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Emotion and Memory in Third-Space Human Rights Education: An Examination of Two National Museums

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Abstract

This article presents a comparative analysis of human rights education at the National Center for Civil and Human Rights in Atlanta, USA (NCCHR) and the Canadian Museum of Human Rights (CMHR) in Winnipeg. Specifically, what is analyzed is the role of emotion and memory in the construction of the exhibits and the impact on the visitor. The investigation is based on the author's field observations at these two locations and interviews with staff. The museums are viewed as third spaces of education, situated somewhere between the home and the school, which presents particular dialogic openings in terms of human rights and peace pedagogies. The NCCHR and the CMHR are found to emphasize visceral and emotional experiences, over purely intellectual ones.

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Furthermore, traumatic content is not avoided. Rather, it is placed at the forefront. In terms of memory, the past-present continuum is underlined by subverting chronology and through the thematic juxtaposition of content. Finally, there is a call for activism that goes beyond strict commemoration.

Keywords: Third-space education, Museum education, Critical peace education, Human rights education, Dialogism

Third-space education in human rights is carried out very powerfully at various national museums around the world. Two major instances are the United States' National Center for Civil and Human Rights and the Canadian Museum for Human Rights. The particular preoccupation of this study is to trace and exemplify how these two institutions utilize the interplay of emotion and memory in order to build transformative educational experiences.

In the first part of the study, I discuss the notion of the museum as a non-formal, pedagogical third space, situated outside both schools and homes. Secondly, I provide a brief overview of the specific possibilities of museum education, in its most recent framing and understanding. Subsequently, I describe how human rights education tends to be carried out in the museum setting, and the role of the human rights museum.

This is followed by the rationale for the study, which centers around the need to explore the immersive interplay of emotion and memory in these presentations, an aspect that is often overlooked due to the classic preoccupation with intellectual content. Finally, the findings section provides ample exemplification of how these two institutions engage in specific pedagogies along these lines, followed by a short summation of the possibilities of the postmodern human rights museum.

The analysis reveals human rights museums to represent third spaces of immersivity and visceral participation, where the emphasis is often placed on generating memorable emotional experiences, rather than simply conveying information. This form of museum pedagogy can augment what happens in classrooms and provide visitors with a sense of awareness, reflection and empowerment that is hard to recreate in formal school

settings. Human rights education in these two institutions presents multiple examples of resonant contestation of metanarratives and does not shy away from confronting uncomfortable, even shocking, truths.

Museums as Third Spaces of Education

The museum setting is a non-formal space of learning, situated somewhere between schools and homes. Another manner to describe the originality of such pedagogical places is to define them as “third spaces.” In one of his works on cultural theory, Homi Bhabha defines the postcolonial positionality, in particular, and the postmodern identity, in general, as one of hybridity, dislocation, and amalgamation (1994, p. 1). Knowingly or not, many human beings are presently inhabiting mental and cultural places of neither/nor or hither and thither. Colonialism, globalization, and the inherent interchange and borrowing between cultures have led to complex, multifaceted, pluralistic identity formations. Now more than ever, cultural purity is an illusion. Having said that, these unstable borderline locations are not necessarily negative or detrimental. On the contrary, these third spaces can become vibrant places where new understandings emerge, where one can go beyond traditional, binary oppositions.

Thus, a third space is a space of translation,

a place of hybridity, figuratively speaking, where the construction of a political object that is new, *neither the one nor the other*, properly alienates our political expectations, and changes, as it must, the very forms of our recognition of the moment of politics. (Bhabha, 1994, p. 25)

What is particularly relevant in this passage, as it pertains to museum education, is the emphasis on unexpectedness, reinterpretation of historic moments, and inclusiveness as opposed to division, in a new design. This is a definition of open-endedness and re-articulation that challenges established norms, without being necessarily adversarial. Thus, third spaces do not aim to demolish previous knowledges but rather to *add* to them.

Everything that has already been said is taken into account and re-birthed, enriched with a fresher and greater complexity. Shallow oppositions, like ‘clashes of civilizations,’ are left behind. Ideally, “by exploring this Third Space, we may elude the politics of polarity and emerge as the others of our selves” (Bhabha, 1994, p. 39).

The all-encompassing nature of third spaces is rendered convincingly by Edward Soja:

Everything comes together in Thirdspace: subjectivity and objectivity, the abstract and the concrete, the real and the imagined, the knowable and the unimaginable, the repetitive and the differential, structure and agency, mind and body, consciousness and the unconscious, the disciplined and the transdisciplinary, everyday life and unending history. (1996, p. 57)

While this convergence of multitudes could become overwhelming, it can also fuel inspiration and the conceptualization of new solutions. As Harvey (1973) underlines, social processes are not only spatial but also as complex, convoluted, and intertwined as third spaces can be (p. 11). Nevertheless, the advantage of this seemingly chaotic open-endedness is its malleability. There is a lot of room for human agency and critical thinking. “Space becomes whatever we make of it during the process of analysis rather than prior to it,” writes Harvey (1973, p. 13). This is a wonderful summation of the unprecedented openings offered by third-space pedagogy, such as museum education. Along the same lines, Bruyneel (2007) acknowledges the power of third spaces to reshape discourse, critique false choices, and defy artificial divisions (p. 217).

Museum Education

The non-formal learning space of museums has the potential to stimulate critical reflection, concern for social justice, and collective memory in the most interactive manner. The marginality of certain disenfranchised groups can be underlined and critiqued with vivid immediacy in these

settings. Visitors can reinvigorate their own sense of identity, humanity, and compassion while learning about the experiences of others. When used dialogically, a museum can engage, challenge, and liberate. Furthermore, museums are reconstructive places where memory is reaffirmed or re-defined. Like any other learning institution, a museum exists in a certain socio-political climate and is shaped by it to a significant extent. Consequently, hegemonic and counter-hegemonic elements often coexist in the same space (Hein, 2006). Indeed, the potential of museums to indoctrinate with biased and prejudiced narratives should always be acknowledged. As Christy Coleman (2006) points out, past exhibits on Indigenous and African American groups have “often reinforced stereotypes rather than illuminated the dynamics of depicted peoples’ values and beliefs or cultural expressions” (p. 151). Such mystifications demand continued and renewed vigilance.

