*Grigor Ghazaryan* & *Steven Donatelle**

# Encoding Memory through Multimodality in Modern-Day Memorial Museums: Concerns over the Use and Possible Overuse of Technology. The Example of the Armenian Genocide Museum-Institute

## Abstract

The article is devoted to the study of the use of technology in memorial museums, particularly in those related to genocide, with a goal to construct a theoretical framework that can be used to reflect on and analyze the use of technology in similar spaces. A multidisciplinary theoretical framework is assembled through Semiotics, Communication and Memory Studies, as well as Philosophy, in order to explain the benefits and dangers of implementing technology in memorial museums. Particularly, Peirce's idea of unlimited semiosis, Eco's considerations about the multiplicity of meanings ("open text"), the existence of two narratives in memorial museums, Heidegger's writings on technology (especially enframing and revealing) and Jakobson's communication theory based on Buhler's organon model are invoked with the aim of explicating the interplay between technology and memory. Proceeding inductively from the example of the Armenian Genocide Museum Institute (AGMI), the authors identify general dangers that should be kept in mind in the process of genocide memorialization.

## Keywords

museum communication, memorial museums, semiotics, narrative, enframing, revealing, Armenian Genocide Museum-Institute, memory studies

## 1 Introduction

Most of the publications that can be considered as relevant to the present research belong to various disciplines, ranging from museum communication to genocide memorialization, and they tend to cover diverse aspects of communication and memory. Specific arguments relating to genocide memorialization deal with such aspects as the nature and goal of memorialization, thus linking it to the topic of memory institutionalization in general.

A brief review of the literature that can be helpful for situating the argument of the present research leads us to suggest that the two overarching directions that should, for the purpose of clarity, be differentiated within the theoretical literature in question are **1. the study of language, modes and modalities of memorialization** and **2. the study of narrative and memory creation in genocide memorialization,** where the first category obviously pertains to the *plane of expression*, whereas the second one deals with *the plane of content*.

Thus, the first block of literature deals with *expression* and includes diverse publications that are centered around: the language adopted by museums in their communication with the public (Lazzeretti 2016); the choice of language and the ways of presenting a particular content in museums; the complexities of communication in museums; studying the influence that the modes of representation have on how visitors critically analyze and understand museums (Ravelli 2006; Winterbotham / Avagyan (Eds.) 2018); the ways and modes in which (the rise of) social media transforms museum communications and the socio-cultural contexts, organizational and education consequences, as well as methodological implications of these transformations. Research works based on similar theoretical orientation tend to focus on the fact that museums are being highly mediatized in the

* Grigor Ghazaryan
  Faculty of European Languages and Communication
  Yerevan State University
  g.ghazaryan@ysu.am

** Steven Donatelle
   College of Humanities and Social Sciences
   American University of Armenia
   SDonatelle@aua.am

modern-day data-full and technology-rich contexts. They tend to study museum communication in the mentioned media-centered environment, in which communicative media is a constitutive property of museum organization and of the visitor experience (Drotner / Schrøder 2017; Drotner / Dziekan / Parry / Schrøder (eds.) 2019).

The second block approaches the subject with an emphasis on *content*, and includes literature on the interplay between multimodal ways of expression, the content presented, and how its actual users are positioned to engage with stories, which often leads to examining memorialization, as well as the narrative and memory created through different modes of representation by utilizing the examples of various genocides (Wessels / Anderson / Durrant / Ellis 2012; Elander 2013). Through a broader lens, genocide memorialization is studied from the perspective of the post-genocide community (Bennett 2020), as with the aftermath of the Armenian Genocide, the Holocaust, the Rwandan and other genocides, the ways of memory institutionalization, the "duty of memory" and commemorative rhetoric in the present-day world (Pisanty 2020), as well as the transformations of genocide from historical matter to a political dilemma (Avedian 2020). All of these anchor most of their arguments on the content plane, examining the respective materials through diverse methodological frameworks between history, anthropology, linguistics, memory studies, semiotics and other disciplines, but, however, they are still mostly inclined to observe and register, rather than draw on a distilled advice or guideline.

The present research aims to fill the gap of the philosophical and, at the same time, practical toolkit to deal with multimodality at the very stage of encoding memory, drawing attention towards certain risks in technology overuse and hinting at "don'ts", rather than stating a matter of fact. The multidisciplinary framework constructed for the purpose of the research, as well as the choice of its practical example, situate it at the crossroads of *expression* and *content* blocks mentioned above. Still, the starting point and crux of its idea remains centered on memory.

Memory is encoded information about an object, which is in constant interplay with both the sign (or representation) and the understanding (or interpretation) of that same object. This interplay can be seen in light of the so-called **semiosis** which is defined to be "an action, or influence, which is, or involves, a cooperation of three subjects, such as a sign, its object, and its interpretant, this tri-relative influence not being in any way resolvable into actions between pairs" (Peirce 1998: 411). In other words, the memory of something is always subject to change and/or ambiguity because these three elements are never in a static relationship with one another. This constitutes the so-called "unlimited semiosis."

In criticizing structuralism, Umberto Eco embraces the Peircean concept of "unlimited semiosis" to find a philosophical grounding in order to argue for the "openness of texts" (Bondanella 1997: 76). If we apply the concept of the open text to the analysis of the "communication" that takes place between a visitor and a museum (taken as institution or entity, rather than a physical, material thing), this would assume that however far the museum reaches in setting its "narrative" (information bits – consisting of words and/or images – in sequence, that visitors are expected to collect in a more or less predictable linear process in the course of their visit), through the application of diverse traditional and experimental technologies (traditional: posters, charts, maps, documents in the exhibition; experimental: video-clips, sound effects, lights, virtual reality, holograms, etc.) in order to transmit to the visitor specific messages about the object (of the exhibition/observation), it is, in the end, the visitor who has the defining power to shape an end-result in his or her mind, in the form of an "understanding of the object". This is the same idea that applies to the reader having the last say in how they understand a text. This understanding of the object takes place on the levels of the *first* and *second* **narrative** that we shall discuss below.

## 2 Genocide and the Openness of Terms

Genocide "in the popular mind is the worst of all crimes" (Wald 2007: 624). It is seen as being worse than both war crimes and crimes against humanity, though crimes against humanity are seen as worse than war crimes. Comparing and contrasting these three crimes can help to shed light on what a genocide is, which can then give us a better idea of how it can be memorialized or presented in a museum.

