A society in distress: the role of museums

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The Role of Museums

Universiteit Leiden

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Waarde Rector Magnificus, Waarde decanen, Geachte bestuursleden van de faculteiten Geesteswetenschappen en Archeologie, Beste toehoorders, Welkom, dank voor uw komst. And many thanks to my colleagues from abroad, from London and Paris, for coming to Leiden to support me in this event.

Introduction

Under the title *A Society in Distress: The Role of Museums* I would like to discuss an issue that has occupied me for some years now. I would like to share some thoughts on the question: How important are museums? What is or should be the role of museums in a society that is in a state of crisis? What can museums do in an affluent society, as it has never existed before, but also a society in distress and despair. A society in which people are angry, are dissatisfied, are blaming others for everything that goes wrong. It is never our own fault, it is always the other's fault. To mention just a few real or imagined reasons for our discontent and fear: The corona pandemic, climate change, migration, violence and straight out war (Ukraine, Gaza), inflation, a complex situation in healthcare, the rapid changes in the digital world that will no doubt greatly influence our daily life.

Next month two hundred years ago, on 7th May 1824, there was a nervous atmosphere in the musical world of the Habsburg capital Vienna. It was the day the first performance of the Ninth Symphony of Ludwig van Beethoven was staged. There was a lot of anxiety, a lot of nervousness, a lot of fear. It was well-known that Beethoven was deaf for some years now, he had not produced a symphony for twelve years. Was he still able to write good music or would this first performance of his new symphony fail and end in disaster? Apart from these doubts, there were many practical problems that had to be solved before Beethoven could even start to prepare the orchestra. There was no orchestra big enough and professional enough to meet Beethoven's needs. Such orchestras simply did not exist in these day, so the composer himself had to find musicians to reach the necessary volume. And then there was a chorus, a symphony with a chorus! Another big problem was that Beethoven had written the last pieces of music for this new work at the last moment, so there were not enough copies available for the whole orchestra.[1]

So, when the actual event took place, the public was foremost curious. What would happen? Was Beethoven still the genius composer the world took him for? And what was that chorus doing on stage? A chorus that also appeared to remain silent for most of the time.

As you know the Ninth Symphony became an enormous success and its final part has now even made it to the status of European anthem. It is now unmistakenly an important part of European heritage. The success of the 9th, as it is usually called, is based on three things: musical quality, Schiller's text and, not the least, societal circumstances. Although the symphony has its weaknesses in form (not uncommon with Beethoven) and the composer has been criticized for his compositions for the human voice, the fact that Beethoven could still compose a major work was an enormous relieve for the people. Beethoven showed in the first three parts of the symphony a very mature mastery of the art of composing. It showed that he was not yet finished as *the* leading composer of Vienna. And then the chorus did not even do anything. The big surprise came in the fourth part with Friedrich Schiller's poem *An die Freude* and its message that *Alle Menschen werden Brüder*, a load cry for universal friendship. During that legendary performance of 7 May 1824 this message resonated widely and the applause was immense (although Beethoven himself couldn't hear it).

In 1824 European societies were in distress. The Napoleonic wars were still fresh in people's minds and the conservative governments did their best to control the people to prevent a new revolution. Stability was the ultimate, "sacred" aim and the political elite did everything to achieve that goal. This means that there was no space for opinions that diverted from official standpoints. 'Other' opinions were quickly seen as a threat to the existing social-political order. Secret services flourished as never before, trading - often false - information for more political influence.[2] The Austrian chancellor Count,

later Prince, Klemens von Metternich was particularly good in suppressing his own population. It would finally cost him his powerful position, but in 1824 he was still the most powerful figure in the Habsburg Empire. And people felt the anxiety of the political elite to control. Individual initiative was curtailed and there was a strong feeling of stagnation. The musical cry for friendship for the whole of humanity fell on fertile soil.

