

The Plastic Venuses

The Plastic Venuses:
Archaeological Tourism
in Post-Modern Society

By

Marxiano Melotti

Translated by Christine Calvert and Chris Pearson

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P U B L I S H I N G

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Archaeological Tourism in Post-Modern Society,
by Marxiano Melotti

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*Complete authenticity we don't have...
My approach is to guess what the public will like*
—Jay Sarno, founder of Caesars Palace, Las Vegas
“Los Angeles Herald-Examiner”, July 24, 1966

*On November 22, 1922, Howard Carter peered through a hole
with just the flicker of a candle flame
to discover the Tomb of King Tutankhamun.
When asked what he saw, he replied, “Wonderful things!”.*
*The Luxor Hotel and Casino has reopened the doors to once again bring you
magical and mystifying entertainment in Las Vegas.
Now you can explore the treasures of the King Tut Museum,
featuring authentic reproductions from what has been called
the greatest archaeological find in the history of the world.*
—Website of the Luxor Hotel, Las Vegas, 2008

Romulus and Remus: the grotto has been found.
The Minister of Culture Francesco Rutelli: “The myth has become reality”
—“Corriere della Sera”, November 21, 2007

Pompeii, Domus of Gladiators crumbled to ruins.
The Minister of Culture Sandro Bondi: “Don't worry. We'll rebuild it”
—“Roma”, November 8, 2010

I've just seen a Viking get into his Audi and drive off at top speed.
—Eleanor's short text message from the Lofoten archaeological park, 2010

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INTRODUCTION

“When a wrinkle furrows the face of a top model, it’s as if a monument was scarred: a real catastrophe”. Of course, when she made this statement, Linda Evangelista had no idea that it would end up in the introduction to this book, which, through an analysis of the new forms of archaeological tourism, offers reflections on the image of the ancient world in our society, its role in modern society and the cultural transformations in current post-modernity.

Some might smile at these words, finding them rather too self-regarding, far from reality and even further from any serious consideration of the new role of tourism and of our archaeological heritage. But, in fact, this famous catwalk model goes straight to the heart of the matter. Our idea of a monument has undergone a definite change in recent decades and the body of a top model, supreme expression of this society of images, media and consumption, and ephemeral interface between the material and the immaterial, is a monument “good to think”, in the words of Lévi-Strauss.

But if the body of a model can be thought of as a monument, clearly something has happened. It is precisely these changes that I intend to analyse here.

Zygmunt Bauman, the theorist of “liquid modernity”, came to the same conclusion as Linda Evangelista. A feature of contemporary society is the fluidity of the phenomena and of the processes that characterize it. Although greatly over-used by researchers and scholars, this is an image that provides a simple and effective way of describing the world in which we live today.

Everything is fluid nowadays, or at least so it would appear. Phenomena are inter-related and inter-dependent to such a degree and in such a continual mutation as to appear scarcely distinguishable from one another: boundaries appear to dissolve and the phenomena, like so many liquids, mix and blend, giving birth to fresh complex realities.

Tourism, archaeology, cultural goods and above all our way of living, reading and thinking cultural goods are not spared such transformations. What, however, occasionally avoids transformation is academic reflection, especially in countries firmly rooted in their past, and the consequent

policies of those institutions called upon to supervise cultural goods and tourism.

In other words, fluid archaeology and fluid tourism exist, characterized by innovative and user-friendly practices, which reflect the cultural and structural changes in our society, but are rarely perceived as such.

Archaeological parks are gradually taking on the features of theme parks. Museums compete to draw in visitors by offering attractions which have little to do with traditional archaeology. These are, however, marginal signs and remain outside a far wider process. Such changes are, in fact, keeping pace with other far more crucial transformations. Archaeological tourism no longer necessarily implies contact with an archaeological object. It is possible to enjoy experiences of an archaeological kind in contexts totally devoid of archaeological monuments or archaeological finds.

Within the global process of re-definition of identity and fluidity of the subject matter of phenomena, everything appears more fudged, less distinct and, furthermore, characterized by new forms of “relative specificity”, as much from the point of view of individual enjoyment as from that of the production of content and of cultural processes. Of course, the loss of specificity and, as we shall see, the definition of new forms of relative authenticity can appear absurd in contexts like that of archaeology and, indirectly, archaeological tourism, where traditionally great specificity of content has always been a feature. Archaeology and archaeological tourism are essentially bound to the exploitation and experience of testimonies of the past. However, this is no longer true or, at least, no longer absolutely true. The image of the wrinkles that “scratch” the surface of the body of the model forming an archaeological monument is a good metaphor for this process.

For another more immediately interpretable image we might consider the Altamira cave. In this case the authentic archaeological site is no longer usable and has been replaced by a reconstruction. Each year hundreds of thousands of visitors undertake the journey to the Cantabrian hills, where they visit a site with an archaeological flavour, but which is not, in fact, archaeological at all. The virtual cave is located close to the original one, which means that the cultural and geographical context remains the same, but it does not alter the fact that this is a different cave, a monument that, far from having tens of thousands of years of history, has existed for only a few years. The same reconstruction can be enjoyed in various archaeological museums in very different parts of the world. Can this still be called an archaeological visit? The tourists are pleased and

satisfied with the experience, treating it in every respect as a form of archaeological tourism. The organizations themselves, even though somewhat hesitatingly, tend to accept this, give it credit and promote it as such. It is definitely a form of archaeological tourism, despite the fact that, strictly speaking, it is by no means archaeological. But, as we shall see, Altamira is not a particularly new or surprising case. On the contrary, in a society like ours, used to historicizing that which is no longer in fashion, the *neo-cueva*, now some years old, can at this point almost be considered an archaeological site in all respects.

