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Redefining ethnographic museology: response to the challenges of modernity

EXAMPLES FROM THE MUSEUM PRACTICE IN SERBIA

- The ethnographic museology in Serbia today is under intense criticism from the expert public. Numerous objections addressed to it are related to all fields of activity, from the problems and artifacts treated to the very concepts of the exhibitions. Facing criticism and in an effort to respond to the challenges of modernity, museum professionals are directed to overcome the discontinuity of ethnology/anthropology in the museums within their core science and to keep monitoring the global museum practice. While the academic ethnology/anthropology has long since expanded its traditional frame of research from the rural areas and the past to the urban areas and the present, ethnology/anthropology in the museums has just begun to move its focus of interest on topics related to the contemporary society and culture.

Key words: ethnographic museum objects, redefinition of the ethnographic museum object, exhibiting modernity, ethnographic museology

INTRODUCTION

The origin and the development of the museum are linked to the process of the formation of nation states in the 19th century. However, some of the founding ideas of the museums can be traced through to the earlier periods and differently constructed forms of collecting and exhibiting. In this context, we can observe cabinets of curiosities (*Wunderkammer*), which developed during the 16th century, first in Italy and Germany, and then in other parts of Europe, as a form of demonstration of the ruler's power, but also as an instrument for the dissemination of the knowledge about the "old" world and the introduction of "new", recently discovered worlds.

It was on this concept of a location where different spatial and temporal segments would be interspersed that the idea of the museum was born (Sladojević 2004: 17). Developing the inherited idea of spreading the knowledge of the “self” and the “other”, museums have become a database of culture (in totality), both their own and the captured one (Gavrilović 2007a: 173). The time in which they were created, along with the national states, determined their new role – creating the definition of the nation and its national identity. In order for existing individual and local identities to be “immersed” in the new state, mechanisms were created to strengthen and expand the idea of community. The sense of community within the nation could not be created on social relations, but was built instead on the basis of shared cultural practices, the rituals and symbols. However, this does not apply to the whole culture, but on its specific representative instances, which are determined according to the needs and requirements of the certain groups that are in power. Museums are today still following the form of the space in whose structure the identity and role in the codification of “national values” is embedded. In modern society, they are an instrument for the production of social knowledge, which codifies the power of the state (Gavrilović 2007a: 174). This is confirmed by the very first step in the museum practice – the choice of objects to be preserved. Although the criteria for choosing a specific item and its application in the context of the museum are different, they are based on the dominant ideology underpinning the work of the museum.

Classical museum practice supports treating representative items. They were already identified as valuable in the culture in which they were created, and were thus preserved until such time as the curators gave them purpose as the proper representatives of the past, deserving preservation in museum collections. Age and aesthetic characteristics, and the relationship with the culture of the rural environment are set as the main criteria for selection of cases for ethnographic collections. These criteria for the selection of items were a reflection of developments in theoretical ethnology, which was focused on the study of all aspects of traditional culture. Determining the stability and long durability of the elements of traditional culture through a long period of time is a reflection of the scientific conceptions of the 19th century, which were ideologically shaped and based on the romanticist grounds (Gavrilović 2007a: 179).

This practice was continued in the socialist / communist period, but with a completely different background. Ljiljana Gavrilović stated that the stability, continuity and constancy are not observed as equivalents of a traditional society, which should have meant that the immobility and non-volatility is the natural cultural framework of our lives. These ideas suited the concept of permanence / immutability of socio-cultural relations, which was one of the main goals of the regime.

Given the fact that the museum practice reflects each state ideology, this view of society meant that the ethnographic museology¹ continued past practices in a virtually unchanged form (Gavrilović 2007a: 179).

