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# Remembrance as Presence: Promoting Learning from Difficult Knowledge at the Canadian Museum for Human Rights

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## Abstract

This thesis explores the relationship between memorial museums and the Canadian Museum for Human Rights (CMHR), Winnipeg. Although the CMHR self-defines as an idea museum, using theories of remembrance, commemorative museum pedagogy, memory, and difficult knowledge, the CMHR is also easily situated in the growing global network of memorial museums. Angela Failler's theory of consolatory hope and my own theory of past-future dissonance suggest that there are several reasons the CMHR has not fulfilled its intended mandate of advocating for human rights in the present. Through a compare and contrast approach, this paper argues that the CMHR should look to memorial museum's practices of remembrance to better engage visitors with difficult knowledge, especially in exhibitions related to histories of genocide both abroad and within Canada's own borders.

## Keywords

Genocide, Human Rights, Curating, Holocaust, Indigenous, Memorialization, Museums, Education, Remembrance, Difficult Knowledge

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## Introduction

“Memorialization occurs not only between events and memorials, but also between memorials and ourselves. It is not to Holocaust monuments as such that we turn for remembrance, but to ourselves within the reflective space they open up.”<sup>1</sup> -James E. Young, *The Texture of Memory*

What is memory and can we trust it? Individual memory may refer to a capacity to recall personal experiences, but what about memories that do not belong to the individual? How do we form memories of events and histories that are not part of our lived experience? And more importantly, should we be cautious of museums that present history and collective memory?

In the last two decades, there has been a proliferation of ‘memorial museums’ around the world. Their aims and devotions are varied; some are dedicated to victims of genocide, others to traumatic incidents, slavery, mass atrocity, abusive totalitarian regimes, war, and terrorism. ‘Idea museums’ are another relatively new form of museum, emerging almost concurrently with memorial museums. Idea museums go beyond representing human experiences, art, or history to call into question the social purpose of museums as institutions. This new generation of museums recognizes an institutional shift where museums are public centres that educate about a range of ideas or issues and may include advocating for social change as part of their mandate.<sup>2</sup> Interestingly, a number of both memorial and idea museums that have opened during the period in question have human rights issues at their core. The driving theory behind this thesis is that idea museums can be risky when educating about genocide if curators rely too heavily on abstract ideas, theories, and histories while eliding difficult knowledge in attempt to comfort the visitor.

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<sup>1</sup> James E. Young, “The Texture of Memory: Holocaust Memorials and Meaning.” *Holocaust and Genocide Studies* 4, no. 1 (1989): 74

<sup>2</sup> Jennifer Carter and Jennifer Orange. “Contentious terrain: Defining a human rights museology,” *Museum Management and Curatorship* 27, 2 (2012): 113

To substantiate this theory, my research examines a relatively new idea museum, the Canadian Museum for Human Rights (CMHR) in Winnipeg, and contrasts it with several memorial museums. The CMHR, the first Canadian national museum to be built outside of the capital city of Ottawa, opened in 2014 and is dedicated to the “evolution, celebration, and future of human rights.”<sup>3</sup> The building itself features seven floors of permanent and temporary exhibitions that explore global and national human rights issues. The museum relies heavily on digital technology displays and interactive visitor monitors, with relatively few material objects. According to the museum, its purpose is “to explore the subject of human rights, with special but not exclusive reference to Canada, in order to enhance the public's understanding of human rights, to promote respect for others and to encourage reflection and dialogue (*Museums Act*).”<sup>4</sup>

Structurally, this thesis begins with a global survey of memorial and idea museums that deal specifically with educating about and memorializing genocide. I describe memorial museums first to give a background for the range of museum practices focused on handling sensitive topics. This also sets up parallels for the ways that the CMHR mimics some memorial museum practices while rejecting others. I then argue that although the CMHR defines itself as an ideas museum, it still draws on various memorial museum characteristics. However, unlike the memorial museums that influenced it, exhibitions at the CMHR tend to avoid confronting the viewer with difficult knowledge, and the museum resists forms of remembrance, creating a detached visitor experience. Based on my comparison of the CMHR and memorial museums, I suggest that memorial museums often do a better job of teaching about genocide than do idea museums, and that the CMHR should not undervalue the memorial approach.

Utilizing a ‘compare and contrast’ methodology, my thesis gradually builds a case for the value of remembrance and commemorative museum pedagogy. The formatting of

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<sup>3</sup> “About the Museum”. Canadian Museum for Human Rights. <https://humanrights.ca/about>. accessed Jan 7, 2017

<sup>4</sup> *ibid*

this thesis is such that each chapter is divided into a number of sections. Section one of chapter one begins by looking at human rights and memorial museums around the globe. I start with these examples to show how deeply embedded remembrance practices have been in the evolution of memorial museums. Section two of chapter one narrows the focus of this study by addressing the vast range of remembrance and memorial techniques present across Poland. The memory landscape that emerged in Poland in the late twentieth century sparked a global trend of memorial museum building and in turn, the development of human rights museums. Consequently, this history of memory building in Poland foretells how human rights museums like the CMHR would come into existence. Section three of chapter one is an in-depth case study of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum (USHMM) in Washington, DC. In its early stages, the CMHR looked closely at Holocaust museums, specifically the USHMM, as models for its human rights project, making an analysis of the USHMM especially pertinent. This section discusses the planning stages of the USHMM that strove to both educate visitors while also incorporating remembrance practices. I hold the USHMM up as an example of how a museum can successfully teach about human rights and genocide while maintaining integrity as a memorial space.

The Canadian Museum for Human Rights is the sole focus of chapter two.<sup>5</sup> In my early stages of research, I hypothesized that the CMHR mimicked or modified certain memorial museum frameworks to fit its own needs. I later discovered that the similarities between the CMHR and memorial museums were restricted to external characteristics (i.e., surface-level appearances). The museum architecture and curatorial design of the CMHR is strikingly similar to memorial museums but does not always reflect the same internal values and initiatives. The second chapter of my thesis makes clear the difference between the CMHR and memorial museums. The major distinction is that the CMHR does not engage with remembrance or memorial practices, both of which I argue are imperative for educating about genocide. The first section of chapter two introduces the

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<sup>5</sup> Due to the nature of my one-year Master's program I was not able to go through the ethics review board at Western University. Consequently, all information pertaining to the CMHR precludes any information I received directly from the museum or from interviews.

CMHR and top down human rights narratives present in the museum. The second section addresses two permanent exhibitions in the museum, “Examining the Holocaust” and “Breaking the Silence.” I argue that these exhibitions are examples of consolatory hope and past-future dissonance, two theories that attempt to contextualize the museum’s avoidance of difficult knowledge. Consolatory hope is a theory put forward by Angela Failler to describe how museums may console the visitor rather than confront them with difficult knowledge that contradicts or upsets their previously held beliefs. Past-future dissonance is my own theory (presented in chapter 2.2), and suggests that when museums advocate for change in the future by solely looking to the past that there is a disconnect from the present, ensuring the museum’s failure to create any real social change. Finally, Roger Simon and Julia Rose’s theories of remembrance and commemorative museum pedagogy are brought in at the end to suggest future directions the CMHR may take. Ultimately, my argument comes full circle as I conclude with theories of remembrance that have long been the heart of memorial and Holocaust museums around the world.



## Terminology

As my research deals with particularly contentious and debated topics, I have included a terminology section to provide definitions of important vocabulary that I refer to throughout my thesis, including difficult knowledge, genocide, settler-colonial genocide, human rights, and remembrance. Most of these terms have multiple definitions and thus the explanations I have chosen here are based on consensus among scholars in their respective fields.

Difficult knowledge:

Difficult knowledge is a term coined by educational and psychoanalytic theorists Deborah Britzman and Alice Pitt. Simplified, difficult knowledge can be described as confronting a learner with any knowledge, experience, or history that tests the limits of what they are willing or able to understand.<sup>6</sup> Julia Rose identifies in her discussion of commemorative museum pedagogies that:

Museum visitors, museum workers, and learners in general who wish to avoid, forget, or ignore traumatic histories will turn away from the difficult knowledge that they cannot stand to know. The person who is faced with learning difficult knowledge that she or he cannot bear represses that information and returns to it through expressions of resistance that appear as negativism, irreverence, jokes, and denials.<sup>7</sup>

Britzman's theory is largely inspired by the work of Anna Freud, a child psychoanalyst. Britzman explains how education, particularly in children, involves an "interference" in the internal world of the learner, resulting in a sort of learning crisis. Newly introduced information that unsettles the learner's identity and preconceived understanding of the

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<sup>6</sup> Karen Sharma, "Governing difficult knowledge: The Canadian museum for human rights and its publics," *Review of Education, Pedagogy, and Cultural Studies* 37, 2-3 (2015): 189

<sup>7</sup> Julia Rose, "Commemorative Museum Pedagogy: A Psychoanalytic Approach to Engaging Visitors in Exhibits with Difficult Knowledge" *Beyond Pedagogy*, (2014): 116

world around them is defined as difficult knowledge. The learning crisis that ensues may cause the learner to repress or resist this knowledge until they are able to work through it.<sup>8</sup> I return to Julia Rose's theory of commemorative museum pedagogy in the final section of chapter two to suggest strategies museums such as the CMHR might use in teaching difficult knowledge.

My use of the term difficult knowledge throughout this thesis will follow Angela Failler and Roger Simon in recognizing the need to move beyond simply learning *about* genocide as a form of difficult knowledge through museums, in favour of learning *from* genocide, in order to foster awareness of the lasting impacts of mass violence.<sup>9</sup> This stance is aligned with their distinction that:

in learning about, knowledge is given to be an object separate from or outside of the self that can nevertheless be acquired, owned or mastered. In learning from, knowledge is understood to be a relation that is contingent upon a willingness to recognize one's connectedness to an event or people, but can nevertheless be seen for its enmeshment with the structures, privileges and constraints of one's own life.<sup>10</sup>

By this definition, confronting visitors with difficult knowledge in a museum setting is of the utmost importance when educating about genocide. I argue that the CMHR resists difficult knowledge in favour of consoling the visitor, an antithetical approach to memorial museums, which are often explicit in their approaches to representing mass violence. In contrast to difficult knowledge, attempts to comfort the visitor or reaffirm

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<sup>8</sup> Julia Rose, "Commemorative Museum Pedagogy", 116

<sup>9</sup> Angela Failler and Simon, R. I. "Curatorial Practice and Learning from Difficult Knowledge". In K. Busby, A. Woolford, & A. Muller (Eds.), *The Idea of a Human Rights Museum*. Winnipeg, Canada: University of Manitoba Press. (2015): 173

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

their previously held beliefs is defined by Britzman and Pitt as lovely knowledge.<sup>11</sup> Thus, when a learner encounters hard to look at material such as evidence of mass violence or genocide, the presentation can take the form of either difficult knowledge or lovely knowledge depending on whether or not it shakes the learner's core beliefs. My writing refers to "hard to look at" material as *difficult or traumatic histories and imagery* (often interchangeably). Consequently, I make a clear distinction between difficult histories or graphic imagery and Britzman's term difficult knowledge that refers exclusively to ideas that are hard for learners to accept.

Genocide:

During the Second World War, Raphael Lemkin, a Jewish refugee from Nazi-occupied Poland, published *Axis Rule in Occupied Europe*. The book tried to capture the essence of the "crime without a name"—which he came to call genocide—as it applied to the German campaigns of brutality that were underway in his native country Poland and across Europe.<sup>12</sup> The term "genocide" has both Greek and Latin roots: "genos" from the Greek meaning race or tribe, and the Latin "cide", which translates to killing. Lemkin's intention for the term, however, expanded its meaning beyond killing. He writes:

By "genocide" we mean the destruction of a nation or an ethnic group. . . .  
Generally speaking, genocide does not necessarily mean the immediate destruction of a nation, except when accomplished by mass killings of all members of a nation. It is intended rather to signify a coordinated plan of different actions aiming at the destruction of essential foundations of the life of national groups, with the aim of annihilating the groups themselves. The objectives of such a plan would be disintegration of the political and social institutions of culture, language, national feelings, religion, and the economic existence of national

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<sup>11</sup> Angela Failler, Peter Ives, and Heather Milne, "Introduction: Caring for Difficult Knowledge—Prospects for the Canadian Museum for Human Rights" *The Review of Education, Pedagogy and Cultural Studies*, 37, (2015): 102

<sup>12</sup> Adam Jones, *Genocide: A Comprehensive Introduction*. New York; London: Routledge/Taylor & Francis, 2006. 8

groups, and the destruction of the personal security, liberty, health, dignity, and even the lives of the individuals belonging to such groups.<sup>13</sup>

The official United Nations Convention definition follows that:

genocide means any of the following acts committed with intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial or religious group, as such:

- (a) Killing members of the group;
- (b) Causing serious bodily or mental harm to members of the group;
- (c) Deliberately inflicting on the group conditions of life calculated to bring about its physical destruction in whole or in part;
- (d) Imposing measures intended to prevent births within the group;
- (e) Forcibly transferring children of the group to another group.<sup>14</sup>

As described by Adam Jones in *Genocide: A Comprehensive Introduction*, all eras of recorded human existence have known genocide, including our contemporary era.<sup>15</sup>

Jones views:

[G]enocide as inseparable from the broad thrust of history, both ancient and modern – indeed, it is among history’s defining features, overlapping a range of central historical processes: war, imperialism, state-building, class struggle. I perceive it as intimately linked to key institutions, in which state or broadly political authorities are often but not always principal actors: forced labor, military conscription, incarceration, female infanticide.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Adam Jones, *Genocide: A Comprehensive Introduction*, 10

<sup>14</sup> Adam Jones, *Genocide: A Comprehensive Introduction*. New York; London: Routledge/Taylor & Francis, 2006. 13