How might other phenomena be read, though? The Luxor Hotel in Las Vegas has for some years housed an archaeological museum consisting of a seemingly perfect reconstruction of Tutankhamun's tomb. Can we speak of archaeological tourism in this case? But the real question is why shouldn't we speak of it? The space is presented as an archaeological museum and offers an archaeological-type experience, conceptually and materially no different from that of the new cave at Altamira. These are two totally contemporary spaces reproducing archaeological sites, offering experiences and sensations of an archaeological character and transmitting information of the same kind. What changes is the cultural context of such spaces and the degree of authority of its authors. But as anyone who operates in the academic field or in the world of museums well knows, context and authority are extremely fluid concepts these days. A group of scholars, experts in experimental archaeology and in sophisticated techniques of digital reproduction is probably, but not necessarily, culturally and scientifically better equipped than the marketing office of a hotel, which, moreover, could have resort to the same groups and the same techniques for its reconstructions. Besides, the Egyptian authorities, always ready to criticize exploiters of their archaeological heritage and to defend its uniqueness, have themselves announced the construction of a tomb in the Valley of the Kings in which they intend to mount a replica of Tutankhamun's tomb.

Deliberately to mock experiences like that offered by the Luxor Hotel is evidence of an elitist attitude and betrays a fundamental incapacity to comprehend the changes that have taken place in contemporary society and its system of values.

As we shall see, the Luxor Hotel with its museum is a digest of contemporary society, in which phenomena and experiences appear ever more often inter-related: cultural tourism, entertainment, simple curiosity, in the same way as shopping, games and education, can occur not only in the same place, but at the same time too. Naturally this does not cancel or replace other typologies of tourism or of cultural enjoyment of a more

traditional kind. Unfortunately administrators and archaeologists tend to focus their attention on traditional practices and all other new forms of enjoyment tend to get forgotten or looked down upon. The result is that the more fluid formulas end up by not being “governed” by institutions and specialists in the field and instead proliferate in the limbo of marketing, especially in the more conservative countries.

If the archaeologist takes a step backwards and refuses to soil his hands with post-modernity, he is free to do so and certainly does not deserve reproach. Unfortunately, we do not live in a phenomenological reality in which only that which comes into contact with us exists. Fluid tourism and merchandising of the past do not disappear if we just ignore them. One may not like post-modernity, but, independently of any label one would like to give it, it exists. We must acknowledge it and learn to govern it, perhaps trying to put its more creative and innovative aspects to good use.

In Italy we have a rather disagreeable expression used to brand experiences like that of the Luxor Hotel. If I show photographs of the King Tut Museum during a lecture, someone almost always exclaims: “That’s an *americanata*!”. This term, which is practically untranslatable, is used to define a kind of open space in which anything can happen and which serves to solve the contradictions of contemporary society, in our case the difficulties and embarrassments that arise when different realities, such as tourism, the market, archaeology and pop culture, come together. The *americanata* is not a phenomenon in itself but a concept that measures an interpretative void and lays bare often elitist forms of cultural and identity resistance to historical processes of change in culture and values.

It is clearly pointless today, in a world that has long since metabolised globalization, to accuse the United States of imperialism. Those which perhaps could once have been considered “other” cultural models, different from those predominant in Europe, are, in fact, widely shared and accepted. America is in Europe and in the world, just as Europe is in America and in the world. However, it is a process that does encounter some resistance. The “fluidity” of the phenomena tends to bewilder and frighten people, who, paradoxically, re-discover and often reclaim local identities. Archaeological heritage in such a context becomes an instrument of defence and of a fight for identity.

Resistance to this kind of thing is not necessarily a refusal of the new global culture, but rather an expression of a new confused need for identity. The cultural elite (archaeologists, university dons, administrators) are also involved in this process, making a desperate attempt to defend a role that is increasingly unclear in this world of change. Many intellectuals

defend tradition behind the shield of the always well-accepted fight against globalization. But an internationally renowned scholar, as Umberto Eco is, hypothesises a duplication of monuments: the original ones for the well-educated public, truly interested in history and the past, copies and *americanate* for the public of reality T.V. shows.

A solution of this kind might perhaps protect monuments from the material damage wrought by cultural and archaeological tourism, which has today reached mass proportions. Eco's hypothesis reveals a basic elitism: true culture, that of the originals, being reserved for the chosen few, only reproductions being offered to the others. But in a computerised society like ours, in which authenticity can only be relative, is there still any sense in building a system of cultural usage based on the distinction between copy and original? Of course, the identity of archaeological and monumental heritage should be defended or, at least, should not be under threat; we must, however, take care not to transform the defence of this identity into an instrument of social exclusion or cultural discrimination. Likewise, we might ask ourselves why the reality T.V. public should be picked out to receive second-class treatment. Does it really make sense to separate the television public, or viewers of the more questionable T.V. programmes, from the public of cultural tourism? Users of the Luxor Hotel do not really belong to a separate category from that of the tourists who visit the Valley of the Kings. Youngsters who at home watch reality shows on T.V. are also those who can be found in museums and at archaeological sites.

What is more, the computer revolution can be discomfoting and culturally upsetting for those born before it or those who grew up in an era that had not yet absorbed such changes. But for the "digitally native" the new culture of copies, hybridisation and relative authenticity is quite normal.

