

# Public memory in a deluded society

Tomislav Sladojević Šola

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Notes of a lecturer

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English language editing: Ellen McAdam

*To my daughters Jana and Ida Marija*

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# Table of contents

A few introductory notes ..... 3

The tottering world ..... 8

On museums, as typical public memory institutions ..... 30

Curators – between occupation and profession ..... 52

Mission as social cybernetics ..... 65

Heritage, the importance of being public memory, private institutions ..... 93

Mnemosophy as a general theory of heritage ..... 108

The search for wisdom and reality in a denied society .....117

A final note instead of conclusive remarks ..... 139

Appendix – Some biographical features (hopefully instructive) ..... 142

References .....153

# A few introductory notes

## How this book happened

In 2018, at the occasion of the International Museum Day, I lectured in Kaliningrad. This was followed by a discussion, which I continued with my host Irina Polyakova while we travelled around the region in the days following. Some lectures disappear into thin air, while others turn into friendships, or indeed books: the colleagues there suggested to me that they would publish any text I wanted. A real privilege. My interviews? Unpublished texts? About 18,000 notes I had scribbled and classified in preparation for lectures or new writing? As often happens, a simple idea immediately turned into multiple problems: translating, updating, explaining the context...

I came up with a simple proposal: to compose a book out of former, lost lectures – out of the notes and fragments remaining after 25 years of teaching seven different areas of heritage practice and theory. However, all that survived of most of them were sequences of slides. The explanations and interpretations were, like my student and other audiences, mostly gone. But some were still there. It seemed that out of the collection of about 5,000 digital slides, some may still deserve an audience. I have already been sharing some of them for a few years in a leisurely manner in the form of ‘one-slide lectures’ at [www.mnemosophy.com](http://www.mnemosophy.com). To these have been added the surviving or reconstructed commentaries of former lecture fragments. Publishing a selection of lecture notes and commentaries in book format seemed to me like making an exhibition out of a collection. As a former curator, I liked the idea, but at the same time, I have had no pretensions about constructing them into a scientific book: at least, not in form. Lectures are usually motivational, pointing to directions, not works of literature.

Unrelated correspondence with current ICOFOM Chair Bruno Brulon revealed his interest in this book which we were to publish in Russia. He liked what I showed him, and shared it with others in ICOFOM. I admire this openness and entrepreneurial spirit and thank the publisher for the privilege. I consider being associated with ICOFOM again as symbolically returning ‘home’. I spent my first and most active professional decade there, and it was a decisive, formative experience. However, a collection of notes can only be a relaxed sequence of testimonies, lacking the usual firmness and solidity of published, refereed texts.

That so many of us, globally, speak and write International English is a legitimate consequence of the language being so practical and widespread. But this does not meet the standards required for a book, so the notes needed serious language editing. A dear colleague, Ellen McAdam, the former Director of Birmingham Museums Trust, was so kind as to take up the delicate task. Her corrections and remarks were invaluable.

The notes I present in this book are fragments of lectures delivered long ago and interpretations adjusted to the needs and expectations of different audiences, both in time and space. So the Russian and English editions differ to some extent, the former reflecting some Russian professional experiences. It also came about naturally that two editors have exercised their competence in proposing specific comments and suggestions, for which I am grateful. Now, when the book has happened (never an easy process), I feel sorry that I did not take more care: I probably chose the most advanced notes, the ones that were easiest to edit and put in printable form, and not those that might have shown more creativity or courage. Notes originally belonged to the slides which consisted of a brief text and a persuasive and visually attractive part. Out of practical reasons, the book needed to be conceived without this provocative and motivating pictorial component designed to capture the attention of the auditorium. The rest has been a curatorial work of reconstruction; I have aimed to convey the relatively informal, engaged tone of lecturing.

## **The language of lecturing is persuasive and polemic**

This is deliberately not the usual sort of book: my idea was to retain the relevance of science, but using a lecture format. It retains a tone of agitation and a certain sedition, because I see the role of the professor as being that of instigator and motivator. Alongside the available literature, professors are not there to offer the final truth but to encourage and engage its constant pursuit. On the other hand, the increasing pace of change and our shortening attention span has reduced our ability to take in information to mere blips of pictures and clippings of text. My lectures were always fair attempts at achieving ‘verbo-voco-visual’ quality (as Marshall McLuhan would say). Alas, the visualizations became too complicated for a book format. For those who like dipping in at random and returning to material from time to time, this could be a convenient form of literature. A certain tautology is not meant as a substitute for proof, nor it should be regarded necessarily as a fault of style, but to some extent as an inevitable consequence of making the small unit of a lecture self-sufficient in the teaching process. The somewhat polemic tone has also been left in, because it wakes up minds and should be pertinent to any lecturer. In the end, it is just a display of notes of lectures that faded away long ago in the lecture halls. This collection of notes therefore contains critical remarks about the functioning system(s) that care for theory and practice. The wise among these systems allow a certain heresy; a well-behaved apostate by nature should be regarded as a precious corrective to any system. I agree to assume the role of the passer-by, an episode in the long life of institutions. Understanding the original cybernetics of Norbert Wiener makes this an acceptable position.

## **Public memory is about survival**

Any society succeeds or fails to depend upon the quality of understanding of its past. Public health is everyone's responsibility, but some individuals are professionally responsible for it. This should be the case with public memory, and, equally, there should be a profession devoted to it. Its science should be critical and corrective, based on the process of refining memory into wisdom. I named the nascent science first 'heritology' (1982) and then 'mnemosophy' (1987, when I was already teaching in a university). My intention with the latter term, implying a science of public memory, was that it should send a message through its very derivation: not just any memory, but one ethically founded and socially responsible. Heritage performs its purpose only if turned into wisdom. This book was composed with these ends in mind. In contrast to Anglo-Saxon practice, the rest of the world is more relaxed about using the term 'science'. The current fascination with STEM (science, technology, engineering and mathematics) in education signifies the crisis of social and humanistic 'fields of knowledge' in their emancipatory mission. As I may propose in some of the following notes, this crisis should be regarded as a sign of their failure to provide the world with enough wisdom to survive. The world is not threatened by 'cultural Marxism' and leftist sabotage of humanities faculties, but precisely by their inability to point to the real messages of the experience of civilization. So-called 'neutral', 'objective', subservient science has only fed the forces of accelerated, heedless development.

## **Understanding the world is a basis for any profession**

Museums are about the present: they merely use the past to create and interpret it. Most students, when we discussed this, lacked an understanding of their proper life context, often in a way that had been somewhat distorted by the biased media. To lecture about the concept of heritage and institutions and actions serving it without proposing a frame of reference proved hardly viable. To operate or create heritage institutions without knowing the reality and needs to which they must respond is futile. I have therefore increasingly offered lectures whose content was in effect a series of essays in explaining the world to my audiences, be them students or colleagues. I am sure many misunderstood and disagreed with my engaged assertions about social, economic and political reality. No harm in that. When curators claim 'neutrality', which is often the case, I find it frivolous and irresponsible. Heritage is political by nature, just as being a citizen is a political qualification: putting some effort into interpreting the world and its memory is crucial to any form of participation. It is virtually impossible to do any meaningful job in the heritage domain without referring to the needs of the users or community. In countries where the public status of those institutions is still high, all else could be disputable. I use 'public' as opposed to 'private', or belonging to any other owner, in the sense of public health or public transport. Public funding makes it illogical to serve any other special interest. I have been a curator, director, editor, publisher, conference

organizer, writer, professor and consultant, involuntarily, a witness of war and ruinous political and economic transition. That was a long and complex insider experience. I have mediated it in all honesty and independence.

My vision of the world is intentionally naïve, and so are some of the solutions to its problems that I propose. A salute to the benevolent reader - *Lectori benevolo salutem* – has been since Roman times the humble invocation of all writers, a practice so well known that it took the form of the abbreviation L.b.s. at the beginning of a book. Like all long-lasting wisdom, it (among many other implications) places understanding on the side of the reader or listener, who judges the proffered work on the basis of his (or her) personal value system, but certainly gives it the opportunity through his benevolence and openness. Finally, just like curators in a museum, we welcome visitors who do not bring their judgments or prejudices with them.

## About the title

Contemporary society is devalued, fooled, played upon by non-issues, the manipulation of priorities, staged democracy, deregulation instead of freedom, excessive privatization, monetization.... That society is dispossessed of ideals, of control over its own destiny, of its social contract and responsible visions of the future; it is denied its right to wisdom and deciding it in a democratic process of self-exploration and insight for which the process of public memorizing is crucial. It is, therefore, a negated society (une société niée), deceived and disavowed, not one that is autonomous and able to continue the historic Western societal project, now in a state of dangerous aberration. Modern society is depreciated by the holders of power and betrayed by its elites. On the plus side, this massive repression is, on the whole, less violent than in the past, but the world of illusions can disable its potential opponents by manipulation of the mind, deprivation of ideals and powerless anonymity. In plain language, the times are so bad that they can hardly get worse. However, though in recent times everything has been challenged, questioned or reconceptualised, giving an impression of liberty of counter-action, the world is sinking deeper into delusions while ruining its chances of continuation and survival. Western democratic tradition is manipulated into a neoliberal dream, or, in the case of global corporations, a heavenly system. Poverty is no longer considered a social vice, but a personal or collective failure. Anonymous elites rule an anonymous mass of alienated individuals, but only the intermediaries, i.e. politicians, are known in this malformed social contract. They are responsible only to the elites, although legally, at least on the face of it, they represent the masses. They are responsible for preserving the system that provides the highest income, even if needs to include war as the most profitable kind of 'business'. Thus betrayed, living in post-truth, post-fact times, facing transhumanism and post-democracy, society needs to be humanized and reset through the best of its memory.

## **A very personal approach**

All my students must have heard statements like this from me: 'You all have silver bells in your head. It is my job to swing them and make your experience enjoyable and rewarding. To do so, I need your goodwill in following me through the collective, scientific, and practical experience of the profession. I will invest my own experience of, insight into and fascination with the profession for which I am preparing you. The Faculty is the formal framework of our agreement'. I wanted to recapture some of this atmosphere and goodwill.

Any book on the theory of practice or philosophy of a profession (and this one touches on both) should be universally applicable. The leading countries listed in world happiness reports are mainly the ones that also have the best museums. The curators coming from that 'first' world, are therefore likely to be upset by this book. Their museums respond well to the needs of their communities. However, if I am speaking from some 'middle world' where I belong, from that particular experience and sensitivity, it is an easy exercise to reach the 'second' and the 'third' world. Having lived through the experience of socialism, transition and war make it all that much easier. But the middle world literature on public memory is not likely to reach either of the two other worlds, let alone the creeping 'fourth' one, that of hunger, misery, ostracism and slavery, although those who live there most need the institutions and actions invoked here. It is not so much a question of lack of access to literature or the Internet, but rather of their consent to some conservative western mainstream reasoning, a certain lack of a free mindset and the dictation of the most basic priorities. They feel betrayal the worst.



# The tottering world

## 1. The denied, disavowed society

Building society has been an object of all visionaries, no matter what creative art or science they have pursued. Human society as a whole has speculated about innumerable variants of its development. History is about that collective experience. Humans needed projections of the present and future to be able to continue to strive collectively for survival as a species. It has always mattered who would formulate these visions, and how. Memory, be it individual, civilizational, cultural or formed specifically as a public value, was always decisive. Individual cultural, racial, religious, economic interests often turned these visions into the misery of conflict and destruction, but as a whole, the long effort of history was primarily centred around the vision of improvements that would earn dignity and prosperity for humankind. Facing unprecedented power and a most perilous lack of unity in vision, mankind may finally drown its common sense in the ocean of unusable or harmfully applied knowledge. Special interests have never had so much universal power, and their absence of any consideration of others may bring the end, not only of societal concerns but of the species itself. Modern society as proposed by the dominant West denies the legitimacy of any social project. Privatization is not the liberty of possession but the new ideology of collective dispossessing, even when the common interests and social arguments against it are obvious and verifiable by economic analysis. The world has long suffered ideologies that imposed themselves upon arguments of common interest, working against it. Like any ideology, extensive privatization reaches an oppressive phase when it forcefully rips public property out of the hands of society. The violent oligarchy has combined the theories by which it manipulates minds. It is a mixture of the poetic individualism of primitive society, the victorious 19<sup>th</sup>-century capitalism, failures of socialist ideologies, populist condescension, strategies of subliminal manipulation of instincts and new-old alliances with priests and, plainly, scoundrels of all kinds. This modern 'democratic' society is largely a denied society. It has been denied wisdom from the past, prosperity and justice in the present, and safety and security in the future. The process of rejecting the professions is a condition for the reign of profit over the criteria of quality. Thus legal traditions are negated by excessive deregulation in favour of a privatized society in a denigrated, devalued state. The Western development model of freedom is turning into libertarian totalitarianism: a few people at the top of the global corporate pyramid will have power to rule the world. Universal basic income looks like paying for consent or seeking redemption as modern society slips imperceptibly into a kind of Huxley dystopia. Instead of a planet-wide strategy for survival of the species we will be threatened by the ever-rising appetite for profit and control. All that Wiener claimed in cybernetics was that some projected, beneficial 'norm' can be maintained only by reacting to threats. So how is it that we do not perceive our public memory as one of the means to reach certain desirable visions of the human condition?

## 2. Blame for conspiracy theories as an easy way of discrediting warnings

The only good thing about this frightening world is that it has become non-ideological in the sense of division between the left and right of the political spectrum. We have learned that the pendulum was part of the hypnosis involved in faked democratic processes. The post-democratic society leaves such a narrow space for political choices and negotiation that left and right have become barely distinguishable. Mainstream media are subtle henchmen of the structures in power. In communism, one was easily discredited by the use of capitalist terminology or lack of the party's newspeak, let alone by the outright denouncements of bureaucratic *vrhuskha*. Today the process is almost equally effective. One is discredited for issuing warnings under the pretext that they promote conspiracy theories. Some words are denounced as wrong or undesirable. A single argument should be proposed against this. We should all agree that the world, generally speaking, is badly managed and therefore in a poor state. It was made like this either by creating distress or by failing to respond to challenges. Under the tyranny of the profit ideology, we may rightfully ask *cui bono*? To whom is it a benefit? – the principle that the responsibility for an act or event probably lies with the person who has something to gain from it. So Webster claimed. With politicians becoming millionaires and their bosses entering the global 1% caste, we should assume that “the Machine” would use the media to silence the witnesses, as Mumford feared in 1970. Subtle ostracism in a surveillance society is a reality.

## 3. Conspiracy theories stem from paradoxes

But as a civilization that invented obligatory schooling and social and humanist sciences, we are giving up. Schools in the world's great democracies have started to produce ignorance, as the legal system produces prisoners or as health and pharmaceutical institutions produce patients. When leadership becomes dominated by managers, all goals tend to be replaced by profit-making. As a result, populations are becoming stupid, desperate and ill. The same has happened to the media, which appear to be the keystone in this grand, evil arch. Except for some rare, decent societies, we are, globally speaking, led by ruffians, rascals, villains, bullies, notorious liars and sneaky profiteers. Contemporary society has manipulated the idea of democracy and leadership to such an extent that we get anomalies as a result of formally correct democratic procedures. But, starting to realize the pathetic and miserably inadequate dimensions of our hypocrisy, we now discover that even most of our great nation-makers were hardly more than war criminals, if judged by any civilized measures. The very fixation upon the managerial art of attaining the highest possible profits at any price (to society or nature) should by its fatal harmfulness be regarded as a conspiracy, against fundamental morality and sheer common sense. Are heritage institutions still in a position to offer some hope? The false elites who hide behind staged, play-acting democracy are ruling by creating chaos which they hope they will always be able to control. The collective psychoses by which the world learns

to live are not dependent on rational arguments. We occasionally recognize moments when the big *gamers* simply rule out certain *augmented reality* when they realize that their losses are too big to sustain. There is no occult knowledge in the well-argued geopolitical analysis of intertwined interests. The paradox (which itself sounds conspiratorial) is perhaps that simple truths must not be seen, let alone understood.

#### **4. Explaining to the users where they are**

Do you remember the comforting relief you felt when, lost in a vast public space, you found yourself in front of a map with a red dot and an arrow reading ‘You are here’? That, on a wider, different scale, is what we need most of all from the professions and institutions that were created to help us to manage our lives in time and space. Almost any story in a museum can or should make an immediate or conclusive point about the world we live in. Museums began by trying to keep the record of the past from being lost or forgotten, and equally, to explain the actual world. Remember exhibitions about colonialism and related phenomena. The pragmatic world of open conquest saw the essential nature of the traditional museum as the communication of that conquest, whether of nature or other cultures, in ways that were physical, convincing and obvious, sometimes to the extreme of exhibiting live people in their reconstructed habitats. What puzzles us is that this legitimate practice of documenting conquest has gradually changed into a different discourse. Now museums explain the past to make people understand the present. We are more and more lost in a frenzy of rapid change. What changes is not only the places where we live or work but also our perceptions of reality and our systems of values. We increasingly live in a managed, constructed world where literally everything is subjected to our interventions or is entirely invented. In the bewildering, baffling reality of illusions, we are supposed to retain common sense and basic humanist ethics. The world is undergoing almost the same devastating stress that Eurasia suffered during the Great Plague in the 14th century; only this time the pandemics of 2020 assaults the human condition and the universal societal project of a decent society.

#### **5. Understanding of the world is choosing the vantage point**

Communism and socialism of the Soviet type failed. Their historical idealism had the power of inspiration but never represented a practical plan. It was only natural that ideals got hijacked by the bureaucrats. The amount of absolute power protected by the grand ideas was irresistible. The bigger the idea the stronger the manipulation. So was the idea of capitalism that has been stolen away from believers in human creativity and entrepreneurship by the fraudsters and bullies among tycoons and thug politicians; they deserve to be named as false elites. The monstrous power seized in a few decades, since the 80s, has been usurped under the alibi of unlimited individual freedom within the economy and the

superiority of individualism. The goal was hidden, this time by the libertarian ideology and unlimited greed. Its result is that the owners of half of planet's wealth could fit into a single bus.

Now the planet is the closest it has ever been to self-destruction. Social humanism in a welfare state, as Europe successfully proposed, remains the most plausible solution to our problems, but it is pulling away from us. Now, with neoliberalism so firmly installed, overthrowing the power founded upon the unprecedented concentration of money by legitimate means seems impossible. The welfare state guaranteed its citizens free access to air, water, education, health care, culture, science...everything that before the 1980s was taken for granted. In any decent society of equal chances and the rule of merit, public memory institutions are also very accessible, if not entirely free, to all citizens. But the ideal of a noble social contract has been brutally snatched from modern society. It included a constant striving for the humanization of society threatened by latent opposite temptations. Now, this social project has been renounced and discredited in the name of ruined revolutionary experiments. The societal experience concentrated in all knowledge should be public property by definition, especially knowledge from the domain of social sciences and humanities. A legitimate and justified claim for access to the whole of knowledge is a condition for a prosperous world, safe for humans as well (other) animals and for nature. The very essence of public memory institutions is enlightenment. Knowing the world and understanding the nature of its condition is therefore the only departure point for a meaningful stance in matters of public memory. In other words, if you do not understand the world you cannot qualify to curate its interpretation.

## **6. Post-capitalism is against museums, too**

If consulted about 'living wage movement', the Internet offers a caricature in formidably black humour by a famous author. A fat capitalist riding on the back of an exhausted creature exclaims: 'first they asked for an end to slavery... then a minimum wage...now they want a living wage!... What next?!? I used it as a way of waking up my students and letting them understand that museums do not exist outside economic or political reality. Whatever their world view may have been, I thought it was worth provoking them. Today's capitalism is not about the exchange of goods and services. It is only about profit, and it is therefore not capitalism in the true sense. It reduced work - expertise, competence, and experience - to 'portable skills' that one brings to the labour market with no right to negotiation. The financialization of societies moved the centre of gravity of the economic system towards banking and finance. The culture of labour, and not only the supposed ideology behind it, has been depreciated. What has become essential is success, measured in money earned and social influence exercised. The dignity of a job well done and therefore remunerated accordingly is not there any more. The working class has ceased to exist, hence the disappearance of the traditional political configuration that is now in critical transition. The financialised society affirms ideals of profit at the lowest cost, and this very society is hilarious about its present achievements. It is eating up

the very substance of the founding values of western society. Only one-third of employees at the universities in the States are fully employed lecturers; the lowest third are there on contract while the upper third are mainly composed of managerial staff. Education has become a marketable good at its own expense (and that of the society that depends upon it).

There is neither need nor argument to support the belief that justice was ever the ruling criterion of profit vs quality, but to devalue work and insist on the priority of success is a far-reaching error. Contemporary society is already alienated by insecurity, turmoil, discomfort, frustration and the resulting flight from reality. We have symptoms of collective neurosis, a divide between unprecedented care for human rights and their derogation, between concern for the disadvantaged and minorities to merciless abandonment of their needs.

We have found that modern economics is not an exact science and that all the models that skirt basic humanist ethics are doomed to expensive failure. Without moralising, wrongdoings seem to be paid for. The world of global corporations and that of mega-finance is deliberately creating chaos, such as a transition in some countries or war in others; hunting big prey to them means submitting the world entirely to their control. This is done by sowing discord and creating confusion. Of course, the system is bound to fail, but the profits are always private and losses are, as a rule, socialised. The citizens are manipulated into believing that they are witnessing the natural process of social Darwinism. The so-called neo-liberal economy is a cynical euphemism for obscene fraud. Any free-thinking individual may notice that this became possible only when total capitalism phased out ideologies by replacing them, not with the traditional, evolved capitalism, but with its detrimental deviant. By the obsessive focusing on the incessant increase of profit, they have created the era of Great Greed. It differs from preceding epochs by its ruthless exclusivity and lack of an alternative.

## **7. Great Greed**

Great Greed is a concept I first used in lecturing in 2005. I have often written about it, unaware that others had described our time in the same way. This means that I was justified saying in one of my slides. 'The Great Greed turns humans into insecure addicts of illusions, who fly from freedom, fly from reality, and fall prey to collective hysteria'. As never before, our technology makes us blur the limits between what is reality and what is mere illusion. We have always played with that. Any story told, any book read can transfer us into another reality. But now with Second Life, 3D Imagineering, with interactive games, we become immersed not only in the picture but in the happening. The Omnimax was the final stage of the classic game, teasing our sense of being lost in a reality other than our own: the screen and the sound have had us as their focus and captured all our attention, but that is nothing compared to what we are exposed to now, or what we can reasonably expect to happen. If used for play and pleasure, for gaining insight into worlds otherwise unknown, this may advance our participation in living, but nobody is there to observe where we become lost in

this other reality. I believe that museums of technology are like grandparents and family, always on our side and yet willing to guide us and encourage us to use our natural confidence. We want adventure, but we also need guidance and secure places where the earth beneath our feet is our one and only safe point of departure and return.

If one combines these circumstances with the fact that we, unlike any civilisation so far, live in the age of Great Greed, where no other option is left, it is likely that many will fall victim to rising insecurity. People will try all sorts of flights from reality, some becoming addicts to illusions, others becoming utterly selfish and isolated and yet others falling prey to all kinds of collective hysteria, to extreme ideologies or extreme beliefs...

In this sense, museums will have an enormous role to play, particularly those concerned with technology, if they are willing and able to explain the world around us. They can ensure that we do not lose sight of humanist ethics, and that this offers a reliable framework to any wavering or tottering individual, without taking his or her freedom in return for this security.

## **8. Great Greed as the face of the process of globalization**

With the prevailing ideology on the planet that of profit, we may leave the hope of a better world behind. The Great Greed era means that societies, particularly of the so-called enlightened West, are saturated with the frenzy of conquest, instead of the ideology of peace and the protection of our natural habitat. The museum boom is not a sign of our progress, but of our troubles and response to changing needs. Museums are a force to re-establish, reconstruct or reinvent what otherwise would form part of the current, operating, functional value system, or would be developing as a natural response to changing circumstances. It means that we have lost the natural wisdom that any culture holds, if correctly interpreted. Globalization is the name of the huge package of problems that we carry on our backs, facilitating the doctrine of constant growth and legitimizing incessant conquest as the concept of natural human behaviour and the pattern for the development of human societies.

## **9. The sin of corporative economy**

The original sin was CORPORATION, a blind interest for the quickest and greatest possible profit on behalf of an organized interest. The corporate spirit evokes in people's minds an instinctively driven primitive horde or a pack of hyenas hunting their prey. Is that why a corporation is an anonymous society, group, *gruppo*, holding, or other names that suggest their faceless character? The financialization of the world has demonstrated that corporations can deteriorate into even more wicked forms of exploitation. They blight the tissue of society by the enslavement of the legal system, then the redefinition of the economic system, then the decomposition of the concept of the social contract in politics.

Blurring the ideals of collective wellbeing in a wholesome society, they finally deconstruct and depreciate the systems of values upon which culture is based. Their strategic prey is ways of remembering and the construction of public memory, which in turn develops criteria for all the players in society.

## **10. Welfare society in the contemporary world**

Though denigrated and disdained as some form of historical communism, there is no alternative to the welfare society: it is democracy in material form. This knowledge is of long standing, and yet forced to be considered ahead of our time. We should embrace it, and endure any disregard for it. Roland Barthes claimed that the only thing eternity gives us is the gift of humankind: we are humans, on a small planet lost in infinity. One should refuse to think outside of this vision of solidarity. We increasingly live in a devalued world of vanishing qualities. The present disintegration of values, hypocritically manipulating ideas of personal freedom, harms any societal project except that of neoliberal chaos and its masters. The manipulation is done under cover of western democracy, which is imperceptibly devalued, mainly through the media and by manipulated civil society, all ultimately in the name of liberalisation. Yet freedom has never been just chaos, and culture, though noble by definition, is composed through criteria. The norm, in the best possible meaning provided by the science of cybernetics, is the elusive platform for constant negotiation by the stakeholders in the social contract, but it is still one that counts within definitions of the norm, however changing. To be forced to avoid the term 'norm', as we in fact are, is merely a reversed tyranny.

## **11. Total capitalism, the poor and museums**

If you launch a search in Google for 'The institutions of labour heritage in Finland', you will find only my slide, taken and redesigned probably 20 years ago from the same Internet that registered the existence of eight different national institutions dedicated to that public memory in Finland. The original slide is not there, but Finland, with its wise memory of labour is, I hope. Whether all the institutions survived or how they have changed is also another matter. The first message of my slide was directed at my domestic students. My former country, a country declared as socialist, with a population four times bigger than that of Finland, had one such institution, and the countries that succeeded it have an even worse lapse of memory concerning labour heritage – not a single museum of labour, work, of the working class or anything of that nature.

In the meantime, the world changed, not for the better (as it seems to me), and it still follows the same direction. Total capitalism, which permeates the entire structure of society and its value systems, has invented the mythological genius of the successful individual, a sort of demi-god, a superhuman always crowned with success, possessing all the attributes of his (rarely her) super-social power. These lucky bastards (I apologise for the use of the academic version of scien-



tific vocabulary) unfortunately are lesser human beings like Donald Trump, or exceptional cases that confirm the rule, such as Bill Gates. Total capitalism is an unavailing phase of growth extorted fraudulently from the human race.

The perverse drama of jumping from the still waters of administrative socialism/communism into the wild Thatcherite torrent is still a global theatre where one can learn the true, predatory nature of global, total capitalism. As the poor always have more than their fair share of troubles, the transitional European countries and other developing countries enjoy its wildest variety.

While overnight tycoons are hastily trying to disguise themselves as decent citizens with legal assets and lawful business procedures, the West is watching carefully, because most of the profits will go to them, whatever happens. The local maharajahs will be contented vassals of the international business empires. The obscenity of this arrangement emerges with the paradox of the common denominator of their rules: populist ideas and identitarian outbursts of polished radical nationalism. In the latter phase, for international use, it is covered by phrases about the unity of diversity, multiculturalism and care for minorities.

Why would this have anything to do with industrial archaeology? Because this is the context of all decisions, including technological. For a long time we have known that technologies are the expression of processes in society, as much as they mould them. It is the ruling value systems that, when implemented, receive the material form as techniques, technology, buildings and machinery, but are also expressed as business practices, trade, labour relations, civil and state organisations and so on.

Imagine an industrial archaeologist who excavates in ice or mud (whichever scenario global warming may bring) the remains of the worlds' great corporations. The headquarters is a modest, dull building with offices, nothing much to look at. The body does not physically exist, and its tentacles are on the other part of the planet, and have changed their position and technology many times every decade. This corporate reality of the industrial present has a dispersed identity close to the notion of intangible heritage. It is the contextual story that matters more and more.

Into this modern societal construction consisting more of relationships than substance, museums have to bring back the experience of skills, the dignity of creativity and the pride of personalized production. In the age of total capitalism, automated production lines suppress the rest of the underpaid workforce. The quality of products is in permanent decline, as goods become the illusion of their proud predecessors, made for a brief period of use followed by discard into landfill. Manufactured food is another illusion of original, natural products. It is hard to expect a radical return to lost values, but although we have to adjust to changing circumstances, it is not impossible. Total capitalism is an unavailing phase of growth by conquest, extorted fraudulently from the human race. Museums can help to explain and to join the change of mind-set.



## 12. The inversions of society with no value obligations

Contemporary society, according to Orwell's prophecy, is producing ignorance. So we increasingly live in a society of lowered standards of communication. There is a tacitly or actively encouraged lack of criteria of excellence in any human endeavour. It started paradoxically as a post-modern meme, by the slippery claim 'anything goes'. It looked from the beginning like a lack of respect for authorship, but again, the new, rich world seemed to deserve fewer rules to comport itself by. The loosening of expected rules gradually turned into the libertarian world view. The call for creative liberty has over a period of decades blatantly and fatally turned into 'nothing matters'.

Chaos as a projection to keep the crowd busy, insensible and apathetic, sees any criteria of quality as a threat in the form of firm, opposing structures. Over decades, the general public was fed with sensationalism and loud noises, where simple human stories and the healing influence of art should have played. The eager managers and entertainment industry moguls used any young mutinous fashion, pushing it to extremes and turning it into growing need. This logic touched all spheres of human endeavour. Sensationalist, blockbuster exhibitions started to offer an alibi for what was otherwise a fading cultural life. The enjoyment earned by education turned into the ritual pilgrimage to these events as the media's 'must-sees'. Superficial spectacle is supposed to make up for the lack of living the art in the people's regular reality. Some may claim that the growth in visitor numbers has been unprecedented, extraordinary, and this is true. However, the huge numbers may simply illustrate need and frustration - the need to live art as a personal experience and the frustration of the fact that people are more and more estranged from practising and using art in their daily reality. In the same way, major political campaigns and reality TV confrontations between candidates in the democratic process serve to cover the lack of free will and choice involved in elections. The latter are discretely (or not) guided by the media, expensive PR and power plays. The ultimate political correctness was introduced to replace the freedom of humour and satire, by which, when they existed, citizens were able to rationalize their fears and turn them into art or, often, relaxed humour and socializing. Paradoxically, though, and perhaps due to the hypocrisy of contemporary society, we are increasingly exposed to the rude and aggressive behaviour of all the protagonists, especially the arrogant power-holders.

## 13. Bureaucracy and lobbying are aberrations of society

At its origin, lobbying was conceived as a way of proposing ideas or actions that others would otherwise not appreciate or even perceive. Instead of the mere persuasiveness of proposing arguments that would appear convincing, moral value is now compromised by pushing lobbying into coercion and bribery. The existence of around 15,000 lobbyists in Brussels speaks poorly of the state of democracy in the European Union. Fed with false, biased information, democratic institutions and citizens lack the basic conditions for any democratic process to

function. Yet the mechanism is there, the formalities of insight and consensus are in place, so the perfect alibi for the governing forces of society in any malicious project is provided. In consequence, there is an evident crisis of confidence in public, governmental institutions and still more so in the politicized media that depend directly on corrupted corporations. Despite their shortcomings, in such a society museums still appear as trustworthy institutions. EU cultural projects more often than not turn into endless conferencing, frenzied travelling and complex administration under the aegis of trans-border cooperation. If one regarded it cynically, purely for the sake of constructive criticism, one might say that they perfectly match, not the interests of society, but the agenda of the lobbyists for the hotel and transport industries.

## **14. Dream Society of the lonely**

The American Dream became a global striving towards the Dream Society, a world of illusions that attacks the weakest points of the selfish individual ego in the way that it destroys any chance of constructive, calm reasoning. Once divided by individual ambitions for glory and fortune, disarmed by the stock exchange challenge (where everyone can become rich), exasperated with frenzied competitiveness and the sheer eagerness to surpass others, citizens turn into deserted, angry, anguished, lost and lonely individuals. As such they are easy prey to fallacies, collective neuroses, phobia and obsessions. That in turn explains modern neo-fascism and other similar results of collective insecurity, like populist political parties and identitarian movements. If museums are the best expression of the protected, essential values cherished by their founders, then reacting to what threatens them and their growing vulnerability is their proper task. I mean that the task of museums has been inherited alongside their collections and the values they represent. What else? But that only explains the methods and logic of conventional museums set up by such individuals or composed of such collections. The real, publicly concerned museum is always trying to serve the community and make the world better, at least by offering insights into the nature of reality (or realities).

## **15. Managed humans in a managed world**

The world must be in an omnishambles to offer so-called energy drinks as a legal solution to the frenzy of keeping up with the proposed speed and rhythm. The soma pills prophesied by A. Huxley are also legal and many. Their aim is the opposite, but both additions to our lives are a rather alarming reality. Had it not been for the serious implications, the names chosen for the first are an amusing psychological exercise (Monster, Sting, Burn, Bang, Gorilla, Hell, Relentless, Dragon, Power horse, Total activation, 9mm, Buffalo, Red devil...)! They all challenge our deep, basic urges and promise to turn us into some kind of wild, reckless and uncontrollable beings. The message is that one does not survive by being a simple human, let alone orientated towards virtue.

But what do museums have to do with this? Everything. They are in the value management business. These egregious deviations are a reminder of the impending dangers of genetic engineering and cyborgisation. The role assigned to museums by the corporations and their politicians will increasingly be only that of scientific amusement park or adjunct of the tourist industry. If we want to serve our communities, the very first thing to do is to understand the world and then assist them in improving the human condition.

## **16. Oligarchs of the world unite!**

A hundred years ago political prophets were selling the dream of a society of equality and prosperity for all. Only their eagerness survived. The grand pose and gesture have been appropriated nowadays by salesmen. The rising global oligarchy of the obscenely rich desperately looks for the ways to secure their rapidly increasing wealth. In the diversification of investment and ways of compressing it into valuables, art was always a good choice. That gave a tremendous boost to the art trade. Fairs for a rich clientele multiply. For them, artworks are the undersigned bills of exchange. In most cases, they do not leave the airports. The freeport storage facilities, outside the taxation and control of the public institutions, serve not only as fabulous stores but also offer other services: private showrooms (exhibitions!), art advice, framing, restoration and banking services. When an appropriate moment in the strategy of prices comes, works will find their way to private galleries, private museums, and, due to influential boards and permissive curators, to public museums. The strategic combination manipulates prices in the same way as shares on the stock market change value overnight. The heritage profession that might react to this does not exist. Heritage jobs such as museum curators are pushed into “fach-idiotism”, isolated within their specialist knowledge. It is servility and opportunism. Does anybody remember having seen a blockbuster called ‘Art as a commodity’? Public institutions, at least in Europe, are paid for by taxpayer’s money to explain the world and represent public interests. The deregulated economy inspired and helped the birth of deregulated art; both have rules that apply from the moment they are invented unannounced until they are unpredictably revoked. The rule-makers who are in charge of the process are trying to prove that these apparently continuous and spontaneous processes are the faces of democracy.

## **17. Transitional countries assume greater consequence of the neoliberal aggression**

Whatever the consequences for the public sector might be in the future, the paradox will have it that the worst situation will be, almost as a rule, in the former socialist countries. They were ill-prepared for the transition and will suffer the wildest deregulation and devastation of value systems, both economically and politically. Unification with Europe happened economically and politically as a sort of colonisation. The transitional new elites were eager to catch up with the advanced countries, but often inclined to corruption. They voluntarily assumed

the role of vassals to the bigger European countries and so traded their own integrity for their permissiveness, by allowing a clearance sale of the countries' resources. As with democracy, beneficial changes do not happen overnight in culture. In fact, unprepared and seduced by the ghost of the past (be it fascism or clericalism), liberation may produce contrary effects. The paradoxical nostalgia for communist/socialist rule (though in some cases justified) confirms this schizophrenic situation. The past seems to have an ability to disguise itself as the future. If I could use the situation, I would again plead for a strong profession to help in dealing with the danger.

## **18. Transitional countries have suffered a great shock, some even with wars**

If we talk about Croatia and our traumatised neighbours, I immediately have an excuse: the war. Contrary to what is thought, war is also about the destruction of the fine tissue of societal organisation and the value systems. If you add to it transition in the form of deindustrialisation, financialization, depopulation, and excessive, marauding privatisation in the context of predatory capitalism, you have the contours of disaster. We have social involution and the false, imposed elites that only wars can bring to positions of power. Our decision-makers are all handpicked by politics and different interest groups - including museum directors, by the way. With ruined social discipline and an environment of intolerance, culture and museums, especially their innovators, creative thinkers, and free, critical spirits, are of low priority and badly funded. This serves well the growing botany of the weeds of all conservatism. One of the populist phenomena is *identitarianism*, which obstructs our role in society: ordinary folk start to perceive us as increasingly useless. It will always be hard to impose the story of the former Yugoslavia as relevant to the needs of the West in particular, but wrongly so. What happened there is a fixed image of the West in the historical mirror. Of course, one can, at least in the privacy of one's mind, dismiss the theme as one of bloodshed by barbarous Balkan tribes. But this is a refusal to understand the geopolitical significance of the disaster areas where vast tectonic plates of identity collide. What if the Third World War had started there? Ever since it has only been changing places.

## **19. When labour becomes repulsive as a social value, it is a sign of bad times**

We need to allow some of the basic values back into our lives if we want to remain a human society. This has been recognized for a long time, as there are many museums of labour history all over the world, and even wider interest in some aspect of labour history. Some like Het Norsk Industri Arbeider Museum in Norway, Museum der Arbeit (Germany), Arbetets museum (Sweden), Arbejdermuseet (Denmark), The Finnish Labour Museum Werstas (Finland), Museu do Trabalho in Brasil, together with many other, usually complex museums, are different forms of labour or social history museums. The National Museum of

Labour History in the UK changed its location and name to become, finally, the People's Museum in Manchester, advertised as a museum about democracy. Labour may presently appear less attractive but the basic value behind it is probably not. However, it feels as if devoting a museum to labour, or working-class history, would be almost politically biased: a sign of bad times.

## **20. Plundering the very bottom of the future**

Museums of science and technology have a slightly dark side to interpret, though not so fatal as military or war museums. They fascinate us with energy and power, and the human ability to exercise immense impacts on the environment and society. The negative side of this empowerment is rarely presented or problematized, as we are naturally guided by positive motives and intentions.

Science is by itself neutral, and technology, since it has so many consequences, also needs its negative aspects to be explained. It is only exceptionally treated as a force of destruction. Some technologically concerned museums should demonstrate and reveal the barbarous nature of the societal and economic systems that invented those devices of infinite greed and destruction. Examples are, regrettably, abundant. Fishing is an inevitable and beneficial industry, but the excessive use of technology motivated by ruthless striving for profit may turn it not only into extreme overfishing but into the real destruction of the very sea they fish in. Bottom trawling is one of those buccaneer versions of the exploitation of natural resources that exist in the world. Turning the sea bottom into an irreversible desert is a crime against humanity and should be treated as a criminal act, not as debatable technology. How many museums have organized exhibitions on this theme? How many have tackled the theme when presenting sea fishing? Do we need such museums? Are there museums to explain how the atomic bomb was created and how it works, or even more importantly to tell us that it is an evil invention that should never have been conceived, let alone used. Which museum tells the whole story of how the very existence of atomic weaponry is a criminal concept? Which one explains that much industrial technology, used in peace, is weaponry in the war against human welfare?

