

## REFERENCE

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## Prologue

### **PUBLIC MEMORY AS THE ART OF QUALITY MAINTENANCE FOR SOCIETAL DEVELOPMENT (Some notes on mindset and the context)**

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#### **1. The privilege of communication and the value of invoking**

I was given the privilege of contributing an introductory text to this well-respected publication in full liberty granted to the seniors only, I believe. I will use the opportunity with appreciation, but, as announced to the benevolent editors by writing an informal text, hardly more than a collection of lecturer's notes. So the text is not a scientific one, - at least not in form. I hope the readers will bear with me nonetheless.

I speak from the long experience, insight and frustration and claim some professional relevance even if it comes at the expense of the scientific impression. As ever, I write in the first person, giving my insider opinion gathered through a long period of diverse interests and roles that I have assumed in the domain of public memory. All I have ever written is freely accessible at Academia.edu and on my website (mnemosophy.com).

When an idea or thought has an obvious source, quoting is about basic honesty, not so much the matter of scientific norms. We, the actual living, are just like the blooming surface of the coral reef, made possible by those beneath. I was a direct disciple of Georges Henri Riviere and a close colleague to Kenneth Hudson. My websites and The Best in Heritage conference are verbatim dedicated to them. Like people often do, they are (as different as they were) my imaginary interlocutors while writing: what would they say or comment on it? Some other bright

minds of the sector inspire me too (Grace Morley, J. C. Dana, D. S. Ripley, W. Sandberg, Hugues de Varine, Jacques Hainard, Jean Veillard, Pierre Mayrand, Božo Težak and some others), but like all of us, I rely upon some great minds of choice and preference (E. Fromm, L. Mumford, A. Huxley, B. Russell, N. Wiener, Marshall McLuhan, A. Toffler, R. M. Pirsig and many others). The important, usually older others, are behind everything we are, no matter how we may, or indeed, should differ from them. Antun Bauer initiated me into researching museums and curatorial work. Ivo Maroević invited me to the position of assistant professor at the Department of Museology, which he had just founded (1984) at the University of Zagreb.

In some cases, I referred very directly to sources of wisdom and inspiration. In a book I wrote as a kind of glossary of "museum sins" ("Eternity does not live here any more ..."; translated into Spanish, Russian and Latvian), I was widely paraphrasing two wonderful books: "Gulliver's Travels" and "Faust".

## **2. Knowing the broad context as the way to the meaningful mission**

Will for power and flight from freedom, Erich Fromm would claim, prevent us from creating a sane society. The temptation, strive for eternity, the passion for possessing and the pleasure of conquest created conventional museums. The whole matter, compressed into one phrase, would be that all that needs to be done is to interpret the need for museums as a pursuit of the divine inspiration of humans, serving their incessant need for perfecting the human condition. Museums are not there for our materiality but for our spirituality, - the temples, not of science but secular spirituality. As R. Barthes said, the only eternity given to humans is that of the human race. Other eternities seem to be reachable by religious projections and speculated upon by philosophy or natural history. Humanist ethics by which we should interpret and communicate the accumulated experience (to guide the world and care for its harmonious development), - that is what museums are about. In my young curatorial years, some 45 years ago, Dillon S. Ripley, a legendary director of the Smithsonian Institution was claiming that museums are there for our "survival". The idea struck me as a typical mind opener. Who would have thought that we shall face it literally by

experiencing even the end of species option? Ever since I have heard it from him, I knew that museums ought to be very busy institutions. Well, all good museums are!

It is not the societal groups but the value systems that rule the world. The living humans are all temporarily there as passers-by, as the changing members of humanity; what stays changing at a slower pace and oscillating, are the values in different “packages”. Identity - the central issue to most of the museums is one of them. They only serve or feed their Machine as it transforms in time and circumstances. Their museums are the core part of that. Should they be such? Not really. Correctly understood museums are mechanisms of adaptation to some extent but should be a corrective force, the one that serves the change helping us to create it for the simple, banally sounding goal, - of making the world a better place. Shallow words? No. The best museums, like the best people, are just that. The change for the better or the steady invitation to stick to the status quo. How can you recognize the latter? They never excess their selfishness, never transcend their first, pragmatic interests. To recognize them when they disguise requires insight and a professional mindset. In the hands of a professional “open authority” becomes sharing the insight and expertise, whereas the mere chasers of buzzwords lose authority.

Technology is a direct consequence of increasing knowledge but always becomes the extension of ourselves. Our spiritual and moral capacities fail to control this materializing knowledge so it produces almost its autonomous change. We may blame ourselves for miscalculating the effects but a minority, which is increasingly privatizing this development, does it merely for profit ignoring the consequences. Generally, our technology represents our psyche mirrored. Knowledge without ethics is, to put it simply, - harmful.

### **3. The unnumbered revolution and the changed value system**

The world is constantly changing. The mega-trends are usually registered as “revolutions” and we now live in the fourth, that of artificial intelligence, the one changing, mentioned often as “cyber-

physical systems". To remain in the comfort zone of convenient knowledge we decided long ago to understand revolutions as technological. However the theory and practice may chase each other competing for priority right, it is likely that spark happens in spirit and turns into a concept which, in turn immediately seeks for some further inspiration and finally demands legitimacy from the practical application.

The romantic claim is that revolutions happen due to the epochal inventions of genius minds. But, do technologies happen because the world changes or the radically different technologies change the world? It is not either way, but both ways. Like the circle of theory and practice that Kurt Levine was so ingeniously defining by saying that there was nothing so practical as a good theory. So, revolutions, I believe, happen rather as a change of mindset, of the world view, and the way we juxtapose our values by which we mean to shape our human destiny. We dream and project and crave ideals and values that seem to be the natural part of our spirituality. Naming revolutions after technological changes is therefore only partly true but certainly too sterile STEM-minded. )The awkward balance to this manipulative simplification is the invention of coloured revolutions as the way of warmongering and geopolitical engineering). Humanities, memory institutions included, are supposed to stay out of the way.

The one that dominates Anthropocene is unnumbered and overwhelming, heralded by Thatcher and Ronald Regan; it took the leading two global politicians at the time hardly a decade (approx. 1980-1990) to best serve the forces which imposed them as leaders. To this purpose, huge quasi-democratic machinery was engaged to provide them with legitimacy to lead the fatal privatisation of the world. This libertarian movement was adorned by a fake historical alibi dating back to mid-18<sup>th</sup> century Adam Smith's romantic economic moralizing. Instead of "the invisible hand" of the market governing the society, the society gradually slipped into the authoritarian rule of the unobservable forces of the ultra-rich. Velvet totalitarianism provided all needed support, from Nobel prize winners (and juries) to innumerable hired experts in privatized media and became known as liberal capitalism. It is just libertarian and it is not capitalism. Privatisation, meaning the incessant concentration of ever greater ownership means that process

is so overwhelming that it will not stop at our doors. It changes the way politicians, and the masses they manipulate, perceive the world.

