

The real problem of humanity is the following:

We have **Palaeolithic Emotions,**  
**Medieval Institutions,**  
and **Godlike Technology.**

— E. O. Willson —  
Natural History Museum, 2009



**Palaeolithic  
Emotions**



**Medieval  
Institutions**



**Godlike  
Technology**

## A SCHIZOPHRENIC WORLD

**Ancient Instincts**

Tribalism & Fear

**Outdated Systems**

Bureaucracy & Conflict

**MUSEUMS** must confront these tensions:

**UNDERSTAND** THE PAST, **ILLUMINATE** THE PRESENT,  
**INSPIRE** THE FUTURE



# Can Memory Institutions Transcend Schizoid Reality?

Tomislav S. Šola, 2026.

## 1. Outside the Shelter

As a former curator and still a theorist of heritage, now largely withdrawn from active professional life, I have often written outside the safe shelter of the curatorial and professorial world. Doing so meant confronting - at my own risk and sometimes to my own detriment - what I perceived as the social autism of the profession and its fatal misunderstanding of the wider world.

Such intellectual wandering has its rewards. It leads one toward kindred spirits—often superior spirits—thinkers who themselves have stepped beyond the comfortable boundaries of their disciplines. Some I have met through professional juries, conferences, and encounters; others I discovered across time through books and ideas. These affinities are rarely institutional. They belong to a different order of recognition.

It is therefore surprising that only recently I encountered one of the most lucid “emigrants” from his own discipline—biology in his case—the great American scientist Edward O. Wilson. As ever, once in a different but related domain, the view widens and the insight deepens.

## 2. The Diagnosis

Wilson formulated a diagnosis of the human condition that is so concise and penetrating that it deserves constant repetition:

“The real problem of humanity is the following: We have Paleolithic emotions, medieval institutions, and godlike technology.”

It was a “by-product” of a panel discussion in New York’s Natural History Museum (2009), after one of his lectures I presume. This statement captures the structural imbalance of our civilization with such precision. Our emotional apparatus was shaped in prehistoric environments of small groups and immediate dangers. Wilson argued that human emotions are rooted in the Stone Age (tribalism, aggression), while our social structures are outdated (medieval), yet we possess technology capable of destroying the planet (god-like). Our institutions - states, bureaucracies, and professional systems - still largely follow hierarchical models inherited from earlier centuries. They are certainly not literally medieval, but certainly less modern than necessary or expected. Yet our technological power has reached a level that earlier ages could only attribute to gods. Figuratively so, as it indeed, surpasses our collective ability to control it or use it with ease and understanding, - as a tool not as partner, - let alone superior one.

This mismatch produces permanent tension. Technology accelerates. Institutions lag. Emotions oscillate between fear, tribal reflexes, and fragile aspirations.

The loss of connection to reality is a medical diagnosis, and if memory institutions - to name just one profession, though one sadly fragmented into mere occupations - cannot offer us the security of knowing, or rather understanding, our reality, we find ourselves in still deeper trouble. Seemingly, museums are about the past. In fact, they are about the present using the past to understand it or influence it.

### **3. The Limits of Institutional world**

Such a clear insight is usually so much resented that the scientific community would invent ways of standing the outcome by proposing fake or unimportant dilemmas like discussing whether we need multidisciplinary or pluridisciplinarity. Confusion would be achieved by artificial, imposed dilemmas so the true subject of new knowledge that changes their comfortable reality would be dismissed at once. Thus the old fighters would get tired, and if staying around, they would have witnessed how the new, younger ones would be treated the same way, - the same tactics applied to them. The elimination or giving up of innovators is the goal of the prevailing every closed, conservative scientific community.

This persistent, boring and effortless procedure freed them for (as I mockingly complained to them) comfortable "conferencing around". This explains why some important international associations, especially in the social sciences and humanities, have been persistently led for decades by deliberately selected, very decent but hopeless mediocrities. Corrections and changes are tiring, create conflicts and are bad for a career. Only rare, great spirits and exceptional innovators manage to overcome this "gravity force", and set off into the poetry of new knowledge. The irony of their great battles is that they are always about simple and obvious claims: They change the world or at least threaten pretentious delusions. Official science, let's say it, does not like magnificent simplicity because it creates an image of an unattainable and complicated world about its importance.

In such a world, it is unrealistic to expect that memory institutions - museums, archives, libraries - will easily overcome this structural contradiction. Most do not. A minority of exceptional and creative institutions occasionally succeed.

Their work becomes visible in rare moments when professional excellence is brought together and recognized. One such moment occurs annually at the conference The Best in Heritage, where outstanding achievements in museums and heritage projects are presented. These gatherings, which are luckily many and growing in number, demonstrate that memory institutions can transcend routine administration and become laboratories of imagination and responsibility. Yet even this is not enough. Correctly grounded and obligatory professional education in the domain of heritage and for the profession of heritage curating does make logical sense.