<sup>15</sup> Adam Jones, *Genocide: A Comprehensive Introduction*, xviii

<sup>16</sup> Adam Jones, *Genocide: A Comprehensive Introduction*, xxi

Jones' definition is central to my argument and compliments my understanding of the original genocide definition put forward by Raphael Lemkin. It is from these definitions that I refer to settler-colonial relations in Canada as genocidal, a statement that is in line with recent arguments by scholars such as Tricia Logan, Dirk Moses, and Andrew Woolford. Tricia Logan argues that there is a misconception that "settler-colonial genocide" is a relatively contemporary idea. Rather, Raphael Lemkin's work on defining genocide in the 1940's actually included research on colonial genocides.<sup>17</sup> It seems that "Lemkin's insistence that biological, physical, and cultural techniques of genocide remain conceptually inseparable from each other [which] is conceptually similar to how genocide is defined by Indigenous communities."<sup>18</sup> Traces of and repercussions from the genocide of Indigenous peoples in the Americas have had ongoing and long-lasting negative effects on Indigenous communities. To better explain how settler-colonialism works I refer again to Adam Jones. He reasons that:

In *settler colonialism*, the metropolitan power encourages or dispatches colonists to "settle" the territory. (In the British Empire, this marks the difference between settler colonies such as Canada, Australia, and New Zealand; and India, where a limited corps of 25,000 British administered a vast realm). Settler colonialism implies displacement and occupation of the land, and is often linked to genocide against indigenous peoples (and genocidally tinged rebellions against colonialism).<sup>19</sup>

Moreover, genocide scholarship is divided into harder and softer positions that have left settler colonial genocide widely unrecognized and misinterpreted. Harder positions are concerned that overuse of the term "genocide" will render its meaning banal, while softer positions maintain that excessive rigidity of the naming and

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<sup>17</sup> Tricia Logan, "National memory and museums: Remembering settler colonial genocide of Indigenous peoples in Canada" from *Remembering Genocide*, London: Routledge, 2014, 113

<sup>18</sup> Tricia Logan, "National memory and museums", 113

<sup>19</sup> Adam Jones, *Genocide: A Comprehensive Introduction*. New York; London: Routledge/Taylor & Francis, 2006, 40

recognition of genocide (i.e. typically focused on the total physical extermination of a group) casts aside too many cases that by Lemkin's original definition must be included.<sup>20</sup> Overall, I view myself as standing on the softer side, through which I believe that the excessively rigid framing of genocide by the UN and the Canadian federal government often results in the exclusion of atrocities that should be included, expressly a long history of unjust colonial practices.

#### Human Rights:

The most basic definition of human rights starts with the United Nations Declaration of Human Rights in recognition that "all human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights."<sup>21</sup> I acknowledge, however, that human rights are not universally upheld and universal human rights pedagogies can be misleading. The second chapter of my thesis unravels how museums can either educate about or conceal such issues through bottom-up or top-down human rights narratives. I argue that the top-down approach in museums universalizes human rights narratives, which greatly oversimplifies and ignores the complexity of human rights debates. This is particularly true of the CMHR. For example, Ken Norman explains in "Grounding the Canadian Museum for Human Rights in Conversation" that if the 'for human rights' in the museum's name was to succeed, there would need to be a strong emphasis on engaging the public and sparking empathic connection among individuals.<sup>22</sup> My concern in the second chapter is that the CMHR has not achieved the goals it set out to accomplish, particularly those concerned with meaningful engagement with its visitors, especially with regard to human rights. The scope of a project such as the one set out by the Canadian Museum for Human Rights is not easily achieved, and my research suggests that the CMHR exhibitions are not in line

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<sup>20</sup> Adam Jones, *Genocide: A Comprehensive Introduction*. New York; London: Routledge/Taylor & Francis, 2006, 19

<sup>21</sup> "Universal Declaration of Human Rights." *United Nations*. Accessed January 03, 2017. <http://www.un.org/en/universal-declaration-human-rights/>.

<sup>22</sup> Ken Norman, "Grounding the Canadian Museum for Human Rights in Conversation" from *The Idea of a Human Rights Museum*, University of Manitoba Press, 2015.

with the museum's mandate. Rather than enhancing the public's understanding of human rights, the museum affirms what visitors already know and discourages any emotional engagement with difficult histories, specifically genocides and mass atrocities.

Remembrance:

Roger Simon's writing on remembrance pedagogy defines remembrance as practices that make it possible to engage with traces of the past, including how these histories are shaped and reproduced in various forms such as stories, photographs, songs, objects, and monuments.<sup>23</sup> Simon believes that remembrance practices hold the possibility for transformative learning where "words and images not only bear witness to specific histories of violence and violation, but are given over as a difficult inheritance to those called to receive it."<sup>24</sup> This transformative learning is evoked by what Simon terms "the touch of the past" through which practices of remembrance can influence the way the past is made present.

To be touched by the past is neither a metaphor for simply being emotionally moved by another's story nor a traumatic repetition of the past reproduced and re-experienced as present. Quite differently, the touch of the past signals a recognition of an encounter with difficult knowledge that may initiate a de-phasing of the terms on which the stories of others settle into one's experience.<sup>25</sup>

It appears that difficult knowledge and remembrance are intrinsically linked through Simon's definition of "the touch of the past." Engaging with difficult knowledge is a key aspect of remembrance practices and, due to this relationship, remembrance becomes central to my discussion of the CMHR's avoidance of difficult knowledge in the second chapter of my thesis.

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<sup>23</sup> Roger Simon, *The Touch of the Past: Remembrance, Learning, and Ethics*, New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005, 3.

<sup>24</sup> Roger Simon, *The Touch of the Past*, 4.

<sup>25</sup> Roger Simon, *The Touch of the Past*, 10.

Having defined the key terms of the thesis, I now return to my opening argument.  
What can memorial museums teach us about curating difficult knowledge?



## Chapter 1

### 1 Museum Case Studies: Memorializing Genocide

This first chapter begins with several case studies from museums and memorials that deal with curating or memorializing human rights abuse. The first section broadly considers the diversity of memorial and human rights museums globally, referencing important examples to give a sense of their scope. The second section discusses Holocaust memorialization across Poland, with special emphasis on the sites of the six major death camps that were built during the Second World War. The chapter culminates with an analysis of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum (USHMM) in Washington, DC. In this final section, I also discuss some of the ongoing debate over whether or not Canada needs a Holocaust memorial, touching on how the Canadian Museum for Human Rights (CMHR) would arise from this dispute.

I begin by presenting the legacy and standards for Memorial and Holocaust museums to foreground how such sites utilize remembrance practices to bring histories of trauma into the present. In this chapter, I set out the human rights pedagogies that are present in memorial museums and argue that these museums educate about human rights and genocide in more specific and appropriate forms than the CMHR. Understanding how remembrance practices and human rights pedagogies function in memorial museums will be important to my arguments regarding the CMHR in the second chapter. It is my belief that memorial museums more actively engage viewers with difficult knowledge and continue to lead the way in developing pedagogy about genocide and human rights issues. While the CMHR has made every attempt to distance itself from being defined as another memorial museum, I argue that this has the paradoxical effect of undermining the museum's attempts to fully educate about and remember genocide.

## 1.1 Global Human Rights

“We can not change our past; We can only learn from what has been lived. This is our responsibility and our challenge.”<sup>26</sup> –Chilean President, Michelle Bachelet, 2017

The diversity and rise of memorials, monuments, and human rights museums in all corners of the world indicates a shift that has taken place in the focus of museums since the 1970s. Most recently in 2010, the International Council of Museums, a global network of museums and museum professionals, adopted the Cultural Diversity Charter. This charter “calls on museums worldwide to recognize all forms of biological and cultural diversity in their policies and programs. It also exhorts museums to continue to work toward establishing inclusive approaches to addressing cultural diversity.”<sup>27</sup> While the charter is first and foremost about inclusivity in the museum, discussions around tolerance and reconciliation can partly account for the onset and growth in human rights museology. Principle four in the charter is *Peace and Community Building*, which encourages museums to “promote the sense of place and identity of diverse peoples through appreciating their multiple inheritances — natural and cultural, tangible and intangible, movable and immovable — and fostering a shared vision inspired by the spirit of reconciliation through intercultural and intergenerational dialogue.”<sup>28</sup> The increasing emphasis on cultural diversity and inclusive practices among global museums is surely reflected in the rise of human rights museology and human rights museums.

To clarify, Jennifer Orange and Jennifer Carter differentiate between human rights museums, which are institutions that frame human rights at the core of their mandates, and human rights museology, which more broadly recognizes the potential for any museum to promote human rights principles at the local, national, and international

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<sup>26</sup> "Exposición Permanente." Museo de la Memoria y los Derechos Humanos. Accessed January 03, 2017. <http://ww3.museodelamemoria.cl/exposicion-permanente/>.

<sup>27</sup> Jennifer A. Orange, and Jennifer J. Carter. “It’s time to pause and reflect: Museums and human rights.” *Curator: The Museum Journal* 55, 3 (2012): 260

<sup>28</sup> “ICOM Cultural Diversity Charter”, *International Council of Museums, 2010*, [http://inclusivemuseum.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/04/ICOM\\_Cultural\\_Diversity\\_Charter.pdf](http://inclusivemuseum.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/04/ICOM_Cultural_Diversity_Charter.pdf)

levels.<sup>29</sup> Human rights museums, such as the CMHR, are influenced by ideas of human rights that are set out by the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Proclaimed by the UN General Assembly in Paris on December 10, 1948, the declaration set out fundamental human rights that are to be universally protected and has since been translated to over 500 languages.<sup>30</sup> The document arose directly as the result of two world wars, to promote social progress and to create better standards of freedom protection. I argue that human rights museology may promote respect for diversity and human dignity without exclusively promoting a universal human rights narrative. Whereas, human rights museums often rely too heavily on concepts of universal human rights, which can be misleading.

First, modern consensus of universal human rights suggests that human rights are equal rights, meaning that they are possessed by all humans equally. They are also believed to be innate or inborn, suggesting that humans acquire them at birth. Universal human rights are also thought to be inalienable, which means they cannot be given or taken away.<sup>31</sup> Modern universal human rights discourse, as David Stamos suggests, is “simply an expression of normative values, a kind of shorthand for what people should think and do.”<sup>32</sup> However, universal human rights narratives do not account for the fact that human rights are most often made, not found, and will vary across time and culture. Thus, the nature of human rights is much more complicated than a universal concept of human rights can encapsulate. While one might assume that a human rights museum would be the best avenue for educating about human rights, I posit that these museums may perpetuate a universal human rights narrative.<sup>33</sup> Alternatively, the human rights

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<sup>29</sup> Orange and Carter, “It’s Time to Pause and Reflect”, 261

<sup>30</sup> "Universal Declaration of Human Rights." United Nations. Accessed April 2, 2017. <http://www.un.org/en/universal-declaration-human-rights/>.

<sup>31</sup> David Stamos, *The Myth of Universal Human Rights: Its Origin, History, and Explanation, Along with a More Human Way*, London: Paradigm Publishers (2013): 19.

<sup>32</sup> David Stamos, *The Myth of Universal Human Rights*: 2.

<sup>33</sup> See page (44) in thesis for full definition of top down human rights

issues that can be negotiated in other museums such as memorial museums are more specific and open up discussions about how Western human rights pedagogies have little impact on preventing present and future atrocities. This section briefly introduces a wide range of museums and memorial projects from around the world. The chosen museums and memorials are all dedicated to very *specific* events, making them a useful starting point and counterpoint for a museum with a *broad* mandate like the CMHR. As Orange and Carter point out, museums that are born out of a direct response to specific human rights violations have a clear initiative whereas museums like the CMHR have struggled with narrowing the focus of their curatorial mandate.<sup>34</sup>

There are two other major Human Rights museums in the world besides the CMHR, one in Santiago, Chile and the other in Osaka, Japan. Museo de la Memoria y los Derechos Humanos (Museum of Memory and Human Rights) in Santiago narrates the events that took place in Chile between September 11, 1973 and 1990. The museum serves as both museum and memorial, focused chiefly on the unjust events that took place under military dictatorship over the course of almost two decades, but is also linked to global ideas of human rights. The Osaka Human Rights Museum in Japan, better known as Liberty Museum, emerged from the liberation movement of the Buraku people (members of a formerly outcast group). Since its inception, the Liberty Museum has made issues of discrimination central to its mission, especially histories of marginalization within Japan.<sup>35</sup> More recently, the museum has expanded its focus to reach a more multicultural and global audience.

While these two museums are both technically human rights museums, their frameworks are indebted to memorial museums. The Museum of Memory and Human Rights memorializes the victims of human rights abuses under Augusto Pinochet's rule from 1973-1990. The Liberty Museum commemorates the discrimination and abuses

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<sup>34</sup> Jennifer A. Orange, and Jennifer J. Carter, "It's time to pause and reflect: Museums and human rights." *Curator: The Museum Journal* 55, 3 (2012): 261

<sup>35</sup> Eika Tai, "Local and global efforts for human rights education: A case from the Osaka human rights museum." *The International Journal of Human Rights* 14, 5 (2010): 772

against the Buraku people. While both museums define as human rights museums, memorialization and remembrance play a key role in educating the public about human rights injustice. This differentiates these two museums from the Canadian Museum for Human Rights since the CMHR attempts to broadly teach about the history of human rights while resisting any forms of remembrance specific to Canada. I speculate that the CMHR may have been a more successful undertaking if it had instead chosen to commemorate a specific human rights abuse. For example, the museum itself sits on Indigenous land and yet the exhibitions avoid any mention of settler colonial genocide, which significantly undercuts the credibility of the museum's mandate. To explore this point, it is first necessary to look at memorial museums.

