

Public memory – origins and reflections

by Tomislav S. Šola

a lecture made in Maribor, Slovenia, 2012

1. Memory

The subject of memory in the society of total recall becomes a multiple issue. We have the ability to remember literally everything with complete, detailed accuracy. We have realized the ancient dream which implied that perfect memory is attribute of wisdom. This phantastic attainment can serve many purposes. For the moment we know that quantity is not a guaranty for quality. It can drown it. We also realised that that interpretation of memory objects (or units, probably *meme* as it will be explained later) not only can be a way of apprehension but a wicked means of manipulation.

In the legendary Roman book on the art of memory, of the lost title and named by the dedication it bears (Ad Hereniam), memory is the fourth art of rhetoric, a “treasure house of inventions, the custodian of all the parts of rhetoric”¹. Unlike we usually think, the Ancient world did have more than transcribed and the lost writings. It had its art of memorizing (*ars memorativa*), growingly structured teaching of its secrets and the grand masters of this art. Aristotle wrote what was later translated as a book “De Memoria”. Cicero (De Oratore), Plinius, Seneca, Quintilian, Petrarch, Thomas Aquinas..... Most of the great masters were able of demonstrating fascinating feats which nowadays seem impossible. F.A. Yates says Simonides was the founder, Tullius the best teacher and Thomas Aquinas the patron saint. When the fascination with this art finally died with the modern times, memory forever stopped to be a triumph of exceptional minds who developed a phenomenal ability. In the hands of great masters, memory was more than ability to retain facts, - it was the formal framework for wisdom. In Renaissance Giulio Camillo, as a great connoisseur of *ars memorativa*, admirer of its great masters, created according to this art of artificial memory a real locus, a “Memory theatre”, which offered images and texts so arranged in a memory structure that they would represent the creation of universe in seven grades. It was still prevalently Christian learning about virtues, practiced and theorized by Romberch (German, at the beginning of 16 century) and Rosselius (Florentine, by the end of it) known as “Dominican art of memory. The art finally died away with rising mass production of

¹ Yates, Frances Amelia. The art of memory. University of Chicago Press, Chicago, IL, 1974.

knowledge entrusted to easily reproduced books. The *coup de grace* to the cult of memory was the invention of chip and all we witness as IT. Electronic technology turned memory into goods and its massive production devalued its quality to the ocean of trivia. Perfect recall proves to be unselective and therefore unusable unless there is a special effort in searching for the quality. The memory is now, technologically speaking, on unlimited disposal to anybody. The motivation to remember by using own brain has never been lower. With it vanished also the need to evaluate, to compare, to use associative and emotional powers and talents to create from it questions, solutions, assertions, doubts, - reactions of a creative human being. It became not only saturated with banality but also short, fragmentary and uncritical. People so deprived of their own human performance, can hardly formulate any request to the institutions which are supposed to be social functions for some aspects of common good, - a social, public memory.

Plato thinks that the soul's true knowledge consists in recollection of ideas². This is so important that, if taken really into account, would change all the institutions of public heritage. In this sense, Aristotle is the choice of the modern world as his notion of memory was very much sensory and technical, - far from Plato's implications of a knowledge derived from forms or moulds of ideas that are latent in our memories. If understood this way, Yates³ seems to support the attitude that moral knowledge and the need for it is latent. This is very important because it may mean that memory institutions are extensions of this right and this need for moral, socially efficacious memory. St. Augustine⁴ conferred upon memory the supreme honour of being one of the three powers of the soul. Memory, understanding, and will, which are the image of Trinity in man", according to the latter.

We come to the world equipped with basic "programming" and the need to upgrade it. In it there is a search for sense of human existence, the fear of the unknown and a fascination with ability to create the good and bad, - all but the essence of human condition. This book will sometimes claim and sometimes imply that we have to go back to primary meanings of memory in the society, when it meant an ambition to wisdom, a noble knowledge, - not just any. Boncompagno⁴, a scholastic from the first half of the 13. century says what modern scientists have themselves arrived to: "Memory is a glorious and admirable gift of nature by which we recall past things, and we embrace present things and we contemplate future things

² Yates, Frances Amelia. The art of memory. University of Chicago Press, Chicago, IL, 1974. p.37

³ same

⁴ same

through their likeness to past things. The newest research demonstrates that no single individual experience, however insignificant, happens without being immediately “scanned” through entire memory, compared and evaluated, and then the reaction is formed, mostly in a particle of a second. That might be one of the answers for the seemingly unused immense capacity of human brain. There is no better inspiration for understanding the true nature of the collective extension of the individual brain: public memory, the conscious part of the collective memory, the one intended for giving responses.

