



## SOLILOQUISING ABOUT TRUSTWORTHINESS (MUSEUMS AS PLACES OF TRUTHFULNESS)

This soliloquy is based  
on my speech  
"Museums as Places of Truthfulness"  
at the ICOM-MPR Conference 2017, Amsterdam

### **ME:**

We are living in an era of complexity and informational overload. Can museums benefit from this circumstance for their own work? How should museums face these challenges?

### **I:**

In former times we had to deal only with facts and falsehood. Nowadays we should be aware that alternative facts are more and more coming up. That's why there is a great need of institutions that we can rely on: We need keepers of the facts. In my opinion, museums are predestined to become keepers of the facts - based on an elaborated inventarisation.

### **ME:**

What consequences would result from this?

### **I:**

This would lead to a high level of social responsibility of the whole curatorial work.

Not only in relation to content of the past but also for questions about the present and future.

### **ME:**

Which conceptual approach should have to be developed?

### **I:**

In the past we often discussed about museums as factories of identity (Gottfried Korff). But our daily life has become more and more a playing field of diversity. The concept of identity may not be useful any longer. Therefore we have to care about sensemaking and knowledge as one of the upcoming new skills of museums. Because we are living in an era of complete changes

we may not seek only for identity but for overlapping areas in the cultural field.

**ME:**

Please give me details?

**I:**

Both aspects – the concept of sensemaking and knowledge - do have a complex structures. There are different levels we have to care about with regard to exhibitionmaking. If we understand exhibitions as accessible argumentations we will reach a higher level of awareness. To give an example: Following Karl Edward Weick, sensemaking is retrospective, continuous, socially interactive, plausibility-oriented, focused and anchored. In short: It is not a result of public activities, it is an ongoing individual process.

**ME:**

Do these two concepts will have influence on the relation between the curators and the audiences?

**I:**

Yes, of course! Museums should become spaces with an atmosphere of radical transparency. We have to recognize that presentations are interpretations and last but not least representations at the same time. That means, they are focused argumentations. The German artist Bazon Brock once developed an interesting concept of exhibition: not only to put the selected pieces on display but also the non-exhibited exhibits. Due to this, the concept of an exhibition would be clear to the audience. In my point of view we can benefit from such conceptual thoughts.

**ME:**

What is the aim of that new approach?

**I:**

I can recognize three key aims:

Holistic quality: That means doing everything (management, research, concept, scenographie, communication etc.) with a great level of awareness.

In resonance with the society: Walking on the whole timeline between past, present and future to fit the needs of the society.

Become a place of truthworthiness: Museums should be aware of their social responsibility – based on facts, with the means of transparency, with an emotional sensual approach, authentic offline and online.

Following this roadmap, museums will become places of trustworthiness and sensemaking – with a great benefit for the diverse society.

Dr. Matthias Henkel