

## **“99% of your work is context-dependent!”**

This research-document refers to the question about the context in which I want to place my work.

The project is still planned as an installation, an interactive apparatus for people to play with and to explore the content of this machinery. So, by this, the first idea of placing this work is as an installation in an art- or gallery-based context, within exhibitions or festivals for art, technology and society.

While thinking about institutions like a museum or a gallery as a place for publishing my work, I came across a book called “Museum Ethics” by Gary Edson (Editor).

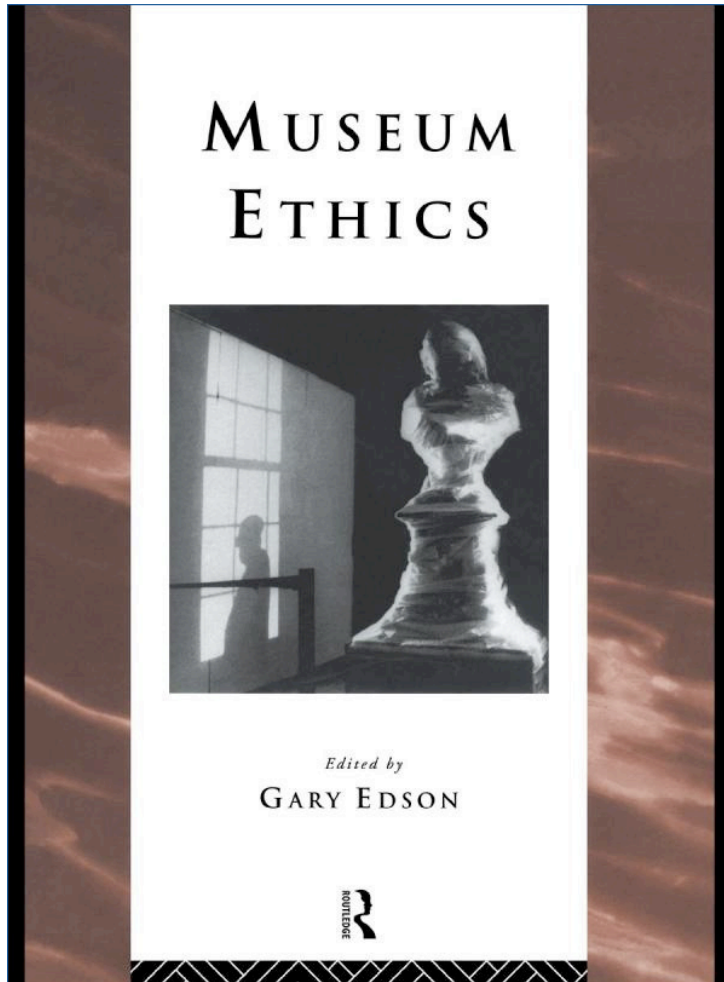
“Museum Ethics considers the theoretical and practical elements of ethical behaviour in relation to critical contemporary issues in museums” (from the Back Cover). As you can see, this book is more about all the persons active in a museum (whether custodian, curator or trustee) and their ethical obligation to the museum profession and the public. But the discussion in this book also contains some interesting questions and thoughts about ethical codes in the field of art, design and exhibition – which is for me in general a very interesting topic as I am interested in philosophical questions. And in addition to that there is a focused discussion encompassing the role of education within a museum which is in the case of the Industrial Palace helpful as well. So, although this book tries to have a look at the question of ethics and education from the point of view of a curator or employee of a museum, I found it quite absorbing to read some parts of this book.

This document is a kind of summarised collection with quotes, figures and some conclusions by myself that hopefully helps me to become clear about how and where I can place my work.

**Museum Ethics by Gary Edson (Editor), Routledge 1997**

“Every one of our acts has, as its stake, the meaning of the world and the place of man in the universe. Through each of them, whether we wish it or not, we set up a scale of values which is universal. And one would want us not to experience dread and anguish in the face of such a momentous responsibility!”

(Jean-Paul Sartre, *Action*)



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Contrary to common assumption, telling right from wrong is not always easy to do. It can also be equally difficult to know which right answer is the more right for a particular situation. The study of ethics aids defining both the question and the answer of these kinds of concerns. Why? Because everyone makes decisions, and decisions are about values. There are profound philosophical and ethical questions about the nature of museums, particularly as they redefine their obligations to the public.

Page 4 | Chapter 1 | Ethics

“Suppose you ask me, “What is the right thing to do?” I answer, “Do what a virtuous person would do!” But you counter, “Who is a virtuous person?” To which I reply, the man [person] who does the right thing.”