Susan Crane (2000) notes that exhibitions are especially evocative places where the objective encounters the subjective, while vibrant interplays between memory and museums emerge. Consequently,

The widening gap between the histories created in the academy, whether of art, nations, or science, and the memories sustained by the publics in the interests of collective memory and identity, while often remarked on or lamented by scholars, is possibly the place where a reconsideration of the role of museums in modern culture must begin. (Crane, 2000, pp. 6-7)

There is clearly a shift toward a more pluralistic and less dogmatic display of memory in the museum (Dubin, 1999; Janes, 1997; Molineux, 2016; Sandell, 2007). As publics and stakeholders become increasingly more diverse, administrators and curators are challenged to incorporate a multitude of pasts, instead of the formerly established dominant metanarratives. In this sense, Steven Conn (2010) observes that there is a growing contestation of “the single, authoritative voice with which the museum spoke to the public” (p. 199). In the context of the United States, this contestation is largely an expression of the multiculturalist and

postcolonial criticism that has emerged in the postmodern paradigm (Lavine & Karp, 1991).

Scholars have noted the potential for museums to instruct in unprecedentedly dialogic ways. Tine Seligmann (2016) depicts museums as informal and “alternative spaces” of education (p. 73). Similarly, van den Dungen and Yamane (2015) describe the third-space pedagogy and non-formality of the museum as particularly engaging. Even more so than the classroom, museums have the capacity to interactively reconstruct “the excitement, and hands-on experience, that is associated with the teaching of chemistry in the laboratory” (van den Dungen & Yamane, 2015, p. 213). Furthermore, children are able to learn alongside parents, grandparents, friends, and museum professionals. The learning process is no longer limited to just classmates and teachers. Rather, the museum is a space situated somewhere between homes and schools.

As mentioned, the originality and privileged position of these pedagogic sites has to do primarily with the fact that they can provide a high degree of interactivity (van den Dungen & Yamane, 2015). According to Nina Simon (2010), an engaging, vibrant, and viable 21st-century museum should facilitate genuine participation. Thus, three conditions have to be fulfilled: the institution has to be (1) audience-centered, (2) allow individuals to construct their own meanings, and (3) encourage constant feedback (Simon, 2010, p. ii).

Along these lines, Molineux (2016) describes how dialogic museums disseminate third-space pedagogies centered on “sharing authority” and utilizing the “community as agents” (p. 215). First, these institutions consult the communities they serve in order to collect relevant stories and interpretations of specific events. Second, there is an emphasis on visitor evaluations and feedback, both formal and informal. Third, individual participation is stimulated throughout the visit, in a manner that turns the visitor from observer into actor. Fourth, the community is allowed to become the co-creator and co-curator of the displays, as “the relationship and degree of authority is negotiated in developing the exhibition” (Molineux, 2016, p. 215). Fifth, open exhibitions link the museum experience to current projects that unfold in the rest of society and demand civic engagement. Finally, the

community curation/hosted exhibitions approach “turns over all curatorial authority to the community” (Molineux, 2016, p. 215).

The refreshing open-endedness of museums as third spaces can be conducive to liberating contestations of the status quo. From this standpoint, Michael Fehr (2000) writes about the “ironic museum,” one in which “legitimized taxonomies” are challenged and subverted (p. 59). In this context, a healthy dose of skepticism undermines traditional understandings and leads to new articulations of the museum space. These spatial reconfigurations have one superseding goal in mind: to achieve more harmony between subject matter and structure, to the point where the two become one. Thus, the “autopoetic” exhibit allows content and design to interact fully and freely. There are no canonical preconditions. Instead, historicity is perpetually underlined, while the visitor is permitted to ponder the fact that reality is socially constructed. As the author argues, it is preferable to “conceptualize the museum as a space whose inner organization matches what it organizes and thereby enables us to shift to a new, structural perception” (Fehr, 2000, p. 59).

Human Rights Education in Museums

As the rhetoric of human rights has gained in intensity, authority, and relevance over the recent decades, this interest has also been reflected in the creation and consolidation of numerous human rights and peace museums. Jennifer Carter (2015) observes that museology has been “responding to broader manifestations in political society” (p. 209). One such manifestation has been the global mainstreaming of human rights discourse and activism. Increasingly, nation-states have engaged in pushing the precepts of the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948) to the forefront of their agenda, at least on paper. Similarly, numerous museums have made the same document the fundamental part of their ethos. Consequently, the Federation of International Human Rights Museums (FIHRM) was established in 2008. According to its mission statement,

FIHRM encourages museums which engage with sensitive and controversial human rights themes, such as transatlantic slavery, the Holocaust and other instances of genocide, and the plight of many indigenous peoples, to work together and share new thinking and initiatives in a supportive environment. (“Federation of International Human Rights Museums,” 2016)

Many museum professionals have started to realize that if museums lose their social value, they become irrelevant. Therefore, “As places where ideas are explored, museums are finding there can be no more important role than that of fighting for human rights for all” (Fleming, 2012, p. 252). From this standpoint, human rights museums are viewed as political, non-neutral, and transformative institutions where social injustice is actively challenged (Fleming, 2016). The inherently political nature of this type of museum has to do with the fact that the fight for equity is always impacted by politics. Along the same lines, neutrality is arguably an illusion and should not even be a goal. Fundamentally, every exhibit is an expression of a certain viewpoint. In the fight for social justice, museums have to side with the oppressed and the marginalized. In essence, human rights “museums can and should change lives” and “have a role in the democratization of society” (Fleming, 2016, p. 79).

Terrence Duffy (2001) defines human rights museums as museums of “human suffering” (p. 10). He goes on to classify these institutions into several categories. “Museums of remembrance” serve as places where past tragedies are reflected upon and lessons are learned to avoid their repetition. In this sense, the Peace Memorial Museum in Hiroshima is a powerful example. “Holocaust and genocide museums” expose instances of mass extermination and ethnic cleansing from across the globe. Exemplary in this regard are the Yad Vashem Center in Israel or the Holocaust Museum in the United States. “Museums of slavery and the ‘slave trade’” mark the legacies of this abusive practice in the New World. The best and most recent illustration of such an establishment is the National Museum of African American History and Culture, which opened in 2016 in Washington, D.C. and hosts a large section on slavery. “Museums of African-American civil rights” are also related to the

marginalization and struggle for equity of Black Americans. Examples of these institutions can be found in Atlanta, New York, and Boston, among other major cities. Finally, “prison museums and museums of torture” evoke the physical and emotional abuse suffered by unjustly incarcerated individuals at the hands of oppressive states and regimes. One of the most eloquent examples in this category is the Robben Island Museum in South Africa, where Nelson Mandela was imprisoned for nearly three decades (Duffy, 2001, pp. 10-15).