Why is this seeming “politicizing” justified in a writing about museums? Because in the last four decades the governing world paradigm changed from product to profit. Before that, profit was the consequence of producing and selling products, whereas, from the early 1980s, the product became the mere means of profit. The process of great commodification took place. Even the culture, even the heritage, even the intangible heritage, even their air, water, animals, woods... even the humans, all could have gradually been viewed as an asset. Product was so unimportant that the very labour became unimportant and humiliated. As such it was assigned to the laborious and needy others and that is how the West' worldview mounted into its geopolitical and geostrategic problem. Such detrimental, involitional developments inflicted upon others return like a contagious disease.

The consequences of the growing financial adventurism enabled the banks and military-industrial complex to corrupt democratic processes so much that even the global financial crisis of 2008 was itself grabbed as an opportunity for the plunder of public money. It is due to these changes in approach to economy and politics that the working class disappeared and everything legitimately became the potential asset. Commoditisation of the world began. The libertarian triumph was presented as the blossoming of freedom. Whatever the scenario of the fall of the USSR was, the changed paradigm melted additionally its deviated bureaucratic illusion. Gorbachev was not the only person who believed that the world, once principally and predominantly democratic and capitalist, will lose reasons for conflicts and (finally) unite its nations to save the endangered Planet. Ayn Rand's evil gospel and prophecy of triumphal selfish individualism became the most sinister reality. Knowing this, the disintegration of the West seemed at first possible, then obvious and finally inevitable. Of course, an unfavourable prophecy may be rightfully taken as a risky claim benevolently offered only to avoid the unhappy outcome.

Contrary to what new libertarian capitalists claim, Ayn Rand's destructive celebration of ultimate individualism was not capitalism at all, but an apotheosis of selfishness and greed against any decent humanity. Nevertheless, the clowns from political reality show (as her

vulgar followers) can be still worse: "The reason we have the vaccine success is because of capitalism, because of greed my friends". This "private" statement of Boris Jonson publicly has spread all around the world. How can this man understand why any country should have museums? How could many others, less educated and less obliged by their function?

The depreciation of labour is equally an economic and cultural sin. To mention again the value-less society, the disappearance of the working class led to the extinction of criteria of quality which together with products withdrew into the unattainable 1%. The diminishing middle class made non-culture possible, - a certain state of *dis-culturation* or apathy: the post-modern syntagma "anything goes" imperceptibly slipped into "nothing matters". Cynically, the creators of problems can be easiest recognized at the moment when they present themselves as the saviours from trouble when they propose solutions to problems they have created themselves. Even when disguised into small businesses and franchising, the blueprint reveals the writing of multinational companies. So the offered remedy for devalued labour is in further robotisation, virtualisation of reality, universal income and deeper decrease of quality, rising privatisation of resources by genetic manipulation and patenting of reality as, they convince us, this makes everything more accessible and fights pending famine. It may well be just the contrary and yet, public memory institutions will hardly utter a word like it did not happen before in many ways.

#### **4. Why would the libertarian world be concerning museums?**

So, knowing the context matters. The cultural or creative industry has been the rightful reality but at its fringes and in some of its core areas, the society took care that creativity would not depend entirely upon the whims of any individual or a group. Even socialist countries were to some degrees tolerating this freedom. The western democracies respected an array of practices, from philanthropic to entirely public financing.

But, still, what has this to do with heritage and museums? Simple: the very idea of heritage is transcending the particular and extends into collective and public. Heritage is about value systems. Protagonists, be

they institutions or occupations serving it, - change, but values systems live and govern us. The world not only became managed (what I naively thought in my PHD to be the call for responsibility) but became constantly re-invented, registered, classified, catalogued and then appropriated as ownership, bought, concessioned, “genetically” managed and therefore rightfully owned. Identity has been historically misused for nationalist and economic conflicts. Culture of heritage, or (what it should be defined into) public memory is built upon the basic human need for peace and harmony, for continuation and flourishing of differences as of richness, be it nature of culture. Funnily, most religious people that thank their creator god(s) for the beautiful world, are the most ominous hypocrites. Their monopoly over the God(s) usually excludes others, - exactly that lavish inherited God-given richness. While the three main religions (claiming that God is one and being on bad terms with each other) may be still contemplating the mathematical truth behind it, we may rightfully claim some significant space for public spirituality, because it is exactly that claim that matters. The secular world knows that heritage is but the well-chosen, profoundly studied, attentively cared for and generously communicated wisdom. A responsible and ethically founded human experience.

In brief, what has become a ruthless monetisation of the world, tends to end up as a clearance sale of values, its institutions, its collections and its rights to a public mission. Who will own our memory? Will human beings become obsolete? That “revolution” may pass easily under the societal radars as we fumble with disputable AI, genetic manipulation and planetary mega-brain as a merely technical “revolution”. Much more is at stake. As we are being reduced to the *hyper-mnesic*, autistic character from the “Rain Man” movie, we might still contemplate, however, whether our heritage may hold some superior wisdom than fun stories for tourists that we finally appropriate as a cosy truth. Funnily, all dictators be them old fashioned ones or hidden behind the curtain of the staged democracy see heritage and issuing identity, as their mightiest, ultimate tool.

That engineered consent to the unstoppable right of ownership goes so symbolically well with the basic procedure of science, - cataloguing the world seemed like the first phase of possessing it. The changes seem to

be irreversible. The subjugation of memory institutions may well be just a technical fact on the way to the ownership of the minds.

## 5. The value framework is always political

Beyond certain basic education, we all form our own knowledge “bubbles”, or quanta, particular compilations of human experience that become uniquely ours, sort of our ever-changing “private” cognitive clouds and pulsating mental maps. All of them, any of them, no matter whom they belong to, - they deserve a chance of sharing, and all take part in an immense “parallelogram of forces” that brings about resultant vector(s) representing the magnitude, direction and choices... Any person, community or culture is a unique amalgam of very different experiences. Its frequencies, densities, prevailing tones or types of imagining make us so different, sometimes in the invisible subtleties while at other times differences amount to represent specific civilisations.

Such prevailing patterns of thinking and values dominate the basis of culture and identities; the organisation of any society is about it and stems from it. The span of organisational variants ranges from intentional chaos (which some call liberty) to forced order. Both political options claim to represent the rule of the majority and believe to be able to stop the processes where they choose. Historically, both systems have had the disguised elites that hijacked the mandates from the “masses” and ruled in their name. If we limit the critique to the West, which seems to be fair, we are talking about ochlocracy, the rule of the mob by its quality, seemingly obsessed with human rights and justice. It is always, except in occasional cases, about interests, staged democracy being a mere tactic of it.

The illusions fed to the masses of the precariat are masking the true power of the obscenely rich but false elites hiding behind the appearance of the staged reality be it news, events, happenings...even conflicts and wars just as well as the tricks which seemingly advocate peace. Only the honest *homo faber* profits from the peace; to the ruling war is always the best business, be it as forced elimination of rules or open plunder. The big privatisation of Eastern Europe was one of the greatest plunders in history: deindustrialisation, de-population, brain

drain, deprivation of own banks and resources, privatisation of the functional public sector...

