

Vesna Mikelić

Senior Curator of the Museum of Yugoslavia

VIRTUAL TIME MACHINE IN THE CONTEXT OF “THE FIGURES OF MEMORY” PROJECT

Abstract. The unrestrained progress of technology in the first decades of the new millennium has led to changes that affect development in all areas of life, with consequences that affect our views and understanding of history, cultural heritage, and affect activities of museums too. The consequences of such changes are seen in the ways of collecting, storing, protecting, and displaying museum exhibits. The Virtual Time Machine is just one of the new approaches and applications of digitalization that has been applied to the Visitors’ and Memorial Books at the Museum of Yugoslavia. The narratives of the records left in the Visitors’ and Memorial Books, which in a way represent the reality and the various alternative visions of Yugoslav society until the end of the 20th century, are indisputably essential documents for the process of reification of reality that is characteristic of the Museum. The Virtual Time Machine is a link connecting the old and the new; it provided contemporary access to records within the project “Figures of Memory”. A digital collection of Memorial and Visitor’s Books was created, which made the content visible and accessible to the general public, which is of great importance for the “culture of remembrance in the Yugoslav context” (Đorgović 2019, 15).

Keywords: memory, exhibition, digitalization, virtual time machine, narrative

About the Museum of Yugoslavia

“Only the past, which an epoch can reconstruct with its frames, remains in memory. The past is reconstruction in accordance with the needs of the present. Cultural memory is a framework, the site of new construction of memory that adapts to changed circumstances” (Albvas 1999, 78).

The history of the Museum of Yugoslavia (Figure 1 and Figure 2) relates to different periods of time and social periods of Yugoslavia, which is reflected through the existence of different institutions starting with May 25 Museum (1962), then Josip Broz Tito Memorial Center (1982) and the Museum of History of Yugoslavia (1996), to the Museum of Yugoslavia today. During this time, more than 20 million people have visited the Museum. Many of the visitors who have visited the Museum have left traces that depict the diplomacy of the former Yugoslavia, as well as the economic, cultural, and social events of that time. Reading and comparing written material dating back from the first Visitors’ Books to Memorial Books from 1963 to the present, one could interpret and have an overview of the state of Yugoslav society and the changes that have taken place, but also the relationship to the Museum and its transformation from the Museum which was basically a gift to Tito, through a memorial institution acknowledging Tito's name and work, construction and decomposition of the cult of personality, and finally, an institution cherishing culture of remembrance in the Yugoslav context. Records of visitors to the Museum left in different Visitors’ and Memorial Books are to be viewed over three periods: 1) from 1963 until 1980, 2) from 1982 until 1996, and 3) from 1997 until 2015 and beyond (Figure 3 and Figure 4).