I: *A society in distress*

In 1930 Sigmund Freud wrote, in his *Das Unbehagen in der Kultur*, '… civilization overcomes the dangerous aggressivity of the individual, by weakening him, disarming him and setting up an internal authority to watch over him, …'[3] Of course this sentence now sounds ridiculously optimistic. Looking at the many violent conflicts in the world and the aggressive way people communicate, often by means of social media, the idea that we can control people's aggressivity by means of a civilizing process now seems to be a complete failure. The idea of any progress in human development, from the seventeenth century onwards a dominant element in Western culture, has only been successful in some areas of knowledge, not in the field of human's mental and moral capacities.

When Werner von Siemens gave a speech in the largest conference location in Berlin, it was 1894, he still expressed a firm belief in progress, in the sense that technical and industrial progress would ultimately lead to a wealthier society and to happier people. Of course he couldn't have been aware of the misery that the first half of the twentieth century would create, immense poverty, mass killings and two World Wars. Naturally, Freud was not that naïve in his *Unbehagen in der Kultur*. Talking about sexual freedom, he wrote: 'Civilized society has found itself obliged to turn a blind eye to many transgressions that by its own lights it should have punished.'[4] So, he was certainly aware of the limits of civilization and of the problems of the period he lived in. 'It seems certain that we do not feel comfortable in our present civilization, but it is very hard to form a judgement as to whether and to what extent people of an earlier age felt happier, …'[5] It seems as if Freud was well-aware of discontent being a phenomenon of all times.

On January 12 this year a Dutch national newspaper, *NRC*, reported on the New Year speeches of mayors of some large and small municipalities in the country. The headline was: "Mayors see dark times." The message was unanimous: have more attention for each other and don't withdraw in despair,[6] which is of course easier said than done.

We should however be aware of the fact that feelings of uncertainty and discontents are not new. I talked already about discontent in 1824, Freud refers to a history of discontent and the historian Eric Hobsbawn, known for his in-depth studies of the nineteenth century, made clear that even at the end of that century (when material richness exploded) people were often not feeling safe. Due to the rapid technological changes (railways, telegraph, rapid increase of industrial volume, etc.) and increasing migration from the countryside to the towns, but also from non-European regions to Europe, people had difficulties coping with the lack of stability.[7] The threat of a Marxist revolution was certainly real and a potential danger and instability was something people worried about. In Julie Manet's diary, she was the daughter of Berthe Morisot and Eugene Manet, there are moments when feelings of insecurity are clearly noticeable, such as the enormous social tension during the Dreyfuss affair or simple remarks such as not wanting to walk home in the evening, because it was not safe.[8] The idea that the outbreak of the covid crisis in 2019/2020 changed everything is also not accurate. Long before covid there were strong signals of massive discontent[9] and covid only added extra stress to this situation. And what about the state of Dutch (and international) politics nowadays? I will, however, not bother you too long with a list of societal crises that are ongoing at the moment.

I will come to the role museums, as promised in the subtitle of my lecture, in a moment. First, it is important to try to understand, more in-depth, the phenomenon of feelings of discontent and the apparently widespread, also historically,

occurrence of it. To do this, I turn to the work of Hanna Arendt. And mainly to a text she published in 1961, about *The Gap between Past and Future*.[10]

Hannah Arendt started her text with a sentence of the French writer René Char: *Notre heritage n'est précédé d'aucun testament*. (Our heritage is not preceded by any testament.) He wrote this after four year of active service in the resistance during the German occupation of France. The collapse of France in 1940 had been unexpected and after the liberation it was very uncertain which direction the future would take. There was no testament from the past, no guidelines, to direct our steps towards the future.
Arendt suspects an influence of the Tocqueville who wrote: "Since the past has ceased to throw light upon the future, the mind of man wanders in obscurity".[11] Around this fundamental uncertainty Arendt sketched her model. She sees the past as a parabola pointed upwards with the individual person in the top of the parabola. The past pushing persons further into linear time. At the same time the future, the images of the future, ideas and worries about the future is pointing down with the individual person in the lowest part of the parabola. And each individual has to struggle with both influences. Each individual has to fight on two fronts, without support of the present, since the present does not exist in this model. Then Arendt makes a distinction between the past as a force to push us forward in time and tradition as a burden that creates an invented past to feel comfortable, to create invented identities and, if necessary, exclude others. Tradition is seen, by Arendt, as something negative, something that blocks us, something that makes us feel comfortable and enforces our focus on the past. This also creates an unwillingness to act towards the future. And action-oriented thought is a central theme in Hannah Arendt's work. "In this predicament action, with its involvement and commitment, its being *engagée*, seems to hold out new hope, not of solving any problems, but of making it possible to live with them without becoming, as Sartre once put it, a *salaud*, a hypocrite."

