MeLa Books

MUSEUM MULTI-PLICITIES

Field Actions and Research by Design

edited by
Luca Basso Peressut
Cristina F. Colombo
and Gennaro Postiglione

Museum Multiplicities: Field Actions and Research by Design

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Acknowledgments

This book grew out of the work of the Research Field 05 "Exhibition Design, Technology of Representation and Experimental Actions," led by Jamie Allen of the Copenhagen Institute of Interaction Design in cooperation with Gennaro Postiglione, Politecnico di Milano, within the European project MeLa–*European Museums in an age of migrations*. MeLa is a four-year interdisciplinary research project funded in 2011 by the European Commission under the Socio-economic Sciences and Humanities Programme (Seventh Framework Programme). Adopting the notion of "migration" as a paradigm of the contemporary global and multicultural world, MeLa reflects on the role of museums and heritage in the twenty-first century. The main objective of the MeLa project is to define innovative museum practices that reflect the challenges of the contemporary processes of globalisation, mobility and migration. As people, objects, knowledge and information move at increasingly high rates, a sharper awareness of an inclusive European identity is needed to facilitate mutual understanding and social cohesion. MeLa aims at empowering museums spaces, practices and policies with the task of building this identity. MeLa involves nine European partners—universities, museums, research institutes and a company—who lead six Research Fields (RF) with a collaborative approach, and this book is meant to report about the findings of the experimental phase that follow and conclude the research.

The editors would like to thank all the scholars who enriched this book with their suggestions and contributions, as well as all the museums and their staff, curators, directors, who kindly supported the projects, providing information and hosting the "actions." A mention goes to the English editors and translators.

Rethinking Religion Representation as Transcultural Experience in Museums
The on-site Experimental Action at Museo Diocesano di Milano

→ RITA CAPURRO, SARA CHIESA, ELEONORA LUPO, DAVIDE SPALLAZZO,
   RAFFAELLA TROCCHIANESI

→ RELIGIOUS ASSETS AS POTENTIAL INTERCULTURAL HERITAGE

By the nature of their institutional role, museums are committed to improve society, pursuing strategies to facilitate dialogue between different cultures and solve issues arising from cultural diversity (Silverman 2010, 13). It is significant that in 1996, UNESCO adopted the Action Plan on Cultural Policies for Development in which important principles were announced. In particular, a relevant role has been assigned to the dialogue between cultures, as a major social and political challenge and as a prerequisite for peaceful coexistence.[1] UNESCO reiterated the importance of these statements in 2001 with the Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity, as well as in 2005 with the Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions, ratified by eighty countries (including Italy) at the end of 2007, thereby acquiring binding force (Bodo and Bodo 2007).

The museum has become more and more a "listening ear"[2] of a multicultural and intercultural society where cultures co-exist and debate. The

1   The "Action Plan on Cultural Policies for Development" was adopted by the Intergovernmental Conference on Cultural Policies for Development—Stockholm, Sweden, 2nd April 1998. Point 5 of the principles recognised: "The dialogue between cultures appears to be one of the fundamental cultural and political challenges for the world today; it is an essential condition of peaceful coexistence." See website: http://www.unesco.org/cpp/uk/declarations/cultural.pdf, accessed 21st December 2013.

2   This expression has been used by the Anacostia Museum & Center for African American History and Culture's director, during his conference presentation at the General Conference of ICOM in 1971.

PREVOUS PAGE, IMG.
1.51 — *Museo Diocesano di Milano, Milan, Italy. Expert users exploring by tablets the content of the artworks in the "Sala della Confraternita e del SS. Sacramento e S. Caterina" during the first user test of the on-field experimental action at the museum. Photo by Davide Spallazzo.*

intercultural dialogue relies on differences among cultures or "diversities" considered and enhanced as resources for mutual understanding. The museum, accepting the challenge to describe and interact with society, could be the privileged place in which these resources can be endorsed.

One of the most interesting and controversial themes of the interculture debate is interreligious dialogue.

The representation of religious issues in the public discourse of contemporary society seems to be a difficult issue. Problems of identity, diversity and dialogue among different cultures are amplified whenever religious aspects are involved. That is an important concern for museums (Benoit 2010; Capurro 2013).

Few museums have a formal policy on religious issues, and instead religious museums—representing one or more religions—are considered the proper place to develop narratives on religion and religious issues. These bodies have the responsibility to use their collections to promote mutual understanding between people in the whole field of religious faith and practice (Paine 2013, 12).

In any case, the *mise en scène* of religious museums is not a neutral topic but is affected by cultural settings and by the contexts of the museums themselves. There are different approaches to what can be summarised under the label of "religion." Talking about religion can imply the different aspects. As far as discursive strategies are concerned, three approaches are possible, according to the following frame:

→ **discussion of religion**, when contesting, discussing on, undermining religious identities (the discussion around the aspects of identity of a religion is not intrinsically intercultural, but by questioning religious fundamentalism it is possible to open up to the following interreligious dialogue);

→ **discussion among religions**, when confronting, dialoguing about, or questioning religious diversities and frictions (since this approach stimulates confrontation, it fosters the interreligious dialogue among different religions, be it in a neutral way—by juxtaposing symbols or beliefs—or in a provocative way—raising frictions);

→ **discussion through religion**, when dialoguing among diversities (this approach fosters an intercultural dialogue because it uses religion to open the discussion and confrontation in a wider cultural sphere (Capurro and Lupo 2013).

For the creation of an effective project, which has intercultural dialogue as its main goal, the work team had to consider all of these variables and possible frictions.

The setting of the experimental action here presented, is the Museo Diocesano (Diocesan Museum), owned by the Church of Milan and opened in 2001. Its collection mainly comprises art and sacred art. The site is well known in Milan because it is a very active node in the cultural life of the city, housing various cultural projects and exhibitions. It is the

natural setting for presenting a project of intercultural and interreligious dialogue, as its mission clearly indicates:

> The Diocesan Museum is a place dedicated to the hopes and needs of our society, a place where art meets Christian wisdom. Open to everybody, it invites visitors in search of the meaning of life to take an active part in its initiatives. With its cloister, an area increasingly available for public use, its library and bookshop, it is not only an historical site but one which is both lively and liveable. Closely linked to the museum's underlying mission is its aim to be seen as a space which is accessible, dynamic and enjoyable. (http://www.museodiocesano.it/museo/mission)

Besides these aspects, it is important to underline that the Church of Milan is very active in the field of intercultural and interfaith dialogue, with different institutions promoted partly by Caritas Ambrosiana, such as the Centro Come,[3] and partly by organisations promoting interreligious dialogue and unity, such as the Forum of Religions (FRM);[4] the Milan Council of Christian Churches (CCCM);[5] the European Ecumenical Centre for Peace (CEEP);[6] and the Ambrosian Centre of Dialogue with Religions (CADR).[7] Many of these institutions' activities have been successfully implemented in the social sphere, especially in the city of Milan, a particularly multicultural area with over 220,000 foreign immigrants out of a total population of about 1,300,000 (Istat - Italian National Institute of Statistics, 2010). Over the last two decades, while xenophobic groups have vehemently opposed the integration of immigrants into the community, the Church of Milan has shown fierce determination to make the city a welcoming place for people of all ethnic, racial, cultural and religious backgrounds (Camponio 2006). In this challenging context the museum has yet to developed specific programmes for improving interreligious and intercultural dialogue.

Indeed, the choice of this museum for the experimental action is very stimulating for all these different reasons and because, as a religious museum, it is an appropriate venue for religious narratives, discussing this topic, by stimulating debates, and fostering equality and dialogue among different communities (Capurro 2010, 108).

→ AIMS, METHODOLOGY AND PROJECT PHASES

The experimental action here discussed has two main aims: the first is verifying some theoretical propositions about the intercultural potentials of digital and mobile technologies elaborated by the authors within the MeLa Project framework (Lupo et al. 2014), and the second is discussing and verifying the intercultural potential of religion and the role of the

3   http://www.centrocome.it, accessed 21st December 2013.

