

1.

Question:

Most of your projects are having a commemorative character. What is the difference of your project and other projects of the kind, like governmental projects?

Answer:

In a democracy, governmental or public projects have mostly the intension to deal with history in a most object way and spotlight most thinkable aspects from most different point of views, by using a variety of sources in order to underline this objectivity. Statistics play an important role, since they are said to represent a most objective way to tell facts. Even if this is not completely true, in statistics the human factor is nearly completely eliminated. They become often this way rather an expression of inhumanity..

On the other hand, the view on history and the ways how people deal with history is not a static or constant value, but is different in each generation and different periods of history, so even if people have the best intention even under the most ideal circumstances, just a kind of relative objectivity remains, since it is always human made.

In a totalitarian system, governmental or official projects are made to justify and underline the position of the current political ideology, and nearly in all cases they are more or less neglecting humanity completely.

An art work, not matter what type of subject is used, whether commemorative or not, has never the intention to be objective, but the contrary to express the (most subjective) artistic ideas of an artist.

So do I, and my personal point of view, the way how I face the things generally, and its not different from my position as an artist, whether I deal with commemorative aspects or not, my measure is always humanity.

It determines the way how I approach such projects which have never any ambition to cover all thinkable aspects, but reduced as they are, they go down to the essence of Being and a level which has the potential to touch people and motivate them to reflect the sensually experienced.

2.

Question:

What is the main motif for making such projects on the Internet? Is there a certain extropian practice inscribed in making people that have gone, for any of reasons, constantly present on-line, an effect of balsaming a memory?

Answer:

The first part of the question cannot be answered just in a few words. In the family I grew up, humanity had been always the basic measure for all, at school the ideas of humanism had further lasting influence on my view on life, so when I started dealing with art at the age of 15, there was already the focus on the essential of human life, but I got the awareness for history and historical contexts only when I was about 35. When in 1989, the wall in Berlin fell, this forced my life into a new direction. While travelling in the East of Europe, especially Poland, I was continuously confronted with the Nazi history and the Holocaust. The following eight years I dedicated completely to a (physical) artistic memorial project dealing with this thematic context, a period which was on one hand extraordinary touchable since I was confronted with the personal history of countless victims, but this represented also a most violent period since I became a victim myself, highly traumatized not just once, but over a longer period and on different levels. That all was highlighted by a terror attack which did not only destroy a part of my artistic work, but it finished my life and my artistic career at that time.

As a result I fell for some time in a kind of coma, but when I waked up, nothing was it the way it had been before, I had to learn the essentials of life again, eating drinking, walking, everything was blocked, but it returned after a some time again, but really frightening was actually that I had lost the sense for the material and physical, in this sense I was also not able any more to work physically as an artist the way I did before.

In order to train my brain and intellectual skills again, I started sometimes a kind of therapy by learning computer programming languages.

When in 1999, the war & genocide in Kosovo was escalating, I felt addressed again to become active as an artist, but I did not know how.

At that time also the Internet became just really popular and I got the idea to find out whether I could use the new knowledge of programming languages for something completely new in concern of creating art. And soon the virtual artist was born!

On 1 January 2000, I started a new life from point zero without any money and without any idea what eventually might come, my big life experiment had started, which still is running, by publishing online the mother of all future projects "A Virtual Memorial" as a kind of continuation of my previous physical memorial project "A Living Memorial Space of Art", which was by the way installed at 43 places in Poland, Germany and Czech Republic between 1995 and 1998, among them Auschwitz, Majdanek, Dachau and Theresienstadt, but also Krakow, Berlin, Cologne, Hamburg etc.

So, actually one can really not speak, at all, of a motif which was driving me to work as an artist in Internet and/or one who is executing commemorative projects online, for me there was no alternative for becoming active as an artist again, and without being dramatic, without the Internet I would not have survived, since over a longer period I was highly endangered for committing suicide.

The second part of the question sounds a bit polemic, but the first part is actually also answering the second one, since I did not open a kind a funeral for balsaming memory.

3.

Question:

What is the difference of those memorials and pages of daily newspapers that are daily announcing who has died on the Internet

<http://www.slobodnadalmacija.hr/20071122/osmrtnice01.asp?>

What do you think of the concept "collective trauma"?

Answer:

We learned already, the difference between my type of (art) working and public commemorative contexts and governmental memorials.

Your question is mentioning a third party, i.e. the families or relatives of died victims.

These memorial announcements in a newspaper or Internet have again another goal, they follow the need of the affected families They represent forums for collective mourning, and this way a tool for overcoming an individual and also collective trauma, for instance.