By the way, Schiller's poem *An die Freude* is future oriented, not focused on an idealized past.

So, there is the past pushing towards the "here and the now", towards us here and now, and the future crawling in the opposite direction, against linear time, coming towards us with its constantly changing outlook. This may be, in Arendt's words, "I suspect, … not a modern phenomenon, it is perhaps not a historical datum but is coeval with the existence of man on earth". In other words, this may be a universal characteristic of human existence. So, this struggle on two fronts (on the one hand the past and on the other hand the future) is most likely a universal characteristic of the human condition. It is something that people have to deal with always and everywhere in the world, something that is a common characteristic to the whole of humankind.

Does this open the way for a more universalistic discourse, a kind of Enlightenment 2.0 discourse? And could this be helpful for museums and their future policies? Let us continue with some remarks about the Enlightenment.

II: *Enlightenment*
Having described contemporary societies as societies in distress, I have to counterbalance this idea of a worrying situation with something more positive. I do this not against my better judgement, but because I really believe there is another perspective, in line with what Hannah Arendt said. Arendt sees tradition as a burden, the past as a force and the future as an opportunity. That does not mean that we have to forget tradition or that we have to see it as superfluous luggage. However, focusing on tradition as a place where we can withdraw to hide for the problems of the future, is a dead end. That is why Arendt wants us to act, not only to think. Idealizing the past, also in heritage policies!, is a dangerous development, but we can try to use elements of the past to give direction to our actions towards the future.
The nineteenth century is also called the museum age. In the wake of the newly created European nation-states the city of

Leiden saw the emergence of three major museums that would develop into national museums: the Museum of Antiquities (1818), the Museum of Natural History (1820), now Naturalis, and the Museum of Ethnology (1837), now World Museum, Leiden. Although these museums are from the nineteenth century, their intellectual background is clearly the eighteenth century Enlightenment, with universalism (combined with an interest in diversity), ordering and curiosity as key elements. And there is always also the overall idea, however vague, of humanism. In the words of the founding fathers of these museums we can clearly identify these roots. Caspar Reuvens' ideas covered not only Dutch or Mediterranean antiquities, but also antiquities from non-European regions, particularly – but not only – from the Netherlands East-Indies. He is interested in a global approach towards antiquities from cultures of the world. Philip Franz von Siebold wrote, in his founding statement that led to the emergence of the Museum of Ethnology: "Humankind, in its diversity in foreign areas, is the main subject of an ethnographic museum." He stressed the educational tasks of an ethnological museum, to get to know "the particularities of the other".
So, the main incentive was clearly curiosity, to come nearer to the other.[12] The idea of dominance over other cultures is much less present in these early nineteenth century ideas about human cultures and the role museums have to play in understanding the other. That changes of course with the rapid expansion of European influence in the second half of the nineteenth century, reenforced by the rise of evolutionism after Darwin's *Origin of Species* (1859).

Immanuel Kant's definition of enlightenment is well-known: "Enlightenment is man's emergence from his self-imposed immaturity. Immaturity is the inability to use one's understanding without guidance from another. This immaturity is self-imposed when its cause lies not in lack of understanding, but in lack of resolve and courage to use it without guidance from another."[13] This striving for knowledge is a key element in eighteenth century thought.

