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Objects, Memories and Nostalgia*

Visual Ethnography

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Abstract
This article is a first step in the re-elaboration of part of the documentary material collected during our ethnographic research at Iesa, a Tuscan village in the Municipality of Monticiano (Siena), in the period 2012-2018.
In visiting the houses of some of the people of Iesa to whom we spoke, we were prompted to reflect on the way they live, a manner shaped by a continuum between the domestic, social and natural environments. We followed these people inside and outside their houses, collecting their memories and recording their stories of the changes (historical, cultural and economic) that have affected the village in recent decades. Focusing on hunting trophies as prisms for the production and reproduction of locality, we were concerned with how their relationship to their living space gives rise to a nostalgia effect embedded in emotions, practices and objects.

Keywords:
hunting trophy, nostalgia, agency, photography, home cultures

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* The research was conducted in collaboration, the images belong to a shared archive and the text and images were decided together. The authors therefore opt for joint attribution of the photographs and the text.

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Introduction

This article is a first step in the re-elaboration of part of the documentary material collected during ethnographic research at Iesa, a Tuscan village in the Municipality of Monticiano, about 35 km from Siena. The research was conducted in the period 2012-2018 in the framework of a series of projects funded by the Tuscan Regional Government, the Fondazione Musei Senesi and the Department of Social, Political and Cognitive Sciences, University of Siena.

The toponym Iesa indicates six groups of rural houses (Quarciglioni, Lama, Solaia, Cerbaia, Contra and Palazzo) situated in an area measuring several square kilometres and surrounded by a vast area of thickly forested land between the nature reserves of the valleys of the Farma and lower Merse rivers. The groups of houses, documented since the Medieval period (Ascheri, Borracelli 1997), are still relatively autonomous today. In the past, a system based on family ownership prevailed, the economy of which depended mainly on the forest, a vital source of sustenance. In the forest, animals were hunted, mushrooms were collected and drying houses were built to dry chestnuts, which were then round to obtain a sweet flour. Animals were grazed in the forest; families also raised rabbits, chickens and at least one pig; many had a small flock of sheep, a donkey, a pair of oxen and a cart. Small clearings freed land for the cultivation of vegetables, grain and olives, the yields of which often did not meet family needs. Most small owners therefore added to the proceeds of self-production by working for agroforestry holdings, harvesting cork, cutting wood, digging up briarwood for pipes or producing charcoal for energy in the forests of the Maremma or Corsica. Local people tell that in the 1930s, the closest bus stop for the only public transport to Siena (two buses per day) was 5 km from the village of Lama, which at the time featured a tobacco shop, a grocer and the workshops of a carpenter, two blacksmiths and two shoemakers.

Until two generations ago, people were born and died in Iesa, often without ever leaving the area. The only prospects for young people were to work in the forest or fields, marry and raise a family. The geographic marginality of the area and the hard existence are recalled today by many of the old people who experienced those conditions. This explains why many young people preferred emigration to a life of toil and straitened circumstances. Indeed, afater the end of WW2, many left here to break free from their families and pursue their ambitions elsewhere, reaching nearby Siena or the factories of northern Italy. For several decades, the village became depopulated like other small Tuscan municipalities in mountain and rural areas: the population declined continuously, those who remained grew old and cultivated areas gradually reverted to forest and scrub. Then in the seventies and eighties, some of those who had kept a house there, retired to Iesa. When they died, many houses remained closed or abandoned, others were occupied by their children, transformed into second houses or sold to newcomers. This was helped by construction of a better road between Siena and Grosseto, which began in the 1950s. Today this road offers a convenient link between the two cities and the larger towns in the area.

Today the population of Iesa is about 250 and includes 18 different nationalities. In recent decades, persons from Albania, Bulgaria, Brazil, Germany, England, Kosovo, Macedonia, Morocco, Moldova, Poland, Romania, Russia, Serbia, United States, Switzerland, Thailand and Ukraine have joined the Italians. The Italians include persons from Friuli, Sardinia, Calabria, Apulia, Veneto and Latium, as well as locals. People come to Iesa from every part of the world for many different reasons: to cut forest, which is still a major element of the local economy, to care for the elderly in their homes, to find silence, to foster family roots, because the houses are economical or to get away from the world. Today like yesterday, a sense of domesticity can be found here in the quality of social relations, in the daily routine and in a special relationship with the natural environment.

As anthropologists, we were interested in relationships with the environment, in the imaginary of rural life and in the production of locality (Appadurai 1996, 2013) in domestic spaces.