There are "overlaps and gaps between the three types of crimes", referring to war crimes, crimes against humanity and genocide (Wald 2007: 626). It seems to be a common opinion in international law that the last one, genocide, is the most difficult to prosecute because it requires "*A mental element*: the 'intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial or religious group…'" (United Nations, Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide, 1948).

For something to be considered a war crime, it has to take place during an armed conflict, whereas crimes against humanity and genocide do not (Wald 2007). The Holocaust, the classic example of genocide, was in fact prosecuted as a crime against humanity in Nuremberg alongside prosecutions for war crimes. This is because genocide as a crime did not exist, and the term had just been coined in 1944. The originator of the term, Raphael Lemkin, used both the Holocaust and the atrocities committed against the Armenians from 1915 to 1923 as examples when defining the term and laying the foundations for the United Nations Genocide Convention, which defined genocide and made it illegal under international law. In addition to not having to happen during an armed conflict and having to have the mental element, genocide, according to the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide, is restricted to five specific acts:

- Killing members of the group
- Causing serious bodily or mental harm to members of the group
- Deliberately inflicting on the group conditions of life calculated to bring about its physical destruction in whole or in part
- Imposing measures intended to prevent births within the group
- Forcibly transferring children of the group to another group

(Article II of "Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide")

Genocide is also more limited in application because "the victims of genocide are deliberately targeted – not randomly – because of their real or perceived membership" in a "national, ethnical, racial or religious group", "case law has associated intent with the existence of a State or organizational plan or policy" and "cultural destruction does not suffice, nor does an intention to simply disperse a group" (Ibid.). Political groups are explicitly not included in the definition of genocide. This means that the destruction or intent to destroy a group that is seen as political but not national, ethnic, racial, or religious would not be considered a genocide. That could be a valuable point of departure for explaining why the Armenians, along with other Christians in the Ottoman Empire, were deliberately seen as and termed "internal enemies" as was reported, for instance, by the German Ambassador Wangenheim on June 17, 1915 (Gasparyan 2014: 162) and were "suspected to be in a league with foreign enemies" as some Turkish protective scholars might choose to describe it (Gasparyan 2014: 64).

This narrow definition and application of the term is sometimes criticized. However, "other commentators […] are grateful that genocide […] is definitively so limited and does not thereby lose its deterrent currency through too expansive application to every kind of massacre" (Wald 2007: 624). On the other hand, in practical legal use "in the prosecutor's world, genocide can and is used as a bargaining chip because of its super-stigma; it can be negotiated down to crimes against humanity in exchange for a guilty plea and the accuseds' help in prosecuting others" (Wald 2007:

627). This shows that the term is flexible in some way or is used as if it is; though this can also be seen as an abuse of the term that cheapens it.

Still, "because of the peculiarities of definition, some of the worst crimes in history may not be brought as genocides but only as crimes against humanity" (Wald 2007: 627). This is if they fail to fit the criterion of intent or do not fall into one or more of the five specific acts listed. This makes it clear that genocide is not determined by the scale, in terms of victims, or heinousness of a crime.

Despite the specificity of the legal definition "genocide has taken on a life of its own in the popular mind" (Wald 2007: 633). Because the way it is often seen by the general public, and the disconnect between the public understanding and both the legal definition and the difficulty of legally proving genocide, "victims of almost all massacres feel cheated when a court or commission finds that their perpetrators have only committed a crime against humanity not a genocide." (Wald 2007: 633). This is because the public perception of genocide, as a crime that is large in scale and heinous in nature, lacks the clarity and specificity of the legal definition.

What this brief inquiry into the term genocide should make clear is that the definition and application of the term, especially in a legal setting, is difficult and often at odds with what the general public understands by the word *genocide*. This should be kept in mind as we explore how to approach presenting the facts and events relating to the Armenian Genocide. Turkey's adamant and continual denial that these events constitute genocide, and that they are better understood as acts of war, or war crimes at worst, keep this an open question as well. As Taner Akçam aptly describes this situation:

> Because of the long-standing Turkish policy of denial, the very term "genocide" has become contested – sacred to Armenians, taboo to Turks. Both sides attach supreme importance to the question whether or not "genocide" should be used.

> (Akçam 2006: 9)

This is not to say that the term genocide should not be used or does not apply, just that it should not be clung to as the only way to understand or define these events. The importance of keeping this in mind will become clear later when the idea of a museum's two narratives and Vattimo's essay 'The truth that hurts' (2008) are discussed.

## 2.1 Background of the Armenian Genocide Memorialization

While it is not within the scope of this article to introduce or debate the theme of the Armenian Genocide in detail, some background is still necessary. What is presented as background here concerns the memorialization of the Armenian Genocide, and that should be accepted with two factors in mind. First, the fact that there is not as much information on the Armenian Genocide as on the Holocaust or even the Rwandan Genocide. Second, the classification of it as a genocide has been constantly under dispute. There is a significant body of literature on the Armenian Genocide which can be consulted for research purposes connected with the historical, political, and other aspects of the issue.

In the Soviet era, the memory of the Armenian genocide was suppressed for many decades. Though it was ultimately unsuccessful, the Soviet system worked to unify by erasing nationalities and national differences. In that environment, no explicit presentation/exposition of the facts of a specific nationality, let alone a national tragedy, was welcome.

In 1966, however, after the 1965 rallies in Yerevan, where one million people demonstrated for 24 hours to commemorate the 50th anniversary of the Genocide, the construction of a memorial complex was initiated. The complex was designed by architects Arthur Tarkhanyan, Sashur Kalashyan and artist Hovhannes Khachatryan, and completed in 1967:

The 44-meter stele symbolizes the national rebirth of Armenians. Twelve slabs are positioned in a circle, representing the twelve lost provinces in present-day Turkey. In the center of the circle, at a depth of 1.5 meters, there is an eternal flame dedicated to the 1.5 million people killed during the Armenian genocide.

(Atabaki / Mehendale 2009: 137)

The commemoration of the Armenian Genocide today is seen within the context of a continuous fight for the right to memory and recognition of the crimes committed, and combating future crimes against humanity. The memory of the genocide is alive inasmuch as it has become part of the oral and written traditions of the peoples whose direct ancestors suffered it. Hence, one may find it necessary, justifiable, and legitimate that the memory be materialized through the creation of memorial sites.