However, there are also more critical definitions of enlightenment. Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno, in their classic study *Dialectics of the Enlightenment* remark that: "Enlightenment, understood in the widest sense as the advance of thought, has always aimed at liberating human beings from fear and installing them as masters. Yet the wholly enlightened earth is radiant with triumphant calamity. It wanted to dispel myths, to overthrow fantasy with knowledge."[14] And they give shocking examples of direct or indirect consequences of enlightenment, the calamities of nineteenth and twentieth century realities, including the concentration camps of World War II.

Should we disregard the Enlightenment altogether because of the excesses of later times? "Throwing the baby out with the bathwater". As we saw in my remarks of the founding ideas of some Leiden museums education, curiosity and emancipation (including attempts to bring in the working class) were humanistic attempts of improve the welfare of the people. And much has been achieved since then, particularly in certain areas of scientific research, with many positive consequences for us, human beings. The Enlightenment failed, however, in other areas of the human condition, such as morality. So, maybe we do need an Enlightenment 2.0, as I suggested earlier. And then we should not look at the excesses of so-called enlightened thought of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, but to its sources in the eighteenth century. For museums as well such a revaluation could be beneficial. A revaluation of a holistic view of humanity, of nature and of its entanglement can take place along the lines of Stephan Feuchtwang and Michael Rowlands' *Civilization Recast*, in which they adapt our ideas of what a civilization is.[15] 'Civilization' without its discriminatory elements and with more attention for trade, exchange and religion and ritual (including its ghosts and demons)[16] may be a useful path to proceed on. Ignoring exchange and migration in human societies and disregarding the importance of "World Beyond", even in a secular society, is disastrous. If we would have listened more to eighteenth

century scholar Alexander von Humboldt, particularly his holistic view of nature and the entanglement of everything with everything,[17] we would probably have less climate change nowadays.
In Indonesia people would say: "You always have to strive for a balance, between mountain and sea, between the Upper World and the Lower World, between good and evil and between male and female." And actually, I believe that this is a good advice for us Europeans as well. We should not believe in the ultimate paradise, since you will always be disappointed if you do. But we also should not loose ourselves in despair, in the feeling that it is all hopeless. Such an attitude would lead to apathy and to an unwillingness to act for the benefit of others, for the benefit of society as a whole. As in the Javanese *wayang* theatre, there is balance in the cosmos, the balance is disturbed, but finally restored. As in large, communal rituals everywhere in the world, there is 1) a balance in society, there is 2) a complex ritual in which the dead are honoured, young people initiated and the soil revitalized. After 3) the final offering meal after which people, the village and the whole society have received new energy and the capacity to create new life again.[18] Hannah Arendt would add: we have to act towards the future, not stand still in the past.

III: *Museums*

So, what about the role of museums in an uncertain world? In general, Dutch museums are doing well,[19] but how do we know they are doing well? We can measure the importance of museums on at least three levels: the empirical, the educational, the museum and the sublime.

- **The empirical level**. In our rapidly changing world most museums flourish. The year before the corona pandemic raged over the world, 2019, there were more than 1,3 million registered visits to the Leiden based museums. In 2023 this was more than 1,5 million, a record year. The national figure for 2023 was 32 million. However, what do these figures actually mean? It includes foreign tourists and repeat visits. So, the actual amount of Dutch people going to museums is much lower. And, of course, these figures do not give any indication about the quality of the museum products offered and about what people take home from a museum visit.
Another important empirical criterium for a Dutch national museum to be taken seriously is the "inverdiencapaciteit", the earning capacity. "Inverdiencapaciteit" an ugly word that fits well in Werner von Siemens view of reality. Museums have to earn at least 21,5 percent of their annual budget from other sources than government subsidies. Some museums are extremely successful, the Van Gogh Museum in Amsterdam actually doesn't need subsidies from the Ministry, but others have great difficulty in meeting this requirement (I won't mention names of these museums here).
Again, these types of statistics do not say anything about the quality of the exhibitions or the museums. What do we do with museum with bad exhibitions, museums that feed the visitors with unbalanced information, or just have an incomprehensible routing, unreadable texts and very bad graphic or three-dimensional designs. They can still attract a lot of visitors, despite the bad quality of the products they offer. Actually, there is no valid instrument to measure quality. There are websites of the 50 or 100 best museums in the Netherlands. The criteria used for this ranking are totally unclear.
- **The educational level**. Many museums are doing well with the outreach of their educational programs. There is a strong focus on how many school children visit the museum and much less on adult education. Audio tours became more important than 10 years ago and are effective means to educate adults who usually want to enjoy an exhibition on their own and not in a group. Still many groups in society are not well-represented in

