

The Cradle of Gold

The workshop and the goldsmith artisanship in Valenza, Italy.

“As an anthropological concept, ‘identity’ is simple but profound. At its most basic, identity represents the way an individual or group sees itself: that is, self-image and the features that characterise distinctiveness. But identity also includes the way a group or individual is defined by others- and how these definitions, self-definitions and counterdefinitions interact and affect other. [...] Identity is therefore concerned with the way people acquire a sense of community (albeit real or imagined), and the feeling of belonging upon which that community is based” (Shore, 1990, pp. 14-15)

Introduction

The international community has been often interested in the socioeconomic dimension of the Italian industrial districts. Even though these were deeply studied from an economic and sociological perspective; they were rarely the subject of an anthropological analysis. In fact the most of the previous studies looked deeply inside the districts’ economic trends but do not diffusely discuss the role of the individual inside these socio-economic networks, and especially the connection between the individual’s identity, his work and the district context (some examples are

Amin, 1989; Blim, 1990; Gereffi, 2006; Putnam, Leonardi, & Nannetti, 1993; Rabellotti, Carabelli, & Hirsh, 2009; Sabel, 2004; Straber, 2001; Yanagisako, 2002). In particular the connection between these districts and artisanship in Western modernity was overlooked.

In this paper, basing my exposition on the data gathered during my fieldwork in Valenza, I illustrate the connection between an industrial district and the theme of artisanship; in particular, following the results by Michael Herzfeld and Richard Sennett, I examine how the identitary concept of *artisanship* is defined by Valenza goldsmiths and related to the workshops.

Methodology

This paper presents some of the results of my fieldwork in Valenza begun in April 2009. This is part of an ongoing research for the Department of Anthropology of University of Durham (UK) aimed to study the effects of the actual global economic on the worker community employed in Valenza jewellery industry¹.

During my previous research in Valenza, which investigated different aspects of the city's political history (Fontefrancesco, 2005), youth culture (Fontefrancesco, 2004, 2009) and articulation of the welfare-state system (Fontefrancesco, 2006), I had the possibility to contact different exponents of

¹ The district, which includes the city of Valenza and the surrounding villages of Bassignana, Bozzole, Giarole, Lu, Mirabello Monferrato, Pecetto di Valenza, Pomaro, Rivarone, San Salvatore Monferrato (Benzi & Fugagnoli, 2004, p. 32), in 2001, had a total population of about 30,000 inhabitants (CEDRES, 2005), that is about its present demographic dimension: in this amount the employed in jewellery production were about 7000 (Benzi & Fugagnoli, 2004, p. 33). Then, almost 10000 the retired lived in the district (De Micheli, 2005; Fontefrancesco, 2006) and it means, applying the standard rate of seniority, which is the ratio between the population over 65 and the under 18, of the Province of Alessandria, which was about 2:1 in 2001 (De Micheli, 2005), that almost half of the entire working population were employed in jewellery firms, mainly set in Valenza (Benzi & Fugagnoli, 2004).

Valenza society. During my fieldwork, through my previous contacts, I easily found people that accepted to collaborate to my study allowing me to visit their workshops and to interview them without the reluctance that other scholars had to experience (Gaggio, 2007; Paradiso, 2008a). Furthermore, the observation of the activities inside workshops specialized in different productions allowed me to grasp the inner articulation of the production inside the jewellery cycle of production and specifically the single workshop, besides to have offered a visual and vivid reference of the various phases of the production (Tope, Chamberlain, Crowley, & Hodson, 2005).

Valenza, Italy

During XXth century Italy emerged as one of the world's most important exporters of luxury goods. In particular, in the last decades of the XXth century Italy was the first exporter of jewellery (Carcano, Catalani, & Capello, 2007; Colpani, 2007; Department of Trade and Industry, 2001; ODV, 2007, 2008a, 2008b, 2008c). At the base of the primacy there were three industrial districts specialized in the manufacture of precious artefacts: Arezzo in Tuscany, Vicenza in Venetia, and Valenza in Piedmont (ODV, 2008b; Servizio Studi e Ricerche, 2006). It is relevant to stress these centres have been specialized in distinct productions: since the XIXth century, Arezzo and Vicenza has developed in centres based on high-mechanized factories, whilst Valenza, being characterized by a less machinery-based production, has been the only centre where the key factor remained the skilfulness of the workers rather than the complexity of technology employed (Gaggio, 2007, pp. 128-203; Gaibisso, 1995).

