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Exhibiting Human Rights: Making the Means of Dignity Visible

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Doctor of Philosophy degree
in Media Studies

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Abstract

This dissertation examines the visual communication of human dignity. With the opening of human rights museums, such as the Canadian Museum for Human Rights, human dignity's visual communication has been exposed to new issues of corporeal and mediated expression. In response to photographic mediation and theory, which often poses individuals as central claimants or possessors of human dignity, human rights museums openly suggest that communities and relationships between individuals are central to human dignity's visibility outside of the law. As such, I propose that curatorial mediation is important to the contemporary apprehension of human dignity because its notable forms – atlases, albums, and museums –help to shift conversations from individual human persons to communities of human beings. *Exhibiting Human Rights: Making the Means of Dignity Visible* theorizes human dignity as a *relational property*, which entails thinking about larger constellated strategies of representation. I theorize human dignity as a product of life shared with others, across families, communities, cultures, and borders, seen most dramatically in curatorial forms.

Combining museological notions of curation with Walter Benjamin's concept of the constellation, this thesis demonstrates how a theory of human dignity founded on relation also grapples with its tendencies towards rationality and immateriality. Working from these forms and concepts my key questions include: How has human dignity been visually depicted? How can a focus on curation help to support a *relational* theorization of human dignity? And, how can an emphasis on the history of the affiliation between human dignity and curation help us to understand human rights recent move into museums? Curation, I argue provides a framework that acknowledges how our means of existence create demands on others, thus expanding conversations about the ends of human dignity. Three case studies aid in the development of my argument: 1) August Sander's *People of the 20th Century* (1910-1964); 2) UNESCO's *Human Rights Exhibition Album* (1950); and 3) *The Canadian Museum for Human Rights* (2014). Shifting attention towards exhibitionary projects offers creative and constitutive language that speaks to the communities and alliances foundational to human dignity's contemporary communication and significance.

Keywords

Human dignity, human rights, communication, curation, visual studies, exhibitions, museums, photography, media theory, cultural studies

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INTRODUCTION

The exhibition of the future will be an exhibition of ideas rather than of objects, and nothing will be deemed worthy of admission to its halls which has not some living, inspiring thought behind it, and which is not capable of teaching some valuable lesson.

—George Brown Goode, 1892; *First Draft of a System of Classification for the World's Columbian Exposition*.

For ideas are not represented themselves, but solely and exclusively in an arrangement of concrete elements in the concept: as the configuration of these elements.

—Walter Benjamin, 1928; *The Origins of German Tragic Drama*

This dissertation is about the visual communication of human dignity. The idea of human dignity has become one of the most prominent concepts under the umbrella of human rights discourse and has received an immense amount of critical attention in the last decade.¹ However, despite the critical attention surrounding human dignity its cultural and visual significance has been narrowly articulated. Discussions about human dignity are most often relegated to spheres of philosophical or legal significance. Understood as a uniquely human value, human dignity is posed as inherent to the human person and thus largely invisible. It is something we are presumed to have, but not something we can necessarily see.

¹ These works, which will be surveyed in the following chapter, include: Agamben 1999b; Anker, 2012; Bergoffen 2009 & 2011; Duwell 2014; Kateb 2011; McCrudden 2013; Moyn 2014 & 2015; Rosen 2012; Sliwinski 2015; Waldron 2012.

Dignity is crucial to the project of human rights, but its definition and meaning remains contested and slippery. Its contemporary importance, beyond its place in legal documents, has been traced back centuries to philosophers like Immanuel Kant (1724-1804) who posed human dignity as a value beyond a market price affiliated with the faculty of reason and to social attitudes, which saw human dignity as part of one's social status (Waldron 2012). As I immersed myself in the literature surrounding human dignity, I began to realize dignity is a term that has evolved and reinvented itself, and its definition is malleable depending on context. Defining human dignity, beyond allusions to its distinctly human value, proved difficult, which made engaging with its visual communication all the more challenging.

As a media studies scholar, I began to feel unsettled about human dignity's contemporary communication. It felt odd to me that something so central to modern laws and declarations could feel so amorphous and immaterial. The tendency to have discussions about human dignity in philosophical or legal arenas seemed to limit more direct questions about its communication. There seemed a considerable gap between knowledge that the idea of human dignity is important and how it looks or is visually apprehended. If human dignity, as inherent or inviolable worth of the human person, was so important how could it be visibly grasped? How could I begin to engage the idea of human dignity, an idea not directly given to the eye, within the field of media studies? How could a concept that so often "seems at home in the law" be thought of anew in relation to broader mechanisms of communication and mediation (Waldron 2012, 13)?

These questions led me towards visual theory, which did help to put the relationship between human dignity and visual communication into context. I found that human dignity was asserted in narrow visual terms, especially in relation to these three areas: *normativity, absence, and emancipation*. First, it seemed common enough to attribute dignity to *normative* notions of status, reserved for members of the clergy, monarchy, or state. Images of queens, such as Queen Victoria (Fig. 1), presidents, or priests are often said to have "an air of dignity" about them or exude a "dignified look." Normative visualizations of human dignity connect one's station to the abstract quality of human dignity via notions of self-esteem, self-worth, or self-importance. Second,

discussions of the lack of human dignity, as *absence*, have been firmly tied to the visual field, especially in the last decade. Visual theorists have come to demonstrate how photography is especially useful at capturing the “lack” at the centre of human rights (Linfield 2010, 37 see also Azoulay 2008 & 2012; Dean 2015; Sliwinski 2011; Sontag 1973 & 2003). Photographs of dead or wounded humans from a myriad of historical scenes – war, famine, genocide – have come to play a central role in how we understand dignity in the visual world. The horrors of the Holocaust, in conjunction with the power of the camera, provided potent images of what those who were treated without human value look like, such as in the portrayal of concentration camp inmates after the liberation of Mauthausen (Fig. 2). Within discussion of dignity’s absence especially, an aesthetics of indignity has been used in newspapers, TV, and museums to come to the defense of human rights writ large. There is an assumed sense that witnessing the suffering of distant others will work to prevent future crimes (Dean 2015, 241). Finally, and more recently, the concept of dignity has been tied to the visual realm in terms of aesthetic *emancipation*. Sliwinski (2015) has argued that the invention of photography had an important impact on the “ascension of the idea of human dignity” (174). As the genre of portraiture was democratized in the 1800s, photography disrupted notions of status and gave subjects the power to construct their own image outside of state relations. Such was the case with Frederick Douglass (Fig. 3), who used photography to create an image of himself, as an African American who was worthy of the same status, respect, and value given to other citizens. As one of the most photographed men of the nineteenth century, Douglass drew upon his own body to stage a claim for dignity – as a status, as an intrinsic value, and as a site of composure – and demonstrated aesthetic emancipation through the camera as a medium, and the visual as a political field.



Figure 1: Queen Victoria, 1859, by Franz Xaver Winterhalter. Public domain.



Figure 2: Survivors of Mauthausen soon after liberation, 1945, by Ray Buch. United States Holocaust Memorial Museum: 1989.324.3.

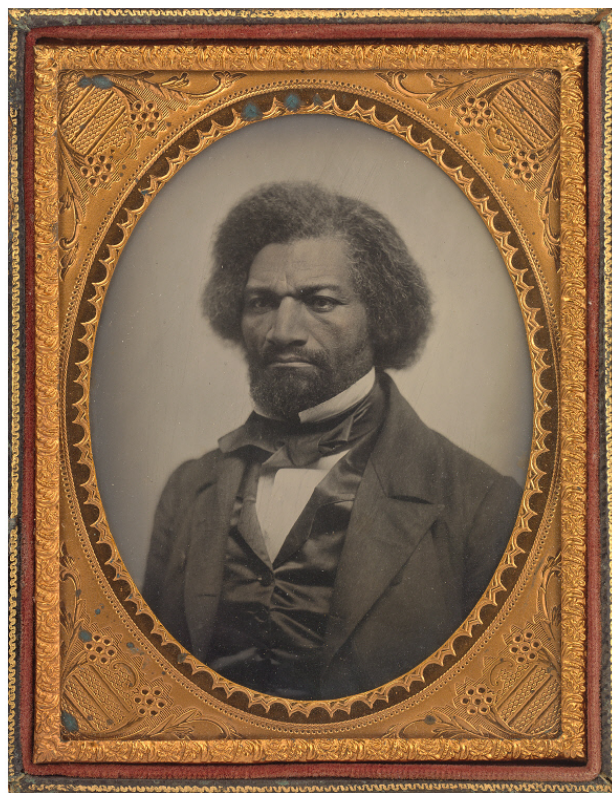


Figure 3: Frederick Douglass, 1856, unidentified author. Smithsonian Institution, National Portrait Gallery NPG.74.75.

The emphasis, in each of these three areas, on the body and its representation has formed the basis for how human dignity is thought of in relation to visual communication. Distinct patterns began to emerge as these categories came into view, and slowly I realized that I was not just interested in how dignity was visually communicated, but rather how it could be communicated and apprehended outside of idealized or degrading images. The language surrounding these three areas so often felt exclusionary (reserved for royalty or elected officials), negative (found in instances of genocide or famine), or autonomous (seen as something one could make or be fully in control of). The language and representations of human dignity as normative, negative, or emancipatory made its visual communication into something that one holds, but does not share with others. These terms seem something of an anathema to dignity as a contemporary phenomenon, understood from an “everybody” and “every body” point of view, most famously communicated through the United Nations Universal Declaration of

Human Rights: “All humans are born free and equal in dignity and rights” (United Nations, 1948). Despite the fact that we now consider human dignity to be something we are *all* entitled to, discussions of it have either shied away from material or embodied connections or coupled it with notions of individuality and autonomy or extreme violation. How then do we begin to discuss the visual communication of human dignity if it is something everyone has or has access to without evoking differential or inequitable language? How can we talk about inherent or inviolable worth of the human person without deferring to uniformity or a false sense of universalism? These foundational couplings of normative, negative, or emancipatory theories are indeed important, but leave human dignity articulated within singular visions vis-à-vis a focus on iconographic or individual photographs.

These questions are directly relevant to a development in Canada: the opening of the Canadian Museum for Human Rights in Winnipeg, Manitoba. In 2014, after over a decade of planning, building, and consultation—processes which piqued my interest as an undergraduate student in Winnipeg and provided an extracurricular education in the public presentation of human rights—the museum opened its doors. The question that framed the first gallery, “What are Human Rights?,” crystalized part of the problem I was trying to understand in terms of a more mundane communication of human dignity, and enlivened why the issue of human dignity’s visual communication was important to study. In this space, Article 1 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights is etched prominently into the back wall: “All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights” (Fig. 4). In this gallery, the declaration of dignity is tied to visual representations of human bodies, as much as it is tied to legal and philosophical frameworks. As you enter the gallery a looping video of a series of men and woman rolls on a full-length screen to your left. Each subject tells the visitor what human rights mean to them personally. Directly following the video display, a timeline connecting one-hundred “ideas,” “events,” and “measures” stretches along the wall creating a multicultural and multimedia history of human rights extending from as early as 4000 B.C.E. to 2012 A.D. Underneath the timeline sixty images of people who have “advanced” our current understanding of human rights forms a visual basis for the textual and historical points

conveyed above. Figures such as Plato, Cyrus the Great, Harriet Beecher Stowe, Louis Riel, Martin Luther King Jr. and Gen. Romeo Dallaire become more than just stand-ins for the specific histories with which they are affiliated. More complexly, they become markers of human dignity and the struggle for it. The declaration that “all human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights” thus becomes connected to a myriad of specific and historicized representations of bodies, cultures, and technologies.



Figure 4: The Canadian Museum for Human Rights: view of first gallery, "What are Human Rights," photograph by author.

For me, the CMHR began to open up questions about what it might mean to articulate dignity through more complex and less sensationalized forms, what it might mean to visually communicate this idea within the frame of curation and museums. Might these spaces offer an alternative route of communication that helps us to understand the visual communication of human dignity as more than the property of individuals? Could curation help to frame relationships at the centre of human dignity, and account for the *mass* of bodies and cultures that make up its shape? Although the UN declaration takes a noticeable place within the CMHR’s first gallery, the prominence of the human body in this and other new museums focusing on human rights brings forth new questions concerning the relationship between human dignity and the human body on the one hand, and human dignity and mediation on the other. In effect, these museums have embraced a

more corporeal and cultural understanding of human dignity, which openly suggests that the law is not the only logical home of this potent idea. Further, in spaces such as the CMHR, there is no longer a sole focus on dignity as a product of idealization, negation, or emancipation. Museums like the CMHR connect dignity with the body and with media in a way that demands further reflection, especially considering the recent surge in philosophical and cultural debates about the efficacy of dignity as a concept.

Inspired by the CMHR, this dissertation proposes to theorize human dignity as a *relational* property and begins to imagine how human dignity might be thought of as something shared, as something built in and through communities. I use the term *relational* both for what it says about the necessity of thinking beyond individuals so often at the centre of human rights discussions, and for its descriptive alliance with the task of curation and curatorial systems. I propose that curatorial mediation is important to the contemporary apprehension of human dignity because its forms help to shift conversations from individual human persons to communities of human beings. Set against normative negative, and emancipatory frameworks, my relational understanding of human dignity speaks directly to its visual communication through the exhibition of human bodies en masse. In part, what follows might at times feel counterintuitive. Opening up the conversation about human dignity's visual communication to themes of relation requires speaking in technical terms about curatorial systems themselves. I describe and analyze systems that I argue make human dignity apprehensible as much as I describe and analyze specific subjects or people that populate them. I understand relationality as a mode that “does not deny difference, but rather seeks to more deeply understand how our different histories and experiences position us in relation to each other (Donald 2012, 45).² Relationality is especially important when thinking about human dignity because of the way it does not impose conformity or an easy sense of

² Dwayne Donald uses this definition in conjunction with what he terms *ethical relationality*. As he notes, “this form of relationality is ethical because it does not overlook or render invisible particular historical, cultural, and social contexts from which a standpoint arises. Rather, it puts these considerations at the forefront of engagements across frontiers of difference” (Donald 2012, 45).

universalism. Systems of curation can tell us a lot about the way relations are made across people, cultures, and time without reducing one form to another. In this dissertation, I investigate three notable forms of display: atlases, albums, and museums. These models demand a way of seeing human dignity that expands beyond the limits of a single frame or individual, and in so doing forces a reading of human lives and human worth as existing *between* frames. Though I understand human dignity to be a distinctly human value, I rely upon a media oriented lens to shift the conversation from individuals to communities on the one hand, and to enliven this idea's material parameters on the other. Rather than seeing human dignity as something owned by the individual, I position human dignity as a product of life shared with others. For the purpose of this dissertation, I define human dignity as an idea that upholds humanity, not through the agency of the individual, but through the primacy of cultural systems. Thus, apprehending an idea not visible to the eye comes via relations, as a product of kinship across families, communities, cultures, and borders.

My dissertation aims to situate the opening of new multimedia exhibits, such as the CMHR, within a longer history of display and exhibition that similarly attempt to map the cultural and embodied dimensions of human dignity. I use three case studies that date from the 1900s to the present to make this argument: 1) August Sander's *People of the 20th Century* (1910-1964); 2) UNESCO's *Human Rights Exhibition Album* (1950); and 3) *The Canadian Museum for Human Rights* (2014). I demonstrate how these three models aid in the apprehension of human dignity beyond the perpetuation of schemas that foreground autonomy or individuality. Each of these exhibits use images that connect integrally with the human body and juxtapose representations in ways that demonstrate how human dignity can and must be thought and communicated in complex visual spaces.

The museological notion of curation and Walter Benjamin's concept of constellations will be used to support my claim that the visual communication of human dignity depends upon media studies broadly, and curatorial systems specifically. The case studies are used to articulate both the problems and possibilities of embedding dignity within visual frameworks. In juxtaposing human bodies in social and cultural contexts,

exhibits perform important work in defining the ways that equality, universalism, and ultimately human dignity have been conceived, communicated, and contested. The dissertation focuses on how human dignity can be visualized beyond bodily violation or normative idealization, and commits to a sustained focus on the corporeal and mediated functions of dignity. My aim is to make the means of dignity and indignity visible within complex and constellated frameworks.

Research Questions

Throughout the dissertation, I remain engaged with three key questions currently underserved by human rights, media studies, and museum studies:

1. How has human dignity been visually depicted?
2. How can a focus on curation help to support a *relational* theorization of human dignity?
3. How can an emphasis on the history of the affiliation between human dignity and curation help us to understand human rights recent move into museums?

The first question is ultimately tied to the much broader question of how the concept of dignity is communicated generally. Communicating human dignity remains a fundamental problem given the fact that the idea of dignity has a long and complicated etymological and social history. As noted, dignity has been used to communicate the status of humans over animals; the exceptional status of the clergy, nobles, and parliamentary officials; the capacity for human reason; and the capacity for composure under pressure. When considering the visual communication of human dignity, many of these threads remain central even as human dignity has started to be used as a way to signify the inherent value of all human lives.

Human dignity has emerged as one of the most prominent concepts among the collection of concepts that make up human rights and is receiving renewed attention with prominent legal and philosophical historians weighing in on human dignity's conceptual legacies (Agamben 1999b; Kateb 2011; Moyn 2014 & 2015; Rosen 2012; Waldron 2012). Dignity remains one of the most contested and abstract concepts available to

researchers and the general public because it poses as many problems as it seeks to resolve. On the one hand, dignity signals a base line from which all human beings can claim rights. On the other hand, it appears as just another word that grasps, sometimes unsuccessfully, at what it ought to mean to be human. As Joseph Slaughter (2007) has explained, dignity presents itself in the UDHR as a common sense tautology: “located on both sides of the law’s transitive ‘therefore,’ human dignity both precedes and derives from human rights, warranting their recognition and emerging from their declaration; thus, rhetorically, dignity...is both a founding natural rationale for, and the positive product of, human rights legislation” (76-77). In this sense, dignity communicates something that exists both before and after the law; in contemporary society, it is the groundwork for the existence of human rights, the product of its declarative and idealized vision, and something in need of protection. The majority of the renewed interest in dignity distinctly focuses on state apparatuses – legal, political, religious – and their functions in communicating and establishing the means of dignity as it exists “after the law”; that is, recent engagement with the concept of human dignity primarily emphasize the *formal* processes designed to claim rights or reclaim dignity.

I contend that the contemporary museumification of human rights has made the concept of dignity more widely available to visual, cultural, and technological paradigms.³ As I focus on exhibitions, I aim to contribute to these philosophical and legal conversations by staking out ways in which representations make the means of dignity visible both adjacent to and outside of strictly legal frameworks. Legal and political communities are important to the workings of human dignity, but so too are cultural and curatorial systems. Examining exhibitions force us to practice seeing human dignity as a relational idea—across bodies and between cultures. This way of seeing is especially crucial if we are to grant the idea of human dignity a more nuanced form within media studies and throughout visual culture, as a transnational idea. Emphasizing the relational aspects of human dignity via exhibitions that disrupt simplistic notions of taxonomies and

³ The CMHR is but one of many museums that have opened in the last five years which are dedicated to human rights. These include Museo de la Memoria y los Derechos Humanos (Santiago, Chile – 2011), The Centre for Civil and Human Rights (Atlanta, Georgia; USA – 2014), Kazern Dossen (Belgium, 2011).

mediation pushes us to reconcile social and visual hierarchies, and forces us back onto integral questions of human worth. Exhibitions such as atlases, albums, and museums have the ability to connect human dignity more firmly to mediated subjectivities outside of the law and provide a frame that might resist idealized notions of autonomous subjects that have largely left human dignity communicated as a utopian and abstract notion.

My final research question, “how can an emphasis on the history of this relationship help us to understand human rights’ recent move into museums?”, dovetails with the broader concerns over the communication of human dignity. By taking a historical approach, I do not seek to find *an* origin of human dignity aligned with contemporary museums. The historical approach is meant to demonstrate how the contemporary museumification of human rights is indebted to issues of taxonomy and representation that have their roots in scientific racism, technological reproduction, institutional parameters, and partial archives. Sander’s *People of the Twentieth Century* richly demonstrates how the human body becomes laden with moral and domestic symbolisms that persist today, while UNESCO’s *Human Rights Exhibition Album* demonstrates how dignity’s inclusion in the UDHR necessitated a visual form. Taking a historical approach provides room to analyze when and how disruptions of dignity’s visible mediation occur, and ultimately why these shifts are important to our own contemporary understanding of its conceptual limits.

Mapping the Dissertation

This dissertation is composed of four main chapters. Chapter one provides a brief overview of the relevant literature that engages with human dignity and the museological notion of curation. To begin I will look more closely at the concept of human dignity, particularly in relation to the field of media studies. From there I explore the history of curation and Walter Benjamin’s concept of the constellation, both of which I believe are necessary to help understand human dignity as a relational property within media studies. Here too, I will also begin the historical work of connecting human dignity to modern and technological reproductions of which twenty and twenty-first century curation trades on. Combined, these threads inform the theoretical lens through which I analyze

representations of the human as the locus of human dignity beyond normative, negative, or emancipatory frameworks.

The middle chapters proceed chronologically and use case studies to offer insights into how curatorial models might work in service of a relational theorization of human dignity. In chapter two, I examine August Sander's book of photographs, *Face of Our Time* (1929), and his larger photographic project, *People of the Twentieth Century* (1910-1964), asking how and whether the idea of a dignified human subject is available within his taxonomic and typological venture. Primarily addressing how Sander disrupts taxonomic and aesthetic functions of the body, I argue that his work helps to understand anxieties that underlie the connection of dignity with the body because of its relationship with physiognomy and its status as "an atlas of instruction" (Benjamin, as quoted in Berger 1992). Importantly, Sander's project begins the process of laying out how visual spaces that move between finite subjects and infinite configurations are integral to understanding how bodily comportment works alongside human dignity.

Chapter three turns toward the period directly following World War II and examines how the translation of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948) into UNESCO's *Human Rights Exhibition Album* (1950) should be taken as integral to the formation of dignity as an international idea. As dignity became part of a declarative instrument, it also became something of a modern technology. There is a tendency to think about the UDHR and human dignity as a stable property, existing across cultures and histories in a uniform manner. However, the *Exhibition Album* helps to demonstrate how dignity's new declarative functions should be tempered with its visual and varied communication. The album opens the declaration up to questions of its own use as it "reflects back a usable image of the law" (Wexler 2017, 101). Put differently, the album makes the ideas of the UDHR visible and relational. Indeed, the concept of human dignity benefits from the album as a form that both points to family relationships and attempts to extend them to an extreme conclusion. The album visually depicts the "human family" alluded to in the UDHR through a familiar, yet complex, media structure.

In the fourth chapter, I will address the Canadian Museum for Human Rights with specific attention paid to its first gallery. The gallery's timeline will be explored in depth as a way to demonstrate the ways the museum *expresses* human dignity, and in turn how it reverts to a new normative visualization of this idea, as it delimits vulnerabilities and connections despite its technological innovation. As the museum attempts to move beyond an aesthetics that relies on images of indignity to communicate human rights, it struggles to reconcile what new relationships might be made beyond a politics of comparative oppression or inclusion. In this chapter, I aim to demonstrate how the CMHR tends to fix or solidify relationships between people and cultures, thus avoiding how human dignity is a relation made in negotiation and through developing frameworks of understanding. The CMHR's emphasis on fixed relationships is especially clear in terms of its treatment of Indigenous perspectives and most recently as it has faced criticism in regard to one of its hagiographic human rights advocates. Thus, I aim to demonstrate how human dignity's relational aspects must be embraced, both curatorially and culturally, if a positive articulation of human rights and human dignity are to be seen as something alive in these structures, and not as something that is indeed archived or achieved.

In many ways, my dissertation is an attempt to refute the way discussions of human rights and human dignity are predominantly framed in terms of gateways of suffering or idealization. There has been substantial consideration of what is insufferable, cruel, and otherwise inhospitable in relation to the visibly violated human body (Bergoffen 2012; Hunt 2007; Ignatieff 2001; Linfield 2010). Unlike Payam Akhavan (2017), the latest Massey Lecturer and a renowned international human rights lawyer, I do not agree that "feeling injustice is the only means of understanding justice" (6). How human dignity is communicated must be thought of and imagined outside of injustice; feeling injustice is not the *only means* of understanding. The project of human rights is a work in progress. It is also a process in need of language that is both creative and constitutive when it comes to the "human," the "people," the "body," and the "everybody" beyond naïve idealism. Shifting attention towards visual projects, which are not solely focused on broken or violated bodies, opens up new routes of communication

and offers a language that speaks to the communities, alliances, and relations that are foundational to the contemporary understanding of human dignity.

1 Human Dignity: History, Media, Curation

Abounaddara, a collective of film and image-makers specializing in emergency cinema in the context of the Syrian War, recently issued a provocative claim: “dignity has never been photographed” (2017). Similarly, Ariella Azoulay (2013) has argued that universalism, a conceptual neighbor to human dignity, is “an idea deprived of body and form” (36). Both observations point to the way a desire for a singular image, as something to uphold or idealize, is insufficient when engaging with the visual communication of distinctly human qualities. Relying on or striving for a singular image of human dignity has lent itself to notions of idealization or autonomy only to be contradicted with a relentless stream of images of atrocity. Individual photographs have been read as proof that dignity is something that human beings claim or possess, or conversely that it is something which can be easily violated. Both sides of this spectrum have been central to the contemporary assumptions that undergird the visual communication of human dignity. That an aesthetics of indignity has been used to come to the defense of dignity itself is not only a prominent tactic in visual communication, but something that has been thoroughly considered and contested, while positive visualizations have been labeled as celebratory or unfaithful to the realities of global disparity.

If we are thus aware of the limitations of photography in communicating human dignity, I take Abounaddara’s and Azoulay’s claims as a challenge to be more specific about the kinds of visions, technologies, and systems that can help us to think through the mediated parameters of human dignity, and in turn move it towards less binary assumptions. Human dignity is not just something made ideally or revealed in gross violation. Human dignity is made in and through relations and communities, amidst the promise of a shared world has made it a powerful and enduring idea. As such, I turn to curatorial models to help express my claim. While photography creates the images and reproductions central to the visions and technologies under consideration in this dissertation, it is not the *act* of photography or its subsequent representations in particular

that I am expressly interested in. As Azoulay (2012) claims, “the event that the camera sets in motion does not necessarily result in a photograph” (21). For my own purpose, the “events” that the camera sets in motion are indeed more systemic and related to modes of exhibition. I see a wide range of curatorial models – atlases, albums, and museums – as alternative routes to the visual communication of human dignity, routes that do not simplify its shape in idealized or degraded images. This chapter aims to position my claim within three broad conceptual moves. First, I provide an overview of the current discussions of human dignity as a way to situate how this interdisciplinary field has considered the differences between individuals and communities. From there, I connect these discussions to media studies more broadly. This leads into my main intervention, which proposes curatorial systems as alternative media that provide spaces to think with and about human dignity as embodied and relational.

Dignity: An Overview

Like the history of human rights, which only gained prominence in the mid to late 2000s, historical inquiries considering human dignity are a relatively new phenomenon. In terms of human rights four periods are often foregrounded in their development: the Middle-Ages and Roman Law, the late 18th Century with the rise of the American and French Revolutions, the 1940s as a response to the Second World War and its aftermath, and most recently in the 1970s with the rise of global humanitarianism (McCrudden 2013, 4). The surge in the study of human rights has given form to debates concerning their origins, particularly between Lynn Hunt (2007 & 2016), who positions the origins of human rights at the turn of the 18th century with the abolishment of public torture, and Samuel Moyn (2010 & 2016), who positions the origins of human rights after 1968, at the time of the development of international aid and humanitarian justice.⁴ I note this debate over the origins of human rights because it focuses current discourse around human dignity as well, as scholars search for and develop the origins of human dignity in similar moments and institutions. Like emergent histories of human rights, histories of

⁴ See Hoffman (2016) for a detailed overview of this debate.

human dignity are equally new and similarly fragmented. In many cases, histories of human dignity follow similar patterns, aligning its development with famous laws and declarations from the Middle Ages to the present. Similar institutional, etymological, philosophical, and cultural analyses have been playing out in the last decade, especially as the interest in human dignity has grown (Düwell 2014; McCrudden 2013).

Despite the fact that human rights and human dignity are both relatively new areas of historical inquiry, the study of human dignity does have its own particular contours. Human dignity is often considered to be foundational to human rights. Today, the invocation of human dignity signals a baseline value and respect of all human lives that make any program of human rights viable. In this way, whereas human rights define what humans are entitled to, human dignity defines a distinctly human value that anchors humanity and allows scholars and legal professionals alike to invoke human rights writ large. However, though human dignity seems to signal a baseline for human rights, it should not be thought of as simplistically universal. Its meaning and use heavily depends on context, and debates often fall within legal, philosophical, and of utmost interest to this dissertation, cultural themes, each of which has important ramifications for my own study.

First, a large portion of the work on human dignity follows legal leads. These studies position our current understandings of human dignity in relation to specific legal documents outside of the dominant historical frames of human rights writ large. For example, the 1848 French decree against slavery (Scott 2013), the 1937 adoption of the Irish constitution (Moyn 2013), the 1949 adoption of German Basic Law (Goos 2013), or more recently the rulings of International Criminal Courts (Bergoffen 2012). Further, more contemporary engagements with the legal importance of dignity in South Africa (Fagan 2014), Japan (Matsui 2014) and India (Baxi 2014) have been crucial to situating human dignity as a distinct realm of legal study. Most of these endeavors are restricted to where and when the term or word dignity appears and to how it was and is used in legal processes.

Second, an emphasis on the philosophical origins of dignity is also important. Here scholars most often point to early notions of duty dating back to Cicero (Rosen 2012; Düwell 2014) and Immanuel Kant's theory of *würde*. Kant's writing on dignity in *Groundwork for the Metaphysics of Morals* (1785) is especially crucial to understand how and why dignity has been predominantly considered as immaterial and disembodied. Kant saw the rational being as the central subject of human dignity, and the abstract undertaking of reason as the central act. Bound by the categorical imperative, which tells us that an action or judgement must be moral in all circumstances for it to be considered good, Kant's idea of dignity is similarly positioned within a rational and imaginative sphere (24). The process of reason responsible for undertaking Kant's imperative is meant to happen *independent of experience*. For Kant, the rational being must be an *end in oneself*, and in dignity the person must not be used to reach another being's desired end. In this sense, the means of existence (material and corporeal realities) are secondary when the faculty of reason takes care to act only when actions can be claimed to be universally good for all. Centering the faculty of reason constructs a metaphysical, idealized space with values that are easily distinguished. Kant argues:

morality is the condition under which alone a rational being can be an end in himself, for only thereby can he be a legislating member in the kingdom of ends. Hence morality and humanity, insofar as it is capable of morality, alone have dignity. Skill and diligence in work have a market price; wit, lively imagination, and humor have an affective price; but fidelity to promise and benevolences based on principles (not on instinct) have intrinsic worth. (40-1)

It should here be noted that Kant used the term *würde*, which is most often translated as dignity, but is also allied with value and worth in a more concrete sense.⁵ In any case, Kant's philosophy of human dignity underscores clarity in distinction, a willed space for thought beyond out material selves, and a sense of security in how this idea ought to be

⁵ As Waldron (2012) notes, "'dignity' here is the English translator's term, not Kant's. Kant uses the German term '*Würde*.' There is a well-established practice of translating *Würde* as 'dignity.' But the two words have slightly different connotations. '*Würde*' is certainly much closer to 'worth' than our term 'dignity' is" (24).

deployed.⁶ For Kant, the mind and its capacity for reason and morality is the ground on which the concept of dignity is waged and won.

For modern thinkers Kant's theory seems to perform a dual function, as it signals one of the earliest conceptions of human dignity that is perceived as universal in nature and resembles a theory of dignity found within recent laws and declarations. Jack Donnelly (2015) explains that the period marked by the French and American revolutions is the beginning of a time when the concept of human dignity was transitioning from a *normative* concept to a *taxonomic* concept. Normative conceptions of dignity refer to the way this idea helped to create symbolic designations reserved for select groups of people, such as rank, virtue, and reason. In visual terms, we can return to Queen Victoria (Fig. 1) for reference to the outward presentation of her dignified station. *Taxonomic* conceptions of human dignity most resemble the way human dignity is thought of currently, as an idea or symbolic designation granted to all people simply because of their biological traits marking them as human (Donnelly 2015, 2). Kant's version of dignity, which ascribes all humans a worth outside of a market place, is one of the first iterations of this idea that gestures towards a taxonomic or otherwise inherent version. While there is disagreement as to how or whether Kant's theory informed later laws or understandings of human dignity (Hill 2013 & 2014; Kerstain 2014; Moyn 2013; Rosen 2012; Waldron 2012), one would be remiss not to count his understanding of free will founded in rationality as one of dignity's historical and philosophical turning points.

Finally, cultural manifestations of dignity, or inquiries that search for the presence of dignity within human history where dignity is not explicitly tied to laws or obvious invocation of dignity in name, make up the third broad sphere of its historical analysis. Predominantly, this dissertation exists within this cultural sphere, and proceeds from the observation that though human dignity might not be evoked in name its demand as a distinctly human value pervades the case studies examined here. Within more cultural

⁶ As much as Kant emphasizes reason, there is an underlying aesthetic, or at the very least imaginative component of this imperative dignity: there is a way in which the moral component must project options in and for the world.

considerations of human dignity Jeremy Waldron (2012) has staked out a theory of human dignity that is aligned with aristocratic notions of status as much as it is with moral or legal frameworks. Waldron argues that how we understand dignity today is directly connected to its “ancient and historical connection with rank,” which now translates to the idea that dignity expresses “the high and equal rank of every human person” (14). While Waldron places human dignity within the law—specifically, within the “bodies of law” that support his claim—there is a slippage between the normative arena of the law and the performative aspects of bodies within it that points to the complexity of human dignity’s cultural forces. Waldron states, “the sort of conception I am developing...presents dignity as a rank or status that a person may occupy in society, display in his bearing and self-presentation and exhibit in his speech and actions” (28). Thus, speech and outer appearances become markers of dignity before the law in Waldron’s work, but the same markers are unreconciled within society or culture at large. For my own purposes, Waldron’s theory is compelling, as it gestures towards the visual realm in a way that few other academics do. However, when we put his ideas into conversation with specific examples and historical trajectories, the footing becomes less secure. For example, the image of Frederick Douglass (Fig. 3) can traditionally be aligned with dignity as a status, as both a position one occupies and displays in self-presentation. Douglass used his body and self-stylization to great effect, demonstrating how people of colour could occupy the same high-ranking status as white, land-owning men. Moving forward in time, the “upwards equalization” of human dignity begins to become less clear, as technology and self-stylization become prolific and symbolically charged; these confluences will be explored in more depth throughout the proceeding chapters. How are we to perceive human dignity as something displayed in one’s bearing that doesn’t become normative or aspirational? As Samuel Moyn (2014) has argued, “such rituals...seem fairly silly when applied to everyone” (22). Though Waldron radically opens up questions regarding human dignity parallel to the law, as it manifests in and on bodies, an underlying tension remains that sees human dignity as normative, that is as something meant to look and feel a certain way. Difference here remains problematic. Thinking in terms of relationality, which does not deny difference, but seeks

to understand how our different histories position us in relation to one another, Waldron's theory does not go far enough in terms of human dignity's visual communication.

Although Waldron's is one of the more high-profile contemporary thinkers to engage with human dignity via culture and the body, he is not the only or the earliest. Friedrich Schiller's work, in the treatise *On Grace and Dignity* (1793), formulates one of the earliest relationships between dignity, representation, and the human form. On the heels of Kant's theory of dignity, Schiller saw fit to question the centrality of reason so integral to Kant's understanding of human worth. For Schiller, corporeal realities are just as important as the faculty of reason when navigating the means of human existence and thus *the means of human dignity*. Dignity, for Schiller, "is the *expression* of a noble disposition of the mind" (370; my italics). Bodily comportment, emotions, and reactions become places to find evidence of how humans conceive of their relationship to others, and ultimately how they see themselves and others *as human*. While Schiller's formulation has often been solely aligned with the realm of aesthetic judgment, his theory of dignity far exceeds a visual encounter. Schiller understands dignity as something made knowable through the confluence of material, corporeal, and moral worlds, of which the human is the central locus of evidence and study. However, rather than being simply another object of aesthetic study, the human is framed as a complex interface that meets the demands of moral obligations and the realities of corporeal being. The human being "cannot account the dignity of his moral purpose, cannot urge his preeminence as a moral creature, if he wants to claim the prize of beauty; here he is nothing but a thing in space, nothing but one phenomenon among phenomena" (Schiller, 343). Thus, in Schiller's understanding, the dignity of the person is not tied to her aesthetic qualities or questions of her beauty alone. The realm of beauty treats objects and subjects as *things*. The realm of dignity understands people to be connected, vulnerable, and morally impactful. Schiller emphasizes the human capacity to master his or her own feelings, as a form of internal fortitude, that is in fact tested when put in contact with the realities of the material world.

Schiller's theorization poses dignity as a connective property. Human dignity is not the product of solitary or isolated reason, but rather proof of its existence can be

found within products of human interactions and reactions. The dignified person, rather than being one thing amongst other things, is vitally and necessarily *animated* and constituted in relation to others; he or she is a person whose demands are both tied to and reach well beyond the material self, yet it is the material self that gives the dignified person real and contingent force. With the introduction of a material dimension, a sense of real vulnerability is brought into the concept of dignity. In this light dignity becomes not only a moral exercise, but also a tangible product, which can be seen as capturing the ways in which humans are supported as more than just “things in space.” Schiller does not move completely away from Kant, but rather sees the body and its material possibilities as an integral part in our understanding of dignity. The body is not merely a thing getting in the way of superior morality; it is the *medium* that demarcates our humanity from other things of beauty.

In this way, Schiller binds human dignity to the expressive and exhibitionary realm. In Schiller’s configuration, noble dispositions of the mind can be understood as being translated through the body: “we cannot say, that mind reveals itself in a willful movement, for this movement only expresses the material of will (the purpose) but not the form of will (the disposition). About the latter only the accompanying movement can teach us” (353). Dignity is thought to be readable in the body because of the tensions it communicates when humans are put in contact with the wills of others. Most notably, and iconographically, the evidence for such a claim was found within the Laocoön statue (Fig. 5), which depicts the agony of the Trojan priest as he witnesses his sons’ deaths at the hands of the snakes, deaths which were punishment for his own crimes. The scene is said to reveal:

Calm in suffering, wherein dignity actually consists, although only by a decision of reason, becomes the demonstration of intelligence in man and the expression of his moral freedom. But, it is not merely in suffering in the narrow sense, where the word signifies only painful emotions, but at every moment the desiring faculty shows a strong interest, that the mind must prove its freedom, and thus dignity be its expression. (376)

Thus, dignity is not about suffering per se, but rather about the human’s ability to recognize her place in a world where she is not always in control; it is about the moments

of disruption and mediation that occur when humans are brought into contact with one another. The tension between pain and peace or degradation and stoicism is a sign of a developed mentality that recognizes coexistence and personal control. In Schiller's account of dignity there is a disjuncture between the natural instinct and bodily comportment, and it is in these signs of disharmony we find evidence of a particularly human quality and a particularly human worth. In this sense, dignity does not mark an unbound freedom or limitless agency, but rather a constant being in tension with the needs and concerns of others and an awareness of one's place within a field of action and embodiment.



Figure 5: Laocoön, photo by James Anderson c. 1845-1855. Digital image courtesy of the Ghetty's Open Content Program.

Dignity and Media

Schiller's reading of the Laocoön statue brings us to the *mediation* of human dignity. Shifting away from notions of objectivity, ethics, and metaphysics, Schiller allowed questions of aesthetics, representation, and performance to filter into philosophical discussions of dignity. Undoubtedly, these visual properties complicate what we now understand as one of the underlying principle of dignity as a contemporary concept: regarding and taking seriously the representational and performative aspects that intersect with human dignity risks undermining the establishment of inherent value bound to the person. Put another way, questioning the visual communication of human dignity, comingling its visual elements, introduces notions of *difference* in a way that calls into question the notion of inherent value, which is now considered core to the idea of human dignity. How, indeed, can the essential quality of our humanness be communicated within a diverse visual sphere without introducing new ideas of hierarchy? How can human dignity be responsibly thought of alongside difference? In many ways, there is no perfect answer to such questions. Pairing the idea of human dignity with visual communication necessarily troubles its perceived uniformity, which has until recently been protected by its place within philosophical and legal discourse.

The mediation and communication of human dignity is, however, a growing concern. In particular, the place of the body, and its role as a medium of expression is an expanding field in current analysis of human rights and dignity. This dissertation expands upon recent thinking that affixes human dignity to the body in legal, political, and aesthetic ways (Anker 2012; Bergoffen 2009 & 2012, Sliwinski 2015). Importantly, these theorists have established connections, between dignity, the body, and media in ways that developed normative, negative, and emancipatory perspectives on dignity's embodied properties via testimony, literature, phenomenology, and photography.

Relying on the rulings of the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda (ICTR) and the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY), Deborah Bergoffen approaches the embodiment of human dignity from the intersection of law, phenomenology, and testimony. She writes: "this body of law is a law of bodies. In

identifying slavery, torture, and rape as a weapon of war as human rights violations, it ties human dignity to bodily integrity” (Bergoffen 2009, 311). War and genocide mediate bodies in a way that disrupts their meaning and their materiality: “when my body is used as a thing the meanings it brings to the world are destroyed” (Bergoffen 2009, 312). Though Bergoffen does not abide by any stable sense that bodily violation alone marks human dignity, she does outline the importance of the body as a central signifier to pursuits of justice. Recognizing rape as a weapon of war, as a crime against humanity, acknowledged that visible scars alone did not define a violation of human dignity, and fundamentally reoriented the gendered dynamics of bodily vulnerability. Testimony is a vehicle of communication legible in front of the law, specifically in relation to the genocides in Rwanda and Yugoslavia, each of which saw rape used as a weapon. Bergoffen reminds us, “we cannot reduce any of these human rights offenses to matters of the material body alone. We must take account of the ways in which the human body is always the embodiment of a meaning making subject” (2009, 313). The subject’s power to give the world meaning is integral, and conceivably why testimony is so important to her study. Testimony is a process of reclaiming power to give the world meaning, and thus shifts the conversation away from the initial violation of the body to the pursuit of justice. While bodily violation is here the beginning of dignity’s communicative process before the law, it is not the end.