Traditionally, memorial museums are most often situated on the very land where the mass atrocities they are commemorating were committed, adding to their aura and sanctity.<sup>36</sup> Majdanek concentration camp memorial is often cited as the first memorial to genocide, as it was transformed right after it was liberated in July, 1944. The memorial landscape that grew up in Poland after World War II set a precedent and model for the genocide memorials that have followed in the past seventy years. The Tuol Sleng Museum of Genocidal Crimes in Cambodia, for example, was immediately transformed into a museum after the discovery of the Tuol Sleng prison and Choeung killing field in 1979. The site was quickly labeled the 'Asian Auschwitz' for its adaptation of Polish memorial practices.<sup>37</sup>

Following the genocide in Rwanda, many Catholic churches were transformed into national memorials elucidating the connection between religious institutions and mass slaughter. In Rwanda, schools and churches were sites of some of the largest

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<sup>36</sup> My use of the term aura is closely aligned with Walter Benjamin's writing on aura, art, and authenticity and his essay "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction"

<sup>37</sup> Caitlin Brown, and Chris Millington. "The Memory of the Cambodian Genocide: The Tuol Sleng Genocide Museum". *History Compass* 13, 2 (2015): 31

massacres when Tutsi families fled there seeking refuge.<sup>38</sup> These sites were originally left as they were found with bones, bodies, and clothing scattered about, but they have since been cleaned and transformed into memorials by locals and survivors. Amy Sodaro suggests that although these spaces are occasionally visited by international groups or people from other provinces in Rwanda, “the memorials are principally the cemeteries of those killed in the genocide and their purpose is mourning first, warning against genocide second. Their display of bones and bodies is also completely unlike Western forms of memorialization, which typically do not display human remains.”<sup>39</sup> These memorials to genocide prioritize remembrance but their raw and unadorned display of mass extermination teaches about human rights abuse in a way that is both immediate and affective. There is no need for lengthy museum panels or photography displays because the material evidence is visible and the sacred ground of these traumas is under the visitor’s feet. Janet Jacobs proposes that in many of these post-genocide cultures “places of death and destruction have been transformed and redefined as religious spaces, hallowed ground where the sacred and the profane are brought together in a spiritual reconstruction of a death-strewn landscape.”<sup>40</sup>

Museums of suffering and slavery are another form of thanatourism (i.e. tourism related to death and tragedy) that have surfaced. Two particularly eminent museums commemorating suffering and death are the Maison des Esclaves, Senegal, and Robben Island Museum, Cape Town. Built in 1776 and established as a museum in 1962, the Maison des Esclaves (or the House of Slaves) originally served as a holding cell for African slaves en route to the Americas and elsewhere. Robben Island, located off the coast of Cape Town, housed political prisoners and exiles for over four hundred years and is infamous for being the holding place of Nelson Mandela during the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

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<sup>38</sup> Amy Sodaro, “Politics of the Past: Remembering the Rwandan Genocide at the Kigali Memorial Center” in Eric Lehrer’s *Curating Difficult Knowledge: violent pasts in public places*, Online: Palgrave Macmillan (2011): 75-76

<sup>39</sup> Amy Sodaro, “Politics of the Past”: 76.

<sup>40</sup> Janet Jacobs, “Sacred Space and Collective Memory: Memorializing Genocide at Sites of Terror,” *Sociology of Religion* 72, no. 2 (2011): 164

Both the Maison des Esclaves and Robben Island are remote locations that are quite difficult to reach, which indicates the importance of memorializing the spaces where the torments were carried out. The grounds on which terrorist attacks have taken place likewise have become sanctified, as can be seen with the Atocha Train Station Memorial, Madrid and the World Trade Center Memorial, New York.

These memorials to suffering, slavery, and the victims of terrorism speak volumes about a long history of unequal human rights and prejudice based on race and religion. A narrative of universal human rights (such as the one presented in the CMHR) largely ignores these divides and locates tragedies as a necessary part of a larger story of triumph. I argue that actively resisting universal human rights narratives in favour of engaging with practices of remembrance for individual cases of abuse promotes a better understanding of how and why these events took place, guarding against repetition in the present or future.

## 1.2 Understanding Space and Place: Poland's Memorial Landscape

This section introduces Holocaust memorials, museums, and monuments that I encountered on a fourth year intensive research course in Poland in May of 2016 under the supervision of genocide scholar Amanda Grzyb and thus employs a narrative approach describing my own personal experience at each of the locations. First, I present the Holocaust memorials at the six major death camps in Poland—Auschwitz-Birkenau, Majdanek, Treblinka, Belzec, Sobibor, and Chelmno. Then I bring in memorial projects and museums that emphasize a longstanding Jewish history in Poland rather than viewing Jewish history through the lens of the Holocaust. I have selected as many diverse examples of Holocaust memorialization and education as possible but even so, they cannot fully encapsulate the range of forms that memory restoration has taken in Europe. Within the limits of my thesis, this section provides a small sample of strategies in Poland to show how varied memorialization practices are across just one country and in response to one genocide.

Moreover, my intent here is to show how inherently complex genocide is. Each site has a different history, all intrinsically linked to the broader history of the Holocaust. Further, within each site, there were people (both victims and perpetrators) who had lives, families, and stories separate from the Holocaust. The seams and ties that bind all of these histories within a greater narrative are practically impossible to make sense of. The mass scale of genocide is a difficult reality to shed light on in a memorial or museum. These examples provide a glimpse into the different approaches memorials use to educate and memorialize. I spent two weeks travelling Poland, visiting over 12 sites and at each site something new would come to the forefront. There were so many layers to peel back and even after two weeks I left knowing that there was still plenty I had not uncovered. It came as a bit of a shock to then to discover that the CMHR attempts to tackle the Holocaust in one gallery and in a succeeding gallery, other genocides are given only one wall panel each. This section of my thesis sets out the standards for educating about the Holocaust, a standard that I do not believe the CMHR has achieved. I expand on this in the second chapter when I discuss the Holocaust and genocide permanent exhibitions at the CMHR.

Undoubtedly, Auschwitz has come to define the global memory of the Holocaust. In fact, the site is so busy now with tourists that you cannot enter without a reserved tour. Once inside, visitors are led by guides through several of the barracks, which have been transformed into national pavilions—one of which is devoted entirely to the Jewish experience. The red brick barracks look surprisingly familiar to traditional low-rise apartment buildings, and with lush green grass, gardens and mature trees you can almost forget where you are. It is only when you look up and notice the guard towers looming above that you are brought back to the reality of the place. James Young writes of the shocking impact of the Auschwitz and Majdanek camps that still stand as undeniable evidence of a mass extermination machine:

Guard towers, barbed wire, barracks, and crematoria — abstracted elsewhere, even mythologized — here stand palpably intact. Nothing but airy time seems to mediate between the visitor and past realities, which are not merely re-presented by these artifacts but present in them. For as literal fragments of events, these



ruins tend to collapse the distinction between themselves and the memory of events they would evoke.<sup>41</sup>

During my own visit, walking through the gas chamber in crematorium I at Auschwitz caused the most visceral reaction in myself and among my peers. To stand in a cold, dark cement room with the knowledge that this was the place where hundreds of thousands of people were gassed to death is the most disconcerting feeling. I walked through as quickly as possible, feeling like the air was tightening and the walls were closing in on me. That feeling made the reality of the events at Auschwitz snap into focus. To stand where they had stood and died is an impression that no museum could ever replicate. That is the power of place.

The massive scale of the nearby Birkenau concentration camp, the largest of the Auschwitz camps, makes clearer the enormity of the Holocaust. To tour and walk the perimeter of the camp requires an entire day. Like Auschwitz I, many of the barracks here have been converted into educational pavilions, but the majority of the barracks and crematoria were actually destroyed by the Germans in the final weeks of the war. Most of the ground can be considered a mass grave and the ominous presence is felt by visitors. Many people come to pray and meditate on the train tracks, and at the crematoria and gas chambers. The mass tourism to Auschwitz-Birkenau has been widely criticized for providing both a desensitized and sensational visitor experience. Britta Timm Knudson offers a constructivist and relational identities perspective in understanding tourist behavior, acknowledging that “tourists and people in general are also bodies who understand sites and events at a bodily and sensuous level.”<sup>42</sup>

In Knudson’s essay on thanatourism, she proposes that if:

Auschwitz is to be understood as a traditional in situ museum, Birkenau is more

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<sup>41</sup> James E Young, “The Texture of Memory: Holocaust Memorials and Meaning” *Holocaust and Genocide Studies* 4, no. 1 (1989): 64

<sup>42</sup> Britta Timm Knudson “Thanatourism: Witnessing Difficult Pasts” *Tourism Studies* 11, no. 1 (2011): 56

like an in situ landscape. In the Auschwitz part of the memorial site, the encoding and interactive modes both tell and show: a great deal of material evidence in the form of relics and remnants is on display, and the obligatory guided tours although using different strategies strongly encode the visitor to distance herself from this regime. In the Birkenau part of the memorial site, the scarred landscape itself offers a platform for communication with the past. The mode is performative because the visitor strolls around and gets the experience of the place in a quite traditional phenomenological manner.<sup>43</sup>

A similar type of witnessing occurs at Majdanek. Liberated in July 1944, the Majdanek camp was the first memorial museum of its kind. The camp appears mostly untouched since the war: all buildings are still in situ, but the landscape has healed, replenishing itself, and several exhibitions have been added inside the dormitories along with three imposing monuments. The first Soviet monument greets visitors as they drive up to the camp, but I am much more interested in the mausoleum that was erected near the very back of the property. The mausoleum, which is covered by a grand oval-shaped structure, contains the ashes of the 350,000 victims (most of them Jewish) who were gassed and cremated at the adjacent crematorium building. Janet Jacobs asserts that because the ashes are visible and accessible to the viewer, the memorial conveys the reality of the lives lost in a way that is unachievable by any other Holocaust memorial site in Europe.<sup>44</sup> These literal fragments and ashes of the victims on display are part of the aura at Majdanek. How have the sites that were demolished during the war dealt with making memory of place felt, understood, and remembered?

At Treblinka all traces of the camp were bulldozed and planted over by the Germans to conceal its existence. The vast Polish landscape simultaneously obfuscates this site (as well as other camp sites such as Belzec and Sobibor), which explains why

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<sup>43</sup> Britta Timm Knudson, "Thanatourism: Witnessing Difficult Pasts", 64

<sup>44</sup> Janet Jacobs "From the Profane to the Sacred: Ritual and Mourning at Sites of Terror and Violence" *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, 43: 3 (2004): 313

most tourists do not explore beyond Auschwitz-Birkenau. Treblinka was only in operation from July 1942 until October 1943, but approximately 800,000 people were murdered here, most of whom were Jewish. Visitors are now greeted at the site by a small museum that details the history of the camp. The memorial itself is a short walk through the forest that leads to a clearing with 17,000 jagged stones that rise up from the ground. The symbolic graveyard features a stone for every Jewish community that prisoners came from, thousands of which are engraved with the town name. In the center is a towering monument with a menorah carved near the top. The plaque near the base reads “never again” in Yiddish, French, German, Russian, and Polish.

When I visited Treblinka I entered the field of the memorial by myself. Travelling with fifteen other people, this was a rare moment that I was alone. Yet, as I walked among the gravestones I felt that this space was irrevocably connected to the 800,000 people buried beneath my feet. The configuration at first appeared abstract but the memorial in fact maps out where the crematoria once stood, as well as the location of the mass graves. The calculated design both directly and obliquely indicates the way the landscape has been scarred and healed over. As Laurie Beth Clark proposes, “over and above our general obligation to remember, there is something we believe specifically about the power of place to invoke and sustain memory that makes us more likely to preserve the actual sites of atrocities for special uses. Many people believe that the dead or their spirits inhere in or revisit places: land, architecture, trees.”<sup>45</sup> I entered into these spaces technically for research purposes but the value of space and place in connecting to memory rapidly came to shape my understanding of and connection to these memorials.

Another example is provided by the Belzec death camp, which has a similar history to Treblinka, but the memorialization of the grounds takes a quite different form. In 2004 the memorial to the death camp at Belzec, Poland opened to the public. David Harris of the American Jewish Committee proclaimed at the dedication of the memorial that Belzec is:

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<sup>45</sup> Laurie Beth Clark, “Ethical Spaces: Ethics and Propriety in Trauma Tourism” in *Death tourism: Disaster Sites as recreational Landscape*. Seagull books. India (2014)

‘a place at once sacred and accursed’. He talked of those present at the commemoration as being people ‘enveloped by haunting memories, excruciating pain and overwhelming loss’ yet noted that, like themselves, the memorial itself could play an intercessory role in proving the site for ‘affirming an unshakable resolve to build and defend a more humane world’.<sup>46</sup>

Harris declared that the space was a place of public witnessing and consciousness, that simultaneously educates about the events that took place on the ground during 1942.<sup>47</sup> Although the camp was in operation for just ten-months between February and December 1942, it was the first camp to use gas chambers as a form of systematic extermination. Belzec was responsible for the deaths of 500,000 people. Like Treblinka, once it had served its function it was demolished and planted over. The challenge again here was deciding how to commemorate the space and events that had taken place when there was no evidence left. It was not until 1994 that discussions began in consultation with the U.S. Memorial Holocaust Museum to commemorate the site. Following a design competition and selection by an international panel of judges in 1997, plans were put in motion to go forward with a design by Andrzej Solyga, Zdzislaw Pidek and Marcin Roszczyk.

The memorial features a prominent slash in the landscape through which visitors descend toward a memorial wall. The entire ground is covered in grey-coloured inorganic materials and visitors are led around the perimeter walkway that identifies the names of the Jewish communities from which the victims at Belzec had come. The memorial covers the entire ground of the original death camp, much of which is mass graves. The walkways that guide the visitor down the ramp (meant to replicate the horrors of the victims’ walk down to the gas chambers),<sup>48</sup> and around the boundaries of the camp,

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<sup>46</sup> Barbara Buntman, “Tourism and Tragedy: The Memorial at Belzec, Poland” *International Journal of Heritage Studies* 14, no.5 (2008): 424

<sup>47</sup> *ibid*

<sup>48</sup> *ibid*, 432

signify the respect and sanctity for the space. This minimalist approach bears resemblance to Treblinka— except where Treblinka invites mourners to walk among the graves, Belzec marks the ground as sacred and strictly off-limits.

