of an episode documented by Tommaso Losavio:[10]

> Along the path I was walking down, alone with these thoughts, I saw Nino B., who had been for many years a resident in pavilion 16, coming towards me. [...] Despite his disease and long-term admission, he was a person who had preserved a great relational aptitude and his observations were always full of wit and intelligence. «It's easy for you» he said to me «but you can't know how hard it is for us to come in on the outside».[11]

On May 13th, Law 180 – better known as Basaglia Law – which bans the re-opening or construction of new asylums receives very little media coverage. If among politicians consensus in clear, the public debate seems clouded over by the ideological extremism of the time and many people felt strongly opposed to it because they wanted to avoid trouble. "Prosecutors, politicians or irritated citizens denounce the irresponsible person who lets out mental patients who may then have a crisis at the sight of things they have not seen in 30 years such as a department store window or a young girl...".[12]

A few days later, the law on the interruption of pregnancies comes out (Law 194), and the decision on this one

proves to be more difficult: 308 votes are in favour and 275 are against it. At 1:30 pm on 19 May there is an anonymous telephone call to the police headquarters: «In Via Caetani there is a red car with Moro's body inside».

The aim of the law signed in 1904 by Giolitti's government was to try for the first time to regulate asylums. Article 1 explained that the reason for sectioning – whether it was by request of the family or directly ordered by public safety authorities – could be based on any type of mental alienation. According to the organicist approach, the nature of the disease was considered strictly related to a malfunctioning of the brain; the social context that the patient came from was completely irrelevant, just as it was not considered necessary for him to have any contact with the outside world. In the 1950s, the asylum institution acted as a social container, housing not only people affected by mental issues, but also severely disabled people, social misfits, poor people, outcasts, alcoholics, and

after the war also many orphans; there were also people who were born there and spent their entire lives in the institute. Then there was the electroshock therapy, the straightjacket, the containment room where patients were tied to beds with large straps and bound at the wrists with strong bands sown together by the nurses using mattress needles and were made to stay there for one or two days or even a couple of years, or again the therapy carried out by inducing malarial fevers; all these were treatments aimed at curing any sign of malaise or correcting a state of agitation or of violation of the rules. All forms of human relation were discouraged, both with nursing staff and among the patients themselves. When Losavio became director of the Santa Maria della Pietà institute, fifteen years had already passed since the approval of Law 180 and despite this the first thing he saw was a 44-year-old patient named Giuseppina naked and tied to a heater. Beyond the entrance, some figures throw themselves

against a transparent wall that divides the entire museum area. "The action of throwing oneself against an invisible barrier is connected to its double nature of physical and psychological exclusion and underlines the gravity of the violence suffered by the patience".[13]

The installation (*fig. 2*) is the result of a readaptation of the work designed by Studio Azzurro and presented at Vision Rhur in Dortmund in 2002 titled *Dove va tutta 'sta gente?* [*Where are all these people going?*][14] On the polycarbonate sheets, the videos played by three different projectors are blended into a single image. The visitor is forced to walk beside them, thus coming into contact with the drama of reclusion. The proximity of the structures makes the intensity of the impact physically perceivable; thanks to the skilful positioning of the *subwoofer*, located near the transparent surface, the suggestive-emotional effect is increased by the amplification of low soundwaves that thus make the sheets vibrate.

Fig. 2 – The wall, *Come in on the outside and come out on the inside,* Laboratory of the Mind Museum, Santa Maria della Pietà, Rome, 2008, © Studio Azzurro

The four rooms that follow are dedicated to perception; here the rules according to which we perceive reality as correct or fallacious are questioned. The interactive installations draw in visitors by inviting them to experiment with the different cultural models that gave rise to the prejudice on mental illness. In *Modi del sentire* [*Modes of Feeling*], certainties crumble and the boundary between