(Louis Pojman, *Ethics: Discovering Right and Wrong*)

**Virtuous:** conforming to moral and ethical principles; morally excellent

As museums have opened their doors to a more representative audience and gained a greater sense of social identity and responsibility, they have increased the need for maintaining high ethical standards. (...)

Ethics is one branch of philosophy. It is defined as the science of conduct.

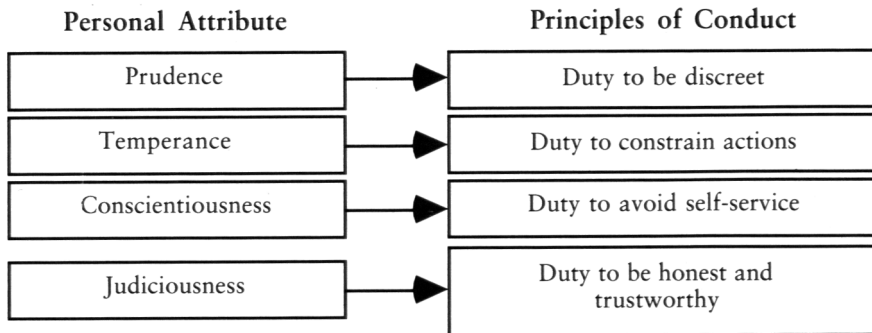


Figure 1.1 The relationship of attributes to conduct

1. Prudence: calculation, foresight, forethought
2. Temperance: moderation or self-restraint in action, statement, etc.; self-control.
3. Conscientiousness: just, upright, honest, faithful, devoted, dedicated.
4. Judiciousness: rational, reasonable, sober, sound, sagacious, enlightened, considered.

“Ethics is a human activity” (Brown 1990: xi), and the primary purpose of a code of ethics is to raise the level of professional practice. For the museum profession, this goal is achieved by helping to maintain the professional status of the museum community, and by strengthening the role and responsibilities of museums in society.

Education and training are the normal methods for instilling ethical values. Clear language, practical association, and meaningful reference are important in the process of understanding and using museum ethics.

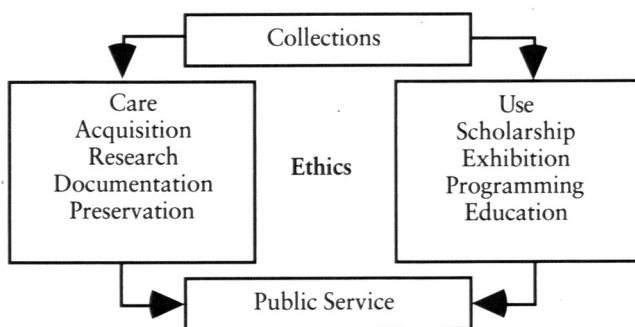


Figure 1.2 The ethical interrelationship of museum activities

### Education and codification

The former (education) is accomplished by a variety of methods, including professional meetings, professional publications, training programs at all levels, informal interaction, and professional expectations. The latter (codification) is a code of professional ethics emanating from the profession and endorsed by the general membership.

### Codification

1. the act, process, or result of arranging in a systematic form or code.
2. Law.
  - a. the act, process, or result of stating the rules and principles applicable in a given legal order to one or more broad areas of life in this form of a code.
  - b. the reducing of unwritten customs or case law to statutory form.

*Page 9 | Chapter 1 | Ethics*

A code of ethics for museums is a system that details principles of conduct. It should have the general aim of presenting a scheme of action based on the outcome of study rather than a system of speculative goals. Museum ethics defines the principles that underlie practice, so that those working in a particular occupation may better understand and respond to the expectations of the profession.

Term: **Museological methodology**

*Page 11 | Chapter 1 | Ethics*

Exhibitions may stimulate or irritate, and in either case there is a risk involved.

This conclusion is a very nice description of what I want to do as well. There is on the one hand an immanent tension within the poster by Fritz Kahn: The familiar human body explained with an unfamiliar visual language, as an artificial machine. On the other hand or you can say in addition to that, I tried to intensify this aspect of tension by setting up an aesthetically familiar framework (the wooden box) and making it unfamiliar with the help of new technology. With the help of this duality of contrasting media I want to create a framework as a combination of now and a time past. Referring to the quote above, I think one of my aims with this work is definitely to stimulate people to have a closer look at the Industrial Palace and its inner logic, to explore the machines and working cycles within the body. But at the same time I aim to irritate them just by the unfamiliar and surprising elements of this work.

The risk? Good question... Is there a risk to display this work? Is it possible that somebody is offended or angry about this installation, probably just bored or not interested at all?

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Terms: **Collections - Public - Profession**

Page 13 | Chapter 1 | Ethics

In establishing a code of ethics, it is preferable to develop a set of standards that will have the best possible consequences, that is, provide the best possible guidance and outcome, while causing the minimum of bad consequences.

