



Violence, a self-portrait: the place denied by man. A reflection on psychoanalytic concepts in displaying violence in a museum

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Abstract This article explores the curatorial project “*Violencia un autoretrato. El lugar negado por el hombre. Una reflexión sobre los conceptos psicoanalíticos en la exposición del fenómeno de la violencia en un museo*” (Violence, a self-portrait: The place denied by man. A reflection on psychoanalytic concepts in displaying violence in a museum), which was held at the Museo Casa de la Memoria Museum (Medellín, Colombia) between 2017 and 2018. The project’s primary objective was to reinterpret the main exhibit of the museum *Medellín, Memorias de Violencia y Resistencia* (Medellín, Memories of Violence and Resistance) using psychoanalytic theory and the concept of death drive to underpinning this reinterpretation.

Keywords memory museum · violence · death drive · aggressiveness · social bond

Introduction

This paper is divided in four sections. The first section consists of two components. First, we present a brief historical review of the Colombian conflict and its impacts on commemorative processes, especially memorialization in institutional settings such as museums in Colombia. Following this, we place the Museo Casa de la Memoria in Medellín and the main objective of the museum in their historical and social context. Second, we present an overview of the curatorial project “Violence, a self-portrait: The place denied by man. A reflection on psychoanalytic concepts in

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displaying violence in a museum” (hereafter abbreviated as VUA). Then we present the challenges and the questions that motivated us to seek out psychoanalytic theory as a framework for our curatorial practice. Finally, we introduce the new insights that we obtained through this curatorial practice.

The Museo Casa de la Memoria aims to make visible the victims of the armed conflict in Colombia. The museum was conceived as a way of symbolic repair for the victims and, at the same time, as a place to exhibit different themes about the armed conflict in Colombia. To achieve this goal, the museum had a group of curators who were continuously researching, writing, and reflecting on the problem of violence in the country. The museum was not intended as a platform to resolve the conflicts of the country—this is not the job of a museum. The reflections that we are going to present in this chapter are the result of conceptual and practical discussions between the curatorial group involved in VUA with the sole objective of giving new meanings to the problem of violence, one of the central themes of the museum’s long-term exhibition *Medellín, Memorias de Violencia y Resistencia* (Medellín, Memories of Violence and Resistance). The curatorial project was developed, discussed and conducted with museum employees, like us, who were active members of this curatorial practice. During that time, we held management positions in the museum: one of us was the museum director, the others being the director of museography and education, the director of research, and an external consultant.

Armed Conflict, Memory, and Public Display in Colombia

In order to contextualize the context in which the Museo Casa de la Memoria operates, it is necessary to give a brief account of the post-conflict political situation in Colombia.

Colombia’s internal armed conflict has been going on for over fifty years, although its roots go back to the 1930s. In addition to the two longest established traditional guerrilla groups in Latin America, the FARC (Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia) and the ELN (Ejército de Liberación Nacional), many other armed groups, such as paramilitaries, drug cartels, urban guerrillas, indigenous groups, as well as criminal gangs, joined the conflict over these decades.

In 2005, during the government of Álvaro Uribe Vélez (2002–2010), the Congress of the Republic of Colombia approved Law 975, better known as the Justice and Peace Law, which provided a regulatory framework for peace negotiations and the demobilization of paramilitaries. The legislation was strongly criticized by victims and human rights organizations for what some viewed as its laxity and others as its generosity towards groups that had committed crimes against humanity in the context of the conflict. Academics and researchers, such as Rodrigo Uprimny and Maria Paula Saffon (2006) and Pablo de Greiff (2005), criticized the legal framework for not requiring full confessions of violations committed by perpetrators and for not including victims sufficiently in the process.

Human rights organizations such as Dejusticia, Verdad Abierta, Colectivo de Abogados José Alvear Restrepo, and Amnesty International, brought an action at



the Constitutional Court claiming that Law 975 was unconstitutional, and in May 2006, Ruling C-370 was issued introducing a series of corrections. Among other considerations, Ruling C-370 required that those who invoked the law should tell the truth about all the crimes in which they had been involved; victims, for their part, could participate during the process to guarantee the right to truth; and institutions should establish the necessary spaces and policies to preserve the historical memory of the conflict.