New forms of social modernization, the processes of globalization and regionalization, technical and technological progress, necessarily led to a reexamining of the role of the museum, and then to the criticism of the current practice and the development of the idea of the museum as an active participant in the local community, a place of intercultural dialogue, of multivocality and reconciliation. Dissatisfaction with the current practice, demonstrating the need for a modernization and establishing communication with all social groups, has created a new museum paradigm - a “new museology”.² Development of the idea of the active participa-

1 The debate about the separation of ethnographic museology in relation to other segments of the general museology was initiated by Ljiljana Gavrilović in her paper “*Ethnographic museology: yes or no?*”. In that paper the author states that museum professionals, such as archaeologists, historians and art historians, have been taught during their university education to observe the past, not the present, and that during their museum practice they adopted treatment of representative items in the temporal, aesthetic and quantitative terms. Namely, these would be directed at points in time and space that are separated from everyday life or onto periods that are very distant from it. On the other hand, ethnology/anthropology should reconstruct exactly the kind of ordinary everyday life that represents the totality of culture. The difference between ethnography and other museology originates from these orientations. The author also notes that the ethnographic collection and ethnographic exhibition should have the capacity to present culture as a whole in any time or space. Unlike archaeological or historical, an ethnographic item is not sufficient in itself; instead it derives its value and meaning from its culture of origin. Ethnographic item is not tasked to single out any particular moment from the daily flow, but to showcase that daily flow, regardless of the time and place of the events. Therefore, it is possible to determine that the ethnographic museology does not deal with individual museum items and values that they carry in themselves, but with the broader context of culture / cultures and items as carriers of meaning within them. Ljiljana Gavrilović states that it is necessary to define ethnographic museology as a special subcategory of museology, as well as an applied ethnology/anthropology which follows the development of the core discipline and that in addition to representative examples from past it deals with everyday life and current times. Ethnographic museology, defined this way, could be in line with its own premise, which involves the practice of collecting and presenting information about the culture of the past and present (Гавриловић 2004: 321-323). The term “ethnographic museology” is now accepted in the literature and in the professional community in Serbia and involves the synthesis of ethnological / anthropological and museological directives reflected in all aspects of the musealization of ethnographic items.

2 The first discussions about the “new museology” were launched at the meetings of ICOM in Mexico in 1980 and in Paris in 1982. This term was controversial due to a lack of understanding, and similar reactions were caused by the proposal of the Canadian Pierre Mayrand to the General Assembly of ICOM in London in 1983 to establish a working group on “Social Museology”. Although this proposal met with disapproval from the majority, museum experts who supported the proposal organized the First *International Workshop of eco-museums and the new museology* in Quebec, and published the *Quebec declaration*. In the *Declaration*, it is stated that the new muse-

tion of museums in initiating social change and dialogue, the assessment of the issues of minority groups, their history and inclusion, have developed different expressions of the new museology. Even though they were reflected through variously named types of museums (“eco-museum”, “post-museum”, “total museum”, “critical museum” and the like), they were based on the same priorities – cooperation between museums and the community, its involvement in the issues of storage and presentation of its own heritage, polyphony and social equality.

As the museums in the world found ways to meet the demands of the new museology, theoretical ethnology/anthropology had widened its corpus of traditional topics by including those referring to the modernity and the city. However, the changes that have swept the world museology and ethnology have left ethnographic museology in Serbia unaffected, and then the already slow progress of change was followed by the events of recent history. They affected the whole society, including the museums and ethnographic museology, in the form of a process of retraditionalization, efforts towards the establishment of a continuity with the past, the forgotten customs.

As Miroslava Malešević states, the fall of communism created in all the Eastern European countries an ideological void that was filled by the ideology of nationalism, the process in which one collective identity was replaced by another (Малешевих 2005: 221). The Serbian society began forming a new cultural / national pattern and thus

