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Inclusión cultural en museos y patrimonio



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■ TREA ■

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Communicating Conflicting Histories
La comunicación de historias contradictorias
DARKO BABIC | ŽELJKA MIKLOŠEVI

Communicating Conflicting Histories

La comunicación de historias contradictorias

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ABSTRACT. Once modernist approach to history started to be contested, primarily by historians themselves, an opportunity arose for museum communication of prismatic, multi-perspective narratives which form a close relationship to people and, moreover, come from people. Communicative memory started to be presented in museums together with “objective” cultural memory. However, juxtapositions of communicative and cultural memory inevitably give birth to oppositions, especially in the case of traumatic experiences such as those resulting from war. The aim of the paper is to analyse the ways in which material culture and memorial sites can trigger contradictory memories and a range of different feelings, and to investigate institutional communication of shared and contested historical narratives in Croatia. The theoretical explication is followed by example thematically related to cultural and communicative memory of the Second World War in Croatia, more precisely the Jasenovac Memorial Site/Museum (ex-concentration camp) and changes it witnessed over a half of century due to different political or museological perspectives. The paper also explores, on the one hand, the degree to which communicative memory can be subjected to institutionalization and on the other hand a possibility of making museums and heritage sites polemic platforms which could contribute to reconciliation and recognition of differences.

KEYWORDS: conflicting histories, memorial site, museum communication, difficult heritage

RESUMEN. Una vez acercamiento modernista a la historia comenzó a ser impugnada, principalmente por los propios historiadores, surgió una oportunidad para la comunicación Museo de las narrativas prismáticas, con perspectivas múltiples que forman una estrecha relación con las personas y, por otra parte, vienen de personas. La memoria comunicativa comenzó a ser presentado en los museos, junto con la memoria cultural “objetivo”. Sin embargo, yuxtaposiciones de la memoria comunicativa y cultural, inevitablemente, dan a luz a oposiciones, especialmente en el caso de las experiencias traumáticas, como las que resultan de la guerra. El objetivo de este trabajo es analizar las formas en que la cultura material y el memorial sitios pueden desencadenar recuerdos contradictorios y una gama de diferentes sentimientos, y para investigar la comunicación institucional de las narrativas históricas compartidas y controvertidas en Croacia. La explicación teórica es seguida por ejemplo por temas relacionados con la memoria cultural y comunicativa de la Segunda Guerra Mundial en Croacia, más precisa será la Jasenovac Memorial Sitio/Museo (ex-campo de concentración) y la cambia testigo de más de la mitad del siglo, debido a las diferentes políticas o perspectivas museológicas. El documento también analiza, por un lado, el grado en que la memoria comunicativa puede ser sometido a la institucionalización y por otra parte la posibilidad de hacer museos y sitios patrimoniales plataformas polémicos que podrían contribuir a la reconciliación y el reconocimiento de las diferencias.

PALABRAS CLAVE: historias contradictorias, sitio conmemorativo, comunicación de museo, patrimonio difícil.

Introduction

We constantly surround ourselves with artefacts, those we use in our everyday life and activities, those that have lost their functional role and are kept for the sake of memory or those that never had any other use but to act as reminders of something or someone. The relevance of these artefacts in the lives of people is different from person to person, but the reason of their existence is the same – they are with us because we either use them or possess them (Boudriallard, 1996). According to Boudriillard, utensils refer people to the world, whereas objects which are abstracted from their function are brought into relationship with the subject and are thus possessed. Possession of objects speaks of a relationship that goes beyond the practical spheres of life and enters the private definitions and determinations of a person. Objects, devoid of any function or completely abstracted from their use, take on a strictly subjective status. They become time travellers which connect our present with our past. The awareness of ourselves as beings, and as accumulations of acquired experiences and lived moments, is formed exactly through retrospection and insight into our own history. We possess artefact to make us believe that the past is equally real as the present (Lowenthal, 1996). Aware that memories disappear easily, we materialize them in objects that are on the one hand expression of memory and on the other hand act to induce memory.

Similarly, museums as public institutions establish the link with the past by converging three paths to it – by way of material culture, history and personal memory. This paper presents the way in which the Jasenovac Memorial Museum in Croatia has been dealing with a politically and historically sensitive topic of war crimes during the Second World War and the manner in which it has represented painful past events through artefacts, used and possessed, and people's stories by embracing both personal and institutional approaches to the topic.