2. Collective memory

Is any social memory also collective? Hard to say. Halbwachs seems to think so⁵. Connerton⁶ claims that. Social memory is dispersed among groups, individuals and media. The main difference between this memory and the public one is that it is spontaneous and natural and the latter artificial and highly organized and hierarchical; typically it does not comprise complicated systems of recall as any artificial memory would. The high regard of memory in Christian learning and practice was constant, but all world religions function in practice as giant memory systems. Much could be said about their books and constant obligation of returning to them and learning them if not by heart then as specific structure of obligatory returns to its parts. All of them have their calendars of rituals which direct sense and implicit requirement is to secure compactness of value systems on daily basis, as the weft of the collective identity they present. The like structures have been created by the ruling class of nation states. The issuing political mythology established commemorative, evocative events and ceremonies, - the network of dates in the calendar that constantly bring to mind important battles, tragedies, victories, sufferings and triumphs, so that collective memory is managed towards projected state useful for the ruling political options.

Whether this be social memory, mass memory or just a collective memory might have implications, and this is why memories are many and the literature is growing⁷. Curiously, the theme stayed attached more to psychology, sociology and even history than to occupations literally in charge of it. They were for century concerned with their own history, methodology

⁵ Halbwachs, Maurice. *On Collective Memory* (ed. by Coser, Lewis A.) The University of Chicago Press. 1992.

⁶ Connerton, Paul. *Kako se društva sjećaju*. Antibarbarus, Zagreb, 2004.

⁷ Olick, Jeffrey K.; Robbins, Joyce. *Social Memory Studies: From "Collective Memory" to the Historical Sociology of Mnemonic Practices*, *Annual Review of Sociology*, Vol. 24. (1998), pp. 105-140.

and technology, posing the fundamental questions only within the strait theoretical framework of their particular occupational theories.

Memories thus can be many: individual, collective, cultural, social or public. Collective memory appears to be, according to the ancient distinctions, a natural memory, rather chaotic, circumstantial and optional. Much of collective memory is inbuilt into what is afterwards recognized as public memory, as it appears to be more useful as *zeitgeist*, a context, than, say, an identity. It would seem correct to regard collective memory as unarticulated or dispersive whole spontaneously mounted, transferred and practiced. It is less complex than collective experience and surely constitutes unstable body of knowledge, but collective memory was all there was: the ancient world did know the artificial memory too. The part of memory controlled by religious objectives though not separated, functioned for different needs, being early institutionalized and instrumental to their mission. Collective memory inherited by Renaissance and The age of Reason has been devastated by Church, history and science. Once we have reached the era of conviction that we can discover the secrets and laws of nature to finally govern it, the growing secular power (replacing the religious, ecclesiastic culture), profited from a Biblical command and implied right to master the World. The myth of science started to grow. The collective memory and thus haphazardly stored experience, being the result of spontaneous activity of unlearned persons, seemed rather foolish, superstitious and irrelevant, and was gradually expelled by disregard, neglect and even punishment. The oblivion imposed started the process of depreciation that only in the last decades reversed. So the popular medicine, like traditional farming latter on, became obsolete and forgotten together with the inbuilt wisdom that defined relatively well the place of humans in the nature. Since 18th and 19th century, speaking about the Western world, the collective memory has little relevance and congruity to be held accountable in the modern society. This space has become the polygon of changing mythologems for the lucrative purposes, a sort of constantly changing, seductive and deceptive vanity fair: as production of knowledge grew so grew the need to memorize. The memory institutions were invented to take care of it.

But inventing the ways to record the growing memory required social development. It was stemming from gradual industrialisation and the rise of idle entrepreneurial elite and powerful middle class. Others followed as the literacy was only way to impose nationhood, state and qualified working class to serve growingly sophisticated production processes. Social memory is what groups, from a few individuals to the organized whole of a state choose to remember.

It is unstable and manipulated quality though in many cases we can recognize the memories generated by a class or social layer, by minorities or other political group⁸.

What was a rightful insatiable appetite for more knowledge and more memory plummeted in the 20th century with the information revolution and invention of micro-chip. We are facing finally the ultimate questions upon the nature of memory. More is not enough and choose is not a term that solves any problem of quantity. Like the character from *Rainman* we suffer, from fatal and disturbing *hypermnnesia*. This illness of modern society combined with unprecedented ability to change, indeed, manipulate memory by changing algorithms, - has brought further concerns that may impose some (at least, seemingly) simple solutions. Living in the turning point of its fate, mankind will either learn basic lesson and grow up or will collapse into a most daunting barbarism and slavery ever seen.