A collective trauma comes up, when many persons who are, and/or others who are not affected identify themselves with the victims.

There were already collective nationwide traumata, because the charismatic leader of a political party was killed, or simply dying.

The massacre of Srebrenica, and the mass-rape on Muslim women for instance, had the goal to produce such a collective trauma, to paralyze people, to throw people into despair, to destroy living structures, social contexts, the consense among nationalities and ethnical groups etc, in so far they represented highly symbolical acts for the perpetrators, as well as much more for the affected families.

By announcing on such forums, the families and relatives demonstrate also, the victims are not forgotten, in fact the goal of the perpetrators failed in the end.

4.

Question:

Somehow the tone of each project doesn't appear shocking, but rather peaceful. What do you think, from the perspective of your work, on works by Tarik Samarak

<http://www.fabrika.com/en/?id=1&j=87&t=&m=444&media=mov> who has recorded a travel to Srebrenica making photographs of parts of people's lives on the way? Or posters by Anur Hadžiomerspahic' of branded clothes from the exhumation of Srebrenica massacre?

Answer:

Those artists who were dealing with the Holocaust thematically, know that it is not possible to visualize something which is blasting human imagination, something which the human brain is principally refusing.

The massacre of Srebrenica, for instance, belongs also to a dimension which is blasting human imagination in its own way, like war, violence on children and women, and much more, is blasting the mind of those who are not affected, and those who are affected even more.

An artwork dealing with such exceptional human experience has to go other ways than repeating the horrifying curios, we all see daily in the news on TV. or newspaper. One type of people is continuously consuming such visualized pornographic violence which becomes a part on their perception of life, another type of people is principally refusing the continuously escalating visualization of violence.

Massacres like Srebrenica have a very difficult position, since they stand in direct competition with other horrifying events, from the Past, as well as the Present.

As long as they are in the news, people pay attention, but as soon as the matter is through it becomes more and more a problem to motivate people.

It is the best certainly to document such event scenarios the best way possible, at best by erecting types of multi-purpose documentation centres, so that they can be valued and interpreted by the coming generations from distance of time and affection.

Artists like you mentioned above can help to give the public also another point of view, but like in the case of the Holocaust, time will show which is the best way to approach, since whether artistic or not, it has to be one goal of all projects to initiate a better understanding for the dimensions (human, cultural etc) of such events.

Like the photos documenting war in all parts of the world, the aesthetics of the images incorporate the big danger of romanticizing the situation.

People who did not experience the situation of war, for instance, have generally no idea of it, and such aesthetical views gives a completely wrong idea.

It is a difference whether people see reproductions of horrifying curios of the Holocaust or they visit Auschwitz or Majdanek, the same is good for Srebrenica.

My personal position is by presenting the audience a variety of projects, approaches, events etc to motivate people to become active via reflecting, The projects I was creating stand all in a common context.

If it was ever my intension to produce the impact of a shock, at all, then certainly not a "horror vacui" lasting just the second until it is replaced by a next following shock, but a long lasting shock through reflecting.

5.

Question:

What do you think is the impact of those projects on victims of same events you are focusing your attention to, tsunami, violence against women, holocaust... that have survived these events? Do you think forgetting these events would be better for them? And do you think that remembering of violence can produce another violence?

Answer:

I never made a survey among the visitors who were victims, and what kind of impact my projects might have had to them.

As art projects, all projects are made for the art community and this may include victims potentially, as well. All these memorial projects, you mention above, were active for a certain period, but are now completed and/or are not updated any longer.

All projects have a lot of good feedback, sometimes one gets the idea that deeply affected people write, many of the projects are used for educational purposes by universities or schools, the site statistics give evidence, but there is one special project which gives evidence of an enormous impact on survived victims--->

"Women. Memory of Repressing in Argentina" - <http://argentina.engad.org>-

The project is about the "disappeared " people in Argentina during the military dictatorships in the 70ies and 80ies of 20th century, which were leading a war against the own people by terrorizing the families of so-called different minded people. Sons and daughters, but also husbands of families were kidnapped and disappeared mostly without leaving any trace, and from the 30 thousands of disappeared just a few survived in the end. The remaining mothers and grandmothers better known as Mothers of Plaza de Mayo, do not only belong to the surviving victims, but they eliminated also these dictatorships in the end through the ritual of weekly demonstrations which were going on until these day also after the political system changed s.