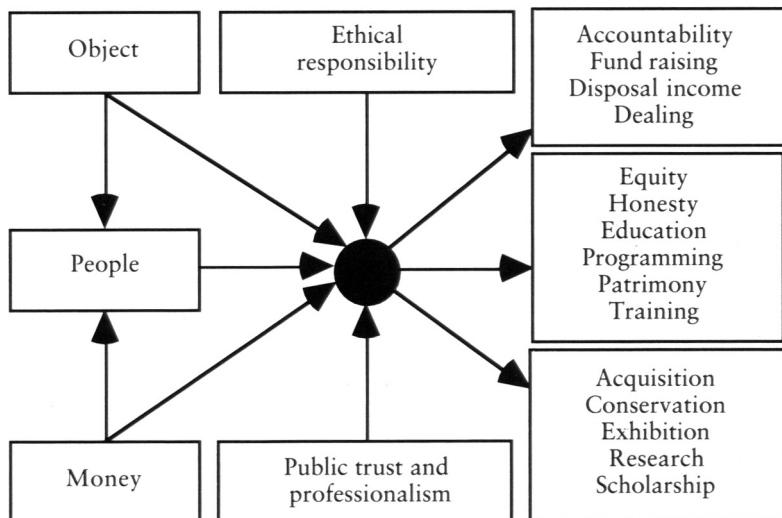


Figure 2.4 Museum practices and ethics

Page 66 | Chapter 4 | Ethics and duty

The following guideline for making ethical decisions (Guy 1990):

- 1 Define the problem.
- 2 Acknowledge the context in which the problem arose in order to identify all stakeholders involved.
- 3 Identify the values that are at stake:
  - (a) caring
  - (b) honesty
  - (c) accountability
  - (d) promise keeping
  - (e) pursuit of excellence
  - (f) loyalty
  - (g) fairness
  - (h) integrity
  - (i) respect for others
  - (j) responsible citizenship
- 4 Select the values that must be maximized.
- 5 Choose the alternative that maximizes the essential values and minimizes as few as possible.
- 6 Assure that the consequences of the decision will be ethical in regard to both its short-term and its long-term consequences.
- 7 Implement the decision.

- 1 to recognize the ethical objective,
- 2 to describe the ethical objective, and
- 3 to achieve the ethical objective.

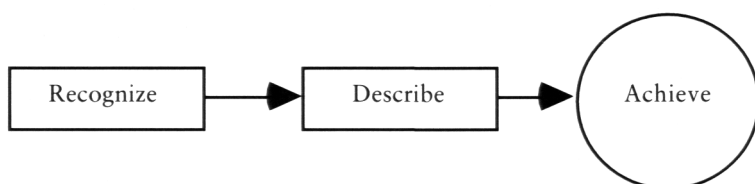


Figure 3.2 Establishing a code of ethics

Page 90 | Chapter 6 | Ethics and the museum community

The well-being of museums depends on two very critical elements:

- 1 the ability to acquire the information (in various forms) needed to better serve society, and
- 2 the ability to use that information properly and productively.

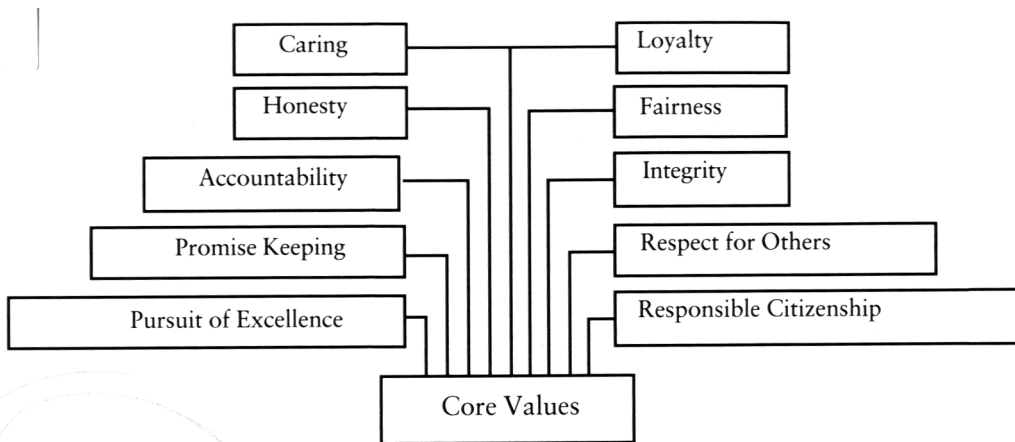
Page 127 | Introduction to Part II

The idea of **reciprocity** (mutual exchange): Shared values include: trust, respect, honesty, fairness, integrity, reliability, commitment, openness, and diversity.

