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1. Introduction

In a scene echoing Tadeusz Rozewicz's short story *An Excursion to a Museum*¹, a young family stand crowded together, arms around each other. The children look laughingly at the camera. Their father asks them to move a little closer together and then clicks the shutter. Above their heads, the words '*Arbeit Macht Frei*'. And therewith forms the question in my head, "is that appropriate here, in this terrible place?" It is universally accepted by the majority that Holocaust memorial sites must be treated with respect, but problematically we are not united in our opinion of what constitutes respectful behaviour and what does not; what honours the memory of the dead and what defames it. Using Rozewicz's short story as a framework, this essay will aim to outline various visitor responses to Auschwitz and seek to analyse how we judge the appropriateness of these responses and, indeed, who has the right to make these judgements. It will also aim to identify potential barriers to fully engaging with the site. In conclusion I will aim to draw some meaningful conclusions as to how these barriers could potentially be overcome in order to allow each visitor to engage with the Auschwitz-Birkenau site as fully as possible.

2. Responses to the Auschwitz-Birkenau Museum

It is undeniable that the Auschwitz-Birkenau Museum is a powerful place with the ability to evoke strong emotions in visitors; fear, shock, sadness, empathy, anger amongst others. However, visitors

¹"A teen-aged boy in tight pants is standing next to a sign that reads 'Halt!' His buddy is taking a picture." Rozewicz, Tadeusz. (2002), *An Excursion to a Museum*, in: *A Dream* by Felicja Kruszezka (Routledge). (Available at <http://www.aapjstudies.org/manager/external/ckfinder/userfiles/files/Rozewicz.pdf> [Accessed 13 Feb 2013]), p6.

exhibit a wide range of emotions, some of which would not typically be associated with a visit to a Holocaust memorial site; for example, disappointment. Auschwitz is perhaps a particular case in this instance as it is unrivalled as the best known and most widely portrayed of all Nazi concentration camps. Sometimes, having seen the former concentration camp immortalised countless times on film and in books, visitors are somewhat disappointed by what Fackenheim refers to as the “ presence of an absence”² that they find inside the camp gates- whether it be the absence of emotions they feel or the absence of victims themselves. Indeed, Professor Elwira Grossman of Glasgow University concurs that “ it is paradoxically what’s not there that continues to fuel visitor’s curiosity in 1949 as much as it continues to do in 2004”.³ How are we then to deal with this “absence”? In *An Excursion to a Museum*, a child comments:

“Mommy, there’s nothing here. What kind of a museum is this, anyway?”⁴

Traditionally museums are places where we go to look at what has been left behind, but in Auschwitz we go to look at those who are no longer there.

In other cases, fear, anger and sadness can manifest themselves in behaviour that may be considered offensive by some. Particularly younger visitors may talk loudly, joke, push and shove. In many cases this boisterous behaviour can act as a shield against unexpected or unwanted emotions. In other

² Fackenheim, Emil in Camper, F. (1987), *Shoah’s Absence*, in: Motion Picture 4. (Available at <http://www.fredcamper.com/Film/Lanzmann.html>> [Accessed 13 Feb 2013]).

³ Grossman, Elwira M. (2008), *Auschwitz: a never-ending story*, in: Scottish Review of Books, 4(1). (Available at <http://www.scottishreviewofbooks.org/index.php/back-issues/volume-four/volume-four-issue-one/107-auschwitz-a-neverending-story-elwira-m-grossman> [Accessed 17 Feb 2013]).

⁴ Rozewicz, Tadeusz. (2002), *An Excursion to a Museum*, in: *A Dream* by Felicja Kruszewska (Routledge). (Available at <http://www.aapjstudies.org/manager/external/ckfinder/userfiles/files/Rozewicz.pdf> [Accessed 13 Feb 2013]), p2.

cases, visitors are simply not sufficiently prepared for what it means to visit a memorial site and what behaviour is expected of them.

