

Images of Peace:

Re-Creating Curiosity and Hope

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“You see things and you say why?

But I dream things that never were and I say why not?”

G. Bernard Shaw, *Back to Methuselah*

Images in Peace Museums try to create an environment of personal and social reflection through data, photos, sounds, etc. But Museum visitors, no matter their age or place, live in a labyrinth of voices, cultural images and preconceptions. Globalized images of violence distract us and dominate our way of viewing the world.

Images are everywhere in all Museums, but I ask myself what people feel and understand, both when they are inside and following their visit. This reminds me of the sentence: “To see is *NOT* to understand.”

In this article the question I have chosen to discuss is: How do we reflect when the images of our museums invite us to recreate Curiosity and Hope?

The discussion is based on my theoretical research and combines practical suggestions that the reader can download.¹

1. IMAGES OF PEACE

I would define images of peace as pictures, photos etc. which touch us, surprise us and suggest new views, opening our mind to questions we haven't asked before. They are like surprised murmurs that invite us to reflect, and to feel the exciting and mysterious nature of diversity.² These images promote questioning and inquiry, asking us to become aware of the multidimensional aspects of reality and different ways of looking and coexisting.

While mass media and advertisements restrict us, images of peace should invite sensitivity both towards social issues and towards acting together to transform conflicts. We are witnesses and actors able to imagine and create a better world.

These images should be contextualized, deepening their meaning, and placed within a context that reveals a complex world. We should use methods of grasping mutual relationships and reciprocal influences between parts and the whole.³

Curiosity and Hope are two fundamental concepts because they serve as a base and support and store energy for us in difficult moments. Curiosity is one of the main conditions of being settled and of belonging to a society that wants to achieve peace. Hope is a primary source and cause of growth of a fair world.

2. OUR OWN MUSEUM OF MEMORIES

When we arrive at a museum, we step in with a personal collection of memories, our own mind-museum. Silence is necessary to enlarge our notion of what is worth looking at, and what is relevant.

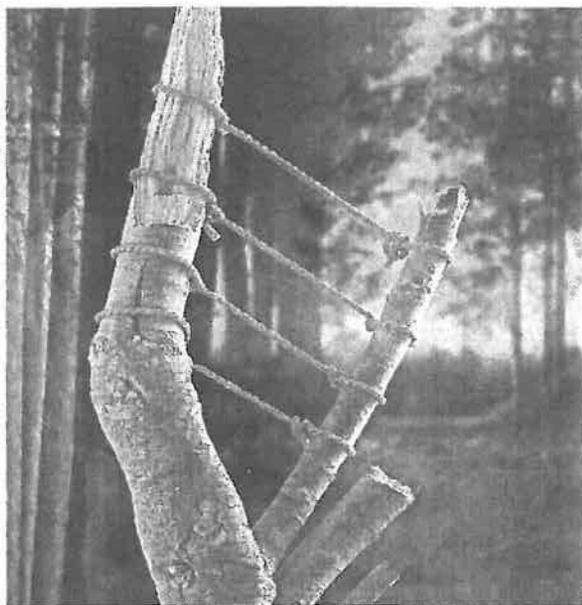
We need to start remembering our pre-conceptions about a theme, because we live surrounded by an over-abundance of visual material.

This personal museum of memories lays the basis on which important conflicts are remembered and important decisions are made. “Remembering is being able to evoke an image,” said Susan Sontag.

On the other hand, knowledge of isolated information or data is not enough. Starting with unusual themes, we provoke curiosity into previously unthought-of relations and realities.

Furthermore, words have a series of meanings. For example, the meaning of the word “peace” in one context is different from the same word in another context, and its meaning differs depending on whether it is pronounced by a teacher, a politician or an activist.

We also enter into a Museum with a mixture of feelings which are worth identifying, the feelings we associate with images.⁴



HARP. Author: Karto Gimeno. www.flickr.com/photos/kartojac/

We gradually adapt and become accustomed to certain types of images. There are images whose power does not diminish, in part because they are not frequently viewed.



LIBYA ON TEARS. Author: Diego Ibarra. www.diegoibarra.com

Hands after digging the grave of a relative. How can an image suggest intimate pain?

3. ATTITUDES TOWARDS PICTURES

Objective: To make ourselves conscious of the impact that an image can make on us (such as retention of a memory, pleasure, displeasure, associations) and the attitude we adopt as a result.

Activity 1: Which of the images of this place⁵ would we relate to the following images?

