



“This is not a place of memory; this is a place of commemoration.” Rethinking Authenticity of the Holocaust Experience Through Museum Architecture¹.

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Abstract

This article discusses the authenticity of the experience of the Holocaust through museum architecture. This issue arose during the writer's visitor research conducted at European Jewish museums with the aim of examining the effect of the spatial design on Holocaust memory construction. From Aristotle and Plato to Benjamin and Heidegger and with the support of psychoanalytic concepts of Freud, Lacan, and Jung, we acknowledge different theories that approach the experiential and existential dimensions of authenticity; pursuing self-discovery and overcoming experiential challenges are the two central axes that will help us identify the different categories of visitors according to the kind of authenticity they quest for and the cause of its necessity. Moreover, the juxtaposition between the Museum and the actual site, such as a concentration camp, apart from raising questions of veracity and representation- which one provides a “real” account of the past? - posits problems of ethics, appropriation, materiality, narrativity, and empathy and, finally, leads to a salient issue: how different is memory from commemoration and which “locus” represents better each one of them; the Museum or the site? Is such a question legitimate?

Key Words: Holocaust, authenticity, experiential, existential, memory, commemoration.

Introduction

This paper aims to approach the issue of the authenticity of the experience of the Holocaust in the Museum drawing upon the writer's research at European Jewish and Holocaust museums. This issue emerged during the examination of the effect of the spatial design on the bodily reactions, emotions and thoughts of the visitors interviewed. What triggered this particular exploration was a statement of a middle-aged male visitor from Italy at the Holocaust Memorial Center in Budapest: “*This is not a place of memory; this is a place of commemoration. Unlike the concentration camps where the real facts took place, this museum did not move me at all; it left me indifferent. I would like more evidence rather than a building with dim lighting to show me what I already know*”. If we try to analyze his statement, the first important part has

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to do with the difference between *memory* and *commemoration*, and the second part refers to “*real facts*” and “*evidence*”, phrases that imply a demand for authenticity. The problem is compounded within tourism because the term is often used in two distinct senses: authenticity not only as genuineness or realness of places or events, but also as a human attribute signifying being one’s true self or being true to one’s essential nature and its meaning tends to combine philosophical, psychological, and spiritual concepts, which reflect its multifaceted history (Steiner & Reisinger, 2006, p. 299).

The Demand for Authenticity

First, we need to define authenticity. According to the Cambridge dictionary (“Authenticity”, n.d.), authenticity is “the quality of being real or true”, whereas in the Merriam Webster (“Authentic”, n.d.) one would find this definition: “worthy of acceptance or belief as conforming to or based on a fact made or done the same way as an original or conforming to an original so as to reproduce essential features”. According to anthropologist Andrew Johnson (2007), authenticity is sometimes a shiny label that the traveler pins on his or her experiences—a marker of distinction, to recall Bourdieu, that proves that he/she is more knowledgeable, more adventurous, and more off-the-beaten track. Hence, a relevant motive is that of social class affiliation; it is especially a habit of the “service class”, those with professional managerial jobs, to defame staged experiences as “fake”, “tasteless” or “kitsch” and to associate them with social classes of lower education (Urry, 2002). Consequently, the wish to experience something “more authentic” is the wish to be distinct from the masses and to belong to a certain *elite* dominated by a wish for social and educational distinction, which is a result of a philosophy of differentiation, between high and low culture, between art and popular pleasures, and between elite and mass forms of consumption (Engler, 2016). Besides, Freud (1985) considered a person to be “authentic” when he/she is in balance between reason and emotion—being able to restrain and repress the latter due to the demands of “civilized” morality. Therefore, while some people find meaning in their lives in “inauthentic” experiences, this elite is still dominated by rationalism, only allowing for a specific “kind of authenticity” to their heritage visits. But what kind of authenticity is this?

Authenticity can be both a *social construction* and a *source of evidence* and is classified into two types: *iconic* and *indexical*. To view something as an “index”, the perceiver must believe in the existence of a factual and spatio-temporal link by having some kind of verification, which can emerge out of his/her personal experience. An “icon” is something that is perceived as being similar to something else, and perceivers must have pre-existing knowledge or expectations (Ram, Bjork, & Weidenfeld, 2016, p. 112). The main theoretical discussion, therefore, revolves around whether the authenticity reflects a “true image of the past” (*objective authenticity*) or if it is subject to contemporary inputs and influences (*symbolic authenticity*) (Culler, 1981). Gilmore and Pine (2007, p. 49) contend that when we perceive as authentic that which refers to some other context, drawing inspiration from human history, and tapping into our shared memories and longings, we talk about *referential authenticity*, while when we perceive as authentic that which exerts influence on other entities, calling human beings to a higher goal and providing a foretaste of a better way, we talk about *influential authenticity*. In the case of the Holocaust museums, it is complicated to explain what “real” means and why visitors juxtapose them with the actual sites of this tragedy. As stated in Miles’s work (2002, p. 1175), there is a difference between sites *associated with* death, disaster, and depravity and sites *of* death, disaster, and depravity. If visitation to the former is rightfully characterized as “dark tourism”, then journey to the latter constitutes “darker tourism”. “Darker tourism” is conceptually and linguistically preferable to Young’s unintentionally reifying polarity between “memorials removed from the sites of destruction” and “sites of destruction” per se (Young, 1994, pp. 174-184). “Darker tourism” enjoys a locational authenticity that its counterpart does not. Just being there imparts to the darker tourist a uniquely empowering

commemorative potential (Miles, 2002, p. 1176). Biran's field research results at Auschwitz-Birkenau indicate that the motives for visiting an "authentic site" can be grouped into factors the most important of which are: "see it to believe it"- interest in seeing the site out of a need to believe that such atrocities really happened- and "learning and understanding"- interest in being educated about the Holocaust and gaining a deep understanding rather than simply being provided with information². This category of visitors who quest for "indexical" or "objective authenticity" was characterized by Biran, Poria, and Oren (2010, p. 830) as "*knowledge seekers*"- more interested in a knowledge-enriching experience.