On the other hand, it is wrong to believe that television is an element ontologically opposed to culture and, in this specific case, to archaeology. Apart from the fact that there is an excellent T.V. coverage of archaeology, especially in Britain, television is a constitutive element of identity and of contemporary imagery. What should be analysed instead is the demand for reality shows, which in the last decade has been typical of television in almost all the Western World.

"Fluidity" creates fear and bewilderment and people look for certainties and, if possible, roots too. But we find ourselves, as I said, in a media-dominated society in which image and image culture play a central role and cultural models are inclined to be non-material. We have no choice nowadays, as things stand certainty can only be sought in the artificial and

ephemeral world of television, cinema and advertising, which, moreover, transmit precisely the models to which society tends to conform. In this context the reality show has answered the need for solidity and certainties to the highest degree: “real” stories, perhaps even set in “real” homes, no matter that these are filtered by the artificiality of television scripting and media marketing. Cultural tourism, and especially archaeological tourism, offer the same certainties: stones and ruins, tombs and skeletons give tactile and visual consistency to our need for materiality and roots. The last days of Pompeii are, in this sense, an extraordinary reality show, or at least it is presented as such by guide books and brochures, and as such is experienced by millions of visitors.

On the other hand, we can consider the success of reality shows as a special form of virtual tourism where the visitor, comfortably settled on his own sofa, visits the “houses” of others, immersing himself in an “other” reality which, like tourism, helps towards the formation of an identity, transmitting new information (no matter of what kind). Seen in this light, the gaze of the television tourist who enters the intimacy of others is not that different from that of the archaeological tourist who frequently ends by entering into contact with the more intimate aspects of the worlds he visits. With regard to this, I like to recall an episode of some years ago. Following a particularly brutal infanticide that caught the attention and captured the imagination of Italians, a well-known television presenter brought a model of the interior of the house where the crime was committed into the television studio and built his entire show around it. Nothing out of the ordinary, you might say. And yet this is a key episode in gauging the convergence between voyeurism, television and tourism and, in particular, archaeological tourism. With the aid of his model, the presenter led viewers through the rooms of a house which, in its being close and yet faraway, real and yet non-existent, present and past, had at this point assumed an archaeological dimension in a context where the voyeuristic gaze was protected and mitigated precisely by this archaeological-touristic dimension.

The success of archaeological tourism is largely linked to this voyeuristic dimension which, from the Egyptian mummies to the erotic frescoes of Pompeii, is satisfied by sex and death. It is no mere coincidence that tourist information of an archaeological nature, like exhibitions and events, tourist guide books and articles, including those by influential scholars, tend systematically to highlight those aspects that best answer this voyeuristic strain: sex and death, often under the more elegant heading of “gender studies” or “everyday life”. In this sense the abstract

and historically consolidated concept of “cultural tourism” has an important psychological (and commercial) function, since today, as two centuries or so ago, it makes something more socially acceptable; something that society, even though increasingly “sexualised”, still finds it hard to accept. One could say, perhaps a little provocatively, that archaeological tourism, like reality shows, answers deep-seated drives in people and helps to neutralise them. So, in a Pompeii which is falling to pieces, the administration comes up with the bright idea of organizing a sensorial by-night itinerary, *son et lumière*, “strictly for adults only”, within the Suburban Baths, well-known for their erotic frescoes.

So we can then consider the culture of “reality” to be an aesthetic and experiential category that defines a way of looking at the world of which reality shows and tourism are two different spin-offs. The whole, though, is an overall process of convergences—no matter whether permanent or not—between diverse phenomena. So it is that the reality show can be included in a museum, an example of which is the “Diary Room of Big Brother” in Madame Tussauds, where members of the public can “confess” and record it on video. In this way the public transforms the passive experience of the reception of a television “reality” into an action and into an experience, which, however, remain in a kind of limbo *à la Baudrillard*, mixing real and virtual, authentic and artificial. Nevertheless, the inclusion in a museum marks an important step in this process of convergence.

Likewise, various archaeological sites offer touristic-experiential activities ranging from traditional activities, such as real digs, simulated didactic digs or forms of experimental archaeology, to more post-modern activities, such as costume role-play or authentic reality shows. “Live a day in the life of a Bronze Age man” or “Spend your family holiday in a primitive hut” are not infrequent invitations in Germany and Scandinavia, which are avant-garde where “living history” is concerned. German television has even produced a brief reality show themed in a Bronze Age village. Meanwhile, one of the competitors in the Italian Big Brother show boasted a tattoo bearing the letters SPQR (*Senatus Populusque Romanus*, i.e. Senate and People of Rome), explaining that it served as a reminder of his Italian identity when he was abroad. These are different signs that, in their confused convergence, show and contribute to determining the collective imagery.

Among the various hyper-experiential practices that are changing archaeological tourism, the re-creation of moments in history through re-enactments must be mentioned, since they are included in the activities of archaeological sites and, even more, in tourist festivals, with increasing

frequency. Despite the incomprehension of many researchers, these re-enactments are very successful in effectively addressing the fragmentation and fluidity of contemporary society and people's need for identity, protagonism and sociality with creative forms of associationism. This is one of the more interesting expressions of contemporary "edutainment" and of the process of "theming" experiences that is firmly establishing new forms of relative authenticity. Closely linked to this world of re-enactment is another way of recalling bygone days which, however, is often ignored or relegated to the mere field of merchandising, that is, the so-called "gladiators for pictures" who surround the main archaeological monuments, especially in Rome, for the joy of the tourists. It is true that, unlike re-enactments, this is an area that moves outside experimental archaeology, but is there really any sense in calculating or comparing the "scientific" reliability of experiences that are different forms of relative authenticity? Moreover, "gladiators for pictures" serve a definite purpose in the sphere of archaeological tourism: they act as a filter in the approach to the monument and form a link between history and the contemporary world, between the material dimension of the monuments and the non-material one of everyday life, and between the two components of the tourist experience, cultural fulfilment and leisure activity.

