

The Ignoramus Palace

It is now time to call for *The Ignoramus Palace*, where the mind and the memory of man have the powers of grasping the highest reality.

The interpretation of the collected knowledge of humankind, of all times, should now lie in the power of every individual, every observer entering The Ignoramus Palace. What has been formed is an infrastructure; let's call it an archive, but imagine it as something closer to a medium, where the universal knowledge will be gathered. Entering The Ignoramus Palace, the observer will experience all the knowledge in the world, or rather, the whole universe. The notion of the archive can also be seen as a metaphor for the collection of traces from the past, of what has ever been shared and articulated in any form. In its finalised state the importance of the archive lies in the internal made external, making the mind visible.

The information collected within the archive is being shared through a complex system based on the principles of *The*

Theatre of Memory by Giulio Camillo. Camillo wrote in his published work *L'idea del teatro* that he imagined his Theatre of Memory to “locate and administrate all human concepts, everything which exists in the whole world.” Reaching for the level of the planets, the observer would be able both to see more, as well as more easily catch glimpses of true wisdom. In this way, the theatre became both a constructed mind and soul.

Camillo used the principles of the Vitruvian theatre to organise the structure which had the form of an amphitheatre built from wood. The construction represented the universe and contained the knowledge of all things; beyond that, it also aimed at making the spectator experience both material and time-bound existence. The theatre was divided into seven sections and seven levels. Each section was marked with one of Solomon's seven pillars of wisdom (inspired by those bearing Solomon's own House of Wisdom), on top of which six heavenly bodies rest—the Moon, Mercury, Venus, Mars, Jupiter and Saturn.

In the total forty-nine areas of the theatre all human knowledge was archived. Most remarkably, the single spectator of The Theatre of Memory had his place on the stage from where he would look up at the structure, and, through the images and symbols on the forty-nine sections, grasp all human knowledge.

In 1614, shortly after Camillo's attempt to realise his theatre (he never found a patron capable of building his complex structure), Daniël Heinsius contemplated the idea of the narrator of history in his book *De praestantia ac dignitate historiae oratio*, where he touched upon the concept of The Ignoramus Palace:

“He [man] would be free from the limits of time and space... and would gather into one focus the immeasurable great vastness of generations. ... He would view in a moment an indefinite multitude of matters and affairs.”

As intended within The Theatre of Memory, the spectator was no longer a passive observer in relation to the universal knowledge. Likewise, in The Ignoramus Palace it is now the observer who, through the power of memory, has the ability of bringing together, filtering out, creating relations and in the end conceiving the truth and highest reality. The observer will be present everywhere, both in the material world and in time.

Though mentioned sporadically throughout history, The Theatre of Memory had been forgotten for the larger part of the past five hundred years. However, more recently it has come to light again and in different forms been interpreted and studied. But none of these efforts—even if very ambitious—have fully managed

to put the observer in such a central position with regard to the universal knowledge as The Theatre of Memory.

The Mundaneum was developed in 1910 by Belgian lawyers Paul Otlet and Henri la Fontaine. It had the intention of gathering all the knowledge in the world according to the Universal Decimal Classification Method, as part of their work on documentation science. It consisted of 12 million index cards and documents, and they thought of it as a centrepiece of a new world city—and called it the *Palais Mondial*.

Only a couple of years after Otlet and Fontaine published their visions of the *Palais Mondial*, Louis Borges thoroughly described *The Library of Babel* and its universe with enormous adjacent hexagonal rooms. Every book ever written, or that might have been written, is stored in the library. Although most of the books of the library are pure nonsense, every book is somewhere to be found. Not only that, the library must also contain predictions of the future, biographies of any person, and translations of every book in all languages. Although it may take weeks, yes, even years to find the paths of thought you are looking for. In the eternal search for their path, running through the rooms and up and down the stairs of the library, the observer had to find themselves present in the material time, at all times.

Within The Ignoramus Palace there are certainly similarities with the Library of Babel—it is vast, ungraspable and contains all universal knowledge, not seemingly without a purpose. However, The Ignoramus Palace is not quite like the endless library. The way of organising the universal knowledge and future

predictions in the Library of Babel is still highly related to material time. Instead, in The Ignoramus Palace, the observer does not have to find the universal knowledge in relation to material time, all being viewed—as well put by Daniël Heinsius—in a moment of time. Through the same principles developed in The Theatre of Memory, the observer can at one glance take part of what has been told, read and written, seen, recorded and forgotten. The observer becomes both a listener, performer and composer in The Ignoramus Palace.

More recently, Asimov created the *Encyclopedia Galactica* of the Galactic Empire, intended to preserve the knowledge in a remote region of the galaxy in the event of a foreseen galactic catastrophe. Being at first an archive in a physical medium, it later became computerised and was no longer hidden away in the galaxy, but instead subject to continual change. As the *Encyclopedia Galactica* became digitised it had to stay on earth, and it has now evolved into becoming an archive hidden away in remote places in all corners of the earth. Only small fractions of the archive are being experienced daily by some observers. Sadly, there is no efficient way to fully interact with the knowledge saved within the *Encyclopedia Galactica*.

The closest anyone ever got to the concept of The Ignoramus Palace was Ken Isaacs in the 1970s. Isaacs designed a compressed environment for experiencing ‘culture’: in itself a rather simple form—a cube of wood, Masonite and steel, equipped with twenty-four slide projectors and audio-suppliers. By letting the observer into the cube, while simultaneously projecting images and sound with the twenty-four

projectors and audio-suppliers, the observer was experiencing narratives in a non-linear way. Isaacs wanted to question the passive models of transmitting information, leading people to individual ignorant states. An important quote from Isaacs himself:

“As the imagination of many men creates a fantastic new world, the danger is that individual man may soon find himself lost in it. He may be expert in his own special field—microbiology, perhaps—but otherwise remains an ignoramus. New teaching techniques and devices are therefore much required in order to cram as much knowledge as possible, as fast as possible, into his swimming brain.”

Similarly, within The Ignoramus Palace it is now time to bring all the knowledge of the universe out from the walls of the hidden and passive archives. As an archive of the commons, an archive for every individual observer to fully have power over it. It is not with the simple intention to provide the observer with chosen and collected knowledge and information. It shall reach much further.

With the continuous accumulation of information, knowledge and wisdom created through the progression from generation to generation, better visions of the universe are expected to emerge, resulting from the structural permanence of the The Ignoramus Palace. And for the first time, through the realisation of Giulio Camillo’s visions of The Theatre of Memory, the relationship between technologies of inscription and memory processes are to be developed into The Ignoramus Palace. Here it is no other party than the observer who is in power to reach the universal knowledge, and foremost, the highest reality.