As evidenced, human rights museums serve a variety of functions, including “social reconciliation, reparation, symbolic memorialization, calling to action,” and imagining a more just social order (Busby, Muller and Woolford, 2015, p. 1). It is important to underline that these institutions do not concentrate exclusively on the past. They are also proactive in their efforts to construct less violent futures. From this standpoint, the proliferation of human rights museums signals a museological turn away from objects and toward ideas, arguments, visions (Jacob, 2015). The impact of human rights education on museums has inaugurated a fresh critical lens in curatorial practices (Carter, 2015). There is a new understanding that a museum has an important social and political responsibility to fulfill, as structures of oppression still exist and must be confronted.

Emotion and Memory in Human-Rights Museum Education

One of the fundamental tasks of museums is to construct and deconstruct the past. Visitors enter these spaces in order to remember and to allow history to inform the present. In the process, the identities of nation-states, groups, and individuals are reconsidered and reflected upon. The museum experience can either reinforce common preconceptions or challenge and complicate them to the point where they are undermined and left behind.

Silke Arnold de-Simine (2013) acknowledges the contested predicament of present-day museums as places where historical events are both represented and critiqued. The author defines “memory museums” as contemporary museum spaces that emphasize sensorial and emotional

experiences over intellectual ones, operating dialogically at the intersection of many power interests, like local communities, policymakers, and funders. Such places generally strive to memorialize troubling pasts democratically and inclusively, as they often display a variety of viewpoints belonging to eye witnesses, critical commentators, or previously marginalized groups. Thus, multiple memories coexist, interacting to shape these third-space environments of learning and reflection. In this analysis, many of today's most engaging museums go beyond simply providing information and knowledge. Instead, "The ethical imperative to remember is taken to its literal extreme: visitors are asked to identify with other people's pain, adopt their memories, empathize with their suffering, reenact and work through their traumas" (Arnold de-Simine, p. 8). This is clearly a psychological test. While taxing and uneasy, ultimately the process can become cathartic.

By focusing primarily on the preservation of individual and collective memories, museums emerge as narrative spaces where history is personalized. As the emphasis on objects and artifacts is diminishing, personal narratives and recollections take center stage. Increasingly, today's museums are expected to turn these private remembrances into institutionalized public practices that shape present identities. In essence, "The museum as an institution has acquired the role of society's memory" (Arnold de-Simine, 2013, p. 11).

According to Sherene Suchy (2006), connection and recollection are two of the essential functions fostered by the exhibit spaces of museums (p. 50). However, a top-bottom or trickle-down view of the contemporary museum experience is no longer satisfactory when discussing memory and identity formation. This perspective leaves out the counter-hegemony of both individual agency and the museum itself. As John Falk's (2009) "identity-related motivation model" points out, visitors actively contribute to the museum experience by reconfiguring what they see through the lens of their specific positionality and need. They are not passive recipients but involved participants who engage critically with the content and can impact ulterior curatorial decision-making through feedback. Furthermore, there is significant data to suggest that museum goers enjoy having their assumptions challenged, tested, and enriched (Arnold de-Simine, 2013; Falk

and Dierking, 2013). Indeed, it is appropriate to think of “a successful museum learning experience as a transformative one” (King, 2016, p. 5). In conclusion, what emerges is a complex picture, where a plurality of memories and identities is becoming the norm. Notably, the overall permutation in discourse and display appears to be from public history to private memory (Arnold de-Simine, 2013, p. 11).

Along with the emphasis on personalizing the past, there has been an equally sustained effort on the part of museums in recent years to stimulate people’s emotions. Arguably, empathy is at the center of the contemporary museum experience, especially in the case of human rights and peace museums. Present-day displays strive to compel the visitor to adopt the perspective and understand the suffering of victims of atrocities. This induced identification is expected to trigger not only compassion but also a commitment to social change (Arnold de-Simine, 2013, p. 13).

Instead of sanitizing history and making it more digestible, a confrontation with the past in all of its gruesome injustice can be powerful and uncompromising enough in order to shake the consciousness of a museum’s visitors. They are expected to literally relive the experiences of the ones who suffered. In a certain sense, the museum has to ‘wound’ the visitor. The sharing of grief, hardship, and alienation is presumably conducive to feelings of solidarity and renewed vigilance. In this context, even trauma is viewed as a relevant means to gain knowledge, if some form of hopeful empathy is eventually achieved through catharsis (Arnold de-Simine, 2013).

Along these lines, strong and often very difficult emotions are evoked at the new National Museum of African American History and Culture (NMAAHC) in Washington, D.C. Here, part of the overall intent is to create discomfort in order to underscore the continuing obligation to build a better world. In this sense, artifacts include iron shackles with very tight diameters used to immobilize slaves on ships during the trans-Atlantic slave trade. These objects are expected to speak louder than words and aim straight for the heart. The shackles, “Despite their small size, deliver a gut punch by summoning the horror and humanity of the slave trade in a way that no history textbook could ever do” (McGlone, 2016).

The element of shock, even unpleasantness, has become instrumental to contemporary museums (Logan and Reeves, 2008; Schorch, 2012; Tyson, 2008). The idea that the visitor experience has to be comforted is generally obsolete. Instead, difficult emotions are no longer avoided but rather amplified when dealing with troubling pasts. In this sense, whenever personal narratives are augmented by specific objects, these items are selected primarily for their unsettling value:

By engaging the viewer in a very direct and physical way, (these) objects are able to activate an emotional response based, in part, on partial knowledge of what has occurred in the past and, in part, on the opportunity the installation/object provides to extend that partial knowledge through a simulation of dialog with those who experienced that past or that situation. (Witcomb, 2013, p. 267)

What is important to underline is that, paradoxically, such artifacts are both unusually shocking *and* familiar. In other words, as they are encountered, they provoke what the literary critic Edmund Wilson used to call the “shock of recognition” (1943). Like literature, museums now appeal to empathetic emotions by conflating and almost eliminating the space between oneself and the other, both physically and temporarily. The goal is the eventual conceptualization of “oneself as another” (Ricoeur, 1992, p. 338).

The case for appealing directly to sentiment has been articulated since the early 1990s. In his Oxford Amnesty Lecture of 1993, the American pragmatist philosopher Richard Rorty advocates for a type of learning centered on feeling and emotion. He strongly critiques the overvaluation of reason in education and reaffirms the human being’s capacity for compassion, empathy, and putting oneself into another’s shoes. The accent is placed on the plasticity and malleability of affects. In Rorty’s analysis, “the emergence of the human rights culture seems to owe nothing to increased moral knowledge, and everything to hearing sad and sentimental stories” (1998, p. 172). According to this argument, the fundamental question is not “what is a human being,” but rather “what can a human being become” (Rorty, 1998, p. 175). Under the right circumstances, if provided with a

minimum level of security, prosperity, and sentimental education, all humans have the ability to reach the stage where they stop being members of tribes or factions and become members of humanity. This progress of sentiments can lead us “to see the similarities between ourselves and people very unlike us as outweighing the differences” (Rorty, 1998, p.181).