In addition to the legal routes established by Law 975 and the parameters set by Ruling C-370, the regulatory framework provided for the creation of the National Commission for Reparation and Reconciliation (CNRR), responsible for carrying out reparation and demobilization, disarmament, and reintegration (DDR) processes. Among other functions, the commission was responsible for issuing a report on the reasons for the emergence and evolution of illegal armed groups since 1964. In order to fulfill this task, a group of academics called the Group of Historical Memory was to prepare the report. (The group later became the National Center for Historical Memory). At the center of this effort to make visible the magnitude of the tragedy and remember is the creation of a national memorial museum (Centro Nacional de Memoria Histórica, 2015).

In 2011, during the government of Juan Manuel Santos (2010–2018), Law 1448, known as the Victims and Land Restitution Law, was passed in favor of the victims of the armed conflict. This law extended the recognition of the victims' rights and promoted the recovery, diffusion, and social pedagogy of memory for national reconciliation, the dignity of victims and society. Law 975, Ruling C-370 and the Victims and Land Restitution Law would have a long-lasting impact on the legacy of the conflict in Colombia, not least for commemorative processes and especially memorialization in institutional settings such as museums (Sodaro, 2018).

In October 2012, negotiations began between the Colombian national government and FARC. These negotiations, also known as the peace process in Colombia, resulted in the signing of the Final Agreement for Ending the Conflict in Bogotá on November 24, 2016. This process has had deep ramifications for all of Colombia as it has laid the blueprint for memorialization. However, as this paper explores, curators of cultural heritage and museum collections face a challenge in handling dissonances of the contested past. The relation between the practices of memory and the practices of politics are compacted and difficult to unravel.

The purpose of this brief overview of the national context is to present the legal frameworks that have been shaping the workings of memory in the country. These national efforts have arisen in parallel to local efforts, such as the one that frames the Museo Casa de la Memoria in Medellín (Fig. 1), which, although it responds to the same dynamics of violence and resistance, is strongly anchored to local practices. As Amy Sodaro explains, “the massive project of coming to terms with Colombia’s violent past is just beginning” (2018, p. 3).

In societies making the transition from massive violations of human rights and armed conflict to some form of political reconciliation, museological interventions in the form of memory museums have gained importance (Sodaro, 2018). In such cases, memory museums have emerged embracing new practices that differ to those of traditional museums. Evidence suggests that the memory museums provide





Fig. 1 Main entrance of Museo Casa de la Memoria in Medellín, Colombia. Photographer: Isabel Dapena, personal archive, 2019.

significant insights into how a society advances beyond the reflection and understanding of a difficult past to a point where trauma and loss become significant agents in negotiating a contested past. In doing so, memory museums such as the Museo Casa de la Memoria in Medellín, with its mission to bring about a change from the logics of war towards cultural and social transformation enabling greater democratization (Museo Casa de la Memoria, 2018a, 2018b), is not merely depicting past events; instead, the museum is influencing the cultural reconstruction and the reinterpretation of the past.

A History of Displaying at Museo Casa de la Memoria in Medellín, Colombia

Colombia is a huge country, geographically five times bigger than the UK, with many different localized experiences of violence and variations in how it has been dealt with. Medellín and the surrounding metropolitan area was one of the regions



most affected by the conflict in Colombia (Martin, 2015). In 1991 Medellín was the most violent city in the world, as Jorge Giraldo explains:

To better understand the dimension of the problem, it is pertinent to indicate that Medellín reached rates of up to almost 400 homicides per 100,000 inhabitants ... in the early 1990s (years 1990–1993), having at that time one of the highest homicide rates on the planet, e.g. 6,809 deaths in 1991, a higher number than the total number of U.S. soldiers who lost their lives in the Iraq war over almost 10 years of fighting. (Giraldo, cited by Dávila, 2016)

The violence in Medellín goes far beyond drug violence; the population has been affected by the violence of organized and common crime, the actions of private justice groups and urban guerrillas, and the violation of human rights by members of the state who sometimes exceeded their authority. Homicide rates in the city have always been very high. In 1988, 18% of all homicides in Colombia were committed in Medellín and its metropolitan area; in 1991, this figure increased to 30% (Departamento Nacional de Planeación, 1991).

