Automatic indexes of literary sources for art history: the Notizie by Frederico Alizeri

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Automatic Indexes of Literary Sources for Art History. The *Notizie* ... by Federico Alizeri

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The analytical aimed culling of texts of artistic literature (1) is a typical problem of the art history research. The burdensome work of culling a great quantity of texts to find, in most of the cases, very few informations is really little assisted by the traditional indexes. Often, these indexes are partial and have a fragmentary character which prevents the possibility of relation between the items. In order to improve the quantity of retrievable information safeguarding in the mean time the relational context of the single items, it has been undertaken a project of textual analysis and automatic indexing of art history secondary sources.

1. Origins and Institutional Framework of the Project

The project I am presenting concerns a documentary data base deriving from the work of analysis on a secondary source for the history of art in Liguria: the Notizie dei professori del disegno in Liguria dalle origini al secolo XVI (6 vol., Genova, Sambolino, 1870-1880), written by the local historian and connoisseur Federico Alizeri. This project is part of a wider research on the textual sources for the history of art in Liguria between the XIII and the XIX century undertaken at the University of Genova, with the patronage of the Consiglio Nazionale delle Ricerche, in 1981 (2). The tasks of the research are the realisation of a bibliographic repertory of all the sources and the experimental definition of a documentary data base on the main informations concerning the artistic production supplied by these sources.

This research started to study the relevant literary production, so rich in quantity as in quality, deriving from the philological and positive work of the ligurian local historians and connoisseurs of the XIXth century. Directed by the professor Marisa Dalai Emiliani, various researches on the cultural and social context of this age have been developed by a research group of the Istituto di Storia dell'Arte dell'Università di Genova. The results of the researches have been presented in 1985 in an exposition and

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a conference dedicated to the connoisseur <u>princeps</u> of that period: Federico Alizeri (3).

His capital work, the <u>Notizie</u> **...,** is founded on methodical documentary an bibliographic researches, achieved in a great part of the regional archives, whose results are often enriched with the informations deriving from a direct knowledge of the works of art. The <u>Notizie</u> ... is a real mine of primary and secondary informations both on the art works and on the social context of art production and circulation (mainly concerning artist corporations, patronage and displacement of works) related with the salient historical events of the Repubblica di Genova. Yet, the incoherent subjects distribution, the verbosity of the author and an intrinsic index deficiency make the consulting of this work very difficult and little effective (4). Because of all these characters the text has been considered an important experimental field.

On the occasion of the Alizeri conference two works on art history data computing were presented. For the first one, a simple **bibliographic data base** on Alizeri works (realised on a personal computer using the software DBASE II), we had good results but for the second one, a test on **electronic textual recording** of the <u>Notizie</u> ... (using a main frame IBM 4361 and the Information Retrieval System STAIRS), the results suggested us to abandon the way we were running. This was due to two main reasons: we based our recording on the identity »one record of the data base - one work of art quoted by Alizeri« filling each record with a lot of data such as artist name, kind of work, subject, date, physical description, position, patronage, restoration, documents, bibliography ..., but in such a way we were unable to retrieve and relate to each other all the data which did not concern directly the works of art such as data on artist travels, patronage, artist corporations, literature. The second reason had a technical character: the information retrieval system we adopted was very heavy to use and it was unable to print indexes we needed.

II. The Alizeri Data Base at Present

Originating with this experience, we decided to change in a radical manner the work on the Alizeri text, developing a new project on two different levels. The first one concerns the theoretical definition of a **methodology for textual analysis and information extraction;** the other one regards the practical individuation of **information organizing criteria.** The task of the project was the realisation of an experimental documentary data base as tool for: **a) printed cross indexes** on the main items (artists, works of art, places, names, institutions, quoted documents and quoted artistic literature), **b) on line queries** to satisfy the more complex critical researches.

The software we are using at present, the CDS/ISIS, has been produced by the UNESCO and belongs to the family of the Information Retrieval Systems (IRS). Our experience of the last three years confirmed us that this is the kind of system necessary to process data deriving from historical and critic sources. Actually, the adoption of a Data Base Management System (DBMS) means, in most of the cases, the coding (or at least the homogenisation) of all the data. But the coding operation is very hard to achieve and, overall, means the drastic reduction of the semantic value of the historical and critic data (5).