## **21. Technological waste**

I was once on a yacht as a guest. My host, the director of a regional museum in the EU, changed the batteries in his camera and threw the old ones into the sea. I still hear the splashes as they fell into the blue, crystal clear seawater. (We never sailed again, if that is the question that crosses your mind.) Of course, we witness such behaviour daily on the part of shameless individuals or by aggressive businesses. But it rightfully urges a question: do we often see a museum exhibition about the technological waste that faces us as a result of the shocking everyday behaviour of citizens? Do we have an insight into the disastrous consequences of corporate frauds, be they diesel emissions by prestigious car manufacturers or field mines pushed into 'use' by the military-industrial sector? It would be

good to have a museum profession that was able to produce an international, travelling, blockbuster exhibition on pollutants and the solutions we are offered. Would we have the courage to compare the list of the most dangerous corporate polluters with the list of those offering us solutions? I guess not, because the lists are practically the same, and this can mean only one thing. Are you feeling prone to conspiracy theories? Of course not.

Industrious human nature is not a sin, but the prevalence of profit can turn it into something monstrous. Perhaps so, but this monstrosity is rarely perceptible in any of the museums that mention or probe deeper into the theme of work and technologies. It would be useful to see the testimonies of alarming selfishness. Where are the ideals by which we will leave the world in at least as good a state as we found it, though indeed our aim should be higher than that? What is love for our children or humanity, if not that? How should one conceive of a museum of technology? Surely in such a way that technology is explained on one hand and the implications and consequences on the other. No matter what we use to accomplish our goals, we always have to end up considering responsibility and ethics.

## 22. The Brave New World

Some 15 years ago, Banksy offered freely on the Internet his version of Monet's *Waterlilies*. It was an inspiration to me and to my students. Huxley's book had a poetical illustration. Monet's Japanese bridge crosses a small lake where shopping trolleys and plastic cones from the highway are dumped among the waterlilies. It was a good reminder of what idealistic 19th-century pictorial poetry may become in everyone's reality today. Banksy suggested that consumerism, the apotheosis of the materialistic craving for objects, spoiled the dream and projected a gloomy future. Even Banksy's pirated painting has become commercialized to the point of losing its meaning. We would not have been so susceptible to the industrial past had it not been for the speed with which technology has come to serve the dominating ideologies. In the East of the formerly divided world, it took the omnipotent image of heavy industry, and consequently of a certain glorification of the 'working class', the proletariat. The West glorified technology for its power to produce and create the so-called affluent society. The fascination with technology turned into the consumerist funnel that spoiled the quality of our lives. The technology that was the epitome of progress, meaning the advancement of humanism and well-being, proved to be a colossal error. The criticism the West received from the East side of the bipolar world we lived in throughout most of our lives was self-discrediting because they had brought to ruin the long line of idealist thinkers and reformers who worked hard for the welfare society and real democracy. We are likely to have none in the end if we continue to follow our path. If industrial heritage cannot support this revelation, indeed play a cybernetic role in the development of contemporary society, then we may question the legitimacy of the huge effort to preserve it.

## 23. Acculturation as identity malady

My home town of Zagreb is a small European capital, nice enough but not a star city. Its 900 years are, however, enough for a respectable identity. And it has one. But for decades my daily walk has revealed new fractures in it: everything tends to be in English and it seems that in all aspects its inhabitants are trying to pretend to be somebody else. An ideal, rich Westerner? Well, we were always Westerners, part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. But there seems to be no end in trying to resemble some Western, Internet culture ideal. Is it just globalisation? Maybe just the internationalisation of culture? Or is it a plain inferiority complex encouraged and constantly facing the lucrative industries behind the “franchising” stereotypes? Zagreb thinks, looks and talks in a way that none of its museums registered, let alone questioned or explained. But museums are about the past, or at least they are preferred like that.

‘There are two ways to conquer and enslave a nation. One is by the sword. The other is by debt.’ These were the prophetic words of John Adams, second president of the United States. Perhaps he would consent to add a third way, that of acculturation. Here I suggest the gravest of its possible meanings, that of ‘cultural modification’ where a transfer of values happens as assimilation to a different dominant culture, as a process of replacing the local or national culture by the foreign one. The world has suffered it mostly as the degrading processes of globalization. Most of the cultures that suffer it fell under the radical influence of the West. In fact, for those suffering from it, it involves replacing one’s own culture with that of somebody else. It is always a blend, but one that takes away the soul of places and their inhabitants. Any Eastern European country, to name the part of the world I know well, has bilingual inscriptions, English being added, all over the place: usually, there is neither obligation nor need for it. Some places are practically never visited by any foreigners, but foreigners, their values and their culture, are growing in the mind of the population. The English language in such cases figures as a sign of an inferiority complex and a way of usually voluntary Americanisation. Most of the music played is foreign; language is inundated by Anglicisms. Trying to be somebody else is a schizophrenic and dangerous social disturbance. Most of the cafes and restaurants, let alone foreign shops (mostly owned by foreign companies anyhow), have English names. This is, of course, a truly global trend. I do not remember having seen any specific exhibition or action by any local heritage institutions to recognize the problem or propose a cure. Needless to say, this is paradoxical and irresponsible, as all these institutions claim the protection of heritage as their mission.

It has always been the case that economic, technologic and political reality intertwines with the ways we eat, speak, dress or behave. Some standardisation of the world is inevitable as we connect to form the mankind of a shared future. But the gigantic monocultural plantations have their counterparts in social and political reality. What we fail to understand is that both are similarly fatal: one ecologically and the other socially. We are dependent upon the very essence of diversity as, though changing, we should retain the quality and richness it



offers. The profession-in-the-making failed to perform this task and the leaders of society gave in to the profiteers. The resulting frustration has been successfully capitalized upon by the rising alt-right. Its success is the measure of the decline of the West. Perhaps what was perceived a few decades ago as perilous globalisation was finally nothing more than a certain Americanization? The possibility of a multipolar world seems like the materialization of the very nature of any diversity perceived as richness, a blessed logic of the nature of heritage and public memory as its generative form.

## **24. Festivalising cities instead of maintaining identity**

To live and develop, cities are turning to all forms of ‘soft power, sometimes (ironically) because they have lost the industrial and other developmental power to fight crises or match their competitors. Only those with an imposing track record as important and creative cities survive, acquiring reputations as attractive destinations for tourists and investors. There are many interpretations of how this is achieved and not all are correct. The new managerial elite has grown up with formidable expertise in monetization, while claiming the humanist and cultural relevance of the approach. The book *Eventful cities* is a good account of the ongoing story of the European Cultural Capital initiative – a revealing and globally relevant experience. But that is the best part of the process, being well-financed and exposed to pan-European scrutiny. Cultural manifestations (exhibitions, festivals, competitions, congresses, performances, concerts ...) are the best when they come from a perfect, scientifically based knowledge of the identity or spiritual potential of the city in question. But most often the enterprising creators of the events, especially the increasingly numerous festivals, content themselves with the prospect of profit (regardless of content), and often embrace all the simplifications proposed by the so-called brands. Only a thorough understanding of the particular identity of the city can be the basis of an event. Yielding to all sorts of managers and PR experts, it becomes obvious that the practices of the public memory sector are not participating enough in this business. However, on any occasion when they take part, even at their best, they represent glittery, barely exploited potential.

## **25. Sensationalism is detrimental and opposed to the heritage**

The sensationalism demanded by the business environment, allowed by politicians and widely acclaimed by the dwindling media, is a development that ruins values by defining them at a lower level. The essential professionalism gives way to resourceful amateurs and dilettanti forming a sort of false professional elites, often created by the private educational sector. A lot of the commercialized educational industry is ineffective and its claims of innovative managerial expertise are bogus. Again, the post-modern paradigm of ‘everything goes’ (taking this to mean freedom), has changed through mercantilization and loss of value systems into ‘nothing matters’ (which is simply the chaos of passing



fashion) and illusions. The public from developing countries hardly recognizes this drama, because the developing and transitory countries are getting more than their fair share of the world's troublesome tendencies. The East believes that the West is superior and better, so they import its mindset with little self-respect. The West is itself shaken in its standards of quality. Uncritical acceptance of foreign experiences also jeopardizes cultural institutions and the possible positive contribution of cultural tourism. The reckless, newly privatized media encourage epigonism, superficial copying and poor imitation. Kitsch seems to have become a disappearing phenomenon, because some contemporary art has appropriated it as a way of expression (Jeff Koons for instance, or the rightfully controversial Damien Hirst) and it has lost its disqualifying power. *Anything goes* indeed became *nothing matters*. So kitsch does not exist any more, because it faces neither professional criticism nor the evaluation of the public media. Of course, museums as keepers of the continuity of good taste and lasting, compelling experiences, are at a loss (as is the society that maintains them) if they withdraw to the secure, scientific analysis of the past.

## **26. Pretended public intellectuals were a model for some modern museums**

Modern, evolved museums were created upon the model and role of the dying species of public intellectuals. They are still there, but modern citizens have been multiple betrayed by all, and this guilt is hanging in the air. As for the visible public intellectuals, not many manage to survive, but fake ones certainly do. Possessing an elevated, extraordinary intellectual capacity is no guarantee of anything. Neither is great factual knowledge. It depends upon how one wishes to use it and to what purpose. If the extraordinary capacities coincide with an equally hypertrophied ego, then no solution will be benign. An insatiable ego is an avaricious monster, which could explain most of our surprise at some knowledgeable, eligible and talented people. They use their extraordinary abilities, first of all to obtain what the world apparently 'owns' them: a very special, personalized, and if possible luxurious treatment, sealed with a monument or at least a plaque to their persona, to provide for some sort of immortality. To make it happen, most of these otherwise gifted and creative humans are ready to serve almost any master. Not only have public intellectuals failed, especially confronted with neoliberal aggressive power-holders, but they have fatally weakened the ideal of the welfare society.

## **27. The world given over to amateurs and the reduction of quality**

'Karaoke', an 'empty orchestra' in the original Japanese meaning of its inventor, was voted several times in recent history to be the most annoying invention of all time. Basically a jukebox with a recording of a music track that makes it possible for anybody to sing along was the symbolic beginning of the world of no content, increasingly void of the real thing. Missing both the real music and the

real singer(s), karaoke gave legitimacy to what in fact was the innocent challenge of letting oneself attempt what professional singers do. But in fact it opened a wider door, figuring almost as a new face of democracy. It was an open invitation to action without doing anything, to the pretence or fantasy that you can do it all yourself without the professionals' contribution. These novelties, though probably coinciding with some general framework, encouraged the value of imitation and mediocrity, so much so that, for instance, air guitar competitions have grown into international events. That meant that the world is turning away from the ideal of professionalism and thus generally denying the values that denote it: knowing one's *métier*, pursuing excellence as a painful but rewarding process of perfecting one's skills, having (at least to some extent) a certain humanistic mission as a framework and taking moral responsibility for one's decisions.

We seem to have handed over much of the world's production, from shipbuilding to popular music, from spirituality to technology, to financiers and managers, who are themselves amateurs in terms of the responsibility they assume. Unable to take responsibility for final consequences, they removed from the production process an expensive insistence on professional perfection. These ruling elites seem to have mentally opened the door to general amateurism. They may not have planned to do so, but they have certainly benefited from it. Professionals are like a bad conscience and may act as blockers, so that weakening their position or removing them from decision-making processes also facilitates the manipulation of the masses.

Anybody can be a painter, waiter, TV presenter, singer, chef, business person, politician, lecturer, or even a Nobel prize winner, it seems - certainly a museum curator. Anybody can set up a university, claim the status of higher education and request the right to public money. The world deprives itself of criteria in increasingly barbarian freedom. This is not a pessimistic lamentation. When 'bad painting' was invented in the 1970s, another fundamental criterion fell. Culture has always been a set of criteria, or a game with them, but kitsch simply cannot be part of culture just as swearing cannot, by any definition, be a pious statement. The post-modern paradigm of the 1980s meant certain freedom of expression which, in its enthusiastic eclecticism, claimed the credo 'anything goes'. But this legitimacy and ease of self-conscious borrowing was turned into the nightmare of 'nothing matters'. In this way, quality ceased to be a cherished concept and the world began to sink into a grotesque, excessive imitation of itself, created by excessive simplification and shallow aspirations. As in politics and economy, chaos seems to be the desired condition for those who, being its creators, imagine they can control it. Maintaining the 'norm' of quality, speaking in the sense of true cybernetics, is exactly what museums are about.

## **28. The need for public authority (-ies)**

We deserve equal chances but we are not equal. We are all free to think what we choose, but most of us need to rely on reliable authority to make up our minds. The age of museums was about science and analysis. Collecting relevant data is

an achievement, but any suggestion about how to use or interpret them always borders on the edge of offering judgements, or rather, it is more important to offer the most credible, most possible judgements. Heritage institutions are, ultimately, unavoidably political, without necessarily being politicized. Politicians have largely lost the confidence of their citizens, and religious organisations are losing it in many countries and cultures. The corporate sector might have had some respect a few decades ago, but scarcely has it any more following the neoliberal craze for an unconditional fixation upon ever-increasing profits and the ensuing corrupt behaviour. A possible comparison between modern museums and public intellectuals might clearly explain their nature. Whether failing or succeeding, they behave in the same way. Some brilliant minds, judging by their formidable knowledge and intelligent research, fail to make brave or usable conclusions. So do museums. When they dare, through their programmes, to advocate the public interest explicitly, they expose themselves to the risk of being rejected by the power-holders that may in some way damage their status, civic comfort or private peace, or reduce their financial support. Nevertheless, most people need some sort of guidance by an authority, be they trusted individuals (such as the most advanced minds) or public institutions like museums and others that form the memory institutions sector. Behind the notorious statements about the importance of science, past, traditions, identity, the fear of sheer oblivion or manipulated memory is the reason we have created our memory institutions. To do the job and make sure public memory matters, they have to turn into a profession.

## **29. Changing the notion of time and future**

Time in prehistory was inconceivable except as a cycle of seasons and astronomical events. The ancient world understood time as mythical and cyclic, while medieval, Judaeo-Christian time was articulated as liturgical. But we are finally arriving at the time continuum, with no more separate layers of time divided into the past, present and future. Half a century ago, Marshal McLuhan was telling us about the 'simultaneous happening' in the 'global village'. In the meantime, the world took a fancy to other prophets, but no-one was as capable as he was of suggesting the shrinking space and bursting simultaneity brought by so vehemently by information technology. The digital cellular networks, now turning into the capacity of the 5G generation, including the Internet, are finally able to prove and exceed McLuhan's vision. The global mega brain of unprecedented efficiency in 'massive machine type communications' is ready to accept challenges. One of them is the notion of time and reality, both as the threat of losing ourselves in the nightmare or as an advance of human consciousness to the higher level. Both will happen, of course, but we shall have to take sides and accept the greatest challenges ever. The fight for cultural heritage will be one of them, and there we stand some chance. The perfect memory which we can attain will require very accountable, responsible interpretation. The other struggle, for the very identity of the human race, poses a challenge which we may not meet in a way we would now find acceptable. Our lurking, concealed,

eugenic ambition may be realised by the creation of the super-human cyborg. Our human nature may only become the issuing inspiration. Time will become what we make of it. The future becomes optional. The past is chosen ever anew.

### **30. World of illusions or the lost reality**

Recent developments aim at augmenting our reality beyond the palpable and immediate. It is good to have your friend or relative on the other side of the globe and yet engage in quasi-real conversation through a video link at practically no cost, or walk the most of the planet virtually as if you were there. It is good to turn your mobile phone towards the picture of a tiger and then see one jumping out your screen into the jungle of your own reality. (By the way, why do we still keep some in zoos, if we are not implying that in cold reason we are not counting on the survival of those outside?) But with opportunities also come challenges. Living in a world of three-dimensional movies and the virtual immersive sound and picture environment will crush any feeble, fragile personality into general confusion about the basic notion of reality. Living in some artificially created, suspended reality as if in a surreal holographic dystopia alters the mind and may ruin our innate need for the safe ground of immediate, real reality around us. Like food with artificial colour, preservatives, fillers, enhancers and dyes, the reality may just fade into thin air, with no reliable contents. Thus our digestive tract, like our brain, will receive questionable input with uncertain but unhealthy and even damaging consequences. Who is going to be in charge of a secure reality? Who or what will be the safe refuge of guaranteed reality? In whom will we place our trust? It would be reasonable to believe that public memory institutions themselves will have their chance to fulfil their mission.

### **31. The overlooked substance of the rising global meta-brain**

The world is an immense store of objects. The world's museums keep, care for and, very partially, display hundreds of millions of objects. Libraries store billions of books. Archives have kept primarily paper documents in equally immense numbers. It is the material substance of a colossal parallel brain for humanity. This material memory, although it appears very obvious and logical, is a peculiar invention of our civilisation. Once the speed of change and self-discovery created the need for something to oppose the change, at least by documenting it, we began to live with this accumulation, evaluation and presentation of the past as a sort of constant process parallel to the forces of change itself. The curious fact is that our brain performs the same procedure all the time: we constantly compare any new sensation with the entire contents of our memory. It is a process of instantaneous comparison that the brain takes fractions of a second to perform. Only then do we form and communicate our reaction. That, I believe, is a good indication of what museums and public memory are for.

## 32. Collective and social memory for the public one

I am not opposed to collective memory as it has formed from individual memories and been composed into this fluctuating and unstable whole, that constantly accumulates and dissipates, that is being recorded and exposed to oblivion, that is channelled, modelled and manipulated. Memory formed in science, culture and the arts, in the creative industries, is social memory par excellence. Any society processes huge amounts of past. From social and collective memory we form our societal, public memory, the one we as a society must have to live by, to configure a reliable mental landscape, a factual and spiritual ground that is developing beneath our feet. Any present process stems from *some* memory. Hopefully not *any*.

## 33. Changing the world sounds like a plausible task for heritage institutions

It is considered childish to aspire to change the world as if this is entrusted only to some geniuses beyond ordinary reality. We cannot afford to doubt whether the world can be changed for the better, but if a contribution to this is not on the agenda of all public institutions, then what is? Museums, like politicians, have been inventing a better past for a long time. This has served many practical purposes (just remember the falsifications, myths and mythologemes used in creating nation-states), but the time has come for museums to become part of the resistance movement. We must balance development and provide sustainability. One way to do this is to employ insights from the past as pearls of much-needed wisdom. Otherwise, we may see the past of we are in charge being put up for sale.

## 34. Europe should know better

Europe is facing hard times because of the confrontations it has taken on through being pushed into unproductive and harmful geopolitical strategies. Abandoning the painfully earned vision of a welfare society, we have become prey to organised chaos. We have to be the continent of continuity, taste, reliable criteria -- a firm point of reference in time and space for the entire world. If we do not impose the lessons of our helpfully long historical experience upon ourselves in the first instance, we may lose prestige and developmental chances. Europe is turning into a museum, which is bad, and into a badly managed one, which is worse. Greece is suffering from degradation of values as the consequence of imposed scarcity, and so are Spain, Portugal and Italy, but which country is not? The transitional newcomers are a case in point. It is an unbearable, ever-increasing pressure. The time for a change of policies has come: the bureaucracy of the EU is not able to propose, support or even follow a vision. Too often European cultural projects have become a mockery in serious circles. Even clever and well-intentioned ideas are turned into endless conferencing, pointless travel, staged cross-border collaborations and calculated-as-sterile workshops.

We should share our perspectives and concerns with the rest of the world and rescue our potential and good reputation for being central to the cultures of the planet. As the former ruthless ruler of the world, Europe, now finally united (though shattered by Brexit), should know better than anyone how to capitalize upon this experience for the sake of humanity.

# On museums, as typical public memory institutions

## **35. An intentional simplification about the nature of museums**

A lot has been said in a complicated way about the true nature of museums. It is the way scientificism (an exaggerated insistence upon the scholarly understanding of the world) would have it. Curiously, this great effort often blurs the picture. Perhaps simple proposals can help, although they naturally invoke simplifications and generalisations, dear to practitioners and amateurs but poorly regarded by academics. It is like swearing, a rightly inadmissible practice in polite society, but, curiously, often the only way to make ourselves very clear. The same is true for excessive political and other correctness. Fortunately enough, we have arts and artists to take over for us. We may, however, try a simplification to prove the case in the point. Why do we have museums? Museums are there to allow and enable us not to live or experience anything for the first time. They are, like all education, great savers of time and trouble: others have experienced everything countless times before, and although they are gone, by our mutual will they are still here to pass on their experiences. We, the actual people, are temporarily the intermediaries between our predecessors and those who are yet to come. The 'torch' to be handed over burns for a while in our possession. It has myriad meanings and interpretations. Through some, we may unite and prosper, while others may lead us to conflict and destruction.

## **36. Once upon a time, or about the self-sufficiency of a conventional museum**

Once upon a time, two men went for a trip in a balloon, but a sudden storm blew them off course, and when it had died down they realized they were completely lost. They were relieved to see a man walking along below and they shouted down to him, 'Hello there! Where are we?'. The little figure on the ground looked up and shouted back, 'You are in a balloon'. The two above looked at each other, and one said: 'He must be a museum curator.' 'What makes you think that?' said the other, quite embarrassed. 'Because the information he gave us is perfectly correct but totally useless!'

Old jokes, quite rightly, may cost one dearly. I originally told this joke within the keynote lecture at the annual meeting of ICOM's International Committee for Education and Cultural Action (CECA) in Paris, 1987. At that time, it sounded a bit harsh, but it was quite appropriate and the paper containing it was published in ICOM News. Much later, I discovered that I was a secretive optimist, although I had thought otherwise. Curiously, the joke makes sense even now, but happily enough, not as much as before.

### 37. The stuffed tiger in a museum

One of the best minds ever in the field of heritage, Kenneth Hudson, wrote and often said: 'A stuffed tiger in a museum is not a tiger but a stuffed tiger in a museum'. This cynical remark has the potential of a full lecture on substitutes and the false character of reality as presented in museums. Museums themselves are a curious paradox, and yet it is not about burning them but rather of enlightening them so that they turn into a more usable memory. To underline the paradox by a coincidence, the French have a funny term for stuffed animals: *animaux naturalisés*. To foreigners, it sounds very paradoxical that the 'naturalisation' of a dead animal can bring any suggestion of life, rather than serving as a reminder of its death. We kill and stuff animals, only to show how they looked when they were alive.

What was obvious before, became evident now: stuffing animals is like zoos, a disputable practice. With modern technologies, we do not need to pretend that our knowledge depends upon such fragile, primitive reminders. There is no valid excuse to kill nor to retain the carcass thus embalmed. An animal turned into a museum object by taxidermy is a ridiculous way to show respect for the living world or even quench the thirst for the exotic and satisfy curiosity. One should be aware that museums serve as an alibi to millions of people who make or buy taxidermy specimens.

But there are exceptions to every rule. 'A New Big Cat for Amgueddfa Cymru' (2017) was an exhibition in the National Museum of Wales on Sumatran tigers, a dramatic and interactive story based upon a specimen from the Welsh Mountain Zoo which died naturally of old age. The stuffed tiger was used as a complex reason and opportunity for presenting the drama of that species from loss of habitat, illegal trade and lack of food. The fact that we have all contributed to this decline was also clearly implied.

So even when we oppose the practice of taxidermy we have to retain our ability to make responsible judgements about nuanced and well-balanced practices. In cases like this, insight, and a 'taste' for creative solutions, are themselves proof of professionalism.

### 38. The curse of materiality in curating heritage

Museums are notorious for their fetishism of the original, of three-dimensional and real objects. Most cultures have a mentality that requires this sort of evidence. The implied expectation is that museums justify their spiritual pledges or their accountability by material proofs. The physical requirement of their spiritual pledge is rather disappointing. The true language of wisdom should not necessarily anchor itself in material evidence. Though people need gods, they readily pardon them for the lack of material evidence of their days on earth. The superiority of material evidence, so consistently required, is rather primitive. It is logical and inevitable in discovering or punishing criminal deeds, but the need



to fixate upon it in matters of spirituality or immaterial values and virtues is arguable. The methods of forensic science are intrinsic to specialist research, but should develop in museums beyond mere information into real communication. The solution is to balance both approaches, knowing that objects are deaf and dumb; they never say anything or prove anything on their own. No evidence will justify or condemn anyone among the thousands of wars we have fought; finally, it will always be up to us and our honesty, integrity and morality to decide. Otherwise, should we resign ourselves to the expectation that we understand all human societies to be corrupted by their own interests and inner denial of any lasting integrity? Should museums simply reflect our imperfections? Our heritage can be understood as a continuous process of negotiation, but, alas, it resembles rather an endless series of trials and judgements. It will be our deeds that matter, not our words. At their best, a museum is a clearing house for the truth by which we survive.

### **39. Museums often reflect the disorientation of society**

The ways of devaluing others have gained subtlety and are hushed up by the campaigns of hypocritical politicians and the activist voices of civil society. The world is in turmoil. When things go wrong, finding scapegoats is the meanest but most efficient way of avoiding responsibility. Museums' sins are smaller than ever, because they are better than before, but they still fail to play their full part, and may be reproached for this; their sin is rather the sin of omission. If they are there to preserve variety and richness, they have to be in synch with the problems of the present, demonstrating a willingness to contribute to their solutions. Museums are still monuments to the conquest of others, of nature, of classes. Recent projects around the repatriation of objects have been encouraging. So too are the programmes for broadening access and inclusion in many Western European cities. Art exhibitions about refugees and the similarly suffering 'others' of the world are often an intentional *omission*: a sort of avoidance or exclusion, by extracting them from their primary contexts. Contemporary art is so much permeated by private interests that it often uses public interest only to simulate solidarity, while in fact monetizing troubles and sufferings. Moreover, as any connoisseur knows, some 'artists' take up these themes only to thrive upon the refugees' misfortune, even to the extent of serving a hidden political agenda while pretending empathy. Ongoing global conflicts are also fought by the soft power of art, by professional dissidents in an amazing combination of private interests and geopolitics. Of course, art is, like any other domain, full of ambitions, manipulative potential and profit opportunities, though the present wild 'one per cent rich list' clientele has encouraged the lowering of quality like no other previous elite.

### **40. Museums as an endangered species**

The present prospects for the world are not looking good and neither are those of culture or museums. A certain disregard for serious criteria has become al-

most the norm. Paradoxically, with the proliferation of studies of marketing and cultural management we have a creeping yet open commercialisation of traditionally public sphere. It is a global process of monetization with its consequences. Anything is a commodity in predatory capitalism. Much blame must be assigned to the cultural sector, and museums in particular, for having missed the opportunity to affirm their mission more clearly. The growing variety of uses for heritage, their commodification and even the production of profit-friendly heritage, harms the credibility of heritage. It also underestimates and downplays the relevance of public institutions. The museums we projected as being ideal may well become an endangered species. Internationally, we failed to create the profession of heritage curatorship, the public memory profession. The title of this section is an allusion to a chapter in the book *Museums for 2000*, to which my contribution was *Curators, the endangered species*. Will that intentional exaggeration become another irony?

## 41. Devaluing others

Formerly overtly racist, museums are becoming positive and healing. Long gone are the days when museums functioned like zoos in which ‘primitive people’ were exposed. In 1876, Carl Hagenbeck, the father of zoos and animal trading, put together a European travelling exhibition of live animals and ‘wild’ people, in this particular case Nubians. His endeavour encouraged a collaborator to return to the Egyptian Sudan in search of more wild beasts and Nubians. In his Hamburg Tierpark, at another successful show, he had displayed an ‘Esquimaux’ (Inuit) from Labrador. Hagenbeck’s exhibit of human beings, considered as ‘savages’ in a ‘natural state’, was the probable source of inspiration for Geoffroy de Saint-Hilaire’s ‘human zoo’ exhibition, in the *Jardin d’Acclimatation* in Paris. In 1877 Saint-Hilaire organized two ‘ethnological exhibitions’, presenting Nubians and Inuit to the public, thus succeeding in doubling the entrees of the zoo.

That was the high-water mark for those attitudes, which have since been abandoned, apart from instances of intolerance and racism. But even when museum objects originate from other cultures and civilisations, attempts to understand them are usually made from the Occidental point of view. They are exposed entirely without context and represent cultures known to some extent by experts only; these objects are hardly more than strange, enigmatic aesthetic facts. Taken in their expatriated reality, these objects, though allegedly collected out of scientific interest, are testimonies of colonial victories, spoils of wars, conquests and the consequences of looting distant, disadvantaged cultures. A disregard for the original meaning of objects or for the appropriate methods for their display (often contrary to the beliefs of the culture they belong to) is a sign of ignorance and a domineering attitude that should be denounced by any public cultural institution, let museums, which are endowed with a humanist mission. Exhibiting the Royal drum belonging to the Ankole tribe of South East Africa is sacrilege: an entire generation of Ankole may pass that will never set eyes on it, important as it is, and yet it is exposed to the eyes of crowds of foreigners in a museum that acquired the object in distressing circumstances. Georges Henri

Rivière claimed for ecomuseums that they should be a mirror of society, and rightly so. However, that mirror often shows us what we were not aware of or would like to hide or ignore. The West is, paradoxically (because it often declares otherwise), still racist and intolerant. It should give back what it has taken from others. It is not the task of museology to design the creative solutions to this problem, because museology is about the technicalities of running an institution, but of public memory science. The latter would find ways to make return the symbolic core of a process of reversal for the planet, one of giving instead of conquest. This goes for the cultures of others as well as for nature. No wealthy Western museum would perish or close in the process, but would simply share. Noble memory can become a core part of the strategy for global peace and justice. General prosperity and a safe Earth are only a step away. Does it require financial support? Some, yes, but let us reflect in terms of military hardware: a luxury submarine costs about three billion, an aircraft carrier about nine. The world's top combat aircraft currently sells at a good price: you can buy three for the price of Tate Modern, but the programme to develop it cost almost five hundred billion dollars. In general, the world does not lack money, but brains and morality. Excuse me for the lack of scientific subtlety. How should we envisage the role of education and public memory in this light? Of course, we cannot have them, as this would lead to a welfare society for everyone.

## **42. A museum is a democratic tool, but it is the mind-set not the collection that decides what it does**

Most museums have powerful elements of a great societal narrative in their collections. But it is not objects but a sense of purpose and mission that determine the working process. Museums and other heritage institutions are themselves a political issue, and as memory – collective, cultural and public – they are a natural component or rather a tool of democracy. The future will pass by and ignore simple ideological orientations. These survive more by manipulation than by arguments. Insight into societal processes, and being well and objectively informed, will provide the basis for a society of justice and equal chances. There is no democracy without free participation in the processes of memory: collection, care (storage, retrieval, research) and communication.

## **43. Charles the Decent**

History often relies on facts, though not too often. If based on facts, history would change the world, would actually dismantle it. It is not only written by winners and the powerful: it is also painted by them. That is, by their hirelings. The painting you see on the easel just before it is finished, has ended up, some 500 years later, in a museum. The good and noble King Charles, by the grace of God, King of X, Lord of Y, Duke of Z and W, Count of &, who reigned by law (he is pointing to the BOOK!) and who brought peace and decency to the country (for which fact his PR forced his subjects to call him 'the decent') had no concept of museums. But great rascals, who always refuse to die, shrewdly

plan how to immortalize themselves. Unlike the pharaohs, they are embalmed in the composition of collective memory, not a mixture of ingredients but a set of mnemonic actions and procedures imposed on the societal mind.

So King Charles decided to live on in the public memory of society, well and fondly remembered. At that time, as increasingly today, the state offered little help, so scientists, artists, writers, actors and professors depended upon the sponsorship of the mighty. If the masters suddenly fell into a rage, they would be kicked out of the warm castle into the cold darkness. No wonder they were keen to please him (it is usually *him*, even today). The king thus purchased many portraits, and so did his sycophants, and thus they were dispersed to all parts of his kingdom and elsewhere. His statues adorned the most representative squares of the cities to which he granted free status, or, to put it less historically, by paying a ransom to the king they were allowed to defend themselves against robber barons. His beneficial help was mentioned on the front pages of many books and he received the most exquisite praise in poems and paintings. The words were written by his grateful beneficiaries, who happened to be the greatest minds of his time. Like painters and sculptors, they invested their names, becoming forever the guarantors of the credibility and veracity of the king's humanist reputation. Greatness granting benefits in exchange remains even today the liveliest trade.

If you take your grandchild to a museum, try to observe the paintings by famous artists, not only as works of art but also as multi-dimensional historic objects, testimonials to the time and circumstances. Unfortunately, the captions tell you nothing, while the guides usually mention only the genius and mastery of the painter. Museums are unlikely to assist us in this venture, as only a rare few have realized that their true mission is to play the role of public intellectuals - sometimes even that of the tribunes, the bad intermediaries who consciously stand little chance of recognition.

The caricature and text are can be found on the web site [www.mnemosophy.com](http://www.mnemosophy.com), part of an abandoned project; the two decades ago my friend, Ivica Kiš, did the drawing after I humbly requested a pictorial translation of the above story. The musicians afforded me grim amusement, as they reminded me so much of some curators witnessing reality. I drew the explanatory, second drawing showing my students a grandfather with a grandson in a public museum showing the painting, but, without the context at the moment of its creation.

#### **44. Museums multiply**

There is a certain crisis hidden in any success, and this is the case with museums. Museums are multiplying, and there will eventually be even more of them. China is a case in point, with a growth rate of a new museum every day and a half, but the explanation for this is complex. However, the growing interest in museums is a fact and demonstrates at least two things: one is their rising importance, and the reasons for their existence, which is a significant phenomenon in its own

right, and the other their failure to impress, so that everybody feels tempted if not qualified to have an opinion about them.

There is also one more possibility about which I am much concerned, and that is the disintegration or rather spread of the concept. I have no problems with this. To me it is just another confirmation of the thesis I proposed four decades ago in my PhD entitled *Towards the Total Museum*. I should mention that 27 years after my defence of this thesis it has been translated into Serbian and published at Belgrade Faculty of Letters. No wonder they did so, as a visionary colleague there, Dragan Bulatović, renamed the entire Department so that it included heritology, alongside the notorious museology.

## 45. Big does not mean good

‘A big collection and an empty store? That might be the sign of a good museum.’ With this provocative statement, I tried to suggest that museums should make full use of their collections. They may rotate their displays, lend them to ‘poor’ museums, or if required, return them to the place from which they were taken. After a century or two of diligent or sometimes compulsive collecting, most museums display and use barely a quarter of their collection, the majority probably much less. As Ellen McAdam, former director of Birmingham Museums says, in the case of Glasgow and Birmingham the proportion is under 2%. The statistics would much vary from one country to the other or one type of museum to another, but numbers tell that most of the museums are congested with objects doomed to the perpetual darkness of their vaults. Mentioning bulimia in this context is also provocative: most museums continue to pursue this sort of quantitative perfectionism, in which more is better. While the subject is very complex, the implication that a big collection means a good museum is usually very wrong. Creative and responsible use of a well-selected collection (with the aid of secondary material and interpretive media) is surely the route to quality.

There was an art project called *It Wasn't Meant To End Like This* (Sea Festival, Aarhus, Denmark), a temporary sculpture involving a huge, real excavator that buried itself, that may well illustrate part of the museum destiny. The Age of Museums (G Bazin) was very much characterized by collecting. Responding to the quickly changing world and the need to document the disappearing past, collecting was a way to a well-founded, scientifically and factually supported public memory. However, like any strategic decision it can become perverted into yet another problem. Occupied with the problem of securing the preservation of what was endangered, museums often turned to a sort of false perfectionism by collecting everything that fitted into their theme. Thus collecting has occasionally become mere hoarding. Faced with the challenges of declining funding and a clear mission to serve their communities, museums need to adjust: their enormous collections tend to be both a challenge and a danger. It is not only a question of the rising costs of collecting. Politicians have already started to investigate the weaknesses of the museum position as an excuse either to close museums or to reduce their public funding, regardless of the devastating consequences this may

produce. Answers to the questions of how to collect, store and use collections are to be found in positive practice and professional experience. Some are suggested in the thinking that has grown up around the theory of the role of museums in society. However, the current revival of political conservatism retards the decisive formation of a heritage profession, the only long-term solution, because the existence of a profession confers a certain legitimacy and power of response. There is a powerful mission that museums have the right and duty to defend.

#### **46. The short reach of museums**

We may lull ourselves into the illusion that museums matter, but in the configuration of power what museums propose and do is largely marginal. Giving voice to citizens, to communities, to identity groups is what we do, but if we only look at the context created by corporate interests with the assistance of politics and the media, we can see how far short we fall from all our ideal projections. Our reach is still short and limited, compared to what we could achieve. To put it the other way round, museums are more visited than ever. But we may be concerned about two aspects of this: the inadequate quality of those visits (especially where big numbers are concerned) and their ineffective socio-political power (especially in the countries where their wisdom is most needed).

#### **47. Museums stand for the elitism of quality**

Many countries live in a post-democratic world of staged democracy, where the population is often addressed as *mass* and *crowd*, so that the voters seem to be there only to provide the process with formal, manipulated approval. Museums must avoid any reduction of their contribution to this populist level. The false elites have destroyed the positive implications and features of elitism. The majority deserve to be the focus and purpose of constant societal improvement, but not via blandishment and flattery. The growing commercialism of the mass media is degrading this ambition and constantly lowering standards.

#### **48. The western model of museums should be widened by specific solutions**

A museum is a process, not necessarily an institution. It does not even have to own a collection in the traditional sense. The transfer of collective experience is happening everywhere, from Inuit igloos to skyscrapers in New York and mud-brick houses in Africa, and it can be performed everywhere. That is the basis of what the museum is – the process. Of course, the transfer can take place as little more than a deteriorating routine in a traditional society hit by a crisis. It can turn into manipulation and folly if fatally exposed to business and political ambitions. Luckily, however, the inherited experience can also be passed on as noble values and wisdom. The West invented museums and, unfortunately, being preposterously prone to conquest it has been overtly or implicitly imposing its model. The internationalization of culture and the influence of the West

left little space for others to have an opportunity to invent their specific ways of dealing with the process, in the form of museums stemming from their own cultures. It is hard to believe that such divergent understandings of the nature of the past, culture, identity and heritage should necessarily lead to the same institutional model as the western museum. Great cultures and civilizations other than the West should be able to design their own or self-adjusted response to the need for human advancement. They should stop measuring success by statistical comparisons to the West. I believe that different conditions and needs necessarily result in specific solutions. In this sense, the eco-museum concept was revolutionary, as it advocated an institutional shape that stemmed from identity itself, its nature and its protagonists.