The memorial design contests that were responsible for commemorating the death camps of Belzec, Treblinka, Majdanek, and Auschwitz-Birkenau have resulted in immensely unique experiences at each of the sites. Lack of funding and low attendance numbers at the other two Polish death camps of Sobibor and Chelmno have resulted in less fully realized memorial projects. Even seventy years after the end of the Holocaust, Poland is still working to reconstruct Polish and Jewish history.

James Young is particularly critical of and brings awareness in his writing to the trouble with museums and memorials that solely locate Jewish history in the Holocaust. While the Holocaust is essential to memorializing projects across Poland, Jewish history in Poland existed before and after the events of the Holocaust that have unfortunately come to define it. During our travels throughout Poland, we also sought out museums and projects that were countering a focus on the Holocaust by attempting to uncover fragments of a longer Jewish heritage in Poland, one that existed long before the war and that has persisted since the Holocaust. The Galicia Jewish Museum, for example, is located in Kazimierz, the formerly lively Jewish district of Krakow, Poland. The museum features a contemporary photography exhibition called *Traces of Memory* that unveils a long Jewish history and contributions to the fabric of Polish culture. The museum's objectives are "to challenge the stereotypes and misconceptions typically associated with the Jewish past in Poland and to educate both Poles and Jews about their own histories, whilst encouraging them to think about the future."<sup>49</sup> The exhibition displays colour digital photographs by Chris Schwarz from all over the Galicia region that attempt to pull these sites out of the past and into contemporary consciousness.

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<sup>49</sup> "Museum." Galicia Jewish Museum. Accessed January 08, 2017. <http://www.galiciajewishmuseum.org/en/museum>.

A similar initiative has been underway since the 1990s at Grodzka Gate Theatre NN, a local government cultural institution that happens to be located at the gate that once marked the passage between the Christian and Jewish districts of Lublin. Those involved in the project were initially unaware of the history of the Jews of Lublin, and that the gate leading to new roads, parking lots, and lawns had been built over former Jewish houses, streets, and synagogues—a lost ‘Jewish Atlantis’ as they call it. Since then Grodzka Gate Theatre has been a center of education, workshops, and activities focused on remembering the town’s Jewish heritage and commemorating victims of the Holocaust. Archival and oral history initiatives are ongoing and are accessible to the public within the rather unconventional museum/theatre building.

Other traces of memory are likewise enmeshed within the architecture of cities and towns. Plaques of commemoration often mark where former city ghettos used to exist. In Krakow, part of the original Jewish ghetto wall still stands in place. Small memorials are placed at forests that were sites of mass shootings. Along the routes of the death marches, cemeteries have put up monuments and headstones dedicated to those who died nearby on the marches. We travelled part of these routes in Galicia, four hours by bus, stopping at several of the cemeteries to leave candles, a common ritual for those who have lost loved ones.

The recent opening of POLIN: Museum of the History of Polish Jews even more fully realizes the vision that James Young was hoping for in his writing almost two decades ago:

Until POLIN Museum of the History of Polish Jews opened its doors to the public in 2013, people who wished to honor those who had perished went to the Monument to the Ghetto Heroes and remembered how they died. Today, we can honor them, and those who came before and after, by remembering how they lived – at the museum. Therein lies the transformative potential of POLIN

Museum and its core exhibition.<sup>50</sup>

The museum is built in Warsaw's former Jewish district, which was infamously turned into a ghetto during the war. POLIN's core exhibition immerses the visitor in the thousand-year history of Polish Jews, beginning with their arrival as merchants in the Middle Ages right up until present day. This ambitious exhibition is the culmination of work by over 120 international scholars. The museum's mission "to recall and preserve the memory of the history of Polish Jews, contributing to the mutual understanding and respect amongst Poles and Jews as well as other societies of Europe and the world"<sup>51</sup> sets it apart from many Holocaust and Jewish museums that have come before it. Nevertheless, the museum's location in what was the Warsaw Ghetto is a constant reminder of an exceptionally dark time in a longer standing Polish Jewish history.

As can be seen from these selected case studies, memorials and museums in Poland are often partly legitimized by the sacred ground on which they stand. The spaces and places that I have discussed in this section are sites of trauma and death on an unimaginable scale. The form and message of these memorials often pays tribute to the very specific events that took place there and to those who died. Clearly, forms of remembrance and memorialization in Poland are tied to values of sanctity of place. In the succeeding section, I discuss how remembrance practices are taken up at a memorial museum that is removed from the actual sites wherein these atrocities occurred. Through my analysis of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum (Washington, DC) I endeavor to demonstrate how a museum may strike a balance between educating about and remembering the victims of genocide. While place and space can contribute enormously to memorialization, practices of remembrance only hold the possibility for transformative learning when individuals recognize their encounter with difficult knowledge and are able and willing to work through it. Memorial museums are only a

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<sup>50</sup> Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett "Inside the Museum: Curating between hope and despair: POLIN Museum of the history of Polish Jews." *East European Jewish Affairs* 45, no. 2-3 (2015): 217

<sup>51</sup> "Mission and Vision." POLIN Museum of the History of Polish Jews. Accessed January 08, 2017. <http://www.polin.pl/en/about-museum/mission-and-vision>.

vehicle through which transformative learning may take place.

### 1.3 Genocide in the Museum: The United States Holocaust Memorial Museum

Since its dedication in 1993, The United States Holocaust Memorial Museum (USHMM) in Washington, DC has stood as arguably the most thorough examination of the Holocaust by a museum outside of Europe. The USHMM is a narrative history museum that builds in intensity as the visitor is guided through three major periods of the Holocaust: The Nazi Assault (1933-39), the “Final Solution” (1940-45), and the Last Chapter (from 1945 onward). This approach was the outcome of a five-year design-process with an emphasis on the strong educational potential of a narrative history museum. The goal was to create exhibitions that succeeded each other in building-block fashion, with a continuous story line. The hope was that a well-constructed narrative museum would affect visitors on a more emotional level through processes of identification, as they projected themselves into the story, thus allowing them to experience it like insiders while remaining at a safe distance as outsiders.<sup>52</sup>

In this section, I use the USHMM as a case study of a memorial museum with a narrative exhibition strategy that engages with difficult knowledge and remembrance as a point of comparison and contrast to my second chapter analysis of the Canadian Museum for Human Rights. I argue that the USHMM is both educational and commemorative, whereas representations of genocide at the CMHR are strictly educational. For memorial museums that are removed from the actual sites of atrocity to be transformative, they must prioritize remembrance practices. As Paul Williams argues in his book *Memorial Museums: The Global Rush to Commemorate Atrocities*, surviving objects and photographs can be used as truth telling evidence. Both the CMHR and the USHMM rely heavily on photographs, story telling, and careful display of very few material objects, yet the two museums are vastly different. The USHMM, like the CMHR, faced certain

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<sup>52</sup> Michael Berenbaum and the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, *The World Must Know: The History of the Holocaust as told in the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum*. 1<sup>st</sup> ed. Boston: Little, Brown. 1993: 49



struggles in the planning process out of the “genuine fear that the museum might be too horrible, and that no one would come.”<sup>53</sup> My summary of the USHMM here describes those struggles and the curatorial/design decisions that were made, resulting in the museum as we know it today. Most of my discussion is drawn from Edward T Linenthal’s *Preserving Memory: The Struggle to Create America’s Holocaust Museum*.

It is worth noting that Israel Asper’s original vision for the CMHR grew from multiple visits to the USHMM. Winnipeg-based anti-Semitism scholar Catherine Chatterley shows in her article “Canada’s struggle with Holocaust Memorialization” how Canada was one of the only Western countries following WWII that did not build a National memorial to the Holocaust.<sup>54</sup> Consequently, in 2011 a bill was passed to pledge the building of such a monument somewhere in Ontario. Arguments were made for its inclusion in the New War Museum but it would not come to pass.<sup>55</sup> However, Israel Asper’s Human Rights and Holocaust Studies program (established in ’97) included a trip to the USHMM every year. “It was this program that stimulated Asper’s desire to build a Canadian version of the Washington museum in Winnipeg. Instead of sending Canadian children to Washington every year, the schools would send them to Winnipeg to see exhibits on the Holocaust and on their own national history—both its human rights failures and successes.”<sup>56</sup> Evidently, the earliest lobbying for the CMHR and its inception came from a desire for Canada to have its own Holocaust Memorial Museum. Thus, the CMHR is greatly indebted to the USHMM and so I discuss the USHMM before finally arriving at my analysis of the Winnipeg museum. Although Asper originally envisioned it

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<sup>53</sup> Edward T Linenthal, *Preserving memory: the struggle to create America’s Holocaust museum*, New York: Columbia University Press. 2001, 192

<sup>54</sup> Catherine Chatterley, “Canada's struggle with holocaust memorialization: The war museum controversy, ethnic identity politics, and the Canadian museum for human rights.” *Holocaust and Genocide Studies* 29, 2 (2015): 189

<sup>55</sup> Kirsty Robertson, *Tear Gas Epiphanies: Protest, Culture, Museums*. Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen’s University Press, forthcoming, np.

<sup>56</sup> Catherine Chatterley, “Canada's struggle with holocaust memorialization: The war museum controversy, ethnic identity politics, and the Canadian museum for human rights.” 190

as a Holocaust museum, the Canadian museum would end up with a much broader human rights initiative. Similar to the CMHR, the USHMM would face many debates during the planning process which are the focus of my discussion in this section.

Initially, some of the most obvious external characteristics that have come to define memorial museums include: monumental architecture; building design and exhibition design that work in tandem; dim lighting to create mood and atmosphere; contemplative spaces for remembrance and commemoration. In the USHMM, the interior mood is important to mediate the narrative set up by the design team. “The mood of the exhibit space offered not only aesthetic but moral direction. Visitors are to take this journey with a heart and soul ‘heavy and dark,’ like the space itself.”<sup>57</sup> On the third floor for example, where visitors enter the exhibition dedicated to the death camps, the space becomes constrictive, dark and tight. The walls are left unpainted, pipes exposed, with no visible escape. Visitors are immersed in the journey, following the narrative from “their normal lives into ghettos, out of ghettos onto trains, from trains to camps, within the pathways of the camp, until finally to the end.”<sup>58</sup> The idea was that if the museum could take visitors on the same journey as those who died in the camps then they might be able to begin to empathize with the victims.

The USHMM itself is built in glass, steel, and stone to emphasize the permanency of the story. The mood of the interior set up by the architecture offers visitors no visceral relief from the intense and emotional journey that the design team has put in place. However, the tower exhibits were designed as transitional spaces between the third and fourth floor large exhibitions. From the towers, visitors can see the Hall of Witness with the names of victims and lost communities. Adrian Dannatt, an architectural critic speculates that the bridges offer:

a double sigh, of relief from the pressures of history on either side and of sadness

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<sup>57</sup> Edward T Linenthal, *Preserving memory: the struggle to create America's Holocaust museum*, New York: Columbia University Press. 2001, 170

<sup>58</sup> *ibid*

at the tale that continues before and after. It is only from these bridges that the full crookedness and distorted proportions of the main hall below can be understood... a distorted, ruptured structure, just as the classical foundations of fascist society seen from the overview of history appear as barbarism, insanity, chaos.<sup>59</sup>

The architecture in this case allows visitors a chance to come up for air from the depths of the Holocaust narrative.

Secondly, the internal values and practices of memorial museums must strike a balance between educational and commemorative approaches. My second chapter uncovers how the CMHR relies strictly on an educational approach, dismissing the importance of commemorative practices, a methodology that I view as extremely unethical when it comes to representations of genocide. In contrast, at the USHMM there is a strong emphasis on personalizing the story through faces and artifacts, and shaping the boundaries of memory by both remembering and teaching about enduring issues. The exhibits must at once respect and honour victims and survivors while also expressing the weight of the Holocaust story to a general public. Like most memorial museums in Poland, the USHMM does not shy away from the horrific aspects or imagery of the Holocaust. This is despite the fact that the difficult content of genocide gave rise to several debates throughout the planning process about the boundaries of horror and what was appropriate to display inside a museum. As Edward Linenthal notes, “the desire to commemorate occasionally clashed with the desire to present an accurate and moving historical narrative.”<sup>60</sup> The following analysis brings up several debates that played out prior to the opening, showing how the museum chose to handle them.