A further reaction sometimes experienced is that of no reaction at all. This is perhaps the hardest of all to deal with; having come to the camp full of trepidation and expectations, visitors find that they feel nothing. Coupled with the personal disappointment, there may also be feelings of guilt:

“How could I be in Auschwitz and feel nothing: is it disrespectful, is it hideously indifferent, is there something wrong with me?”⁵

Furthermore, people may exhibit behaviour that other visitors may find inappropriate. In Sachsenhausen concentration camp I witnessed a young man posing for a photo on the camp gallows, imitating a hanged man. In that moment, I was certain that some acts are definitively inappropriate. On this spot where hundreds of people had their lives taken from them, no one should be emulating the tragedy for a photo. In contrast to the family photo mentioned above, I find the motivation behind the acts important when trying to judge their appropriateness. In the first instance, perhaps the family wish to immortalise their visit to the museum, so that it will not be forgotten. For them this may be a commemorative act. I, personally, still find photographing one's family in such a location problematic. Author Anne Karpf indicates a similar feeling:

⁵ Polish Ministry of Education, Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum

and Council of Europe. (2010), Editors: Alicja Biłacka, Krystyna Oleksy, Fabienne Regard and Piotr Trojan'ski, *European pack for visiting Auschwitz-Birkenau Memorial and Museum*, (Council of Europe Publishing: Strasbourg), p30.

“ I can't believe the other tourists are photographing each other smiling on the ramp- but perhaps this is the only way they can deal with it all, by trying to contain it within an ordinary touristic experience.”⁶

However, such an act is not necessarily inappropriate. Indeed, visitors are permitted to take photographs throughout the Auschwitz-Birkenau museum. Photography is a powerful commemorative tool and may act as a vehicle for visitors to engage with the site, however, it should be used carefully and thoughtfully.

If Auschwitz then is not to be treated like just another mass tourist site, then how are we to act? Dubbed “dark tourism”⁷, this branch of sightseeing involves moral considerations which one need not take into account when visiting a modern art gallery. While such tourism is not in itself inappropriate, we are asked to be “ethically engaged dark tourist[s]”⁸ and treat the site and the other visitors with respect. This is obviously an issue that concerns a woman in Rozewicz's story:

“You can't laugh here. There's really nothing to laugh about.”⁹

⁶ Karpf, Anne. (2007), *The War After*, (Minerva: Great Britain), p300.

⁷ Keil, C. (2005) *Sightseeing in the Mansions of the Dead* in: *Social & Cultural Geography*, 6(4), pp. 479-494.

⁸ Keil, C. (2005) *Sightseeing in the Mansions of the Dead* in: *Social & Cultural*

Geography, 6(4), pp. 479-494.

⁹ Rozewicz, Tadeusz. (2002), *An Excursion to a Museum*, in: *A Dream* by Felicja Kruszevska (Routledge). (Available at <http://www.aapjstudies.org/manager/external/ckfinder/userfiles/files/Rozewicz.pdf> [Accessed 13 Feb 2013]), p6.

But to what extent is she right? While it is important to maintain a respectful demeanor, “respect for the site and its victims doesn’t mean one has to spend the 3 hours with a funeral face expression moving in the manner of a mourners march.”¹⁰ Children will laugh. The sun will shine. Flowers grow at Auschwitz. None of these things detract from the terrible things that happened there and laughing does not necessarily mean that a visitor is not engaging with the site. It may be a moment of light relief in an otherwise emotionally draining visit. It may be a deflection of feelings of fear and immense sadness. In the case that the visitor has not fully grasped what happened where they are now standing, their behaviour should at the very least aim not to disturb other people.

In the wider sphere of responses to the Holocaust, in recent years a number of acts related to Holocaust memory have come under criticism for being “inappropriate”. Adolk Korman, an 89-year-old Holocaust survivor, caused a wave of backlash after his daughter published a video of him and his family dancing at Auschwitz to the song “I will survive”¹¹. Deemed tasteless by many, his daughter claims that the video is a “celebration of life and survival”.¹²

In a similar vein, a number of grandchildren of Holocaust survivors are choosing to have the Auschwitz camp number tattooed on their arm too. One grandchild bearing an Auschwitz number tattoo says: “It’s provocative, I guess. Everyone is kind of appalled at first, kind of shocked by it.”¹³ A permanent marking, the tattoo is their ink form of the saying “never forget” and provokes

¹⁰ Cebulski, Tomasz. (n.d), *How to change the visit to Auschwitz-Birkenau into an educational experience*. (Available at <http://www.jewish-guide.pl/Tomasz%20Cebulski-Auschwitz%20Birkenau%20Visitors'%20Manual%20Guide.pdf> [Accessed 13 Feb 2013]).p9.