By the ISIS system we have defined the data base ALIZERI and the structure of the records. In the text we have individuated seven main kinds of information corresponding to the seven main items of the projected indexes and to seven kinds of record. The data extracted from the text concerning every quotation of artist, work of art, place, name of person, institution, document and work of artistic literature, are stored in records which all have the same structure, as follows:

Scheda: kind of the record
Tipol.: typology of the work of art
R.g.a.: actual geographical reference
Onom. : onomastic
T.s.a.: subject of the work of art / argument of the quotation
Denom.: name of the quoted institution
Qual. : qualification of the quoted person
Data : date to which is referred the quotation
Topon.: name of the quoted place
Coll. : position of the quoted documents
O.s.c: context of the quotation
V.pp. : volume and page of the quotation

the data belonging to the different kinds of the record arc entered in the same structure filling different fields as shown in the next scheme. All the data arc controlled in syntax and lexicon, particular sub-fields arc reserved for historical language and a series of thesauri of terms and locutions have been defined to compile the fields and the sub-fields concerning the context of the quotation. In the upper side of the scheme arc indicated the different kinds of record, on the left side the fields of the record. The X sign individuates the fields which must be filled for every kind of record.

Operating in such a way, we are able to relate all the different kinds of record and to safeguard the context value of the quotation avoiding, in the mean time, the confusion of all the kinds of information. So, for instance, we are able to relate the artist records with the document records or to obtain the chronological combination of the sources used by Alizeri retrieving the document records together with the artistic literature records.

	ARTISTA	OGGETTO	LUOGO	NOME	ISTITUZIONE	DOCUMENTO	LETT.
Scheda:	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Tipol.:		X					
R.g.a :		X	X		X		
Onom. :	X	X		X		X	X
T.s.a.:		X				X	X
Denom.:					X		
Qual. :	X			X			
Data :	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Topon.:		X	X		X		
Coli. :						X	X
o.s.c.:	X		X	X	X	X	X
V.pp. :	X	X	X	X	X	X	X

At present, the ALlZERl data base contains about two hundred records; we estimate that at the end of the analysis work on the <u>Notizie</u> ... the total amount of the records will be thirtytwo thousand. On the present data base we tested the different kinds of queries having a satisfactory result; for what concerns the indexes, we are able to obtain a lot of different kinds of indexes ordinating the desired informations in up to four levels. Two examples are shown in the appendices 1 and 2.

The first example regards an artist index: here are supplied four kinds of information suggested in four different levels. In the first level we have the names of the artists in alphabetical order and, if necessary, the Alizeri form of the name in parenthesis; on the second level there arc the dates in chronological order for every artist; the third level is dedicated to what the artist did at that date (a work of art, a travel, ...) or to the context of the quotation; in the last level all the references of volume and page of the text of Alizcri are indicated.

An example of index of places is shown in appendix 2. Here, the data are organized by geographical, alphabetical and chronological order. On the first level there are the nation or the Italian region names in alphabetical order; on the second level there arc the Italian province names, in alphabetical order, belonging to the region indicated in the previous level; the third level is dedicated to the place names of the indicated province, in alphabetical order; the last level contains, in chronological order, the date and the context of the quotation followed by the references of volume and page.

Our analysis and text indexing of the Alizeri work started for seven main items and we consider satisfactory the results we have at present. Yet the structure of the data base is still open, so we will be able, if desired, to extend our work to some other items: for instance, we think that an analysis of the art history language used by Alizeri could be very interesting. The introduction of this new item will not submit particular problems for what concerns the structure of the data base.

Appendix 1

INDICE ALFABETICO DEGLI ARTISTI
(Nome/Data/0.s.c/V.pp.)