The history of jewellery production in Valenza began in the XIXth century when the first goldsmith's studio was opened in 1840 (Gaggio, 2007, p. 40; Libero Lenti & Pugnetti, 1974). From this early experience, within thirty years 5 firms were active in Valenza employing about 110 workers. In 1889 their number rose to 25 with 222 workers. In 1911, on the eve of the Libyan War,

the jewellery firms numbered 43 and employed 613 workers in a city of about 10,000 inhabitants (Gaggio, 2007, pp. 40-41). The XXth century saw a constant growth of this sector that culminated in 2001 with a total of 1300 firms open in the district of Valenza, and about 7000 workers employed in the trade (Paradiso, 2008b). Since the initial period, the panorama of Valenza firms has been distinguished by the massive presence of medium or small enterprises, most of which employed less than 10 employees, and few larger enterprises with more than 30 employed (Benzi & Fugagnoli, 2004, p. 33; Gaggio, 2007, pp. 59, 88)



Photo 1: Gemme s.n.c.

The majority of Valenza firms is composed by small workshops that scarcely employs complex machinery (Benzi & Fugagnoli, 2004; Paradiso, 2008a). An example is (Photo 1) that portrays a

detail of Gemme s.n.c., a workshop specialized in the cutting of precious stones: in the room just some desks, lamps, and some grinders.

Besides the exceptionally high number of companies that work in Valenza, only a minority part of them directly markets the production. As Gery Gereffi and Dario Gaggio recently explained (Gaggio, 2007; Gereffi, 2007) the access to the market is limited to the larger firms, such as Pasquale Bruni, Damiani or Crova-Bulgari, and few others whilst the majority of the enterprises bases the business on agreements of outsourcing with the larger companies. Consequently, Valenza's district appears as a complex network of enterprises where every firm collaborates with many others to complete its production. This massive networking, as I will show in the next paragraphs, is strictly bond to Valenza idea of artisanship, because, parcelling the cycle of production among various firms permitted to maintain the small scale of the workshops, their scarce mechanization, and the specialization of the workers, and, moreover, constituted the base of the creation of a collective creative community.

Elements of Artisanship

The brief presentation of Valenza district makes emerge some of the elements that have a very important role in the self-definition as artisans by Valenza goldsmiths and link Valenza to the current academic debate on artisanship: The centrality of the handcrafting; the non-employment of advanced technology in the production; the conspicuous presence of small scale production plants.

In the Social Sciences a new attention to the theme of *artisanship* in the contemporary time has been brought by the publication of *The Craftsman* by Richard Sennett (Sennett, 2008). In this book, taking as starting point the Indoeuropean functional triad theorized by Georges Dumézil (Dumézil, 1940), the American philosopher moves to a reflection on the role of human "skill of making

things” inside the present Western culture (Sennett, 2008, p. 8). Sennett considers the human being as *Homo Faber* [tr. Man Creator] and uses this Latin locution reviewing the acceptance that Anna Arendt gives in her *The Human Condition* (Arendt, 1958): While in Arendt this expression was tinged with pessimism because the human productive ability was considered (quasi) inevitably vowed to Man’s auto-destruction, in Sennett all the negativity is defused through a new conception of the human creativity that is symbolized by *Craftsman’s* producing. In Sennett the *Craftsman*, rather than be considered as a part of Marx’s antithesis “Artisanal manufacture”–“Industrial production” (K. Marx, 1867=1994; K. Marx & Engels, 1848=1971), embodies who, through his work, aims to the excellence of the production and the constant self-improvement of the skills employed. In fact Sennett explains: “*All craftsmanship is quality-driven work; Plato formulated this aim as the arête, the standard of excellence, implicit in any act: the aspiration for quality will drive a craftsman to improve, to get better rather to get by*” (Sennett, 2008, p. 23): the defining criteria for this categorization are not anymore the typology of the means of production, and the characteristics of production but just the presence of this motivation. Consequentially, for Sennett, potters, doctors or computer developers can be all considered *Craftsmen* when they work aiming to this continuing improvement of their skills.