## **49. Fascination with material evidence**

Our fascination with material evidence is both logical and paradoxical. In losing the solid ground by living a life of increasingly dematerialized illusions, we may be developing a new taste for real objects, but this is paradoxical because we accumulate so much past and so many objects that three decades ago I was alarmed to find myself prophesying the 'limits of growth' for museums. But what I did not know at the time was the fact that most cultures still care for the 'precious' and 'old', and not so much for the actual and contemporary, which they probably find ephemeral. I surmise that this has a lot to do with the fetishist nature of human beings. It opens up very interesting perspectives for the future. Museums may turn into stores for the parameters of reality. I would conclude by saying that fetishism will continue, but that it will be seriously rivalled by the great multimedia ambiances. The technical issues of the limits to growth were resolved long ago by separate stores, sometimes using the valuable space that was released for communication instead. In other cases, there has been a certain postponement of imminent problems. The guiding idea should be that of the total museum: the museum remaining there, at the very heart of life, supplying a high degree of sensitivity, taste and the cultivated need for good-quality understanding of the past. My PhD was entitled *Towards the Total Museum* (1985)

## **50. The lack of objects and creativity in the new technological environment**

Sometimes the problem may be the absence of real objects. All the potential is there if there is an ample, well-preserved and documented collection with the capacity to support good research. I have often seen, especially after periods of war or transition, that culture appears to be irreversibly deprived of its constructive arguments and evidence of its beneficial qualities. The shame is that both these types of event are devastating to identity, one because it involves the more than symbolic erasure of the adversary and the other because it usually takes the form of denial of identity and acculturation. The claim that all heritage is ultimately intangible but only some of it can be presented in a tangible form makes sense, especially in such situations, when objects are scarce but a



definite right to them and to the memory they contain persists. So places and ambiances of memory can exist, regardless of the medium or mode in which the memory has been stored, cared for, retrieved or communicated. My hope has been derived from my study of the history of art: the artist can help us to form a confluence. For a while I believed that curators were clever enough to understand that although they are scientists, or people of learning, their primary job is to communicate. Parallel to that, I hoped that artists would finally see that their destiny does not have to be restricted to the tyranny of endless innovation, but that they could serve life itself and remain creative individuals, by, for instance, joining curators in the creative communication of the past. With the help of technology and even minimal material relics, this can become a superb applied theatre, as Peter Greenaway demonstrated in his revelatory and genial way of interpreting Leonardo da Vinci, Rembrandt or places such as the Palace of Venaria. He is a painter turned film director, screenwriter and artist. I would also like to mention Robert Lepage, Canadian playwright, actor, film director, and stage director, who eventually turned more to the theatre, but who was one of the first to demonstrate the power of 3D mapping and grand-scale happenings. For two decades such people suggested that heritage and memory institutions might seize the chance this creativity offers. In practice, however, designers prevailed over curators: their agenda was more effectively argued and, it must be admitted, they demonstrated the great potential of new technologies, whether in creating exhibition ambience and the use of equipment, or using IT and multimedia. Now we have a whole new branch of design serving museums and exhibitions, but the cumulative potential of curators and artists has not turned into the '8<sup>th</sup> art', that of heritage communication. At the time of writing my PhD, in the early 1980s, I was advocating the use of information technology, claiming that it would mean a 'new richness of museums'. In the 1990s, I thought it would be so triumphant that it would assume the quality of definite creative autonomy. I guess both claims should encourage us to advance the quality of communicating heritage.

## **51. Museums as past-processing plants**

We produce so much past that if we had perfect memory we would be soon immersed in it. So, in contrast to their origins, our museums turn more and more into processing plants of the growing accumulation of memory. The internet providers have turned into gigantic collectors of memory, and only at the edges of their communication are they to some extent selective, increasingly in response to their own commercial criteria.

## **52. The metricist efficacy as the criterion of quality**

One of the reasons for the growing fascination with efficiency is the competitive environment. The other is the result of the mobilisation of the whole force of society towards prosperity. The economy has finally perceived culture as relevant to development, which, of course, is good because it helps to overcome the



traditional obstacles to proving its importance. On the other hand, it exposes culture to business logic and managerial solutions which are usually destructive to its essence. The commodification of culture is a gradual and to many, alas, imperceptible process. The media will often offer lump-sum assessments of cultural organisations or museums based upon the numbers of venues, their size or the number of objects they contain. Even more frequently, they will announce as a success any event that demonstrates high visitor numbers. These creeping criteria of industrial logic (the cheap, mass-consumed product) and efficiency of investment (the biggest effects for the smallest input) are importing true marketization into the culture. Of course, not even museum curators, let alone their audiences, would be aware that marketing is not about PR but about creating a quality product and making it known. The direct consequence of this misuse of marketing has been the reduction of quality in anything influenced by it.

### **53. Fascination with technology and management**

Museums nowadays use business techniques and skills to improve performance, but what remains most important is understanding the nature of museums and the true role of heritage. That is why we need theory and, eventually, a practical science. Business management and technology bring the irresistible charm of omnipotent capacity. But good technology and perfect management are at the core of successful warfare, not of culture, of killing, not of life. To avoid wars and what they bring to decent people we need the virtues of humanity and wisdom.

### **54. The paradox of rising technological potential**

Until the cyborgs themselves invent their world, everything will remain the same: we will only write what we have in our heads, whether with a quill pen or dictated directly to the computer. Even more people will write books, and the quantity is likely to lower the quality of both offer and reception. Paradoxically, it may even distance us from the wisdom and solutions we seek. Unfortunately, the world becomes uglier, more trivial and more banal, losing its richness and diversity from day to day. For the first time in human history, we will leave the world worse for the young than when we found it. Of course, this position should be reversed. Most of the wonderful technologies, despite their extraordinary, unprecedented potential to make the world better, have become part of the problem, not part of the solution. The invention of television is still the best example. The world was given a chance to fight for wholesome values and assure beneficial social agreement at the planetary level. As with any revolutionary development, we had the fate of the world in our hands. It seems that we failed to make a thorough and lasting beneficial impact out of any of these changes, political, social or technological. Although some collective experience survives, it has not led us out of the rising paradoxical threat to the very survival of mankind.

## 55. Weighing technology as a potential mindset

No change happens without a changed mindset. Higher education itself turns into a splurge of buzzwords and a smattering of knowledge of some sensational innovation. Our museums will not promote ancestral wisdom better because we have ICT, VR, 2.0, 3D mapping, AR, 5G and the culture as well as the heritage sector adapted to the potential of the fourth revolution... The technology itself will not make us the conveyors of the brightest, best, most precious and dearest of ancestral achievements, those our ancestors were proudest of, recognized by others as their contributions of value. Only our own efforts, our understanding of the spiritual nature of human existence, and a scientifically based worldview that acknowledges and reaches the unreachable, can do so. All that is good in human history consists only of trying to make mankind resemble their ideals, or those of their benign gods, and to establish worthy earthly circumstances. The latter, alas, are only promised to the suffering and obedient among us, either as a democratic ideal or as compensation in heaven, but both, admittedly, after death.

True professions refuse to be part of illusionary reality. The technological euphoria of the world in the early 80s suggested that all our catalogues, all our documentation, in short everything, would be computerized and accessible at the touch of a button. Technology may assist, enhance, improve, advance, but it does not do so by itself. When computers appeared as a magic solution to all our problems, the cooler heads who saw the danger also issued the first warnings. Their brutal, sobering proposition was simple: garbage in, garbage out! And this remained the philosophers' stone of the information revolution.

## 56. Is technology our servant, friend or boss?

The technological challenge reminds us that we should first have answered the question from our infinity, that of the human mind and spirit. The simple, ignored and manipulated problem has been the same from the beginning: what is good and what is evil? Being lulled by science into exploring diligently the two infinities, that of the macro and the other of the micro world, we have forgotten to explore the only one that finally matters, that of the human mind, the spiritual dimension of our existence.

The place of computers and telematics in the late 1970s is today occupied by 5G and AI, and again we expect the marriage of technologies, but this time not one that would simply surprise us, but one that already appears hazardous and pernicious. Its potential is almost self-generating and will define the tools and outcomes of the fourth (or fifth?) revolution. Not only that, we have the logical feeling of being at the moving start-line of the future as it overwhelms the human capacity to understand our own reality. Our power of change has taken over and imposes a rhythm to which we have no capacity to adjust. Faced with the unattainable, people involuntarily sink into ignorance, mysticism and fierce identitarian angst.

## 57. The ambiguous power of IT

Information technology first seduced us, then puzzled us and blurred our job descriptions, and then the best used it to get even better.

Unthinkable money (which the developing world has never had in abundance) was spent on ever-newer generations of computers and millions of working hours (which we apparently still have in abundance) were spent on changing hardware, futile arrangements and temporary knowledge. Even after three decades of expense and effort, the documentation of half the entire museum holdings of Croatia has not been digitized. And this is a phase that no computer can bypass by scanning with some intelligent wonder drone. Everyone forgot that technologies pay off only for those who want to improve what they already do well. To give an example, the Intranet was introduced in all major institutions, involving millions of meters of cable at huge cost, but it did not introduce a culture of collaboration and teamwork to justify the investment. Then 4G made most of the wiring obsolete. Using technology purposefully, making sense of it, does not work that way. Thus it is with digitization. Thus it will be with 5G or as yet unknown variants of technology. We are dealing with an industry that pursues its own interests, not those of the users of the technologies they offer.

Learning and understanding the profession, that is, real professionalization, which behaves morally and responsibly as part of a social project, is the only way to enable good technological decisions: what is the rational ratio between cost and benefits, what are the risks, what are the priorities of the work? If a curator lacks the conviction and drive of a true public servant, he or she will never surpass it through mere knowledge of technology. At the beginnings of IT in the early 1980s, the first handbooks tried to make it clear: garbage in, garbage out. Computers were never meant as a shortcut to anything. Buying information technology first impoverished us, then its capacity for memory and retrieval fascinated us, then for some it blurred the fundamental aspects of our job, appearing as a goal and not a means, and finally becoming what it now clearly is, a challenge to our creativity and a reminder of our power. The greater the ability, the bigger the responsibility.

## 59. Using technology correctly is the measure of professionalism

The point of writing and theorizing about the curatorial job is not to flatter the profession or its members, but quite the opposite, to create a warning, as annoying and irritating as the farewell of a parent to a travelling child. Technological fascination can make us victims of marketing (programs, unnecessary equipment) and turn us into helpless clients for unnecessary innovations, or as the sellers adore, for regular, expensive and massive memory migrations, none of them worth the money and time invested. But unfortunately, only our catalogue cards seem to be permanent. The art is to take what one needs. In dealing rationally with priorities (and who can afford otherwise in times of scarcity?) we should

assume that the catalogue of a small museum can remain un-digitized for a long time, because some collections are still manageable by the traditional paper system, or it is still within the capacity of the curators' memory to reflect upon them. Change, like innovation, can become a terror in a way that the original meaning of the words does not imply.

Only a strong profession is capable of creating its own, real solutions. We should love and embrace new technologies. They deserve our love most when they serve a creative and caring person or team, and least when they are a means to someone's profit and trivialize creativity and professionalism. Put simply, curatorial excellence should not depend on technology which should be used only to increase its reach and impact.

## **60. The value of the public**

Regular visitors to museums are called the public. They are called all sort of other names. Casual visitors are people who just pop in, whereas users are those who live with the museum's offer. The lay public is spoiled by the ruling elites of society: by politicians, in recent decades by the church, and by the sensationalist media that demonstrate a disregard for anything that is not ostentatiously banal amusement. As usual, poor and transitional countries and 'smaller' cultures get more than their fair share of trouble. I am the only museum person I know who has ever complained in writing (*Eternity does not live here any more*) about the museum public: I am aware of their latent conservatism and reluctance to experiment. However, we have no choice but to fight for them. If we study their needs and respond to them they will support us. One thing must be accepted as axiomatic: an empty museum is never the fault of the public or the community, it always reflects a job poorly done.

## **61. The immaterial nature of values**

Every heritage is immaterial and only some of it is materialized. The field of meaning possessed by every museum object invariably reminds us of 'immateriality'. Without added interpretation, every object is a mute puzzle. Heritage reduced to objects, even to precious objects, is neither complete nor true. Isolated in institutions, in display cases, and on shelves, it is merely a reminder that only the heritage that lives or that we live with is important. To be complete, it needs its integrity, the inexhaustible, fluid part of heritage that forms its natural connective tissue. Public memory institutions (museums, archives and libraries) are not a luxury for wealthy societies, nor can they be the pastime of idle scientists. In a world of confused values, of the continuing loss of quality, in a world that is getting uglier and increasingly inhospitable, the interpretation of heritage, especially it's an impalpable part, is a question of the correct perception of development, and hence of life.

## **62. Excellence is always a result of matching expertise to the simple streams of life**

Professional analysis of the local situation has to precede all decisions; such an analysis should offer a structure, even a hierarchical list of local values that need to be presented, communicated and continued. It has to be reductive and planned for a programme of successive changes. The project, as a matter of principle, should be undertaken with the local population, following its needs closely: it requires their consent and approval. It has to be adopted as theirs, by their conviction, and if not there is no reason for it to exist. Of course, innovation may take time to be accepted, but among the conditions for a successful project one requires courage and power of persuasion. Good arguments matter. Politicians are often the guardians of the status quo, but so often are members of the public, who tend to be conservative. Even museums have their traditions, and sometimes these traditions seem to play along with this. A sense of balance combined with an unfailing sympathy for the immediate, true needs of the community might be a good start. The final intention is always what Kenneth Hudson called, 'an honest museum'. Of course, those identity-minded museums that tell the story of the place and the people are ready communicators, unlike specialist, scientifically oriented ones.

## **63. A small museum in a small region: turning threats into advantages**

Outside our meetings and beyond our institutions, there are the creators of developmental decisions - all decisions that impose conceptual and financial frameworks. Political parties have no development strategy that either originates from heritage or relies upon it. Politicians usually understand culture either as a show or a burden, as a means of forging nationalist mythology or as a way of making money. Each of these misapprehensions is a fatal mistake because they lead not only to the disintegration of culture and identity; they act as labels for poverty and regression. What can a small museum in a small region do? With good curators and local decision-makers, a lot. It is possible to turn misunderstandings in the community's favour, showing that culture is a way of life, a necessity, a constant source of self-awareness, self-respect and respect for diversity while creating additional arguments for economic development. It can resist impoverishment and the erosion of identity by carrying out the proverbial mission of wise old people from traditional culture: recognizing values, researching and documenting them and restoring to life those that deserve to be remembered and lived.

## **64. Contemporary art museums are the most exposed memory structure**

I will paraphrase a famous art gallerist, John Sailer from Vienna, who many years ago in a lecture said: 'if art dealers sell it, art publishers publish it, media

support it, museum directors display it and people buy it, it is probably not art at all'. If a millionaire tycoon buys art 'en grosse', it is not an achievement but simply another game of investment and returns, and quite possibly not art, either. However, whatever has been produced with the aim of selling it as art, with much advice and intervention from the interested parties, has a very good chance of assuring itself a place, not only in the market but also in museum collections. The market will yield the biggest profit that can be created by the merchants, while museums with their public role of cementing values for eternity will serve as guarantors and providers of legitimacy. The chain thus starts with money for consultants and dealers and ends by approved, attested public value, with an exorbitant increase in market value. Artists who for any reason refuse to cooperate fully will be ostracized, even if their talent or work demonstrates exceptional quality. The entire system then has another chance with a posthumous career, which can be arranged with well-disposed and pliable heirs and inheritors. Even if the turnover is not fabulous, this is how dealers are accustomed to function. Most artistic biographies are mainly convenient myths, written with the close cooperation of all interested parties. The general practice of history of art, beyond the top personalities and literature, is mainly a construct based upon some facts and a lot of convenient projections, almost a branch of fiction, an art in itself, so to say.

## **65. Museums' innate nature makes them natural leaders of cross-sector cooperation**

They are natural leaders because of their role within the nascent profession of the care and communication of public memory, as are libraries and archives, and the relevance of this spreads widely, to some private, civil, hybrid or virtual (digitally born) heritage institutions or actions. Cross-disciplinary and cross-institutional cooperation is now advisable but will become part of the future solution, for society (which needs its active, well-selected and responsible memory) and for the very survival of the heritage sector as a reasonably autonomous societal power for the constantly negotiated social contract. Democracy is not what we are taught in the West on daily basis: we see the velvet dictatorship of the corporate sector, politicians and media. Free elections are staged as a grotesque carnival for the increasingly ignorant, resigned and despaired mob. We need an entire publicly relevant memory sector to unite and feed the strategies for best decision-making because the population needs to rely upon unbiased public memory.

## **66. The endangered role of contemporary art museums**

Museums are about the past, however we may object to the fact. It can be an immediate past, one that everybody remembers, or the past we are creating, or indeed, the ancient, sedimented past. So contemporary art museums are a paradoxical syntagm, an oxymoron, a contradiction in terms. Museums discern what is important in the past or in passing human experiences, they recognize the importance of the values included and recognize what is endangered and

deserves to be studied, preserved, cared for, and communicated to others. This last is done out of the immanent nature of the institution and its public mission: it is all about memory maintenance, so that progress emerges as a result.

This process is a natural one, but museums are there to energize it, and they do so with the assistance of eager supporters: people in need of the service, mostly and effectively the educated public. The middle class (with its ambitious lower part and its elitist sprouts in the upper layer) lives with this social transfer and supports it. One way of doing this is, of course, by buying art and enjoying exhibitions. Alas, museums have been pushed into a passive role by underfunding and exclusion from a position of influence over the public evaluation of art production and its affirmation. Market stakeholders, in the varying forms of the 1% velvet tyranny, usually find a way into public institutions, and make them accomplices of their manipulation. Public taste becomes a construct, usually designed in the marketing laboratories of rich collectors, gallerists and media.

Paradoxically, museums are natural promoters of equal opportunities, the basis of real democracy. By providing access to a worthwhile collective experience, historically reserved for the rich and powerful, museums are able to help ordinary people by raising their (often miserable) existence to a better level. However, contemporary art museums seem to be too close to the suddenly released liberal beast to be left alone to act as a part of a responsible profession. Instead of being agents of ennobling the visual reality of contemporary society, their centre of gravity is somehow shifted out of the democratic societal ambition.

## **67. Digital reality and museums**

The interconnectivity of digital reality, as interconnectedness and interdependence, has a huge potential to accumulate societal powers. They can be manipulated, but they can also gain a certain momentum and quality of their own and turn into tsunamis of public protest, for example against politicians, who now serve corporations instead of the people who elected them. When that happens, other things become possible. It may demonstrate that any medium is perfect for humanist ethics to be dispersed so that we finally advance as human beings. Digitally born museums and heritage actions are already very advanced but need improvement at the level of the entire system. They will ultimately be responsible for being the safe ground for all those lost in the nightmare of second reality. At least occasionally, they will need a human touch of real things, real places, real exchange and real basic morality, even if reality means a certainty that the data are not manipulated, that information is true and proposed conclusions ethically plausible.

## **68. A bad museum in place of proper, quality action**

Languages are centres of identity, at least symbolically; they share its fate. The globalization or rather internationalization of cultures is like a monster devouring hundreds of them a year, languages and even identities. The obvious remedy



may be to found a museum, but that brings new worries, since any medicine may have side effects. When a village wants a museum we should be ready as a profession to react and help. It will come into existence once a sector of public memory institutions is formed as a self-generating system following certain public standards and criteria. However, the world which is becoming more privatized daily is an increasingly unlikely place for servicing public needs. It may rather serve its wants, even inventing them when deemed opportune. There is no value that an amateurish lack of understanding and taste cannot trivialize and destroy. In the history of museums, we have had bad museums which were, as a rule, punished by being empty. Now, even bad museums may be full, because in their disregard for the community they may encourage only its baser instincts.

## **69. The language of museums as that of life itself**

Too many curators think that their museum is there to display the collection that is held in its stores. In an ideal situation this may work. However, a regional museum with a collection that is the result of curious and sometimes bizarre historical circumstances, not to mention the war and plunder, natural disasters or political changes, would almost certainly fail to represent its region by showing only what has been 'washed ashore' by these tumultuous circumstances. But it is there to tell this story. How much more can be done with appropriate collecting and display policies, borrowing, use of secondary material, cooperation with other heritage organisations in the region, and redefinition of concept (perhaps as the centre of a territory interpreted by an eco-museum). Surely the language of museums has to be that of life itself.

## **70. Marketing is indispensable if comprehended and harmful if misunderstood**

Marketing is about creating a good, honest product and then making it known. Marketing is a perfect checklist for managing your institution safely to assure the accomplishment of its mission. It does not tell you much about contents, but more about outcomes - as a form of strategy. I believe that I was the first person from the profession to write a book on marketing: until then (2001) such books were written by economists, managers and others who might have had some peripheral experience in museum matters. This is why I was able to include in it three chapters that other books at the time did not have: The world we live in (because what on earth can we produce if we keep our minds closed to the world around?), The mission of museums (because if we do not know our sacred mission somebody will come and redirect us towards his own interests), and, of course, Friends and supporters (because we shall be successful if we are loved, and be loved back if we love). The first piece of wisdom comes from Goethe (1821) and the other is probably some two millennia older, a Latin saying. My book, *Marketing in Museums*, is now probably obsolete and was written in Croatian (and also published in Serbia), but the sub-title reveals its basic thesis: '...or on virtue and how to make it known'. An attempt to have it

translated at the time failed, due to finances, poor translation and so on. This supports my complaint that small countries and 'small' cultures receive little attention. The rich and powerful cultures and countries can afford to lead the world, but the world with its common, globalized destiny will have to search for less obvious sources of knowledge and innovation. The arrogant brain drain, to take one example, should become the sharing of common potential. Perhaps wrongly used or misunderstood marketing, imposed by the increasingly biased media, has damaged the image of 'less obvious' countries and cultures in favour of supremacies that traumatize the world always anew.

## **71. Marketing is a reminder of two basic questions**

As author of the book *Marketing in Museums* I have both implicitly and explicitly criticized misunderstandings of the museum concept and of marketing itself. It was one of those innovations, like computers, which were greeted as magic solutions. But marketing was just a reminder, invented by managers, of all the basic questions one has to answer correctly if one wishes public success if one wants to sell one's product, as marketers would put it. The first question of marketing is 'What is your product?' I have therefore tried not only to affirm the true nature of the museum product but also to elucidate some of the parameters of its quality. The second most important question is 'What business are you in?' Essential marketing always requires a clear and convincing answer to these two questions. Without acceptance of them, and the ability to offer solid answers, marketing in museums (or indeed anywhere) is mere pretence and an unnecessary burden. Some twenty years ago, museums regarded themselves (openly or secretly) as prevailingly scholarly institutions. However, even then and still more so now the job of a museum, or any institution in the heritage sector, is prevailingly one of communications. Of course, what one communicates must be founded in science or scholarship and socially motivated. Heritage institutions exist in splendid variety but make the best sense when publicly minded. If public standards of transparency and responsibility match public financing, then we are doing things the way sound marketing would advise us to. This simple truth, if adopted and internalized, has huge consequences.

## **72. Heritage institutions and identity**

If we were to describe the museum/heritage process it would be as one of giving back - reinforcing - continuing. It is about the reinforcement of the cultural immune system through self-assurance, pride and awareness. It is about the encouragement of cultural life, and in fact of any creativity: assisting living cultural production by providing organisational and logistic support, through heritage institutions, and by heritage action, revitalisation, reinforcement and recognition. Part of the process is also the affirmation and support of quality in culture and in life, through the education of the consumer/user, by public promotion of its status and value and by training. The societal mindset, as part of the same process, should have heritage at the foundation of developmental

strategies with controlled growth, the ideology of quality, and harmonisation and balance as supported ways of thinking. That process should be influential enough to promote sustainability as opposed to excessive profit orientation. Of course, it sounds utopian: what value orientation isn't? It would suffice, as a beginning, if we were able to claim that we are on that path, working in that direction.

The conventional paradigm for museums was based upon taking while giving away what was regarded as appropriate and necessary. But the mindset of giving is a different approach. Much has been said about the true nature of museums, and I believe any serious projection was deliberately idealistic. How else could we know the direction of our advance and improvement? Museums were there to reinforce what was weak and disappearing, wherever science and the humanist vision suggested that we had good reasons to save some vanishing value. To reinforce in this way is to assure a new ability to survive, even in an altered form. Such values, sometimes tangible and sometimes intangible (why was this ever differentiated?), are best preserved if they are retained in some living, practising form, even if this has to be adjusted to new circumstances; researched and documented, they retain a potent capacity, a richness that is capable of continuing to live, working for an ever-richer reality. One of the best ways to protect values is to educate people about their importance and entwine them into development strategies, usually to the benefit of sustainability. Sustainability is not a recent invention but was always a rightful concern, made dramatically necessary only by the wasteful and careless corporate practices of the contemporary world.

### **73. A museum can be not only small but also non-collecting**

The fact that non-collecting museums are taking their recognized place among conventional museum institutions implies exactly this approach, which needs only to be more widespread and its consequences better understood. This shift is the way to approach the micro-situations of scattered and often abandoned industrial heritage sites which can never depend upon substantial investment or a 'satisfactory' number of visitors/users. It is modest creative solutions that can salve the 'bad conscience' of society or of particular communities as they fail to do justice to their neglected heritage. Cultural investment is difficult to obtain as it requires continuing operational costs and guaranteed visitor numbers. We often cannot calculate in terms of such 'profitability' for investments, let alone in the situations that cultural or heritage tourism deals with. The shift has to be effected and made bearable through clever ways of combining investment and maintenance/conservation with technological, economic and organisational implications.

## **74. The museum is a (permanent) aspiration and ambition, not necessarily a permanent institution**

Micro-museums can come into existence today and disappear tomorrow - a temporary museum as intentional deflection. It is obeying the basic museum rules and yet it is a sort of trick, paradoxically reversing them only to enable the transfer of experience to happen, but in real-time.

The versatility, actuality and attractiveness of a model like this, that could be applied to still prosperous or dying villages, derelict city centres, abandoned industrial sites, or deserted cultural landscapes would easily gain wide recognition and serve the growing awareness of heritage. Building a successful, conventional museum is good, but in the future, the huge expense may be impossible. There are many places of significant memory that lack any infrastructure, with small local populations and no amenities for visitors. Very often these important places are desolate, perhaps seemingly unattractive, remote or out of the way. So the black box is a sort of real box containing reminders of a fragile, often endangered or even disappearing identity, a sort of capsule of compressed wisdom on local identity, as if containing its basic codes.

## **75. Museums are the consciousness of mankind**

Museums are traditionally 'neutral', often servile and indeed almost socially autistic as far as awareness of the reality of their community is concerned, - say a social unawareness. Once consolidated in an integrated service of public memory institutions they are well-positioned to become part of a new, autonomous profession. As such, they are able not only to provide transparency and insight into surrounding processes but in fact to lobby for a well-informed society. They can literally lend words to those who would otherwise be ignored as speakers or contributors; exhibitions and other activities can criticise the evils of institutionalized lying and reveal, at least to some extent, the mechanisms of a game of interests. You will have noticed that museums are pushed firmly into the mould of specialist, unrelated knowledge. But to put it bluntly, there is a social, psychological, economic, technological or human side to any painting or precious object. We need a well-balanced, complex story. We cannot tolerate the fantasy that history was composed only of artistic geniuses, any more than we can fail to observe that history was not enacted solely by mass murderers, regardless of their rank or title. Museums are a means of the continuation of values recognized as worth retaining, of victories over evil, trouble and misfortune in a constant struggle to ameliorate the human condition. Museums can commemorate wars, but not in a way that continues the conflict by other means. Museums can speak about times of war only by advocating peace. Museums of war purporting to be history museums are a perverted form of heritage institution.

Changes happen fastest and best in the mainstream and the big world. But the speed of exchange is increasing with new technologies, and hence the power of each individual. The museum today should be a community-based cultural

action, a versatile institution pulsating with cybernetic impulses against the threats to which their identity is exposed. Intended as major supports for the well-disposed in society, museums are usually established where identity is dying at heart. They do not replace those hearts but act as a reliable pacemaker to them. An identity that is preserved only in a museum is like a taxidermy specimen from an extinct species.

# Curators – between occupation and profession

## **76. ‘Historical distance’ is a confession of defeat and lack of professionalism**

Thomas Aquinas claimed that the present is just a moving dividing line between past and future. Museums are about both the distant and the very recent past, a past so close that it is the moving present itself. My first clash in the profession was 40 years ago in 1979 at my first professional presentation, at the most important national museum symposium. A senior colleague warned me in a plenary session that we can only store in museums what has passed the ‘historical distance’. To my question about how far back that should reach, he claimed bluntly that this would be at least 30 years. In the intervening period, this has been shown to be nonsense, and many museums collect literally yesterday’s objects and documentation if they judge them important. However, my constant contact with practice in re-conceptualizing new museums revealed that there are still many colleagues who would seriously consider some sort of historical distance to be necessary, expressing their responsibility in terms of the risky task of evaluating the recent past or, God forbid, the present. I can add two explanations to this. Firstly, it is no wonder that an ethnologist or historian working in a museum and lacking any specialist education for the curatorial role should claim such a defeatist incapacity, despite the reality that the museum public is paying him/her to perform a public service. Secondly, a true professional would consider the challenge of the processual nature of reality, be it past or present: we have the right to suppose and re-evaluate, to accession and deaccession, to form a collection and redistribute it. Of course this is delicate and risky.

## **77. Knowing the context is the first condition of professionalism**

Being a professional implies public responsibility and a compatible ethical stance. However, most professionals have little understanding of the world, their society and their own community. Most of them are immersed in their specialist area of expertise. This is widely acclaimed and accepted, and even regarded with some sympathy as we learn from the popular stereotypes of nutty scientists and absent-minded professors. Lecturing, to take one example, should always offer the contextual view, the framework and a broad-brush picture as a start for profound insight. Professors should usually offer more than the practicalities explained in handbooks, or rather, with that hands-on practice in mind, the conceptual knowledge. No handbook convinces a curator that only by loving the users can he accomplish his mission. Of course it does not explain the mission itself, as it presents the matter as a series of technical, technological and managerial

solutions. But it is only when we master the general picture and provide a good understanding of humanist vision in dealing with public memory, that we see where the importance of the technicalities lies.

## **78. The new conservatism in the profession**

In 2012, I published *Eternity does not live here any more*, to my knowledge the only book entirely dedicated to criticising museum theory and practices. By that time I was no longer worried about the reaction of my colleagues. I had already assumed my position at the auxiliary, folding seat of the professional amphitheatre. But what inspired me was that the critique was still timely. In contrast to what we once believed, time can apparently run backwards, so that now we have social involution, a sort of negative, conservative revolution. Many features of contemporary society are actually medieval. A neo-con logic also crept into the museum world, and the old cries for the sacrosanct status of museum objects became legitimate again. Objects are important, especially if the new austerity causes neglect, but this opened the doors also to a reluctance to entertain all new ideas, except perhaps those of technology. You may have noticed this yourself. Every new and incompetent director goes immediately for rebuilding and the purchase of new technology, whereas any capable one reaches out to the task of re-conceptualisation and adjustment to a changed society.

## **79. Conservatism as comfort zone**

If it is defined as a public institution serving the needs of the community, any heritage institution instantly becomes obliged to offer dedicated public service. On the other hand, if it is defined as scientific in character, its obligations are only to the scientific community and the objectives that derive from that. Paradoxically, museums are not scientific institutions although they are unconditionally based upon science and learning. But despite being the most visible of the PMIs (public memory institutions), museums rarely see themselves as needing to operate outside their comfort zone of officially acceptable, expected and approved professional behaviour. This coincides with the expectations of the centres of societal power, which regard such practices with a benevolent eye and ready financial support. Outside this comfort zone lie all the risks, but also the benefits. The common good is rarely identifiable with the aims of those who hold power.

## **80. The lack of obligatory professional education – the biggest frustration**

Naturally, there has never been more than recommendation and encouragement from the international museum organization, for the obligatory education of museum professionals. Within ICOM, the committees for museology (ICOFOM) and for professional training (ICTOP), and many other international and national organisations have made an enormous effort in creating syllabuses and



numerous analyses of both needs and potentials. That work improved curatorial practice but generally, stayed limited to the faceted, occupational approach, missing the ultimate need for the creation of a true profession. Other compatible, similar occupations in the field of public memory, such as those of archivists and librarians, are usually required to have formal specialist education and/or postgraduate qualifications. The places for studying “museumology” in its growing number of variants have been multiplying. More and more future curators receive some kind of professional training, but it has yet to become obligatory and then widened into the consciousness encompassing the entire domain of public remembering while caring for the specific practices of each occupation with it. The changes that have taken place have been great and beneficial because museums have found many alternative ways of transferring professional experience. Like many other events, although very specifically, the conference in Dubrovnik is part of this collective effort to learn (at the very least) from the best examples ([www.thebestinheritage.com](http://www.thebestinheritage.com)). However, no profession would consider this partly spontaneous process to be its strategy for its future. The disturbing fact is that probably around 80% of curators working in museums have received only the specialist academic training of their first degree, and no specific education to equip them to run their public service.

## **81. Velveteen totalitarianism and public intellectuals**

The velveteen totalitarianism of pretentious modern democratic society offers a range of effective illusions about its character, so that serving it does not need to look too ugly. We are usually talking about some ‘him’, because men in this society are more aggressive, dominant and eager, but the character has no gender boundaries. You can recognize pretentious public intellectuals relatively easily: they are always present at any important social occasion; they are usually well received by the ruling powers; they rub along decently with the other side (if there is one); they are occasionally very critical, although only at the beginning of their frequent speeches and in the first half of their books (the conclusions always offer consolation to their overlords); they always get their projects and the money for them; their lectures are fabulously well paid but never happen at the grassroots level, only at prestigious universities; they are seen on the yachts of despicable business oligarchs; they can be found, noticed and interviewed at the ‘must-visit’ places; and they are on familiar terms with all the actual ‘celebs’. And at some point in their lives, they are usually invited to join the national academy of arts and sciences.

Knowing their egotistical weaknesses, we may observe that they fight aggressively against their more noble and generous counterparts, or just against anyone who demonstrates integrity and independence. These people are their denial, an unsettling reminder of their lost innocence. Whenever they can, they block all genuinely creative and unselfish people from realising their missions. This is why the corrupted spiral of modern society is burrowing ever deeper. Overtly or subtly, they will sabotage any standards and procedures that reveal their role.

How can one expose their fraudulence? We used to have social and humanist science education for that purpose, but neither formal nor informal education is supported: the masters need a world without people who can nag them. The evolved idea of museum mission is about this, correcting and counteracting.

## **82. From heritage occupation(s) to a heritage profession**

A broad concept of heritage based on theory has far-reaching effects. We may finally be talking about the science of public memory, in which Museography, alias Museology, remains a set of practical, institution-specific, methods and technologies. A general theory delivers an *a priori* multidisciplinary mentality to heritage experts, enabling them to use heritage for the benefit of society. This theory will soon transform itself into another applied science, be it Heritology or Mnemosophy (T Sola, 1982 and 1987).

There are perhaps 25 or 30 true professions, and all the other hundreds of human agencies are merely occupations. If this is correct, it would explain certain problems in the world of museums, but also those of conservators, archivists, librarians and the like. Professions have prescribed characteristics: none can be practised without a licence or obligatory training; they are also self-regulating. Interestingly, whenever, like in archaeology, business and state have great interests, a licence is required. While in the UK The Royal charter witnesses long and prestigious history of archaeology, in some smaller and/or transitional countries it is only part of processes of privatisation.

All professions are socially recognized and appraised, their role in society is accepted and they are given a high position by the dominant forces of society. They are frequently either members or supporters of that power structure. In that sense, working in museums is not a profession, but the cumulative total of work in the domain of heritage institutions, as a set of related occupations, might be. Together they make a convincing and impressive body of occupations in the domain of public memory. We could be witnesses to the formation of a mega-profession of heritage workers. If that happens, it would bring importance, social status and stronger financial support for the profession. To achieve these results, heritage professionals will have to be stronger players in society, not only more socially conscious and engaged but recognized as such. Without this development, and facing the crises from which the cultural sector so often suffers, we shall have few arguments with which to defend our mission in society. After more than a hundred years of theoretical claims, those who work in museums have not achieved either status or recognition, nor have they mustered the full argument to support their mission in modern society. Many divergent practices in training remain puzzling. Mandatory training for museum practice should happen at the university level, as a complementary or specialist study. It should include the science of heritage as a common denominator and basis for the broad mindset of a future profession, but should otherwise concentrate on the specific practical issues of different institutions. We must understand and manage the developments that are already happening, such as the convergence

of the public memory institutions, as well as working out how we can best serve a world in peril.

### **83. The definition of objects changes public memory roles**

The profession has also changed. It has been recognised that much of heritage is directly verbatim, immaterial and intangible. After 60 years of changing definitions, the museum role functions with a definition that for a long time satisfied the majority of museum people, but in 2005 acquired a new quality: museums were supposed to care for intangible heritage too. This, of course, changes the very notion of collecting and, consequently, of museum forms. To some of us it was like claiming that, ideally, much of the essence of sex should stem from affection and love, not just from mere physical intercourse. It was wrong to spend two centuries of museum practice claiming that 'objects speak for themselves' or that only objects can contain evidence. Mankind often lives by nonsensical claims. Of course, knowledge was stored and shared as a human experience in innumerable ways and in all sort of institutions. So today the museum is many things and will become many more.

### **84. Activists and amateurs**

Activists are good people who deserve all our sympathy, but that is where one should end the relationship unless they are prepared to rely upon our experience, receiving in return our full attention and willingness to learn from them. There is nothing so sacred or valuable that amateurs in their enthusiasm cannot destroy or denigrate it through lack of expertise, knowledge and taste, turning it into kitsch or mere pastiche. This is not intolerance towards them, but a simple fact: only a rare and extraordinary talent can match solid professionalism. Of course, we always need eager people with the common good in mind. They may be volunteers and/or join those advanced museums that practise open authority mode, involving them in all aspects of professional work, but they cannot be more. They should not be excluded from anything and their insight and knowledge should be welcomed, but amateurism, if given the power of decision-making, easily dismantles professional criteria, and no system can endure much of that challenge. Despite my hostility towards overtly imposed amateurism, I greatly appreciate genuine enthusiasm. All curators have met amateurs who bring impressive knowledge and self-sacrificing devotion: the love of a subject can foster the finest expertise. The successful formula is a relaxed synergy between professional and amateur or creating opportunities for enthusiasm to share knowledge and experience.

## 85. The heritage profession as societal self-defence

The societal project, or any social contract, is enabled by active professions. It took us centuries to build this self-defence system for society. If our health and public health are threatened we have medical doctors. Their ideal is health for all. If injustice troubles us we have a judicial profession to lead our claims. Their ideal is rights and justice for all. If the fear of the unknown worries us and we can find no solution but religion, we have priests to calm us. Their ideal is that we have an impeccable relationship with the divine being who arranges our lives. If our constantly growing need is for understanding nature, advancing techniques and improving society, there are scientists in charge of research, of training new researchers and of disseminating their insight. Their ideal is constantly growing knowledge and its decisive role in development. If our need is to be constantly informed, as required in any organised let alone democratic society, we have our journalists scattered throughout the burgeoning media. Their ideal is to offer an insight into reality through independent, unbiased reporting and analysis. If we need to ensure the transfer of socially formed knowledge, our teachers are there to assist us. Their ideal goal is to make scientific knowledge accessible and provide us with all forms of literacy.

But what if we are very concerned about how we remember, as individuals, as communities and as a society? What if we are concerned about disorderly oblivion, the manipulation and distortion of memory? In the case of public memory, we need to form a profession to fight oblivion. The ideal of this so far non-existent profession is to provide wisdom to live by. This profession would have science as its basis and an ideology of peace and harmonious development, with memory constructed upon ethically based choices and social responsibility, with a democratic mission in society, complementary to schools and the media. Memory institutions would do well to use these perilous times in history to put themselves forward as a new profession, one that can be part of the solution. However, we must acknowledge that reluctance or inability to see this opportunity exists on both sides, that of the nascent profession and the society as it is run today. We were never meant to assume such a huge responsibility. The society that founded museums never expected them to be much more than attractive repositories for the loot of successful conquest. To make things worse, we are witnessing a dangerous tendency towards a certain disintegration of professions, created by the ruling power structure. By the logic of their formation, all professions are meant to be loyal to their ideal, and that is why most of them can be entered only by those with a recognized qualification. Their relativization and the persistent running down of their credibility is the way to eliminate them as democratic stakeholders. The civil society movement has been partly a reaction to their diminishing influence and power in society. It is as if we are returning to Orwell's 'War is Peace; Freedom is Slavery; Ignorance is Strength'. The goal of our rulers is, might I remind you, control over the people and, more importantly, over their hearts and minds. Or perhaps, importantly enough in our case, their memory.

