Summary of the opening speech for the conference "L'archivio operativo"
Torviscosa, February, 1st 2007
by Massimo Negri

On January 1st, 2007 in Tarviscosa in the conference room of the CID-Museo Territoriale della Bassa Friulana, a study day on the theme "Operational Archives" was organized with the participation of many who are well-known in the field including:

Carlo Rastrelli
Manager of human resources, relations and communication of SNIA - Caffaro Chimica s.r.l, a chemicals group that currently owns the productive complex in Tarviscosa.
Carolina Lussana
Director of the Archives of the Dalmine Foundation
Giulio Mellinato
Trieste University " Archivio e Business - Archivio è Business"
Raffaella Canci
Stefano Perulli
Museum operators
Gianna Ganis
Curator of the Museo Cid di Torviscosa

The study day covered a wide range of themes including: the structure and the organization of business archives; techniques for the preservation of various materials, not only records; and a debate on the perspectives regarding use of the archival heritage. A visit to the museum (800 square meters that demonstrate several innovative ideas for communication techniques) proved extremely interesting for the participants, as well as a tour of the site that is perfectly preserved and visually striking because of the architectural quality of the residences and the impressiveness of the industrial estate. Torviscosa clearly exemplifies the concept of "corporate land"; that is, the total impact of an industrial enterprise on a specific territory.
Massimo Negri   gave the opening speech, which is published in this issue of Culture e Impresa.

1. Industrial archaeology in Italy
In 2007, the brief history of industrial archaeology in Italy celebrates two small anniversaries. 30 years have passed since the cornerstone event of Italian industrial archaeology: the International Conference in Milan held in Rotonda della Besana in 1977 for the exhibition "San Leucio: archeologia, storia, progetto" (San Leucio: Archaeology, History and Project)

organized by the then newly-founded Italian Society for Industrial Archaeology (SIAI) chaired by Eugenio Battisti. This year also marks the 10th anniversary of the Italian Association for the Industrial Archaeological Heritage, founded in 1997 and chaired by Giovanni Fontana. The latter association grew directly out of the SIAI and its new corporate name demonstrates the evolutionary shift in focus from the activity (archaeology) to the assets (heritage).

In Italy, the introduction of the term "industrial archaeology" into general usage (as evidenced by its appearance in a Donald Duck comic book) marked the completion of a cycle. The number of censuses of industrial monuments proliferated in many regions. a large photographic resource was constituted, and a multitude of television programs used industrial sites as ideal sets because of their expressive strength. Industrial archeology became the chosen backdrop to present fashion, cars and drinks. The industrial-archaeological setting in cinema appeared, in which industrial derelict lands were increasingly used as a backdrop to portray existential torment (for example, "Maledetti vi amerò" and "Nirvana" by Salvatores, just to mention two chronologically and thematically distant cases). Industrial archeology also heavily influenced the Arte Povera movement in the 1970s (above all, Kounellis) and several important artists at the end of the 1980s, who picked up the representation of historical, real or imagined industrial architectures, through hyper-realism (Arduino Cantafora), neo-De Chiricho surrealism (Paola Gandolfi) or romantic-symbolism (some paintings by Raffaele Bueno), These varied artistic expressions differ notably in their sense and intentions from the interpretations of the urban industrial setting produced by the futurists and the neo-realists.

The cultural milieu of the Italian industrial era was replaced by the reworking of physical and visual materials of a dismantled industry or, to put it more starkly, a dead industry. Therefore, the perception of the industrial-archaeological site as "monument" grew in the public consciousness of the end of the 20th century, especially in the sphere of aesthetics more than in the knowledge of its technological or social-historical values. This occurred in Italy, but also in the UK where the concept of industrial archaeology was introduced thanks to significant figures like Kenneth Hudson who wrote:

"(Industrial archaeology)...was the child of an exhausted Europe after the Second World War. A continent that had to recover from the destruction and chaos caused by what took place between 1939 and 1944; a continent that lost all illusions towards generals, heroes, political matters and empires, and that was trying to rediscover an earlier golden age, when Great Britain was laying the foundations of a new world.
Suddenly, old industrial buildings became beautiful..."

2. The historical heritage of industry

Among the developments of Italian industrial archaeology, there has been a noticeable effort to "break free" from the historical-artistic dimension (even if, curiously, industrial archaeology in the Italian academic system falls into the field of contemporary art) or a historical-architectural one; to shift towards a more comprehensive definition of "historical heritage of industry". Simply put, the concept of industrial monuments also covers the categories of paper records, or intangible assets, including know-how and – a new entry in a previously iron-clad field – digital heritage.