Another important piece of the debate is *The body impolitic* by Micheal Herzfeld (Herzfeld, 2004). In this book, he demonstrated that *to be an artisan* is a complex social construction that cannot be just summarized *ex post* for the presence (or the absence) of a “*connection between hand and head*” (Sennett, 2008, p. 9) in the worker’s performance of his job. Essentially, Herzfeld in his study of the artisans of Rethemnos, Greece, showed that a worker, whatever his job is, can be considered as a member of the community of the artisans, neither for quality of his means of production, nor for his propensity toward his job, but because he had embarked (maybe even involuntarily) a long apprenticeship that made him have learned some particular skills, as well as have assumed the model shared specifically by all the artisans of the city as his model of life and ethics.

Thus Herzfeld presents *artisanship* as a social construction whilst Sennett describes it as a methodology of work that the individual can apply in his profession. Even though these treatments are apparently distant, the case of Valenza represents a *trait d'union* between them.

The language context

With all in mind, in the next paragraphs I am going to present the use of *artigiano* by the Valenza goldsmiths. However as preliminary step, I consider important to present the linguistic context and the wider current use of this word in Italian.

Artigiano appears in Italian at least in XIV century. Since the early occurrences, it has referred to a person who practices a manual work (Crusca, 1612).

In seven centuries, the meaning of the word was changed, even though not completely distorted, by the effects of the industrialization. Thus, its current acceptance denotes:

Chi, in proprio, con l'aiuto di familiari o di pochi dipendenti, produce oggetti d'uso o di ornamento la cui realizzazione richieda una particolare capacità tecnica o un certo gusto artistico. (Garzanti Linguistica, 2004)

[Who the model shared specifically by all the artisans of the city, produces everyday use or decorative objects, which manufacture requires a particular skill or a certain artistic taste, x]

This use resembles the definition theorized by Karl Marx and Fredrich Engels that emblemized the artisanship as a model of production whose fulcrum was the human factor rather than the machines. (Gramsci, Gerratana, & Istituto, 1975; C. Marx & Cafiero, 1879; K. Marx, 1867=1994; K. Marx & Engels, 1848=1971, pp. 35-48). At the same time, this definition is directly connected with the legal meaning of *artigiano* in Italian Law.

Since in the Constitution (Repubblica Italiana, 1946 art. 45), *artigiano* is used as synonym of small producer. In particular, Legge n. 443/85 defines all the activity specialized in the manufacture of objects or offer of services -without any regard to the level of mechanization of the production-, with less than 15 employees, and whose owner is directly involved in the production as *artisan firms* (Repubblica Italiana, 1985). Thus, all the firms that respect these parameters can be enrolled in the national *Elenco Aziende Artigiane* [tr. list of artisan firms] and become officially *aziende artigiane* [tr. artisan firms], enjoying special tax reliefs and a specific labour legislation.

Manualità and artisanship

Corresponding to the parameters imposed by the legislation, nowadays the most of Valenza firms are officially *aziende artigiane*. Nevertheless, the use of *artigiano* by the goldsmiths does not refer only to the legal standards: it denotes the quality of their job.

“ Ho fatto l’orafo.[...]No, non mi sono mai messo in proprio,ho lavorato per quarant’anni in fabbrica come modellista con decine di altri dipendenti. [...]Ho fatto pezzi che non si sarebbero potuti fare solo con le macchine: serviva abilità e talento [...]. Si, mi considero un artigiano: per il mio lavoro serviva manualità e fantasia [...]. L’abilità: questo è quello che ci differenzia dalle fabbriche e dagli operai di Arezzo e Vicenza.”(Balzana, 2009)²

² Franco Balzana, 72, retired in 2007. He was a goldsmith and a modeller. He began his apprenticeship in a small workshop of Alessandria, where he learned the elements of the goldsmith techniques, and afterwards he moved to Valenza where he was employed in a large firm with more than 30 employees. Italian Law would classify a person employed in such condition as an *operaio* [tr. factory worker] rather than an *artigiano*. Nevertheless Balzana stresses his artisan identity and proves his status through the very basis of his occupation: the *manualità* and the creativity required.