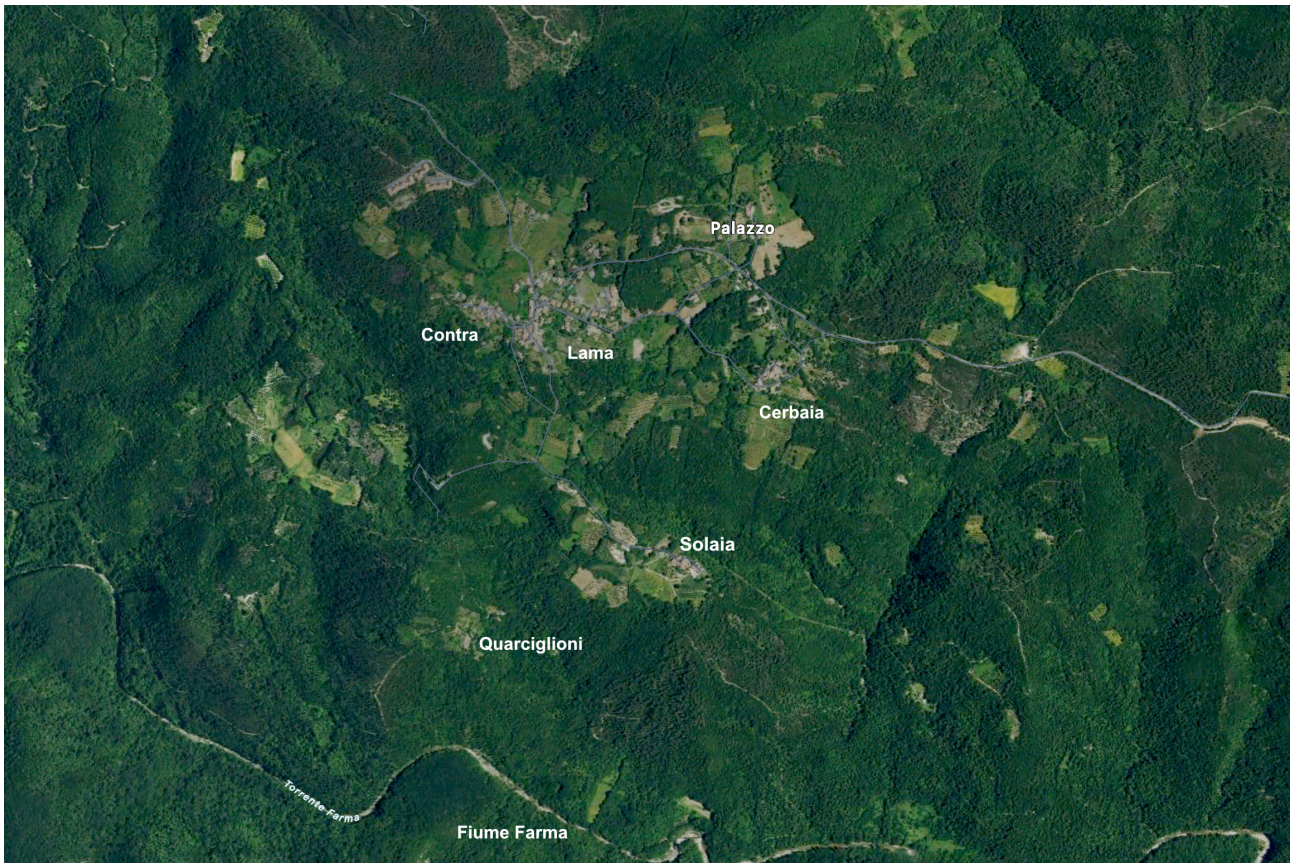

Figure 1 The Merse valley study area

Figure 2 Cerbaia (photograph by the authors)

Figure 3 Quarciglioni (photograph by the authors)

Figure 4 Lama (photograph by the authors)

Figure 5 Palazzo (photograph by the authors)

Figure 6 Quarciglioni in an old photograph (photograph by the authors)

Methodology

As observed by Hockings (2014), visual anthropology is a zone of disciplinary interpenetration, which is also evident in the methodology. It is not solely a question of using videos and photos in one's ethnographic research, but also of transforming them into an effective theoretical-methodological tool.