Tourism, archaeology and reality shows are not, after all, so distant from each other. Quite the reverse. For some years now, precisely this experiential aspect has been increasingly underlined, not just in tour brochures, but also in offers made by sites and museums. Archaeological tourism guarantees genuine contact with the earth and our roots and, not to be overlooked, with that particular experiential and psychological dimension: the "other" world of death. Plays of light, sound effects, virtual reconstructions and holograms are being used more and more in order to stress the emotional aspect of contact with the world of archaeology. Casts of the victims of Pompeii, "created" in 1861 by an ingenious archaeologist, are fundamental to the site's touristic and media success and are a prototypical form of virtual and experiential tourism. New technologies cannot but make this kind of experience more attractive and sophisticated. Contemporary taste tends to favour the more non-material expressions of this panorama. So museums and archaeological sites are transformed into "sensorial" spaces where more and more often odours, perfumes and tactile and taste experiences are added to sounds and lights: "ancient" Egyptian creams, "real" Roman perfumes, "authentic" Pompeiian wines.

The spread of this practice is really extremely swift. In fact, the expense of the necessary sensorial installations is not that great when taking into consideration the enormous success achieved with visitors.

This makes the installations especially attractive. What is more, sounds, perfumes and play of lights can change the touristic fortunes of small museums and of realities of little archaeological interest to the point of making an enormous difference to the image of an entire city, and very effectively contributing to the processes of urban regeneration.

Sensorial tourism often takes extremely intriguing and complex forms ranging from thermal archaeological tourism to that of underwater archaeology and even archaeoastronomical tourism or “new age” tourism, with experiences that bring together authenticity, virtuality and show. At Stonehenge the natural effects of the solstitial sun attract visitors in search of emotions and authenticity, even if nowadays in a standardised context. At Abu Simbel there is the same attraction, but the authenticity of the event is made relative both by the relocation of the temple and by the camera flashes of the tourists. At Newgrange the solstitial tourism has given birth both to a lottery which, with typical British pragmatism, offers as a prize the chance to be present at the precise moment when the sun enters the tomb, and to a simulation of the same effect obtained with the use of electric devices.

At Teotihuacan an interesting hybrid situation between modernity and post-modernity is to be found. Teotihuacan is an extraordinarily important archaeological site that has been a tourist destination since the nineteenth century and is historically endowed with a kind of relative authenticity. On the occasion of the centenary of Mexico’s war of independence and in order to honour the present with the glorious deeds of the past, the great pyramid was the subject of a grandiose operation of reconstruction that even led to the adding of an extra floor that had never previously existed. On the site today traditional spectacles of *son et lumière* exist alongside the mystic (or not) tourism of the great solar events. In 2009 the government even tried to introduce a *son et lumière* show, called “Resplandor Teotihuacano”, installing rows of tiny Philips lights on the pyramids of the Sun and of the Moon and all along the Avenue of the Dead. This enterprise, intended to “modernise” the site, sparked off a lively debate. Archaeologists questioned the use of metal cables and light boxes introduced into archaeological structures, damaging the pyramids and the look of the site. The authors of the project came out in defence of their plan, explaining that the illuminations were actually installed in the more modern structural parts of the monuments, those dating back to the restoration work of the early twentieth century. However, the most interesting protest came from the local community, who intervened to defend the authenticity of the monuments, intended not in a philosophical and abstract manner, but as a local concrete heritage of identity. The battle

against this electrification and the defence of the archaeological heritage thus became a form of local identity resistance against political centralism and, indirectly, against cultural globalization linked to archaeological tourism. In the end, however, the decisive intervention leading to the removal of the lights was, in fact, that of a great international body, the U.N.

Of course, it is not only the light that contributes to the emotion, but also its lack, in this case without the need for any particular special effects. Night, obscurity and darkness act as experiential “multipliers” that accentuate and interconnect certain fundamental elements of the new emotional tourism and are, at the same time, closely linked to founding elements in the success of archaeological tourism: mystery, death and sexuality. “Night” stresses the “otherness” element of the archaeological experience, intended as a journey into the world of the underground, of the past and of death, but also of a different civilization, freer than ours, at least from the point of view of sexuality, as the media keep on reminding us. The previously mentioned night itinerary at Pompeii “for adults only” makes the most of and exploits the already historically consolidated sexual attraction of the site.

Evening or nocturnal visits make it possible to dispense with the rhetoric of the traditional museum or archaeological experience and take the experience into that temporal sphere usually reserved for entertainment, transforming it into an “event” to which all of us, victims of the culture of events, are extremely sensitive. If you then consider the fact that evening or night visits mean that the touristic day is lengthened, it is easy to understand the worldwide success of similar enterprises.