From a literary and phenomenological perspective, Elizabeth Anker has been critical of the way our current human rights regime prioritizes bodily integrity as a vehicle of communication. She argues, “not only are [human rights] underwritten by the dual fictions of human dignity and bodily integrity, but they yield a highly truncated, decorporealized vision of the subject” (Anker 2012, 2). Anker sees dignity as a fiction that scripts the human as an *inviolable* body, despite the fact that violated and abused bodies can be found with little effort. Posing the body as “fully integrated and inviolable...whole, autonomous, and self-enclosed” serves to turn “corporeal integrity into something of a baseline condition that precedes the ascription of dignity and rights to an individual” (Anker 2012, 4). When corporeal integrity acts as a baseline for human dignity, we enter an exclusionary realm that forecloses the vulnerability and decay that

cannot be untethered from the human body itself. Not only are those born with specific “defects” excluded in this normative formulation, but deep assumptions about human dignity and bodily integrity ignores the body until it becomes a thing to be dealt with as it *inevitably* decays, which “when the body cannot be thus ignored, the liberal tradition generally treats it as an entity that must be repressed, quarantined, or otherwise mastered by reason” (Anker 2012, 4). Anker sees phenomenology as an answer to the quandary between inviolability and violation, arguing that we should affirmatively recast “embodiment as a ubiquitously shared site of disorder, flux, and brokenness” as a way to “overwrite the stigma and the shame that attach only to some bodies and not others” (Anker 2012, 59). Literature, she argues, acts as a site that can perform this recasting, as it challenges liberal and individualistic conceptions of the self. Anker importantly turns the concept of human dignity towards a messier, and thus less binary notion of human dignity that exceeds normative or negative tendencies and examines its own exclusions.

Whereas Bergoffen and Anker see testimony and literature respectively as the vehicles that help to reframe questions of vulnerability and materiality in relation to human dignity, Sharon Sliwinski has posited that the invention of photography had an important impact on the “ascension of the idea of human dignity” (2015, 174). Working with the photographs of Frederick Douglass, the significance of which were briefly explicated in the introduction (Fig 3), Sliwinski sees three prominent versions of dignity – status, intrinsic value, and an ability to keep one’s composure during suffering – coming together. In democratizing the genre of portraiture, photography disrupted notions of status, it gave sitters the power to construct their own image outside of the structures of repressive political relations, and it helped advocate for what might be called aesthetic emancipation. For Douglass, an early adopter of photographic portraiture, the medium and form provided a venue to create his own image and subvert discriminatory notions of value directly related to race and its manifestation on the body. He too could present an image of himself that captured an “air of dignity” and visually demonstrated his belonging, not to a class or race, but to a distinctly human category.

Each of these contributions have been influential to the genesis of my own project and begin to set up the communication of human dignity generally, and within specific

realms of study particularly through legal testimony, world literature, and photography. Furthermore, they complicate the way human dignity has been communicated, and frame its visual terms in complex cultural terms, outside of philosophy and the law, that defy an easy sense of stability or autonomy. In turn, they pose the human body as a multifaceted locus of expression, mediation, and contestation.

In effect, current debates concerning the mediation of human dignity can be seen as a response to themes of bodily inviolability and individuality that are so often posed as baselines for its existence. These themes have a long and complex history in relation to human rights, which have been well-documented. In *Inventing Human Rights* (2007), Lynn Hunt demonstrates how individuality became linked with human rights and human dignity around the turn of the 18th century in concert with the Declaration of Independence (1776) and the Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizen (1789). At this moment, a shift from state or feudal ownership of people to individual autonomy and self-determination was taking place: “torture ended because the traditional framework of pain and personhood fell apart, to be replaced bit by bit, by a new framework, in which individuals owned their bodies, had rights to their separateness and to bodily inviolability, and recognized in other people the same passions, sentiments, and sympathies as in themselves” (Hunt 2007, 112). In Hunt’s view, spectacles of suffering no longer had the desired effect of community restoration; the body no longer belonged to the state in the same way and thus its mutilation no longer provided positive affirmations of inclusion and morality. The slow swing of the pendulum from state ownership of the body to individuality and bodily inviolability began to create a new framework of human rights.

As Michael Ignatieff (2001) argues: “human rights is a language of individual empowerment...when individuals have agency, they can protect themselves against injustice. Equally, when individuals have agency, they can define themselves what they wish to live and die for” (57). As empowering as this promise of individuality was and remains, it denies how the individual is, in fact, made by a myriad of cultural factors. Indeed, as Hunt admits, “the very notion of human rights inadvertently opened the door to more virulent forms of sexism, racism, and anti-Semitism. In effect, the sweeping

claims about the natural equality of all mankind called forth equally global assertions about natural difference, producing a new kind of opponent to human rights” (Hunt, 187). While we might see the move towards individuality as liberating on the one hand, it brought about a framework with equally troubling effects in terms of human dignity, effects that we are still coming to terms with today. As human rights named a new form of collective agreement untethered from monarchy, it offered another form of protection, by way of individuality that traded one type of subjection for another (Brown 2004, 455).

Understanding ourselves as individuals sits in tension with the collective offering of human rights discourse writ large. The move towards “separateness and bodily inviolability” ushered in a way of understanding human dignity and its relationship to the human body that privileged purity over vulnerability and exalted individuality over a collective or social community. As human dignity began to be owned by the individual, rather than understood through the community, it became entrenched deeper into normative dichotomies of idealization on the one hand, and violation on the other. Though violation was no longer as instrumental to the state, it began to serve different purposes, making sweeping claims about the value of humans more generally. Even where the body was used as a way to assert aesthetic emancipation, as we saw with the photographs of Frederick Douglass in the 1800s, ascension of human dignity was personal and tied to ideal visualizations often along the lines of race, class, and gender.

This dissertation attempts to contend with the movement of human rights and human dignity into the individual, and offer an alternative way of imagining shared ownership through a relational theorization. Despite the rhetoric of individual ownership that we are still left with today, and which will be explicitly analyzed in chapter four, our experiences of human dignity are made through relations with others, relations that must be named and theorized beyond scenes of violation or autonomous faculties.

Dignity and Curatorial Constellations

At its core, this project proposes a different media of communication – namely, curation – as a form that might help to situate human dignity outside of strict binary frameworks. While the same problems arise in terms of opening up human dignity to questions of

visible, and thus hierarchical difference, I argue that curatorial models provide structures that help to assert how our means of existence creates demands on others, thus expanding conversations about the ends of human dignity. Shifting attention towards exhibitionary projects offers creative and constitutive language that speaks to the communities and relations that are foundational to human dignity's contemporary understanding, as a distinctly human value that is universal but not culturally uniform. My claim—that dignity is apprehended through relation—rests upon the observation that the idea of dignity is always already bound to the visual realm, a realm wherein the configuration of different subjects and elements is telling about the regard of human worth. I see the concept of human dignity turning alongside those moments where people are brought together, and where the limits of our freedom are indeed tested. I take Schiller's emphasis on a tension, in his case between calm and suffering, and extend it to the tensions that arise when different people, cultures, and histories are visually brought together. It is not enough to focus on singular instances of violation or aspirational images of autonomous achievement. That we exist alongside the rights of others in time, space, and representation is key to understanding human dignity's visual communication as a constellation of visible signs that allows for a universality of human rights without demanding conformity or dismantling differences.

A sustained focus on problems of aesthetics, representation, and performance allows for a more complex understanding of human dignity beyond binaries of violation and purity on the one hand, and hierarchy and abstraction on the other. As McCrudden notes, "a rich history of dignity would combine these differing approaches" (McCrudden, 2014, 6). Institutional, philosophical, legal, and etymological understandings currently speak to each other only in bits and pieces. I propose that the language and media of curation can help to make these connections perceptible, and might offer models that do not make these strands of knowledge compete with each other for prominence, but rather situates them within less hierarchical modes of knowledge. Seeing human dignity as relational—as a product of life negotiated and shared with others and as a property that values how our different experiences position subjects alongside one another—rather than as something owned by the individual or the state depends upon a framework that is

not only *curatorial*, but importantly *constellated*. Curatorial forms dramatically demonstrate human dignity's relational edges via kinship – across taxonomies, families, communities, and borders.

Curation

The term curation has come to be used across wide swaths of modern life. This word is no longer relegated to art historical or museological fields. Content curation, data curation, digital curation, genetic curation, and cultural curation have become synonymous both with the way ever-growing amounts of information needs to be managed and with the way individuals have come to understand their roles in performing the task of information and cultural management in their everyday lives.

The term curation has no simple origin, yet has already been provisionally entwined with the explicit movement of human rights into museums. The Latin root of curate, “cura” to care or take interest (as in curiosity), has been favorably looked upon as the realm of human rights meets the museological (Failler, 2015; Failler, Ives, Milne 2015). Caring for others supports the care taken by curators to tell stories associated with human rights abuses and more practically look after the artefacts and material remnants left in the path of human rights' progress and peril. In my own case, aligning human dignity with curation does not just signal a conscious effort to care for or make something of the past, but an ongoing and conscious effort to care for the present-conditions that make us human. As Lehrer and Milton (2011) note, “thinking about curation not only as selection, design, and interpretation, but as care-taking—as a kind of intimate, intersubjective, inter-relational obligation—raises key ethical questions relevant in an age of “truth-telling” (Lehrer and Milton, 4). My interest lies within the “inter-relational,” how embodied, cultural, and historical difference curatorially positions people in relation to one another without demanding conformity.

Beyond the roots of care, there is a more granular historical link to be made between curation and human dignity in relation to law and bureaucracy, and as a concept that links legal and cultural concerns. As David Levi-Strauss (2006) elucidates:

Under the Roman Empire the title of curator (‘caretaker’) was given to officials in charge of various departments of public works: sanitation, transportation, policing...the curators regionum were responsible for maintaining order in the 14 regions of Rome. And the curators aquarum took care of the aqueducts. In the Middle Ages, the role of the curator shifted to the ecclesiastical, as clergy having a spiritual cure or charge. So one could say that the split within curation – between the management and control of public works (law) and the cure of souls (faith) – was there from the beginning. (NP)

Thus, from an early moment, curation combined the legal and cultural in a way that arguably continues to this day, and becomes more evident as the relationship between museums and human rights grows. Curation signals a set of relations that is not just about caring in the archival sense, but expanded outwards in terms of bureaucracy, faith, and value in the more humanistic sense. There is a strange affinity between human dignity and curation because of the way they both impart cultural value, which can neither be seen or measured. Both exist within economic spheres, to be sure, but are also aligned with notions of non-monetary cache. As Balzer (2014) notes, “the curator is someone who insists on value, and who makes it, whether or not it actually exists” (32). Dignity too insists on value, even when this value is not given to sight, and can’t be pointed to directly. Mining human dignity’s visual communication might seem strange in this sense, but I argue that dignity’s value can be seen through a curatorial framework where bodies, cultures, histories, and values collide.

Playing off curation’s history in relation to clergy and divine notions of authorship, David Balzer (2014) has coined the term *curationism* as a word that describes the way curating has expanded beyond museums and exhibits. Curationism is not merely a descriptive role (noun) or a task (verb), but has rather become a way of being since the early 1990s: “curationism is, then, the acceleration of the curatorial impulse to become a dominant way of thinking and being” (8). Wine, music, books, and all other facets of culture can and have been curated. Expanding curation to these realms effectively points to the way culture writ large needs to be taken care of—managed, arranged, edited—by those with specialized knowledge (and in the case of online spheres and algorithms, specialized skills).

In this dissertation, I am not suggesting that dignity is yet another thing *to* curate by experts or self-described connoisseurs. Rather, my reliance on curation stems from both its broad dependence on the act of arrangement and juxtaposition and its merging of systemic and value-laden concerns. Curation is at once a method or toolkit of placing objects and images beside one another and a conferring of meaning between them. While there is often an element of happenstance within the process of curation, it is also full of purposeful and conscience decisions which are ultimately full of cultural value. Following the contemporary art historian, Hans-Ulrich Obrist (2014), who argues that curating is “simply about connecting cultures, bringing their elements into proximity with each other – the task of curating is to make junctions to allow different elements to touch” (Obrist 2014, 1), I argue that our sense of what dignity is, is similarly indebted to the connection of peoples and cultures as their elements are brought into proximity with one another. Curatorial models dramatically reveal the effects of such proximity, especially in cases where the body mediates and expresses assumptions underlying human dignity. For example, the groupings August Sander creates in the *People of the Twentieth Century* demonstrate how it is not just the inviolability of bodies that make a dignified life or define dignified movement, but a whole host of social characteristics and environmental constructs. Though we can strive to reach a place where each individual can make their own image and be regarded as wholly autonomous, the realities of our everyday entanglements are much closer to Obrist’s idea of curation. Moments where we are brought into proximity with one another are indeed the moments where human dignity is tested. Crucially, many of these tests occur outside of bodily violation, through the meeting of people in labour, culture, and communities. If “the very idea of an exhibition is that we live in a world with each other, in which it is possible to make arrangements, associations, connections and wordless gestures, and through this *mise en scene* to speak,” human dignity too is made through the worlds we inhabit with each other, and made through arrangements, associations, connections, and often wordless gestures (Obrist, 32).

Focusing on specific curatorial models, I argue, helps to meet the challenge of being more precise about the kinds of visual communication that assist in mediating

human dignity beyond normative, negative, or emancipatory frameworks, and in so doing move towards a relational theorization. On the one hand, exhibitions continue to open up important questions about the connection between human dignity and mediated human subjects that photographic theory has already begun. On the other hand, the language and media of curation provide a framework for the contemporary theorization of human dignity that might resist idealized notions of autonomous subjects or violated bodies, and reposition human dignity as relational. As exhibitions have the capacity to hold and visually compare multiple objects at one time, they are prime places from which to situate human dignity as a more diffuse quality. Curation depends on plurality and logics of arrangement that are at once epistemic and systemic. The arrangement of concrete elements in these spaces can provide clues as to the limits of exclusion and inclusion within the human family, and concretely demonstrate how human dignity is shared and made across bodies of people and bodies of knowledge. Although dignity may never have been photographed, it can and has been exhibited.

Constellations

More specifically, I am interested in a particular kind or strategy of curation that directly helps to expose human dignity as a relational property. In this dissertation, I am interested in types of *constellated curating* that disrupt taxonomies, histories, and ultimately cultural hierarchies with their disregard for temporal and spatial orthodoxies. Not all curating is constellated, and thus not all curatorial endeavors should be aligned with an articulation of human rights or human dignity that does not strictly depend on scenes of violence or indignity. Constellated curating or curatorial constellations help to make a relational theorization of human dignity more direct not only by foregrounding a multi-media and multi-vocal approaches, but also by marrying the material concerns of exhibitions with conceptual language. Curatorial constellations help to make an idea such as human dignity visible as they foreground relationships between individuals, communities, and nations, as they move away from traditional models of time and history, and as they decenter an emphasis on instances of suffering as the main route to the visual communication of this idea.

I depend upon Walter Benjamin's definition and use of the constellation to make this leap. Benjamin introduced the metaphor of the constellation in his *habilitation*, titled, *The Origin of German Tragic Drama* (1928), and directly and indirectly used the concept of the constellation and a constellatd approach to his writing and research that is instructive to our own moment, especially in relation to human rights on a transnational level. Though Benjamin's use of the constellation as a metaphor is not one of his most well-known or regarded contributions, paired with curatorial models it is arguably instructive as we search out new ways of communicating human dignity, its history, and its present configuration.

Benjamin's habituation, *The Origin of German Tragic Drama*, was notably rejected by the faculty committee at the University of Frankfurt, and in turn ended Benjamin's goal of becoming a faculty member.⁷ On its most basic level, the work argued for a reconsideration of Baroque drama over Classical drama. Beyond the unpopularity of its argument, Benjamin's writing was and remains obscure and at times ill-defined in this work. Partly, this fault lies within Benjamin's pursuit of truth as something eternal. Against the reality of the material world, a world constantly in flux, his pursuit for an enduring sense of Truth met real problems. From the first sentence of *The Origin*, Benjamin exposes his trouble, between ideas and their material elements, as it manifests between philosophy and representation: "it is characteristic of philosophical writing that it must continually confront the question of representation" (1928, 27). The "truth" of an idea is seemingly and endlessly tested against its representational situation. As Susan Buck-Morss (1989) has shown, despite Benjamin's simultaneous engagement with the fragmentary and decaying nature of the world in other projects he was working on or just beginning at the time, in *The Origin of German Tragic Drama* he seemed enamored with a "metaphysical understanding of philosophy as the representation of eternal ideas, as if 'constellations' of truth were impervious to precisely that transitoriness which was supposed to be truth's most fundamental quality.... If the historical transiency of the

⁷ The rejection also caused this work to go unpublished in Benjamin's lifetime. It was first printed in 1977, arguably when the diffuse nature of his inquiry became more palatable under a burgeoning postmodern regime interested in disrupting dominant ideas and truths.

physical world is its truth, how is a *meta*-physical speculation about it possible?" (Buck-Morss 1989; 21). Undoubtedly, questions of truth and metaphysics held up against the physical world, especially the physical world Benjamin was a part of in the 1920s, would seem in tension. Developments in technology rapidly changed the representational structure of society, and an eternal sense of Truth more and more out of reach.

I take Benjamin's initial tension between Truth and the transitoriness of the physical world as the first link between human dignity and its visual communication. This tension seems sympathetic to our current moment as well. Though there is a search for dignity's origins and its Truth within philosophical and legal contexts, the historical transiency of the material and visual world complicates this pursuit. On a most basic level, human dignity is confronted by the inherent transitoriness of the human in its most basic sense, as a form in a constant state of change and decay. Further, this concept is confronted by the transiency of the physical world, which has its own lines of cultural and economic disparity, alteration, and decay and which can be seen through changes in media and technology. Within the frame of Benjamin's early struggle between ideas and their representation, which was never resolved in his own work, we begin to get a view into one of the problems facing the study of human dignity today. How can the metaphysical and historical origins of human dignity face the transitory nature of the human and physical world where it also resides?

One answer to such a question comes by way of the heuristic of the constellation itself. Benjamin's introduction of the constellation comes in relation to the same tension between eternal truth and worldly decay. In the "Epistemo-Critical Prologue" to *Origin*, Benjamin makes the following claim: "ideas are not represented in themselves, but solely and exclusively in an arrangement of concrete elements in the concept: as the configuration of these elements...ideas are to objects, as constellations are to stars" (34). The image Benjamin draws, of an idea making itself known through an expansive constellation, is evocative. How we hold an idea is here visualized succinctly. His sentiment foregrounds the way ideas are formed and mobilized from *multiple* sites, and

acknowledges how an idea is never *perfectly* embodied in one object, but instead made through a networked arrangement of multiple and often contesting objects.⁸ What is fascinating here is the tension between constellations as things that are thought of as eternal, as an arrangement of stars remains stable forming a recognizable image that allows constellations to become wayfinding devices, and the presence of what is arranged or admitted more generally, as a constellation that changes or is open to change. His claim suggests how an idea might change, through the introduction or omission of concrete elements or through a change in perspective. In Benjamin's metaphor, which works in terms of objects and material assets, constellations become both wayfinding devices, presenting recognizable patterns, and at the same time open to changes in culture and technology.

From the rejection of Benjamin's early work, he went in two different directions with his philosophical writing, each taking forward the metaphor of the constellation in a distinct way. At the same time that he was working on finishing the *Origin of German Tragic Drama*, Benjamin was beginning to formulate the *Arcades Project*, which he would leave unfinished at the time of his death in 1940. Originally, Benjamin's *Arcades Project* was conceived as a 50-page essay that would outline the importance of nineteenth-century French arcades—glass covered Parisian passageways that are seen as early prototypes of shopping centres or malls—to the project of modernity. However, this simple task ballooned: “Benjamin kept extending its ground and deepening its base, both spatially and temporally” (Buck-Morss 1989; 5). Like an expanding constellation, the relevance of the arcades expanded from their specific locations in Paris, to the city itself, to a broader problem of the modern condition. The patterns of modern life that were at

⁸ For Benjamin, there is a difference between ideas and concepts: “the concept defines a class of phenomena, the Idea determines the relation of the phenomena in the different classes of each other” (Bernstein, 23). In the context of tragedy, the concept of tragedy “defines a certain number of plays” while tragedy as an Idea “figures the relation of these plays to history in the widest sense” (Bernstein, 23). Thus, claiming that “ideas are not represented in themselves, but solely and exclusively in an arrangement of concrete elements in the concept” or “ideas are to objects, as constellations are to stars” is in the instance of German tragedy a way of critiquing the exaltation of a certain play over others. While never stated outright, Benjamin's task in this work was to demonstrate how tragedy must admit other forms, that, while not regarded as highly, nevertheless make up the pattern or configuration of elements that make up tragedy in the first place.

first specific to the arcades began to become applicable to a whole host of modern experiences. In the *Arcades Project* an idea is not found in the appearance of one thing, but in the arrangement of many things: “Benjamin’s intention was to bring together theory and materials, quotations and interpretations, in a new constellation compared to contemporary methods of representation. The quotations and the materials would bear the full weight of the project; theory and interpretation would have to withdraw in an ascetic manner” (Tiedemann 1999, 931). In many ways the arrangements of these materials, quotations, and interpretations bears out part of what Benjamin was trying to reveal regarding the cultural effects of the arcades as an expanding set of materials and growing fragmentation of culture itself. Everything is both connected even through their separation. Benjamin’s method of collecting quotations and thoughts itself imposes a constellated way of thinking and writing. “Benjamin has simply not allowed us to write about his work as an isolated literary product” (Buck-Morss 1989, x). He turns scholars who use his work into detectives, finding clues and connecting dots across the mass of quotations and interpretations. Here the constellation became part of Benjamin’s method (and potentially a culprit of the project’s state of incompleteness).

Closer to the end of Benjamin’s life, the metaphor of the constellation reappeared in his “Theses on the Philosophy of History.” In the first addendum to this essay, which was finished near the beginning of 1940, he writes:

Historicism contents itself with establishing a causal connection between various moments in history. But no fact that is a cause is for that very reason historical. It becomes historical posthumously, as it were, through events that may be separated from it by thousands of years. A historian who takes this as his point of departure stops telling the sequence of events like the beads of a rosary. Instead, he grasps the constellation which his own era has formed with a definite earlier one. Thus, he establishes a conception of the present as the “time of the now” which is shot through with chips of Messianic time. (1940, 263)

At the most basic level, Benjamin is here making a simple, yet important, distinction between historicism and historical materialism that is at the heart of his theses. Whereas he sees historicism as an attempt to detach oneself from the present “establishing a causal connection between various moments in history,” historical materialism is constellated, “shot through” with the knowledge of the present. Historicism presents an “eternal’

image of the past; historical materialism supplies a unique experience with the past” (262). His allusion to a set of rosary beads, which form a set sequence of prayers, gives a linear shape to the contentment of historicism, which itself is wanting to proceed sequentially.

What Benjamin is calling for here is a way of thinking and writing filled with tensions between the past, the present, and the future, a way that acknowledges our unique experiences with the past from a particular moment. To varying degrees of success, Benjamin’s writing from the *Origins of German Tragic Drama* to the *Arcades Project* to his set of theses are all attempts to put a constellated way of thinking and writing into practice: “to the mind that would comprehend intellectual phenomena in terms of logical or chronological development wherein one thing leads to another, to use Benjamin’s metaphor, ‘like the beads of a rosary,’ his work offers little satisfaction” (Buck-Morss 1989, 7). Set between the desire for recognizable patterns and the decay and diffusion of the modern world, Benjamin recognized that a search for origins and linear thinking provided a limited set of information.

Reading the history of human dignity itself as a rosary or sequential pursuit seems similarly simplistic, especially given its transnational and cross-cultural implications. Searching for origins or making linear historical connections provides one type of information about human dignity, but forecloses the necessity of apprehending it along multiple registers. What is, indeed, left out when connections are made between Kant’s theory of *würde* and international laws, notions of status, and idealized access to the law? What is overlooked when images of atrocity come to make up the visual archive of human dignity? In effect, these tactics perpetuate one facet and origin of human dignity rather than confronting its constellated and contested meanings.

Thinking in terms of constellations does important work in conjunction with questions of perspective, universality, and each era’s position relative to the past, each of which will be considered in more detail throughout this dissertation. Through his work and the concept of the constellation, Benjamin spells out a relationship between ideas and objects that further helps to rebalance the somewhat neglected material dimensions of

human dignity, complicate the search for origins, and defy a reliance on sequential or individualistic histories. Beyond the poetic and imagistic evocation of the constellation as a metaphor for ideas and their relation to the material world, the constellation seems particularly pertinent in terms of human dignity because of the way it demands an expansive and networked view of its meaning. As human rights and human dignity have come to encompass a transnational and global importance, it is imperative to understand the meaning and significance of these ideas not just in terms of their idealized form, but as a complex set of relations. Such a shift is especially important as histories, cultures, and positions outside of Western interests are not just figured into existing frameworks of human dignity, but necessarily stretch and explode them accordingly.

Current debates and discussions about human dignity require a sort of constellated thinking, one that does not reduce one form to another or eliminate difference, but takes diverse histories, traditions, and premises as part of dignity's odd existence. Constellations are relational and concerned with the points of connection, rather than singularity or autonomy. Each point is needed to make up the bigger image. Writing about Benjamin's constellation, Buchanan (2010) shows that "ideas are no more present in the world than constellations actually exist in the heavens" (Buchanan, 2010). Ideas and constellations exist only by way of other elements. The astrological constellation requires a myriad of stars to make up a recognizable image. Human dignity operates in a similar fashion. It does not exist in itself, but through a complex of relations. It is an idea necessarily formed through multiplicity. Engaging the idea of dignity, an idea not directly given to the eye requires a constellated view which enables us to perceive relations between individuals as more than self-governing autonomous subjects. In this frame, dignified subjects are *essentially* connected, but not essentialized. The visual presentation of dignity, I argue, ought to similarly defy a home in any one person, image, or object if it is to exceed the historical frames of normativity, absence, and emancipation that we are already comfortable with. Each person should similarly be thought of as a point within the constellation that makes this idea visible.

Admittedly, these assertions feel quite large and unwieldy, and I do not have the time or capacity to allow all of the connections that could be made to enter here. In this

dissertation, I reserve my discussions to curatorial models specifically as a way to focus these discussions and begin preliminary conversations about human dignity's visual communication vis-à-vis curatorial constellations. Specific systems are required that make human dignity's relational properties apprehensible. Paired with curation, the constellation finds a home in contemporary debates concerning human dignity and its mediated forms.

Whereas Benjamin's emphasis lay on the collector, we can, as Claire Bishop (2013) argues, replace collector with curator in a way that demands a much more political reading of that which has been brought together within an exhibit to form the basis of an idea.⁹ Exhibitions have been home to complex media constellations for some time, but it is indeed their social dimension that makes them integral sites from which to evaluate how and to what end the idea of dignity is visualized and communicated. Though this dissertation focuses on media components of curatorial models and analysis of their visual components, the social dimension of this argument might be productively extended to the realm of visitor and audience studies. I have consciously excluded more direct discussions of museum pedagogy both because of the historical nature of this dissertation and because a proper theorization of how the concept of the constellation might be put in conversation with audiences would require a substantially expanded methodology and time commitment.¹⁰ A relational understanding of human dignity expressed through constellated curatorial models is indeed meant to re-coup elements of human dignity elided in more unitary and linear conceptions of it, and viewers and their diverse backgrounds and knowledges must be further considered as a crucial site of difference and ultimately as crucial contributors to missing points on these constellations. However,

⁹ The notion of collecting and collections was another constant thread in Benjamin's writing, and though outside the scope of this dissertation, warrants more substantial reconciliation with current notions of curation. Particularly, Benjamin's mediation on collections and collectors can be seen in *The Arcades Project*, both in its introduction and Convolut H (on the collector), and in his essay, "Unpacking my Library" (1931b).

¹⁰ Here the work of Roger Simon (2011 & 2014) can be pointed to as one example that demonstrates a trajectory from theoretically informed analysis to a substantial engagement with museum visitors and audience studies.

in this dissertation, I focus on how underlying media components of curation—taxonomies, temporalities, juxtaposition, and representation—converge with the formation of the idea of human dignity. Admittedly, thinking about *human* dignity in such technical terms often feels counterintuitive and exclusionary of the diverse audiences that ultimately consume and contribute to these constellations. While humans remain central to this dissertation, what is equally at stake is the technical components of these histories, and the communities they uphold and support.

This dissertation does not take exhibitions as “visual declarations” (Azoulay 2013), but rather demonstrations how curation itself opens up small windows of vulnerability necessary to the project of human dignity along the lines of taxonomy, media, and the body.¹¹ Methodologically, theories and histories of dignity are put in direct conversation with visual and museological analysis. While I maintain an emphasis on the material world in effort to avoid abstraction, my focus on curation in Sander’s atlas, UNESCO’s album, and the CMHR strive to avoid the desire to find an idealized image of human dignity. The CMHR is just one in a long line of curatorial examples wherein the body and its enmeshment in various technologies, forms a constellation that is telling about dignity’s diffuse and tenuous existence in the world. My brief description of the CMHR’s first gallery in the introduction was designed to establish a parallel arrangement: our contemporary idea of human rights and dignity is formed through a bringing together of different elements—laws, bodies, and events—and in the configuration of these elements. The cases used here not only become points of analysis, but are in many ways exercises in thinking with curation. By blending the threads of

¹¹ Azoulay reads Edward Steichen’s *The Family of Man* exhibit as a series of “prescriptive statements” claiming universal rights. Steichen’s exhibit, which will be addressed in chapter 3, relied on photographs from across the globe, grouped in thematic clusters around broad themes – birth, play, work, love, death. Azoulay sees the plurality of experiences on display creating “scope of variations – from the optimal that should be universally claimed for all, to the one that demands intervention, correction, regulation, prevention or prohibition. Being part of a declaration, the scarcity of information about the photographs enables one to see the link of the situation presented in the photograph as entirely contingent and thus reversible in regard to the concrete historical context” (39-40). While I agree that variation and contingency are necessary to the visual exhibition of human dignity, I see curation as a tool that helps to map vulnerabilities, not only where intervention is needed, but in communicating everyday entanglements. Thus, I do not see this dissertation as analyzing cases that perform as visual declarations, but as a series of sites and forms that can more fulsomely account for the range of experiences that constitute human dignity.

human dignity and curation, I aim to trace how an essential quality of humanness can be communicated beyond falsely universalizing, idealizing, or degrading scenes. I am less interested in how museums endow visitors with rights or how visitors understand exhibits as communicating dignity, and therefore more focused on how curation has and can be used to map ideas of equality and dignity that span beyond national borders and across simplistic notions of time and progress. This work is not meant to advocate from some sort of ideal expression, but rather springs from an understanding of human dignity that is necessarily shared, relational, and vulnerable.

History Between Hierarchy and Abstraction

By taking a historical approach, I argue that the links between exhibitions, equality, and human rights were forged much earlier than the turn to “new museology,” which occurred in the 1980s (Macdonald 2007; Sandell & Nightingale 2012; Vergo 1989), or “memorial museums,” which grew in prominence in the 1990s (Duffy 2000; Sodaro 2018; Williams 2007). Both shifts have been used to connect human rights to museums in the last ten years.¹² This dissertation is an attempt to shift these conversation, not only

¹² Posed against “old” museology, which over-emphasizes the administrative methods of museums, including the work of curation, funding departments, and techniques of preservation, new museology aimed to open up the study of museums to more humanistic concerns, to the social communities built around objects, spaces, and educational models. New museology has been seen as integral to the movement of human rights into museums, as it names the reflexive attempt to make museums and their study more heterogeneous, effectively making community consultation integral to the act of curation and museum spaces more accessible to wider publics and subject positions (Failler 2015; Scharma 2015). These developments were indeed important as human rights began to enter museums, but, in many cases, does not fully consider the technologies foundational to these new heterogeneous ends. In part, my dissertation aims to consider the technology that underlies practices of multivocality and multiplicity. In terms of memorial museums, their study presents one of the earliest mentions of human rights and museums (Duffy 2000), and in many cases memorial museums, such as the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, have become synonymous with human rights in the aftermath of violence. In this vein, the link between human rights and museums is figured in relation to narratives and displays stemming from genocide and other extreme human rights violations. The rise of memorial museums can initially be linked to Holocaust memorialization, such as the Auschwitz-Birkenau Memorial and Museum, the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, and Yad Vashem. More broadly, a genre of memorial museums addressing global human rights abuses and traumas closely followed. See Williams (2007) and Sodaro (2018) for a detailed history of memorial museums. While memorial museums do indeed demonstrate how human rights have been inherited through conflict (Purbrick 2011; 173), such a link focuses solely on the development of human rights and human dignity from a position of absence, and continues to trade on a promise that an

away from strictly contemporary museums, but also away from a primary emphasis on suffering and bodily violation. The CMHR and other contemporary human rights exhibits are in many ways making a concentrated shift away from a lineage of human rights based on extreme suffering through their invocations of positive stories and inspirational messages. A sustained focus on the nuances of positive stories, beyond a celebratory tone, is needed just as much as histories of violation if a more robust constellation of human rights is to be apprehended.

I situate the historical beginnings of the connections between human dignity and curation around the turn of the twentieth century. Before the 1900s, museums and exhibits worked in tandem with the authoritative, oppressive, colonialist, and racist programs of the era of empire (Bennett 1995 & 2004; Hooper-Greenhill 1992; Mirzoeff 2011; Rydell 1984). As Robert Rydell (1984) has shown, until the early 1900s, displays of race and culture played substantial roles creating and entrenching hierarchies of difference. Put otherwise, constellated approaches to curation were hard to come by. Many exhibitions, which were at once tools of education and entertainment, “excluded people on display from the so-called family of man” (Young, 100). The practice of making hierarchical and value laden distinctions between people (not to mention the act of literally placing colonized subjects in exhibits), largely went unchallenged until the twentieth century. Though Purbrick (2011) has made connections between early universal survey museums, such as the Louvre, and the discourse of rights, this connection sways towards citizens and nations, rather than universal pursuits.¹³ Though universal survey museums gestured to a wider mandate and scope, national interests were never far away.

aesthetics of indignity can come to the aid of human dignity itself. In this respect, linking contemporary human rights exhibits with memorial museums leaves a wide swath of the history of human dignity excluded.

¹³ The Louvre provides an interesting study in the connection between museums and nationhood. In 1793, it became a public space. Herein another arm of the former princely regime was transformed and instrumentalized as an arm of the nation. Soon after, the collection was re-categorized into historical and stylistic schools, which performed the work of distancing the new government from the hands of the

Today, national interests are similarly never far away from human rights museums, which will be made explicit in chapter four in relation to the Canadian Museum for Human Rights. Making a definitive claim that there has been a “shift” from national interests to universal aims remains complicated in the realm of museology. However, my interest lies in cases where technology helped to make the shift from nationalistic to universal human rights through broader curatorial models and mandates. For instance, in the next chapter, I examine August Sander’s *People of the Twentieth Century* from the premise of how a “people” is constituted beyond national claims. While underlying assumptions about hierarchy and difference remain entrenched within some of the exhibits under consideration in this dissertation, what binds them is the attempt to avoid imperialistic classificatory language and comparisons, and instead formulate new schemes that demonstrate the tensions between peoples, cultures, and histories at the heart of human dignity, as an idea bound to the worth of all people. As will be explored in the next chapter, while the early 1900s was itself fraught with technological innovations that defined and ordered the human, it was also a time in which new technologies and methods of display posed challenges to the tiered narratives entrenched in universal survey museums, anthropological exhibitions, and world fairs that dominated the curated world. The borders of the nation and the scope of national laws are, in these examples, stretched in ways that begin to define human dignity as a relational property.

Whereas the late 1800s had marked a change in the way dignity was conceived from a normative conception to a taxonomic one (Donnelly 2015, 2), the early 1900s opened up new visual routes for dignity’s development outside of philosophical or legal spheres. On a most basic level, this period marks a time in the explosion of technological reproduction broadly, and photographic reproduction specifically. Though art had always

monarchy and placing the nation within narratives of national and civilizational progress (Duncan and Wallach 1980; 24-25). This development provided a base for a novel form of cultural and historical wealth, a wealth that is ultimately important if we are to connect dignity to the material demands of the museum. As collections were being rebranded and expanded in a way that represented the wealth of the nation explicitly, there was at the same time a reordering and valuing of human lives and dignity implicitly via strategies of display and cultural othering.

been reproducible, photography “freed the hand” from the labour of reproduction (Benjamin 1936, 219). Technological reproduction ushered in a speed and quantity of reproductions that allowed for new forms of comparison outside of museums or private collections, and as Benjamin notes, “around 1900 technical reproduction had reached a standard that not only permitted it to reproduce all transmitted works of art and thus to cause the most profound change in their impact upon the public” (1936, 219).¹⁴ The public became immersed in images in a new way, and importantly images of human subjects in a new way. On a more complex level, the early 1900s saw an explosion in symbolic value, specifically in relation to art history and photography which will be explored in more depth in the next section. Photographic reproductions of art and photographs of human subjects comingled in new ways, opening up discussions that traversed symbolic and human value. While human dignity was never called out in name within these discussions, how representations of the human being intersected with issues of self-stylization and human value along the lines of race, class, and gender were never far away. As I mentioned earlier, curation and human dignity both impart cultural value, value that in both cases is difficult to see or measure. Yet, as processes of curation were changing via technological reproduction, so too was the visual communication of human dignity. In relation to visual communication, representations of the human being began to be connected to symbolic and classificatory systems that emphasized social experience, materiality, and personal habits alongside aesthetic properties or morally loaded hierarchical categories, thus opening up human dignity’s cultural value in new ways.

¹⁴ While I positioned the advancement of photographic reproduction as integral to the way human dignity came to be thought and known it should be noted that photography also paved the way bureaucratic violence, subjective instrumentalization, and rationalization. As Sontag notes, “photographs were enrolled in the service of important institutions of control, notably the family and the police, as symbolic objects and as pieces of information. Thus, in the bureaucratic cataloging of the world, many important documents are not valid unless they have, affixed to them, a photograph-token of the citizen’s face” (1973, 22). Similarly, Sliwinski reminds us that just as photography has been used in advance of democracy and emancipation it has also been used in systematic pursuit of oppressive practices. She warns that “the medium is at its most dangerous when it makes its users forget the vicariousness of its functioning” (Sliwinski 2015, 13). Both of these rejoinders can be applied to curatorial endeavors as well. While I focus on the expressive possibilities of curatorial models, they undoubtedly have been used to enforce hierarchies of difference and perpetuate racial stereotypes.

Dramatizing Curatorial Change

The work of Aby Warburg is exemplary of the change brought about by technological reproduction in the early 1900s, and highlights how the ease of photographic reproduction engendered a shift in the importance of curation itself alongside the symbolic importance of the human being. More pointedly, his work dramatically exemplifies a visual constellation in action, as it presents a marriage of ideas with curation in a stunning and complimentary fashion.

Aby Warburg (1866-1929) was an art historian by trade, and an anthropologist, collector, and curator by intellectual pursuit. At the same time Benjamin was beginning his *Arcades* Project, Warburg was also experimenting with a different sort of constellated visual communication. Whereas Benjamin formed his constellation through quotations, texts, and interpretations, Warburg worked primarily with images. Warburg was, by many accounts, a complex man, and his ability to make connections across cultures, geographies, and taxonomies was perhaps both his genius and his downfall. In his early days he wrote about iconography, how images communicated symbolic rather than stylistic information, a method later made popular by Erwin Panofsky. After completing his doctorate, Warburg travelled to the United States. This trip, which began in 1895, was notable for how it brought together Warburg's art historical and anthropological interests. He visited regions inhabited by Pueblo Indians and became enamored with their symbolic customs, particularly their pottery and the snake dance ritual.

This trip would later become instrumental in Warburg's recovery from depression and central to the formulation of his final project: *Mnemosyne Atlas*. Throughout his life, Warburg struggled with his mental health, and in 1921 was hospitalized in Switzerland. After almost three years there, he devised a plan to prove to himself that he was capable of being released and in control of his own thoughts. Central to his plan was a lecture on the topic of his choice. Warburg used his experience in the United States as the backdrop of this lecture, entitled "Images from the Region of the Pueblo Indians of North America." Considered a successful exercise, the lecture brought his comparative lens into contact with contemporary concerns. Here Warburg began to think through the symbolism of the snake, not as it was unique to the Pueblo Indians of North America, but

rather how the snake connected many cultures and many beliefs. Using slides from his trip to the United States along with images from classical art historical paintings and sculptures, Warburg drew associations between histories and cultures in a dazzling manner. In effect, he disrupted the boundaries between art history and anthropology as he brought together cultural icons through technology. Ritual, symbols, and art were not evaluated on their aesthetic merits, but connected through the ideas and themes they helped to perpetuate.

After leaving the hospital, Warburg began work on the *Mnemosyne Atlas*, a project that embodied his thematic and visually associative method. Beginning in 1924 with the aid of a double projector, Warburg started to make uninhibited visual connections that defied entrenched art historical ordering and categorization that had been established in formal exhibitionary practice since the mid 1800s.¹⁵ In the realm of museums and curation, photography helped to advance the discipline of art history. As Donald Preziosi has argued, “art history as we know it today is the child of photography” (1989, 72). Beginning around 1900 there was a shift taking place within the fledging field of art history from an emphasis on stylistic properties of art to a newfound “science” of symbols or iconography. The increasing ease of photographic reproduction and the invention of slide projection helped to usher in the growth of symbolic interpretation. Alongside the juxtaposition of aesthetic symbols was a growing juxtaposition of humanistic symbols. Warburg’s *Mnemosyne Atlas* was at the forefront of the shift. While Heinrich Wölfflin, a prominent art historian is said to be the first to use double projectors in his art history classes, beginning around 1900 in Berlin, Warburg used this technology to new effect with his iconographic atlas (Schoell-Glass 2001, 206f). In 1924 Warburg began to use 150cm by 200 cm screens made of light metal, covered in dark cloth where he attached, arranged, and rearranged reproductions of artworks, postcards, and photographs with metal clasps (Schoell-Glass 2001, 185). The ephemeral nature of Warburg’s arrangements, aided by photographic reproductions, slide projectors, and temporary image boards, is noteworthy. As George Didi-Huberman has shown, “the fact

¹⁵ See Bennett (1995 & 2004), Duncan (1995), Hooper-Greenhill (1992), and Preziosi (1989) for detailed accounts of the history of art history as it intersects with curation and photography.

that the configuration of images can always be changed around in the *Mnemosyne Atlas* is a sign in itself of the heuristic fecundity *and* the intrinsic madness of such a project” (2010, 20). The atlas was a constantly changing series of constellations, and each panel a search for how an idea presented itself both through the body and through representation.