The first issue I would like to raise is that of artifacts of resistance (i.e., objects made, hidden, or stolen by prisoners). While photographs play a dominant role in the

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<sup>59</sup> *ibid*, 168-169

<sup>60</sup> Edward T Linenthal, *Preserving memory: the struggle to create America's Holocaust museum*, New York: Columbia University Press. 2001, 192

USHMM's narrative, small artifacts (approximately 1000 on loan from Auschwitz) throughout the exhibitions were chosen to bring each segment to life. In a design meeting on June 20, 1991, a discussion arose about whether or not it was appropriate to display objects made by inmates in the camps.<sup>61</sup> There was already a presence of artifacts that either belonged to or were taken from prisoners but "some members of the design team thought that individual human stories had been submerged in favor of the grand narrative of the Holocaust. Permanent-exhibition coordinator Ann Farrington believed that the design team was 'ruthless' about using 'hard material,' rather than incorporating small artifacts to tell 'poignant stories.'"<sup>62</sup>

Common practice among Polish memorial museums is certainly to foreground a grand narrative where inmates are diminished to a single number, insignificant, and lost in the mass atrocity of degradation and killing. As noted earlier, this approach provides a deeply affective learning experience. To give equal weight to the resistance and the individuality of inmates risks undermining the narrative of destruction. As Martin Smith notes, "There was more resistance than many people know about, so maybe it's right to highlight it in some way, but I think you could go away and feel that there were lots of people fighting... It's not so."<sup>63</sup> Ultimately, the decision was made at the USHMM to include only a small number of personal items, following a similar exhibition strategy as that found at Auschwitz and Majdanek. In the third floor audio theatre, survivors describe daily life in the camps with stories of horror, brutality, illness, starvation, and death. This is one point where forms of resistance might have come forth, but survivors describe acts of kindness not "as resistance, but momentary aberrations that provided psychic nourishment: 'Many remember moments of love and hope that sustained them in the midst of so much death and destruction.'"<sup>64</sup> The use of only a small number of artifacts is

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<sup>61</sup> *ibid*, 190

<sup>62</sup> *ibid*, 190

<sup>63</sup> *ibid*, 192

<sup>64</sup> *ibid*, 192

common across memorial museums, often because so few objects remain. Paul Williams notes that “while the idea of objects ‘revealing the truth’ is an aspect of all memorial museums, it is an especially pertinent oppositional strategy in memorial museums detailing histories of harsh suppression. They aim to foil what the perpetrators sought to effect: *silence*.”<sup>65</sup>

Another issue that arose at USHMM meetings during the planning stage was over the appropriate context in which to display images of nudity. The museum has an extensive collection of violent and graphic photographs of nude victims, many of women, many of survivors and corpses at liberation, as well as a series documenting Nazi medical experiments. The main debate arose over what large image visitors would first encounter when they emerged into the Holocaust exhibition on the fourth floor. There was lobbying for an image “of the landscape of a camp after liberation, with shocked American troops and emaciated survivors ‘hinting’ at the horror.”<sup>66</sup> Others argued for a more explicit image from Buchenwald of corpses piled onto a wagon with soldiers standing by and onlookers peering over the camp fence. Arnold Kramer justified that the Buchenwald photograph had “a ‘moral gravity’ that others did not. It revealed the grim faces of the liberators, and the guilty presence of bystanders.”<sup>67</sup> In the end, neither of these initially proposed images was chosen. Rather, when visitors exit the elevators on the fourth floor they are confronted by a photomural of “American troops looking numbly at charred human remains on a pyre, remains that were certainly visually less human—therefore perhaps less threatening—than the flesh-coloured corpses and faces at Buchenwald.”<sup>68</sup>

Ultimately, the issues surrounding photographs of nudity and horror that percolated throughout the conceptual planning phase came down to debates over

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<sup>65</sup> Paul Williams, *Memorial Museums: The Global Rush to Commemorate Atrocities*, New York: Berg Publishers. 2007: 27

<sup>66</sup> Edward T Linenthal, *Preserving memory: the struggle to create America’s Holocaust museum*, 193

<sup>67</sup> *ibid*, 194

<sup>68</sup> *ibid*, 194

judgment and taste in the museum's presentation of genocide. While some committee members, particularly survivors, believed that nudity should not be shown at all, most members agreed that in order to tell the story accurately some nudity was necessary but should be properly contextualized and visitors should be prepared. The final design included violent and graphic nude imagery on video-monitors that are hidden behind privacy walls. Thus, the images are concealed from children, and visitors must walk up to the walls and peer over to view the monitors. Such strategies ensure that such imagery is included but also respects the visitor's decision not to engage with some of the more horrific imagery, should they choose. Arnold Kramer regarded the museum's decision not to use the Buchenwald photograph and the inclusion of privacy walls as an attempt to soften the story. In his own words, he believed "We're building this to tell the story without softening it, and we can't expect this story to impinge on people's moral faculties if we don't give them the responsibility to grapple with the worst of it."<sup>69</sup> Perhaps, the greatest challenge in creating a memorial museum is finding the balance between commemorating while also educating about the difficult knowledge inherent in representations of genocide. Although Kramer's point resonates with me, the use of privacy walls in this case offered a way to tell the whole story while resisting a narrative that sensationalized abuse through dramatic imagery.

Commemorative priorities also further complicated the museum's portrayal of perpetrators and bystanders. In order to tell the whole history of the Holocaust, the museum rightly had to tell the story of the Nazis and of Hitler. However, as a commemorative museum there was also a desire to keep the museum space uncontaminated by the presence of murderers. Before the opening, several complaints were raised about the near absence of perpetrators in exhibits. "Yitzchak Mais, director of the Yad Vashem Historical Museum in Jerusalem, while walking through a model of the permanent exhibition with Michael Berenbaum in August 1991, was bothered that the Nazis appeared as a 'superhuman force that just took over,' as if, he said, 'there was a

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<sup>69</sup> *ibid*, 198

metaphysical evil that mysteriously killed the Jews.”<sup>70</sup> It became necessary to contextualize the role of police, Nazis, and bystanders. Rather than showing the faces of perpetrators in portrait form, they were depicted in action, and often enjoying their work. This depiction personalized the face of evil in the Holocaust story, underscoring the unsettling truth that the villains in this story were ordinary people. “The design team understood well the volatile issues involved: from deciding on who, in fact, were the most important groups of perpetrators to include, to picking appropriate locations for their photographs. The faces of the perpetrators offer visitors the opportunity to reflect on the moral choices made by ordinary people who were not victims.”<sup>71</sup>

Ultimately though, as a commemorative museum the priority was first and foremost telling the story of the victims and survivors of the Holocaust. When debates came to a head, it was always the wishes of the survivors that won out. One such example, and the last that I will raise, was the discussion over how or if to display nine kilograms of human hair that were shipped to the museum in Washington from Auschwitz. An agreement between the USHMM and the State Museum at Oswiecim (Auschwitz) allowed for personal items that had been confiscated upon arrival at the camp, along with twenty cans of Zyklon-B gas and a mass of human hair to be shipped overseas for display at the museum. Hair was collected from victims usually upon arrival or prior to gassing to be sold to a number of factories. After the Soviet Army liberated Auschwitz, nearly seven thousand kilos of human hair was discovered. The display of human hair in the Auschwitz museum is certainly a most unnerving and effective manner to make real the various forms by which the Nazis stripped prisoners of not only their personal belongings but also their identity. Smith and Appelbaum at the USHMM were quite moved by it and saw it as imperative to recreate a similar display in Washington.<sup>72</sup> The tragedy of the victims’ extermination did not end with their death, but continued with

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<sup>70</sup> *ibid*, 201

<sup>71</sup> *ibid*, 210

<sup>72</sup> *ibid*, 211

the auctioning off of their belongings and products of their bodies, which Appelbaum saw as vital to completing the story.

For years, there were many quite vocal objections to the planned display of hair at the USHMM. As fragments of human life with an innate sanctity it was argued that such relics of once living individuals belonged in a memorial setting, not a museum in the United States so far removed from the arena of Holocaust events. Museum consultant Alice Greenwald, and Susan Morgenstein, former curator and director of temporary exhibitions, put the issue succinctly when they wrote in 1989:

If the museum were situated at Auschwitz or Treblinka or Mauthausen; if it were the very site of the atrocities and the place of death of the victims, then the evidence of their degradation, manifest in the remaining hair, bones, and ashes would have validity. Here, in Washington, DC, that validity does not carry over. Human remains are not a commodity to be shipped, transported, catalogued, and crafted for dramatic display; we have an obligation—morally—to respect these materials, whose most meaningful placement would be one of ritual burial... which the individuals themselves had been denied... The horror, abuse and true inhumanity of the Nazi perpetrators must be conveyed, but not at the continuing expense of the victims or in an emotionally exploitative format for the museum visitor.<sup>73</sup>

There are several sides to this debate. Many people actually argued for the inclusion of the hair because it revealed another layer of truth about Nazi crimes. Most committee members agreed that the issue was not about the hair being on display, but that the human remains were out of place and away from home, which made it register differently than the Auschwitz display. The two voices that were clashing in this argument were the commemorative and the educational voices that were shaping the museum. Survivors sat on both sides of the debate but eventually it was announced that the museum would keep the hair, but not display it, in order to keep the support of those survivors who were

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<sup>73</sup> *ibid*, 212-213



vehemently opposed to the idea. In the museum exhibit, there are colour photographs of women's hair and bundles of hair ready for shipment, while the museum's collection of hair was put in storage outside of Washington.<sup>74</sup>

Linenthal notes that in this particular debate between the voices that were shaping the museum, "the commemorative voice, the privileged voice of the survivor, won out. For, as Raul Hilberg once remarked, one of the problematic "rules" of Holocaust speech is that any survivor, no matter how inarticulate, is superior to the greatest Holocaust historian who did not share in the experience."<sup>75</sup> The voice of the survivor and the commemoration of the victims is a character of distinction for memorial and Holocaust museums. While most of these museums, like the USHMM, strive to be as blunt and unrestrained in delivering the whole story of events, it is always out of respect for the victims and in collaboration with survivors. Comforting the museum visitor is of little concern and in some cases difficult knowledge and graphic imagery are actually used to provoke an emotional response.

I brought in this last example because it conveys one of the most obvious voices that is absent from the CMHR. The USHMM, like most memorial museums, values the voice and memory of victims and survivors above all else. One of the greatest issues with the CMHR's handling of the Holocaust is that despite extensive consultation, it prioritizes the visitor's education and experience (discussed in section 2.2). Likely due to the often competing and interwoven voices at the CMHR, forms of memorialization are absent. I question the ethics of a museum that educates about genocide but does not give equal space to memorializing victims. The success and popularity of museums such as the USHMM indicate that it is possible to both educate and engage visitors with forms of remembrance. Even though the form of the USHMM and CMHR are strikingly similar, the USHMM prioritizes the survivor's voice and the commemoration of victims while at the CMHR, the voices of survivors are present, but their stories are drowned in an effort

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<sup>74</sup> Edward T Linenthal, *Preserving memory: the struggle to create America's Holocaust museum*, 216

<sup>75</sup> *ibid*, 216

to promote a positive future rather than commemorate a difficult past. Many of the debates that play out in the planning stage of the museum decide the form that a museum will eventually take and the journey that visitors will go on. My discussion of the USHMM here clearly shows how difficult some of those debates were but that priorities always came back to representing the whole of the story with the input and approval of survivors, no matter how awful those realities might be. The following chapter on the CMHR demonstrates how, when museum staff was faced with similar debates or under pressure from controversies playing out in the media, the museum avoided practices of remembrance in favour of a more sanitized educational approach.

## Chapter 2

### 2 Introducing the Canadian Museum for Human Rights

“Critical to the process of countering genocide has been the desire that details of genocidal events, the victims, and the worlds they inhabited are not forgotten.”<sup>76</sup> – Eltringham and Maclean

The Canadian Museum for Human Rights opened in Winnipeg in the fall of 2014. As mentioned in chapter one, the monumental museum was the vision of Winnipeg businessman Israel (Izzy) Asper and had taken nearly two decades to come to fruition. Originally, the museum was imagined by Asper as a Holocaust museum but early in the planning and fundraising process demands were made for the museum to be more inclusive, and to reflect Canada’s multicultural national identity. From the beginning, the museum was plagued with multiple controversies that played out in the media over the building site, funds, exhibition allocation, terminology and representation within the museum.

My thesis compares the CMHR with Holocaust and memorial museums to draw out similarities and more importantly, differences among them. I argue that the CMHR defines itself as a forward thinking human rights museum, but actually mimics historical frameworks that are characteristic of memorial museums. However, in doing so, it only mimics some elements of memorial museums, while avoiding those dedicated to difficult knowledge. Initially in this chapter, I term the theorization of the museum’s relationship to time as past-future dissonance. The first section of this chapter introduces human rights top-down narratives, and discusses genocide debates in two permanent galleries at the CMHR. In the second section, I then look at commemorative museum pedagogies and practices of remembrance as tools for bringing history into the present. I suggest remembrance as one way that the CMHR can move beyond historical narratives,

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<sup>76</sup> Nigel Eltringham and Pam Maclean. *Remembering Genocide*, edited by Nigel Eltringham, and Pam Maclean, Taylor and Francis, 2014. ProQuest Ebook Central, <https://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/west/detail.action?docID=1721061>. 1.

overcome past-future dissonance and step into its intended role as a museum advocating for human rights that its mandate presupposes.

## 2.1 Negotiating Human Rights and Genocide Narratives

Long before I even began writing this paper or forming my thesis, I knew that I wanted to discuss the Canadian Museum for Human Rights in relation to Holocaust and memorial museums. I had already drawn connections between the two without fully understanding what that link was. Upon visiting the CMHR in Winnipeg, it became immediately clear to me that the museum mimicked external frameworks commonly used in memorial museums.<sup>77</sup> On the surface level, I noticed similarities in the dim lighting, monumental architecture, contemplative spaces, and the primacy of historical narratives through the use of personal testimony. The CMHR also places a Holocaust gallery at the heart of the museum to tell a moralizing universal human rights story, not unlike the many memorial museums that have come before it. However, the memorial museum emphasizes remembrance and transparency, which are two attributes that the CMHR has seemingly rejected or struggled with. The CMHR, as its website outlines, is “the first museum solely dedicated to the evolution, celebration and *future* of human rights. Our aim is to build not only a national hub for human rights learning and discovery, but a new era of global human rights leadership.(emphasis mine)”<sup>78</sup> The museum presents itself as a future-oriented and forward thinking institution but has failed to move beyond an inherently contradictory forward-looking, historical approach to teaching.