The social memory *stricto sensu* should be probably assigned to ideological structures when studying society and thus prevalently may be pertinent to sociology or political science. The social memory is therefore basically concerned with societal structures as producers and users. Cultural memory would regard the totality of what seem to differ us from other animals and among ourselves as the object of its interest. It seems to be of great help to go through literature upon memory, but besides understanding better its paramount essence, one is exposed to puzzling variety of overlapping notions.

3. Tradition

Tradition is a liturgy of the everyday, - a try to give it a more solid and reliable structure by expected, repeated “communication” with collective self at whatever level, be it a family, group, community or nation. As well as liturgy in its own right, it gives the feeling of long continuity, stability and a privilege of some special “language” and relation with collective –self. It can be literally any mutually shared, gathering or unifying idea or concept, perceived as important enough for the coherence or spiritual survival of the group. Tradition, as it is based upon obliging rules, forms and timing, thus appears as a sort materialized, captured Eternity, - often, specially in religion, some kind of unique way of accessing the Divine. Social and psychological values and uses of tradition are innumerable. The practice of it, declarative or tacit, is taken for a sign of adherence and belonging, very often, not only to the group or community but very much to the mindset or the value system. This explains why

⁸ Connerton, Paul. *Kako se društva sjećaju*. Antibarbarus, Zagreb, 2004.

tradition, which is sometimes only a building element of heritage and sometimes only formal method of emanating identity, - enjoys such a general approval and public importance. It strongly resembles or even acts as heritage or identity themselves. Knowing certain traditions in minute detail and the ability to practice them correctly is almost a password to belonging to the culture of their collective owners. It behaves as a certain persisting order, the relationship between parts within a whole that stays functional as long as the order is there. This is why we know so many occasions where traditions are defended by weapons if necessary, - sometimes only to retain certain *status quo*, certain social order of power relations. It is important to understand, as opposed to laymen that there are bad, brutal and harmful traditions that do not deserve respect. Yet, hidden in the own cultural tissue, they cannot be denied or opposed by the outsiders and stay the part of the human right to difference.

What we often call tradition is but a well filtered and packed public memory assuming the role of a survival tool, adding the survival quality to any endeavour. This filtered experience thus became the required, obliging knowledge in doing things in a “proper” way so as to assure the success within the given climate, culture or some other general circumstances (be it building a house, rising the cattle, working the land or marrying and rising progeny). The terms do mingle and overlap so the essence of this sort of tradition is actually the heritage. When tradition becomes *the choice* to take in the future it turns into heritage. Much of tradition is far from presenting any choice or liberty. Tradition, as mentioned, concerning a collective, can become, like an individual habit, - an iron shirt: protecting but also immobilising. Some traditions survived by far the circumstances that created them so be it folk songs, heroic songs, patriotic songs, - some do call for blood revenges and brutal vengeance. When these traditions are practiced or continued they are usually adopted by highly problematic, extremist, socially or politically disturbed individuals or groups. The calling upon bright, impeccable, heroic ancestors who, of course, could not be wrong, because “tradition cannot fail”, is done under the egide of heritage but it is not the heritage. It is either useless or harmful legacy to be renounced, demystified and dismantled to its banal elements (circumstantial or true but) of the former, now inexistent reality⁹. Contrary to the prevailing

⁹ Books and museums (as the collective but also public memory), accompanying my education taught me to hate, in this order: Turks, Hungarians, Austrians, Italians, Germans, Serbs....poisoning my soul until much too late in my growing up. I recovered. Most of my companions never managed. I have achieved to feel repulsion and disgust only against bad, mean and vicious no matter who they are, and especially if they are of my own

convictions, traditions are not permanent or stable. They are rather pragmatic solution to some life problems or dilemma: they are a well tested protocol of possibilities. They are always a weight on the neck to all heretics and creators (like there is a big difference between the two). So the so called traditional societies are unlikely whereabouts to them.

3. Heritage as immortality

Many, even in “professional” circles take little care to understand the ultimate nature of heritage which causes ever more trouble to their service to society. Lacking a convincing theory and equally useful definitions, heritage means to everybody what one finds useful to believe it is. While being so, it is in a sense almost improper to oblige anybody with unifying definitions. Art-historians will have it as artistic “patrimony”, politics will see in it set of inherited obligations to the glorious and illustrious ancestors, archeologists would perceive it as remnants for a social and cultural forensics, anthropologists as a material for comparative analysis of cultures and so on... The attractiveness of a good, purposeful narrative, usable in some aspirations or plans have been the trigger of much interpretation of history. Traitors and heroes with their fame were often just a circumstantial outcome of such needs, real or created ones, in a way the consequence of a good story being just built or guarded and adjusted. The facts are often a good inspiration for history.