In this category we can mention the “aperitif at the museum”, which is a re-modelling of the traditional edutainment made available in the “serious tourism” of Richard Florida (2002) and, in a wider sense, of the “leisure class”. In this same perspective of sophisticated urban tourism, the great European capitals, starting from London and Paris, and including dozens of other cities and towns, are introducing events of the “Night at the Museum” kind.

The fact that the poster advertising the 2010 “Night of the Museums” in Rome depicted Canova’s famous statue of the beautiful Paolina Borghese, nude and languidly resting on a bed, is certainly not a casual choice. Nothing scandalous, obviously, but a fun and flirty way of lending visual consistency to the undoubted value of the night visit to the museum.

A development of this trend, to be linked to the culturalisation of consumer experiences, is the transformation of museums. The model of the Guggenheim, which inaugurated a kind of autographed bedroom for

nocturnal visits “in pyjamas”, will definitely be copied, also because of the effect of films like *The Night at the Museum*. The hyper-experiential use of sites and museums is in any case already recognisable in initiatives like the possibility of celebrating weddings or organizing catering events in one of the houses of ancient Pompeii.

The new experiential, sensorial and emotional tourism is radically changing museums and archaeological sites. If on the one hand it helps remove the rhetoric of archaeological communication and brings to light again an old idea of archaeology as a magic and evocative coffer, on the other hand, it speeds up the processes of convergence between archaeological areas and theme parks and between touristic and media experiences, as well as the process of archaeology’s loss of identity. The wooden horse that welcomes tourists to the site at Troy is substantially no different from the one standing in the theme park of Terra Mitica, neither is it very different from the one used in shooting the film *Troy* and which was later used as a monument in the square of a town not far from Troy. The eruption of Vesuvius, accompanied by earthquakes and the destruction of Pompeii, is now an attraction present in many theme parks, from the Bruparc of Brussels to the Bush Gardens Europe of Williamsburg, the colonial capital of Virginia, and it was already one of the shows in the first American amusement parks at the end of the nineteenth century. Not to be outdone, for some years Pompeii welcomed visitors to its website with a trembling of the page intended to give an idea of the earthquake. It then decided to pass on to “hyper-experientiality” and so inaugurated an “original ‘seismic platform’ that enables visitors to have, in absolute safety, the sensorial experience of an earthquake, even one of great intensity”. Naturally, this caused great amusement among the children on school trips to Pompeii but bewilderment from the archaeologists who were expecting investments of a very different sort. A friend, who has been involved in digs at Pompeii for years, confided: “It gives you a strange feeling to hear people laughing at an event that caused the destruction of an entire city and the death of thousands, and one which could be repeated, next time causing hundreds of thousands of victims”. It is certainly odd that installation of the seismic platform should have been arranged by the special commissioner who, as senior officer of the Civil Defence force, has the duty to deal with real earthquakes and to intervene should a real eruption occur. But then a small explosive Vesuvius has for some years now entertained guests of the Italian prime minister Silvio Berlusconi in the grounds of his much admired villa on the “Costa

Smeralda” in Sardinia, and where, legend has it, there is even an authentic archaeological site with Phoenician tombs.

The progressive convergence between archaeological areas and theme parks is actually only a reflection of a much wider phenomenon, the establishment of the culture of edutainment, referred to earlier, which represents not just one of the feature elements of post-modernity, but also one of the most effective formative mechanisms of our times.

This new hyper-experiential and poly-sensorial archaeological tourism is a truly interesting and potentially creative phenomenon. If, on the one hand, it is a reflection of the progress in experimental archaeology, above all in areas of Anglo-Saxon and German culture, on the other hand, it is undeniably the strongest point of contact or, rather, of confluence between the world of archaeology and that of the market. So where does research in experimental archaeology end and where does merchandising begin? In this specific sector, too, we can see the spread of new forms of relative authenticity, often far more relative than the “authentic reconstructions” of which the Tut Museum in Las Vegas boasts. The “real” Pompeiian wine is refined in *barriques*, that is, in oak barrels, and its only claim to being Pompeiian are the holes in the archaeological ground where the vines were planted, a sophisticated form of virtual authenticity that re-proposes in a post-modern key the use of the “void” from which the casts of the victims of Pompeii come to life. The archaeological site lends authority to an experience that, despite its evidently commercial nature, can turn out to be satisfying and in certain cases even educational for the user. The same goes for creams and perfumes, going as far as more complex forms of enjoyment, hybridisation or re-invention, such as thermal baths and well-being centres, capable of integrating antique and contemporary both on a material level of the spatial context and on a non-material level of the experience and the atmosphere.

This growing attention to the sensorial aspects, like the growing attention towards local identity and history, are two different manifestations of the loss of identity or, rather, of the search for new identities characteristic of the contemporary world. These two elements are obviously compatible and appear in combination with increasing frequency. In fact, initiatives linking tourism, history, taste and well-being under the banner of the search for a supposed territorial authenticity are gradually becoming firmly established. This is a phenomenon that goes far beyond archaeological tourism and is not just a phenomenon of today, as the studies of Cloke (1993), Urry (1995) or Hopkins (1998) clearly show, and which, with regard to the theming of tourist locations in the countryside,

even then posed the problem of “market saturation”. Movements such as Slow Food or Mother Earth, that have found a sort of global guru in Carlo Petrini, are an expression of a further stage in this trend and are experiences strengthened by their ability to wed local and global, new philosophies of life, market demands and new tourist practices. In fact, the same “slow” culture in itself represents a form of theming of consumption. Its success would appear to be further consolidated by its crossing political boundaries. Actually it takes the form of an archipelago that brings together various forms of resistance to globalization, including the new “local nationalisms”, with the new post-political or depoliticised cultures. That is how, as Milan’s Expo 2015 entitled “Feed the World” bears witness, this “slow” culture can even go as far as theming the most global of mega-events. But at the same time, in the fantasy world of gossip, the idea can develop that Paris Hilton bathes in baths filled with priceless Barolo wine.