This inconsistency is what I describe as past-future dissonance. This theory proposes that the contact zone of past and future is always in a state of flux or disagreement because time is continuously moving. Thus, to plan for the future by looking backward proves impossible. The museum presents a mission of promoting

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<sup>77</sup> See section 1.3 on external and internal characteristics

<sup>78</sup> “About the Museum”. Canadian Museum for Human Rights. <https://humanrights.ca/about>. accessed Jan 7, 2017

action and advocacy for the future but does so by looking to the past. The missing link here is the present. Historically, humans are quick to forget the past or learn from their mistakes. This is why genocide and war are still prevailing global issues. We mourn tragedy for a short time, raise monuments, build museums, and then swiftly forget until the next disaster. To truly have an impact on the current state and future of human rights, the education and conversation need to be located in the present. If a museum hopes to do more than chronicle and preserve history then its framework will have to be reconsidered. How might memorial museums offer solutions for past future dissonance at the CMHR?

Upon my arrival in Winnipeg, I caught sight of the CMHR from a distance as we were driving along the river. The iconic building designed by Antoine Predock looms large in the city skyline, rivaling some of the tallest office towers in the downtown core. The architecture is even more impressive in real life but it does not read, in my opinion, as welcoming or visitor friendly. The dominance and complexity of the building design are intimidating and somewhat discomfoting even for someone such as myself who is well acquainted with museums. As Larissa Wodtke notes in her essay “A lovely building for difficult knowledge”:

Tourism organizations, funders, and the media have often referred to the museum architecture as world-class and iconic, a regenerative addition to the Winnipeg economy and skyline, an echo of the “Bilbao effect.” The impressiveness of the building should be read with caution because, as Paul Williams remarks, ‘spectacular monuments designed to attract the tourist gaze risk foregoing relevance in everyday city life’.<sup>79</sup>

The CMHR and its architecture promise a transcendent journey “from darkness to light” that begins in the Earth and ends with the climb to the Tower of Hope. So what happens on this journey and is it, in fact, transcendence or is it something else entirely? How is the visitor led through the museum and what kind of knowledge do they encounter along the

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<sup>79</sup> Larissa Wodtke, “A lovely building for difficult knowledge: The architecture of the Canadian museum for human rights.” *Review of Education, Pedagogy, and Cultural Studies* 37, 2- 3 (2015): 216

way?

Located in downtown Winnipeg at the Forks, the juncture of the Assiniboine and Red Rivers, the seven-story building is composed of four main architectural elements:

[T]he Roots, which consist of four large stone ramps covered with prairie grass at the base and housing class-rooms, the gift shop, the restaurant, and other exhibition areas; the Mountain, a sheer modernist facade of overlapping, angular limestone that rests upon the Roots and contains the gallery spaces; the Cloud, a curvilinear, translucent glass section enveloping the upper portion of the northern facade, containing offices and allowing light into the Garden of Contemplation area; and the Tower of Hope, a 100-m spire of bluish glass that rises above the Cloud and is lit at night.<sup>80</sup>

The exhibitions that occupy floors two through four take a predominantly historical approach, presenting pertinent human rights abuses in Canada and around the World. Floors five through seven focus more on the future of human rights and ask visitors to reflect on what human rights mean to them. Curatorial strategies rely on digital interactive displays, video-testimony, and oral history as well as traditional display techniques. The journey of human rights as the museum visitor continues to ascend the building is a tale of triumphant universal human rights that culminates with “enlightenment” when the visitor finally reaches the top of the tower of hope. As I uncover through my analysis, this prescribed journey at the CMHR reinforces a top-down universal human rights narrative that does not reflect the true nature of human rights.

Christopher Powell identifies two narratives of human rights; top-down and bottom-up. In the top-down narrative, human rights are interpreted as theological or metaphysical essences. Such “essences exist beyond human agency and historical

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<sup>80</sup> Larissa Wodtke, “A lovely building for difficult knowledge: The architecture of the Canadian museum for human rights.” *Review of Education, Pedagogy, and Cultural Studies* 37, 2- 3 (2015): 207

change.”<sup>81</sup> The sacredness and discovery of these rights are authoritative and mark our “progress” or “cultural achievement” as a species. The explanation of human rights is viewed as the responsibility of experts such as scholars and political philosophers. Meanwhile, the enactment of these rights is upheld by the law and state power.<sup>82</sup> In contrast, the bottom-up narrative views human rights “as social constructions-as things made by people.” Therefore, they are “culturally specific and historically variable”.<sup>83</sup> While the top-down narrative describes human rights as a discovery or enlightenment, a bottom-up perspective recognizes that human rights are made, not found. I agree with Powell’s argument in that the CMHR’s top-down narrative encourages visitors to view human rights abuses in Canada as exceptional rather than normal, distancing their own implication in ongoing power struggles.<sup>84</sup> I will clarify how this top-down narrative unfolds in my following analysis of the CMHR galleries.

From the ground floor of the museum, the visitor is led up a long ramp to the first gallery “What Are Human Rights?” Spanning the left wall is a timeline that marks significant moments in international history of human rights progress and failures. Although there is some attempt to avoid linearity through the inclusion of such missteps as genocide and war, the use of a timeline immediately signals to the viewer that the journey and education they are about to receive is one ultimately of historical progress. On the opposite wall, a video installation shows individuals explaining what human rights mean to them. Adjacent to the video wall, bold white letters set against a black wall announce the museum’s definition of human rights, borrowed from the United Nations declaration of human rights:

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<sup>81</sup> Christopher Powell, “Transcendence or struggle? Top-down and bottom-up narratives of human rights” from *The Idea of a Human Rights Museum*, University of Manitoba Press, 2015, 131.

<sup>82</sup> Ibid

<sup>83</sup> Ibid

<sup>84</sup> Christopher Powell, “Transcendence or struggle? Top-down and bottom-up narratives of human rights”, 138

“All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights.”<sup>85</sup>

This quote is repeated elsewhere in the museum and certainly reinforces a top-down narrative. As Powell remarks, within Canada, “the predominant story about rights, and about social truths in particular, is the top-down one, and the museum’s exhibits will tend to rely on and reinforce this narrative unless they actively disrupt it.”<sup>86</sup> This quote and definition, although seemingly benign, through its repetition in the museum emphasizes a narrative of universal human rights. However, it is not the case that human rights are universally observed in practice. The bleak reality is that depending on what class, society, and culture we are born into, most of our rights have already been determined. A Western political human rights discourse glosses over issues of inequality of rights and the social construction of human rights as a historical process that is most often a solution to a practical problem. After all, the United Nations declaration of human rights and the definition of genocide by Raphael Lemkin were both direct responses to the devastating effects of the Holocaust. The very fact that the CMHR is overflowing with cases of human rights injustices points to the inadequacy of human rights discourse and the ongoing failure to effectively intervene by the United Nations.

Moving further into the museum, the second gallery the visitor encounters is “Indigenous Perspectives.” The central focus is a 360-degree video theater, which projects Indigenous understandings of human rights and responsibilities as told through four different generations. The CMHR (which is marketed as an ideas museum) is unique in that its collection is made up predominantly of oral histories rather than material objects. The telling of individual stories throughout the museum’s various galleries is meant to provide connections between events from around the world through interwoven themes of loss, trauma, despair, healing and hope. While efforts have been made inside the museum to address Indigenous perspectives and histories of abuse, the CMHR has

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<sup>85</sup> Wall text, *What Are Human Rights?* Canadian Museum for Human Rights, Winnipeg

<sup>86</sup> Christopher Powell, “Transcendence or struggle? Top-down and bottom-up narratives of human rights”, 131



been widely criticized for its inability to respond to contemporary issues happening just outside its front doors. For example, the body of 15-year old Tina Fontaine, of the Sagkeeng First Nation, was pulled from the Red River in August 2014, a short distance from the CMHR. Police located her body during a search for a man named Faron Hall, a member of the Dakota Tipi First Nation.<sup>87</sup> The conditions of Fontaine's body strongly suggest she was murdered, making her just one of approximately 1,200 murdered or missing Indigenous women cases in Canada at the time,<sup>88</sup> although numbers are now estimated to actually be much higher.<sup>89</sup> The CMHR made no comment at the time of the event, which raised questions about whether the museum would actually step up to be an advocate *for* human rights as its name suggests.

Amber Dean argues that although museums in Canada have made strides toward building relationships with local Indigenous communities that have fostered many successful exhibition collaborations, the CMHR's silence in the wake of Fontaine's and Hall's deaths risked angering and upsetting cultivated relationships with these communities.<sup>90</sup> Further, the CMHR had already been under attack by Indigenous organizations and individuals for its failure to use the term genocide in exhibitions responding to issues of settler colonial violence. I will expand on this in the next section, but I want to bring the emphasis back to the CMHR's silence in the summer of 2014. Is it antagonistic for a human rights museum to teach of a history of progress while human

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<sup>87</sup> My knowledge of these issues came through reading Kirsty Robertson's chapter "It takes a lot of wrongs to make a museum of rights": Indigenous Activism and the Canadian Museum for Human Rights"

<sup>88</sup> Amber Dean, "The CMHR and the ongoing crisis of murdered or missing indigenous women: Do museums have a responsibility to care?" *Review of Education, Pedagogy, and Cultural Studies*, 37, 2-3 (2015): 147-148

<sup>89</sup> The number of MMIW has and continues to be updated.

"Missing and murdered indigenous women in Canada could number 4,000." *The Guardian*. February 16, 2016. Accessed May 22, 2017. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/feb/17/missing-and-murdered-indigenous-women-in-canada-could-number-4000>.

<sup>90</sup> Amber Dean, "The CMHR and the ongoing crisis of murdered or missing indigenous women: Do museums have a responsibility to care?", 150

rights abuses continue in the present day? How might a human rights museum move beyond the boundaries of its walls to bring about real activism and change? What are the possibilities when a museum chooses advocacy over silence?

Featured on the fourth floor of the museum is a gallery somewhat ironically titled “Breaking the Silence.” The opening didactic panel reads:

“Words are powerful. When people dare to break the silence about mass atrocities, they promote the human rights of everyone.”<sup>91</sup>

The exhibition itself highlights the five genocides recognized by the Canadian government: The Armenian genocide, the Holodomor, the Holocaust, the Rwandan genocide, and the Srebrenica genocide.<sup>92</sup> However, the CMHR’s decision not to recognize colonial violence as a form of genocide exposes the museum’s own failure to take a stance on important contemporary debates. A large interactive screen running down the center of the gallery invites visitors to explore other mass atrocities. There is a section devoted to Indian Residential schools but the only mention of genocide states “many Indigenous and non-Indigenous people argue that this school system was a form of genocide.” Tricia Logan, the former Curator of Indigenous content at the CMHR, discloses that she was asked in July 2013 to remove the term genocide from the small exhibition pertaining to settler colonial genocide in the Canadian Journey’s gallery and that she was not permitted to name settler colonial abuses as genocide elsewhere.<sup>93</sup> What

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<sup>91</sup> Wall text, *Breaking the Silence*, Canadian Museum for Human Rights, Winnipeg

<sup>92</sup> It is unclear how the exhibition will be expanded as the Canadian government recognizes other genocides. Liberals recognized the Islamic state violence against the Yazidis as genocide in 2016. The CMHR has been slow to update museum material on current events around the world such as the recognition of the ongoing Yazidi genocide.

Michelle Zilio, "Liberals recognize Islamic State atrocities against Yazidis as genocide." *The Globe and Mail*. June 16, 2016. Accessed May 01, 2017. <https://www.theglobeandmail.com/news/politics/liberals-recognize-islamic-state-atrocities-against-yazidis-as-genocide/article30493995/>.

<sup>93</sup> Tricia Logan, “National memory and museums: Remembering settler colonial genocide of Indigenous peoples in Canada” from *Remembering Genocide*, London: Routledge. 2014.

if the museum had in this instance chosen to recognize and acknowledge settler colonial genocide? What might it look like if a human rights museum more actively engaged with debates and difficult knowledge? Obviously, there is a certain fear and reluctance at the CMHR, in particular, to do anything too contentious considering the controversies that played out prior to the museum opening. However, the museum risks becoming irrelevant and hollow if it does not move beyond the safety of a consolatory hope narrative. Angela Failler defines consolatory hope as a narrative that:

offers comfort or consolation in response to the prospect of “bad feelings” that may or may not arise upon exposure to evidence of past and present violence, suffering and traumatic loss. Consolatory hope is enacted through a moralizing pedagogy that sets narratives and images of the past against an imagined future time in which the past “must never happen again.” At the CMHR, consolatory hope promises visitors and stakeholders that the museum is going to get the right “balance” of tragedy and triumph so that people ultimately come away feeling inspired, not depressed or awful about themselves.<sup>94</sup>

The problem that arises from consolatory hope is that it does not actively engage the visitor with difficult knowledge and it often portrays the past as safely in the past while idealizing prospects for the future.

These idealized narratives are especially prominent in galleries that promote Canadian nationalism. Although the museum brings a Canadian lens to all of the exhibitions, the “Canadian Journey’s” Gallery is the only gallery devoted entirely to human rights issues central to the Canadian public. The gallery itself features a large open space with a perimeter of “pods” that highlight different human rights topics in Canada, both historical and ongoing. Some examples include “From Sorrow to Strength: Aboriginal Women and the Right to Safety and Justice”, “Taking the Cake: The Right to Same-Sex Marriage”, “Speaking for the Future: Protecting Language Rights”, and

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<sup>94</sup> Angela Failler, “Hope without consolation: Prospects for critical learning at the Canadian museum for human rights,” *Review of Education, Pedagogy, and Cultural Studies* 37, 2-3 (2015): 233

“Childhood Denied: Indian Residential Schools and Their Legacy”.

The breadth of topics covered gives the visitor a brief introduction to some of the challenges different communities within Canada have faced. However, many of these exhibitions cannot fully flesh out the complicated nature of these issues due to space constraints. Instead, they are presented in a succinct package that may either leave the visitor with feelings of satisfaction or confusion. For example, the Indian Residential Schools are given one pod in the gallery that, in my opinion, glosses over the controversial issues of reconciliation. The main description for the “Childhood Denied” exhibition reads:

From the 1880s to the 1990s, thousands of First Nations, Inuit and Metis children were torn from their homes and sent to Indian Residential Schools. Canada’s government used these schools, run by Catholic and Protestant churches, to try to assimilate Aboriginal children into the dominant culture. Many students suffered neglect and abuse.