But the true meaning, colouring all smart scientific derivations is that the idea of immortality is basic, latent, almost instinctive, involuntary aspiration of humans and heritage seems a tool and expression of it. It is an immediate continuation of biological and social basic designations, that one is alive and aware of his/hers status among others. Of course, immortality seems impossible even to the entrepreneurial technocrats who see it as the ultimate goods for sale. Its improbability, - the grotesque and monstrous nature of it entertains and seemingly paradoxically, gladdens the humanists. Though the realisation of eternity being is impracticable and vain, it does not mean that it will be ignored: common or extraordinary by their status, humans will continue to have temptations. Ego refuses to die. The aristocracy is long time gone from the scene where it played the constitutive role. The aristocrats today are tolerated by the majority as a matter of some benevolent curiosity or taken seriously only

breed. Their moral misery should be taken as a personal insult. I am supposed to share with them not only the same heritage but also the identity. The moral and intellectual authority should colour the brand, so it is a constant fight. Any country is like this, - to some extent, at least. Public memory institutions are force behind the hope.

by snobs and particularly insecure nouveau riches. And then, paradoxically, one has an upsurge of genealogy and heraldry like anybody cares again. Well many do, but not so much in the line of what aristocracy historically really was, but more as a courting the Vanity: in the world so unstable and quick to be anonymous is attribute of the death. Discovering the long line of ancestry at least is what gives some the feeling of belonging, fights loneliness and brings importance to our obviously unimportant lives in the crowd of growing and mixing billions. Many want their heritage to feel secure again and to prove their importance. In a city where some live there may be the prevailing majority of inhabitants who are immigrants and have no relation whatsoever to their present (and future) life environment. Busy with survival and acquisition of necessities and caring for the rising family they cannot care less for locals' long traditions and their prestigious heritage. Today, while the city government is still in the "local" hands, their museums and other heritage places are expected to play the role of inclusion, of certain "raprochement", but tomorrow will be different, maybe dramatically different if a strong profession (able to create a movement of lay followers) does not take it into its hands.

Human nature will sublimate this strive for Eternity into the endless ways of extorting or negotiating whatever is possible from the arrogant, aloof goddess of Eternity. Once we plunge into this, it may rightfully seem that most of human existence is marked by this frustration. Isn't the immortality the reason for human reproducing. The more the humans are closer to the primary drives, the more this mechanism works for them. At least the collective "them" will thus survive forever. Most of the wars still fought have this strong element of earning the space and the energy of the others that supports the survival project of their own group. With the so called neo-liberalism, the world collapsed into the collective psychology and social relations resembling those of medieval age, a greedy, primitive involution. Eternity is a sort of universal strive: it can demonstrate itself as a claim for unrivalled religious orthodoxy and privileged position with the God(s), constant claims for roots longer than others', rights and claims deeper and more justified. Like our animal ancestors we still leave traces of our presence and rights by marking our territories, in the physical and mental space. Our heritage, our culture inherited and passed on, with us inbuilt, is often regretfully the only consolation for such a short-term individual life.

The other way of achieving eternity is through the creative and exceptional deeds that survive their authors. Some rare will do it in a self-denying manner, while majority will strive to

accomplish the actions and positions of social and political power in a way that history loves to remember, that collective memory recognizes as a good story. (Modesty, like many other virtues is so much verbally supported and praised that it clearly reveals how scarce it is in the real-life circumstances. However, cultivation of virtues seems the one way to Eternity which seems superior to all by the fact that it is available to each and everybody. Namely, in all their variety, importance and consequences, as attributes of the divine (eternal!) projection of ourselves¹⁰, they are an obvious opportunity at all levels, - small and grand, open to the poor (as modestly as the circumstances allow) and to the rich and might (as modestly as they can fit it in the space mostly occupied by their ego).

The blessing of the welfare society is in the widening space for the virtues and tranquil existence where fear and insecurity have little chance with the omnipresent danger of primary instincts. The owners of chaos, be them just impulsive bearers of this medievalisation (to avoid the conspiracy theory), or victims of their own greedy managerialism, take our reality from us, - the one in which we can rationalise even our strive for Eternity. That is the level of our own daily, seemingly banal and yet the only reality that belongs to us. The inbuilt curse is that “banality” of basic honesty and unpretentious human relations is proscribed these decades, hence chased out of its own domain: our lives. We are supposed to strive frenetically to living life of famous and this is done by the terror of frightening banality, the inclusion of no-quality “ideology”, of manipulating ideas of freedom and free expression into “anything goes”, “nothing matters”. Democracy is turned into a travelling circus and proclamation of *karaoke world* meaning that we are all just ignored, undetected celebrities. In the daily reality in which we are all constantly made selfish, insecure and alone, - ethics is arbitrary and any culture just a burdensome set of rules and incomprehensible values. That is part of harrowing neurosis which is becoming more common. Discrete quality of everyday life looks more and more like a failure. Heritage? That is probably the mechanical torso of a rodeo bull installed in a pub.