ology is an invested museology, which protects the material achievements of the past and the achievements and technologies of today, but is primarily focused on supporting social development (Babić 2009: 54). However, even after several meetings and declarations which were related to the new museology, besides insisting on the creation of links between museums and communities in which they are located and in which they work, as well as the social and developmental role of the museum, the term was still not clearly defined. Peter van Mensch, a museological theorist, explains the origin and use of the various terms that simultaneously became alternatives to the new museology: In the new museology, museological objectives are focused on community development, hence the term ‘museology of the community.’ The presentation and preservation of heritage are viewed in the context of social action and changes. The heritage is the resource that is being considered and developed in the context of improving the community. People in the community need to take care of their heritage, hence the term “popular museology”. The characteristic view is that the concept of the museum is not limited to the building. The museum can be anywhere, and is anywhere and everywhere within a specific area. The term “eco-museum” was coined for this museum concept and hence came the term “eco museology”. Although we can observe a nonuniform development of ideas about the new museology, the common characteristics of its various expressions can be determined. Primarily, they have evolved as a response to the dissatisfaction with the current museum practice, the passive attitude of the museum to the problems faced by the society in which they are located and where they function, and efforts to move the museum from a passive position to a position of an active participant in the life of the community. Therefore, many representatives of the new museology accept the term “active museology”. (Van Mensch 1995: 136, 137).

started the process of reviving the past, the national myths, a quest for the “original” and “authentic”. The new collective identity conditioned the establishment of a “tradition” that could support such an identity. Thus the mechanisms of construction and validation of national identity were re-activated, the same that states/nations have reached for since the 19th century when in need of (re)affirmation.³

This process affected ethnographic museology by creating a thematic stagnation, by dwelling on the various segments of the traditional culture. Ethnographic museology in Serbia in the early 21st century encountered numerous criticisms originating for the most part from the perspective of theoretical ethnology/anthropology. They related to all aspects of the practice, from the treatment of items, the topics presented, to the way in which the exhibitions were conceived and heritage was interpreted.

The dominant focus on the items related to traditional culture was primarily criticized. Items from the urban environment and the second half of the 20th century were mostly not the focus of ethnographic museology. If they had found their place in the museum collections, this was not a reflection of general practice, but results of individual decisions of curators that a particular item should be catalogued and preserved. The criteria by which items were selected for collection were also criticized. Those that were representative by their aesthetic characteristics, ways of production and decoration were singled out. Classifying by usage they were related to housing, clothing, economy, crafts, customs of the personal and family circle.⁴ Priority was given to items that were the product of a domestic

3 The politicization of traditional culture and its use in the awakening of patriotic feelings is not new and can be traced through the history from the French Revolution. Ivaylo Ditchev showed through a comparative analysis of rebuilding a national identity in the Balkans after the fall of communism that this process relies on the same basis as the process of the forming of the first national states in Europe. In all analyzed cases, it was observed that the emphasis was placed on the myth of long duration, establishing historical continuity with the presumed ancestral glory, differentiation through language and the like (Малешевих 2005: 222, 223).

4 This situation is well illustrated with the list of thematic ethnographic exhibitions that have been planned or implemented during 2005/2006. These are the *Gate, Traditional culture of Serbs in the Serbian Krajina and Croatia* (Ethnographic Museum in Belgrade); *Distaffs of Timočka Krajina* (National Museum in Zaječar); *Earth - the house made of rammed earth; Exhibition of acquisition* (National Museum in Kikinda); *Towels* (National Museum Kragujevac); *Skirt - traditional folk costume gown of the Kruševac area* and *We are well and the same we wish for you* (National Museum in Kruševac); *On Trade in Loznica* (Museum of Jadar, Loznica); *Our daily bread* (National Museum in Niš); *Living Together* (multidisciplinary exhibition, Museum of Vojvodina, Novi Sad) *Rugs, Children's Toys* (National Museum in Pančevo); *Civic spirit of Pirot, All in Easter resurrected, Collection of suitcases, A collection of costumes, Pirot pottery* (Museum of Pirot); *The path of wool* (National Museum in Prijepolje); *Spinning tools from the ethnographic collection of the City Museum in Sremska Mitrovica* (City Museum in Sremska Mitrovica); *National Costume of Zlatibor* (Open Air Museum

craft or craftsmanship. The topics that were presented in permanent and thematic ethnographic exhibitions were identical in all the museums in Serbia. The same type of item that was placed in the same context was presented everywhere; the only difference between them was that they belonged to another geographic area or another ethnic community. Regarding the interpretation of the presented material, they were presented rather as general information about life in the past, then something illuminating the structure of a particular social problem or phenomenon. This engendered criticism that such information was not objective, but was meant to create an idealized picture of life in the past.⁵

