

The background of the image is a detailed photograph of a stone wall. The wall is composed of large, irregular, light-colored stone blocks, some of which are covered in patches of moss and small plants. A vine with small, dark red leaves is visible on the left side, climbing up the wall. The overall texture is rough and aged, suggesting a historical or natural setting.

TRACES OF THE PAST

HARMEN DE HOOP

Does history teach us to move forward, recognize our mistakes and learn from them? Does it allow us to think critically about narratives that have developed over time, and does it provide us with a format to examine the present? Can it help us to rectify injustices, discuss divisions and celebrate differences? Or will studying the past only create the illusion that we can make sense of it all?

1.

SATURN V
NEUCHATEL



We were so optimistic in the 1960s. Things could only get better. The advent of modern appliances such as washing machines and refrigerators changed the lives of women. We put a man on the moon. The future looked bright. But of course, all that changed. The rise of our living standard created a waste problem and climate change became a serious issue. Instead of hope the dominant mood today seems to be one of anxiety. Is it all downhill from here?

2.
DAS KAPITAL
TRIER



The writings of Karl Marx were hugely influential. They were an inspiration for the Russian Marxists, led by Lenin in 1917, and the Chinese Marxists, led by Mao in 1949, but they also inspired the student movement of the 1960s, in hopes of realizing a more fully democratic and inclusive version of Marx's original vision of social justice. Well, this copy of Das Kapital is not likely to inspire anyone any more. So, whose writings can inspire us in a time when capital has run amok, a time of wage stagnation and growing social inequality?

3.

EAST GERMAN BANKNOTES
QUEDLINBURG



Why was there no proper building maintenance in communist East Germany? Why did their inner cities look like slums? The main reason was a permanent rent freeze: it was their way to keep the wages low. But it also meant no repair, no renovation, no maintenance. After the reunification of Germany a massive renovation project started. But even after 30 years of capitalism not all buildings are fixed. Can these bundles of East German Marks (with the portrait of Karl Marx) still be put to good use?

4.

CHINESE PORCELAIN
ZANDVOORT



Between the 16th and the 20th century a wide range of Chinese porcelain was made (almost) exclusively for export to Europe and later to North America. In 1602 and 1604, two Portuguese ships were captured by the Dutch and their cargoes, which included thousands of items of porcelain, were sold off at an auction, igniting a great interest for Chinese export porcelain in Holland. Between 1602 and 1682 the VOC (Dutch East India Company) carried between 30 and 35 million pieces of porcelain. Not all cargos arrived intact, sometimes shipwrecks took their toll. Were these Chinese vases, now washed up on the Dutch seashore, part of this global trade?

5.

ADVERTISING POSTERS
COLMAR



I didn't know the French liked rum so much. Negrita rum is distilled in the French islands of Réunion, Guadeloupe, and Martinique in the Caribbean. In the colonial era, rum production depended on the labor of slaves to harvest the sugar cane. Is advertising this Caribbean drink with a picture of a black girl still acceptable?

Who wants to be served by a black servant?

To this day, the logo of the Negrita brand is this black girl, but in their ads they now show a more diverse group of ethnical mixed young people, dancing in the Caribbean sun.

6.
FILM POSTER
OLTEN



Paths of Glory is a 1957 film directed by Stanley Kubrick, starring Kirk Douglas. From 1957 to 1975 the film was banned in France because of its critical depiction of the French army during World War I.

Germany banned the film from 1957 to 1959 ‘to avoid straining relations with France’, and somewhat surprisingly even Switzerland banned the film as ‘incontestably offensive’ to France, her judicial system and her army, until 1970. What was so offensive? It tells the true story of three randomly-chosen French soldiers who were executed for cowardice, just to cover up the failures of the French military and bureaucratic authorities. The film is considered one of Stanley Kubrick’s best.

7.

MADONNA & CHILD SCULPTURE
BREMKGARTEN



When did this Madonna and Child end up in the river Reuss? Was it in 1529, when Bremgarten became a Protestant city? But the city was re-Catholicised only two years later, after the Second War of Kappel. Or was it in 1712, after the Second Villmerger War, when the official religion changed back to Protestantism again? For a long time there was no individual freedom of religion in Switzerland. Everybody had to adopt the faith of their rulers ('cuius regio, eius religio'). Dissenters who didn't want to convert had to emigrate to a region where their faith was the state religion. Or they could hide their faith (and maybe even throw away a Madonna and Child sculpture) just to be on the safe side....

8.

BURNED TOYS
WURZBURG



On March 16, 1945, a month after the annihilation of Dresden, English bombers destroyed Würzburg in the same way. First heavy bombs were used to destroy the roofs of the old town, then 300,000 incendiary bombs were dropped to create a firestorm that raged at temperatures up to 2000°C, and destroyed 90% of the city centre. Over 3,700 of the 5,000 casualties were women and children, most of them painfully burned to death. Initially, the English believed that bombing German cities would force Germany to surrender, but it didn't, it just transformed a magnificent mecca of culture and art into 2,5 million cubic meters of rubble. I think the bombing of those medieval city centres was an unforgivable war crime.

9.
RIFLES
COLMAR



Do the citizens of Colmar see themselves as French or German? The French conquered the city in 1673, the Germans took it in 1871, it became French again in 1919, German in 1940, and French in 1945. So which army left these rifles behind? Were the young men of Colmar again and again conscripted into a foreign army against their will? Did they believe in the wars they had to fight?

