How to Constitute an Archive of Oral Memory and Identity Within the Framework of A.P.T.O.: A Few Methodological Proposals

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Abstract: In this paper I will focus on a few problems relating to the cataloguing of anthropological materials concerning the specificity of demo-ethnological and anthropological disciplines like context, confidentiality, the role of the ethnographer and the integrity of the field-work. In order to do this I will discuss the concepts of material and immaterial goods (TUCCI 1999) of objectivity and subjectivity in relation to memory and identity and verify whether the notion of cultural goods are appliable to memory and identity documentative materials (narratives etc.).

Other questions I will try to face are:

- Whether we can consider memory and identity as objects of cultural property

- The limits of this perspective

- Other problems in documenting and archiving oral culture materials in relation to the identity and memory of the people

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1. APTO Objectives

The project has three purposes: the first is a salvage operation: to rescue the most significant material created by research from previous years (i.e. preservation, conservation and promotion of the cultural heritage of Trentino). The second is to ensure that for current and future projects the unnecessary waste of qualitative data and oral materials does not continue. The third is that oral documents should become speaking testimonies of the past and present for the region [1].

2. Province Objectives

Considering oral culture fundamental to the survival and maintenance of its community and realising that oral sources have a vaster oral dimension than other sorts of "cultural materials", the province of Trento has decided to dedicate particular care and to fund the constitution of an archive of memory and identity [2].

Up to now heritage experts have been elaborating ways and means for cataloguing artistic cultural materials (tangible or *material goods*) while forgetting other sorts of oral materials (intangible or *immaterial goods*) such as music and narrative testimonies, popular rites, feasts of the local ethnic, folk and cultural heritages which have been partially catalogued in Museums of History and Folk Traditions according to extremely different and heterogeneous criteria. [3]

APTO is a container for social memory and identity within the framework of a theoretical and information grid which as far as ethno-musicological documents are concerned (songs and ballads etc.) have already been constituted. It offers the opportunity to heritage experts of cataloguing and documenting interviews, narratives, ballads, songs, ceremonies, through IT technologies and informative digital strategies while following a consistent and homogeneous design. The point is now to see whether such a framework is fit for the documentation of narratives, interviews and the archiving of life-stories [4].

Keeping in mind that the first and more urgent objective of the Province of Trento remains a practical one: to obtain the most appropriate and most scientific index card apt to catalogue the existing identity-memory oral materials present in Trentino, the objective of this research project is to work within the same information system and framework that has already been constructed within the ethno-musicological archive [5].

The objectives are:

1. find directions for cataloguing oral materials,
2. find out what is available in the field (Museums of War, Immigration Archive etc.),
3. propose an index card or more index cards apt to enable people to index and document the oral heritage,

4. face theoretical and methodological problems concerning the different sorts of oral documents to be catalogued (and available in the field),

5. think about their disciplinary specificity. [6]

3. The Archive of Memory and Identity

Besides the Ethno-musicological Archive, the Province of Trento is also organising an Archive of Memory and Identity "which will be collecting Oral testimonies in relation to History, Ethnography, Immigration, Social History, Trentine Autonomy and it will be giving organic consistency to the already existing heritage of Trentine society while at the same time promoting new pieces of researches on the field" (MORELLI, 1996, p.3). [7]

From the point of view of the archives of memory and identity there are no significant examples on the Italian territory with the same findings and characteristics of APTO. Talking about oral and social memory there are interesting experiments of archives in Europe (University of Essex, Kent etc.) that have developed heterogeneous peculiarities from the points of view of card files, documentation and cataloguing procedures—which will be worth while discussing in this project. They have been working on oral materials of different sorts, according to their requirements, objectives and privileged areas of study (oral history, sociology etc., in one case anthropology) and implemented different systems of documenting oral materials) and implemented different systems of documenting oral materials. [8]

A comparison among the archives would allow us to understand in a broader per-spective different sorts of problems we need to face when constructing an archive of memory and identity while helping to make more responsible choices. [9]

At the moment in Italy a group of researchers and heritage experts are working together on a regional and national basis, in order to solve theoretical and methodological problems in relation to the cataloguing of oral documents. In the past oral materials have been catalogued according to very heterogeneous criteria. From the 70s the Regions had to fulfil a ministerial lack as far as oral and popular culture was concerned while organising their cataloguing systems, index cards and projects. Recently demo-ethno-anthropological disciplines are being experimentally catalogued by the ICCD[1] (TUCCI, 1999a). [10]

Roberta TUCCI (1999b) has considered oral documents as immaterial goods (in contrast with the more known material goods) and produced for the Lazio region an index card (BIA) that has eventually been transformed into BDI[2] an index card for the documentation of *immaterial* goods. *Immaterial* goods comprehend oral ethnographic materials coming from music, folklore, and popular traditions such as, feasts, ceremonies but also ballads and narratives. In order to develop my

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1 Istituto Centrale per il Catalogo e la Documentazione (Central Institute for Cataloguing and documenting).