[I was a goldsmith [...]. No, I have never set up on my own; I have worked as a modeller (employed) in firms for forty years with dozens of other employees [...]. I made pieces that could have been made only with the machinery: It needed craftiness and talent. Yes, I consider myself an artisan: for my job *manualità* and creativeness were required [...]. The craftiness: this is what distinguishes us from the factories and the factory-workers of Arezzo and Vicenza.]

This quote exemplifies the common criterion of distinction between *operaio* and *artigiano* used by Valenza goldsmiths: whilst *operaio* is considered a sort of appendage of the machinery that contribute to the production only setting the engine going, *artigiano* is the skilful forger that use just few tools to mould the precious material to create the piece of jewellery.



Photo 2 Goldsmith at work

This contraposition can be considered a legacy of the particular history of Valenza district: in the XXth century Arezzo and Vicenza had been poles of an industrialized form of jewellery production where the technology was at the base of their success and, in these cities, the jewellery worker has been a specialized metalworker able to create, modify and use jewellery making machines inside a highly technological factory where the jewellery were mass produced and assembled (Gaggio, 2007, pp. 128-153, 154-203, 204-244); by contrast, in Valenza handcrafted production has prevailed and the most of the manufacturing is still manual because the technology is limited to the utilization of some simple tools, like the brushes for polishing the setting, or the drills for mounting of the stones. As a consequence of this different industrial evolution, whilst in Arezzo and Vicenza the goldsmiths consider themselves as *meccanici* [tr. specialized mechanics], in Valenza they esteem themselves as *artigiani*, someone who is able to create the complete piece of jewellery from the raw material alone through the work of his hands and his creative skills (Gaggio, 2007, pp. 204-244). This speciality is embodied by a recurrent sentence:

“A Valenza erano sufficienti solo un chilo d’oro e qualche lima.”(Barbero, 2008)

[In Valenza it was just necessary a kilo of gold and few files]

In other words, Valenza artisans considered that in Valenza the ability of the local goldsmiths made only few and easily accessible things³ be needed to create better pieces of jewellery than what produced in other cities with expensive devices and large investments.

Moreover, in this sentence the artisans’ disesteem toward the technology is not veiled. This negative propensity is often motivated for the quality of the jewellery made through the industrial, mechanical production that has appeared poorer compared with the Valenza’s crafted, because, at least until the late ‘90s, the restricted possibilities offered by the robots resulted in products of a

³ Even the same gold was available without difficulty to the local artisan through the system of loan used by the local metal banks and banks(Gaggio, 2007).

lower quality and creativeness than the handcrafted production (Garofoli, 2004; Lia Lenti, 1994; Lia Lenti & Bemporad, 1996, 1999; Libero Lenti & Pugnetti, 1974; Silvestrini, 1989).

Since the late '90s with the advent of the CAD [Computer-Aided Design] and the improvement of other informatics techniques, such as the CAD/CAM [Computer Aided Design and Computer-Aided Manufacturing], the gap between human and machine has been reducing and this has not been a welcome transformation by many Valenza goldsmiths: *"I pezzi fatti a computer sono freddi"* [tr. The computer made pieces are "cold"], *"Stiamo perdendo le nostre tradizioni"* [tr. We are losing our tradition], *"Le macchine riducono il valore del nostro lavoro"* [tr. The machines are reducing the value of our work]. These recurrent statements reflect, rather than just an aesthetical appreciation, a concern for the rapid development of a potential "contender" that risks reducing the market shares of Valenza *artigiani*. It is not the first time, the goldsmith community faces the effect of a technological evolution: for example, it happened in the early '50s when the new equipments for the centrifugal casting⁴ were commercialized making the old technique *a cire perdue*⁵ no more competitive (Gaggio, 2007; Prandi, 2009).