Although the need to modernize the practice was underscored before, an organized effort on the redefinition of ethnographic museology and ethnographic items was started in 2005, by the establishment of the Ethnological section within the Museum Association of Serbia. The project “Ethnology museums Serbia at the beginning of the third millennium - Strategic objectives for further development” was launched. This project envisaged the reexamination of the state of ethnology in the museums of Serbia, defining the operational problems and possible directions for development. Through professional conferences the museum ethnologists / anthropologists initiated discussions about finding ways to overcome the resulting discontinuity with the overall ethnology and the international museum practice. Some of the topics that were discussed were documentation, redefining ethnographic museology and ethnographic museum items, systematization of the terminology of collections and objects, the presentation of items, the attitude of ethnographic museology towards new identities and the like.

This paper will examine a process of redefining the field of action of ethnographic museology and the definition of an item in an ethnographic museum. It will also review methodological problems arising from the exit from the traditional and secure framework and the challenges of dealing with recent events and contempo-

“Old Village” in Sirogojno); *Wedding photography* (City Museum in Subotica); *Jewellery and gold embroidery* (National Museum in Užice); *Towels, 100 years of Abrašević* (National Museum Čačak) (Romelić 2006: 125, 126).

5 A proper example is the presentation of the 1950's, which are generally regarded in museums as the upper limit for the age of items introduced into the ethnographic collections. In the context of the village, which is the dominant theme of ethnographic presentation, these events occurred in that time: agrarian reform, a ban on the keeping of goats, forced colonization and a multitude of other events that have affected the village, and were not covered by a single ethnographic exhibition. Illustrating this phenomenon, Ljiljana Gavrilović states that neither the collections, nor exhibitions show the Serbian folk hat adorned with a red star, black leather coats, costumes of the colonized population in Vojvodina, or other items that would in a realistic way present the life of the farmers in the specified period (Гавриловић 2004: 318).

rary issues. The stated problems will be examined through thematic exhibitions: *Fashion in the mirror of the Sixties*, by the author Snežana Šaponjić-Ašanin (National Museum of Čačak, 2007) and *Plastic Nineties* by Marko Stojanović and Miloš Matić (Ethnographic Museum in Belgrade, 2010). These exhibitions, organized after the work on the modernization of the practice of the treatment of the subject and the exhibited material commenced, emerged fully out the previous spatial and temporal framework – the villages, exotic landscapes and the period from the 19th to the first half of the 20th century.

REDEFINING THE ETHNOGRAPHIC MUSEUM ITEM

No (museum) item is by itself ethnographic. They are determined as such by ethnology/anthropology and ethnologists / anthropologists, who are attributing to them the character of being ethnographic. The item gets new meaning at the level of the culture in which it was produced and where it was used, as well as at the level of the culture in which it is selected into the museum collection, where it became one of the representative items of its culture of origin and in which its original meaning is read and interpreted. The two main criteria by items are which determined as ethnographic are: the origin (where and when it was made) and use (where and when it was used) (Gavrilović 2007b: 85).

While academic ethnology/anthropology in the eighties of the 20th century spread its field of interest and research over the city and modern life, ethnographic museology has continued to engage in the same framework of themes and to have the museum displays illustrating the same kinds of collected items. Alignment towards the “old” and “beautiful” items produced the multiplication of these types of cases, while those that would allow the reconstruction of the everyday life of different socio-economic and cultural strata, as well as overview of the social and cultural phenomena that were already researched in ethnology, remained out of the limelight museum ethnologists/anthropologists. Vesna Dušković stated this about the problem: “The unsystematic collection of items dating from the second half of the 20th century, but also in the decades before that, has prevented the processing of an array of very important segments of everyday life. How are we supposed to, for example, present ways of maintaining hygiene in these parts when we have almost no item to help with this? In our collections, there are no aluminum basins, no pots, sinks, furnaces for heating the water, not to even mention a washing machine. There are very good studies where the exact way the laundry was done pointed to the relationships within the local community and family... The black hole envelops the entire period of the “socialist state” and the symbol of its existence, from Crombie coats, leather coats, fleece jackets, tergal skirts, sets, shimmy shoes, krimkis, velvet

children's pants, to the hippie and punk clothes.“ (Душкович 2006: 28).