BARDO
  1302
    Collabora con Cimabue all'esecuzione del mosaico absidale del Duomo di Pisa
    I, 92

BENEDETTO DI ALBENGA
  Sd.
    Rapporti con Taddeo di Bartolo
    I, 183

BONTURO
  1302/05
    Collabora con Francesco da Pisa all'esecuzione del mosaico absidale del Duomo di Pisa
    1,92

CAPITINI GIUNTA, Giunta Pisano
  Sd. [XIV sec]
    Pittura ligure, XIV scc: Croci dipinte
    L91

CENNI DI PEPO, Cimabue
  Sd. [XIII sec]
    Pittura ligure, XIV sec: Madonne in Maestà
    1,91
  1302
    Soggetto non specificato (pittura (mosaico)), Pisa, Duomo, abside
    1, 92

CIOLO (A.: Maestro Ciolo)
  1302/05
    Mosaico absidale del Duomo di Pisa (attività del figlio Puccinello)
    1,92

DATO

   1302/05

      Collabora con Francesco da Pisa all'esecuzione del mosaico absi-
      dale del Duomo di Pisa
      I, 92

DUCCIO DI BUON1NSEGNA ? (A.: Quel Duccio fu verisimilmente il
celebre Duccio da Siena)

   1302/05

      Collabora con Francesco da Pisa all'esecuzione del mosaico absi-
      dale del Duomo di Pisa
      I, 92

Appendix 2

INDICE TOPOGRAFICO E ALFABETICO DEI LUOGHI
(Naz.-Reg./Prov./Loc.-Luogo/Data-O.s.c-V.pp.)

GRECIA

   Lesbo

      Lesbo (isola)

      Sd.: Pittura savonese, origini [I, 47]

LIGURIA

   Genova

      Genova, Cronici (chiesa): vedi San Colombano (chiesa)

      Genova, San Bartolomeo degli Armeni (chiesa) XIV sec, terzo
      quarto: Pittura ligure, origini: »Sacro Volto« [1, 7]

      Genova. San Bernardo [al Peralto ?] (chiesa)

      1303: Tura: Santa Maria Maddalena e storie della sua vita [I, 93]

      Genova, San Colombano (chiesa)

      Sd. [XIV sec, fine]: Taddeo di Bartolo, o. Pittore di

      San Luca: Santi Pietro, Giovanni Battista, Benedetto. Bernardo,
      Nicola, Caterina, Lorenzo, Stefano [1, 182]

      Genova, San Lorenzo (chiesa (duomo))

      1303/2/9: committenza del polittico di Santa Maria Maddalena di
      Tura [1, 94]

      Genova, Santa Maria delle Vigne (chiesa)

      XIV sec: [Anonimo]: Crocefisso [I, 91]

      Genova, Santi Cosma e Damiano (chiesa)

      XIV sec: [Anonimo]: Madonna [I, 91]

      Sd.: Taddeo di Bartolo (?): Madonna col Bambino [1, 181]

      Genova, Staglieno

      1360/9/9: casa posseduta da Giovanni Re [1, 139, 143]

Imperia

    Pigna, San Michele (chiesa (parrocchiale))

    Sd. [XIV sec.]: [Anonimo]: San Cristoforo [I, 94 n. 1]

    Pigna, San Tommaso (chiesa)

    XIV sec, inizio: [Anonimo]: Soggetto non specificato
    [1, 94-95]

Savona

    Bastia, Santo Stefano (cappella)

    1308: [Anonimo]: Martirio di Santo Stefano [I, 94]

    Savona, San Domenico (chiesa)

    Sd.: Pittura savonese, origini [I, 49]

Notes

1.1 use the terms artistic literature, primary, secondary and literary sources as defined in: Schlosser 1924, pp. 1-2 of the italian edition, 1977.

2. Census. Computerization 1984, pp. 223-224, with bibliographical references.

3. On F. Alizeri: Federico Alizeri 1985; and Federico Alizeri 1988.

4. In despite of the importance and of the great richness of this text, there have not been any other editions following the first one of the XlXth century. The use of this source has been really restricted till today.

5. For an interesting comparison of the two systems in art history data processing sec: Signore 1985, pp. 52-56.

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