4. Corrupted heritage

When heritage is corrupted it means that it is used to suit particular interests though its sources and nature may be of public origin. Heritage as public memory is the one created by the society, for the society, - so to say a public asset in itself. Public interest is relatively controlled in the institutions but public memory spreads beyond institutions. Even if private,

¹⁰ Joffe said that the only eternity we have is that of human race.

heritage made public makes a part of public offer. Different industries (heritage, tourism, leisure, entertainment), political ambitions, mere profit or sheer vanity may compromise it.

Heritage is often understood as the right to possessing, it itself makes right and therefore belongs to the powerful, rich and wellborn. Heritage is thus formed under the curse of frailty of human nature. The ultimate objective of our biology should be the health as the happiness should be the aim of our sociology. Yet, we easily imagine how much is done against health and happiness, - a circumstance rather illogical but true. So, instead of serving health and happiness as the quintessential societal project, the accumulated memory proclaimed common to certain community or group, i.e. heritage turned all too often into violation of freedom, - own or then other's. The culture of conquest is based upon high expenditure of resources, be them humans or energy. Thus, interpreted as the account of conquest and domination, of self-actualisation, - heritage rarely attained the quality of wisdom. As it is rather evident, its only plausible and sustainable function is continuation (of selected, generative values) and survival (of the identity it refers to). The survival is, of course, both spiritual and environmental, - based on inner harmony and harmony with nature. Both history and heritage have the same source, only history requires knowledge to support itself whereas heritage may depend upon ambitions and frustrations, on pathetic perceptions of self, - it is less obliged to facts. To some extent history is the "crude matter of heritage", superior by its official standards and expectations, but "further the history the easier the heritage" (Lowenthal). The claim is, the lack of reliable knowledge makes it easy to construct more. However, there is much folly and manipulation in history because the manipulation there, in the "crude matter" matters more; it seems to be more efficient, as much heritage may be honest and well conceived.

Those who passed wars, the situation where the worst in society, in culture in history in human nature has its moment of unrestrained vice, - they know that history offered at least as much as heritage to the both, reasons for war and to the crimes and atrocities. Cynically, it seems that "politicians" preferred "historical" arguments while priests and ordinary rascals found themselves more at ease with ("softer") heritage, as an efficient way of manipulating majority into the warfare¹¹. The worst crimes ever were committed in the name of god and

¹¹ I did say at the beginning that this is not a scientific book. If it were, I would have been prevented from making the matter-of-fact simplifications. These simplifications do enter heritage and tradition and represent a wealth of popular wisdom scattered beyond the usable form: collecting, storing and communicating it would make a strong

fatherland: both of them memory wholes composed of history, heritage and traditions. The proverbial victim of any war is the material substance of heritage: destruction of monuments, museums, natural parks...The evil is too shrewd not to feel that this is nearly as good as destructing the souls of the enemy, like the rape as almost compulsive desecration of the foe's genetic heritage.

The formation of heritage, out of the immense tissue of collective memory is thus result we have after it passes through many sieves. It will finally always be a result of the dynamic field of power relations in the society. Thus, seemingly illogical, heritage may overshadow the true culture as it is formed upon our needs. The power virus of particular interests all too often changes the character of the needs so that they may retain the outer form but are malign. Thus a patriotic feature of culture stemming from the natural urge for security of belonging can take a solemn tone of "*aris et focis*" (the altars and hearths). This emotional momentum is used, usually after the starting romanticism, for building structures of (subtle?) hatred and intolerance against the particular others. Unfortunately the irresponsible "objective" scientists among curators have it all clear and obvious. Ultimately, even the most exact among them all, - physics can hardly claim objectivity. Happily enough more and more curators realise that they are there to offer guidance and criteria in appreciating public memory as heritage. Their objectivity is ethics and humanist responsibility. That is probably the most simple way to describe their professional position.

Partisans of all creeds use heritage to preach their own virtues and incite animus against others.

3.5.5. Heritage as industry

Heritage does narrow down the ambitions of objectivity and though it can be quite wide a configuration its general ambition may be manipulated into attractiveness, exclusiveness and particularism that are not sympathetic. As already said, if we practice heritage as yet a new cultural industry it then disqualifies itself in aspirations to objectivity. While UK is notorious

feature of the future, cybernetic museum, - the one that cares and matters. Of course, wars are a complex: the stakeholders are many and scattered.

for heritage industry, it is in rising elsewhere, specially, alas, in transitional countries of Europe.