During our research, photography and videos had a triple function: documentary, strategic and reflective. Documentation is the most frequent use made of photos and videos. Ethnographers have recorded what they saw and then used the images to explain their research since the dawn of their discipline (Pennacini 2005; Banks, Ruby 2011). This was also true for us, at least at the start of the research, since one of the first objectives of our study was to make a video on the daily life of Iesa.

The images also had a remarkable strategic function. We have always been fascinated by Bourdieu's relationship with photography. Bourdieu's theoretical analysis of photography (Bourdieu 1998) is usually used more – also critically (Pinney 1997) – than his relationship with photography (Bourdieu 2014). In our case, the use of photography and videos has often had the methodological function attributed to it by Bourdieu. It was not solely a question of documentation: photography was a way of forging a relationship with others. As observed by Behar (1996), methods are a defence system. For us, photography has also been a way to defend ourselves from a direct relation with the subject in a first field approach; a way to have something to say and share. As Bourdieu explained, in Algeria, photography helped him simply because the persons expected him to give them a copy of the photos he took. Surprisingly, it was relatively easy to go into the houses of people we did not know with our cameras, tripods, recorders and microphones.

Figure 7 A moment of the fieldwork (photograph by Valentina Lusini)

Finally, photography and videos also had cognitive and reflective functions. As Hendrickson (2008) used drawings, photographs were our visual fieldnotes, our mnemonic tool that helped us evoke and remember situations. It was through repeatedly observing our photographs that we discovered the house as a place of anthropological interest and the different interior styles as something to reflect on. As pointed out by Collier and Collier (1986), the camera is a basic tool because we are often distracted observers, or because only by going back over the field data (photos are this too) that we notice details

that previously escaped us. The "optical unconscious" that Benjamin (2014) attributes to photography seemed to be amplified with the advent of digital photography, broadening our knowledge of the ethnographic field and of the world (Smith, Sliwinksi 2017). By examining photos on the computer screen, enlarging them and penetrating light and shade, we were able to note details that had escaped us and that we had photographed unawares or hurriedly. The optical unconscious also favoured emergence of an "anthropological unconscious" (Mascia-Lees 1994): we may have seen something in the field, we thought we had understood something, but only later, going over the photos and videos, we were able to better capture our initial intuitions. These "inadvertent images" (Geimer 2018) may have been taken hurriedly, out of focus or with low resolution, or they may have been fragments of videos shot in dark rooms. Intentional photographs, namely those intended for publication, were few. However, all these images were fundamental for this ethnographic reflection.

Rural houses in the Merse valley

January 2015. As we walk the streets of Iesa, a small village in the heart of southern Tuscany. On our way to interview a resident, we are struck by the many abandoned houses with broken windows and crumbling rendering near the main square.

We stop to photograph an open window festooned with spiderwebs that gives into the interior of a house that has been abandoned for some time. In the past, the houses of the Merse valley were modest, as in most rural towns of the Tuscany, and were similar in structure. On the ground floor of many houses there was the stable. Almost everyone in the village had a donkey, a useful animal for transport and work. Forest work involved the use of draught animals to transport wood or charcoal along mule tracks that could not be negotiated by wheeled vehicles, to where it could be loaded on a truck. Other barnyard animals could also be found in the stable. Also on the ground floor there was the cellar where provisions were stored.

Figure 8 Abandoned house at the centre of Lama (photograph by the authors)

As explained by local historians (Calossi 1988, 1992; Ascheri, Borracelli 1997), the house consisted of very few rooms, and these were used for sleeping. There was no running water, so this had to be brought daily from the fountain.

Figure 9 Abandoned house at the centre of Palazzo (photograph by the authors)

As in most of peasant Europe (Bonnin, Perrot 1989; Roche 1997), the most important room of the house was the kitchen. It was also the biggest room, where the usually numerous family met to eat and be together. Guests were received in the kitchen and warmed themselves by the fire in winter.