The advent of new computer technologies, which is creating new economic opportunities⁶, is also leading to a profound redefinition of the artisan culture:

⁴ (Newman, 1981, p. 61)

⁵ (Newman, 1981, p. 70)

⁶ Thus Gino Prandi, a retired goldsmith that worked, from 1943 to 1993, as artisan and, from 1993 to 2003, as teacher of goldsmith's art at Valenza goldsmith professional school "Vincenzo Melchiorre", commented the introduction of the new casting technique in Valenza: *"Fu uno shock e forse è vero, lavoravamo meglio prima. Ma non è da dimenticare che la microfusione ci ha permesso di produrre da 1 a 100 pezzi e rispondere ad un pubblico più ampio, arricchendo questa città."* (Prandi, 2009) [tr It was a shock and, maybe, it is true, we worked better before. However we must not forget that the centrifugal casting allowed us to pass from 1 to 100 pieces produced and to answer to a larger public, making the city rich.]

“Per decenni l’esser artigiani è stato per gli orafi valenzani motivo di vanto. L’abilità manuale era considerata ragione di sicuro successo contro i prodotti fatti a macchina degli altri produttori. [...] La tecnologia è andata avanti, il mondo è cambiato: è ora che vada avanti.”(Ponticello, 2009)⁷

[For decades to be artisan has been source of pride for Valenza goldsmiths. The handicraft was considered the reason of sure success against the machine-crafted production by the other producers. [...] the technology has moved on, the world has changed: it’s time Valenza goes on]

This technological transformation is obliging the artisans to adopt new techniques of production but also to create continuity between the traditions and the future with transmission of the old methods to the new generations to preserve their artisan and local identity:

“ Lo sbalzo è una delle tecniche più antiche dell’oreficeria. Era l’arte di modellare la lastra di metallo. La microfusione l’ha resa desueta. È, però, importante continuarla a insegnare e che non si dimentichi perché è parte del nostro lavoro, della nostra identità.” (Gubiani, 2009)⁸

[The *repoussé*⁹ is one of the most ancient techniques of goldsmith’s art. It was the craft of modelling the metal plate. The centrifugal casting make it obsolete. However it is important to keep teaching and don’t forget it because it is part of our job, our identity]

⁷ Luciano Ponticello, 37, is one of the owners of Ponticello Antonio s.r.l (Ponticello Antonio s.r.l., 2009), a jeweller house created in the ‘70s by Luciano’s father, Antonio, and ceded to his three sons in the ‘90s. Nowadays Ponticello Antonio s.r.l. is a growing firm that based his business mainly on the international export and whose collections are the results of a continuing research of new material and styles and techniques of production that combines Valenza traditional crafts with the new technologies, such as, for example the computer design.

⁸ Aldo Gubiani, 50, is a gem-cutter and teacher of repoussé at “Vincenzo Melchiorre” school (Scuola Orafa "Vincenzo Melchiorre", 2009).

⁹ (Newman, 1981, p. 255)



Photo 3 Goldsmith's bench

Workshops: A creative network

Thus, Valenza idea of artisanship is anchored to the creativity and the manual ability that have characterized the local production. Even though this definition seems to focus only on the worker, it must not be ignored the role that workshops have in preserving and corroborating an artisan ideology. In fact, first of all, a continuous stimulus for the creativity is granted by the presence in the same city of hundreds of small workshops bond together.

Valenza goldsmith district has been composed by more than one thousand enterprises (Benzi & Fugagnoli, 2004) distributed in all the territory of the city. Even though in the late '80 was instituted an industrial area outside the city dedicated to the artisan activities, the *Coinor.*, the most of the *fabbriche* remained set inside the city (Bovero, 1992): in all the city many ground floors or apartments in residential buildings are used as workshops and everywhere in the city one can see *fabbriche* open. Thus the illusion that all the city be a factory diverges just a little from the reality.

“Valenza è stata una grande fabbrica, dove la gente si alzava alla mattina, andava nella propria fabbrica e lì lavorava fino a sera, poi usciva dalla fabbrica e tornava a casa.” (Bosco, 2009)¹⁰

[Valenza has been a great factory where the people get up in the morning and went to their *fabbrica*¹¹ and there they work until the night, then they go out from the *fabbrica* and come back at home.]