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normality and folly become feeble. Thanks to *Camera di Ames* [*Ames's Room*], the famous experiment designed in 1946 by American ophtamologist Adelbert Ames (1880-1955) in connection with the studies on visual perception by German scientist Hermann L.F. von Helmholtz (1821-1894) is presented. A room that is distorted by an optical illusion drives the brain to wrongly evaluate the people and things found inside and the sense of sight is deceived. There is a writing on the wall: "Up close no one is normal". Moving on, with *Parlare, Vedere, Ascoltare* [*Talking, Seeing, Listening*], the possibility to interact acquires a greater meaning and the level of perceptive distortion increases proportionally. In the middle of the first room there is a microphone. It is sufficient to speak [into the microphone] and the mouth projected on the wall – which has remained closed up until now – starts emitting sounds and phrases that appear nonsensical because out of context; if the incoming sound stops, the mouth be-

comes silent again. This is the usual stereotype of folly; a man who talks to himself and hears voices. "In order to hear you then have to speak, but if you listen it is hard to speak and if you speak it is hard to listen".[15] In the installation *Vedere* [*Seeing, fig. 3*], one is faced with one's image reflected in the mirror. "The mirror – Merleau-Ponty wrote in *The Eye and The Spirit* – appears because I am seeing-visible, because there is a reflexiveness of the sensitive, which the mirror translates and doubles".[16] It is no longer a question of *cogito ergo sum*; the contact with one's I occurs through the dimension of the human animal that is "visible and seeing". It is precisely the articulation of this duplicity that makes it possible to double into an *alter ego* who, with his own existence, becomes the very necessary condition for the perception of the *ego*. The being thus only manages to discover himself through the relation with the other. But something is wrong; half of the face reflected in the mirror is not connected with

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the other half. This represents the doubling of the person, the impossibility of not managing to identify oneself with a single image, in a perception that is similar to the alienation of an asylum. The reflection offered back by the mirror defies our perceptive system precisely because each half does not represent the completion of the other and it is as if we find ourselves not in front a coherent configuration but rather two halves that were mistakenly put together and whose counterparts appear hidden both from the eyes and from the mind.[17] In the third room, *Ascoltare* [*Listening, fig. 4*], about twenty funnels hanging from the ceiling broadcast the phrases that are spoken and taped within the *Parlare* [*Speaking*] installation, together with screams and sighs. The sectioned life passes through the same funnel that is worn by the self-declared curator of Bosch's painting (*fig. 5*) who, according to a traditional story, managed to convince a fool to let the stone of folly be extracted from his head.[18]

Fig. 3 – Seeing, *Modes of Feeling,* Laboratory of the Mind Museum, Santa Maria della Pietà, Rome, 2008, © Studio Azzurro

Moving along the path, we leave the outside behind and beyond the wall we enter into the world of lunatics. As soon as one crosses the threshold, on the wall to the right there are a series of portraits painted in the 1930s by Italian psychiatrist Romolo Righetti that are placed silently in a row. Maybe though still bearing traces of a Lombrosian cataloguing, these faces were treated with profound sympathy, taking the term in its strictly etymological

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sense: from the Greek *syn* (with, together) and *pathos* (passion, affection) therefore as the "faculty of participating to the feelings of our fellow men, to their pleasure and to their pain".[19] Here we have two points of view in comparison; the one belonging to the psychiatrist and the one derived from the cold, cataloguing camera.

Through the latter – which was originally used up until the 1960s to document the entrance of new patients and later restored and digitally reanimated by Studio Azzurro – visitors take part in the recording process that patients underwent when they entered the asylum.[20]

Fig. 4 – Listening, *Modes of Feeling,* Laboratory of the Mind Museum, Santa Maria della Pietà, Rome, 2008, © Studio Azzurro

Fig. 5 – Hieronymus Bosch, *The Stone Operation / The Extraction of the Stone Madness* (detail), oil on canvas, 1494 ca., Museo del Prado, Madrid

After that, the fourth area of the museum is *Dimore del corpo* [*Dwellings of the Body*]. This houses two installations for which sophisticated "interfaces of dialogue between man and machine"[21] have been studied. The *Tavolo sonoro* [*Table of Sounds, fig. 6*] and the *Dondolo* [*Swing, fig. 7*] are result from a research aimed at freeing visitors from technology in favor of an interaction based on the use of the body. Pier Luigi Capucci in *Realtà del virtuale* [*The Reality of the Virtual*], during an examination that is still very relevant today on the figure of the "regressive intellectual", observes that:

> Over the course of time the artificial tends to fall into nature's "zero grade", to be considered normal […], in a process that Barthes has called "naturalisation of the cultural". In condemning that "technological machine", who he considers a threat to certain faculties, the regressive intellectual fails to see that as all machines, this one is also an extension of certain human functions, though more complex and delicate than those that were amplified by the wheel, by glasses and by the loudspeaker.[22]