From Rorty’s standpoint, Immanuel Kant’s rational emphasis on the need for universal morality and responsibility is less persuasive than the power of Harriett Beecher Stowe’s novel, *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*, to elicit compassionate responses and actions in learners. That is because the former appeals to intellect, while the latter deals directly with feelings. While ideas can be argued for and against, emotions are truly universal, undeniable, and humanizing. Furthermore, as Elaine Scarry points out, “the act of verbally expressing pain is a necessary prelude to the collective task of diminishing pain” (1985, p. 9).

Subverting chronology is another contemporary means used by museums to achieve this objective of emotional identification. For example, Ngaire Blankenberg (2016) discusses the juxtaposition of present and past in an exhibition at an English museum marking 150 years of armed-conflict photography (p. 39). The photographs are arranged and connected strictly based on the emotions they summon, not chronologically. Thus, photos of a decimated Dresden after the World War II fire-bombing stand right besides others taken in the aftermath of the first Gulf War in 1990. Similarly, close-ups of soldiers from previous conflicts are placed in direct proximity to the ones of present-day fighters. This mixture of tenses and places is constructed to abolish temporal and geographical boundaries, linking then and there with the here and now.

In recent years, the increasing presence of audiovisual materials and experiences is especially tailored to stimulate emotion and create a virtual reality of suffering. When used wisely and not overwhelmingly, technology can facilitate deep immersions into the most troubling circumstances, such as war, ethnic cleansing, or systemic oppression. Indeed, “Emergent digital technologies offer opportunities for further theorization of the historical and ethical possibilities of representing atrocity and mass violence in museum settings” (Muller, Sinclair, and Woolford, 2015, p. 147).

Rationale and Main Research Question

The recent past has witnessed an increase in construction of and interest in human rights museums in North America. Over two decades ago, the Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington and the Museum of Tolerance in Los Angeles opened in 1993. The Mexican Museum of Memory and Tolerance opened in 2010 in Mexico City. More recently in 2014, the Canadian Museum for Human Rights started operating in Winnipeg, Canada and the U.S. Center for Civil and Human Rights was established in Atlanta, Georgia.

It is critical to evaluate if human rights pedagogy at the national-human-rights-museum level presents fresh openings for dialogism that can engage with formal education. In other words, it is relevant to explore if less formal, or non-formal, educational institutions, such as these two human rights museums, have space for an unprecedented and impactful education for peace and social justice, especially from the standpoint of the interplay of emotion and memory in the exhibits.

From this standpoint, the superseding question informing this study is the following: What is the specific role of emotion and memory in the third-space pedagogies of these two human rights museums?

The mission of the National Center for Civil and Human Rights in Atlanta is to “empower people to take the protection of every human’s rights personally” by gaining “a deeper understanding of the role they play in helping to protect the rights of all people” (National Center for Civil and Human Rights, 2016). Furthermore, this center aims to “strengthen the worldwide movement for human rights” (National Center for Civil and Human Rights, 2016). Similarly, the Canadian Museum for Human Rights strives to “explore the subject of human rights, with special but no 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 Museum for Human Rights, 2016).

A comparative exploration on the role of emotion and memory, such as this one, can retrieve valuable insights into museum pedagogies that can

augment classroom education dialogically. At a moment when both Canadian and U.S. societies navigate profound racial and social challenges, along with an increasingly more heterogeneous population, these two major human rights centers play an essential role that can set the tone for a more pluralistic understanding of society. Consequently, the impact and outreach of these national institutions deserve a much closer analysis that can inform peace education, museum education, and human rights education.

As non-formal sites of peace pedagogy, the Center for Civil and Human Rights in Atlanta and the Canadian Human Rights Museum stand as intermediary educational spaces, situated between the classroom and the home (van den Dungen & Yamane, 2015), in a place with plenty of opportunity for participation, interaction, and emancipation. Consequently, the logistical premises for dialogism exist and the study of them can lend valuable insights.

Method

This study included qualitative content analysis which unfolded over repeated visits to both of these human rights museums. In terms of data collection, multiple sources of information were utilized. They included direct observations on the ground, postings from the museums' webpages, exhibits, documents, videos, and semi-structured interviews.

Along with interviews, central components included observations of the museum environment and exhibits, documents from the displays, and audiovisual materials photographed or filmed on location. Seven semi-structured interviews were conducted with staff members at the two museums. Three such conversations took place in Atlanta, while four unfolded in Winnipeg. The length of each interview was approximately an hour.

On the subject of observations, it should be noted that they were either participatory or detached. That is to say that the researcher acted as an average but active visitor to the museum during certain periods, while taking a step back and surveying the scene from a more reserved position in the background at other junctions. Often, the same locations and museum

activities were explored first as participant and secondly as an observer. The idea was to create a productive balance between involvement and reflection. Experiences were documented on paper.

Several documents were reviewed. They included museum brochures, communication provided by the museums on the Internet, various texts that are embedded in the exhibits, and visitors' written feedback in guest books. A journal was kept for the duration of the research and visits. Audiovisual materials studied included: footage of visitors and museum staff engaged and interacting in various contexts with visitors; examinations of photographs, videos, and games featured throughout the museum; analysis of multiple artifacts and special possessions on display.

The data was first organized by type and subsequently coded. Eventually, the coding process led to the emergence of a few overarching themes, as defined in the Findings section. Triangulation was used as much as possible, in the sense of exemplifying a specific theme with various types of materials and sources, including personal observations, field-journal entries, and interview excerpts.

Researcher Positionality

As the author, my positionality is relevant and I made every effort to take this fact into account. Given that I am White and male, I belong to a most privileged social group and could easily be influenced by this status. This is an undeniable reality.

However, having grown up in the 1980s in what was then a marginalized and politically totalitarian society which was part of the Soviet Block, I can say that I have experienced systemic inequity and injustice to a significant extent. As a consequence, I feel that the particularities of my background have been equally conducive to critical thinking and to deconstructing various forms of hegemony.

Findings

This section documents the role of emotion and memory in the presentations of the two museums and examines some of the main techniques used by these institutions to appeal directly to the visitors' feelings. The pedagogies employed by the National Center for Civil and Human Rights and the Canadian Museum for Human Rights are structured to shape the visitor experience emotionally in a variety of powerful forms.