This stagnation in practice began to face harsh criticism, so redefining the concept of ethnographic museum items was singled out as the main problem. As stated by Ljiljana Gavrilović, everything that can represent daily life is in the domain of ethnologists “who should, using an item, record what is happening here and now, as it will be impossible to reconstruct in a few years“ (Гаврилович 2007b: 71).

Changing the definitions of ethnographic items extended the boundaries of the field of action of the museum ethnology/anthropology in the spatial and temporal context, resulting in the need to create a new organization of ethnographic collections.⁶ This ended the practice of dealing with the issues related to modernity

6 The Commission for the standardization of the terminology for the collection, established in the Ethnological section of the Museum Association of Serbia in 2008 had made a proposal to classify the ethnological collections into the following sub-collections and collections: 1. Housing - The collection consists of architecture and furniture. The first group includes: parts of the architecture of residential and commercial and economic structures, such as doors, windows, beams, signs on the houses, all kinds of building materials and roofing materials, decorative moldings. The second group consists of all the furniture, which is in the function of nutrition, preparation and storage of food, hearth, home comfort, hygiene, aesthetics of housing, then, the sacred furniture, or furniture in the function of religious performances and rituals. 2. Economy – The Collection includes the following collections: Agriculture, Livestock, Viticulture, Fruit-growing, beekeeping, hunting and fishing (including fish farming), Transportation, Mining, Craftsmanship (collection includes tools related to all trades, master's letters, books, records. In addition to traditional crafts, the collection also includes contemporary crafts, and traditional service activities), Trade and supplementary livelihood. 3. Craftworks - The collection consists of the collection: Tools for spinning, weaving devices and supplies, samples and supplies for sewing, embroidery and knitting, small tools. 4. Dress - A set includes the following collections: Clothing, Footwear, Jewelry and decoration, personal items (glasses, wallet, umbrella, fans, opera glasses, powder box, staff and orthopedic devices, curlers, handkerchiefs, etc.). 5. Social – The Collection includes the following groups: family, social housing organizations, Childhood, The social life of the local community. The first group is made up of items testifying about the family life and his organization, such as deeds, wills, various accounts, chronicles, correspondence, birth certificates, wedding dresses and the like. The second group relates to items that point to housing as a reflection of gender, kinship, economic and other relations, housing in relation to other aspects of culture, such as religion. Items for children of adolescent age, which could not be classified into any of these collections, were classified into the third group. Such cases are, for example, prams, walkers, school bags and so on. The last group consists of the collection of social organization (items that testify to the humanitarian work, singing, sporting clubs and associations, amateur theaters, cultural societies, etc.) and social gatherings (cases arising from traditional and modern forms of social gatherings, such as fairs, various kinds of entertainment and social games, protests, strikes, etc.). 6. Spiritual Culture - The Collection includes the following groups: Traditions and religion (annual traditions, customs, life cycle, cults and magic, customary law), folklore (folk art and creativity, folk literature, new forms of folk communication (jokes, articles and scrapbook lexicons, graffiti, schematic e-mails and SMS), knowledge and skills (musical instruments and games), toys and games, measures and measuring instruments, weapons, ethno-medicine (implying ethno-veterinary medicine, meteorology and

and the city being only dependent on the individual affinity of curators, instead establishing the potential to draw attention to a particular social phenomenon as a criterion for collecting items, regardless of the temporal and spatial context.