Apropos, Benjamin (1968, p. 220) states that authenticity has a prerequisite: *presence*. One can only see or experience something authentic when it is *physically present* in the same time and space as the audience perceiving it. Hence, while expectations may differ from person to person, generally people go to authentic memorial sites to find *a connection with the past*. They can get the story anywhere, but when confronted with the *material remains*, it becomes *tangible* (Assmann, 2006, pp. 218, 223). At the Museum of the History of Polish Jews in Warsaw (POLIN), a Polish-Jewish female visitor argued: "*Since we are where we are, I would prefer a glass floor where one could see the foundations of the ruined ghetto. You know, every time I pass by a street where drainage works take place and see pieces of the ghetto walls, I shudder.*" As she explained, that sense of spatial proximity with those relics offers her proximity with her grandmother, who was an inhabitant at the Warsaw ghetto. In Feldman's (2008, pp. 105-106) ethnographic research, during a Warsaw Ghetto Museum tour, a participant remarks: "*I want to see concrete things, not just candlesticks that I can see anywhere*". A fragment of the Warsaw Ghetto wall "which can be touched and (as some visitors imagine) smelled as well as seen" is singled out as singularly impressive. Feldman (2008, p. 89) argues that the impact of a site or relic is in direct correlation with the "thickness of its sensory envelope" implying that there is some aspect of the Israeli identity that requires a more direct and intensive *sensory experience* to prompt *symbolic response*. In specific, Israeli teenagers demand a much higher level of authenticity from Holocaust remains than Diasporic Jewish youth, in order for them to function as effective symbols. Indeed, in our research at the Jewish Museum Berlin (JMB), the majority of the visitors from Israel denied any emotional engagement with the Museum and its architectural symbolism, which made zero impression to them either due to emotional insulation- having been overexposed to the Holocaust trauma- or because the only thing that matters is the place of the martyrdom of their predecessors and their need to connect with them in a metaphysical way that leads to catharsis. Those specific visitors seek a referential authenticity, have a personal connection to the site, and seem to engage in a profound emotional experience, an *affective attachment* to the place (Ram, Bjork, & Weidenfeld, 2016, p. 111), known in psychology as "*place attachment*" (Bowlby, 1969). Their quest for authenticity is provoked by the proximity to the historical event due to family bonds on the one hand, and the contemporaneous temporal distance from the historical event on the other hand. Those perceiving a site as personal heritage are captured by Prentice and Anderson (2007) as "*identity reinforcers*", searching for what Connerton (1989, p. 70) calls a sense of "collective autobiography".

The exclusiveness of the satisfaction of this desire, however, does not belong only to the "authentic" site; a visitor may find and strengthen his/her identity through museum architecture as well. For instance, at the JMB, the architect³, being an immigrant himself, bequeathed to the Jewish Diaspora visitors his hope and optimism by leading them outside his dark building to the peaceful Garden of Exile and Emigration with the symbolic olive bushes that grow atop its 49 concrete stelae, although he had previously exposed them to how it feels

² Several studies highlight educational experience as a key motive of visits to sites of dark attributes (Austin, 2002).

³ Daniel Libeskind was born in Łódź, Poland, and his parents were Polish Jews and Holocaust survivors. They lived in Poland for 11 years, and, in 1957, they moved to Israel before moving to New York in 1959 (Libeskind, 2004).

to be eradicated and disoriented, through the Axis of Exile, the slanting ground and the maze created from the stelae (**fig. 1-2**). A young American visitor confirms: “*At the beginning, I felt destabilized, but, at the end, I felt like returning to a safe ground in an era of uncertainty, and I left with a sense of restoring continuity with my ancestors*”. However, visitors who have no family link to the event may often find themselves to be deeply touched. They may even unwittingly find themselves becoming- to use Victor and Edith Turner’s (1978, p. 20) phrase- “half a pilgrim”. This is the category that searches for an influential authenticity, an experience that would transform them as human beings. Even so, sometimes, the symbolic value of a place’s identity is transfigured into stiff *place dependence* (Ram, Bjork, & Weidenfeld, 2016, p. 111). This exclusive insistence on the preservation of the myth of authenticity may be based on a *topolatry*, an attachment to the genius loci or an adoration of an unquestionable past without taking into account the palimpsest that an area constitutes. After all, Benjamin claims that it is the concept of “distant closeness” that describes how one experiences a place’s aura⁴. So, on the one hand, a place was present during historical events, and, thus, constitutes material proof of what has happened. On the other hand, authenticity lies in what the object has gone through over the years, its duration and its unique lifetime (Benjamin, 1968, p. 220).



Fig. 1. View of the Garden of Exile and Emigration at the Jewish Museum in Berlin. © Xenia Tsiftsi.

