Introduction

Kenneth Hudson

In 1992, the Committee of the European Museum of the Year Award decided to organise an Annual Lecture on a subject of importance both to the public and to those who earn their living within the museum world. The first of these lectures was given in Utrecht in 1993 and the locations in subsequent years have been the Eurotunnel Centres at both ends of the Channel Tunnel, Barcelona and Mannheim.

Our policy in each case has been to suggest the broad outline of the subject and then to invite the lecturer to make proposals for its detailed treatment, emphasising that we should, for publicity purposes, appreciate a text, but that there was no need to follow it word for word when speaking to the audience. Believing that there are few things more guaranteed to send listeners to sleep than a typescript read aloud, we have always encouraged our speakers to talk to the people facing them rather than to read to them and, as naturally friendly and confident people, they have followed our advice, with excellent results.

Our four lecturers are all well-known internationally and it would be dishonest to pretend that this has not influenced our decision to invite them. But much more important to us has been their willingness to put forward new and possibly heretical ideas which will move museum thinking forward and make it most relevant to our rapidly changing society. We are grateful to them for the time and trouble they have devoted to the preparation of their lectures and for the constructive and patient way in which they have dealt with all the questions arising from them. We are also greatly indebted to the museums and other institutions which have agreed to host and sponsor the lectures and to provide the necessary local organisation.

The lectures were, it was evident, of a quality which made it desirable that they should reach an audience much larger than those which heard them when they were originally delivered. The Council of Europe has made this possible by offering to publish the four texts. This most generous action will allow these four distinguished and, we hope, provocative papers to be widely appreciated throughout Europe.

We should like to emphasise, however, that they represent a slightly modified version of what was actually said, since our request to the lecturers was that, to make communication more successful, they should speak rather than read. The difference between the written and the spoken word is particularly marked in the case of English, the language in which three of our four speakers chose to address their audiences. Our view is that when anyone speaks in public, the people immediately present should be regarded as the primary audience and their interests must always come first. Those who read afterwards what has been said are essentially a secondary audience, even though they may be more numerous. To think of one s readers first and one s listeners second and almost as an afterthought is almost certain to lead to a poor public performance, which is the main reason for the low communication-value of most contributions to conferences.

Equally, however, what is very effective when it is spoken may do its authors less credit than it deserves when it is read. There are very likely to be repetitions, parentheses, half-sentences and the occasional colloquial interjection which are helpful as a means of building bridges between a speaker and his audience but which may appear careless and semi-literate in print. In editing these texts given here, I have made the minimum number of changes required to produce the acceptable printed word, while taking the utmost care to preserve the flavour of the original and to reflect the personality of the speaker. I have also made certain small changes where the choice of the English word was not exactly correct.

The translation of Michel Van Praët s lecture is mine, but I have no responsibility for the French translation of the other pieces, although I have no reason to suppose that it is anything other than faultless.

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