¹¹ *I will Survive Auschwitz*. (n.d) (Available at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cFzNBzKTS4I> [Accessed 12 Feb 2013]).

¹² Lipmann, Jennifer. (2010), *Survivor Disco Dances at Auschwitz*, in: The Jewish Chronicle [online], July 13. (Available at <http://www.thejc.com/news/world-news/35612/survivor-disco-dances-auschwitz> [Accessed 12 Feb 2013]).

¹³ Rudoren, Jodi. (2012), *Proudly Bearing Elders’ Scars, Their Skin Says ‘Never Forget’* in: The New York Times [online], 30 Sept. (Available at http://www.nytimes.com/2012/10/01/world/middleeast/with-tattoos-young-israelis-bear-holocaust-scars-of-relatives.html?pagewanted=all&_r=0 [Accessed 13 Feb 2013]).

conversation and questions to keep the dialogue alive. Michael Berenbaum, a professor at the American Jewish University in Los Angeles, commented: “We are moving from lived memory to historical memory. We’re at that transition, and this is sort of a brazen, in-your-face way of bridging it.”¹⁴

However, Gil Troy, professor of History at McGill University, states: “one generation’s importing the scars of an earlier generation is perverse.”¹⁵ As a survivor, it is possible that Korman has a certain license to deal with his past in any way he sees fit; he lived through it and if he wishes to dance at Auschwitz with his family, then who can tell him it is inappropriate? Similarly, the tattoos of the grandchildren may be considered inappropriate by many, however, if they are not offensive to their grandparents, who survived Auschwitz, then who else can really be qualified to make this judgement? If there is a moral ‘grey zone’, perhaps there is also a grey zone for appropriateness; similar acts can be deemed appropriate or inappropriate depending on the motivation behind the act and who carries it out.

As I have shown, reactions and responses to the Auschwitz-Birkenau site are varied and sometimes surprising, however, there are a number of barriers faced by visitors, which may have an effect on their reactions and their ability to engage with the site.

¹⁴ Rudoren, Jodi. (2012), *Proudly Bearing Elders’ Scars, Their Skin Says ‘Never Forget’* in: The New York Times [online], 30 Sept. (Available at http://www.nytimes.com/2012/10/01/world/middleeast/with-tattoos-young-israelis-bear-holocaust-scars-of-relatives.html?pagewanted=all&_r=0 [Accessed 13 Feb 2013]).

¹⁵ Troy, Gil. (2012), *Never forget, but forget the Auschwitz Tattoos* in: The Daily Best [webpage], 5 Oct. (Available at <http://www.thedailybeast.com/articles/2012/10/05/never-forget-but-forget-the-auschwitz-tattoos.html> [Accessed 13 Feb 2013]).

3. Barriers to engaging with Holocaust memorial Sites

3.1 *Ice-cream at Auschwitz*

One of the first things I noticed when I arrived at the Auschwitz-Birkenau Museum is that they sell ice cream. Of course they sell others things too, but it is the ice cream that really makes an impact on me. Rozewicz's Auschwitz has fruit on sale but, in a way, the reality of ice cream at Auschwitz seems even more incongruous, even more grotesque. But on reflection, I wonder should they rather serve starvation rations of day-old bread? Would this be more or less appropriate? It is a reality of museums that they offer amenities. Furthermore, the educational pack on visiting Auschwitz states: "while this "normal" dimension may come as a surprise, it can also help to keep the Holocaust situated within human experience."¹⁶ In this way, visitors should be reminded that what happened during the Holocaust is not a distant, removed event but rather something which happened in the midst of everyday life, to people just like them.

In a similar vein, Rozewicz highlights the vast contrast between the women in their "colourful sweaters and tight pants"¹⁷, the men with their "elegant thick soled shoes"¹⁸ and the images of those imprisoned in Auschwitz. Again, it seems it would be inappropriate to suggest that those visiting Auschwitz should be dressed as if in mourning. It cannot be denied, however, that the presence of luxurious, colourful clothing and ice cream is bound to temper the emotion responses that visitors

¹⁶Polish Ministry of Education, Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum and Council of Europe (2010) ,Editors: Alicja Białecka, Krystyna Oleksy, Fabienne Regard and Piotr Trojan´ski, *European pack for visiting Auschwitz-Birkenau Memorial and Museum*, (Council of Europe Publishing: Strasbourg), p24.