⁴*Aura* refers to the authority held by the unique, original work, which under modernity is liquidated by the techniques of mass reproduction. This involvement with authenticity and reproduction squarely ensconces Benjamin in an older debate over the nature of the original and the copy, which dates, of course, back to Plato and continues in various ways until today.



Fig. 2. The label at the exit towards the Garden of Exile underlining the feeling of unsteadiness that the visitor may experience. © Xenia Tsiftsi.

Experiential Authenticity: The Encounter with the Other and the Power of Empathy

Carden-Coyne (2011, p. 177) states that Holocaust museums' strategies are part of a larger trend towards the *experiential as a mode of knowledge*. The move from a descriptive to an experiential conceptualization of heritage tourism calls attention to the *authenticity of the experience*, which affects value, meaning and interpretation, acceptance, and, finally, the way humans react to it (Goodman, 1976). This approach is consistent with the postmodernist move in tourism research, which emphasizes the subjective over the objective and the individual's experiences of tourism. Postmodernism has not only created a craving for the real and the lost aura, but also for the physical and the affective, for what has an *effect* on viewers, an effect that can be felt and witnessed. According to De Simone (2013, pp. 34-35), the more dramatic and traumatic this effect is, the more it needs to be acknowledged as real. But do our experiences have authenticity, are they real? In *Republic*, Plato (1996) sees most of human experience as inauthentic because he views media as a negative filter clouding experience. The media is like the cave in his "Allegory of the Cave." He believes some experiences can be unmediated and therefore real, and one arrives at them through philosophy. On the contrary, Aristotle, in *Poetics* (1954), views media as a positive method for learning and imitation as natural to mankind or, in other words, part of authentic life. Bolter and Grusin (1999, p. 5) describe this "desire for immediacy" as a paradox: "Our culture wants both to multiply its media and erase all traces of mediation: ideally, it wants to erase its media in the very act of multiplying them".

Regarding mediation and the authenticity of the experience, traditionally, it is customary to perceive the trip to Poland as the main and most effective experiential method of learning about the Holocaust. However, visits to Holocaust museums show that it is possible to learn about the Holocaust experientially and thoroughly without traveling as far as Poland. Participation in the learning experience afforded by the various institutes shows that in practice each has its "own" Poland, as Davidovitch (2013, p. 41) puts it. At the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum (USHMM), the curators posted the following statement at the entrance of the permanent exhibition: "The events you are about to experience are real." This statement posits questions about the relationship between representation and authenticity. What is an authentic representation? Is it even possible to represent authentically? Or is it the case that any representation involves interpretation, thus losing the authenticity existing in the represented event? And if representations are interpretative acts, might it be the case that representations can never be authentic? These questions came up repeatedly in the USHMM Council meetings

and in the curatorial team's meetings. On a literal level, if we take the meaning of the term "*real*" to be actual and authentic, then the claim suggests that visitors are about to experience actual and authentic events. This is quite obvious because every event we experience is real, actual and authentic at its moment of occurrence. Thus, in the Museum, visitors are going to experience the "*real*" of the Museum through the reality it constructs, which is a representation of the Holocaust as the reality of their immediate experience. The representation is going to be the authentic experience of the moment. On a conceptual level, this statement does not refer to the current reality suggested by the Museum, but rather to the events that took place in Europe before, during and after the World War II, which now are presented in the Museum. Here, the real stands for true and valid. The paradox and confusion in the use of the terms stems from the use of the word "*experience*". "We are about to *experience* events that are *real*." Nevertheless, if the events belong to the past, how can we experience them? Past and present are collapsing into one another, creating one reality, in one temporal structure. Representation as the mediator of the past and the real as a possibility for authenticity in the present are united, so that the representation becomes an authentic reference to the present (Neuman, 2014, p. 107).

In our case, we refer to the architectural representation of the Holocaust; the past is brought into the present and we are located between two temporal structures: that of the presented past and that of the present as an actual spatiotemporal structure of existence. The past is mediated to us, represented by spatial, visual and tactile means, and is experienced in the present through those means. The present is the reality of the moment, a reality that is composed of the material presence, the formal configuration and function of the used space. This reality may include a represented past as part of its construction of a current reality, thus amalgamating the past and the present (Neuman, 2014, p. 107). Baruch Stier (2015, pp. 5-7) refers to the relationship between Holocaust icons and representational authentication, by stating that what is unique about such icons is that they embody both "then"- an authentic aspect of the Holocaust- and "now" - what Souto (2011, p. 99) calls "the architecture of the Aftermath". This symbolic architectural mediation stimulates remembering through phenomenological designs and through "bringing back experiences which otherwise would have remained dormant, repressed or forgotten" (Kwint, Breward, & Ainsley, 1999, p. 2). Here, architecture builds a whole scenography into which the body of the visitor and all his senses are incorporated into an experience. It lets us inhabit the worlds of the past. We are not only conjuring other worlds in our imagination; they have become three dimensional, occupying the same space as us. We walk into them, become surrounded by them; we are even invited to manipulate them (Tosca, 2016, p. 56). Walking through a museum, visitors enter on a journey that recreates significant and meaningful events; the Museum's structure, circulation route, lighting, and architectural design constitute the theatrical setting, while the visitors are its active actors (Duncan, 1995, p. 12). In this case, icons are cultural constructions that provide believer-friendly epiphanies and an aesthetic contact with encoded meanings. They are facilitators connecting people to the deeper realities to which the icons refer, permitting identification with those inaccessible meanings through symbolic association (Baruch Stier, 2015, pp. 5-7). Here, the symbol perpetuates collective cohesion cognitively by transcending actual social relations or physical proximity (Polzer, 2014, p. 700).