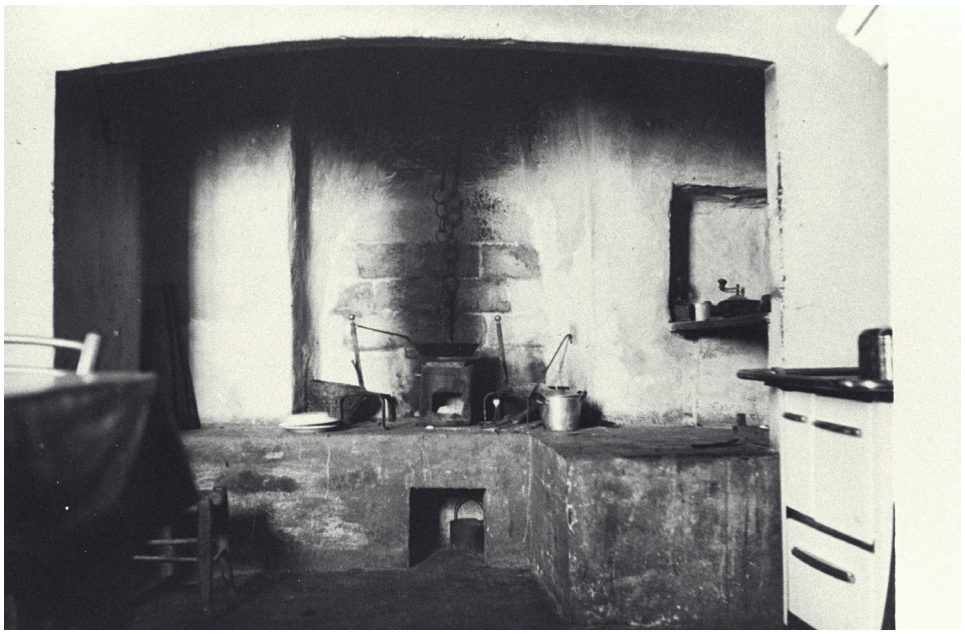

Figure 10 An ancient fireplace (photo courtesy of Sandra Becucci)

The centre of the kitchen was the fireplace, which had special "stoves" (holes where coals could be placed for cooking). The fireplace generally occupied a whole wall, being large enough for people to sit around the fire and keep each other company under its funnel. The fire was lit every day of the year and burned for most of the day. Above the fireplace there was usually a mantlepiece on which to place things of daily use: salt, sugar, matches, coffee surrogate. A copper hung in the fireplace: according to Camporesi (1989), this was a fundamental object of the

Figure 11 Kitchen of a rural house in the village of Quarciglioni today (photograph by the authors)

Italian peasant world. Today it has practically disappeared; some examples remain in the houses of ex-share farmers, who conserve traces of the past (Mugnaini 2016). On another wall there was the draining cabinet, though in many kitchens there was not even a sink, so the dishes were washed in a basin of water brought from the fountain. The centre of the room was occupied by the table and chairs, and in a corner there were two other articles of furniture of fundamental importance: the kneading cupboard in which bread was stored, and the chest for chestnut flour.

Remains of the peasant domestic world persist in many objects, conserved and recalled, such as the kneading chest, removed from its context and reallocated as a multifunctional article of furniture for storing pans, crockery and provisions, or as a bar. Of all the furniture, the kneading chest is the one that somehow suggests the rural Tuscan style. Coppers, copper saucepans and oxen's' yokes also are frequent in the contemporary houses of indigenous residents and foreigners alike.

Figure 12 Copper saucepans (photograph by the authors)

Figure 13 A yoke transformed into a household decorative item (photograph by the authors)

Figure 14 A cartwheel transformed into a a household decorative item (photograph by the authors)

The cultural significance of hunting

Among typical objects in the houses, today we find hunting objects, that are exclusive to indigenous residents: mounted heads of deer or boars, boar tusks, objects made of horn or hoof, guns, cups and medals are omnipresent in their houses. Even in the houses on non-hunters, there may be an heirloom, usually a mounted head.

At Iesa, hunting is a right and a commons by custom, like forest access. Although today it is prevalently a social and recreative activity, in the past it also played a non-secondary role in the economy. Not only birds, boars, deer and porcupines were hunted to supplement a normally vegetarian diet, poor in protein, but even martens, ferrets and foxes, which were also sought for their fur. Since the wildlife of the forest, fields and scrub was diverse and abundant, hunting was the major activity of withdrawal of natural resources and supplementary source of family income.

Figure 15 Mounted boar head (photograph by the authors)

In the course of time, hunting has come under rules, such as "control and withdrawal plans", which have modified people's perception of hunting, as well as the way hunting is managed and organised. Boar hunting parties, which in the past were composed exclusively of residents, today include many hunters from other parts of Tuscany and northern Italy. Among the population of Iesa, a feeling of disinterest and sometimes genuine rejection of hunting has spread. At Iesa, hunting nevertheless maintains its cultural roots and continues to be an essential theme of the identity narrative, bound to the area and its history. The passion for hunting is expressed in the strong community bonds formed during hunts and reinforced by daily needs, by stories of epic ventures and memorable defeats, by detailed descriptions of the design and sound of bird whistles, by descriptions of the rich paraphernalia of hand-made traps used by adults and children to catch small prey, by memories of elders who as children used to watch their fathers or grandfathers packing cartridges and enjoy being taken to a forest hideout to wait for hours in silence so as not to alarm the birds.