2 Index card for the cataloguing of demo-ethnoanthropological immaterial goods.

argument I will discuss the concept of immaterial good—that is reducive of orality which, as a form of expression cannot be considered nor immaterial or textual (and probably not even good or object of consumption) and the relevance of both this concept (immaterial good) and Tucci's index card in relation to the cataloguing of music, oral narratives and the multiplicity and variety of oral materials that can be catalogued from anthropology to folk and popular music. In the section anthropology—I will deal with the specificity of those oral documents that are ethnographic and identifiable as narratives, testimonies, interviews. [11]

4. Implementing the Archive of Memory and Identity: Problems in Cataloguing and Documenting Ethno-anthropological Materials

Here I will focus on a few problems relating to the cataloguing of anthropological materials looking at the specificity of demo ethnological and anthropological disciplines like context, confidentiality and the integrity of field-work. In order to accomplish this task, I will discuss the concepts of material and immaterial goods, of objectivity and subjectivity in relation to memory and identity. I will verify whether this notion of cultural goods is relevant to narratives of memory and identity and other documentative materials.

1. What are the problems of documenting and archiving oral culture materials in relation to the identity and memory of people?
2. Shall we consider memory and identity as objects of culture? What are the limits of this perspective?
3. Are they material or immaterial and if they are immaterial is the paradigm of textuality enough in order to catalogue them? [12]

4.1 Material versus immaterial

Unless we consider memory and identity as collective exchangeable property (HARRISON, 1999) and we want to transform oral materials on memory and identity into objectified texts (when they are not), we should think of ways of preserving and cataloguing documents that account for at least the subjectivity of the informants. [13]

Orality is experience, subjectivity and fluid cultural heritage. It is transmitted from person to person down to different generations. It is bodily social memory (CONNERTON,1989). To objectify the informant's discourse as it is, means to deprive it of its value and original sense. It is otherwise possible to transform narratives into mere objects of consumption. The decision is not only ethical but also theoretic. [14]

In the case of memory and identity the informant is subject and object of the research answering to specific questions in time and space. To objectify his discourse means to fix it while causing the loss of both depth and context (that we will see is very important to anthropology). [15]

The reason why oral documents should not be objectified is because discourse is the product of an interrelation. The discourse of the informant and the discourse of the anthropologist are set within an asymmetrical relation placed and moving on two different levels of communication, from which the informant and the anthropologist speak and communicate. Although interrelated, such discourses are independent and autonomous. [16]

The anthropologist and the informant are both subject and object of a relation with the difference that the anthropologist produces a text. The first discourse is materiality from which to collect data, but also the objectification of a subject's discourse, the second one is subjectivity in form of questions and interrogations in relation to an "other" different from the self. [17]

To fix orality means to treat it as a text, but whatever way we think of it oral documentation is not "textual". The parameter of textuality is not valid and not enough in order to catalogue it. Sounds, voices, narratives have an emotional consistence and a bodily dimension that can not be neglected. [18]

Another reason why oral documents should not be fixed and objectified is that orality changes along with tradition which is created and recreated by a specific community in space and time. The misunderstanding lies in the fact that though narratives on memory and identity are fluid, in order to be rescued they have to be fixed on a material support and recorded on something durable and physical (CD ROM etc.) becoming finally physical objects of analyses and interpretation. [19]

Though, the document must not be confused with the event that needs to be catalogued (cf. PIANTA, 1999). A book is a book and a CD ROM is a CD ROM, they are just means through which the documentation of oral material is possible. [20]

What are oral documents goods or data? Can we fix oral documents and treat them as goods? What is the difference between material and immaterial goods and what characterises oral materials? Can we use material goods procedures in order to catalogue *immaterial documents* such as folk songs narratives? Is this concept of immaterial useful to us? What characterises oral documentation? [21]

Eventually, there is a problem of objectives: for the heritage expert or archivist goods are something to document museographically and preserve (a book, a cassette). From the point of view of the researcher ethnographic interviews are not goods but data materials, testimonies through which the research is possible and results are attainable. All these questions would need further reflection. The questions is after all how can we keep orality living and speaking. [22]