In 2008, government and church leaders formally apologized for the schools in an effort to foster reconciliation and healing.

Aboriginal families continue to be affected by the schools’ legacy and by government policy. Aboriginal children are still far more likely to be placed in foster or institutional care than other Canadian children.<sup>95</sup>

While, this description suggests that a formal apology may lead to reconciliation, the lasting detrimental effects that are hinted at in the final paragraph indicate that this is not the case. What these ongoing difficulties are is left ambiguous and visitors are not made aware of how they might be implicated in these ongoing power struggles. Concrete examples or explanation of discriminatory policies are also not presented. The text panel, like many others in the Canadian Journey’s gallery, is vague and offers little in the way

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<sup>95</sup> Wall Text, *Childhood Denied: Indian Residential Schools and Their Legacy*, Canadian Museum for Human Rights, Winnipeg

of engaging the visitor with difficult knowledge. The visitor is made aware of the issues at stake but is not asked to take them on in any real way by grappling with their own privilege and/or unconscious prejudice.

I question whether the brevity of such complex injustices goes against the fundamental purpose of teaching difficult knowledge. David Petrasek identifies that:

“linked to the fear of sanitizing rights is the fear that a museum will gloss over the inherently competing, and occasionally contradictory, claims embraced within the concept of human rights. A human rights museum will feel pressure to position itself around points of consensus rather than conflict. The result leaves visitors with the impression of having encountered ‘received wisdom’, ignoring the deep divides and ambiguities that bedevil both the idea of human rights and the movement supposedly united in their defense. And it is only through an honest exposure of these debates and dialogue around them that an idea of human rights can remain relevant and compelling and gain new adherents.”<sup>96</sup>

It is certainly the case that the Canadian Journey’s gallery avoids topics of conflict, especially recent struggles. The Childhood Denied exhibition presents a ten-minute video that features testimonies from survivors of the Indian Residential Schools and the 60’s scoop. There is mention of how the trauma of such events has had lasting detrimental effects but no further attempt to contextualize present-day issues. Similarly, the main video about the Canadian human rights journey that is presented at the entrance to the gallery gives a purely historical account. The video culminates by stating that human rights battles are ongoing but there is no mention of what exactly these conflicts are that Canadian citizens currently face.

The museum prides itself on being an ideas museum that advocates for change but how can this be true when it has not escaped a consolatory hope narrative? While it can be useful to learn from the past (as I have found through my investigation of memorial

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<sup>96</sup> David Petrasek, “Illusion and the Human Rights Museum” from *The Idea of a Human Rights Museum*, University of Manitoba Press, 2015, 88-89

museums), with the case of human rights I maintain that educating about issues that face the public right now is of equal importance. The CMHR as a new museum has had extreme difficulty in fulfilling the goals and mandate that they set up as an institution advocating for human rights. Jennifer Orange and Jennifer Carter argue that museums, particularly human rights museums, need to be clear about their goals and how their engagement with certain topics will affect future generations. They ask,

Are museums working to change human rights standards in a progressive manner, or is their work entrenching the status quo? While museums have demonstrated the ability to change cultural habits and to influence civil society's expectations of its government, the development of a human rights museology means that this enhanced capacity must be fully recognized as bringing new responsibilities.<sup>97</sup>

If the responsibility of the CMHR is first and foremost advocating for Canadian human rights, then why does the Holocaust take center stage at the museum? The CMHR has explicitly stated that it is not a memorial museum, nor a Holocaust museum, so why does it present itself as one?

## 2.2 Memory and Remembrance: Engaging with Difficult Knowledge

“with memory comes a sense of obligation and responsibility: remembering is a moral injunction.”<sup>98</sup> – Alison Landsberg

Time is a curious thing; even more curious is the way that museums can manipulate time to make it stand still, move quicker, or bring you back to a moment otherwise forgotten. In the opening of this chapter, I theorized that the CMHR attempts to promote action in the future, by looking back at histories of abuse and tragedy, which results in past-future dissonance. My argument here is closely in line with Angela Failler's theory

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<sup>97</sup> Jennifer A. Orange, and Jennifer J. Carter. “It's time to pause and reflect: Museums and human rights.” *Curator: The Museum Journal* 55, 3 (2012): 262-263

<sup>98</sup> Alison Landsberg, “response”, *Rethinking History* 11 (2007): 628

of consolatory hope as described in the previous section. Both arguments dispute the museum's overemphasis on hope for the future without critical engagement in present issues. They differ in that Failler suggests this curative or consolatory hope may be a result of the museum being subject to neoliberal market logic and outside pressures as a state-funded institution.<sup>99</sup> While I agree that this is certainly one component, my own suggestion of past-future dissonance emphasizes a stronger element of time that has surfaced from modeling the museum after memorial museums such as the USHMM described in chapter one.

However, I suggest that memorial museums are able to raise social consciousness in the present through acts of remembrance. Silke Arnold-de Simine suggests in her book *Mediating Memory in the Museum: Trauma, Empathy, Nostalgia* that memory brings responsibility. In the past it was believed that knowledge carried responsibility but it has since become necessary to replace concepts of 'knowledge' with 'memory'. There has been a shift in the way that individual and collective memory is negotiated: "rather than reducing memory to a store-house, it has become inseparable from social-consciousness, as members of communities are increasingly asked to recall violent pasts. Because this is deemed to make them into better people it becomes a moral duty."<sup>100</sup> Past-future dissonance in the CMHR may arise from exhibitions that rely on knowledge based histories, rather than calling on visitors to engage with practices of remembrance. If the CMHR hopes to instill a sense of moral obligation in its visitors, then prioritizing memory as a key ingredient towards attaining knowledge may be the answer. I argue that past-future dissonance within the museum (particularly within the two exhibitions presented in this final section) may be resolved through incorporating practices of remembrance; i.e., choosing memory over knowledge.

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<sup>99</sup> Angela Failler, "Hope without consolation: Prospects for critical learning at the Canadian museum for human rights," *Review of Education, Pedagogy, and Cultural Studies* 37, 2-3 (2015): 234.

<sup>100</sup> Silke Arnold-de Simine, *Mediating Memory in the Museum: Trauma, Empathy, Nostalgia*. New York, NY; Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire; Palgrave Macmillan, 2013, 11.

As a National Museum,<sup>101</sup> the Canadian Museum for Human Rights opened with a clear nationalistic agenda. The exhibits themselves often overemphasize genocide and human rights abuse histories from elsewhere in the world while downplaying the ongoing debates within Canada's own borders. Dirk Moses notes that when it comes to national self-images, reality rarely reflects the ideal. In the case of Canada, criticisms concerning failings with respect to Indigenous peoples, refugees, and the environment are often dismissed in the vein of this idealized collective self-image. Moses argues that "the evidence suggests that in Canada, as elsewhere, economic interests trump human rights norms when they clash."<sup>102</sup> With respect to the CMHR, the museum propagates this idealized national identity rather than questioning it. I believe the CMHR's inability to disentangle itself from its status as a National Museum is in part to blame for the past-future dissonance that occurs within the museum. The "Examining the Holocaust" and "Breaking the Silence" galleries are the two most obvious examples in which the CMHR idealizes Canada's role as a human rights leader.

The primacy of the Holocaust gallery at the CMHR was a point of contention long before the opening. The gallery came into existence based on three main arguments.

1. that it was the catalyst for international human rights law, specifically the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the United Nations Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide; 2. that it is the best documented and commemorated genocide; and most recently 3. that it represents "the archetypal collapse of democracy into genocide from which human rights

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<sup>101</sup> The National Museums of Canada are operated by the Federal Government. The CMHR is the first to open outside of the Nation's capital of Ottawa.

<sup>102</sup> Dirk Moses, "Protecting Human Rights and Preventing Genocide: The Canadian Museum for Human Rights and the Will to Intervene" from *The Idea of a Human Rights Museum*, University of Manitoba Press, 2015, 42.



lessons can be drawn.”<sup>103</sup>

I do not dispute the rationale for the gallery. The Holocaust can certainly be a useful lens through which to think about human rights, as shown by my analysis of Holocaust museums in chapter one. I do however question whether it is the most appropriate example to place at the heart of a museum that seeks to advocate *for* human rights. Within the gallery, Canada’s own shortcomings during the Holocaust are exposed in a video about how thousands of refugees fleeing persecution were turned away from the United States and Canada during the war. Such transparency seems like a step in the right direction in terms of taking ownership of past wrongs and confronting the visitor with difficult knowledge. But just around the corner the museum takes another two steps backward by its exclusion of Canada’s own settler colonial genocide and propping Canada up as a human rights champion.

Initially, the periphery of the gallery gives a fairly straightforward chronology of the Holocaust. It begins with “Abuse and Power” which details the prewar mindset in Germany, and Hitler’s rise to power. The next section is “Persecution” which covers topics of anti-Semitism throughout the early war and the targeting of Jews, Romans, homosexuals, and disabled people. The last wall presents “War and Genocide” with panels on the ghettos, death camps, and death marches. It should be noted that the Holocaust gallery in the CMHR takes a concise, historical approach but avoids the disturbing imagery, first hand accounts, and practices of remembrance that give the USHMM and Auschwitz museum their moral gravity. The opening didactic panel to the gallery tells the visitor “we examine the Holocaust to learn to recognize genocide and try to prevent it”.<sup>104</sup> Yet as the museum visitor moves through the gallery it is quite easy to miss or overlook the section tucked behind the video screening room titled “Defining Genocide”. I would have missed it myself if I had not been actively seeking out some sort

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<sup>103</sup> Olena Hankivsky, and Rita Kaur Dhamoon, “Which genocide matters the most? An Intersectionality Analysis of the Canadian Museum for Human Rights.” *Canadian Journal of Political Science* 46 , 4 (2013): 903

<sup>104</sup> Wall text, *Examining the Holocaust*, Canadian Museum for Human Rights, Winnipeg

of attention to educating about genocide as part of my research. The wall panel reads:

The Holocaust was the systematic attempt to eradicate all Jews. In 1943, Raphael Lemkin, a Polish-Jewish lawyer, invented the word “genocide” to describe attempts to destroy an entire people. Lemkin studied historical examples of genocide to identify common methods used by those who commit this crime. The Holocaust employed all these methods. Lemkin believed the Holocaust was the most deliberate and thorough genocide in history.<sup>105</sup>

The actual definition of genocide is not given. However, the visitor can interact with a nearby computer to delve further into the methods of genocide: physical, biological, and cultural. The five examples of genocide used to elaborate on these methods are the Holocaust, the Armenian genocide, the Holodomor, the Spanish Conquest, and the Colonization of Tasmania. The section on cultural methods of genocide defines these methods as “the aim to destroy the specific life patterns and institutions that help to shape a group’s identity.” The description of the cultural methods of genocide used in the Colonization of Tasmania from 1803-1901 states that:

As the British took over Tasmania, they used cultural methods of genocide to destroy the Aboriginals’ way of life. The settlers imposed their own culture, including clothing and language, on the Tasmanian Aboriginal population. Aspects of the new culture, such as alcohol, proved to be deadly, undermining the health and unity of the group.<sup>106</sup>

The use of the colonization of Tasmania as an example of genocide appears to be a way of sidestepping the issue of discussing Canada’s own colonization. If visitors are informed about ongoing debates surrounding Canada’s settler colonial genocide they might be able to make these connections and parallels to Tasmania. However, in a museum that gives special attention to Canada, it is a failure on the part of the museum to

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<sup>105</sup> Wall text, *Examining the Holocaust*, Canadian Museum for Human Rights, Winnipeg

<sup>106</sup> Wall text, *Examining the Holocaust*, Canadian Museum for Human Rights, Winnipeg

use Tasmania as the example of colonial genocide, rather than educating Canadians about their own history. Due to the lack of education about settler colonialism within most Canadian schools, the average Canadian visitor would not understand the links between Tasmania's genocide and Canada's own that are being hinted at rather than outright stated. If the curatorial intent here is to show rather than tell about Canadian settler colonial genocide, then it has failed simply by presuming a certain level of previous knowledge among visitors.

The succeeding "Breaking the Silence" gallery further misleads visitors about the role of Canada as a human rights leader. The gallery is described as an examination of how Canadians have spoken out about human rights abuses. The opening wall features a panel on each of the five genocides recognized by the Canadian government: the Armenian genocide, the Holodomor, the Holocaust, the Rwandan genocide, and the Srebrenica genocide. These panels serve to place Canada on the right side of history. Each panel introduces the genocide in their respective countries and then is underscored by images as examples of how Canadians attempted to intervene, setting up a dichotomy of right vs. wrong, hero vs. enemy and us vs. them. The Rwanda panel gives a brief description of how genocidal events unfolded in 1994 between the two ethnic groups of Hutus and Tutsis while the international community failed to intervene. Six images featured on the panel are as captioned below:

#### Canadians Call for International Responsibility

1. Fax from Canadian Romeo Dallaire, commander of the United Nations (UN) peacekeeping force in Rwanda, to his superiors on January 11, 1994. It warned of Hutus' plans to exterminate Tutsis, but the UN did not intervene.
2. Major-General Romeo Dallaire (centre) talking to a UN representative during the genocide, Rwanda, May 1994.
3. Desire Munyaneza on trial for his role in the Rwandan Genocide, Montreal, 2009. Munyaneza, a Toronto resident, became the first person convicted under Canada's war crimes law.
4. Lloyd Axworthy, Canada's Minister of Foreign Affairs, at the UN, 2000. He

advocated the Responsibility to Protect, a principle the UN adopted in 2005 calling for international intervention to prevent mass atrocities.