For those who continue this activity, regulated by the yearly calendar, hunting remains a ritual conducted with all its ceremonial, technical and physical components. As in the past, hunting is linked to direct observation of the natural world and to acquired knowledge about animal habits and types of habitat. This aspect links up with the principle of responsibility towards the environment, shared by all the hunters we met. It is expressed in a precise behaviour code, constant commitment, surveillance of the area, which is frequented with regularity throughout the year, and conservation of the wildlife's reproductive ecosystems.

Much revolves around the prey, especially wild boars, hunting of which involves complex organisation, the collaboration of many persons, meticulous disposition on the terrain, the use of guns and the help of trained dogs. Boar hunting is a topic of conversation among the people of Iesa well beyond the hunting season and into summer, when the whole village is involved in organising the "Waltz of tagliatelle in boar sauce", a feast established more than 40 years ago. For three days, usually the first weekend in June, many people of all ages are involved. This is an important get-together for the village and a confirmation of community solidarity, involving a big organisational effort and great commitment for all volunteers.

Figure 16 A waiter at the "Waltz of tagliatelle in boar sauce" wearing a t-shirt printed for the occasion (photograph by the authors)

Hunting marks continuity and separation between the domestic space and nature, between interior and exterior, being expressed in relations and oppositions that re-evoke the structural constructivism of Kabyle houses (Bourdieu 1977) and Descola's (2005) domestication of nature. The dining room usually celebrates the male world, with trophies, guns and cups. The same is true of the entrance, where hunting clothes and guns often hang and mounted heads of boar and deer are displayed on walls. The cups and plaques are usually on the mantlepiece. It is rare to find hunting objects in the kitchen. Just as women are denied access to the forest as hunters, hunting objects are not admitted in the kitchen, the female realm, except as meat already cut and quartered for cooking. The kitchen is still a place for receiving guests (Bonnin, Perrot 1989), inheriting the frugal spirit of informal relations from the peasant world. In many cases, the kitchen is the only room where visitors can be received, because in the older houses there are no other suitable rooms.

Figure 17 Enlarged photograph by Piero Rosy displayed in the entrance of a house in Iesa (photograph by the authors)

Figure 18 Sign along the roads linking the different parts of Iesa (photograph by the authors)

Hunting trophies and the autochthonous style

The trophies typical of the "autochthonous style" are thick, complex objects. They hark back to the idea of "petrified time", which condenses past, present and future in the living space, as remarked by Roche (1997) in the nineteenth century French house. They also define a social life involving people and things (Appadurai 1986), a complex relationship in which objects speak to and about persons.

The first time we entered the house of Paolo and Paola, we felt disorientated. He is a manager in a major telephone company, she a flight hostess. They decided to move to Iesa and turn their backs on Roman life, embracing a neo-rural style today common above all among the aspirational class (Phillips 1993; Corti 2007; Currid-Halkett 2017). The entrance opens into a large living room. Several dozen rifles indicate not only passion for hunting but also economic well-being. There are antique guns inherited from old hunters together with the latest expensive rifles with telescopic sights for hunting ungulates.

On the wall next to the rifle rack there are hunting trophies: more than fifty skulls of fallow and roe deer. Paolo insists on displaying the skulls, though his wife thinks it macabre. We are so astonished that we do not photograph it or shoot a video.

According to Dalla Bernardina (2003, 2008), the hunting trophy is a thick ethnographic object, and in this case it enables us to understand the habitus of the autochthonous style of the Merse valley houses. The presence or otherwise of a trophy, whether taxidermized or naked skull, partial or integral, transformed into an object, invites interpretations having a symbolic horizon that is not always immediately obvious. For Dalla Bernardina, the hunting trophy is an excellent sign of two diverging ethics: one urban, the other rural. The city person loves to display wild animals, whereas the peasant, who hunts out of necessity, does not want them in his house. For the city person, hunting has a role similar to what it had in the nobility culture of the feudal and modern ages, where this activity was above all a pastime and a privilege (Bloch 1987: 343). By hunting, the nobility acquired the technical and social skills of its rank, learning self-control and to impose rules on nature. Today the legacy of that culture remains as a bourgeois custom, qualifying a stance towards the countryside conceived as a way of life and a place of leisure distinctive of one's social position (Le Wita 1988).