MacCannell (1989, p. 7) perceives experiential authenticity in two different senses- as *knowledge* and as *feeling*- and points out that when the tourism involves the "search for authenticity of experience", tourists are concerned basically with the state of authentic feelings. Joseph Pine (2014), who studies consumer experiences, points out that there is no such thing as an inauthentic experience because the experience happens inside of us. It is our reaction to the events that are staged in front of us. As Sarah Ban Breathnach (1995) puts it, "the authentic self is the soul made visible". In fact, the second important part of our visitor's dictum refers to *the authenticity of feelings* ["it did not move me at all; it left me indifferent"]. Rather than an affront

to historical rigor, the experiential mode is seen as relying less on realism and more on “knowledge, responsibility and empathy between the spectator and the past victim” so that we “learn to wear the memories of such traumas, so that they become imaginable, thinkable and speakable to us” (Landsberg, 1997, p. 74). Grynberg and Pollatos (2015, p. 54) define *empathy* as a basic human ability with affective and cognitive facets and high interindividual variability. Hence, architects of Holocaust museums do not base their designs solely on the embodied experience per se, but, basically, use this tool in order to achieve *intersubjectivity* between the victims and the visitors, which, for Husserl, is more than shared understanding; it is closer to the notion of the possibility of being in the place where the Other is (Duranti, 2010, p. 5). What is more, according to Wang, authenticity is relevant to kinds of tourism- ethnic, historic or cultural- which involve the “representation of the Other, not only of the past” (Wang, 1999, p. 350). And, just as the approximation of the past in Holocaust museums should be mimetic and not identical in order to avoid a pseudo-experience of the Holocaust, similarly, over-identification with victims and appropriation of their trauma should be interrupted in order to recognize the otherness and the totality of the Holocaust (Huysen, 2001, p. 362). Besides, empathy is the bodily experience of feeling connected to the Other, while at the same time knowing that one was not experiencing directly the Other’s movements or feelings. It is a factor that “fills the gap” between bodily presence of the “spectator” and bodily absence of the “character” thanks to a mediation- in the double sense of keeping separate and putting in contact- between the two lived-bodies (D’ Aloia, 2012, p. 98).

Still, not all visitors reach the same level of empathy, as embodied cognition occurs in different ways. For instance, at the JMB, empathy followed a certain graduation: From the “sympathy” of an older male visitor from Germany, who remembered the stories of the families of his Jewish friends, the “compassion” of a young German of Jewish descent, and the feeling of “connection” with camp prisoners enunciated by a young Finnish woman, to the sense of “bond” and “kinship” and the absolute “identification” of two American women from the age group of 60-69, relatives of Jewish immigrants and victims. At the POLIN Museum, starting from the sense of “familiarity” and the feeling of “connection”, mainly stated by Polish and Israeli visitors, we encounter the “compassion” of individuals coming from countries with Holocaust victims, the feelings of “bond” and “kinship” expressed by Polish Jews and, finally, the “identification” that has been achieved in specific categories such as a German Jew and a Jewish student from the United States. Of special interest is the statement of the realization of a “common destiny” by a visitor of Armenian descent- relative of genocide victims. As we see, in Holocaust museums, Benjamin’s aura may not be replaced or created artificially, nevertheless, empathy offers experiences lived through the human flesh and its subjective autonomy. On the contrary, at the “authentic” sites, visitors acquire “prosthetic” memories, which, according to Landsberg (1995), do not come from their own lived experiences, but are implanted to them.

Existential authenticity: The Encounter with the Self and the Power of the Aura

Speaking about the subject, the term “authenticity” becomes applicable in demarcating a relatively new concept, understood as being true to oneself for one’s own benefit. Handler and Saxton (1988, p. 243) state that “an authentic experience [...] is one in which individuals feel themselves to be in touch both with a “real” world and with their “real” selves”. The decision to be authentic or not is taken in the existential moment, in the moment of fundamental self-understanding. Being in touch with one’s inner self, having a sense of one’s own identity and then living in accord with one’s sense of one’s self is being authentic (Kierkegaard, 1985). There is a postmodern “pathos of authenticity” in order to restore a personal mental power and sense of selfhood that modernity had diminished (Golomb, 1995, p. 19). The individual no longer has a fixed and given social position but must choose his place and role and, in doing

so, construct his/her own identity. In this situation, the self becomes divided into an outward persona of social roles and relations, and a private inner self (Taylor, 1991, p. 29).