Ancient mines, slave markets, prisons, battlefields, execution sites, dungeons, torture chambers, - have become places of interest, a toponymy of public memory. But, all have suffered a sway towards immediate effects that can be at some point cashed in. Many turned into just another cultural industry (heritage industry), while some have slipped into entertainment industry.

If shown without piety and decency, such places of mass execution or suffering with grim evidence there collected, become a themed attraction with a themed shop, cynically topped by a café or even a restaurant; such places are morally horrifying and represent an offensive kitsch against good taste and compassion, or simply decent human loathing at the abysses of human nature.

Liberated from the restraints of culture, that is, - from its sense of value, measure and ethical responsibility, - heritage becomes just another marketable good with all the consequences. Integrity and dignity become relative as profit margin justifies the consequences. Such is the character of the Great Greed Age. By becoming “attractions”, places of tragedy and infamy betray their powerful potential. When hard concessions are made to the sensations and a cheap, rude stimulus seeking public is being curry-flavoured there, - how can shame and awe at human misdeeds hover upon them? In a society of lowering standards, catering to bad taste pays better. It is also easier to rule over ill informed and politically illiterate and so the (scientific) history and public memory are expelled to the brink of public discourse as burdensome and humdrum knowledge of tedious scientists¹².

Privatized education in such mass media environment can, at its best, create plutocracy because elites grow from the wide basis of reasonably educated well-to-do citizens. Culture and heritage as its part, like democracy, thrive upon quality. Otherwise, they face an involution which constantly feeds the disintegration and decay of the system. We are amidst

¹² David Lowenthal said at Dubrovnik The Best in Heritage Conference, 2005, quoting Hewison that heritage artifice sells so well that "meaningful history has all but vanished from public life". The media have created the picture of scientists, professors and curators as bromides, ultimately useless and incomprehensible; many accepted the so offered lee as a sort of excuse for enjoying their job as sinecure.

these processes. Evidently, we do possess more but overall quality is steadily decreasing or/and withdrawing within the exclusive reach of the affluent.

What seemed the privileged professional domain was discovered by tourism, media and entrepreneurs as increasingly lucrative resource. Relieved of any obligation to science and integrity, they amalgamate and compose heritage in the most attractive, even sensationalist way. They have learned: anybody can do a museum or any other heritage action, temporary or permanent... Lowenthal seemingly implies that there is certain inherent, pervasive, intriguing and mystic attractiveness of heritage that inspires its lucrative exploitation: "The heritage market makes philistines of all of us"¹³. The tsunami of "anything goes" has reached our shores. In spite of tries, Museology conceived as it has been, failed to prevent anything. Rich people, the new among them too, have found again that heritage objects are a good and prestigious investment. Wide public is fascinated by the prices and value of the heritage objects and watches the soaring prices like the growing number and size of yachts in the fancy ports. The difference between them seem to fade anyhow. As heritage is becoming mercantiled, there is also an almost romantic reaction to this: many see or think that selling or buying national heritage is a sacrilege, a blasphemy. A New York gallery director regard it a bad taste to write dollar sign on their invoices: there is some self-understandable indecency there. While maintaining free entrance British museums gain a certain dignity through it and join strong feeling that public services include right to culture and knowledge.

However, the most of the world has not largely reached this point in mercantilisation of collective memory, so heritage is public memory, still a "legitimate" subject of their public institutions.

Will museums and other heritage institutions be forced to retreat into the ivory towers of science remains debatable if we are pessimists. One claim (or expectation) that deserves support is that heritage would withstand the danger and be used in public institutions in a new, efficient, democratic way. We shall increasingly discuss the public memory, taking heritage as its formative and communicational, pulsating form. In some decades, a strong, united

¹³ Lowenthal, David. *The Heritage Crusade and the Spoils of History*
Cambridge University Press, 1998, p.98

profession in charge of it will count the losses, will survey the damage the constructs did to people or to their integrity and will start process of recovery by truth and parallelly, accommodating the taste for attractiveness into the new professionalism: both in absorption and emission. Science and art will have to collaborate upon the same societal project.

5. Public memory

Public memory as the object and product of the related public domain is not the natural, largely chaotic collective memory. It is embodied into organised, intentionally artificial, controlled, research based, mission driven public memory service with its own technologies and methodologies. We shall easily recognize the content of it if we call it, even interchangeably, - heritage. Yet, as any deeper insight may reveal, the syntagm *public memory* implies the consent, tacit or official, that legitimizes its claims and its wide public responsibility.

For the sake of simplicity it may seem practical to stipulate public memory as the one institutions are there for . It is the one supported by history , practiced by public institutions and which represents a conscious scientific, social, political and technological effort, an “official” platform, - a public mind almost. Needless to say, living in, verbatim, - a flux reality, - noting is stable by definition. (The frightening fact is that this plenty of scary dimensions has never had more instable support, almost like our memory could be turned off by a switch or suffocation).