If then Roland Barthes's "naturalisation of the cultural" is realised when the new technological instruments are accepted into a society as naturalised protheses, Studio Azzurro seems to move towards the "zero grade" even in connection with the hardware aspect. The research carried out by the Milanese group to make interfaces and devices invisible is perfectly realised here; without the aid of a mouse or a monitor, visitors can freely interact with the stories of the Laboratory of the Mind Museum. Sometimes, however, one is forced to interact with the installation in ways that are not always "natural"; sometimes one must become insane, or at least assume behaviours and positions that recall those of an insane person. To listen to the stories of the psychiatric sessions that actually took

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place within the Santa Maria della Pietà institute, one must place one's elbows on the table, cover one's ears with one's hands and let the voices enter one's head. The surface of the table, conceived as a sound transmitter, broadcasts the acoustic vibrations through the bone structures of the arm and thus carries the sounds to the head. To activate the second installation, *Dondolo* [*Swing*], visitors must sit down in front of a screen that is tilted horizontally. Moving the upper part of the body, it is possible to select one of the photographs of the patients of the former mental hospital that are available on the screen; the selection, similarly to a zoom effect, activates a film clip on the life of that person. The complete functioning of the two installations cannot be understood without taking their location into account: the *Tavolo sonoro* [*Sound Table*] and *Dondolo* [*Swing*] are found on the other side of the transparent wall that was encountered previously and where *Dove va tutta 'sta gente?*

[*Where are all these people going?*] is being projected. If a visitor enters while two other visitors are interacting with the installations, he would see the following scene before his eyes: a transparent surface against which some bodies are throwing themselves and behind that two people, one of which is holding their hands on their ears to stop the voices sounding throughout their head and the other which is continually oscillating back and forth while staring at a surface in a catatonic way. They could possibly be patients. We never said that mental illness does not exist, but we maintain that for the few patients that are suffering from irreversible conditions, there is a great multitude who is doing fine and whose only fault is that of being poor and forgotten.[23]

Fig. 6 – *Table of Sounds, Dwellings of the Body,* Laboratory of the Mind M., Santa Maria della Pietà, Rome, 2008, © Studio Azzurro

Fig. 7 – *Swing, Dwellings of the Body,* Laboratory of the Mind Museum, Santa Maria della Pietà, Rome, 2008, © Studio Azzurro

When Basaglia was called to take over the mental hospital in Gorizia, he noticed that insane people, who have always been branded as being different, even with a specific stamp on their identity document, were poor. Many of them were people who had turned to alcohol or given in to depression during hard times. For those who could afford it there was the clinic or for the most fortunate ones a regenerating stay in Switzerland.
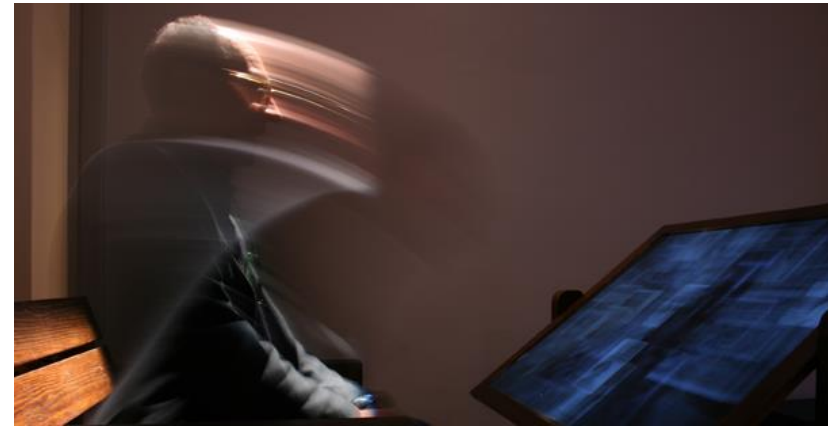
The fifth area of the museum is dedicated to the works of two great artists, Oreste Fernando Nannetti e Gianfranco Baieri, titled *Inventori di mondi* [*Inventors of Worlds, figs. 8-9*]. Both of these men, though living inside a constrictive dimension, found a way to go beyond the limits of the asylum with their mind. Some pictures painted by Baieri hang from the walls. To complete the décor of the artist's studio there is a table with paint brushes, colours

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and a palette is positioned in a corner; on top of it, there is a fully painted suitcase hanging in mid-air. Gianfranco Baieri was an unwanted child from birth and was abandoned by his mother when he was one. When he was seven, he was sectioned due to learning difficulties and spent his entire life in voluntary confinement (lacking any certified illnesses) within the Santa Maria della Pietà institute. Up until his death, which occurred at the age of 52, the most recurring theme in his pictures was a "time-stopping clock" with which he freezes the moment of separation between children and the love of their dear ones within the infinity of time of the two-dimensional image.