4   http://www.forumreligionimilano.org, accessed 21st December 2013.

5   http://www.consigliochiesemilano.org, accessed 21st December 2013.

6   http://www.ceep.it, accessed 21st December 2013.

7   http://www.cadr.it, accessed 21st December 2013.

museum as an ideal place for the encounters of different religions.

The theoretical frameworks propose three possible attitudes according to which museums and cultural institutions can invite people to deal with diversity (Lupo et al. 2014):

→ **Multicultural storytelling**: it conceives and represents different cultures alongside each other, but in a separate way.

→ **Intercultural dialogue**: it identifies interconnections among cultures and represents dialogue and contaminations.

→ **Transcultural practice**: is characterised by the practice of passing through cultures, calling the audience to a displacement towards other cultures.

Furthermore the project is based on the use of digital technologies, such as video narrations, performative interaction and 3D visualisations meant to stimulate different interpretations on the cultural assets and intends technology as:

> a transversal driver that intercepts place/space, content and sociality within museums, functioning as a medium that widens the relation between visitor and content to the ones among visitors and content-in-space and visitors and visitors. (Allen and Lupo 2012, 163)

The development of a digital interface in the museum, together with a platform enabling comments, and the production of contributions on religious topics, should facilitate the connections and relations among visitors with different cultures.

> The most promising aspect of bringing technologies in the museum come through an approach that is well informed by the technological culture form which these technologies and their use-patterns and values emerge. That is, thinking "eco-systemically" about what it means to bring technological interventions into the culture and historical context of a cultural or heritage institution, and vice versa. (Allen and Lupo 2012, 26)

The main focus is designing a visitor experience capable of transforming a contemplative visit into an interactive and contributory one, possibly enabling and stimulating intercultural dialogue too.

Religious cultural assets have been chosen for their inherent intercultural potential (Capurro and Lupo 2013), and in particular, the experimental action regards five paintings of the collection of Museo Diocesano selected in the so-called "Sala della Confraternita del SS. Sacramento e S. Caterina."

Five paintings from the 18th century representing various miracles about the Eucharist were chosen because of the topics they deal with (miracles and Eucharist)—topics that are quite exclusively Christian—and because their figurative as well as iconographic language can be difficult to understand, not only for non-Christian or -Catholic people, but also for contemporary Italians with a religious background. This choice

was meant to fully test the potential of digital technology both in helping the interpretation of artworks and exploiting them as stimuli for dialogue and confrontation.

The project is a pilot experience and the action has been accordingly limited to only five paintings of the collection, selected not only for their relevance within the group, but also for the different topics with which they deal.

Two groups of the MeLa consortium take part in this ongoing activity: the Design Department of Politecnico di Milano and ITIA from CNR (National Research Council), which express design (and partially curatorial) skills and technological and programming abilities respectively. The curators as well as the director of Museo Diocesano are not directly involved in the design activities but act as dialoguing partners in the evaluation of the project and its results. The methodology adopted to structure, evaluate and improve the project is design-driven and consists of an iterative process that goes back and forth between theory and practice in a progression of design, testing and reflection, involving several actors at different stages of the project.

This research-by-design is indeed structured in activities that can be grouped into two categories: research actions and on-field experimental actions. The first kind of actions are meant to build a theoretical framework for the project, to define the curatorial part and to evaluate the test sessions; while the second group of activities are hands-on and aimed at gathering information, data and feedback from on-field tests.

Six main activities define the general structure of the project:

→ **Phase 1. Institutional interpretation (Research)**
The first phase consists of the defining of the curatorial structure of the project and in setting up the first user test.

→ **Phase 2. Authoritative and multicultural content gathering (Experimental action)**
The second phase consists of establishing a prototype to conduct a test with experts and specialists in the field of intercultural dialogue, religion, art history and interpretation with different cultural backgrounds. The aim of the test is to get feedback about the prototype and to gather content, as well as interpretation or merely hints from experts in the field.

IMG. 1.52 — *Five 18th century paintings of the "Sala della Confraternita del SS. Sacramento e S. Caterina" in the Museo Diocesano, Milan, representing various miracles about the Eucharist. Courtesy Museo Diocesano di Milano. From left: Saint Peter Martyr unveils the false Holy Mary (Filippo Abbiati), The Communion of Saint Stanislaus Kostka (Gaetano Dardanone), Saint Bernard frees a possessed woman with the Eucharist (Federico Ferrari), The miracle of the child returned unharmed from the furnace for receiving the Communion (Carlo Preda), Saint Catherine of Siena sees out a flame from the consecrated bread (Giovan Battista Costa).*

→ **Phase 3. Data analysis and content selection (Research/Reflections)**
The third activity comprises the evaluation of the prototype in the light of the expert users' feedback and the selection and re-arrangement of the their contributions in order to build a multi-vocal interpretation for the artworks.

The following phases are an iteration of the previous ones:

→ **Phase 4. Design of a multi-vocal interpretation/narration (Research/Envisioning)**
In this activity, the contents created in the first phase are discussed and implemented on the basis of the user-generated content (Phase 2). The role of museum curators is highly relevant here, in order to build up a coherent multifaceted interpretation of the artworks.

→ **Phase 5. Performance and social-oriented intercultural experience (Experimental action)**
The fifth activity is based on a second on-field experimental action and involves non-expert users (e.g. second-generation immigrants and foreign communities resident in Milan). The second test is meant to evaluate the ability of the designed interpretive model to encourage intercultural dialogue and direct social engagement.

→ **Phase 6. Data analysis and envisioning (Research/Envisioning)**
The last phase comprises a critical evaluation of the project in the light of the second user test, aimed at evaluating whether the proposed model actually stimulates and enhances the intercultural dialogue and confrontation.

→ **GENERAL FRAMEWORK: EXPERIMENTAL ACTIONS AND DYNAMICS OF INTERACTION**

This experimental action framework was created in order to define a process that can be tested by real users in a real context. After designing the whole framework it is necessary to verify the hypothesis through an empirical way and achieve a repeatable model of study. This model presents two different meanings:

→ the first one is about a museological approach, focussed on the relationship between works of art and improvement of the knowledge of the content;

→ the second one is about a museographical approach, focussed on the relationship between exhibition devices and visitor.

In projects like this, it is very important to integrate into the design process the verifying of requirements through tests and specific sessions of discussion.

The potential feedback by visitors is a central point of the project, allowing us to correctly set the whole direction of the project attitude. It

is useful not only to verify the coherence of the development but also to understand the further potentialities of the visitation system.

The experimental actions are intended to be conducted in two different steps, conceptualised and tailored for different visitor targets: expert users and a general audience.

The first test involves experts and specialists in art and/or religions (e.g. art critics, art historians, museum curators, people with a deep knowledge of their own religion: priests, theologians, rabbis, etc.). This test was designed to verify and review the efficacy of the interpretative tools in enhancing the visitors' experience and to improve the displayed content. Through user-generated content (UGC)—a collection of different expert opinions and a wide range of religious beliefs—the aim is to increase the potential multi-vocality of the narrative. Having collected different religious point of views, the issues addressed to the second test-individuals will be improved by the feedback obtained from this first test-individuals.

The second test involves general users, non-specialists, but those personally interested in the intercultural exchange (e.g. second generation immigrants and foreign community residents in Milan). This step allows us to add new content to pre-empt the next steps, while also understanding whether the intercultural model of socialisation through performative and connective technologies is functional or not.

Each path mentioned, namely specialist (to expert users) and non-specialist (to general audience), proposes six dynamics of interaction: contemplative, interpretative, contributive, explorative, performative and connective.

Contemplative: visitors are invited to look closely at one of the five paintings showing different aspects of the miracle in the "Sala della Confraternita." A tablet is given them. This device must be pointed at the painting in order to reproduce the image on the screen and with that, the video starts. Visitors watch a video on the tablet which—through some visual effects and an audio-narrative—highlights specific elements of the painting useful to understand the composition, the symbolic meaning of the objects therein, the gestures, the sacral clothing and accessories. The idea is to increase the observation experience through digital technologies, amplifying and enriching temporal and spatial horizons of vision, and also showing not so obvious links among the works.