It would be possible to compress, condense and abstract its many possible intellections though into a rather depleted and compromised term of *heritage*. The meaning of heritage is rather uneven: in some parts of the world it is losing momentum and in others gaining. If English would stress the original meaning of heritage, compromised by the heritage industry, they would tend to say *patrimony*. In some countries it still bears a romantic, nationalist aura that museum and arhives, let alone libraries, have difficulty to appropriate as rather unscientific and general. However, popular use is spreading much to the disadvantage of its inherent interests, as leisure and entertainment industry, companies, media and amateurs try to gain profits through the exploitation of it. Cultural (or creative) industries also exploit heritage heavily, also for the sake of profit in the increasingly and ruthless, competition. There is still a chance we secure dignity to heritage against forced commoditisation. So did heritage, that is, those using heritage for profit, by inventing heritage industry. Therefore, until the end of the

book, there will stay an ambivalence between what a term *heritage* brings as still quite expansive in the public domain, and the public memory as a more disciplined yet wider framework of it, - a term rather more convenient for the converging occupations in the domain. Deep below the seeming readiness to regard themselves too as heritage institutions, neither archives nor the libraries (and the hybrid forms of both) are ready for it. Therefore, the syntagm close enough to museums and acceptable to the latter would be that of public memory.

Before we start reflecting upon the implications of importance of memory and its functioning in any given society, it could be plausible to reflect upon phenomenon of history, often a either ignored or overestimated.

Public memory is highly unstable and pulsating set of values: "Active involment distinguishes heritage from history" because "making history" and "steering its course" are quintessential HERITAGE activities.... heritage privileges action over books"¹⁴. One has to know that Lowenthal writes this from the situation of a flourishing heritage industry in UK and the notion of heritage without this context and his connotations will have another meaning on the Continent. In another way, history is serious, heritage is profit-making entertainment. But, on the other hand in the very same UK museum studies (that rarely turned into Museology) all became Heritage Studies and multiplied. Logical continuation would be some science of heritage, whatever it may be called. One is inclined to think that like Philosophy, with all its varieties, is universal, so should be any other science. Applying to the central concept and the general features of the practice, this science will have to exist, paradoxically fighting the universal game to save particular identities from the vulgarized process of globalisation. Applied to memory institutions, to the heritage institutions or, to make the profession more evident a framework, - to the public memory sector, - it should be, like physics, good enough for the entire world¹⁵. But, if heritage is more pliable then history then it will be heritage as the object of political manipulation. One could almost cynically presuppose that only statesmen, not the mere peddlers of political influence (into what politics is turning) are up to the task of meddling with history, burdened as it is with scientific obligations.

¹⁴ Lowenthal, David. *The Heritage Crusade and the Spoils of History*
Cambridge University Press, 1998, p.125

¹⁵ Sola, Tomislav. *The Limited Reach of Museology or, can Museology stand sandstorm and tropical rain.* ISS, No. 15, 1988, Varanasi, India

Individuals, groups or media, constantly change heritage. In the world of profit, media immediately grab it to squeeze out of it sensationalist or mean contents, so instead of being a formative, en-culturing, self-reassuring quality for a relaxed living, heritage is perceived as obsession, as nostalgic fascination with the past, as a reservoir of inspiration for the groups and individuals with social disturbances rationalised in intolerance, nationalism, right extremism etc. But, then, here it is, - as a sort of popularized history, as a public memory: agreed, socially responsible, in charge, as any public service would be.

It would be difficult to make practical difference between public memory and heritage. A memory made public, recognized as such and used as common to all is a heritage. Humanity, in its infinite complexity of particular identities and their relationships depends, in its functions, upon public memory. Public memory or, indeed, heritage, is a sort of social genotype, a set of inherited characteristics passed on and yet conditioned and changed by predecessors and by the own choices. The entire public memory, though probably not *stricto sensu*, is but heritage, - the communicated memory, the memory in circulation and in process. In this meaning, heritage creates narratives to create soft-power, - the main ingredient of image or brand.

Anglo-Saxon world understands heritage realm already as the defined by the heritage industry¹⁶. Europe and much of the rest of the world understand heritage as living part of the grand whole of culture. This domain is therefore considered, in fact increasingly, a living, creative and development generating agent in the society.

Heritage is a good example of a concept founded upon different phenomena, where the lack of precision in understanding it is still an advantage and a defect. The professionals (to be), have a freedom to take it seriously and, almost like a new chance, as a focal concept of their future and their science (because there is no profession without a serious science in its centre). The others (already) use it as their domain of profitable business. We already have a heritage industry which is a profit-making, heritage based edutainment, just vaguely

¹⁶ One of the best connoisseurs of meanings of history and past, D. Lowenthal has given up on heritage as his two most popular books demonstrate, but the term nevertheless gains momentum and is still alive in his country (UK).

concerned with facts or moral or any other long-term beneficial implications of their activity for the society or community this heritage belongs to.