On a local scale “slow” culture contributes to the revitalisation of the traditional kind of archaeological tourism, using visits to sites and museums, above all in extra-urban contexts, as an excuse for recreational activities of an enological-gastronomic kind. Likewise, it contributes to the development of direct or indirect forms of post-modern archaeological tourism, from the themed menu to the bottle with a “Roman” label and to the thermal sensorial itinerary in a well-being centre. Slow culture, like enological-gastronomic tourism, has had an important “educational” function, helping to spread the social acceptance of practices linking art and market.

It should not be forgotten, however, that archaeology itself has been systematically used for the same purpose for some time now. Advertising exploits the past as a “sign” capable of bestowing authority and authenticity and of leading the consumer experience back to a reassuring dimension of respect for tradition.

In short, territorial interest converges with individualism and, in particular, with the new forms of consumption of well-being. The outcome is a form of consumeristic-cultural tourism, inclined toward the more educated and well-off, attentive to the exploitation of local resources, but careful that this should not mean the loss of any of the advantages of global culture. A variety of tourism that coincides substantially with the “serious tourism” of Florida, but which also moves outside metropolitan settings and involves not only the “creative class” but also those who conform to its life-style. Paradis (2004) rightly explains that, in an economy increasingly based on consumption rather than on production, it is essential to theme experiences “to create perceived differences in

products that are in reality quite similar". In such a circumstance "themes are designed specifically to promote the virtual and experiential consumption of places". Theming is not, however, just the result of skilful mechanisms of marketing or a process of adaptation to the new demands of the market and of the society that exploits culture. It shows and at the same time effects an important process of "culturalization" of the experience of consumption and helps to draw new boundaries between different practices and experiences. Neither should it be forgotten that theming, like other forms of relative authenticity, is a satisfying process. The user, in other words, is not the "victim" of deceit, but at the very most, and if a crime exists, is a satisfied "accomplice".

It is in this ambit that various forms of post-modern tourism live, where culture, well-being, shopping and entertainment crossbreed with intelligence and creativity.

This frustrates the classic categorisations of tourism: shopping takes on cultural and touristic overtones; sport is linked to archaeology, leisure and entertainment are themed historically, and so forth. Alongside an archaeological tourism characterized in a "slow" sense (from archaeological trekking to underwater archaeological tourism), a myriad of mixed agendas are born in which commercial, formative and ludic components exist side by side. So I can enjoy a well-being treatment in a themed spa, but that does not then exclude a visit to a traditional archaeological museum with its collections boringly displayed like supermarket goods. I might hurry to an exclusive *vernissage* in an old castle or in some museum for the launch of a new product and meanwhile use my iphone to find a "typical" restaurant, provided it has received a suitable review by an internationally renowned publication. I buy a bottle of wine bearing a label recalling some ancient myth and queue for a couple of hours to gain entrance to the archaeological exhibition "event", which is "not to be missed". Smilingly I buy a plastic replica of a Greek statue, but I delight in a historical review in a shabby archaeological site. I finish reading an essay by Althusser while queueing to enter an archaeological theme park. In the afternoon I go on a shopping spree, without wandering into any museum, but derive great pleasure from the antique vase displayed in the airport building while waiting for my flight. So, ironically young Karl Marx's (1845-46) prediction for a utopian future would appear to have come true.

All this may appear obsessive and in certain cases perhaps it is. However, the concerns of Baumann (1991) seem largely without foundation: contemporary mobility might be interpreted as neurosis, but that certainly does not prevent many of these forms of mobility from being

enjoyable and satisfying. One should not undervalue the increasingly strong identifying dimension of consumption and, among its practices, of tourism. One of the contributory factors in the satisfaction to be found in these new forms of tourism where culture, leisure and shopping intersect, is precisely their identity value.

This new tourism looks for authenticity of sensation, emotion and experience without troubling about problems of archaeological, historical or philological authenticity. It appears even less interested in distinguishing between different forms of “staged authenticity” in the style of Cohen (1974) or MacCannell (1976). Neither does it really seem that attentive to or interested in the “quality of the copy” which, according to Frenkel and Walton (2000), is one of the bases of authenticity in theming processes. A feeling of authenticity is enough, nothing more. A taste of the antique suffices; antiquity itself is not necessary. The archaeological site will be no less real if it has a reproduced fresco or a reconstructed room, but it will certainly be more real if I can breathe in an authentic ancient atmosphere with correct use of lighting, sounds and smells and, above all, if it leaves me good memories. Yes, this is real to all intents and purposes.

Theories regarding authenticity in the touristic experience are based on the assumption that, when you distance yourself from authenticity, you inevitably enter the world of contrivance, representation and deceit. Actually, the phenomena are never that clearly distinct. But the theories can be, above all when in scientific contexts, such as the Italian one, where the past, history and archaeology are assumed to be untouchable cultural models which should not be so much as skimmed with “degrading” experiences like contemporary market and tourism.