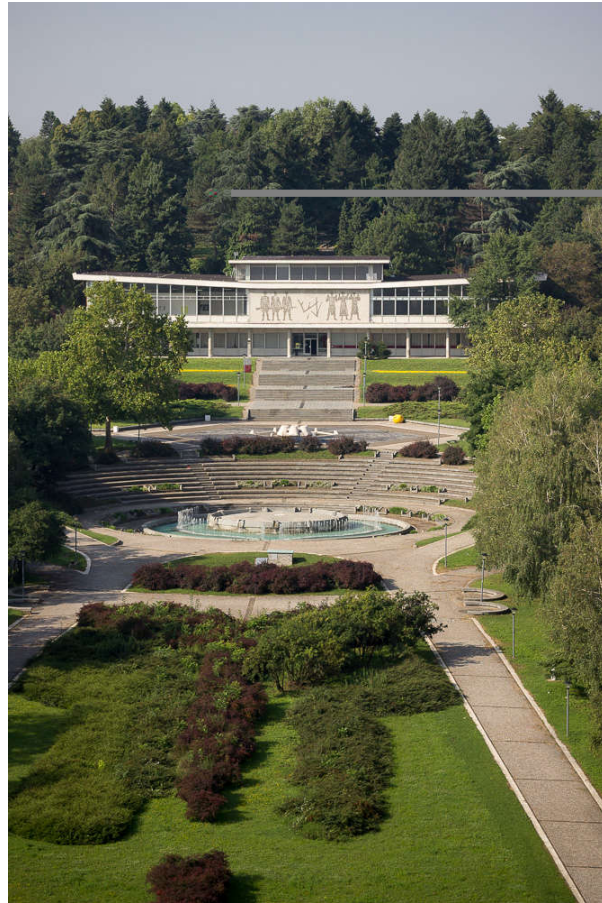


Figure 1. May 25 Museum



Figure 2. House of Flowers

Opening of May 25 Museum and the first Visitors' Book

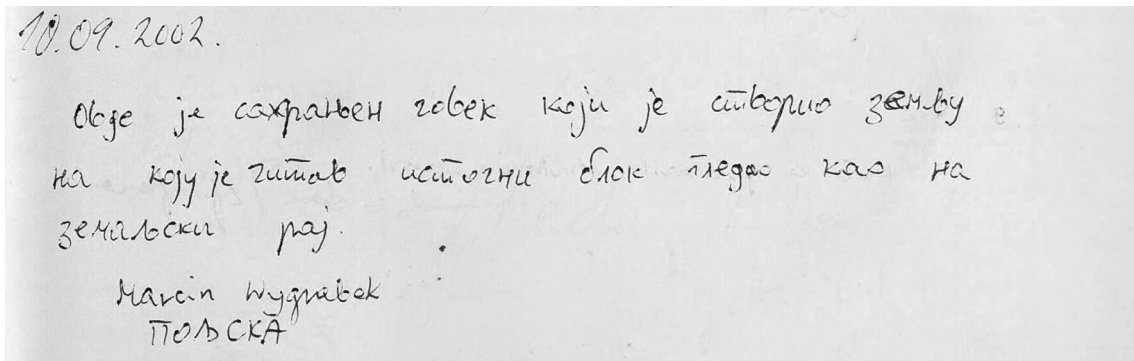


Figure 3. Note from Visitors' Books, 2002



Figure 4. Visitors' Books, 2015.

May 25 Museum was founded in 1962 and was a gift to Tito for his seventieth birthday. From 1962 to 1982, the Museum operated independently with a permanent exhibition of Relays of Youth and other gifts given to Tito and Yugoslavia. Since its opening, the Museum had its Visitors' Book established to preserve exciting testimonies of the common man about different experiences, ever-present emotions, comments on displayed exhibits, on Tito, and social circumstances enabling us to see today the views of a developing society. It contains records of many public figures, citizens, the youth, companies, societies, and associations, both local and foreign ones. Visitors' Books, 139 of them, are essential because each of them has a story of a particular generation that can be viewed

from different aspects of the development of society and the impact of socialist order on the consciousness of the population as well as significant developments in the country. It is interesting to note that the number of Visitors' Books of May 25 Museum was 19 (from 1963 to 1980), and after the death of Tito, the number of Visitors' Books increased to 75. In 1981, that number was 45, with only 20 books in 1982. In 1983, May 25 Museum became an integral part of the Memorial Center J. B. Tito, with a visitors' book being still there until 1990. At the time of massive visits to the facility, the most significant number of entries were signatures of visitors. The records into the Visitors' Book at the House of Flowers started in 1998 and have continued until today at the Museum of Yugoslavia. Available to any visitor, this book still attracts attention. The Museum of Yugoslavia has 250 visitors' books in its collection.

Books of Condolence and the Funeral of Josip Broz Tito

J. B. Tito was buried in the circle 11–15 of Užička Street, that is, in the House of Flowers, which has been open for paying respect since May 5, 1980, to the general public. On that occasion, the Book of Condolence was established in the National Assembly of the SFRY and intended for signatures of statesmen, kings, diplomatic missions, consulates, ambassadors, political parties, etc. In the records left in the Condolence Books, Tito is a personification of daring courage, national dignity, brotherhood, and unity of the Yugoslav peoples.