In the middle of the room, the continuation of the transparent wall faithfully reproduces some of the works by Oreste Fernando Nannetti, better known as Nanof. Born to Concetta Nannetti and NN (the initials used to indicate an unknown father), at the age of seven he was assigned to a charity and later admitted to the Carlo Forlani hospi-

tal for a serious case of spondylitis. In 1948, he was acquitted from a charge of offence to a public officer due to mental illness and sectioned to Santa Maria where he stayed until 1958, when he was transferred to the mental hospital in Volterra. Here Nanof – or as he liked to call himself, "astral colonel, minerary astronautical engineer of the mental system connected to the telepathic system"[24] – using his vest buckle – called "cathodic buckle"[25] – with a systematic action that lasted 15 years, fully covered a 180 meter wall with writings, drawings and tables: "Sunday n. 127, a shower of stars [...] the earth goes into gangrene [...] dear Milena, I knew another Milena"...[26]

In actual fact, Nanof is an old friend of Studio Azzurro's; in 1985 the feature film *L'osservatorio nucleare del signor Nanof* [*Mr Nanof's Nuclear Observatory*], directed by Paolo Rosa, won the third edition of the Premio Filmaker [Filmaker Prize] and the Premio Gabbiano d'oro

[Gabbiano d'oro Prize] *Anteprima del cinema indipendente* in Bellaria.

P. R.: Their sense of life was built almost in the invention of another world. This is an extraordinary lesson, especially for people like us that practice expressive drifts; you can draw levels of poetry and expressiveness from it that are different from those of a lucid poet (who in any case develops his research and who is also necessary). But I see [here] somewhat of a conter-melody. A sort of an impressive echo that makes poetry move inside. A different reality. It is not the lucid, inspired condition of the poet, but the drama (because this dramatic element persists), the dramatic echo of folly that is moved elsewhere […] An argument of art brut – thus considering it as art in its strict sense – is of no interest to us, but rather as expressions of extraordinary strength that communicate something to us and send us messages that act as mirrors for our own lives from the point of view of the moon looking at the earth and not that of the earth looking at the moon, as Pasolini would say. They are works of art that need to be studied, re-evaluated, and understood. I then have this remorse for having made a film in 1984, many years ago, aimed at saving a work by Nannetti in Volterra that in my opinion was clamorous, extraordinary, unique. Instead, in the past 25 years, I saw if fade away, become decrepit. […] Nannetti has fans I didn't even know about! It is truly a great network of people that are wrapped up in this canvas; this world of his is a spider web. You get tangled into it. Personally, since that film experience, I remained tangled in that wonderful tableau of meanings, of sparks, of unpredictability that he has staged. There, these worlds have much to tell us. They are worlds, not works. They are worlds![27]

In the *Istituzione chiusa* [*Closed institution*] visitors are taken to the harsh life inside the asylum. Here it is possible to peer inside the *Fagotteria* [*Parcel room*] where,

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together with a few personal items, patients had to part with their memories and their identity, put on the uniform and shoes of the institute and receive the number by which they would be identified from that moment onwards. Beside the *Studio medico* [*Medical clinic*] where the electroshock machine was located, the *Camera di contenzione* [*Containment room*] and the *Farmacia* [*Pharmacy*] with characteristic wardrobes filled with stills, vials and bottles of all sizes. Moving on, in the middle of the room there are two large wooden tables. On the first we find some dishes, cups, spoons, a jug, a bowl and a tray that remind us that this was originally a dining hall. On the second there is a projection of a medical chart, the asylum's rules and the delivery register. *Le storie* [*The stories*]. It is sufficient to brush against a document and objects and images, as well as faces that tell us their stories, start taking form.