With regard to tourism and the use of cultural goods, our starting point must be the user and not the theories. The user does not show much interest in authenticity in traditional terms, in the sense that he tends not to think about it. Of course, he appreciates the authentic, given that authenticity, originality and uniqueness are elements that the cultural system hands down as being fundamental and that as such have established the prevailing aesthetic and commercial canons. This formulation has taken root in the tourist mentality too, which, thanks to guide books like Baedeker, Michelin and Lonely Planet, has been historically formed on a “star aesthetic” according to which each location and each museum has a masterpiece or at least something that is not to be missed for its uniqueness. This uniqueness must, though, be repetitive and repeatable, typified and typifiable in order to be really enjoyed. On this basis, in a play of more or less explicit levels of awareness, represented authenticity has

developed: what is important is not the authenticity of the event, but the authenticity of the experience, which, although repeatable *ad infinitum* for every tourist, is always real and individual for each one of them.

The cultural and technological changes of the last thirty or forty years—the “post-MacCannellian” world—have progressively pushed us forward into the world of represented authenticity.

Among these changes we must, of course, recall digitalisation and media dominance. We live in a profoundly media-dominated society in which visual culture plays a key role. Cinema, television and advertising reflect the reality of which they are the sometimes true, the sometimes distorting mirror, but they create and they re-invent reality at the same time in a continuous action that helps to construct collective imagery and contributes to the establishment and the adaptation of the process of globalization.

Neither should the spread of a digital culture and a culture of copies be forgotten. This has brought about a real cultural revolution. For the younger generations, growing up in a culture based on the use, manipulation and production of digital systems, copies in themselves are not necessarily worth any less than the original. This indicates the overcoming of a definite cultural taboo of twentieth century Western culture, still very much bound to romantic and idealistic ideas of aesthetics: the uniqueness of a work of art and the over-evaluation of the artist's creativity. The new possibility of comparative equality between the copy and the original and the progressive disinterest in the uniqueness and the non-repeatability of an object is giving birth to a new conception of authenticity and, in particular, to new forms of relative authenticity.

Such processes are part of a general process of removing the stress on the intellectual element in society, parallel to the firm establishment of an image culture and an increasing focus on the non-material rather than the material, and on the sensorial and emotional aspects of everyday life, from cognitive activities to leisure forms. This change is a manifestation of society's, or at least its younger members', altered interests. Moreover, it reveals the establishment of a new scale of values better equipped to meet the demands of the new society and that is therefore based on the new image culture, on the determining role technology has assumed, on the new global interconnection and on the new function of the media and of consumption.

It is a process that has institutional components, too. The new formative models, both in Europe and in North America, allow for the substantial

changes in Western culture and consequently have greatly reduced the study of history. This new and altered relationship with a past of which we know less and less, is certainly freer and more productive, perhaps even less rhetorical, given that we have fewer and fewer cognitive and methodological tools of control, making us less able to challenge a reconstruction or an image of the past we are presented with from any source, a television documentary, a film or a costume festival, for instance. We run the risk, though, of spreading a duller and more stereotyped relationship with the past and contributing to the acceleration of the processes of re-invention of tradition and to the spreading of new models of relative authenticity.

Short memory, a feature of contemporary culture, is an important contributing factor in this. In the new global and media-dominated society, obliged to consume goods, images and information rapidly, culture is constructed with the tempo of newspapers, television news and television programmes in general and is characterized by the same speed as the media and every form of consumption. The “past” is somehow out-of-the-market and a mythopoeic sphere enters more rapidly and, above all, more easily. “History”, deconstructed from its formal protection guaranteed by the big scientific institutions and traditional formative processes, becomes—without any moralistic connotation of mine—a simple collection of images and therefore of “themes”.

Of all these phenomena, it is the speeding up of the process of re-invention of tradition, a determining factor in the establishment of new forms of relative authenticity, that seems to me to be crucial. Such a process creates interesting consonances with Romantic culture, and so also with Romantic tourism, while at the same time defining an important difference.

The new trends in contemporary tourism, so attentive to experiential, emotional and sensorial aspects, can, in fact, be compared to the sentimentalism and the taste for the experiential of the Grand Tour and of nineteenth-century cultural tourism. Categorising tourism exclusively on the basis of tourist flow hampers a grasping of these diachronic affinities. But then those who focus on the “mass” features of contemporary cultural tourism, often with an anti-tourist attitude, usually, either implicitly or explicitly, eventually regret the elitism of the Grand Tour or, at least, end by discerning an incurable fracture between “traveller” and “tourist”. With this approach, they can surely never get a grasp of the points of contact between the contemporary tourist experience and that of the Grand Tour and the first forms of cultural tourism. Nocturnal visits, the individual and

experiential use of sites and museums, the often “distracted” and bored gaze, the pleasure in using disguise, in historical evocation and in themed activities, the attention to the more sensorial aspects of the visit, are all common features of both archaeological tourism and the new post-modern tourism.

The Romantic rediscovery of history and the process of re-invention of tradition, which according to Eric Hobsbawn and Terence Ranger (1983) have accompanied the formation of new nation States in both Europe and North America, had given birth to a cultural system attentive to history, but also creative and elastic. In short, a culture inclined to hybridisation, eclecticism and forms of mythopoeia, extremely bold forms even. It is in this orbit that archaeology as an academic discipline developed, large-scale digs were started, monuments and archaeological sites were “reconstructed” and the great national museums created. History was used to construct a present identity and to offer a coherent past. It is in this context that Theodor Mommsen pinpoints a turning point in world history in the battle of Teutoburg, while others hailed Vercingetorix or Arminius as national heroes or built the Saalburg fortress. This process of re-invention of history and tradition did not refute serious scientific research and did not create problems of authenticity for the users of reconstructed sites and monuments. The age of the great dictators reappears and brings this political use of history and of monuments of the past to a sudden uncontrollable outburst.