Written material and supporting material created on the occasion of death of Josip Broz include: Condolence Books from the Federal Assembly of the SFRY, Condolence Books from Yugoslav Embassies opened when Tito passed away (Figure 5), photos of entries from the books themselves, telegrams, letters to the Federal Government and the Presidency of Yugoslavia, letters to the Broz family and Tito's spouse Jovanka Broz (Figure 6), letters to the people of Yugoslavia, Condolence Books of the Citizens of Yugoslavia, Condolence Books of Yugoslav associations abroad, Condolence Books of Yugoslav workers' associations from different countries in Europe. The mentioned documents and written material are in the archive of the President of the Republic, which is housed in the Archives of Yugoslavia.



Figure 5. . Books of Condolence from Yugoslav Embassies, 1980.

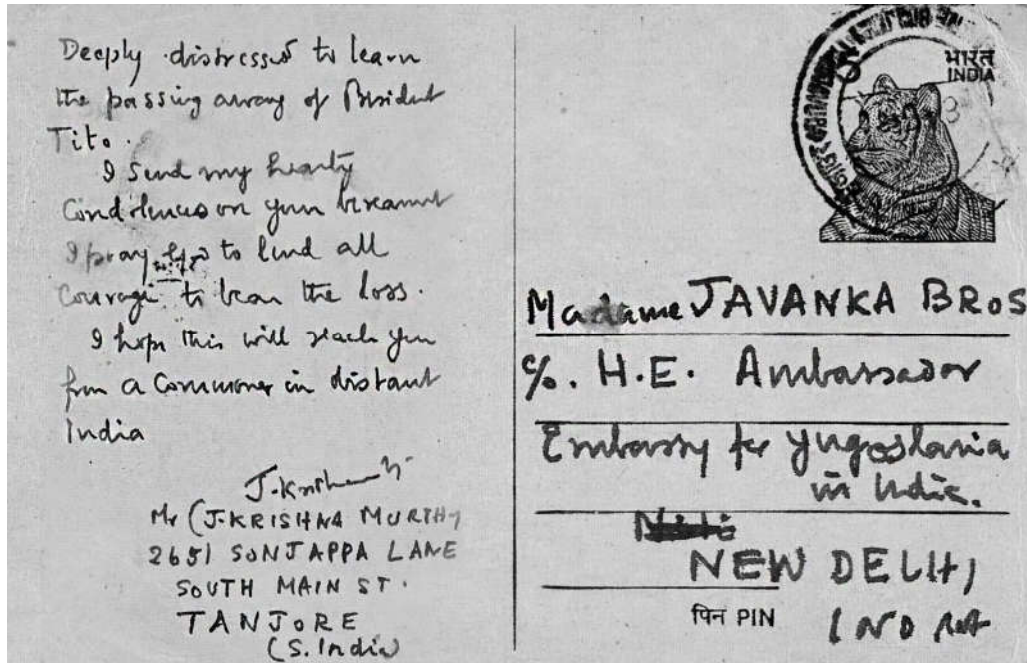


Figure 6. Note to Mrs. Jovanka Broz, 1980.

Memorial Books from the “Josip Broz Tito Memorial Center”

After two years, the Federal Government decided to establish a Memorial Center as well as a law to protect the name and work of Josip Broz Tito. In 1982, when the Memorial Center was established, a Memorial Book was established, which is housed in the Memorial Room of the House of Flowers and is intended solely for the registration of foreign and domestic delegations of different ranks, from heads of state, prime ministers, embassies, military attachés, various political parties as well as public figures from the political, economic, military and cultural milieu. Depending on the rank of the delegation, the method of entry in the Memorial Book had its own peculiarities in writing form, style, and content. From Yugoslavia, it was mostly representatives of the Communist Party of Yugoslavia, social organizations and the Yugoslav People's Army who left records, as well as delegations of all the levels of government. Visitors filled in the book at Broz's desk after laying flowers and passing round the Memorial Room (Figure 7). The practice of leaving records in the Memorial Book has continued to this day and a total of 15 books have been filled.