It makes me feel⁶

It leaves me indifferent

It invites us to act

It seeks the complicity of the spectator

It appeals to the critical sense of the spectator

It is hard to forget

It makes me feel.....

It is suggestive

I am tired of images like this.

It makes me see that I was badly informed

I feel immersed in the situation depicted there.

I can imagine.....sensory elements (sounds, smells, taste...)

Upon seeing the photo I think that

Activity 2: Choose one of the images. Complete some of the following phrases with the first thing that comes to mind.

Upon seeing it I felt the desire to.....

It is difficult to..... because.....

It doesn't interest me because.....

If this image was of a member of my family

It reminds me of.....

Beyond what I can see, I imagine

Activity 3: How would you define the associations that this image evokes in you?

It reinforces the stereotype that.....

It is a horrible image but

It accuses, and at the same time, it.....

It resembles a scene..... (familial, biblical,.....)

I can't forget it because.....

I feel cheated (I have the feeling that they are playing a joke on me)

I feel irritated because.....

It reminds me of a work of art:.....

It calms me down and.....

Activity 4: Put the images in order according to your attitude

Which do you like the most?

Which do you identify with the most closely?

Which photo would you have liked to have taken yourself?

Which do you think has the greatest impact?

Activity 5: Explain why you have put them in that order.

4. THE LANGUAGE OF THE PHOTO COMPOSITION⁷

We pretend to evaluate a snapshot as a method of transmitting information or giving an opinion.

When we look at an image we get a first and close idea, but do you get more?

Many pictures take sides from political, cultural or communicative point of views, but this is often hidden or we don't stop enough to inquire about it.

As a suggestion, ask yourself what you believe the photographer wants to convey by means of the composition he/she has chosen. Ask if the photo could have been taken from another angle and how that would have resulted in another composition. When you re-imagine the images, you always uncover relevant aspects that make you wonder.

It is worth reflecting on the distance between your original description, or first idea, of the photo and the combination of photo plus caption. And the references the photo suggests such as religious, mythical, the unconscious, ideological,...

Images are conditioned by our cultural filters.

5. WITNESSING DISASTER

"This war is like an actress who is getting old.

It is less and less photogenic and more and more dangerous."

R. Capa

The goal of this section is to debate the use of powerful images as a means of making people feel moved, indignant, or socially aware and to evaluate the possible influence of images on oneself and on social change

Choose an image that has moved you or has had an impact on you. Then ask how it makes you think and feel. Perhaps it presents an event as inevitable and as always occurring, or projected as far away. The camera may seem too close or it may help to question authority or government decisions

Secondly we ask what the image makes you feel? Does it provoke indignation, or does it appeal to your conscience or make you feel remorse?

It's also important to debate the effects of shocking images. What purpose do they serve? To what extent are they successful? How long does their effect last?⁸

Sontag argues that no good came from her seeing terrible images as a young girl, before she fully understood what the holocaust was. For Sontag, viewing these images left her partly numb to any following horrific image she viewed; she was desensitized. According to this argument, "Images anesthetize" and open accessibility to them is a negative result of photography.⁹

Consider Galtung's classic definition of violence: people being so influenced that their actual somatic and mental realizations are below

their potential. This definition, and concepts of structural and cultural violence, may lead to a meaningful discussion. For example, pictures with initiation rites in traditional societies, statues of war heroes, colonial administrators, etc. may add to our understanding of different types of violence.¹⁰

There are many aspects of a conflict, besides overt violence, which merit reporting, by virtue of their importance in its overall dynamic. The following questions may be kept in mind when viewing an exhibition.

How is the violence to be explained? What is presented as the problem, and who or what is to blame for the violence? What does the reporter lead us to believe the solution is likely to be?

Laws of Violence

- Continuity: Once you have resorted to violence, the only option seems to be to continue to resort to it.
- Reciprocity: If you feel that violence has been used against you, it is most likely that you will use it too
- Comparison: Once you have agreed to use violence against someone, you have in effect agreed that your adversary may use it too.
- Procreation: Violence never solves the problem it sought to fix, and it just ends up producing more violence
- Self-justification: The person who uses violence always tries to justify him/herself and his or her violent actions

If one visits a museum with these Laws of Violence in mind,¹¹ then contemplate the following. Choose pictures about a violent act and look for its antecedents and consequences. What happened before the incident? What happened after the incident? Analyze the images to see if during the whole process (antecedents, acts, and consequences) it corresponds to any of these laws.