## **86. What is truly needed should be provided**

It is often impossible to obtain a usable statement of what people need. They do not have all the available evidence about the circumstances, the possibilities, the available technologies, the other stakeholders... How can a community know what the potential and best outcomes for them of their museum might be? In some more familiar and established sectors like health or law, people are able to formulate their requests. And this is why we have created professions: to study and fulfil people's needs. The profession of public memory has not yet been formed and without regard for any conspiracy theory, I continue to wonder why. At present, we leave our collective, social and public memory exposed for anyone to engineer and manage according to their will and interests. Museums should be, like hospitals, the property of society, responding to its needs.

## **87. Gender equality as effective public memory for a better world**

The world is becoming a dramatic, uncomfortable and dangerous place. I always had the impression that females, as a more responsible gender, would have done things better than we men. If this is true, as it seems, it would explain why real women (not male mind clones) are denied equality. Maybe this assertion makes little sense in some advanced societies. There, the situation is better than the global average, but this is often because women are misled by the status of elites and political language. As decadence grows, so does the call for a new moral stance on whatever constitutes our common history or, better, our human experience. This schizophrenic mindset is tearing reality apart. The powermongers wish the new justice to remain, as one of the illusions they have created to manipulate reality. But it is too late. The world will seek balance. For most of the world, we would be best to seek to gain it by starting with the relationship between genders. With the unique nobility of the female mind and spirit, we still stand a chance. What better hope can we have than to see female sensitivity take over the strategy of the formidable human experience stored in our public memory institutions? Just to check with sceptics: do you really think that our female counterparts in society would create as many museums of war as we have currently? They are the perverted kitsch of public memorizing.

## **88. We need a profession to be in a position to negotiate our mission**

We will increasingly try to find in our heritage the inspiration and experience we need to face our growing challenges. We need to be able to negotiate a safe measure of change, sometimes by adapting better to it or by opposing it more effectively. We need to be able to keep sight of the solid ground we have left, or be able somehow to return to it when lost in this kaleidoscope world. Good museums provide that. We cannot decide upon anything, but being catalysts

and enzymes in societal processes we can provide the ground for insight and debate; our curators have to fight for the mission.

## **89. Public professions against the invisible hand**

Education should be free. The Americanisation of public systems creates horrors such as debt slavery for students and private prisons unless we invent some tool to measure precisely where to stop the commodification of public assets. This is a long story that will be dramatically continued. We are starting to learn that the ‘invisible hand’ of the market is conspicuously picking our pockets and reaching into our heads. That tells us who is interested in managing our narratives. I would like an autonomous profession in charge of public memory to perform its duties on a scientific basis, in constant dialogue with all the stakeholders of the society and citizens themselves.

## **90. Designing the specific response is a professional task**

What I am advocating is that after studying the particular local circumstances we may end up with a composite, very custom-built institution, with a name and content that will respond best to local needs. We may have the memory of the place, the permanent display, the documentation centre, the unit for activists who want to join the museum, temporary exhibitions, outposts, and dispersed interpretations of the cultural landscape. Some institutions have some or most of these components. Any permanent or temporary heritage activity presents a social space, a source of information and orientation about past and present values, and may perform a direct role in the promotion and scrupulous revival of the identities they stand for; such a museum is a sort of developmental agency. You have the tradition, the name, the stories, the places, the objects that people identify with, at least to some extent. But an expert or team of experts can study the potential and design a strategy that may outlast the obvious framework. This is why I praise creative professionalism. Theoretically, an amateur can design a formidable product, but that happens as a one-off occurrence or a coincidence, an exception that proves the rule: we need reliability.

## **91. Human existence and the meaning of heritage profession**

It may well be that most of our lives are part of an immense, inextricable parallelogram of causal relations in an indecipherable interaction with genetic predispositions. Though I claim this assertion (which sounds very pretentious, for which I seek forgiveness) to be very valid, I also consent for it to be construed as some sort of fatalism. But that is no reason for resigning ourselves to this fact: having some negotiable space in our lives depends upon us and upon our societal context. Be that space what it may, we are obliged to act as responsible human beings on both levels. Our institutions, as tools of our protective professions,

are responsible for making our lives decent. I am implying that professions in any society form a firewall, a security system that monitors and controls threats to society and its members. In this way, museums at their best are a sort of 'gatekeepers', as K Zadek would probably agree. They fight the sinister oblivion as well as harmful, destructive, manipulated or deceitful memory.

## **92. The paradoxical misunderstandings of the ecomuseum concept**

What limits the ecomuseum concept is, paradoxically, its generosity of scope: any ecomuseum is about the entire, integral heritage of a territory, its cultural, technological and natural landscape, and therefore not any one specific heritage or phenomenon. All museums seeking context and relevance to the community can certainly profit from the spirit of ecomuseums. Naturally, many people have understood ecomuseums as just another passing fashion and hurried to apply the term to their thriving museums. But no museum conceived around a single phenomenon can be dignified by the name of ecomuseum, because they are about the complex, total territorial identity.

## **93. Combatant curator**

I no longer know whom I should thank for this amazing caricature of a frog squeezing the throat of a stork while the latter tries to swallow it up. I found it perhaps 20 years ago somewhere on the Internet and I still see it reinterpreted and used by many people. It has become part of our collective social memory. The caption I liked best said 'Never ever give up', and it was a very funny illustration of justified, stubborn resistance, no matter how hopeless the situation might be. Any creative professional can be inspired by it or reminded of similar situations, even if one no longer has the stamina to resist.

My curatorial career was not dramatic. As usual, one enters the museum 'profession' knowing nothing about the job. Those without training are preferred by the curatorial establishment. None of them received any formal training for the scientific and yet communicative institution that is a museum. Their insecurity is then transferred to the younger colleagues who will perpetuate this resistance to improvement by obligatory professional education. Most curators have therefore learned their 'very important' role on the job, by their mistakes or as a result of the fortunate presence of someone sufficiently experienced, old, generous and talented to teach them.

As a consequence, two things have happened in the sector, almost spontaneously. The first has been an unprecedented multiplication of examples of informal education and the exchange of experiences. The other occurs on the level of verbalising, 'we know everything we need to do', and they have learned to express it well. Why has this come about? Lip service and the use of buzz words is an instinctive cover. It is the natural outcome of a glaring need unsatisfied by proper professional action, so the deficiency is being covered by verbalisation.



Only solid, systematic, professional education for the job itself, can provide an in-depth understanding of the profession's mission.

All this has to be explained to provide context for those rare, professionally educated or simply hard-working and talented curators who lead in innovation and dedication. They are brave and creative enough to exercise their expertise, very often by courageous action. Sometimes it is by improving the functionality of the institutional working process or by advancing their societal performance. Doing so, they often find themselves often squeezed between internal resistance and outer resentment, usually by reticent colleagues or the political and corporate establishment. That history of our emerging profession is only partly recorded but demonstrates its importance even when it is prevented from exercising it. In many countries, especially those that are developing or transitional, the directors are, paradoxically, the watchdogs who are placed there to sabotage the change that is being tacitly forged within the system. The best book on rebellious curators was offered by the American author Steven C. Dubin in his *Displays of Power: Memory and Amnesia in the American Museum* (1999).

#### **94. Professionals fail to prevent the monetization of heritage**

The heritage sector has been pushed aside and seems to have accepted its position. The city decision-makers allow the business to function with strategies that are not based on quality criteria; the media (turning yellow) and general public (turning into a mob) is of no help. They are losing or lacking the support of professionals and professions that once guarded the sense of measure, the criteria and civic taste for what is appropriate, worthwhile and sustainable.

#### **95. Loving the job, the community is a way to good performance**

Wisdom is always the same. If someone wants to be a dancer, his/her career will depend upon love and devotion, not just on technique. Only with a proper understanding of dance do the natural disposition, talent and learning get their chance. Only then the dancer can identify with dance and become the dance itself. The same goes for any creative job. Everybody must have experienced a performance by a virtuoso as an enchanting demonstration of the merging of the player and the instrument. I believe a curator can identify with the museum as a librarian can identify with the library and an archivist with the archive. We have all known some of them, and remember them still by their strange ability to give us exactly what we needed, to direct us to a source we had never thought about or to smile at us benevolently when we explained what we wanted to have or find. Some of them were fortunate in having received a good training that matched their natural disposition, while others made up for the absence of training by sheer love of the job. But realistically, what about the rest of us, ordinary people without great talents? Both society and we, as individuals, should ensure that

we end up doing the job of our choice, close to our personal affinities, but the rest of the task belongs to our professors and our colleagues.

## **97. No administration, let alone a bureaucracy, can judge professional quality**

No administration, let alone a bureaucracy can be a good judge of professional quality. Of course, the claim is, whether in the EU or its countries, those decisions are taken by professionals. To some extent this is true, but those professionals are handpicked with the administration's criteria and strategies in mind. The submissive attitude of the professionals somehow becomes more obvious the further East and South one goes in the EU, some of it due to their vassal psychology. The EU bureaucracy is the reason for some of the failures of the EU. Through concentrating on the economy and becoming part of a harmful geopolitical strategy, the EU missed the chance to grow and build its relevance from a shared cultural identity, as announced a few decades ago with the slogan 'all different, all equal'. Now it is imploding onto its inner colonialism and lack of its own foreign policy, the latter a defect of identity positioning, more than a political agenda. That is why only recently Europe is clear that its unity must be based upon cultural values.

Any serious external scrutiny would demonstrate that the majority of EU projects are a waste of energy and money. The best system of distribution of public finance is done through a mixture of professionals and qualified democratic representatives. An administration or bureaucracy usually designs metric and artificial criteria composed by some neutral and sterile formalists who have no understanding of humanism, politics and society. Once the criteria code of the professional EU project champions is broken and decoded (translated from its language of buzz words, political and other correctness-es, multiculturalism, and actual issues, be they migrants or gender problems) hardly any genuine, a truly relevant project can survive their gruesome perfection. Most of their projects are formally perfect but void of any empathy or constructive intention.

## **98. A general theory of heritage should be a widely offered general academic subject**

To lecture to museum or heritage professionals is relatively easy. If you please their sense of importance, fine. If you criticise them, also good, because at least they will listen to you. But to lecture to students with mixed backgrounds, knowledge and interests (especially outside the social and humanist sciences), was not easy, not even when my auditorium consisted of students of economy, marketing, cultural management, tourism etc. They lacked the broad picture, operated within a different frame of reference and perhaps lacked basic insight into the nature of heritage or the triumphs and troubles of the museum occupation. Even worse, they may idealise the sector in the way laypersons often

do, sometimes contributing to its stagnation or inefficiency. It happened to the extraordinary practice of eco-museums.

In those lectures, I was using a general critical tone as a way to keep the attention of the audience and to plant some necessary heresy about heritage and society. I also tried to plant some basic knowledge about the nature of museums. If we regard museums as conventional institutions, we can merely praise their prestige, but if we think of them as institutions of public memory, or of the value system management business, things change dramatically. It would be good to offer some general theory of heritage to various future professionals. No human activity takes place without experiencing the basic process of the public memory institution: how can we filter relevant past experiences to retain the integrity and successfully adjust to changing circumstances?

Before we give up on the welfare state that both generates and profits from the sustainable social contract, we may still imagine a new profession in the making that would become a partner in democratic, political and economic developmental decisions. To explain this interconnectedness will be a difficult task if we stick to teaching theories of institutional practice, and it is doubtful that the new studies that are popping up will be able to handle the problem if they do not open up to the interdisciplinary knowledge and synoptic view of the phenomenon of societal memory.

Lecturers need to explain that the success of any society depends upon its ability to recognise, research, document, care for, present, communicate and finally continue the values it regards useful for its successful present and future. The past has no other use but to serve the present, not only as the mere accumulation of facts but as humanist and ethically responsible knowledge. The tourism industry, the experience industry, the greedy entrepreneurs and endless commoditization, are lousy bedfellows for harmonious development. The young professionals who have not been introduced to the basics of sociology and philosophy will not grasp the essence of this. The engineered, managed world of staged democracy, based upon hoarding and neoliberal arrogance towards unselfish moderation and respect for the natural world may otherwise prove to be the last epoch of humanity.

## **99. General rules for the heritage profession**

A heritage profession could teach all employees of museums that public memory institutions are agents of the selection, care and communication of value systems: they are not about the past but about the present, a true value systems management profession in the making. It could teach them that except for prestigious instances where architecture needs to be part of the attraction, the excellence of museum institutions lies in their effectiveness in serving the true interests of their community. Once the full lesson of ecomuseums was learned, no museum would be designed in the usual way. Any museum would make it clear that it served the needs of its community, not desires, projections, prestige or any other motive imposed from above.

A profession that knew the very essence of the public memory mission and the role of its institutions would create an enormous network of micro-museums across all countries. Low-cost, friendly in design and comfortable, they would celebrate the spirit of place and respond to local needs for recognition and development. The system of values of practically every group or community is endangered, and they need support and assistance in changing while retaining identity. Some museums will become visitor attractions, but the richness in heritage is there to be continued and enjoyed. The world of entropy is seeking legitimacy for its irreversible processes of decadence, decay and disintegration, of a world becoming an uglier and more hostile place. Though that may seem inevitable, it is not. The forces of noble memory are there to be united and do their part in advancing the quality of the human condition.

## **100. Describing the ideal curator**

The ideal museum professional would be a devotee of his or her museum specialization, but with a strong sense of belonging to a wider whole. Are dermatologists, gynaecologists or psychiatrists members of distinct professions? No, they are occupations, specializations within the medical profession and exist by the arguments of medical science. If the comparison is valid, I would say that talented, noble and responsible curators can exist as the result of a happy accident, but that no job let alone no profession can or should be founded upon such fortuity. However, talent and devotion, helped by seminars, symposia and practice, create many good professionals. They have a broad insight into their basic academic discipline and a deep interest in understanding of the world around them. Only from that can they provide the users of their museums with the correct, required, honest product.

# Mission as social cybernetics

## 101. Cybernetics as wisdom

Is this just more theorising? Of course. But theorising by a practitioner. In my books, I have written quite a bit about the need for a norm in society, in a way that is desirable in any managed, guided system. It is not about prescribing rules, but about assuming responsibility. Democracy itself is a norm, one that ideally is incessantly negotiated and improved. Societal processes happen to a great extent as a result of feedback that our predecessors, meeting the same problems, have built up. Norbert Wiener has spoken about this poetically: the nervous system and the automatic machine are fundamentally alike in that they are devices that make decisions based on decisions they made in the past. He was not aware that his principles were *verbatim* applicable to the theory of public heritage and its role in running a community or society. Whether one takes a jet plane, torpedo, guided missile, car or bicycle, the system of steering is there to maintain the desired trajectory, norm, development.... In one case the mechanism is a flying valve, in others a gyroscope or the steering wheel, while in the case of society it is, among other inventions, museums as interpretations of collective experience, as correctives and reminders of harmonious development. They counteract the threats that endanger the projected norm: purposes, goals, objectives towards improvements of the human condition in the natural environment. We have to think of this as part of the guidance and steering system of social structure. Since we are implying an intelligent system that needs to calculate and evaluate infinitely many parameters, some affective and spiritual, I have proposed that we should call it wisdom. Understanding public memory institutions (no matter of what provenance, but scientifically and publicly relevant) as the best imaginable application of AI and the final, most noble task of the 4<sup>th</sup> revolution is surely worth explanatory books and, one hopes, handbooks explaining the practices implied in this application.

Lewis Mumford was somewhat disregarded as an author because Orwell offered politically more attractive and easily manipulable interpretations. Mumford, unlike Orwell, knew two decades of humankind's disastrous cold war experience before he wrote *The Myth of the Machine*. The masters of technological development regarded him, like Wiener before him, rather as a bothersome nuisance to their elegant progress than as a usable inspiration for their shallow triumphalism. Yet his warning was timely and precise and is still valid. Half a century ago he warned that the totalitarian technocracy might produce the world 'fit only for machines to live in'.

## 102. The grand scene of social cybernetics will happen

All wisdom must produce the best distillate, the finest and most useful selection for the present and future of society. That is where my fascination with social cybernetics comes in. Social contracts are not necessarily ideological options. Social humanity (or human society, as Marx claims in *Theses on Feuerbach*) is what I take to be a good title for our civilizing endeavour. Having been a practitioner for at least half of my long career, I find conventional philosophising often too opaque to be of use for my practical frustrations. But cybernetics, now almost forgotten and overwhelmed, buried under the otherwise nonsensical invention of 'cyber'-everything, will have to find a way of making a comeback.

## 103. Taking the risk of proposing solutions is a way to claim relevance for the theory

My writings, and even lectures, have often been dismissed as too theoretical by the practitioners and too down to earth and unscientific by the theoreticians. I am afraid that I never wanted to change, because I understand any curator as homo duplex, or even more. I often claimed, by way of explaining myself, that the museologist (whoever, finally, that might be) is a curator with the mind of a visitor. If we cannot efficiently serve the public interest we are practically useless. I have even written a book in Croatian on *Public memory – preserving diversity and possible projects*, intentionally adding some 50 pages of specific project proposals to what was formally a scientific text. It was a calculated risk in demonstrating that what is said in theory can be translated into relevant practice. I guess it was a failure, but I did what I thought was honest.

Once again, after a chapter or group of rather theoretical notes, I wish to demonstrate the risk of illustrating my claims with the example of Kaliningrad. It is probably not the ideal case, because I know the city only superficially and because some other places need advice more. I have even claimed in a book that there is a list of general proposals that all cities can at least consider as a reminder. The basic methodology is simple: first knowing the place through the facts and its spirit, and then seeing the threats and shortcomings. Kaliningrad is unique and endangered, like all other cities. Making proposals opens up the unique privilege of having professional or other interlocutors. This is an excellent way to test one's own theory and gain insight into professional or political circumstances.

I have proposed in writing that it counteracts some features of its contested identity.

It is a place where I would install an outpost of a virtual Global Love Museum (see the web site of the same name), demonstrating the universality of human nature through the positive common denominator of love. The venue could be very small in terms of size and investment, almost as an affordable experiment. Such can serve as a poetical reminder of the universal power of love where conflict and general destruction are so imposed in the public memory of the

city. Moreover, Kaliningrad is the location of the famous seven bridges and the resulting mathematical poetry. It also has two unique industrial bridges. I proposed a new museum there, a permanent exhibition with the working title International Museum of Bridges (a version of the abandoned project is still at: <https://www.mnemosophy.com/links> ) If that city does not enrich its future by the noble symbolism of bridges it will suffer still more its divided identity. The bridges would function both as concept and multidisciplinary inspiration.

## 104. The Reformist Manifesto

A slide I have often used in lectures since 1989 read, *The Reformist Manifesto: Museums have always analysed the world, whereas the point is how to change it; i.e. how to serve the world towards harmonious continuity and survival.* The curious fact is that the last dramatic expression is quoted from Dillon S. Ripley, the legendary director of the Smithsonian Institution, who used it in the 1960s to describe the role of museums as serving survival.

It is almost a provocation in a neoliberal world, where museums are part of a culture whose role is thanked with big, kind words, but in which the expectations are that it serves the power holders or, more banally, the owners of money. But any likeness to the historic original is, of course intentional. It belongs to Karl Marx, who is nowadays much despised and ignored. Too bad for the proponents of such an attitude. Though he belongs to his own time and political context, and despite the failure of communism, which proved very inappropriate to the stagnant human nature, his messages are still relevant. His original words in his Theses were: Philosophers have hitherto only interpreted the world in various ways; the point is to change it. The English translation was first published in the Lawrence and Wishart edition of *The German Ideology* in 1938. The most widely known version of the Theses is based on Engels' edited version, published as an appendix to his *Ludwig Feuerbach and the End of Classical German Philosophy* in 1886, where he gave it the title *Theses on Feuerbach*. The explanation of the source matters because the thesis preceding the one quoted is almost as inspiring, though not so famous. I used both as a *Leitmotif* and inspiration in describing the nature of museums.

When we substitute 'curators' for 'philosophers' we have a message that strikes at the very heart of 200 years of museums' main shortcomings. It is the history of being mere observers of memory and its uses, and of being passive scribes to the rulers in society. To make the claim more obvious I have simplified the theses to the one proposed in the slide. The added line of explanation suggests a crucial change in paradigm: from analysis and scientific interpretation to understanding the institution(s) as the factors of change, contributing to the creation of a better, more harmonious world. This paradigm, proposed in 1989 in my lectures and writings, now in contrast imperceptibly governs many advanced museum practices. But it is only the introductory sentence of a much longer story about applied cybernetics that would explain the full consequences of the Manifesto. Such an attitude and *Weltanschauung* may lead to theoretical conclusions, such



as explaining the impact as Mnemosophy (proposed in 1987). Although this neologism sounds like provocation, yet another piece of irresponsible exhibitionism from the smart-aleck professors, it represents a simple plea: we need, finally, to have a science of public memory, whatever name we choose to call it by. As mentioned elsewhere, my last book bears the title, *Mnemosophy – an essay on the science of public memory*.

### **105. Knowing the needs**

My claim is that only by knowing the needs of society in real time can we create an offer in our public memory institutions. Anything else is either wrong or futile. To the regret of my fellow professionals, heritage is very political, or to express it modestly, there can be no democracy without good and proper insight into our inherited memory. It is only in this process of constant dialogue that we form the narratives we can use to confront our immediate reality. Times change, and we change with them (beautifully expressed in the 2000-year-old Latin saying, *tempora mutantur et nos mutamur in illis*). And I admit that I have changed, and would now write these expanded notes differently.

### **106. Ecomuseums were the real change of paradigm, never exploited to the full**

The concept of the ecomuseum has the power to influence any museum. Their invention was the first to bring clearly to our consciousness the need to establish museums on the basis of identity, not on its remains in the form of collections or on projections of it reflecting political will. Ecomuseums promoted museums that were genuinely interested in their citizens, in the community, in everyone in the community and in working in cooperation with community members, all in the context of real-time and with the aim of supporting development of high quality. They were a clear paradigm of museums of identity, always working for a defined, coherent, territorially comprehensible identity, its transmission in good condition and its successful future. The entire community was itself an object and also an inseparable grouping of objects, most of them impossible to contain within a glass case. For almost five decades, the phenomenon, and in fact the ecomuseum movement has remained a favourite professional topic. Though it may not have been obvious back in the 1970s, they started the age of public memory (see [www.mnemosophy.com](http://www.mnemosophy.com) and the article by the same title at [academia.edu](http://academia.edu)). Ecomuseums changed the centre of gravity of the institution forever and thought us to think differently. It was not the technology or science (which remained respected instruments of practice) but the service to the community that gained the movement the momentum it deserved. Once their essential qualities have been studied and understood, they will never cease to inspire public memory institutions and the occupations involved in them.

## 107. How ecomuseums changed our job

Many now well-known innovations were based on the ecomuseum concept:

- museums without walls
- participation and collaboration by local people
- the integration of museums into local life
- the participation of citizens in developing institutional strategy and museum activities
- sharing information and experience in researching and understanding complex identity
- openness to any media interested in presenting the experience and conveying the messages
- understanding the past as part of the present, i.e. the present as the underlying theme of the museum
- defining the museum mission as knowing oneself, as constant contemplation based upon sound judgment (the method) and self-perfection (the objective)
- a constant effort to understand the 'outside' world, leading to adjustments, appropriations and corrections
- the constant ambition to create a solid basis for harmonious development
- caring for the research, documentation and preservation of the identity in its totality
- ensuring that the generative values and forces of society and nature remain productive so that the inevitable change does not endanger the richness of inherited diversity

This innovation, though not without precedent and similar practices scattered all around Europe, brought a conceptual opening which is still not entirely appreciated: visitors are a bonus; tourists are guests; a museum is a democratic tool; museums belong to the people; museums are there to discover, document, research, preserve and communicate values; museums do not take account of special interests except those that serve the public good (be it spiritual, cultural, civilizational or material); museums serve quality; museum marketing is the way to discover the audience's needs and finds ways to fulfil them; museums are not about the past, but about the present and future. Not all of this was directly spelt out by the authors (Hugues de Varine Bohan and Georges Henri Rivière) but it made space for new thinking.

As most curators are not specially trained or educated, a certain superficiality in grasping important moments of professional history is their natural weakness: they saw ecomuseums as just another model, they thought that it sounded as if it were about ecology and understood it as a passing fashion that they thought would soon be outmoded. However, none of this was the case, and objectively, as a form of practice and a professional mindset, ecomuseums have been the only revolution in museums so far. They changed our job and have the capacity to change it even further.

## **108. The inspiring power of terrain**

Visiting different regions, seeing networks, remembering ecomuseums, and speculating about the extraordinary boom in Chinese museums has been an inspiring exercise. In 2018 new museums were appearing at the rate of one museum per day and a half, which made me think. Official Chinese policy claimed that they had too few museums by comparison with the West. I wrote about the subject at some length. But the effort was going into supplying their country with as many big, prestigious museums as possible. This was understandable for an awakening world power, but almost too ambitious, and led by an appetite for prestige. What if they were to follow some other logic? What if the solutions were not this sort of exhibitionism, born of an obvious eagerness to affirm the long-neglected glory of the continuous five millennia of their culture and civilization? That ambition was, in a sense, too western. But the West has also had experience of 'white areas', unknown, under-interpreted, neglected and in a crisis of identity. Thinking about these networks of heritage interpretation points as a part of a system of interpretation, it seemed correct to understand the Chinese ambition as a need for scattered 'memory black box' units.

I wrote a long, detailed project proposal. China should understand that a huge country like theirs needs much more than the 6000 museums that the state has planned to create by 2022. To reach the standards of some of the developed countries whose economies they have been swiftly catching up on, the country would need to create a structure, or, better, a network, of some 50,000 museums. Micro-museums are their best chance. The sensitivity of the ecomuseum concept to small communities and regional identities would offer a real chance of preserving the country's identity. This will eventually happen, one way or another.

## **109. The value of grass-root initiatives**

Positive elites, all those who cherish ideals of freedom and equality and contribute creatively to the community, are our natural leaders. The pragmatic course would be to support simple, ambitious, positive civic elites, who cherish the values of the citizens and build up a wide base for a cultivated, socially ambitious society. Many of them are often denounced by perfectionists as petit-bourgeois, but in effect, they are the disappearing middle class. They need museums to help them to set the tone, offer support and assist the creative elites in the shared project.

The socially-minded, positive and discriminating elites are highly endangered by the increasingly aggressive markets. The elitism of discrimination and high quality is what the museum mission is about.

### **110. The ailing society needs positive assistance**

Yes, by all means, keep the trash that is the political reality game show expensive by taxing it out of everybody's immediate reach! Happy people do not spray graffiti nor kill their schoolmates or strangers. Frustrated ones do. Modern society willingly spends billions on expensive state apparatus and outsourcing, CCTV cameras and repressive institutions, and yet is reluctant to provide people with safe, friendly, inspirational, noble and useful places such as museums and libraries. There, as in free public education, they could find themselves, the inspirations for their lives and work, the solutions to their problems, and peace of mind.

Except when at their best, museums in most countries treat these issues with a certain intellectual reticence, because they do not perceive themselves to be social institutions. They certainly are. To be fair, however, the fact is that when they propose exhibitions and actions that interfere with the interests of the power groups, they put themselves in an awkward, even dangerous situation. However, they have to choose between being a public service or a publicly supported form of creative light industry. If they pretend to be a profession, it is hard to see how they can avoid seeing themselves as detached from the innate task of any memory-based occupation, that of serving advancement. The sectors that provide knowledge, education, entertainment or amusement are many and unsurpassed in their constant improvement. The heritage sector stands an equal chance only if it assumes that it can supply some healing function to the ailing society of today.

### **111. Helping the countryside to survive**

Times of scarcity and the unprecedented depopulation of the countryside at the expense of bursting cities require new strategies. It will be increasingly important to design ways of eliminating frustrations and achieving maximum effect with minimum investment. Usually, an informed diagnosis of local identity *malheur* and the creative use of technology is a good route towards a solution. Television is increasingly making up for our need to discover unknown or un-interpreted identities, that otherwise, being small, frail, disregarded or perceived as unimportant in a world guided by sensationalist logic, would never have a chance. In this case, being known to its owners and offered to others is equivalent to survival mode. It is about preserving and symbolically preserving the codes of identity.

### **112. The paradox of the tourist offer**

I often repeat one curious fact: a museum that is appropriate for local people is, with minor adjustments, an excellent offer for foreign visitors as well. Most

of the terrible consequences of the tourism industry are caused by disregard for the local population, while at the same time we know that sustainable tourism prefers to leave the local environment unharmed and habitable for the locals, because only then does it remain a long-term destination.

### **113. The local community has to be convinced of the 'identity black box' as a solution**

When public memory is degrading, a museum is a good way of preventing this, or turning it into a beneficial change. But museums are an expensive solution and are certainly not possible in most such situations. So the small, poor, distant and most fragile communities will suffer worst. But what if local people are made aware of the processes they are they being subjected to? The most effective was to do this is through schools, and followed by the various organisations of civil society. However, heritage is not in their focus. In some cases, museums are a strange and embarrassing solution. That is almost the invariable rule outside the western world. Local communities must not be directed to solutions that are foreign to them and their thinking, or, equally, must not be deprived of museums on the grounds that they are expensive. They need to be convinced that in times of recession and scarcity creative solutions can retain both efficiency and dignity to a reasonable extent. A pre-fabricated, modular box, relatively cheap, small and well equipped, combining simple technologies for display and interpretation, can be a solution. Digital media can play an important part. This sort of 'memory black box' can be promoted as a good way to offer places that are lacking interpretation a firm point in real-time and space where their identity can be interpreted. Rather than the excessive expectations of the ideal, conventional museum response, a simple project like this can reveal and promote identity, enabling local identity to show and affirm itself, even if only to avoid it becoming endangered by going unnoticed or being ignored.

### **114. Ecomuseums as a reminder of the democratic nature of museums**

The ecomuseum is a form of active social consciousness, a mechanism for self-knowledge and self-regulation. Everything else serves these tasks. The experience of ecomuseums could help heritage action, under which I include all the regular, professional activities of heritage institutions (public institutions, civil society institutions and private institutions, when they go beyond the personal interests of their owners), to become an autonomous managing force. The heresy which ecomuseums still present to traditional theory and practice (half a century after their invention) is the constant reiteration of faith in the mission of public memory institutions. In their ultimate form, ecomuseums suggested, at least for 'museums of society' or local/social history museums, the interpretation of the entire territory in which they were located, with museums serving as the focal point of interpretation and overall orientation. The endangered world probably needs this inspiration more than ever. Not only are ecomuseums of, by and for

the people, but they also should be from the people, in the sense that curators ideally appear only as moderators of the process that ecomuseums represent. The museum of synthesis in a time of synthesis is a logical consequence of a common need. With a long and dynamic experience of involving the community half a century before the 'shared authority' approach, ecomuseums remain an almost romantic revelation of the possibility of a museum 'of the people, by the people, for the people'.

### **115. The smallest museum in the world**

In 1997 I created in Kapele, Slovenia, what was supposed to be the first ecomuseum in this part of Europe. It was very important to me, as I was a direct disciple of Georges Henri Rivière and longed to create one. The team was excellent and we carried much of the project, also mounting a substantial exhibition announcing the future museum. But in the last moment, the building had to be returned to the Church; the museum was postponed and we lost precious momentum. Apart from a newly formed collection, one thing survived. As money was so tight I created the designs for a central information kiosk in the village and supervised the craftsmen. (The architect we had engaged was behind with the job.) A jolly little piece of architecture, I joked, was the smallest museum in the world. One square meter in the floor plan, three square meters of shallow glass windows for the flat exhibits (on three sides) and about two cubic metres of glass case within the column (on the fourth side), like a weather station, right in the centre of the village. The 'museum' is still there, the village being its collection, and run by the local elementary school. At the start, we clandestinely connected it to the public lighting so that it lights up every evening and stays 'open' for the entire night, a 'well-lit place' (as Hemingway would understand it) of local identity.

### **116. Museums must resist labour depreciation**

A dozen or so years ago, I presented some lectures on industrial heritage in Rijeka and Zagreb, both powerful industrial cities in Croatia, in some relevant periods, and then I collaborated on presenting a mining town, Labin. De-industrialisation is part of a process that it almost imposed upon transitional countries or some specific regions of developed countries (UK West Midlands or Western Scotland, to take an example). But with this loss comes another: the oblivion of local expertise and skills, built up for generations in their traditional industries. With oblivion comes deconstruction and abandonment of the former value system. Young people do not have the same perception of labour. The rich and happy are those who never worked, the mere profiteers and politicians.

One should avoid leaving the impression of being just another professor engaged in irresponsible theorizing. I always proposed very concrete actions or even institutions. So at least one of these places might have a chance. Our damaged value system desperately needs a Museum of Labour, say, or a Work and Workers' Museum, an institution that has a chance to become a national centre for the

history of labour. That would be a true, brave challenge, a pledge for the future, almost a patriotic act, if one bears in mind the transitional havoc that ruined not only the industry but also devastated the very culture of work.

### **117. In praise of hands or how to regain *humanitas***

An ideal project would encompass the ideological history of labour and its political relevance. Finally, it would praise the essence of the human creative act. Though it may vary in complexity and be the object of a hierarchical evaluation, labour is always the one and only constant. It is the hands and their constant dialogue with the mind that have made all the difference to human destiny. I imagine a meeting of science and art, a synergy from which such a project could earn its uniqueness. I therefore dare again, after a decade, to propose the name of the project: In Praise of Hands (borrowed from the title of the book by Henri Focillon, the French art historian). Unlike when I first proposed it, I now see how far it is from any conceivable reality. Or perhaps it is not, and I may continue dreaming. Pulling out of the impasse of robotisation and the AI environment may just be achieved by this humanist introspection. Value-based museums will help us regain our humanity.

### **118. Labour values are regarded as a communist resurgence**

Much harm has been done to basic values everywhere. But the poor and needy always get more than their fair share of evil. The transitional countries have suffered from a terrible blow to the value system of work and of individual dignity in the working process. Since museums should be about the present, using the arguments of the past, about change and managing change, and since it is obvious which values are endangered, it would seem only natural to create a mechanism to care for them. I have often been invited to lecture at different places. On all those occasions I have tried to make a point by offering some practical advice. Theorizing is fine but a lot of it is only talk, and one likes to demonstrate that one can do more.

But even the mainstreamers, let alone the destructive political sycophants among the decision-makers, are afraid to help with such a 'communist' idea. It is a shame, because work is firmly embedded in the Christian values that they supposedly support. What I am particularly interested in is creating a place that would advocate the culture of work, human creativity and its historical destiny. That is a societal identity very much endangered and in retreat, being devalued and denigrated by the dangerous non-culture produced on a daily basis by neo-liberal hypocrisy and insatiable greed. The story of labour is about all of us and the prosperity we deserve, not about ideological socialism.



## **119. Change is not just a danger to fight**

Change is also part of the nature of progress and development. That is the whole drama of it. Museums are not here to fight change but to help us adapt to some, to influence some correctly and to resist some which may destroy, to put it bluntly, the achievements of humanity. We must continue our journey, as individuals, as groups and as communities, but we have to retain coherence and diversity. We have no use for nor we would enjoy a world that was designed and uniformly constructed. We need to restore some values to circulation, not as a nostalgic tourist attraction, but as the vibrant red threads of our own dynamic identity. Identity is best preserved by practising it, allowing changes, not as annihilation of what preceded but as a choice of values that deserve continuity.

## **120. Museums' mission for the booming cities**

By 2050, if we live to see it (the world is playing with its destiny), half of the world's population (some 5 billion) will live in cities. Can there be any other function for museums in these exploding, giant conglomerations but that of guardians of identity and guarantors of the cities' uniqueness? Alas, all cities tend to look the same, turning into ugly, preposterous, aggressive megalopolises. The new practice from Moscow to EU and China is that cities build and (re)create some of their real or imaginary past. Regrettably, most of it is done with a sort of cultural motivation, but the arguments derive from the tourism industry. The deep culture of cities, the real urban, cultivated and proud mentality, is being erased by social involution and corporate greed. The faceless, pretentious glass giants, with their pedestals and crowns clad in chaotic glittering neon, grind the identity of the city into nothingness. Museums in a city are wells of self-knowledge, self-awareness, of reassurance and inspiration for its inhabitants. Besides material culture, they are the best way of preserving whatever may have survived of the singularity, the special mentality and self-appreciation of its inhabitants. This seems to be fighting a lost battle, because cities have always changed and their periods of high achievement were also the times of the greatest losses of earlier identity. On the other hand, never before were the processes so devastatingly quick and irreversible.

## **121. The meaning of being useful: making money**

In the triumphal western civilization proposal for ultimate liberalism, the value system is so simplified that 'good for development' starts to mean 'eligible for profit-making'. We may imagine that what we discuss at our symposia matters, and while it does to some measure, we should not forget the decision-makers: they decide upon the framework and, besides, their decisions were never before as quick or as irreversible as they are nowadays. While development has never become sustainable, despite four decades of trying, the endangerment of values has advanced. The tactics of earning money are substituted for strategies that would bring long-term prosperity. Business increasingly sees soft values as assets

ready to be commercially exploited. Politicians are prone to monetization. The media are engineering mass consent while smearing the shrinking enlightened minority as unreasonable romantics and anachronistic communists. Culture is a public right, the underlying condition for any benign development. It has never been so challenged, for the most part turned into creative industries and in some instances, like contemporary fine art, the object of international oligopoly. While we take that as a sort of new normal, the inclusion and almost suction of museums into these industries is directly leading to the financialization of public memory. If museums become still another offer, a vehicle for wealth and investment instead of a social good, it will change the entire societal project we have been building so far. Times of scarcity and recession, the weakening of the state and the simultaneous insistence on the growth of income (of those who already own most) are squeezing the entire public memory sector into unprecedented trouble. The basic outline of this picture is that museums must generate most of their revenue, that libraries are too expensive to maintain and that archives are reduced to records management.

## **122. The public nature of museums and their position as endangered species**

Officially and through their international organization museums do possess a convincing public relevance. It stems from their easily recognizable non-profit nature, especially in the times of great greed, when profit has become a legitimate obsession, in fact a supra-ideology. Opinion polls demonstrate that museums are regarded as the most trusted and reliable public institutions in these hard times. Citizens are increasingly left to themselves. The structures of civil society are often supported only to create an illusion of security and power. The public sector is the natural environment of museums, and the welfare state its natural ideological context. Corporations, pious individuals or self-organized citizens will never be the source of social contracts. The common good had at last been historically institutionalized and was about to develop when in the course of only a few decades it was dismantled, discredited and unaffordable. Who claimed that? The 1% owners of the planet. Their media can repeat the lie often enough to make it the final truth. Why do museums also happen to be in their way? Because they are by tradition and by understanding of their very concept innately public institutions. They are perpetrators of insight and all sorts of civil literacies, a natural democratic tool. Future curators, before they start their museum careers, need to understand that the natural owners of museums are the people, the widest possible public, the citizens, the communities. The bias is whether we envisage the development of society as being composed of entirely privatized sectors or as a mixed economy primarily oriented towards the common good. Though we have a museum code of ethics, it will be necessary to broaden its basis and create legislation that encompasses the entire public memory sector. I do not think this is very clear in the sector's document, let alone in our behaviour. The continuation of this natural ideal of improving the

memory of society is also free access to museums because their mission and objective is the people's side of the social contract.