Contemporary society, formed with globalization, developed with the local processes of adaptation to it and now forced by the world crisis to redefine its equilibria, appears to be experiencing powerful forms of mythopoeia and re-invention of tradition. The new global citizen’s identity is today formed by innumerable factors that prove to be extremely effective, though museums and archaeological sites have only a marginal role compared with mechanisms like, for example, tourism itself.

Archaeological sites and museums obviously cannot have the same political, educational and cultural function as they had a century ago. The global citizen is first and foremost a consumer and the new processes of identity formation, be they global or local, are mostly bound to a new centrality of the market, thanks to the media. It is in this setting that the ephemeral body of a fashion model, projection of the consumer culture, can begin to be seen as a monument.

Nor are archaeological sites and museums totally alien to processes of identity formation, however, and they come into play in a variety of ways. Cultural consumption is an important part of the new citizen-consumer’s

identity. From a post-modern viewpoint, cultural consumption represents the sophisticated point of arrival of a society that has largely reached and surpassed the gratification of primary needs and can at last allow itself the pleasure and luxury of consuming the non-material value of history and of the past. That which at the time of the Grand Tour was a luxury reserved for the few, today concerns ever wider groups, which take the form not only of the new urban elite, always in “serious” and creative movement, but also of sizeable sections of the more or less educated and more or less well-off society, but all engaged in activities that link consumption, leisure and new non-material requirements.

From this viewpoint consumption of monuments is increasingly less material and more and more non-material in a process that signals the passage from traditional cultural tourism to emotional tourism. The atmosphere of a place is more sought after than the place itself. The lights are more important than the monument. The form of a museum bearing the “signature” of an “archistar”—a star in architectural activities—is more interesting than its collection. One goes to the exhibition because it is an “event” and not for its content. And so it is that, if sovereigns and dictators rebuilt monuments in order to lend visual and material solidity to the political strength of their States, today the mayors of post-modern cities offer “white nights” (i.e. “sleepless nights”) and install illumination systems on the great monuments of the past.

This evermore emotional enjoyment of heritage is consistent with the process of individualisation of modern society and goes with the waning of the traditional idea of monumental and archaeological heritage as collective goods. It is a cultural process that can, of course, be moderated with appropriate forms of “re-education” of the population, but which it is not really easy to oppose. We can only hope for State policies that know how to wed market and heritage intelligently, without allowing themselves to be tempted by the monetisation of the past, especially in times of crisis. In this respect European politics appears to be sufficiently moderate. Italy is a case apart and the debate, due also to periodic rumours of “sell-offs” and privatisation of the heritage, has at this point in time firmly (and pointlessly) polarised between modernists and conservatives, “marketists” and purists. The true problem lies in the fact that a consideration of the consequences of post-modernity in the sphere of cultural goods has yet to be made and authoritative figures, such as Andrea Carandini, one of the most influential Italian archaeologists, and Salvatore Settis, ex-director of the Getty Museum in Los Angeles, who lead the debate, appear totally unfamiliar with literature that lies outside or goes beyond the field of the history of art and of archaeology.

Current mechanisms of identity exploit the iconic value of the great monuments of the past and of archaeology in general and this process of “non-materialization” of heritage in order to “culturalize” consumer experiences. If archaeological heritage becomes a simple “sign” and if from being solid it becomes “non-material”, transforming itself into image, emotion and atmosphere, then it becomes easy to include it in the mechanisms of media and publicity communication and exploit it in order to ascribe “tradition” and “culture” to the consumer experience. Hannigan (1998), analysing transformations in the post-modern metropolis in his *Fantasy City*, noted, even then, how places of tourism are now “combinations” of amusement park, souvenir stand and museum. The most interesting aspect of these transformations is, however, that they combine the leisure of the consumer activity with a specific educational value, giving birth to a form of edutainment. It is in this perspective that themed “outlets” and hotels with an archaeological theme are developed.

Archaeology turns commercial space into a museum and lends visual consistency to a real process: “non-places” have now for some time been hyper-experiential spaces that contribute to the formation of our identity and, as formative places, have a role comparable to that of the museums and the archaeological sites of the last century. The Egyptian Hall in Harrods, like the Roman walls or the reconstructed archaeological site complete with T-Rex in the Castel Romano outlet, are the external signs that reveal the social need to present shopping as an experience of adherence to tradition and at the same time show the achievement of a “culturalization” of that experience. Many of these shopping centres are real tourist areas nowadays that people visit like new monuments and places of edutainment, which bring satisfaction and at the same time transmit the values and the cultural and consumer models of society.

On the other hand, archaeological sites and museums, as previously mentioned, help to counterbalance the sense of identity loss in the new fluid society. As an experience which is completed and distinct, the past attributes certainty, and archaeological tourism offers an opportunity for rediscovery of roots and reconciliation with the mechanisms of history. However, among the various contemporary phenomena, it is possible to single out forms of local resistance to globalization and forms of rediscovery and re-invention of local or regional identities that use archaeology in nationalistic terms, not unlike that in vogue a century ago. Disagreements arise at very different levels and give a measure of the complexity and instability of contemporary phenomena and equilibria: the demands made by the Lega Lombarda with regard to the Italian State, the