Interpretative: visitors are encouraged to relate information achieved via the proposed video, together with the visitor's own previous knowledge, by answering a questionnaire on the device at the end of the video narrative. This questionnaire proposes some issues around the subject of the painting but also about crucial topics emerged starting from the painting. Technology itself acts as a facilitator, providing the user with different interpretations of the subject and stimulating critical reflection.

Contributive: visitors can add a personal contribution directly to the tablet's folders (i.e. a literary, historical, philosophical or artistic reference; links to other topics or objects and their meanings; the imaginative representation of their religious view or expression of their culture).

This kind of dynamic contribution involves the direct participation of the user called to provide a personal interpretation of the work, and a visiting experience embracing previous knowledge, cultural references or relevant quotations. Therefore a sort of "basket of religious references" is enriched by the contribution-to-contribution approach—thereby enhancing future visits.

Explorative: visitors explore intersecting paths and intercultural meanings thanks to technological devices and/or intervention by cultural mediators. Each painting offers visitors several levels of reading and interpretation. Besides this, they can discover several links between objects represented in the paintings and other ones in the museum collection, or those diffused in the region. Therefore, one has a model of cultural experience consisting of a visit in situ and external references, beyond the museum.

Performative: one of the aims of the project is to introduce performative (or gestural) action through digital technologies. The general user (non-specialist path) is able to activate some content on the tablet with gestures and actions consistent with different cultural practices, avoiding standard interactions with the technological tools and stereotypes of interaction (i.e. touch, click, move and drag). Introducing the gestural experience means to aim to the memory of the visit through the memory of the body. The theme of these paintings has a strong ritual content, therefore the introduction of the gesture in the visit is coherent with the framework of the expected cultural experience.

Connective: digital technologies connecting people to the cultural heritage (community building) act as a facilitator for social relations. Community-building processes come as a result of direct social involvement, or through a consistence presence of technology, allowing a better knowledge of the other cultures. The museum should have this aim: to increase the intercultural dialogue through a transcultural practice. In this way, one supposes this "connective" dialogue continues beyond the museum visit in order to implement the knowledge of intercultural contents through artistic material.

For the five paintings chosen, the visitor experience has been composed by different possible activities (not meant to be performed in a chronological order or necessarily all together) corresponding to six interaction dynamics:

→ **to listen and watch**: listen to the explanation about the painting while watching a short video on the tablet (or projection) highlighting some specific elements;

→ **to interpret**: interpret while answering the questions at the end of the video (by means of digital devices like tablet or smart phones);

→ **to contribute**: suggest some literary, historical, philosophical or iconographic-artistic references and add links about the painting topics and objects, or write a comment starting from your own culture, religion and experience;

→ **to explore**: look for and discover the intercultural paths and content

in the painting (by means of digital personal or collective devices, interactive table or by means of a cultural mediator);

→ **to perform**: activate content through gestures and actions consistent with cultural practices, using 3D digital models or other technological system able to multiply content;

→ **to share/to link**: connect people and share content with them, also connect the content of the paintings with other objects and meanings.

For the specialist users test, addressing the gathering of authoritative and multi-vocal and multi-perspectival points of view contents, the relevant interaction dynamics are (see table): to listen-interpret-contribute-link.

1ST TEST OCTOBER 2013	**Users**: experts - **Objective**: authoritative & intercultural contents gathering			
	Level 1: LISTEN	Level 2: INTERPRET	Level 3: CONTRIBUTE	Level 4: LINK
CULTURAL CONTENTS	Artistic and historical info on the painting; "narration" of the miracle	Contents on specific critical topics/issues related to the painting	New interpretative paths on specific proposed topics associated to the painting	Connections with other issues and works of art of the museum
DYNAMICS OF INTERACTION	Passive: listen to the audio and watch the video animation	Active: answer to a structured questionnaire on "fiction issues"	Active UGC: serious interpretations, tags, references to other works of art or literature in the personal culture/religion	Active UGC: link with other cultures

TABLE 1.01 — *First user test: summarising schema.*

For the second test, addressing the general audience, the relevant interaction dynamics are (see table): to listen-explore-perform-contribute-share.

In this experimental action, the multicultural storytelling (created by overwritten content) multiplies the narratives about the painting. The intercultural dialogue is activated thanks to a multi-level cultural experience and transcultural practice is facilitated through the performative and contributive approach.

This format of cultural experience is focussed on variable features in terms of specific works of art in the museum involved and on constant elements repeatable in other contexts. In this case the variable features are the specific pieces of the Museo Diocesano's collection, their content, and the suggestions useful to create links and topics. The constant elements are in the format of the framework, in the structure of the dynamics of interaction, in the design of the relationship between visitor and contents through several ways of knowledge and interaction.

TABLE 1.02 — *Second user test: summarising schema.*

2ND TEST SPRING 2014	Users: generic audience - Objective: contents performing & intercultural sharing			
	Level 1: LISTEN & LEARN	*Level 2:* INTERPRET & EXPERIENCE/ PERFORM	*Level 3:* CONTRIBUTE	*Level 4:* LINK & SHARE
CULTURAL CONTENTS	*Artistic and historical info on the painting; "narration" of the miracle*	*Contents on specific critical topics/issues related to the painting*	*New interpretative paths on specific proposed topics associated to the painting*	*Connections with other issues and works of art of the museum*
DYNAMICS OF INTERACTION	*Passive: listen to the audio and watch the video animation*	*Active: "perform" specific contents*	*Active: add your comments on similar experiences, tags, rating and reference to your culture/ religion*	*Active: share and link with other people for confrontation*

→ **PERFORMED ACTIONS: FIRST TEST WITH EXPERT USERS**

The first pilot test took place in October 2013.[8] A path for the evaluation of content was offered to 15 specialists (such as museum curators, theologians, priests, religious of different religions, cultural mediators): their contributions helped to verify the hypotheses behind the project, by offering an eminent interpretation of religious values related to intercultural integration within the Museo Diocesano.

Politecnico di Milano, Department of Design with ITIA-CNR presented historical and artistic content in relation to the artwork included in the project through a tablet, using both the form of narrative description and an interactive questionnaire.

The test consisted in a guided experience concerning the five paintings selected within the "Sala della Confraternita del SS. Sacramento e S. Caterina." The experience was supported by video animation and a digital platform. Both these digital tools were designed to stimulate multifaceted interpretations, to enable comments and contributions, and possibly to encourage confrontation among the visitors.

The tablets were set to recognise the paintings and, by simply approaching and framing the artworks, to activate their related content. These devices guided the expert users through three out of the six steps composing the experimental model and considered the most pertinent and appropriated for a specialist audience: to listen–to interpret–to contribute.

8 http://www.mela-blog.net/archives/3021, accessed 21st December 2013.

Initially, the expert users listened and watched the video animation and finalised the narration of the miracles. Secondly, they were invited to conduct a personal interpretation of the associated topic of the painting. And finally, they were invited to complement their interpretation by providing references to other works of art, literature or iconography. Furthermore, experts were also asked to provide comments and look for parallelisms and analogies or, eventually frictions, with their own beliefs, and to support them with appropriate references.

The use of technologies, even if currently limited to the development of video animation on tablet, offered an interesting opportunity to make the paintings more eloquent than the short printed captions currently providing the museum's only interpretative apparatus. Nevertheless, the application of digital technologies has to be observed from an in-progress perspective. These tools may become more effective in addressing the social and virtual dimensions and the gestural interactive dynamics, which could activate multiple and augmented religious content by adding further meanings to the museum environment and experience.

Tablets are currently the tools being utilised, but an interactive-digital-desk could also be another instrument to facilitate interactions among visitors, allowing multi-participation at the same time.