### **123. Work as value or just a marketable good**

Many caricatures from [www.corpwatch.or](http://www.corpwatch.or) helped me to create a contextual understanding of the world for my students. Without that understanding, I still think it is impossible to face the challenges faced by the roles that deal with public memory, including museums. The ideal of free trade and the unrestrained corporate world was freedom of circulation of capital, with endless reductions in taxes and the cost of labour. It was a recipe for the disappearance of the working class and the depreciation of societal values of labour. As in many other notes in this collection, the question may arise, 'How does this concern museums?' Well, it does, because museums are about the values by which we structure our lives. So are the organized religions, at their best, as humankind incessantly searches for reliable values. Museums and their curators may suffer from institutionalism out of ignorance or weakness and prefer the servility and comfort that comes with it, just like the religions and their priests, both forgetting their community and its fate. Is human labour part of some ideal system of values?

Even the communist regimes' ideological care for the working class was serious enough to bring, in many cases, full employment, social security and free education for all. Whether this was 'equal distribution of poverty', or whether there was some true advancement of the social contract, remains a question, for some at least. The ideological experiment failed in practice, but to remain on a positive note, it was true that the framework of daily life guaranteed the security of the citizens, a low crime rate and peace. The bureaucracy had little understanding of the labour phenomenon but tried to create some positive aura around it. The workers started the day (I take a Czech example), by saying 'čest práci', or 'honour to work'. Some may remember this with contempt as an example of the Party's hypocrisy, but work was, at least officially, highly appreciated. To those of us who know that robotisation contributes to the constant rise of unemployment, their slogan 'Nechme dřinu strojům', which meant 'let's leave the hard work to the machines', sounds, albeit naïve, properly concerned about the working class. It sounded like and was thought of as of an improvement of the condition of the working class after its first clashes with machines during the Chartist movement of the 19th century. The machine was then still perceived as a means towards a more comfortable life, not to a more significant profit, and a reduction in the number of workers. The invention of standardized working hours was equally viewed with pride by the new class as indicating how work was valued. The old, traditional capitalism, of which the Ford company (among many) was a great proponent, invented free time, social housing and retirement, and thus changed the world.

Without the support of ideology, and in the face of the financialisation of the economy, the working class has disappeared. But work has remained, and if it is denied dignity we may fail to learn the lessons of the past. It would be wise to

reintroduce respect for labour into society, at least as a rallying cry and an ideal, worth attempting to preserve even if unattainable. The triumphant neoliberal frenzy would not miss the chance to see in this yet another proof of lurking communist propaganda. Too bad, because what is at stake is our relationship with labour, with the dignity of human endeavour and the understanding of how to channel safely the inevitable processes of automatisisation without losing the human beings in the process. If the answer is more profit, destined to go to a minority of owners, then we must have misunderstood the lessons of history and misinterpreted the human experience. The ostensible socialisation of the stock market may appear democratic by apparently widening the circle of investors or profiteers, but the depreciation of labour and wrongly positioned technology cannot bring prosperity. Most museums have a unique potential to serve the ideals of human creativity and the value of labour. Some 200 museums across the world were dedicated to this theme, and many include it, but the celebration of labour remains a poorly represented topic in museums.

### **124. Any past is political by its nature**

One must be painfully aware that a discourse seemingly so political and engaged may appear awkward to the expert engaged in science. Such an expert is thrilled by the formidable richness of the scientific research for which one can find reasons when it is about industrial archaeology, but frightened by leaving the 'neutral' position of science. Most curators still think of themselves predominantly as scientists and cherish the notion that being neutral politically and socially is an inherently scientific attitude. The truth is that they mistake neutrality for responsibility and societal ethics. There is no neutral past nor politically septic interpretation. In comparison with these hard-working researchers, the interested citizens who are the end-users of the products of research and presentation deserve that the past should not only be presented as scientific facts but translated into useful, beneficial experiences that respond to their needs.

### **125. The theory of the institution is about the technicalities of the job**

Museology or museography is necessarily a theory of certain institutional practices, its history upgraded by managerial experience. What we readily accept as our responsibility is more decisions about whether to turn various industrial archaeological sites or monuments into museums, interpretation centres, visitor centres, interpreted sites, or simply a mixture of uses that responds to the particular demands of the situation. If we move further into the societal role of heritage, of its public mission, we will usually require that any approach should be based upon thorough research, resulting in interpretation that will comprehensively cover the historical context and events, and offer the full scope of technological, social, political and psychological implications. Only then does communication, as a two-way process, and indeed an exchange, become possible.

## **126. Industrial archaeology as a way to understand the neoliberal present**

If conservatively understood industrial archaeology omits the present completely, making the channel of communication narrow and impenetrable. Why is it not possible for museums to explain the vocabulary (free trade, free trade zones, outsourcing, layoffs, technological surplus...) and meanings of phrases in daily use that explain to the 'masses', through the 'mass media', their proper, only future – and their past too? It is worth noting that 'mass' and 'working masses' were terms much criticised in the past as a communist denigration of human beings, let alone citizens, but they were less used in the past than they are now. May we conclude, provocatively, that all corporations prefer to be undisturbed by public opinion and that many scientists and curators prefer to be undisturbed in their sinecures? In today's job market we see labour treated as a portable skill. The dignified term 'labour' (meaning not only work but also people, the workers) is now dealt with impersonally as 'human resources', so that work is just another asset, another marketable good. Unexceptionable as it may appear, it seems an introduction to an uncertain, undignified future.

## **127. Positioning is impossible without a clear idea of the product**

All is relative, and though a museologist or curator is not called to offer an opinion upon everything that surrounds us, the truth is that our role in society is that of tribunes of public memory. So are we merely a silo for accumulating knowledge in the form of endless acquisitions and neutral, scientific presentation? If so, who does really need us? Will we be necessary in the long run? Three mega-sectors, or industries, are draining the motives of this neutral existence: knowledge, leisure and education. We are at ease to some extent with the aspirations of all three, because none is as good at communication as we are. However, we can hardly compete with these industries in their fields and competencies. Our product is all of theirs, and then much more. Our positioning becomes a question not of imposed marketing but of successful survival.

## **128. Heritage should assume a more metaphorical role for humanity**

We are institutions of communication, with the aim of assisting our users in understanding the world and ourselves in it. We cannot ignore the fact that any present is usually, to some extent, a result of a particular past, and will in turn be a significant part of the future. Humanity does not die but actually grows every time an individual passes away. In this respect we resemble a coral reef, in which any new individual grows upon the previous ones, expanding the cay and pushing it towards the surface. Has any individual human experience been meant as a contribution to our human society? Are the coral reefs programmed to reach the surface, face the sun and receive land life? One can justifiably believe

that humans also live some metaphorical life of their own. Or is it just that we cannot do without an ultimate meaning for our existence, whether as individuals or as the institutions by which we survive and prosper? If it is relevant, this question underlines another: what is the mission of museums in society? It cannot simply be spreading knowledge or communicating the disciplines that are central to their subject. Our very existence is by human nature tuned to constant advance. If interpreted superficially, advance or progress or improvement will be expressed in terms of conquest. Our conventional museums are perfect proof of that misunderstanding. If, on the other hand, we perceive our task as a way to self-perfection as human beings, then there is a whole new mindset that should guide our institutions.

### **129. Pollution? Why not tell the true story in museums?**

If museums are concerned with technology and society, is pollution their subject? Apparently 'yes', on condition that we do not name the culprit and avoid any 'alignment'. To avoid an uneasy commitment, curators prefer to stay at the level of scientific discourse and leave to others the role of interpreting the world around us. Are museums and other heritage institutions important enough? Well, no, but whose fault is that? We often complain about our lack of finances and prestige. It is implied that others are to be blamed for our low profile in political priorities and the media, resulting in our shrinking budgets. Imagine if our activities marked bombings, operations of war directed at refineries, natural resources and so on. Such events would convey an accurate though depressing picture of who are the most dangerous polluters on the planet. We could document the fact that the military sector is to be blamed for environmental degradation of staggering proportions.

The low level of our visitor numbers reflects the low level of our ability to offer them credible, substantial and reliable information in a world where these are manipulated into news for daily political (mis)use. A hierarchy of values, of problems or concerns, is what we desperately need in the democratic processes. A world void of the culture of peace may soon end in the non-culture of war. To take one example, there are close to 100,000 fighter planes in the world. They are, alas, in constant use, releasing volatile organic compounds, carbon monoxide, nitrous oxide, sulphur dioxide, and large and small particulates in absolutely abhorrent quantities, beyond comparison with anything in the civil world.

Knowledge is everywhere if we need it. Just type 'how many cars equal the CO<sub>2</sub> emissions of one plane', and you have arguments pouring out. Even a non-military comparison illustrates the neurotic world in which we live. The 'culture' of compulsive jet-travelling, promoted by the ruthless tourism industry, is in itself a terrible problem. To fly from Heathrow to Edinburgh, a distance of 530 km, a Boeing 747 uses 10,668kg of fuel, which releases a little over 33 tonnes of CO<sub>2</sub>. One can drive 336 cars from London to Edinburgh for the same CO<sub>2</sub> as one such plane.

### **130. Transitional countries forget their past**

In the years when some of these notes were used for lecturing, I was suggesting that any of the countries of my hosts (often transitional European countries) could have created a network of industrial heritage interpretation points, at least one museum of labour, and associations or societies of friends of industrial heritage, creating a major national or international event on the theme and establishing an international association of industrial heritage institutions. During the time, societies were created, but to transitional countries, usually post-socialist, working-class and industrial heritage seemed ideologically a rather repulsive past, so objects were often abandoned to decay and memories to oblivion.

It is a rather sad fact that so many countries have done so little to protect their industrial heritage. That is quite a gap in the collective memory. For instance, Rijeka in Croatia, once a strong industrial city, had an excellent opportunity. The relative poverty and slowness of development in the former socialist regime might have seemed the best conservator of this inheritance. A lot of it survived until the last decade of the 20th century. The abrupt change into the capitalism of primitive accumulation and simultaneous, ill-considered, sudden privatisation endangered this miraculously preserved heritage overnight. The war and its traumatic consequences contributed to neglect and devaluation, devastation and destruction. The effects of the international and local economic crisis worsened the situation. There is little respect for labour and its history in transitional countries. This splendid heritage is now needed to help local self-assurance and recovery.

The same is unfortunately true in more affluent nations. In the UK Matthew Boulton and James Watt's 1795 Soho Foundry in Smethwick, the first custom-built factory in the world to manufacture steam engines in one place, and the first factory to be lit by gas, has been on the Buildings at Risk register since 1998. It represents not only pioneering innovation in engineering but two hundred years of working life. Yet for over 20 years attempts to make this derelict industrial landmark the spearhead of heritage-led regeneration in one of the most multiply deprived areas in England have stalled.

### **131. Neoliberal backlash towards labour history**

It will take a long period of sensitisation and a change of political atmosphere to reverse the fate of the surviving relics of industrial heritage in the transitional countries. The new neo-liberal political orthodoxy finds any mention of 'work', 'workers', or 'labour history' intolerable, as the terms remind them of the former regime's rhetoric (or, until recently, of their political past). This is too bad because respect for these values does not necessarily carry any ideological bias nor a concession to the past ideologies. We desperately need institutions that would use the arguments of the past and present to render dignity to work and correct a value system that has got it entirely wrong. The present in some south-east European transitional countries sees the public space flooded with pretentious,



deceitful language and false claims that disguise corruption and lack of responsibility. These find support in religious and social conservatism, much of it with the support of the Church. This 'medievalisation' has far-reaching consequences for the general condition of civil society and its fundamental political values. The media and cultural life have experienced a lowering of quality, while the uncritical and snobbish glorification of bragging, ostentatious capitalism has turned into pervasive social kitsch.

Being at the centre of development, technology is charged with a myriad of meanings and possible interpretations. As a metaphor for the spirit of the time, it expresses it perfectly. Memory institutions have failed to ensure the proper reaction of a society that has decided to forget its highly instructive past. The call for the creation of a stable profession is about this role of counteractive consciousness. If we are to be part of the solution, our task of preserving the traces of the paths of civilization should consist of successes, not failures.

### **132. The failing public sector needs all its capacity**

Schools need to teach people how to understand reality, how to use technologies and how to live together on an increasingly crowded planet. Often, however, schools teach useless knowledge or have insufficient authority to teach anything, not even enough to keep young people off the street. As with museums, it all depends which country or culture we have in mind, but let us say that thanks to the strong influence of the neoliberal West we are referring to many: some already have these problems, while others may develop them. But even an ailing society still has public spaces with almost unharmed images and immense potential for communication -- public memory institutions. They are our proverbial grandparents and grand-uncles, our shamans, our 'middle house memory'. I am trying to refer to a great chapter in anthropology that tells us about the central building of the village, which typically in so-called 'primitive' societies is where all the communal meetings, rituals and collective events are held. In some cases, in ancient cultures where we imposed our museum action as the solution, it would have been enough to repair the central house and support its continuing minimal maintenance. Every community will always need a central, neutral place for its identity, or it will not be a community, a place where it recognizes itself or forms itself against the mounting challenges of sudden change. There it should have its constant community-building space. Thousands of peaceful, reasonably happy communities do not amount to warring states, but they easily may, if reduced to the level of the lonely, frightened, endangered, manipulated, insecure individual who runs eagerly towards the illusion of security, solidarity and self-assurance.

### **133. The importance of the presentation of industrial archaeology**

Industrial heritage is about humans and machines in an economic, social and political context. Its interpretation, therefore, has to take place on the level of technology, explaining technological innovation, creativity and the uniqueness of the experience. The aesthetic level should care for the special nature of product design and the architecture of the buildings, where they survive. The social dimension is the only level that can explain the human stories behind the industry. When fighting for industrial archaeology, we may remain on the technical level, tracing the adventures of innovation, the nature of creativity and the emerging technologies. We may, but we should not.

Only exceptionally, our insight widens to encompass the aesthetic dimension, as that one is not only inextricable from art but is also a true inspiration in art, so much so that certain art movements (let alone programmatic ones like Futurism or the art of war, upheaval and revolution) would have been unimaginable without technological context (Impressionism, Cubism, Pointillism). Designing factories and workplaces, and enveloping the working processes in functional, comfortable and visually attractive buildings, is a branch of architecture and design that not only changed our architecture and art but also our world. Its absence is a sign of brutality in pursuing in pursuing with reckless abandon the one and only goal of profit.

By the time we have reached a post-ideological society, speaking in the strictly political sense, I find it hardly imaginable that a museum consecrated to industrial archaeology can omit the social and political component of this composite, multi-layered subject. Is this difficult because it is unpopular with the power holders? Would they be offended if we laid bare their reckless neglect to provide any social care for the workers of today? As a profession, even if in the making, we should feel strongly about this, or have some sense of guilt about not displaying the human context of technology, while knowing it perfectly well. Is it the positive lesson of the past, or the paused messages of our predecessors that we are so afraid of suggesting to the power holders? The visitors to such a museum or exhibitions should not only be more knowledgeable but also better able to make judgements, form conclusions, have some food for thought and form their own opinions. Freedom starts with good, solid insights into matters that require judgement. How do we know this is the right path? Easily: it is harder, it is much opposed as a choice, and, from its appearance, it seems to be the road 'less travelled by'. That is a form of freedom, one that many seek to discredit by political codes, or simply a change of director.

### **134. The ideal contemporary art museum**

Two decades ago, as a result of my happy return visits to Finland, I suggested to my ambitious curatorial colleagues in a Finnish town the name for their dream: Taide Tile -- the space of art. I wrote my concept for them: this fragment

dates from that time, but it is the story of the failed Guggenheim Helsinki that reminded me of this project. I still cherish the idea of an art museum as a place where art happens. Since that time, many art museums have turned in a similar direction, bursting with life and ideas, and happily so. Many, in their turn, have remained dull places where paintings hang lifelessly on whitewashed walls and sculptures are put up on scaffold-like pediments.

There are no models. No museum should be created in the likeness of others. The modern tradition of art museums is to oblige people to adopt the usual solutions. Too many new museums are too intellectually and socially dubious to act as models. The 'Ta-Ti' was the name we spelt out together, and thus I joined their precious effort: it was about art, it was the space where art happens and it was the personal name of the museum. They asked me to lecture about it, and I did. We did not continue this work together. Yet, afterwards, I often thought about their dream, and it intrigued me so much that I decided to take up the most delicate 'museological' subject: the theme of art museums. I never dared to publish those thoughts. I have often discussed the matter with the late Kenneth Hudson, who claimed that 'art museums are the backward children of the museum world'. I agreed with his arguments and at that time it was even more true than it is now. But, then again, circumstances have also changed greatly, so I guess he would still cling to his claim if he were here.

### **135. Contemporary art museums are a precedent and a paradox**

The international art phalange, consisting of art historians, art dealers, tycoon collectors, art publishers, famous architects and politicians has its agreed formula of prestige that pumps out public money and creates grand palaces for their art. The artistic stars created, for the most part, by the very machine they run, practice 'their art'. They classify their opponents in the rough category of those who resent contemporary art and thus dismiss criticism. It is a paradox to have a museum of today, of the present, and it will remain so, even though we have several museums of the future which are organised as a network. It is as if a hasty thirst for eternity prevailed for a moment, and artists and curators wanted not only immediate access but a legitimate opportunity to create eternity themselves. But the past hurries too and is constantly moving closer to the present, as other museums demonstrate. Robber barons and industrial tycoons eagerly sought to donate their collections to a public institution, or create institutions for their collections -- a dangerous path. The owner of a multinational chocolate factory would, indirectly, force the state to employ curators whose role was to create the history of art out of his airport deals with consultants and gallery owners. This is a somewhat risky way to form public memory from the most creative and worthwhile artistic creations of a society or culture. It is both good and bad news that such rich collectors are now making their own museums.

### **136. Paradoxical popularity of contemporary art museums**

Optimists, beware! Art museums today are probably leaders in terms of rising numbers of visits and close to being leaders in total visitor numbers. But this does not correspond to the quality of the experience, nor does it mean unqualified success. Conditioned by education, media and prevailing patterns of behaviour, the average visitor behaves like a cultural zombie. Never before in history was the public consumption of art as massive as today. Equally, never before has there existed such a dramatic gap between the official concept of art and the cognitive/emotional and intellectual capacity of actual or prospective consumers to understand it. Just as money today is worth what the international community is prepared to accept, so with other created, not inherent, values. Social networks create famous personalities whose only quality is the fact of being famous, important only because they have been admitted to the ranks of the famous. The same thing, to an amazing extent, is happening to arts and artists.

### **137. Whose side do we take?**

The slide I used to explain this to students was based on a photo from a local newspaper in Zagreb, showing the lighted interior of a tramway at 5 o'clock in the morning. It is filled with people from the occupations that carry most of the burdens of urban life. They are very unlikely to be museum visitors. They are from the other half of society, the one that statistically, in many countries, never sets a foot in a museum. The reasons for this are many, but we can surely begin by blaming the museums themselves for their share in the problem.

In the course of their professional education, future curators rarely posed the simplest and most human questions. It will always be crucial to build a sound mindset as a useful departure point for their careers: whose side are we on? It sounds rude and unscientific, but life is not science and, alas, science is more often than not a long way from life. The photo from the local newspaper makes the question more justified. What book on 'museology' (whatever that may mean) or institutional practice says anything useful or inspirational about providing a service to these potential users? They probably do not even consider visiting museums. They KNOW museums are not meant for them. They are not a minority group or a disadvantaged community, only the citizens with fewer chances in life about whom there is little concern. How can we get them into museums? With difficulty, if at all. But if we were to try to derive themes from their range of worries and plans, perhaps they would include the faces of exploitation, or debt: modern slavery, or poverty and profligacy today, myths and realities.... Expect many of them to turn against you: the citizens have already been lobotomized by the media and politicians, but the majority who have still some inclination towards common sense will recognize whose side you are on. I am not advising you to do this. You may lose your job and put your family in jeopardy. The Machine (Mumford) will react like an angry snake. Doors will slam shut in front of you, invitations will dry up and you will be ignored by everyone who might

help to advance your career. But on the other hand, maintaining knowledge and wisdom may become useful one day.

### **138. To be loved requires loving**

The Latin proverb says *Si vis amari, ama!* If you want to be loved, love! People and museums do not understand that love is always about concern, a concern for the good of the loved one(s), in which one is ready to expose oneself to loss and discomfort, perhaps even contempt, and yet continue trying.

The mission of museums is the common good, but we frequently hear that people do not care for what is offered to them. Goethe said in 1821 that we only learn from those whom we love. The Latin saying claims simply that love is not a self-understood attitude but a sentiment acquired through giving love. Love has to be demonstrated as devotion and readiness to persist despite discouragement. It is not about sacrifice, just about doing what is right and honest. In the case of institutions, it is about responsibility and understanding one's mission and the users' needs (not wants!). This is why the definition of museums is not a question of formality nor mere theorizing.

### **139. Your user-friendly museum**

The user-friendly museum is not a vain demand: some museums are not user-friendly, or at least not in an obvious, intentional and premeditated way. A competent designer can make any museum look, let us say, at least correct, but that is not what we are talking about. Human nature performs its frailties in museums too: it is so easy to find technological or mathematical solutions to any problem. This is why most contemporary museums, at least in the 'lucky and resourceful' part of the planet, look good. They all give the same impression, of swell places. Kenneth Hudson, my mentor, used to say that museums can be divided into two categories: those with chairs and the others without them. By that, he meant that some take the trouble to study when and where a visitor might enjoy or need the chance to sit down and take a closer look, contemplate or have a rest. And indeed those museums that are visitor-friendly demonstrate that the expenditure of a few Euros can be incredibly effective in many ways.

'Museums with chairs' are therefore those that bother to imagine how would a visitor behave and react. They define their role as that of fulfilling the needs of the user. Deeply immersed in learning, fascinated by the peculiarities of their collections and, in most cases, neither trained nor educated for the job they do, curators easily fall prey to misconceptions of a very general nature: their starting-point is wrong and their lack of skills, or even worse, of the mind-set that would make skills effective, is notorious. They may believe that their museum is a prevalently scientific institution and that producing knowledge is their business. There are more effective institutions and even professions to do that. Communication as a two-way process calibrated upon the needs, not the

wants, of their users and their community, escapes their comprehension and they do their jobs badly.

Their general attitudes can be turned into a list of mistakes:

1. Most museums trap themselves. Before you do anything, think about the needs and probable reactions of your users and work them into a strategic plan.
2. Do not waste your energy. When you have nothing important to offer your users, look down your priority list. Frantic activity will not result in quality.
3. If you have no vocational enthusiasm or high ideals to follow, it will be difficult for your users to get turned on.
4. Only your professional confidence and expertise will win your institution the essential trust of your users.
5. To be an excellent professional in an appreciated museum you must be a perfect communicator: a good speaker and a great listener.
6. The only purpose of your museum is to be a useful and comfortable place to your user.
7. The most important factors in success are WHOSE values you represent, WHOM you serve, to WHAT end you do it and HOW you do it.
8. If you do not know what your mission is, neither will your user: reaching into nowhere to meet unknown needs will inevitably be costly, ineffective and frustrating.
9. If your users do not accept your activities, you will have an empty museum. Follow their wishes and try to understand their needs to make your museum indispensable.
10. If your user cannot understand what you are saying, everything you do will be in vain; deliver a story that explains the importance, depth and relevance of your subject for the daily life of your users.

## **140. A healing influence for the community**

Although industrial archaeology is a subject in its own right, it may stand for any societal memory. If presented and interpreted well, it may serve to reinforce a sense of identity from a former, vanished reality, it can effectively defend and preserve the disappearing concepts of value and quality and it can produce catalytic conversions that create momentum for development. Industrial archaeology is one of the ways to understand our former collective selves and recognise ourselves as inheritors of the past. Mankind is incessantly faced with a growing number of choices, some of them apparently with fatal consequences. Can we not learn from the past? Knowing oneself is by definition a source of

pride. A devastated community that was a prosperous and flourishing town in the industrial past has a value that can be enjoyed and shared. We always live partly in our past, and it is our past that often determines our present. This little community that was once a mighty mining complex can retain some of its former glory, and maintain some of the dignity and nobility of its glorious past, whether it is remembered for its superlative achievements or a terrible mining disaster. It all counts.

An insight into a once flourishing textile, ceramics or engineering industry is a form of right, the right to a particular memory, to its contents, to re-vitalisation, to its inspirational force, in the same way, that a river that finds its old bed has a special right to it. That right to a specific experience is also the right to have inspiration and know-how, a source of high potential for the present and future. Traditions, let alone profound traits of culture and civilisation, leave traces in the DNA. Identity carries obligations. What a chance to bring back some kind of life and continuation to what has almost disappeared, but deserves to survive! This right to a specific identity also carries a genuine potential to revitalise in an appropriate way what has often been seen as lost and useless, responding to contemporary needs.

### **141. Loving your user is the way to success**

As the Buddhist master comments on his archery: how can miss if I am one with the target? If a heritage curator identifies with the needs (not wants!) of the user, how can his museum be obsolete or useless? The supreme professionalism is always the same, and only the circumstances change. The proper mindset for one's mission or calling in society will determine the quality of one's performance. Sound professional training involving the systematic, obligatory transfer of the finest available expertise is the solution. Textbooks about working in museums may claim that knowing users by asking their opinions or looking at the visitors' book is an acceptable way to a good product. It is not, because knowing is not enough. What visitors will say or claim may simply reflect the cultural conditioning to which they have been exposed. Our love for them should go deeper than that.

### **142. Democratic processes are possible if public memory is publicly cared for**

The West tries to suggest that the route to progress for any country is by adopting democracy. True. No country has enough of it. However, the suggestion is that democracy is what the West, or rather the forces in power there, proclaim it to be. This is not so. The long fight for democracy is a great European achievement, so we in Europe ought to know better. Over the last three decades, the development of democracy has been a sort of horizontal spread of participative formulae for engineering popular consent. Now you may think: why has he addressed this theme? Why this political tone? Because museums and heritage are a political



question par excellence, and because they are the tools of democracy. The future will overtake and ignore simple ideological orientations. Insight into societal processes, and being well and objectively informed, will provide the basis for a society of justice and equal opportunity. There is no democracy without free participation in processes of memorizing: collection, care (storage, retrieval, research,) and communication. Who remembers what, with what intentions and for whose benefit?

### **143. Knowledge needs a purpose to be meaningful**

The Internet is a proliferation of interconnectivity and interactivity, but also an unfathomable well of data, information and knowledge. The oceans of knowledge suggest, uncannily, that we do not need that much, that it hides the original idea of advancement and progress. Knowledge is the food of progress, but its accumulation disavows and undercuts the fundamental motive for collecting it. Knowledge proved to be only a means, as museums, schools or anything else is a means, towards some ideal end, aimed at improving our human condition. But whereas accumulation, building and acquisition may be allowed or encouraged, use is not, or not the sort of use that takes universal messages for granted. Private schools or universities and the proliferation of so many other sources of knowledge and training appear to be futile: they exist only as profit-making businesses with some general intention of serving an industry.

### **144. The idea of museums denies chaos and the absence of quality**

If the world is descending into thinly disguised chaos, why should museums care? They would not care, if they were about the past. But the past makes sense only as the fertile ground for the present, and museums should be about identity, the real, genuine, authentic identity that can continue to inspire and create duties and obligations, the one that makes us what we are. They are therefore about the present, using the past only to serve it. Even if challenged and denied, culture depends upon rules, norms and expectations. Any culture is a system of values, and heritage (itself always in a process of change) is one of its generative parts. Even contesting a rule relies upon an existing one. Change itself takes a course conditioned by the chosen deviation from a former rule. The greatest experts in anything are the masters of change. They are the arbiters of precise language and proper taste, and the artists of measure and proportion able to provide vital 'aberrations' in the most appropriate circumstances. The sense of good judgement and measure applies even in distinguishing what is truth and fact, as we can juxtapose truths and facts in multiple, opposing interpretations. This is obvious even in museums, which are by far the most trustworthy public institutions. In any society, museums should take on the role of imaginary, wise elders. Museums are about value criteria. The first of the three parts of their conceptual process is selection, and if done properly, the subtlety of their job

can hardly be overestimated. Besides, one must bear in mind, they are about the ways in which we as a society remember the past and conceive the present.

### **145. Museums should take a stand against heritage as an asset**

The tourism and heritage industry extracts cheap sensationalism and entertainment from heritage, discarding its 'dull' qualities or virtues as redundant dross. If their campaign continues its victorious penetration into the homes and minds of the population, we may arrive at a population which will find museums dull, moralizing and boring. The neoliberal world elevates as essential the ideas of advancement and progress; by its practice of distraction, entertainment and the relativization of qualities and virtues, it has offered firm legitimacy to a careless and cruel world, its leaders and celebrities resembling the drunken crew of a pirate ship. Many feel a need to stand up in defence of decent humanity and retrieve a sense of genuine playfulness and the straightforward enjoyment of life. The treacherous media impose on us the bacchanalia of the chosen 1% and their miserable, snobbish followers as a demonstration of what joy of life is. If public memory institutions will not react as an organized profession, will they abandon their possible role to religious institutions? The shameful renunciation by the civilization of the ideals of secular society is a sign that people seek shelter and demand reliable criteria by which to practise their freedom and sense of living.

### **146. Staged democracy needs a corrective contribution, even from museums**

The West created a variety of regulatory societal mechanisms, and for a while, when it was functioning in several countries of Europe, it produced a feeling that we can influence, enhance, correct or even prevent various erroneous developments in the decision-making process. But apparently, this freedom can be realized only when the attention of the ruling forces wanes or they fail to see the cleavage in the system. The truth is that a gigantic illusionary theatre of staged democracy has been created, and it functions in it an awkward form of ochlocracy. Museums, which by their nature are on the side of the citizens, are at a crossroads: there are many good museums in developed countries which play a very positive role in their society. Museums cannot change the world, but they can assist change by providing awareness and understanding. Any democratic insight, let alone one in the decision-making process, is founded upon scientifically verified, socially responsible and ethically chosen information. There are many examples. A conventional technological museum, say, presents great themes and great people, and disseminates knowledge. It would probably never touch upon the local dilemma of which technology in the given circumstances is the best choice to produce energy. The counteractive, engaged, technological museum detects the worries and needs of its community or society and offers, probably not obvious answers, but an objective insight into the problem and its possible solutions. There is scarcely any other agency in a society that can

better support this process, requiring clearly explained reasoning illustrated by the necessary facts, which is so essential to meaningful public decision-making.

### **147. A new role for national museums**

Any national museum, from the world's biggest to the world's smallest, has the potential to demonstrate more than the splendour of important museum objects because the richness must also be attractive, able to instruct and guide. Part of their space, redistributed or added, should give local as well as international visitors an opportunity to have an overview of the rich totality of that particular heritage, as a sort of visitor information and orientation centre, a benefit and privilege for those in need of the panoramic view. Conventional museums tend to lose the goodwill of their visitors by immediately offering them a huge number of objects, presenting them with the subtleties of specialist expertise. But they have to speak the language of reality and life even when conveying great beauty, unique skills or wisdom.

Any culture is unique and the best. All cultures are born equal. There is a need to explore this phenomenon and celebrate it in a dignified, professional manner. The historic need for national museums should transfer today into the third generation of national museums, becoming a changing, versatile central exhibition(s) of a complex heritage as dispersed in museums, archives, libraries and private collections. What about its exiled heritage? This fascination should provide the orientation and tone for a balanced self-appreciation, which in the case of 'little' cultures and countries is suffering from the blows of acculturation, part of the globalising tendency to substitute the apparently imposing culture of others for one's own.

### **148. If independent, museums can be useful in the post-truth and post-fact reality**

All the processes that make up the typical Western democracy are manipulated through increasingly artificial political parties and ghost organisations of civil society. With the great change in methods of communication, harmful content can be created legally and easily transmitted. In the past, although it was in no way ideal, the responsible professions were a guarantee of a certain level of plausibility in public communication. This is not a matter of moralizing but of straightforward responsibility. It is about allowing the privilege of wide public distribution to those whose education and training will guarantee culpability, liability and accountability. We seem to have yielded far-reaching concessions to the managerial elites far too easily. They succeeded in convincing us that anyone can do anything if it serves his/her selfish purpose. Never before in human society has bare-faced mendacity been proclaimed a regular means of communication or given the power to exert influence. Trolling is bad. Hate speech is bad, but 'freedom of speech' allows it. Anything that makes a profit is legitimate. Despite being an ingredient in any history, lying was always disregarded as a human

failing. But instead of discrediting it further, it has been granted legitimacy as 'spinning', and admitted into the practices of PR and marketing.

The public memory institutions that hold the memory of society are naturally expected to denounce such practices in various ways, and they probably would, if they were an autonomous and powerful profession rather than a dismembered army of fragile occupations, increasingly exposed to the menace of shrinking funding, political coercion and the vagaries of corporate sponsorship. Heritage institutions are about the constant negotiation of the making of memory and are democratic by their very nature. Discredited by post-truth and post-fact information, society needs public memory institutions to provide corrective and firm support. With knowledge, one can manage a corporation. To manage society, one needs wisdom. It is my obsessive belief that knowledge is a relative and often dubious ideal. We need a higher goal, for which knowledge serves as the raw material.

# Heritage, the importance of being public memory, private institutions

## 149. An endangered sector

The military and leisure industries lead the cortege of change-makers. At their worst, they thrive upon our fears, power aspirations, innate tendencies to discord and basic instincts. But it has always been thus, and only the protagonists and the technologies change. The same forces were always in place, ever ready to fulfil our wants (easily manipulated), or even our needs (which can be expanded, influenced or invented). The introduction of new technology in museums helps, but unless curators take the decisions about how they are used, for what purpose and to what standards, we may fall victim to business and managerial collusion. The limping cultural sector (as Theodore Roszak prophesied in the 1970s) may turn into a mere extension of the service industries. Neither knowledge nor education, let alone amusement, is our primary product. Should we remain without one?

## 150. The heritage industry – a dangerous brother

The heritage industry is a profit-based, museum-like activity that sees heritage as a commercial asset. The boundary with the tourism industry is barely distinguishable: visitor centres, visitor attractions.... This is the profit-oriented side of heritage use. Although these days they are often combined, one must retain the distinction. What we are about is the other side of the coin, the socially concerned and responsible one, the mission-oriented use of heritage. As well as all sorts of museums, we have interpretation centres, eco-museums (as museums of community and locality), econo-museums and hybrid institutions (interpreted sites or cultural landscapes), temporary museums, programmes of regular activities and so on. Errors multiply when economists, managers and PR experts who do not grasp the meaning of public memory nor understand what the museum product promote the communicational, commercial attractiveness of heritage. Museums may earn money, but that is not primarily what they are there for. What they earn indirectly is more important. Theories and scientific disciplines have many ambitions, but one of them is certainly the development of standards and the ability to distinguish bad from good, harmful from useful, and ugly from beautiful. This is driven not by rules but by developing the ability to form one's own judgements and find one's own way.

## **151. The right to interpretation is different from the ownership of objects**

My theory helps me with this claim: it says that the *genius loci*, the magic of the place, the uniqueness of *topos*, will prevail if assisted by the force of the right to do something. Some places have the right to show something, others do not. This is a very profound concept of human nature and his or her environment. I have a good example from the place where I first realized this. The magnificent male statues (*kouroi*) on the sacred way (*hiera hodos*) which was the link between the ancient city of Samos and the Heraion, the temple of Hera, appear to be in their original places. In fact, the sacred way at Samos is partly reconstructed, using cement replicas of the statues now in the collections of various museums in Europe replaced *in situ* in their original positions. If you reconstructed the same ceremonial, sacred way in Göttingen, where most of the originals were taken to, even using the original statues, it would be ridiculous kitsch even though it contained the most precious parts of the monument. What makes the reconstruction at Samos acceptable is its right to tell the story, a sort of priority, an ethically unique right to be the transmitter of that particular collective experience. The colonial mentality in our heads prevents us from seeing this. Let us stop there, with the claim that this right of place is very important. The rights of places are rather immaterial in terms of a collection of objects.

## **152. A museum is one of the responses to the need that creates them**

A museum, as a wise social device that works to the advantage of its community, can help the community adapt to the changing conditions in its surroundings, and use its knowledge about the local potential for creating viable conditions for its prosperity. All this is true for industrial heritage institutions and projects, or art and natural history ones. It would be wrong, however, to overestimate the potential of museums, as they are only one among many responses that modern societies create to survive threats and protect their endangered values. The tourism industry has introduced a certain confusion, which blurs these clear motives for creating a museum. The industry, and the policies it has conveyed to the decision-makers in society, suggest that a museum can be created as a vanity project for the destination industry market and a mere prestige destination for future travellers. We need a theory, if not a science, to tell us how to discern the difference and understand what is happening. The recent merger of the Chinese Ministries of Culture and Tourism will be a much-studied innovation, and probably a massive mistake. We shall see.

## **153. The sector of public memory institutions as part of the social contract**

The public memory sector includes museums, archives, libraries, digitally born memory institutions and numerous hybrid institutions, whether public, private

or civil. A unified society of shared destiny that cares for the well-being of its citizens will have to own a controlling interest in the conceptual shares of the domain of public memory. It is too serious and too crucial to be left exclusively to individual private or corporate interests, and yet the state should admit the freedom of ownership to all sides. The public administration that was installed to defend public, democratic interests must exercise its oversight to prevent excessive commodification. But a relevant public memory sector, preferably with the consistent standards that enable it to perform the functions of a profession, is the real mechanism of the social contract.

### **154. The private ownership of heritage can be publicly relevant**

I have often been misunderstood. Some would say that I omit private and civil society memory projects. Indeed, ownership may matter, as private often remains very private by its very mission, but any institution can achieve coherence, integrity and devotion to the public cause, to a mission in society. The right to form memory freely and take part in the socially responsible process of the transfer of collective experience is another expression of freedom. This freedom is the freedom of contribution and insight. The welfare state has to provide opportunities for this process to be of excellent scientific quality, socially responsible and ethically embedded in basic human and natural rights. Anybody is welcome to contribute and participate: private institutions, civil society institutions, communities and individuals.

### **155. Societal memory logically defies fragmentation**

The ‘transfer of collective experience’, which I propose as the shortest definition of museums, is a paramount societal function. This is why we have so many mediators and interpreters of this inherited human experience: historians, art historians, archaeologists, ethnologists, anthropologists, philosophers: some scientists, others educators and some both – and finally the curators. There is a similar variety in institutions and methods of remembering. The problem is obviously that a common heritage so divided is hard to grasp, and barely able to react as a unified sector. Divided by scientific taxonomy, by the nature of their collections, and by ownership, they are a dismembered army, facing oblivion and the manipulation of narratives. The sad truth is that not many have recognized the full potential of museums, but those who have achieved institutional success.

### **156. Museums are the natural aggregators of the heritage sector**

Museums often have the advantage of bringing together most of the features of all the other heritage institutions, at one time and in one place, a sort of easy-to-recognize invention with about two centuries of institutional experience. Their major difference from all the others lies in the fact of their collections of



original artefacts and the no less original documentation that accompanies them. Displaying them is always the opportunity for a great communicative impact. Compared to archives and libraries, museums are the sector's natural leaders in communicating the sum total of societal memory that we have amassed.