Mnemosyne Atlas disposed of any verbal supports and became a visual space to perform or embody larger connections within the symbolic and social world. Each plate of Warburg’s project connected images and symbols through a theme or *pathos*.¹⁶ For example, plate 41a (Fig. 6), is an expressive constellation founded on themes of pain and sacrifice. Notably, these images are all depictions of the Laocoön, which helped Schiller to formulate his understanding of human dignity as “calm in suffering.” Warburg collected images that attempted to tell the same story, from antiquity to the Renaissance, yet defied a linear structure. It is here in Warburg’s work that the tension inherent in the constellation between an eternal search for patterns and wayfinding meets the introduction of new elements. By drawing together images from different eras, Warburg aimed to visually communicate how an idea is both recognizable over time and open to change – eternal and transitory.¹⁷ Together these images say something about the idea itself, in this instance pain and sacrifice, and how that might look differently through time and via different expressive media.

¹⁶ Specifically, Warburg was drawn to thinking through the emotive responses captured in these representations and used recurring emotions as a way to create constellations of human connections. Warburg was mapping *pathosformel* (or pathos formulas), which “illustrate this process, which one could define as the attempt to absorb pre-coined expressive values by means of the representation of life in motion” (Warburg & Rampley 2009, 277). Although never explicitly defined by Warburg, the term *pathosformel* embodies the comparative and connective thrust that undergirds much of his work. See Vidal (2009), Didi-Huberman (2017), and Rampley (2001 & 2009) for more on pathosformula.

¹⁷ In Greek mythology, *Mnemosyne* is the personification of memory and the mother of the nine muses. From this we can already see one of the tensions arising in Warburg’s thought: the personification of memory in works of art and the generational changes that alter their symbolic meaning. Warburg was all too aware of the technological and political changes altering human gestures and therefore shifting human interaction during his lifetime. Not only was he aware of Darwin’s evolutionary theory, but Warburg was also witness first hand to technological innovation and great human destruction during World War I, both of which greatly altered human gestures and human interaction. *Atlas* is best known as the Titan who was banished to hold up the heavens. In this character there is great strength, endurance and responsibility. In his hands lay the whole of humanity. From these two meanings we can see the *Mnemosyne Atlas* as mapping the generational, emotional, and technological changes in Western imagery of the human form.



**Figure 6: Plate 41a from the *Mnemosyne Atlas*, 1927 (est.), by Aby Warburg.
Copyright: The Warburg Institute.**

Warburg's arrangements present an example of a constellation in perhaps its most abstract form, as they bring together art reproductions and documentary materials in dynamic ways. In his image atlas Warburg dropped all pretenses to traditional art history. Instead of arranging images through a strictly temporal, stylistic, or hierarchical schemes, he clustered groups within symbolic structures that were meant to demonstrate the "carrying-on" of cultural iconographies and emotions through time and through the human body. Warburg used the form of the atlas, a form which will be explored in greater depth in the next chapter, to model comparative frameworks. What André Malraux (1947), would later come to define the "museum without walls," which names the process whereby art was "freed" from museums with the advancement of photography and thus opened up to new areas of comparison, was the generative yet

unnamed starting point for Warburg's *Mnemosyne Atlas*. For Warburg, questions of aesthetic inquiry began to overlap with questions of symbolic and humanistic inquiry across histories and cultures. While the advent of photography "seemed destined merely to perpetuate established values," Malraux explored how "an ever growing range of works is being reproduced, in ever greater numbers," opening up lines of inquiry into lesser known and otherwise marginalized works, artists, authors, and representations (Malraux 1947, 17). I see the opening up of the "common heritage of all mankind" (Malraux 1947, 40) made possible by increased mechanical photographic reproduction as integral to the emergence of human dignity within the field of media studies. Without this technological advancement, our comparative lenses would be much different. The rise in the idea of a distinctly human value applicable to all coincides with these reproductive technologies that exposed symbolic connections beyond national borders. The generation of new lines of symbolic inquiry was integral to the connection of the idea of human dignity to processes of visual communication.

What Warburg demonstrated, first through his lecture and then his atlas, was the idea that rather than being divided by time and space, class and culture, humans are more connected than they might have thought. Underlying Warburg's image boards was a sense that the lines dividing art, humans, and periods were less opaque than the stark disciplinary and scientific classifications of art history and anthropology let on. Parallel to Schiller's contention that bodies must be thought of as more than aesthetic objects or *things* when it comes to a property such as dignity, Warburg read the human body as a set of relations that endures and exists across time and space.

Both in Schiller's concept of dignity and Warburg's image atlases, the body extends in space and time and creates demands on others that stretch the limitations of philosophy or photography. Here we begin to see an overlapping articulation of the ways in which humans embody their vulnerability both in the moment of their existence and in historical frameworks. Focusing on gestures of the body gave Warburg's project a set of ethical and political stakes that exceeded the bounds of what was in his time a delimited art history, and exploded what curation could look like or do.

Constituting Relational Dignity

My own project gains ethical and political stakes, not in attempting to map how people are affected by images, but by articulating the importance of curatorial models as they make connections between people that extend between our inhabited bodies. While the exhibits under consideration in this dissertation do not offer perfect solutions to problems we face in the making of a human community, they do help in understanding the different ways a relational theorization might be taken up through visual communication. In this light, a number of central motifs recur throughout the dissertation. Through the lens of the curatorial constellation human dignity becomes a relational property characterized by the following traits: as an idea that does not shy away from taxonomic, cultural, or historical difference; as an idea that does not trade on an aesthetics of indignity to come to its defense; as an idea focused on communities rather than individuals; as an idea made through technology as much as it is made through the subjects that populate curatorial systems; and, as a form of visual communication not directly given to the eye.

This dissertation depends on curatorial models as the starting point for a broader conversation about how the idea of human dignity might be thought of as relational. In excavating the ways in which periods and peoples are connected through these systems there is a certain element of training ourselves to see how humans are aestheticized and subsequently how visual representation is connected to human dignity. Warburg abstractly demonstrates how different periods and symbols might all be connected via corporeal and mediated bodies. The case studies presented in this dissertation are much less abstract, yet they are undoubtedly instructive in terms of how material selves make constellated demands on others, and in so doing provide clues as to how taxonomies, media, and representation impart value that makes the invisible aspects of human dignity perceptible.

For Benjamin, the complexity of the world began to present itself through the heuristic of the constellation. Benjamin's method of accumulation began to mirror how he saw the heterogeneous and increasingly fragmented world of the arcades and the modern economy that was enfolding around him. Jonathon Crary (1992) argues that Benjamin's mode of perception "was acutely temporal and kinetic" (20), and his allusion

to kinetic motion aptly describes Benjamin's constellated view. Like the constellation, which we are only granted access to through the connection of other stars or objects, Benjamin's encounters with overlapping technologies was similarly formative to his "kinetic" viewpoint, always in motion, always in dialogue with other facets of modern society.

Dignity, too, requires a sense of kinetic heterogeny in order to become an international force, and requires it still. As Michel Foucault argued, "we are in a moment, I believe, when our experience of the world is less that of a long life developing through time than that of a network that connects points and intersects with its own skein" (Foucault 1984, 1). While we are past Foucault's specific moment, our own feels eerily similar, and his description is important to human dignity's resurgence. Our own moment, which is less like a rosary and more like a constellation, is also the moment of human dignity as an idea that must reach beyond exclusionary groups, national borders, and specific cultures – a moment where dignity must and is emerging outside of philosophy and the law more concretely. Through the lens of curatorial models, such as the atlas, the album, and the museum, we can come to see the tendency towards individuality and autonomy as merely partial when posed against the visual technologies of mass society. The project of individuality and liberal agency that has so long been at the heart of concerns around human dignity begin to feel like an illusion when placed into conversation with these material and curatorial models. Herein, my dissertation, and its emphasis on the embodied, the mediated, and the curatorial, begins to narrate a different cultural subtext wherein the relational properties of human dignity might be revealed.

In part, my theorization of human dignity as a relational property pushes back against the overwhelming emphasis on narratives of violation that have predominantly been used to defend the project of human rights. While I do not focus exclusively on moments of inspiration or positivity, I aim to avoid the pitfalls of focusing primarily on bodily violation and begin to articulate a history that upholds a modicum of faith in the compassionate and imaginative goals of human rights. In so doing, I also aim to trace how human rights have entered the museum more recently, especially as these museums turn to instances of growth and justice, such as the CMHR. Susie Linfield has argued that

“we cannot talk – at least in meaningful or realistic ways – about building a world of democracy, justice, and human rights without first understanding the experience of their negation” (Linfield, xv). While I do not disagree that experiences of negation have been crucial to the surge in discussions around human rights as it intersects with visual communication, my approach proposes other *meaningful* and *realistic* ways of talking about human rights and human dignity. Formulating new avenues in terms of how human dignity might be communicated beyond instances of indignity is important, both as it relates to projects of creative expression and in relation to the promise and hope that the idea of human dignity can still offer.

Criticism alone is easy. We need to learn to apprehend human dignity in the visual sphere, not only where lives are degraded without regard for their value, but rather across a wide variety of relationships that make up our lives. In instances of degradation, vulnerability has already been foreclosed. Similarly, instances where our individuality is presented as the only end of human dignity is equally delimiting. Curatorial constellations leads us towards the fact of our vulnerability, whether through taxonomic signifiers, historical and cultural diversity, or more plainly in the act of editing and arranging. In this way, vulnerability does not become something in need of overcoming, but rather something that defines our humanness and our dignity. Though not without their own faults, the curatorial projects under consideration in this dissertation forge a different path that connects human dignity and media as a response to the transnational, multi-cultural, multimedia, and constellated world we inhabit. Thus, my dissertation does not necessarily provide satisfying answers to the problems underlying the development of human dignity, but attempts to demonstrate a different way of envisioning the existence of human dignity within visual communication. I do not deny that curation and human rights still work together in detrimental ways. However, these limitations have been more pointedly expressed in other studies. I take it as a challenge to attempt to provide a history and language that is equally as compelling as that which relies on criticism or starts from the point of negation. Examining curatorial constellations does important work in this regard, as it defines an approach that blends the material, the ideological, the historical, and the ephemeral in important ways. A relational theory of human dignity

stems from an understanding of our mediated connectivity – from the locus of the body and the exhibition – rather than envisioning autonomy or individualism. Combining the language of curation and constellations, human dignity becomes tied not only to philosophical and legal visions, but to an ever networked and fragmented culture. The idea of the constellation forces us to look upon these aesthetic, technological, and material networks in a way that is committed to the underlying concerns of dignity in the first place – that is an awareness and acknowledgement of how our means existence create real demands on others in the embodied world.

2 Human Dignity *En Masse*: August Sander's "Atlas of Instruction"

The body is the most basic of all media, and the richest with meaning, but its meanings are not principally those of languages or signs, reaching instead into deep wells soaked with vague limbic fluids. The body is not one with itself: it is a network. Sharing the same time and space with another is already pregnant with meaning before a single word is uttered

-John Durham Peters, *The Marvelous Clouds*

An atlas, George Didi-Huberman, writes is “a *visual form of knowledge*, a knowledgeable form of seeing” (2010, 14). Atlases combine different types of knowledge, mixing data with aesthetic representation, and introducing “a sensible dimension into knowledge” (Didi-Huberman 2010, 15). The way atlases mix forms of knowledge, has for me, become both metaphorically fertile and systematically helpful in terms of thinking through human dignity’s visual communication. Placing human dignity in conversation with atlases helps to fundamentally upend dignity’s disciplinary orthodoxies in philosophy and the law, and, as we will see in this chapter, forces an understanding that is both rooted in concrete beings and in their representation. Like Schiller’s introduction of aesthetic and material concerns into the discourse around human dignity in the late 1700s, atlases themselves introduce aesthetic concerns into scientific and philosophical areas of knowledge. Introducing the “sensible dimension” into discussions of human dignity does indeed introduce a “fundamental impurity” to the frenzied search for historical origins, to the reliance on binaries of violation and normativity, and the strict abidance to philosophical truths or legal particulars within its study.

As a cultural and scientific tool, the atlas attempts to map or categorize the world from a particular position that is at once all-encompassing and impure. Like Benjamin’s metaphor of the constellation it provides a way of seeing and thinking that is filled with

precise information – about how things look and where they fit – and with imaginary potential. Atlases offer both methodical and arbitrary junctions and routes; their contents can be scanned from the beginning or a new beginning can be formed depending on location, destination, elevation, etc. Like curating, which Obrist (2014) himself describes as “a form of map-making that opens new routes through a city, a people or a world” (1) atlases express new routes, offering junctures that might not have been visible before, allowing different elements to touch that reach across technical and aesthetic concerns.

The geographical atlas, as we know it, was revolutionized in the 16th century by Gerardus Mercator (1512-1594), who was a prolific cartographer, geographer, and instrument maker. There were compendiums of maps before his time, but by most accounts Mercator was the first to place an image of the Greek titan, Atlas, who was punished by Zeus to hold up the world for eternity, on the front cover of his map collections. In this way, atlases were seen to say something about the monumental task of understanding the world’s vast diversity in a finite amount of space, of holding it up to be seen. Atlases are, indeed, a response to this monumental task of understanding the world, and since the time of Mercator, moved beyond the job of charting the terrain of geography into charting more diverse visual and epistemic issues and ideas.¹⁸

One such atlas, which attempted to chart the human world in the early 1900s, will be the subject of this chapter. August Sander’s *Menschen des 20. Jahrhunderts (People of the 20th Century)*, was a compendium of early twentieth century people, categorized by social position, and mapped through categories of life and profession. It should here be noted that Sander himself did not describe this project as an atlas. It was, indeed, Walter Benjamin that called Sander’s work an “atlas of instruction” (as quoted in Berger 29, 1992).¹⁹ However, I rely on the language and systems of atlases for their imaginary

¹⁸ While outside the scope of this research there are numerous connections to be made between anatomical atlases and natural atlases in terms of how the human came to be conceived, both as an individual and as part of value laden communities. For more on the proliferation of atlases outside of geography, see for example Mondino dei Luzzi’s *De Anatomia*, Ernst Haeckel’s *Kunstformen der Natur (Art Forms of Nature)*, along with King (1996), Hill (1978), and Piper (2002).

¹⁹ This phrase is often translated as “training manual” (Benjamin 1931).

potential and for their usefulness as I begin to think about human dignity's position between the world of ideas and routes of visual communication. The atlas is a model that not only captures tensions between the finite and the infinite, the technical and the aesthetic, and the pure and impure, but it also, more bluntly, opens up questions about the tension between the topographical and the subterranean, between what is seen on the surface and what is understood as a human characteristic. The problem of visually communicating human dignity follows these tensions, and Sander's *People of the Twentieth Century* usefully exposes them.

Despite Sander's affiliation with photography and photographic analysis, in this chapter I demonstrate how his work should be read as a curatorial endeavor. The characteristics of the atlas are here used to make this case. Not only does Sander's work explicitly combine aesthetic and scientific knowledge, thus creating a complex space from which to begin a robust conversation about the visual and cultural aspects of human dignity, but it also trains us to move between the finite and the infinite, between individual photographs and the curatorial system, and ultimately between individuals and their communities which I argue is necessary to a relational theorization of human dignity. Sander's atlas combines different types of knowledge in surprising and problematic ways. And, just as other atlases open up a new region, country, or zone of knowledge to be explored, Sander's atlas provides a new zone of knowledge about the human and its social relations that is bound to broader cultural problems that surround the idea of human dignity. Sander's position within a *comprehensive* and *taxonomic* genre is helpful when situating his work alongside, and often outside, other visual projects that emerged around the same time, and which were otherwise delimiting human dignity. I admit that taxonomy and comprehension are not often looked at favorably, especially in terms of projects that order and aim to understand the human. However, taxonomic difference should not merely be read as undermining an essential human quality such as human dignity. Combined with the speed of photography, atlases aimed at the mapping of the human were indeed problematic, but their scope of vision is important in terms of how we see human rights entering museums today.

The Seeds of a Prolific Project

It is difficult to delimit August Sander's work, and specifically *People of the Twentieth Century*.²⁰ Before embarking on this research, I had only engaged with his photographs in singular instances. John Berger (1992) had used his "Young Farmers" (Fig. 7) to highlight visual hegemony, and a photograph of an "Bricklayer" (Fig. 8) as a study in labour, strength, and grace. These particular cases cemented Sander's historical importance in the history of photography, but did not situate his project in the realm of museum or curatorial studies.

It wasn't until Sander was mentioned in a lineage of examples that advocate for a visual declaration of human rights that my interest was piqued (Sliwinski, 2015). Here, Sander's *People of the 20th Century* was listed alongside the photographs of Frederick Douglass as exemplars of dignity and the visual politics of emancipation. Photography, Sliwinski (2015) argued, could be used to construct an image of oneself that visually communicated equality and dignity through the mediated body. In the association between Douglass' time and Sander's there was, however, a swift movement from the *photographs* of Douglass to Sander's larger *curatorial* project that used photographic images. A considerable distance seemed to separate these two examples. For Douglass, the camera was used to create a dignified image of himself, but for Sander, the camera was a tool to create an image of "the people." Were the same photographic politics applicable in both instances? Their distinction began to put into perspective the problem of what *forms* human dignity circulated in and how it might work beyond individual instances or a negative framework. Was it possible to see human dignity in a project

²⁰ Some attention should be paid to the translation of Sander's larger project, which helps to align his work with the general trajectory of human rights I build here. In German, the title of Sander's project is *Menschen des 20. Jahrhunderts*. The MIT edition translates this title as *Citizens of the 20th Century*, clearly aligning Sander's work with a nationalist trajectory. However, most other translations provide a much broader prerogative, translating *Menschen* to "people". This opens Sander's work to a wider variety of readings in terms of people and their humanity. It is possible to take the translation of *Menschen* one step further and read it as *Humans of the 20th Century*, thus aligning his work with what it means to be human in a way that doesn't rely on the lacunae negation. Here we come much closer to a positive visualization of human rights, *Menschenrechte*, than a strictly nationalist or citizen oriented reading. Going forward I will use *People of the Twentieth Century* except for instances where it is translated otherwise in direct quotes.

where the subjects are not in control of the production of their own images? How exactly did Sander's images, which I had come to know as singular and iconographic, fit within a history of human rights exhibitions? And, how might they be connected to the concept of human dignity through curatorial constellations?



Figure 7: Young Farmers, 1913, by August Sander. Public domain.



Figure 8: Bricklayer, 1928, by August Sander. Public domain.

The sheer scope of August Sander's *People of the Twentieth Century* is remarkable. What we know about the structure of this project comes via a few disparate sources: from a small book of sixty portraits, *Antlitz der Zeit (Face of Our Time)* (1929), which offered a mere glimpse into the larger image world Sander was creating; from notes and small exhibitions Sander made when he was alive; and, from an exhibition and corresponding publication orchestrated by his son, Gunther Sander, in 1986. The variety of these sources make *People of the Twentieth Century* difficult to explain and definitively describe. Like Walter Benjamin's *Arcades Project* and Aby Warburg's *Mnemosyne Atlas*, both of which were left unfinished at the time of their respective deaths, Sander's *People of the Twentieth Century* was never completed in his own lifespan and remains shrouded in questions about its ultimate form and intent.

Importantly, Sander was adamant about how his photographs should be read together, *as a curated system*. He wanted his photographs to be shown, but not merely one or two at a time. Rather, he viewed photography “like a mosaic that becomes a synthesis only when it is presented *en masse*” (Sander 1986, 36).²¹ Though individually Sander’s photographs are striking, together they have a meaning far greater than a sum of their parts. As Hake (1997) has argued, shifting attention from individual images to the curatorial design Sander envisioned does important work. Sander’s “social physiognomy tends to be identified with specific images, and not with the selection and presentation of the full constellation. Yet it is precisely in the continuities and contiguities imposed by the book format that its critical intention must be located. Sander’s physiognomic project emerges from the relationship between images and not through the images themselves” (Hake 1997, 127). In this way, Sander’s metaphor of the mass draws direct parallels with Benjamin’s heuristic of the constellation. Each image is like a star, whose formation within the project is revealing of an idea or series of ideas. But what kind of ideas are Sander’s constellations of images meant to reveal? If ideas are never fully represented themselves, but are revealed through an arrangement of concrete elements, and if Sander’s work is but one such concrete arrangement, what idea or ideas does it invoke? And, is it possible to see the idea of human dignity as emerging from the multiple, and often contesting, sites that make up the networked arrangement found in *People of the Twentieth Century*?

Most basically the ideas dispersed in Sander’s *People of the Twentieth Century* relate to occupation and social position or types. His photographs have an internal contradiction about them related to the idea of social types. Individuals yield to social types, yet these same types were meant to demonstrate fundamental differences between people. Sander’s subjects seem so singular, yet they are ultimately not tied to their proper

²¹ Note that there is some disagreement over the translation of this phrase. Though this line comes from Sander’s notes and can be found in the catalogue that coincided with one of the first posthumous exhibitions, the words agglomeration, cluster, coalescence, concretion, and aggregation have been argued as more fitting translations of “mosaic.”

names, but to the types that they are meant to stand in for. His photographs work to demonstrate how a person's labour manifests through a body's movement. The "Bricklayer" (Fig. 8), pictured carrying the stack of bricks is meant to tell the viewer something about the position he occupies and the ease with which he carries out his task. However, beyond these concrete social roles, as a mosaic, mass, or constellation his curatorial arrangement attempts to communicate something more complex about *humans* as they intersect with an increasingly modernized and mass society. A brief detour through Sander's career may help to shed some light on his projects and their importance to human dignity specifically.

Born in 1876, Sander's training as a photographer came by way of his military service, where he was a photographer's assistant just before the turn of the 20th Century.²² Eventually, he honed his skill enough to start his own photography studio, first in Austria and then in his home country of Germany. Situated in the Cologne region, which contained both fertile agrarian land and a growing industrial economy, Sander was ideally located amidst a wide variety of professionals, laborers, and other emerging and established social types. The intersection of urban development and rural tradition was important as Sander began to conceive of *People of the Twentieth Century*, which would consume a major part of his life. The project began around in earnest in the early 1920s as a task aimed at capturing an "objective" and comprehensive visual account of the social types of his milieu—to "fix the history of the world" (1931, 675) through photographs and their arrangement.²³ Sander wanted to use his aesthetic instrument to "scientific" ends. While objectivity might have been his aim, the camera and its own political aesthetics would invariably sully his methodical pursuit.

Sander set out with his camera across the region, taking photographs of a range of agrarian and urban workers. Farmers, bakers, secretaries, day-laborers, and the down-

²² Sander was first introduced to photography in his home town of Herdord when a photographer visited the local mine. During his military service he was trained in Trier by a local photographer, Georg Jung.

²³ Though Sander did not conceive of the project until the early 1920s, he did use many photographs from his early commercial ventures in *People of the Twentieth Century*.

trodden all became the subjects for this *People of the Twentieth Century*. The idea was to photograph the broad strata of social life and to compile these images into a series of portfolios as a way to capture the “face” of the time. Indeed, if we consider atlases to be “systematic compilations of working objects...dictionaries of the sciences of the eye” (Daston & Galiston 2007, 22), then Sander’s *People of the Twentieth Century* certainly fits the bill. Replace “objects” with “subjects”, and the image arrangements Sander was creating fall within this sort of optic organization. In Sander’s case, the subject matter remained *the people*, and the atlas a form to map their relations to one another. Undoubtedly, this attempt to fix the history of the world through photography was a giant undertaking. Living between two wars and unending social, technical, and visual changes provided endless changes that manifested on the bodies of his subjects. Sander’s attempt to “fix” the people within his project was thus met with the fact of their increasing transience.

While Sander began working on the project in the early 1920s, he did not formally release details about it until 1929, at which time he published *Face of Our Time*.²⁴ In this little book of sixty portraits, which acted as a preview for *People of the Twentieth Century*, subjects were identified by their occupation rather than name.²⁵ While the book follows the same general trajectory of types - from the farmer, to the locksmith, to the businessman, to the unemployed – its scheme was markedly different from the plan of *People of the Twentieth Century*. It is important to emphasize that *Face of Our Time* is structured as a *series*, as a set of subjects portrayed in their social roles.²⁶ I note this because, as a prototype for *People of the Twentieth Century*, *Face of Our Time* is both an important pre-cursor to Sander’s greater ambitions and a distinct body of visual knowledge.

²⁴ A small selection of Sander’s photographs were exhibited in 1927, but details of the larger project were not concurrently unveiled.

²⁵ In *Face of Our Time* initials were placed beside the photographs of the subjects that Sander thought would be public figures. In later publications of this work some of Sander’s subjects have been identified by name.

²⁶ See Appendix A for a full list of the types included in *Face of Our Time*.

Included with copies of *Face of Our Time* were leaflets that announced Sander's larger ambition. The copy provides an outline of his visual atlas:

The complete work consists of seven groups, which correspond to the existing social structure, and is to be published in about 45 portfolios, each containing twelve pictures. Sander begins with the farmer, the earthbound man, and leads the viewer through all levels and types of occupations. (as quoted in Sander 1986, 23)

At first glance, this description seems straightforward. A project is formulated that was to encompass seven major groups and forty-five minor corresponding portfolios, with each portfolio containing twelve portraits. This would mean that roughly 540 photographs were initially imagined to communicate the strata of social types.²⁷ The seven groups were to be comprised of the following categories: *the farmer, the craftsman, the woman, the professions, the artist, the metropolis, and the last people*. The forty-five portfolios correspond with more finite categories within these seven areas. For example, within the "farmer" category was "young farmers," "the farm child and mother" and so on, while the "professional" category was to contain "the student," "the doctor and pharmacist," and the "clergyman" amongst others. In both instances, there is little indication as to how these categories emerged, though their significance seems to narrate Sander's own conception of social structure.²⁸

Beyond the seven groups there was also a "germinal portfolio" or "portfolio of archetypes," which was to precede the groups and act as a model for the project at large. The "germinal portfolio" was indeed conceived as something of a map in itself, as a key

²⁷ The scale of this described project is made even more impressive against the number of Sander's photographs at large. Even the printing plates for *Face of Our Time* had been confiscated and destroyed by the Nazi's in 1936, most of his negatives survived World War II, only to be destroyed by a fire in 1946. At its highest point, there is said to have been over 40,000 negatives in Sander's collection. Some 11,000 have been preserved in Cologne, and were used to "complete" *People of the Twentieth Century* posthumously.

²⁸ See Appendix A for a complete breakdown of these subcategories. It is especially notable when talking about Sander's role as a curator to think about the additions of subcategories from the project's initial conception to the time of his death (Sander 2013, 26). New types were added along the way, with the subcategory "Farmer in the Second Half of the 20th century" added before World War II and "The Persecuted" and "Political Prisoners" added after. Similarly, categories encompassing "National Socialist" men and women were added to reflect political changes. Sander's taxonomies were, in this way, flexible and open to change. His constellation of images expanded, rather merely subsuming new types under his original model.

to the relations Sander was aiming to build. Reflecting in 1954 Sander provided a brief explanation of this portfolio:

In the year 1911 in my elective homeland of Cologne I began to work on my project *Citizens of the Twentieth Century*. The figures in the portfolio originated within my actual Westerwald homeland. People whose customs I had known since my youth appeared by their close connections with Nature to be excellently suited to the realization of my ideas in a germinal portfolio. Thus the beginning was made, and I proceeded to subordinate all later types to the archetype with all its generally human characteristics. (Sander 1986, 23)²⁹

Like the description of the project in general, this description of the “germinal portfolio” provides clues to Sander’s thinking, but no definitive answers. The portfolio provides hints as to how Sander conceived of the arrangement of society at large, broadly demonstrating movement from the individual (Fig. 9) to the family unit (Fig. 10) and from man to his surrounding community. In this portfolio, the 12 germinal portraits are categorized as:

The Man of the Soil (Fig. 9)
 The Philosopher
 The Fighter or Revolutionary
 The Sage
 The Woman of the Soil
 The Woman Philosopher
 The Woman Fighter or Revolutionary
 The Woman Sage
 The Woman of Progressive Intellect
 Two couples, Propriety and Harmony
 Three Generations of the Family (Fig. 10)

²⁹ The translation of this passage brings to light important details as to the people and humanity these photographs represent. The above translation differs slightly, but significantly, from a translation found in Lange (1999), which reads: “The photos for the album were made in and around the Westerwald. People whom I had known in all their foibles and habits from youth onwards struck me as being suitable through their closeness to nature for realizing my idea of a master portfolio. That was how it all started, and I classified all the types I found under this original type with all the characteristics of the generally human” (Lange, 109). Whereas the first seems to emphasize the people, the second emphasizes their habits/gestures and it would seem as though their outer mannerisms/actions become more central than the person in and of him/herself. There is a difference between classifying all other types “in relation to” this group versus subordinating all other types to this archetype. Though these are slight changes, they should be considered when evaluating how we read the germinal portfolio, either as a key that helps to define generally human characteristics or as an exalted type.

By all accounts these twelve categories were meant to be repeated throughout the other 45 portfolios, which “would have meant that a certain variety of basic human characteristics would have recurred on different social or cultural levels” (Keller, 23). Even though the leaflet from 1929 depicts the design of Sander’s project as “complete” the portfolios published posthumously do not logically correspond to the “germinal” archetypes. It is unclear whether Sander changed his mind about these types as germinal figures or whether the accelerated pace of social change outmoded his original plan leaving it impossible to “subordinate” all types of people to this model. These twelve archetypes do not clearly correspond with the seven groups that made up the rest of the project. While the first group does start with the farmer, the other groups do not proceed likewise.

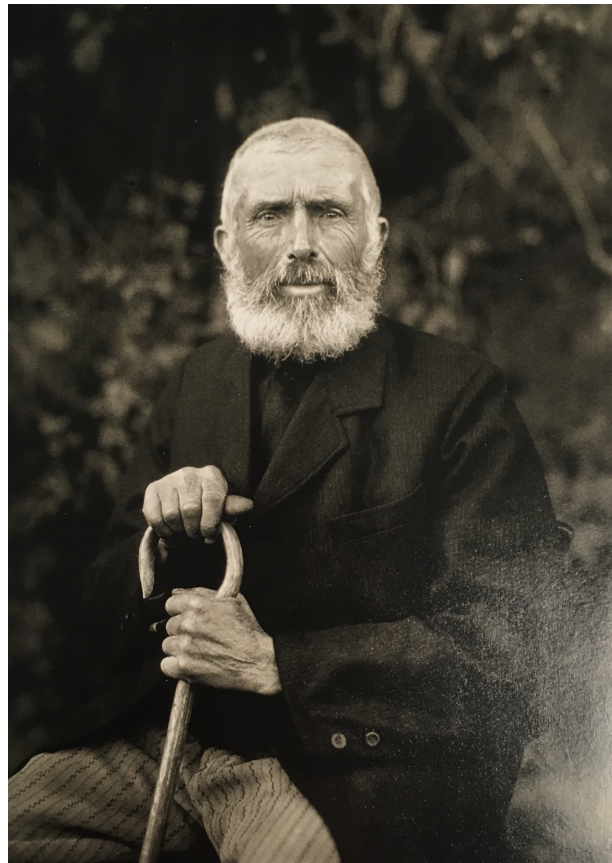


Figure 9: Man of the Soil, 1910, by August Sander. Public domain.



Figure 10: Three Generation of the Family, 1912, by August Sander. Public domain.

As George Didi-Huberman notes, “an atlas often begins...in an arbitrary or problematic way, which is quite different from the beginning of a story or the premise of an argument” (2010, 14). Sander’s “atlas of instruction” does indeed begin in an arbitrary *and* problematic way. It begins from the premise of the “general characteristics of mankind” situated within rural or “earthbound” men and women. Though this beginning has been read as the premise of an argument, as an exaltation of agrarian workers and lifestyles, it is also notable in terms of the way that it uses curation.³⁰ Within the system of atlases in general, Sander’s beginning makes slightly more, though still arbitrary sense. Many atlases start from an immediate or familiar geography, situation, or location, and expand outward. The map-maker becomes familiar with their own terrain before further exploration occurs. Sander’s own atlas starts in a similar fashion, with those people he had known, whose habits he had witnessed. Though still problematic, especially in terms of Sander’s own claims to objectivity and the claims of objectivity made by atlases in and

³⁰ As noted in the collection published by Sander & Keller (1996) and later in the volume edited by Die Photographische Sammlung/SK Stiftung Kultur (2013), which now holds Sander’s photographic collection, Sander’s outline of the germinal portfolio seems to broadly correspond to his idea of time and social hierarchy, most notably in the way he separates professions bound to notions of prestige, how he positions men ahead of women, and his privileging of agrarian and rural workers. However, his scheme does not make clear what we are to make of these divides.

of themselves, this structure mirrors our own encounters with the world, which begin from a localized position and expand ever outward. This movement is true in terms of how we encounter the issue of dignity and community in our own lives as well; from a young age our families and our neighbours are those that we rely on for a dignified life, and as we get older that circle expands. Though Sander seems to start from an arbitrary position, the axis he leans on corresponds to these simplistic notions of earthbound and gender divided roles, which are problematic in our time, yet descriptive of the era he inhabited.

While Sander was never clear as to what he meant by “generally human characteristics” or “mankind in general,” what is apparent is that no one person embodied *all* of these characteristics at once. While people stand in for their social types, no one person stands in for a *model* of society via their occupation or their habits. While Sander did offer a point of “origin,” there is little evidence for how or whether the next category “follows” from the last. The layout of *People of the Twentieth Century* entails a significant set of curatorial choices. And although Sander’s projects have been thoroughly examined in photography studies, they have yet to be given much consideration as models of curation. Sander was a prolific photographer, but he was also a curatorial thinker, and his place within a set of projects that communicate human dignity without trading on an aesthetics of indignity should be fully considered. Sander’s refusal to situate characteristics of mankind in general within a specific and exalted type is crucial to the connection between human dignity and curatorial constellations. In the following section these choices, which do not deny difference, will be looked at under the guise of physiognomy, a taxonomic practice whose ends in the first half of the twentieth century continue to shape the relationship between dignity, universalism, and human difference.

Physiognomy as Moral Topography

There is a risk that the juncture I am trying to forge between human dignity and visual communication might be read as a project that attempts to connect an otherwise invisible or inherent quality with the human body, thus creating a simplistic physiognomic

equation. Broadly, physiognomy is the practice of connecting physical features of the body with moral or otherwise intangible ideals. During Sander's lifetime, physiognomy was a complimentary practice to nationalist agendas and racialized discrimination. Importantly, however, the ideologically and technologically fraught historical moment Sander was a part of is crucial to our current understanding of human dignity and its visual communication. This era not only grounds assumptions about the way dignity ought or ought not be connected with the human body, but it was also a time when aesthetic and scientific concerns were brought together to horrifying ends through the body. It is noteworthy that Sander's project has itself been aligned with the physiognomic ideas that were popular during his lifetime, though as we will see his projects exist just outside morally and nationally coded physiognomic practices. Physiognomy's connection with Sander's photographic project must be met head on, *as should any simplistic association between bodies that look a certain way and the idea of human dignity*. I hope to demonstrate through a discussion of the idea of physiognomic essence, how we might reconcile our ongoing concerns about human dignity and the body through curatorial constellations, which provide a system for thinking ourselves as connected alongside aesthetic concerns, but outside of essentialized moral categories.

The visual communication of human dignity should not be articulated as a one-dimensional sense of harmony between the body and this idea or as simplistic individual autonomy, but as a complex understanding of how one's countenance or carriage intersects with the inherent idea of human value. While this discussion might feel strange, as engagement with visual communication and self-stylization sullies claims of inherent value, we cannot ignore how bodily comportment is always at issue with the communication of human dignity. Though never said outright, the academic focus on photographs of atrocity bound to the idea of indignity is already connected to questions of comportment, "debate about atrocity photography's focus on dignified comportment is a focus on how dignity looks and feels" (Dean 2015, 243). While I do not focus on photographs of atrocity here, I agree that we must confront the legacy of how one's countenance relates to the idea of human dignity, and further offer curatorial constellations as one way to avoid essentialized moral difference. This section

interrogates the historical links between physiognomy, as a practice that links “inner” characteristics with the human form, and the idea of human dignity, which ascribes humans, finitely material beings, a formless value. In order to understand why and how Sander’s project provides a complex space from which to discuss the relationship between the human body and an idea on the one hand, and *the people* and social ideas on the other, a small detour outlining the routes of modern physiognomy and its connection with human dignity is imperative.

While there have been discussions about physiognomy dating back centuries, the man who popularized the type of physiognomic relationship that would come to inform ill-fated theories of race and normative citizenship in the 19th and 20th centuries was Johann Kasper Lavater. From 1775-1778, Lavater published his fragments on physiognomy, which visualized and formalized his theory about the connections between moral characteristics and outer appearances. For example, those who were thought to be calm were considered to have distinct facial features from those who were considered to be bad tempered or woeful (Fig. 11). In metaphorical terms of maps and atlases, physiognomy speaks to topographical interpretation. What is given to the eye via the face is given value that extends beyond the realm of the visible. For Lavater, the face was meant to provide a map to help judge the destiny of one’s soul. As Cusack (2006) notes, Lavater hoped that physiognomic guidelines would help to discern those who were “marked for salvation – to recognize one another on the strength of specific physical traits” (764). Whereas language came to be seen as deceptive, physiognomic visualizations of the body became “infallible sign[s] of the moral constitution of the individual” (Cusack, 764). One could not merely verbally proclaim their place as a good or moral person. Rather, the body’s features were seen as more truthful markers of these characteristics (Fig. 11). In Lavater’s conception, there was a perceived harmony between the body and the soul, a totalizing vision that “beauty and ugliness have a strict connection with the moral constitution of man” (Lavater, as quoted in Berland 2005, 33).



Figure 11: Image of woodcut from *Physiognomische Fragmente zur Beforderung der Menschenkenntnis und Menschenliebe* (1775-1778), by Johann Kaspar Lavater. Phlegmatic and choleric (above), sanguine and melancholic (below). Public domain.

Lavater's visual theory had a significant impact on Frederic Schiller's theory of dignity. Schiller, who as we have seen provided one of the first and most complex theories about the relationship between human dignity and aesthetic representation, made sure to distance himself from Lavater's simplistic equation. He did this by shifting attention away from a perceived harmony between the body and the soul, and towards emotional and visual tension. As discussed in the chapter one, the most famous example of Schiller's idea was found in the Laocoön group's (Fig. 5) strained visual narrative as "calm in suffering" (Schiller, 376). Whereas Lavater was concerned with the fixed and ultimately measurable signs of the body—forehead, chin, nose, etc.—Schiller was more concerned with the mobile features of the face and body, or rather, the features that could *demonstrate* the tension and control of one's mentality (Gray, 340). Thus, rather than just being a topographical endeavor, Schiller understood that human dignity could not be "read" or assumed through a harmony between the body and the soul. As such, Schiller developed a *physiognomy of sensation* that sees one's countenance or carriage as integral

to the otherwise intangible quality of human dignity. Human dignity reveals itself in our *carriage* — through our bodies and our subsequent interactions with others, we are counted as more than things, and through movements we can be understood as expressing an awareness of our relations to the embodied carriage of others.

Schiller's formulation of human dignity not only helps to counter the reductionism inherent to Lavater's physiognomy (that the body is no different than the visualized soul), but also helps to ground my own understanding of human dignity as an expression of bodies *in relation*. For Schiller, dignity was indeed a relationship between human reason and the body, but one that denied a simplistic equation between "good" and a small nose or "bad" and a large forehead. If "calm in suffering" revealed the "existence and influence of a power independent of suffering" (Schiller, 376) — that is human dignity — then the place to look for this property is not in isolation, autonomy, or harmony, but through human relations. With Schiller's introduction of an expressive dimension, two important items are married to dignity as a concept: the *democratization* of human experience via the ability to *carry* oneself as dignified through a demonstration of bodily control and a sense of *contingency* that outwardly marked the effects of human interaction. As a broadly democratic and contingent property, Schiller's idea of dignity depends on human actions and their effects, rather than isolated appearances, rational autonomy, normative ideals, or social titles. By refusing to defer to the ideals of those with power (church, monarchy, politics, etc.) in terms of what an ideal relationship between the body and soul might look like, Schiller opened up the body to questions of human will and social arrangement, and thus to human dignity as a relational property.

It is interesting, however, that the sense of contingency and disharmony Schiller saw in human dignity was never really taken further. Control came to be seen in normative terms of bodily integrity and contingency become secondary with the rise of individuality and self-determination. Between Schiller's time and Sander's time, the path of physiognomy, and therefore the relationships between the body and otherwise inherent qualities took many twists and turns. Despite its religious, superstitious, and narrow-minded beginnings, physiognomy was not just a short-lived fad. It found new homes and purposes, specifically in terms of composites, and more generally in terms of the creation

of racialized and national ideologies (Gray 2004; Rittleman 2010; Sekula 1986). In one publication on physiognomy from 1879 human dignity is included in a long list of how one's faculties present themselves through the body, "agreeableness imparts a winning, pleasing look...ideality, a beautiful look; self-esteem, a dignified look" (Willis, 33). Here a continuation of human dignity as an idealization of status or station shines through via an understanding that one's self-esteem is worn and could be outwardly measured.

Whether or not this view seems outmoded today, the connection between self-esteem and dignity was and remains essential to an ideal visualization of it. Notably, Lavater's emphasis on the flat, immobile parts of the face became synonymous in physiognomic propaganda of the National Socialists and their supporters. During the opening decades of the twentieth century many German photographers and authors of "instructive" race based photo-books, such as those made popular by Hans Gunther and Erna Lendvai-Dircksen, generally focused on the specificities of the face and racial connotations of skull shape and genetic presentation, much in line with Lavater's eschatological prerogatives.³¹ In this turn of physiognomy, what was considered "good" became tied to facial and cultural markers in ways that attempted to prioritize "good citizens", rather than good Christians.