Besides the resounding appellative of *fabbriche*, which may translate the English “factory”¹², the milieu of Valenza is composed mostly by small workshops:

¹⁰ Fabio Bosco, 40, grew up in Valenza and worked in his family’s firm Giovanni Bosco s.r.l. as agent. In the early 2000 he left this occupation and started his activity with Tramfabrik company (Traumfabrik, 2009). He published in 2004 *Oro Scuro* a collection of short novel that narrate element of Valenza goldsmith culture (Bosco, 2004).

¹¹ I prefer to leave it in Italian because as it is explained in this paragraph for its peculiar use in Valenza.

¹²Singular version: *fabbrica* [tr. factory]; plural version *fabbriche* [tr. factories]

“Noi parliamo di fabbriche, ma le nostre “fabbriche” son per lo più laboratori grandi come una stanza con due banchetti e pochi macchinari, dove artigiani lavorano da mattina a sera” (Prandi, 2009)

[We speak of *fabbriche*, but for the most part our “factories” are workshop as large as a room with some jeweller’s benches and few machines where artisans work from the dawn to the night].

Such a massive presence of firms in one only small city made the Valenza a tangled web where information, ideas, experiences are diffused inside through channels that are mostly based on personal relation, conviviality, and fortuity. An example is what happens in a cafeteria at 7.30 am, thirty minutes before the normal beginning of working hours. Dozens of workers meet at the bar and, waiting their cappuccinos and brioches, chat of work, soccer, new models of cars and jewellery, and about what it is happening in their firms shifting from a topic to another without great attention on whether the other interlocutor be employed in the same firm: besides the so much professed privacy of the firms, also in such a banal situation the information are spread, the curiosity and the creativity stimulated.

Thus the entire Valenza district may be considered a diffused, creative community where every artisan contributes with his work to implement the collective creativity, even involuntarily through the simple process of invention-copy- invention. Furthermore, besides the coping, the active interaction among artisans could stimulate discussion, experimentation and creation of new tools or techniques¹³.

¹³ An example of the fruitfulness of such interaction is Smart 3d (Smart3d, 2006). This software house specialized in jewellery cad applications, distributes the software that its owner Andrea Dotta developed starting from the discussion had with his friend Andrea Giè, a cad modeller (Dotta & Giè, 2009)

“La forza di Valenza è sempre stata il tessuto di centinaia di piccole fabbriche, ognuna con la sua produzione, ognuna capace di inventare qualche prodotto ogni mese. Quante ditte ci saranno a Valenza... più di mille?... quale grande azienda può sperimentare ogni mese mille pezzi al mese? Le idee passano da una persona all'altra. Non importa se uno parli o tenga un segreto, la nuova idea si diffonderà in città.” (Prandi, 2009)

[Valenza's strength has always been his milieu of hundreds of small firms, everyone with his production, everyone able to invent some new product every month. How many firms are there in Valenza... more than a thousand?... which big company could experiment one thousand pieces in a month? The idea spread from a person to the other. It does not really matter if one speaks or keeps the secret, the new idea will spread in the city.]

In this situation, the same outsourcing¹⁴ has become an important piece of the creative process. This common practice between big and small companies, in fact, is not only an economic, momentary relation but, in the most of the cases, it is a stable alliance between enterprises where the small producer is often spurred by the bigger house to invent and propose new pieces to insert in the their collections in exchange of contracts of exclusive production: thus, in Valenza outsourcing has been the driving force that has allowed the small enterprises to boost their profit increasing rather stopping their creative experimentation.

Workshop: The school of crafts.

Thus, if *artigianalità* is defined by the goldsmiths through the creativity applied to the production, we have seen how the presence of a network of interacting *fabbriche* has contributed to generate a constant flow of new ideas.

The single workshop is also colligated to *manualità*, the other distinctive trait of goldsmiths' idea of artisanship. In fact, also in Valenza, as Sennett has underlined (Sennett, 2008, pp. 53-80), this is the

¹⁴ “The process of subcontracting a process, such as product design or manufacturing, to a third-party company.” In (VentureOutsource, 2009)

place of development of the goldsmith's crafts and transmission of knowledge from generation to generation.