This is in contrast to the attitude towards the historical events in question and towards the commemoration of the Armenian genocide in Turkey, which is where the events largely took place and the decedents of non-victims currently live. As Dr. Uğur Ümit Üngör (2013) (director of Graduate Studies at the Institute for War, Holocaust, and Genocide Studies in Amsterdam) put it, "The Turkish government is denying a genocide that its own population remembers". This means that the Armenian genocide as a series of dramatic events — including atrocious acts against the Armenian people, their forced deportation and mass killings — still constitute a part of the so-called 'episodic memory' of the population of Turkey. Episodic memory, as the studies on the nature of learning and memory suggest, refers to "contents that can be located within a spatiotemporal context" (Brem / Ran / Pascual-Leone 2013: 693-737). Although the memories on the Armenian Genocide exist, they are not always welcome and memorialized. Furthermore, no necessity is felt to do so, and in fact the Turkish government acts in ways that suggest their desire, or necessity, is to erase or drastically re-work those memories.

What can also be deduced from the above considerations is that the long-term storage of the "data" about the genocide — the actual encoding of information — appeared to be overwhelming and impressive (in a negative way) to such an extent as to be carried out through an entire century, from generation to generation, sometimes underground[1]. This can be seen as a sort of natural consequence of the force of these events and of the memories they created. Consequently, as a natural reaction or, rather, retaliation to the creation and storage of the memories, a 'denialist policy' would have to target any initiative of commemoration, including but not limited to preventing the establishment of memorial sites and museums – monuments that with their mere existence would contribute to what is known as the short-term storage and consolidation from short-term memory (STM) to long-term memory (LTM), as well as to the repeated reconsolidation (Brem / Ran / Pascual-Leone 2013: 693-737) of the memories about these events.

Since museums are also points of contact between different societies and as such, they happen to be "frontline" structures representing generalized perceptions about a subject or topic, the problem of organization seems to be of paramount importance in guiding possible decisions / views / stances on the subject laid out through the museographic space. Interestingly, in his hypothesis about the society of tomorrow, Giuseppe Sacco (1973: 126) points out that "the problem of the multiplicity of individual decisions finds its solution in the physical organization of spaces". In this context, the space and territory of a museum can be seen as a micro-model embodying a given society's experience in materializing a narrative through traditional and modern means. The creation and organization of a memorial museum can be seen as the physical and meaningful embodiment of a solution to "the multiplicity of individual decisions", and a means of co-creating memories and

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[1] The circulation of the information about the Armenian Genocide was realized without public representations, such as gatherings, discussions, marches, and without cultural events such as inauguration of monuments, because it was often discouraged in the Soviet Union and prohibited in Turkey.

understandings within a community. This physical embodiment is how these memorialization solutions are presented both to those in the multiplicity that it arose from and to others outside of it.

## 3 The Armenian Genocide Museum Institute: Its Exposition, Mission, and Two Narratives

The Armenian Genocide Museum-Institute (AGMI) is a research institution and a museum at the same time. AGMI's exposition route is not a static walk; it is a dynamic flow which chronologically and thematically characterizes the various environments and stages of the Armenian Genocide. The visitor is taken through an experience of reconstructing the events of the Armenian Genocide while going through a corridor that presents a series of related texts, documents, looped videos, images, as well as sound and light effects (See photos 1-3 in the Appendix). As one can read on AGMI's official website:

> The exhibition consists of 50 main headings, in which are summarized thousands of new materials acquired during the last 7-8 years' collective work. Some of them are presented as print, as well as multimedia, projectors, and touch screens. Also, original and unique photos, books and documents are exhibited. For the first time in Armenia, new technologies, design approaches and solutions have been widely used in the world-wide museum practice. The content of the museum exhibits, textbooks and explanations are based on scientific and methodological developments in the field of genocide science in the past few years.
>
> (Armenian Genocide Museum-Institute, 2019b)

As is evident from the description, the museum is interested in and has taken steps to integrate new technologies into the exhibit. It is not clear or self-evident why or how those decisions were made. The purpose of the present paper is to try to build a coherent theoretical framework to think about and analyze those sorts of memorialization solutions.

The museum currently has a very linear and traditional layout for a memorial museum. It starts with events and background that lead up to the genocide in question. The focus of this is mainly to help show a history of similar action and atrocities in order to support the claim that the events of 1915 to 1923 fit the category of genocide, specifically in terms of intent and planning. Data is presented regarding similar atrocities perpetrated against the Armenians (and other ethnic and religious minorities) also before the 20th century, so it can more easily be argued that what took place during World War I was not a war crime related to keeping internal peace and order.

The museum collection continues — with mostly photographs, quotes from first-hand accounts and the printed sources of those accounts — to chronicle the actions that the Ottoman government took towards the Armenians and the suffering that resulted. Later, more and more attention is given to actions that the Armenian population took to try to escape or survive and the actions of others — non-Ottomans and non-Armenians — to help protect or rescue the Armenians. The museum gives a good account of how the events were seen at the time and in the years immediately following the events.

Again, much of this is done with photographs, texts, and some artifacts such as books and newspapers printed at the time and even some personal correspondences. There are some video elements to the exhibit as well. There is one room in the museum where it is possible to view videos of survivors' accounts. The use of background sound and dim light add to the atmosphere (See photos in the Appendix).

This organization is conducive to the mission of the museum and the two narratives that flow from that. It works to tell the story of the events as that of a genocide, and in doing so brings awareness of what genocide is. This then feeds the second narrative, that anything like this must be prevented or identified and intervention must take place to stop it.

The organization, methods of exhibit and items exhibited also work to maintain a serious and reverent attitude and environment at the AGMI. Clearly, any technology added to the museum in question should be in tune with its solemn and thoughtful environment, in order to merge into the reality of a memorial which stands, as a symbol, for the events of the Armenian Genocide.

AGMI works not just to preserve the memory and artifacts of the Armenian Genocide but also to raise awareness of the crime of genocide in general. Its mission statement reads:

> The Museum-Institute teaches universal lessons to combat hatred, discrimination, prejudice and apathy […] promote the value of human rights and foster recognition and prevention of genocides.