In the majority of physiognomic works from the early 1900s, ideas of moral, racial, and nationalistic hierarchy were married to genetic features and biological traits as a way to valorize an *ideal* type. Difference was positioned both narratively and visually as dangerous to the nation and as something to eliminate through biological selection, laws, and ultimately genocide; in these eugenic projects, any sense of dignity is normative, a quality reserved for a select and idealized group, thus transfiguring old ideas

³¹ Erna Lendvai-Dircksen was a German photographer and eugenicist whose work advocated for a primacy of the rural German *volk* (Rittleman 2010). Along with her popular photobooks, she was also notably the main photographer of children for the German periodical, *Volk und Rasse (People and Race)*. Hans Gunther promoted himself as a "race scientist" and published books such as *Rassenkunde des deutschen Volkes (Racial Science of the German People)* (1922) & *The Racial Elements of European History* (1927). Both used photography to their advancement, combining photographic "evidence" with scientific language so as to create strong alliances between hierarchical ideology founded in national interests with outer appearances. See Brückle (2013) Lange (1999), and Magilow (2012) for more on these and other physiognomic photographers and theorists.

of rank or status into genetic and racial forms. Through these examples we can see how the physiognomic framing of individuals as types to be deciphered through racial and physical categories delimits dignity. These are not people approached in a way that values their individual lives or experiences, but *things* subsumed under a strict ordering system. Alan Sekula (1986) summarizes the tenets of physiognomic practice and its effects concretely:

Virtually every manual developed an array of individual cases and types along a loose set of ‘moral, intellectual, and animal’ continua. Thus zones of genius, virtue, and strength were charted only in relation to zones of idiocy, vice, and weakness. The boundaries between these zones were vaguely demarcated; thus it was possible to speak, for example, of ‘moral idiocy.’ Generally, in this pre-evolutionary system of difference, the lower-zones shaded off into varieties of animality and pathology. (Sekula 1986; 12)

Just as exhibitions were used to create and reinforce racial hierarchies in the nineteenth century, the body itself had become a site where hierarchical ideas of race, gender, and nationality were constantly being experimented with and developed.³²

³² We can see these experiments play within physiognomic projects at the time, which similarly used the idea of mapping and atlases to develop their own racist and exclusionary ends. For example, Hans Gunther used maps to segregate and define different races in his pseudo-scientific endeavors, going beyond where different cultures or races *did* reside into territory that defined where they *ought* to reside. Comparatively, we can see the most deceptive components of a physiognomic undertaking, which naïvely equated of the racialized body with geographical zones joining together in the 1933 exhibit, *Races of Mankind*. Mounted in conjunction with the 1933 *Century of Progress World’s Fair* in Chicago, *Races of Mankind* consisted of 101 life-sized bronze sculptures crafted by Malvina Hoffman, each of which were to encompass one of the world’s racial types.³² Using the globe as an interface, and the conceit that mankind could indeed be mapped on a geographical level, *Races of Mankind* perfected techniques used at world’s fairs or human zoos in the newly founded sterile and scientific Field Museum. The artistic quality of these statues encouraged visitors to examine others who were “unable to respond or return the look. The exhibition encouraged a kind of voyeurism sanitized of shame in the culturally approved setting of a museum in which such seeing is given scientific sanction as the pursuit of knowledge and cultural sophistication” (Teslow, 55). While a physical map was not added to this exhibit until after World War II, the reification of race along the lines of geographic region and cultural stereotypes was clear from the beginning. The exhibit’s condensed field of vision promised a clear pinnacle of human and geographical perfection. Like Hans Gunther’s *Racial Elements of European History* (1927), which valorized the Nordic type, Hoffman’s exhibit similarly places the White/Nordic man as the pinnacle of progress. In both the *Races of Mankind* exhibit and Gunther’s books maps were used to clarify their findings. The visual message inherent in both is that there is a specific way progress and human value appears across the world. In both instances ideas of progress and hierarchy overshadow any attempt at equality or universal dignity.

This new era of experimentation with the body and its physiognomic significance in the 1800s and early 1900s runs parallel to Hunt's (2007) description of how state ownership of bodies gave way to individualistic and secular ownership of the body in conjunction with the new era of human rights around the turn of the nineteenth century. While the idea of the individual was beginning to take hold, it was accompanied by notions of group belonging based on cultural markers that extended beyond race, class, and gender into more finite principles of phrenology and physiognomy. As Shawn Michelle Smith (1999) has demonstrated, in the nineteenth century photography helped middle class Americans connect imagined ideas of "inner essence" to physical appearances: "the photographic sign invited one to participate in a leap of faith whereby the body might serve as index to an imagined essence. And by the same leap of faith, by the same process of metonymy, individuals could imagine themselves linked to others similarly represented, and thereby mutually affirm an imagined essence" (Smith 1999, 5). Detrimentially, a process of imagined essence collided not only with photographic technologies, but with social processes of imagined value and worth, especially as it concerned differences of race and gender. The visual landscape was used to affirm imagined differences by linking biology and imagined essence, while at the same time deferring ownership of such qualities to the individual. White authoritative frames of reference came to superimpose non-existent differences onto "other" populations, thus giving these imagined differences material forms. While this new era of ownership was not tied to the pain of physical torture, it was indeed linked to differential qualifiers of meaning that were directly tied to the body. In this way, while the individual came to be seen as the central unit of this new era of human rights, there was at the same time a limited sense that individuals could make their own meaning in the world, which Bergoffen sees as central to the contemporary connection between human dignity and the body (2009, 313). Group identifiers and morally laden taxonomies came to reside on the body, on the individual, yet the individual had little recourse to claim their own meaning in ways that did not conform to what was considered good or right. Thus, as people were thought to own their bodies and agency, they were also seen to own the harmful racialized and gendered dynamics whose significance resided on their bodies. The physiognomic equation of inner essence with outer appearance seems to foreground the

dynamic shift of bodily ownership that the new human rights era entailed and the myriad symbolic and human values that connect human worth with culture broadly.

Defining New Territory: Sander's Physiognomy

We should be wary of projects that rest on an easy relationship between the body and the soul or the body and moralized inscriptions of race, gender, or class. The body cannot be seen as a morally laden topographical medium. The connection between human dignity and the body similarly cannot be about a perceived sense of harmony between the body and the soul or a simplistic observation about bodies that are deemed whole or inviolable or simply look a certain way. Why then start with a project created by a man who experimented with physiognomy? What can his curatorial vision possibly tell us about the relationship between human dignity and the mediated world? Looked at through the lens of archives that helped to fuse ideas of imagined essence to bodily appearance, Sander's photographic projects are yet another site that might entrench unfounded ideas of difference (Smith 1999, 3). In this vein, Smith is rightly critical of Walter Benjamin's praise of Sander's photographs. However, there are important differences between Sander's work and those that came before and after it that help to position *People of the Twentieth Century* as a site that can be used to differently imagine a relational understanding of human dignity beyond idealization, absence, or aesthetic emancipation. Importantly, Sander was mapping new territory in terms of the visual politics of the body in relation to mass society and in opposition to simplistic notions of hierarchy.

Since Sander first published *Face of Our Time* (1929) his work has received mixed reviews: praise for its expansive scope and its position at the forefront of photographic portraiture (Aiken 2005; Benjamin 1931a; Lange 1999; Sander 2013, 16) and criticism for his aloof relationship between the politics of the body and eugenic ideas of racial purity (Jones 2000; Sekula 1981; Smith 1999). In many ways, Sander's work situates itself just outside of the biological, psychological, and social stereotypical projects, which were gaining momentum and intersecting in the early 20th century around

questions of race, class, and gender.³³ While many of these projects were engineered to help place people into specific moral and value-laden categories, such as the ones Sekula exposed above, Sander's work was much less interested in ideological or moral types, which is evidenced in the way he linked physiognomy to profession or social position.

Sander developed his taxonomy in relation to the roles people played in their daily lives, to his subject's labour as farmers, mothers, doctors, artists, architects, and so on. Taxonomy – a process of naming and ordering – is a political technique. Effective taxonomies fade into the background, seem obvious and descriptive, rather than deceptive or exploitative (Hooper-Greenhill 1992, 6). Though taxonomy is predominantly considered under negative rubrics of bureaucratic oppression, it is also constitutive. In relation to the idea of human dignity, taxonomic difference should not be thought of as an anathema to its universalizing project. Thinking about the visual communication of human dignity requires more complexity than an ideal or uniform end where all humans are neatly labeled or described as “dignified.” We rely on taxonomic systems to make sense of the world and “make up” people and species beyond a taxonomy's nomenclature, and this is true of human dignity as well. As Ian Hacking argues, “numerous kinds of human beings and human acts come into being hand in hand with our invention of the categories labeling them” (1999, 170). In this light, Sander's categories are compelling. The subjects he constitutes are neither idealized or celebratory. They are also, not always direct or obvious. While some are photographed with the tools of their trade, others are not clearly aligned with these traits. Sander directs the viewer's attention, not to categories of race or citizenship, but to people as they inhabit their labour and exhibit general characteristics. His labels do not fade into the background, but rather become part of what is compelling and instructive about his project. His taxonomy helps

³³ It was not just racists or politically corrupt parties that were experimenting with physiognomic models in the early 1900s. Leesa Rittelman (2010) makes a strong case for the more general resurgence of physiognomy in Weimar Germany, as it “was not merely a sign of conservative racist dogma but a culture wide symptom of Germany's interregnum identity crises” (147). As cultural transformation took place across all facets of German life – from the fields to the home to offices and industry – questions of national identity were raised in conjunction with the bodies that filled said roles. The surge in physiognomy was an attempt to marry nationalistic and otherwise intangible qualities with a visible and material form via the human body. August Sander is one of many photographers who was grappling with this connection.

us to see human dignity, not by giving everyone the same label, but by demonstrating how fundamental differences manifest through lived experience. Dignity must be thought in relation to these diverse experiences. Thinking about human taxonomies is one area where one's countenance intersects with notions of value beyond atrocity or degradation.

Though we know taxonomic endeavors are inherently political, Sander was careful not to align himself with science or politics explicitly. From the leaflet announcing *People of the Twentieth Century* in 1929 there is a strong push away from these established positions. "This enormous task," it reads,

was not approached from an expert's point of view. Sander had no scientific aids and was not advised by race theorist or social researchers. In other words, he relied exclusively on the direct observation of human nature, appearance, and environment; he followed his unerring instinct for the authentic and the essential, and embarked upon his mission primarily as a photographer. And he completed this mission with the fanaticism of a seeker of truth, without prejudice for or against any part, alignment, class, society. (Sander, 1986, 23)

Sander attempted to depict his social milieu as it was and not how it should be. This prerogative – to shy away from imposing an alternate ideal on society through his taxonomy and arrangement – has been the cause for much of the ambivalence towards his work. Sander did not attempt to imagine a society devoid of the downtrodden or ill. Indeed, the lack of an idealized subject may ultimately have made Sander's work irreconcilable with Nazi politics. Though it has been documented that the Nazis destroyed the plates for *Face of Our Time* in 1936, there is some academic trepidation in associating Sander's images with a politics that outwardly defied the Nazi's visual program (Baker 1996; Halley 1978). The destruction of these plates has been read as incommensurate with the National Socialist program, but Sander himself was never jailed. Though there remain questions about political alignment, I agree with Aiken (2005) who has noted that the lack of an idealized framework makes Sander's work subversive in its own right: "what is missing...are images of handsome, healthy, resolute Aryans typical of the Nazi's physiognomical views of the human race" (202). These omissions from *Face of Our Time*, and Sander's arrangements are telling in terms of his

ideological alignment with a physiognomy corrupted by racist eugenics.³⁴ In not conforming to a vision of progress so pervasive at the time, Sander quietly promotes an *outline* of society, rather than its idealized image. While the “earthbound man”/“farmer” do take up the opening positions within Sander’s curatorial arrangement, the project lacks any real directive, no instructions or advice on whether or how people should conform to the ways of the earthbound man. Indeed, this internal contradiction has flummoxed thinkers like Susan Sontag who voiced frustration with Sander’s work: “despite its class realism, it is one of the most truly abstract bodies of work in the history of photography” (1973, 61).

Along with Sander’s subversive taxonomy, his view of what physiognomy was and how it worked alongside technology requires examination. Sander was, like Schiller, more interested in physiognomy as a product of one’s carriage and trade, rather than nose length or chin shape.³⁵ In a radio lecture given in 1931, Sander outlined his views on physiognomy and its relation to the process of photography. At the beginning of this lecture physiognomy is framed as the act of apprehending the nature of another human being through an optic lens (Sander 1931, 677). However, rather than focusing on the measurable aspects of the face, Sander concentrated on full- and three-quarter-length images of his subjects, and valued the characteristic movements of human bodies as they intersected with social roles and labour: “not only a person’s face, but his movements define his character” (1931, 678). You can imagine this kind of physiognomic judgment

³⁴ While Aryan soldiers do not appear in *Face of Our Time*, they have been included in subsequent versions of *People of the Twentieth Century* published posthumously.

³⁵ Unlike Schiller, however, Sander seems uninterested in pathos. Importantly, and sometimes infuriatingly, Sander appears to engage only sporadically in sentimental affiliation. While many of his first photographs, such as the man of the soil (Fig. 9) are intimate and personal in comparison with photographs of businessmen and professionals that were taken later on in the project, this development is unsurprising given that he admits that he had known these first subjects in his description of the germinal portfolio. There is no clear way of seeing these differences in sentiment and intimacy as more than the differences between those “people I had known” and other social types that were needed to complete his project. The differences between the subjects Sander knew and those he did not is inherent to the project and to the way he worked. As a commercial photographer, many of the photographs were taken in official settings and later re-used while others were taken specifically for the purpose of completing *People of the Twentieth Century*. In many cases, it is not possible to define the circumstances of each photograph given how much information was destroyed.

as a part of everyday life as people act and move through the world. The baker or the locksmith exhibit their labour through the swirl of a whisk or quick move of the hand. In this way, Sander's view of physiognomy is not merely a topographical endeavor; he does not assign hidden moral characteristics to the terrain of the body. It is not merely the surface of the body that provides clues to his subject's professional characteristics, but their movement and actions. Their qualities are not magically inherent, but rather part of their life's work and environment.

With the addition of photography, the relationship between actions and appearances becomes complicated. A medium that is meant to capture a *moment* is employed by Sander to capture something much more temporal and animated. Herein lies a fundamental tension in Sander's work. He seems to recognize that it is not just about the subject's topographical appearance that makes his or her characteristics and yet he uses photography to capture the face of his time. To get around this duality Sander emphasizes the importance of the mass, and subsequently the importance of the curatorial endeavor to his visual understanding of society. He argued that "it is possible to record the historical physiognomic image of a whole generation and, with enough knowledge of physiognomy, to make that image speak in photographs. The historical image will become even clearer if we join together pictures typical of the many different groups that make up human society" (Sander 1931, 678). A mass of images is needed to make an image of the time. The idea of the "people" Sander was attempting to create could not be made iconographically, but necessitated curatorial thinking.

A similar tension arises when placing human dignity in conversation with photography. Using singular photographs to visually communicate human dignity lends itself to notions of idealization or autonomy, only to be contradicted with a relentless stream of images of atrocity. When the surface of the body, especially in states of decay or violation, is read as proof that human dignity is something that can be easily violated, we hold ourselves back at the level of topography, attuning ourselves to certain kinds of violations while obfuscating those less visible. The constellation Sander was creating makes visible disparate human forms without reducing one to the other, and effectively opens up conversations about how this idea might look and feel otherwise. As such his

atlas acknowledges one of human dignity's underlying concerns – that is, an awareness of how our means of existence create demands on others in the world. Though photography might not be the best medium to make these relations visible in obvious ways, examining its intersection with the human and its representation through a curatorial constellation is useful, as these bodies perform ideas of social and aesthetic value.

For Benjamin, deeming Sander's project an "atlas of instruction" can be thought of in two ways as it relates to taxonomy and curation. First, *Face of Our Time*, did present a new taxonomy of humans connected through their social roles. Curatorially, it brought people together in a way that resembled Benjamin's own mosaic thinking, which manifested through a layering of quotes, and objects, and interpretations in the *Arcades Project*. Sander's assemblage brought together a whole host of different elements as a means of forming an historical image, forming an idea of the social shape in a highly complex fashion. Second, Benjamin's fixation on Sander's work might have also stemmed from his concerns about how commodification and mechanical reproduction were flattening the visual landscape and deadening the authentic aura of everyday life. Sander's comparative form gave it distinct political stakes: *People of the Twentieth Century* might provide a place where viewers could learn to parse differences, and in so doing avoid a passive viewing of the people on the pages and in the world. For Benjamin, there was an anxiety that the world would come to wash over its subjects, and create a sense of "sensory alienation" in political and social life (Buck-Morss 1992, 4). As Benjamin writes in "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," "humanity that, according to Homer, was once an object of spectacle for the Olympian gods, is now one for itself" (Benjamin 1936, 242). Inherent in this statement is a warning: people can become immune to their own aestheticization or alienated from their sensory realities. The consequences of this kind of immunity would be that people in turn might begin to take joy in viewing their own destruction. Alienation from one's own aesthetic situation, from one's own physiognomic symbolisms and appearance, is thus at stake.

Most basically, Sander's atlas was a way of acquainting people with their own images, and with the way their own images related to others.³⁶ Benjamin writes, "work like Sander's can assume an unsuspected actuality overnight. Shifts in power, to which we are now accustomed, make the training and sharpening of a physiognomic awareness into a vital necessity. Whether one is of the right or left, one will have to get used to being seen in terms of one's provenance. And in turn, one will see others in this way too" (Benjamin, 1931a; 520). Sander's project, in this light, becomes one way of uncovering the aspects of society that may be hiding in plain sight, uncovering the way one's comportment makes "value" in the world, and a way of communicating an idea of society not previously available vis-à-vis technology. As we will come to see in the final chapter, regarding the CMHR, there is a finite risk of levelling subjects or upholding them to hagiographic standards. In Sander's time, and in our own, complexity is required to understand human relations. Sander's compilation of images is nothing if not tied to the way that people are read and must learn to read others in terms of their carriage or countenance, not just in a snapshot, but in the social world. Thus, in relation to the visual communication of human dignity, which already intersects with issues of bodily comportment via atrocity, Sander's *People of the Twentieth Century* becomes one site from which to imagine the intersection of human dignity and visual communication through labour and social constructs.

Human Dignity Between the Finite and the Infinite

Sander's work does not strive to make a homogenous image of social life, but rather ties itself to fundamental differences between people, which manifest through lived experiences. His photographs are relational in a way that does not deny difference, but instead attempts to map how his subject's experiences position them alongside one another. The baker, the locksmith, the farmers, the mothers, and society ladies are emblematic of these differences, and clearly demonstrate how lived experience and social

³⁶ It should again be noted that many of Sander's images were taken primarily as commercial photographs. In this way, they were taken in accordance with an "official" portrayal of the self, rather than a sense of casual or candid acquaintance. This makes a reading of his photographs, as an opportunity that allowed people to understand how their images and identities were read in public stronger.

constructs manifest in the body. Of course, this introduces a complex of relations that intersect with questions of gender, race, and class, which I will attempt to address below. Despite the fact that Sander's subjects were taxonomically aligned with their social positions or aesthetic styling, the comparative framework of *Face of Our Time* and *People of the Twentieth Century* resist a sense of flattening or aesthetic alienation.

In the introduction to August Sander's *Face of Our Time*, Alfred Doblin argues that Sander's photographic atlas has an important social function. Beyond instructing his audiences about the relational qualities of mass society, his work is said to be an answer to the aesthetic flattening of mass society, or at the very least a warning of its effects. Doblin, a writer and notable cultural figure of 1920s, claimed that Sander's work makes his audiences more aware of the "leveling" of mass society: "what do I mean by leveling? Assimilation, the blurring of personal and private distinctions, the fading away of these differences under the stamp of greater power" (Sander 1929, 8). This statement seems initially at odds with any program of human rights. Intuitively, the fading away of "these differences" would appear positively in the fight for equality and justice. However, Doblin sees the blurring of distinctions as a negative development. The "stamp of greater power," assumedly capitalism and the amalgamation of class distinctions that come with it, made people unable to recognize social distinctions and inequalities in a way that was detrimental to recognition and respect of difference. Despite the appearance of more choices and thus more room for individual expression, Sander is positioned as keenly aware that outer expression was co-opted by style and capital and therefore not the pristine canvas from which to measure inner characteristic, a relationship so popular with other physiognomic projects. The shift from the face as the main canvas of physiognomy to the body and its movements or habits, in fact reveals the failures of physiognomy, and makes visible the conditions of modernity that manifest corporeally and ideologically. The human could no more be a marker of calm or sadness or Germanness, as it was becoming the canvas of capital. In the same way, human dignity could no more be a marker of harmony between the body and the soul, or one's outer shell and this inherent quality. It was, indeed, relations within capital and culture, that gave credence to a more

generalized sense of human value, which in Sander's case we see most dramatically through his curatorial constellation.

Sander ultimately displaces any easy relationship between the human form and an inherent characteristic such as human dignity. His curatorial constellation, which shows how characteristics are dispersed through society, never found in one idealized body, is integral to this observation. As mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, one of Sander's most famous photographs is the "Young Farmers" (Fig. 7). In this image three young men stand on a rutted road. With their feet and shoulders pointed away from the camera, they are caught as if moving across the camera's field of vision. Suits, hats, and evening canes stand out in relief on the uneven path and rural setting creating a contrast between their countenance and their surroundings. In John Berger's (1992) essay, "The Suit and the Photograph," the three farmers on their way to a dance are described as exhibiting a "special physical dignity" (34). Peasants, Berger writes, present us with a specific physical rhythm:

...directly related to the energy demanded by the amount of work which has to be done in a day, and is reflected in typical physical movements and stance. It is an extended sweeping rhythm. Not necessarily slow. The traditional scything or sawing may exemplify it. The way peasants ride horses makes it distinctive, as also the way they walk, as if tasting the earth with each stride. In addition peasants possess a special physical dignity: this is determined by a kind of functionalism, a way of being *fully at home in effort*. (Berger 1992, 33-4)

There is a way in which these farmers are caught between two worlds, plainly between their laborious work and the evening's entertainment, but also metaphorically between their class and the outer appearance of their being. In terms of the importance of exhibitions in crafting their dignity, their placement within Sander's curatorial constellation makes a case that their dignity is both theirs and made in relation to others. Their "functionalism," self-representation, and styling becomes apparent through this comparative scheme that places these people in direct conversation with other members of the community.

Going a step further, I would argue that throughout Sander's projects the *dignified* human subject is made through a curatorial constellation that relies on relationality and interdependence. Within *Face of Our Time* especially, an air of contingency is created that develops the importance of Sander's manufactured social types as part of a constellation and part of a community. His curatorial arrangements submit what has been considered by some as a "utopian dream of a community without boundaries" (Hake 1997, 123). This is especially true of *Face of our Time*, which presents an arrangement much less demarcated than the subsequent renderings of *People of the Twentieth Century*. In this prototype, there are no groups or portfolios that give the arrangement as definitive a shape as *People of the Twentieth Century*. In terms of a visual mapping, *Face of Our Time* provides a more general series of locations than a well-defined terrain or detailed representation. The "Young Farmers" existence and meaning is shared with each other *and* with the other types of people—sages, artists, doctors, architects, the unemployed—as they are arranged in the book. Next to "the Notary" (Fig. 13) or the "Village Band" the roughness of the young farmer's hands and off-lengths of their pant legs, mark them as physical laborers not used to moving through the world in such fine apparel. As Berger points out "the three men belong, at the very most, to the second generation who ever wear such suits in the European countryside. Twenty or 30 years earlier such suits did not exist at a price which peasants could afford" (30). While we might be inclined to think that the suits would mask their social class, Berger argues that their suits "underline and emphasize it" (31). Though Berger never states this explicitly, his conclusion is only made through a *comparative* framework, in relation to other photographs in the atlas of images. The farmer's dependence on others for meaning defines *their* special physical dignity, which in turn is only special in so much as it appears differently than some of the other social types. Sander's subjects form the concrete elements whose exhibition creates an understanding of how dignity presents itself in this image world as radically contingent. Put differently, Sander teaches us how dignified personhood is dependent on and established through arrangements that both refer to and endure within existing social constellations.

In many ways this tension, between static visual representations and the relational and comparative aspects of his project bears out one of the most crucial aspects of Sander's work as it reveals the idea of human dignity. In his use of a physiognomic frame tied to a laboring mass, Sander is attempting to capture something not immediately given to the eye, in essence attempting to capture experience and value that occurs outside of the technological limits of photographic media. Sander does not attempt to capture an image of his time in one photograph and in this way, moves beyond photography or iconography. The relationship between dignity and the visual world is emblematic of a similar problem. As something often conceived of as "inherent," dignity is not immediately given to the eye. Indeed, it is not something given to the eye in *one* finite material subject or object. For there to be a successful connection with the visual realm dignity must resist optic idealization. Susan Sontag has asserted that "though the poor do not lack dignity in Sander's photographs, it is not because of any compassionate intentions. They have dignity by juxtaposition, because they are looked at in the same cool way as everybody else" (62). However, it is not merely a technical quality that gives the poor or disabled dignity within Sander's projects. If that were the case than any project that used photography as a means of creating a comprehensive image or argument about a group of people might be thought of similarly, which we know is unfounded given the rise of eugenically driven physiognomic archives. Indeed, the camera does not grant dignity. Rather, dignity in Sander's *People of the Twentieth Century*, and arguably within society at large is only made through the relations of meaning that underwrite our assumptions about what it means to have any number of visual properties that would come to be included in later laws and declarations: family, occupation, ability, and culture. Though not as sensational as the images of war and famine that have come to occupy our sense of what it means to have human dignity, as a function of bodily integrity, these more mundane relations are indeed telling about the state of human dignity through this image of Sander's time. He does not attempt to fashion the poor or disabled in the image of a normative ideal, but treats their existence as important to and revealing of the social reality. This optic relationship is a crucial first step if we are to see dignity in the visual realm as more than a product of its negation.

In Sander's curatorial constellation there is no *one* dignified type, but rather a curatorial method that connects the material and corporeal world, and conveys a number of different ideas, human dignity being one of them. Sander's work helps to situate and define the dignified human person as inextricably linked with his social environments and the taxonomic systems that accompany them. This is nowhere more visible in the portrait of a disabled ex-serviceman taken in 1928 (Fig. 12). While we do not have information about the specifics of this man's life or injuries, his uniform marks him as part of a social group marred by war. His past military service meets his present movements in a haunting way, as his mobility is bound to encounters away from the frame and to his current embodied and environmental realities, the design of which was not his own doing. Not only are his movements restricted by his injury and place in a wheelchair, but also his position at the bottom of a set of stairs demonstrates how the environment is itself immobilizing. The physical space, designed by the otherwise abled does the work of defining his movement.

Importantly, however, this man does not come to embody what ability looks like alone. He is not simplistically positioned in a portfolio with other "Servicemen," as a foil to their ability. Rather he is included in a portfolio labeled as "Itinerant Tradesmen," or more colloquially people who travel for work. I mention this, partly because the "Disabled Ex-Serviceman" here holds an interesting position, he is both "disabled" yet marked as part of a laboring and moving force. In this portfolio, similar dichotomies appear between these men who are by and large visually disfigured, but labelled through their socio-economic roles, which are inherently defined by movement. This is not to argue that Sander dignifies these men by avoiding labels that shirk their ability, but he does introduce nuance to their social roles, especially in light of his own emphasis on characteristic movements as a route to the characteristics of mankind in general. Though their movements are indeed limited, they are marked as part of a group that is in motion by way of their labour. Furthermore, the "Disabled Ex-Serviceman" is not a man who defines what ability or disability looks like on his own and does not provide a singular image of a group that should be ostracized or avoided. While looked at in the same cool manner as everyone else, his inclusion is crucial to the formation of an image of the time.



Figure 12: Disabled Ex-Serviceman, 1928, by August Sander. Public domain.

Another layer of this man’s relational dignity can be apprehended through a reading of this photograph within and between the types that make up Sander’s larger curatorial constellation. Set against the “Young Farmers” the movements of the “Disabled Serviceman” become more defined. His movement is incompatible with the rutted road that the farmers traverse. More simply, his movement is not compatible with his own surroundings. His is not a dignity made “fully at home in effort” (Berger 1992, 34), but rather *in spite* of his social situation. Unlike the “pastry cook” or the “bricklayer” whose images bear the effortless marks of their professions and continued place within stable employment, the “disabled ex-serviceman” is defined by his past, and limited by his immediate social environment. These differences become all the more evident in relation to Sander’s photograph of “The Notary” (Fig. 13). While similarly positioned at the bottom of a set of stairs, the notary’s countenance and command over his dog tells a very different tale about mobility, inclusion, and access. These aesthetic differences do not merely name someone as part of one group or another, but show how one’s life is

grounded in the material world and built in relation to others. Here again there is no easy relationship between one's outward appearance and one's perceived dignity, but rather a way in which curation begins to reveal these associations, and begins to hint at the limits of exclusion and inclusion, along material, aesthetic, and social lines.



Figure 13: The Notary, 1924, by August Sander. Public domain.

The juxtaposition of the disabled ex-serviceman and the notary map the ways their lives and characteristic movements are made different through the social environment, through things they are in control of and things that they are not in control of. Even if they were to never meet in person, their lives become linked through the image atlas, which puts them in relation. As the series begins to map these inclusions and exclusions, it helps to reveal the assumptions of what a dignified life might look like and provide clues as to where specific work might take place to remedy these problems of access and inclusion. In this way, it helps to reveal the more mundane areas where we might begin to read human dignity as vulnerable and relational. Here, dignity is not only made in relation to corporeal integrity, but in relation to situations of labour, the environment, and social stability. Though these intersections might seem obvious to us

today, Sander's visual compendium is one of the first that examined the social, rather than the biological or racial, as the site from which these relations grow. The "Disabled Ex-Serviceman's" inclusion, along with other people considered to be at the margins of society, helps to visualize the realities of human rights and human dignity beyond an idealized vision and as an ongoing project, "as they are not as they should be" (Sander 1986, 21). His presence makes this constellation less of a dream state and more of exercise in apprehending the boundaries of social, embodied, and material manifestation. Within the confines of this man's own life, it is not only his bodily integrity that defines his humanness, but also shifts in technology – his wheelchair being a modern appendage – and shifts in the way labor was configured and valued. The "Disabled Ex-Serviceman" helps to decenter any notion of an idealized or unattainable singular vision of what it means to have dignity, and demonstrates how shifts in material and technological configurations support or deny dignity.

Here we might begin to see Sander's atlas beginning to craft ideas about ability as it intersects with human dignity more broadly. In response to normative claims, Wendy Brown (2004) points out that "human rights configure subjects as either able or entitled... to protect themselves from what they consider unjust and define for themselves what their individual aims and ends are" (Brown 2004, 455). Sander's atlas demonstrates how individual empowerment and agency are indeed contingent. The social dimension of these photographs demonstrates how individual aims and ends meet the means and ends of others in both diffuse and concrete ways. Here, making the means of dignity visible means exposing the uncomfortable reality that individuals are not always in control of their own characteristic movement and not always able to define their own ends. Human dignity is not just a matter of life or death, or ability or disability, or even bodily integrity. Human dignity is a matter of everyday entanglements. The atlas is a helpful tool in this way. As a form that offers aesthetic and epistemic knowledge, it allows these different junctions to meet in a way that moves beyond simplistic contrasts.

This is not to say that Sander's *People of the Twentieth Century* solves the problems that come with a relational understanding of human dignity, especially as it concerns gender. Although Sander's "germinal portfolio" sets up an equal-but-secondary

division between men and women, women and girls take up much less space within the larger project, and are given a specifically gendered grouping that is much more limiting in terms of roles women play in society. Though there are hints at the new positions women were occupying outside of the home—for example in the photograph of the “Office Worker” who is positioned amongst the technologies of the modern workplace (Fig. 14)—the majority of women are photographed as mothers or as social figures that support their laboring husbands. Women are, in this world, much less dynamic and their animation is sequestered in real ways. In this way, Sander’s images embody older conceptions of the human body “with differential consequences for women, whose sovereignty resides in sexual as well as moral integrity” (Dean 2015, 243). The contingency of the project, reveals these limitations, but does not propose a new way forward. If human rights figures people as otherwise “able or entitled” we begin to see through a focus on the mass or constellation how one person’s ability or entitlement rests upon systems which are distinctly coded along cultural lines. In this way, human dignity becomes distinctly constellated, through all areas of social life, including ability and gender. Women are not without dignity, but figured as otherwise able and confined. While we might see this as a sign specific to Sander’s time, gendered dynamics that reach across arenas of labour, ability, and action remain pertinent. Though outside the scope of this dissertation, the kind of relational reading I am describing via curatorial constellations might gain traction when placed in dialogue with current debates in media and gender studies, specifically in relation to feminist disability studies, which brings together the concerns of gender and disability as a way of demonstrating how notions of ability and equality reside in intersecting spheres.³⁷ How indeed might a focus on curatorial constellations begin to provide a subversive archive that reveals contingent

³⁷ See for example Garland-Thompson (2005 & 2011), Hall (2011 & 2015), Haraway (1990). I am especially interested in the potential connections to be made between Haraway’s oft cited question, “why should our bodies end at the skin” (Haraway 1990, 220), and the theorization of human dignity as a relational property. As Garland-Thompson notes, “a feminist disability approach fosters complex understanding of the cultural history of the body” (2011, 16). An expanded understanding of human dignity might productively compliment the interdisciplinary approach being taken in this field, especially as it relates to diversity and marginalization.

frames of ability, gender, and access and speak more broadly to human dignity as property that both resides at the interface of the human body and demands a relational understanding of our lives as both embodied and meaning making subjects?



Figure 14: Office Worker, 1928, by August Sander. Public domain.

Sander's curatorial constellation does not offer answers to the environmental and cultural ways that construct some people as inhabiting a special physical dignity. In this sense, there is no pretense to the "equality" between men and women or professionals and the poor. Sander's objective, to photograph his subjects as they are and not how they should be, can, in the context of gender roles, feel unsatisfying. However, his technique of arrangement, of placing these categories into conversation, offers a method of reading the meaning of human dignity as fragmented and supported by a wide range of people. There is a clear way in which Sander's subjects must be read as animated, enduring, and wholly contingent that not only makes us aware of the forces of aesthetic countenance – the clothing, styles, and carriage that mark us a part of one group or another – but also

points to the ways that shifts in power can come to constitute how human dignity is culturally and aesthetically supported. As Sander forces his viewers to read his images as a constellation, he demonstrates how the connection between an idea and a human body is not made in isolation or instantaneously. As an atlas, which teaches us “how to see the essential and overlook the incidental,” Sander’s work acts as a hinge between projects that entrenched social hierarchy and those that help us to read the manifestation of moral hierarchies via the visualization of the human form (Daston and Galiston 2008, 26). Placing the process of comparison and relation ahead of exaltation or idealization, situates Sander’s work just outside of the typical physiognomic projects. And, in so doing, begins to demonstrate how an invisible quality such as human dignity must be read between human bodies not in them. In relation, the subject’s humanness is not just about a posed moment or a sum of its described visuals, but mutually constitutive and embodied process that must be supported and over time through the communities that make up our lives. Sander’s curatorial constellation produces an idea of contingency that is not just visual, but importantly lived and embodied.

Conclusion

While atlases often begin in a problematic way, from a subjective position or location, they often end, as Didi-Huberman argues, with reference to “the unexpected appearance of a new country, a new zone of knowledge to be explored” (Didi-Huberman 2010, 14). For his time and ours, Sander’s atlas of instruction offers a zone of knowledge particular to the human, a zone which traverses scientific and aesthetic concerns, and which begins to carve out the complex relationship between human dignity and visual communication. In Sander’s conception of photography, “like a mosaic that attains synthesis only when viewed *en masse*” (Sander 1986, 36), a vision of curation is made that seeks to put these subjects in an infinite number of relations. If, as Deborah Bergoffen claims, “we need to think of dignity and integrity in terms of the way that we are, as singular and distinct from others, [and] also bounded to them in a shared world. What needs to be protected are the way as that this connection to the other is structured and lived” (2012, 30), then Sander’s atlas provides one such structure directly tied to the lived experiences of these subjects. Dignity is not made manifest in *an* image, but rather through a method or

process of apprehension that takes into account the relational and taxonomic properties of these social types. The constellated curatorial *masse* aids in understanding dignity's visual parameters as integrally tied to the duration of one's existence that resists the momentary nature of static representation. Seeing these social types as dependent on each other for meaning is a lesson in reading dignity's contingent forces as obtaining synthesis en masse.

We should be wary of projects that present an idealized dignified subject or ones that only draw our attention to momentary actions of good or evil. Sander's work diverts our attention to the shortcomings of said projects through his insistence on overcoming the aspirational limitations of singular photographs or utopian visions of what society *ought* to look like, and provides an arrangement that demonstrate the importance of thinking through the complexities of what it does look like. Herein issues of essence, countenance, and contingency begin to reveal themselves. While photography had been in use for half a century before Sander began his work, techniques of reproduction were making it easier to amass images and to create comparative frameworks that did more than just reproduce hierarchy. As with any atlas, Sander's *Face of Our Time* and *People of the Twentieth Century* will disappoint if one is to approach them from a chronological perspective with a definitive narrative arc. The mundane statements his images make become animated when placed in conversation to others in his scheme, slowly revealing social connections that on first glance were not obvious or terribly interesting. In terms of my own engagement with Sander's projects, I have only scratched the surface of their interrelations, of how they might help us to apprehend a more diffuse sense of human dignity. Bringing together different types of people, Sander invented a way of looking that offered new visual information—an optic that allowed spectators to envisage themselves as bound to social networks based on labour rather than strict moral codes. In the case of Sander, it is not only the technology evident in the photographs, but also his representational arrangement that make “shifts in power” and being understood in terms of “one's own provenance” visible in a way not encountered before.

Together, these people become *humans* of the 20th century. In leaning on the use of the “masse” visible in exhibition, Sander brings to the fore contemporary problems as

we continue to amass bodies in exhibitions that “make up human society,” a problem which will resurface in the final chapter. There is an eerie way in which Sander seems to both predict and pose answers to problems of nationhood and belonging that would come to dominate discussions around human rights and dignity after the Second World—problems that remain central. In creating an exhibitionary arrangement wherein people must be read in relation to others, and in which the aestheticization of the body is played out in relation to unnamed yet taxonomically configured others, Sander’s projects help to stake out vulnerability and dependence in tandem with the making and unmaking of dignified subjects. At the level of the nation, vulnerabilities were cast aside during the Nazi’s reign in Germany with great consequence, as Jewish subjects were deemed undignified based both on genetic features and on social roles, such as profession and religion.

Importantly, the entwining of physiognomy, exhibition, and human dignity is an issue we are left grappling today. That is, when we think through the visual qualities of human dignity that have at their centre the human form, assumptions around physiognomy, a practice which by definition strives to connect “inherent qualities” with outer appearances, need to be met head on. In our time, there is a growing trend of connecting human dignity to poverty and social appearance. The practice of giving haircuts to the homeless as a way of restoring dignity has emerged as a celebrated act of charity. However, behind these acts of charity and transformation lie assumptions about human dignity and physical appearance, most basically that human dignity is not only part of our physicality, but linked to social conceptions of hygiene, occupation, and appearance. The vulnerabilities that Sander helped to show has interesting parallels: “as in our uneasy times, the material trappings of Sander’s world attest to the precariousness of daily life. The haves and have-nots seem equally vulnerable” (Keane, 2017). There was and remains a complex relationship between social roles, physical appearances, and the idea of human dignity. Sander’s focus on one’s actions or carriage in society helps to shift the focus from human dignity as a normative property to a property made in relation. The constant flux of personal style and technological innovation here make human dignity into an idea connected to suites of actions dispersed amongst bodies, and itself

adapting alongside the techniques of biology and technology. Responding to the levelling of mass society, in Sander's case, means seeing how changes in the material world registered or worked on the body. Complacency about these tangible effects are not an option, as they are telling about the way human value and worth work in tandem with outer appearance. This task might appear monumental, given the constant set of changes facing humans, but the form of the atlas can help in this line of thought as well. Didi-Huberman writes that "if the atlas appears as an incessant work of re-composing the world, it is first of all because the world itself does not cease to undergo decomposition upon decomposition" (2010, np). The human too, undergoes decomposition upon decomposition, composition upon composition. It is thus necessary to commit to a constant engagement with the body and the aesthetic and scientific values that come to reside there. Sander's project instructs us about the project of dignity underway at the time, but its taxonomic and comparative system can be equally useful in ours. While the human body is not the perfect place to attach values of dignity, the body remains central to our understanding of human dignity beyond scenes of suffering, idealization, or aesthetic emancipation. When paired with the curatorial constellation, the body becomes a central interface that draws relations of human dignity across points of labour and style, and within a frame that considers diverse facets of public life.

3 Human Dignity Between Declaration and Curation: The *Human Rights Exhibition Album* as a “Usable Image of the Law”

From the time of its conception, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights was a visual event. Less than a year after this momentous declaration was signed the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) had translated the UDHR into an exhibition titled, *Les Droits de l'Homme*, which was on view at Musée Galliera in Paris from September to December of 1949. Objects, art, and lessons from history were used to showcase various attempts made to implement human rights both by name and spirit in the new declaration. This was the first official visual iteration of the UDHR. Though I begin this chapter with a short explanation of *Les Droits de l'Homme*, I will be attentive to several such visual communications indicative of the state of human dignity as it was publicly developed after World War II. Images of the UN's General Assembly, the *Human Rights Exhibition Album* (1950), and *The Family of Man* (1955) provide glimpses of how cultural difference and visual communication were handled alongside the emerging institutionalization of human dignity. Strikingly, these cases do not trade on an aesthetics of indignity to come to its defense despite their temporal proximity to war and genocide. With an emphasis on the logics of the family album, these exhibits demonstrate how human dignity required constellated systems of visual communication outside of the law to construct a field of understanding tethered to culture and community.

Les Droits de l'Homme is significant, not just because it was the first official iteration of the UN's program of human rights, but also because of how it thematically brought together museological tropes from art history, anthropology, and history alongside current events. In the first room of this exhibit, a stylized solar system positioned humans within a larger cosmological context, and was followed by a showcase narrating the historical struggles of humans around the world in their pursuit to secure rights with reference to earlier laws, cultural artefacts, and photographs. This so-called “treasure room” brought together a cast of a prehistoric footprint, an etching of an early

alphabet, Thomas Jefferson's draft of the United States Declaration of Independence, among other items under the auspices of culture and the law as "different in language, identical in spirit" (Bregengaard & Prag 2014). As one reviewer described this first space: "we are reminded of man's early gropings with his conscience, or of the meditations of those ancients who were seeking to evolve systems of ethics or law or freedom...the cumulative effect upon the visitor of this bird's eye view of human effort is that the long battle has yielded many victories" (Williams 1949, 201). To be sure, the exhibit did not only address victories, but, by all accounts, strived to demonstrate how and where work still needed to be done to make human rights universal. Most strikingly the positive tone was tempered with the inclusion of photographs depicting the horrors of World War II. At the time, what we now know as the Holocaust was never mentioned as a singular event, "while a photograph displays victims incarcerated in a concentration camp, this image appears to signify the general destruction of the war, rather than the particular persecutions of the Jewish people" (Bregengaard & Prag 2014).³⁸ "Fascist denials of liberties" was in this sense more of a "human concern" rather than the concern of a specific race or culture (Williams 1949, 201). Indeed, making world history or events a human concern rather than the concern of a particular culture, race, or nation undergirded the entire show. While the history presented was predominantly Western, an issue I will return to, the vision of a shared humanity was from the outset stated in alliance with the vision of a shared history.