Figure 7. Memorial Room in House of Flowers

Virtual Time Machine, Memorial Book and Visitors' Book

The exhibition “Figures of Memory”, which was opened on the occasion of the 35th anniversary of the death of Joseph Broz and the 70th anniversary of Tito’s birthday and the first Relays of Youth, presented the original (written) material of the Museum of Yugoslavia, containing a messages addressed to Tito, both during his life or posthumously. At the same time, research was initiated as well as the development of a methodology for processing and presenting the contents of Memorial and Visitors’ Books called “Virtual Time Machine”. Within the project “Figures of Memory”, the process was initiated to digitalize messages accompanying Relays of Youth (Figure 9), messages by delegations from Yugoslavia and countries throughout the world, from Memorial and Visitors’ Books (Figure 8) with the entries of visitors to the museum, the youth, citizens and associations from various social milieus, as well as digitalization of photographs of entries in condolence books, telegrams, letters of condolence.

Memorial books have a unique cultural, historical, and museological value for the Museum of Yugoslavia. It is actually a manuscript material created in 1980 with records of messages and signatures of many rulers and their contemporaries, which at a particular historical moment were of exceptional importance in the 20th century. The messages were posthumously dedicated to Josip Broz Tito and the Yugoslav Revolution, the cult of freedom and heroism, anti-fascism, and address the philosophy of coexistence of different social systems. The continuity of leaving messages, which has taken many forms to this day, enables one to monitor the change in the character of messages as well as the emergence of collective memory. In this regard, several types of messages were identified: commemorative, motivating, reflexive, and nostalgic:



Figure 8. Exhibition “Figures of Memory”, 2015.



Figure 9. Exhibition “Figures of Memory”, 2015.

1. Commemorative messages related to the commemoration of important dates from the People's Liberating War (WWII), the development of self-government, the policy of non-alignment, and international reputation, emphasizing the historical role of J. B. Tito (Figure 10).

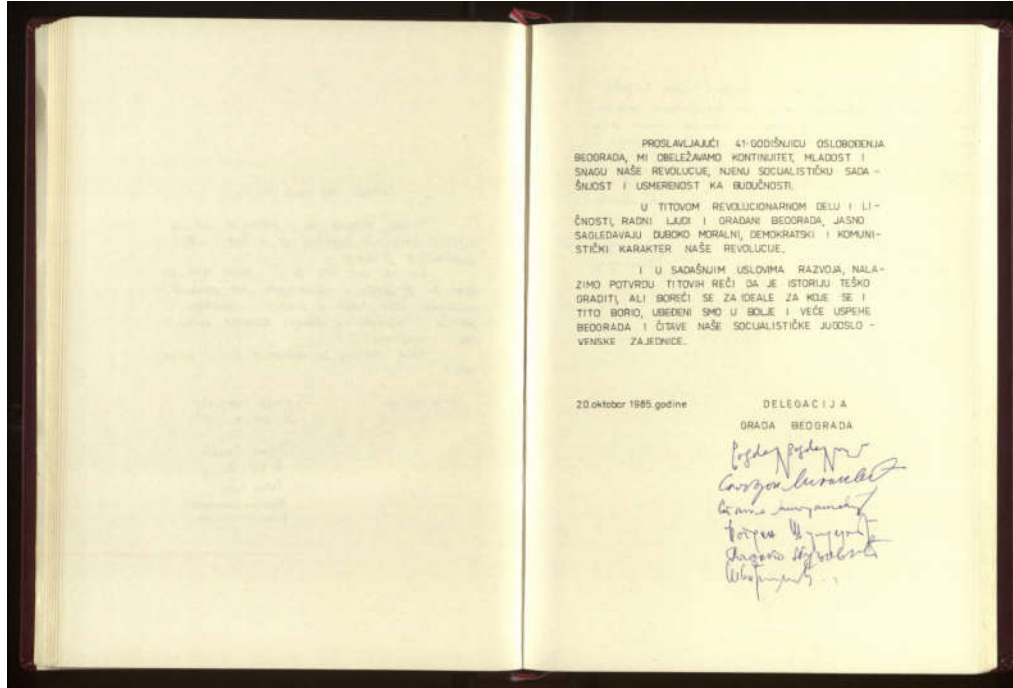


Figure 10. Narratives of the records in Memories Book, 1985.