Changing museum paradigms

The emergence of public museums that we know today is to a large degree determined by the ap-

proach of the Western society to the past. Modern age, as the period which gave birth to a large number of museums, was characterized by several things among which the following three are important in respect to the development of museum presentation regarding historical narratives: the process of industrialization and urbanization (Walsh, 1992), the development of historical disciplines (Bennett, 2004) and the formation of new states which used the past to build national identity and justify it through the illumination of the past (Nora, 1989; Shelton, 2006).

Traditional communities based on memory started disappearing in the Western world with industrialization. According to Nora, peasantry, the quintessential repository of collective memory disappeared with the birth of the city and in the course of its impact on rural life. A changed the way of life, braking off with tradition and personal heritage released the past from its dependence on experience replacing it with a process of social construction of history. The collapse of memory is congruent with the emergence of museums and similar institutions which became places of memory, or more precisely history, because there were no longer real environments of memory (Nora, 1989). With displays of historical traces and mediation of distant periods of human life, museums helped history become an institutionalized and authoritative discourse (Walsh, 1992).

The development of historical disciplines played a major role in the formation of methods in which the past come to be represented in museums. According to Bennett, there were two crucial things in that development. The first one was the positioning of artefacts into a calibrated past seen as a series of interconnected sequential events. The second one was the development of techniques for reading artefacts as traces of human existence and life which started speaking the scientific language of the disciplines that researched them (Bennett, 2004). Establishing a realm of artefacts that related to time before written records was first accomplished by archaeology. It gave artefacts historical interpretation and made them sources of knowledge about ear-

lier ways of human life. The following step comprised the construction of basic principles for deciphering the past which developed in the early 18th century into a systematic method for reading the past on the basis of the physical feature of material remains and were the predecessors of the comparative method. In the second part of the 19th century typological principles of archaeology led to the similar development in other historical sciences. History came to be supported by material proofs in addition to written records.

These developments were closely connected to the creation of nation states and the role history played in constructing national narratives.

During the modern period, history as a discipline mostly dealt with kings, ministers, battles, and treaties, with nation-states and their mutual relations (Beier-de Haan, 2006: 186). It came to be understood as national history which tried to establish continuity of a nation by rooting it in the past and showing progress that projected into the future.

Consequently, museums as public institutions were a suitable medium for conveying construed historical messages through material culture in a similar linear narration. Introducing the linear sequencing of development stages, disciplines that dealt with material culture appropriated historical methodology.

“the raw material of history, which presented itself in the form of dispersed events — decisions, accidents, initiatives, discoveries; the material, which, through analysis, had to be rearranged, reduced, effaced in order to reveal the continuity of events” (Foucault, 2004:9)

With a clearly defined role in the museum as researchers of material culture, history curators assumed the role of scientists who organized displays and shaped the historical knowledge with taxonomy that reflected great historical narratives (Hooper-Greenhill, 1992; Bennet, 1995). Objects were the source of meaning and knowledge which could be acquired through perception. Using their sense of sight and moving in a

linear way along the museum space, visitors were supposed to enter into a dialogue with museum objects and acquire knowledge by the immediacy of the experience, contemplation (Hooper-Greenhill, 2007: 191). Such a process strictly divided curators as knowledge producers from visitors who came to museum to learn about the past.

Curatorial profession that was taking shape ever since the emergence of the public museum has therefore been based on what has been assumed to lie at the heart of the museum work — the collection of artefacts, their care, research and display.

However, during the 1980s, and especially in the 1990s, there was a paradigmatic shift in museums. Museums adopted more responsive attitude to their audiences and became aware that their visitors were not one homogenous group of people but a number of individuals who bring into the museum their own cultural and historical backgrounds, reasons and motivations for visits and different expectations of the museums (Hooper-Greenhill, 1994; Falk and Dierking, 2000; Lang, Reeve and Woollard, 2006). In addition, the museum has become aware of a myriad of possible interpretations opposing the strong linear narrative which allows space for only one point of view, though it is still rather gladly accepted in the museum world. A one-way communication has been replaced with interactive relationship with the visitors who get increasingly included in the production of meaning rather than being at the end point of the production process (Witcomb, 2003; Simon, 2010). Interpretation, and by that it is meant different levels and sources of interpretation, has been stressed as important segment of museum communication. It often remains unarticulated and taken for granted that museum objects are not only museum objects but stories behind them. However, this fact matters a lot if the museum is to have some real and powerful impact on the lives of those who use them (Weil, 1990; Watson, 2007).