¹⁷ Rozewicz, Tadeusz. (2002), *An Excursion to a Museum*, in: *A Dream* by Felicja Kruszezwska (Routledge). (Available at <http://www.aapjstudies.org/manager/external/ckfinder/userfiles/files/Rozewicz.pdf> [Accessed 13 Feb 2013]), p1.

¹⁸ Ibid. p 1.

feel when approaching the site. This jarring sensation creates distance between the visitors and the past events, rendering it difficult for visitors to imagine the site as it was under the Nazis. Unable to make a connection between what they see before them, and what they know from history, visitors may encounter a profound sense of “dislocation”.

Indeed, Author A.M. Rosenthal commented: “The most terrible thing of all, somehow, was that at Brzezinka¹⁹ the sun was bright and warm, the rows of graceful poplars were lovely to look upon, and on the grass near the gates children played.”²⁰ All these factors may make it hard for visitors to grasp the historical reality.

3.2 Information Overload

Can it be that by trying to preserve the memory of Auschwitz, we have rather achieved the opposite effect? Books, pamphlets, postcards, films all bombard visitors with information and conversely fail to fulfill their intended function and rather act as a barrier, preventing visitors from truly engaging with the site which is in front of them. If I buy the postcards and watch the films I do not have to engage in the “memory work”, to bridge the gap between imagination and reality; I already have a representation of that reality in my hand. If I buy the book then I have done my remembrance duty and am not forced to stand face to face with the memory; I rather carry that memory home, enveloped in a paper sleeve, and place it on my shelf.

¹⁹ The Polish name for “Birkenau”; a village located 3 km from Oświęcim (Auschwitz).

²⁰ Rosenthal, A.M. (n.d), *No News from Auschwitz*, (Available at http://www.nexuslearning.net/books/elements_of_lit_course4/Collection%206/No%20News%20from%20Auschwitz.htm [Accessed 14 Feb 2013]).

While books are an invaluable source of information, Rozewicz suggests that attempts to profiteer from the grisly details should be viewed critically. One of Rozewicz's old "crones" cries:

'Interesting reading. Buy one, Mister. You can't stop readin'. Everythin' you wanna know! Deportations, transports, all about torture and how they burned peoples' bodies. All sorts a descriptions. It's worth the money!'²¹

Similarly, in her book *Auschwitz* Angela Morgan Cutler speaks of her search for "good guilt"²² in areas where Jews formerly lived; that is the motivation to tell of the Holocaust and preserve the memory of those who perished from a sense of duty and remorse. She is suspicious of the "Jewish revival"; Jewish restaurants, music and shops springing up in places where few or no Jews now live to satiate tourists' curiosity and fill the pockets of businessmen. There is a fine line between providing visitors with the opportunity to learn further information and allowing the commercial element to take over. And of course, judging the educational value of each individual book is a very subjective matter. It seems, once again, that it is the motivation behind the act and the manner in which it is carried out that is decisive.

A further pitfall is that learning facts and information does not necessarily lead to a true understanding of the Holocaust. The Holocaust is so well documented that it is not historical facts that people generally lack. Indeed, the sheer volume of information on the topic can even have a

²¹Rozewicz, Tadeusz. (2002), *An Excursion to a Museum*, in: *A Dream* by Felicja Kruszevska (Routledge). (Available at <http://www.aapjstudies.org/manager/external/ckfinder/userfiles/files/Rozewicz.pdf> [Accessed 13 Feb 2013]), p1.

²² Cutler, Angela Morgan. (2008). *Auschwitz*, (Two Ravens Press: Isle of Lewis).

numbing effect. In relation to his father's story, Art Spiegelman, a child of Holocaust survivors and the author of *Maus*, commented:

"I'd heard everything countless times before, but it had all been background noise, part of the ambient blur; precisely because I'd been subjected to all of it so often before, I could barely recall any of it."²³

It is true that the sheer volume of information at Auschwitz 1 is overwhelming. Designed in the 1950s when the Second World War was still fresh in the memories of almost everyone, the exhibitions offer little chronological overview of events. The visitors usually take a guided tour, surrounded by others, in which the main points of both sites are condensed into three hours. Indeed, Rozewicz highlights the potential negatives of such a tour when he refers to the guide as giving a "lecture" to the visitors, his information "precise and accurate"²⁴ - but we cannot grasp the unimaginable:

"Four million people were exterminated here"²⁵, so I start estimating that if you were to pile the corpses one on top of another they would reach all the way to the celestial spheres. But if you were to lay them side by side . . ."²⁶

²³ Witek, Joseph. (2007), *Conversations with Art Spiegelman*, (University Press of Mississippi: Jackson), p79.