#### **4. Beyond Excellence**

The ultimate aim cannot be institutional excellence alone. That would be too modest, even evasive. The real ambition must be larger: a better world - and perhaps even the redefinition of what a profession is. That is the true essence of any profession. There the excellence consists of generational experience of working in such institutions and practicing the most effective and yet utterly responsible methods of serving their "owners". Since we necessarily consider only public memory institutions, or publicly conceived and relevant, the through awareness of the users' needs would be essential part of that professional quality. The knowledge about the world has to my experience been the most feeble point in professional discussions. Discovering that my students completely lack the understanding of the world's circumstances, forced me into reshaping all my strategy. How on earth could professionals fulfil their role if they lack the big picture? How could possibly any practice, let alone any theory could students appropriate if all of it remains and abstract knowledge void of any connections to real life of communities, groups or individuals seeking understanding, inspiration, if not consolation or (even) solutions from their museums?

Here we encounter a central paradox. In the name of efficiency, management, and institutional rationality, contemporary society is dismantling the very professions that once guaranteed competence, responsibility, and ethical commitment. Many professions are being reduced to administrative functions or precarious forms of labour, stripped of authority and moral substance. For the sake of context, I will just say that journalism is being substituted by the paid advertising texts while the dismantling of this most important profession is camouflaged by a flood of completely worthless, insulting and insignificant writings of the mob. A huge shame and huge damage is done to Western civilization by the fact that this dump of ignorance and kitsch is declared democratic progress. Responsible editing by social networks is a grotesque fraud. So, in such a context, museums are rightly known as rarely credible public institutions, but this is again more the wish of their users than a reflection of the museum's performance and quality.

At their best, professions are not mere technical communities. They are ethical infrastructures of society. They embody accumulated knowledge, professional conscience, and responsibility toward the public good.

Without them, technology becomes dangerous, institutions hollow, and emotions regress to their most primitive forms. The one-percent owners of the world and their politicians triumph while the mob celebrates its public debauchery as a triumph of democracy.

#### **5. Professions Under Pressure**

Autonomous free professions should exist to guarantee that "godlike technology" is used by us, through the power of institutions, to improve the human condition - or, simply, to make the world a better place.

They must be able to help development decision-makers to consider technology development not only as the speed of technical innovation but also as its social aspect. Are people willing, ready and able to use new technologies to their advantage or not? Of course, the answer to the right question asked with professional responsibility may be undesirable. But it should be possible. What is simpler and clearer than the claim that technical museums are there to explain to the community the meaning and state of technology, to be part of a profession that

participates with decision-makers on the development and application of technology. Unfortunately, such an attitude seems ridiculous if we remember the power of corporations that make all the decisions even without politicians who, as they claim, represent us. (We know, of course, that this is not true. Otherwise, we are doomed to failure.)

The total capitalism (see “Total Capitalism – The Rich, The Poor and Crispy Culture”, at: [mnemosophy.com/vault](http://mnemosophy.com/vault)), or until recently velvet totalitarianism, requires power - all of it. The world can then be disguised as a grand conjuring game, as is the case with modern democracy: a media merry-go-round in the planetary hall of mirrors. Freedom and equality are interpreted as the right of the innocent mob to cede to corporations and their political servants all authority to lead society.

Given that this is the case, all institutions are likely to be merely tolerated, remaining "medieval," while professions must be either corrupted, neutralized or eliminated. They are thus effectively prevented from fulfilling their sole mission: to adapt to, counteract, or effect change in response to threats facing their society, drawing on their deep knowledge, insight, and public responsibility.

The partial, completely narrow interests of these individual occupations (as distinct from the status of a profession) have always represented a broken army dominated by social reality (be it chaos or order from a neoliberal paradise). They have no strength or vision, and the masters are anyway looking to either abolish them (at least as responsible social institutions or even as social property) or commercialize them through privatization or impoverishment.

## **6. Public Memory and Reality**

The Gulliver’s travels is an absolutely adorable book, with so many references to human nature and applicable to the present that one is stunned. I have dedicated an entire chapter in my book “Eternity does not live here anymore....” /see at [mnemosophy.com/vault](http://mnemosophy.com/vault)) Much of its mockery with obsession with the past and obsession with real objects is a sort of critical, visionary writing about curators.

AI is a sort of contrary but very Swiftian in its unintended irony about humans. Reality in museums is arbitrary and a drift, in itself, in real time it is evasive and prone to interpretations whereas in AI it was, we thought, meant as hyper reality: all-encompassing and immediately available. This was based upon naïve trust while forgetting that for long we have lost control of our own technology. In reality, the reality is never further and never more evasive. What you cannot control will sooner or later become your master, the All-Knowing Servant, becoming (increasingly independent) a means of unprecedented, unreal power of illusion and deception. All it takes is such input and the evil intent of the owner of his powers. The more important things are to us, the less we can rely on AI.

It has been claimed, the loss of connection to reality is not merely metaphorical; it is a diagnosable condition. If memory institutions - one fragmented field among many professions - cannot provide the security of understanding reality, society drifts further into disorientation.

Museums appear to be about the past. In truth, they are about the present, using the past as an instrument to understand and influence it. The role of memory institutions must therefore extend beyond preservation. Their deeper mission is to sustain continuity of

understanding—to ensure that knowledge, responsibility, and memory remain in productive overlap.