Using the advantage of generalisation to make things obvious let us say that the world today is truly post-democratic and post-ideological. The false elites are always flirting with the social evil of poverty, the cradle of many calamities. So the ochlocracy as a rule of the mob becomes the daily face of democracy: the world of a bland simulacrum, a certain shifted, derivative reality. Such “elites” (by influence and share in decision making) either begin by attacking the culture or, more likely, end by harming it. Any war is like that; any push for power is organized like that. (People from the “first countries”, be they the general public or curators dismiss this reasoning judging by themselves). But, to form a world view and meaningful mindset comprises knowing the world, all of them, - the first, the second, the third, and the appearing, shameful “fourth”. That one is composed of our contemporaries, - continents, countries and communities less lucky by their economic and political past, the suffering society, exposed to badly disguised colonisation, permeated by corruption, poverty and slavery.

Globalization is effectively functioning only in the interest of global corporations and as internationalisation of cultures. Most cultures suffer certain schizophrenia as a widening divide between, on one side, a population culturally estranged by the international media-generated “culture”, and, on the other, by the radical alt-right identitarian movement. Neither of the two extreme groups would be happy with long term, non-sensationalist, scientifically based discourse of public memory institutions. Heritage institutions are not protected by the integrity of the profession nor isolated from these processes. They are, on the contrary, increasingly pressured to act in favour of particular interests (tourist industry, corporative strategies, geopolitics, nationalist/chauvinist politics).

Deviations are many and varied. To illustrate it we may remember that museum exhibitions are being replaced by professional exhibition-dealing companies, while the expensive and wayward curatorship is substituted by people from media, marketing and instant “cultural managers”. Any ambitious provincial mayor and his administration will prefer to invest a few hundred thousand dollars to have the “sensational” Andy Warhol’s exhibition or one on “Titanic” and receive

50 thousand visitors than fumble with local curator and forgotten themes or geniuses that boost deep local values. This goes as far as macabre, necrophilic exhibitions like “Bodies 2.0”, advertised as “Shocking! Impressive! Incredible” in several European cities. Like instead of embracing some relevant future, we are reiterating the primitive concepts: Barnum was doing the same in his proto museum in The States, back in the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

To illustrate the second “position” it would be enough to follow a rising number of nationalist exhibitions with zealous propaganda of national identity that should stand firm against something or somebody... Like we are warming up for some real conflicts. Instead of protecting and affirming what is the most vital and valuable in identities, they are in charge, some museums fail prey to politically misused overtones. There is nothing wrong with building monuments or making exhibitions but only the sense of measure, calculated for long-term accountability, can protect us from harm by, say, turning masses into nationalist illusions of greatness and uniqueness against dignified, modest pride and sense for diversity. Calibrating and sense of measure do sound as an idealist folly. But thousands of monuments built generations ago got recently demolished. To tell the truth, museums manage often to resist such pressure, seemingly at their loss, because this aggressive energy (and the money and influence that come with it) is then channelled to the streets, stadiums, new “historical” monuments, media etc. Again, if a profession has had existed to insist upon standards, procedures and criteria, if it still could come into being, the care for heritage and identities would not have been hijacked by the radical political right or unarticulated activists. My heart is with the latter, but their solitary act witnesses that they have been abandoned by their museums. Heritage, if exclusive, overstressed and tailored to suit specific interests, myths and narratives, represents the most fertile ground for alt-right or corporative interests. Any society not only requires but deserves a professional response to its threats.

Most of us work in the public domain, some in the memory institutions directly in charge of forming, caring for and communicating the public memory. You must have noted, however, that major social topics are typically opened by the general public or organized citizens, - not by us. We are tolerating the portraits, statues and plaques of slave traders and

colonial despots and similar despicable personalities in our institutions, on the squares of our cities squares. , But, our public lost patience and started to act in the only way it can, - in aggressive, riotous action. That should not be the way in an organized, democratic society, but it is justified in the absence of timely initiative from competent professions. Again ignoring the inert, dismembered memory institutions, in some European transitional countries, the new nationalist, rightist and vulgarly libertarian regimes took the chance to wipe out or distort the antifascist past by massive destruction of reminders: museums, monuments, sites, libraries, archives, names of streets and squares or even the identity of entire cities. In the post-ideological world, this is not truly politics but historical authoritarian templates that demonstrate efficiency in manipulation with the masses. These templates should have been denounced long ago by all those occupations whose task is to record and evaluate the historical experience.

The decades-long formidable phenomenon of museums “growing like mushrooms” has had many causes and motives, some implicit, others tacitly expected to be fulfilled. Decades ago in a text about it, I remarked that not all of them are edible. If people seem to want their museum, who says they have gotten the one needed? Ready public consent should never be taken for granted. For decades the management and marketing (directly imported from the economy) stressed the importance of research of public need, but, sterilized as it comes out it cannot replace the true force of professionalism which forms a clear, brave vision studying the needs of society. What if people do not know how to formulate their needs. All would agree that they need good health but it takes an autonomous profession to construct the public health service. Marketing is first and foremost the quality product. If we want to be loved, we must love, as an old Latin saying claims. To love means first unconditional giving and affectional care. It agrees well with old wisdom. A Buddhist one says that you cannot miss if you are the same as your target. In the world in which your users are tricked, deceived, abandoned and manipulated, living some illusion of democracy in a betrayed society, - true friends are easily sensed. People feel that museums might or should be the place of security and unconditioned giving, but for most, they are not.

## 6. The power of mindset as a basis of usable professionalism

The vantage point does not change reality itself, but our relation to it. I preach some emerging science of public memory and being rather a solitary radical I use the freedom to be occasionally provocative. It is interesting how a different point of view may paint more intriguing, challenging and dynamic picture of a grand process of transfer of collective experience that we classify into overlapping (memory) institutions. In them, - whatever we are and whatever we may wish to attain, depends upon the world around us: the way it was, or it is or the way it could be. Such shifts in mindset, expressed undoubtedly by many, makes us see possibilities and challenges that we otherwise not perceive.

Webster Merriam dictionary says that mindset is “a mental attitude or inclination” say of voters that politicians may like to determine so that they grab or maintain the power over them. It is also the way of reasoning, a certain life attitude, it later explains. So, one can say, it can be fixed, a sort of stable conviction that guarantees the *status quo* (when we want to preserve and continue something worth it) or be modified (when we need to oppose something or adapt to it) to become the most powerful vehicle of change.

A productive, creative, flexible, receptive mindset is like a formula in arithmetic into which one substitutes ever modified values to attain the correct, credible effect, - be able to apply it to any situation. It is also an equation that has to function no matter what changes happen at either side of it. So, not to obfuscate the point I am making, I wish to say that mere *factography* or learned knowledge does not necessarily help or change anything. If you are a trained curator working in the children’s museum, having passed whatever was necessary to provide you with working skills and you happen to dislike children or be indifferent to them, - the whole effort and prospect are in vain. But, loving children is being them, knowing them, finding the work with them pleasurable and fulfilling; that is the mindset more either important than formal education about it or ideal basis for it. In that case, talent or love are enough to present the correct mindset. When there is a conviction and attitude, only then knowing the institution and its working procedures

(what handbooks are about), - becomes important. Maybe the god-given, the talented and the very special among us, may hardly need formal education, but the rest of us, however, cannot do without the training and professional education. We need the regular and organized transfer of the accumulated professional experience. That is one of the obligatory features of any profession.