At Monticiano, many tell that until about ten years ago, the hunters fired any cartridges left in their guns before returning to the town, to signal a good outcome of the hunt. They then returned in procession. The boars they caught were tied to poles and carried on their shoulders into the square. There, the whole community flocked around the trophies, celebrating the event. The custom of displaying the animals killed has been lost in the course of time; at the end of the day the parties go to a common shelter just outside the town, where they fill in the forms for each animal and the butcher shares out the meat. However, hunting trophies are still displayed, but are only parts (heads, tusks, horns, skulls) appropriately treated and transformed into objects that adorn the houses of many Iesa inhabitants.

Thus, the deer skulls and guns in Paolo's house are justified by his social position. In the houses of other indigenous people of lower social class, not so many trophies can be found on display. Deer are absent but boar tusks are common. In the house of Prasildo, an elderly hunter, cups and plaques he won are displayed, usually for the best hunting dogs, along with boar tusks. These are displayed on wooden supports hung on the wall, forming a sort of artistic installation. The largest ones were chosen, indicating the size of the animal.

Figure 19 Boar tusks (photograph by the authors)

Dalla Bernardina can help us understand the complexity of the hunting trophy. It can represent an act of reconciliation that attempts to deny the death inflicted on the animal. Making the animal into a trophy is also a valorisation of the animal, equivalent to objectification and commoditization.

Unlike in other parts of Italy, as far as we could see in the Merse valley, no trophies had been reduced to consumer commodities. We find them in food shops for tourists in medieval towns and cities, for example in the form of boars with ties and glasses. Dalla Bernardina (2008: 80) described some with panama hats, displayed outside the shops to entice tourist to buy local food products. The hat attenuates the wildness and ferocity of the animal.

Hunting trophies have semantic properties that can reveal relationships with the surrounding habitat. Their symbolic value comes from their being signs, expressions of codes shared by the locals, and witnesses, to use as mnestic tools to evoke one's acts as a hunter, thus indicating the hunter's social position in the local group.

Figure 20 Trophy (photograph by the authors)

The tusks in Prasildo's house, like those at Mario's, an elder of the village who enjoyed authority by virtue of his partisan past, are witnesses of time and of life experience. By observing the tusks of "their" boars, Mario and Prasildo re-evoke the experience of the first boar they killed, albeit in different circumstances, defining the terms of construction of a personal relationship between the prey and the hunter, a relationship re-evoked by the trophy. As he shows us one of his guns, Prasildo recalls the difficulties of earlier times, when people hunted from need, with difficulty and high risk of failure.

Figure 21 Prasildo's rifle (a frame of the video by the authors)

The tusks become witnesses with that special property which enables objects to speak of events in the absence of written documentation (Debary, Turgeon 2007). As shown by Caiuby Novaes (2016) and Fortis (2012), material objects are often visual manifestations that mediate between different worlds: human/non-human, life/death and so forth. In this case, the hunting trophies

are mediators between the wild and the domestic worlds, between the nature surrounding the village and the safety of the house, between locals and tourists.

There are very few ways of coming to own a trophy: either one hunted it, inherited it or was given it. In the house of Marco, who does not hunt, we found both inherited trophies (a mounted boar head) and gifts (a snake in formaldehyde, a boar skull and a deer skull) displayed together with various travel souvenirs and therefore no longer having the role of witnesses in hunters' houses. This shifts their cultural biography (Kopytoff 1986) towards museum pieces and puts them in the category of exotic articles, like the ethnic objects Marco bought or collected during his travels or from second-hand stores.

Figure 22 Boar skull (photograph by the authors)

Figure 23 Viper in formaldehyde (photograph by the authors)

Even more than the heads, often exploited as a stereotypic "icon" (Herzfeld 2005) to give folk charm to a holiday house, the tusks express an autochthonous character, making it possible to associate material culture with display of the local habitus.

Figure 24 Taxidermized badger (photograph by the authors)

Social agency and the production of locality

To avoid the complication around "art", Gell expands this category to "art-like" objects (Küchler, Carroll 2021: 19), in which he included "secondary" agents intentionally made (an artefact, a doll, a car, a work of art, a rock on the beach, etc.) through which the artists distribute their agency in the causal milieu, and thus render their agency effective (Gell 1998: 20). According to Gell, the objective of the anthropological theory of art is to account for the production and circulation of these "art-like" objects as a function of their relational context (Gell 1998: 11).