We need them as wise grandmothers, as old uncles or grandfathers, to share with us, from the calm of their experience, well-intentioned and reliable advice, to moderate our attitudes and add to them a dimension explained by eternal virtues. Nothing revolutionary but simply insisting on moderation and wisdom. The grandfather of all grandfathers is perhaps Confucius. Same simplicity of three values: benevolence/humanness (being kind, empathetic and compassionate), ritual/propriety as acting properly in one's social role to maintain stability of society and righteousness as moral disposition to do good disregarding selfish interests. The latter includes the ability to discern right from wrong and good from evil. That is all that museums have failed to understand as the foundation of their unrealized profession. Do we feel ennobled when we leave the museum?

AI offers us, as if we were Pinocchio, a colorful fair of endless illusions, and we need a reliable friend, completely on our side and ready to help and encourage us to be adults and ourselves. Integrated, honest people. Ideally, that's what museums should do. Secular spirituality in secure understanding of reality around us. Why not?

## 7. Mnemosophy

When it became obvious that there could be no science of an institution (generally in the 1980's, I believe) museology probably seemed to many as an impossible claim. But the “scientific” mainstream kept to its simple narrative as it was comfortable and effortless. In 1982 I proposed the name of the future science, to suggest that any profession has a science of its own: heritology. Being literally laughed out, I continued my side interest in theorizing seeing the failure partly due to the awkwardness of the Latin-Greek combination of that neologism. Yes, it sounded kind of rough. The implied message was clear that the needed science is about heritage, therefore relevant to all that have heritage as central concept of their interest.

But, pushing it further, I wanted to imply that such science able to serve as a core of mage-profession, the real profession instead of accumulation of occupations, should be explicit about its aim. Libraries and Archives seemed full and IT was promising capacities beyond imagination. (Some three or four decades after, hypermnesia was not only an ability but proposed itself as a problem). So, the memory as the essence of the past and therefore of the heritage too. It was like a length that needed direction to become a vector. To reveal the intention of its existence and point to the direction in which it wanted to be realized.

In 1987 I came out with a playful proposal, knowing that, again, I will be blamed for the lack of seriousness and exhibitionism. This is where the idea of *mnemosophy* - the memory as wisdom of memory (by the implied ancient Greek composition of the neologism) - becomes a useful idea. The future “science’s concept is much wider and can accommodate the exploding capacity of memorizing. At the same time, it offers a discipline and meaning to the otherwise chaotic expansion. I will repeat myself by saying that curators of heritage become some sort of alchemists there to extract wisdom from the mountains of information and rivers of knowledge. Information accumulation is less than ore, and rivers may contain golden dust, but only the motivation and self-denying effort can filter the preciousness we may be after. So

mnemosophy was not meant as a rhetorical device, but as a conceptual framework: a way of understanding that memory is not storage, but orientation; not accumulation, but responsibility.

The entire sector of public memory - including private institutions when they earn public trust - should aim at something larger than preservation: the cultivation of a better world and the emergence of a new type of profession, one capable of ethical and intellectual synthesis.

## **8. Toward Balance**

The same O. Wilson was indignant at the divisions of science (and I believe institutions as well), so he proposed the term "consilience", which he used to denote the unity of knowledge, advocating for connecting the natural sciences with the humanities and social sciences through a common framework of evolutionary biology. One would say that it is just a call to common sense, because what could be more obvious than that. And the real problem is that the division is still there today, perhaps even more crucial than before. Mnemosophy is also not a panacea, but it can help us improve emotions if we build a world guided by virtues. It can advance the social community if institutions and professions are its defense and not the servants of those in power, and it can also, now only theoretically, support technology with humanistic ideals. The solution to the world will be found only where profit does not give the final judgment in developmental and even everyday decisions. In a way, it is too late. Total capitalism is an outdated and unsustainable concept, so it recognizes its only chance in the most profitable and most destructive business in the world: war.

If humanity is ever to reconcile its Paleolithic emotions, medieval institutions, and godlike technologies, it will require more than innovation. There would practically be no domain in which this schizophrenic situation should not be urgently treated. It will require cultivated memory and responsible professions - capable of interpreting the past, understanding the present, and providing decision makers with arguments for the usable future. Basically, the latter is the role of all professions.

If diplomacy were still a profession, it would co-decide about the world. At the end of every war, there is some kind of agreement, let's say cynically, if the participants remain alive. But, as Sun Tzu claims, ideal warfare always seeks to avoid war. Casino capitalism has largely swallowed up public health in the West, destroying the medical profession through privatization. In a similar way, religions have forgotten faith by corrupting the clergy and reduced it to hypocrisy. Churches are not closed because people do not need God. If museums are closed, it will be the same because of the loss of faith in institutions, along with everything else that accompanies the closing of professions. Unfortunately, this heritage has never come to life fully.

Without them, imbalance will remain the defining condition of our civilization. With them, the possibility of balance - and perhaps even progress - still exists.