10.
TYPEWRITER
KUSNACHT



When the Nazis came to power in 1933, Nobel Prize Winner Thomas Mann was told that it would no longer be safe for him to live in Germany, so he fled to Switzerland. From 1933 to 1938 he lived in exile in Küsnacht. I wonder, did he write 'Joseph in Egypt' and 'Lotte in Weimar' on this old Continental typewriter I found in the garden of his villa (Schiedhaldenstrasse 33)?

11.
BOOKS
MURTEN



Jeremias Gotthelf (1797 - 1854) was a famous Swiss author. He wrote about the virtues of rural people, defending the church and traditional family life. His books were still very popular in the 1950's, but who reads them nowadays? I found the 'Complete works of Jeremias Gotthelf' in the streets of Murten, the town where he was born.

12.
DRUGS
AACHEN



Thalidomide (brand name Contergan, Softenon) had been prescribed in the late 1950s and early 1960s to pregnant women to help reduce morning sickness, but tragically, it turned out to be toxic to developing fetuses. Worldwide, an estimated 24,000 babies were born with short arms, twisted hands and no thumbs.

The thalidomide tragedy is probably one of the greatest pharmaceutical disasters of all time. In November 1961, the Grünenthal company withdrew the drug from the market, but thalidomide never disappeared, it is available now for treating leprosy and as an anticancer drug.

13.
MENORAH
STRASBOURG



Was it just vandalism? Or was it a clear case of anti-Semitic aggression directed at the emblem of the State of Israel, the seven-branched menorah?

Is Arab hostility towards Jews anti-Semitic or simply a political stance?

Is it possible to discuss Israel's human rights record without being called anti-Semitic? They say anti-Semitism is rife amongst young Muslim men. Yes, it is true that Muslim extremists have been responsible for some of the anti-Jewish attacks in Europe, but Muslim organizations firmly condemned such actions. Is violence ever a legitimate form of protest? Well, maybe in this case it was just kids having fun smashing windows....

14.
ELECTRIC ORGAN
MANNHEIM



Was it a frustrated keyboard player who threw this Hammond organ from a 4-storey building in Mannheim? Electric organs were popular with symphonic rock bands in the early 1970s, but the rise of punk rock made their complex music unfashionable. Most symphonic bands stopped in the late 1970s, some re-formed in the 2000s or 2010s, but their music ceased to cover new ground. Maybe it is time to buy a synthesizer.

15.
AUDIO CASSETTES
AMSTERDAM



Phil Ochs (1940 - 1976) was an American protest singer and a political activist. He was part of the 1960s counterculture and performed endlessly at civil rights rallies and anti-war demonstrations. He released eight albums in the 1960s and 1970s, but was unhappy that his work was not receiving the popular success he had hoped for. Depressed by this lack of widespread appreciation and suffering from writer's block his drinking became more and more of a problem.

He committed suicide in 1976 at the age of 35.

16.

VINYL RECORDS
AMSTERDAM



Gary Glitter (real name Paul Gadd), was a successful glam rocker in the 1970s, selling over 20 million records. He was sentenced to 4 months in prison in 1999 for possession of child pornography and he was convicted repeatedly for child sexual abuse, cumulating in a 16 years in prison conviction in 2015 for having sex with a girl under the age of 13. Is it ever OK to listen to the music of this convicted paedophile? Can we separate the artist from his art?

17.

BEETHOVEN BUST
AMSTERDAM



Is classical music still part of the school curriculum? There is also ‘the unintended curriculum’: the lessons that arise from the culture of the school and the behaviors, attitudes, and expectations that characterize that culture. Does that mean that students of a ‘white’ school get to know Beethoven, but the students of a ‘black’ school are not? And what happens when a school slowly becomes more and more multi-ethnic? Does that change the knowledge and skills that the school expects successful students to acquire? Less Beethoven and more Beyoncé? Long ago classical music was part of a good upbringing, but how many children are now introduced to classical music? Classical music has unfortunately become associated with the intellectual elite. How long will it take before Beethoven ends up on the trash heap of history?

18.
FOOTBALL
AMSTERDAM



This is where Johan Cruyff used to play as a kid. Long before he was named European Footballer of the Year. Long before he was sold for a world record transfer fee to Barcelona. Was he still able to enjoy playing soccer when expectations were so high, when everything seemed to be about money and fame, when things became really professional? Or did he long for the days when he was just practising his skills on the streets with this ball, when it was just about having fun?

19.

LIGHT BULBS
OESCHENBACH



The electric light bulb has been called the most important invention since man-made fire. Without the light bulb, there would be no night-life. It allowed us to navigate and travel safely in the dark and it extended the workday well into the night, changing the natural rhythm of society. But the incandescent light bulbs have not advanced much since they were first produced commercially by Thomas Edison in 1879. Overall, these bulbs release 95 per cent of their energy as heat and only 5 per cent as light. The 1973 oil crisis caused lighting engineers to develop a more energy efficient spiral shaped fluorescent tube for domestic use (CFLs). Even more energy efficient are the new light-emitting diodes (LEDs). So finally, after 140 years, these incandescent light bulbs can get some rest.

20.
BANKNOTE
AACHEN



I drank a cappuccino in a café in Aachen and left the waitress
a 100,000,000 Mark tip.