

## Social Museology: A Safeguard against Societal Collapse?

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*La muséologie sociale, un bouclier contre l'effondrement sociétal ?*

### Social Museology: A safeguard against Societal Collapse?

In 2005, the American author Jared Diamond published the bestseller *Collapse: How Societies Choose to Fail or Survive*, raising a real questioning about the future of Humans on Earth. At the back of the book, he formulated its intended "food for thought" by this query: "Who hasn't gazed upon the abandoned temples of Angkor Wat or the jungle-choked cities of the Maya and wondered, could the same fate happen to us?"<sup>2</sup> The book's first nine chapters reveal how the abuse of resources and of the environment by Humans caused the societal collapse of the inhabitants of Easter Island, of the Anasazis in the North American southwest, of the Mayas in Yucatan, of Vikings in Greenland... A relentless pattern of environmental disasters emerges. A pattern whose harbingers are besieging us again, an embezzlement we disregard, at our own risk.

Published at the beginning of a new millennium, this book was received by strong critics and concerns, but also by praise, some of which deserve to be mentioned here, because they summarize, in few words, the 600 pages of the book:

With *Collapse*, Jared Diamond has written a fascinating account of the collapse of civilizations around the world... A reader cannot help but leave the book wondering whether we are following the track of these other civilizations that failed. Any reader of *Collapse* will leave the book convinced that we must take steps now to save our planet. — *The Boston Globe*  
In a world that celebrates live journalism, we are increasingly in need of big-picture authors like Jared Diamond, who think historically and spacially – across an array of disciplines – to make sense of events that journalists may seem to be covering in depth, but in fact aren't.... Thank heavens there is someone of the stature of Diamond willing to say so. — Robert D. Kaplan, *The Washington Post*<sup>3</sup>

Almost twenty years later, Canadian museologist Robert Janes, founder of the Coalition of Museums for Climate Justice, published *Museums and Societal Collapse: The Museum as Lifeboat*. Professor François Mairesse, of Université Sorbonne nouvelle, thus acknowledges its relevance:

All of Janes' books are milestones in thinking about the museum, its role, and its evolution. *Museums and societal collapse* addresses for the first time, abruptly, a topic related to the

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<sup>2</sup> Diamond, Jared (2005). *Collapse: How Societies Choose to Fail or Succeed*. Londres : Penguin Books. Translated in 2006 and titled: *Effondrement : Comment les sociétés décident de leur disparition ou de leur survie*. Paris : Éditions Gallimard.

<sup>3</sup> Diamond, Jared (2005). Ibidem

possible vanishing of our civilization. Global warming, resource depletion, increasing inequalities and conflicts provide the breeding ground for a radical world's metamorphosis. The role that museums can play in mitigating the effects of these transformations is at the heart of the author's concerns: a book that must be read.<sup>4</sup>

### The biotope of a possible 'societal collapse'

In the first part of his book, Janes analyzes the context of a possible "societal collapse" before proposing to museums an "agenda" to counter the illusory *status quo*, "*Business as usual*"... The link between this first part and the agenda is done by tackling the myth of "sustainable development" and its panacea of clean technologies that supposedly will compensate for abusive resource extraction, biodiversity loss, forest destruction and ocean acidification. Janes opens Chapter 3 with the following statement:

It is with genuine difficulty that I write this chapter, recognizing that there are so many people who are committed to sustainability as the overarching solution to planetary chaos. Sustainability's adherents are intelligent, caring, and committed human beings, and I count many of them as my close colleagues, friends, and family. [...] In short, sustainability and sustainable development, as currently defined, are falsehoods.