The results of the first test have been examined and the critique by experts became a guideline for following development of the project. For example, some positive (and controversial) aspects arose, like the idea of the video narration. On the one hand, few experts considered the video as a disruption from the real view of the paintings, on the other hand, the majority of them affirmed how effectively videos capture and focus the attention of an audience on the subjects, by highlighting contents and messages.

Moreover, the first step was useful also in terms of collection of cultural contents, associated with specific elements of the paintings.

The experimental project has some weak points as well: in particular the need for a better connection between the topics (e.g. disease and faith) and the miracles presented in the paintings has been highlighted. Another aspect underlined by the invited professionals is the idea to make the topics more social, dialogical, and closer to the daily life of visitors. The topic of heresy could be a useful example. In fact, in order to talk today about heresy, we need to dissociate it from certain the 17th century meanings and beliefs, linking it to contemporary issues. Even more, experts suggested a stress on the relations between a user's personal past experiences and the theme represented in the paintings. The focal aim is to allow a personal identification with the theme expressed in the artwork, in order to facilitate a deeper comprehension of it.

The experts' contributions were useful also for the technical setting of the digital devices. As far as this point is concerned, the impossibility adding arguments about the expressed opinions in the structured questionnaire (multiple choice questions) and the difficulty of fostering discussion and confrontation around the topics was underlined.

IMG. 1.53 — *Expert users using tablets in front of the artworks during the first user test. Photo by Davide Spallazzo.*

IMG. 1.54 — *First user test session. In the foreground some experts are adding a personal interpretation on the desktops (level 3–contribute and level 4–link) while in the background other super-users are experiencing the use of tablets (level 1–listen and level 2–interpret). Photo by Sara Radice.*

IMG. 1.55 — *Screenshots of the video animation: highlighted some details in the artwork. Courtesy of Museo Diocesano di Milano.*
On the left The Communion of Saint Stanislaus Kostka; *in the centre* Saint Peter Martyr unveils the false Holy Mary *and, on the right,* Saint Catherine of Siena sees out a flame from the consecrated bread.

The experts' contributions were therefore important in connecting curatorial content with cultural, artistic, literary references and to link them with multicultural themes.

Some remarks on the five sample paintings follow:

→ *The Communion of Saint Stanislaus Kostka* represents the saint during his journey to Rome receiving the Holy Communion by an angel. The story of San Stanislaus presents the topic of pilgrimage, an element that is commonly considered a way of separating from the secular and approaching the sacred in many religions. The experts focussed on issues such as journey, hermitage, voluntary reclusion, and, of course, the Eucharist. Some connections with other cultures emerged such as the Kumbh Mela—the mass Hindu pilgrimage in which Hindus gather to bathe in a sacred river. Other suggestions regard the objects presented in the paintings.

→ *Saint Peter Martyr unveils the false Holy Mary* is instrumental in dealing with the dichotomies: truth/deception and orthodoxy/heresy. The experts suggested some symbols or figures able to represent this ambiguity between good and evil, as the mythological figure of Janus Bifrons. The interpretation of this theme suggested also a reflection about illusion in artworks (*trompe l'oeil*). A lot of iconographic references have been associated with this painting: for example the same subject is in fresco in the Cappella Portinari in Sant'Eustorgio Church. This specific painting favours a wider dialogue about transreligious topics that can sometimes cause frictions: the concept of martyrdom while extremely actual may vary depending on the religion.

→ *Saint Catherine of Siena sees out a flame from the consecrated bread* suggested different issues about liturgy, ecstasy and faith. Moreover, this work surfaces a reflection about similar ways of participating in ceremonial services; the specific use of ritual objects proper of each religion; liturgical dresses and objects. The museum collection has a section of liturgical jewellery which will become relevant in the second phase of the experimental action when the connection between paintings, museum works and other religious objects will be used to define the interreligious dialogue.

→ *The miracle of the child returned unharmed from the furnace for receiving the Communion* offers the opportunity to speak about the rites of passage that are common to several cultures and about the blessing of saints or of other holy figures. One of the experts reported the example of Ceylon houses, where a wood mask is hung after the childbirth to keep away the Evil. Many artistic references were suggested regarding the Holy Mary as an intercession figure (i.e. Lady of Mercy).

→ *Saint Bernard frees a possessed woman with the Eucharist* speaks of the presence of evil that can be rejected through the intercession of a person or of an object. Moreover, the practice of exorcism is not a catholic prerogative, but it is also present in other religions. The

Eucharist, at its essence, is nourishment and therefore also a common point amongst other cultures and religions.

The test was designed to develop a participatory model aimed at the acquisition of authoritative and possibly multicultural content generated by the users' contributions. This content was analysed and critically evaluated in collaboration with the museum's curators, and will be used for the second pilot test addressed to an intercultural public.

→ FORTHCOMING ACTIONS: SECOND TEST WITH PUBLIC

The final activity to be performed is the second pilot test with the general public.

During the second test, expected to be concluded in Spring 2014, is conducted with the intention of increasing the use of technology devices (with the introduction of tools based on augmented reality, characterised by the three-dimensional reproduction of museum works, and the use of social networks). Capitalising on the content gathered during the first test with a specialist audience, the second phase will verify the dynamics of interaction and steps of experience conceived as more appropriated for a non-specialist audience: explore-perform-contribute-share.

The experience will therefore be designed to offer augmented and multiple points of view on the religious content and topics, using the intercultural suggestions and references provided by the experts—looking for a more active, social and participative interaction. By exploiting the technologies, visitors will be able to: access and explore parallel interpretative paths along the same painting, or details linked to different cultures or religions; browse content and media (video, pictures) related to other religious heritage, such as objects and works of art within the Museo Diocesano or other religious museums; enjoy additional virtual contents like 3D models; activate all that content by performing and simulating gestures and actions that may be consistent with the religious content; to better understand rituals and beliefs (e.g. using ritual or liturgics objects, etc); and finally to share opinions and connections in real time with other visitors.

These exchanges will be amplified by using the museum social platforms in the context of a live event that will be launched in order to stimulate the online participation of museum followers.

Currently, the meta-design phase of this second test is ongoing. The research team is discussing different hypotheses and tools (analogue and digital) for creating a new visitor experience (addressing the non-specialist audience) that will reach both the scientific objective of the research and the aim of valorisation within a heritage and museum sphere.

In particular, concerning the research objective, this second test will provide feedback especially useful for assessing the effectiveness of ICT in mediating the multi-vocal and multifaceted contents' understandability (UGC level), as well as the accessibility and engagement of "perform"
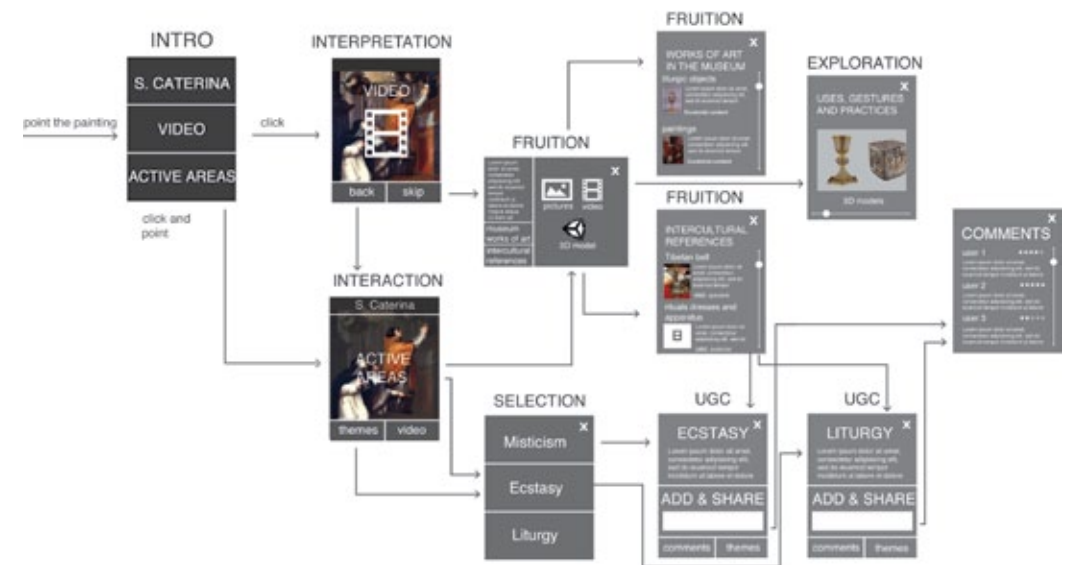
and "share" dynamics: these experiences have not been explored enough in terms of successful intercultural dialogue.