²⁴ Rozewicz, Tadeusz. (2002), *An Excursion to a Museum*, in: *A Dream* by Felicja Kruszewska (Routledge). (Available at <http://www.aapjstudies.org/manager/external/ckfinder/userfiles/files/Rozewicz.pdf> [Accessed 13 Feb 2013]), p2.

²⁵ At the time Rozewicz was writing, the number of victims at Auschwitz was thought to be much higher. At the Nuremberg IMT, the German war criminals were charged with killing 4 million prisoners at the three camps known as Auschwitz I (the main camp), Auschwitz II (Birkenau) and Auschwitz III (Monowitz). The Soviet figure of 4 million was based on the estimated capacity of the ovens at Auschwitz and Birkenau, despite the fact that the ovens had been removed by the Germans two months before they abandoned the camp. The number of victims has now been revised to 1.1 million.

As this information washes over the visitor, numbers blur together and the individual stories become lost. The Holocaust is history, but it is a part of history that affected and continues to affect us today. If the feelings and emotions which surrounded the event are not transmitted as well, then all that will be passed on to future generations is facts and figures. It is the difficult job of the guides to provide enough information to aid understanding and to awaken the emotions and feelings of the visitor.

Finally, the museum form of Auschwitz 1 may contribute to the feeling of “dislocation”. Looking around at the exhibition, visitors fail to make the connection between this safe, educational place and the terror of a Nazi concentration camp. Indeed, in relation to Auschwitz 1, Karpf commented “the place looks like a film set.”²⁷

3.3 Auschwitz on film

A further issue is when visiting the Auschwitz-Birkenau Museum is how much do we bring with us? Some visitors have had a great deal of exposure to the history of Auschwitz from a number of varied and reliable sources. However, others come with only the most minimal historical knowledge and minds filled with cultural references to Auschwitz, gleaned from books and films, many of which bear

(http://en.auschwitz.org/h/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=14&Itemid=13&limit=1&limitstart=3)

²⁶ Ibid, p2.

²⁷ Karpf, Anne. (2007), *The War After*, (Minerva: Great Britain), p299.

little resemblance to reality. Guides are constantly asked questions about films²⁸ and we ourselves did exactly the same. There is a fascination about that which has been immortalised on film; how realistic was it, did that really happen, was it filmed here? It is as if visitors are seeking to reconcile the cinema's representations and the historical reality.

This in turn is connected to more general issues of reality and authenticity; within the site it must be clear what is authentic and what is not. We must also carefully consider how much replication and reconstruction is necessary to aid the imaginative process and what would be going too far so as to damage it. Indeed, there was a proposal made to rebuild one of the gas chambers at Auschwitz in the 1990s, but this proposal was regarded as too radical. While authentic objects are invaluable in allowing visitors to connect with the site, replications must be used with caution. As was stated above, visitors need to do some of the "memory work" themselves and if everything is reconstructed in front of them, then this negates the need for them to invest their own input. Similarly, in the documentary film *Shoah*, the director Claude Lanzmann purposefully did not use any recreated scenes or documentary footage. In this way, Lanzmann forced viewers to listen to the testimonies, look at the sites as they were at the time of filming and connect the past and the present in their own minds.

4. Remedies to these barriers

It is clear that in order to fully engage with the Auschwitz-Birkenau Museum, visitors must do more than just be present. However, visiting itself is indeed an important first step as "spectatorship allows an intervention in collective memory that, potentially, allows the remembrance of what the museum

²⁸ Cebulski, Tomasz. (n.d), *How to change the visit to Auschwitz-Birkenau into an educational experience*. (Available at <http://www.jewish-guide.pl/Tomasz%20Cebulski-Auschwitz%20Birkenau%20Visitors'%20Manual%20Guide.pdf> [Accessed 13 Feb 2013]), p8.

forgets.”²⁹ The images and details that I imagine for myself, and that are not presented to me by the museum, are my contribution to remembering that which the museum has forgotten.