Further on, he acknowledges that he belongs to:

[...] the critics' camp and will argue that the widely used concept of sustainability is an unachievable myth as currently promoted. In brief, efforts to address environmental sustainability have centered on green growth, which is described as a win-win proposition – continuing economic growth, while simultaneously meeting environmental outcomes and goals. The promise of green growth relies on decoupling environmental harm from economic growth and, as such, denies the fundamental relationship between economic growth and greenhouse gas emissions.<sup>5</sup>

With Janes' book in hand, my intention here is to give the participants of the 27th ICOM General Conference, to be held in November 2025 in Dubai, a different but very revealing point of view on its theme and the reflection it wants to generate on *The future of museums in ever-changing communities*. This rather depressing point of view, I want to share with as many people as possible, while trying to summarize – here, in few pages – the thought of my friend "Bob" Janes. The objective of his book is to propose to museums a new life, becoming real "lifeboats" to shield their communities against the different phases of collapse, their warning signs being by now quite noticeable. After translating Janes' book into French, I wish to highlight Janes' insights, not only for SOMUS-IC adherents, but for all ICOM members, as they directly address museums and the essential social role they can play – and indeed will have to play – in the coming decades.

In his book, Janes updates the crises that devastate our societies today, delivering a vibrant message in favor of renewing the mission of museums on all continents. In other words, reform the current practices of conventional museology to adopt those of "sociomuseology" to reduce the impacts of the collapses that our societies will undergo in the coming decades.

In the process of translating *Museums and Societal Collapse*, I came across another book that allowed me to better grasp the substrata of societal collapse as they creep today at various levels in our societies, whether democratic, autocratic, or other. This book full of metaphorical ideas is titled: *Halte à l'avancée de l'inhumain*, and it ends, on the second-last page, with the following snapshot:

– How are you?

– As well as one can feel on the deck of the Titanic, at cocktail hour, with a group of merry men singing and dancing, while turning their backs on the iceberg that is heading towards them.<sup>6</sup>

Combining its "life-size" images depicted by Quebec poet Paul Chamberland with the museological approach of Robert Janes, I propose to explore how societal collapse can be perceived and understood by

<sup>4</sup> Janes, Robert R. (2024). *Museums and Societal Collapse: The Museum as Lifeboat*. Londres et New York: Routledge.

<sup>5</sup> Janes, Robert R. (2024). Ibidem, p. 40.

<sup>6</sup> Chamberland, Paul (2024). Ibidem, p. 140.

museum workers and by various other sociocultural stakeholders. To do this, let's see how Janes describes what he calls: "Societal Collapse".

### "Societal Collapse": its phases, its scenarios...

According to Nate Hagens<sup>7</sup>, cited by Janes, the sustainability movement is based on a disabling deficiency he calls "Energy blindness". In other words, we pay nothing for the creation of – or pollution by – fossil fuels, now the most valuable contribution to our economy. As noted, each barrel of oil is equivalent from four to five years of work for one person. Of course, no one thinks of that when refueling his car or flying in a jet plane. For example, according to recent statistics, the average American consumes the equivalent of 72 barrels of oil per year, which equals to 360 years of work and therefore to roughly 14,400,000 US dollars. It means living in an ocean of energy consumption that we are not even aware of, while the bank statement for oil is continuously declining. We burn and release this ancient carbon ten million times faster than it has been sequestered over millions of years in the earth, and this consumption directly contributes to Green House Gas and the destruction of the biosphere.

To summarize, it seems almost impossible, given the scale, to eliminate all fossil fuels in a few decades, with the added cost and technical irrelevance of activities that depend on them, and the numerous systemic problems related to their use. At the heart of the problem, our cultural and capitalist models of overconsumption and economies based on growth and endless development based on an ever-greater energy dependency. As the Swedish activist Greta Thunberg said in 2022, it is "a question of social justice, considering for example that three billion people consume less energy per inhabitant and per year than a standard American refrigerator."<sup>8</sup>

In his book, Janes explores the role of electricity, acknowledging our unconscious reliance on it for most things we do. It is much more difficult for him to imagine living without electricity than without fossil fuels, and this, although only 19% of global energy consumption stems from electricity, the other 81% coming from fossil fuels. That makes him dumbstricken by the UN's "17 SDGs" – Sustainable Development Goals<sup>9</sup> – that he describes as unsustainable, as nondurable... He writes: "*Homo sapiens* madness remains at play with its rampant denialism, but museums need not be held captive in this mindset. In fact, [...] museums can provide an inventory of how societies [without fossil fuels] have achieved rapid transitions in the past by codifying the ingredients and design criteria for successful future rapid transitions." On this subject, Janes highlights the relevance of economist and environmentalist Andrew Simms' opinion:

Museums matter because they challenge our lack of belief in the possibility of change. In fact, they graphically demonstrate its inevitability. Museums give the lie to the myth of permanence. They are filled with objects and documents that show how change happens, including the possibility of rapid transitions, whether in response to cultural, political, or environmental factors, or war, technology, or demography.<sup>10</sup>

In the 2<sup>nd</sup> chapter of his book, Janes links the five stages that make up complete societal collapse to four possible scenarios dealing with them. The table below summarizes the different phases of societal collapse, according to Dimitri Orlov<sup>11</sup>:

<sup>7</sup> Hagens, Nate (2022). "Energy blindness." YouTube, June 19. From *The Great Simplification*.

Available online: [www.youtube.com/watch?v=mVjhb8Nu1Sk](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mVjhb8Nu1Sk)

<sup>8</sup> Thunberg, Greta (2022). "Greta Thunberg on the climate delusion: We've been greenwashed out of our senses. It's time to stand our ground." The Guardian, October 8.

Available on line: [www.theguardian.com/environment/2022/oct/08/greta-thunberg-climate-delusion-greenwashed-out-of-our-senses](https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2022/oct/08/greta-thunberg-climate-delusion-greenwashed-out-of-our-senses)

<sup>9</sup> United Nations (2015). "Open working group proposal for Sustainable Development Goals."

Sustainable Development Knowledge Platform. Online: <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/focussdgs.html>

<sup>10</sup> Simms, Andrew (2019). "Museum of rapid transition: Museums in a world facing existential crisis."

Museum-iD, Issue 23, March 26. Available online: <https://museum-id.com/museum-of-rapid-transition-the-role-of-museums-in-a-world-facing-existential-crisis/>

<sup>11</sup> Orlov, Dimitri (2013). *The Five Stages of Collapse: Survivor's Toolkit*. Gabriola Island, Canada : New Society Publishers.

Phase	Collapse	Description
1	<b>Financial</b>	Confidence and " <i>Business as usual</i> ". The past is no longer a guide for the future. Financial institutions become insolvent. Savings and access to capital go skyrocketing ...
2	<b>Commercial</b>	Despite the total dependence on trade, faith in the market is disappearing. Money devaluation, storage of goods, collapse of imports, breakdown of retail chains, widespread shortage of necessities becomes the norm ...
3	<b>Political</b>	Trust in governments fades away, including their ability to take care of society, leveling wealth inequality, mitigating the widespread scarcity of goods and services necessary for survival... The political <i>establishment</i> at all levels loses its legitimacy and relevance.
4	<b>Social</b>	Social institutions, charities, and non-profits lack resources or fail internally. The belief that yours will take care of you goes crumbling ...
5	<b>Cultural</b>	The darkest and ultimate phase: faith in the goodness of humanity is lost and with it, the ability to be generous, honest, caring, charitable... Families split apart, fighting over their meager resources...

These five levels of societal collapse, as hypothetical or realistic as they may be, are all capable of revealing certain fundamental truths which are currently shaping our future. Although these truths are in opposition to our current way of life, their innate presumptions can no longer be ignored. They muzzle the sources of wisdom and motivation that could help us create a new approach for the future, based on knowledge, experience, compassion, common sense. Can we see now the possible scenarios facing these phases of societal collapse? Let Janes describe four of them in the following table:

Scenarios	Configuration	Description
<b>Red Global Scenario</b>	<b>Status quo</b>	Serious efforts are made on a global scale to face the environmental crises, but are taken by technologies and the market, without paying attention to regulating damages to the biosphere, without efforts to restore the ecosystems... Inequalities and conflicts over resources will persist.
<b>Silver Global Scenario</b>	<b>Techno-utopia</b>	Efforts by companies and governments have doubled to replace fossil fuels by alternative energies and to create new sources of water and food, but the effects of climate change have worsened, with the acidification of oceans, the expansion of deserts...
<b>Green Global Scenario</b>	<b>Ecotopia</b>	The biosphere's inherent value is finally recognized, and efforts are made to return forests and oceans "to the wild". Parks have become commonplace, but these efforts did not avert the tipping points of responses to climate change. It was hoped that the wilderness could be restored in some areas to allow biodiversity to recover. Humans and nature are still improving certain regions, but not everywhere.
<b>Black Global Scenario</b>	<b>Accept decline</b>	Efforts to counter environmental and resource crises have been ineffective and/or came too late. We lacked courage, determination and objectives. Consequences have been different in various places, some societies accepting decline, others choosing crime, conflict, still others returning to nomadism. This is the scenario of "total societal collapse"!