When we study the authentic self with reference to the Holocaust, we inevitably make reference to the existentialists of the 19th and 20th centuries, who understood Freud's concept of *Angst*- the individual's *creative experience of anguish*- to be instrumental in the analysis of the human condition. Existentialist anguish is comprised of three different types (Olson, 1962, p. 30). The first type, *the anguish of being*, results from the absurdity of being and the meaninglessness of existence and everything it comprises. Sartre was convinced that the anguish of being leads directly to a sense of alienation, a sense of being abandoned by God or utter disbelief in God's existence. For Sartre (1956) the anguish of being is to be found in the incomprehensibility of the nature of the self. One can only gain brief glimpses of the being-in-itself, whose starkness is frightening and sickening, and causes the *Sartrean nausea* (1964), an actual physical sensation of being connected to the in-itself, and realizing that existence is separate from the external world but at the same time one with it (Plank, 1981, p. 69). The second type, *the anguish of the here and now*, is also linked to existentialist individualism; as human beings limited by our own mortality, we are restricted to our present physical environment and the precise time of our existence, the here and the now. Anguish is produced by our frustrated attempts to rise above the historicity imposed by time, by the transience of our own existence, and by the inability to participate in eternity. The third type, *the anguish of freedoms*, is the one that Sartre describes as anguish over the freedom to make decisions or choices in life, for which the individual then bears full responsibility (Olson, 1962). At the JMB, particularly sensitive groups of visitors regarding their nationality- Germans, Polish or from countries severely affected by Holocaust- described their spatial experience with words like "tension", "distress", "agitation", "unsettling", and "despair", emotions approaching not only the experience of *anguish* but also the feeling of the *Uncanny*, as introduced by Jentsch (1906) and Freud (1919). In accordance with the categories of anguish, we encountered the *anguish of being* and *of the here and now* in cases where the "self-reflection" and "contemplation" were part of the experience and a "revulsion", the feeling of "suffocation", and the "realization of the mortality" were stated, whereas the *anguish of freedom* was revealed in expressions that refer to a feeling of "burden", and in claims that the visitors left with more "maturity" and "mindfulness", a "sense of consciousness", an "awareness of responsibility", and a "feeling of completeness".

Heidegger (1996, pp. 137-138) named an inauthentic state of subscribing to the values of an alienating and mechanized social environment that encourages conformity and pettiness- *being-in-the-midst-of-the-world*- as a state of *fallenness* (*Verfallenheit*), which corresponds to Kierkegaard's theory of the crowd, while the state of authenticity is a level of consciousness that subverts the shallowness of social reality, a level that is intuitive and inspiring. He, therefore, uses the term "authenticity" to indicate that someone exists according to his/her nature, originality or essence which transcends day-to-day behaviour and activities or thinking about the self. Because existential authenticity is experience-oriented, the existential self is transient, not enduring, and not conforming to a type. Heidegger sees people as a "there", as an empty locus in which the world reveals itself. Past (heritage), present (openness) and future (possibilities) coexist and bring together the here (world) and the there (existence) as experience of what is given (Steiner & Reisinger, 2006, pp. 305-306). Heidegger's state of "untruth" was called by Sartre "bad faith". For him, the individual must accept what he/she is for others based on his/her past, and at the same time transcend it and be only what he/she is for himself/herself, based on what he/she will project into the future. Likewise, regarding his/her past and future, the individual must admit the irrevocability of this past, but must face the responsibility of the choices he/she will make in the future, paralleling the in-itself (the unchangeable, immutable past) and the for-itself (the malleable future). The problem of the individual's relationship to

society leads us to the problem of the *Other*, a major existentialist dilemma (Kaufmann, 1975, p. 95). For Sartre the relationship with the Other is based on conflict, as it is with Freud (Olson, 1962, p. 166), which involves an intense emotion such as *anguish* (Samuels, 1993). Like Sartre, Celan (1983, p. 177) sought a state of existential authenticity. His desire to expose an authentic reality, to present it “without a mask,” was evident. Celan equated the search for reality with the search for truth. In a letter to Hans Bender, he says that “only true hands write true poems”. The Holocaust motif, in particular, represented the most destructive state of reality that could provoke the poetic search for truth. Like Celan’s poems or an artistic or architectural creation, Sartre brought forth an existentialist project, as a kind of psychotherapy that maximizes meaning in the life of the anguished individual. This project would help his/her representation of a reality and the process of exposure that was necessary to unveil that reality. For Celan, the exposure causes one to feel an alienating strangeness that has a quality of being stricken. The artistic/architectural project, then, must be existentialist in its essence. Tied to the uniqueness of the here and now, it has a quality of timelessness. But what does Celan mean when he identifies metaphor with reality? Certainly not the reality of the concentration camps. According to Kraaijeveld (2016, pp. 11-13, 22), perhaps he means that the poem or the artwork itself is what we should connect with. His argument could also ensue that both the figurative and the literal can lead to intense experiences, and that this is precisely what poetry, art or architecture should be about; *intense experience*. For Celan, metaphors are radically singular, unique and untransferrable experiences. He refers to an aesthetic experience which is direct and intimate, which reveals a fundamental meaning and cannot be repeated. The kind of reality that is addressed here is not external but phenomenological. For him, what is rendered authentic is the experience of a metaphor.