THE ETHNOGRAPHIC MUSEOLOGY “AT HOME”

Redefining ethnographic museum object set the challenge before the museum ethnologists / anthropologists of dealing with topics related to urban communities and those contemporary with their lives, as was previously the case in theoretical ethnology/anthropology. New parameters in the work also caused a series of questions. One of the most frequently cited problems was the selection of items from the contemporary environment, especially the products of mass production, which will act as the best representatives of certain social phenomena when introduced in the museum collection. The concepts of ethnographic exhibitions with themes that the curators meet in their (daily) experience became problematic due to the possibility that the familiarity with the topic could affect the curator to overlook certain elements while researching and interpreting, deeming them to be self-evident. Leaving the safe sphere of subjects that were already engaged by generations of museum ethnologist was also not a negligible risk. Finally, a fear was expressed that the new currents in ethnographic museology were moving in the opposite direction from the rural areas and the past and that the few remaining items of traditional culture would be left outside the museum, and thus disappear. In the best case, they would be found in private collections, ethno-houses and other buildings where the focus is on ethnographic objects.

The change in the anthropological paradigm, facing the anthropologists with the need for the research of a temporally and spatially adjacent terrain is explored by Marc Augé in his work *Non-places: An introduction to the anthropology of supermodernity*. His perspective on these issues and conclusions can be set as a framework for observing new trends in ethnographic museology.

Marc Augé states that anthropology has always dealt with the local and current. His explains his views with the fact that a field ethnologist is a person who exists

general knowledge on the developments in nature), food (traditional and modern knowledge and skills related to food preparation and consumption (notebooks of recipes, cookbooks). 7. Written audiovisual records - the collection consists of: Archival material, photographs, audiovisual recordings, Models, illustrative material. 8. European and non-European cultures - this collection includes items made outside of the territory of the former Yugoslavia, which are part of the donations, donated collections or individual gifts. I thank my colleague Ivana Jovanović-Gudurić, the president of the Ethnological section of the Museum Society of Serbia on the information regarding the new systematization of collections.

somewhere, which is the “here” in that moment, and describes what he sees and hears at the time. The term “current” he explains with the fact that regardless of the age of the informant, the information received from him says less about the past, and more about what he knows or thinks about it and how significant it is from the viewpoint of the present, and from the perspective of the past. When it comes to the concept of ‘the local’, the western notion of ‘local’ is understandable in relation to something ‘over there’, the former “colonial” and the contemporary “underdeveloped” (Augé 2005: 12, 13). Augé writes this about the research of the contemporary proximate environment:

“The question that first arises regarding the modernity of the immediate environment is not getting to know whether, and how, we can examine some residential blocks, a company or a summer resort (we will measurably succeed in that), but to find out whether those aspects of contemporary social life which would be suitable for anthropological research exist today, just as distant societies had once imposed the problems of kinship, marriage bond, gift, exchange, and the like on anthropologists, first as objects for their attention (so, as empirical objects), and then as objects of thought (as intellectual objects)” (Augé 2005: 19).

The cause for turning to new fields should not be sought in the saturation with the exotic, but in the need “to make sense of the modern world, undergoing rapid changes that the meaning, in the need “to give meaning to the world, not a village or kinship community” (Augé 2005: 31). The movement of the spatial parameters, which Marc Augé calls the “spatial glut”, has resulted in major physical changes: the concentration of population in cities, the constant movement of the population, the production of “non-places.”⁷ Although it can be assumed that the spatial glut causes difficulties in the work, it is still an incentive for research. His advice for coping with the new challenges of research is: “... nothing else is left for us to do but to get studying these new civilizations and cultures, like in the 19th century “ (Augé 2005: 37). The object and the terrain of anthropology are not compromised. Three types of excesses (overabundance of events, abundance of space and individualization of references), which characterized the state of supermodernity - become a form of expression for the imperishable material from which anthropology creates its object. Also, in the situations of supermodernity the individual components of anthropology are connected to each other, without cancelling each other. Therefore, one should not agonize over traditional anthropological topics.