To conclude these descriptions of the phases and scenarios of "societal collapse", Janes turned to Joseph Conrad (1857-1924), a 19<sup>th</sup> century Polish writer who reflected in depth on the perils caused by our modern civilization, including those induced by imperialism, colonialism and authoritarianism of 'collective

thinking'. Conrad provides us with a quite prophetic warning for our times in his book *Tales of Heroes and History* published posthumously in 1960:

Few men realize that their life, the very essence of their character, their abilities, their daring is only the expression of their faith in the safety of their environment. Courage, restraint, confidence, emotions and principles, all thought, from the greatest to the smallest, do not belong to the individual, but rather to a whole population: to people who blindly believe in the invincible strength of their morals and institutions, and who believe in the power of their police and their opinions.<sup>12</sup>

### **Museums, beacons of hope to face societal collapse?**

Strengthened by Robert Janes' analyses and proposals, I venture in his footsteps to summarize chapters 4 and 5, the core of his book, on the possible role museums can play in facing societal collapse. He readily admits the incongruity of the global situation facing museums and of what they must do, not only to avoid, mitigate or manage their collapse as institutions, but more importantly, to work with their communities to face the threats of societal collapse.

Although museums cannot, on their own, deal with the current polycrisis, there is a metaphorical way of looking at their potential role as "lifeboats", well-equipped and ready to help people who are or will be in danger. This danger will come from the confusion, anxiety, and despair of individuals, families, and communities in great need of information, compassion, and assistance as the risks of the various collapses are identified. Often, words come easily, but action does not follow. Here is how the late Canadian museologist and scholar Michael Ames pointed it out in 1992:

It is typically easier to see what should be done which simply requires a judgement than to get it done which requires a more extensive analysis of the situation and the marshalling of support. Despair is thus frequently the shadow to ambition in the museum world, like devils following one in the night<sup>13</sup>.

Although action might become arduous, and perhaps accompanied by despair, the museum acting as a "lifeboat" is an original alternative to its impertinence and possible decline. To explore the meaning and application of this metaphor, Janes begins with the following truths, as we know them today:

1. Global warming is not the cause of the polycrisis – ecological and civilizational overshoot are.
2. The so-called renewable energy technologies are not solutions to climate change as they are not renewable and will only increase overshoot through the consumption of yet more energy and materials to prolong the consumption of material comforts.
3. Decoupling the human enterprise from the natural world is impossible, and the idea of net-zero carbon emissions is fraudulent and ignores the need to stop using fossil fuels.<sup>14</sup>

These alarming realities shape the context within which the museum community must live and deal, and it follows that much remains to be done. Both extensive and powerful, the museum community, in addition to the buildings and the collections they protect, includes human resources, boards of directors and government authorities, members, stakeholders, volunteers, shopkeepers, donors, consultants, professors in museum studies and museum associations.

In this article, I focus on the role and responsibilities of museums, of museum workers, of their organizations and associations, while keeping in mind their interaction and mutuality. To the question *Why are museums a sign of hope?* Janes answers:

The global museum community is the largest, self-organized franchise in the world, and museums constitute an informal network of public storefronts, unlike any other organizations. As noted earlier, museums are also civil society spaces where the threat of collapse, and all its

<sup>12</sup> Conrad, Joseph (1960). *Tales of Heroes and History*. Garden City, NY : Doubleday & Company Inc.

<sup>13</sup> Ames, Michael (1992). *Cannibal Tours and Glass Boxes: The Anthropology of Museums*. Vancouver, Canada : UBC Press.