The loss of individual identity that comes from inauthenticity might be behind the number of scholars in the 1980s and the 1990s that see tourism as a quest for new and significant experiences outside of routine life. They have noted that tourist activities and heritage experiences allow people to distance themselves from their norms and look at their lives from a different perspective, free from their everyday confinements (Steiner & Reisinger, 2006, p. 312). Echoing philosophers and psychologists, Berman (1970) and Ryan (2000) claim that authentic tourism and heritage experiences are associated with identity, autonomy, self-development, and self-realization. Tourists experience the creation and reaffirmation of identity by using insights gathered about a different culture to understand their own place in time and space (McIntosh & Prentice, 1999). Furthermore, in our days, people seek to alleviate the anxieties in their lives through a “pilgrimage” to places of self-fulfillment (Young, 1999), such as death-related sites, which, as stated in relevant literature, may be places for remembrance, mourning, a spiritual or an educational experience. Accordingly, among relevant visit motives cited are pilgrimage, satisfying curiosity about the unusual, seeking self-identification and self-understanding (Ashworth, 2004), “challenging one’s sense or mortality” (Dann, 1998) or “*thanatopsis*- the desire for actual or symbolic encounters with death” (Seaton, 1996, p. 240). Speaking of symbolic places of death and the need for an intense, singular, existential experience stated by Celan, the dramaturgic of Holocaust museums provides a useful dimension “within which the unspeakable [of the Holocaust can] to a degree be familiarized and interpreted” (Fussell, 1975, p. 199). Indeed, most European Holocaust museums and memorials are designed in such a way that the visitor is invited to descend into a subterranean space and to separate from the life outside. The bright sunlight, the color and the sound give way to dark, silent spaces in shades of black and grey. At both the Jewish Museum in Berlin and the Holocaust Memorial Centre in Budapest, several visitors used the expressions “depth”, “underground”, “immersion”, “bowels of the underworld”, “Hades”, as opposed to “emergence”, “revival” and “return to light and life” in order to describe their spatial experience, after which they stated a “reconnection with their ancestors”. This underground

path is a *katabasis*, a symbol initially adopted by Jung as the journey of the soul to the land of the dead, a meaningful descent into the cave of initiation and secret knowledge where one makes contact with his ancestors, retrieves individual and cultural creation myths, and finds emotional maturity or enlightenment (Jung, 1968, p. 41). Falconer (2005, p. 89) and Clementi (2013, p. 217) see the Holocaust narratives as inherently katabatic in nature, structure and mode; a “memorious genre” that entails an esoteric experience, a transformative passage, and the destruction and rebirth of the Self through the encounter with the Other. As Clifford and Marcus (2010, p. 23) explain, “every version of an ‘other,’ wherever found, is also the construction of a ‘self’”. According to Hall (2016, p. xxxii), it is a threefold process of “descent, dismemberment and re-membrance”. In the case of the victims’ descendants, the individual is in search of his/her self-wholeness, which was uprooted by genocide. Given that, in line with Jung’s Depth Psychology, he/she is guaranteed to return as a changed person (Ellenberger, 1970, p. 562), this *katabasis* that most Holocaust museums offer is an experience that carries existential meaning thanks to its mortality salience and sublimated confrontation with the Holocaust. This expression of the *Sublime*, as described by Kant (1986/1790) and Burke (1756) may be found in terms such as “shock”, “captivation”, “riveted”, “awe”, “rapture” and “uplift”, that were used by visitors in all the cases examined. This “one-timeness” of the experience, this unique and irreplaceable situation constitutes an element of authenticity even for Benjamin (1968, p. 220). In this sense, the aura of an original site is not the only quality that enables the visitor to reach into the depths of the Self to discover hidden gems that allow him to figure out the meaning of his life. This Lacan’s “gap”⁵ may be experienced in the Museum as well. As Dekel (2009, p. 83) argues, the function of such “inauthentic” spaces of memory is “commemorating the rememberers themselves, the ones who actively experience their past during their visits.”

Memory and Commemoration

It is noteworthy that our visitor’s quote starts with the phrase: “*This is not a place of memory; this is a place of commemoration*”. He yields to yet another contrast by attributing to commemoration a negative connotation. But how is commemoration different from memory? *Commemoration* is the act of calling to remembrance, of honoring the memory of or serving as a memorial to someone or something. However, the term entails the concept of politics which encompasses the element of “official” selectivity and filtering (Foote & Azaryahu, 2007, p. 125). Bomba (2016, pp. 7-12) points out that commemoration is an act that arises from intentions and conscious decisions controlled by the individual. Awareness of intentions makes visitors appear rationalized, and incorporating into memory an interpretation of past events tailored for the purpose of present political goals can be devastating. Moreover, this massive international proliferation of commemorative monuments and memorials for a large number of visitors highlights the definitive role that material culture and tangible objects as containers of memory play (Marschall, 2013). Therefore, many would argue that Holocaust monuments devalue the historical event, a reproach that holds memory to be primarily internal and subjective and thus incompatible with public display. According to Huyssen (1995, p. 258), the attempt to counteract seeming trivializations by serious museal and monumental representations may not solve the problem of remembrance, but may only, once again, freeze memory in ritualistic images and discourses. On the other hand, *memory* itself is something alive and evolving (Runia, 2007). It entails the concept of presence while commemoration is considered to be a consolidation of the past. The commemorative history of memorials is possibly punctuated by discontinuities that evince the ideological priorities of successive regimes (Foote & Azaryahu, 2007, p. 131). These discontinuities that are stressed through this

⁵For Lacan, the “real”, as opposed to the conscious “imaginary” and beyond the unconscious “symbolic”, may only be experienced as a traumatic “gap” in the symbolic order (Fink, 1997, p. 27).

distinction make us forget the transtemporality of memory. The juxtaposition between what seemed to be an end to the story and the reference to its continuation challenges the gap between past, present and future, and is starkly reminiscent of what Nietzsche termed “the eternal recurrence of time”. The refusal to commit to an end negates the uniqueness of memory and the notion of teleological progress and individual memory within one space and time is portrayed to be merely a part of a much grander narrative. Hence, the preservation of collective memory not only honors the memory of a collective group in a single time and place, but gives meaning to the lives of individuals in an entirely different temporal and geographical space (Gallis, 2016).