The second part of the exhibition proceeded to look more closely at each of the UDHR's thirty articles from a variety of cultural and historical viewpoints as a way to promote a sense of global progress and solidarity. Pillars were placed throughout the

³⁸ This is not surprising given that "the Holocaust" as a term used to describe the Nazi's program of genocide did not gain traction until the late 1950s and early 1960s in the context of the Eichmann Trial. In recent years there has been a growing reconsideration of how the Holocaust influenced the forming of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Most vocally, Moyn (2010), has argued that "contrary to conventional assumptions, there was no widespread holocaust consciousness in the postwar era, so human rights could not have been a response to it" (7). See also Moses (2013): 'Nazi criminality in general rather than the Holocaust in particular was a background context of the UN human rights regime' (21). As we will see in the next chapter, these debates have more concrete repercussions in terms of the visual communication of human dignity in relation to the development of the CMHR.

room with one devoted to each article of the declaration. The declaration became more tangible and visually engaging as the formal language of the articles were paired with various artefacts and art. For example, the pillar devoted to Article 4 (the prohibition of slavery) combined an antique bronze slave in chains, the log of a slave ship, and a photograph of what is presumably the result of abolition, “Negro doctors in Nigeria.” As the visitor left the exhibit, a final reminder of personal responsibility and futurity was imparted through a machine that counted the births per second of children around the world—a literal representation of the newcomers to this planet provided a way to extend these rights beyond the exhibit and make them part of a visual and material reality.

While fascinating in itself, the exhibit’s relatively short period of display coupled with the fragility of some of its artefacts made it difficult to sell as a travelling entity.³⁹ Instead, a relatively novel form of curatorial dissemination was developed: the exhibit was refigured and condensed into the *Human Rights Exhibition Album*, which was published in three languages (English, French, and Spanish) and upwards of 10,000 copies were shipped to UN member states in 1950. The bulk of this chapter will look closely at the *Human Rights Exhibition Album*. However, in the next section I examine key moments and motifs of the UN’s visual communication leading up to the signing of the UDHR. Herein we begin to see how human dignity emerged through the frame of the UN, the technology of the declaration, and the optic frames that accompanied both. Though *Les Droits de l’Homme* was the first official exhibition, it was in many ways merely an extension of the visual language emerging around human dignity’s place in the post-World War II era.

Interdependence or Catastrophe

The founding of the United Nations and the conceit of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights was, arguably, an exhibitionary event before these institutions became synonymous with their declarative functions. The site of one of the UN’s first meetings in

³⁹ Despite the “universal” nature of this exhibit, only five countries lent objects for display. There is a greater commentary to be made about museums and cultural imperialism inherent in this exhibit outside the scope of this dissertation.

Flushing Meadows, New York itself has a compelling visual and curatorial lineage. In 1939, nestled between the end of the depression and the beginning of the Second World War, a world fair was held in New York City. Not unlike other world fairs, the New York fair heralded visions of progress and demonstrations of new technology around a broad aspirational theme: *The World of Tomorrow*. Central to the fair were two architectural feats, the Trylon and the Perisphere (colloquially the spike and floating ball) (Fig. 15), which together housed one of the main exhibits, *Democracity!* (Fig. 16). Herein a large diorama of an urban city plan that promised to promote democracy dazzled visitors with its visions of idyllic green spaces, friendly roadways, and strategically placed community centres. A bird's eye view of this vision of democratic city planning could be seen from two rotating elevated platforms that spanned the perimeter of the Perisphere. Over speakers, a script was read that reinforced the democratic properties of this sight: "Design for the future. Men working together...bound by a common faith in man...independent and therefore interdependent" (Seldes 1939).



Figure 15: Perisphere (right) and Trylon (left), 1939, by Samuel H. Gottscho. The Metropolitan Museum of Art: 1987.1100.404.

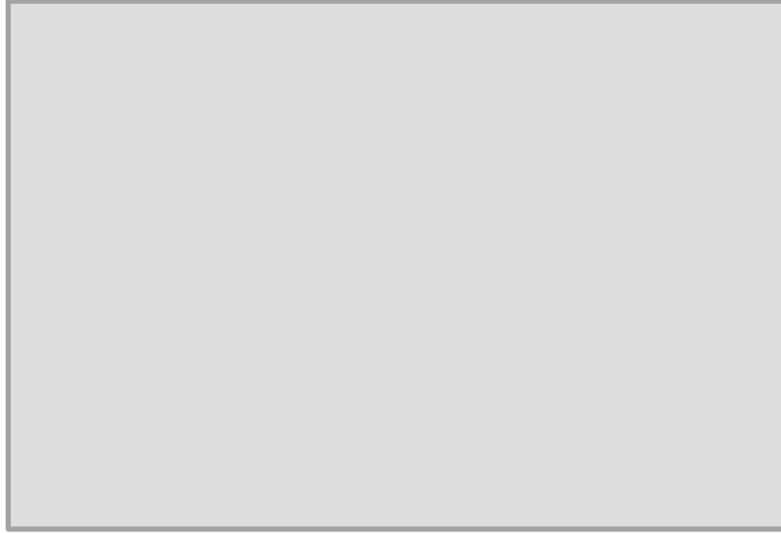


Figure 16: Birds eye view of *Democracy!*, 1939. New York Public Library.

The assumption underlying *Democracy!* was fairly simple: better infrastructure, planning, and technology can make society more democratic. As the brochure reads, this is “not fanciful...not dictatorial;” rather, it was about a standard of living available to all: “for the borders of the world have shrunk – every man is the neighbour of every other man – interdependence or catastrophe” (Seldes 1939). Accordingly, the fairgrounds mirrored the planning seen in the Perisphere, and embodied an ordering system between the participating nations as the scale model had between cities, towns, and community centres. Democracy embodied something beyond the borders of the U.S. as a political entity, and became tied to transnational relations, technology, and infrastructure, which could be reproduced anywhere as long as the plans remained intact. Industrial zones fed the entertainment zones, and the pavilions hosted by different countries provided sources of knowledge and culture integral to the balance of the fair and its so-called “democratic” order.

Despite the growing tension in Europe, Germany was the only country to opt out of this grand exhibition, citing financial strain (in the fair’s second season, 1940, the USSR was the only country that shuttered its doors). Despite attempts to make new world democracies since World War I, of which the fair was but one exhibitionary product, nationalism and the fight over borders, resources, and political ideologies swirled beneath

the architectural dream-world of the fair grounds. “Interdependence or catastrophe” took on a different tone as the world stage shifted from a fair ground in New York to the theatre of war in Europe. The technological infrastructures of imagined cities had nothing on the machineries of air-war and the concentration camp. And for five years the fair-ground at Flushing Meadows lay mostly dormant as catastrophe after catastrophe impacted the world.

As WWII carried on, the leading powers in the world sought to build another machinery of interdependence by way of the United Nations. The beginnings of such an organization came courtesy of war-time alliances in 1941 and pledges between those fighting against fascism in 1942 to provide maximum war effort and bound signatories from making alternate peace agreements (United Nations, “1942”). The first discussions of a permanent organization that would extend beyond the war were carried out by a small handful of leaders representing Great Britain, Russia, China, and the United States in 1944 at Dumbarton Oaks, a private mansion just outside Washington, D.C. Soon after, drafts of the agreed upon foundations of the United Nations were circulated to the public. In the next year, conferences held in Yalta and San Francisco helped to cement the growing constellation of interdependence. Ultimately, six bodies were to make up this structure, including the General Assembly, the Security Council, the International Court of Justice, the Secretariat, the Trusteeship Council, and the Economic and Social Committee. Though “independent and therefore interdependent” had been used to explain the city planning envisioned by the world fair, the same could be said of the governing bodies of the UN, each necessary to the smooth functioning of an international organization and to the growing need to materialize the understanding that “interdependence or catastrophe” had real consequences.

The United Nations officially came into existence as of October 24, 1945, and as the UN grew so did its visual apparatus. With 50 initial members, the General Assembly was something of a spectacle itself. At the San Francisco conference in April 1945 2,500 media representatives were there to witness the coming together of 3,500 delegates (United Nations, “1945”). In 1947, the site of the New York fair became the temporary home of the UN. The world returned to this stage in an augmented form. The fair’s

theme, “World of Tomorrow,” seemed even more apt in relation to the UN’s mandate and apparatus, with *Maclean’s* magazine calling this display “The Biggest Show on Earth” (Berton 1947, 69). The bombastic, visually stunning, and hopeful tones of the world fair were here transfigured within the aims and hopes of the United Nation’s itself.

The transposition of the world fair into a world political organization should not go without notice, for there are many ways in which the establishment of the United Nations was itself an event founded on familiar tropes of world’s fairs. Sweeping photographs of the General Assembly, such as the one featured here (Fig. 17), became synonymous with the UN’s new world order. The diverse and massive nature of the General Assembly and its chambers came to communicate the core of the UN’s mission, helping to sell the burgeoning ideology in a concrete form. The curvature and arrangement of its desk nodded to the global desire and design of this material constellation despite the uncertainties that remained as to the ultimate power of the Security Council. Between a mass of flags, which put a finite number on the amount of countries participating in this new endeavor, world-maps (often borderless), such as the one condensed into the UN’s logo, and a visibly diverse contingency, the symbolism of the international and cross-cultural nature of this coalition is optically unmistakable. The differentiating markers founded in flags and maps gave way to a new order of people. The type of “imperial visuality” which had been synonymous with world fairs of the past, which made taxonomic and stylistic distinctions around different cultures as a way to enforce ideas about primitive or civilized habits (Mirzeoff 2011, 197), appeared to dissolve in the UN’s chambers. These were people connected in time and space in a distinctly new manner. In the UN’s chamber a shift in imperial power was visibly on offer. Though the imperial powers still largely ran the show, the forward-facing theatre of this new system consolidated the divisions of world’s fairs under the banner of universal governance and later human rights.



Figure 17: Plate 25 from the *Human Rights Exhibition Album*: meeting of the United Nations from the day the UDHR was signed (December 10, 1948). Photograph by author. Used with permission of UNESCO.

Whereas August Sander saw photography “like a mosaic that attains synthesis only when viewed *en masse*” (1986, 36) the importance of the United Nations similarly attains synthesis when viewed through the lens of its visibly diversified constellation. Indeed, while the forming of the UN was itself important to our understanding of human rights, as important was this visual configuration. As human rights and human dignity came to encompass transnational and global importance, it was imperative to understand the ideas it promoted beyond an idealized form. The complex of relations configured in the UN’s chambers underscores Benjamin’s claim that “ideas are not represented in themselves, but solely and exclusively in an arrangement of concrete elements” (1928, 34). To its advancement and detriment, the marriage of the UN’s mandate and ideas with its visual apparatus, a curatorial constellation, helps us to understand how this international organization came to shape the trajectory of the idea of human dignity. Here, the location of the ideas of human rights and human dignity are not founded in one person or object, but dispersed throughout the delegates, political gestures, and other

visual representations that make the UN function. Together this mass of representatives formed a new constellation, which made a statement about how the idea of human rights and human dignity was to be formed and protected, not through the voice of one nation or one ideal image, but through a cluster of elements. This did not mean that a new sense of harmony was founded in international relations, but rather a new form of managing and dealing with tension was promoted. The UN grasped for devices and declarations that would provide a front against the infinite diversity of its constituents and in the face of a rapidly modernizing society where change was a constant. In the same way that *Democracy!* promised that better city planning or infrastructure would create more democratic communities, the UN's early visual language and mandate similarly promised that better infrastructure, planning, and technology could make society more dignified. Wherever the principles of the UN were adopted, a similar ideological transformation was promised, one that depended on the technological and infrastructural mandates and declarations executed in its name.

One tool of the United Nations that encapsulates this technological promise was the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which was officially adopted on December 10, 1948. In this document, the idea of human dignity gained a new prominence. The concept of dignity is central to the opening statement of the UDHR's preamble and its first declaration. They respectively state:

Whereas recognition of the inherent dignity and of the equal and inalienable rights of all members of the human family is the foundation of freedom, justice and peace in the world. (United Nations 1948, Preamble)

All humans are born free and equal in dignity and rights. They are endowed with reason and conscience and should act towards one another in a spirit of brotherhood. (United Nations 1948, Article 1)

The legal conjunction "whereas" in the document's preamble establishes a unique relationship between human dignity and the world. "Whereas" means to take into consideration the view or fact of something. It is here interesting that human dignity, and its role as the foundation of freedom and justice, is considered a common held view or fact. This clause signals human dignity as an established view or fact that does not just exist in the law or philosophy, but as integral to society in some way. Whereas connects

human dignity to a broader world of lived experience outside of this declaration, as something that is not just a hypothetical basis for proceeding forth with human rights. Recognition of the inherent dignity of all humans is thus not only *understood* as something that is important, but through this word symbolically tied to a vast network of established meanings and experiences. It is, however, telling in terms how these experiences were reconciled within the UDHR. Article 1 reiterates the centrality of human dignity, yet defers to immaterial facets of social life as a means of communicating its importance. Reason and conscience conjure a transcendent conceptualization of human dignity, again showing how it is easier to put forward an idea without reckoning with its mediated and embodied functions. In both the Preamble and Article 1, human dignity works in a similar manner as the *Democracy!* diorama: an established idea is needed to create the plan and is, at the same time, the intended outcome of the plan. The inclusion of human dignity in this declaration is similarly infrastructural and technological. In the case of *Democracy!* the technologies needed to help advance democracy included roads and neighborhoods; in the case of human dignity in the late 1940s, the technologies needed to help advance this idea included a declaration and an international organization.

As a declaration, rather than a treaty or other legally binding document, the UDHR sits in a peculiar position. A declaration is not law, it is an explicit and open *announcement* meant to clearly elucidate the *state of* a given idea. Though declarations are often associated with beginnings or new beginnings, past events, present knowledge, and future concerns, shot through this process of consolidation (Hunt 2007, 145). In order for human dignity to even be included in this declaration it had to overcome barriers of language, culture, and politics within the UN's diverse constellation. This was, indeed a highly charged unfolding process of social transformation for these ideas and their interrelation. The mass of delegates so central to the UN's visual scheme, and the ideas they brought with them, had to be merged into something clear and useful. The hope was that the declaration's wording and broad understandings of human rights might be readily adopted in subsequent treaties, charters, or laws. In the spirit of a declaration, as an open announcement, the concept of human dignity should have been something easily used or

appropriated, in this case on a universal scale. The declaration requires other legal devices, such as laws or international bodies to help secure and enfold its ideas in society.

However, dignity itself has had a limited audience since the signing of the UDHR. Though it has been taken up in subsequent laws, it has not reached the cultural saturation or relevancy that was initially desired. In many ways, the UDHR has come to be treated “more like a monument to be venerated from a distance than a living document to be reappropriated by each generation” (Glendon, 2002; xvii). This statement rings especially true in terms of the idea of human dignity, and the scope of current debates around what it actually means or does. It would seem as if those who drafted and initially implemented the UDHR were aware of this problem of translation and use. As Williams (1949) wrote “the historic document is well drafted, in simple terms, yet few of those who read and approved it can really visualize what it implies” (201). As we will see, the *Human Rights Exhibition Album* was one attempt to solve this problem of access and approval. The early sense that the ideas contained in the UDHR needed to be connected to a larger visual world, so that it might remain generative, rather than staid or monumental, was manifested within the album’s production and circulation.

In the context of media studies and alongside the heuristic of the constellation, the attempt to treat the UDHR as something that is generative and taken up by each generation should briefly be considered within a rather old set of distinctions between *technologies* and *techniques*. The worry that the declaration might (or has) become a “monument” seems to capture the tension between eternal truths and fragmented culture in Benjamin’s early work. There is a desire for the declaration to be both durable and yet embody the diversity of global cultures. This desire for the durability can be aligned with John Durham Peters’ definition of technologies, as “durable materialities” (2015, 87). Whereas technologies, such as a hammer, a boat, or any other media that may both precede and outlast human interaction are seen as durable, techniques refer to the local or cultural gestures, skills, or other ephemeral practices that put these technologies into motion: “techniques have both biological and artificial histories; they consist both of suites of actions and of materials, even if those materials are the body of the user...techniques are material but are not necessarily durable, while technologies always

are [durable]” (Peters 2015, 91). Those who drafted the UDHR knew that the declaration should be considered as a technique, something connected to the bodies of its users, as part of their actions and comportment. The declaration was not meant to become a technology. Though universality was desired, for the declaration to be “picked up” and applied in a uniform manner, its broad constituency made this kind of relationship a tenuous proposition. As we will see, the *Human Rights Exhibition Album* is one place where the technological brevity of the UDHR was challenged. The album demonstrates how the “monumental” language of the UDHR sits in conflict with the visual and cultural evidence that amass around it. The album explicitly attempts to tie human dignity to biological and artificial histories, and for this it should be commended. The declarative form ought to be seen as a technique *par excellence*, as a form that necessarily needs to be seen as related to a constellated world, as generative and embodied.

The declaration was not meant to perform as a “durable materiality,” yet there often seems to be a desire that it should be visually, materially, and culturally produced in a uniform and durable manner, that it should be able to be mass produced like so many other “valuable” parts of society. It would be easy to place human dignity in dialogue with mass production, and in many ways the visual communication of human dignity as either normative or negative falls within such a frame. Visualizing human dignity as a product of bodily inviolability or scarring are indeed acceptably universal. However, these categories are not enough. They are important, but communicate a false sense of universality within the idea of human dignity. Bringing questions of embodiment and constellations into the mix necessarily alters these infrastructural assumption; as human dignity is tied to a changing visual realm, and to “biological and artificial histories,” it must be grappled with as a technique, and acknowledged as part of local or cultural gestures and skills. The album is itself one site where local and cultural skills become palpable, and where the relations – on the levels of nations, cultures, and families – that make up human dignity disrupt any monumental glare. Within the context of this dissertation, a similar dichotomy is present between frameworks that seek to define the “durable” parameters of human dignity – through a search for origins, lineages, and textual evidence – and those, like the constellated method underway here, that approach

human dignity from culture and media, which are constantly shifting and tied to suites of biological and artificial histories. Acknowledging that we are in need of a rich history of human dignity that approaches its legal, philosophical, and cultural manifestations is only part of the answer. Going one step further is examining how these threads have indeed come to light within different forms. In this chapter, the curatorial constellation found in the *Human Rights Exhibition Album* again grounds this process of examination, and further demonstrates how we might move away from those conversations that seek incontrovertible stability within the idea of human dignity that verges on a technological desire. If we are to see human dignity as salient and generative, it must be approached from the realm of technique, as something made in relation through negotiation and developing frameworks of understanding. Curation and exhibition provide one such realm where we can see a range of techniques that make this idea operable. Picking up from the discussions of taxonomy and juxtaposition of bodies met in the first chapter, this chapter aims to address how the UDHR and its use of human dignity might similarly be understood, not as “durable,” but as enduring. In the light of Peters’ distinction between technologies and techniques, Sander’s projects can be seen as closely connected with techniques, as he focused on the intersection of biological and artificial histories: between bodies and their labour and between bodies and their tools. In the following section I show how the UDHR was visually mobilized through the *Human Rights Exhibition Album* in a way that understood the importance of biological and historical connections, but did so within an institutional and often technological frame.

Exhibiting a Declaration

The UN made a concerted effort to activate the UDHR beyond legal and philosophical venues in the days and years after it was signed. Charged with developing and disseminating the understood and stated missions of the UN, UNESCO played a large role in figuring out how to deliver human rights to a growing constituency of nations. Dreams of a global educational infrastructure guided UNESCO’s early days, and when the Universal Declaration of Human Rights was passed in 1948, UNESCO played a major role in disseminating its contents across the globe. UNESCO’s preamble aptly asserts: “since wars begin in the minds of men, it is in the minds of men that the defences

of peace must be constructed” (UNESCO 1945). Visual communication was key in this process as it promised to be a more “universal language” with which to communicate the message of human rights globally (Allbeson 2015). The *Human Rights Exhibition Album* stands out as one such example, where the need to communicate the UDHR to a broad audience is clear via its reliance on visual evidence and patterns.⁴⁰ Modeled after the Paris exhibition, the album connected past, present, and future via artefacts, art, and documentary photographs, thus giving the declaration a scope much wider than the UN’s institutional parameters.

The album came in a dark embossed folder (Fig. 18) and consisted of 101 pages of images with accompanying text. The album pages were 19 x 12 inches, and were separated between pages with images and pages with contextual captions.⁴¹ The general layout of the exhibition album was made to emulate the Paris exhibition, with an introductory section that similarly recounted the historical bird’s eye view of human struggle and fourteen subsequent sections that narrowed in on a specific right or cluster of rights.⁴² Many of the pages grouped different images together in the same patterns as the Paris exhibit, similarly connecting people throughout histories, such as in Fig. 19, which shows three different scenes representing the culmination of emancipation from slavery and equality amongst races. Despite the named function as *album*, the *Human Rights Exhibition Album* was meant to be exhibited in local libraries, community centres, and other public spaces.

40 See Duedahl (2011 & 2016) and Kulnazarova and Ydesen (2017) for more on UNESCO’s early history and communication projects.

⁴¹ While the image pages were all full size most of the text pages came perforated so that only a small strip of text would accompany each image.

⁴² See Appendix A for layout of album.

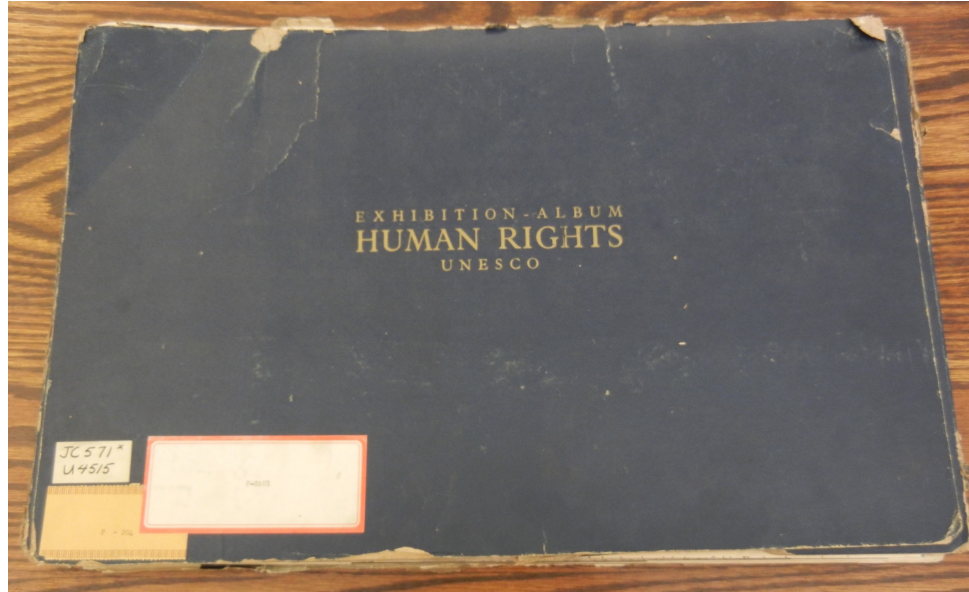


Figure 18: The *Human Rights Exhibition Album*, 1950, photograph by author.

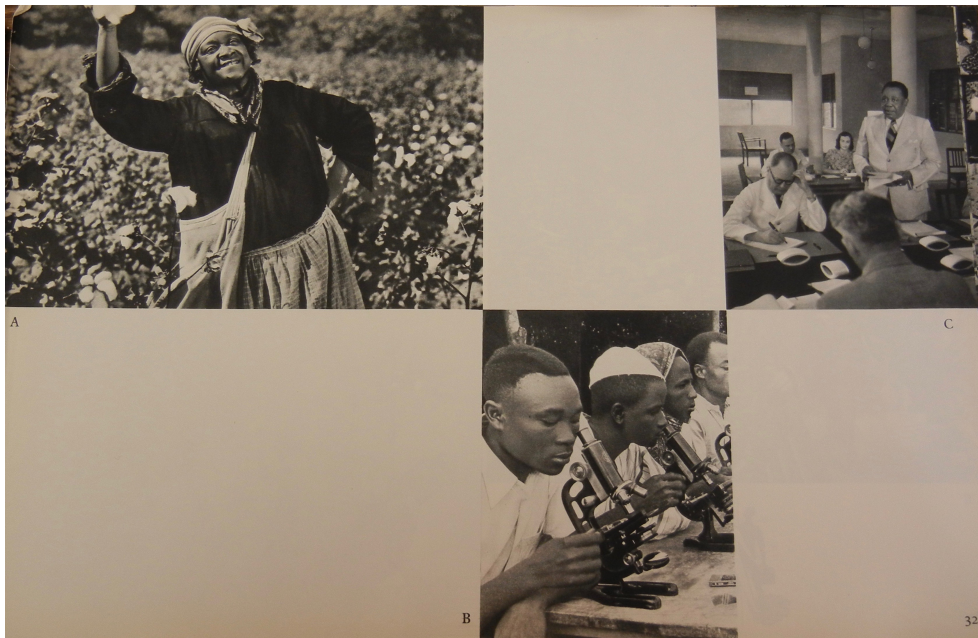


Figure 19: Plate 32 from the *Human Rights Exhibition Album*, 1950, photograph by author. Caption: Abolition of Slavery/Equality Between the Races: Men of every race must have free access to public office, and no profession must be closed to them. The value of their contributions to science and art must be recognized by all.
 A. Working in the cotton fields of Alabama. B. Negro doctors in Nigeria. C. Governor Félix Éboué at the Brazzaville conference. Used with permission by UNESCO.



Figure 20: *Human Rights Exhibition Album* presentation instructions, 1950, photo by author. Used with permission of UNESCO.

The album was comprised of three broad sections. The first sixteen pages are an historical intro that spans from 20,000 B.C. E to the late 1940s and illustrates the emergence of human rights. Here key technological (tools), linguistic (alphabets), political (revolutions), religions (Buddhism and Christianity), and legal moments (The Magna Carta and the American Declaration of Independence) are highlighted, which will be explored in more detail below. The second section has been called the “threat to human rights” (Bregengaard & Prag 2014) and shows how the Second World War endangered the progress of the past. The final section, the largest and arguably most

important as it regards the translation of the UDHR into a visual language, illustrates the emergence of the declaration's thirty articles through 14 thematic groups.⁴³

The album came with very loose instructions on how to hang the sheets contained within its packaging. Three options were provided: recipients of the album could hang these sheets horizontally, vertically, *or* create their own clusters, an option that was “especially recommended” (Fig. 20). The instructions for this last option read: “the illustrated sheets and the appropriate captions may be pasted or otherwise attached to cardboard, stiff paper, thin sheets of aluminum or some other firm but light base. After the sheets and captions have been mounted in this way the exhibition may be arranged in any form desired.” It seems as though the creators of the album knew that recipients would want to emphasize a certain right or otherwise create new constellations out of the album's pages to suit their needs. Though universal in aim, the local use value of this exhibition was promoted from the outset.⁴⁴

Introducing Human Rights

Despite the knowledge that specific communities might want to emphasize different parts of the album, thus expanding its relevance and contemporary qualities, the introductory section seems to resist such knowledge. The album's introduction seems caught between a desire to acknowledge that human rights have been taken up differently and will indeed look different at different times, while at the same time striving for universal or durable outcomes. Technology becomes a stand-in for this durability. Human rights emerge as both the result of different kinds and eras of progress and as a transfiguration of their benefits that could reach a global audience. As such, and more broadly, the cultural constellations of dignity translated into the album's introduction finds little effect in particulars and aims to please as wide a population as possible. Diversity is indeed met with generalizations over and over. Though the album attempts to socialize the declaration, it does this in aversion to social particularities.

⁴³ See Appendix A for complete list the 14 groupings in the *Human Rights Exhibition Album*.

⁴⁴ See Lydon (2016) for a discussion of the *Human Rights Exhibition Album* within the Australian context.

In the introduction, photographs of a variety of objects, such as a clay foot, a papyrus that depicts the metaphorical weighing of a soul in ancient Egypt, architectural details from houses of worship, and people, at work, home, school, and other facets of life, come to constitute the way different cultures at different times attempted to “solve” the problem of human community. One of the earliest statements in the exhibition communicates the scope of the UN’s human rights project: “all races, all civilizations, all nations have made their individual and valuable contributions to what is today the sum of human rights” (UNESCO 1950, 4).⁴⁵ While stories particular to a culture, civilization, or nation are told, they are always connected to a broader emphasis on global communities, using *physical* and *cultural* tools as a way to connect them. For instance, the caption for the album’s second image (Fig. 21) is especially telling in terms of the connection between technology and human rights:

Earliest Technical Achievements: The humble inventions that helped man to rise above the animals were devised at widely scattered points on the earth’s surface. The first tools and the first handicrafts were evolved in all parts of the inhabited world by unknown craftsmen, nameless pioneers in mankind’s great adventure” (UNESCO 1950, 6).

Here no special attribution is given to any culture, civilization, or nation. No special treatment is given to a particular inventor, ruler, or religious figure. No special accolades are even given to the names of particular inventions or discoveries. Fire, the wheel, the lever, paper, all remain unattributed amidst the global vision being set out by the exhibit. The tools that “helped man rise above the animals” are presented in a way that sees them as *access points* to universal inclusion. Decoupled from specific human bodies, these tools are filled with imaginary and utopian ideals. Tools that extend across time and between cultures effectively tie the ideas presented in the UDHR to physical objects that are both durable and transferable. The focus on tools, the materials that endure and are physically passed down, and the nameless or generalized sets up a technologically driven vision of human rights in a way that mirrors the problems inherent with the UDHR. There

⁴⁵ Parenthetical page numbers associated with the album correspond those found on the pages and their corresponding captions.

is a desire that these tenets be passed down and reappropriated, but alongside of that a narrow vision of the limits of inclusion that is signaled by an aversion to individuals and particular actions.



Figure 21: Plate 2 from the *Human Rights Exhibition Album*, 1950, photograph by author. Caption: **Earliest Technical Achievements: The humble inventions that helped man to rise above the animals were devised at widely scattered points on the earth's surface. The first tools and the first handicrafts were evolved in all parts of the inhabited world by unknown craftsmen, nameless pioneers in mankind's great adventure. A. Prehistoric tools. B. Coloured drawing of a bison, Altamara (Spain). Used with permission by UNESCO.**

Despite the rather broad technological vision, the curatorial function of the introduction to the UNESCO Album does do important work in terms of thinking through human dignity as emerging through curatorial constellations, and supporting a relational theorization of human dignity that neither relies on the valorization of *an* ideal or sensationalized fear mongering based solely of the catastrophes of war so fresh in the minds of men. As the introduction surveys global engagements with conscience, ethics or the law, audiences are visually shown how human dignity does not have one origin or idealized image, but a myriad of points that makes up this postwar constellation. The idea

of human dignity here is indeed an “arrangement of concrete elements” (Benjamin 1928, 34). Importantly, the introduction does not valorize an ideal image or dwell on bodily violation in the way that we have come to rely on today. Here dignity is again found *en masse*, through a much broader community than Sander’s project (discussed in the last chapter). Despite a generalized feeling of progress, a diffuse vision is attempted, echoing the sentiment that all races and all civilizations have made important contributions.

In the introductory section of the *Human Rights Exhibition Album*, the historically and culturally constellated thinking has interesting consequences, as it attempts to illustrate how equality and inclusion was diversely conceived. Though “human dignity” is not evoked in name within these first pages, the vignettes draw inspiration from what scholars now see as disparate “origins” of human dignity. Images from legal, religious, and political moments are put together and make a pointed contribution concerning the multiple and contested origins of human rights and human dignity. For example, the first image from the introduction (Fig. 21), asserts a philosophy of human dignity first attributed to Cicero. “The humble inventions that helped man to rise above the animals” qualifies our humanness as something we have against other species; dignity is here something humans have because they are considered to have rational brains and can organize and build accordingly. This idea has recently been taken up by Michael Rosen (2011) who explains that setting human dignity against animals is not just about “what position some individual or group occupies in relation to other human beings as a particular society, but what position human beings as a whole occupy in the order of the universe” (Rosen, 12). Another example of “origins” from the introductory section is the inclusion of Christian imagery and teachings. Michelangelo’s *Moses*, The Tympanum of St. Peter’s Church, and the Plan of Rome from *Tres Riches Heures* all come to help define the Christian contributions to human dignity. This thread has recently been taken up by Samuel Moyn (2015), who positions the rise in the expediency of human rights around Christian directives made in the years before the end of the Second World War.

Indeed, all facets of what today have become singular areas of study with the question of human dignity at its core are here represented. Law, philosophy, and culture are unmistakably constellated in a way that scholars today have yet to consider.

Contributions from diverse nations come to constitute the idea of dignity as more than the contributions of individuals and as something that incorporates a wide variety of values and beliefs: Phoenician script from Egypt, a bust of Socrates from Greece, a painting depicting society built on reciprocity and duty from China, the Magna Carta from the United Kingdom, and an engraving from the destruction of the Bastille in France, to name a few. This constellation does indeed provide a rich history of human dignity that does not subsume cultures under a strict ordering system, but allows their experiences to speak to the idea of human dignity, here under scrutiny. To be sure, there is an overwhelming bias towards Western cultures and Enlightenment ideals in this constellation. However, the approach was novel for its time and instructive for our own. Long before anthologies were written staking out the origins of human dignity (Düwell 2014; McCrudden 2013), the *Human Rights Exhibition Album* created a curatorial constellation of these origins ahead of our time.

This broad strategy of inclusion within the album runs parallel to how human dignity was thought of in relation to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in the first place. Christopher McCrudden (2008) demonstrates how dignity's place within the UDHR was born out of a process of appeasement. Diverse national interests were consolidated in this small but powerful word in order to provide a groundwork for perceived and actionable unity. In McCrudden's estimation "dignity was included in that part of any discussion or text where the absence of a theory of human rights would have been embarrassing. Its utility was to enable those participating in the debate to insert their own theory. Everyone could agree that human dignity was central, but not why or how" (2008, 678). While calling dignity a placeholder in the UDHR might go too far, it is clear that its purpose was in response to multiple histories and uses. It was at the time constellated throughout a myriad of laws, philosophies, and cultures, which all upheld its value, but could not agree on its definition. Indeed, the drafting of the UDHR is really a remarkable and instructive moment that demonstrates how an idea was concretely

contested on a transnational scale.⁴⁶ Today, while it might seem infuriating that dignity was never concretely defined by the declaration's drafters, its untethered state is a testament to the constellated relations that made up this organization. Mirroring the importance of the declarative form, which was used so that the ideas would be taken up and utilized by subsequent generations, dignity in the UDHR was similarly constellated, a technique applicable to both biological and artificial histories.

The historical diversity of the introduction begins to crack open the technological language of the UDHR to questions of culture and biology. Despite the attempt to focus on the technological aspects of human rights – the nameless, the generalized, and the tools – the curatorial strategy, which delves into history, sits in tension with this desire. To that end, the introductory section of the *Human Rights Exhibition Album* demonstrates an important, if not optimistic and progressive view of how human rights and human dignity evolved from disparate cultures. Dignity is not formed through an idealized vision, but gestured toward through the curatorial strategy as evolving and open to change. Through the album, dignity becomes something “that is both timeless, in the sense that it embodies basic values that are not subject to change, and adaptable to changing ideas of what being human involves” (McCrudden, 677). What it means to be part of the human family is here held in relation to the technologies of the past, the promise of the UDHR, and the particularities of diverse constituents. Wedged between the imagined infrastructures of a new human rights era, and the accumulation of past events, the album demonstrates dignity's history in a different light, and shows itself to supply a “unique experience of the past” (Benjamin 1940, 262). While flawed, the introduction properly begins to unravel the technological conceits of a universal human rights project, and instead puts its tenets in relation to broader suites of cultural actions.

⁴⁶ For a further example of the transnational and transcultural contestations that gave rise to the UDHR, see Glendon (2001) and Goodale's (2018) respective discussions of the UNESCO Philosophical Committee and the 1947-48 human rights survey.

The Album as Constellation

Just as it was helpful to examine the curatorial logics behind the atlas, as a way of reading Sander's *People of the Twentieth Century*, it is similarly important to examine the *Human Rights Exhibition Album* in terms of its overarching scheme. In this section, I examine the form of the album as a way to further these observations, in particular, by focusing on a specific type of curatorial constellation that can help us to understand later visual projects that connect human dignity with culture, media, and the body. Of course, just as Sander's *People of the Twentieth Century* was not a typical atlas, the *Human Rights Exhibition Album* was not a typical album. Coupled with its large scale and intended use as an exhibition, what sets this album apart is its departure from traditional family bonds on the one hand, and typical museological categories of style, aesthetics, and periodization on the other, as it prioritizes the theme or idea of human rights as its central organizing force.

The *Human Rights Exhibition Album* presents one of the most explicit venues where the *relational* aspects of human dignity are found in both a literal and transfigured sense. The form, as album, helped to communicate a more intimate and *familiar* understanding of human rights. Albums were and continue to be things that people would feel comfortable with, and this choice of form speaks more broadly to the reach that was desired and the audience that was anticipated. More generally, the album sits at the border of many threads of knowledge: as the public face of our private lives, as the familiar or everyday meets milestones and grand events, and as a recognition of the past (of memories) meet our dreams or desires for belonging. The album is not a simple site of preservation, but rather offers a complex set of relations between the people within the album and the diverse demands of temporality, expectation, and curation.

Using the form of the album to communicate the Universal Declaration of Human Rights links the desire for close familial connections with the transnational force of a large intergovernmental agency such as UN. As Marianne Hirsch (1997) has argued, "if one instrument helped construct and perpetuate the ideology which links the notion of universal humanity to the idea of familiarity, it is the camera and its by-products, the

photographic image and the family album” (48). Together the photographic image and the family album were key to the development of the *Human Rights Exhibition Album*, and helped to make the big ideas contained within the UDHR feel familiar to the masses. In many ways, the album turns on a desire for what Marianne Hirsch calls the “familial gaze”:

The familial look, then, is not the look of a subject looking at an object, but a mutual look of a subject looking at an object who is looking (back) at an object. Within the family, as I look I am always also looked at, seen, scrutinized, surveyed, monitored. Familial subjectivity is constructed relationally, and in these relations I am always both self and other(ed). (9)

The *Human Rights Exhibition Album* attempted to create family bonds; it *aspired to create* a sense of family within an aestheticized and historical field. Though the *Human Rights Exhibition Album* did not rely on photographs in the same way as typical family albums, the sense that “subjectivity is constructed relationally” is similarly generated. The subject looking at the album’s pages is meant to both be a subject looking and a subject being looked at, and in this way, feel connected to people and cultures that might otherwise have felt distant. As a tool meant to construct relationality, the album, and specifically the *Human Rights Exhibition Album* plays on this form within the global context. If human dignity was something available to all, the family album was one way to make this inherent quality known and felt within a global sphere. As it directs its viewers to both see the objects within as subjects, and themselves be understood as “seen, scrutinized, surveyed, monitored”, it trades on a material form of empathic relations without relying on an aesthetics of indignity founded on bodily violation so familiar in subsequent memorial museums and human rights appeals.

What makes this album unique, beyond the appeal to a universal human family, is its use of artefacts once considered to be “at home” in universal survey museums. Unlike universal survey museums, such as the Louvre, which relied on original artworks or professional copies, the album was freed from this realm of authenticity in compelling ways in terms of our understanding of human dignity and its curatorial forms. The creation of this album depended upon photographic reproductions of various artefacts and art that had before this never been grouped together to make an explicit argument about

the “human family.” In turn, this new argumentative model opened up what it might mean to compare histories and cultures under such an expansive umbrella. Binding questions of universality, family, and cultural history, the album is an explicit example of a shift from exhibitions that focused on style, period, or categorization to that of ideas, of human rights and human dignity. Whereas family albums had contained a real sense of immediacy in regard to who and what was contained within them, the *Human Rights Exhibition Album* shifted the genre. Here the focus is not on individual lifespans or family genealogy, but on eras, epochs, and civilizations.

The *Human Rights Exhibition Album* thus enlivens Andre Malraux’s (1947) notion of “the museum without walls” in compelling and problematic ways. The museum without walls came about by way of the explosion in photographic reproduction. In his now famous exploration in the *Psychology of Art*, Malraux explores how photography came to affect both the museum and the use of art. The transformation of portraits, sculptures, etchings, and so-on into sets of photographs produced a monumental shift in their meaning. As we saw, for Aby Warburg, amassing photographs of great works and playing with their arrangement allowed him to create new connections between large swaths of art history and human emotion. Though Malraux was not all in favour of this new era, he did make a crucial contribution regarding the universal and relational effect of reproduction itself.⁴⁷ Malraux takes note:

Alongside the museum a new field of art experience, vaster than any so far known...is now, thanks to reproduction, being opened up. And this new domain – which is growing more and more intellectualized as our stock-taking and its diffusion proceeds and methods of reproduction come nearer to fidelity – is for the first time the common heritage of all mankind. (1947, 46)

While we should be wary about any claim made to a “common heritage of *all* mankind,” Malraux’s observation about a new field of experience opened up by photography is important. Not only did this new domain effect the field of art history, which was once

⁴⁷ Malraux was critical of how photographs of famous artworks altered their scale or diluted their colours, thus claiming that the type of comparison photographs of art produced were indeed “fictitious” (1947, 24).

situated closer to museums themselves than academia, but it also made the products housed in museums open to a much broader range of interpretations.

The *Human Rights Exhibition Album* used this development in photography to great effect. As the album brings together different cultures, histories, and geographies through the medium of photography and the curatorial strategy we see how a belief in “the common heritage of all mankind” was both fundamental to the UDHR’s new formulation and communication of human rights, and at the same time how limited its universal language was. What was “common” was indeed limited to artefacts from five countries, with institutions like the Louvre, providing many of the exhibit’s originals. Undoubtedly, the Louvre itself has a troubled history with art and artefacts plundered from around the globe, and its contributions should not be taken as value neutral (Freier 2017). Though the curators were interested in expanding inclusion to a global audience through images and artefacts that were not Western in and of themselves, its reliance on universal survey museums, as archives to its endeavor, undermines its global appeal and exemplifies its limited scope.