Many of the problems and challenges that the city experienced in the 1990s are still current today. There are the same structural problems impacting on the quality of life of its poorest inhabitants and resulting in the inequity of educational and economic opportunities. In addition, problems related to violence and impunity have taken on alarming dimensions and continue to demand special attention from the state (Museo Casa de la Memoria, 2018a, 2018b).

Given the experience of violence in Medellín, and the high numbers of victims in the population, the local administration was motivated to create a pioneering new program to support the people affected by the conflict. The Program of Attention to Victims of the Armed Conflict initially offered legal guidance and psychosocial support. During the program's implementation, the importance of creating symbolic reparation mechanisms for victims and the need to create a center to document violations of human rights was identified. This gave rise to the idea of starting work on recovering memory, and a "Historical Memory Area" was developed; by 2006, the idea of a museum began to take shape. This was a significant moment for memorialization processes and identifies some of the characteristics and purposes associated with placing local and national histories on public display.

The first phase of the museum was built during 2011 and 2012, and the building was then handed over to the city. (Due to lack of finance, the second phase of the museum has not been built.) The museum opened its doors to the public in 2013, with a permanent main exhibition *Medellin Memorias de Violencia y Resistencia* (Medellin Memories of Violence and Resistance) (Fig. 2). The exhibition provides accounts of past violence, which range from stories of victimhood to processes of resilience and resistance that have taken place in Medellín, Antioquia and Colombia from 1948 to the present. It comprises 16 displays within the gallery. These museographic displays are arranged in the gallery space in three thematic areas: violence, victims, and citizen resistance. The exhibition includes dissemination and reflection on the various forms of violence and resistance using audiovisual, interactive, and multimedia systems. Throughout the gallery, events are presented in chronological order (Fig. 3), including testimonies (Fig. 4) and photographs (Fig. 5)





Fig. 2 Museo Casa de la Memoria permanent main exhibition: *Medellín Memorias de Violencia y Resistencia*. Photographer: Isabel Dapena, personal archive, 2015.

Fig. 3 Museo Casa de la Memoria permanent main exhibition: *Medellín, Memorias de Violencia y Resistencia*. Image of the museographic display *Cronología* (Chronology). Photographer: Isabel Dapena, personal archive, 2017.



Fig. 4 Museo Casa de la Memoria permanent main exhibition: *Medellín, Memorias de Violencia y Resistencia*. Image of the museographic display *Susurros* (Whispers). Photographer: Isabel Dapena, personal archive, 2017.



Fig. 5 Museo Casa de la Memoria permanent main exhibition: *Medellín, Memorias de Violencia y Resistencia*. Image of the museographic display *Las Múltiples Caras de la Violencia* (The Multiple Faces of Violence). Photographer: Isabel Dapena, personal archive, 2017.



of people who have been victims of the armed conflict. In doing so, the exhibition offers historical information and elements of testimonial transmission.

Accompanying the exhibition there is a museum guidebook that provides an explanation of the museum's purpose, its thematic focuses, and the conceptual



underpinnings to interpret the display. The guidebook explains the conflict from a political, social, historical, economic, and anthropological point of view. This interpretation of the exhibition places violence as coming from outside towards others for different reasons: social inequality, unfavorable economic conditions, violations of rights, among others.

Psychoanalytic Theory as a Framework for Curatorial Practice

As part of the museum's curatorial team, we were not indifferent to the various discussions on the role of memory museums, as we found ourselves asking the same questions about the relationship between the museum, its mission, and the experiences of visitors.

It is well known that regardless of recent efforts by cultural institutions worldwide to present stories related to violence, injustice, loss, and death that offer a more complex public history of the events, there is little evidence that "human-instigated affliction and misery are disappearing from the world" (Simon, 2014, p. 3). Critics of these institutions argue that the use of memory of past injustices "has done little more than encourage a form of abjection enacted through identification with either victims or those who have sought to prevent or contest victimization" (Simon, 2014, p. 3). Furthermore, Simons argues that "such identifications result in placing the self at a comfortable, distinguishing distance from those rendered as malefic, malicious perpetrators of injustice, eviscerating the force of memory for rethinking how one might alter the way one lives in the present" (2014, p. 3).