(Armenian Genocide Museum-Institute, 2019a)

If we look closely at the mission of the museum in terms of creating and presenting a *narrative*, we will see that it actually has two different narratives. The **first** is to tell the story of the genocide, and the **second** is to inspire the visitors to execute a new narrative that involves them in the mission to recognize and prevent genocide.

The necessity of having two narratives comes from the work of Wolfgang Kemp and his analysis of narratives. According to Kemp, when the narrator finishes telling the audience a story, the audience can lose its connection to and interest in the story because the tension in the narrative is resolved. At the end of the story the narrative, "lose[s] its validity: whatever the outcome for those concerned in the story, the viewers / listeners / readers always have a gain to set against a loss: they gain an ending and lose a story" and they need "a new lack [or tension], and a good reason for starting the next story" in order to stay engaged with the subject of the story (Kemp 2003: 71). The new lack that the AGMI offers is the realization that genocides have occurred since the Armenian Genocide (and the coining of the term and its elevation to international law) and that they can occur in the present and future. The *new narrative* that the museum visitor is asked to create and execute is to recognize and prevent genocide. From this perspective, the museum communicates with the visitor in a way that asks and encourages them to engage with the museum exhibit so that they bring about and live out the new narrative. In this way, the AGMI is inherently an interactive experience for the visitor.

This interactivity will be discussed later in terms of what part technology can and should play in the museum. For now, it is important to turn to the research component of the museum. This plays a part in both narratives that the museum offers to its visitors. The research component of the AGMI helps to uncover and preserve the historical data that is shaped into the narrative of the Armenian Genocide, the first narrative. That research also contributes to the second narrative (the call to the visitor to recognize and prevent genocide) by exploring the concept of genocide itself. On the website of AGMI we read: "The Museum is included in the RA National Academy of Sciences, and has a status of research institution" (Armenian Genocide Museum-Institute, 2019b).

The well-balanced co-existence of the memorial site and the museum-institute, which help reconsolidate the memory of the Armenian Genocide, can be compared (in broader terms) with the relationship between the object of commemoration preserved as long-term memory, its "sign" (the symbol of commemorating the 'object') and the "interpretant" (the locus of understanding and giving value or meaning to that sign) if we think in the semiotic terms of Ch.S. Peirce's famous triangular model[2]. The provision of the mentioned balance [equilibrium] is justified if we take into consideration the analyses of memory production and consumption, proposed within Memory Studies. Thus, making reference to Andreas Huyssen (1994: 11), James E. Young points out that "in a con-

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[2] "I define a Sign as anything which is so determined by something else, called its Object, and so determines an effect upon a person, which effect I call its Interpretant, that the latter is thereby mediately determined by the former." (Peirce 1998: 478).

temporary age of mass memory production and consumption, there seems to be an inverse proportion between the memorialization of the past and its contemplation and study". He then continues saying "it is as if once we assign monumental form to memory, we have to some degree divested ourselves of the obligation to remember" (Young 2003: 238).

The continuous research and study of the materials owned by the museum is fundamental to an effective organization of the exhibition both in terms of form, content, and the expected result. The latter – which we prefer to see as an "end-state" of a specific message transfer against the "author-work-reader" relationship – is or should be among the goals of any memorial museum. Thus, the official website of AGMI does include a special emphasis on the diverse forms of presentation of the materials, as well as on the application of scientific and methodological innovations in the field of genocide studies.

The artifacts, etc. that are owned by the museum are organized into a narrative that gives them meaning and significance beyond being isolated things. This narrative is based on the metanarrative of genocide, or the idea of genocide. This can be seen as the creation of a mosaic picture out of a collection of colored stones. The stones have qualities of their own, but their meaning and significance is augmented when they are made part of a larger picture. This picture is what the visitor to the museum is presented with. Here we deal with the first narrative mentioned above. However, the creation of narratives and meaning does not stop there. The picture itself is also open to interpretation and it is being included in a larger or later narrative which is the second narrative mentioned above: the story that the visitor becomes a part of and goes on to recognize and prevent genocide. This narrative can also examine the stones in the mosaic for itself and re-evaluate them within its own narrative. A research institute plays a part in the creation of both these narratives not just by being aware of the artifacts and information it provides for the museum but also by how it understands the museum visitor: who they are and how that impacts, and can be used to enrich, their experience.

The organization and reorganization of the museum's artifacts on both levels – of the first narrative and the second one – will require awareness of the visitor (their background, origins, expectations, etc.) by the curators of the museum and the research institute. This awareness and understanding is necessary to enrich and deepen the visitor's participation in the museum: the two narratives. The visitor's participation might best be understood using the idea of the **open texts** as introduced above. The curators and research institute have an influence at both levels, but the visitor has, or should have, more freedom to interpret at the level of the second narrative. In other words, the second narrative is more of an open text than the first one.

## 4 The Semiotics of Museum Communication

To discuss museum communication from the perspectives of Semiotics and Communication in general, one could start with a retrospective view of Roman Jakobson's theory (Jakobson 1985 [1956]), which was influenced by Karl Bühler's organon model. Although the factors of communication and language functions, respectively defined by Jakobson, are most of the times used to discuss verbal communication, the six elements, or factors can also be utilized to discuss the tacit communication that takes place between visitor and museum. This extension would be similar to the communication between a reader and a book.

In another – complementary, yet rather technical – approach to parsing museum communication, we could analyze its processes by invoking the famous Jakobsonian elements, which traditionally include: (1) a context (the co-text, that is, the other verbal signs in the same message, and the world in which the message takes place), (2) an addresser (a sender, or enunciator), (3) an addressee (or a receiver), (4) a contact between addresser and addressee, (5) a common code and (6) a message. Here it is worth mentioning that various transformations of Jakobson's model have made their way into various contexts of scientific research.

Based on the aforementioned argument, it can also be theorized, correspondingly, that (1) the context of modern day memorial museums[3] is shaped by ethnic, local (societal) and /or global, cultural and political influences filtered through the given community, (2) the addresser or sender is the institution itself, (3) the addressee is the community of visitors which in many ways resembles the "readership of a book" (4) the contact between addresser and addressee is realized by multi-modal means of expression, (5) the common code in this case is comprised of the verbal (natural) and non-verbal (visual, auditory and kinesthetic) language(s) and (6) the message represents the narrative about the historical event(s) with an implied stance/attitude suggested in relation to the message (this latter one is at the meta-communicative level of the museum-visitor communication).