De-materializing the museum

Alongside the museological changes, the last thirty years have witnessed changes in topics re-

searched by historians and a shift from presentations of “grand narrative” to cultural history and micro history with an alteration of focus “from facts to contexts and emotions...in which the scientific analysis of sources is accompanied by inspiration, empathy and understanding” (Beierde Haan, 2006: 186). A myriad of small histories, historical narratives which emerged in the post-modern condition, took the authority away from the once monolithic and universal discipline. This has made those working in the museum take a different standpoint in their efforts to represent the past. Questions which have arisen in the process include: To whom does the past belong? If there is no more one history, which history should be presented in the museum? Do museums hold the right to maintain authoritative voice since the knowledge is scientifically based? In history museums such dilemmas were eased by broadening the range of topics which have included everyday themes, experiences and individual memories alongside the curatorial, professional stories. These broadened perspective of history opened space for new ways of approaching the past.

The social role of the museum as a place of memory, or rather mnemonic place, arose from a need for social remembering. It was deliberately created to serve this purpose because the natural process of remembering stopped occurring. Memory has been sustained in museums through display of material witnesses which helped create a story about the past that is repeatedly conveyed to museum visitors. However, those museum stories which are taken over or appropriated by visitors and deposited in their own memory storages to various extents and in individual ways are nothing more than sorted historical traces. True memory is not construed, voluntary, deliberate or individual. It is anchored in gestures, habitual activities, in ingrained memories and is primarily a social activity in that it gets transmitted across a community by personal contact and communication (Assmann, 2008). For Assmann communication is a crucial point in his theory that broke up the concept of collective memory into

communicative and cultural memory. Assmann sees two ways of remembering things. Cultural memory, which needs symbols as reminders of places, people and events, can be representative of the museum. Such memory is institutionalized and dependent on myths and history and has its specialists (curators in museums, teachers in schools, priests in churches...).

Communicative memory is, on the other hand, non-institutional form of remembrance. It is not created by professionals, formalized and embodied in any physical symbols. It lives in everyday interaction and for this reason it reaches no farther back than eighty years (Assmann, 2008: 111). This short life of the communicative memory, dependent on the durability of social bonds, is yet another reason why collecting testimonies has assumed an increasingly important role in museums. Research of micro-history in museums invited inclusion of people’s stories which museums consider relevant to their thematic framework, especially if they are connected to people, things or events from the past. With every day that the past grows distant and live witnesses grow older archives of testimonies have to get richer in order to capture past events from those who witnessed them.

(In)tangible Heritage of Jasenovac

New museological and historical approaches to exhibiting events related to the Second World War in Croatia have also been adopted by the curatorial team of the Jasenovac Memorial Museum. However, during the last 48 years, the museum and the entire memorial site went through changes that included both their institutional functions, primarily exhibiting material remains that witnessed to the horrendous events taking place on the site, and its place in the collective memory of Croatian citizens as well as people living in the former Yugoslav republics. Before dealing with the museum and the ways of its communication of histories through material witnesses, it is necessary to place it in a historical context of both the WWII events in question and their institutionalization.

Jasenovac Memorial Site was conceived as place for paying respect to the victims of the war crimes committed by the Ustasha organization and condemning the atrocities that happened on the site and generally during the Second World War.

The Croatian Revolutionary Organization known as the Ustasha was founded in emigration in the 1930s where their political strength gradually rose until the collapse of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia in April 1941. They created and ruled the Independent State of Croatia (NDH) from April 1941 to May 1945. Closely collaborating with the Nazis and highly dependant on the politics of Mussolini and Hitler, the NDH ruled their newly formed country following fascist's ideology that supported and enforced discrimination against certain religious, national, ethnic and political groups which were assembled, transited and killed in about thirty German, Italian and Ustasha camps that existed during WWII in what was then the Independent State of Croatia.

The Jasenovac concentration camp was set up in August 1941 and it consisted of five camp units (Camp I (Krapje), Camp II (Bro ıce), Camp III (Brickworks) in Jasenovac, Camp IV (Tannery) and Camp V (Stara Gradiška).

The area of the village of Jasenovac was suitable for the foundation of a war camp for two reasons. It was a wide, lever area, easy to oversee, difficult to attack and largely inaccessible due to flooding from the Rivers of Sava, Una and Veliki Strug, and the vicinity of Lonjsko Polje and Mokro Polje marshlands. Such geographical conditions made it almost impossible to escape from the camp. The second reason served well to justify the existence of a camp in Jasenovac and to hide its true purpose. The fact that the village contained industrial plants (a chain shop, sawmill, brickworks, mill and electricity generator) and that the whole area was rich in raw materials was claimed to be useful and appropriate for further production. The camp was thus proclaimed a labour camp while at the same time existing as a death camp. Jasenovac Concentration Camp was in operation for the longest period and in terms of prisoner numbers and surface area was the largest Ustasha camp in Croa-

tia. The largest numbers of victims were Serbian, Jewish and Roma people, than Croatian antifascists and Muslim people.