Facing the challenges posed by these discussions and our own experiences, and in the quest to comply with the museum's mission "to bring about a change from the logics of war towards cultural and social transformation enabling greater democratization" (Museo Casa de la Memoria, 2018a, 2018b) and to move visitors out of their role as a spectator of violence, we undertook a new curatorial project during years 2017 and 2018. The main objective of this project was to reinterpret the main exhibition: Medellín, Memories of Violence and Resistance. Underpinning our endeavor, we had several questions. Is it enough to explain the different dimensions of violence contained in the gallery displays, or is violence a subjective phenomenon typical of the human condition? Is it necessary to reinterpret the exhibit to understand violence in a more intimate way? These questions and reflections were at the center of our experience as museum workers and researchers familiar with discussions around contested heritage projects.

This new curatorial project was informed by psychoanalysis, which considers the subject of the unconscious and its psychological determinants beyond sociological and political determining factors. Introducing a psychoanalytical framework to our curatorial practice enabled us to bring in new meanings and reflections around the exhibition's three thematic areas: violence, victims, and citizen resistance. This framework allowed the phenomenon of violence to be thought of from a new perspective that moved away from the anthropological and sociological interpretations.



One of the tasks of the museum is to think about the dynamics of violence and why human beings are violent, but we were also aware that sociological, anthropological and political concepts do not give us sufficient tools to think about and deepen the question of violence in human beings. This motivated us to have recourse to psychoanalysis, a theory and practice familiar to us, as we felt that the concept of death drive addressed by Freud in *Civilization and Its Discontents* (1930/1961) could give us new curatorial insights. The death drive is a concept specific to psychoanalysis, initially explored by Freud in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (1920/1955a). Freud argues that this impulse (the death drive) works in every living being, leading it towards a natural tendency to disintegration. Furthermore, Freud maintains that the death drive becomes an instinct for destruction, when it is turned towards objects in the outside world, yet a portion of the death drive remains active within us. When we introduced the concept of death drive as a new interpretive frame to address the exhibition, the logic of violence changed radically; it permitted us to understand that violence is not exclusively executed by the groups that participate in war (guerrilla, paramilitary, state) but that violence is natural to the human condition.

In the light of this framework, a new discussion arose between us, as museum employees. We thought that it would be interesting to utilize the mirror effect of the gallery's first display to create a metaphor based on the new insights gained by introducing the concept of death drive. In other words, we sought to find a way to think about violence not only as something that is suffered and that comes from outside, as it is effectively manifested in situations of war, but as an intimate singularity of human experience, as a process for which each human being must assume responsibility. The display consists of a three-minute video projected from a series of screens placed through a false wall of mirrors. The display shows the vast array of losses left by the armed conflict in Colombia. The mirror effect is a metaphor for our shared implication in the events represented in the video. In this exercise we could recognize our reflection within the images and think about our responsibility about the violent society we live in.

Sociological reflections usually give greater weight to historical and economic determinants when it comes to establishing the causes of violence. This is adopted because it is often very difficult to see ourselves as an agent of the evil we denounce. We are more easily consoled by not wanting to know our role in that evil. This denial was one of the motives for our recourse to the Freudian concept of death drive. Freud articulated the concept of death drive while he was exploring the origins of violence and how violence involves each subject in a singular way. Freud states that conflict is inherent to the human condition. The French psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan follows Freud in reaffirming the concept of death drive as central to psychoanalysis: "to ignore the death drive in Freud's doctrine is to misunderstand that doctrine entirely" (Lacan, 1966/1977, p. 102).

Freud states that the death drive concerns the intimate and constant conflict between Eros (the will to live) and Thanatos (death). In addition, this internal conflict has social manifestations, such as the permanent conflict among people. Therefore, the conflict of a human being with their fellows is structural, that is, it is neither circumstantial nor historical. Following Freud in *Civilization and Its*



Discontents (1930/1961), we can identify the intimate relationship that he establishes between subjective discomfort and the organization of subjects in society. This approach suggests it is not easy for human beings to find full and lasting happiness because when we submit to the impositions that society places on us, for the sake of ideals, education or the law, we must endure the frustration, regulation, or sublimation of the sexual and aggressive drives that are characteristic of our nature. Thus, being and accepting life in culture represents a high personal cost of happiness and satisfaction. There exists a permanent subjective conflict between what we want to do and what we are obliged to do. Without the regulation society exercises over its subjects, the advances of civilization would not be possible.