But only the wider theoretical insight into the society and the way it is managed can help us in building a deep understanding of the society and its functions, - assist us in creating the clear sense of mission. Handbooks are not meant to reach that far as books. A good theory, a scientific discipline, a science maybe, - that can provide us with inspiration and self-assurance as we come to realize that any common good is based upon collective, shared devotion. Knowing that we are not alone, but rather part of a society designated with a mission, acquires the professional consciousness, certain ethics, responsibility, importance, rules and expectations, - that is the way to build any profession.

## **7. Lack of autonomy is always hiding a servitude**

Therefore, both systems are called democratic. So, where do museums stay? With the rulers. Their natural choice would be, with truth, honesty, humanist ethics and virtues of the autonomous profession. Neither of the two extreme systems can tolerate such museums, - representing some independently chosen, researched, cared for and communicated public memory. Sounds ideal to have such a conductor of varieties and curator of values, that like an orchestra, needs to produce wisdom to live by in a harmonious society. This is why heritage activities (new statistical term in Australian governmental documents; elsewhere too, obviously) comprising museums, libraries, archives, digitally born actions, and all similar public memory activities were never enveloped into a common theory, let alone specific science. Such a self-confident and autonomous sector would counter-act and at the threats to collective integrity and sane societal reasoning (say, showing how wars compare to natural disasters and unlike the first can all be avoided). That, of course, cannot be allowed. (Here, only a step separates me from being accused of offering conspiracy theories). How it came that the greedy, gluttonous, mendacious, aggressive, perverted or simply stupid

have so much power over us? How come that we promote the values and lives of so many rascals and no-goods, of unworthy, from decadent aristocracy to mass murderers? Having such a huge, scientifically documented insight into the human odyssey, museums are best when controlled at least by the lack of professionalism and obligatory training and by discouraging their strategic unification with other institutions of public memory. Those who know this are frustrated and trap themselves imperceptibly into slow careers.

### 7.1 “Neutralism” and public intellectualism

In ones' life, one meets a few scientists or artists, as all the rest are craftsmen, followers, imitators, reproducers, many of them mastering their trade quite well. So who are the scientists and artists? The rare ones. Those who change the way we see and understand things. Those who change the world for the better, who are bridges, cornerstones, passages, gates, crossing points, sometimes sensors, amplifiers or catalysers, - always visionary.

If deeds, not the words, are let to speak, the most pretentious among them are the weakest and always somehow disguised and, often, protected by the professional, social or political statuses and titles. In the case of professors and scientists, one can recognize them first by their fateful seriousness and incomprehensible, almost occult language they use. Some are also biased as servants should be. Others enjoy being useless, as the status of “being neutral” acquired some legitimacy: power holders honour them thus getting out of their way; majority falls for the hype of some romantic “right” to scientific aloofness to the problems of the world. Have you noticed how many scientists and artists manage to be so avant-garde that they miss addressing any problem of contemporary society? Or, when they do, it remains a decorative, agreed, properly dosed one: any neoliberal rascal benevolently cultivates some harmless criticism. This way, the illusion of democracy is shared on both sides of the deceiving mirror. Contemporary artists are a case in point, as so many are disguised dissidents, false tribunes, salon leftists, pretended rebels and inactive activists. Their proper, just dose of non-conformism flatters their bosses, - from the obscenely rich who control the society to lesser bosses, in fact, their political, media and

cultural concealers. Like the easy-going scientists, such artists provide them with a plausible public image of width and indulgence. Where should we place the majority of our museums according to this societal reality?

Public intellectuals do not have any more the conditions to dedicate themselves to the public good. If they wish to survive in the privatized world, they have to compromise their knowledge, insight and understanding of the public good. In the last three to four decades, in ways that depend upon the system and the country, the science and the arts as a public good are losing ground and slowly sliding into commodification.

Paradoxically, only the countries which are declared authoritarian, stand a chance to keep public interests outside of the reach of profit, and, for those who know better, even them are wrestling with the rising pressure of seeing culture and science as yet another asset.

Learned material, if not interiorized, if not absorbed at some sub-level of mind (as motivation, inspiration etc.) is either useless or even harmful. As the latter may sound exaggerated, one should be reminded that some of the greatest criminals, be them among politicians, military or businessmen have been very knowledgeable but immoral antipodes of wisdom and honesty. Our collective and public memory, written or carved into statues and plaques, is saturated with such fallacies, becoming recently subject to public protests.

Radical thinking is not there for others to agree, but to persuade others into thinking and reflection, to weighing the options and forming their own opinion; the objective is, not just any, but the well informed, ethical and responsible one. That simple proposal is increasingly blurred by the media denunciations and information manipulation of common sense, like “A cui bono” (Who stands to gain from this?). The greatest existing conspiracy is exactly the tirade of disqualifying any relevant testimony by the etiquette of conspiracy. Museums never made it to one of the possible dozen main features of any profession: autonomy as implied right to offer responses to detected questions and needs in the community that finances them. But again, some did of course, in some rare countries and institutions. Be it museology or mnemosophy, any theory let alone science fails its very idea if it applies only to some. (I have amply written about it, as visible at Academia.edu and at

[www.mnemosophy.com](http://www.mnemosophy.com)). Like knowledge, any transfer of memory (turned into heritage and identity), survives in the long run only upon the ethical responsibility. The re-examination of conscience that took place in the West as a spontaneous civil protest enabled the voices of wisdom from the heritage sector to finally come to the fore. Oxford professor and curator Dan Hicks has written a wonderful book on museum ethics, seemingly talking only about British museums and the criminal raid and plunder of Benin in the 19th century (British museums - The Benin Bronzes, Colonial Violence and Cultural Restitution, 2020).

## **8. The essential role of museums in society or why would we need museums?**

Museums are here to make the world a better place. Why else would they exist? What is public memory there for? To build national/religious identities? Most of the wars were fought in the name of those constructed reasons. Conventional museums are anyhow only expected to support the preconceptions or assist the projected ones. Denied our proper professionalism, they proclaimed themselves some extended scientific elite, there to research the nature of the world. With due respect (while they may contribute to that) – others are created and paid to do precisely that. So, why would museums and other memory institutions boast of being educational or scientific institutions *per se*. One would expect them to be some business on their own, comprising these but taking part, say, in development strategies. Their basic idea was always disturbed by corrupt delusions disguised into scientific fascinations and that basic idea could have been one and only: the noble transfer of collective experience. The memory institutions were supposed to respond to the implicit pursuit of values that merited continuation and were the supposed instrument of survival and improvement. It is so banal to find out that we always tend to smile when photographed. Not meaning to mythicize it, just be reminded: the impulse of our basic survival urge is to leave the best of ourselves behind. We are in a constant game of eugenics: as mankind, we want to be better, but instead of spirituality and wisdom we are either offered vaster oceans of knowledge to drown in, or robots, mutants and cyborgs

to choose from. What we need is simple: wisdom. Responsible, ethically founded and chosen experience of our best predecessors. What new “flowers” on the coral reef know by the self-effacing wisdom, we have to painfully transfer to each new generation.