museum visitor groups. And what type of knowledge do they bring home? In the National Museum of Ethnology, now World Museum Leiden, we used to have the problem that for a long time exhibits with North-American Indians, living in *tipis,* were very popular, although far besides reality. In the National Museum of Antiquities Egyptian mummies were and are important items of attraction. In Egypt you can see the mummy of Pharao Ramses II, as long as you pay. On the whole I have the impression that educational programs of museums are rather successful. There is an increase in school children visiting museums and there is a greater diversity in the programs than before.

- **The museum and the sublime**. And finally the museum's role as place to be amazed, impressed, shocked or bewildered, as a place where you experience things that you cannot express in words. This wonder is a basic element of collections of rarities, of objects of extreme beauty, of things that come from far-away places and cannot easily be tamed in classifications that we are used to make. These things make the museum into a temple, a place of worship. As far as I know we have no marketing information on what the effect is of this aspect of the museum on the visitor. It is, of course, difficult to measure, but we also hardly ever ask for it. We need more in-depth research to comprehend this phenomenon and that is a different type of research than dealing with statistics. Lacking attention for the museum and the sublime may mean that we lack understanding of an essential element of museums.

Indeed, museums are important for a variety of reasons: identity building, learning, aesthetic enjoyment, amazement, to be surprised and for reflection. And we should try to make them even more important, particularly now, in a shifting world. I wish that museums could end wars and contribute fundamentally to a society of acceptance, a society of equal opportunities, a society of respect for our fellow human beings, but I am afraid we are still far from these targets.

I do think, by the way, that we can learn from many new museum initiatives in non-European countries, where local museums are built on ancient temple sites, as in China, or where there is a special place to honour the veterans of the American War in Vietnam, a place where you can bring offerings to the deceased ancestors, victims of the war.[20]

IV: *The universal and the particular*

So, what can we do to contribute to a better world? The easy answer is: not a lot. However, in the spirit of Hannah Arendt, to me this is an answer I cannot accept. What does all this mean for museums? What should museums do with the uncertainties in our world and in our individual minds, uncertainties that are inherent to the human condition? First of all we should, apart from recognizing human diversity, have more attention for the common characteristics of humankind. Maybe we stressed too much the differences and not enough what we have in common. I realize that anthropologists, I am one myself, are fascinated by diversity and much anthropological research is meant to comprehend 'the other', to map the differences and to try to explain them. Of course, we should still have attention for cultural and individual diversity (I don't deny the value of that), but each time we should wonder: How different the others actually are? What are common features that are recognizable for us, the beholder? Adolf Bastian, the first professor in Anthropology in Berlin, already talked about the *The Psychic Unity of Mankind*, even in the evolutionist framework of his time.

Just before I left for my first anthropological fieldwork, in 1983, I visited my supervisor, the late Professor Adriaan Gerbrands. I expressed my doubts about the adventure I was going to start, whether I would be able to cope with the challenges ahead and to meet his expectations. He smiled and said: "Just go there and live with these people. They look different than us, but fundamentally they are just like us". Museums should realize

that however strange "other" people are (and now I am not only talking about people who live far away, but also about people in our own society whom we find strange because they are "different"), they are still people with whom we share more than we differ.