Immediately before German capitulation the Ustasha shelled, burned and destroyed the concentration camp in Jasenovac. In the last days of their rule, in April 1945, ninety-five people managed to escape from the camp and save their lives.

The remains of the destroyed camp buildings were allowed to be taken away by the partisans for rebuilding the houses of the people living in Jasenovac and the neighbouring villages. The camp location became completely overgrown with weeds and shrubbery and almost completely vanished. After the war, in 1945, Croatia became a constitutive state of the Social Federal Republic of Yugoslavia. Fascism was defeated and there was a need to mark the sites which could openly speak about the WWII terrors.

In the late 1950s it was discovered that the site contained traces of barracks and other buildings (foundations and parts of the walls) which enticed protective measures and decisions to build a memorial site. A concrete monument reminiscent of a flower was built as the centre of the site (designed by architect Bogdan Bogdanovi) (Fig. 1) The locations of the camp buildings were marked by hollows in the ground in the shape of shallow, inverse pyramids, and the graves and torture sites by shallow cones of packed earth (Fig. 2). The memorial was officially unveiled on 4 July 1966 and 22 April has been commemorated on the site in honour of the survivors.



Figure 1



Figure 2

Jasenovac Memorial Museum - communicating conflicting histories

The Jasenovac Memorial Site & Museum was opened in 1968 close to the original site of former Camp III (Brickworks). Since that time there has been three permanent exhibitions mounted in the building. They exhibited three dimensional artefacts unearthed from only a few out more than 150 mass graves in Jasenovac and its vicinity, photographs of the camp and people during the war and documents about the NDH. The first group of objects presents utensils, artefacts which camp internees used every day (clothes, cups, cutlery, shaving kits, combs, personal amulets...). If similar artefacts were exhibited in any other museums, they would not be so interesting to watch since they do not attract attention with their special, beautiful or exotic features. They are interesting and powerful precisely because they are authentic material in relation to the event.

On the other hand, there are objects which represent a mass of material that formed the language of a particular moment in history in a particular place - Croatia in the period between 1941 and 1945. They include documents related to the NDH government such as referral papers, memoranda on deportations, notices of executions, orders for the registration or forced removals of certain nationalities, camp office inventory etc. These objects are intrinsic signs of the Ustasha regime and function as the regime's footprints that help the museum convey a clear message about the discriminatory and fascist ideology.

Another set of objects in connection to Jase-

novac includes weapons used to kill prisoners - knives and hammers - which attest to a close proximity of executioners to their victims and bring to mind horrid ways in which people were killed.

They are all concrete, materialized units of a historical period. Although the museum material shown in the exhibitions was more or less the same, display approaches show different historical and museological discourses that have been subjected together with the memorial site in general to various understandings in the last 43 years.

The first display from 1968 featured personal artefacts recovered from mass graves or during design of the memorial site. They were placed in free standing glass showcases whereas the documents on NDH (texts and photographs) were shown in wall showcases arranged like a frieze. These also contained murder weapons displayed behind mock prison bars. The two-level model of the arrangement divided the material into the world of the victims and of the perpetrators of the crimes. Labels explaining certain exhibits, functioning of the Jasenovac camp and the creation of NDH were meant to give visitors insight into the period and the fascist state which committed crimes against humanity. The personal objects were assembled together according to their function, following the museum taxonomic principles. Contextualized only with thematic labels about the predominant ideology of the time these objects were supposed to speak for themselves. The second exhibition space was designed as a small cinema which showed documentary films, most frequently *Gospel of Evil* directed by Gojko Kastratović and *Jasenovac 1945*, by Bogdan Žižić.

The second display was set up in 1988 after a member of the delegation from the Serbian Academy of Arts and Science that visited Jasenovac in October 1985 expressed his dissatisfaction, saying, "as recorded in the minutes of 13 October 1985, that the 'exhibition did not feature some first-class documents'" (Jović, 2006: 295). Alteration of the permanent exhibition commenced immediately. The first class documents in question were photographs of fascist killings and

the killed people in Jasenovac but also in other camps. They were included in the display, also in a form of a frieze above the row of documents. Class showcases with personal objects remained part of the display so the arrangement of the exhibition changed only in regard to the content. By showing photographs and illustrating in that way what happened to people in Jasenovac the display came closer to the victims but it also made a stronger impact on the visitor who could be more aware of the fate of the victims. The film showed in the screening room was *Blood and Ashes of Jasenovac* directed by Lordan Zafranovi in 1984.