In *Civilization and Its Discontents* (1930/1961) Freud presents human beings not as those tender subjects in need of and capable of giving love, in which we usually want to believe. Rather, Freud establishes an instinctive and aggressive disposition, which leads human beings to see others not only as objects to satisfy sexual impulses, but rather subject to their aggressive tendencies. Freud presents a human's desires towards the other as being

... to exploit his capacity for work without giving him any compensation, to take sexual advantage of him without his consent, to take possession of his property, to humiliate him, to cause him suffering, to martyrize and kill him ... Those who remember the horrors of the great migrations, of the incursions of the Huns, of the Mongols under Genghis Khan and Thamerlan, of the conquest of Jerusalem by the pious Crusaders and even the cruelties of the last world war, will have to humbly bow to the reality of this conception. (Freud, 1930/1961, pp. 111–112)

In the epistolary exchange between Albert Einstein and Freud in 1932, Einstein asks: "How can war arouse enthusiasm and passion for men if one could suppose that it is that from which we would want to depart?" (Freud, 1933/1964, p. 200). From what Einstein himself can deduce, it is a question of human beings being inhabited by an appetite for hatred and destruction that in normal times and under certain circumstances appears moderate but when it has the opportunity it manifests itself unrestrainedly and turns against one's own culture. Einstein continues to reflect in his letter to Freud: "Are there possibilities of avoiding the ravages of war on mankind or to save man from hatred and destruction?" (Freud, 1933/1964, p. 200).

Einstein warns that civilization has a psychological obstacle. The questions Einstein posed to Freud highlight three myths that have derived from the common conception we have of violence. The first myth is that violence comes from the other; the second myth is that violence is circumstantial; and the third, more complex, myth has to do with the aspiration of the great universal brotherhood that would pacify destructive tendencies via the commandment of love your neighbor (Freud, 1933/1964).

The third myth deserves an elucidation to understand the origins of the social tension that is elevated to the status of great conflicts. A first element that permits us to approach this origin is the thesis on aggressiveness offered by Lacan. Lacan



defines aggressiveness as “the dual relation between the ego and the counterpart. The consequent identification with the specular image in the Mirror Stage, thus implies an ambivalent relation with the counterpart, involving both eroticism and aggressiveness, a fundamental ambivalence underlying all future forms of identification, an essential characteristic of narcissism” (Lacan, 1966/2008, p. 114). This primordial rivalry is triggered into aggressive competition and from it the triad of the neighbor, the self and the object arise (Lacan, 1966/2008).

This triad I-object-other is based on a tension and, under the aggressivity as the tendency that is correlative to it, it structures the social bond obeying at the same time a law “the other or I” because the object of the satisfaction that is at stake is an object that only one can enjoy. What gives a singular constitution to human relations is that, while based on a mode of identification, they are also segregative, which is why Lacan has on more than one occasion said there is no fraternity but segregation: the more energy we put into being brothers proves that we are obviously not brothers. Contrary to the ideal of fraternity, which prevails in our time, segregation is increasingly imposed (Lacan, 1966/2008).

Furthermore, returning to Freud’s text *Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego* (1921/1955b) it is possible to verify that what Freud has called “the gregarious instinct,” the instinct responsible for drawing human beings to the group like the necessity of the herd in animals, loses its value as a support for the social fabric once the relations between human beings are regulated by the paradoxical force of the death drive. It is paradoxical because while it binds, it also separates; at the same time that it unites by way of Eros, it destroys by way of Thanatos. This ambivalent force of the impulse is the foundation of the social fabric, and Freud shows that what underlies the ideal of renouncing the satisfaction of each person in order to promote the common good is a kind of greed that can be expressed in the following way: “each one is willing to renounce his satisfaction, on condition that the other is also deprived” (Freud, 1921/1955b, p. 154). It is therefore the deprivation of the other, which underlies the impulse. Moreover, the question that should be asked is not how to explain segregation if the tendency of human beings is towards collective life, but rather, if segregation is at the very heart of the social bond, how can the bond favor the union among people?

Returning to Lacan’s theory of the specular dialectic that we have articulated previously as “the other or I”, a new modality of violence emerges. This modality of violence does not derive directly from the violence which stems from political power—from the great chief or the great *fürher*—but a violence that is anchored in a fratricidal struggle, that is, destruction among equals.