Similar theoretical extensions are justified in light of the very definitions of Museum Communication, which is understood as "the process in which *the visitor has always the last say* and whose experience of visit, strolling and personal evaluation deserve more than a descriptive reduction that leaves in the side the processes of interpretation by means of which the visitor interprets his experience in a particular way in a specific moment" (Zawala 1993).

Returning to the terms we have defined above, we should notice that the 'addresser' (the memorial museum) is, in a broader perspective, a monument which functions in a given socio-cultural and political context. If the a-politization (deprivation from political meaning) of a monument is in many cases deemed possible – especially in the case of the Armenian Genocide Museum Institute – its cultural component is inseparable from the whole concept of being a carrier of information. In this respect, as far back as in 1943, Architectural historian Sigfried Giedion, architect Josep Luis Sert, and artist Fernand Léger in their essay entitled "Nine Points of Monumentality" mentioned that "Monuments are […] only possible in periods in which a unifying consciousness and unifying culture exist" (1958: 48).

If the visitor 'has always the last say' then it naturally follows that the exhibited objects, even with all their cultural and historic value, do not constitute a ready-made narrative.

However, technology which pertains to the levels of the common code (point 5 of above), intervening and conditioning the contact between the addresser and the addressee in modern-day museum spaces (point 4 of above), tends to envelope the message (point 6 of above) in certain ways that we will further discuss below.

## 5 The Use and Danger of Technology: A Janus Head Nature

Technology has a Janus Head nature: it has the power to cause as many problems as it solves if it is not used thoughtfully. Our considerations about this dual nature of technology are based on Martin Heidegger's essay *The question concerning technology* and the text of his *Memorial address* from the book *Discourse on Thinking* (Heidegger 2008; Heidegger 1966).

For Heidegger "Technology is a mode of revealing. Technology comes to presence in the realm where revealing and unconcealment take place, where *aletheia*, truth, happens" (2008: 319). This means that technology is one of the ways in which – what we would commonly call – reality is created. The creation of reality is a revealing and, for Heidegger, an act of arranging things that gives them meaning. The truth, or *aletheia*, that he speaks of here is the result of revealing and that is then used as the reality to which ideas and statements must correspond to be considered true in terms of **truth as correspondence**. Technology is not the only thing that **reveals** and **unconceals**, or, in other words, creates a reality or truth as *aletheia*. The creation of a narrative can also be seen as a form of revealing and unconcealing, reality creation. However, Heidegger shows that the way modern technology reveals is markedly different from revealing done by other means, "tbhe reveal-

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[3] Here we can also speak of an industry-setting pertaining to a diacultural level of shared professional knowledge or the 'right/accepted way' of dealing with the specific task of presenting facts/artifacts as parts of museum exhibitions.

ing that rules in modern technology is a challenging… which sets upon" the things it reveals (Heidegger 2008: 320).

The difference between technology and other types of revealing is that other types set things in order and technology sets upon things (Heidegger 2008: 320). This setting upon things Heidegger calls **enframing**. What he means by enframing is the organizing of things in a way that rigidly places them in a system, so they are ready for use. It could be said that enframing makes things into commodities ready to be easily and unthoughtfully used and then disposed of. **Enframing**, or setting upon, takes everything it encounters and sees it only in terms of how it can be used as a means to an end.

Technology and enframing is revealing as **setting-upon** and not a **setting-in-order**. The difference for Heidegger is of the utmost importance. To set in order is to make something comprehensible and useful, but it still allows it to be seen as something more than its use and simple meaning determined by and limited to that use; or it makes it easier to see it that way. To set upon reduces that something to what it will be used for and limits its meaning to a means to a specific and limited end. This is the danger of modern technology for Heidegger: that it *enframes things efficiently*. It not only does this efficiently, it does it in a way that makes it appear as if it is not doing anything at all. This is important for Heidegger because it interferes with what he sees as the essence of humanity.

The essence of humanity for Heidegger is to reveal things (Heidegger 2008: 333). It is the way that we create a livable reality out of the essential tension between the physical world (which is how we can describe the term **earth** from his essay 'Origin of the work of art') and the world of concepts and ideas (which is roughly what he means by the word **world** in that same essay). Revealing happens when we set the earth and world into relationship with one another. This relationship always has an element of conflict, or as he says 'striving', to it (Heidegger 1971).

There is an unresolvable and essential tension between 'earth' and 'world', but it is the setting of them in relationship to one another that creates a reality. If we were to relate this to Peirce's terms, the **world** would be similar to the **interpretant** and the **earth** to the **object**. The sign is something that tries to capture the connection and conflict, or striving, between the earth and world in a static state. This, however, is a difficult if not impossible task for the sign because both of the things it is trying to connect are resistant to the idea of being securely tied or defined by the other. This is precisely why Heidegger uses the word 'striving' or 'struggle' and talks of it as being essential as well as unavoidable and unresolvable (1971).

Modern technology enframes, reveals, in a way that makes it look like it is merely presenting what already is (Heidegger 2008). By doing this, modern technology makes things appear to be obvious and makes them *functional* and *reliable*. The fact that things work reliably helps cover over the 'setting upon' that technology performs, and all we are left with is technology and the world it reveals:

> Everything is functioning. That is exactly what is so uncanny, that everything is functioning and that the functioning drives us more and more to even further functioning, and that technology tears men lose from the earth and uproots them…. The only thing we have left is purely technological relationships.

> (Heidegger 1998: 105-106)

Because everything is functioning reliably, and because of that appears to be obvious and natural, we have no reason or opportunity to notice or question the revealing that is taking place. By enframing and hiding the fact that it is doing so, modern technology threatens thoughtful revealing, which is part of the essence of being a human. Heidegger summarizes this as follows:

The threat to man does not come in the first instance from the potentially lethal machines and apparatus of technology. The actual threat has already afflicted man in his essence, the rule of enframing threatens man with the possibility that it could be denied to him to enter into a more original revealing and hence to experience the call of a more primal truth.

(Heidegger 2008: 333)

This more primal truth would be revealing that takes place consciously, meditatively, and out of thoughtful interaction with the things being set in order, the things we actually encounter in our lives. Keeping us from that essential experience is the danger that modern technology presents us with. This is the negative face of the Janus Head nature of technology.