## **9. Surviving on the endangered planet with the help of professions**

Through the appropriate mindset, we can build up a specific ethos of public service, therefore, an attitude which by itself inspires and guides us as professionals. Either we shall have a well-moderated and reliable process of public remembering so that our entities, be it a family, community or society steadily improve, living harmoniously and in peace, or we shall have an irregular, hectic, manipulated and distorted version of it, leading to social convulsions, unrest, fear, insecurity and conflicts.

Mindset can become a worldview or stem from it. Though liberty has to be universal, we always teach a certain norm, a certain space of negotiated values which the professions, the positive elites, propose that we live by, or rather, that we improve ourselves by appropriating them. So, whatever it may be, the worldview or, closer, the mindset, it is best if it is tolerant towards the otherness and broadly based. It is the mindset that gives the tonality and general orientation to our discourse. Humankind is curiously and incredibly knowledgeable and able to guide innumerable processes in society, let alone in technology. It uses science and all other means to control the processes, competing with nature. But as species, we have so damaged the Planet and our chances that theorists propose the end-of-the species option as the logical outcome. In national parks (different from museums only by size and our inability to put them in a grandiose glass case) we know by personal name and the chip code most of the rare survivors of the endangered animal species. Are museums an involuntary part of the triumphal hypocrisy? The more we talk about the quality, there is less of it, the more we alarm the less we care about the outcome, the more we warn against threats, the more they multiply. Even civil society has been engaged, alas, turning into a highly manipulated public domain. The excuses are manipulative disguises of our values: liberties, economic prosperity, individual freedoms, human rights, - finally all in the name of the huge

privatization. More and more objections are cunningly labelled as radical activism, denounced as conspiracy and dismissed as subversive. Pauperised, enraged and frightened citizens do get radical and rebellious, - and easily become subject to the barbarization and aggressive mentality of the horde. So, leaving the good side of globalisation, - as a certain planetarisation of its inhabitants, - we can resort anew to primitive nationalism and religious exclusionism. Only then can we accept that the entire Planet is turned into an unsafe, poisonous and ugly place. If I am wrong, an authority like Zbigniew Brzezinski cannot be (his latest book carrying the title "The Grand Chessboard: American Primacy and Its Geostrategic Imperatives"). Reading abundant sources of the sort, one realizes that museums, public memory institutions in general, are not meant to decide on anything. Participation in making developmental (and therefore political) decisions brings importance and money. That explains why we do not figure in strategic planning nor do we get (even) decently paid. It is hard to imagine that a memory of any society backing any societal contract, or the simple life of any community even is such a haphazard and unsystematic project.

We all live by some value system. Those who rule us actually rule by the value system that they have either imposed or that we have agreed upon democratically. First, we research, document and select values that deserve continuity, preserve them and mediate them to the community. This is a systemic question of any society. That is what professions do and what they are created for. Public memory institutions cannot take up the task of saving the world but can contribute to it. Citizens cannot defend themselves without being backed up by professions. The system of selective, ethically responsible remembering is an inevitable democratic institute. The velvet totalitarianism is harming the autonomy, integrity and influence of professions with subtle strategies because professions are the best invention in the evolution of society: autonomous, with its own criteria of quality, obligatory transfer of internal experience, its ethics and with its own ideals about the role in society.

To paraphrase the poet W. H. Auden, we are here to make the world better; what others are doing here, as he says, "I would not know". The world in peril should have had a new, coherent profession to upkeep its

diversity and value systems that still make it so unique. Professions possess the authority to negotiate the social contract.

It is quite likely that we are late to build a new profession. Some well-established ones, like that of medical doctors, are undercut by excessive commercialisation coinciding with the destruction of the dominant role of the public health system in health care. It does sound like a utopian ideal amidst the global process of professions' degradation. If doctors and engineers did not make it how could curators? Most probably they could not. It would be wrong, however, to become a curator not knowing about it. Even worse would be to retire from any curatorial position without an awareness of the underlying mission. This justified frustration deserves to be conveyed to all in the (public) memory sector. Unlike occupations, all professions are respected and prosperous, therefore partners in the social contract. They have their own science, obligatory education, autonomy, ethics (wider as the mere code of behaviour), mission, idealist goal, legislation and licence to be practiced.

## **10. The obsolete nature of individual heroism**

The quality of a society can usually be judged by the common definitions of heroism, by what is considered brave and significant in any society. The advance of modern society is exactly reduction of social risk in the open processes of free negotiation and action, without retaliation against dissidents. As much as public institutions and public intellectuals deserve the blame for opportunistic practices and lack of courage, one should also bear in mind that the prevailing "staged" democracy discreetly but decidedly deals with rebellious among them. Individual heroism is very much expulsed from the set of public values. Rightfully so, after romanticism and revolutions are long gone. Not many among the mass public would regard certain radicalism of, say a museum director, in confrontation with the mainstream (politics or media) as an act of justified bravery. Whenever they have chosen to do so there followed either the enraged reaction of their employers or the public. The first is in charge of their power structure and the latter conditioned by national myths and parochialism, and expectation that museums offer myth supportive of their collective ego.

Individual or institutional courage should be respected but what we need is that it becomes a legitimate practice protected by the influential profession and the prevailing mindset in the society. Why would we rely upon solitary uncompromisingness, causing setbacks in career or the family? Many of us know how much families can suffer because of excessive professional engagement, so a convincing performance of an organized profession should provide a safe environment for safe creativity against taking excessive risks. Museum directors and curators are not trained to appropriate some activist stance, but it should be part of their mindset, acquired sometimes by the talent and, regularly, as part of their professional training.

So, to demonstrate courage and independence institutions and their employees can only do it as a system, as an organized profession. To do the same, citizens need a democratic rule. Both do. It suffices for the latter that individuals are allowed to be integrated, independent, free to abstain, resign or simply express an opinion opposite to the higher authority without being sanctioned.

To humanists, be them public intellectuals or curators who are the consciousness of their community, being ignored by the media and being obstructed by the system in providing resources to the projects may become an imperceptible elimination. In some countries, they can easily slip into being publicly badly perceived or typically unable to procure a decent life for their families while trying to exercise scientific and moral integrity in their job. Besides the favourable value system that can improve this, the only close solution seems to be in supporting the active existence of autonomous professions. Whereas this may appear self-understood in Denmark or Finland, it is not so in most of the countries of the world where being free is a painful process of accumulating sacrifice, loss, stumbling over invisible social barriers, fighting for autonomy, - all that often ends in being subtly ostracized.