Figg. 8-9 – *Inventors of Worlds,* Laboratory of the Mind Museum, Santa Maria della Pietà, Rome, 2008, © Studio Azzurro

The final area of the museum, titles *La fabbrica del cambiamento* [*The factory of change, fig. 10*], houses the memory of the battles that lead to closing asylums down. In a sort of "frontier land", hundreds of forks are stuck into a long plexiglass panel and a screen on the wall narrates *La rivolta delle forchette* [*The uprising of the forks*] by Lia Traverso.[28] White coats, straightjackets, sets of keys, electroshock instruments have been thrown against the walls and some beds have been stuck near the ceiling. The institution was bent, "the asylum was finally overturned".[29] On the other wall, twelve videos articulate Franco Basaglia's thought which is accompanied by the most significant images and episodes that occurred between 1961 and 2008, when former mental hospitals were fully evacuated. The Laboratory of the Mind Museum has received statutory identification[30] as a "territorial museum"[31] and it is mainly aimed at providing "a greater knowledge, conservation and appreciation of value of the

historical and scientific patrimony of the former S. Maria della Pietà Mental Hospital".[32] In addition, the document states that "the LMM itinerary preserves a collection of irregular art and scientific equipment".[33] The medium museum[34] is called to take on "an active in promoting a critical dialogue in all its fields of expertise".[35] The oral narration also has the ability to communicate an emotional component; evoking a certain mood, the associated message is received with greater spontaneity and processed throughout the itinerary of the museum. In past years, one of the most popular didactical approaches to museums has been the participating one, which uses new technologies in a dynamic of interaction between man and machine to allow the visitor to undergo a culturally formative and engaging museum experience.

Fig. 10 – *The factory of change,* Laboratory of the Mind Museum, Santa Maria della Pietà, Rome, 2008, © Studio Azzurro

In actual fact what needs to be narrated thanks to the exhibition of the Roman museum does indeed concern the history of the former psychiatric hospital, but most of all the experiences of those who have lived in there and those who have for various reasons have "glanced into" it. The fourteen installations realised by Studio Azzurro accompany visitors in the complex itinerary of comparison with psychic discomfort.[36] According to Lucia Cataldo and

Marta Paraventi, the approach that is currently being followed for museum communication, defined as "sensitive museography"[37] and which includes the use of video and sound interfaces in the settings, makes multimediality no longer optional but almost indispensable. It would be appropriate to add Valeria Minucciani's thought to this one: "seeing the interactive station awkwardly inserted (and technically poor) in the Scarpa's architectural context of Castelvecchio greatly saddened me, confirming my idea that things should never be done only because "this is how things are done now".[38]

In 2010 the Laboratory of the Mind Museum in Rome received the "Premio al museo più attrattivo ed innovativo nel rapporto con il pubblico" [Prize for the most attractive museum and most innovative museum in its relationship with the public] from ICOM Italia.

P. R.: Such a museum has freed up an unprecedented expressive space. All that worry about information – which can be put online – frees up a narrative space that in some ways recalls the experience of great scenarios illustrated in our golden age. These narratives are slightly asystematic, non-linear, obviously made with languages that are no longer plaster, frescos, or traditional techniques but rather those of installations, videos, other elements, objects and other people's works. If you put together all these forms, all these possibilities in a sequence that unfolds a narrative within this involvement that the visitor is not unfamiliar with, and the spectator is no longer faced with a film or a picture. He is a spectator who enters inside, who is also a protagonist and goes as far as putting himself on the stage.[39]

The shift in horizon that Studio Azzurro underwent in the 1990s towards themed museums marked a fundamental step in the development of a new poetics based on the continued search for both a union and a delicate balance between spectacular scenographic solutions and the attempt to dematerialise the interfaces of technological devices. The aspect that most marks the studio's "break" with previous museography is found in the proposal of a new narrative model that is embodied not only in a new way of narrating, but also in a different relationship with the objects and with the public.

There is a consideration made by Claudia De Michelis on the subject which narrates the articulation of the museum as an "evocative polyphony of point of view".[40] The scholar continues her examination recalling Krzysztof Pomian's theory according to which objects inserted in museums are *semiofori*, in other words "objects that are considered bearers of particular meanings by a certain society and therefore created and exhibited in order to meet a gaze either exclusively or also preserving a practical function".[41]

The alterity that is made clear by these types of objects places them inside a sacred and faraway dimension, a dimension that cannot be touched and with which the museum visitors can entertain an exclusively contemplative relationship. A barrier that is not only physical, but often even cognitive, is thus created. It is here that the Museum of the Mind places another element of fracture; if it is customary to have a sign that prohibits visitors to touch [objects inside a museum], here the distance between the people and the stories of the museum is removed in the precise moment in which the latter are touched. As Ludmilla Jordanova observes, objects inserted in a museum create ideas and mental images by activating connections that establish the stories and that the museum is called to exhibit.