### **157. Saving Utopia but recognizing reality**

Aramco, the wealthiest world's corporation, arouses little sympathy in the cultural sector. In 2017 it built the King Abdulaziz Center for World Culture, also known as *Ithra* (*enrichment* in Arabic), in Dhahran, Saudi Arabia. It is in many ways a magnificent achievement. Being the epitome of the corporate world, it so happened that the project went virtually unnoticed. We are not far from the day when Walmart, Sinopec, Royal Dutch Shell, Exxon, Apple, Coca Cola, or some other corporation will create a similar museum of special architecture and 'cultural' software, and we need to adopt a realistic stance. At some point in their richness, the rich tend to immortalize themselves by serving public interests, in a way they imagine is appropriate. As museums worldwide stumble and shatter, trying to save their ambitious public programmes, we witness civil society's call for their autonomy and integrity. However, things are happening on the other side of the societal spectrum, and they do it more and more in a spectacular manner: private projects want public recognition and claim it without intermediaries. Remember the 'museums' of Ferrari, Vuitton, BMW, Prada and many others? Only a few decades ago, a corporation wanted to have its name on a plaque at the entrance to a prestigious museum. A few decades ago, a big, important private or company museum was an easily tolerated curiosity. The world is changing in front of our eyes, and it fits none of the inherited models or usual frameworks. The USA was always a different case, but even there the private initiative behind notorious or famous big museums like Guggenheim, Norton Simon, Frick or Mellon took care from the outset to project a serious public image through charitable status and the involvement of professionals.

So the grand projects from the 'other side', from the proverbially arrogant corporate world, are here to stay and multiply. What shall we do? By 'us', I mean the institutional culture, the remaining public sector which has not yet given up its utopian dreams. For quite a while, we shall continue to live with a heritage sector constantly and increasingly affected by reductions in public funding. The help will always be there or offered, but on what terms?

### **158. Public, private or both?**

This trend is not going to reverse. Moreover, the overall configuration of societal memory will be actively changed by the corporate and financial sectors. Whoever pays the piper calls the tune - the funder determines how the funds are spent. Should we ignore or face reality? This is about who holds the controlling package of shares in the public memory project. Whichever way, we shall need to have a firm stance and standards, to serve our mission in the changing circumstances.

Remember that great corporations have already entered our sector on many occasions, increasingly on their own terms, and they are rich enough to show they can use the finest expertise the members of the profession can offer. Many, to be fair, respect current, mainstream professional criteria and show some respect for our cause.

### **159. Private museums can be part of the public memory sector**

Since any expression of concern for the public interest has recently been proscribed as socialist and dangerous, we should reverse the suspicion: who finds the public interest dangerous, and why? We might ask to whom freedom belongs. Private museums, like anything else private, can and should exist. We, the society, can even decide democratically to support them with public money, if the private endeavour surpasses, overcomes and supersedes the special interest and contributes beneficially to the common good.

### **160. Autonomy in performing a public role**

Anchored in the ocean of scientific, political or cultural conventions, museums have difficulty in attaining autonomy and serving the real needs of their community or society. Some questions constantly need to be answered. This applies not only to conventional museums but also to those curating industrial or natural heritage. Through whose eyes will they look at the world? Which world will they look at, that of the past, or of the present, but using the past to better understand the present? Whose museum will that be, and whose interests should it serve? Whose past do they interpret: the owners' or the workers'? In a democratic society there is little dilemma, as it stresses the common good as the desired outcome.

### **161. Industrial archaeology was an inspiring, change-making innovation**

In the entire scope of inherited knowledge and its material and immaterial traces, it was only a matter of time before the notion of heritage was extended to the relatively recent past and relatively unexclusive contents. The discovery of industrial heritage was a sensational shift in the early 60s; it became an advanced practice in the 70s and 80s, as a concern for social history, and an attempt at self-understanding in the 90s. Ever since, conveniently situated industrial buildings, their contents and architecture, have enjoyed, not only conversion to museums and interpretation centres, but reuse and revitalisation into diverse new roles, from cultural centres to housing. In that respect, the lesson of industrial archaeology was very supportive of new ideas about how to merge heritage and life in various ways, inspiring conventional museums and encouraging creative solutions. Cultural engineering, coming from France in the 80s, was, for instance, one of the consequences: culture is opened up to intervention in a way we now call management and present becomes a legitimate part of living the heritage.

Thomas Aquinas could not agree more: the past is all that is not present. But even in the present, we can play with the past during its formation. Heritage is more (or less?) because it has a social purpose, with an intention.

## **162. The difficulty of relevant theory**

There is a theory about everything, but any theory aspiring to have scientific relevance should be universal. The difficulty of theorizing in museums and heritage is the expanding variety of practices and needs to which they respond, or not. It seems that some views, books and contributions have limited use, for example in poor, deprived countries and cultures. But any good theory should appear relevant to all. In the last 40 years that I remember, things changed for the better, but not everywhere. There are now formidable museums in many countries, but in many it is still a distant goal. In fact, it seems that those who need museums most are lacking them. However, I have argued in some of my writings that for too many deprived societies the museum model is an imposed and alienating institution. If we define the museum process as a transfer of collective experience then we have no difficulty in helping an African tribe in the provision of the necessary means to continue their traditional transfer. It can hardly be a museum, an invention of the busy, responsible bourgeoisie of the industrial revolution. The concept of mnemosophy ([www.mnemosophy.com](http://www.mnemosophy.com)) was designed to overcome this problem, and make the future science of memory function in an appropriate, useful way, be it in Amsterdam or 'in the deserts and rainy forests'.

## **163. The heritage product is hardly ever metrically relevant**

To exercise their nature all heritage institutions need to define their product so that both sides of the communication process know what to strive for or what to demand. Until recently, the supposed product was a permanent exhibition and the programme of activities of which, for the most part, temporary exhibitions and workshops for children were regarded as the most valuable elements. The visible argument of the product quality was metric, always expressed as visitor statistics. On the contrary, the real product should be the amount of quality change within the community or social context in which museums function.

## **164. Returning 'lost energy' to places**

What we are seeking with industrial heritage, more often than not, is a reading of the potential that can recapture some of the energy of the past in an active state, to contribute to the local identity. Some monuments to past development can be turned into tourist attractions, some can inspire new uses (housing, museums, cultural centres), or they can be 'museumized'. The solution is sometimes a mixture, but what most needs to be discussed is how we re-vitalize those places, in the sense of returning some of their meaning and inspiration

to the lives of the present-day inheritors. If you study the logic of the place, its identity and ambitions, you may find that its former energy can be channelled into an ambition that has a certain coherence with the former glory, that can celebrate what is lost and provide guidance to others with similar experiences. I have advised a museum in a Mediterranean city that has inherited a glorious Roman past, and some remains, to form and lead an association of the cities sharing the same, specific destiny. A mighty company worth the effort. Probably neither curators nor the city fathers understood that being the centre of a network confers certain privileges as a destination. Another long-standing project of mine was 'Remembering Greece', uniting with a changing travelling exhibition all the 200-odd former Ancient Greek colonies scattered from the Black Sea to the shores of Africa and the Iberian and Apennine peninsulas, as well as the Adriatic. Having the central interpretation point and hub of the network in Taormina near Naxos, the first colony, made so much sense to me that it took me some time to understand that nobody else saw its splendid, productive potential.

### **165. Heritage is about values, historically often an asset, a trophy and object of annihilation**

Heritage should be kept as much as possible outside the commercial and political sphere, where it is misused and manipulated. But since it is so potent and important it is subjected to assaults of all sorts. When British and French armies destroyed Beijing's Old Summer Palace in 1860 they felt both hilarious and very righteous about it. However, the stone plaque explaining the justification of the destruction may have been partly a matter of form, to cover up the barbarous looting. A Pekingese dog from the palace was presented to Queen Victoria, and she named it Looty. Thousands of objects from the Palace flooded European private and state collections, and for the most part, we know the new, unlawful owners. We know that even museums themselves have a history still to be told. This is only one out of hundreds of examples of episodes of looting and pillage in imperialist wars. Relatively well documented, these episodes could potentially lead to fair repatriation and thus to rewriting imperialist history. It is, however, very unlikely to happen, or, rather, history tends to follow the same paths. Paradoxically, museums were created for the opposite reason. It is only a happy circumstance that critical notes may lose their edge as the time is passing. The recent book *The Brutish Museums: the Benin Bronzes: colonial violence and cultural restitution* (by curator and professor Dan Hicks, UK, 2020) symbolically marks the turning point in developments: from now on, we shall have fewer and fewer excuses for delay and ever more arguments to take our role in forming public memory as an ethical mission.

## **166. The culture of origin is the ideal location/destination for objects of cultural significance**

Ideally, objects belong in their primary context; their original location is part of their authenticity. Their ideal destination is the place of their origin and existence, in the context of their users or their cultural descendants and inheritors. These are the people who are entitled to them, and probably the only people who can fully recognize the value of the objects. They have inherited the right as well as the obligation to continue the existence of the objects in whatever way they think best. Understanding and appreciation are the best conservation techniques ever invented. Everything else is a matter of methodology and procedure. Unlike the first, the latter two can be learned or bought.

## **167. Some of UNESCO's efforts may become a disservice to the case of heritage preservation**

As a profession in the making, we are like a dismembered army fighting a battle with giants. Scattered and in open retreat, we can hardly think of exaggerating in matters relating to the protection of the heritage that we have saved from the past and that we plan to care for and maintain for present and future users. We are losing ground daily. The corporate giants are the dominant protagonists of the financialisation of the world. They are not only digging a widening gap between themselves and the majority of the population, they are changing the way of thinking and value system by which the world lives, produces and buys. The process comprises converting everything into marketable values and assets. UNESCO's lists were well-intentioned, and truly a great achievement in spreading awareness and promoting the criteria for heritage preservation. They were supposed to grant the undeniable status of monuments to a heritage that otherwise could succumb to an arbitrary decision and was therefore exposed to unnecessary risks. They contributed a great deal to the branding of places and countries and assisted the tourism industry. In times when money for culture was more abundant, inscription on a list also meant help. But the next phase, that of calling for investment into heritage institutions and the education of their public owners to use these resources to their best advantage, often failed, as it was left to restricted local circumstances.

The practice of recognizing intangible heritage flourishes as it becomes clear that rapid changes endanger it. As they do. Whether UNESCO will see that its evaluations and noble intentions are being misused as an adjunct in the commodification process remains to be seen. It may well transpire that its criteria for assigning the right of claim to certain cultural values will be used in disputes over ownership. It has happened already. Could that lead to banning some cultures from using their appropriate expressions of heritage, simply because at some point these have been assigned to some other culture? Shared registration would appear to tackle this problem appropriately, but it is also a reminder of possibly specious claims. Cultural values and their products are already marketable goods and exposed to the implications of proprietorship. But it can securely be

claimed that heritage, like culture, is very often a shared value within its wider framework. It should therefore be treated as live and dynamic. Closing it off in a registry with a label and statement of ownership may just be another version of the display case with the CCTV camera, or even more, an asset that can be given in concession and traded. The best way to preserve heritage is to keep it alive and shared.

## **168. Remembering industry**

As a journalist and publicist, Kenneth Hudson wrote a book that made him a co-founder of industrial archaeology, the title of which betrays a rather solemn understanding of the new phenomenon, *The Archaeology of Industry*. The definitions of industry given by Webster's dictionary suggest a much broader scope than that of being covered by a factory roof. One needs to accept this, as it was this understanding of 'industry' that motivated Kenneth Hudson himself, giving rise as it did to a growing number of museums dedicated to labour and workers. That brings us to the essence of industrial archaeology.

The source of industrial archaeology was in Britain, a logical development when one bears in mind that it was the cradle of the Industrial Revolution. But the fascination with the industry in the broad sense also comes from there. As water is more transparent near its source, so was the idea of protecting the industrial heritage when it was conceived. Kenneth Hudson never thought solely about buildings or machines; he was more interested in the context, the social and political circumstances, than about technology itself. Thus, almost six decades ago, industrial archaeology created a route to a broader view of the theory of heritage, paving the way for other things to happen: eco-museums, museums of society, community museums and so on, as well as for new theorising. Six decades ago, industrial archaeology helped broaden views about the theory of heritage, paving the way for many socially concerned practices.

## **169. All heritage is intangible: strategic implications of the concept**

A museum is many things and will become many more. For the time being, the profession operates upon a definition which for a long time satisfied the majority of people working in the field, but which in 2005 acquired a new quality: museums were supposed to care for intangible heritage too. The latter, of course, changes the very notion of collecting and, consequently, of the forms of museum. Putting ICH (intangible cultural heritage) into the official ICOM definition brought about some prompts:

- Marking the end of the museum age and the beginning of the heritage age
- Implying that public memory institutions (PMIs) are places of ideas and concepts, not objects

- Making non-collecting museums more logical
- Signalling that we should be returning what we have taken, literally and in the sense of getting there ourselves: museums on the spot, in situ, are the best demonstration of their nature as mechanisms of selection and continuity
- Asserting implicitly that we should be about value systems and not about selecting, storing and interpreting objects
- Demonstrating that objects are just tokens of memory, the *images* that serve as reminders, as stores of elusive knowledge and experiences, as the residue of lost reality, as mnemotechnic triggers for contextual and symbolic meanings
- Collections, like all public memory institutions, are a means towards the goal, not the goal itself
- Reminding ourselves of JC Dana who said that a collection in a museum is not a museum but a collection, and of Kenneth Hudson's sentence: 'A stuffed tiger in a museum is not a tiger but a stuffed tiger in a museum'

All heritage is intangible, but only some of it is materialized in tangible objects. PMIs are places of memory regardless of which medium or mode it has been stored in, cared for, retrieved from or communicated by.

## 170. Heritage and the sectors of memory

The past is a lost whole, organic, elusive, dependent upon the quality of memory used, the sciences and institutions that fix it and the interests that influence the processes. Like no other civilisation so far, we have perfected technologies for recording memory. Paradoxically, we have arrived at hypermnnesia, drowning in oceans of data, information and knowledge.

The aim of memory accumulation cannot be ever more memory, as seems to be the case. Society needs high quality, noble memory, a memory that is responsible, ethical and usable for development, filtered and weighted for scientific arguments and sustainable relevance. Such memory, based upon standards of high quality, is in fact wisdom. Knowledge, being neutral or dependent upon the purposes it has been used for, is not what we need for sustainable development.

Heritage is a social construct, but being an extract from complete memory is a welcome process for structuring value, required knowledge and accumulated human experience. Heritage, at its best, brings wisdom but does not equal it. It is formed throughout the societal structures of memory. It relies upon collective memory, which derives from all individuals and groups, and is unstable, elusive and fluid in character. The domain of cultural industries lives partly upon collective memory but is creative, sometimes or even mainly fictional, producing what we might call social memory. It formed amidst lively, versatile



societal processes. Public memory is the vast battleground of the dominant, ruling narratives.

From all this, and with the decisive contribution of science, applying discipline through selection and research, public memory is deduced and laid down. The process predominantly takes place in public memory institutions, such as archives, museums, libraries and other digitally born or hybrid institutions. Public memory is in a sense the operating, public selection of recordings and interpretations of the past that we tacitly agree to take as our authority when it comes to understanding the past, in particular or in general. PMIs are increasingly converging, and could form a new, mega-profession in the near future. In terms of social understanding, their role is the maintenance of the useful value systems that civil society wishes to retain and use in the realm of the societal project.

## **171. The Past is Gone**

The past is gone forever. Only reminders survive. The Judeo-Christian world clings to materiality as a sort of solidity. Yet what is solid in it when matter, as physics and biology confirm, is only temporary in its forms? We use objects as reminders and containers of meaning. If restored to its glory an object can become a token of communication. Research makes it possible for us to bring back some of its former life. We help it by reviving its context. The values it expressed can be thus called back to be examined, learned from, enjoyed or even lived in a modified form. The status of the object, its social controversy, its significance, the joy it conveyed, the skill of its execution, all that can be researched, so that the rich and noble memory is extracted for the enjoyment and education of the living. Too many pianos are silent, incarcerated in museums only because of their apparent splendour and myths they support. Their true life is sound.

Is it not true that humans have an urge to lock up whatever they find precious and exhilarating? Museums should be hospitals or temporary homes, not permanent prisons.

## **172. The public memory domain**

The range of institutions that surround the concept of the totality of heritage increases yet more significantly if we broaden the notion of the heritage object and include all the institutions that use or communicate heritage. With non-collecting museums becoming a reality, the theory should evolve still further. Elsewhere, I have proposed Mnemosophy or Heritology; the latter concept has had some success. Besides museums, archives, libraries and sites and monuments, this domain of public heritage includes the live environment that cares for heritage and continues it by practising it, privately owned heritage, often publicly displayed, but not in a regular, prescribed manner, and other forms of heritage. It is upgraded by the results of new technologies and new insights into what heritage is, so the totality contains also knowledge bases, information networks, dedicated

heritage networks and digitally born products, actions and institutions. The triple function of heritage institutions (collecting, care and communication) serves simply the selection, conservation and continuity of what is regarded essential for the high-quality survival of identity. I have intentionally omitted research, as this should be a given; there can be no credible communication which is not founded upon science. This whole will always be a pulsating inspiration for the actions of the entire memory configuration, from collective to social and public. Public memory absorbs whatever finds its way to it from collective memory. It also compresses memory achievements from the huge domain of art and culture, where memory is at the same time inspiration and product. Visualised in this way, public memory suggests so powerful a capacity that it will increasingly be recognized. It will finally amount to a new concerted effort, able to produce valuable impulses for the survival of identities that we find indispensable for society. The concerted action of public memory institutions is a reality. This is an unavoidable strategy in the growing number of projects. The institutions, associations and events created as part some or all of them are a good argument for the emerging future.

### **173. Why GLAM is not only late but also insufficient**

For a century, the 'professionals' concerned with museums and other memory institutions failed to see that they were institutionalized parts of the same effort on the part of society. Had this not been the case, we would have had an organized public memory sector, just like any other societal/social service. It would have been served by an appropriate profession, as so many other public sectors are. That would in turn mean that societies would have had the chance of more coherent and harmonious development. As we know, we have instead a dismembered army of occupations, each caring separately for different aspects of the public memory. I have proposed that the common denominator of all memory institutions is public memory or the need for it. To the usual list of memory institutions (museums, archives, libraries, sites and monuments, knowledge bases networks/digitally born institutions and systems, privately owned heritage and living heritage), I have added complementary forms of heritage and aspects of the tourist industry (visitor centres, visitor attractions and interpretation centres), privately owned heritage, urban actions, civil society heritage interpretations, political urbanism and public enactments. The boundaries are increasingly blurred and will continue to be so. This, naturally, calls, for a broad-minded approach leading to an anticipatory theory. The invention of GLAM (galleries, libraries, archives and museums) seems to address the problem effectively enough. It shows that practice is able to invent solutions when theory is too slow. The dominant Anglo-Saxon world has always been uneasy about big theories about museums, and has tended to overestimate practice. It was justifiably frightened by the Eastern European pressure to proclaim theorising about museums a science by its own right. Not many have said so, but that unique attempt to create a science, centred upon a single institution (which is simply impossible), rightfully caused much reticence. By the late 70s some

museum personalities from Eastern Europe (Stransky, Jelinek, Gluzinsky et al) attained much attention by theorising museum work and proposing museology as an emerging science. Thus we entered the 21st century with a diminished profession and societal memory at the mercy of the politicians, corporations and predatory industries.

GLAM is a good sign, but it has to be PMI: public memory institutions, all of them, of every variety, when and if they qualify for the status. What were the reasons that it never happened and what should be done to ensure that it finally does happen; all this is explained in many writings and my book *Mnemosophy, an essay on the science of public memory* (Zagreb, 2015: freely available on the Internet). The new profession of public memory is urgently needed if we want to survive as a decent, accountable society.

## **174. The upsurge of private interests in the heritage sector**

The way in which small private and civil initiatives pop up is a sign that our system lacks the ability to reach deep into the layers of society. The discourse of the new reality in Europe dictates that public museums are nowadays discussed from standpoint of the logic and vocabulary of cultural economics. We often find public museums referred to as ‘belonging to the state bureaucracy’, which is overtly revealing its neoliberal discontent. It implies that what deserves to survive must prove it through its profitability. However, private museums, when very serious or competing to be accepted as among the best and most relevant, often seek and get (!?) public funding support (for example the Beyeler Museum in Basel, Switzerland). But at the other extreme we find art museums in hotels and shopping malls, as in Las Vegas or some places in Japan.

Our preference should be, through the strong arguments for the nature of public memory, that public culture stays openly in the public arena, where we can see it, use it, judge its contribution, and finally finance it. The practice in the Netherlands has obliged national museums to plan for the long term, producing a quarter or a third of their budget through their creative effort. Public museums in most countries outside the circle of the developed countries of the West tend to use their position as a sinecure, a normal consequence of lack of public insight, control and professionalism, including ethics. However, I would strongly argue that rich individuals or companies who are capable of creating museums should prove to the professional authorities that they are agents of public good, and not serving particular interests. This rapid development at an amazing rate will be a touchstone for the relevance and professionalism of museums. The more than 100 new private museums that are appearing annually in China, some of them on a vast scale, are only one case in point.

## **175. Private museums are a challenge**

The trend of multiplying private museums has many reasons, two of which are most important. One is the new societal and economic paradigm: contrary to some historical expectations, modern societies have returned to models of plutocracy. The other is the value shift which dethroned the public good and the emerging welfare state. In some parts of the world advocating the welfare state is regarded with suspicion as latent communism, and almost aggressively rejected.

Up until the 1970s big private collectors were eager to bequeath their collections to public museums. Gradually, the conditions they imposed became more and more demanding. Nowadays, having one's own private museum is the preferred solution. The new breed of private collectors does not see the need any more to immortalize themselves through difficult negotiations with curators and city fathers. They do not need partners to be publicly legitimate. They have their own curators the way they like them. This fall in the rating is bad news for the museum 'profession'. If we suppose that public memory is prevailingly a public concern, then we shall have to devise ways of dealing with the fact that it is partly privatized already and there on the 'cultural market', changing the semantic centre of gravity. Any rich private individual with their own private museum of history may advance false and disastrous interpretations of the past. Modern societies have neither criteria nor methods to deal with this. Is that the inevitable future, and are we prepared for it?

## **176. Private museums are an opportunity**

Are they? Yes, in principle and ideally: if they care to consider the existing standard of best museum practice as their own and accept the rules of the professional museum community, they may be a welcome enrichment of the cultural offer. Added to the public scene, they may provide a complementary view of the heritage of their particular personal/ institutional concern. And, that well may be the case. In China, more than 100 private museums a year demonstrate the prestige of the heritage concept. It is mostly the power of possession of magnificent collections, but increasingly it is also the importance gained by acquiring the right to interpret identity, and certain ownership of the past. Besides being a challenge to public criteria, private museums can provide an opportunity for a wider communication with our inheritance, adding private initiative and resources to what is a natural societal urge.

## **177. The heritage sector is a long-term commitment**

Amusement is legitimate, and so is earning money, when festivals and other events are organized with care and professional responsibility. The frenzied quantity of festivals clearly indicates a proportional loss of quality. A more intensive participation by heritage occupations and cultural institutions can improve the situation. If those who are creative and enterprising in culture, especially public institutions and experts, receive support from responsible media, the soft

power of heritage can represent a realistic chance for development and, very importantly, maintain the circumstances for self-esteem. Without it, no culture can endure the strains of entropy of globalization.

### **178. Why is the public memory sector a solution to our troubles?**

Together with the developing human race, nature provides medicine for its sicknesses. Civilisation provided us with the experiences of our predecessors and the ability to select them as remedies for the failures of our humanism. Memory is being taken from us in an attempt to disperse the coherencies of our diversity and the values we have worked hard for, and rendering us victims of anonymity and selfishness. If the Western development paradigm prevails, the human race is going to be reduced to a shapeless mass over which an empire of obscenely rich, worthless nobodies will reign (finally) with the help of robots. Retaining the right to form a public profession for the care and management of memory is a strategic question for any country, and a global one too.

### **179. Museums are a chance of retaining connections with reality**

In a world inundated with illusion and simulacra, one of the major problems in the near future will be how to keep the clear consciousness of what is reality and how far the thin air of virtual reality is still beneficial. Technology - expansions of 3-D mapping, holography, augmented reality and above all 3-D moving images - changes our perception daily. Ordinary reality will be a dull scene to our grandchildren, one to escape from. We shall have to know which virtuality is just an enlargement of our perception, and which one is digging worm-holes in our time-space coordinates, sucking us maliciously into a flux of fraud, hoax realities. Museums, unlike many institutions, have a firm grip upon reality and may serve us as a lifebelt. If they consciously and as a responsible profession follow these perilous developments, at some point they will develop attitudes and expertise that will save our relationship to what human beings are in nature, part of the whole to be preserved not out of nostalgia or for profit but as a guarantee of our basic understanding of what humanity is. It is not the real, palpable 3D object that is the guarantee of 'real' reality in museums but their honesty and ethical approach to transferring the collective experience.

# Mnemosophy as a general theory of heritage

## 180. Knowing the broad context is decisive

The vantage point does not change reality, but our relation to it. As I preach Mnemosophy as some emerging science of public memory, I find it revealing how a different point of view immediately invokes and paints a much more exciting picture of the job. It is a challenging and dynamic perspective of a grand process of transfer of collective experience that we usually classify into a structure of what are in fact entirely overlapping memory institutions. This shift in mindset makes one see the possibilities and challenges that are otherwise imperceptible. I have been a consultant in some dozen projects internationally, but was rarely given a chance to fully demonstrate the power of innovation. Not many people dare to step into the future, as it invokes some risk to the stakeholders or loss of internal support. In these very discouraging circumstances, my 25-30 projects were doomed to remain a daydream. I decided to do the cheapest and the simplest of them by myself, and so I became a landed gentleman in virtual reality. One of the sites is an international conference with no precedent [www.thebestinheritage.com](http://www.thebestinheritage.com), one is a bizarre virtual museum [www.globallovemuseum.net](http://www.globallovemuseum.net), one is this imaginary lecturing site, some (like Bridges of Europe) are hardly presentable (see <https://www.mnemosophy.com/links>), and the rest are still a frustration rationalised by the books I write

## 181. Museology

Museology is a logical consequence of the importance of museums. They seem to need a theory and, in due course, a science of their own. Once this fascination had begun, it caused almost a hundred years of speculation ending with many museologies, tendencies, schools of thought and prominent theoreticians. For most of the time, the fascination with museums was transferred into theorizing. While the West was very sceptical, Eastern Europe, more inclined to philosophizing and the study of concepts, was well ahead, often and increasingly proposing museology as a scientific discipline. In academic circles in the West it was simply 'not scientific', not being from the natural or technical field of study. Thirty or forty years ago the space among the social sciences that museology might have aspired to fill was very limited, and academic consent reluctant. But since history, religion and art history have made their way into academic curricula it seemed natural that museology would also be approved. And it was, in Eastern European universities. Only with the rise of information as new content and the common denominator of many domains did museology stand a real chance. But the term that connected it to a very specific institutional practice was the limiting factor; apparently, no science can be based upon an institutional practice, upon a phenomenon rather than a concept. As any practice always implies, there is a need

for a theoretical basis. The theory of museum practice, that would explain the institution, its methods and technologies, was an evident requirement, realized in many manuals and books. The term remained, however, a stumbling block instead of the first step at the entrance to the occupation of a museum curator. The relativity of terms is known and understood, but 'museumologies' multiplied, demonstrating a certain frustration, unnecessary in my opinion: museology, New Museology, Critical Museology, Museum Studies, Ecomuseology, Economuseology, Social Museology, General theory of heritage, Heritage studies, Cultural Heritage Studies, Cultural Heritage Sciences (Scienze del Patrimonio), Heritage management/Identity management, Heritage Science, Memory Studies or, indeed or why not, - heritology or mnemosophy. But the role of museums was also spreading, opening up and becoming more relevant to the development of every community or society they served, tracing social, technological and political changes. The full reformist potential of the revolution of ecomuseums, perceived by many across the world as just another, perhaps passing fashion of practice and theory, was never fully adopted or recognized. In fact, it changed everything. Since the early 80s, I have thought that museography or museology should rightfully remain the theory of museum practice, but for studying the underlying concepts and the mission of museums, we should open up and propose much higher and more ambitious societal claims. In my view, establishing the right to a new science was also about gaining the right to professional status, and thus to the very social contract in which collective, social memory merges into the constantly evolving and debated public proposals for societal strategy. The huge intellectual effort invested in museology has not been lost, but will be incorporated into the future science of heritage, or perhaps of public memory, as seems more probable.

## 182. Why is theory practical

After a century of effort, most curators tolerate theory but continue to disdain it. The social psychologist Kurt Lewin (1890-1947) said, 'There is nothing so practical as a good theory'. His wisdom about theory has been largely misinterpreted. It was a corrective call for a balanced appreciation of both theory and practice, as one feeds the other, though it gently reminds us that thinking usually precedes an act. A carpenter or fisherman or any other practitioner would fail without theory. But the fact that any curator is already a specialist in an academic discipline blinds them to the fact that being a full-time officer of public memory requires a theory of its own.

The man who praised the practicality of theory also said, 'If you want truly to understand something, try to change it'. As a curator, I have tried to change museums. By lecturing in museology, I have tried to change curators. I have learned a lot. Yet change can be effected only if we finally understand that we are only one occupation in a grand profession in the making, that of public memory. I often quote Kurt Lewin, who is considered the father of modern social psychology. His work was influenced by Gestalt psychology and stressed the



importance of both personal characteristics and the environment in causing certain behaviour.

### **183. Museums need more criticism**

Some countries have an accreditation or registration system for museums, by which museums aspiring to public funds are required to pass the criteria of a professional commission. Some other countries like Switzerland have a long and constant practice of elaborating criteria of quality and implementing them by professional meetings and publications through ICOM and other professional organisations. Generally speaking, the nascent profession lacks the self-confidence that would allow professional critique and make it part of a process of self-evaluation. The theory of museum practice has only recently reached the level of the wider heritage scene and will have to generate criteria and legitimize critique from within the sector, like any profession. The price and prize will be accepting the common concept of public memory institutions as part of the wider whole, united around the same mission. Before that happens, growing professional education, and holding conferences that promote professional criteria and demonstrate best practices, will be the way towards emancipation. Choosing what to remember, whether at the level of community, society or globally, will be decisive for the survival of mankind. How can museums broaden the scope and content of their work? How can museums incorporate other frames of reference? We should regard all public memory institutions as a necessary future network. Some advances have been achieved, but there is still a long way to go.

### **184. Buzz words often signal bad conscience or lack of insight**

Our time is self-doubting, insecure and superficial. To cover up for our inefficiency in dealing with problems, or rather with their causes, we incessantly invent new buzz words that replace the necessary action. One grows rather suspicious of these new terms, as I have often witnessed personally at EU project meetings. One of them, *cultural resilience*, was very fashionable and in circulation, with the gratitude of users, for more than two years. Most of them are bureaucratic puns and witticisms, authored as cunning tricks by the virtuosos in grabbing the projects that some other, similar bureaucracy approves without understanding their essence: scoring them by the number of keywords that are considered some kind of password. These terms consistently follow the political jargon used to cheat the voters of their democratic aspirations, but culture is also often the inspiration for politicians. They are all, as Germans would call them, *Modebe-griffe*, passing fashionable, ostentatious terms meaning to suggest substance where there is, usually, only void or pretence.

I find it tiresome to list them, as many, at least formally, might be assigned an attractive purpose or content if meant sincerely. Community building, for instance, reminds one of team building, as does participatory management.

Well-paid and well-chosen people, good management that maintains honest relations, advancement by merit and a relaxed atmosphere can make the dream team a reality. Forging closer relations while canoeing may help, but it will never replace this sort of good management. The technical term thus is more to do with the self-generated importance of the new managerial theorising than with real innovation. It gets enthusiastic support only from the travel and hotel industry, and the industry of social dreams; its vain nature recalls immediately the forced displacement of beach parties and extreme sports. But instead of unselfish goals, this theory is cultivating the instinct of a pack of wolves or hyenas as its tacit inspiration. The same is true of community building. If the members of the community have their time, opportunities and equal chances, if they enjoy the rule of justice and social security, and their culture works for them, if you demonstrate the advantages of harmonious co-existence of diversity and deal severely with public media and institutions that create disturbing phenomena, then you will have a viable community. Provided we have a responsible heritage profession it will eagerly embrace and encourage any participatory initiative from the different stakeholders, let alone the community that it stands for. In the end, even buzz words are good if they are used as reminders of what we have to do anyway, and not as an end in themselves, devoid of meaning.

### **185. The nature of memory institutions**

Memory is about finding and recognising values, collecting them, researching them, caring for them and then reintroducing them to society. In many cases, they are represented by objects and (officially, since 2005) by intangible heritage. There are many memory institutions, but when we theorize about them we usually consider the public ones. Their configuration is more complex if we also take into account the private, civic and corporate institutions or periodic but regular heritage events. At their best, our central ‘professional’ bodies are able to create criteria of accreditation by which we can admit the seriousness of these institutions and actions.

### **186. Every profession has its own science**

Every profession has its own science. But science needs to be based upon concepts, not upon phenomena or specific institutional practices. This is why I proposed in 1982 at the ICOFOM conference in Paris that we should consider re-naming museology as Heritology, thus freeing it from the constraints and limitations of the institution. Two hundred years of a modern museum institution seemed ever an obliging experience. Museums were seemingly too important to be questioned or changed but, in most countries, this history is hardly longer than a century and therefore hardly binding as an inherited model by which we have to react to the increasing role of public memory in modern society. I mean, museums can and should change. The “heritology” proposal evolved into my later upgrading of the concept into mnemosophy, roughly defined as a science of public memory science. The essence of the matter was the content and use of theory,

not the name. But to be accepted, innovation must not be too radical (it was!) and arrive from an expected, credible source (it didn't!). If urged to change its mindset, the museum community may reject the proponent (it did!). However, the resulting broadening of the concept of museums and the new collaborations that arose made things evolve. But the retrograde, neo-liberal context is not favourable to forming a new profession out of the dismembered heritage sector, which might go on to propose a usable future. To be clearer in my assertion: the power groups in society who profit from the current situation (because it allows them a constant increase in power and earnings) will obstruct structural changes. Of course, their first counter-argument is disqualification, and, more recently, the production of chaotic conspiracy theories, each of which has a grain of truth, a grain of madness or a grain of absurdity, or all three at the same time. That works with the mob. As for museums and other memory institutions, I believe that there is some tacit, imperceptible reluctance, the inertia that prevents us from turning into a big public memory profession that would be a new partner to the state and other powerholders. Instead, though a powerful force, the memory sector is ultimately disarticulated and divided. The world requires its sublimated, compressed, well-selected, synthesized and hyperlinked collective experience, but it has been given a load of diversely conceived boxes, each containing pieces of a puzzle that were never cut to fit together as useful or meaningful knowledge, let alone into a noble secular spirituality.

## **187. Public memory and its science**

As well as museums, archives, libraries and sites and monuments, the totality of heritage comprises all that use or communicate heritage, such as non-collecting museums, but also collective and social memory resources. Most of them, as heritage occupations, pretend to possess attributes of the profession. Their theories exist, but mainly concern the history of institutions, practices, technologies of planning and their public.

Since 1982, when I proposed the theory and science of Heritology, there has been a constant accumulation of arguments in its favour. The heritage occupations kept converging. Sciences exist only if formed upon a concept, not upon an institution, and the obvious concept seemed to be the heritage. However, in order to denote the active societal role of the sector and emerging science, I proposed the name Mnemosophy. So the concept it is based upon can be described as that of public memory, a zone of overlapping interests, competencies and practices.

All that public memory institutions have to understand is that their practices will retain their independence and continue having their proper theories. The increasing need for ever more efficient concerted effort will remind them that, being based upon the same concept, they also share that upper level of theoretical reflection. There they will find solutions to the very nature of their existence and the meaning of their mission. They are part of the societal guidance system, a sort of cybernetic response to the threats and challenges posed to contemporary society. Science, whatever its name, will become also an attribute of their status

as a new profession of public memory. United instead of being dismembered, public memory institutions will, like any profession, exercise their major role in the social contract. Thus they will prove their responsibility and decisively contribute to the common good.

## **188. Mnemosophy - memory as wisdom**

Knowing that theory matters, museum curators spent a century trying to allocate a proper name to it. Even now, many think that Museology is a science of museums. If museology was possible, we would not have had medicine but 'hospitalology', pedagogy would have been probably called 'schoolology', while the search for the divine would assume the name of the dominant institution and be called 'churchology'. We needed a theory, or, rather a science which would advise us how the societal memories, from individual to collective and socially formed ones (in creative industries) would be 'distilled' as a usable and worthy essence.

Knowledge is only a raw building material: in excess, it can even be a problem and irresponsibly used a danger. When filtered through responsible, ethically grounded values, knowledge becomes wisdom (*sophia*). It is wisdom, not knowledge, that we have to substitute into the formula of sustainable development so that it can finally function. We are not looking for just any memory (*mneme*), and certainly not (as is sometimes the case) for oceans of the stuff, but for the memories chosen to qualify as the relevant building blocks for wisdom. That seems to me a reliable concept upon which to build a science: an intersection of scientific responsibility in interpreting the past, and the public need for a profession to protect it from careless oblivion and self-destructive memorizing.

## **189. Mnemosophy - towards a definition**

Mnemosophy is a transdisciplinary science of public memory, serving the heritage profession, through which society studies and understands its past, its narratives formed through collective and social memory, and moderates the continuous formation of public memory as the contents of the collective experience transfer. This is how far I got in 2018 while shortening the definitions I have been working on (it is still to be found on my website [mnemosophy.com](http://mnemosophy.com)).

Trying to elaborate it for my students and audiences internationally, I have taken more a serious stance to prove its scientificness by claiming that it supports orthodox construction, as any science should. Any science is a whole made up of principles, theorems and postulates. In the case of mnemosophy, the principles are probably more than just the fact of the existence of public memory, whether we admit it or no. Museology in its varieties necessarily transcends conventional museums as they, naturally, cannot be coherently stereotyped. Theorems, as general propositions, are not so self-evident and are therefore the existence of an increasing variety of hybrid memory institutions, the need for the strategy as they form a memory system, the striving for the forms of standardisation and norms leading to professionalization. There is one theorem that is of increasing

importance, while increasingly endangered, the non-profit nature of public memory. Finally, there are the postulates as a basis for reasoning, discussion, or belief, like the '3 C' nature of all public memory institutions (collecting, care, communication), the same public mission, their convergence, the same management and marketing. All three, principles, theorems and postulates, are used for the understanding of the concept of heritage, of the institutions of public memory and other heritage practices, their communication and mission, and the role of memory in the social project.

## **190. Can new science help the future happen?**

The claim that guides me is that only by fine-tuning our understanding of the role of different 'memories' in society can we understand our mission. We need to understand why and how memories end up in narratives and in the domain of public memory to decide upon the quality of service we offer to our communities and fellow humans. The science of public memory which I advocate would, if built solidly upon current world circumstances, place museology where it belongs: as the theory of museum practice. If the same logic is applied to archiving and librarianship, we might clear space for a common science that would encompass all heritage institutions. It could elaborate the societal strategy in the creation and use of memory and decide upon preferred ways of transferring the collective experience. As theory can precede practice, so science can announce and encourage a nascent profession. One can have doubts, though, whether we may have lost our chance: the favourable public consciousness, that certain benevolence that builds visions of societal development.