## **11. The innate cybernetic nature of public memory**

The expression *cyber*, came to mean everything related to or deriving from the culture of computers, information technology, and virtual reality. The rare connoisseurs of cybernetics might rightfully claim that the word with its etymology was curiously hijacked while the science

itself was largely set aside. The somewhat sloppy development of the 3rd revolution usurped the term “cybernetics” from its author (Norbert Wiener, 1948) and the brilliant scientific perspective it suggested only to call in its new meaning denoting its virtuality and versatility. Cybernetics was imported into the humanist sciences in the 60s under the presumption that it would help manage societal guidance systems, but little was proved in practice and the concept was mischievously and unfortunately abandoned.

I regret it ever since, as “cybernetic” was a simple term to signify its capacity of governance, as of guidance of a system. The term and the theory behind describe this vision as applied to matters relating to heritage and public memory. I have spent four decades proposing it, - still very convinced (though unsuccessful) that we need this theoretical argument to attain the status of a profession.

Cybernetics, - often defined as a science about guiding systems, an art of analysis, recognizing desirable development and maintaining the balance by countering the threats. It is about balance and harmony, homeostasis if we apply it to society. Hoping that cybernetics would return I have often written about the cybernetic museum, - the one that actively shapes its present by participating in governing of its community or society. In the 1960s we have been after educational museums, in the next decade, it was cultural action and now perhaps activism, implying will and ability to produce or support social change. If disorderly oblivion or uncritical hypomnesia are detected by society as threats, it logically develops counteractive impulses with the aim to keep, return or simply achieve the balance. Both calamities can be intentional or spontaneous but are dangerous if used for manipulation and enslavement, - as it is often the case. What heritage institutions should do is use their principles of cybernetics to ameliorate the art of guiding and governing society as a system, assisting in managing it towards certain harmony by the use of memory input. The best means will always be communication. They cannot change the world but they certainly can help to make it better.

Museums should be regarded responsibly as adding themselves to the society as a system helping to guide and regulate it. Most of our environment is regulated and maintained within pre-set conditions by the action of cybernetic devices in constantly unstable or in any new

given conditions. Simply, cybernetics is about guidance by counter-active corrections, of knowing where we want to arrive or what we want to achieve within changing circumstances. Any system, as original cybernetics teaches, analyses its state and using feedback information corrects its further destiny. The great starting position is the character of societal utopia we are closest to, if we have retained any coherent one still.

Beyond its applications in technology where its function is keeping the preset norm, in society, in all types of memory that form the one we constantly negotiate as obliging collective achievement, -the public memory, cybernetics is about *homeostasis*, the very same balance that makes the essence of sustainable development. Of course we have to change the Planet being so many and so demanding as human kind, but we need to do it in cooperation with nature, striking the amount and quality of change which deprives neither of the “partners” of its viability. When it comes to memory, of course we shall forget and distort what we have retained according to our own or somebody else’s interest, led by the circumstances, - and will be at unhappiest loss. So, we employ some conscious maintenance of the memory. With the first drawing on the cave’s wall, we started a giant human project in which we select and research and document and care and communicate what we have decided to remember. Each one of us does it incessantly, collective memory does it, cultural memory does it, science and art envelope both our criteria and our mnemotechnique into institutions and premeditations that lay behind them.

All we need is that long term memory in our community or society is of a sufficient quality and nobility to lead us in the direction of our ideals, where our identity lies. As it is obvious, museums are not there to scrutinize others but rather the own society, as a sort of self-knowing and self-evaluation: Like we would be hearing (probably) the oldest moto uniting all philosophies over the ages *Nosce te ipsum!* Know yourself!, as a call for basic wisdom. Others can only be an insight into the diversity as richness, as an opportunity of learning or admiration. All else is simply wrong. Identity, though surprisingly a dynamic variable, must be established in a way so scientifically argued and morally convincing that it provides us with stability and self-esteem, but so credible and honourable that others have no difficulty agreeing to the

values it invokes. So, - that to the first it becomes the basis of the quality of life and to the others a pleasure of richness to know and enjoy and be inspired by. All the notorious branding rests on these assumptions. By the way, when it appeared in the 80s, I felt that as a business it belonged to heritage institutions and not to managers barely accustomed to understanding culture let alone identity. If we were a profession, we might have taken that lucrative and responsible job, mostly turned into a reality show today.

If we all, with the help of the descendants of the victims, built museums for the crimes committed by our ancestors, the past would cease to live as the seed of new divisions and destruction. Museums are a means of continuity of vital forces of identity. All but some. Only museums of suffering and war (such themes can be found in all *musées de société*), no matter how justified, can continue conflicts if they are made uncritically and without all sides participating.

Usually, all we want (purely cybernetically) is to underpin the necessary, useful, and grounded memory, so that the identity the museum is talking about lives on. We always make museums when there is a dying heart of an identity, - not as a replacement for that heart, but as a kind of pacemaker to it, - a reminder and stimulator of its life functions, no matter how changed over time.

The past and death are sinful goals, while the future and life are right. Without this ethical attitude, our memory is not just a memory but can also be harmful.

## **12. Mnemosophy, a name as convention and a signpost**

Knowing the institutional practice and researching the needs for strategies of public remembering may lead to proposing new approaches (heritology /1982, / mnemosophy /1987/). Like with all inventions, neologisms are there sometimes to illustrate or provoke a certain re-direction or balance rather than to criticize. But, I was always serious about the need for real science in our profession. If proposed innovation is too far from the dominating theory and practices it may be severely opposed. Some people and some ideas have that role of constant reminder and quality of being a corrective proposal. Their profit is there, nevertheless, because, as it is said, if you want to know

something, then you should try to change it. My claim was recently refused by an international professional authority on the ground that the term “science” is “never used when talking about the fields of knowledge like philosophy or cultural studies, or museology”. Deriving from an Anglos-Saxon taxonomy often revived in these hypocritical times, by which the status of science is allowed only to the STEM domain, - this persisting conservatism is, nevertheless, embarrassing. It necessarily denies the status to sociology, anthropology or any other “new” sciences from the socio-humanist sphere. The ability to change and advance made us so unique among the species. Can we afford to stop or regress?

Museology is just fine, like all terms if a consensus finds it so, and if we agree on what its content is. That may be the case, but why is it assigned more and more names? So museology is named New Museology, Critical Museology, Post Critical Museology Critical, Museum Studies, Critical Heritage Studies, Radical Museology, Museum studies, Critical Museum Studies, Critical Museum Theory, Social Museology, Cultural Heritage Sciences (Scienze del Patrimonio), or in more recent time, Heritage management / Identity management, Heritage Science or Heritage Studies ... During my career, before and after I attained a certain apostate status I have myself added some more. I taught some as fully approved study subjects (Heritology, General Theory of Heritage, Mnemosophy) and about one I have written a book (freely accessible at my web site <http://www.mnemosophy.com>). Some did not find their ambitions encoded in any variant so have chosen specific terms to fulfil their need for theory (Ecomuseology, Economuseology, special museologies...). All of us, whether openly or implicitly, demonstrated a certain ambition to get closer to a definition that would ( as I have pleaded at ICOFOM conference in Hyderabad, 1988. which was about the use of museology in developing countries) that museology must be a universal theory “that can withstand equally desert drought and tropical rain”. I still think the same and it seems we do not yet have agreed upon any such theory, let alone science. Museology is still misleading any newcomer because the term implies an unspoken suggestion that it is some science of museum institutions.