Page 168 | Chapter 11 | Ethics and museology

By recounting the basic elements of a **profession**, it is possible to get a quick summary of the position of the museum profession based on a defined structure. The structural elements are as follows:

- 1 knowledge and skills (long-term training/education, usually university level),
- 2 legal regulations,
- 3 licensing system,
- 4 codes of ethics,
- 5 specific professional culture,
- 6 autonomy,
- 7 defined performances,
- 8 mission.



**Figure 7.1** Ten essential values central to relations between people  
 Source: Adapted from Guy 1990: 14

Page 176 | Chapter 12 | Ethics and the environment

“The environment does not exist as a sphere separate from human actions, ambitions, and needs, and attempts to defend it in isolation from human concerns have given the very word ‘environmental’ a connotation of naivety in some political circles.”

(World Commission on Environment and Development 1987: xi)

(...) The future existence of the human race may be determined by the manner in which it occupies and uses the environment.

Page 218 | Chapter 16 | *Ethics and the exhibitions*

“Does a museum have ethical responsibilities to the public regarding exhibitions?” (...) “Yes!” (...)

“It is an art we are producing. For all the thematic research invested in the creation of an interpretative exhibit, for all the care spent on curatorial documentation and conservation of artefacts included, the synthesis of the entire exhibit is a single, composite creative act – a work of conceptual art.”

(Rabinowitz, 1991)

(...) There ought to be a continual review of what is on display to ascertain its accuracy and validity in the light of current knowledge.

Page 221 | Chapter 16 | *Ethics and the exhibitions*

The power that museums have to transfer knowledge and shape opinions points out the dangers. Not only do people *trust* the information they receive in museum exhibitions and programs, but they *believe* what they are taught.

Page 223 | Chapter 16 | *Ethics and the exhibitions*

#### IN CONCLUSION

To summarize, museum exhibition and program planners and workers need to **be aware of the impact** their efforts have on a largely accepting and expectant public. If what is presented in exhibitions and programs is seen as inherently reliable and accurate, then honesty and openness should be the museum’s proactive approach to presentation. If the context carries messages about values and attitudes, then the utmost consideration must be applied to what exhibitions and programs are meant to communicate for the public without adequate thought given to the implications is inexcusable and unacceptable for a publicly oriented institution.

(...) What it means is that museums must **be aware of the attitudinal and informational potential** that exists in what they present, and dedicate themselves to making decisions about presenting exhibitions in a manner consistent with such an awareness. (...)

Terms: **Public service – enlightenment – education – entertainment**

Let’s have a look at these terms: Despite the term ‘public service’ (which is probably too related to the topic of ethics within a museum), I think these words are quite interesting for describing the Industrial Palace as an installation. Exploring the human body is definitely an educative action. The fact that there is a visual exciting and unfamiliar way of explanation makes this an entertaining event. And as you will begin to compare and to translate the displayed images with your knowledge of the real human body and its functions, it is also a kind of enlightening experience.

Page 225 | Chapter 17 | *Ethics and public programs*

**As uniquely qualified institutions of learning, museums can stimulate visitors to initiate their own encounters with objects and ideas.** In fulfilling this role, do museums have an ethical responsibility to develop educational opportunities for school-age visitors and adults that reflect associated learning styles? Or, is educational programming a collateral activity that is valuable but not totally necessary to the purpose of the museum?

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## ICOM | The International Council Of Museums

(...)

### Article 3 - Definition of Terms

Section 1. Museum. A museum is a non-profit, permanent institution in the service of society and its development, open to the public, which acquires, conserves, researches, communicates and exhibits the tangible and intangible heritage of humanity and its environment for the purposes of education, study and enjoyment. (...)

Principle: Museums have an important duty to develop their educational role and attract wider audiences from the community, locality, or group they serve. Interaction with the constituent community and promotion of their heritage is an integral part of the educational role of the museum.

### DISPLAY & EXHIBITION (...)

#### 4.2 Interpretation of Exhibits

Museums should ensure that the information they present in displays and exhibitions is well-founded, accurate and gives appropriate consideration to represented groups or beliefs.

...

#### *Page 267 | Glossary*

Language is the basis for truth as each word, regardless of the idiom, conveys a pre-established message. Communication is achieved only when that definition is understood by the user and the receiver. Once mutual comprehension has been established, it serves as a foundation for trust based on the knowledge that each time that particular word is used, it will have the same (or similar) meaning.

Term: **Accountability** – accepting the consequences of personal actions and accepting the responsibility for decisions – being accountable.

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**“Truth is that explanation of things which causes us the smallest amount of mental exertion (apart from this, lying is extremely fatiguing).”**

(Nietzsche 1924)