If we were to again tie Heidegger to Peirce's terms, we would have to talk about enframing as a way of collapsing his three terms into one, or at least enframing makes it appear as if that is the case. The **interpretant** is taken to be one in the same with the **object** and the **sign**. Through its power to manipulate the physical world, technology has brought the object into line with the interpretant better than ever before — the **earth** and **world** are better aligned than ever. The sign is seen as simply a sound or symbol to refer to the interpretant, which is so dominant in the relationship that it is the only thing that is ever taken notice of. This can be the case because the interpretant is what we think of and want to use. It is also what we always find because the object always functions.

Heidegger goes on to explore the other face of technology by introducing two lines from the German poet Friedrich Hölderlin:

Thus where enframing reigns, there is *danger* in the highest sense.

But where danger is, grows

The saving power also.

(Heidegger 2008: 333)

It is only because of and through the negative face of technology and its danger that we can come to see the way to avoid the danger. Not succumbing to the danger requires facing it in a certain way:

Is man, then, a defenseless and perplexed victim at the mercy of the irresistible power of technology? He would be if man today abandons any intention to pit meditative thinking decisively against merely calculative thinking.

(Heidegger 1966: 52-3)

Meditative thinking requires that we have a "releasement towards things" and an "openness to the mystery". An explanation to this follows in the lines below:

Releasement towards things and openness to the mystery belong together. They grant us the possibility of dwelling in the world in a totally different way. They promise us a new ground and foundation upon which we can stand and endure in the world of technology without being imperiled by it.

(Heidegger 1966: 55)

The positive side is that modern technology gives us power over things that we did not have before. The point is to make sure that we use it in a way that keeps us aware of what we are doing with that power. This is why Heidegger emphasizes art as the best way *to reveal*. This can be compared to Peirce's three terms and the importance of being aware of the distinction between them.

Art does not have a claim to objectivity the way science and technology do. This is why, in the *Origin of the work of art*, he focuses on works of art as the way that a reality is best revealed, that truth as aletheia is set to work. It is easy to misunderstand Heidegger and insist that he is claiming that art is the only way to authentically reveal. However, a closer reading of the essay shows that any way of revealing that is authentic should be classified as art, including scientific theories, novel political acts, etc. (Heidegger 1971: 60)[4]. In short, *there is a kinship, or even equivalence, between the work of art and meditative thinking. Creating a* **narrative** *for a museum can be seen as the same type of* **revealing.**

It is worthwhile to mention that the Italian interpreter of Heidegger, Gianni Vattimo gives us a convenient point of entry into talking about genocide and artistic representations of it in his essay *The truth that hurts* where he uses Alfredo Jaar's Rwanda Project as an example of art presenting truth. Jaar's project started when he visited Rwanda just months after the Rwandan Genocide took place. Vattimo writes that, "the postcards that Jaar sends to his friends from Rwanda are not closed images but messages calling for a response" (Vattimo 2008: 164). They are talked about as news, something which Jaar himself had almost an obsession with (Jaar n.d.). Vattimo brings in both Heidegger and Nietzsche to explore the purpose of Jaar's early work dealing with the Rwandan Genocide:

> As Heidegger would say, news is the truth in so far as it is […] a having been that does not present itself with the definitiveness of a stone from the past — which in Nietzsche rests on Zarathustra's shoulders paralyzing him — but, rather as an open datum calling for an active interpretation and a practical intervention.
>
> (Vattimo 2008: 164)

The point of Jaar's work was not to present another genocide but to present what was happening. This, again, links back to what Peirce calls the objects and based on its relationship with the interpretant, the sign may often get lost or ignored. Presenting a genocide would be like erecting a monument that allows us to forget instead of remembering, as Young points out in the quote above. Vattimo goes on:

> The point is to bring history back to its roots, that is, the news or reportage, rather than to Aristotle's philosophical poetics of history, which leaves out the details of contingent events in order to represent their essentially rational character. Aristotle's view of history corresponds well to what Benjamin once called the history of the winners, according to which what has taken place is wholly rational and therefore must be accepted as such, insofar as it has given place to their victory.
>
> (Vattimo 2008:164-65)

That is in fact how Vattimo's essay *The truth that hurts* ends. It calls us to think about genocide not primarily as genocide (not to think of the objects as the interpretant, or lose the earth in the world) but as the events, artifacts, and facts themselves. This assumes paying attention to these things in and of themselves, and not enframing them and covering over aspects of them to make them fit

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[4] "One essential way in which truth establishes itself in the beings it has opened up is truth setting itself into work. Another way in which truth occurs is the act that founds a political state. Still another way in which truth comes to shine forth is the nearness of that which is not simply a being, but the being that is most of all. Still another way in which truth grounds itself is the essential sacrifice. Still another way in which truth becomes is the thinker's questioning, which, as the thinking of Being, names Being in its question worthiness. By contrast, science is not an original happening of truth, but always the cultivation of a domain of truth already opened, specifically by apprehending and confirming that which shows itself to be possibly and necessarily correct within that field. When and insofar as a science passes beyond correctness and goes on to a truth, which means that it arrives at the essential disclosure of what is as such, it is philosophy" (Heidegger 1971: 60). The mentioned essay was drafted at a point before Heidegger started talking about the end of philosophy and exploring meditative thinking, which he proposed as an alternative to philosophy.

neatly into the category or concept of genocide. It is an attitude of approaching the historical event in a meditative way that allows an encounter with the artifacts and facts themselves (the **earth** or **objects**) and leaves open the questions that a genocide brings (seeing the striving between the **earth** and **world** or the tension between the **object**, **sign** and **interpretant**).

This is an approach that has *releasement toward things* and an *openness to the mystery*. The visitors' encounter with what is displayed in the museum in general and in the case of the AGMI in particular, is one of experiencing the individual stories, images and other artifacts in themselves. Each visitor is invited to have a personal encounter with the individual items on display in the museum. In the case of the first narrative, the point is to avoid erasing the details and specifics in order to make them fit into the category of genocide. In the case of the second narrative, it is to allow the visitor to have a personal interaction and reaction to what is exhibited and to what they take into the present day with them through a process of reading of signs and assembling them into a meaningful whole. This also has a connection to Eco's idea of open texts in that presenting the artifacts this way will preserve the level of "ambiguity" necessary for it to remain open to interpretation, as an open text.