I had the privilege to collaborate with one of these mothers who is also co-curator, her daughter and son in law and her son were kidnapped, whereby the son died, while the daughter survived and collaborated also in this and other projects.

Realized in 2004, this project had a strange deep impact on the Argentine activists, i.e. the Mothers and associated organisations, since it was created and produced outside of Argentina. In 2005, I was invited to Argentina for presenting my project at museums, cultural centres and universities, and I met many of the still living initiators of Mothers of Plaza de Mayo which was an extraordinary touching experience.

Even if it is not possible that an art project is causing revolutionary changes, but my project was understood as a signal for all those who never gave up fighting for research and recovering the matter of the disappeared, which had as a result, that the Argentine president Kirchner ordered the exhumation of countless mass graves and many of the disappeared could be identified by name meanwhile. The process of overcoming this national trauma after so many decades is still going on, and the horrible dimensions of this "state affaire" becomes really visual just these days. I am happy and most satisfied, that my activities were able to have such a kind of impact on people, at all.

Question:

"And do you think that remembering of violence can produce another violence?"

Answer:

It is said, that violence is producing violence. And it is also known that people who became a victim of violence got a violent behaviour as a direct result of the violence. Personally I doubt, that just the memory of violence can cause violence, and for a better understanding it is good to know, actually, what happens to a victim of violence.

Physical injuries can be cured, but psychological injuries are not visible. Healing a psychological trauma needs much more than the self-healing powers of the human vital system or a therapy. If we understand that besides a physical also a psychological immunity system as a genetic survival strategy exists, the destructive powers of a trauma do not only destroy this immunity system in parts or as a whole, but the personal, social, cultural, political or religious circumstances or living conditions can potentially cause that a victim becomes a victim again and again resulting even the collapse of the immunity system.

My personal course of the described traumatization were leading to such a collapse in form of a coma, but when it was over, I became aware that my psychological immunity system did not exist any longer, since my vital systems identified words or reactions of other people as direct attacks I had to fight against.

One result was that my physical immunity system went crazy, since it reacted on anything directly with high fever, and at the same time my direct re-"action" became very aggressive towards other people, basically verbally, since I do not tend to physical aggressivity, but also aggressive against myself.

In first place these "reactions" happened automatically, without a chance to take immediately influence, only afterwards I became aware what happened.

Of course, also memory of violence plays a certain role. I hated the fact that there had been people who dared to take such a disastrous influence on my life and made me a victim while I had been never a victim before, then I hated myself, my inability to understand properly what actually is going on inside of me, I hated my helplessness.

I think, such personal situations have the potential to drive people completely crazy, and depending on the individual personality, dealing with oneself and the situation can lead to a general violent behaviour and the use of violence on other people, I am sure.

Question:

Do you think forgetting these events would be better for them?

Answer:

It would be better, if the traumatization would not have happened, at all. But it did. It is just hypothetical to dream people could simply forget everything. Fortunately, there exists a kind of genetic emergency strategy, causing a kind of sleeping state of the trauma.

The outside world might even get the idea as if the trauma of a victim would be healed, but in fact it is just that the human vital system is developing individual survival strategies. From time to time, and mostly in the most inappropriate situations the memory is reactivated showing a victim that the trauma is as fresh as on its first day.

In my case, the traumatic course of events caused a complete change and direction of my life, I would have never started working with electronic media and art the way I do, I am sure, I would never stand where I stand currently. Forgetting the events is not possible, but also not wanted, since they are part of my history.

This fact is manifesting itself in my answers on your questions.

6.

Question:

Do you think that victims of the past have a special treatment, as being institutionalized by history, than those of the present time in our culture?

Answer:

My projects refer actually to different types of victims, so it is really the question which kind of victim you mean.

Perceiving the victim as a person of relevance, was a development of the 20th century, when the mass media came up and human rights entered the general awareness.

This caused also a kind of revision of ancient views on history. In the public perception, of course, such mass phenomena of victims like from World WAR I, World War II or the Holocaust received a highly symbolical status, also because these events are and were the expression of unimaginable inhumanity. If certain groups of victims are and were

institutionalized it is/was not caused by history, but those people who deal with history

It does actually not matter, in which time or society people live, in contrary to the perpetrator the victim who is always identified as being a loser, gets hardly any sympathy.

In the end, it is the victim himself who is to blame on his situation. But society separates also good from bad, privileged and less privileged victims depending on their social, political, cultural or religious position and context.

There are dozens of reasons why people institutionalize victims from the Past or Present, but since the view on history is changing from generation to generation, also the view on the victims and the perpetrators and the values generally change.