Archivists, librarians crave for their attributes of professions in their own right. One condition is seemingly the science of one's own, - not the

theory of particular memory practices but a wider one, - able to assist us to formulate the common idealist goal for all publicly relevant memory practices, - also, the ethics of heritage, trying to find the final purpose of societal memory. It is not some “*sciencia generalis*” but a suggestion for the scientific basis of a profession that encompasses various, converging memory occupations, be them called LAM or GLAM, memory institutions, or, as I prefer, public memory institutions. Its term, composed of compatible Greek words for memory and wisdom, suggests exactly what it says: it is a theoretical discipline about quality memory, the one based upon knowledge formed upon responsible, ethical choices, - wisdom, in fact. We have to name and serve our ideals, be them, wisdom or love or justice, - however unscientific and banal they may sound.

Mnemosophy is a trans-disciplinary science of public memory, serving heritage profession, through which society selects, documents, studies and understands its past, its narratives formed through collective and social memory and moderates the continuous formation and societal use of public memory as the contents of the collective experience transfer.

I have followed my fascination for almost four decades in a somewhat wayward, provocative and solitary manner. The heritology that I first proposed (1982) made some success, but mnemosophy (1987) did not. By that time, I was way too far from the mainstream to make any impact. The rather unknown book “*Mnemosophy – an essay upon science of public memory*” (2015) witnesses that well, though it is freely accessible on the Internet since then. I thought, however, that suggesting a clear direction would count. But the conceptual change I was after can be done only when generated within the system.

### **13. Who is the owner of our common memory?**

Ultimately, if we take it without the least ideological implication, democracy is heavily dependent upon the question of property. Who owns your museums, libraries, archives, national parks, protected natural areas, interpretation centres, history trails, visitor centres, monuments and sites? It is rare and unlikely that the answer is simple and obvious, let alone claiming bluntly that “people” is the one. The real

proprietor is, therefore, in control of your public, societal memory, but to quite an extent your own memory. By the nature of things, this cannot be all the same to anybody.

Paradoxically, even if we ignore the fact of ownership, the very character of the Great Greed era manipulates its dependent industries towards excessive marketization. So interpretations can change to suit or boost financial outcomes. Scientists are then being forced into falsifications or are gradually pushed out of the institutions as too expensive. Too often lately we have heard or even seen that “technicians” and communication experts are more appreciated. Maybe AI procedure at the entrance of museums will ensure that visitors get exactly the experience they are willing to pay for. The increasing literature much present on the Internet is “aimed at coordinating the development of cultural and tourism industries”. Bizarrely, the quotation explains the official reasons why China merged the Ministry of Culture and National Tourism Administration into a Ministry of culture and tourism.

Perhaps a strong centralized state can keep such a flammable mixture stable, but the existing division in the West is still some guarantee that profit will not become the master of heritage. Neither culture nor heritage can exist only as industries, or rather, if they do, we even symbolically abandon the democratic character of the social project. It may seem like a political statement, but the socialism of Eastern Europe allowed workers daily access to top culture. Did we have to reject that unique quality with everything that was wrong? Having free access is also legitimacy, much like public health.

Almost all museums in The States are private but run as charities by their trustees. But the temptations of modern crisis and democratic challenges demonstrated how fragile institutions become if exposed to the time of Great Greed (the term is an early proposal of mine but, naturally, others thought of it too). To illustrate how privatisation casts a long shadow, - let us mention the very occurrence of private prisons in The States. This scandalous societal perversion, turned into a legitimate practice, as part of a social context they make a privatized culture or memory transfer seem less Orwellian. And indeed, the state, even to its critics, may suddenly seem as merely a corrupt bureaucracy, not a treacherous gang betraying its citizens. Yes, the Stalinist repression was

worse but we now learn from it, among other ways, from museums of gulags and alike...

Curiously, when the governing forces find it necessary, Adam Smith's 18-century ideas are called in, but they refrain in disgust at Marx's 19-century ideas. Though Marx could not have in mind our notion of civil society, he regarded it as linked to the state and representing the bourgeoisie. In Theses to Feuerbach (No.10), he claims that "the standpoint of the old materialism is civil society", while "the standpoint of the new (materialism) is human society or social humanity". If read it with the mind of a post-ideological (possibly post-democratic) standpoint, it calls for eternal ideals. Have we ever desired anything else? Lewis Mumford (Story of Utopias, 1922) implies that. At best, utopias are ideal visions concerned with the essential values of life.

We are curating values in museums, not objects. If we were curating objects, the academic discipline would suffice for our expertise and our professional virtue would be merely the expert knowledge. If we are curating the past as an evolution of values, academic discipline is not enough to build our responsibility and mission into our output to make wisdom our professional virtue. So objects are not the objective, but people, the quality of their lives and their ability to progress and transfer what deserves to be continued. National or religious identities cannot be at a loss if by definition and their virtue regard others as equal. The obsession with conquest is a sort of Ponzi scheme of development in which the suffering nature and future generations are robbed to provide quick and unfounded profits. In modern society, colonisation was part of its vision of "development", a methodology of power. It is significant that museums have been showcases of this kind of Western progress from the beginning and only now the brilliant minds among curators and scientists (read Dan Hicks' "Brutish Museums") can tell the appalling truth and launch the call for honesty.

The great manipulative doctrine of western democracy is based upon the rule of the majority, upon the illusion of willingness and ability of masses to practice the virtues of harmonious living in an organized society. So, with rare exceptions, any dominant societal system took care to obtain the mandate from the crowd and rule in the best interests of the power holders. They impeccably indicate the weak points in collective psychology use the fetishist and mythical quality of identity to

make it the cause of an irrational threat. So identities are formed through nationalism which always lacks self-criticism and abounds with the fear of others and the different.

Besides, all identities deteriorate and need collective, public care to be maintained. In modern times their violent destruction is rare but colonial ambitions are realised in subtler ways and a global scale. Within the delusive western society, the usual prime cause of the endangering of identities be they natural, cultural or political, - are the interests of the ruling false elites juxtaposed internationally by the might of the corporations and state administrations behind them. The process, even if it may end in the disappearance of identities, is disguised into democratic form.

In a general sense, heritage can be many, - from individual to community's or nation's, - but what public memory institutions are about is heritage as public memory, almost by definition essence of democracy and good government, - the quality essence of harmonious development. To assure that heritage is understood as collective value, itself by nature "of the people, by the people, for the people" does not "perish from the earth" (as famous Lincoln's quotation may inspire us) we need a profession, an organized institutional system to care for it. Looks like too much state and almost communist we have been taught to leave it. The impression is that an unengaged and neutral academic stance is serving the rising vision of the privatised world. What is "public" is supposed to gradually slip into the private domain, but this expectation has an overwhelming nature. Turned into the mindset and world view, it will go as far as water and air, devouring public memory institutions in its progress. This can be done gradually by outsourcing management, reducing curatorial presence in museums, by leasing public institutions or monuments to private entities....