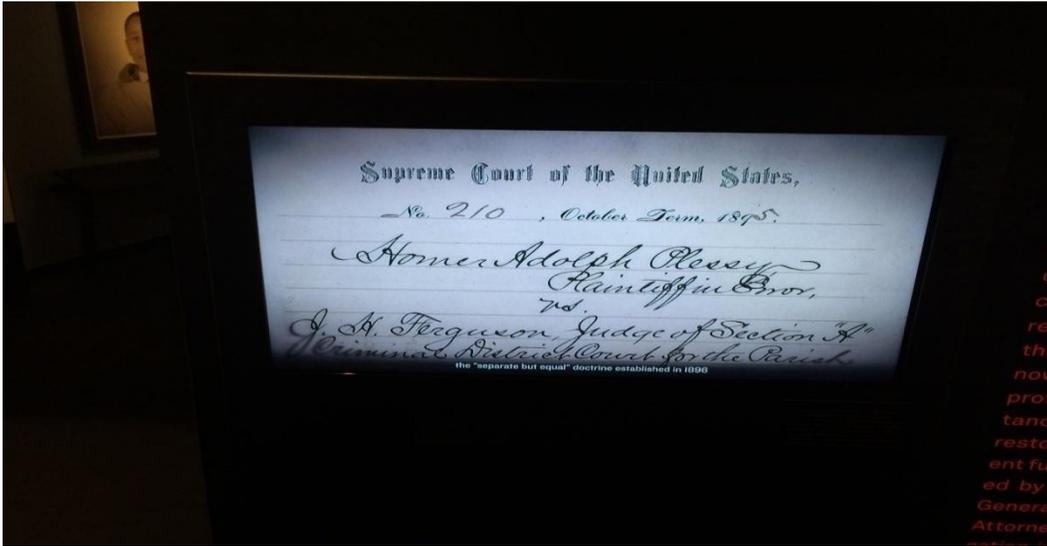
As discussed below, emotion and memory are interlocked creatively throughout the exhibits and function to create an immediate, impactful whole.

Darkness to Light

A major modality in which the museums impact emotions is through their use of lighting. In both institutions, early displays are shrouded in darkness, as windows and natural light tend to be generally absent. The progression toward light is very gradual.

As Tracy, a staff member in Winnipeg, points out, the lower levels of the museum are more somber, while the top levels, "with stories of social movements and agency and mobilization," are brighter, "because we really wanted visitors to leave feeling empowered to do something, rather than hopeless" (interview, 2017).

Notably, while the general movement is from dark to light, both museums complicate this dynamic. For example, at the National Center for Civil and Human Rights, darkness and light alternate within the same gallery, depending on the topic covered. Thus, the displays at the outset of the Civil Rights gallery are rather grim and claustrophobic, as they deal with the re-institutionalization of segregation during the Jim Crow era.



(Photo by the author)

The overall atmosphere and lighting remain bleak during the exhibits that memorialize the violent lynching of young Emmett Till, an African American boy only 14 years of age who was killed in 1955, the incarceration of Reverend Martin Luther King, Jr. in Birmingham, or the violent repression against civil rights marches by segregationist Commissioner Eugene “Bull” Connor.

Suddenly, there is a burst of optimism and possibilities with the March on Washington. The tone of the displays changes abruptly and the room is bathed in light. There is a great vibrancy and exuberance to this exhibit, as depicted below.



(Photos by the author)

Darkness returns with the tragic bombing of the 16th Street Baptist Church in Birmingham in 1963. This episode is followed by a much brighter display on the march in Selma and legislative breakthroughs, such as the 1964 Civil Rights Act. Subsequently, somberness returns with the assassination of Martin Luther King, Jr. in 1968 and the ensuing social unrest. Ultimately, the transition to the Human Rights Gallery is the brightest space in the Civil Rights part of the museum.

The Canadian Museum for Human Rights displays a similar dynamic. The “Canadian Journeys” gallery, which discusses violations and struggles in Canada, along with the “Breaking the Silence” gallery, which details various genocides, are dark and heavy environments. Light begins to reach the exhibits only in “Rights Today.” Eventually, the “Our Canada” and “Inspiring Change” galleries are the brightest areas. However, as staff member Tracy underlines, even here, the picture is significantly more nuanced: “From a content side of things, we complicated that movement somewhat. We certainly didn’t want to present any kind of narrative of progress or triumph or that kind of thing” (interview, 2017). Rather, the progression is toward illumination, greater understanding, and individual and collective agency.

The Mirrors of Responsibility and Compassion

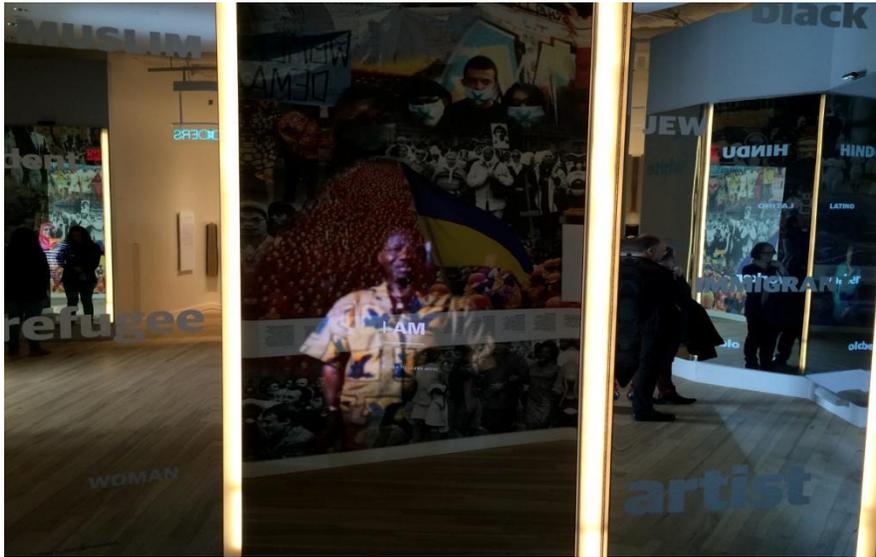
A very intense and powerful emotional experience is provided by the National Center for Civil and Human Rights in Atlanta through a rather simple technique. Specifically, the museum places mirrors in two key locations and thus stimulates self-reflection. The first place where this technique occurs is in the exhibit centering on the Birmingham protests repressed by the local authorities under the direction of Eugene “Bull” Connor. Here, one is confronted with some very graphic and shocking footage from that period. As visitors watch the scenes unfold on a TV screen and hear the screaming and the police sirens, they are confronted with their own image in the background. One is often tempted to look away from the film, as demonstrators on that day of May 3rd, 1963, are shown to be beaten savagely by policemen. Yet, the exhibit does not allow for evasion or any emotional escape, given that mirrors are placed all around the room. The

moment visitors look away, they find their own faces in the mirror. Thus, a sense of responsibility is created. In other words, the display communicates that it is everyone's duty to prevent the repetition of such tragedies.