2. Motivating messages showing the willingness to persevere in difficult times and continue the “right way” date from 1985–1989 (Figure 11).

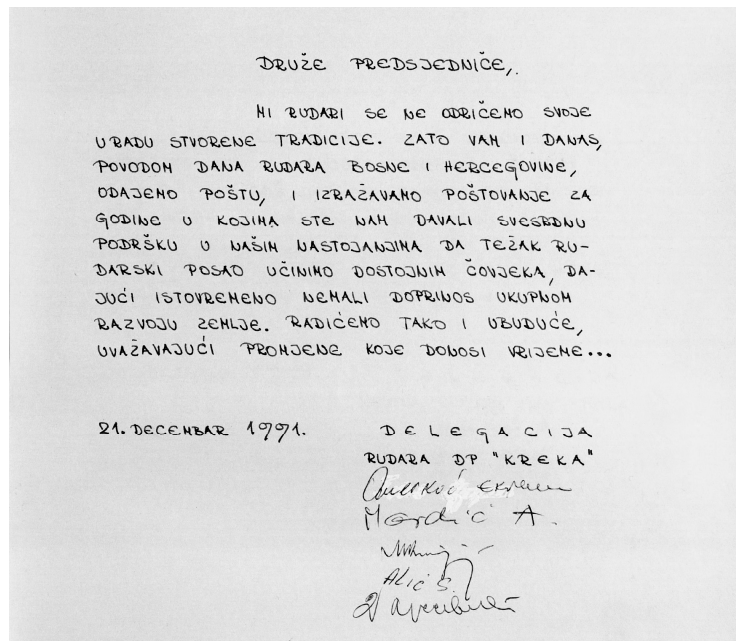


Figure 11. Narratives of the records in Memories Book, 1991.

3. Reflective messages relate to the period of the 1990s and the civil wars that occurred on the territory of the former Yugoslavia, referring to the present moment and the spirit of the times (Figure 12).

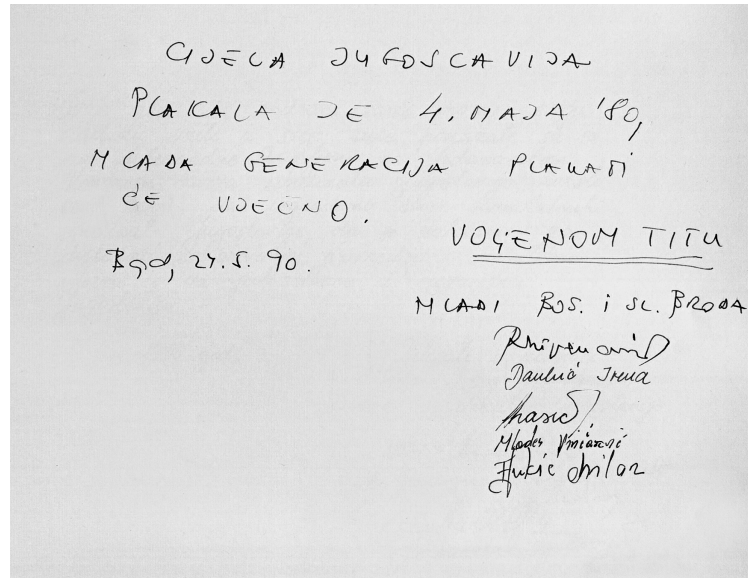


Figure 12. Narratives of the records in Memories Book, 1990.

4. Nostalgic messages reflect the period of transition and a nostalgic attitude towards the past, comparing the present with better days in the past, emphasizing the central values of socialism and referring to the anti-fascist fight as the supreme value on which Yugoslavia stood (Figure 13).