To get as much as possible from the visit, visitors should undertake adequate pre-education on the site itself to prepare themselves for what they will see and what they will not see. It is clear that visitors will not have time to read every book written about the Holocaust before visiting Auschwitz, however, a brief overview of the historical milestones and functioning of the camp would allow visitors to gain more from the experience. Alternatively, watching the introductory film on entry at the Auschwitz-Birkenau Museum may provide enough pre-knowledge to facilitate a more productive visit. Teachers should carefully consider and invest time in the pre-education for students as this is essential preparatory work which cannot be omitted. Indeed, the better the preparation, the more time will remain for more detailed questions the visitors may have. This preparation may also help visitors avoid negative feelings during their visit, such as fear and disappointment and will allow visitors to understand what behaviour is expected of them in a memorial site. We all fear the unknown, if these feelings of fear can be dealt with before the visit then visitors can concentrate more carefully on the information they are being told and negative feelings are less likely to manifest themselves in, what some may consider, offensive behaviour.

Furthermore, visitors should be prepared to bring their imagination with them if they wish to fully engage with the site. It is not the purpose of a museum, nor would it be desirable, to tell people how to feel. The exhibitions allow us room to draw our own conclusions and to invest this information with an imaginative input. We are required not only to hear words and see objects, but also to flesh out the narrative with images and details of our own. An important

²⁹Crownshaw, R. (2000), *Performing Memory in Holocaust Museums*, in: *Performance Research*, 5(3), p23.

question is ‘can we ever understand that which we have not experienced?’ The psychologist Marianne Hirsch coined the phrase ‘post-memory’ which she describes as, “a powerful and very particular form of memory precisely because its connection to its object ... is mediated, not through recollection but through an imaginative investment and creation”³⁰ For generations of visitors, who do not have their own memories of the Holocaust, it is by engaging with and meditating on the subject that they can perhaps begin to come to understand that which they have never known. Additionally, Hungerford concurs that: ‘trauma can be transmitted not only by survivors but also by those ... who show an intense concern with the subject despite the fact that they are not themselves survivors’³¹

It is clear that in order to feel an intense concern with the victims of Nazi crimes, we must move from the vast to the individual. As our guide Natalia Olesky told us “the Holocaust is not the story of 6 million Jews; it is the story of *one* Jew, times 6 million.”³² The piles of shoes, the hair, the suitcases, the artificial limbs all serve the purpose of communicating to us the overwhelming scope of the crimes committed at Auschwitz, indeed: “There are too many individual shoes to cope with, so the task of historicising a single shoe is the measure of impossibility.”³³ But it is just this “historicizing of a single shoe” that can truly allow a visitor to make a connection with site; is it simple or fancy? Elegant or practical? Who was she? Where was she from? Did she die here in this place?

This theme of individualization continues with the poignant photo exhibition in the *Sauna* in the Birkenau section of the camp. *Before they went away*, painstakingly groups together scenes from the

³⁰ Hirsch, Marianne. (2007), *Family Frames: Photography, Narrative, and Postmemory*, (Harvard University Press), p22.

³¹ Hungerford, A. (2001), *Memorizing Memory*, in: *The Yale Journal of Criticism* 14 (1), p74.

³² The comment was made to Natalia by a Holocaust survivor. Their name is unknown.

³³ Dalton, D. (2009), *Encountering Auschwitz: A Personal Ruminaton on the Possibilities and Limitations of Witnessing/Remembering Trauma in Memorial Space*, in: *Law Text Culture*, 13(1). (Available at:<http://ro.uow.edu.au/ltc/vol13/iss1/10> [Accessed 10 Feb 2013]), p193.

lives of the victims before they were victims. The exhibition allows visitors to focus on the individual, personal aspect of the Holocaust, which is sometimes lost in the overarching historical narrative. Indeed James Young comments: "These lives and the relationships between them are lost to the memory of ruins alone – and will be lost to subsequent generations who seek memory only in the rubble of the past."³⁴ To avoid losing these lives and relationships, we must make the effort to connect with them in concrete, individual terms.

Experientially, much of the visitors' journey at Auschwitz must be carried out alone:

"You can't just wander around here helter skelter. You need someone to explain."³⁵

While this is true on an informational level, we must, however, accept that it is not possible that a guide transmits "everything [we] ought to know."³⁶ In many cases it seems that "the value of Birkenau for most visitors is experiential rather than informative."³⁷ Birkenau is filled with absence; the absence of buildings, of people, of guides, of exhibitions, of explanations and in this absence it may be possible to connect with those who were once present.