The mirrors not only increase awareness. They also emphasize individual agency and personalize the experience. To the viewer, the museum says: "You could have been one of those people! What would you have done, which side would you have taken? Would you have remained an observer?"

Larry, a staff member in Atlanta, reinforces this point. As he argues, the role of the mirrors is "to put you in the middle of the street with that hose and that dog" (interview, 2017). He further adds: "When you can envision yourself being there, with the water hoses and the dogs coming across, that's very impactful because it makes you really think about how you would have responded" (interview, 2017).

An equally self-reflective experience, also defined by the use of mirrors, can be found at the very beginning of the contemporary human rights gallery, "Spark of Conviction." In this case, the presentation involves a series of personal testimonies by victims of human rights abuses from across the globe. Several major categories are represented: refugee, student, Jew, Muslim, Immigrant, Black, Hindu. All of these three-dimensional video deliveries place the visitor face to face with the speaker. As they listen to the stories, visitors see themselves in the mirrors, which form the background of the person who is speaking.



(Photo by the author)

Clearly, this is a very clever modality to inspire empathy and identification with the suffering of a fellow human being. The mirrors underline this notion of putting oneself into the shoes of the other, or “oneself as another” (Ricoeur, 1992). As mentioned, the actual reflection in the mirror is conducive to a more subtle self-reflection and creates the impression of an actual dialogue between the visitor and the victims who convey their experiences. Ultimately, this display rearticulates the museum’s main message: “Are you doing your part? Are you joining the fight for rights, standing up, speaking out? The world is yours to change” (“National Center for Civil and Human Rights,” 2017).

The Canadian Museum for Human Rights does not employ mirrors very much but they are not completely absent either. For example, in the “Our Canada” gallery, visitors can listen to activists’ stories and read their profiles while their own reflection appears in the glass partitions behind. The objective is the same: create empathy, solidarity, and agency.

The mirroring modalities discussed are essential components to the creation of a genuinely visitor-centered experience. One truly becomes part of the exhibits and has their feelings intensely transfigured. As Alice from the National Center for Civil and Human Rights underscores, “Being able to see

ourselves in those mirrors makes us understand that these things can happen to anybody, including us, and we have to ensure they won't happen anymore. The question becomes: What do we need to do so they stop happening?" (interview, 2017). Indeed, this notion is conveyed splendidly by the two museums, with great emotional power and urgency, through the strategic placement of mirrors. The Atlanta institution in particular stands out in this respect and achieves a major empathetic effect.

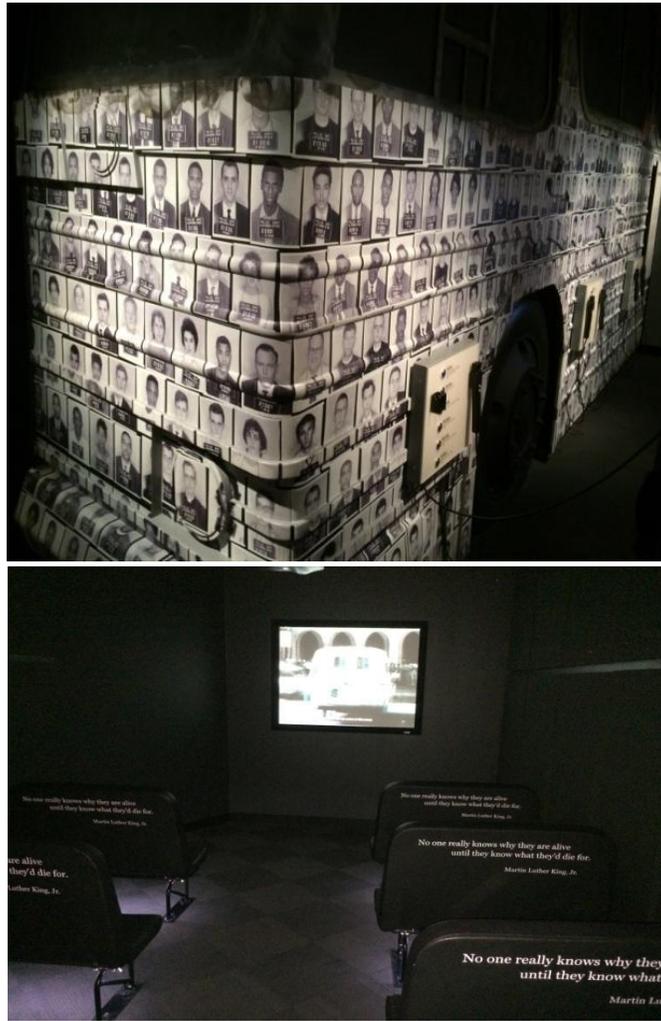
Sensory Experiences Over Information and Artifacts

Unlike older and more traditional museums, the two institutions studied are much more oriented toward impacting emotions directly, as opposed to simply providing facts and data. In this sense, there are several experiences provided that shake the senses. Arguably, a major part of their purpose is to shock, to jolt the conscience of the visitor.

The museum in Atlanta features several such examples. One of the first can be found in the display that explores Reverend King's incarceration and letter from a Birmingham jail. In this case, the visitor can approach a small and very secluded space, covered in darkness. The space resembles a prison cell, separated from the rest of the world by bars. When the bars are touched, the metal is extremely cold. The very strong feeling the visitor gets is one of alienation, isolation, pain. By impacting tactility in such a manner, the museum produces a quick and really intense effect, which words alone could not have captured. While there is some text provided, it is minimal. The emphasis is primarily on *the experience* itself, the feeling of being locked up unjustly behind the coldness of those bars.

Another moving example can be found in the section where the Civil Rights gallery memorializes Freedom Riders and the Freedom Bus. The outside of the bus is covered by dozens of the faces of these riders. Furthermore, the visitor can pick up a receiver and listen to testimonials from many of them. Finally, one can 'travel' on the bus. Visitors can get on the imaginary bus and sit on one of its benches. While there, a documentary about this chapter in the history of the movement plays on the screen in front, situated where the windshield would normally be located. Once more,

the design targets the emotions and aims to make one feel as if they were actually travelling back to the 1960s.



(Photos by the author)

In some instances, the museums create spaces where there is an assault of stimuli. A multitude of sights and sounds compete for the visitor's attention, all at once. These barrages create the feeling of being entirely immersed in a particular place and moment. While seemingly random on its surface at first, this controlled chaos becomes very persuasive gradually. From this standpoint, one of the very best examples in the Atlanta museum

is the room which commemorates Martin Luther King Jr.'s assassination in the spring of 1968.