A second point that I want to stress is that we (museums) should have much more attention for cultural contact, exchange systems and migration. In recent years we have been focused a lot on identity politics. Every culture has its subcultures and many subcultures have hardliners who claim exclusive rights to certain signs of identity: designs, objects, music, dances, stories, etc. Chinese social media object to expressions of popular culture in Korea, because they claim them to be exclusively Chinese. However, without exchange cultures are doomed. Influences from outside are essential for a culture to survive. I was pleased to see in the exhibition "The Year 1000" in the National Museum of Antiquities in Leiden a very international approach. There were many interesting examples of influences from outside. Of course local identities are important, but it is even more important to show the international context in which these local system function.

And finally I feel that it is the task of museums to dismantle politically motivated myths and fake news, as often used by radical right-wing political parties. Museums should be more active to fight prejudices and nonsensical theories aimed at stressing the dominance of particular groups. This may be moralising, so be it. It is also taking responsibility for creating a better society in the future.

Final remarks

I come to the end of this lecture. There is a lot more to say about the role of museums in society. And we should say more, not because we spend so much tax money on museums, or because we can earn money with museums (for instance by stimulating the local economy), but because our society needs a nuanced voice about the issues that keep us divided, issues that are a potential threat to a happy future for us and the next generations. We have a moral obligation to take this seriously, but many museums feel awkward about having a moral obligation, although they have to take their educational role very serious. They are afraid to be moralizing, to be accused of being protestant priests who tell their flocs how to behave. However, in my view it is no option to say nothing, to do nothing. By becoming more active in treating societal problems, museums can contribute to the richness and welfare of our own society.

I feel a lot of gratitude for a lot of people who have helped me, not only the last few years, but in some cases already for three decades. This help took many different forms from a stable situation at home to personal friendship and intellectual inspiration. I cannot thank all the people whom I am indebted to, so I apologize to the ones I do not mention, but I would like to start with Patricia Paravano, my partner in life as well as a sound critical voice that corrects my fantasies. And of course our daughter Charlotte, from whom I learn a lot about things that I would have ignored without her.
Professionally, there are many people to mention, but I have to limit myself to a few. First of all the core group of the Interdisciplinary Research Group *Museums, Collection and Society* (MCS): Laurie Kalb-Cosmo, Holly O'Farrell, Evelien Campfens and Martin Berger. We had more than four years of discussions, mutual interests, seminars and common publications. I enjoyed immensely our cooperation and I will miss our informal talks about all the subjects that fascinate us. Many thanks also to the board of MCS, Professor Mark Rutgers, Professor Jan Kolen and Professor Sybille Lammes. We always had good, and short, meetings. Great!
And then of course the partners in crime: Professors Caroline van Eck and Miguel John Versluys. You made my academic career really worthwhile, already long before I came fulltime to the university, with the *Material Agency Forum* lectures, but also with our visits to museums and collections abroad and, most importantly, our many informal discussions. Professor

Stijn Bussels, many thanks for the pleasant cooperation these last four and a half years and the stimulating informal talks that we had.
My colleagues from Paris and London. Again, thanks, for taking the trouble to come to Leiden for this event: Cecilia Hurley and Pascal Griener, both from Neuchâtel and the École du Louvre in Paris, Graeme Were from the School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS) in London and Michael Rowlands, emeritus from University College London (UCL).
I do hope we will continue discussing museums, heritage, collections, objects, and the many other subjects that interest us.

So, despite the problems we face as human beings in a shifting word, I would like to remind you of the hope that Schiller's text *Ode an die Freude* expresses: a text that inspired so many people on that historical day in 1824 and has done so ever since. I would like to end with Schiller's words: „Seid umschlungen, Millionen. Diesen Kuss der ganzen Welt!"[21]

Dames and heren, Ik heb gezegd.