Contending with Cultural Difference

In the last chapter, August Sander’s *People of the Twentieth Century* exposed how the idea of a *people* might be read within the frame of an atlas, between the finite and the infinite and more generally between photography and curation. Sander’s projects also began to expose how taxonomic difference should not be read as an anathema to the idea of human dignity. Within the *Human Rights Exhibition Album*, the idea of *the people* is transfigured to the level of culture and histories, and the issue of taxonomic difference is expanded to the realm of cultural difference more broadly. Here we can begin to ask: what does it mean to visualize human dignity across eras? Is it responsible to compare the struggles or methods of ancients with those African Americans in the abolitionist era or the labour movement? Does the album equivocate cultures or injustice that is itself an anathema to human dignity as a property made in relation – across borders, cultures, and kin?

It is only recently that the *Human Rights Exhibition Album* has received critical attention, thanks in large part to the Human Rights Exhibition Project hosted at Columbia University.⁴⁸ One of the most vocal reviewers of the *Human Rights Exhibition Album*, Tom Allbeson (2015), has taken to comparing it to Edward Steichen's blockbuster exhibit, *The Family of Man*, which was unveiled at the Museum of Modern Art (New York) in 1955. Here a short detour into Steichen's *The Family of Man* exhibit, which shares both temporal and thematic alliances with the *Human Rights Exhibition Album*, should prove to be helpful. Comparing these two exhibits situates the *Album* in a larger arena of analysis concerning images, reproductions, and curatorial constellations.

Unlike the *Human Rights Exhibition Album*, the *Family of Man* exhibit was a true blockbuster, travelling around the world from 1955-1962 and seen by many millions of people. It has been heralded for its position at the forefront of photographic exhibitions and analyzed for its role in creating a humanistic lens during the Cold War period (Garb 2014; Sandeen 1995; Sekula 1981; Turner 2012). Like the *Human Rights Exhibition Album*, Steichen curated *The Family of Man* around common facets of the human condition – birth, play, labour, love, family, and death – categories that served human commonalities, rather than differences. Stylistic and aesthetic concerns took a back seat to humanistic themes, which was in itself a departure for a museum of modern art. (Turner 2012). Importantly, both exhibits began a process of blending thematic and aesthetic interests, an intersection that academics are still working through today. Museums, which were until this time thought to align with artistic, historic, or ethnographic schools of thought were beginning to give way to broader and more interdisciplinary questions about the state of the human.

Though innovative in its curatorial techniques, *The Family of Man* was famously and vehemently criticized by Roland Barthes (1957) for the way it dared to compare different cultures. Barthes saw only similarity and unity in the exhibit's images, such as

⁴⁸ For more on this project visit: <http://www.exhibithumanrights.org/>.

the oft-compared photographs of an American family and an African family (Fig. 22).⁴⁹ In response to the question of what this kind of comparison could tell us about the human, Barthes saw a vision that was indeed durable and transferable, a technologized view of human difference: “keeping only the similarity in behavior, the unity of a species is here amply moralized and sentimentalized. We are at the outset directed to this ambiguous myth of the human ‘community’, which serves as an alibi to a large part of our humanism” (1957, 100). Barthes claimed that unity – in families, love, child birth – derives from pluralities and diversities, whose ultimate similarities point towards something as deceptive as the idea of human nature.

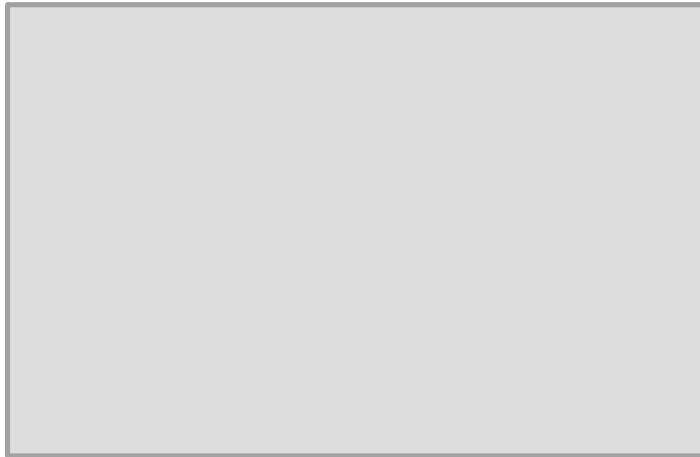


Figure 22: Installation view of *The Family of Man*, 1955, unknown photographer.

Allow me to linger on Barthes reading of *The Family of Man* for a moment. We should, indeed, be skeptical of any representation that naturalizes humanity, divorcing it from history. As Hannah Arendt aptly noted, “when the Rights of Man were proclaimed for the first time they were thought to be independent of history and of the privileges that history had bestowed upon certain strata of society” (1949, 34-5). There had to be a sort of historical forgetting about the relationship between human dignity, as a value reserved for some high-ranking people, in order for the larger project of human rights founded on

⁴⁹ Comparisons between the American family (large photo on the left) and the African Family (largest photo on the right) have been used by multiple scholars to analyze the exhibits portrayal of universalism, family, and nature (Barthes 1957; Hirsch 1997; Azoulay 2013).

this distinctly human value to proceed; history and tradition had to give way to a new constellation of relations. However,

This new dignity was of a perplexing nature. It replaced historical rights with natural rights; it put ‘nature’ in the place of history, and it assumed tacitly that nature was less alien to the essence of man than history. The very terminology of the Declaration of Independence as well as of the Rights of Man – ‘inalienable,’ ‘given with birth,’ ‘self-evident truths’- implies that man’s nature which supposedly developed under the same necessity that compels a child to grow up, was the premise from which his laws and rights were to be deduced. (Arendt 1949, 35).

In this light, Barthes’ concerns about the naturalization of the human family, and subsequently human dignity, was not merely a concern of visual communication. Barthes’ assertion that *The Family of Man* suppresses the “determining weight of history,” which in turn holds spectators “back at the surface of an identity” was indeed a problem of declarations aimed toward universality more generally. For Barthes, the visual genre promoted a false sense of unity and stability, without truly grappling with the realities of injustice or inequality. Photographic mediation left him unsatisfied that audience members could gather anything beyond their surface values. For Arendt, the apparatus’ of human rights—laws, declarations, treaties—were similarly inert and divorced from the weight of history. The trajectory of history, in which “man’s mastery of nature would reach a point where he could conceive of a possible destruction of the earth through man-made instruments” put the idea of natural law into question. (Arendt 1949, 35).

By turning attention towards the *Human Rights Exhibition Album*, I am not advocating for a reliance on what may be perceived as a naturalization of human dignity. Indeed, I see the *Album* as necessarily expanding the UDHR’s ahistorical qualities. Allbeson (2015) has relied on Barthes and Malraux to make his own critique of the *Album*:

In decontextualizing cultural artefacts and placing them in a relation of equivalence with one another, the museum without walls created by the exhibition album does not respect diverse cultures or accommodate difference. UNESCO’s instrumentalization of cultural artefacts in the visualization of a world culture rather imposes the divorce of culture from its bases in individual experience, suggesting particular fixed cultural identities as represented by the material on

display. Synthesizing diverse artefacts and ways of life into a unified visual narrative of civilization's progress thus effectively denies both meaningful differences between communities and any change within them, in favour of the universal ideal. (2015, 399-400)

There is a lot to unpack here: the charge of reification and equivalence, the lack of respect for diversity and difference, instrumentalization, the accusation of fixing cultural identities, and creating a universal ideal. Rather than seeing the rise of reproduction, and its use in the album as an opportunity to think through how the human family might be differently imagined and exhibited within a frame of media, there has been a distinctly negative appraisal of projects like the *Human Rights Exhibition Album*, as it concerns its construction of a visual constellation. For Allbeson, even though there is a distinctly historical component to the *Album*, he claims that artefacts and images brought together merely flatten “the contradictions and conflicts of the past under the image of a shared heritage for an imagined global community” (2015, 394).

However, this critique glosses over two important distinctions between the *Human Rights Exhibition Album* and *The Family of Man* that should be considered. Unlike *The Family of Man*, which did not attach dates to its photographs and in turn promoted the idea of stability or synchrony over time (Hirsch 1997, 57), the *Human Rights Exhibition Album* made no attempt to conceal its temporal or historical markers. Dates are included on each of the captions, and the variety of objects, from carvings, to paintings, to photographs, gives a sense of historical depth that *The Family of Man* does not have. History and time are not flattened, but rather expanded through the layering of diverse media photographed in the exhibition. Further, the images in the *Human Rights Exhibition Album* were nothing if not tied to the idea of justice, even if it was a fairly optimistic version. True, the album does not grapple with injustice or inequality in a particular or robust way. However, the point of the album was not to act as a compendium of inequalities or as a primer on cultural difference. Focusing on the content of such exhibits, on what is included or excluded, does tell us a lot about the limits of *universal* inclusion and cultural value. Taking stock of which narratives are told is an exercise in comprehending cultural power relations and mapping memory practices. However, this kind of exercise tends to peer beyond the media structures themselves, and

the subsequent narrative limits they invoke. Examining these structures expands what the “visual communication” of human rights can mean. Barthes,’ and subsequently Allbeson’s, general wariness that exhibitions can do productive work in terms of communicating humanistic principles meaningfully stems from an almost exclusive focus on symbols, and a desire that the complexities of other historical forms be faithfully upheld in curation’s depth.

Thus, visual and curatorial depictions of human rights are often looked at as less rigorous than other forms for the way they approach history, for what they include, and ultimately what they leave out. Importantly, these critiques leave us back where we started. Focusing on the content of these images does do important work as it concerns assessments of equality or actual overcoming of colonialism, imperialism, racism, or gender discrimination, what will in the next chapter be discussed in relation to “representational justice” (Lewis 2016, 11). However, I contend that this is not the only way to assess these early visual contributions that aesthetically thematize the human family. Shifting attention from the content of these images to the media of curation and mode of mass dissemination is necessary if we are to think of the constitutive capacity of curation, as a set of tools that can help to imagine human dignity otherwise. Examining the *Human Rights Exhibition Album* on the terms of curation, as a model that brings diverse forms into proximity with each other, is imperative in order to more fully examine what new kinds of knowledge the album generates.

Indeed, the concept of human dignity benefits from the form of the album for a number of reasons. Unlike Allbeson and Barthes before him, I see the familial and relational function of the album as crucial to the continuing relevancy of human rights and human dignity outside of the law. Coupled with the reproductive capacities of photography, for the “first time the common heritage of all mankind,” human dignity was given a form that defied a false sense of naturalization. Of course, we should not be blinded by an unrealistic sense of unity or progression, but the gathering of diverse cultural artefacts under the frame of human rights was a key development to human

dignity's visual communication, and how it has entered the sphere of museums so forcefully in the last ten years.⁵⁰

Three basic points support the connection between human dignity as an idea and the album as an organizing force. First, the photographic album allows a collection of objects without their removal from source communities, which is key to the continuing entanglement of museums and human dignity (Freier, 2017). While this might not have been the prerogative of the *Human Rights Exhibition Album* itself, we can and should see the album as subverting norms of collection and exhibition that rest upon imperial and colonial plunder. Second, the photographic album allows a scale of comparison unavailable in traditional museums stemming from prohibitive economic factors. And finally, the album allows different frames of inclusion and categorization to prevail, both along the lines of human connection and along the lines of legal protection. August Sander's projects enlivened questions around taxonomy and human dignity, and the *Human Rights Exhibition Album* again defines new territory connecting people through systems of rights rather than morally or nationally charged values. Human dignity must also exist alongside these three systemic points, as a property and practice of relation that does act upon forced removal or assimilation, as an idea in constant negotiation with the scale of our international system, and which is open to new frames of inclusion and categorization.

The form of the *Human Rights Exhibition Album* mirrors the initial consideration of human dignity in the UDHR in a much more transparent way. Just as the declaration worked from diverse cultures and disparate histories to create a useable language, the photographic album similarly presents us with works from slave ship's log to a photograph of Japanese women working in a chemistry lab to demonstrate its cultural

⁵⁰ Currently, the question of a "common heritage of all mankind" is reaching a different level of cultural and political significance in relation to the visual communication of human dignity. As museums make their collections digitally available to the internet connected public, and as giant corporations such as Google invent algorithms that sort and divide art and people by new taxonomies, the question of how we can apprehend human dignity through these institutions and platforms becomes more urgent.

diversity. Importantly, rather than cultural difference being encompassed into a word or declaration, the visual constellation of the *Album* exposes the neat unity of the UDHR's declarative language. Dignity is dispersed across specific actions around the world and throughout history. As an album that is not just about *a* family, but rather a large and growing aestheticized human family, the *Human Rights Exhibition Album* is a testament to what human dignity looked and felt like at the time, not a monumental law or stable or entity. In this way, the album is a prime example of what Laura Wexler has termed the "state of the album" (2017, 100):

If 'the state' is a place, a condition, and an administrative construct, 'the state of the album' is all of the above. It refers both to a material object or place – a book-like thing or, more metaphorically, something like a box or a drawer or a wallet, where pictures are stored – as well as to the kind of order that results from the way that pictures are thereby disposed...I am proposing to add the family photograph album to these other archives as an index of accountability. The very coming-into-being- of family photographs depends upon and is secured by the optics of governmentality. When you are seeing the family album, you are 'seeing like a state'...it is governments that determine not only what social and biological forms will be recognized in the legal regime as a family, but also which members of said family forms will be able to be available to be photographed as such in the first place, and in what ways they may or not become visible. (Wexler 2017, 100)

Wexler's understanding of the family album as an optic of governmentality provides a useful frame for grasping the *Human Rights Exhibition Album*, as it allows us to see that the album is not only a cultural representation of the UDHR, but an important indicator of the ways that laws, declarations or other state/institutional mandates may or may not become visible. Most notably, albums "reflect back a usable image of the law" (Wexler 2017, 100). In this conceptual move, my initial discussion of the UDHR as a generative instrument, and human dignity as a cultural technique becomes palpable. If we are to think of human dignity within the UDHR as more than a monument to be venerated from a distance or a staid and durable technology, the album is one place where we can see it become a living document with real impact in terms of the way it requires visibility to be effective. If the declarative form of the UDHR was employed in order for it to be more widely used and appropriated as a cultural technique, the album is but one overtly cultural example. Here human dignity is given distinct forms, forms which do not solely rely on an aesthetics of indignity as a means of communicating its merits. Further, human

dignity is again made in relation, from the locus of the family to the level of “all races, all nations.” Cultures and histories meet in a way that pushes the boundaries of an idealized, or wholly autonomous conceit, and instead begins to imagine how the declaration might be mobilized. Again, its limited vision of inclusion can be critiqued from our vantage point over half a century later, but its attempt to map these relations in a concrete way is, from the lens of curation and media fascinating, and something to draw from. The album made the declaration accessible in a way the UDHR’s formal institutional platforms failed to do, and this is indeed a step in the right direction.

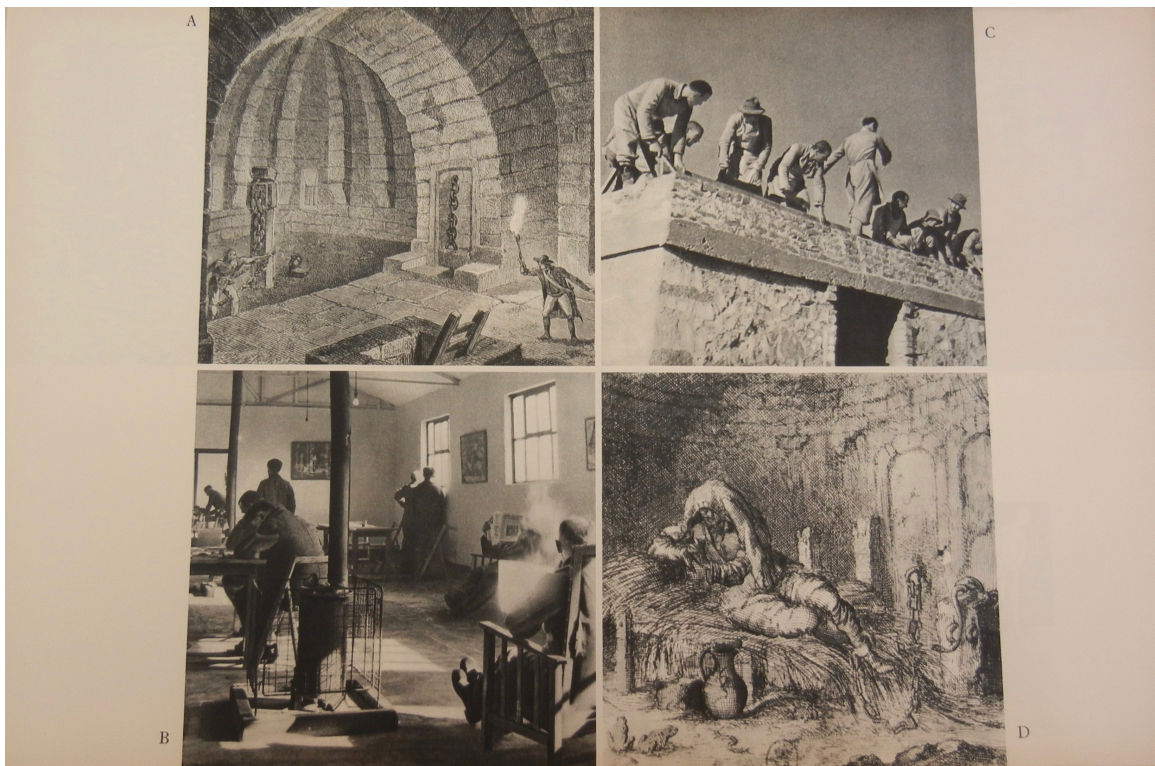


Figure 23: Plate 43 from the *Human Rights Exhibition Album*, 1950, photograph by author. Image descriptions (clockwise from top left): A. Interior of the Bastille. B. Reading room in Sudbury Prison. C. Prisoners working in the model penitentiary at Imrali. D. Prisoner in cells. Used with permission of UNESCO.

As one example, the album’s 43rd page is particularly illustrative of the relational aspects of human dignity that are bound to the curatorial constellation (Fig. 23). This mosaic shows four scenes of historical and representational diversity that align with the “abolition of inhuman practices,” effectively illustrating and extending the UDHR’s articles regarding the quality of treatment before the law and humane conduct. From top

left clockwise the images portray: a sketched interior of the Bastille dating from the 18th Century, a photograph of prisoners working in a “model penitentiary” in Turkey, a photograph of a reading room in a UK prison, and an 18th century engraving of a prisoner in a cell by Jan Luyken, who was known for his realist depictions of torture. This diversity of images compliments the plate’s caption alluding to the connection between punishment and education on the one hand, and education and crime on the other: “there has been widespread penal reform. The aim is now not merely to punish the criminal, but also to reform and educate him. At the same time, it is being increasingly realized that to open a school is to close down a prison” (UNESCO 1950, 43). While this last statement might seem premature for the time (especially given the subsequent rise of the prison industrial complex over the latter half of the 20th century), there is a way in which this grouping demonstrates how the frames of inclusion were being expanded in the area of legal punishment. It also provides a starting point for thinking about other frames of inclusion. The abolition of inhumane practices was not only waged against those deemed worthy in front of the law for impeccable behavior, but to those similarly caught up in this system for behavior that did not reflect an ideal image. While the transition from past to present, signaled by the transition from etchings to photographs, does promote a progressive and optimistic outlook, it also reflects back a usable image of the declaration, not only in that “all humans are born free and equal in dignity and rights” but also in terms of Articles 6-9 of the UDHR regarding torture, recognition before the law, fair trials, and arbitrary arrest. There is undoubtedly a critique to be made of this grouping, and others in the album, which obfuscate ongoing acts of torture, discrimination, or other violations. And, in many ways, the valorization of progress might be seen as a continuation of idealization or personal ownership.

However, like the UDHR, the *Human Rights Exhibition Album* should not be thought of as the *final* word or the only representation of the declaration, but merely as the first official attempt at reflecting back a usable image of the law. Like the family unit, the human family should not be thought of as something stable and unchanging. Family albums usually present us with a specific period of a family’s life; similarly, the *Human Rights Exhibition Album* presents us with one period or moment of human dignity’s

lifespan. The *Human Rights Exhibition Album* presents a compelling venue from which another constellation of dignity makes itself visible and wherein curation aids in our understanding of dignity's then contemporary use.

As a reflection of its time, wedged against the end of World War II and the beginning of Cold War, the album projected what seems like a naïve hope to us today, but which was indeed novel for its time. The conscientious opening up of the ideas of human dignity and human rights to different cultures and histories, whether in name or in visual inclusion demanded that these categories become something thought of in relation, as open to changing ideas of what being human involves in both rational and materialist terms. UNESCO saw the purpose of the exhibition as “not simply to present historic documentary evidence on the progressive recognition of human rights in different countries. Primarily, it aims to show the debt that mankind today owes to the fighters for freedom of the past and that the task they began will only be complete when the Universal Declaration of Human Rights has been converted into fact” (*UNESCO Courier* 1949, 5). In this way, the exhibit is thus meant to visualize an ongoing project, not an exaltation of a completed one.

Conclusion

In practical terms, we can easily reimagine the ways the *Album's* constellations might be updated to reflect back a useable image of human dignity for our time. The *Human Rights Exhibition Album* opened up the monumental functions of the UDHR, effectively visualizing different junctures between cultures and histories. When we imagine or make these curatorial arrangements anew, we engage in a process that sees human dignity as enduring, but not representationally durable. The technological conceit of this new era of human rights has the possibility of being undone again and again when put into conversation with curatorial practices that draw out the visual manifestations of this being-together into an accessible and relational constellation. Diverting focus from the content of the images to the mechanics of their arrangement provides another venue from which to engage with these exhibits, while not miring us in their historical shortcomings.

Despite the fact that human dignity's move into the UDHR has largely been

signaled as a turn towards a homogenous and durable sense of its importance, the historical and material realities that make up the album's constellation work to undermine this vision, as it communicates ongoing differences and historical weight. Curation not only connects cultures "bringing their elements into proximity with each other", but it also performs a sort of "pollination of culture or a form of map making that opens new routes through a city, a people, or a world" (Obrist 2014, 1). The concept of dignity should similarly be seen under this framework, as a concept that does not hive off cultures or sets itself aside as a technologically durable concept, but as a concept that can open up new routes through a city, people, or a world. The idealized form of human dignity founded in the UDHR is here tested against a material world. Though this was by no means a comprehensive test (i.e.: there were many pressing issues not included in the album that would have tested the idea of human dignity even further), it is instructive in its own right. *The Human Rights Exhibition Album* reflects back a usable image of this declaration. Though flawed, and dated, we should take its attempt to demonstrate these visual routes and roots seriously, rather than condemn them for not living up to the standards of other historical genres or our own historical vantage point.

Writing about *The Family of Man*, Barthes vehemently argued,

To reproduce death or birth tells us, literally, nothing. For the natural facts to gain access to a true language they must be inserted into a category of knowledge which means postulating that one can transform them, and precisely subject their naturalness to our human criticism. For however, universal, they are the signs of an ahistorical writing. (1957, 101)

Similarly, writing about the *Human Rights Exhibition Album* in 2014, Bregengaard and Prag assert that "when different emancipatory movements are stripped from their historical context and visualized through the lens of human rights, the political contestations they represent are occluded" (np). True, we are in most instances not given the specifics of certain historical moments and are not familiarized with the political contestations they come from. However, to say that these images are not already part of a "category of knowledge" is to dismiss the argumentative function of the curatorial constellation writ large, and the album specifically. Under the guise of the curatorial constellation we are given a different type of information, information that not only

speaks to the complex relations that make up an idea but also information that allows these different elements to touch in compelling ways. The relational narrative it draws between legal, philosophical, and cultural histories is indeed part of a genre of historical writing, made legible through Benjamin's constellated thinking and dramatically revealed in this curatorial exercise. Both exhibits fashion a vision of the world that is distinctly positive and inclusive *despite* the recent horrors of World War II and the then present conditions of the Cold War.

The use of images from disparate cultures and histories provides a necessary place to think about how to go forward with the idea of human dignity. Reconciling the fact that both the positive and negative visualizations of human dignity will indeed appear different across cultures and in concert with new technologies does not amount to relativism, but rather an acknowledgement of dignity's mediated qualities. If the movement of human dignity into the UDHR signals its instrumentalization, then the movement of human dignity into this curated album pushes back. The album demonstrates how uniformity or universalism is without an ideal home in the embodied and visual field of lived experience. Though flawed this translation again begins to reveal the assumptions about uniformity and cultural comparison that have been made about human dignity and its embodied experience. The struggle to reconcile the album's omissions and equations is in itself revealing of the way human dignity sits in tension between universal inclusion and the specificities of historical events. The *Human Rights Exhibition Album* was a imperfect exercise, but it be instructive in terms of uncovering how human dignity was thought of and situated as a constellated idea.

In the album, the 1939 World's Fair Mantra – interdependence or catastrophe – is found over and over again within the grouping of images that cross nations and bridge cultures. Within one of the album's captions the evocation of interdependence is clear in terms of media and communication: "the increasing speed, regularity, and safety of communications and trade forged ever closer links between all the countries of the world...the prosperity of each is now largely dependent on upon the well-being of the rest.". The album does not dramatically upend our presumptions about the world as it poses interdependence through human rights, but it does gently force us back on issues of

what artificial frameworks bind us together. Human rights is importantly one of these artificial frameworks, and the album a forceful tool to communicate its nascent set of post-war relations. Whereas Sander was fascinated with the “characteristic movements” of social subjects, movement in this album is often tied to specific tools rather than specific people. The tool comes to act as a metaphor for how the UN envisioned its declaration to be used, as a tool that could be picked up and implemented globally. In this way, progress without regret, is tangible. However, the dispersal of the UN’s ideas within this project begin to poke holes in this narrative. Just as the form of the atlas began to show slippages in the social masks Sander’s subjects wore, the album works to disrupt the tidy narrative of progress imagined by the UDHR by simply connecting its ideas to a broad range of people, cultures, and histories of the world. Examining how a “common heritage of all mankind” or the “myth of human community” is constructed need not only focus on or produce analytical language that calls out differences and injustices expressed in the visual arena. The mediated aspects of the constellation help to make tangible sites where dignity might be contested and imagined differently.

The album ought not to be replicated, but we should think about how its various parts might be updated and hopefully continually updated, so as to chart the various periods and struggles that confront it. What might this album look like today? What might the inclusion of other historical moments, artefacts, and philosophies do to this constellation? What might the album look like if created by different constellations of nations, artists, institutions, and non-profits? Here, the possibilities are endless, but might better serve a theory of human dignity that is not just looking for the next ideal figure or disaster to prop up its iconography. Finding the points of tension between these two poles is indeed important, and work that needs to be continually engaged with.

4 Dignity's New Normativity: Ghost Stories for Adults in The Canadian Museum for Human Rights

Dominant forms of representation can
and must be disrupted for something
about the precariousness of life to be
apprehended.

—Judith Butler, *Precarious Life*

At the beginning of this dissertation I asserted that I see promise within conversations around curatorial constellations as a means of visually communicating human dignity, within a series of sites that do not trade on an aesthetics of indignity as a way to come to its defense. In large part, this conviction stems from participation in and critical awareness of the conversations that were happening in relation to the building of the Canadian Museum for Human Rights (CMHR), which began taking shape at the meeting point of the Red and Assiniboine Rivers in Winnipeg around 2008. Throughout the construction and planning of the museum and its galleries there was a hope that this museum would be different both from other national museums in Canada and from other memorial museums throughout the world. Now, it only seems fitting that a museum that sparked my interest in the field of curation and human rights becomes the object of this final chapter. Here, I turn my attention towards the CMHR both as a means of connecting earlier projects to the contemporary moment and as a means of demonstrating how a relational theorization of human dignity might be put to critical use.

To be sure, the Canadian Museum for Human Rights never outwardly set out to communicate human dignity in itself. What human dignity was or how it might work within the museum never entered public debate in name, likely due to its conceptual abstraction. However, even though the language of human dignity was never overtly in play, questions of inherent human value and what it might mean to shift away from an aesthetics of indignity were ever present within the CMHR's public relations communication leading up to its opening.

Rather than proceed from the entrenched frames of memory and identity that have already played a role in the analysis of the CMHR, this chapter instead questions how the CMHR develops connections between an inherent quality such as human dignity and outer appearances, both through its early communication strategies, and as it came to visualize and materialize human rights within its galleries. While I'm sensitive to the role that memorial and human rights museums can play in recognizing past abuses and playing active roles in processes of justice which have been expressly articulated in recent years (Barrett 2015; Carter 2013; Carter and Orange 2012; Failler, Ives, Milne 2015; Lehrer 2015; Opotow 2015; Orange 2016; Orange and Carter 2012a & 2012b; Purbrick 2011), these lines of inquiry often meet the aesthetics of indignity at face value, as they work through how representations of injustice come to raise awareness of and defend justice.

A relational reading of the CMHR demonstrates how this institution handled cultural difference, how it attempted to stake out positive taxonomies, and is ultimately illustrative of contemporary tensions at stake in the idea of human dignity. Understanding how the museum makes visible particular histories and context from which these relations arise is imperative, both in terms of a space that pushes back against a memorial framework, as it tests its political limitations, and as it grapples with crafting a narrative untethered from an aesthetics of indignity. I aim to demonstrate how a focus on human dignity as relational is imperative if human rights museums are to be effective in moving meaningfully beyond discourses of violation or injustices.

The curatorial constellations found in the CMHR raise important points regarding the positive articulation of human dignity. However, the constellation present in the CMHR's first gallery, which will be the focus of this chapter, largely transforms notions of status, once reserved for members of monarchy or parliament to the members of its historical timeline, effectively sending the message that a dignified body looks a certain way. Visually, the first gallery also positions dignity outside of struggle, and as a product of one's individuality and inviolability. In this respect, the CMHR provides another venue from which to interrogate how and why curatorial constellations are integral to apprehending the visual communication of human dignity, as they blend ideological and

material concerns. While I cannot address the entire museum in this chapter due to its immense scale, my aim is to demonstrate how the CMHR used media and curation to a politically ambiguous end. As the museum attempts to move beyond an aesthetics that relies on images of indignity to communicate human rights, it struggles to reconcile what new relationships might be made beyond a politics of comparative oppression or inclusion. As a system of visual communication, the museum relies upon strategies of multivocality and remarkably constellates human dignity between law, philosophy, and culture. However, the constellations the CMHR enacts struggle to fulsomely ally cultures and histories, and fails to reconcile the fact that multivocality does not spark a more complex understanding of human rights. The museum's lack of confrontation with these problem is especially troubling given the subtext of settler-colonial relations and our contemporary moment of understanding human dignity in Canada. The CMHR conveys that individuals provide an aesthetic answer to the foundational problems of an aesthetics of indignity, but in so doing raises questions as to the roles communities and kin play in human dignity's contemporary procession.

Taking the Long View: Constructing the CMHR

Whereas UNESCO's Human Rights Album was conceived and delivered to audiences across the globe within two years of the signing of the UDHR, the Canadian Museum for Human Rights has a long and well-documented history that spans from the 1990s to its official opening in 2014. Most notably, the history of the CMHR's construction in Winnipeg was propelled by contentious debates around public recognition of past injustices, including those committed by the Canadian state. In this section, I provide a glimpse into the history of the CMHR's development, and pay particular attention to how the politics of representation intersected with competing notions of space and justice and normative, negative, and emancipated notions of human dignity. This history sets up the remainder of the chapter, which examines how a theorization of human dignity as a relational property might be used to critically examine the somewhat apolitical outcomes of the museum's early contention.

Primarily, two events formed the basis of the tension surrounding the building of the CMHR, a tension which gets to the heart of Canada's complex relationship with human rights. Here the history and legacy of the Holocaust and Indian Residential Schools met head on. Both histories exposed prickly problems for Canada, as questions concerning what kinds of histories would be told about human rights in Canada intersected with broader questions about what kind of stories *best communicated* human rights.

Holocaust remembrance practice proved integral to the founding of the CMHR. Its museological footing was gained with a 1998 proposal to add a Holocaust gallery to the Canadian War Museum in Ottawa—a city, which at the time, was home to all of Canada's national museums (Moses, 2012). This plan was deterred by debates about how a Holocaust gallery would compete with the stories of Canadian soldiers, beginning a theme of comparison that would come to dominate the CMHR's development and subsequent analysis. Eventually, a plan for a privately funded Holocaust and human rights museum was proposed in Winnipeg, a small city in the heart of the Canadian prairies and thousands of miles away from the capital. This move was also due in large part to one of the museum's greatest funders and advocates, Israel Asper, a man who grew up in Winnipeg and whose place within spheres of media production and Jewish cultural organizations gave him a unique vision of what this kind of museum could do.⁵¹ Eventually, a deal was reached for the museum to become a private-public partnership under the auspices of the Canadian Museum for Human Rights, officially dropping the *named* centrality of the Holocaust from its purview.⁵²

⁵¹ Asper was a prominent lawyer and later in his career the founder of CanWest Global Communications, a large media company whose properties included television and publishing assets primarily in Canada. He also founded the Asper Foundation, which initiated a "Human Rights and Holocaust Studies" program in Winnipeg in the 1980s. Part of this program entailed visits to the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. Subsequently, part of the impetus for the CMHR began with the question of why Canada did not have a similar museum (Moses, 2012).

⁵² While the Holocaust was dropped from the name of the museum it still remained central in the museum's planning, especially as it came to occupy the central gallery in the museum. The rationalization for this decision and how it came to affect the genesis of the museum's galleries has recently been

Parallel to this development, a nascent conversation was beginning to take place within Canada about the history and legacies of Indian Residential Schools, a settler colonial program in place from 1876 to 1996 that dislocated Indigenous children from their homes and aimed to strip them of their language, culture, and traditions. Followed by an historic apology by Canada's Prime Minister for these actions in 2008, a national Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) was established, the same year the Canadian Museum for Human Rights was officially added to the Canadian *Museums Act*. The geographical location of the museum became all the more important as Winnipeg became home to key discussions within the TRC and eventually became home to the TRC's official archive now housed at the University of Manitoba.⁵³ As a city with one of the largest urban Indigenous populations in Canada, Winnipeg was situated between established narratives of Holocaust memory and emerging narratives of colonial oppression. The differences between how these two histories were mobilized in the name of human rights was starkly contrasted, both as the nation began to take stock of its own history and as the museum struggled to communicate human rights within a visual and spatial field.

At the heart of the CMHR's development and ongoing participation in the human rights discourse, was an attempt to grapple with the display and reconciliation of

explained from an inside perspective by Maron and Curle (2018), both of who worked on developing and curating the CMHR's galleries from an early stage.

⁵³ Beyond the politics of the museum's location outside of Canada's capital city, much has been written about the politics of the museum's location within Winnipeg itself. The museum is situated at the forks of the Red River and the Assiniboine River alongside a national historic site and tourist destination, aptly named The Forks. Beyond this current use, the meeting place of these rivers had great importance to the history of Indigenous communities before colonization as a meeting point and intermittent settlement, and after colonization as a point of trade, most notably with the Hudson's Bay Company. The symbolic history of this meeting place initially met well with the cross-cultural conversations that the CMHR was meant to foster. However, many have criticized how the site's history was selectively used or highlighted, especially as it helped to narrate dialogue without mention of colonial violence. Although the museum complied with federal and provincial requirements in terms of how it conducted an archeological review of the site, only 2% of the fork's location was closely examined for historical clues that would enrich Indigenous history (Syms 2009; Busby, Muller, Woolford 2015). Further, as Sharma (2015) explains, the metaphorical use of the site's history by the museum positions Indigenous stakes in this site as "past" and effectively erases *continued* violence of colonial encounter (187).

historical and cultural difference along the lines of justice and injustice. Familiar questions, some of which were addressed in the previous chapter remained pertinent: How could a museum tell the story of human rights without levelling differences between historical moments or essentializing cultural identity? And, how could a museum visually communicate human dignity without relying on sloppy equivocations between the body and the soul or between historical injustices?

For many academics, the answer to these questions came through an engagement with memory studies, wherein “memory wars” or “oppression olympics” became a shorthand for how the museum responded to debates about who would be publicly acknowledged in the museum (Busby, Muller, Woolford 2015; Chatterly 2015; Hankivisky & Dhamoon 2013; Logan 2014; Moses 2012). Linking claims of justice to that of space, the CMHR’s planning mirrors a problem explored in the previous chapter regarding the way disparate cultures and histories were brought together to communicate human rights in the *Human Rights Exhibition Album*. For the UN and UNESCO, both institutions founded on the ideas of international collaboration and human rights broadly, there would undoubtedly be claims of decontextualizing artefacts or histories under their sweeping umbrellas. In the case of the CMHR, however, the universal mandate of human rights met bluntly with the interests of the nation. The issue of how the museum’s expansive galleries would be allocated towards a growing national conversation met the terrain of established memory regimes. Space became an entrenched metaphor for justice and recognition, as the failure to represent one group’s story came to be framed as a slight on another group’s identity (Logan 2014). Notions of justice became tied to the spatial limitations of the museum. Despite its enormous floor space of 47,000 feet, the physical size of the museum seemed small in comparison to the range of voices that were vying for attention. Inclusion in the plan became shorthand for a community or group’s worth, their dignity, and validation of their suffering and/or contributions to the history of human rights. In one of the most extreme cases, a complaint was raised by the Ukrainian Canadian Congress about the location of a panel documenting the Holodomor genocide near a public restroom (Rollason 2013). In response to a swirling controversy about which atrocities and genocides would be featured in the CMHR, the museum’s then

CEO, Stuart Murray, pointedly asked: “how could we ever do them all justice?” (Kives, 2012).⁵⁴ This question has given me pause on several occasions. At face value this question recognizes the spatial limitations of the museum alongside the countless stories of injustice. It also communicates something about the structure and system of the museum itself. The museum aims to be something other than a compendium of suffering, or a dictionary of injustice. Its galleries were to be constructed to a specific end aimed at the communication of human rights, a task that went beyond basic factors of inclusion and multivocality.

At many points in the public debates over whose stories would be told or included, debates which often veered towards heuristics of physical measurement, broader questions of educational importance were overshadowed. As questions were asked about whose stories would be told, or how they might do justice to human rights violations, questions more central to human rights writ large were pushed to the side. How might a museum visually communicate human dignity? How might physical space indeed alter the very conception of human dignity? Though the questions that were being asked depended on assumptions about human value and the translation of that value into square feet or display cases, the question of human dignity and display was displaced.

A Different Kind of Museum: Telling Positive Stories

Though only implied with Murray’s rhetorical question, there was a sense from early on in the CMHR’s development that stories and image of injustice could not fully

⁵⁴ How the museum chose to engage genocide alongside human rights was and remains controversial. While there had been initial plans to construct an “atrocities” gallery, which would feature some 80 historical narratives of atrocity, in 2012 these plans were radically reduced to a genocide gallery which would feature the five genocides that the Canadian Government officially recognized: the Armenian Genocide, the Holodomor, the Holocaust, The Rwandan Genocide, and the Srebrenica Genocide in Bosnia. On top of the fact that the museum openly showed its allegiance with the federal government in this decision, this move also demonstrated tensions between showcasing human rights abuses and telling positive stories. Further, in 2013 the question of how and to what ends the concept of genocide was defined became even more contentious in terms of a growing call for Indian Residential Schools to be recognized as an act of genocide. Given that the Canadian Government does not recognize Indian Residential Schools as genocide, it was not named as such in the museum or prominently featured in the atrocity gallery. For more on how the museum approached definitions of genocide see Hankivsky and Dhamoon (2013), Kives (2012), Logan (2014), Moses (2012).

encapsulate what the museum was attempting to achieve. The narrative of inclusion would have to be tempered with substance and tone. Despite the legacies of genocide and colonialism that accompanied the planning of the CMHR, there was a notable shift away from frameworks of memorialization or a strict association with suffering in the museum's messaging. As the CMHR's director of communications related in 2011:

There are many museums dedicated to particular human rights issues, and their role is very often to memorialize those events...that's not our role. We want to respect the victims, but part of the objective of the museum is to pull out the lessons of these human rights violations, and take lessons from human rights triumphs. That's a bit different (than) pure memorialization." (Angela Cassie, CMHR representative, quoted in: Martin 2011).

Therefore, along with a wide interest in whose stories were going to be told in the CMHR, there was a strong emphasis on *what kind* of stories would be told. Beginning with the CMHR's mandate, there was a concerted effort to disrupt an easy reliance on suffering as the rationale for both the museum and for the program of human rights put forward by this federal institution. Despite the relationship that had been built between memorial museums and human rights beginning in the 1990s (Duffy 2000; Sodaro 2018; Williams 2007), the CMHR was attempting to forge another path.

The museum's mandate is telling about this shift and should be inspected closely. As a national museum, the Canadian Museum for Human Rights joined a bureaucratic and corporate network that oversees Canadian heritage and "contributes to the collective memory and sense of identity of all Canadians" (*Canadian Museums Act*). As a national museum, the CMHR became endowed with specific corporate rights for operating under a state umbrella, especially as it concerned financial and political affiliation with the Canadian government.⁵⁵ The CMHR's mandate is itself short, but defines a museum untethered from indignity and injustice specifically:

⁵⁵ The CMHR is officially described as "a distinct legal entity, wholly-owned by the Crown, which operates at arm's length from the Government in its day to day operations, activities and programming. The Museum is governed by the regime for Crown Corporation control and accountability established under Part X of the Financial Administration Act. It is a member of the Canadian Heritage Portfolio and reports to Parliament through the Minister of Canadian Heritage and Official Languages. The Museum's Board of Trustees serves as its governing body and is accountable to Parliament for the stewardship of the Museum

The purpose of the Canadian Museum for Human Rights 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. (*Canadian Museums Act*, 15.2)

This pronouncement sets out a very broad and education oriented program, and provided the scope to address histories not exclusive to Canada despite the CMHR's role as a national museum. On the one hand, this phrasing of "special but not exclusive reference to Canada" allowed the museum to keep its initial emphasis on the Holocaust, given its growth from an initial plan to build a Holocaust museum itself. On the other hand, the phrase allowed the museum to stretch its view farther afield than many other human rights museums, which focused on national issues. For example, Museo de la Memoria y los Derechos Humanos (Museum of Memory and Human Rights) which opened in 2011 in Santiago, Chile was conceived as a space of memorialization, reflection, and documentation for the human rights abuses carried out under Augusto Pinochet in the 1970s and 1980s, while Kazerne Dossin (Mechelen, Belgium), a memorial museum and documentation centre on the Holocaust and human rights that opened the same year as the CMHR, similarly framed itself around a particular event, the Holocaust, and is open about its commemorative function. The CMHR mandate signaled a tension built into the founding of the museum that mirrors those found in human rights writ large—between national and international interests on the one hand, and between acknowledgment of violent histories and idealized visions on the other. The choice to move away from atrocity specifically would come to have a sizable impact on the way the museum ended up presenting an idea of what human dignity meant in the Canadian context.