(Photo by the author)

As pictured above, the space encountered by the visitor features several footages: Robert F. Kennedy's announcement of the tragedy in front of a perplexed crowd; massive street fighting and destruction in various American cities; the National Guard preparing for large-scale intervention. In each case, the soundtrack is extremely loud, of an almost violent loudness. On top of that, music from a concert held that day in order to prevent more riots blares from several speakers. There is literally an onslaught of concomitant stimuli at work. Notably, the general result is very powerful. One cannot walk through the room and not feel deeply shaken. The memory of the assassination is kept alive through these strong emotions.

The Canadian Museum for Human Rights confronts the visitor with a particularly intense emotional experience in the story alcove which critiques the Residential School Program. The element of shock and discomfort, if not guilt, is central to this display. Visitors are placed face to face with a residential school classroom. Rows of students sitting at their desks, under the supervision of a nun, are staring right back at the viewer. Similar to the mirror spaces in Atlanta, there is nowhere to escape. Rather, the situation has

to be fully acknowledged and confronted in its full tragedy. The photograph speaks louder than any words. Emotionally, one is transported to the very front of that classroom and has to respond to those questioning stares.



(Photo by the author)

As this experience unfolds, two ‘electronic’ school desks placed in front of the photograph feature screens where short videos with victims’ testimonies are presented. The narratives are sobering. The heart wrenching abuses of this colonial program of forced re-education are personalized, achieving great immediacy through the immersive design of the alcove. Nothing is sanitized or downplayed in this display. On the contrary, the condemnation is unmitigated, generating a combination of utter disgust with the program and empathy for the ones who suffered.

Another illustration of impacting the senses directly in the Winnipeg museum takes place at the very beginning of the visit, when the concept of human rights is introduced. While the verbal explanations are fairly conventional, what impresses and moves is the accompanying design and choreography. Various speakers appear on huge panels, which also project a multitude of related sights and sounds. The majestic scale of these panels

suggests the magnitude of the subject matter and the universal character of human rights.



(Photo by the author)

Furthermore, the very diverse footage that is displayed underlines the interconnected, multifaceted, and intricate nature of these topics. The immersive vastness of the presentation makes the philosophical arguments even more convincing. Consequently, an intellectual understanding is augmented by the emotional impact produced by the use of these extensive and very vibrant panels.

Undoubtedly, the most memorable and vivid example of sentimental education through sensory experiences is showcased at the National Center for Civil and Human Rights in Atlanta. This is the “Lunch Counter,” positioned halfway into the Civil Rights gallery. The display is profoundly interactive. The visitor sits on a chair, puts a set of headphones on, places their hands on the table, and has to suffer through a most taxing and emotionally demanding undertaking for a few minutes. Some do not get to finish the exercise, finding it unbearable. That is because the audio includes

a series of racial slurs and threats directed at the listener. Furthermore, as this venom is spewed, the seat starts shaking as if it were kicked forcefully by the racist abuser. The feeling of immediate and very real danger is so authentic that one can only escape it by opening their eyes. This is a traumatic experience that is designed to transport visitors to the 1960s and put them abruptly in the shoes of a person of color who is challenging the status quo. The tissue boxes placed on the counter testify to the major impact and intensity of this museum activity.



(Photo by the author)

The intensity of the exercise is unparalleled, this is visceral pedagogy at its best. As evidenced by recent scholarship, contemporary museums no longer shy away from making the visitor feel uncomfortable (Arnold de-Simine, 2013). On the contrary, shocking and traumatic museum experiences are viewed as fundamental to gaining critical understandings.

Larry, a museum staff person in Atlanta, has observed many go through the display, including former leaders of the Civil Rights Movement:

Jesse Jackson was here a while ago. He was sitting at the lunch counter. He sat there for probably about five seconds and couldn't take it anymore. I've seen three generations sit down and experience that lunch counter. And it's interesting to see how the youth envision it a bit differently than the middle-aged person, and how the middle-aged person envisions it differently than the elderly. Most of the elderly, particularly the African Americans, say "it takes me back, I can't listen, I have to stop." (interview, 2017)

Yet the main objective is to impact the younger crowd and the ones who were not directly exposed in order to educate and prevent the reoccurrence of such discrimination. From this standpoint, appealing straight to emotions is a human rights museum's privileged function. Larry articulates this notion eloquently:

You can go and get information anywhere. We have enough technology, libraries, Internet, books. You can pull up as much information as you want. But to actually get to go and visit a place where an emotional attachment is created and sustained, that's a different story. That's the mission, I think, for this museum. When people get up from the lunch counter, they're full of emotion. And that's exactly the idea. The type of exhibits we strive to put in place are the ones that do not only give you insight and an education on what went on, they also give you an experience, so that when people walk out of here, you talk to them, and they're saying, "Wow, that was an experience!" (interview, 2017)

Subverting Chronology

The National Center for Civil and Human Rights and the Canadian Museum for Human Rights complicate traditional chronological presentations. This is most evident in Winnipeg, where the historic approach is frequently replaced by the thematic approach. In other words, it is

primarily the subject matter that structures and connects the content, not just chronology.

The effort to intentionally subvert a strictly chronological understanding and establish subtler correspondences between past and present transpires vividly in the “Canadian Journeys” gallery. Here, numerous displays on human rights abuses and triumphs in Canada comprise a very eclectic mix, where examples from the early colonial era are positioned right next to contemporary struggles and challenges.

Thus, these story alcoves are never aligned in a purely chronological succession. For instance, the alcove on the current epidemic of violence against Indigenous women precedes the one on the Residential Schools Program, which took place many years before. Along the same lines, the section of the museum devoted to analyzing genocides positions these massive tragedies in no distinct chronological order. Rather, they are viewed interconnectedly, as part of the same destructive and prejudiced phenomenon. This dynamic becomes even clearer on the interactive tables, where the trans-Atlantic slave trade is discussed in conjunction with “cultural genocide” in Canada or the Holodomor mass extermination in the Soviet Union. Furthermore, in the same “Breaking the Silence” gallery, portraits of past and present human rights activists share the stage. Consequently, one can find a polyphony of representations and historical moments interacting freely and establishing an engaging whole.

The museum in Georgia adopts a more chronological approach, particularly in the Civil Rights part of the building. This is understandable, given the profile of the institution and the centrality of this historical episode to the overall struggle for social equity in the United States. While the Civil Rights section is more traditional from the standpoint of chronology, the Human Rights gallery complicates the picture. In this sense, the museum places “Offenders” and “Defenders” in close proximity. They share the same space and take up two opposite sides of the gallery. The juxtaposition is both moral and spatial. On one side, Hitler, Stalin, and Pinochet. On the other, Nelson Mandela, Václav Havel, and Eleanor Roosevelt. In between are contemporary activists from the United States and elsewhere. Similar to the Canadian examples, this is another case where a single and relatively small

space features a multitude of personalities and topics from various historical periods. Instead of isolating them chronologically, the museum chooses to place all of these elements in relation to and in dialogue with one another. As a consequence, visitors are encouraged to establish deeper connections and meditate on the trans-temporality of these phenomena.