Regarding the use of digital devices, the "explore" dynamic can be supported by tablets or interactive tables; the "perform" dynamic by tablets or gesture capture and projections; the "contribute" by portable devices (such as smartphones and tablets) or interactive tables; the "share" one by portable devices (again, smartphones and tablets) or interactive tables. The "explore" and "share" dynamics can be supported analogically by cultural mediators too.

The visitors will be guided in two phases experience, the first part of which will be digitally based, while the second will mix analogue with digital tools. This combination will allow us to really understand how the experience and interaction among users is affected by the use of digital devices.

For the first phase, the test will be conducted individually using digital devices, by viewing the short video introducing the features of a selected painting (of St. Caterina) and the related transcultural topic, exploring, through a specifically designed app, the multi-vocal contents and references, triggering questions, which stimulate personal comments and experiences. In particular, at this stage of design of the app, the aforementioned multi-vocal content, curated by the museum curator together with the design team, has been organised into a kind of architecture, which includes:

→ Institutional curatorial issues (artistic and historical info);

→ Details of elements represented in the painting (divided into characters, gestures and objects) and possible related intercultural issues;

IMG. 1.56 — *Initial user experience flow chart. This visualisation aims to path the users' actions through the interface from the first level; pointing the tablet to the painting, to the following tasks; such as fruition of information, exploring intercultural references and comments. Visualisation by Davide Spallazzo.*

THIS PAGE

IMG. 1.57 — *Visual simulations of the first application area. With the division of the tab on the top, the user has either the possibility to follow a narrative video about the painting as a linear fruition, or land to the active area section. Here, he can deepen information depending on his personal interest, related to the subjects in the painting, their gestures and the objects they interact with. Visual design by Ece Özdil.*

IMG. 1.58 — *Visual simulations of the navigation system. Other than the information pinned on the painting, with the use of the hidden menu, the user can learn more about the painting and its related themes. Visual design by Ece Özdil.*

NEXT PAGE, IMG. 1.59 — *Final user experience flow chart with a detailed view of the user's possible actions in the active area section. This visualisation also maps possible additional information such as: related objects from the museum's collection, intercultural references and themes. Visualisation by Davide Spallazzo and Ece Özdil.*
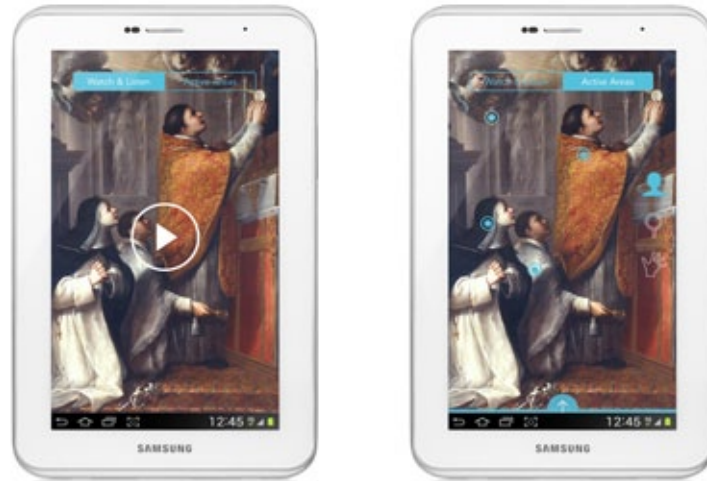
Watch & Listen

The visitors can use the tablet to watch and listen a narrative video about the painting.

Active Areas

The visitors have also the possibility to deepen some information through the themes of the painting, related to the subjects in the work, their gestures and the objects they interact with.

video content

actors   objects   gestures
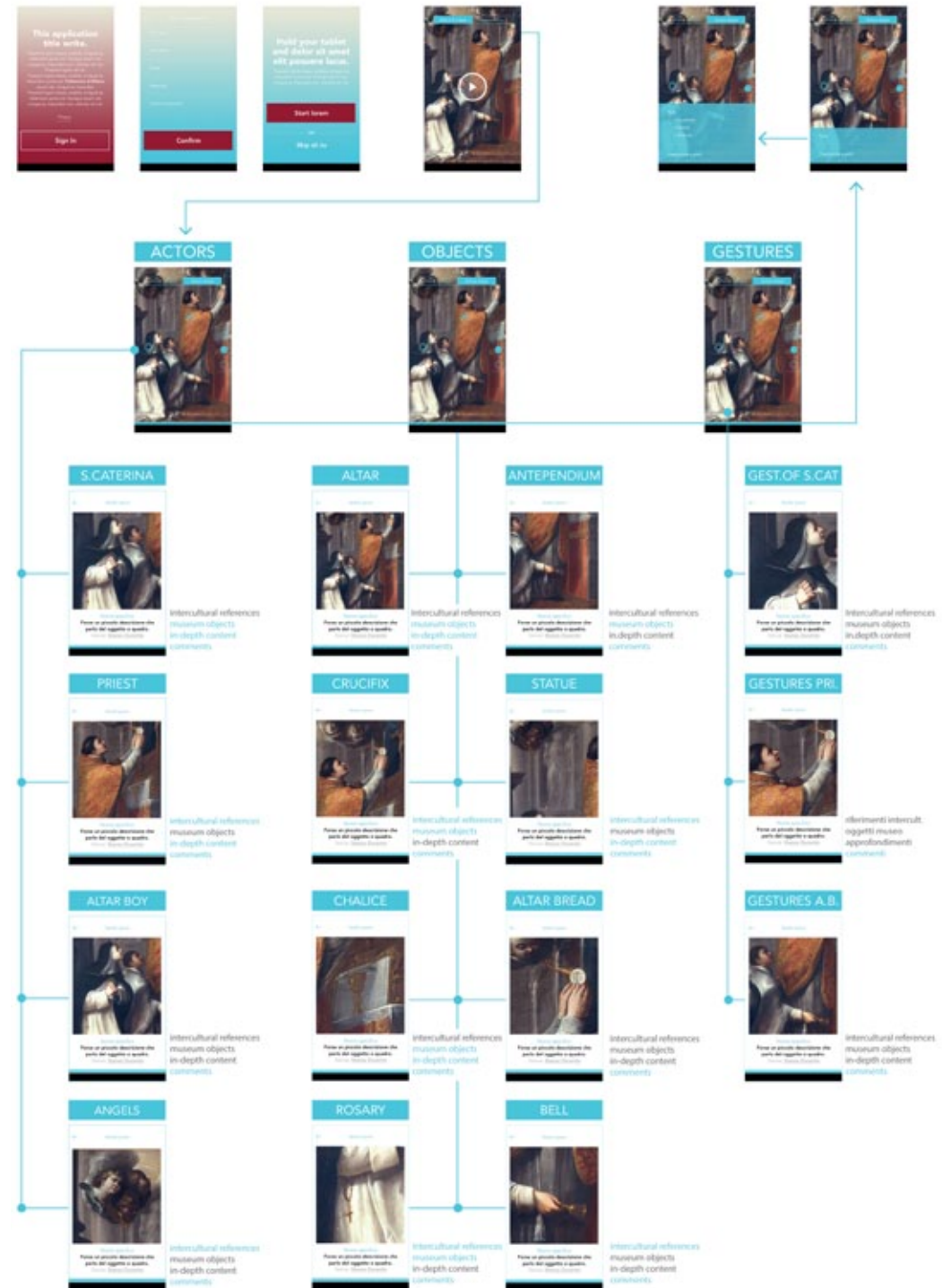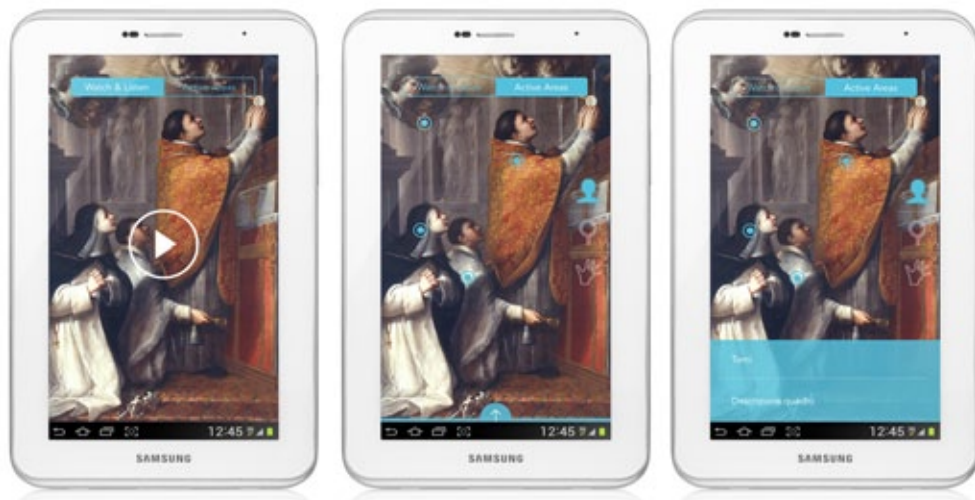
→ Intercultural users generated content;