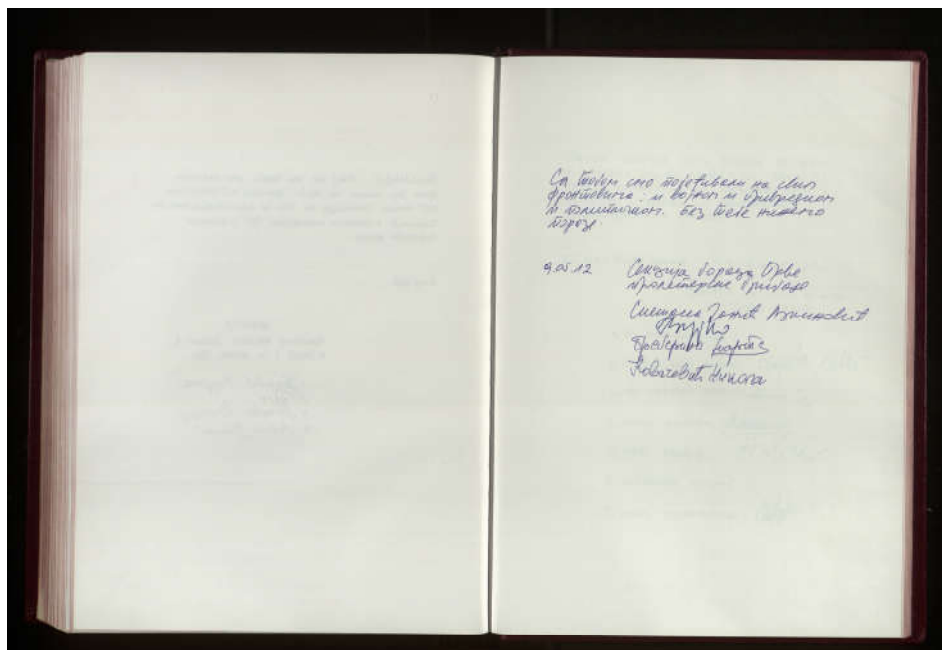


Figure 13. Narratives of the records in Memories Book, 2012.

Memorial books were not available to the general public; they belonged to the ambient part of the Memorial Room, in the House of Flowers, intended only for delegations visiting the Museum of Yugoslavia.

A digital collection of books has been created from the digitalized source material (all Memorial and Visitor's Books). With the Virtual Time Machine, visitors to the Museum can see and access written material in Memorial and Visitors' Books that date from 1980 to 2015. An extensive job of scanning messages, texts, signatures from books was done as well as compression of the signal of the amount of data stored, and thus original material was presented in a digital form. Today, multimedia is applicable in almost all areas, including arts, scientific research, education, as well as computer systems. Multimedia plays a significant role within the project "The Figures of Memory" where multimedia content is divided into static, nonlinear structures, interactive and time-dependent, or linear content structures depending on what material they represent: Relay of Youth, celebrating Youth Day, or written entries into books (Figure 14). For that purpose, the necessary hardware and software, as well as computer systems, were purchased...



Figure 14. Videos about celebrating Youth Day, in the past and now

Visitors to the Museum are given the opportunity to open "the door" with the help of modern technology, high-resolution monitors and the appropriate computer program and visit the past through the search process. The availability of digitalized material was made possible with the help of digital publishing software KvisoftFlipBook Maker Pro. Thus, the concept of the Virtual Time Machine has become a kind of database that can be used in many ways and which can assign the function of a document to existing data, or enter (new) records that interpret and explain an already existing text such as a translation of a text from a foreign language into Serbian and vice versa, from Serbian to English, identification of a state, personality, political party, association and other signatories of records. With the introduction of the internet into Museum premises, a global system of communication and information dissemination has been established. Therefore, a visitor to the Museum can select a year (from 1980 to 2015) which they are interested in, and search through Memorial or Visitors' Books to find a text of a particular person, delegation or their own entry. Selected or desired records can be sent to email, Facebook or other platforms as well as printed.