What does this subversion of chronology do to memory in the museums? First, paradoxically, it enables the past to permeate the present with even more poignancy. While less chronological, the specific exhibits discussed establish more immediate continuities. They create a real sense of urgency. Second, subverting chronology complicates the idea of progress. Thus, what is underlined is not only breakthroughs but also backtracking, stagnation, regress. The Western metanarrative of constant amelioration faces some serious scrutiny. Third, abuses are no longer viewed as isolated forms of oppression. Rather, they are increasingly perceived as transnational, representing parts of larger systems of oppression.

Beyond Commemoration

There is a strong and sustained emphasis in both museums on agency and impacting change. From this standpoint, the two institutions strive not only to memorialize various episodes in the story of human rights, but also to empower. At their best, the National Museum for Civil and Human Rights and the Canadian Museum for Human Rights employ memory to create a critical praxis of recollection, reflection, *and* action. The museums' preoccupation goes beyond learning about the past. The superseding goal is to inspire and generate positive change through collective and individual engagement.

The first major argument in this sense has to do with the fact that both institutions constantly strive to balance discussions of abuses with exemplifications of smaller or bigger triumphs. While Atlanta juxtaposes "Offenders" and "Defenders," as pointed out earlier, most of the space in the Human Rights gallery is dedicated to the actions of the latter group. When contemporary violations are analyzed, efforts are invariably made to underline that there are individuals and groups working intensely to remedy

these problems and that positive change is always possible and can be attained. In other words, the conclusion is conducive to agency, not passivity or fatalism. A very similar approach can be noticed at the Canadian Museum for Human Rights. In this sense, Tracy, a staff member, provides an articulate explanation: “Some describe us as the Museum of Human Rights. But we’re not a museum of human rights, we’re *for* human rights. We do encourage a bit more of that activist angle and that’s where we differ from memorials” (interview, 2017).

Appeals to agency punctuate the visitor experiences in Atlanta and Winnipeg at every turn. For example, besides several very direct pleas to conscience and responsibility, the museum in Georgia weaves the element of agency into many of the activities. As an example, every exploration of topics such as poverty, education, or health on the interactive tables in the Human Rights gallery includes an emphasis on individual engagement. In the rubrics “Act! Take Action,” visitors are provided with specific suggestions designed to get them involved immediately with impacting societal change.

Along the same lines, the Canadian institution incorporates agency into a multitude of displays. One of the most engaging cases can be found in the “Actions Count” gallery, which reveals the courageous activism of many average Canadians, a lot of them children or adolescents. Here, another interactive table confronts visitors with a variety of human rights problems affecting Canadian communities. In this exercise, visitors can attempt to resolve them virtually by organizing a fundraiser, starting an organization, or bringing attention to the issue through other means. The idea is to show that there are always practical solutions if one has enough creativity and determination. A quote from the writer Simone de Beauvoir frames the exhibit: “The present is not a potential past; it is the moment of choice and action” (“Canadian Museum for Human Rights,” 2017).

The second major argument in favor of memory as agency relates to the conclusion of both museum visits. The final stop in each of the museums is one of reflection, self-expression, and personal empowerment. At the National Center for Civil and Human Rights, this is represented by the “Share Your Voice” room, a space where visitors can leave a message of hope and convey their feelings about the visit. Entitled “I Am,” these video testimonials

are structured to resemble the format of the ones displayed earlier in the museum, which featured people who have dealt with adversity and are fighting for equity in their societies. At the Canadian Museum of Human Rights, the concluding gallery is “Inspiring Change.” This space serves two functions. One is to present examples of social movements and activists who have prevailed in their struggles to influence the status quo. For instance, South Africa’s anti-apartheid movement is among these illustrations. The other function is to embolden visitors to “Join the Conversation” by writing down and posting what terms such as ‘reconciliation’ or ‘respect’ entail to them. Furthermore, museum-goers are also encouraged to share how the visit inspired them to take action. The only platform above this exhibit is Israel Asper’s ‘Tower of Hope’ – a glass spire 100 meters high.

Indeed, more than anything else, memory in the two human rights museums is intended to be a motivational force.

Conclusion: Bypassing the Intellect in the Postmodern Human Rights Museum

Some contemporary museums, such as the ones in Atlanta and Winnipeg, no longer engage only with the intellect. As evidenced, an equally important preoccupation of both institutions is to shape emotions and generate strong feelings. The use of lighting and the strategic placement of mirrors, among other ingenious devices, serve to appeal directly to the visitor’s affective response. The goal is to create empathy, combined with a proactive sense of responsibility and resolve.

These museums are not defined exclusively by the artifacts they present or the information they convey. Rather, much of the pedagogy of these institutions has to do with providing emotional *experiences*. In this sense, difficulty and unpleasantness are not avoided. On the contrary, there are moments when the learning can be quite traumatic, such as the Lunch Counter in the Atlanta museum.

From the standpoint of designing immersive visits, the role of technology is crucial. Both museums employ technological tools to engage the senses. Placing oneself in the position of the other through the use of

technology is featured in Winnipeg and Atlanta to remarkable effect. There is evidence that, when employed with measure and awareness, technology can indeed enhance critical learning by impacting emotions.

Finally, there are places where these postmodern museums fuse past and present and deviate from chronological orthodoxies in order to underline interrelatedness and persistence. In this light, memory is more than remembrance. Memory is the source of agency.

The main implication of these findings for human rights education in general is that the type of “sentimental education” (Rorty, 1998) practiced in these museums can be just as important and powerful, if not more impactful, than the information-based approach of more formal pedagogical settings.

The storytelling, emotional identification, and sentimental education framework is one that can inform a contemporary reconceptualization of human rights education. At their best, museums such as the NCCHR in Atlanta and the CMHR in Winnipeg design learning experiences capable of providing visitors with emotional, kinesthetic, and visual identification with victims of oppression and activists for social justice and equity. This is a salutary restoration of the importance of feelings in learning considering that, as Jonathan Rutherford writes, “In the gendered nature of the theoretical discourses we’ve inherited, emotion has always been subordinate to rationality” (1990, p. 23). Indeed, as Rorty (1998) concludes, “sentimentality may be the best weapon we have,” (p. 182).

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