It is an approach that has an openness to the mystery in as much as it does not let the questions of why such a horrible thing as genocide could be allowed to happen, why and how anyone could do such a thing, etc. Similar questions divert the addressee's (visitor's) attention away from the actual history and make aspects of it unbelievable and too logical. When attention is diverted, the presented events are more easily made part of 'the history written by the victors' as Walter Benjamin would call it, where we deal with a closed story or a **closed text**.

In her recent work about the gatekeepers of memory, Valentina Pisanty argues that the issue of the "history written by the victors" is the outcome of the natural selection of the strongest hypotheses, in the sense that those hypotheses actually resulted to be the most assertive and abusive ones. In this context, among the three main rhetorical devices of which the so-called collective memory is composed, Pisanty mentions **trivialization** (Italian: '*banalizzazione*') which is a way of spectacularizing and simplifying history in order to make it more understandable, but also more commercially and ideologically exploitable. She holds that trivializers take advantage of the visibility that memory acquires and promote mass commemorative products that are ever more usable and marketable (Pisanty 2020: 52). Simplification is in demand since thoughtlessness has become a characteristic feature of the modern-day passive consumerism.

All of this dovetails with the famous 'Memorial address' in which Heidegger mentions that "thoughtlessness is an uncanny visitor who comes and goes everywhere in today's world" (Heidegger 1966: 45). Interestingly, the mentioned thoughtlessness is seen in the way that modern technology sets upon things and enframes them while essentially hiding the fact that it is doing so (in other words, how it collapses the distinction between the object, sign and interpretant). This is also akin to the way that Young (2003: 238) thinks pointing out that *the making of a monument aids us in forgetting*. We make the monument (or memorial museum) in order to memorialize specific events, but in doing so we allow ourselves to lose or at least gloss over the details.

Avoiding this thoughtlessness is also Vattimo's motivation for calling us to question the 'essentially rational character' of a historical event and to question the narrative of history told by the victor, as Benjamin also calls us to do. Although post-genocide communities are most often on the losing side and not the winners who might "impose the most convenient interpretation of the past" as Pisanty (2020: 52) would put it, keeping the mentioned principle in mind is significant in order to adhere to truth or *aletheia*, and more importantly, to protect post-genocide communities against the influence of denialist hypotheses. A close connection can also be made between avoiding thoughtlessness and looking at texts as open texts, especially museum exhibits, that the reader or visitor has the final say in interpreting.

All of these things are related to the thoughtlessness Heidegger is pointing out and warning us to avoid. After mentioning that this sort of thoughtlessness is everywhere in the modern world, he continues:

> For nowadays we take in everything in the quickest and cheapest way, only to forget it just as quickly, instantly. Thus, one gathering follows on the heels of another. Commemorative celebrations grow poorer and poorer in thought. Commemoration and thoughtlessness are found side by side.
>
> (Heidegger 1966: 45)

The commemorations, or memorials, become poorer and poorer because we commemorate only what has been enframed or *we enframe as we commemorate* [5]. This means that the details and dynamism of the subject being commemorated have been lost. Everything involved in what is supposed to be remembered is leveled off into something that is simple and ready to be used and used up, like a commodity.

This is not just Heidegger being resistant to modern culture and technology. He is not a luddite, at least not in a simple sense. This becomes clear when he writes:

> It would be foolish to attack technology blindly. It would be shortsighted to condemn it as the work of the devil. We depend on technological devices; they even challenge us to ever greater advances. But suddenly and unaware we find ourselves so firmly shacked to these technical devices that we fall into bondage to them.
>
> (Heidegger 1966: 53-54)

The observable tendency is that technology pervades every level of social interaction and communication, thus becoming a part of what Pisanty refers to as the "paradigms that model experience", distilling it into recurring patterns, absolute metaphors and interpretative automatisms, the central role of which is rarely questioned. Consequently, technology can also enframe dominant stories and narratives which, in their turn, provide "cognitive filters adaptable to a multiplicity of public and private uses" (Pisanty 2020: 145). In this context, Heidegger's advice to limit the access of technology to our interactions is valid, as it attaches importance to freedom of choice (and, consequently, freedom from interpretative automatisms):

> Still we can act otherwise. We can use technical devices, and yet with proper use also keep ourselves so free of them, that we may let go of them any time. We can use technical devices as they ought to be used, and also let them alone as something which does not affect our inner and real core.
>
> (Heidegger 1966: 53-54)

That inner and real core is thoughtful revealing, or meditative thinking, which does not give way to the influence of 'interpretative automatisms' and 'patterns' and helps us use modern technology without falling victim to the dangers inherent in its Janus Head nature.

## 6 Conclusions

Memory Studies, Semiotics and Philosophy offer a solid foundation to build a methodological mechanism for the examination of the interplay between sign and its understanding in modern-day museum communication, especially for analyzing museum spaces used for (or assigned the function of) genocide memorialization.

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[5] It should be noted that *enframing*, as a sort of general tool to make hypotheses marketable and exploitable, can also be used by the deniers of a specific genocide in enveloping their denialist viewpoints as a backlash to the genocide recognition efforts of institutions like AGMI.

The considerations made within the present research allow us to conclude that two major dangers should be kept in mind while making use of technology in memorial museums. The first danger to watch out for in doing this is that the *events alluded to* (discussed above in terms of '*earth*' or '*object*') can be made too familiar and normal. It must be kept in mind that any virtual or augmented reality element erases differences and distances of time, place, language, and culture. This would do damage to the **first narrative** since it can keep the visitor from realizing the difference between what happened in the past and what can happen in the present or future. As a result, it is damage that not only regards the first narrative but could be carried over to the second narrative as well.

The second major danger lies in representing the term 'genocide' as a simple *concept* (which pertains to the level of '*world*' or '*interpretant*') that has a definite meaning or application. This can keep the visitor from seeing current or future events in a clear way when similar events occur or the term 'genocide' is brought up in various contexts. Consequently, it would reduce the effectiveness of the **second narrative** and any action that the visitor may take or be motivated (or not motivated) to take.

As a side-effect to what has been mentioned, the **addresser** (museum) and the **addressee** (visitor), as parts of the process of museum communication, can 'fall into bondage to' the power of technology to 'enframe things efficiently', which will result in attaching too much importance to the code and compromising the message at the same time.