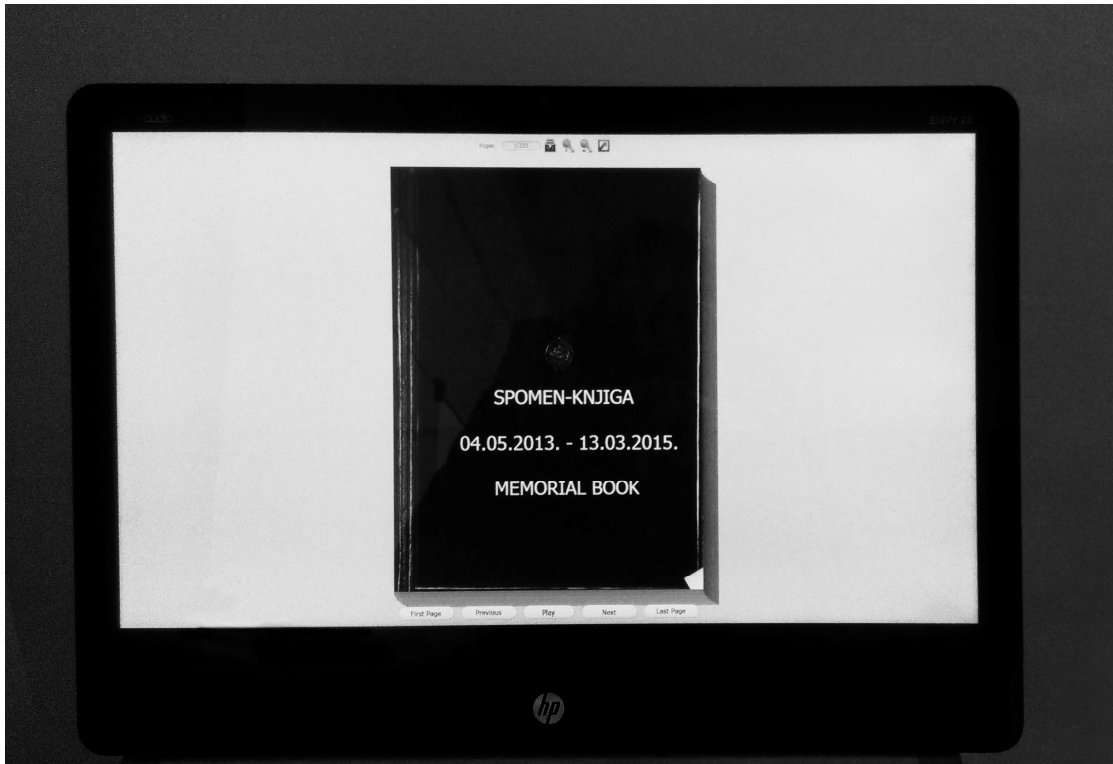


Figure 15. Virtual Time Machine, exhibition “Figures of Memory”

With this approach, the Virtual Time Machine has made it possible to materialize the memories that relate to the personality of Tito and Yugoslavia over the last 40 years. At the same time, the Museum appears in the context of social space as a medium that initiates authentic events and creates collective remembrances through collective memory.

With the introduction of technological innovations, interaction with the audience has been put at the forefront; communication has been improved as well as access to information that is now easier to use and browse through.

The Museum adapts to changes and is up-to-date with IT developments. Thanks to digitalization and software development, as well as the application of various digital publishing options (panels and screens in the museum space, mobile applications, web sites...), the concept of access and use of cultural heritage has been changed, making museum funds more accessible and visible to users around the world.

Building on Asman’s thesis that “collective memory is an object, a ritual, and a memory”, the authors of the exhibition (Mikelić, Đorgović, Cukić) developed several interpretative methods and media “addressing” the audience (thematic exhibition, video installation, digital presentation).

Since the opening of the exhibition “Figures of Memory” (May 2015) until today (September 2019), this “Virtual Time Machine” (Figure 16) has been seen by over 551,577 visitors, 80% of whom are foreigners. It is interesting to note that all the foreign delegations that visited the House of Flowers during this period were interested in going through the “virtual time machine” and seeing records left by their predecessors from earlier years. I believe that over time, “Virtual Time Machine” will be complemented by transcribing the text of the records, adding names of the people who left the records and thus supplemented provide a broader context than the current one.