7 Marc Augé introduces the concept of “non-place” into which he includes buildings and roads through which the very rapid circulation of people and goods occurs (highways, interchanges, flyovers, airports), transportation equipment, big shopping centers, long term camps for refugees, etc. (Augé 2005: 218)

The changes that have started in the ethnographic museology can be seen through Auge's ideas about the impact of the modern immediate environment into the corpus of anthropological study. The introduction of new parameters that have arisen from the need for the modernization of ethnographic museology and for realignment with the mainstream of ethnology began to expand the field of topics and subjects for ethnographic museology. This has also shifted the boundaries of the field from which the curators derive information relevant to their research and from where they collect items for the museum collection. The city has become an equally valuable field with the village, "the people of the city" an equal field of interest with "the people from the countryside," and the present an equal "museum time" with the past. The new concept of ethnographic museology deletes the division of items into those from the city and from country, into "old" and "new" items, and instead the emphasis is placed on their potential to illustrate a particular problem in the best possible way.

New disciplinary tendencies do not impose a cease of research and the presentation of topics that are related to the past and the village. Adding the issues related to contemporary society to these issues opens up unlimited topics for the ethnographic museology. The curators are offered a new experience in researching topics that are part of their personal surroundings and their everyday life, as well as the challenge of presenting topics whose attractiveness is not based on the "exoticism", but on showing the world that surrounds us from a new angle. The Swedish anthropologist Ulf Hannerz states that anthropologists today are never completely out of their field. This kind of understanding should apply to the ethnologists / anthropologists in museums.

EXAMPLES OF PRACTICE: EXHIBITING MODERNITY

Although it has previously been the case that some ethnographic exhibitions dealt with contemporary problems, it can, however, be concluded that those were isolated cases rather than a reflection of general practice and agreement that the ethnographic museology should be engaged in these issues. After the start of the process of redefining the ethnographic museum item and ethnographic museology, exhibiting modernity has been largely related to having the concept of the exhibition as a way of showing the development of a certain theme from the distant to the nearer past or as a representation of a certain current issue through the existing museum items from the 19th, or first half of the 20th century. Two thematic exhibitions that have fully included the new museum material are *Fashion in the mirror of the Sixties* by Snežana Šaponjić-Ašanin (National Museum in Čačak) and *The Plastic Nineties* by Marko Stojanović and Miloš Marić (Ethnographic Museum in Belgrade).

FASHION IN THE MIRROR OF THE SIXTIES

Although only those ethnographic museum items that were more than fifty years old were taken into account, meaning that objects originating from the 1960s should have been included, that was not the case in practice. The exhibition *Fashion in the mirror of the Sixties* is the first in whose concept reflects the effects of redefining the ethnographic museum item. It has also thematically and temporally included a new domain in the ethnographic museum practice. The exhibition primarily showed trends in clothing prevalent in the sixties through articles and photographs. The exhibition also indirectly presented segments of the lifestyle of the working class in Čačak, but which could also be observed in the wider spatial - Yugoslav frame. In that context, it presented travel, vacation, the appearance of television and music players in households, the spread of possession and use of personal vehicles into the masses, the modernization of urban infrastructure, the factory production in Yugoslavia, trade relations with foreign countries and the like.

The author of the exhibition started collecting daily used items during the sixties, bearing in mind the fact that it is hard to obtain them today. They are usually not perceived as objects worthy of preservation, except in cases when they represent family memories. Due to the rapid technical and technological progress, and change of fashion styles in clothing and housing, these items are discarded and replaced with new ones. Initially, items from the author's personal property were placed in a museum, and subsequently, using the method of *snowball sampling*, collection of items continued from the author's private circle, among family members, friends, and fellow citizens. The collected items became a part of the museum fund and one of the first practical examples of a shift in spatial and temporal framework of ethnographic collections. Also, the work on collecting and preserving the material evidence of (everyday) life within the specified period can be seen as a response from the perspective of ethnographic museology to the current issues museums face relating to the study and interpretation of socialist heritage.

THE PLASTIC NINETIES

While the previous exhibition built a positive narrative through shows about fashion and life styles of the 1960s, as well as through the nostalgic memories of this period and life in Yugoslavia, the exhibition *Plastic nineties* introduced treating objects that are new to ethnographic museology, not only due to the recent past which they referred to, but also because of its dissonance. Also, the criteria by which the objects were selected were completely different from the previous ones.