The constellation that the CMHR was beginning to form, was thus not aligned with the past concretely but more so interested in material that would "encourage

through the Minister of Canadian Heritage and Official Languages. The Board represents various regions of the country and is appointed by the Governor in Council" (Canadian Museum for Human Rights, "Info Source").

reflection and dialogue.” While true to the politics of human rights, in which the line between a nation and the world and the tension between past, present, and future goals remain in flux, the line between Canadian content and those stories that would *best* promote respect or communicate human rights was unclear from the start, thus opening up more questions as to whose stories would be told, and to what end. More pointedly, in terms of my own discussion of human dignity, the mandate does not name this idea as an organizing force, but as it turned to issues of equality and justice on a global scale it was never far away.

In response to questions concerning the allocation of museum space to Canadian and international histories that advanced the CMHR’s mandate, the museum began to craft its identity as an “ideas museum.” On the one hand, museums, such as those revolving around peace, tolerance, and human rights, are categorized as ideas museums because they rarely have permanent collections in the way that art or history museums do, and thus need to rely on storytelling and visual reproductions that complement their mandates. On the other hand, “ideas” or “issues” museums imply a direct material engagement with an otherwise immaterial property “not only as a theme of representation, but one of ongoing debate” (Carter and Orange, 2012; 112). In the case of the CMHR, the museum built a narrative around positivity and inspiration, setting it apart from other institutions that focused on historical violation particular to a nation or a group of people.⁵⁶

Despite the growing acknowledgement of physical and cultural atrocities committed against Indigenous people in Canada, some of which were directly sponsored by the state, it was clear that exclusive emphasis on this suffering would not become a way forward for the CMHR. This departure from memorialization allowed the museum to frame some of its exclusions within a narrative that positioned shock and horror as a

⁵⁶ Carter and Orange describe the distinction between issues and ideas museums as follows: “We prefer the use of the term ‘issues-based’ to the more general designation of ‘ideas-based’ museum, for its implicit insistence on a topic that is not only a theme of representation, but one of ongoing debate” (2012, 112). For them, the term “ideas museum” signals the representation of something whose limits have been defined. “Issues” museum signals a debate about an idea that is ongoing.

block to education and inspiration.⁵⁷ There was, indeed, great care taken to tell interested parties that the museum would not be in the business of overwhelming or depressing visitors with a deluge of negative content (Kives 2012). At a 2012 Public Annual Meeting then CEO Stuart Murray rationalized this distinction in the following way: “If your museum is intended to memorialize and commemorate, then it might be appropriate to focus only on tragedy. But if your museum is intended to educate and inspire action, then you must also include examples of where action has led to progress on human rights” (CMHR, 2012). The anxiety that the CMHR would become a “hall of grievances” was repackaged through positive and progressive stories that aimed to evoke “hope.”⁵⁸

The CMHR’s shift away from an aesthetics of indignity was indeed significant and disruptive. While the museum did keep the Holocaust as a separate gallery and while it does tell stories of atrocity, there was a concerted effort to find other ways of communicating human rights. Though there are distinct and estimably insurmountable problems that came with framing human rights within positive narratives, most notably in regard to an overemphasis on individuals and limited engagement with the politics of reconciliation underway, the CMHR’s decisions were and remain profound departures. Moving away from dominant forms of human rights representation, from a reliance on suffering offered new ground to test the limits of the visual communication of human dignity. In the context of this dissertation, the CMHR’s planning around a more balanced narrative provides a remarkable moment of public recognition that relying on images,

⁵⁷ For many museum scholars the relationship between trauma, education, and engaged visitors has been discussed in relation to the idea of “difficult knowledge” (Blumer 2015; Failler, Ives, Milne 2015; Lehrer 2015; Lehrer and Milton 2011; Milne 2015; Sharma, 2015; Simon 2000, 2011 & 2014; Simon and Failler 2015; Wodtke 2015). Adapted from Deborah Britzman’s concept (1998, 2000, Pitt & Britzman, 2003), the museological notion of difficult knowledge moves away from learning about facts and towards learning from the provocation of affect and the assimilation of solidarity that is meant to come from the exhibitionary experience that challenges the visitors assumptions about history and their roles in the ongoing development of that history: “in learning about, knowledge is taken 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 as a relation contingent on a willingness to recognize one’s connectedness to an event or experience that might well be ‘separate’ in the sense of belonging to another time, place, or people but that can nevertheless be seen for its enmeshment with the structures, privileges, and constraints of one’s own life” (Failler and Simon, 173).

⁵⁸ See Failler (2015) for more on the different types of hope the museum expresses.

video, and narrative of human violation would no longer suffice in regard to cultivating a strong understanding of human rights. In the development of the CMHR's exhibits and messaging there was keen awareness that the negative tropes that had become central in communicating human rights and human dignity were limiting. However, as "taking the long view" began to "involve seeing not only discrimination and oppression, but also revival" a clear new path was not readily available from which to mount this balance (CAC 2010, 39).

The Expression of Human Dignity

As it moved away from frameworks that couched human rights within narratives of "never again", the CMHR did indeed stake out important new territory in the visual communication of human dignity. This shift brought about new questions: would positivity or narratives of progress overshadow the work that was still needed in ongoing human rights issues? How might this turn align or interfere with Canada's own trajectory of reconciliation? Was it responsible to jump over recognizing injustice to representing justice? And, in the context of this dissertation, how might an aesthetics of dignity founded on relation provide new routes that confidently come to the defense of human rights? In what follows I use the heuristic of the curatorial constellation and my understanding of human dignity as a relational property as a way to begin to articulate what the fears about linking human rights to positivity and comparison allude to more broadly within this system and as a way to model the type of intervention a constellated theorization holds. Shifting attention to how the CMHR communicates an understanding of dignity invigorates discussions between cultural factions that formed the foundations for the CMHR's development. Importantly, this shift gives context to the positive path the CMHR has tried to forge.

One space where the desire to exhibit progress and elicit hope occurs prominently within the CMHR is in the first gallery, interrogatively titled "What are Human Rights?" This exhibit is a cavernous, dark, and somewhat narrow area with a timeline on one of its long walls and a looping video on its other long wall (Fig. 24). In many ways, this space most literally resembles the astrological night sky as the high black walls and ceiling

provide the backdrop for the array of information hung in its orbit. With the text of the UDHR's first article etched prominently into the back wall in bold white letters, "All humans are born free and equal in dignity and rights," the tone this exhibit sets is a mixture of solemnity and hope right from the outset. As you enter the gallery the first screen, equipped with sensors, responds when a visitor stands in front of it (Fig 25); stopping prompts a video of a man or woman to start playing. The mediated subject steps into the frame, giving the illusion of an approaching friend or acquaintance, and begins to tell the visitor what human rights mean to him or her personally.

The giant timeline stretches across the length of the gallery signalling that a historical narrative is underway. The timeline connects one-hundred *ideas, events* and *measures* creating a multicultural and multimedia history of human rights expanding from as early as 4000 B.C.E. to 2012 A.D. The looping video to your right showcases perspectives on human rights from different cultures, broadly mirroring the information on your left and lending it more narrative weight. Finally, what is also in the line of sight from the first gallery is the "Indigenous Perspectives" gallery (Fig. 24 & 27), the view and position of which I will address in greater detail in the following section. For now, I limit my analysis to the politics of this timeline, as a way to set up the relationship between human dignity and the material world that the CMHR did indeed build.

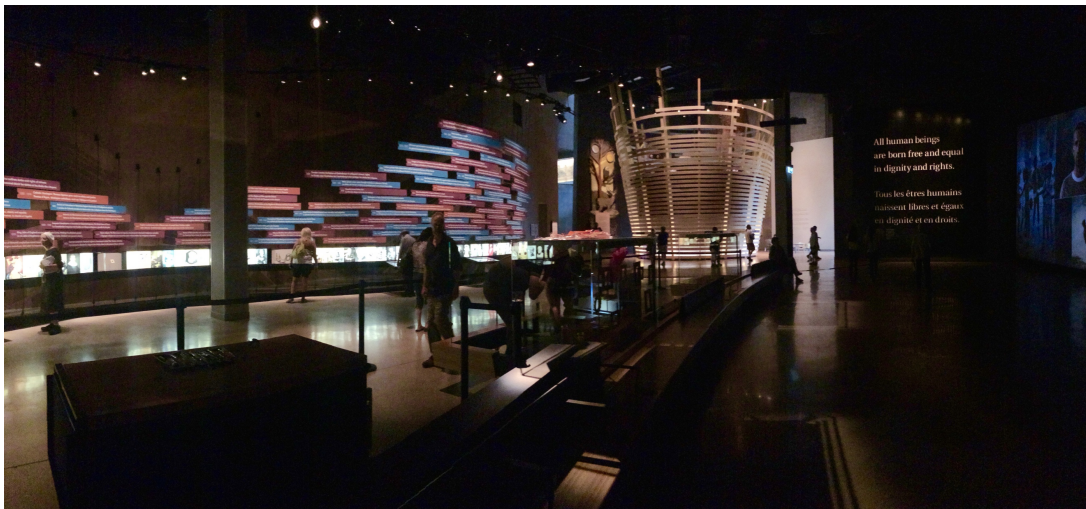


Figure 24: CMHR, "What are Human Rights?" gallery, photograph by author.



Figure 25: CMHR, "What are Human Rights?" gallery, photograph by author.

Though never spelled out in this first gallery, a planning document from 2012 outlines the role of dignity within this space. One of this document's key objectives for this gallery states: "After visiting the zone, the visitor will: Learn that human rights are an expression of human dignity, and that the struggle for their achievement is still not over" (CMHR, planning). The CMHR takes a strong stance here as it imagines human rights as emerging from the establishment of human dignity, as an equalizing and normative force. In this view, human rights are only achievable when the *ideal* of inherent and equitable human value is adopted. The understanding that "human rights are the expression of human dignity," spells out a relationship that was never clearly claimed or declared in previous curatorial endeavors encountered in this dissertation. The introductory text to this gallery signifies these beliefs: "Throughout history, people have grappled with ideas about human dignity, respect and responsibility. Today the term 'human rights' generally refers to the rights we have simply because we are human. It is an idea thousands of years

in the making.” The implication that this idea was *made* connects it to notions of progress: to arrive at a point where human rights mean something *inherent* signals a temporal and historical position within the narrative of human rights. An odd tension here again plays out along the lines of human dignity, as something that must now signal a universal mandate, and thus shed its historical connotations, and as something that is particularly historical in this gallery, which the timeline makes visible. The CMHR is clear that human dignity must be taxonomic rather than normative (Donnelly 2015, 2), as something we have simply because we are humans. However, the CMHR’s own existence, as a visual medium, opens up this idea to questions of countenance, history, taxonomy, and communication more broadly.

The planning document’s language is compelling not only in terms of how it positions human dignity as “foundational”, but also in terms of its framing of human rights as an *expression* of human dignity. This sentiment recalls Schiller’s understanding of dignity as “the *expression* of a noble disposition of the mind” (370; my italics). Both iterations of expressive language, point towards the same issue fundamental to this dissertation; that is, how something intangible or inherent is made visible. Taking seriously the representational and performative aspects that intersect with human dignity risks undermining its foundational and equalizing bond with the human person, but is necessary as its communication is made central. How, indeed, can visitors understand human rights as the expression of human dignity when dignity’s own expressive qualities have been largely ignored or framed in terms of a binary between normative and negative experiences? And, what expressive argument is the CMHR in the business of making?

Presumably, the CMHR’s understanding of human rights, as the expression of human dignity, speaks to the way all humans must be thought of equally for the enterprise of human rights to work. However, the museum does not outwardly attempt to extend this line of thought into its spatial and visual field, as it only vaguely grapples with human dignity’s expressive or mediated properties head on. In its first gallery, underneath the emboldened fragment of the UDHR’s first article, one clue as to this “expressive” relationship reads, “our rights and freedoms may be expressed in many ways – on paper, in our traditions, and in how we choose to live our lives and treat

others.” Here there is an attempt to connect dignity to different forms of mediated expressions, but the statement is equally as broad and declarative as the one above it. As with the *Human Rights Exhibition Album*, curation is needed to help expand these declarative statements and bring cultural complexity to this often-disembodied concept.

Primarily, this first gallery uses its timeline to constellate its expressive qualities. Before the timeline a panel reads:

Throughout history and across cultures, people have talked about how we should treat one another and what freedoms we ought to have. These important conversations have led to ideas, events, and measures that tell the global story of human rights. This timeline offers 100 key moments from the advancements and setbacks in our human rights journey. What would you add or take away?

This gallery does important work in terms creating another constellation of human dignity. The timeline makes a compelling case that the idea of human rights, as the expression of human dignity, is not to be found in *an* object, *a* historical moment, or *one* legal document. For Benjamin, the heuristic of the constellation spells out a relationship between ideas and objects that affirms differences and reflects the fragmentation of modern culture. In terms of human dignity, this line of thought has helped to foreground the material dimensions of human dignity without demanding uniformity. In the CMHR, the constellated nature of human dignity is on full display. The law is not the only logical home of human dignity, but rather exists across cultures, philosophies, religions, and peoples. Just as the *Human Rights Exhibition Album* desired to craft a visual narrative where “all races, all civilizations, all nations” made their contributions to human rights, the CMHR similarly aims to create a sense of inclusion, and human dignity, along vast intersecting historical moment. For instance, the first three points on the timeline, all with dates unknown, emphasize philosophies of respect, good deeds, and interconnectedness across Ubuntu, Persian, and Whakapapa cultures. Until recently these contributions have not been central to our understanding of human dignity, and the CMHR’s first gallery effectively opens up transnational, cultural, and historical possibilities that underwrite this idea. While this gesture towards inclusion should be looked at critically, especially in relation to the urgent politics of human rights, it is indeed important that this type of

genealogy is attempted, thus complicating a search for *an* origin or the reliance on simplistic sequential histories.

Whereas the *Human Rights Exhibition Album* worked through the history of ideas and events that led up to the signing of the UDHR within a 100 page album, the CMHR does this work in 100 moments, each of which corresponds to supplementary digital information and images within the interactive tables below the timeline (Fig. 26). 100 key moments are a lot to take in, and this is only the *first* gallery of the museum. With the addition of a question – what would you add or take away? – there is an odd hesitation within the CMHR’s messaging in terms of the way this timeline functions in the museum, and in terms of the way it functions alongside human dignity.⁵⁹ That is, there is a simultaneous desire to provide an objective account of what has helped to shape human dignity as an idea, knowledge that these choices will never be all encompassing, and a move towards subjectivity allowing visitors to insert their own experiences. Visitors can learn more about each item on the timeline by using one of the four interactive tables in the gallery, which provide contextualizing information and images about each point found above. The technology in this gallery appears as an answer to the claims of historical flatness within visual modes of communication met in the last chapter. Rather than face charges of being “held back at the surface of identity” (Barthes 1957, 101) through its visual strategy of communication, the CMHR aimed to provide historical depth through digital technology.

⁵⁹ The addition of this question can be further related to a growing trend in museums and curation around “interrogation” (Karp and Kratz 2015; Shelton 2013; Lorente 2015; Piotrowski & Murawska-Muthesius 2015). Questions are seen to not only engage visitors, but open up museum collections to the gaze of entrenched power relations. As noted in the introduction, there is considerably more critical work to be done in terms of how a constellated approach works alongside visitors to these museums. Interrogation might be considered one way of encouraging visitors to feel as though their knowledge might be thought of as important to a constellation and properly expanding it.



Figure 26: CMHR, timeline in the "What are Human Rights?" gallery, photography by author.

This added depth has interesting consequences in terms of the visitor's subjective position, and the messaging of the museum in terms of individuality and autonomy. Each visitor must make personal choices in terms of which items from the timeline they want to explore. And with 100 moments to choose from, there is ample room for their own selections. This vast number of choices and supplemental information precludes any sense of being able to fully engage with each of these moments. With corresponding information for each point on the timeline in the interactive technology, a vast amount of information is at the visitor's fingertips, but at the same time hidden and time-consuming. The question, "what would you add or take away?", becomes unmoored in this light, as there is no real way to both take in and comprehend the CMHR's inclusions and exclusions without spending hours hunched over an interactive table. How can a visitor know what should be taken away when they do not know what is all there?

The glut of information provided by the timeline and the technology that accompanies it often abandons a strong argumentative function. As an ideas museum without a permanent collection, and thus not tied to issues of aura or history in the same way as art or history museums, the CMHR had an opportunity to embrace its own

materiality in a different light. If the constellated museum, “suggests a spectator no longer focused on the auratic contemplation of individual works, but one who is aware of being presented with arguments and positions to read or contest,” the CMHR failed to present its visitors with a clear argument (Bishop 2013, 59). As Erica Lehrer (2015) has argued, “the overall result has a “kitchen sink” feel, where inclusivity takes precedence over coherence, and the global strife over first-world definitions of rights and justice is nowhere debated” (Lehrer, 1199). While the CMHR seems wary about overwhelming its visitors with too many horrifying stories, it failed to recognize that it could also overwhelm its visitors with too many positive stories. In turning towards a more inspirational message, the politics of inclusion won out over a strong political message. Rather than forming a succinct constellation of images and quotes that stake out a political or argumentative function about an idea, a vast universe of information is at the visitor’s disposal. Whereas the ancients seemed to understand that they needed to make order out of the stars, bringing into effect the idea of the constellation out of the vast carpet of brightly lit dots that lined the night sky, the CMHR shies away from such pattern making, ultimately shying away from a compelling political function.

Without a succinct or political message about human rights or human dignity the visitor is left with the task of picking out and piecing moments together guided by their own interests or internal compasses. Rather than forcing visitors back on their own assumptions about how human rights or human dignity are to proceed, they are prompted to allow their assumptions to propel their experience. In many ways, this gesture foregrounds the importance of the individual in the CMHR’s narrative, *in spite* of its curatorial constellation. In many ways, the inclination towards subjectivity works in tandem with recent museological research that acknowledges that visitors come with experience that shape their visit, that they are not empty vessels to be filled up (Falk 2009; Simon 2014; Simon and Failler 2015). Interrogative models, that ask visitors to think about what they would add or take away is not unique to the CMHR. However, in this context, the mass of information neuters the potential for the museum to have a political force that extends beyond the physical space.

The CMHR has notably defended its information strategy, relying on a vision of objectivity despite an ever-growing awareness that museums are not neutral. In an article regarding the museum's objectivity, a spokesperson from the CMHR posits that the museum might act as an alternate form of journalism, that is, as an institution that provides information rather than opinion: "sometimes we'll get the question of, 'What is the museum's position on some of these issues?' And through the exhibits we don't take a position or tell visitors what they *should* think...we often see ourselves as a platform for debate, for presenting different perspectives, competing perspectives at times, but we generally try to avoid advocating one way or another" (Wallace 2017). The acknowledgement of visitor subjectivity and divestment of the timeline's political thrust to the visitor does lip service to the museum's mandate to promote human rights as part of an "ongoing dialogue." Posing the question, "what would you add or take away?", does indeed prompt thought, and hopefully discussion, but it is questionable as to whether and how this space is conducive to performing a relationship with the ongoing or the yet to come, or even facilitating debate as we will see later in this chapter. There is little room in this space to think beyond the timeline. Indeed, the timeline stops at 2012, and does not ask visitors to think about a more pertinent and political question: what current or ongoing human rights abuses or victories might be added to this two-dimensional timeline at its chronological end? What definitions or understandings of human dignity are here promoted?

The final gallery in the museum (four floors and ten galleries later) asks visitors to write what they "imagine" human rights to be and add their note to an inspirational wall. However, by the time visitors get there they are spatially and temporally divorced from their interrogative starting point. Despite the modern technologies available to the CMHR, which could potentially allow visitors to make more complex connections throughout history, for example to compare the way actions looked in different moments or make links between laws that similarly address gender, race, or human dignity, there is no such intricacy. The points on the timeline do not speak to each other coherently beyond their colour-coded labels of ideas, events, and measures. The two-dimensional timeline is not aided by the digital tables that expand the points on the timeline, but

further weighed down by it, posing a constellation without much consequence and divorced from ongoing and often comparable real-world stories. If, as Carter and Orange propose, “museums not only reflect historical and current human rights but are also participating in the prospective shaping of those rights” (2012, 119), the rights the CMHR is shaping is largely divorced from both global and local challenges contemporary to the very foundations of these rights, that is to human dignity.

Constellating Communities

As a reflection of historical and current human rights issues, the backdrop to the first gallery’s timeline, the “Indigenous Perspectives” gallery, is evocative in terms of the CMHR’s engagement with local human rights challenges and broader ruptures within the idea of human dignity. Under the guise that “everything we do is interrelated,” a phrase heard in the first gallery’s video montage, it is jarring just how disconnected these two spaces feel and look. The Indigenous gallery has distinct visual qualities. Its two main features are inspired by Indigenous practices of basket weaving and beading, which can be seen on the outside of the gallery’s theatre in the centre of the room and in Rebecca Belmore’s powerful and looming art installation, *Trace*, on the back wall (Fig. 27).⁶⁰ However, the relation between these two spaces provides a compelling study in terms of the constellated understandings of human dignity that exist today.

⁶⁰ *Trace* is made with over 14,000 hand-pressed clay beads. Community members in Winnipeg and across Canada were invited to volunteer in bead-making workshops. Each bead is “the size of the ‘negative space’ formed by a clenched fist, were made from excess Red River Valley grey gumbo (clay) dug up by municipally contracted sewer and utility workers and donated to the artist” (Failler 2014, 242). Strung together, the sculpture spans over 40-feet. In many ways, beyond its symbolic connotations of a blanket or towel draped over a doorknob, this piece sends a strong message in terms of its own *constellated* approach. Community involvement and the material impressions of volunteers’ hands combine to visualize alliance and colonial entanglement in a remarkable way.



Figure 27: CMHR, view of the “Indigenous Perspectives” gallery, photograph by author.

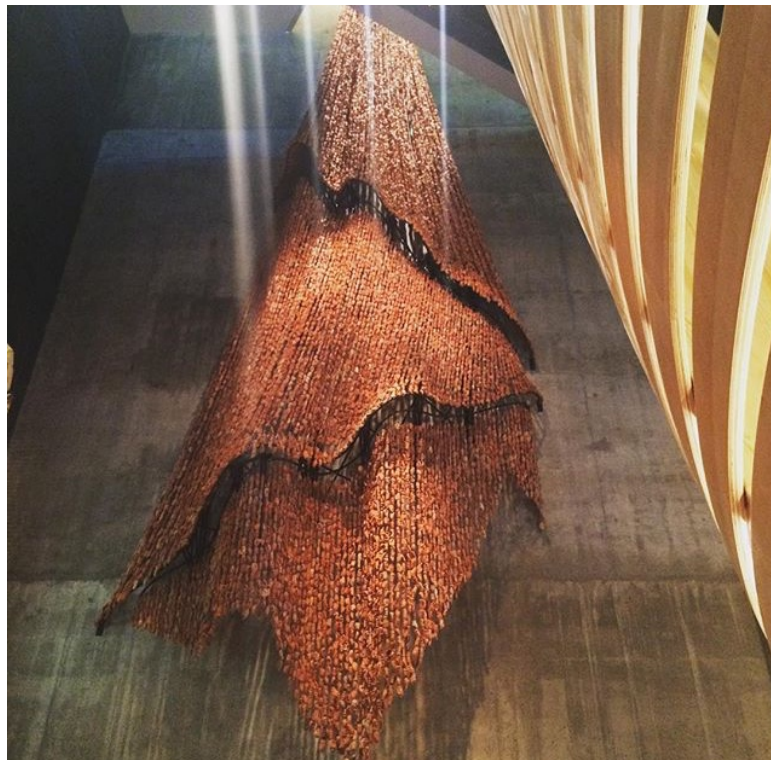


Figure 28: CMHR, Installed view of "Trace" by Rebecca Belmore, photograph by author.

It should be noted that the decision to have a separate Indigenous gallery was done in consultation with Indigenous communities. Creating a human rights museum did not mean denying cultural difference or creating a homogenous narrative, but rather a continued effort to show how diverse cultures approach human rights. A *Winnipeg Free Press* article from 2010 that outlined the main galleries of the museum described the “Indigenous Peoples and Human Rights Zone” as:

An examination of human rights through the cultures and traditions of Canada’s aboriginal peoples. This zone will explain that aboriginal cultures had their own distinct approach to human rights that, in some ways, was far advanced from other cultures. It will also acknowledge that western museums have, for too long, been dominated by a non-aboriginal view of aboriginal culture. (“Floor by Floor” 2010)

This purview was mirrored in the Content Advisory Report published earlier in 2010, which clearly states that “Indigenous Peoples may justly require that the Museum do more than simply view them through an anthropological or cultural lens” (CAC, 28). The CMHR was, in these respects, forging new relationships with Indigenous people in Canada, both as an acknowledgment of the current state of human rights, which required an understanding of rights that was not one-dimensional, and as an acknowledgement of past museological practices, which were largely discriminatory to Indigenous people and their knowledge.⁶¹

Historically, museums have worked to communicate an “imperial vision” of Indigenous peoples, overlaying cultural narratives and artefacts with taxonomies that entrenched separation in space, time, and ultimately Western ideals of what progress looks like (Mirzeoff 2011, 197). This approach situates Indigenous people as things to be known and not bearers of knowledge in their own right. The CMHR’s position, that Indigenous people and their ideas of human rights should not be treated as anthropological is part of a contemporary shift in museological practice. It is a response to the centuries of exclusion and objectification that were entwined with the founding of

⁶¹ See especially Lonetree (2012), Philips (2011 & 2015), Wrightson (2017), and Sleeper-Smith (2009) for more fulsome discussion of the historical relationship between museums and Indigenous knowledge.

many museums and collections and ultimately the ways we have come to know other cultures. This shift in museological practice was integral to the movement of human rights into museums, as it signaled a respect and recognition of voices and knowledge that had not previously been privileged in the museum sphere. Along with a move towards “new museology,” a turn in museum practice that privileges diverse communities and which has been seen as integral to the development of human rights museums (Failler 2015; Scharma 2015), the CMHR positioned its attitude towards Indigenous knowledge in Canada at the forefront of museological practice. In this way, museological practice itself becomes indicative of a constellated model that does not reduce one way of knowing or being to another. And further, it becomes necessary to thinking about human dignity as part of visual communication that can grapple with difference without deferring to outdated hierarchies of display and knowledge. Whether or not the final product in the museum is a reflection of this initial intention is another matter.

Indeed, the move towards more community consultation and greater recognition of different ways of knowing within museums has not been without critique. Recently, Wrightson (2017) has argued that key Canadian museological events in the last twenty years demonstrate that increased recognition does not mean increased power or better messaging for those previously excluded or spoken for. Using Glen Coulthard’s (2014) distinction between *politics of assimilation* and *politics of recognition*, as a basis for her argument. Wrightson shows that giving a voice to other cultures or embracing multivocality only does lip service to the underlying power imbalance. For Coulthard:

Settler colonial power relations have shifted away from the violence of domination and force (though this still demonstrably occurs), and manifest more frequently through the affirmative relationship between recognition and freedom, which produces ‘colonized subjects’ and “specific modes of colonial thought, desire and behavior that implicitly or explicitly commit the colonized to the types of practices and subject positions that are required for their continued domination. (Coulthard 2014, 16)

Wrightson argues that despite the turn towards recognition of other voices and recognition of the negative roles museums have played in colonial relations, the new relationship “retains the asymmetric relationship between museums and Indigenous

communities” (42). Thus, in this frame there is not so much as a new relationship but a transfiguration of an old one.

On first glance, the Indigenous Perspectives gallery does exactly what was promised: communicating that Indigenous communities have their own approach to human rights is signaled through the distinct look and feel. However, the promise that the gallery would “acknowledge that western museums have, for too long, been dominated by a non-aboriginal view of aboriginal culture” is nowhere to be found. The reason for having a stand-alone Indigenous gallery is indeed not communicated whatsoever in the museum. If, as the video narrative in the first gallery provokes, human rights are “interrelated and connect us all to each other,” then why separate these knowledges? As the museum attempted to grapple with what stories best communicated human rights, and as the public debate around whether any one group or event should be given a stand-alone gallery, the CMHR’s messaging demonstrates the fraught relationship with recognition on one hand, and the museum’s constellated demands on the other. Answering the question of whether or not this was a *Canadian* museum for human rights meant placing Canadian (and presumably Indigenous people in Canada) content throughout the museum’s galleries (Kives 2012). Thus, there was a sense that the museum wanted Indigenous knowledge to work in two ways, as a source of value in its own right and as something that worked alongside pre-existing assumptions about human rights writ large. As a case study in relationality, this decision does not deny differences between cultures, but it does not present a deep understanding of how different histories position us in relation to one another. Including *Canadian* content/contexts and *Indigenous* content/context requires not just presenting these two ways of thinking as co-present. To pretend these perspectives have been granted equal footing or exist alongside one another without imbalance is naïve. Yet addressing the history of this relationship, which would enliven Canada as a perpetrator of human rights violations, comes up against the CMHR’s intent to focus on stories that are not primarily about suffering.

More pointedly, the Indigenous Perspective gallery is low on information beyond the fact of its isolation. Indeed, it was one of the galleries where a more “balanced approach” was implemented in a forceful manner; here, the wording of certain panels in

relation to colonial genocide and other state sponsored violence against Indigenous Canadians has been well-documented (Busby, Muller, and Woolford 2014; Failer 2015; Logan 2014). Tricia Logan, a former curator at the CMHR speaks of the tension behind this balance: “I was consistently reminded that every mention of state-perpetrated atrocity against Indigenous peoples in Canada must be matched with a ‘balanced’ statement that indicates reconciliation, apology or compensation provided by the government. In cases where those issues are not reconciled or where accusations of abuse against the government continue to this day, the stories are reduced in scope or are removed from the museum” (Logan, 120). This was a troubling development, especially in regard to a politics of recognition, and its nod towards redistributive justice. As the museum attempted to move away from an aesthetics of indignity, it failed to tackle how its procedures and final product were raising different stakes in the way human dignity was being expressed.

The differences, and ultimate conflict, between the “What are Human Rights?” gallery and the “Indigenous Perspectives Gallery” are complex. We should be critical of those instances where voices were silenced or relegated to partial recognition. Where the CMHR included Indigenous voices under the guise of a more balanced approach is fair ground for the limits of recognition within institutional boundaries. Further, the juxtaposition between the two spaces, between chronology and craft, should not be taken without a fair dose of suspicion. Positioning these schemes as having equal authority in this multivocal universe may actually serve asymmetrical power relations. Placing ‘objective’ scientific discourse against Indigenous perspectives may serve new museological pursuits of multivocality, while at the same time avoiding the process through which the museum legitimates certain voices and eschews real debate about the inconsistencies of these epistemological models (Wrightson, 43). Timelines carry assumptions about history, about the primacy of chronological understanding, and make political choices appear natural (Lubar 2013, 169). The use of chronology as the main epistemological model in the first gallery works to create a sense of accumulation and positive change, and is something that many visitors will ultimately feel comfortable with in museums that aim to create universalizing narratives. Chronology “removes the

storyteller from the story, so that history seems to tell itself, as if things must have happened that way” (Lubar 2013, 170). More pointedly, in the dialogue between the two galleries, which juxtapose chronology and craft, what is lost is how chronology itself has been used in progressive histories of development and hierarchy so central to the violation of Indigenous nations and the justification for that violence in the first place. In presenting the timeline as an impartial way of collecting and representing multi-vocal ideas, this progressive technology is offered as unbiased, rather than itself a source of human rights violation. While a move away from anthropological lenses towards multivocality is a positive step, it is not value neutral. And, as we have seen, the museum failed to make the reasons behind its decisions unclear to its visitors, creating an alternative without creating a strong message behind its function.

Though the museum positioned itself at the forefront of museological practice, this position could only possibly be genuine if we are to ignore Indigenous people’s museological practices. In reference to museums in the United States, Amy Lonetree (2009) argues that though national museums may honour Indigenous understandings of history, they often “fail to present a clear and coherent understanding of colonialism and its ongoing effects” (322). In this context, it seems naïve to read the CMHR’s decision to eschew an emphasis on suffering or an aesthetics of indignity as a signal of progress in museum practice as compared to a prior generation of memorial museums, which treat Indigenous suffering as part of the past, or anthropological museums, which treat Indigenous traditions as part of the past. The difference between the museum’s treatment of Indigenous histories in Canada, which were often violent, and lack of attention to ongoing effects of colonialism *is political*. In this respect, the Content Advisory Report’s conclusion about inclusion of positive Indigenous stories should be taken as a both a political and aesthetic stance; it states: “although the record is full of incidents of the wrongful taking of land and resources as well as Aboriginal lives, it is not the ethnocide and genocide of Indigenous nations that must ground the work of respectfully including the First Peoples in the Museum” (CAC, 72). This stance assumes that a new aesthetics of human dignity can appropriately function even if the group in question has not had their experiences of indignity enshrined in the public mind or sufficiently rendered

publicly visible. Throughout this dissertation I have focused on how dignity might be represented without a sole reliance on its negation. Here though, the complex relationship between human dignity, human memory, colonization, recognition, and visual communication weave a complicated web. The CMHR's shift towards positive stories, in this light, might be considered a *shift* rather than real progress.

However, this shift in perspective *is* important in terms of the move towards a relational understanding of human dignity that does not trade upon an aesthetics of indignity. The final product enlivened in the CMHR's galleries goes only so far in communicating the magnitude of this shift. The decision to place Indigenous values of human rights outside of the first gallery feels important under the auspices of human dignity as series of relations, as a system of understanding that need not subsume one method, identity, or history under another. This separateness and difference in arrangement is significant in terms of what a contemporary project of human rights might look like. Here there is no pretense that a simple or homogenously universal understanding of human rights is achievable. Moving from a linear timeline with a glut of information in the first gallery to a very light scheme, both in terms of colour and content, seems to underscore the sentiment of "interrelation." Though not necessarily a fluid relation, the juxtaposition between the two spaces sends a strong message about what a contemporary understanding of human dignity might look or feel like, as different, but ultimately under the same umbrella.

For Indigenous scholars, the heuristic of the constellation has a distinct function, which has been taken up more recently in the frame of reconciliation and recognition. Jarrett Martineau, an Indigenous scholar and journalist, has recently defined the constellation as "a strategic relational arrangement of space and subjects that provides Indigenous artists and allied communities of struggle, with a mutable for shared creation and action that can be networked to produce collective power" (2015, 215). In Martineau's understanding, the constellation prioritizes *being* and action, and "assume the primacy of the body and lived experience as the front line of decolonial struggle" (275). In this way, the constellation becomes more than just a heuristic that helps us to see the relation between an idea and the material or mediated world, but also a necessary

starting point that demonstrates how relations to each other must be cultivated, “by creating decolonial constellations of existence and love as mechanisms to ensure we are no longer complacent in the oppression of each other” (Simpson, 2014; 1).

In relation to the idea of human dignity, these contributions are crucial, and deserve further critical attention in the sphere of human rights. Human dignity requires a framework that is itself no longer complacent in the oppression of each other. In relation to museums, a constellated decolonial line of thought is also critical. As museums situate themselves in concert with decolonial struggle, an awareness of how museum space and visual communication conceive of alliance and collective power is just as necessary as the existence of multivocality. The inclusion of more diverse perspectives cannot be looked at through the lens of more inclusive museum practice alone. In the CMHR, positioning Indigenous perspectives in its own gallery does indeed provide much needed space to hear different voices, and demonstrates how one way of knowing need not be subsumed under another. However, like the first gallery, which presents more of a universe than a constellation, it is unclear what *alliances*, *connections*, or *visions* of networked relations that ties struggles for equality and human dignity are to be drawn in this space. For some, the relations between these two galleries might cement notions of finite asymmetry, for others, the relations between the two might open up a world of infinite connections and possibilities. In both instances, the contemporary state of human dignity is enlivened, both as an idea that can exist in different forms and cultures and as an idea that is always in tension between the power relations of these same forms and cultures.

The Faults in Our Stars

In general, the Canadian Museum for Human Rights has a difficult time holding tension up to the light. As the museum attempts to move away from an aesthetics of indignity it often shies away from tension in favour of resolution. The first gallery is again telling in this regard. Though there is a desire to frame the moments on the timeline under the auspices that everything is connected, the representational model reverts to old notions of normative images and personal autonomy to frame its series of relations. This is most

evident in the images that appear underneath the timeline, which cling to individuals and their success as the sites from which to learn about human rights, and ultimately sites that express human dignity. This section closely reads a number of these images and demonstrates how this curatorial constellation might be read through a relational understanding of human dignity. Like the relationship between the first and second galleries, the relationship between these images demonstrates important shifts in the contemporary visualization of human dignity.

The images underneath the first gallery's timeline follow a chronological order. Though not every image corresponds to a point on the timeline above, in a most basic sense, their presence serves to ground and open up the brevity of the ideas, measures, and events. Here the message is quite clear: at stake is not only the ideas or events that happened, but real people who lived through, stood up for, and largely prevailed within the arena of human rights. The row of images brings together people who have all responded to a similar human quandary, that is, how humans are meant to live together, and more pointedly, how inherent human worth should be mobilized. Two things stand out about these images: first, they are, taxonomically, images of people who have arguably *advanced* human rights, and, second, they are stylistically similar in terms of their emphasis on individuals vis-à-vis portraiture.⁶² Together, these bodies continue the emphasis on positive stories.

Instead of holding up instances of human rights violation, the museum chose to emphasize moments where justice prevailed in this gallery, thus constituting a progressive vision. Though an interesting choice for a human rights museum, given the dominant emphasis on suffering and violation in most other human rights museums, the CMHR is not alone in its attempt to shift course. Most recently, Sarah Lewis (2016) has argued, “the endeavor to affirm the dignity of human life cannot be waged without pictures, without representational justice” (11). At first glance, this statement rests upon

⁶² Only one photograph contains more than one person, and only two of the 60 images are of things rather than people (the other two being documents representing Mohammed, the founder of Islam (approx. 570-632 BCE), and Abu Mansur al-Maturidi, a Persian theologian and legal scholar (853-944 BC)).

an idea of inclusion; representational justice works as a facet of including images and narratives that were once deemed invaluable to the history of the nation. On second thought, Lewis raises questions as to the type of images that *affirm* the dignity of the human life, “how we should imagine dignity in the face of oppression” (Lewis, 12). Representational justice, then, works on these two levels: inclusion and substance. The CMHR struggled on both fronts. Inclusion became a litmus test for the value of a community, nation, or people. And, substance became, in many instances, flattened. As the museum moved towards an aesthetics of human dignity that did not trade on an aesthetics of indignity, old notions of normativity and bodily integrity resurfaced as a means of communicating inclusion, and in so doing limited the imaginative capacity of curatorial complexity.

As an exercise in constellated thinking, the range of individuals included underneath the timeline speaks volumes. Harnessing stories across a broad spectrum of legal, philosophical, and cultural avenues works towards a rich history of human rights and human dignity. Together this group of people, who range from Sophocles to Jesus to Ashoka the Great to Alfred the Great to Jean Jacques Rousseau to Olympe de Gouges to Louis Riel to Victor Pineda, effectively decenters the primacy of any one area or model of human rights and instead disperses the reach of human dignity into a vast constellation of people and concerns. The images also decenter any claim that reason alone is the site of human dignity, and convincingly demonstrate through their grouping that the body and our embodied characteristics are necessary to the project of human dignity, and distinctly make it visible. In this sense, representational justice is waged through inclusion across cultures, geographies, histories, and bodies.



Figure 29: CMHR, first three portraits underneath the “What are Human Rights?” timeline. From left to right: Zoroaster, Cyrus the Great, Cleisthenes, photograph by author.



Figure 30: CMHR, section of the portraits underneath the “What are Human Rights?” timeline. From left to right: Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Thomas Paine, Toussaint Louverture, Olaudah Equiano, Olympe de Gouges, photograph by author.

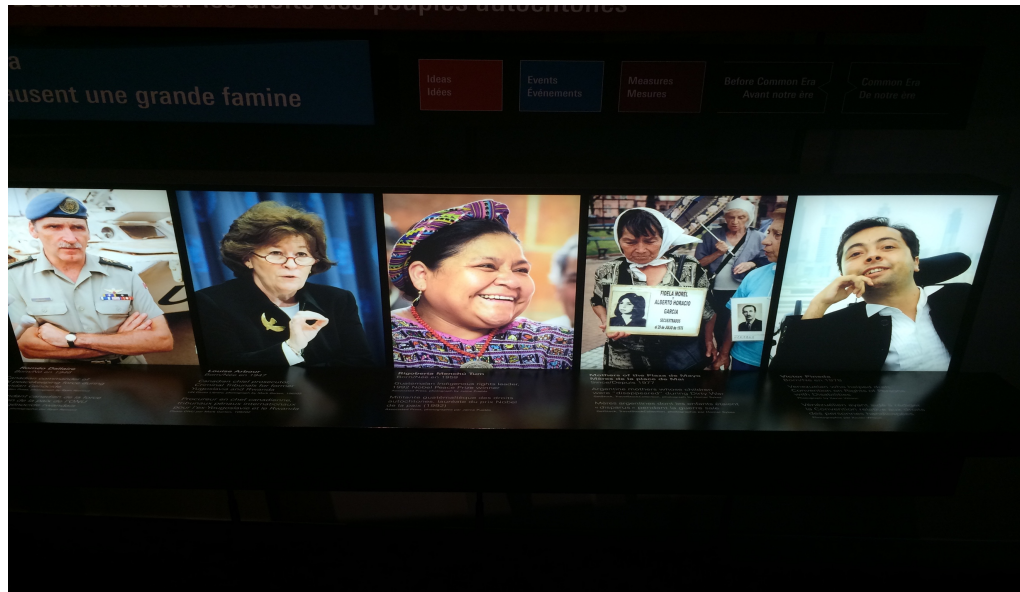


Figure 31: CMHR, final section of the portraits underneath the “What are Human Rights?” timeline. From left to right: General Romeo Dallaire, Louise Arbour, Rigoberta Menchu, Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo, Victor Pineda, photograph by author.