<sup>14</sup> Janes, Robert R. (2024). *Ibidem*, p.77.

attendant issues can be aired, discussed, and acted upon. Museums are uniquely qualified to do so because of their singular combination of historical consciousness, sense of place, long-term stewardship [of heritage], knowledge base, public accessibility, and unprecedented public trust. No social institutions have a deeper sense of time than museums, and their very nature, they are predisposed to exercise their larger view of time, as stewards of the biosphere. Although still plagued by elitist behavior and denialism, museums are public places where people can meet, work, and learn from each other. Museums can move the conversation about collapse beyond the academy and the fringe into society at large<sup>15</sup>.

This long quote leads to the specification of what is "civil society", namely the one located between the family's private sphere and the official sphere of the State. It generally includes a diversity of spaces, actors and institutional forms that vary in their degree of formality, autonomy, and power. Moreover, it produces "social capital", an array of networks, norms, beliefs and shared values that are transferred into the social sphere, that help in keeping the society together and that are useful for facilitating the understanding of society's interconnections and interests within it. Social capital is therefore a long-term asset that emanates from associations not explicitly interested or constrained by it. This social capital decreases if it is not diligently renewed or replaced, hence the need to include "social museology" in the very definition of the museum, because the one approved in 2022 by members of the International Council of Museums (ICOM) in Prague is considered far too traditional by those who, like Janes and myself, consider museums as active agents of civil society, capable of improving planetary well-being.

Although the values and role of museums in society may seem contradictory or inconceivable to some academics, practitioners, and cultural bureaucrats, their diversity evokes an astonishing vigour that transforms them into protections and engagements for the planet and the future of humanity. At the same time, a probably fatal future for museums is conceivable, if the current and fragmented understanding of their scope and value persists, leaving them to sink into impertinence and collapse, without even being able to share a common definition of their work. The last two stages of the collapse, the social and cultural, will be the deadliest. This is when "sociomuseology" can give to society more value, perspective, and dynamism. If the warning signs of collapse are ignored by the museum community, it will be too late for them to claim their legitimacy, while individuals, families and communities will face not only the effects of financial, commercial and political collapses, but also the consequences of the social and cultural downfalls.

Initially, Janes intended to provide a detailed critique of current museum practices to explain why he believes they are in lethal danger. After careful consideration, he has changed his approach and instead focused on what he thinks museums can and should do as "lifeboats" to transform their practices and assume new roles and responsibilities as the threats of collapse become better-defined. Museums have several strengths and qualities that can allow their transformation as "lifeboats", but they also have to deal with obstacles. Janes cannot help but identify the various handicaps and self-inflicted dysfunctions that overwhelm today the museum world.

### **To conclude, four questions, with answers, to adapt to collapse**

Inspired by Jem Bendell, professor at the University of Cumbria, UK,<sup>16</sup> Janes broke down in his book his "Museum Program" into four questions on resilience, relinquishment, restoration and reconciliation. These questions formulate a valuable framework to explore how museums and museum workers can use their "lifeboats" and contribute to resilience, countering pain, adopting new values, and proposing a new museum "narrative" to their communities shaken by the various collapses to come.

The framework of the present text only allows a reduced and formatted view of each of the answers to the four questions as formulated by Janes in the last 40 pages of chapter 5 of his book. It shows museums

<sup>15</sup> Janes, Robert R. (2022). *The value of museums in averting societal collapse*. Curator, The Museum Journal 65 (4), 729-745. Available online : [ht Janes, R.R. 2022. "The value of museums in averting societal collapse." Curator, The Museum Journal 65 \(4\), 729-745. et : https://doi.org/10.1111/cura.12503 tps://doi.org/10.1111/cura.12503.](https://doi.org/10.1111/cura.12503)

<sup>16</sup> Bendell, Jem (2019). *Because it's not a drill: Technologies for deep adaptation to climate chaos*. Conceptual paper prepared for a speech at Connect University Conference on Climate Change, DG Connect, European Commission, Brussels, 13 mai. Available online: [http://insight.cumbria.ac.uk/id/eprint/4776/1/Bendell\\_BecauseItsNot.pdf](http://insight.cumbria.ac.uk/id/eprint/4776/1/Bendell_BecauseItsNot.pdf).