→ Links to other museums' works of art.

During the second phase, visitors will be invited to contribute to a collective discussion by way of a physical mood board. In addition, an educator or mediator will propose some of the topics of the app, especially the ones that have resulted from the test which invite further comments and raised controversial opinions.

Contributing and sharing will be increased and implemented by real time storytelling of the event on the museum social networks (i.e. Storify), in an attempt to engage the public from a remote distance in an online dialogue by interacting with them using questions and comments posted in the social networks.

The concrete actions planned are (the final design choices of this second test will be affected by time and the budget constrains of the research project):

→ Choice and recruiting the audience: the age (probably secondary school) and the cultural background (second generation immigrants and foreign community residents in Milan) are still to be decided;

→ Definition of the content architecture: a preliminary architecture format, suitable for each painting, has been designed as an empty frame to be filled with specific content and adjusted to the necessities of the specific work of art (i.e. number of links and layers related to the painting);

→ Curation of content for each painting, which will include, as a format, all of the following typologies of contents: multi-vocal interpretation (the crossreligious issue selected for the painting, contents related to elements such as objects and gestures represented in the painting, the intercultural contents generated by the "super-users" UGC); links to other museums' works of art; links with works of art in the region; links with other themes;

→ Definition of the final test modalities (structure, mode- analogue/digital, individual/group, mixes of the above, educational activities);

→ Prototyping of the tools (digital, such as 3D models, interfaces, apps, as well as analogue);

→ Conducting the test with the audience;

→ Evaluating the results and possible implementations/envisioning (re-framing the conceptual framework and strategy for designing intercultural experiences in religious museums).

→ CRITICAL EVALUATION: WEAKNESS, STRENGTHS, FIRST RESULTS

One of the assumptions of this experimental action is the possibility of improving the intercultural and interreligious dialogue within museums

through an experience augmented by digital technologies. This assumption is based on the fact that the contemporary digital technologies and devices are the most commonly used to engage audience participation, collaboration and sharing in museums (Allen and Lupo 2012). Indeed this was, and still is, a crucial question.

Many scholars, when it comes to the proximity of religion and technologies, become very critical. Through new media, religious behaviours and beliefs have entered in the mainstream of global culture: in the "age of digital reproducibility" the sacred and the religious experience too are diffused, reproduced and repeated by means of digital technologies (Groys 2010). The temporary exhibition "Medium Religion", held at ZKM between 2008–2009, demonstrated this "medial aspect" of religion that moved

> from the private sphere of personal belief out into the public sphere of visual communication. In this, religions function as machines for the repetition and mass medial distribution of mechanically produced images. (http://www02. zkm.de/mediumreligion)

One example is the art installation, *bios [bible]* (2007) by Robotlab,[9] which, in the discourse of freedom of faith, raises the question of reproducibility of religion by new digital technologies (Groys 2011). The work performs the religious ritual (handwriting) by mechanical reproduction in order to deliberately provoke reflection.

So the question remains open: are religious heritage, rituals and practices enhanced or diminished (maybe oversimplified or even profaned) if represented or mediated by the use of digital technologies?

This has been also one of the biggest worries of the museum curators and educators of the Museo Diocesano and the main challenge of the research team.

Consequently, some leading considerations have been taken into account for the realisation of the experimental action, in order to positively distinguish its approach from the medial one above presented. The first one issue derived from the understanding the relevance of differences between religion and religious heritage, in term of their functions and therefore possible re-interpretation.

Catholic cultural heritage can represent elements of religion with catechetic functions, in many cases didactic.

This religious function usually gets lost when religious heritage and objects are presented in museums only as works of art or as objects of material culture with an artistic or ethnographic approach due to, in addition to their displacement from the original context, the interpretational and curatorial choices (Capurro 2013; Minucciani 2013; Roque 2011).

9   Rotolab is a group with members Matthias Gommel, Martina Haitz, and Jan Zappe. In bios [bible]: "an industrial robot copies out the Bible in handwriting. It performs calligraphic precision-work with a quill, like a monk in a monastery's scriptorium. In this way, two fundamentally different systems are related to each other: the formal noting of information and scripture as a basis for religion—scientific rationality and faith." (http://www02.zkm.de/mediumreligion/, accessed 21st December 2013)

In addition to this secular approach to the treatment of the religious there are also many concerns in terms of conservation (Minucciani 2013, 12), as well as ethical issues:

> A concern with regard to the public display and the provision of wider access to objects of living religious heritage is the extent to which these activities are accepted by custodians of sacred places. The latter can often be reluctant or negative because they may deem the placement of an artefact within a museum context or merely behind a glass-case as inappropriate treatment or as an act of deconsecration. (Alextopulos 2013, 2)

So the ambitious aim of the experimental action is recovering the original function of religious art in the contemporary world of multicultural society empowered by digital technology, trying to facilitate an interreligious dialogue and to avoid the risk of disrespectfulness and simplification.

For this reason the content of the experimental action is not religion tout court, but religious heritage, that is the result of a process of "heritagization of the sacred" (Meyer and De Vitte 2013, 277). To the works of art however (beginning from the five selected paintings on the Eucharist miracles, but to be hopefully extended to other religious objects in the museum), have presented associated topics aimed at opening Christian Catholic religious themes to a wider cultural sphere: for example pilgrimage, disease, faith, pain, safety, intercession, etc. This shift from theological dogmas to religious beliefs, rituals and liturgies, considering religion as a "living culture," may open a discussion on less "sacred" but nonetheless relevant topics for activating an intercultural experience and confrontation among diverse religions. This process may help in bringing the educational purpose of religious heritage actual in the contemporary life.

The second consideration is derived from the opportunity of mediating religion by technologies giving to the audience an active and not a passive role of spectator. In doing this, the *mise en scène* of religion is intended not as a mechanical reproduction or representation but as a critical action enabling various levels of experiences such as interpretation, performance, practice and the technology is the powerful enabling tool and not an end to itself.

Active experiences (such as performing and practicing) are the most suitable to really understand a heritage made of rituals, liturgies and living behaviours like such as those in religious circles. Digital technologies, in this case, proved to be the most effective in order to make more approachable such intangible content.