At this point, as the variety of oral materials is vast (from popular music to folklore to sociology), I will start by dealing with the specificity of particular disciplines in which oral materials play an important role then within the context of such disciplines I would like to discuss a few genres such as narrative interviews life stories. If one problem is the perspective; how to look at data, the other problem

is to distinguish different disciplinary areas and make sense of the variety of materials. [23]

4.2 Anthropology

As far as anthropology and ethnography are concerned, it is a very delicate matter to separate fieldwork from ethnographic interviews and the rest of the research (if available for cataloguing). An ethnography is the finished product of the interconnections between author, text, event, participant observation, field-work, methodological criteria, theoretical assumptions and the subjectivity/objectivity (sex, gender, nature of observations, conditions in the field, etc.) of the ethnographer in the field. [24]

The field is where the author organises his/her material and questions reality. Fieldwork is the basis for building up an ethnography. This also, among other things, should be considered when documenting oral ethnographic materials. [25]

As far as cataloguing procedures in relation to the documentation of ethnographic materials, anthropology is about specific places in time and space and specific cultures and peoples, not about any people, any culture, any place. Therefore when documenting or cataloguing we should then consider that context is very important for ethno-anthropological research. [26]

The lack of context and the sense and meaning of what people tell in their narratives are in danger of being neglected. Context meaning time, space etc. is important to be documented. That time, that space are important axes for understanding reality. Dealing with the lives of certain people in anthropology, not only context but also confidentiality is a fundamental criteria to be followed. [27]

If on one hand it is not possible to reveal the identities of the informants (confidentiality) and to be specific about the context of the research, it is not even possible to anonymise the field unbinding it, causing the loss of both sense and meaning to the whole research. Internet and IT technologies make it difficult to preserve both context and confidentiality. [28]

Furthermore, there should be a gender consciousness in relation to the collection of the documents and how the documents have been collected (the outlook). The ethnographer's perspective informs reality and its reading (CLIFFORD & MARCUS, 1986) also from a sexual point of view. [29]

As far as oral interviews and narratives are concerned, the relationship between the informant and what is said, is also very delicate. What the informant says is something concerning his life and experience and should not be objectified. Data are the results of field work analysis and its interpretation, but also specific ways of questioning reality and relating to another. The discourse of the informant is an entity itself and is independent from the discourse of the ethnographer (AFFERGAN, 1987). [30]

Oral testimonies and music should be documented according to different criteria. Folk songs are expressions of specific cultural traditions, but are also finished products that have their own autonomy in relation to the subjects who have produced them. Oral testimonies are not detached from the people who have produced them. The relationship between what is produced and who is producing it is different. [31]

The variety of documents compels slightly different approaches to documentation. In this context (of conservation and research) the idea of goods is rather confusing. What is a cultural good? Something we can sell and exchange? Something available for consumption? [32]

4.3 The organisation of the existing archive on a basic level

APTO is organised around the single oral document which is also a documentary unit. This means the document is connected to the event, the informant, the multimedia file and other sorts of information which have been designed around the ethno-musicological document in relation to an archive that already exists. Its organisation is very simple. From a document a lot of other index cards are connected to it adding more and more information. [33]

In order to organise an archive of memory and identity a few problems should be faced:

1. What is exactly an oral document and what is the document unity. And how should the interview be connected with its field-work?
2. How can we to start building up an archive from the oral document unit?
3. What is the difference between narrative interviews regarding one's own identity and experience and cultural products (such as songs and ballads)?
4. How can we avoid the reduction of fieldwork materials to simple collections of anonymous archaeological goods?
5. How can we catalogue ethnographic material and ethnographies without loosing context while preserving confidentiality?
6. Do we need a thesaurus in order to catalogue oral documents?
7. We have the problem of using some sort of thesaurus to refer to: rational, functional and easy to use? [34]

5. Conclusions

For many years different scholars have been looking carefully into the problem of the so called "Urgent Anthropology" while promoting documentative and audio-visual projects on traditional cultures. They have also been co-ordinating pieces of research and surveys on a world-wide-scale, aiming at the reunification of methodological archive criteria and the creation of a network in order to facilitate the circulation of scientific collected material. [35]

Through APTO[3] it has been possible to solve a problem that existed for years within ethno- musicological research (MORELLI, 1996). Now we are dealing with oral documents that have yet to be catalogued. [36]

Acknowledgements

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3   APTO has decided to refer back to the methodological criteria already experienced throughout 20 years practice by the Archive of oral documentation (ACO) in the region Lombardia-bordering Trentino. At the beginning of the 70s the Office of popular culture (annexed to the Regional Department of culture in Lombardia funded by Roberto LEYDI and directed by Bruno PAINTA, devised a plan of research which has become one of the most representative of the whole Alpine area (for methodology and findings).

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