While Kansteiner (2002, p. 183) speaks about the “memory phenomenon”, MacDonald (2013, p. 5) uses the phrase “memory complex” and coins the terms “memory mania/obsession”, “remembrance epidemic”, and “commemorative fever” used by scholars like Huyssen, Nora, and Derrida, and phrases like “heritage industry/craze/crusade” that characterize an increase in public attention to the past, especially its commemoration and preservation. Many of these terms draw on the language of pathology (mania, epidemic, fever, obsession, and craze) or employ other terms that carry a negative significance (crusade, industry). According to MacDonald (2013, pp. 3-4), this is expressive of an anxious perspective that many commentators adopt; and it is further entrenched through dualisms that pit the apparently disturbing developments against what is regarded as an organic or authentic relationship with the past which is widely believed to be under threat, in other words, the concern about the “memory mania” and its correlated preoccupation with questions of authenticity and loss. In order to avoid relevant problems, Winter and Sivan (1999) suggest employing the term *remembrance* as a means of putting emphasis onto processes and practices of remembering and to avoid reifying *memory* as an object. Framing research as “remembrance”, they contend, allows for investigation of the articulation of individual and collective remembering, rather than assuming a “collective” memory that is necessarily shared by individuals. Theirs is a thoughtful proposition that works well for the explicit forms of commemoration with which they are concerned- not necessarily forms of remembrance in the sense of either commemorating or actively remembering a particular past. MacDonald (2013, p. 4) also mentions the ambiguity of the term “history”, which, just like memory, refers to the past as well as to accounts of that past and study of it. This ambiguity supports a popular vision of historical scholarship as an objective enterprise of establishing the facts of what happened; and also of the past as a body of factual evidence. Memory, when opposed to this vision of “history”, is regarded as subjective and fallible, based on individual recollections rather than proper evidence verified through expert institutional practices and persons. While this opposition is prevalent in Europe today, it is increasingly accompanied, and sometimes supplanted, by a reversed evaluation. This sees established history as suspect as the product of elites, who are said to mystify their interests under the misleading banner of value-free facts. Memory, meanwhile, is elevated to a status of greater “honesty”, and seen as relatively unmediated and transparent in its very subjectivity. As Albert (2012) contends, Holocaust museums are more comfortably labeled as “narrative museums” instead of “history museums”, because, in this case, communities are involved in the construction and reconstruction of their narratives and they hold museums to a level of cultural empathy in their interpretations of history so that these museums give people self-respect and an understanding of others. In short, according to him, museums must create relationships, and any process of memorialization that fosters positive relationships- i.e. relationships that link history with moral choices- must be understood as a productive endeavor.

Besides, when we study the commemoration of the Holocaust, we have to deal with ethical issues as well- the so called “Holocaust etiquette” (Withorn, 2015); Des Pres (1988, p. 216) maintains that Holocaust representations should not only be historically accurate and

faithful to the facts but should also be approached as a solemn or even sacred event. It is “political correctness” to respect past “as it really was” and failure to do so is not just considered as wrong, but as “wicked” (Engler, 2016). According to Davies and Szejnmann (2006, p. 250), holding personal memories sacred transforms experiential authenticity into an article of faith. In discussing the diversity of possible educational and memorial actions, Kaplan (1994, p. ix) finds it “remarkable how many of those who have addressed the Holocaust with eloquence have almost simultaneously recommended silence and done penance for speaking.” To combat this call to silence, Linenthal and Engelhardt (1996, p. 23) argue that contemporary museums are more like forums than temples. This issue also aligns with a “fear of pleasure” that is equally seen as guilt, prohibiting the fusion of the “truth of the past” with “the vulgar” (Engler, 2016). This struggle between the “pleasure” that an aesthetic object offers and the ethical constraints that it imposes was detected in the words of some visitors to the Memory Void at the JMB who stated that they appreciated the poetic appearance of the “Fallen Leaves” installation but when they were invited to walk on the metal faces that represented the innocent victims, they felt guilty and considered such an action unethical (fig. 3-4). A relevant concern was the *identity of the museum building*; The Holocaust Centre in Budapest (HDKE) is self-characterized as “Memorial”, which, by definition (Hornby, 1995), means a shrine, a commemorative monument which has been built to honor a person or an event, while visitors characterized the JMB as a self-referential *exhibit* of symbolic and commemorative significance. Even though it gets confusing for a number of visitors, the monumental function of deconstructive Holocaust museums lies in the fact that they are not complacent architectural creations or aesthetic objects that merely delight the viewer, but constitute subjects of values that touch him emotionally. Moreover, an equally important function is their moral and didactic mission which incites a historical consciousness. This role has been confirmed through the words of the visitors in both JMB and HDKE, who utilized the words “lesson” and “example”- terms that constitute a direct reference to the *exemplary memory*, introduced by Tzvetan Todorov (1997, p. 258)- and the phrase “Never Again” as a promise of resistance to every upcoming Auschwitz, before it is materialized. Durkheim distinguishes between two distinct domains of physical and mental human experience: “profane” activity, instrumental for the perpetuation of physical human life and achieved at the level of individual sensory perception and rational processing, and “sacred” activity perpetuating social solidarity through cognitively shared, symbolic collective representations (Polzer, 2014, p. 700). The binary of the sacred and the profane raises the following question: Do we actually experience the Holocaust when we enter an authentic site or is there a consensus that understanding and re-experiencing what happened is impossible? MacCannell (1989, p. 42) formulates the term “sight sacralization”, which refers to a communicative process that satisfies the “quest for authenticity” and meets with a corresponding “ritual attitude” on the part of tourists. In this case, following Benjamin, the actual site offers a “moral homage to the past in its actuality” (Benjamin, 1968, p. 247). Nonetheless, according to Bollag (1999), in chillingly incarnating the locus of death, Auschwitz does not provide the kind of historical contextualization that a museum does. Auschwitz is a mass graveyard; hence, there are certain restrictions, because of a fear that the trauma would be trivialized. The actual place may be close in proximity, but the visitor still remains a spectator of the evidence, a pilgrim. On the contrary, the Museum offers a tangible and participatory sense of appropriation which allows you to be spontaneous, and sincerely reminds you that direct experience of the past is not only impossible but also undesirable- as it is uncomfortable for the visitor and unfair for the victim (fig. 5-6).