Examination of the connection between the mentioned material traces (personal objects, murder weapons and documents) shown at the first exhibition point to a spatial and contextual division between the documents and murder weapons, which make one set of objects with a metonymic relationship to the political regime during the war years, and the personal objects as another set which establishes the same relationship to the camp and the internees. As long as they survive physically they function as metonymy to both the perpetrators and victims of the war crimes, that is, to what happened in Jasenovac. As such, they are strong reminders of the events and, in Leach's terms, they act as a sign, an intrinsic part of the crimes in Jasenovac. The display model in which the utensils used by camp internees came to stand for the victims of the crime in general belongs to the representational language of the museum which relies almost exclusively on material statements in an abstract form and conveying a message. By adding a new element – graphic scenes of suffering and killings that had occurred not only in Jasenovac but in other war camps - the second exhibition de-localized the narrative of Jasenovac and elevated it to another level. It became a symbol of violence and threat, a metaphor for a need of continued fights against the enemies. The first two exhibitions thus correspond more to a museological rhetoric that is rooted in the narrative of the modern museum and which stressed the construction of national identity and its legitimization of the present through the past.

The third, and the most recent, exhibition with its new and post-modern concept was opened in 2006 after the building and the site, damaged in the Croatian War of Independence (1991-1995), had been renovated. The creators of the new exhibition decided to redesign the space architecturally and to use both halls as galleries. In a shape of a dark irregular labyrinth the inner space of the memorial museum contains museum and archival material presented in different media: photographic prints and documents, glass cabinet displays, digital photographs showed on screens, maps, charts and audio-visual presentations of survivors' testimonies. Wanting to give more information to museum visitors the curators have created a database with 65 topics chronologically and thematically ordered and explained. The database can be accessed on computers placed within the exhibition. The entire concept is based on the wish to allow individual victims to speak and in that way give them a dignified presentation. What has been emphasized in that respect as the most important part of the exhibition is the list of names of the people who died or were killed in the Jasenovac camp with the date of birth and nationality.

Similarly, to the metonymic principles of the first exhibition, the historical and political segment is spatially detached from the segment that explores the individual. One gallery presents the topics relating to the Ustasha regime (foundation of the Independent State of Croatia and its connection with the Third Reich, the establishment and operation of the Jasenovac concentration camp, genocide, holocaust and acts of terror committed against members of ethnic, religious or national groups, or those considered "undesirable") with material traces of the regime which include the murder weapons and shackles as artefacts which illustrate power, aggression and dehumanization and, in effect, death. No matter how this may sound ironic, the other gallery is dedicated to life in that is shows life in the camp, everyday objects used by the victims (belonging to the killed and alive) and the oral histories of the survived victims.

Ever since it opened in 2006, the third exhibition has caused controversies and discussions in

the public arena among various interested parties, mostly those religious and national groups that were most fiercely treated by the Ustasha. Some of the objections to the new way of representing the painful historical event were remarks that the museum presents only holocaust and not genocide of Serbs and that the individualization of victims undermines the seriousness of the Ustasha crimes. The new concept is said to offer a distorted image of the Jasenovac camp and that it annihilates the true reasons for the killings. The president of the Serbian National Council in Croatia, Milorad Pupovac stressed that the removal of the artefacts which show the Jasenovac camp as part of the official genocide motivated politics of the Independent State of Croatia towards Serbs and other nationalities of different standpoints was very dangerous (“Jasenovac opet posva ao”, 2006). Furthermore, the Jewish Community in Zagreb claims that the exhibition does not present the entire truth about Jasenovac, the atrocities and sufferings of the victims and that it waters down the truth about the Ustasha regime which insults the victims and their ancestors (“Postavom muzeja jasenova ki”, 2010).

Such claims do not further elaborate on the problem and those who oppose the exhibition do not state any other possible alternative. However, they clearly show considerable dissatisfaction with the contemporary museological methodology.

These objections seem to indicate that the new trends in museum communication of the past have not yet been readily accepted, especially in such a sensitive case as Jasenovac and that the representatives of the communities to which the greatest number of victims belonged require a more pronounced manifestation of war atrocities in institutions of collective memory.