both from outside and inside, while indicating how they can and should contribute to the collective well-being of their communities. The following table indicates the topics covered by Janes in response to each of the four questions he puts forward:

The 4 questions	The answers in 27 objectives and actions
<b>1 – Resilience:</b> How do we keep what we really want to keep?	1. Increase social capital. 2. <i>Small is More than Beautiful.</i> 3. The seed and memory banks 4. Have the required knowledge to adapt. 5. Being community synthesizers. 6. Improve their sense of time. 7. Promote wonder and diversity. 8. Support collaboration. 9. Encourage mutual aid. 10. Develop societal trust. 11. Be prepared to fight for culture.
<b>2 – Relinquishment:</b> How do we need to let go of so as not to make matters worse?	1. Renounce the myth of growth. 2. Which museum buildings should be kept? 3. Which collections should be saved? 4. What to protect: social values or the marketplace? 5. Reconsider the neutrality of museums. 6. Assume leadership and sound management. 7. Outsmart functional stupidity.
<b>3 – Restoration:</b> What can we bring back to help us with the coming difficulties and tragedies?	1. Endorse four positions: why, what, how, and for whom? 2. Subscribe to personal agency, initiative. 3. Ensure self-sufficiency through critical thinking, facilitation, assistance, mentoring, and discussions. 4. Encourage the elder culture and the honorable life.
<b>4 – Reconciliation:</b> With what and whom can we make peace as we face our mutual mortality?	1. Learn about other ways of knowing. 2. Honor the More-Than-Human World. 3. Recognize moral injury. 4. Be attentive while saying "goodbye". 5. Curtail uncertainty ...

Robert Janes concludes the fifth chapter of his book with some reflections on the hope he has for the museum's transformation into a "lifeboat", even though he avows that this hope may have little to offer, given the real and potential threats they are now facing. Indeed, there is:

- no hope of limiting global warming to 1.5 °C.
- no hope of stopping the production of fossil fuels by oil companies, big and small.
- little hope that governments of countries in the Northern hemisphere will adopt austerity measures to reduce harmful excesses.
- very little hope that the GDP monetary measure will be replaced by accounting of real, environmental and social costs.
- little hope that the global North will admit that transition to "green technologies" does mean plundering the environment and the poor.<sup>17</sup>

Here is a very modest list of the consequences inherent to the ongoing polycrisis. It is naive to assume that, for the moment, we will achieve all or part of the above, and this for multiple reasons, even if it would be a good thing. According to the American eco-philosopher Derrick Jensen, "Hope is what keeps us chained

<sup>17</sup> Janes, Robert R. (2024). Ibidem, p.77.

to the system, the conglomerate of people and ideas and ideals that is causing the destruction of the Earth<sup>18</sup>. " He also notes that hope means longing for a future condition over which we have no power or control, because we are effectively powerless.

More than half of Janes' book is devoted to demonstrating why museums are essential for dealing with this unknown future as it comes before us, and how they are equipped and capable of playing this role by giving us the perspectives and ingredients to go well beyond the status quo. Giving up hope doesn't mean falling into a big black hole. A well-assuming social museology can identify multiple possible opportunities that will pave new paths for individuals, families, and communities.

### **Think about it ...** [title of the 6th chapter]

In closing, Janes admits that "the North American frame of reference is the MTI society, with its particular values and aspirations. In short, we are the products of the culture we are born into. However, we are also desperately in need of not only a new cultural narrative but also of new institutions to create and steward this new narrative. Contemporary institutions in all sectors are not fulfilling the requirements for a new future<sup>19</sup>."

Although somewhat dated, here is a striking example as Janes reports, of the cultural sector's lack of foresight and judgment, as it happened during the 2022 National Summit on Culture organized by Heritage Canada [in Ottawa]. The proposed themes for this event were as follows:

The promotion of long-term competitiveness and growth.

The return of visitors [ante-Covid-19] and engaging new audiences.

The role of digital platforms in arts, culture, and heritage sectors.

The contribution of cultural sectors to reconciliation, combatting climate change and building an open and more inclusive society.