This position is based on the evidence that religious heritage is a mix of tangible and intangible aspects, that are strongly intertwined: "beyond the idea of a simple opposition of materiality and signification" (Meyer and De Vitte 2013, 276–277). And they raise many museographical questions:

> Whilst we have developed highly sophisticated theories and techniques, in respect of the object's physical conservation, we can say that we have still not managed to conserve its significance (and its meaning) and we still do not re-

store the intangible. The heritage of a religious nature seems to represent these issues to the highest degree: for example the lack of liturgical or ritual usage reference could lead to total mutism some objects. If the rite now belongs to the past, then the problem is more pronounced. (Minucciani 2013, 11)

The liturgical or ritual usage can be profitably compared within the concept of performance of Schechner, that according to his *Essays on Performance Theory* (1977), belongs to intercultural tradition: Schechner connects the performative activities of the western world to the oral cultures of tribal societies in a model that goes beyond the idea of theatre, pushing forwards the concept of representation to the one of rite-event that can be *actualised* and *restored* from the past to the present time, in a process of continuous re-interpretation: from performance to performativity.

Consequently, an innovative use of ICT should change the museum experience from interaction to interactivity, that means to a performative environment that goes beyond a merely theatrical experience:

> this goal can be obtained in a performative environment. (...) For objects that don't need to be displayed in an enclosed, protected space, museography can become analogical to the construction of a theatre set. (Roque 2011, 9)

As this creates a dialogical approach and context of conversation as "a dialogic museum is one wherein the narrative is developed entirely through the diverse stories and perspectives of those who lived it" (Kuo Wei Tchen 2011, 83). Here, the dialogue and the performance mutually support each other in an eminently open-ended and inclusive way for creative users' interpretations, as stated by Kester, "dialogic projects unfold to a process of performative interaction (…) with a collaborative relation with the viewer (Kester 2004, 10). Kester also says "the performative process-based approach, is a context provider, rather than content provider." (Kester 2004, 1)

Therefore our hypothesis is that digital technology can enhance religion in museums and does not necessarily impoverish or trivialise it, especially if technologies are focused on the intangible aspects and didactic functions of religious heritage, without merely mechanically reproducing it, but an active engagement with the cultural material.

Performativity and technologies seem coherent and appropriate means to reach the aim of the experimental action of enabling experience and practices at the intersection of diverse cultures.

However, differences that happen from the (ideal) theory and the (real) practice have to be taken into account for a serious critical evaluation: in an ideal research all the potentialities should be explored to verify the project assumptions; but in reality budget and time constrains already strongly impacted the experimental action, especially in terms of the availability of digital and technological devices and tools. The restrictions of certain media could also critically affect the final results and with that, the extensive and complete evaluation. In any case, this factor cannot be ascribed to the researchers and, as mentioned in the general framework,

the project basis of meta-design and envisioning activities, that are, complementarily to the experimental actions, aimed at establishing a conceptual framework and paradigm for designing an intercultural experience within religious museums, that will goes beyond the specific applications, in a theoretical perspective.

Finally, given this response as far as our perspective on the technology concerns, the last critical element is the successfulness of intercultural and interreligious dialogue by ICT: peoples' interaction and collaboration is made easier by ICT but this does not necessarily imply a mutual understanding being established among cultures. In order to accomplish this objective, substantial and sensitive topics (i.e. controversial questions) will be carefully selected as subjects for dialogue and conversation, triggering frictions as discursive strategies and, at the same time, evaluating the influence of the use of technology in creating empathy or, on the contrary, detachment and animosity. In any case, the positive conclusion of this plan can be evaluated only at the end of the second test.
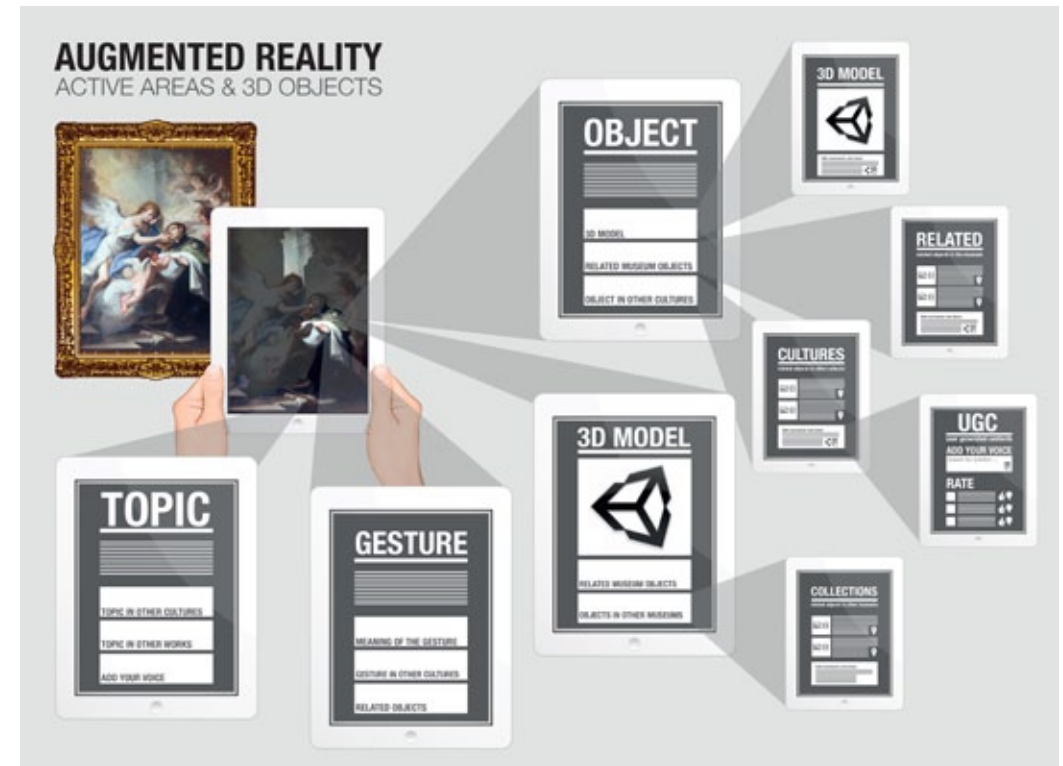
Nevertheless there are real results that have already been obtained even at this preliminary stage: these are on the level of the scientific (hypotheses, methodology, process and tools) as well as on that of valorisation (content produced and visitors involved).

On the scientific level, the first test demonstrated that it is possible, beneficial and appreciated to propose a parallel narration, superimposing it onto the historical and artistic interpretation of the museum without drowning out the original stories. The visitors' comments also suggest that well selected and informed topics are not perceived as being far away from the religious heritage displayed and allow a certain degree of actualisation of religious values in a crosscultural perspective.

Concerning the use of digital media and devices, the comments of visitors reveal an keen understanding of technology: as described in the first test, they were fascinated by the video, which was effective in capturing and focussing the attention of the audience, performing a more dialogical and social experience than just responding to a structured questionnaire. Conversely, the technology has played a supportive role in creating serious interpretations by allowing users to generate content, to add references and comments on the tablets and through internet searches.

Concerning the methodology, a process structured in six phases has initiated a theoretical framework composed of six different interaction dynamics, still to be fully developed.

On the level of valorisation, new cultural content were produced: ranging from the thematic audio-visual of the paintings, to the UGC from the specialist users (mentioned in the description of the first test), to the frictional topics that emerged from the questionnaire. This production results from a co-curatorial practice that is relatively innovative for the Museo Diocesano. In addition, even is at a basic level, the technology apparatus of the museum was enhanced, widening the cultural offer to their audience, with a glimpse of contemporary interactive technologies.

IMG. 1.60 — *Graphic representation of a possible interaction with tablets for the second user test. Different kinds of contents are activated through augmented reality that highlights active areas in the painting. Graphic elaboration by Davide Spallazzo.*

Lastly, but more important, the first experimental action (hopefully, the same will happen with the second) has brought a new public to the museum, made up of different religious and cultural groups. Additionally, a new format of guided tour and visit has been tested with them.