However, the range of representatives collected in this first gallery is taxonomically narrow. In many ways, the mass of images in the first gallery seems brought together in a similar way as one of Sander’s groups. Rather than grouping farmers or professionals together the timeline groups advocates together; the types subsumed here include crusaders, commanders, campaigners, law-makers, protestors, philosophers, and so-on. Thus, the gallery offers a narrow slice of the world through its emphasis on these *exemplary* types. In this sense, the gallery is already much less expansive than Sander’s atlas; though it covers a much broader period of time, the limits of its own inclusion are defined by these constricted taxonomies of *added-value*. The gallery offers a visual form of knowledge that is indeed important to the way human dignity *ought* to be expressed, but offers a constricted range of imaginative possibilities. It narrowly defines new territory. Importantly, the images in this timeline demonstrate a growing constituency of those with rights look like, as the gradual inclusion of gendered, racial, and bodily difference does increase throughout the timeline. However, the growing inclusion of different bodies, cultures, and histories within the framework of human

dignity, appears limiting. Though more and more cultural difference is added as the timeline of images progress, additions that we now come to see as a logical opening up of right via race, class, gender, and ability, there is odd sense of conformity that comes from their inclusion.

Unlike Sander's atlas, which revealed a sense of contingency necessary to the concept of human dignity built on social relations, the portraits in the CMHR only seem to be able to say something about time and place very broadly. As the CMHR turned away from an aesthetics of indignity, it instead positioned human dignity as a property of *autonomy, inviolability, and an ideal after*. For example, Toussaint Louverture (Fig. 30), a well-known leader of the Haitian Revolution, expands the reach of human rights in the area of race. Similarly, the inclusion of Dr. Victor Pineda (Fig. 31), a notable advocate for disability rights, signals another important expansion of human dignity in the area of disability. However, despite their inclusion, they do not serve to raise questions about how difference is to be negotiated or how human dignity is might be imagined outside of these victories, as a property made in relation through the body. Toussaint is "*formerly enslaved*" (italics my emphasis). He is outwardly allied with traditional conventions of military rank, thus legitimating his claims to a dignified life through status. His dignity is made normatively. Similarly, the photograph of Pineda is cropped in such a way that denies the technological and community oriented functions of his life. The wheelchair, on which Pineda relies and is critical to his movement in the world, is itself absent. While, on the one hand, this decision may signal a basis for equality—he is an activist just like the rest of the figures included in this timeline—on the other hand, this decision contradicts the very *means* of his life. Unlike Sander's photograph of the "Disabled Ex-Serviceman" (Fig. 12), which is clear about the reality of this man's movements against the existence of his material surroundings, and which conveys an understanding about how artificial and biological history make up his dignity, the image of Pineda within this mass does not such work.

Against the frame of what Jeremy Waldron argues is a sense of "upwards equalization" (2012, 33) in the history of human dignity, the CMHR transfigures a growing sense of inclusion alongside a politics of assimilation. The timeline and the

portraits show an expanding and more diverse sense of who can be included as a human rights hero (or even as properly human), which may show us something about the expansive quality of liberalism. However, as an exercise in apprehending how people must make themselves appear as belonging, as bearing dignity in order to make claims of rights and recognition, the options are narrowly defined. Recalling the portraits of Frederick Douglass (Fig. 3) does important work here, because his self-stylization applies to Louverture and Pineda as well. The disagreeable parts of Louverture and Pineda's humanness are either dressed up in culturally acceptable markers or rendered invisible in order to be recognized as "fully human." In the CMHR's timeline difference is subsumed under a normative and idyllic banner where bodies are whole and conflict is absent. Rather than instructing viewers to see and come to terms with difference, the images iron out these disparities and quiet questions in the process. The CMHR's focus on a similar style, marked by inviolability and autonomy, provides an arrangement that demonstrates a simplistic understanding of the *ends* of human dignity. Despite the fact that the majority of these subjects rose above struggles, they are leveled in their outward alliance with these traits.

Another aspect of the arrangement that cements their importance *as individuals* is through their names. As opposed to Sander's subjects, who were identified by profession or occupation, these people are identified by proper nouns. Dates on specific photographs are traded in for birth dates and death dates. In terms of the politics of taxonomy, which we first encountered within the scope of August Sander's projects, this process of labelling seems innocent enough. Though a small change, this shift to proper nouns is an important point that corresponds with an emphasis on the individual, not as a social actor but as a self-contained entity. The visitor is here given precise information, not about the social or environmental realities of these figures, but about the data that belongs to them specifically. If taxonomy is a political technique of naming and ordering, it is here politically used as a way to constitute the centrality of the individual within the CMHR's narrative of human rights. It "makes up" the subject of human dignity not through appeals to rationality or consciousness alone, but to their self-enclosed properties as individuals. Even though the images assume a move towards a progressive and

generalized type, portraits come to signal faith in the primacy of the autonomous individual. Though these images introduce a visual form of knowledge to the claim that “All humans are born free and equal in dignity and rights,” they introduce a form of knowledge that is self-evident and teleological. Human rights and human dignity looks a certain way, has a certain form, one that revolves around the individual and is free from conflict.

An example here is helpful to understand the subtle levelling that is underway in this gallery. Take for instance the photograph of General Romeo Dallaire (Fig. 32). The brief account underneath his photo describes him as: “Canadian Commander of the UN peacekeeping force during Rwandan Genocide.” In Canada, Dallaire has become widely known for his role in the Rwandan Genocide, his advocacy for child soldiers and veterans, and as a parliamentary Senator. In the image used on the timeline, Dallaire stands alone in front of a tank, his arms folded, and a deep look of pain and incredulity on his face. That he is standing alone is perhaps a metaphor for his role in the Rwandan Genocide; despite his insistent warnings leading up to and during the genocide, few nations or international organizations came to the aid of the people he was advocating for. Dallaire’s emotional despair concerning the acts of genocide he is surrounded by positions him as a dignified subject amidst the unseen chaos of the genocidaires. Like the description of dignity Schiller uses, “calm in suffering,” which we saw in relation to the Laocoön statue (Fig. 5), Dallaire is visibly agonized, but his hands are both literally and figuratively tied. Indeed, Dallaire holds a similar position as the Laocoön, warning of an immanent danger without any aid.

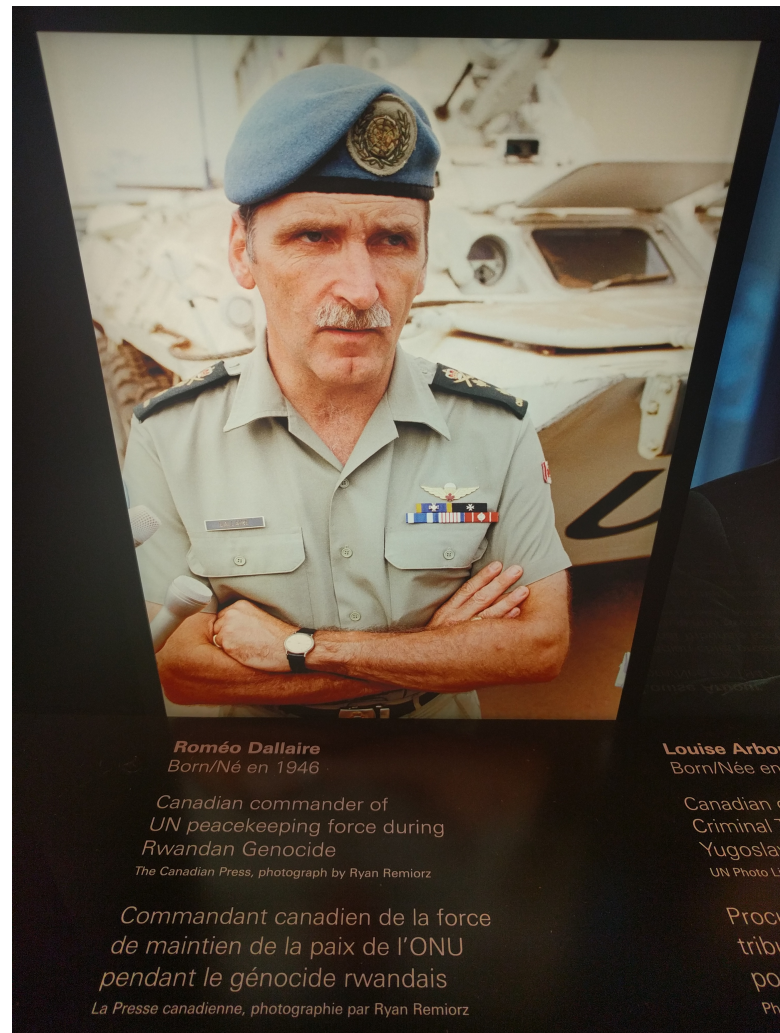


Figure 32: CMHR timeline, General Romeo Dallaire as pictured in the “What are Human Rights?” gallery, photograph by author.

However, unlike the Laocoön, which is surrounded by the conceit of the Virgil’s sorrow, Dallaire’s dignity is starkly distilled. The CMHR’s turn towards beacons of justice and advocacy result in a broader narrative of wholeness and autonomy that haunted normative formations of human dignity based around status and success. Dallaire’s position of dignity is entrenched in relief of those massacred in the Rwandan genocide and against those who experienced its brutality. While Dallaire contributes to the emphasis on Canadian content in the CMHR, his place in the timeline does little to complicate our understanding that human dignity goes beyond violation on the one hand and purity on the other. In this timeline, he is another figure that helps to prop up an idea

of what human dignity looks like as something embodied *alone*, and as a product of his privileged status. The historical and technological field frames him as another whole and autonomous body whose material struggles concerning human dignity are not immanent. Though we can infer that Dallaire's mentality is laden with questions of human worth, he is physically situated removed from the carnage of his environment and therefore from the cultures and bodies that marked the divestment of human dignity during the Rwandan Genocide in the first place.

Despite the fact that these people pictured underneath the timeline are connected through their advocacy, and despite the fact that their "positive" contributions were made through struggles – protest, war, government, debate – and between peoples, cultures, and communities, they are visually removed from this context. Figures like Mary Wollstonecraft, who wrote in *response* to human rights declarations in France in America, or Louis Riel, who *rebelled* against the diminishing rights and access to culture and land in Manitoba in the mid 1800s, or Martin Luther King Jr.'s impassioned *protest* and *fight* for civil rights in the U.S.A. are all pictured in way that is isolated from these struggles. Only one photograph in the entire group provides a glimpse of how protest might work alongside the expression of human dignity. The image of the Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo (Fig. 31) presents a palpable scene of dissatisfaction with the state of human rights, while avoiding iconic images of suffering or harm. The Mothers, who march on a weekly basis for the return of their children who were disappeared during Argentina's Dirty War (1976-83), are seen holding placards with photographs of their children and small bits of information about their lives. Beyond calling for the return of their loved ones, the Mothers hold an important place in this constellation, demonstrating how a struggle for human dignity might actually be part of a less sensationalized aesthetics of human dignity itself. Anger, outrage, or confrontation need not be eschewed as something uncivilized and thus unsightly in the context of a new aesthetics of human dignity, but rather something that richly demonstrates how actions have material consequences and ultimately how we might vocalize and visualize discontent. In turn, more images depicting protest might put a critical focus on ongoing issues, on what lacks continue to put the idea of human dignity in the balance.

Beyond the Mothers, museum visitors are not given a sense of how these humans were impinged upon by ideological or material forces or how they waged their dissatisfaction, but rather pictured in a way that signals a desire for individuality and harmonious ends. Visitors are not shown the *how* of these struggles or the moments where embodied and ideological differences clashed, but predominantly the outcome of these struggles, which are outwardly whole and autonomous individuals. We are left with some large and unanswered questions here: is protest not dignified? Should clashes be seen as means to an end? Are the *means* of human dignity too complex to communicate in this institutional structure? Just as chronology tends to remove the storyteller from the story, making it seem as if things just happened in specific way, the emphasis on endings similarly seems to promote a narrative of human dignity that favours uncomplicated relations with similar embodied outcomes.

Through isolation and chronology, a simplistic understanding of human dignity is presented within this space, which has the potential to be wonderfully complex. Curation is not used to experiment with new models of human dignity based on its underlying epistemic functions, which can work to bring *difference* together in compelling ways. Rather, the museum uses the exhibitionary medium against its own instincts to fit current understandings of normative assumptions within this mold. These images all demonstrate a bodily command and a visual calm that is reminiscent of Sliwinski's (2015) analysis of Frederick Douglass' portraits; that is, these faces are particularly potent in terms of claiming a sort of aesthetic emancipation based on a normative ideal. They convey a sense of bodily command, which was key in Douglass' time, yet feels underdeveloped here. Bodily command and autonomy seem to be the only end of human dignity. Yet that belies our mediated connectivity. We are not islands, and we are not alone in our struggles. Our dignity is made in the orbit of others, and framing this property as product of individual command fundamentally denies the realities of everyday life. If, "possessing a photographic 'likeness'" was a way for Douglass to fashion his own dignified subjectivity, then the museum takes this one step further and uses "likeness" to fashion an idea of human dignity that is tied to the body in a standardized and idealized form. Their similar comportment, autonomy, and wholeness gives dignity a shape that

speaks to a sense of stability over time, and a sense of assimilating difference rather than training ourselves to recognize the limits of our own aestheticization. Unlike the subjects in August Sander's atlas, who were largely removed from morally laden taxonomies, here a sense of moral contingency pulls these people together and frames them in a positive and enduring light.

More recently the flatness and stability of the CMHR's timeline has been confronted with a falling star, and the hagiographic thrust of its members tested. In November 2017 one of the timeline's members was effectively called into question. Aung San Suu Kyi is included in this timeline for her role as a "Burmese pro-democracy leader, political prisoner, 1991 Nobel Peace Prize Winner."⁶³ Like most of the images underneath the timeline, visitors are given little information to go on. While some images correspond with a point on the timeline, others do not. And, for the ones that do not have a corresponding point overhead, that means there is also no supplemental information provided on the interactive tables. Aung San Suu Kyi's likeness is one such image that stands apart from the timeline. Beyond the quoted description above, there is no supplemental information that makes her a complex subject of human rights. Until last year, her inclusion alongside other exalted subjects was never in question. Aung San Suu Kyi rose to prominence as a political figure in the 1980's as an advocate for non-violent protest in Burma. For her involvement in these protests, Suu Kyi was placed under house arrest for a period of 15 years between 1989 and 2010. In this time period, she became the country's unofficial leader and continued to stand in opposition to the military led government through her popular support. In 2012 Suu Kyi became part Myanmar's government, and in 2016 became State Councilor.⁶⁴

⁶³ An image of Aung San Suu Kyi also appears in a second gallery in the museum, "Turning Points for Humanity." In this gallery, she is positioned alongside other honorary Canadian citizens, including Nelson Mandela.

⁶⁴ In 1989 Burma was renamed Myanmar. Because Aung Sun Suu Kyi has children who are not citizens of Myanmar she is constitutionally barred from becoming its leader. She is thus State Councillor in title, but for all intents and purposes considered to be in charge.

However, Myanmar has had a particularly troubled relationship with the different ethnic groups that call this territory home since the days of its independence in 1948. One of these minority groups, the Rohingya, has an especially fraught relationship with the government of Myanmar in recent times. The Rohingya have faced a litany of human rights abuses ranging from discrimination, dehumanization, and death. In 2012 the Rohingya were restricted to “secure zones” in the country, and in 2014, as an act of cultural and national erasure, the Rohingya were removed from the national census, their presence no longer acknowledged in the government’s official language or policy. As Myanmar’s leader, Aung San Suu Kyi has notably done nothing to prevent these measures or support the Rohingya’s human rights claims. At best, she has been silent about these abuses; at worst, she is complicit in the perpetration of genocide. Either way, there is a definitive sense that she has not lived up to the monikers that made her famous in the first place. “Pro-democracy leader, political prisoner, Nobel Peace Prize winner” seem far away, and her position as a role model in these categories in the balance.

As the focus on Aung San Suu Kyi’s actions grew, so too did the awareness of her contradictory role in the CMHR. After calls were made to have her likeness removed from the museum, the CMHR decided to address these contradictions with a sign placed in front of her picture (Fig. 33). It reads:

Serious concerns have emerged about the plight of Myanmar’s Muslim Rohingya minority. Hundreds of thousands have fled to escape violence and persecution.

Many Canadians are critical of Aung San Suu Kyi for failing to condemn these targeted attacks against the Rohingya and thousands are calling for her honorary Canadian citizenship to be revoked.

What do you think? How should we view previous human rights achievements in the face of present-day violations? Join the discussion and share your thoughts on the Museum’s Facebook page.

I do not intend on getting into a detailed critique of the CMHR’s approach here. As I noted earlier in the chapter, there is nowhere in this gallery for visitors to express what they think, but are rather encouraged to restrict their comments to a social media site. And yet, there is no specific thread or discussion forum on this topic on the museum’s Facebook page. Though this case certainly prompts discussion, it is both deferred and

intangible. Like the limits of the timeline's interrogative approach, which asks visitors what they would or would not take away, the museum's structure refuses to engage in contemporary human rights debate in any meaningful way.

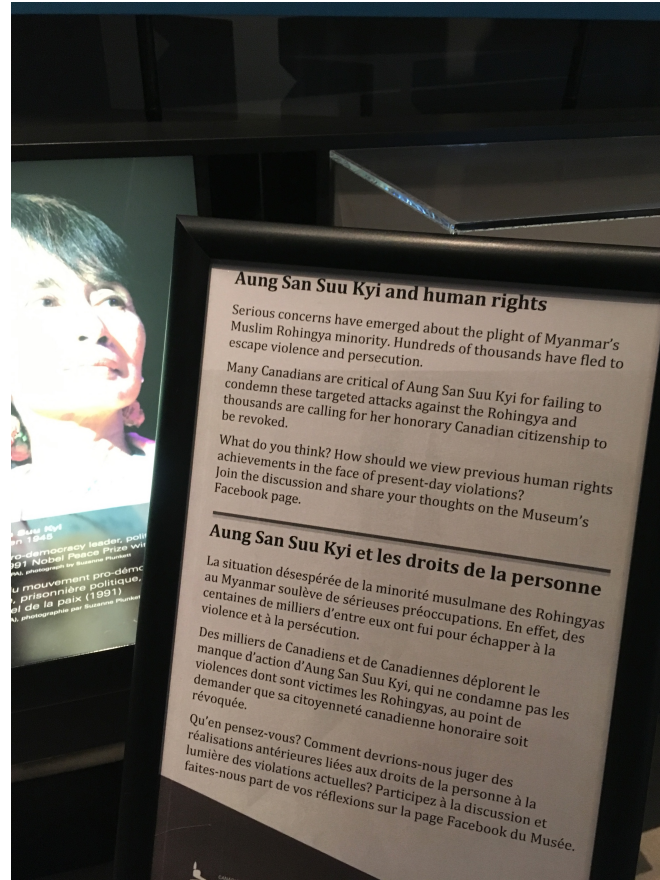


Figure 33: CMHR, sign placed in front of Aung San Suu Kyi's photograph underneath the “What are Human Rights” timeline, photograph by author.

I do, however, want to linger on other aspects of this message, most notably the question of how past achievements should be judged in light of present day violations. At the heart of this question remain assumptions about stability, about how one should appear as dignified over time. The change in Suu Kyi's role is indicative of how human dignity is built on relations: of governance, of family, of everyday entanglements. Further, this change demonstrates how these relations are not stable. Of course, the case of Aung San Suu Kyi is an egregious example of a very public and dramatic turn of a celebrated figure. However, her fall from grace is indicative of the way we have not only

strived for a pure form of human dignity, but also a pure form of knowledge on this topic. Just as the atlas “introduces a fundamental impurity,” sullyng factual and scientific knowledge, there is a clear need to introduce a fundamental impurity into the CMHR’s galleries. Resolution need not be the only form of representational justice, and revision, debate, and a focus on how relations can change might be a way forward.

As an ideas museum, the CMHR needs to probe deeper into its own museological logics, which desire resolution in the name of archival and taxonomic stability. What might a human rights museum look like that deeply explored the life of someone who was violated or victimized, not just at the moment of indignity, but through moments where their lives and dignity were made in positive and nuanced relation? What would a human rights museum look like that deeply explored the biography of a person who was more than just a saint? Many of these figures made complex decisions alongside other people and other groups. While Martin Luther King Jr. was a “Baptist minister, leader of African American civil rights movement” he was also a complicated figure in terms of his views on gender equality, capitalism, and war. In focusing on the ends, and ultimately the saints at the ends of these battles, the CMHR also bypasses the complexities of political struggle, the sometimes-vicious nature of sorting through competing priorities. This is the complexity that the communication of human dignity requires. Ultimately, this kind of complexity is not on offer at the CMHR.

Conclusion

A relational reading of the CMHR demonstrates its political limitations. Even as it attempts to move beyond a sole focus on scenes of violation, it fails to use the technological complexity of its space to form a constellation that goes beyond a regurgitation of normative ideas. Just as the emphasis on bodily suffering eliminates a wide variety of daily indignities, the normative emphasis on separate and inviolable bodies “posits a dangerously purified subject, one purged of the body’s assumedly appetencies: its needs and desires, its vulnerability and decay” (Anker 2012, 4). The CMHR is reflective of this impasse, most notably in the images used in the first gallery. In its desire to tell “positive stories” the CMHR has cast a series of aspirational, solitary,

and ultimately inviolable dignified subjects. These are subjects uncoupled from the needs, desire, vulnerability, and decay of which their thoughts and actions were historically responding to. The complexity of their positions is reduced to “key figures,” “preachers of tolerance,” “formerly enslaved,” “advocates,” or “peacekeepers.” These are all people who reflect the declarative function of the UDHR, and their complicated histories, vulnerabilities, and ultimately dignity are subsumed under this flat ordering system. Unlike the album, which I argued had the capacity to capture a moment of human rights history and provide a usable image of the law, this series seems to desire that the achievement of human rights should look similarly over time.

Though debates around the building and final galleries of the CMHR have revolved around the idea of recognition as a means of cultural value, centering the idea of human dignity means moving beyond the contestation over whose stories are told and delves into value laden narratives that are ultimately made. As Hanivisky and Dhamoon note, “the seductive prospect of being recognized by the state and the CMHR is a technology of white supremacy and necessarily implicates minorities in the oppression of others, even as those minorities experience exclusion and oppression” (2015, 912). Though it is important to remain attuned to who is included in the rubric of recognition, and to strive for representational justice, it is also imperative when debating the value of a human rights museum to think more critically about the fundamentals of its communication – the logics of taxonomy, cultural comparison, chronology – that make up its epistemic system.

In the Canadian context, museums have a distinct and fraught history, especially as it concerns Indigenous knowledge, relations, and recognition. Examining the media-epistemic models that have come to envelope these relationships in the museum reveals how human value is made through both overt and covert gestures of difference and legitimization. Though the CMHR attempts to sell itself as neutral and objective, letting visitors decide what they would add or take away or whether a figure like Aung San Suu Kyi should be removed, there is nothing neutral about its positive choices. Creating a constellation that relies upon taxonomically similar images and which leans upon visions of autonomy and self-enclosure, leaves the idea of human dignity tethered to a binary of

purity and violation. By emphasizing images of bodies removed from their historical and cultural struggles, the CMHR poses dignity as a property that is always already the same. Its first gallery does little to add nuance to the trope of a separate and the self-enclosed subject that anchors a positive material conception of human dignity. Despite the fact that using this giant timeline proposes a desire to couple human rights with progress and change, these figures do not expand the complexity of dignity as it is situated within material and visual worlds.

For a national institution caught between competing memories of genocide and injustice, comfortable tropes of separateness and inviolability seems to capture prickly problems of cultural comparison and national identity. It seems easier to lean upon narratives of liberal individualism than to delve into the way we are connected, and thus the ways we might be implicated in the lives of others through human dignity as the most basic human principle. Shying away from complicated stories of community and vulnerability, the museum promotes individuals and individual control as a key to our current human rights problems.

As space was tied to justice, and as positive stories came to interrupt a focus on suffering, the museum was placed in an unenviable position. While the CMHR was largely disruptive in terms of the shift from an emphasis on bodily suffering and violation, it did not go far enough to disrupt the physiognomies, taxonomies, and cultural divisions that have held dignity in an abstract orbit. For an institution that had enormous monetary and technological resources behind it, not enough care was taken in terms of how to communicate human dignity, to lead debates about its contemporary meaning. Rather than becoming a testing ground for the categories and properties that bolster human dignity, for the substance of what makes us vulnerable, and ultimately how human dignity might be thought anew within the space of a museum, the CMHR leaves its visitors with a depoliticized universe rather than a clear argumentative constellation. Rather than helping its visitors develop a keen awareness of human dignity as founded on a complex network of relations, the museum diminishes the means of human dignity to cases where injustice was overcome, thus creating a falsely enduring sense of what human dignity looks like, and how it might be visually communicated.

5 Conclusion – Human Dignity in Relation

Contemplation of the sky is the grace and
curse of humanity

-Aby Warburg, *Images from the Region of the
Pueblo Indians of North America*

We can predict the revolution of the stars
thanks to the laws of astronomy, but who can
predict that of peoples in history?

-George Didi-Huberman, *Uprisings*

Throughout the process of writing this dissertation I found myself in a constant struggle as I attempted to find a balance between describing how human dignity has been visually depicted and analyzing the curatorial systems that hold images, and ultimately dignity, together. Over and over I found myself questioning how to engage the mediated frames of human dignity, shifting attention from individual photographs and individuals themselves to processes of curation and community, while still giving space to specific situations of human dignity their due.

Focusing on the body itself, as an interface between the individual and these systems, became one answer to the above-mentioned frictions. If I was going to demonstrate how human dignity could be taken up in visual communication beyond its violation or idealization, I had to find ways of demonstrating its communicative properties, as something that has not only been drawn, photographed, and represented, but as a facet of communication itself. Enlivening the abstract tendencies of human dignity on the body opened up new challenges. The body has been for years a central part of the visual communication of human dignity, especially in instances of violation. The connection between human dignity and violated bodies is in many ways a logical pairing. We feel comfortable talking about human dignity in relation to violation because it is

something we are all susceptible to. Within visual narratives of human dignity, violation is oddly equalizing. In a similar way, communicating human dignity through individuals that appear fully in control of their own personhood seems equally palatable. In the opposite direction of violation, the inviolability, or that which should not be infringed or broken, of human dignity is hopeful and unifying. Forging a middle ground between these two points is indeed difficult, but ultimately necessary if the idea of human dignity is to take hold within media and cultural studies. Though it is uncomfortable to think of taxonomies and outer appearances, otherwise scientific and aesthetic techniques that have been used to delimit human dignity, as themselves constituting human dignity in the age of mass culture, together they form one facet of human dignity's complex visual legacy.

When I first began work on this dissertation, I was fixated by the following question: how could human dignity be thought of as a *gesture*? Looking back, I realize that I was struggling to articulate a different question: how could human dignity be thought of as more mundane gestures, outside of violation or idealization? As I attempted to think about human dignity as more than an interior, inviolable, or otherwise rational property, Giorgio Agamben's (1999a) definition of gesture continually piqued my interest. He writes that a gesture is "*the exhibition of a mediality: it is the process of making a means visible as such*" (Agamben 58: his italics). The idea of making a "means visible" seemed to capture part of the contradiction I kept encountering within theories and histories of human dignity. In a classical philosophical sense, human dignity is seen as an "end in itself," and even within the Universal Declaration of Human Rights "reason and conscience" foreground actions. Yet, our lives are nothing if not a series of gestures that expose the means of our existence. Human gestures make exhibitions of our bodies, and act as conduits of complex meaning making. As such, we are more than our rational and inviolable selves, and any idea that aims to capture something essentially human must also look to the exhibition of bodies for clues to its existence. August Sander's photographs were in this sense generative, as his focus on bodily action and comportment outside of extreme suffering provided one place to begin to think through the intersection of bodily gestures and visual communication. As John Durham Peters so aptly writes, "the body is our existence, not our container...any adequate account of the social life of

word and gesture – of ‘communication’ in the broadest sense – needs to face the splendid and flawed material by which we make common cause with each other” (2000, 65). I thought that framing human dignity as gesture might reconcile it as something valued beyond a price and understood as something “endured and supported” (Agamben 1999a, 57).

As I turned the question of how human dignity might be thought of as a gesture over and over, the human gesture seemed too narrow a focus. No single gesture could capture the multitude of actions that make up a dignified life. No typology or “pathosformula” could encapsulate the multitudes of historical, cultural, and technological gestures that might be subsumed under the umbrella of human dignity. However, rather than seeing human dignity as a gesture in itself, as “the exhibition of a mediality,” I began to see exhibitions themselves, and curation more specifically, as a grounding metaphor for the way an individual’s means come into contact with the multitude. More pointedly, I began to see the gesture of curation, and the constellations they endure and support, as critical to our understanding of human dignity beyond normative, negative, or emancipatory narratives. Human dignity, as a relational property, is about what is endured and supported, and is apprehensible most dramatically within the frame of curation as a “form of map-making that opens new routes through a city, a people or a world” (Obrist, 1).

Over the course of this dissertation I have shown how the form of human dignity must move away from photography, from declarations, from cultural specificity, and from binary poles of normativity and negativity if it is to become a concept that destabilizes the myth of the rational individual as the prime location of its value. The case studies analyzed throughout help build a theory that demonstrates how the transference of bodily ownership from the state to the individual in the late 18th century should be complicated in relation to theories of human dignity, especially in its visual communication. Thinking about human dignity as a property of individual ownership defies the way that this concept is lived and embodied, in relation. Curation can help us to map these constellations. An emphasis on curatorial constellations also helps to show how real difference must be embraced. August Sander seemed well aware of how the

aesthetics of mass society were flattening social distinctions. Outward uniformity was not the answer for him, and it is similarly not the answer now. Confronting the realities of how outward appearance intersects with the idea of human dignity is ongoing and should not be brushed aside as a simple problem of style or aesthetics. Cultural difference, an issue central in chapters 3 and 4, is also vital to the visual communication of human dignity. Difference must be embraced if the idea of human dignity is to be useful within a global and transnational human rights agenda. As an artificial framework that binds us together, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the idea of human dignity found within must be open to cultural complexity that is only bound to increase as our technological environments become more intricate. For these, and other reasons, it is troubling that the Canadian Museum for Human Rights engaged with its own technological parameters in limited ways. While the museum marvellously performs a constellated understanding of human dignity, as something that exists across philosophy, law, and culture, it appears to only vaguely engage with the importance of its own taxonomies, its own temporal epistemologies, and its own technological depth. There is a need to tell stories, both visually and narratively, about the way we depend on one another to make human dignity, again and again, each day anew.

Curatorial strategies are not neutral, but they are in many ways central to the modern idea of human dignity. Curatorial constellations can help us imagine communities and engage with taxonomic, comprehensive, and comparative models, as they situate human dignity en masse and in relation, and as they reveal the complex visual legacies that help to prop up human dignity in the material world. From August Sander's atlas, to the exhibitionary structures of the UN and UNESCO, to the galleries of the Canadian Museum for Human Rights, we have seen how human dignity's visual communication shifts and changes, as it is tethered to culture as much as it is tethered to legal or philosophical thought.

The idea of human dignity does not have an illustrious track record, nor is it always easy to grasp. In one of the most famous critiques of human dignity, Hannah Arendt organized her appraisal of the UDHR around the plight of refugees. Her question, which still resonates today, was this: "whether or not there really exist such 'human

rights,' independent of all specific political status and deriving solely from the fact of being human?" (1949, 25). Whether or not human rights can derive solely from the fact of being human is a question of human dignity. It is also a question of systems: laws, cultures, taxonomies, nations, and borders. For Arendt, refugees are positioned as the products of these systems, and especially of borders. Refugees are people who have no state, no law to stand in front of, and as such test the premise that one's humanness; one's dignity alone is seen as incapable of proffering human rights: "only in a completely organized humanity could the loss of home and political status become identical with being expelled from humanity altogether" (Arendt, 30). Territorial control of nations and borders that separate zones of law or civil rights demarcate humans more generally as dignified. Thus, Arendt's answer to the question of where human rights comes from does not stem from the fact of being human, but rather the "right to belong to a political community" (37).

The political community is indeed an important system, but it too remains abstract in relation to our understanding of human dignity, or the fact of our humanness. In this dissertation, I have articulated a conceptualization that similarly rests upon communities. However, I did not offer law or politics as the only route to this knowledge or potential understanding of human dignity. Cultural and curatorial systems became a path forward. The notion of the constellation performs the following functions alongside human dignity and these strategies might be taken up in future curatorial endeavours as a means of stretching notions of cultural inclusion: i) comparing multiple objects at one time, thus dispersing an idea amongst bodies; ii) enlivening the tension between what is enduring and what is constantly changing or decaying; iii) reframing notions of unviability and violation, thus allowing complex personhood; iv) being radically pluralistic and open to local use values; and v) demanding that knowledge is neither sequential or hierarchical. These traits provide an opportunity to disarm the threat of a "completely organized humanity," and to imagine and experiment with different configurations that might make this idea apprehensible and powerful.

I have attempted to offer three cultural systems—the atlas, the album, and the museum—that help to apprehend the struggle for human dignity. Of course, these

systems are not models that aid in the immediate defense of human rights or human dignity, but they do provide spaces from which to imagine different borders, to see the lines of social and historical organization, and to ask questions of the way we understand human dignity as inalienable, inviolable, and individual. Political communities are indeed important to human rights, but they are not the only place where we can come to know them. Atlases, albums, and museums are indeed political, but they have the power to be constitutive and creative about the terms and limits of human dignity not available elsewhere.

We are at a particular moment where human rights have explicitly entered museums and make the problem of human dignity's visual communication all the more pressing. However, my understanding of human dignity as a relational property extends beyond explicitly curatorial media. Just as Lehrer and Milton (2011), position the etymological history of curation, as a form of caretaking, to expand their discussion regarding the curation of difficult knowledge "from museums and exhibitions to encompass heritage sites, memorials, and other (including virtual locations" (4), bringing the discussion of curation into the field of media studies might similarly allow the analysis undertaken in this dissertation to be taken up farther afield. The case studies examined here offer three exercises of *thinking with* curation, as much as they are *analysis of* the systems that make this thinking possible. As media studies turns toward networks and algorithms, these analogue systems, which center the human being might provide points of connection and historical context to the constellations which we inhabit today. Though this dissertation addressed exhibitions in the particular, my claim extends beyond curatorial sites.

In terms of the constitutive and creative aspects of human dignity, the path forward, then, must not only include visual analysis, but also a deeper engagement with the systems of communication that put this idea into context. Critique alone is easy. What is needed is an understanding of such systems and experimentation with their limits. We need to apprehend moments not only where lives are degraded without regard for their value. In these instances, vulnerability has already been foreclosed. Similarly, instances where our individuality is presented as the only end of human dignity is equally

delimiting. As Judith Butler writes, “to make ourselves secure at the expense of every other human consideration is to eradicate one of the most important resources from which we must take our bearings and find our way” (2006, 30). Curatorial constellations lead us towards the fact of our vulnerability, whether through taxonomic signifiers, historical and cultural diversity, or more plainly in the act of editing and arranging. The atlases, albums, and museums considered here are not perfect models, but we should learn from their attempts to visually communicate human dignity outside of its previously assumed limits. A relational theory of human dignity thus compels a way of looking that engages diversities and vulnerabilities without subsuming one way of being under another. The tension between the compulsion towards a stable and eternal truth of human dignity must be met over and over again with the inherent transitoriness of the human body and with the evolving technologies that mediate our vulnerabilities.

Appendix A: Exhibition Outlines

Face of Our Time

1. Farmer, Westerwald, 1913
2. Shepherd, 1913
3. Westerwald farming woman 1912/13
4. Farming couple, Westerwald, 1912
5. Three generations of a farming family, 1912
6. Young farmers, Westerwald, ca. 1914
7. Country girls, ca. 1928
8. Country bride and groom, ca. 1914
9. Prizewinners from a country choral society, ca. 1927
10. The landowner, ca. 1928
11. The teacher, 1913
12. Small-ton citizens, Monschau 1925/26
13. Boxers, Paul Roderstein and Hein Heese. Cologne, ca. 1928
14. Locksmith, Lindenthal, Cologne, ca. 1924
15. Interior decorator, Berlin, 1928
16. Pastrycook, Lindenthal, Cologne, ca. 1928
17. Mother and daughter, wives of a farmer and a miner, 1912
18. Proletarian children in the country 1911/12
19. Worker's family, Leuscheid, ca. 1905
20. Proletarian mother, ca. 1928
21. Coalman, Berlin, 1929
22. Worker's council in the Ruhr, 1928/29
23. Bricklayer, Cologne, ca. 1928
24. Workers' leader, Paul Frohlich, official of the Sozialistische Arbeiterpartei (SAP).
Frankfurt, 1928/29
25. Revolutionaries: Centre: Erich Muhsam, Berlin. 1928
26. Working Students. Left: August Sander's son Erich. Cologne, ca. 1926
27. The herbal medicine expert, Cologne, ca. 1928
28. Catholic clergyman, Cologne. 1925/26
29. Protestant clergyman with candidates for confirmation, Cologne. 1925
30. Middle-class family, ca. 1923
31. Young mother, middle-class, Cologne, 1927/8
32. Middle-class child, ca. 1927
33. Teacher active in the youth movement, Cologne, 1923
34. Postman delivering money orders, Cologne, 1928
35. Police constable, 1925
36. Customs officials, Hamburg, 1929
37. Production engineer, 1925/26
38. The young businessman
39. Grammar-school girl, Cologne, 1928
40. Grammar-school boy, Cologne, 1926
41. Member of a student dueling society, Cologne, ca. 1928

42. Member of parliament (democrat), Cologne, ca. 1928
43. The art scholar. Prof Wilhelm Schafer. Cologne, ca. 1927
44. The doctor. Prof. Schleyer. Berlin, ca. 1928
45. The industrialist, Hilden near Wuppertal, ca. 1928
46. Tycoon, Kommerzeinrat A. von Guillaume. Cologne, 1928
47. Wholesale merchant and iwfe, Cologne, 1927
48. Middle-class professional couple, 1927/28
49. The architect. Prof Hns Poelzig. Berlin
50. The painter. Jankel Adler. Cologne, 1924
51. Sculptress. Ingeborg vom Rath, 1929.
52. The composer Paul Hindetih, Cologne, 1926
53. The pianist, Max von de Sandt. Cologne, 1928
54. Writer and literary critic D.H.S.
55. The tenor Leonardo Aramesco, Cologne, 1928
56. Bohemia. The painters Willi Bongard and Gottfried Brockmann. Cologne, 1924
57. Barman
58. Cleaning woman, Cologne, 1928
59. Redundant seaman. Hamburg, 1928
60. Unemployed. Cologne, 1928.

People of the Twentieth Century

(Plan from 1924; italics refer to later additions)

The Farmer “Germinal Portfolio”

Group 1

The Young Farmer
 The Farm child and the Mother
 The Farmer (his Life and Works)
 The Farmer and the Machine
 The Gentleman Farmer
 The Small-Town People
 Sport
The Farmer of the Second Half of the Twentieth century

The Craftsman

Group 2

The Master Craftsman
 The Industrialist
 The Worker (His Life and Work)
 Worker Types (Physical and Intellectual)

The Woman

Group 3

The Husband and the Wife
 The Woman and the Child
 The Family
 The Elegant Woman
 The Woman in Intellectual and Practical Occupations
The Woman as Domestic
The Woman as National Socialist.

The Professions

Group 4

The Student
 The Scholar
 The Official
 The Doctor and Pharmacist
 The Judge and Lawyer
 The Soldier and *National Socialist*
 The Aristocrat
 The Clergyman
 The teacher and Pedagogue
 The Businessman
 The Politician

The Family

The Artist

Group 5

The Writer

The Actor

The Architect

The Sculptor

The Painter

The Composer

The Musician

The Art Historian

The Metropolis

Group 6

Vagrants

The Street (Hustle and Bustle)

Celebrations

City Youth

Traffic

Servants

Metropolitan Types and Characters

*Return to the Reich**Radio**Political Prisoners of the National Socialists*

The Last People

Group 7

The Idiots, Sick, Insane and Matter

Human Rights Exhibition Album

List of Section Titles

Introduction

1. Abolition of Slavery
2. Freedom of Movement
3. Abolition of Inhuman Treatment
4. Protection against Arbitrary Treatment; Equality before the law
5. Dignity of Work and Social Legislation
6. Standard of living and Property
7. Social Security, Family and Property
8. Emancipation of Women
9. Freedom of Religion
10. Freedom of Thought and Opinion
11. Right to Education
12. Participation in Cultural Life
13. Freedom of Creative Work
14. Participation in Government

Canadian Museum for Human Rights

List of Galleries

What are Human Rights?
 Indigenous Perspectives
 Canadian Journeys
 Protecting Rights in Canada
 Examining the Holocaust
 Turning Points in Humanity
 Breaking the Silence
 Actions Count
 Rights Today
 Inspiring Change

Timeline Images from “What are Human Rights?” Gallery

Zarathustra (Persian priest)
 Cyrus the Great
 Cleisthenes
 Siddhartha Gautama (Buddha)
 Confucious
 Sophocles
 Plato
 Ashoka the Great
 Marcus Tullius Cicero
 Jesus of Nazareth
 Constantin The Great (on Coin)
 Justinian 1
 Muhammad (on scroll, text no face) – founder of Islam
 Alfred the Great
 Abu-Mansur al-maturidi
 Henry 1
 Averroes
 Thomas Aquinas
 Bartolome de la Casas
 Hugo Grotis/ Dutch Jurist
 John Lilburne
 John Locke
 Jean-Jacques Rousseau
 Thomas Paine
 Toussaint Louverture
 Olaudah Equiano
 Olympe de Gouges

Henri Gregoire
Mary Wollstonecraft
G.W.F. Hegel
Harriet Martineau
John Stewart Mill
Harriet Beecher Stowe
Mirza Fatali Akhundov
Karl Marx
Harriet Tubman
Louis Riel
Lassa Oppenheim
Fridtjof Nansen
Mohandas "Mahatma" Gandhi
Franklin Roosevelt
Eleanor Roosevelt
Lester Pearson
Raphael Lemkin
John Humphrey
Oscar Romero
Nelson Mandela
Betty Friedan
Martin Luther King Jr.
Harvey Milk
Chief Oren Lyons
Desmond Tutu
Gloria Steinham
Wangari Maathai
Mary Robinson
Harold Cardinal
Aung San Suu Kyi
Romeo Dallaire
Louise Arbour
Rigoberta Menchu Tum
Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo
Victor Pineda

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