6. RE-CREATING A SOCIAL EVENT

Objective: To recreate a social event and to look for ways of improving it through creative thought.

Choose a social event that interests you and in which you have an emotional stake.¹² Recreate it mentally.¹³



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THEORY ¹⁴	PROPOSAL FOR MENTAL RE-CREATION
1. Stick to reality with all its shortcomings, prejudices, and dangers...	<p>Concerning the person or situation that you are going to tackle:</p> <p>He/It lacks</p> <p>He/It has an excess of</p> <p>He/It could harm</p> <p>I would try and avoid</p>
2. Re-live something horrifying	<p>How much worse could it get?</p> <p>Think of the situation as completely unbearable...</p> <p>... with new dangers</p> <p>... with new circumstantial problems</p> <p>... physically unbearable</p>
3. Insist on improvement	<p>Different means of improvement:</p> <p>economy, safety, respect, affective ...</p> <p>How to help forgive and forget?</p>

<p>4. Audacity to aspire to more</p>	<p>Ways in which the person, situation or topic might become:</p> <p>More just: _____</p> <p>More beautiful: _____</p> <p>Happier: _____</p> <p>A dream come true</p>
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Masters of photojournalism such as Larry Burrows and Robert Capa help us to differentiate between comprehension and compassion.

“The Apocalypse is a state of mind, not an argument.”¹⁵

A number of studies suggest that media is only one of a number of variables that put children at risk of aggressive behaviour. But many research works confirm that people who watch a lot of media violence tend to believe that the world is more dangerous than it is in reality. If people have a negative view of society and don't have utopias they don't act and they are not agents of their own personal and social life.



LIVE IN CHAINS: Invisible Wounds in Afghanistan. Author: Diego Ibarra. www.diegoibarra.com. Such photos could have another title, "Historical Memory" and be used in a museum about the Spanish Civil War. Good photos are good in all places and for all pains.

And a final question: Do images in our museums confront uncertainties?

We have acquired many certainties through books, classes, etc, but the 20th century has also revealed many areas of uncertainty. We should include the study of uncertainties that have emerged in the physical sciences, the historical sciences, sociology, etc. Our museums are constantly changing, they are ongoing; they are like twinkling points of light and the images we have chosen for them are constellations that we

enjoy and we must be open to suggest ways of analyzing, gaining knowledge and envisioning utopias.

Endnotes

1. Each section has a link with a practical workshop (English language). You can also read more in my research

http://www.seipaz.org/documentos/WEB/indice1_content.html
(Spanish language).

2. Of great interest is the guide on Diversity drawn up by the Society of Professional Journalists of Indianapolis whose corporate logo is "Bettering and Protecting Journalism".

3. Adapted from "Seven Complex Lessons in the Education for the future" by Edgar Morin.

<http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0011/001177/117740eo.pdf>.

4. You can find an example of a vocabulary list in

http://www.seipaz.org/documentos/WEB/9.I.ATTITUDES_TOWARDS_PICTURES.pdf.

5. Some of these phrases are based on the measures of the affective or emotional behavior of the attitude towards the news: Wells' Emotional Quotient and the VRP (Viewer Response Profile) scale.

6. It will be seen that the first block of phrases refer to the perception the observer has of other people's reactions while the second block is related to the observer's own reactions.

7. http://www.seipaz.org/documentos/WEB/2.I.THE_LANGUAGE_OF_THE_SNAPSHOT.pdf

8. You can find some point for the debate in http://www.seipaz.org/documentos/WEB/5.I.WITNESSING_DISASTER.pdf

9. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Susan_Sontag

10. http://sydney.edu.au/arts/peace_conflict/research/peace_journalism.shtml

11. http://www.seipaz.org/documentos/WEB/4.I.PUTTING_IN_TO_WORDS_AN_INCIDENCE_OF_VIOLENCE.pdf

12. The poster above corresponds to an international soccer tournament between groups of homeless people. www.streetoccer.org.