This exhibition presented objects that are not pretty, old, nor designed and decorated with special techniques, but those that were selected as representatives of the time period which was the theme of the exhibition. Certain segments of the exhibition, according to the type of exposed objects, such as furniture and dishes, corresponded with the classic ethnographic exhibitions. The difference was in the fact that they belonged to the recent past, and that they were made of a completely different material – plastic. Ivan Kovačević said that the focus of this exhibition was not placed on the items but rather on the lives of people who used these objects and on the overall picture of the times in which these objects made of bad plastic became the surrogate of normal living in abnormal conditions (Ковачевић 2011: 376).

A special feature of this exhibition is the fact that it was set in the Ethnographic Museum in Belgrade, during the celebration of the anniversary of that principal museum institution when it comes to ethnographic museology. This kind of concept of the exhibition, the place and the occasion of the opening had a symbolic character and in practice this presented the opening of the Ethnographic Museum and ethnographic museology in general towards new topics, items and the recent past, even if it is dissonant. However, this exhibition and the presented items started a controversy in professional circles as to whether these objects have the right to be on museum display, and whether they should become part of the museum collection.⁸

FINAL CONSIDERATION

The work on redefining ethnographic museology and ethnographic museum item in Serbia was initiated primarily because of the criticism that was addressed from the perspective of theoretical museology, but also because of the dissatisfaction of museum ethnologists/anthropologists with the existing practice which supported the inherited concept of studying and exhibiting segments mainly from the rural culture in the 19th and during the first half of the 20th century. While ethnographic museology has been focused on the same themes and subjects for decades, society, irrespective of rural or urban location, was affected by a variety of processes and changes. These were overlooked by ethnographic museology, as well as the items which would testify about them. The process of redefining ethnographic museol-

⁸ The biggest controversy was caused by two items - sex toys - which were considered unfit to be on exhibition at the Museum of Ethnography by a part of the expert public. This controversy is due to the idea that this museum, like any other museum, should provide a positive image of culture / cultures it deals with, and these items did not fit into the concept of such a "positive image". (see Ковачевић 2011: 376).

ogy and the ethnographic item has set up the task of studying the overall culture as well as the treatment of the item, not because of its age and aesthetic characteristics, but because of its potential to point to some social phenomenon. In practice, the process of redefining led to the introduction of completely new types of items in the museum funds. When it comes to exhibition practice, this process has to the biggest extent affected the presentation of current issues through the existing museum items, displaying the transformation of certain phenomena to their modern forms and, to a lesser extent, presenting new topics through a completely “new” museum material, at least in the context of ethnographic museology.

Through the examples of the exhibitions mentioned above it can be concluded that the introduction of new subjects and objects does not cause any doubts, if it builds on past practice, if positive narrative is built through exhibition and if exhibited items can be placed into an existing group of items, such as clothing, fashion accessories, toys, home appliances and similar. However, problems may arise if the exhibition builds a narrative about the dissonant past, especially if there is a vivid memory of it, and if treated items are, according to their kind, entirely different from the previous ethnographic museum items.

Ljiljana Gavrilović states that dealing with modernity is not that essential for its presentation to the public, since those who are living that reality can hardly see what a trained anthropologist can see, recognize and demonstrate, but is way more significant on account of the preservation of elements from our present for the future generations. “That definition of ethnographic museology could be in line with its own premise - the practice of collecting and presenting information about the culture, past and present.” (Гавриловић 2007b: 81). By expanding the boundaries of ethnographic museology and the concept of ethnographic museum item onto the urban area, the second half of the 20th century and modernity, the possibility for gathering and presenting information about the overall culture is created. In order to truly have an idea about the overall culture, this information should not relate only to positive images of culture, but also to those that open “difficult” topics.

The introduction of new parameters in the ethnographic museum practice creates new challenges for curators in coping with, thus far, unexplored fields. Nonetheless, to repeat the advice of Marc Augé: “... nothing else is left for us to do but to get studying these new civilizations and cultures like in the 19th century “ (Augé 2005: 37).

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