Curatorial Practice and the Pursuit of New Learning

This curatorial exercise permitted us to open up a reflection on methodological questions for the creation and expansion of new content and meanings in the museum. Introducing a psychoanalytical framework facilitated a new approach to the different phenomena exhibited in the gallery, impacting on our curatorial research.



As we introduced the concept of death drive as a fundamental concept underpinning the VUA curatorial project, which took place at the Museo Casa de la Memoria between 2017 and 2018, a shift in our outlook emerged. It was important for us, and the rest of the museum staff involved in this curatorial project, to understand that we are in a place of struggle with each other. This led us to ask what alternatives do we have so as not to succumb to this drive? How can we find peace? How can we deal with conflict? This new view opened our horizon of reflection, allowing us to reinterpret some of the displays in the gallery.

***Ausencias* (Absences)**

Absences is the first display that visitors encounter when they enter the gallery. The original idea of this museographic display was to show the vast array of losses left by the armed conflict in Colombia: losses of landscapes, traditions, beliefs, and practices in daily life. The display consists of a three-minute video projected from a series of screens placed through a false wall of mirrors. In our new approach, we decided to use this mirror effect, of our image in the mirror, as a metaphor in relation to the video. With the new reinterpretation, we set out to read aloud, to one another, the testimonies present there. Then we asked ourselves what do we see there? The idea was to enable us to recognize our reflection within all this. And then we asked why are we reflected along with these testimonies, with the idea of openly questioning our position in a violent society (Fig. 6). We did these exercises with the museum workers involved in the curatorial project, and then presented our thoughts and discussions to other methodological and creative committees within the museum.

The new interpretation of the experience in front of the mirror allowed the observer to enter as the observed. At the same time, it was possible to convey the idea that the transformation of our relationship with violence requires a step towards



Fig. 6 Museo Casa de la Memoria permanent main exhibition: *Medellín, Memorias de Violencia y Resistencia*. Image of the first museographic display at the entrance of the gallery *Ausencias* (Absences). Photographer: Isabel Dapena, personal archive, 2017.

acknowledging the place that aggressiveness has in everyday life, what we have called the “spiral of violence” that goes from the most intimate level in one’s own home to social and political violence, through rivalries between peers at school level as well as in the so-called bullying and group aggressiveness characteristic of relationships in gangs and sects.

***Paisajes Nostalgicos* (Nostalgic Landscapes)**

The original objective of this display was to give an account of our territorial location, a diverse and rugged territory, which despite its beauty has been despoiled, abandoned, and ignored. This display comprises an eight-minute video projection together with an audio system playing music while visitors stand looking at the video. Using our new interpretative framework, this display suggests that all conflicts have the same structure of “I-object-other” (Lacan, 1966/2008, p. 118) as a metaphor for the territory in dispute.

Since the video is presenting our beautiful and diverse territory, we used this display to expose all the different territorial disputes that our country has been through during the long-lasting conflict. Violence such as the conflict triggered by the land dispute, violence related to the control of water resources, violence prompted by illegal mining. The kind of dispute that is always present, and are common to all conflicts, can be understood in relation to the triad I-object-other. In Lacan’s theory the “object” can change over time, but the structure prevails. The intention was to reflect on the components of a conflict and why we tend to enter into conflict with those closest to us (Fig. 7).

***Recinto de la Memoria* (Chamber of Memory)**

The chamber is a moving and evocative place, a large dark room that resembles a mausoleum. It is a display that pays tribute to the victims of killings and enforced disappearances during the conflict. The dark space is illuminated by screens of different sizes that function as portraits (Fig. 8). The new reinterpretation allowed us

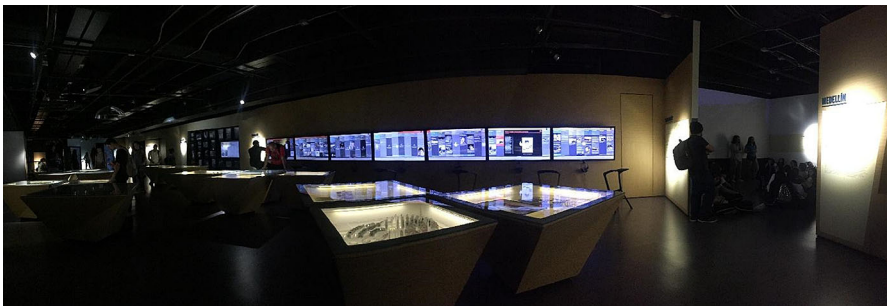


Fig. 7 Museo Casa de la Memoria permanent main exhibition: *Medellín, Memorias de Violencia y Resistencia*. Image of the second museographic display in the gallery *Paisajes Nostalgicos* (Nostalgic Landscapes) with a group of students participating in a museum visit. Photographer: Isabel Dapena, personal archive, 2017.