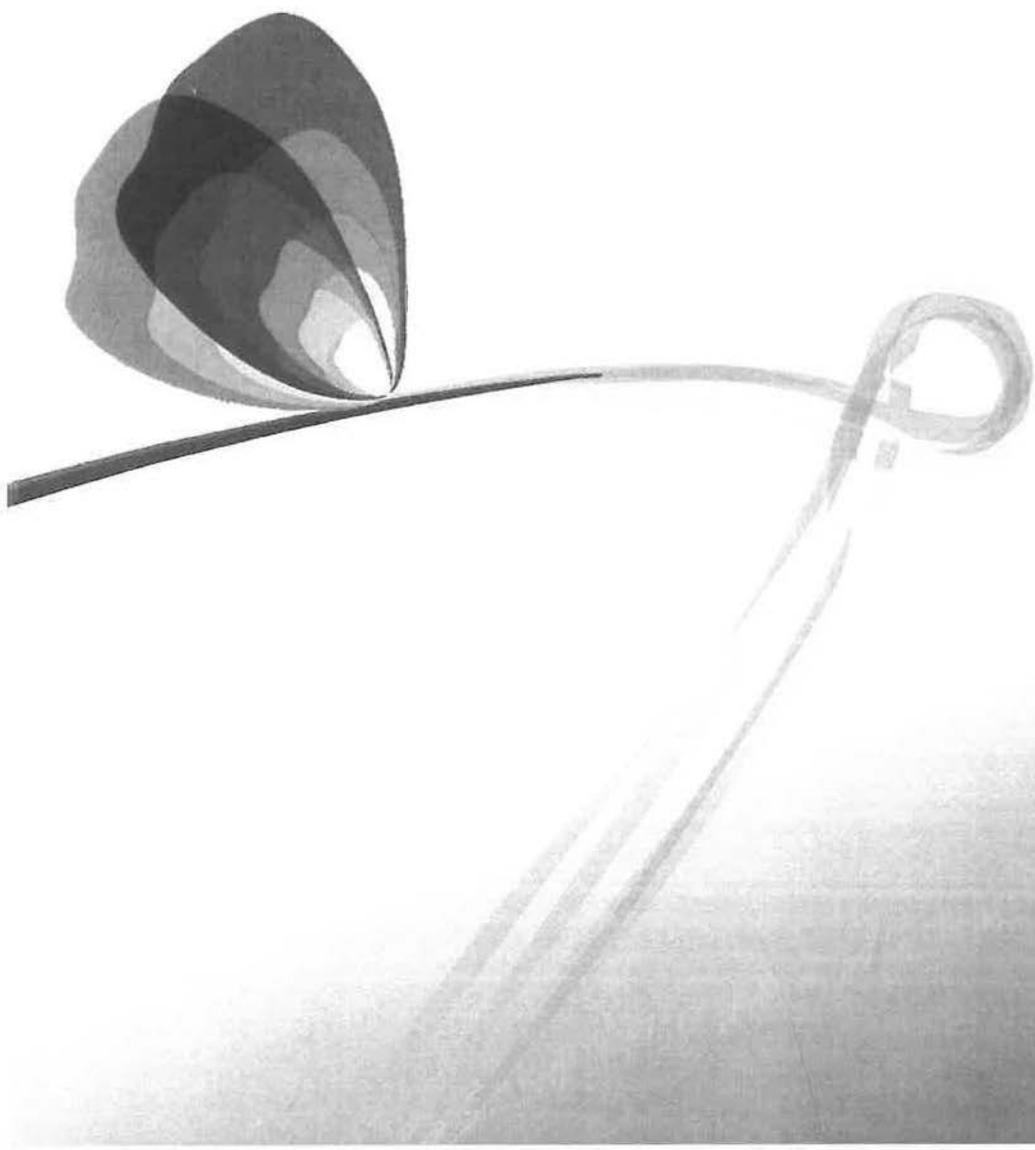
13. http://www.seipaz.org/documentos/WEB/3.I.RE-CREATING_A_SOCIAL_EVENT.pdf

14. Adapted from "Ficha de Solución creativa de Problemas en el arte." PRADO, D. y HUETE, A. (1996): *Los Procesos creativos en la Experimentación Plástica*. Creatividad Aplicada Total. U.S.C. Santiago de Compostela. P.51.

15. BOBBIO, N. (1982): *El problema de la guerra y las vías de la Paz*. Gedisa. Barcelona p. 33.

Museums for Peace: Transforming Cultures

Edited by Clive Barrett and Joyce Apsel



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Papers based on the 7th conference of the International Network of Museums for Peace, Barcelona, 2011: *"The Role of Museums in the Transformation of a Culture of War and Violence to a Culture of Peace and Nonviolence"*

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Appendix 3

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Katherine Josten, USA, is an artist, educator and Founder/Director of the Global Art Project for Peace. Her award-winning art is included in museum collections. She taught art for fourteen years at university and college levels before founding the Global Art Project. She has lectured and led workshops around the world.

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