In fact, in the education of the new goldsmiths, even after five years of classes in one of the two schools that offers courses concerning the goldsmith's arts¹⁵, the most important moment is when the young student begins to labour inside a workshop because only in this way he has the possibility to directly learn advanced techniques and tricks of the trade from experienced artisan, as the same teachers of these institutions underline:

“A Scuola insegnamo le tecniche base, ma è durante lo stage in fabbrica, quando possono vedere come va veramente il lavoro, che i ragazzi iniziano ad apprendere”(Prandi, 2009)

[At school we teach the fundamental techniques, but during internship in a *fabbrica*, when they can see how the work goes really, the students start to learn]

At the end of the day, the youngsters learn the profession in the workshop thanks the teaching of an older goldsmith. Thus the relationship apprentice-master is still essential for the education of the new artisan but, whilst Herzfeld has describes the apprenticeship in Rethemnos as a training based on the silence of the master that obliges the apprentice to “steal” the crafts just watching (Herzfeld, 2004, pp. 101-102), in Valenza the master requests not only to watch carefully, but also to listen and do to the apprentices:

“Si parla, si spiega, si fa vedere e si richiede che gli apprendisti facciano” (Balzana, 2009)

[One speaks, explains, shows and it is required that the apprentices do]

¹⁵ The professional school “Vincenzo Melchiorre” and the high-school “Benvenuto Cellini” (Istituto Benvenuto Cellini, 2008; Scuola Orafa "Vincenzo Melchiorre", 2009)

Thus in Valenza the relation master-apprentice is distinguished by an intense didactical tension rather than by masculinity. As a result, the workshop becomes not only a place of production but the most important, even though informal, school, where in front of his bench the young works and researches, improving his *manualità* in the working hours and often also after.

The importance of this initial training, which can last for some years, is stressed by all the artisan I met: many of them tell of the initial eagerness to learn, or that sometimes they decided to leave a firm not for an economic reason but just because they had apprehended nothing new for a while, or about the *affari* [tr big deal] they closed accepting to work for free some extra-hours when some old goldsmith offered an extra-lesson or the owner of the workshop permitted them to freely use the facilities just for his experimentation (Balzana, 2009; Barbero, 2008; Como, 2009; Gubiani, 2009; Ponticello, 2009; Prandi, 2009).

Conclusion

One century and half after Marx, whilst Herzfeld demonstrated that artisanship has still a relevant importance for local communities in the definition of their identity, Sennett have shown that it can be a powerful element to interpret the role of the work in the Modernity. Following the results of these scholars, I studied the case of goldsmith community of Valenza and their definition of artisanship.

These craftsmen consider the *artigianalità* to be the most important attribute to define their identity and their production. However they use such terminology not referring to the classic Marx's definition or to other current Italian definition, but linking it to two qualitative aspects of their work: the creativity and the *manualità*, a distinctive combination that echoes Sennett.

Even though this definition of *artigianalità* seems to refer only to qualities of individual work, in this paper I showed that it is strictly connected with the economic context of the city, and in

particular with the role that the workshops has in the district and for the life of the individual artisans. In fact, whilst the collaboration among workshops represent a driving force for the collective creativity, for every artisan the workshop is fundamental place where they can acquire, experiment, and improve their skills, and building their *manualità*.

Concluding, the case of Valenza demonstrates that artisanship is not a private *Weltanschauung* but a public, collective phenomenon that involves and characterizes the entire production context, and in particular the role of the workshops. Thus, we can see a *trait d'union* between the philosophical construction by Sennett and the research by Herzfeld: in fact, whilst *artisanship* is for any artisan represents the model of production that he considers representative of his professional identity, this model of production is corroborated by the same social and economical context where the artisan works, and is transmitted from a generation to the other inside the workplace, day after day, learning the skills necessary for the job

Finally, from an economic prospective, being artisanship so linked to the place where the production is carried out, it becomes an additional concept that can be used to promote that area and all the goods there manufactured: it could be spent as an additional cultural value for existing commodity strategies of *Appellation d'origine controlee* or as a base for the institution of a new trademark, whilst the personal stories of local artisans and workshops could be used to substantiate all the advertising campaigns concerning that territory and that artisan production.

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