Fig. 8 Museo Casa de la Memoria permanent main exhibition: *Medellín, Memorias de Violencia y Resistencia*. Image of the final museographic display in the gallery *Recinto de la Memoria* (Chamber of Memory). Photographer: Isabel Dapena, Personal archive, 2017.

to go beyond the concept of “homage” and to explore the room not with the gaze of an outsider, a mere observer, of the violence portrayed in the exhibition. In fact, it was an invitation to examine our responsibility for the violence we were denouncing. We sought to use the chamber to acknowledge our human condition in the phenomenon of violence.

This new curatorial project inspired by the psychoanalytical concepts facilitated for us, the museum workers, the creation of new meanings on the phenomenon of violence, one of the central themes of the permanent exhibition. This work also enriched our discussions and projects, and it has had an effect on our way of thinking the museum’s permanent exhibition: *Medellín, Memorias de Violencia y Resistencia*. In addition, the experience of implementing this new project taught us it is possible to open discussion about the discourse of the museum to a psychoanalytic perspective. The VUA project meant we could comprehend violence not as an alien phenomenon, but as a process for which we all must assume responsibility. Under this new approach we realized that we as researchers were not mere observers or strangers visiting a museum representing the story of a violent other.

Conclusions

The VUA curatorial project allowed us to understand violence not as a phenomenon alien to each of us, but as a process for which we must recognize responsibility. The introduction of the psychoanalytical framework facilitated a reflection on the human being, as a being that among all its potentialities is also potentially violent. Furthermore, it allowed us to understand that being prone to violence is not something we can call bad or good, it is simply a human condition.



Recent decades in Colombia have been marked by the habit of thinking that violence is only the effect of the armed groups in the country, or that it has to do with historical struggles for objects/objectives that may well vary. These forms of violence are historical and circumstantial manifestations. However, in the light of psychoanalytic concepts, we identified that we could displace this violence, which seems to be alien, as if coming from a political power, and find it in closer environments. This shift of violence to a closer intimate space, in the light of psychoanalytic concepts, allowed us to recognize that violence is something that is also exercised within the family, friendships, schools, and interpersonal relationships. As a result, we could then understand that violence is also anchored in a fratricidal struggle, in the destruction among equals.

Approaching the problem of violence from a Freudian perspective makes it possible to understand that violence is not exclusive to a given armed conflict and that, on the contrary, the different manifestations of violence are present or latent in every social bond. With this new understanding of violence, based on the concept of the death drive, the idea of peace, so often mentioned in relation to scenarios of memory and post-conflict, must be questioned. Accepting that conflict is structural to human beings and their relationships, brings about the necessity to recognize the ideal and utopian character of peace. This does not mean that efforts to think about possible ways of having less violent conflicts should be abandoned. In fact, this paper is an attempt to contribute to these efforts.

Psychoanalytic theory tells us that ignoring or rejecting of our own aggressivity can make it return in a more violent and ferocious aggression. From this perspective, if we want to find thoughtful ways of relating to each other in society, it is important to configure spaces where we can think about our aggressivity, not from ideals, but accepting our human condition. This can be a way of dealing with the reality of violence from a symbolic perspective. We realized the importance and the need of places, such as the Museo Casa de la Memoria, that through artistic practices such as theatre, weaving, painting, video, photography, and music, facilitate symbolic elaborations and reinterpretations of the contested past, to represent the different manifestations of violence, present or latent in every social bond.

The curatorial project was the opportunity to broaden our discussion around the role of the museum in transforming our understanding of violence. It has allowed us to think of art and culture as symbolic exercises, that might regulate violence. As Freud states: “It is not a question of eliminating human aggressive tendencies entirely; one can try to divert them, to the point that they need not seek their expression in war“ (Freud, 1933/1964, p. 195).

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