³⁴ Young James E. (2001), in : Weiss Ann, *The last album: eyes from the ashes of Auschwitz-Birkenau*, (W.W. Norton & Company: New York), pp. 16-18.

³⁵ Rozewicz, Tadeusz. (2002), *An Excursion to a Museum*, in: *A Dream* by Felicja Kruszewska (Routledge). (Available at <http://www.aapjstudies.org/manager/external/ckfinder/userfiles/files/Rozewicz.pdf> [Accessed 13 Feb 2013]). P3.

³⁶ Rozewicz, Tadeusz. (2002), *An Excursion to a Museum*, in: *A Dream* by Felicja Kruszewska (Routledge). (Available at <http://www.aapjstudies.org/manager/external/ckfinder/userfiles/files/Rozewicz.pdf> [Accessed 13 Feb 2013]). p2.

³⁷ Dalton, D. (2009), *Encountering Auschwitz: A Personal Ruminaton on the Possibilities and Limitations of Witnessing/Remembering Trauma in Memorial Space*, in: *Law Text Culture*, 13(1). (Available at: <http://ro.uow.edu.au/ltc/vol13/iss1/10> [Accessed 10 Feb 2013]), p201.

5. Conclusion

If we have established that certain reactions to Auschwitz may be inappropriate then this begs the question of what sort of reaction *would* truly be appropriate? This is a question that Anne Karpf asks herself during her visit to Auschwitz:

“Should the whole world freeze and organize itself entirely around this one piece of history? My answer, I suppose, is yes, for that's how so much of my own world has been organized.”³⁸

Karpf feels that if those around her could truly understand the horror of where they were standing, then their world would stop, and they would all throw themselves to the ground and weep. But they don't. Most visitors don't. And with this we see that there is no “normal” response to Auschwitz. Sometimes people weep and sometimes they laugh. Some take pictures for an album and others are numb with shock. Sometimes reactions are visible, sometimes they are not. Indeed, no one can tell what is happening inside a person. Katz argues that the most important factor is the “authenticity of one's immediate, personal response”.³⁹ And in order to reach this personal, authentic response, we must aim to remove as many of the barriers that stand in the way.

As visitor numbers increase: “These colorful, loud masses, often strongly opinionated and convinced about the importance of the site, have to coexist in the sobering physicality of Auschwitz-Birkenau.”⁴⁰

But perhaps this should not only be considered a drawback, but a positive sign of the interest that

³⁸ Karpf, Anne. (2007), *The War After*, (Minerva: Great Britain), p298.

³⁹ Dalton, D. (2009), *Encountering Auschwitz: A Personal Ruminaton on the Possibilities and Limitations of Witnessing/Remembering Trauma in Memorial Space*, in: *Law Text Culture*, 13(1). (Available at: <http://ro.uow.edu.au/ltc/vol13/iss1/10> [Accessed 10 Feb 2013]), p211.

⁴⁰ Cebulski, Tomasz. (n.d), *How to change the visit to Auschwitz-Birkenau into an educational experience*. (Available at <http://www.jewish-guide.pl/Tomasz%20Cebulski-Auschwitz%20Birkenau%20Visitors'%20Manual%20Guide.pdf> [Accessed 13 Feb 2013]). , p6

continues to be piqued by the Auschwitz-Birkenau site. As survivors pass away, the role of the 'rememberers' becomes even more important. Therefore, the focus should be not to lecture, but rather to inspire discussion. We are not looking for the answers but certainly we wish to move people to ask questions⁴¹. The way we educate and preserve memory is changing and at the head of this development is a need for knowledge, vision and creativity. The principal aim of memorial sites is to promote dialogue with visitors⁴² and awaken their curiosity: "There should be.... no finished monuments only an endless discussion".

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⁴¹ "[m]emorial places do not offer answers; they must shock people into asking questions" (2004: 115). Weber

⁴² A.M Rosenthal speaks of "a restless feeling that to have visited Auschwitz and then turned away without having said or written anything would somehow be a most grievous act of discourtesy to those who died here." Rosenthal, A.M. (n.d), *No News from Auschwitz*, (Available at http://www.nexuslearning.net/books/elements_of_lit_course4/Collection%206/No%20News%20from%20Auschwitz.htm [Accessed 14 Feb 2013]).