Notes

1. Harvey Sachs, *The Ninth. Beethoven and the World in 1824*. London: Faber and Faber, 2010.
2. Adam Zamoyski, *Phantom Terror. The Threat of Revolution and the Repression of Liberty 1789-1848*. New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 2014.
3. Sigmund Freud*, Civilization and its Discontents*. Penguin Books, 2002, 77.
4. Freud, 53.
5. Freud, 33.
6. Mark Lievisse Adriaanse, Burgemeesters zien donkere tijden. *NRC* 12 januari 2024.
7. Eric Hobsbawn extensively wrote about the changes in the nineteenth century and the rise of nationalism. See: *The Age of Revolution 1789-1848*; *The Age of Capital 1848-1875*; *The Age of Empire 1875-1914*, all published at Cambridge University Press in 1962, 1975 and 1987; *Nations and Nationalism since 1780. Programme, myth, reality*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990; *On Nationalism*. London: Little, Brown Book Group, 2021 (with an introduction of Donald Sassoon).
8. Julie Manet, *Journal 1893-1899*. Mercure de France, 2017.
9. See, among others, Paul Verhaeghe, *Onbehagen*. Amsterdam: De Bezige Bij, 2023.
10. Hannah Arendt, The Gap Between Past and Future. In: *Between Past and* Future*. Eight Exercises in Political Thought*. The Viking Press, 1961.
11. Arendt, 6.
12. Cited in: Pieter ter Keurs, The National Museum of Ethnology in Leiden. In: Endang Sri Hardiati and Pieter ter Keurs (eds), *Indonesia. The Discovery of the Past*. Amsterdam: KIT Publishers, 2005, 17.
13. Immanuel Kant, *What is Enlightenment?* Or. *Beantwortung der Frage: Was ist Aufklärung?*, 1784. The German text is: „Aufklärung ist der Ausgang des Menschen aus seiner selbstverschuldeten Unmündigkeit. Unmündigkeit ist das Unvermögen, sich seines Verstandes ohne Leitung eines anderen zu bedienen. Selbstverschuldet ist diese Unmündigkeit, wenn die Ursache derselben nicht am Mangel des Verstandes, sondern der Entschließung und des Mutes liegt, sich seiner ohne Leitung eines anderen zu bedienen.“
14. Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment. Philosophical Fragments*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002 [1944, 1947], 1.
15. For a stimulating revaluation of ‘ Civilisation’ I refer to Stephan Feuchtwang and Michael Rowlands, *Civilisation Recast: Theoretical and Historical Perspectives*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019.
16. Feuchtwang and Rowlands, 184-186.
17. Andrea Wulf, *The Invention of Nature: The Adventures of Alexander von Humboldt, the Lost Hero of Science*. London: John Murray, 2015.
18. Maurice Bloch, *Prey into Hunter. The Politics of Religious Experience*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992.
19. There are of course also museums that are in a more difficult position and some small museums have recently closed or nearly closed their doors.
20. Harriet Evans and Michael Rowlands (eds.), *Grassroots Values and Local Cultural Heritage in China*. Lanham, Boulder, New York, London: Lexington Books, 2021; Graeme Were, *Museums, Collections and Social Repair*. London and New York: Routledge, 2023.
21. ‘Komt met open armen nader. Kussen voor iedereen’. Vertaling Matthias Rozemond. In: Menno Wigman en Rob Schouten (red.), *A Thing of Beauty. De bekendste gedichten uit de wereldliteratuur*. Amsterdam: Uitgeverij Bert Bakker, 2009, 139.

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Pieter ter Keurs was conservator bij het Rijksmuseum voor Volkenkunde (nu Wereldmuseum Leiden) en hoofd Collecties en Onderzoek bij het Rijksmuseum van Oudheden, Leiden. Vanaf 2010 was hij bijzonder hoogleraar antropologie van materiële cultuur. Later werd hij gewoon hoogleraar Museums, Collections and Society. Ter Keurs heeft onderzoek gedaan in Papoea Nieuw-Guinea en Indonesië. Hij heeft tevens diverse tentoonstellingen gemaakt en museale samenwerkingsprojecten geleid. Zijn onderzoek richt zich vooral op de rol van kunst en materiële cultuur in de samenleving.

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