## **191. Mnemosophy is part of a wise development strategy**

Museology, in its different approaches, each described by different attributes, always dealt with the ambition to push further from being mere tactics, or what was often its prosaic reality: with what was a certain museography, a descriptive theoretical discipline. The latter would imply that the solution to all our problems is in technology, be it new buildings, new equipment, new design or new managerial inventions (including business geniuses as directors for our creative memory institutions). But whenever the practice is turned into bursting creative inspiration for a community or outside visitors, it is a consequence of deeper insight and part of the philosophy of the emerging, possible profession, some clear, forceful and yet dispersed science of public memory in making. It obviously thrives upon a much wider social concern. Any term is necessarily a convention and yet it is good that it may be a reminder too: in ancient Greek *mneme* is memory and *sophia* is wisdom, and therefore we do not consider just any memory, but the one that has been compressed and selected as wisdom. Such a science, a mnemosophy or whatever we decide to call it, can devise strategies. They will become part of the strategies of exit from this seemingly locked state, doomed to infinite growth, to unrestrained knowledge and the unrestrained

servicing of interests unrestrained by humanist ethics. Mnemosophy is not a panacea. It may well serve as a reminder that 'saving the world' will happen with museums too. This expression was used in one of the lectures of Dillon S. Ripley, a former director of the Smithsonian Institution and a legendary predecessor of the professionalization of the public memory sector.

## **192. The science of public memory as a way to a quality future of the past**

As for the unifying philosophy that is one of the elements of a profession, I am convinced that the new, enlarged field of the science of public memory (mnemosophy), whose object is heritage as selection, research care and communication of societal memory across its entire span, can give useful answers to all our dilemmas about the pursuit of a workable future. Heritage is formed from individual, collective, cultural and scientific sources, and in the most complex and profound way in memory institutions. That makes their employees the members of the nascent true profession.

## **193. What makes mnemosophy different from museologies?**

To imply 'better' when saying 'different' is not a strange thought, but others can quite properly judge for themselves and share their beliefs. Those in teaching positions have not only the motive and the means, but the duty to do so, as guides of the young.

When trying to convey how museology would differ from, say, mnemosophy, I would start with a slide that made this shift obvious. What used to be just a theory with greater or lesser aspirations, in this variant directly aspires to the status of a science. I wrote a book whose aim was to prove these claims. I used a set of general characteristics, but argumentation is varied as well as methodologies. However, sources mostly insist that it has to be empirical, replicable, provisional, objective and systematic, but to some extent must also possess predictability, testability and tentativeness. Many disciplines in the social sciences or humanities do not comply with this exactly, or comply only to some extent, depending upon interpretations. Pragmatically, one should be aware that the consent of the academic community is a binding condition: one that connects the ambitions of curatorial practice with the credible experience of the academic world.

If the object of traditional museology, at least, was the institution and its ways of dealing with processes, the musealisation of the inherited past, the focus of the proposed science should be shifted towards the system of societal memory, with all its direct stakeholders and factors as well as systems (such as education or the media) which must be taken into consideration or cooperated with. The system of public memory, however, we finally define it, is one that deserves such a science.

I believe that most of the theorizing in and around museums is concerned with the tactics or tactical role of museums, whereas strategy should be the aim. Public memory should not only be there at the disposal of the public but should be a part of a societal strategy, playing its part in decision-making about the development of society. The role of the institution depends upon the level at which it is expected to exercise its influence, whether a small community museum or national museum, archive, library, or hybrid institution, as they are tending to become. Of course, nobody offers this sort of status: it is earned, claimed, expected, depending upon how important we appear to be. All professions and their sciences were created around a socially recognized demand.

Occupations are many, but professions are few. The experts working in archives, libraries or museums, to name the central memory institutions, are not members of professions but of occupations. Professions may be ignored, praised or criticized, but they play their part in managing the development of society. Occupations are in charge of certain social functions, but they do not take responsibility for decisions on behalf of their community at the strategic level. The role of professions is considered important, and as a result they are usually better paid and at least consulted in decision-making.

The memory occupations, however important and despite their active functions, are in their totality characterized by their passive role in society. Somehow, they are like the scribes of the governing forces, openly or implicitly. Once again, advanced countries and cultures may be excluded from this, but in most of the others, these institutions are submissive and servile. In those countries, the members of these occupations got their jobs without formal training, let alone a licence to practice, in a way no profession allows. Any academic study related to the topics and work of these institutions is considered sufficient qualification for employment. Any profession is at least to some extent in the consciousness of the ruling structures of society. Democracy is the key quality for managing any society, and it is relatively easy to prove that heritage and/or public memory are at the heart of the insight it requires. Modern museums are essentially democratic institutions, and yet in common with other memory institutions they are not part of a profession charged by society with managing its public memory: what we remember, the ways in which we remember it, and with what vision in mind.

While any theory, museology included, insists that knowledge is a key contributor to prosperity, we might suggest that this claim should be upgraded. This might be done by insisting that we need to recognize what values are worth collecting and to collect them with ethical and scientific responsibility, regarding ourselves as the correctives to the forces of economy and politics that lead to development - perceiving ourselves as proponents of wisdom. All utopias remain unattainable, but they show us the direction of travel and serve to clarify and explain important concepts.



# The search for wisdom and reality in a denied society

## 194. Human troubles are a wasted chance of wisdom

Much of what we say, sometimes unforgivably much, derives from very personal or local experiences. An academic, a professor, a teacher, a politician - anyone who means to influence others should start with the widest possible experience as a departure point and measure of relevance. Troubled histories, unstable, shifting conditions, crises of any kind, let alone wars, do present a sort of extreme laboratory so that the experience of them is precious. To live through such circumstances in one's own life is certainly a disadvantage, but a strenuous and intense experience, and a very social one to any sensitive person. And somehow therein there lies a paradox: most such troubled places have neither the chance nor the inner coherence and self-appreciation to capitalize upon the trauma. Their elites are usually mere suzerains to other affluent countries and big corporations, while the majority of their population frantically tries to snatch some prosperity and personal realisation. They have been deprived of it by what is justifiably seen as unfair and lamentable. To be a public intellectual in such countries is folly or heroism or both. The point is that such a painful and dearly bought human experience is wasted and ignored. Whenever there is a chance for a shift forward, humanity fails to grab it. How can we be sure? Just look at your museums and see what we have chosen to say: the righteous among the dead would accuse us.

## 195. More can be less in searching for wisdom

When collecting, the first impulse is to collect as much as possible. Some people never overcome this. The Western obsession with quantity is probably a reflection of the concept of unlimited growth, which is obviously possible only through incessant conquest. The Chinese sage advised that selection is the way to wisdom and the comfort of the spirit. But all noble minds are alike, so some centuries later, a Latin proverb advised the same, although in a more general way, claiming that having more than necessary is harmful. Implying that a sense of proportion is a condition for wisdom, it implies that the ability to exercise good judgement can be blurred by excess quantity. The time of museums with galleries groaning with myriad objects has passed. Traditional museums are too demanding to stand a chance in competing with ICT and all the other diverse attractions. To make it worse, the educational system is unable to provide the new, well-disposed, culturally motivated public.

## **196. Privatized culture is probably a gloomy prospect**

The moment we privatize culture and memory, impose rights of ownership and commoditize creativity, the entire societal project fails and mankind can be guided into a state of stupor so well described by Aldous Huxley. Curiously, we have several similar scenarios of the gloomy future that seems to have begun in the 80s of the last century. I completely agree with Camus, who said that we are losers who should never give up. I have met extraordinary amateurs, who exist in any human sphere of activity. They exceeded by far the supposed expertise of the incompetent and short-sighted professionals, and were incomparably better than most of those trained and paid to do their job. But such people are, however, very rare.

## **197. A critical remark on EU heritage projects**

Except for serious museum projects, not many relevant organisations or civic groups fumble much with EU funds nowadays. These projects are usually the killers of creativity and efficiency. I am appalled by the discouraging and implosive power of the disastrous bureaucratic spirit the EU has created. My long experience of political systems gives me the right to claim that these projects deserve solid cultural research involving psychology and linguistics. The researchers would find a fatal similarity between them and the communist party apparatchiks' cultural organisation within the former Soviet bloc. The footprint of the bureaucratic mind and management is always similar: it drains creativity, it adores sycophants, it passionately loves the buzz-word jugglers and skilful orthodoxy in following current illusionist shows of pretended democracy. Most money is spent on unnecessary travel, pretended cross-border goodwill and the vainglorious exchange of meaningless soliloquies. The new big brother is by far less wicked than the old, but a rogue anyway. And yet, culture is probably a more successful sector of unity than the economy or politics. Only recently it has become obvious through the action led by Europa Nostra.

## **198. The chances of the devastated industrial sites**

My experience with communities where industry formerly flourished has been grim, of course, as these communities are largely devastated by the processes of deindustrialisation, the humiliation of a once strong local identity and a new lack of self-respect. Those places are usually unable to provide for any cultural institution, and in some cases the places have also suffered physically, resulting in decay, ruins and devastation. A conventional museum would probably not be possible. These suffering places have to upgrade their potential by deepening their insight into their own identity, searching for its historical experience, broadening their approach. This can be a worthwhile task for the strategist in cultural and heritage matters. Such a facilitator can help them to create a critical mass of contents which, taken as a whole, can be a motivation for a visit, especially for the outside public.

A local administration, helped by civic organisations, can probably provide momentum and a positive environment. The destination has to possess arguments to build a brand and tell a convincing story about itself that others will have no problems accepting. The domestic public, in fact the entire community, will profit from the work opportunities inside and outside the project and from the spin-off effects, which always happen when some central energy is created. The value of identity is exactly in the meaning of heritage: it is always about continuity and survival and we have to be wise enough to harvest the fruits of our ancestors' toil.

## **199. Traditional vs. reformed museum and beyond**

The traditional museum's task was in securing the documentation of, say, a disappearing phenomenon or identity and safeguarding it in a researched and secure way. The reformed one, the one that looks at the problem as a situation of cybernetic dichotomy, does it by supporting what is being endangered and reinforcing its vitality. It is a natural reaction to preserve what is specific and different from becoming general and nondescript, be it a cultural entity, natural environment or even individual identity. Free, creative energy (and intelligence) stemming from tradition can only be expected at the level of an individual, group or community. Encyclopaedic museums and tourist attractions or visitor centres are unlikely to be concerned with responsibilities of this sort. The best they can do is to provide successful PR for their city or country or contribute to local development by boosting the tourist industry.

## **200. The Blue Box concept**

I have already mentioned my experience with 'the smallest museum in the world', part of the effort to establish the first eco-museum in SE Europe, in Kapele in Slovenia. It consisted of a kiosk, a roofed glass case with a shallow exhibition space on three sides and a comfortable exhibition space on the fourth. An exhibition was mounted to demonstrate the potential of a museum, but the community failed to provide the space. The glass case in the middle of the village became a sort of micro-museum.

It reminded me of the possibility that any heritage, most of them being under constant threat, needs a sort of 'black box' as a device to keep the record of its fate. If that is expecting too much, a blue box is good enough: it could periodically send reminding impulses to the community about processes that are impoverishing or endangering its identity. That is the essence of what museums are for, in any case.

## **201. Heritage action as the fulfilment of museum ideals**

Usually, in small communities, the reactions to endangered values happen as individual initiatives or civil society activities. This is to be expected, as they are small, versatile and easily adjustable to scarce resources, lack of understanding

and expertise. The shift from steady, heavy institutions already happened a decade or two ago in the West (depending upon cultures and economies) and is continuing to develop in the form of temporary museums, pop-up museums, travelling museums, museum kiosks, non-collecting museums and so on. It suggests that the usual, prevailing notion of museums is turning towards the essence of the museum process and in response to real, particular needs. It is still happening sporadically through increasingly often. If and when the profession of heritage is achieved it might turn into a system and that, contrary to the liberal preference, would be a good sign of a coordinated response by society to the threats to its value system(s). If museums can overcome the shortcomings of too a great of concentration of potential (collections, premises, expertise) that could mean that they spread out and develop an ambition to merge with life.

## **202. Culturally friendly, unimposing technological design of micro-museums**

Purely technological solutions can be imposing and boring. Designers of both software and hardware are driven by the demands of the sophisticated urban millennials or an even younger generation, but that is not the reality of the mass audiences. However, with a good knowledge of museum tradition, we should go bravely towards the risk. First, with some experimental attempts. In desolate, abandoned places of the cultural, natural or technological past, a black box, or indeed quite possibly blue, in the colours of the world museums organisation (ICOM), could become an iconic sign for the opportunity to have basic insight into local public memory, even for the curious passer-by, let alone those who would seek it out. I imagine the blue box as a prefabricated architectural product, a very small space (7 sq. meters?), offering guidelines to local identity and minimal, changing contents.

## **203. The technological hint for micro-museum solutions**

The micro-museum can be custom-built, designed for a particular place in a combination of basic elements. To be cheaply producible and recognizable enough to catch popular attention, it has to offer a design model that produces equal units of the same, attractive, unobtrusive colour.

Needless to say, the BB© outposts need to be equipped with the latest communication technologies so as to symbolically reverse their miniature size and obvious modesty in terms of space and prestige and, practically, unlimited digital/viral power. Energy self-sufficiency, connectedness to the Internet and powerful capacity for response and retrieval should be some of the ways in which the offer should be the most up to date and advanced. The BB© project, therefore, needs an excellent, creative company to make its architecture and its software content the top of the range in a global context.

## 204. Heritage curators – some essentials and beginnings

Since the mid-1990s I have been aware that people, my students included, know little about the world around them. Any successful existence or production starts by understanding the world. How would a shoe-making factory fare without knowing its market before producing the shoes? The world is such an immense experience, accessible as a whole and certainly as stored in the richness of identities. We never had so much stored knowledge, never so much need to fathom its essence and never such urgency to apply it. The simple name for it is unscientific: wisdom. But life itself is very unscientific. Science is great but where it stops life does not.

Once curators receive at least one obligatory additional year of specialist study of the ‘science of public memory’ (perhaps even embracing museology, as the theory of museum practice) they will understand the medium they enter and use it with conviction. Why should an excellent archaeologist be a sort of semi-skilled curator in an archaeological museum, when his/her knowledge can be upgraded by the science of public memory? A complementary semester or two with mentors and internship, ending with a professional examination, would probably suffice. We started a similar experience as early as 1987, in a ‘socialist’ country and in slower times. The four-semester course was planned and then began in 1987 at the University of Zagreb as a supplementary study. Anybody who had finished some academic study (or five semesters of it) could join. That was a feast of multidisciplinary. Through the years, we had medical doctors, military officers, priests, dentists, natural scientists...all aspiring potentially to work in a museum, knowing that they would be well qualified, acquiring much of the curatorial mind-set and knowledge besides their specialist expertise.

I have certainly lectured in that spirit of the science of public memory *in spe*, but we called both the chair and its contents for the first few years solely by the name of museology. Whatever one might name such a broad theory it would by its ample content make any professional employee of a museum or any other memory institution conscious of the broader mission. Even the role of a past-orientated museum, as archaeological museums usually are, would appear broader and seeking for points of comparison in modern reality, or between the institutions or sciences concerned. By merely opening up the concepts, questions start to abound about the potential roles that such an institution can play in guiding the processes of remembering towards productive, beneficial forms and contents, alone or in a network with others. It is hard to avoid a demagogic vocabulary (due to its inflated use, especially by politicians and media), but the whole principle of professionalism is about responsibility and honesty towards the human condition.

## 205. Preparing to be a profession

Happily enough, we do not lack museographical knowledge. In 2017 there was a proposal on the official site of the American Alliance of Museums which I have used ever since, telling my audiences that we have all the basic professional knowledge about museum values (and more) there, clearly stated: Museums Are Economic Engines, Museums Are Community Anchors, People Love Museums, Museums Serve the Public, Museums Partner with Schools, Museums Are for Everyone, Museums Are Trusted, Museums Save Species. Impeccable wording. Good start. The rest is an infinite striving for the contents, for our own science and an autonomous profession formed upon certain elements common to all other existing professions. I have been trying to elucidate the elements of that possible profession of ours, that of public memory; if I am correct, they are covered by this list:

1. obligatory instruction in the historical and scholarly principles of the profession and its skills and methods
2. legal regulations governing status, social function and position
3. a licensing system
4. a code of ethics
5. high standards of performance and achievement
6. a specific professional culture
7. autonomy in action
8. specific methods of research and performance
9. a set of working yet open and anticipatory definitions
10. idealistic objectives

We comply with some of the requirements in full, with others in part, and the rest need to be discussed within the framework of ambitions we decide to assume. We need to have responsibilities and competencies assigned by society in order to turn into a self-aware profession, but that also works in reverse. We have to make our point first. This means having a mission.

## 206. Museum brands sell like luxury fashion, not culture

I like Guggenheim Bilbao, but not as a fashion or a model. It an international collection that partly returned home. An extraordinary brave and lucky project, at that. Lens is more logical because it is a distribution of the potential of the network within the same culture. But your unasked question obviously implies Abu Dhabi (Louvre), Shanghai (Centre Georges Pompidou) and others too. I am a rather hesitant observer of this spreading innovation. The internationa-

lization of cultures may be a means to openness and communication, while still living our own lives of difference or likeness. But in most cases, it is only a concession to the fascination with the West. This I dislike strongly. But the world is also sliding into brutal pragmatism, turning all values into marketable goods and losing any obligation to cherish individual cultural intimacy and a sense of proportion. Such a world is tempted to regard the potential of museums as a sensation, a marketable attraction, trading giant museum brands, or building an argument for the travel industry of (because mass tourism is scarcely more than compulsive travelling). Mainstream media and politicians defend it by suggesting that this one of the good sides of globalization, but I have an uneasy feeling that we are starting to legitimize, in this very sensitive issue, a false, illusionary and largely fake reality, both of the present and the past. The Louvre or Guggenheim can come to Abu Dhabi, or Centre Georges Pompidou to Shanghai, in many other attractive ways. In this lush sensationalism, we can only recognize the business model of the spread out of luxury fashion houses. I will never speak against new museums (so let them be), but I doubt whether they will be visited primarily from cultural motives.

## **207. The future of museums depends upon the character of society**

The future of museums will increasingly depend upon the holders of power. They will decide and we may only hope to build up as many public arguments for our mission as possible. Excessive privatization (pushing heritage outside the public domain), commodification (imposing the criteria of profit upon every sector) and monetization are destroying traditional professions and will certainly not allow the new ones to appear. In the race against time and circumstances, installing new, young curators, well trained and educated for the public mission and devoted to the public good, might assure us some chance. Their job is finally to establish a profession. Some countries and cultures will know how to retain public services and avoid delivering society unconditionally to corporations and oligarchs. Societies thrive on professions and they were created for that. A memory of the values humanity is founded upon will be a condition of the survival of mankind. Voracious, unbridled capitalism pushes the world into undertakings with unpredictable consequences. Artificial intelligence, cyborgs, hybrid human beings, avatars, immersive experiences as a parallel reality, limited nuclear war scenarios, remote-controlled permanent wars of robot soldiers and war machines - all that is already our reality. We desperately need the memory of quality, of basic values and the virtues of *humanitas*. We need professions in charge and individuals with a mission who want to improve the world, however obsolete and cynical it may sound.



## **208. The future of heritage institutions depends upon economy and politics**

Different political and economic systems have very different models of cultural policies and museum management. Any one of these may bring fruit, but we naturally strive to know the best museum policy. How do we transform the museum from an inert, conventional, publicly funded institution and a stately treasure trove into a versatile, engaged, partly self-sustaining social organization? I do not believe in museums as a prevalently private endeavour. There can be private museums that meet the standards of public expectations, but I would always leave it to the profession to certificate and decide upon accreditation. If one knows that the Metropolitan Museum, to take an extreme example, expects that every member of their Board of Trustees should annually contribute \$10 million, one immediately grasps that this is a privilege, paid for and probably consumed as such. The socially-minded among us might find it monstrous that an individual reaches a decision-making role in an institution of public interest (or influence) simply because he or she is rich enough to afford it. Should we allow rich people to influence how we operate on our cancer patients or decide how we raise our children because they are amused by the idea of exercising power in decision-making public bodies? Awkward. The liberal technocrats planned the world in which this practice should become a rule rather than an exception. One is, of course, inclined to think that Boards should be composed of the wise and noble in spirit, willing to invest their expertise for the public good.

## **209. Being an individual in transitional countries**

The masses always cry out in ways we either do not hear or that are poorly expressed, incomprehensible outbursts of unfathomable despair: we are here, and each person is the universe itself. Those who give dignity to people are those who bring freedom. Why on earth should museums not be among them? It is hard to find agents of society that are as well supplied and equipped for tasks as complex as articulating the public mind. They dwell upon tremendous human experience and, far from claiming to be the only saviours, they can join those societal institutions and mechanisms which pursue public welfare. They are makers of quality. Memory is about finding values, collecting them, researching them, caring for them and then reintroducing them to society. Museums may gather people together, creating an environment of memory where ancestral voices of wisdom can be heard. Caring for the individual and specific, they should nevertheless achieve a feeling of unity which is transgenerational and transcultural. This precious, inexplicable feeling of uniqueness and yet of belonging to all those who have been there before us, and equally those who are yet to come, are ambitions peculiar to the arts, but museums themselves are essentially about art - the art of memory. Their ability to provide shelter and companionship, to offer security and the comfort of a pleasant learning environment need to become or remain their unique contribution. Among the memory institutions, museums are in any sense 'a well-lighted place' (to paraphrase Ernest Hemingway).

gway) in an increasingly uncomfortable reality. Maybe it is true that the only eternity is the human race itself (as Roland Barthes said), but even if it is not, it may be the only one given to us. The refreshing breath of eternity can be felt in our best museums.

## **210. The state of the world and the need for a cybernetic museum**

If one knows the threats, one can probably organize the reaction to them. It may sound preposterous, but all we ever talk about when discussing public or publicly active institutions it is about making the world a better place. We have many, perhaps a growing number of reasons to seek solutions. When forced to summarize the list, I opted for some major complex problems: 'paseotropism' (as an exaggerated attachment to the past, T Šola), decadence, the culture of non-freedom, chaos, anxiety, insecurity, uglification, pauperisation. Maybe the first needs some explanation: we glorify the past, we are fascinated by it for many manipulative reasons, including lack of balance or insecurity. Decadence refers to the climate of the decline of values and excessive indulgence of vices like greed, a typical sin of the neoliberal deconstruction of the world. Freedom is being denied, not so much in absolute terms, but in relation to declarative adherence to democracy. Of course, we should also be referring to the cunning continuations of racism, colonialism and bellicose policies exercised in the disadvantaged world. Chaos is hidden by overregulation and hypocrisy but is actually an ideal environment for crony capitalism and corporate manipulation of rising profits outside tax law and the reach of society. Constant war is an ideal way of legally generating chaos. Anxiety as a rising psychological uneasiness across much of society is generating many problems that require to be cured. Linked to insecurity, it may generate extra revenue for banks or the pharmaceutical industry, or it may act as fertile ground for totalitarian rule or populist fantasies. The planet is increasingly becoming not only a poisonous but also an ugly place, populated by the rising masses of the precarious or poor. Poverty is a societal vice, a failure of a fundamental humanist credo and therefore a cradle for and means to great evil.

The conventional museum, so addicted to and fascinated by the past to the extent that it does not see the present, should finally turn into a place where decadence is fought against, where the culture of non-freedom is denounced, where chaos is not the epitome of doomsday but only an order that we are unable to understand. For everyone who is overwhelmed with anxiety and overpowered by insecurity, the museum has to be a safe, reliable place where proper questions are posed and straight answers, even multiple ones, are offered.

We can use any help we can get, especially from public institutions, to struggle against the rising uglification of the world. Perhaps statistics confirm the rise of affluence, but the sad and conspicuous fact is that it is less and less equitably distributed. The increasing pauperisation of society is a source of shame for this civilisation. No public institution should fail to use its arguments against

these calamities. The cybernetic museum is the one implicitly suggested as one that fights back, opposes and counter-acts whatever is recognized as a threat to the society. That, however, implies that curators and their institutions have the capacity and the qualities that they need to fight back: institutions that are independent and curators with the courage to face the challenge, the ability to discern the threat, and the discrimination to choose the standards to fight for the destiny of the world.

## **211. The value of labour in an ‘honest museum’**

Industrial heritage institutions, often museums of technology, have a complex task. At best, they are about the heritage of labour. Researching it, collecting its remnants and documents, caring for this scattered memory and presenting it to the users must respect the needs of those users. Establishing these needs is not easy, and is different from focusing upon wants. We have to establish ourselves as a relevant source of information about valuable, useful experiences. ‘What labour system and culture do we need?’ may not be an attractive exhibition title, but a good marketing officer will be able to think of a better one. We do need a relevant and useful way to get in touch with the relevant historical experience from which we can borrow inspiration, or to see what our predecessors’ mistakes were, disregarding the apparent differences between past and present.

Can we use museums and institutions with their high, mighty, persuasive power to make exhibitions about entrepreneurship that would raise our level of thinking about daring individuals and the system that could direct this creativity and energy towards personal and collective use? All too often we are pushed into believing that the lethargic anonymity of work lost in kolkhozes (collective farms), or Donald Trump’s apotheosis of the selfish, predatory individual, are the only two possibilities left. This is not true, and yet we may wonder if any museums have ventured to say so. In some countries there is no possibility of doing so: their curators lack the professional mindset that could lead to such interdisciplinary cooperation. Museums dedicated to the industrial past are mainly in Europe, perhaps around 150 of them, with many others having sections that refer to these values of the past. Only rarely do they show any enthusiasm for the troublesome history of the work and workers, or adopt a scientific approach in dealing with the topic.

I can barely remember even discussing the theme in developing countries, let alone seeing an exhibition on the societal value of labour heritage. Or, indeed, tackling questions about the role of industry in the world and the future challenges that await? Sustainable development became just another spent syntagm, a buzz-expression void of meaning. The global trends in development and pollution have not been reversed. Do we know of any museum that took the opportunity of creating an insight into the phenomenon of Universal Basic Income (UBI)? With all our stores of memory, we apparently had nothing to say in the political discussions about these matters, including those regarding automation, artificial intelligence (AI), and the future of labour. Growing poverty and incessant wars

have made it worse. By emphasising individual blame, or objective conditions, the politicians and global media distract public attention from the biggest issues and absolve the decision-makers from responsibility.

## **212. The faces of an 'honest' museum**

Instead, the related professions should tell us what ethics and strategies can bring us closer to the harmonious and therefore sustainable development that we need; they can point out the responsible protagonists. Scared of the pollution we produce by heating our homes, we would also like to know how many homes we could heat (and for how many years) with just one blown up oil reservoir in war-ridden Falluja, or for every rocket launched, or what gains a stable peace would bring instead of the arms race, so childish in its logic, and at the same time so criminal in character. How could peace liberate the human spirit and creative potential to work towards wise production and packaging? Could we create a network of museum interpretation centres with the common theme 'Profit – understanding it and using it'? Obsessive greed cannot be turned into a system; it is not an ideology and it does not correspond with any theory of economic development.

Every day we are confronted with new technologies which will soon become a sort of heritage. Sitting upon the vast experience compressed in our collections and documentation, we remain silent about the consequences of the different technical solutions that are offered on a daily basis. It is not a question of playing a judgmental role, but of expressing the concerns of our society, posing questions our users cannot and offering insights that are outside their reach. Any museum can raise questions and provide simultaneously a multiplicity of answers from the weighted arguments of the different sides involved. This useful sort of public museum, a transgenerational one, serving the survival of values and on the side both of the living and of generations to come, is what Kenneth Hudson called 'an honest museum'. The failure of the conventional museum was that it pretended to protect what was endangered by agreeing that it could 'survive' only in a museum. Another of its great failures was to permit itself to function as a pretentious but morbid cenotaph to people of the past and their past values. Preaching about this decades ago, I was provoking: 'If you see the life in a museum, you must be facing the window.' Thanks to the growing understanding of the nascent profession, this intentional cynicism has fewer grounds for support now.

## **213. Public memory transfer for social humanity, or a plea for a responsible museum**

In the plea for a responsible museum, one is tempted to assume the role of tribune by telling museums, 'Your desperate taxpayer, your deserted, betrayed, overworked and anxious citizen, aesthetically illiterate and puzzled, unconditionally handed over to the reckless media, corrupt politicians and ruthless

corporate bosses, that suffering brother of yours, needs your help. You can scrupulously and silently watch him/her fade into the resignation, or even worse, the desperation of the barbarous collective ME and thus fall prey to the collective populist hysteria.' There is a mission to be responsibly defined and then duly performed, a real job to be done, not playing the role of a resigned, otiose institution for which the community lacks respect. Is it not up to museums to accept this assignment?

Even if the title sounds like an activist plea, let us be honest: we need simple and humanist messages, as the spiritual society we need can only be built in this way. Using science, our professions and institutions as well as we, in the form of civil, secular society, can probably ameliorate the human condition. But, needless to say, any competition in humanism is welcome. That is the underlying search of all philosophy and humanist reflection throughout human history. Our memory institutions are full of evidence and knowledge that can enable or at least help us to do this. We must use it for the benefit of each and every member of human society, not for the sake of some invented egalitarian norm but as the only sustainable method of achieving a secure society based on peace, justice and equality of opportunity. Museums were perceived for a long time as being rightfully separate: aloof in their scientific 'objectivity'. But who other than the guardians of human experience is more qualified, called upon and obliged to share this experience for the public benefit? Selecting, storing, caring for and communicating memory is a political function of the first order. Those in charge will have to stick out their necks. This task can be undertaken in different ways, to a specific extent and using varying arguments, by literally any person, legal body, human activity and, above all, by any memory institution. What we are talking about is the span of memory, from individual/collective memory to the social memory created by the creative, knowledge and education industries, by art in general and by public memory institutions, in modern times even by those who belong to civil society and by some private institutions or movements. Name and ownership neither qualify nor disqualify them from perceiving the priorities of 'human society or social humanity' that can be so well realized by the creative and socially inspired transfer of human experience.

## **214. People bridges – the personalities directly shared**

The underlying idea of heritage, like that of love or virtue, is that it can be shared because it is virtually inexhaustible. If a certain heritage is claimed by two or more cultures, nations or communities, that may represent a problem to politics but not to culture, as the concept of heritage supports spreading and sharing.

The abundance of heritage, the inspiration and noble pride it can generate, the grandeur of its figures, denies or at least relativizes insistence upon national or cultural classification. Culture by its nature rejects possessiveness in the same way as it repels commodification. This is why modern society has employed science and the relevant public institutions to offer a balanced, free insight into complex reality as a constant process of evaluation and interpretation. Science

will always be present with its research and facts to satisfy the need for arguments in disputes which are largely unproductive.

Our future will finally depend upon our ability to share. Are we able to see, for instance, the great personalities of European or wider significance as figures that connect us, or as the causes of exacerbating our disputes? The European project must stem from cultural unity, as otherwise it can rely only on disputable or unstable economic and political agreements. It is certainly inappropriate in a 'museological' text to complain that the EU has no independent foreign policy or self-determination distinctive to any identity, so we should abstain. However, if that were the case, the immediate question would be what image, or rather identity, the EU is proposing to the world. A certain pride and self-appreciation are a legitimate consequence of balanced identity, but unlike the common history that may often have divided us, the constant exchanges and cross-fertilization are solid ground for unity and coherence. The web site [www.mnemosophy.com](http://www.mnemosophy.com) contains the now-abandoned project *Bridges of Europe* as an experiment with the objective existence of shared heritage, as most of it, one way or another, may simultaneously belong to many.

## 215. Knowledge is a way to wisdom

All notes have a slide as the visual representation and a reminder, usually in a form of a diagram. The one illustrating the claim in the title consists of an isosceles triangle divided horizontally into three layers. The bottom one contains the starting position in our description of reality, as it starts with data turning into information. The middle one recalls that we communicate knowledge by entities 'mneme' and 'sophia' (explained in my book *Mnemosophy – an essay on science of public memory*, Zagreb, 2015) was simply suggestions that only very communicational, creatively conveyed knowledge can form the basis of museum/heritage representations. Yet, I proposed that the third layer, - wisdom, is our ideal, probably unattainable goal any yet the only worth the effort. That diagram has been invented in some form by many, no doubt independently; to me it occurred (in 2007) as a natural sequence, a simple and self-evident conclusion of the hierarchy in describing our reality. The initial frustration was also evident: museums that inform are delivering less than would be expected from any understanding of their nature or potential. In the mentioned book on mnemosophy I tried to explore the 'metaphysics of quality' that public memory institutions should pursue. It led me to seemingly hermetic proposals in explaining the necessary form and contents of that communication. But even if well presented, knowledge can remain a pretended democratic opportunity or 'neutral' stance. From the atomic bomb downwards, knowledge has been abused; while it is by no means useful it can be also be harmful. The politically misused and wasted motto about the beneficence of the 'knowledge society' clearly demonstrates this. At its best, knowledge is only the basis of its ideal outcome: wisdom. The latter is, in its perfect state, an unattainable goal, as is any virtue. In my book, an entire chapter was devoted to a probably vain attempt to explain the humanist simplicity of that concept. Wisdom is compressed, filtered,

contemplated, deduced, responsible and ethically founded knowledge. Wisdom is active, engaged, value-based and responsible for the implied mission of the professions and their associated institutions. Delicate or not, it is the only way to approach life and serve humanity. For further explanations, please look at my book, which is freely available on my website.

## **216. Why knowledge is not enough and can be dangerous**

Trying to explain the ultimate vanity of knowledge, I shocked my students with portraits of three medical doctors who epitomized the monstrous cruelty of the last world war, or indeed any war. One was Dr Aribert Heim, known as Doctor Death, the second was Dr Joseph Mengele, the SS officer known as the Angel of Death, and the third was Dr Shiro Ishii, a Japanese major and later general. With their access to unlimited experimentation on live humans, they must have been very capable medical doctors and accomplished, knowledgeable experts, but all three were sadistic mass murderers and represent a tragic failure of the human race. By the way, the first disappeared in 1962, the second drowned and the third, granted immunity for his collusion with the USA, died a natural death. Knowledge, if understood as facts, information and skills gained by experience or education, and also the theoretical or practical understanding of a subject, may impress. But it is its understanding and use that assigns it significance or meaning. My students had difficulty in understanding what could be wrong with the triumphal realisation of the 'knowledge society'. Most politicians still proclaim their firm determination to raise their countries to the level of the knowledge society. They suggest and imply that by this fact we will be safe and prosperous, as in some Earthly paradise. What knowledge? Whose knowledge? Premeditated knowledge?

Unfortunately, knowledge is not what the Enlightenment suggested, a liberating state and experience, and certainly not a panacea for the horrifying difficulties created by the neo-liberal apotheosis. Knowledge can be misused, and be the instrument of enslavement and aggression. Besides using the opportunity to explain the nature of the world, I wanted to affirm the value that is superior to knowledge, that of wisdom. Knowledge in a museum means nothing by itself. Used for the benefit of the community and unselfishly shared it acquires quite another dimension. A knowledgeable curator is better than an ignoramus, but still useless without responsibility and moral commitment to the community of users. Medical doctors, unlike curators, belong to a real, respectable profession, but one that is also instructive in its own history of fallacies and ordeals. I showed the three doctors to my students as an example of impressive factual knowledge and mastery of the technicalities of medicine, but also as three degenerate human beings, some of the vilest men our species has produced. Their knowledge actually derived from their criminal minds and grew by atrocious experimentation. None of them received the punishment they deserved. I, therefore, argued that 'the knowledge society' needs further qualification and definition of the quality



and purpose of the knowledge to have any useful meaning. Here we would have detoured into discussing modern industries such as pharmaceuticals and their like, and why any industry is apt to misuse knowledge if it is dominated by an obsession with profit. Adjusting the explanation, I used the same example to explain why mere knowledge cannot create professionalism: it must include devotion to and responsibility for an acknowledged, socially committed mission. Any profession certainly ought to be knowledge-based, but must depend upon ethics. I have elaborated on this in *Mnemosophy – an essay on the science of public memory*.

## **217. State, scarcity and the fate of museums**

It was an obvious development. The communists were acclaiming the death of the state, but communism died instead. The democracies were hoping that the state would survive to help create a welfare society, but it is in fact dying from privatization and as a social mechanism; it seems more and more as if it exists to collect taxes and distribute public money to private corporations who run public businesses, some of them formerly state-owned. It goes without saying that the situation is different from country to country, but there is one permanent rule: the poor, the 'second world', the 'transitional' and similar groups always get more than their fair share of unpleasantness. For them, globalization is just another Conquista, renamed but equally devastating. Colonization has done what it always does, with the local vassal elite disguised by extreme nationalism. Peace should be given a chance, in all its possible meanings, but it isn't.

Incidentally, Europe, never mind the rest of the world, will hardly be able to cope with museum funding if it relies more and more upon charitable gifts from corporations. Sponsors set priorities, whether they are medieval kings, contemporary tycoons or the parasitic fake elite of so-called high finance, getting rich on their 'bonuses'.

Some museums are closing down, some are trying to sell their assets and others look for a solution in mergers with the bigger and better-off institutions. Others still think they can stay out of the reach of the capital drain. Europe is still different, but it was much more different only a decade ago.

## **218. The delicate notion of quality**

It has become relatively easy to evaluate management and institutional procedures. The abundant literature on the practicalities of good operational practice leaves little excuse for curators and other heritage professionals if their institutions function badly. But the notion of quality reaches beyond the advice of manuals. Only those who have standards know what quality is about and are able to describe, propose and promote their product. But the literature about the museum/heritage product is scant; one easily deduces that most of us are still not ready to face the challenge of society in peril, of understanding the essence of the process of collective experience transfer. Our products are ill-defined and most

of our successes are still measured in visitor numbers. Metricism is, however, not a disease of our trade only. The ways of quality and wisdom are different.

## **219. The past can explain that freedom given is the freedom gained**

Much ado about some societal quality or shortcoming usually signals a crisis in it, a lack of beneficial context or, simply, a bad conscience on the part of the responsible agents of society. Why shouldn't multiculturalism simply mean treating differences with respect, and as richness? Both approaches enhance our human experience and add to knowing ourselves better. Inclusivity is simply being good, generous and wise. But the problems do not lie so much with us, despite their scope and urgency. Curing the origins of the problems would provide a long-term solution, giving us a less impossible task. We are forced to cure the problems while knowing all the time that the solution would have lain in timely prevention. If the bosses of the world profit from trouble, if wars continue to be the biggest business, a crime legitimised by the assistance of politicians, we will continue to have more strife and unrest and be forced to admit that we cannot cope with the consequences. Some of the new conservatism stems from this rising feeling of helplessness when faced with problems that surpass their usual dynamics. Migrations have been a constant historical process and occasionally a problem. In times of great peril, like wars or natural disasters, the trauma and helpless rage of the majority was easily channelled by turning it against the others, the people who are different. Punishing and harming them not only rationalized the frustration but brought other practical benefits to the rulers. Sovereignists, populists, the alt-right and nationalists of all colours should be told the true historical and human story which they distort and repeat, probably failing, as a result, to notice that people do not flee from their countries or communities because they do not love them. Of course, it is difficult to see how museums can go far to address explanations of matters which are so charged with global power claims, but they may at least paint an objective panorama in which, as at any crime scene, the question *a cui bono?* (who benefits?) usually helps to understand what happened. Again, how to live with others who are different should have become largely self-evident, to an extent that is incompatible with the nation-state concept.

## **220. Society should own controlling shareholdings in public memory**

The public memory sector includes museums, archives, libraries, digitally born memory institutions and numerous hybrid institutions, whether public, private or civil. The united society of shared destiny that cares for the well-being of its citizens will have to own a control package of conceptual shares in the domain of public memory. It is too serious and crucial to be left exclusively to particular private or corporate interests, and yet the state should admit the liberty of ownership to all sides. The public, state administration, installed to defend

public (democratic) interests must assure its controlling role to prevent excessive commodification. The right to form memory freely and take part in the socially responsible process of transfer of collective experience is another expression of freedom. This freedom is freedom of contribution and insight. The welfare state has to provide the opportunities for this process to be of excellent scientific quality, socially responsible and ethically embedded in the basic rights of humans and nature. Anyone is welcome to contribute and participate: private institutions, civil society institutions, communities and individuals.