If the factory is the industrial architectural monument, the building typology created by industrial capitalism; then the business archives is its paper equivalent, or better yet (since paper records are now increasingly replaced by other supports like film, the floppy disk– itself already archaeological – and the CD) its *information* equivalent. In a sense, an archive is the

archaeological monument of that segment of knowledge society that deals with production and technology.

Even if industrial archaeology and business archives preservation have different starting points (outdoor-indoor), it is true that nowadays they are more closely defined as a single field of research and method of knowledge acquisition rather than a discipline structured according to a univocally defined statute. Simple but true, this profoundly and irrevocably multidisciplinary method asserted itself in the study of these "heritages", perhaps not always by choice, but by necessity.

3. The relationship between archives and museums

What has been said up to now can be considered as premises. Today, we are here at this conference to discuss two specific aspects: *technicalities* (preservation methods, filing, and so on) and *valorization.* Although they differ conceptually and methodologically, they cannot be separated if we wish to initiate action plans directed towards the future (therefore taking current transformations into account) and not only towards the simple preservation of memory.

Let us consider the relationship between the archives and the museum. In particular, I would like to focus on the relationship between the museum's use of physical space and communicative techniques, and how it differs from an archives' use of the same two features. These two worlds are different. For example, there has always been paper in museums, and fewer three-dimensional objects in archives (although business archives generally tend to have more). Since their origin, modern museums have used display shelves (see the link between the British Museum and the British Library), whereas archives tend to use fewer showcases or dioramas. Thus the use of physical space varies significantly between museums and archives.

The model of a contemporary museum is still developing (over 50% of European museums did not exist before World War II), and expanding towards what is being defined as "total museology". The museum now involves libraries and archives not only in its spatial organization for public access to records, but also in the conception of a layout where records, books and objects contribute to the definition of new museum models. The Chester Beatty Library in Dublin and the permanent exhibition "Netherlands Heritage" realized by the National Dutch Library and the National Archives in Den Haag, are two examples of this mingling demonstrates the use of "museum language" to present library and archival heritage. We have seen this phenomenon for centuries in preservation libraries, religious culture museums and so on, that adopts expositive and interpretative language with very restricted vocabulary (*showcase, shelf, and table*).

In contrast, the new model of museum seems to explode in a global approach to the expressive potential of the paper record, used as an object, adopting increasingly sophisticated interpretative techniques. From this point of view, a business archives (frequently the original or overlooked core of a real business museum) appears to be the ideal testing field, since it is directly linked to the place where its history actually happened. A business archives has an inherently eclectic quality, because it often contains both records and objects (even if it's not a collection strictly speaking). We will talk briefly about this, dwelling on the contribution that business museums are making to the renewal of the European museum scenario.

4. The near future

Finally, let's take a look at the near future. The scenario of the abandoned factory has almost completely disappeared from the collections of industrial archaeology, replaced by the factory that has been "erased" or totally re-directed for some other purpose. Similarly, the object of the archives, the paper record, has almost completely disappeared in favor of the bit, unit of measurement of the digital society and its intangible testimonies. Daily life demonstrates that the IT revolution caused an exponential "paper increase" in the world of work, but this seems to be a typical "hump" of an evolutionary curve that is moving towards the complete digitalization of all records, whether business or not. Setting aside the complex matter of digital memory preservation (hardware and software), important questions of access and organization of digital archival heritage in the future (whose "natural" location is almost certainly the Web) must still be considered. It is interesting to note that many processes are beginning to "merge" in archives and in museums, museums where virtual reality poses extremely risky challenges to concrete reality.

It is true that the museums of the latest generation offer a wide range of options for the creation of "worlds" where paper, three-dimensional objects and digital objects coexist and communicate with the users in ways that are still being defined. This last aspect allows us to identify the roots of yet another revolution in European museums (following the revolution of New Museology in the 70s as well as that created by the New Technologies). This revolution is a complete role reversal. Up to now, the collections defined the museums; now the museums (the virtual ones on the web included) increasingly define their collections. As a result, traditional categories and definitions are gradually becoming outdated—perhaps including those of "museums" and "archives".

Three useful books:
AA.VV., Alla scoperta delle carte, Quaderni della Fondazione Piaggio , II, 2004
M.Negri, Manuale di museologia per i musei aziendali, Rubbettino, 2004
M.Negri, The Museum Environment, Museu da Agua-APOREM 2006 (in press).