> The "knowledge" that museums promote presents traits connected with imagination, precisely because it is made possible only through an imaginative process. The modality with which the contents of museums are presented influence what visitors learn and what they feel, without determining it completely.[42]

And Claudia De Michelis concludes:

> In the context of the museum, the roles of objects is not then simply that of showing themselves; they show a period in history, they become synecdoches of an event (J. Clifford, 1999 - F. Dei, 2005), they represent useful clues for imagining past eras. The object inserted in the museum thus becomes the source of a representation of places and of past eras, of imaginative evocations.[43]

Studio Azzurro allows the memory of the past to enter a dialogue with the future; what the spectator/actor experiences cannot be exhausted in the traditional didactic

path, but rather it faces the future in which the visitor will live his nature of a social animal and wilfully make his choices. It is necessary to establish a silent pact of honesty that connects those who arranges any content into art and those who receive this content; this type of bond finds its roots in the experience made by Paolo Rosa with the *Laboratoio di Comunicazione Militante* [*Militant Communication Laboratory*] (1976) and that wants both parties to be responsible for the choices they make.

Claudia De Michelis: Like the fact of taking the wooden flooring out and allowing the original floors of the pavilion to be exposed?

P. R.: Yes, exactly. On the one hand we allowed the structure to re-emerge as much as possible and on the other, instead, we decidedly violated it with the idea of the transparent wall that cuts it in half. These premises are a choice that has nothing to do with the multimedia ele-

ment, but rather it is almost an architectural choice of how to use the space. This was fundamental for me because it immediately gave me the key that guided me in how I engaged with the spectators. To always have the feeling that there is something beyond, and that you are either inside or outside based on the point of view you assume. Also, that you are never in a situation, but that in this situation there is always an elsewhere that divides you. A wall. This metaphor is, in my opinion, [...] like a threshold that opens up a world, more than one that marks a division.

[...] I believe that this should lead us to reflect on the dramaturgy with which you build a museum, because this is important. A museum is no longer a question of physical setting, but it is also connected with scenography, with drama. If you use these systems that come from cinematographic experience, making a museum today is not just about a spatial succession but also a temporal one. You need to understand that in that point you need

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to move along more quickly, in that other point you need to lighten your attention, here you need to examine in more depth, there you need to ask for more time. Exactly as you do when making a movie, when you know that in one scene you can allow yourself to drag things out to the limit and in other moments you need to move forward with a very rapid narration, because they are passages that can be omitted. You need to get to a point where the spectators start listening naturally. There, this ability to listen means preparing them to understand.[44]

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NOTES

[1] Sistema Informativo Unificato per le Soprintendenze Archivistiche (edited by), *Ospedale psichiatrico S. Maria della pietà di Roma*. Available at the following link:
http://siusa.archivi.beniculturali.it/cgibin/pagina.pl?TipoPag=comp arc-&Chiave=9112&RicLin=en&RicProgetto=carte (last consultation in March 2015).

[2] AA. VV., *L'ospedale S. Maria della Pietà*, 3 voll., Dedalo Edition, Bari 2003, in P. Martelli, *Introduzione*, in UOS Centro Studi e Ricerche ASL Roma E, Studio Azzurro (edited by), *Museo Laboratorio della Mente* , Silvana, Milano 2010, p. 15.

[3] G. Antonelli, *L'esempio del Santa Maria della Pietà*, "Metro", 28 August 2000.

[4] P. Martelli, *Introduzione*, in UOS Centro Studi e Ricerche ASL Roma E, Studio Azzurro (edited by), *Museo Laboratorio della Mente*, cit., p. 14.

[5] Pompeo Martelli was responsible for the scientific direction of the museum project.

[6] Credits: Idea Pompeo Martelli, Paolo Rosa / Direction Paolo Rosa / Collaboration to the direction Carlo Riccobono / Photography Fabio

Cirifino / Video Rocco Cirifino, Mario Coccimiglio / Video editing Silvia Pellizzari / Video post-production Mauro Macella, Claudia Casati / Graphics Giulia Guarnieri, Francesca Gollo, Francesca Cianniello / Sounds and music Tommaso Leddi, Yugen / Interactive and technological systems Stefano Roveda, Marco Barsottini / Software development Alessandro Pecoraro, Lorenzo Sarti / Hardware development Alberto Massagli Bernocchi / Project coordination and executive production Olivia Demuro / General production Reiner Bumke / External relations Delphine Tonglet.

[7] V. M. D. Pugliese, *L'arte nell'era tecnologica: il viaggio di Studio Azzurro tra "videoambienti" e "ambienti sensibili":* thesis in History of Contemporary Art, Università degli Studi di Bari, a.a. 2002/2003, p. 253.