5. Michaëlle Jean, Governor General of Canada, with Paul Kagame, President of Rwanda, 2010. Jean officially apologized for Canada's failure to take action to prevent the genocide.
6. Gerald Caplan (left), Canadian author of *Rwanda: The Preventable Genocide*, helped to organize the 2004 international Remembering Rwanda project. That same year, Canada officially recognized the genocide.<sup>107</sup>

The other five panels are in a similar vein wherein Canada is the altruistic nation that is simultaneously distant from and connected to these traumas. This dichotomy is symptomatic of the museum's inherent hypocrisy in pointing to genocides elsewhere while failing to speak out about Indigenous genocides on Canadian soil. It seems that the gallery calls for international responsibility and radical intervention with the exception of the Canadian situation. On the surface, the CMHR appears very similar to a memorial museum; the lighting, contemplative spaces, historical accounts, calls for action, and "never again" moralizing stories all suggest the CMHR is a memorial museum that goes by another name. However, the museum's own rejection of that definition likely ensured the museum's failure from the beginning. Where the memorial museum strives for transparency out of a deep respect for remembering and honouring the victims of traumatic histories, the CMHR elides and rewrites important histories to console the visitor. In the case of the "Breaking the Silence" gallery, these five cases of genocide are made palatable to the viewer by casting a Canadian lens on histories over which Canada has no ownership.

The museum attempts to avoid memorializing and remembrance (memory) in favour of educating and advocating (knowledge). However, I argue that museums cannot adequately educate about such histories without fully engaging with memorial practices. Compassion for other human beings and raising human rights standards is not possible if

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<sup>107</sup> Wall text, *Breaking the Silence*, Canadian Museum for Human Rights, Winnipeg.

we as a global society are disconnected from the millions of lives that have already been lost to genocide, war, colonization, and terrorism. If these lives are just abstract numbers rather than faces, names, and people, then we cannot fully understand the implications. Herein lies the issue with a museum that educates about history, numbers, facts and resists remembrance and memorialization. Angela Failler argues that the museum's reiterations about what the museum "is not" (i.e. not about looking back, not a memorial museum) devalues the practice of memorialization and equates looking to the past as antithetical to progress. This viewpoint creates an imagined divide between past and present, where events from the past remain firmly in what she terms an "absolute past". Failler writes,

In the imaginary of an absolute past, Canada's own so-called "dark chapters" are more or less over, safely sealed off from the present. Status quo fantasies of an unimplicated "now" and a hopeful future are thereby preserved, along with feelings of national pride. In the imaginary of an absolute past we can be cured of the disease brought on by evidence of continuing suffering with a "hope injection," a quick and painless antidote that rids us of having to sit uncomfortably with difficult memories or take the time to learn new ways of relating to the past and "others" in the present as a means of possibility. In this curative version of consolatory hope, we are to be comforted by the notion that a future-oriented human rights education, along with a positive attitude, are enough to empower people to "change thought and action, to build a world where everyone is respected and valued."<sup>108</sup>

Again, Failler's discussion of consolatory hope expands my own thinking of how past-future dissonance occurs within the CMHR. I posit that the museum lacks a foothold in the present moment and galleries only relay the past with the intention of safeguarding a more peaceful future. I argue that the museum was far too hasty to dismiss the value of remembrance and memorialization. Clearly, the CMHR is drawing on several

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<sup>108</sup> Angela Failler, "Hope without consolation: Prospects for critical learning at the Canadian museum for human rights," *Review of Education, Pedagogy, and Cultural Studies* 37, 2-3 (2015): 234

characteristics of memorial museums but it discards its most valuable feature: remembrance. Where the CMHR regards looking to the past as counterintuitive, Roger Simon identifies in his writings on collective and historical memory that remembrance actually works against the grain of history and may be a useful strategy to bring history into the present. Simon finds that a historical approach says... “we are here, behind us is this, this, and that. Ahead is unknown territory, empirically open and possibly morally different, the future. By mapping time, the historian creates histories which put us [differently] in our [differentiated] place.”<sup>109</sup> Remembrance does the exact opposite. Remembrance collapses past and present, connecting the two in what Simon terms *living memory*. “This is an imagined relation that, while it is aware of its own constructed character, nevertheless operates with some force on everyday life. Thus within remembrance, past and present become dialectically intertwined in ways that orient actions and project desires and possibilities onto the future.”<sup>110</sup>

Consequently, the CMHR’s consolatory hope narrative and past-future dissonance may actually be a result of the museum’s opposition to remembrance and memory. Both the “Examining the Holocaust” and “Breaking the Silence” galleries take a historical approach, which differentiates these exhibition spaces from similar exhibitions that have been put forth by memorial museums that strongly emphasize remembrance. The CMHR claims to want to do “more” than look to the past but this may prove to be impossible if it stands by its position not to use memorialization or remembrance as tools. Rather than dismissing Holocaust and Memorial museum strategies as stuck in the past, the CMHR should consider looking to and expanding upon these established approaches to create a museum for human rights that actively remembers, commemorates, and values the individual human lives that are so often disconnected from the numbers, dates, and facts. The Canadian Museum for Human Rights as an ideas museum appears caught up in this abstract idea of “rights” but completely disconnected from the awareness of what it

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<sup>109</sup> Roger I Simon, “The Pedagogy of Commemoration and Formation of Collective Memories” *The Journal of Educational Foundations* 8 (1): 5. (1994): 7.

<sup>110</sup> *ibid*

means to be human.

The disconnect that is created at the CMHR is what Julia Rose refers to as “emotional disengagement.” Rose’s discussion of learning from difficult knowledge in the museum relies on a theory called loss in learning. In a museum setting when faced with difficult knowledge, visitors can either choose to accept or refuse this knowledge. In the acceptance phase, participants move through a state of mourning whereby they experience loss through learning.<sup>111</sup>

Difficult knowledge causes the learner to experience internal grief due to having lost his or her object. Loss in learning specifically refers to the learner’s psychical response to new knowledge that disrupts the status quo of the learner’s ego. Britzman (1998) contends that learning is painful in the way it jeopardizes the learner’s psychic balance and thereby creates real scenarios of loss.<sup>112</sup>

The alternative is that the learner resists the difficult knowledge, often due to a reflex for ego self-preservation. Teaching often requires a kind of learning crisis and in a museum setting, it is up to the museum educators to detect where learners might experience learning crises and use those pressure points as opportunities for teaching.<sup>113</sup> Rose elaborates:

The museum visitor who experiences loss in learning needs to find the energy that will enable his or her ego to negotiate the difficult knowledge. Visitors who are mourning, or have mourned, are more likely to empathize and respond to the specific historical events of the Other’s trauma. Megan Boler (1999) explains that an active meaningful empathy might arise from a mournful position that could inspire change, which might productively address the meanings of the historical

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<sup>111</sup> Julia Rose, “Commemorative Museum Pedagogy: A Psychoanalytic Approach to Engaging Visitors in Exhibits with Difficult Knowledge” *Beyond Pedagogy*, (2014): 122

<sup>112</sup> Julia Rose, “Commemorative Museum Pedagogy: A Psychoanalytic Approach to Engaging Visitors in Exhibits with Difficult Knowledge”, 122

<sup>113</sup> *Ibid*, 123

trauma for the learner in the present.<sup>114</sup>

The mourning that Rose refers to in this passage is not a mourning for those who have suffered, but rather a mourning for the learner's own ego or self-identity. When faced with difficult knowledge and up against learning that addresses the learner's ego defenses, the learner reorganizes or rebuilds their sense of self (that is based on knowledge) with each new piece of information they receive.<sup>115</sup> Similar to Roger Simon, Julia Rose offers remembrance learning and commemorative museum pedagogies as tools for working through mournful states of resisting difficult knowledge. The neutrality that is present in the CMHR's historical exhibits is a form of emotional disengagement, which Rose argues, allows us "to forget the humanity embedded in the traumatic history; the very history an exhibition or historical site stands to represent. Emotional disengagement relieves us from the responsibilities to recognize human suffering, thus encouraging what Boler (1999) observed in classroom learning as passive empathy."<sup>116</sup> In contrast, remembrance learning unfolds when learners are asked to engage with and respond to the traumatic history causing a shift in one's ego boundaries.

What might these theories of mourning and loss in learning meaning mean for museums that teach about traumatic histories? Rose recommends that,

[M]useum educators can explore visitors' encounters with historical exhibits as events of loss for the visitor-as-learner. Museum educators can begin to see how the visitor's responses eventually alter his or her individual relationships to past events, and affect his or her subsequent social interactions. Museum educators can begin to focus on the possibilities that learners' responses are formative ethical relationships that are emerging as responsibilities to the historical individuals and

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<sup>114</sup> Ibid, 123

<sup>115</sup> Ibid, 123

<sup>116</sup> Ibid, 124



groups.<sup>117</sup>

Thus, museums need not avoid difficult knowledge but should recognize which elements of the histories they are presenting might result in a loss in learning for the visitor. For example, at the CMHR, mention of settler colonial genocide certainly could result in a learning crisis for Canadian participants but as Simon and Rose have reasoned, a learning crisis is crucial in learning from difficult knowledge. It is clear that what Failler names as consolatory hope and what I refer to earlier in this chapter as past-future dissonance are forms of emotional disengagement. My inclusion of Roger Simon and Julia Rose's arguments for remembrance support my original hypothesis that the CMHR should look to rather than resist practices of remembrance present in memorial museums.

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<sup>117</sup> Ibid, 125

## Summary and Future Perspectives

The Canadian Museum for Human Rights was certainly envisioned as a leader among existing memorial and human rights museums. The CMHR was to stand at the same caliber as the USHMM (Washington, USA), the Berlin Jewish Museum (Germany), and the Museum of Memory and Human Rights (Chile). However, the conversations put forth by scholars and media thus far suggest that the CMHR is widely regarded as a failure. The controversies that played out prior to the opening were overwhelmingly negative. This has subsided since the opening in 2014, but issues raised by scholars have yet to be addressed by the museum. Throughout my thesis, I have situated the CMHR as an outsider in relation to the global community of memorial and human rights museums. Moreover, I have argued in favour of remembrance and commemorative museum practices as future tools for the CMHR to utilize in reconciling existing consolatory hope narratives and past-future dissonance.

In chapter one, I presented two other major human rights museums, the Museum of Memory and Human Rights (Santiago, Chile) and Liberty Museum (Osaka, Japan). My argument suggested that both of these museums educated about human rights through histories of abuse and prejudice specific to their respective countries. In chapter two I presented the complex issues inherent in CMHR exhibitions that arise due to a broad mandate that attempts to tackle too many global issues and histories in one building. The CMHR introduces cases of human rights abuse and triumphs within Canada and around the world. In exhibitions related to the Holocaust and genocide, the staff chooses to point to injustices elsewhere while downplaying human rights issues within Canada's own borders. This is the complete opposite approach to exhibition strategies at the museums in Santiago and Osaka, where local issues take priority over global perspectives.

Furthermore, in the second section of chapter one, I introduced Polish Holocaust memorials to demonstrate the value that these sites have had in memorial practices and educating about genocide. The six death camp memorials in Poland set in motion a proliferation of memory building across Europe and around the world. My discussion of these sites brings to the forefront the multitude of ways the Holocaust is remembered and

memorialized within Poland. I used these examples to begin framing the importance of remembrance as a tool for bringing histories of genocide into the present. In contrast to the CMHR's avoidance of tackling settler colonial genocide, these sites confront discussions of genocide in depth and head on. My arguments in favor of remembrance reach their precipice in chapter 1.3 on the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. It is clear through my discussion of the USHMM that it is possible to promote human rights while also educating and remembering genocide. The CMHR attempts to promote human rights through a purely historical, factual lens that resists forms of remembrance.

Evidently, the CMHR presents outwardly as a memorial museum but rejects significant memorial and remembrance rituals. My guiding question throughout my research has been: is it possible to educate about genocide without remembering genocide? My conclusion has been that it might be possible to teach the facts and the history, however, without engaging with the difficult knowledge of these histories then we as a society are fated to repeat the same mistakes. Difficult knowledge confronts the participant with a learning crisis whereby they are shaken out of complacency and guided through stages of reception, resistance, reflection, and reconsideration.<sup>118</sup> This process is uncomfortable and it is a difficult task to take on as museum curators and educators. With that said, the stakes are too high not to take on this challenge. The Canadian Museum for Human Rights cannot fulfill its intended role if educators continue to ignore and avoid difficult knowledge. Likewise, the museum will never be able to honestly teach about genocide if they do not encourage remembrance as well. The question I am left with is how do we ethically challenge visitors to become passionate, moved, and invested in these issues so that they are motivated to take action in the present? What are the possibilities of remembrance practices in the museum for bringing about real social transformation?

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<sup>118</sup> Julia Rose, "Commemorative Museum Pedagogy: A Psychoanalytic Approach to Engaging Visitors in Exhibits with Difficult Knowledge" *Beyond Pedagogy*, (2014): 127

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ORA study abroad scholarship/ 2015

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Faculty of Arts and Humanities Alumni Award/ 2014

#### **Teaching**

**Teaching Assistant**, Western University 2016/2017

Visual Arts History 1044B: Art, Media and Popular Culture

Visual Arts History 2254F: Romanesque Art History

### **Publications**

Kelsey Perreault. "Cold Front: An Introduction" *Cold Front, Exhibition Catalogue* 2017.

Kelsey Perreault. "Captive Memory: A History of Animal Display in the Museum" *Cabinet of Shadows: Reliquary for Lost Animals, Exhibition Catalogue* 2016.

Kelsey Perreault. "Hidden Histories and Collections: Discovering the Underbelly Project". *Undergraduate Awards* 2015.

### **Presentations**

"What is a Human Rights Museum?" *Community: A Participatory Conference* 2017, London, Ontario

"Hidden Histories and Collections: Discovering the Underbelly Project". *Undergraduate Awards Global Summit* 2015, Dublin, Ireland