→ PRELIMINARY CONCLUSION: ENVISIONING NEW CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

It is evident that "when museums and religion collide"[10] a critical museum practice is needed to make the postcolonial approach evolve in a living manner, always closer to the audience, where neutrality is impossible.

In a scientific project, this ethical position, which questions political issues such as gender and nationality, turns into the research issue of challenging representations of religions and the sacred within museums.

The museological and museographical model here conceived in terms of methodology, technologies and contents defines a basis for further envisioning, that will necessarily be informed by the critical evaluation and feedback received during the completion of the project.

The expectation by the audience of an intense emphatic engagement

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10   See: "Religion in Museums: When Museums and Religion Collide," http://religioninmuseums.wordpress.com, accessed 21st December 2013.
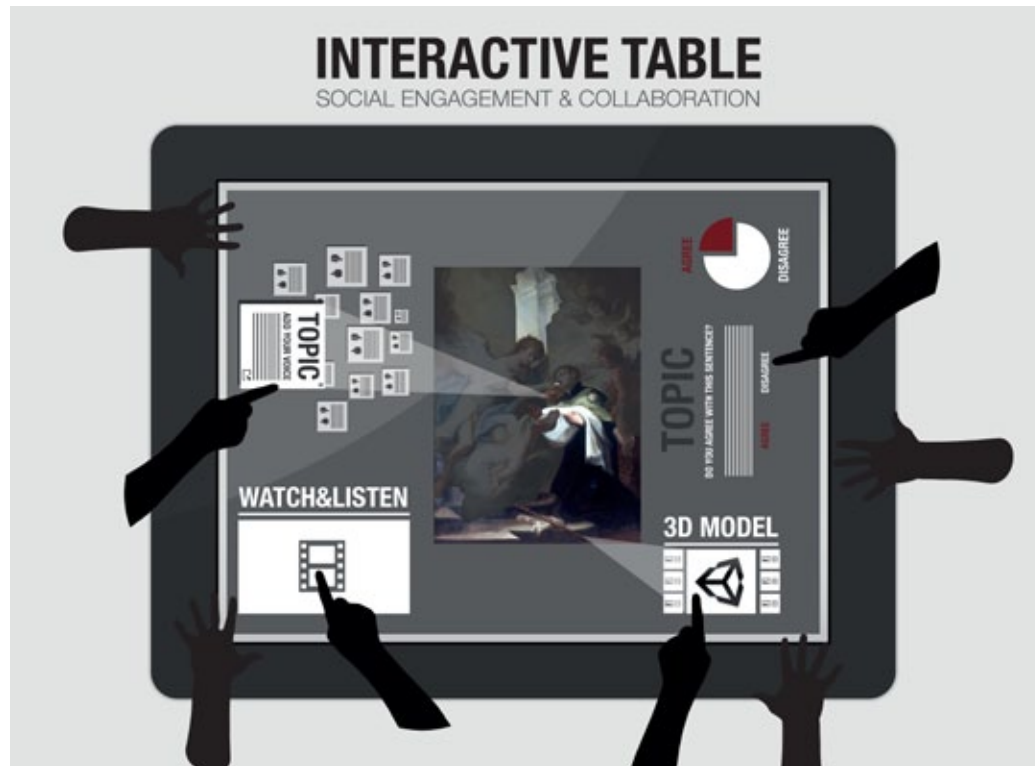
(identification and personal past experiences), as well as a dialogical and social experience, are not in contradiction with the idea of performativity and multi-vocality/multiculturality striven by the project, but rather reinforces them. The four dimensions constituting the visitor experience: contents, gestures, space and sociality (Allen and Lupo 2012) can converge together in a meaningful experience system wherein the direction (in the sense of directing function) is committed to design and technologies. In fact, there is a margin in religious performances for a bigger contribution from interaction and technology.

In our vision performativity requires that we pay attention to meaningful and consistent gestures in spaces (those that simulate religious ritual practices or simply metaphorically evoke them) to activate content. While multi-vocality and multiculturalism must rely on the dialogical, participative and social experience enabled by technology.

It is crucial not to create any touristic or spectacular effect, due to the sensitive topic of religion. Rather this process aims to make the subject more familiar and habitual. Paraphrasing Agamben's concept of profanation (Agamben 2005), we could say that religion needs to be "given back to the free use of men," avoiding any "separation" and "subtraction" of sacred from life.

Finally, even if this applied research project will probably be developed only up to the level of a prototype, and not implemented as an everyday offer for visitors by the museum, the market feasibility leads us to assume its scalability and likelihood.

PREVIOUS PAGE

IMG. 1.61 — *Graphic simulation of a possible interaction with an interactive table. Several visitors use the table at the same time, activating different contents and sharing information. Graphic elaboration by Davide Spallazzo.*

IMG. 1.62 — *Simulation of a gesture based interaction. Users can interact with the contents simply using their body. This performative approach could activate the memory of the body and visitors could perform gestures and actions consistent with different cultural practices. Graphic elaboration by Davide Spallazzo.*

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Christopher Whitehead

Chris Whitehead is Professor of Museology at Newcastle University and member of the University's Cultural Affairs Steering Group and the Great North Museum's Board. His research activities focus on both historical and contemporary museology. He has published extensively in the field of art museum history, with particular emphases on architecture, display and knowledge construction. His second major strand of activity relates to education and interpretation practices in art museums and galleries, and includes considerable government-funded and policy-relevant research. In the context of musicological study he has strong interests in social constructionism, theories of representation, cultural cartography, time and place, coproduction, art theory, disciplinarity and epistemology. He is the author of the following books: *The Public Art Museum in Nineteenth-Century Britain* (Ashgate 2005), *Museums and the Construction of Disciplines* (Bloomsbury/Duckworth Academic 2009) and *Interpreting Art in Museums and Galleries* (Routledge 2012).

MeLa* - European Museums in an age of migrations

Research Fields:

RF01: Museums & Identity in History and Contemporaneity
examines the historical and contemporary relationships between museums, places and identities in Europe and the effects of migrations on museum practices.

RF02: Cultural Memory, Migrating Modernity and Museum Practices
transforms the question of memory into an unfolding cultural and historical problematic, in order to promote new critical and practical perspectives.

RF03: Network of Museums, Libraries and Public Cultural Institutions
investigates coordination strategies between museums, libraries and public cultural institutions in relation to European cultural and scientific heritage, migration and integration.

RF04: Curatorial and Artistic Research
explores the work of artists and curators on and with issues of migration, as well as the role of museums and galleries exhibiting this work and disseminating knowledge.

RF05: Exhibition Design, Technology of Representation and Experimental Actions
investigates and experiments innovative communication tools, ICT potentialities, user centred approaches, and the role of architecture and design for the contemporary museum.

RF06: Envisioning 21st Century Museums
fosters theoretical, methodological and operative contributions to the interpretation of diversities and commonalities within European cultural heritage, and proposes enhanced practices for the mission and design of museums in the contemporary multicultural society.

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MUSEUM MULTIPLICITIES
FIELD ACTIONS AND RESEARCH BY DESIGN

The present book collects experimental works led by several research teams involved in the MeLa Project—presented in the first section of the volume, titled "actions"—and undergraduate students in Architecture attending the Politecnico di Milano—organised in a section called "Research by 'design'"—whose common purpose is to challenge the traditional idea of exhibiting and introduce participative practices able to promote a better cultural integration and dialogue.

With contributions by: Rachele Albini, Jamie Allen, Jakob Bak, Chiara Baravalle, Luca Basso Peressut, Giuseppe Biscottini, Rita Capurro, Dario Cieol, Anna Chiara Cimoli, Sara Chiesa, Cristina F. Colombo, David Gauthier, Giulia Grechi, Eleonora Lupo, Elisa Mansutti, Elena Montanari, Gennaro Postiglione, Alessandro Raffa, Davide Spallazzo, Raffaella Trocchianesi, Christopher Whitehead.

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