[8] Ivi, pp. 263-264.

[9] F. Basaglia, *Conferenze brasiliane*, 1979, in T. Losavio, *Entrare fuori uscire dentro*, in UOS Centro Studi e Ricerche ASL Roma E, Studio Azzurro (edited by), *Museo Laboratorio della Mente*, cit., p. 47.

[10] Tommaso Losavio, Director of the project that lead to closing down the asylum in Rome at the end of 1999.

[11] T. Losavio, *Entrare fuori uscire dentro*, in UOS Centro Studi e Ricerche ASL Roma E, Studio Azzurro (edited by), *Museo Laboratorio della Mente*, cit., p. 47.

[12] O. Pivetta, *Franco Basaglia il dottore dei matti*, Baldini&Castoldi, Milano 2014, p. 37.

[13] UOS Centro Studi e Ricerche ASL Roma E, Studio Azzurro (edited by), *Museo Laboratorio della Mente*, cit., p. 51.

[14] Studio Azzurro, *Dove va tutta 'sta gente?*, 2000, directed by Paolo Rosa in collaboration with Andrea Balzola and Davide Sgalippa.

[15] UOS Centro Studi e Ricerche ASL Roma E, Studio Azzurro (edited by), *Museo Laboratorio della Mente*, cit., p. 24.

[16] Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *L'occhio e lo spirito* (*L'œil et l'esprit*, 1960), italian translation SE, Milano 1989, p. 18.

[17] The installation was realised thanks to a plexiglass surface treated with a semi-transparent film. Moving towards this mirror of sorts, the surface reflects half of the image while the other half is captured by a camera. This second image is sent to a computer where, thanks to dedicated software, it is re-processed in time, whether by acceleration or deceleration; after undergoing this process, the new image is projected in the other half of the screen. This way the correspondence between the two parts becomes almost impossible. Cfr. C. Riccobono,

Teorie e Pratiche dei Musei dell'immateriale. Studio Azzurro e il Museo Laboratorio della Mente: Master's degree thesis in Cinema, theater and multimedia production, Università degli studi di Pisa, a.a. 2008/2009, Avalable at the following link: http://etd.adm.unipi.it/t/etd-04072010-170207 (last consultation in February 2013), p. 39

[18] H. Bosch, *Estrazione della pietra della follia,* 1494 ca., Museo del Prado, Madrid.

[19] *Vocabolario Etimologico della Lingua Italiana*, s.v. "simpatia".

[20] Visitors write their name with a piece of chalk on a slate placed on the wall behind a chair. When the sensor detects the weight of someone who sits down, a signal is sent to the digital camera installed within the original one and this takes a photo. The image, sent to a computer and processed by image editing software, is aged and sent to another installation of the museum.

[21] J. Tonini, *Didattica museale e nuove tecnologie. L'esperienza dell'Istituto Museale di Storia della Scienza di Firenze*: thesis in Edicational Sciences and Instructional and Learning Technologies, Università degli Studi di Firenze, a.a. 2002/2003, Avalable at the following link: http://www.musei-it.net/tesi.php (last consultation in February 2013) p. 67.

[22] P. L. Capucci, *Realtà del virtuale. Rappresentazioni tecnologiche, comunicazione, arte*, Clueb, Bologna 1993, p. 23. Cfr., R. Barthes, *L'ovvio e l'ottuso*, Einaudi, Torino 1985, p. 16.

[23] Franco Basaglia in O. Pivetta, *Franco Basaglia il dottore dei matti*, Baldini&Castoldi, Milano 2014, p. 38.

[24] UOS Centro Studi e Ricerche ASL Roma E, Studio Azzurro (edited by), *Museo Laboratorio della Mente*, Silvana, Milano 2010, p. 79.

[25] *Ibidem*.

[26] Ivi, p. 81.

[27] To consult the original version of the interview with Paolo Rosa, see C. De Michelis*, Verso una museografia della mente: un percorso antropologico di progettazione, valutazione e formazione nell'attività museale di un ex Ospedale Psichiatrico,* Doctoral thesis in Sciences of Signs, Spaces and Cultures, Università degli Studi "La Sapienza" di Roma, a.a. 2009/2010, pp. 281-291.