Gell's theoretical framework suggests the relational nature of agency, anchored to the context in which four basic terms – index, artist, prototype, recipient – are combined in agent/patient relations. The index is an artefact, a material thing that permits a particular cognitive operation which Gell calls "abduction of agency" (Gell 1998: 13). The index is an instrument of social agency. The artist is the maker of the index and causes it; the index is caused by its maker and motivates an abduction which specifies the identity of its maker (the artist as "primary" agent). Artists and recipients are the basic poles of communication that rotate around the index, while the prototype is what the index represents for abduction.

Borrowing Gell's theory of art, we can say that trophies are "secondary agents", namely social agents through which the hunter, in this case the primary agent, is "distributed" in the milieu, beyond the body-boundary (Gell 1998: 104). The tusks are a special trophy and represent an index which refers back to the boar prototype. The prototype is what is evoked by looking at the index, abducted by anyone who knows the social and natural world of this area. The trophies also act as testimonial objects for the hunter; they are "actants" (Latour 2005). Nobody can have any doubts about boar tusks hanging on the wall of a room: they belong to a boar killed by the hunter who lives in the house, an "abduction of agency" which makes it possible to infer the action from the tusks, the struggle between culture and nature evoked in these remains that have become trophies. To continue in the terms of Gell,

the interest of these objects resides in the fact that they express the direct link between the index (tusk) as (separate) part of the prototype (boar) and the action of the hunter, who facing a strong fierce animal, demonstrates his ability and readiness, confirming his validity among his peers. For this very reason, hunting trophies are objects that cannot change hands (Weiner 1992) and objects of affection (Dassié 2010). Although there is a market for hunting trophies and even local hunters can therefore buy trophies, no local hunter would ever admit to buying "his" trophy and nobody is likely to do so for at least two reasons. The first is the possibility of being discovered; the second has to do with a hunter's social capital (Bourdieu 1979), which involves mutual recognition of the act of hunting that would make it difficult to explain the appearance of a trophy that did not match the hunting experience of the group.

It would be wrong to reduce the trophy to hunting alone. The indexical character of the boar tusks goes further, because they make it possible to evoke and recompose the relationship between interior and exterior, between domestic environment and wild environment. If the trophy has autochthonous value, it is because it speaks of everything that the locals say about themselves and their world. Its articulation is flexible and complex; it speaks beyond the hunting practice and acts as a mnestic catalyst. Its evocative capacity is in fact orientated more towards the environment than towards the single prey.

We can understand this aspect better if we consider the close relation between men and boars and the different ways in which locals and newcomers relate to animals. In the stories of various people, boars, like wolves, are often evoked alongside the exertions of forest work as part of a broader relationship with the natural environment. Boars are part of the daily life of the village; although hunted, they are conceded a sort of selfhood (Kohn 2013). Many new residents are against hunting and view hunters with disfavour. Some are vegans or vegetarians. Many do not have a firearms license. Others simply do not know what hunters do because they live in the village to get away from urban life (Rosa 2013; Eriksen 2017).

For locals, hunting and their relationship with the woods is fundamental. Local resident Giordano, evoking the past of his village, defines the Merse valley as a land "besieged by boars", where trees are walls that enclose the village and where people do not like talking, but tend to grunt in reply. Mario tells us how hard life was in the woods for those who went to dig up the briar root for pipes or to produce charcoal. These people spent months in the woods, living in huts made of earth, branches and leaves. This hard life is inscribed in their calloused hands, in their brusque manner, and in their distrust of strangers.

The reason why the forest has such a central place in the daily life and conversation of the people of Iesa can be understood by exploring the many paths that descend to the river Farma through the vegetation, in places impenetrable. Whether one arrives from Monticiano or Siena, the forest announces, protects and besieges Iesa. Rolando, the last carter of Iesa, describes the details of days passed in the forests, bringing out charcoal and wood with horses and mules along rough mule tracks. Many recall the days when women, too, frequented the forest daily, leading their donkeys loaded with linen to wash in the creeks, or collecting brush to fire the bread oven. Others tell that during the war, the forest hid partisans and sheltered soldiers who had deserted the Fascist armed forces. Many expert hunters and mushroom gatherers boast that they know the forest so well that they could cross it by day or night, without even a torch or the moon to light their way. For everyone we spoke to, the forest, like the bell tower of Marcellinara in the celebrated page of De Martino (1977: 479-481), is a fundamental element of the spatial and existential dimensions of a well-defined domestic environment.