Most of the curators might have learned by now that the pauperisation of the state will quite possibly result in making concessions that destroy the very professional basis of this responsibility. No deaccessioning can or should happen without the profession itself deciding about it. More clearly, deaccessioning for the sake of financing museums is the end of any decent future of society. Within museums, that can be a rare exception, decided by the collective will of the profession, but it needs to be formed first, with all its prerogatives. Private institutions rarely

serve public needs, or they may do, but in a way tacitly agreed as harmless to private interests: much of contemporary art is in the same way commoditized and crushed by the market and media terror of obligatory innovation and excessive, kitschy modernism at any price. The more the myth of modern geniuses is backed up, there are fewer and fewer of them. Why would Banksy be possible if the entire project wasn't a manipulated failure of art? Why is it that authors like Kurt Vonnegut testify stronger to the true nature of art than art museums? Shall we finally curate the entire truth to our visitors? Art is very much a product of the market and prevailing ideology, - like museums, to tell the truth. Or more to the banal truth, we have to interpret Degas as more a symbolic biographer of his time than an artist predisposed to our subtle formal analysis of his extravagant compositions and specific dry palette. That is why I think that heritage should be more often simply termed as public memory. Out of the same reason and sheer extravagance, I have written a book on science that we have the right and obligation to, naming it mnemosophy. Terms are a matter of convention but they should try to suggest a direction in which to go.

#### **14. Plain honesty vs. The inverse value scales**

I always regarded that museums, so packed with reminders of human experience implicitly charged by the task to reveal it, make us more ready to face the challenges or live our lives meaningfully. The eager people in museums often look for that, but it is unlikely that they rationalize their urge. Usually, the museum fills the urge to buy the ready content, often creating cognitive dissonance or simply prevailing with its agenda. Very special museums, compassionate and concerned, offer their visitors the same spiritual fulfillment as any good work of art, a theatre piece, concert or, indeed excellent food or drink would produce. The strive and dedication to quality confirm that this does not happen often enough.

Once too old to continue, former curators turn to reading, gardening or grandchildren - or if they're lucky, all of it. Humanly, that is not bad at all, but their past reaches as far as that. In contrast, a criminal and opportunistic past is always an asset when retiring. A profitable servitude can be reversed into verbal betrayal of former bosses and

turned into money and social reputation. One can recognize the past ambassadors, high government functionaries or potentates of corporate empires taking, this time their second trump card out of their long sleeves, and capitalizing their experience by turning it into an academic career even at the public universities. In the hypocritical world, these false penitents who turned into the great liberal mind and progressive professors are even regarded as valuable. In a way, they may better testify against the wrongful or criminal deceptive nature of the activity they have pursued themselves while in business, resulting in ethically repulsive financial and personal gains. Their magic of being faithful husbands while taking their legal mistresses to the mess is nevertheless a remarkable skill. Anyhow, amidst the fascination with the very idea of success, everybody applauds them for that. Private universities and academies are mostly founded on that fascination and thrive upon it. So, we have but a few such defectors from our sector, apart from maybe some curators and directors of contemporary art museums (where money makers often knock at the doors) who turn up in galleries and auction houses. When at its worst, our sector is more attractive to slackers than to rogues, which, in all its cynicism, gets a certain message across. Some curators make it to universities and institutes and so they overcome the frustration when finding out that museums are primarily communicational business with an obligation to science, rather than vice versa.

Given the privilege of non-scientific discourse, allow me to remind you that worthless and bad people use the same language and same learned and wise words as the most valuable among us may do. Most of them are masters in verbalizing the virtues, an art that has become quite an achievement of (western?) hypocrisy; it is now, in the times of fake news, of post-truth and post-fact, being perfected.

Is it not the basic truth that we have to affirm and defend heartily, that museums (public memory institutions) are to be an example of credible discourse? If possible, following the Latin proverbial plea: *res non verba!* Deeds, not words. Research of public opinion demonstrates that people trust museums almost more than any other public institutions. We daily hear the most compromised persons speaking the words that they have the least right to utter. No religion approves gluttonous, vainglorious and authoritarian priests. Such are easy with words and

hard on being examples. The excessive richness of billionaires is the fault of society. Though being rich by itself is not a sin, possession and ownership cannot be a social ideal. We need to prefer the modest and humble because they can reject privileges and make ethical choices even if that may be counterproductive for their careers. They refuse what is improper and resign when forced to compromise their morality. Moralizing has been rightly unsympathetic but honest people and honest museums are the reality and desired one, at that. That can and should be said in museums too. Why would a largely disputable television be braver by claiming (rightfully) that “history is a crime scene”? We never dare to say it but, paradoxically, it is us who have the arguments. And yet, one famous commercial TV channel does it, fighting smartly for the attention, by offering a common got taken away sense reasoning about, otherwise mythicized past.

Kenneth Hudson's favourite syntagm to describe a job well done was commenting that a certain museum is an “honest” one. Elaborating his vision for my audiences I tried to lecture upon honest museums. It is not so difficult to imagine an unpretentious friendly institution sincerely interested to serve the needs of the community of its users. Is it a moralist tirade to praise honest among people? How unscientific and unimpressive, one would probably comment! A museum from Luxembourg sent a Seasons' greetings card. Kenneth received one and commented on it in one of the EMYA bulletins in March the same year “A museum that does all these things is surely fulfilling its purpose”. The museum stated that it “hopes that their patronage of the museum will:

- help them to rediscover their roots
- forge stronger links with the past
- experience a sense of change
- satisfy their curiosity
- calm their anxieties
- make them become aware of new trends
- strengthen their beliefs
- renew their ideas
- awaken their creativity
- anticipate the future
- breathe the atmosphere of happiness

I have included it into my lectures on the quality of museum product as a slide titled „The dynamic quality“, - a direct reference to R. Pirsig's „metaphysics of quality“ (Zen and the motorcycle maintenance, 1974). This remains a theory of reality, based upon holistic apprehension of virtues other than subjective/objective mindset, and compatible with the understanding of the true nature of the museum. Museums are not about the past but about the present. Their connection with the past has hardly any more connection than Michelangelo's sculptures with the Carrara quarry. But still, the past may be more like a mine from which we will, long and painstakingly, first extract ore (knowledge, insight) and then precious metal - in our case wisdom with all its glorification of virtues. Pirsig calls them *quality*, while Hudson, speaking about the proactive and counter-active understanding of museums, calls good museums *honest*, like would be speaking about the virtuous among the humans. No profession implies that its members could be selfish and socially disinterested and yet correct and plausible. The professions exist to run society, therefore for the common good. A profession that would deal with public memory implies honourable people and such institutions. It should be hard to imagine a real curator with the mindset of taking and not giving. A great curator cannot be but an honest person. The entire innovation of ecomuseums was, in essence, about that mindset.