[28] One of the first internal battles in asylums lead by Lia Traverso in 1970 with a hunger strike in which she was able to involve other patients in order to ask for cutlery at the table. Cfr. C. Piraino, *Lia Traverso,* in UOS Centro Studi e Ricerche ASL Roma E, Studio Azzurro (edited by), *Museo Laboratorio della Mente*, Silvana, Milano 2010, p. 107-112.

[29] Ivi, p. 42.

[30] Azienda Unità Sanitaria Locale Roma E, Regione Lazio, *Regolamento Museo Laboratorio della Mente*, may 2012, art. 1.

[31] In absence of a single document that allows the division of museums in areas of interests, UNESCO published a document in 1984 for their classification, which is still in use today. It distinguishes eleven types: museums of art, history and archaeology, history and natural sciences, science and technology, ethnography and anthropology, specialised museums, territorial museums, general museums, other museums and finally zoological gardens, botanical gardens, aquariums and reservations. The territorial museums find their predecessors in the "ecomuseums". The the 1970s in France, the *Nouvelle Musèologie* marked one of the first steps towards the recognition of intangible patrimony. Hugues de Varine's e Georges Henri Rivière's research lead to the creation of one of the first ecomuseums in 1968. Designed initially to preserve the testimonies of rural society in a particular historical period, when urbanisation was modifying the landscape and risked cancelling all traces of the history of country life, the ecomuseum became a museum that was capable of illustrating a more or less extensive territory and build a historical and cultural entity and sometimes an ethnic, economic and social one as well.

[32] Azienda Unità Sanitaria Locale Roma E, Regione Lazio, *Regolamento Museo Laboratorio della Mente*, may 2012, art. 1.

[33] Ivi, art. 4.

[34] On the museum as a medium, see R. Silverstone, *Il medium è il museo* in J. Durant (edited by) *Scienza in pubblico. Musei e divulgazione del sapere*, Clueb, Bologna 1989 D. Jalla's contribution, *La comunicazione scritta nei musei: una questione da affrontare* in A. Andreini (edited by) *La parola scritta nel museo. Lingua, accesso, democrazia*, Atti del convegno Centro Affari e Convegni di Arezzo, 17 October 2008, useful for an overview on the positions assumed by some of the main museology scholars on the identity of the museum as a medium.

[35] L. Cataldo, M. Paraventi, *Il museo oggi. Linee guida per una museologia contemporanea*, Ulrico Hoepli Editore, Milano 2007, p. 32.

[36] Paolo Rosa himself, during a conference held on 13 December 2012 at the University of Florence had presented a new installation of the museum: *Portatori di storie. Da vicino nessuno è normale* thanks to which Studio Azzurro developed an itinerary they had already inaugurated in 2008 in Casablanca (Marocco) with the installation *Sensible map*; *La quarta scala* (Santa Fe – Biennale Internazionale, Lucky Number Seven, 2008), *Fanoi* (Potenza, 2009), *Sensitive city* (Padi-

glione Italia – Expo, Shanghai, 2010) e *Estrella del deserto* (Antofa-gasta, Cile, 2011) then followed. The most recent one mentioned by Paolo Rosa was *Portatori di storie. Da vicino nessuno è normale* re-alised for the Laboratory of the Mind Museum.

[37] Ivi, p. 91.

[38] V. Minucciani, *Perché "Il museo fuori dal museo",* in V. Minuccia-ni, *Il museo fuori dal museo. Il territorio e la comunicazione musea-le*, Lybra Immagine, Milano 2005, p. 21.

[39] Transcription of a part of the Paolo Rosa's speech at the cycle of conferences "Memoria | Progetto di memoria", curatore Francesco Moschini, Accademia Nazionale di San Luca, Roma, 4 December 2012.

[40] C. De Michelis*, Verso una museografia della mente: un percorso antropologico di progettazione, valutazione e formazione nell'attivi-tà museale di un ex Ospedale Psichiatrico,* cit., p. 234.

[41] K. Pomian*, Che cos'è la storia*, Bruno Mondatori Editori, Milano 2001, p. 113.

[42] L. Jordanova, *Oggetti e conoscenza*, in C. Ribaldi (edited by), *Il nuovo museo. Origini e percorsi*, Il Saggiatore, Milano 2005, p. 173.

[43] C. De Michelis*, Verso una museografia della mente: un percorso antropologico di progettazione, valutazione e formazione nell'attivi-tà museale di un ex Ospedale Psichiatrico,* cit. , p. 237.

[44] To consult the original version of the interview with Paolo Rosa, see C. De Michelis, *Verso una museografia della mente,* cit., pp. 281-291.