As no science can be founded upon particular phenomenon, be it a fact or institution, the obvious concept in our case is the wide concept of public memory. Therefore, this common memory is central to any attempt for theory of what is origin of huge configuration of institutions and occupations. Heritage is usually the property of many. It can be shared and combined. It is usually composite and compiled. Its differences often stem from variety in combinations of relatively equal or similar elements. Any particular entity can be composed of same elements and yet in different proportions and thus be, as whole, legitimately different because of it.

When about the definition, the most serious among the authors, like Lowenthal, are giving evidence that most practitioners and theorists are nether clear nor sure what heritage is¹⁷. Is it so much different with defining the past or history? Alas, good insight often puzzles and discourage the lay public by its doubts. So, some practical simplifications are welcome. Why heritage should not simply be anything a community prefers to carry on further from where it is and seemingly wishes its descendants to pass it on? Basically, heritage is the container of knowledge and experience upon past that one recognizes as useful to retain and use, a sort of raw material of specific wisdom that supports the given identity. Following the John Updike's metaphor that compares composing history to packing a suitcase, we could say that this is still more appropriate when describing heritage. If historical suitcase is rectangular, expected type, the heritage suitcase is always a different, strangely shaped one, in fact truly custom cut one, in the form of identity the objects in it should compose.

Heritage is a projection of the socially and scientifically formed knowledge in a form of a value system, i.e. a body of knowledge, experience, style, needs and wishes, formatted mostly into a tradition(s), and implied as our projection of collective self, - perceived as valuable to inherit and to be passed on to the future generations. As history overestimates knowledge, we may use the quotation from McLuhan: "New, simple, and inclusive concepts, make an enormous number of 'facts' obsolete"¹⁸. As we may gather, it is often the ways of thinking,

¹⁷ Lowenthal, David. *The Heritage Crusade and the Spoils of History* Cambridge University Press, 1998, p.94

¹⁸ *The Medium is the Massage: An Inventory of Effects* (with Quentin Fiore) Random House, 1967. p.37

the fashion of reasoning and the quality of ideas (formed upon certain knowledge) that count more than array of facts it were based upon. Same facts, as we have learned in everyday life, may be a basis to a many different wisdom. So, heritage, paradoxically, even if passed on, is never the same.

Heritage is any relatively well defined set of values extracted from collective memory (and culture as its expression), mainly the result of the effort on public memory we estimate worth for continuation in the constant redefinition of the value system(s) that define any communit(-ies) in the present and future. It is expressed in a basic element that we could call *mneme*¹⁹, maybe even better described as sort of *sophem*, a wisdom element of the public memory discourse. Whether this holds truth stays to be proved and described²⁰, but quite likely heritage has its building elements. While public memory is the whole of memory collected, researched, cared for and maintained, - heritage, though being virtually the same, may present its surface, its changing, pulsating programme. A museum, archive or library may have a decades of one programme upon the same fundus and change it gradually or even abruptly (in case of, say, a political overturn) into a different one. The bosses change, value system changes, and even the public memory institution will to some extent, as nothing is stable and inert.

Heritage is a presumably benevolent and well intentioned memory suited to specific collective needs, applying to the set of specificities of particular group or community and intended for the daily use. Heritage is the maintenance of the norm, - tacitly understood, spontaneous or, indeed, in case of the institutions and intentional actions, - openly encouraged. Norm, a term unsympathetic and too “normative” may just be the name for the constant effort to foster the virtues. The implied assumption is not idealisation of human race but a constant strive for qualities of living. Dignity, for instance, is not the virtue as much as it is the right to this quality, a human right and designation.

Therefore, heritage or public memory is also a construct. However, it is implicitly or outwardly proclaimed to be the common obligation and property. We shall do well to claim that public memory might be the justified object of an organised, societal effort intentionally

¹⁹ In Greek mythology, Mneme (Μνήμη) was one of the three original Boeotian muses, though there were later nine. Her sisters were Aoide and Melete. She was the muse of memory. <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mneme>

²⁰ This article is an excerpt from a book „Mnemosophy – the art of understanding memory“ soon to be published.

charged with some idealist projections that one may call a societal project. It is, though, highly arguable if any project of the sort can currently acquire such a critical support to make difference on the world scale. All of them are denigrated by the provoked failure of social state as well as the by the debacle of mismanaged socialism and the so called communism. Namely, public memory was always after some improved, better world, as otherwise it would make little sense.