Note the emphasis on audience growth, on development, digital platforms... It monopolizes three out of four themes. The last theme, although addressing several contemporary issues, did not convey any sense of emergency, even though it sets out polite consideration for the "greening" of the artistic community.

Although traumas, with their sufferings, conflicts and victims, take place all over the world, they did not seem important enough to deserve to be really considered at this Summit. The performing arts were well-posted at the center, with a continuous reference to entertainment, consumption, and money. Knowledge and values-based organizations, like museums, libraries, archives..., were invisible or seldom recognized during the Summit sessions. In Canada, culture seems consequently to focus more on leisure consumption rather than on the way we live.

Had the Summit been better planned, as Janes pretends, it could have sparked significant discussions on how the arts and heritage sectors can help the Canadian governments and citizens plan for a future free from the privileges and expectations we take for granted. The cultural sector could have begun to define its role and responsibilities as a very large "lifeboat", a big "rabaska"<sup>20</sup> and a social meeting agora. Furthermore, the Summit could have helped to redefine the vision and objectives of the arts and heritage sectors to replace economic instrumentalism and the desire for popularity, with a commitment to the viability of societies and the well-being of individuals, communities and natural environments. What was supposed to be a golden opportunity... was missed!

Fortunately, sociomuseology is appropriately present in the conclusion of Robert Janes' book which still sees the light at the end of the tunnel. Although the approach of museums beyond consumer society remains without research, little defined, it will certainly encompass a gradual evolution or renewal through the rupture and birth of something new, unexpected and potentially good.

There are good reasons to believe that a new type of museum is possible, even if this vision flies in the face of conventional wisdom and time-honoured practices. If this new vision appeals to

<sup>18</sup> Jensen, Derrick (2006). "Beyond hope." Orion Magazine, mai/juin. Available online: <https://orionmagazine.org/article/beyond-hope/>.

<sup>19</sup> Janes, Robert R. (2024). Ibidem, p. 121.

<sup>20</sup> The word *rabaska* is a Canadianism derived from the French spoken in Quebec to define a very large bark canoe capable of carrying heavy loads and 12 to 15 passengers. It comes from an alteration of the word *Athapaskaw* in Algonquian and Cree languages, curiously meaning *Herbs and reeds, here and there ...* (fr.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rabaska)



enough museum practitioners, it could be revolutionary in breaking the mould of traditional museum practices, assumptions, and the lethal baggage of MTI society.

It is liberating to consider what might be possible for the museum as lifeboat:

- a seed bank of sustainable living practices that have guided our species for millennia;
- the museum as public advocate;
- the museum as problem solver;
- the museum as a community laboratory;
- the museum as an open source to sustainable technologies;
- the museum as cultivator of personal and community agency.

There is also an opportunity for the museum of rapid transition to help us understand the dynamics of change and the stories of how we have made our home in the world. These are only several of the new frontiers that await the caring museum.<sup>21</sup>

In conclusion, Janes wants us to realize that the past is no longer a guide to the future and that required social changes will not occur while fighting to keep the current model of museum practices. A new model based on the best possible sociomuseology and narrative must therefore be devised, tested, and implemented, making the current museum model rather obsolete.

### **Why this translation of Robert Janes' book *Museums and Societal Collapse*?**

I first met Robert "Bob" Janes in 1985, at a Heritage North Symposium he had organized in Yellowknife, Northwest Territories, Canada. Founder of the Prince of Wales Heritage Centre in Yellowknife, he directed it from 1976 to 1986. Then, from 1989 to 2000, he was director of the renowned Glenbow Museum in Calgary. He is now a scholar, researcher and advisor in museum design, organization and management. In 2002, we both became "Fellows" of the Canadian Museums Association.

Captured by the content of his last book, I decided last year to translate it so that the French-speaking museum community could have access to its provocative and inspiring content. Today, I am addressing this text to all the participants of ICOM 2025, in Dubai, encouraging them to consult or to obtain this book so that they will become the brave rowers on cultural lifeboats, those large canoes or 'rabaskas' who will bring their museums and communities out of the murky waters of societal collapse.

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<sup>21</sup> Janes, Robert R. (2024). Ibidem, p. 123.