## **221. Do we need the knowledge society or the wisdom society?**

Opting for the knowledge society instead of the wisdom society, that is, one that is not only knowledgeable but wise, the West flooded society with excess, trivial, misleading and futile information. There are more and more authors who claim that contemporary societies are exposed to the intentional production of ignorance and oblivion. The velvet tyrannies disguised it with forms of populism and globalized the patterns of easy manipulation of the public mind: the Internet is a jungle, the media are manipulated, institutions are servile, and public intellectuals are bribed. Societal issues of little priority are imposed as essential. They distract attention and saturate reality with fake oppositions and disputes. This they waste social good intentions, time and energy, only to leave important matters to be decided in parallel, with little or no public participation. If the problem of smoking cigarettes rises to the very top of the list of the world's problems then the only conclusion one can draw is that it occupies the place of some other, much more dangerous problem. Although smoking is unhealthy by definition, museums could simply explain how the natural qualities of tobacco were so degraded by chemicals, both in cultivation and in processing, that its harmfulness grew to the present extent. Public attention is manipulated in the same way as in illusionist theatre. To that end, all the channels of media communication including the subtle penetration into the social networks, are used for incessant, continuous campaigning. But museums should be part of the cybernetic management of society: they make sense only if able to perceive the configuration of problems within their reach and remit, and react to them as a part of their solution, sometimes just to offer insight, sometimes to pose the right questions, or at other occasions propose the answers. Museums are a mechanism for the continuation of the values that we find it important to retain as practice or inspiration. Taking a global view, useful museums are rare and themselves an endangered species.

## **221. A global museum that collects places and their noble memory**

In the late 1980s, I conceived the idea of a museum of love. At the time, even temporary exhibitions on concepts and values were rarely envisaged and carried out. There were some at La Vilette, and some in Neuchâtel (Musée d'Ethno-

graphie de Neuchâtel, curated by Jacques Hainard). Ever since, I have been trying in vain to persuade many museums and authorities to participate in my project, to adopt it or take it seriously. The project finally gained shape and a title around the turn of the century and was realized in 2006 as a web site ([www.globallovemuseum.net](http://www.globallovemuseum.net)). The concept has exercised a certain influence and inspired others, not so much as a global network, but as a reminder that practically any community can afford a place like this, dedicated to what people like to call 'romantic love'. They can make it truly global, with their local story at the centre. We mounted a few exhibitions based on the project in Croatia and one in Serbia; for a short period, a small public space in our family home on the island of Hvar simulated successfully what a typical outpost museum could be. Love is, of course, a universal concept, and this 'romantic' variation is merely a reminder this wider fact.

The Global Love Museum collects places and their memories. The site advocates that love may be an inspiration that helps us in a time when obsessive materialism, selfishness and fear of the different, the others, trivialize our lives. Love is the most perfect communication we can imagine. By its total lack of selfishness, it has a unique place in the human condition. The site implies that museums are about values and their place in our world view, whether we define our planet by recognizing places of love or by building walls and memorializing sites of hatred and suffering, which is currently the prevalent reaction. These two opposed visions of life might make all the difference to our future.

The Global Love Museum (GLM) is, at any rate, a contribution to a workable future, as most of the troubles of this world can be attributed to a lack of love. In one form or another, love is the solution to any problem. What water is to the body, love is to the soul, and this is likely to apply to any individual as well as any community.

The experiment was a long and instructive one, but in managerial or pragmatic terms it is still a failure. Compared to the Museum of Broken Relationships (Zagreb), which became a global sensation, it offers a less attractive concept. People are innately more easily interested in bizarre, intriguing, controversial and sensational themes. The media discourage and trivialize romantic idealism in dealing with the subtleties of human nature. Why would anybody risk social conflict or assume personal losses in the name of some irresistible, emotional impulse? While the first is still vehemently about life and hope the other is noble but, alas, permeated by suffering and failure. The controversial potential of the Museum of Broken Relationships sits well with contemporary sensitivities and the need for a quick and witty sensation. Zagreb has several international-class museums but tourists are likely to spend their quota of museum time on the witty irony of this one. The booming scene of museum-like art concepts, edutainment centres or simply commercial pop-ups for selfies conspicuously follows this logic. But the experiment of GLM is not finished, as it holds great potential for some 'agape'-tourism and may be made more attractive by a possible conceptual shift which I wish to introduce.

## **223. The impoverishing state mandates public interests to private entities**

In the West, the media industry has contracted into some dozens of great corporations to serve the network of money-making and controlling corporate associations. The political profession has sunk into servicing the financial and corporate sectors. States have lost their own income by giving up their assets to an unprecedented marauding and wild privatisation. The organizations of civil society increasingly turned for their funding to governments and corporate foundations. The administration of the state is often so corrupted by lobbyists that it traps itself by assisting frustrated, impoverished and unemployed citizens in their efforts at an entrepreneurial version of civil society. With open hands and the authority of civic trust, these private or charitable groups often relinquish their integrity and original ideals to give way to indiscriminate fundraising. In this way these organisations become vehicles for the invisible transfer of diverse political or corporate interests. Their original freedom has paid its price, and most of them slowly compromise their mission and the common interest by succumbing to pressures and extortion. This may seem of little importance for museums and heritage, but given the fact that privately or independently run or charitable museum-like institutions and activities are increasingly common, it is clear that still more public memory is exposed to the risk of interference from private interests.

## **224. Deregulation and privatisation are endangering culture and heritage**

Deregulation is part of the neoliberal strategy, leading to excessive privatisation and consequently to chaos and a medieval division of power. Roughly speaking, modern civilization invented public institutions and their corresponding professions as the way to run a modern society. The strategy is deeply rooted in the doctrine of human rights, the rule of law and, eventually, in a vision of sustainable development. Therefore, the excessive privatisation and commodification of a society entirely delivered to corporate interests have already ruined the great Western tradition of civil liberties and openness.

But what does this have to do with museums, which are ‘neutral scientific institutions’? Everything, because museums are, though scientific by approach, essentially communicational and democratic institutions, and certainly not neutral if they wish to represent the best interests of their citizens in the social contract. And besides, the heritage sector has to be aware that the next item on the menu at the corporate table will be the public sector; museums and heritage will be their tastiest dish. In some countries, the creeping privatisation of the educational system is devouring any quality or standards in education and prevents society from implanting the basic values needed for it to function. Culture is increasingly regarded as a set of assets, with soft marketable value, and heritage is probably the most vulnerable part of it because it is not defended by a strong,

related profession. The sale of museums or giving them away to concessions has already started. We have much to fear and much to learn, as the disappearance of the public sector actually means the demise of any natural rights. We have the right to our memory. Once totally manipulated and engineered, nature, with its air, water snow, rain, clouds, plants and animals will become a huge marketable asset in the hands of a few anonymous shareholders.

## **225. The change needed comprises a new mindset and strategy**

In the face of all these challenges in the world, the museum sector as a whole is more part of the problem than part of the solution. That should not be tolerated. It may take a library of texts to explain this through details, arguments and examples. Yet a benevolent listener to this lecturing reader may sigh and demand what would be the best way to make these, let us say, convincing arguments for new practices and perspectives in museums and heritage less unattainable than they may now seem. The shortest possible answer is that what we need is a different mindset, a new attitude on the part of the occupations in the heritage sector. This being a most difficult change (unlike managerial or technological renewal), it will require a new long-term policy in respect of obligatory professional education. The result must be a coherent mega-sector of public memory. To be a curator in a museum, one must be more than an archaeologist, art historian, biologist or engineer; one must be a scientist-communicator with the mind of a visitor. The sector must become a relevant and responsible partner to the government and other shareholders in the social contract. How can it be that our institutions show only a fraction of their collections? Why should we not put this huge cultural capital into circulation? To do this, we need only a conviction that collections belong to all of us and that we can create a network with places where we exhibit collectively our immense potential, according to the needs and opportunities as they pop up within the network.

## **226. The brutal reality of the warring world and our utopia**

Any peace-loving country and any culture are in permanent need of self-assurance and consolidation. Many are suffering from the post-colonial or neo-colonial reality. The brutality of the world is disguised in proxy wars and extortion. Most of it is tacitly within the supply zone of the great powers. But that is apparently beyond our powers and the scope of our expertise. The information war, the war of identities, has been always there, but is now more open, perfidious and effective than ever before. The identities are again recognised as platforms of conflict, as values whose fragility can be turned into the fear of being put in danger by others. Any value can be turned into profit and power. Our differences are thus instrumentalized to become divisive instead of being a source of inspiration and enjoyment. This world that claims solidarity and creates an impression of understanding that the planet is small and endangered is flooded by cynicism and hypocrisy: technologies gave these old social perversions unprecedented

dimensions and reach. Even a superficial comparison of the lists of the main polluters and the corporations that are selling solutions to the problem reveals a significant match. We all feed on a largely utopian dream that humankind still has a chance, but that will be possible only with fundamental changes in the strategies of development. If imagining the solution were to be allowed, then it could happen only with the decisive involvement of the known professions which were created to protect us, and the ability to create new ones. Improving the human condition is a task that gives meaning even to individual existence, let alone institutions or entire sectors.

## **227. Is culture really that expensive?**

The military-industrial complex with its global power ambitions will continue its sabre-rattling and local wars as long as social energies are successfully misdirected to engineer public consent. There is neither the necessary social energy nor the legal possibility to impose truly massive public protest against societal decay. Culture has finally been placed among the spending we can afford only after everything else has been taken care of. Instead of being a priority, culture is claimed a great expense that not many people can afford, though as a sector, it never spends more than the average 1% of any state budget. However, culture having been turned into the creative industries, we are made to believe that anything from the sector can directly earn most of its costs. This box-office logic may work for Hollywood movies, but it does not mean that it should work for the rest of culture. The public memory sector not only cannot, it should not be profitable, as this would serve only the profit-makers. If a public museum earns money, - that is good. Exceptionally it can even finance itself. But being not-for-profit is the first condition for public memory institutions. Without it, they easily turn into their opposite.

The most modern battleship or submarine costs \$3-4 billion, some 20-30 medium-sized new museums. For the price of one of the last generation aircraft carriers, we could build about 30 Tate Modern-sized museums. Without going into further elaborations that estimate the cost of project development for all our armaments, the comparison should convince us that culture is not expensive. How we distribute the finances across the budget is, finally, just a matter of priorities, nothing else. The cost of culture is a small fraction of any military expenditure, and, we have learned that culture directly feeds development and makes the world better. 'Culture' is a generic term, but it should by definition comprise quality, or as many virtues as it can, because if not ennobling, it may just be another, this time, cultural industry. The whole point of museums is that they are and must remain not-for-profit, never an industry. The heritage industry is the proof of this, an industry so detested by authorities on heritage whom I estimate as highly as I do Kenneth Hudson or David Lowenthal. All the heritage sector has to do is guard, protect, conserve, treasure and use the richness of the diversity we have inherited. Any diversity. All diversity. If all the heritage institutions of the world did the same, the Earth would become a safe and beautiful place for everyone. Apparently, it is only a matter of lacking



the proper mind-set. But to be realistic, it all depends upon which system of values we practice.

## A final note instead of conclusive remarks

This book is a paraphrase of three decades of lecturing. The choice of notes from among thousands was almost haphazard: some appeared publishable while others seemed more like scribbled reminders to myself to interpret the slides. Many remained lapidary, direct, harsh, some almost impolite or politically incorrect. Therefore, writing in the first person remains an honest proposal, be it lecturing or displaying one's notes.

Lecturers, like their subjects, have been increasingly the student's choice, just as readers pick a book; luckily so, because otherwise, one would feel guilty about one's opinionated and dishevelled attitudes and the position of imposing them easily on others. I also admit to a certain activist tone: my lectures were never neutral and neither can this book of notes be, as it recalls vaguely the living communication. I have always preferred the risk of being disliked and opposed, as it also contained the opposite opportunity - to be rewarded by consent, at times by a shining, inspired face in the auditorium or, sometimes, applause from the audience. Proposing a strong thesis is an honest attitude, as only that can provoke minds and inspire autonomous thinking. I willingly regarded myself, not as a solution, but rather as a part of the process of correction and adaptation in reaching balanced, viable and durable judgements. A certain radicalism merely serves that cybernetic ambition of counteraction, contributing to reaching the balance while collectively contemplating our job(s) and structuring our mission. I, therefore, do not mind if my contribution serves as mere building blocks for some future, superior evaluation of the affairs of the world and the ways it remembers its past(s).

Luckily, professors are expected to prepare for their lectures and write, as otherwise, their output would entirely resemble that of actors. Lecture theatres, to be frank, are less influential and instructive than real theatres. However, when taken seriously and creatively, the professorial lecterns are just little stages where one demonstrates a difficult form of a monologue. A book can mean more but certainly is not the same as lecturing, where one is often profoundly motivated by the living audience: one uses all forms of communication to convey the message, or convince, or simply encourage thinking. So combining the discipline of writing with some of the remaining persuasiveness of direct live communication was worth a try. I had my rare successes and my numerous failures, books and articles all freely available at the slowly growing site [www.menmosophy.com](http://www.menmosophy.com), where this 'display' of notes comes from. The field of social sciences and humanities must be free from copyright restrictions. Knowledge and insight are to the social community what water is to the body and love is to the soul -- indispensable: mankind cannot advance solely by cashing in upon its endless conquest. There is no endless taking. Infinite taking can only make us hopelessly finite, whatever it is. Effective forms of public memory, museums

among them, can take us back to the path of perfecting the human condition. The goal is balanced development.

Some notes were updated in the process of making them part of this book. As an ephemeral form, they did not deserve the specific responsibility of keeping them in the original context of former lectures. Besides, being mostly interpretations and elaborations of lecture slides they have always been subject to change or, indeed, adjustment to the auditorium. Some of the later versions demonstrate that professors, as another well-chosen memory descended to us from the Romans claims, often learn by teaching, *docendo discimus*.

In my long experience of museums, universities and consultancy, I have remained a homo duplex: always too theoretical for the practitioners and too practical for theoreticians. Because of this dynamic biography, I somehow imagine that I stand for all those among the thousands of colleagues that I have met who do not write much, nor have time or ambition to influence others, as I do. We share the same feeling that the testimonies of ordinary members of the profession are credible and necessary, supporting the contribution of the great authorities of the museum domain. It crossed my mind that one should speak in the name of the former and make up for their modesty and self-denial. We are connected by the same fascination for museums and other various ways that the past uses to fade into the present and future. Our nascent profession still demands no obligatory specialized education, so the fascination is less likely to come by an acquired knowledge but represents rather a certain talent, almost a character trait. The best curators have not chosen the job - the job has chosen them, as happens in the creative domain.

I have already excused myself for the form of this book, which is not meant as scientific and is therefore purposefully optional, nonchalant and naïve. It is, however, a conscious effort to join arguments with all who believe that we cannot entrust the world to private persons or groups (however powerful or rich they may be), no matter what public interest we take into consideration, let alone processing the memory of any society. In a privatized world anything can be owned, or rather, everything has to have an owner, whether an individual or corporate one. So can, apparently, heritage or any institution or process that deals with it. But that is an obsessive deviation of our times, and as a lowering of humanist standards is in complete opposition to all the aspirations of mankind, as well as being unsustainable. There is too much that belongs to mankind, to all of us, living beings, by natural law, to be left to the whims of individuals. One of these noble rights, both individual and public, is to recognize, collect, study, care for and communicate what to remember and to what purpose.

Digitization will make the common denominator of memory institutions more obvious and push the processes of compaction of the sector so that it builds up by unity the ability to react in a cumulative way. This unrealized mega-brain, the material substance of some general consciousness of mankind, is there in bits and pieces, unattainable but always a challenge worth following. Heritage institutions are there to ennoble individuals and communities, to work our way

from mere consciousness to conscientiousness. Public memory institutions are catalysers, enzymes, amplifiers, accelerators, boosters, enablers and, ennoblers; they are meant to be useful, never just passive observers.

To those who would dismiss my claims on the ground of ideological bias, be it mine or theirs, I can only respond that a state may be an oppressive structure, but the history of utopia sees it mostly as a form of societal organization and an instrument of welfare for its citizens. All else is rightly dismissed deviation and abuse of the concept. If, as an apparatus, society is run by highly trained and humanist-inspired professions, including the civic administration, it leaves the negotiation of interests within the social contract to the democratic processes led by politics. Working in museums will not become a profession, but together with other public memory occupations it might, and so become the most effective power in charge of the processes of transfer of societal experience. All professions necessarily overlap in their competencies but this does not undermine them: it rather consolidates their mission. We all have no choice but to make our world a better place, despite reality and indeed all the more because of it. Keeping control of the package of conceptual shares in matters of collective experience transfer may well be decisive for the destiny of humanity. We cannot confide this ambition either to particular interests or to smart machines. From knowledge we need to arrive at wisdom, as all else are mistakes or betrayals.

## Appendix - Some biographical features (hopefully instructive)

### **I experienced, wrote and lectured about what was asked from me**

I have always enjoyed being faced with tasks, questions and situations, often in a foreign or unfamiliar environment, and frequently also provocative. It gave me that sporting challenge and, I guess, encouraged the preacher's evangelising spirit that many professors either have or develop with time. This is nothing to be particularly proud of, as preachers may fall into the trap of their own prophecies in an attempt to attract attention. They may be loved by some, but they tend to be a rather unhappy species. To ordinary professionals and ambitious lay persons, they lack the credible dullness that would enable them to be taken seriously, while people of social status and the academically trained miss a certain impenetrable complexity and punditry. In any event, I have certainly experienced what it is to be too theoretical for curators and too practical for museologists, whoever the latter may be.

In brief, if you are looking for an alternativist in museum matters, I might be the one that can handle and support professional heresy.

I have travelled a great deal, but my hosts composed the geography, not me: only a few of my travels were of my planning. However, I accepted it as a plan made for me by circumstances, as I refuse to bother myself with great speculations about the nature of human existence. (At least I spared my professional environment such philosophising.)

I did one thing which, though a fact, would never fit in any work of science, but which, I believe speaks well of a certain personal professional stance. When war broke in my country, I was exposed to personalized experiences of human suffering and drama, despite living outside the immediate war zone. It was fascinating to see how human existences, people and their lives' creations, were annihilated in no time. People were leaving their burning houses, whole lives of investment and creativity, with only a plastic bag in their hands (full of randomly grabbed things - these often included a picture album...). I decided not to spend any more public money on my travels, be it from the Faculty or the Ministry of Culture. At first, it was my impulsive reaction to the suffering of war, but later it became a professional habit. With two minor exceptions my 150-200 journeys since 1990 have, until now, been undertaken according to this principle.

## My first contact with the sector

I am a museum person, but I always felt encouraged to mix my interests and experiences in a way that led me out of strictly curatorial business. When I became a director of the Museum Documentation Centre, the only 'museological' institution at the time in this part of the world (created two years after the documentation centre of ICOM and *de facto* serving the entire former state of Yugoslavia), a whole new world opened up for me. I took International Museums Day seriously and was the first in the former state and that region of Europe to turn it into a very intensive urban cultural (heritage?) action, putting banners across the street or slides into cinemas, creating a true urban festival with bands playing jazz, pop, or renaissance music, and students walking in groups in historical costumes. In my capacity of the chairperson of the national committee, I also organized three successful international ICOM conferences (ICOFOM, ICTOP, CIMAM).

My interests were not centred any more upon art museums (I was an art historian by academic training), but literally upon the full scope of museums. I soon realized that the divisions between museums as a complex sector were literally the consequence of the historical circumstances of the development of museums: their specialization and scientific commitment, their structure corresponding tightly with the system of sciences. Most curators 30 or 40 years ago referred to themselves as to scientists working in museums. The absence of a broader perspective at that time already appeared to me to be a sheer waste of opportunities. It was logical and yet misplaced. Curiously, as we live through the troubled times of monetisation and dis-acculturation, it appears to some curators that this withdrawal into an ivory tower is the solution. This may prove a fatal error, as in the hard times that lie ahead the ruling oligarchy may use it as an excuse to reduce the mission of curators to playing an ancillary and incidental role at the edge of cultural and other derived soft industries like cultural or heritage tourism. At the time, there was no specific training for the job that was already (though weakly) defined as specific and of special social interest, of course, in ways that were different in every country. In the early 1980s I compared the situation of the museum sector to that of pre-Garibaldian Italy, a state yet to be realized, composed of city-states and their long historic rivalry. When alluding to the existence of museums and other similar institutions, and the mission they were supposed to assume, I often used the metaphor of a dismembered army. That powerful, numerous and publicly well regarded army had and still has disorder in its ranks, and only a vague, slowly rising awareness of their grand common cause.

## Building the profession as personalized experience

Once, in an interview with EMYA magazine, I described myself as a preacher, because that was an accurate definition of my ambition in, or rather for, the 'profession'. During my studies, I spent four semesters at other faculties so Architecture and Journalism became, from my fascination with them, part of

my practised composite experience. However, I graduated in the history of art and English language. The fascinations somehow attained coherence as they became clearer: to build a successful exhibition one needs to be a curator with experience of architecture and journalism. My generation grew up with the ideas of Eisenstein's complex poetical communicational engineering, his montage of attractions. At the time that was still a living idealistic heritage, charged with the decisively positive role that art and humanities can exercise in the societal project. In the interim, I have acquired a more profound understanding, but I find the present incapacity for idealism, with all enthusiasm for the future apparently lost, overwhelming and saddening. Disney was doing his business along the same creative lines. In the early 1980s I even wrote about the museological experience of Disneyland.

## **The stages of involvement**

Later, I received a scholarship from the French government, and with Georges Henri Riviere as my mentor, I finally ended up in what was at the time known as Museology. I was restless and proactive, always speculating about future developments so, as one may imagine, it was almost natural to be pushed out of my rather conservative domestic scene and be accepted more internationally. Being independent and free-spirited in my country was not a career advantage, then or now. But I could not afford more than my nonconformist stance, saying and writing what I think. I cannot boast any public or professional recognition, nor am I on the roll of honour of deserving museum persons.

As the director of a Museum Documentation centre, I created a gallery which was supposed to offer themes that were common to museums as a sector: a display about collectors (as they have always been a crucial source of collections and inspiration), different museum activities (a display of publications by the Centre Georges Pompidou...), books about museums, etc. Back in 1983, I was responsible for an initiative that saw the museums of Yugoslavia promote their publications at their Zagreb book fair. To my knowledge that was the first regular showing of what I would claim was the considerable but largely invisible publishing activity of an increasingly influential sector. Collectors and libraries hastened to Zagreb because we were the only place that offered insight and a chance to purchase in this field. One copy was always retained for our library, and this was a cheap means of acquisition. The state has been dispersed, but the fair continues its regular editions at the national level.

## **Building professional convictions**

Dr Bauer, a Croatian museologist, was my first mentor: he was the founder of the Museum Documentation Centre, the first institution of its kind after ICOM. He created the inspiration and provided the information that eventually took me to Paris on a bursary from the French government. I started my post-graduate studies of museology in Zagreb at the Centre for Studies in Librarianship, Do-



cumentation and Information Sciences (CBDIZ), and continued in Paris with Georges Henri Rivière, the legendary director of ICOM and the co-founder of ecomuseums. Georges Henri Rivière and ICOM, until then abstract concepts to me, opened up a universe of museums, and of those who shared my fascination with them. In this way I was able to demonstrate my growing conviction that by getting together and uniting forces museums can produce extra, cumulative effects. By that time, I had already worked on my PhD, *Towards the total museum*, the title explaining my dominant and obsessive idea of museums permeating the life of societies.

It was at Dr Bauer's suggestion that I was elected the Chairman of what was at the time the Yugoslav National Committee of ICOM, and served two terms. The time I spent in ICOM was a decade of activism. The National committee organised in Zagreb and Dubrovnik three major international conferences of ICOM's international committees, well organised and excellently attended. Then, after 14 years of curatorship and directorship in the museum sector, Professor Ivo Maroević offered me in 1987 the post of docent at the newly established Chair of Museology at the University of Zagreb, Faculty of Letters. My PhD in Ljubljana was still fresh; as the study was complementary, and noticed by many young, ambitious academically trained and working people, some of them tried to have the thesis published. Curiously, 27 years later my colleagues running the Study of museology and heritology in Belgrade, had the PhD translated and published in book format in its integral version. The thesis was theoretical, but like any well-conceived theory it provided inspiration and practical advice. What if museums could achieve such an impact on and sensitisation of society that society became aware of its memory, to the extent that museums remained only ganglions of that mega brain, as digitisation would demonstrate 30 years later? What if they united with other memory institutions according to the same theory? Since then, I have gradually become an apostate, but I like to believe that any sector thrives upon obsession and irritation. I started to be invited frequently to join international symposia or give lectures. My radicalism has closed some doors to me, but ever since then, I have believed that I was on the right side of developments. The eight books I have published on different aspects of heritage theory testify to my conviction.

The life of a lecturer was a good one, with full liberty and ample time. I never applied for an extension of a professorship or for emeritus status so I retired without full seniority in the status of full professor with tenure. Although I was engaged at a few universities, it was too late for the only academic ambition I had left, that of establishing a chair of public memory. However, being educated in contemporary art I thought that creating a sort of regular action named Academia Mnemosophica (the free chair of public memory) at the Museum of Contemporary Art in Zagreb would correspond to conceptual creativity in art. It was a failure. That happens with most projects in any case, especially if one entertains a lot of them.

Professional fascination is a pleasant fever, but if it were possible I would reduce my enthusiasm as a belated apology to my family. One of the first words my older daughter learned was 'symposium', as we called conferences then. When, without lobbying, or rather as recognition for my dedication, I was elected a member of the Executive Committee of ICOM, I really had the impression that the time had come to change the world. But what can a provincial priest change in the Vatican? It was therefore quite logical that I ended that decade by leaving all active engagement in ICOM, while needless to say remaining a believer. I should probably have stayed to fight on and ensure a straightforward career. Idealism and a restless mind are voluntary deviations, which the majority ignores and people loyal to success reject, so I made my own logical choice.

## **Experience with evaluation and criteria**

Having left the regularity of ICOM's events and meetings, I felt very lonely, and so I responded readily to the offer of Kenneth Hudson, the director and one of the founders of the European Museum of the Year Award (EMYA/later EMF), to become a member of the jury. We have been on friendly terms, often meeting internationally for quite some time before this, as I wrote in his obituary. I was plunging into the reality of the newest, competitive projects in Europe. What an experience of nascent professional evaluation it was! And, what luck to have had two gurus as part of my professional maturation! I later dedicated everything I was doing publicly to their memory (The Best in Heritage conference, [www.mnemosophy.com](http://www.mnemosophy.com), my various writings). One thing needs to be said, however. When Kenneth Hudson started EMYA, the competitiveness his award scheme implied was a very strange idea to the museum world. But so was SIME (1989; later SITEM), the first museum fair created by Jean Francois Grunfeld. ICOM refused to be associated to it, declining to appear at a stand and to offer its patronage. I was the only member of the Executive Council to vote in favour. Times changes gradually and it became more and more obvious that public awards for best practices were not harming the image of museums. They proved to be an effective tool for spreading the power of a good example, and for increasing the public visibility of creative and innovative practices. It became obvious that at their best award schemes were and still are formidable exercises in evaluating excellence, in developing criteria for professionalism and the quality of public impact of heritage projects. I was so convinced of the multiple impacts of this simple model that I tried to propose changes in EMYA to boost its importance. To cut a long story short, I was very unsuccessful, but my failure led to founding The Best in Heritage conference.

Theorizing has to be balanced by practice, at least in the same person. To advise others what to do while yourself avoiding the risk of practical failures feels somehow improper and irresponsible. When we are serious we are always talking or doing things that are intended to change the world. It seems relatively easy to share tips as a consultant, but I have tried to master this delicate job. At some point, some consultants reveal that it was always implicitly about their urge for creativity, which they are exercising through other people's projects. Saturated

by these temptations, one can start to become restless and proactive. Becoming the author in one's own right of heritage-related projects is a difficult but also rewarding experience. Convincing others of the merit of one's projects is a hard and barren activity. It requires good insight, vision and a lot of luck, but failure is the dominating reality of most such innovators. In my case, I realized at one point that the only choice was to prove my claims personally. Among my present, my visible successes are an international conference with no precedent, an ongoing attempt to contribute to European identity, a bizarre virtual museum and, for the rest, the (as it were) virtual lectern of a retired professor. My long history of attempts and failures is exposed at my blog-site, ironically under the title 'solutions'.

## **Discovering the civil society**

For the next decade, almost as if it had been arranged by some external time/career organiser, I dedicated much time to the growing role of civil society in dealing with heritage. What was usually the domain of the various public memory institutions now started to be well and appropriately cared for by organized citizens. As this corresponds with the idea of the 'total museum' I was naturally attracted to it. I saw great power in it. Political society, as well as the corporate world, started to understand that heritage is a mighty lever of the soft power that they viewed as having potential for development. Due to its young and eligible secretary-general Snenska Quaedlieg-Mihailović, Europa Nostra was changing in front of my eyes from an elitist society run by toffs into an agent of development, ennobled by the cultural heritage and activism of its member organisations. I had no difficulties in believing that hard-working citizens, active and concerned for the quality of their community life, can exercise formidable uses of public memory. When they fail, it is because all amateurs lack knowledge of the demanding expertise that professionals take so long to acquire. They can over-simplify things and fall prey to improvisations that render their effort disputable, whether by mystification, nationalist temptation and so on. The example of ecomuseums in Canada, a post-ecomuseum tendency (unfortunately not a movement) was successfully insisting on a formula that united top professional expertise and living creativity in the field. Unlike the isolated enthusiast individuals, the civil society associations readily ask for cooperation from experts and are open to appropriating the best professional practices.

## **Being the protagonist of uniting the sector**

A decade after leaving ICOM, I returned to it (under president Jacques Perot) to ask patronage for what I have created as my own contribution to the international profession: The Best in Heritage conference in Dubrovnik. At that time ICOM had a clear idea that it is, as an organisation, about affirming and building excellence in the profession. Such was also the conference that I proposed. In short, since nobody else wanted to do it, I decided to do it myself. Again, the family deserves an excuse. A bigger one, this time. Dubrovnik, recovering from war,

needed its international public back. I needed proof that the proposed science of heritology (mnemosophy), or whatever unites museums and other heritage institutions, makes sense. We all needed greater insight into the most effective method of advancing quality practices and learning from the best examples. The world as it entered the digital age needed a demonstration of the convergence happening in memory institutions. After some hesitation, ICOM's Executive Council granted its stamp of authority and declared that a global, annual survey of best practices deserved their support. That was the beginning in 2002 of the conference which at the time of writing is still there, after 18 years. It has grown into a convincing global event, still a professional event outside the conference business, one-track, non-profit and credible. Some 40 handpicked winners, the change-makers, the projects of influence (as Kenneth Hudson would have named them) from four or five continents get together every year and celebrate excellence in public memory. They tell their success stories. It is my firm conviction that ICOM is a natural leader of that emerging sector. In 2019, ICOM became the main partner of the conference, and in this way my professional cycle seems to be elegantly closed, as one might say.

## **Being a nuisance**

For much of my career, I was a nuisance and a grudger, and maybe quite justifiably so, as from my corner of the world the future did not appear bright. In the decade-long friendly atmosphere of ICOFOM I was occasionally nick-named a 'catastrophist'. I always thought that professions are in charge of endangered society. At the first meeting of ICOFOM that I attended (Mexico 1980) there was an invitation to propose a theme for the next ICOFOM conference. I proposed 'Museology and Politics'. The proposal was rejected with disapproval. However, the time I have spent on the committee was the best experience of the conceptualisation of our occupation I could have had. I was wrong to leave this unique discussion platform after ten hectic years, only to continue my priorities in the role of a lecturer at my university or on international invitations.

I have been an involuntary nuisance for much of my professional life. Some of the lectures have been published either on my website or widely by conference organizers.

Some of the notes were easy to find and date mainly from the last decade when I insisted that knowing the world and changing the mindset would be preconditioned to any meaningful, grand role that public memory might assume in the perilous circumstances of mankind. One of the texts I used several times (by the mid-20s of this century) in teaching internationally, is probably concise enough to be presented here, illustrating why I must have been a nuisance to some of my audiences or hosts:

"Savage and obscene greed cannot be the way to run the planet. The world is devoured by entropy, increasingly impoverished, violent, poisonous and ugly. The western paradigm is ending in a debacle. It is leaving behind a world worse

than it ever was. How shall we go on? I believe the world is in need of the innate multi-centred leadership of the worthiest. Gaining credibility is like democracy, a constant, incessant process.

The wisdom of ruling the world is not in fighting others, be they cultures, societies, systems, civilisations. It is the art of managing the economic forces of change in a cybernetic manner: adapting to it or opposing it, as the *need* commands for the maximum benefit of humans and of nature. Humanist and social sciences are the conscience of science. The balance will lead to beneficial cooperation instead of harmful conflict. The final strength is not in fighting others but in being able to sustain peace. The real power lies not in conquering others but in maintaining a mutually acceptable balance. The ultimate objective of science is not discovering the God particle nor reaching one of the outer galaxies of the universe (what about the billion others?). Finding, conquering and settling another planet just because we have ruined ours is nonsense.

The wise powers of the future will encourage the only conquest that makes sense: that of ourselves. Knowing ourselves is a far greater adventure and more important objective than microscoping and telescoping into unattainable infinities. Sustainable development has been turned into hypocritical cynicism that seems to say: we will leave the world as ruined as possible and you, our descendants, can do your best to save it. Just the opposite of wisdom. The world cannot continue like that.

We ought to abandon the biggest conspiracy that troubles this world: the concept of western democracy a so-called, free-market economy. This unipolar world is grotesque and destructive. The warnings of Huxley and Orwell cannot be our vision of the future. A crowd can rule only in utopian socialist visions, not in reality. Until then it will be just the object of dangerous demagoguery: propaganda in Nazism, agitation in Bolshevism, and marketing (or the manufacture of the consent) in the economy of greed. We need to get labour, culture, science and politics back, to work for the only ideal worthy of humankind: that of the common good in the welfare state, building the social contract that will sustain both us and nature. All the practical wisdom by which we can run any modern society is defined in the rights of humans and nature”.

There is a downside to the endeavour of well-intentioned preachers as they try to persuade others to understand that the cause of heritage, let alone museums, will be resolved only in an adequate, wider frame of reference in which we could finally, as a profession, participate in writing the history of the world, not as a mere scribe but as a kind of editor.

## **More complaints of an unwary preacher**

Thirty-eight years ago, I publicly claimed that museology as a term and scientific discipline formed around a single institutional practice did not make sense. This was a justified claim at the time, later confirmed by the direction and the content of the professional debate. That was how heritology came to be proposed. It was

a curious occasion that changed a great deal in my life. Five years later, dissatisfied with what seemed a clumsy combination of Latin and Greek, I proceeded to rename it as Mnemosophy, which I felt would be more appropriate. Proposing a new term in a defined institutionalized field is usually a vain ambition. It is done compulsively, and obviously, the proponent takes out of it the only secure output: the adventurous pleasure of challenging the change. It did appear clear to me, in this voluntary exclusion, that the term museology would always drag behind itself certain limitations deriving from a fixation upon the institution it was inspired by. Its many later names, whether with prefixes such as socio-, critical-, or downplaying it to museum studies and similarly composed terms, proved to me that it will remain in some eternal *statu nascendi*. I have little insight into the latest attempts to make it a science, or at least a scientific discipline. The debate about the term, any one of which is finally only a convention, can only confirm the banal fact that terms are important and, if possible, should carry a certain revelatory power of the concept behind it. Science can stem from a concept, not from any institutional practice.

At one point in time (1997), I was so ambitious that I made Mnemosophy an official teaching subject at the Department of Information Sciences, University of Zagreb. The subject was offered at the BA level before students finally decided whether they would be educated as archivists, librarians or curators. It was barely mentioned that they were all together there because of the beginnings of the development of information science at Zagreb University based upon the work of Professor Božo Težak in the early 1980s. Small nations usually have 'small languages' and narrow doors when proposing their wisdom to the great outside world. His definition of information science preceded the formidable ideas of Lorcan Dempsey, two or three decades later. Though the times were tough in my country, the academic world was a safe haven for daydreamers, but I nevertheless reiterated, so as not to frighten off the potential students by an extravagant term. I penitently reduced the ambitious neologism but offered it to the freshmen as two completely new subjects, 'Heritage institutions' and 'General theory of heritage' with the same aim - to orientate them professionally for work in memory institutions.

By that time, I knew that radicalism had cost me a certain divorce from the professional mainstream that maintained its comfortable continuity and social/political neutrality. Only coercion or a lack of wit (as with dictators or anarchists) can make one believe that changing the system from the outside is possible. At some places in my texts I was regretting having left the priesthood in Rome, only to become an itinerant preacher, so that, instead of enjoying the comfort of being a liberal, unruly Jesuit whom some listen to with sympathy, even in cathedrals, I became the moralizing Franciscan preacher. I repeat this here because in any wise system the apostates should be tolerated. They do not seriously intend to be anything but a reminder and corrective but can become a real nuisance. In losing contact in this way with the certain reality of the professional 'religion' I have become, like many with a similar temptation, a sort of grudging renegade.

Belonging to a small nation or 'small culture' of poor reputation is not what one needs when aspiring to an international career. An American, Dutch or, say, English academic, as invited professor or keynote speaker - that makes sense. But a Croat? Romanian? Azeri? Iranian? Benin? Would a potential audience be benevolent enough to allow the possibility that such a person could be worth listening to? Would superiors approve the expenses? My friendly hosts would openly admit their hesitations. So, in brief, the 'unknown Croat' was a self-ironizing jest. But I will not miss the chance to say that people from, let us say, disadvantaged places, have a better understanding of the complexity of the world and more empathy for the underprivileged than those from rich countries.

My book *Eternity does not live here anymore – a brief history of museum sins* is still the only text entirely dedicated to criticizing museums, done without support and therefore somewhat sloppy, almost a pamphlet in form and outdated samizdat by spirit. A rather careless language editing made it still less attractive. The first version of it was a lecture conceived in the late 1980s. Kenneth Hudson was listening to its Brno summer school edition and he liked it. Later, when I was convinced that, as a whole, museums are progressing too slowly, I expanded it into what was for some a reminder of former sins and for others advice on what to avoid in their progress. I took care that all my dishevelled productions are freely accessible, as even the best should be.

My irregular path, although it brought a certain estrangement from the mainstream, was, however, abundantly generous in providing a variety of experiences. It brought insights into the profession, much helped by constantly making proposals, many more or less successful consultancies, and failed attempts to change it. This was surely bad for a regular, successful career. However, it was altogether me, I must admit; too bad for mnemosophy, which could have enjoyed bigger and better-lit stages. Less metaphorically, being tempted to innovate (both in theory and practice, as it happened) is a curse rather than a blessing. Although it makes life interesting, it also makes failure a frequent companion. With all due sincerity, one has to admit one's inadequacies, but however it may have happened, the best way to deal with failures is to make them visible and turn them into a usable experience. I guess as mankind we have developed many institutions and practices with the same simple intention. At the very beginning of my career, at the table where I first met my great colleagues, I claimed that museology and politics should be the theme of the next symposium. Unconsciously, but speaking from frustration with the 'socialism' I lived in, I suggested a theme that proves all the more crucial as we progress towards democracy. To ground any debate, we should simply ask ourselves if we ever witnessed any museum project being born without political will behind it. In exceptional cases, maybe. In a plausible democracy, based upon the expertise of professions and the decisions of elected citizens, who would have a problem with this?

Most of the partners, organisations or individuals I have dealt with are tolerant and openly invite any critique or call for re-thinking the old concepts. They



better be so as such is their mission, - ultimately, making even the books like this possible.

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