Fig. 3. Visitors inside the Memory Void (JMB) walking on the metal faces. © Xenia Tsiftsi.



Fig. 4. Detail of the metal faces (the "Fallen Leaves"). © Xenia Tsiftsi.

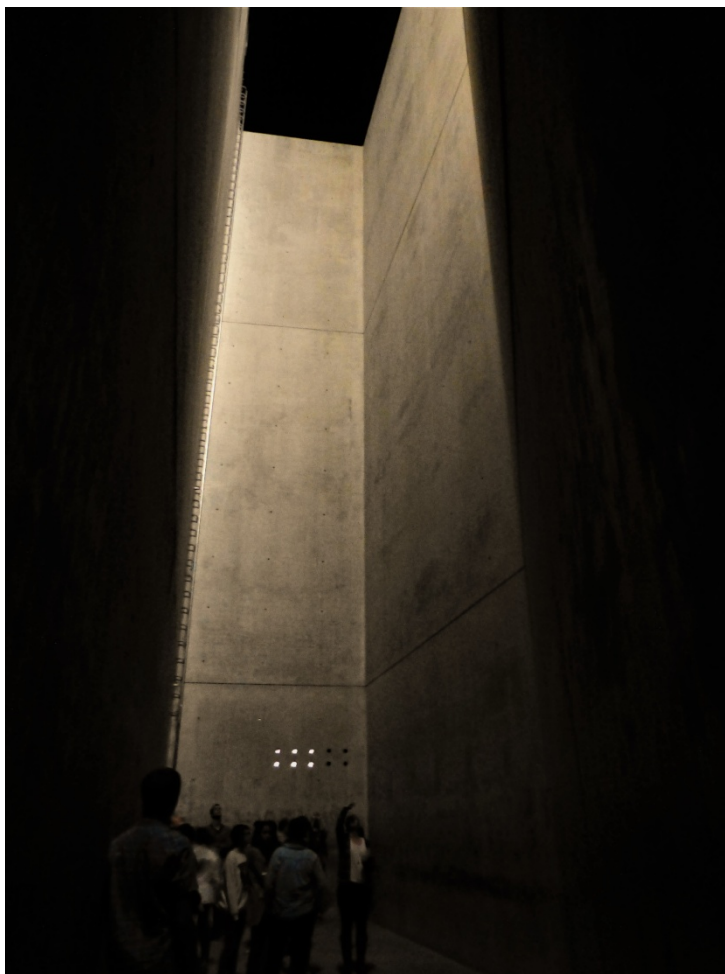


Fig. 5. Visitors inside the Holocaust Void/ Tower- usually perceived as a representation of the experience of a gas chamber. Source: <https://berlinadventure.wordpress.com/2012/11/11/jewish-museum-berlin/>



Fig. 6. The remains of a gas chamber at the Auschwitz- Birkenau death camp. © Xenia Tsiftsi.

Conclusion

As historical distance grows, the Holocaust will be remembered in different ways dependent on different levels of knowledge and familiarity of visitors and their diverse views in relation to the respective display; these may affect their preferences of mediation, representation and interpretation, and provoke new ritual experiences. From Aristotle and Plato to existential philosophers like Heidegger and Sartre and the acknowledgment of psychoanalytic concepts of Freud, Lacan, and Jung, we attempted to explore this diversity of projected expectations. Hence, while some may be interested in a sophistication that would allow for a social affiliation and an educational differentiation, others may be seeking an emotional experience, an empathic concern or a reinforcement of their own identity or may desire to transcend their daily lives and to find a moment of spirituality, self-encounter and transformation. This analysis along with the juxtaposition between the actual Holocaust sites and Holocaust museums gave rise to ethical issues like the a-critical identification with victims or the trivialization of the trauma and generated questions like: What is that matters the most? The knowledge or the experience? The content or the context? The index or the icon? The aura or the empathy? The tangibility or the appropriation? The encounter with the Real or the connection with the Other? The connection with the Other or the connection with the Self?

In what preceded we aimed to address issues that pertain to the essential question: How can post- Holocaust generations experience such a distant and unique event? Certainly, the demand for authenticity as an effective response to the Holocaust is problematic in light of the fact that the relics of authentic sites are decaying and aging and Holocaust survivors are all the less. We are in need of *lieux de mémoire* because there are no longer *milieux de mémoire*, as Nora (1996, p. 1) said. This difficulty leads to an ever-increasing creation of hybrid forms of layouts that sway between memorials and museum buildings in order to cover alternative forms of remembrance.

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