Any use of technology in modern-day memorial museums should allow for **meditative thinking** while still creating enough of a coherent and compelling narrative, so that the datum used in the narrative can be meaningful and accessible to the 'reader'/visitor. The individual stories, artifacts, etc. should not be overly shaped by the overall narrative, and the term 'genocide' too clearly defined by the examples used, so as to remain a part of the 'open text' which gives way to 'thoughtful revealing' or 'meditative thinking'.

An *effective model of museum communication* would be based on a mechanism in which: a) the use of technology is mostly left to the **discretion of the addressee**; b) the **contact** is not overwhelmed by technological and multimodal means of expression; c) the **message** is not rigidly **enframed** and d) the **narrative as a form of revealing** is distributed by the **addresser** among different signs, ready to be assembled into a meaningful whole ('set into order') by the **addressee** through a process of intentional reading and **meditative thinking**, and not just through passive perception (which may be evoked, for example, by looped video clips or repetitive sound effects). It is worth emphasizing that in such a model the outcome of the communication will largely depend on the free choice reserved to the addressee in regards to the use of technological means.

Thus, the reading of signs – without the excessive aid of technology – in the process of unlimited semiosis, remains a fundamental precondition for *revealing* to take place with the function of 'the last say' reserved to the addressee.

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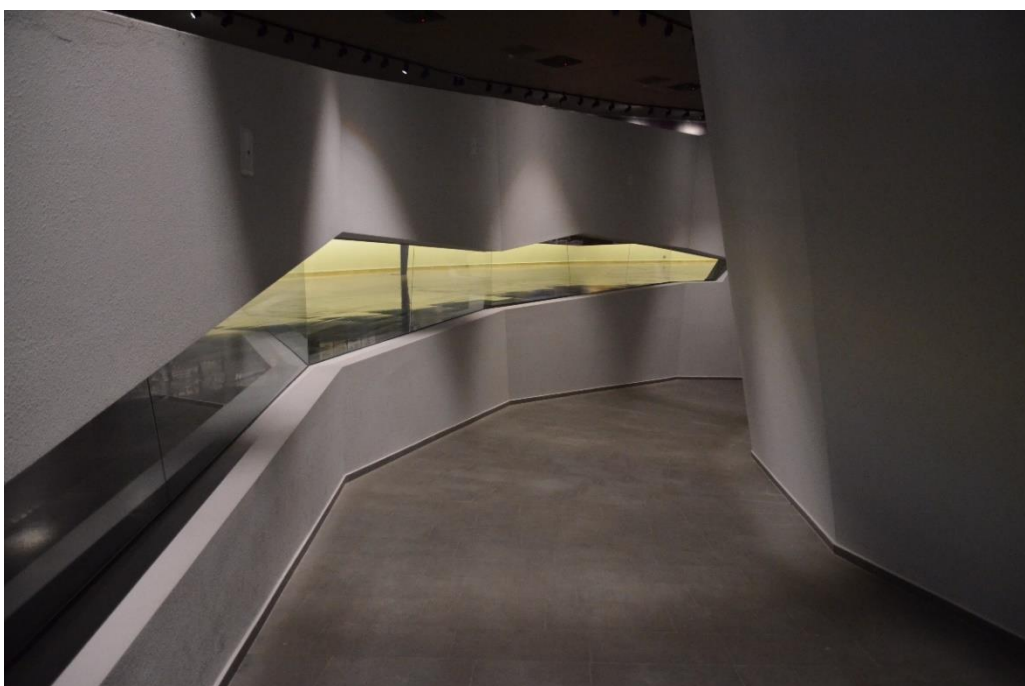# 7 Appendix[6]



Photo no. 1. Start of corridor.



Photo no. 2. Middle of corridor.

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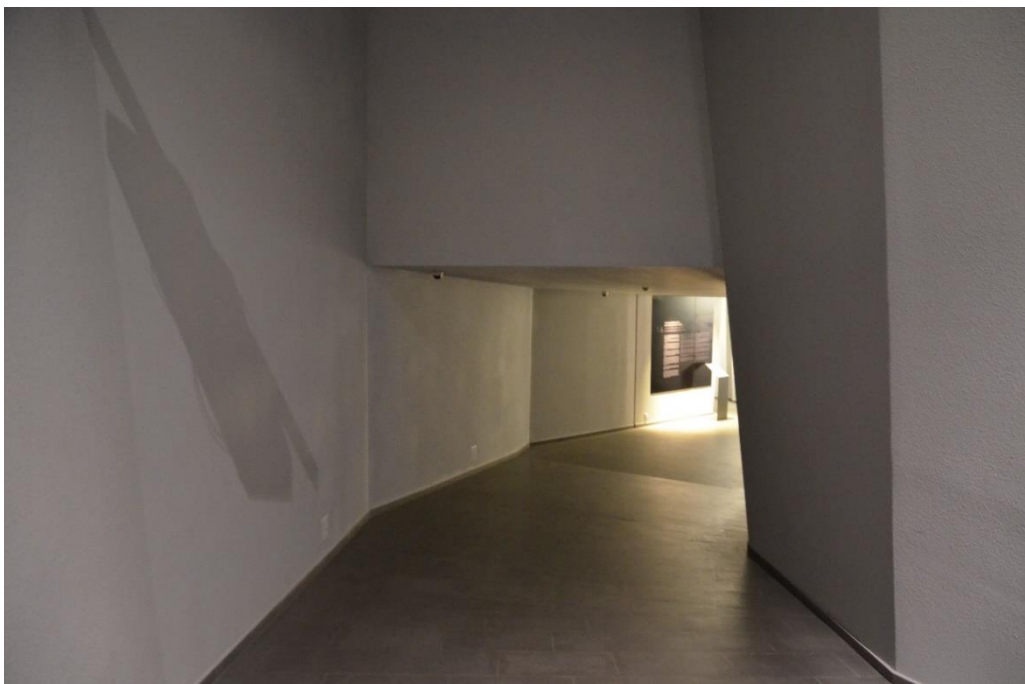[6] All pictures by the authors and taken with permission of the AGMI.

Photo no. 3. Last bend in corridor.



Photo no. 4. End of corridor with map of regions of Western Armenia.