The reason why it is incorrect to reduce the trophy to hunting activity is because the prototype has different levels. Its value is closely linked to the person who produced it, namely he who hunted the prey. The hunting trophy

usually denotes a direct relation between the hunter and the prey. But a second abduction of agency (connotative) is possible where the index is linked to something broader than hunting. The relation between denotation and connotation (Barthes 1957; Procter 2004) makes it possible to broaden the levels of abduction. Thus, there is a second level of the prototype in relation to the index, establishing two levels of interpretation. In this second level, the index becomes aniconic and identifies the intimate and deep connection with nature, with the woods, and with the history of the village. The distinction between iconic and aniconic index is particularly relevant in this case, because the index activates level I prototype (the boar) and level II prototype (nature, the woods, the history of the village), respectively.

This second level is necessarily aniconic because it makes it possible to activate what Berliner (2012: 781) calls "endo-nostalgia", a re-evocation of that world of life experience consisting of constant juxtapositions between the worlds of yesterday and today. It is true visual nostalgia, triggered by seeing the objects. Faced with a copper or some ladles, even "exo-nostalgia" can activate a shared rural imaginary, since it is certainly imagined. Faced with tusks or a mounted boar head, it is less likely that briar root workers, who sleep in earth huts on beds of straw with few food provisions, and who in the absence of other meat may even eat badgers or foxes (Nepi 2012), come to mind. Mario told us that woodsmen stayed away from home for long periods: charcoal burners had to continuously tend the charcoal pile to prevent it from going out; owners of a chestnut grove had to attend to all phases of the drying of the chestnuts. They were therefore obliged to sleep in the woods in makeshift huts built there. Today they only exist as reconstructions, as Sandro showed us in an ecomuseum near Monticiano. So, as we talk to Mario, the story begins with hunting the boar and the hare, and touches on the hard life in the woods and the construction of the temporary huts built with large branches found on site and covered with waterproof insulating layer consisting of turf, bundles of Erica and broom. Organised like a camping tent, the hut had a place to cook polenta and a bed made of leaves and brush, or sometimes straw, known as a *rapazzòla.* Mario tells of mice entering the hut to eat the chestnut flour or the cheese when the woodsman was out, so it was necessary to hang the food from the roof in the hope that the mice would not reach it.

Figure 25 Reconstruction of a hut for sleeping in the woods (photographs by the authors)

The re-evocation of a past based on work, consisting of long periods in the woods far from one's family, formed a continuum with hunting and with the local way of life. Mario tells us the story of the *meo*, the boy who helped the charcoal burner with his work in the woods, a job that Mario too had done. The *meo* always came from a poor family and was recruited by charcoal burners without sons to apprentice into forest work, from heads of families with many children and whose poverty and precariousness made it easier to "rent" ten-year-olds to help with the work of producing charcoal. Usually the *meo* did odd jobs: he would get water from the nearest spring and bring it to the hut; he would cook the polenta, gather brush to lay on top of the charcoal pile to damp combustion and prepare wood suitable for running the pile during the process of charcoal production. Life experience of this kind is certainly accessible to new residents, in the form of stories, but it does not necessarily connect with the objects of daily life as precisely as it does for locals.

Conclusions

In visiting the houses of some of the people of Iesa to whom we spoke, we were prompted to reflect on the way they live, a manner shaped by a continuum between the domestic, social and natural environments. We followed these people inside and outside their houses, collecting their memories and recording their stories of the changes (historical, cultural and economic) that have affected the village in recent decades. Focusing on hunting trophies as prisms for the production and reproduction of locality, we were concerned with how their relationship to their living space gives rise to a feeling of individual identification and family or community belonging.

We saw that the hunting trophies indicate both the hunters and their public of reference (other hunters or local residents). Hunting trophies speak of the hunter who "produced" them, but also of other hunters who know their stories. Hunting trophies are not aesthetically beautiful. Their objective is not to be beautiful. The codes they evoke are the hunter's enterprise at a first level and the natural environment at a second. Such objects, which evoke "endo-nostalgia", can cause polarisation and divisions among the population. As found by Zonabend (2001: 17) in his research at Minot, where the population was divided into two distinct groups (those with direct access to land who owned cattle and sheep, and those without land or animals), hunting trophies in the domestic space seem to mark a division between autochthonous inhabitants of the Merse valley and new residents.

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