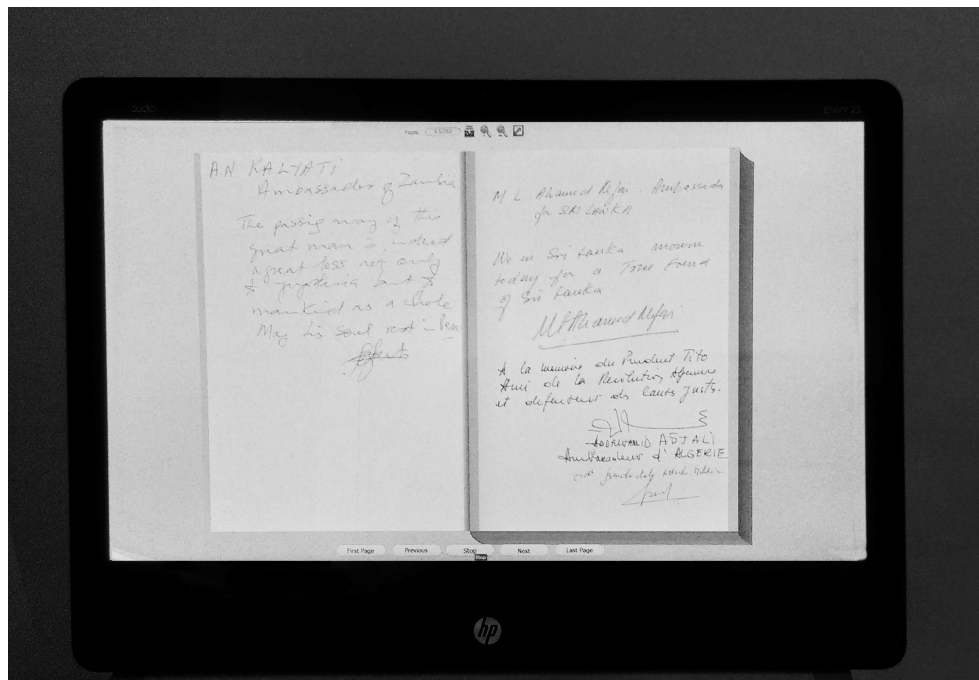


Figure 16. Virtual Time Machine, exhibition “Figures of Memory”

Instead of a conclusion. I guess Leonardo da Vinci would be proud of the technological inventions of today's man...

From the beginning of time, man has strived for and imagined the world of the future sometimes wanting to go back in time thinking that maybe processes we have gone through, both as individuals and as a society, might have been different. Many of us had a vision of how it would be in the distant future and how man will master the universe. Perhaps today, at the end of the second decade of the new millennium, a dream has come true, the fourth revolution marked the victory of robotics and virtual reality. Their implementation, I believe, will be part of future creative processes.

References

1. Babić, Darko ,O muzeologiji,novoj muzeologiji i znanosti o baštini. Zagreb: Zavod za informacijske studije Odsjeka za informacijske znanosti, 2009,73.
2. Brkljačić, Maja i Prlenda, Sandra, Kultura pamćenja i historija, (2006), Zagreb.
3. Đorgović, Marija, Muzej kao medijator sećanja na primeru postavke u Kući cveća, 2019, Beograd.
4. Kuljić, Todor , Kultura sećanja: Socijalno konstruktivističke teorije o pamćenju: M. Alvas, A. Asman i P. Nora, 2006, Zrenjanin.
5. Maroević, Ivo. Spomenik kulture kao dokument, Filozofski fakultet, 1988, Zagreb.
6. Maroević, Ivo, Izložba kao oblik muzejske komunikacije // Osječki zbornik XXI. Osijek: Muzej Slavonije Osijek, 1991, str.287.
7. Šola, Tomislav. Eseji o muzejima i njihovoj teoriji: prema kibernetičkom muzeju, Zagreb: Hrvatski nacionalni komitet ICOM, 2003, 184–191.
8. ICOFOM Key concepts of museology.

vesna.mikelic@mij.rs