It is difficult to determine why this is the case. It might be that part of criticism is a consequential reaction to excessive expressions of nationalism and display of Ustasha insignia by individual extremist rightists in the 1990s as well as attempts by the Croatian administration to wipe Jasenovac from collective memory in Croatia.

Whatever the reasons for disapproval might be, these debates pose a question on the role of the museum, or, in this case the Jasenovac Memorial Museum, in society. How should it represent war topics without renouncing research and attempting to make unbiased interpretations? More importantly, what should be the message stemming from the interpretation and to whom should it be directed?

In order to answer to this question, the concept that favours individual approach to victims should be explained in more detail.

In contrast to the previous two exhibitions contextualization of the personal objects of the camp internees has been made through the environment of individual, communicative memory the victims had of the life and happenings in the camp. Videotaped interviews showing human faces with sadness, fear, tears and smiles provided directness and immediacy of human experience. This is emphasized in the space of the museum by placing screens in small nooks of the labyrinth which bring the visitor into more intimate contact with the narrator. Although it might be said that the interviews were curated, as much as the rest of the exhibition, they still introduce the voices and faces of real people. No matter how much a person's “performance”, i.e. interview, “becomes like an artefact when it has been photographed, recorded...” (Kirshenblatt - Gimblet, 1991: 420) and consequently becomes part of cultural memory, the video still makes it possible to present events through the eyes and mind of the person who really experienced them. The museum has adopted a model of a personal relationship with objects used and possessed and cherished by people in the camp either to assure themselves that the better future would come or as reminders of a horrendous event by those who survived the terror. It provided a situation where the objects act almost as the validation of not only personal narratives that are displayed in the museum but as bearing out the truth of what happened to all those killed in the camp. Showing living people and syntagmatically relating it to the personal

objects attempts to create the simultaneously existing presence and absence of people who were killed by the Ustasha. Playing with the notions of individual and collective memories, the exhibition uses objects and stories to make visitors aware of the absence of someone within their knowledge or assumption of the pre-existence of the absent people, the victims. The past presence and the present absence of the internees are condensed in the exhibited objects and space – the materiality of the objects, the oral histories and evocative spatial design construct a sense of the victims whose absence becomes relevant not only to their family and friends, but to museum visitors in general. Furthermore, video presentations add another sort of experience to the interaction that occurs in the museum and can be a way to better relate objects and people to the past and to memory. Audiences interact more effectively with objects on display if they are able to make a personal connection to them. Integrating oral history into exhibition brings objects to life. Being able to relate to an exhibit or story is an important way in which the audience can become involved in historical events and their consequences, and oral histories can open that door of communication. As it has been stated several times by the director of the Jasenovac memorial site, Nataša Jović, the basic function of the Jasenovac Museum is education and prevention of mass crimes against humanity. The mission statement of the museum is thus primarily to make visitors relate to the victims, evoke in them both respect and compassion, but also a powerful, critical attitude towards crime and violence in general so that such things never happen again (Fig 3). Strongly pacifist motivation, together with a serious historic research is what lies at the heart of this museum, just as the architect of the memorial said in his book when he described the Flower: “a melancholic concrete lotus flower not only stops bad thoughts from both sides, it also provides catharsis: it has insulted no one, threatened no one, desired no revenge, and yet never hidden the truth” (Bogdanović, 2000).



Figure 3

Conclusion

Commemorating warfare can be a sensitive topic to many social and national groups and can easily bring contradictions to the fore. Memorial museums as public spaces are regarded as cultural representation that is socially produced. As such they have a significant role in society in that they shape not only knowledge about the past in their exhibition but also the consciousness of their visitors. The power of museum objects and the narratives that are created around them can make a considerable impact on communities whose understanding of the past, and especially the sentiments about the past differ. The Jasenovac exhibition recognized the literal meaning of the objects, spaces and practices (the functioning of the fascist state, existence of war camps and the life in them) as the precondition of their secondary, figurative meaning (death of the internees and the significance and consequences such events can have in the present and the future) and merged the two by creating both a museum and a memorial in order to create a metaphor of progress from contextually defined to referential meaning. That is, with this exhibition Jasenovac memorial site created a public space which can function both as a commemorative, sacral place for paying homage and respect to war victims and a secular place of learning which can offer stimuli for thinking about the absurdity of warfare and insights into tragic historic stories that should never be forgotten and ignored. This memorial museum should be a place which can contribute to the formation of a new and better man.

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