

## PRESENTATION ABSTRACTS

*For Museum Openings: Caring for Difficult Knowledge within and Beyond the Canadian Museum for Human Rights (a workshop)*

### SESSION 1: *Human Rights in a Museological Context*

#### **Presenting Canada's Legal Traditions at the Canadian Museum for Human Rights: Challenges and Choices**

— Armando Perla (CMHR)

The CMHR is set to open its doors on September 20<sup>th</sup> 2014. Many of its exhibits are based on the vulgarization of human rights laws, legal doctrine and jurisprudence in order to make them accessible to the general public. The exhibit titled "Canada's legal traditions" aims to present a narrative that speaks to processes of colonization and decolonization of legal traditions in Canada. Through the use of artifacts such as the Royal Proclamation 1763, Aboriginal treaties, the Proclamation of the Constitution 1982, and an Aboriginal judge's robe, this museum exhibit aims to present the visitor with an invaluable piece of Canadian legal history. As such, this exhibit intends to walk the visitor through the history of legal traditions in Canada, acknowledging that Indigenous legal traditions pre-dated European contact. This paper will bring to light a great number of challenges that presenting complex legal ideas in an exhibit with limited text space poses to its developers. At the same time, it will highlight strategies that have been used to solve some of these challenges.

#### **Works in progress: Negotiating human rights in museological context**

— Jennifer Carter (Université du Québec à Montréal)

Human rights museums are a new phenomenon in the cultural sphere. As institutions that self-identify in their title and mission statements as museums dedicated to human rights, they are somewhat different from earlier examples of museums that pursue human rights issues, or social justice more broadly, in their exhibition, curatorial and/or programming orientations – but how? And to what ends? Located in specific geo-political contexts and arising from different political, economic, social and cultural exigencies, a dozen human rights museums founded since the millennium are responding in different ways to the conjuncture of museology and human rights. This presentation will contextualise the emergence of human rights museums within a broader museological framework, and offer a comparative analysis of the nature of discourses and practices on and of human rights as works in progress by drawing on research conducted at human rights museums in Chile, Paraguay, Japan, and Canada. In particular, the presentation will examine the terms within which these sites of public memory engage with a range of issues emerging from a culture of human rights, notably human rights abuses, cultural diversity, transitional justice, trauma, reconciliation and mourning.

#### **The Museum as International Human Rights Norm Entrepreneur**

— Jennifer Orange (University of Toronto)

There has always been a link between cultural norms and law, but historically states have been the only actors with recognized standing to influence international law. Through the era of globalization we have observed numerous non-state actors challenge this paradigm, such as non-governmental organizations, aboriginal peoples, and corporations, as they have demanded to provide input into international law-making processes. The opening of the Canadian Museum for Human Rights presents an opportunity to explore the potential for museum practice to affect international human rights law. In this paper, I will explore how museums are engaging in human rights work, both domestically and through international networks, and evaluate their potential to influence the development of international human rights law as a new type of "norm entrepreneur."

## SESSION 2: *Resituating Subjects and Participants in Human Rights Discourse and Practice*

### **From Karl Heinrich Ulrichs to Lady Gaga: Born this way and its Discontents**

— David Churchill (University of Manitoba)

The history of homosexuality, of what in contemporary terms we refer to as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transsexual, two-spirited, queers, and other sexually diverse subjects, has been bound up with the language of rights (civil and human rights) since the 19th century. One of the most consistent arguments, made by many early emancipation advocates, was that “homosexuality” was a natural, material condition one was born with. As such “homosexual” were according to the logics of natural justice, entitled to dignity, deserving of protection and entitled to legal standing as modern citizens. This legitimization argument is not only central to many contemporary LGBT rights campaigns such as “Born the Way” but also to the very conceptualization of who is the subject of human rights instruments. This paper will examine the implication of the naturalization of same-sex sexuality in terms of human rights but also in terms of the place of sexual and gender diversity within the Canadian Museum of Human Rights.

### **Comfort Women in Human Rights Discourse: Obscured Colonialisms, Fetishized Testimonies, and the Politics of the Abstract**

— Hee-Jung Serenity Joo (University of Manitoba)

This paper provides a brief critical overview of the ways in which the discourse of comfort women has risen to global prominence in the past few years. Specifically, I focus on the ways in which the topic of comfort women has been able to garner strategic global attention via its inclusion within a human rights/women’s rights discourse, in lieu of its original context of anti-colonialism and reparations from Japan. Drawing from the works of Samuel Moyn (*The Last Utopia*) and Erika Doss (*Memorial Mania*), my paper ponders how this detachment of the experiences of comfort women from the historical specificity of Japanese colonialism may relate to the concept of an “ideas museum” such as the CMHR. I also unpack some of the assumptions and problems of relying on first-person testimonies of comfort women to raise awareness of human rights violations, as was the case of a CMHR promotional and fundraising event in fall of 2013. Finally, I end my essay with an example of a comic strip that documents the testimony of a comfort woman, and I will argue for the ways in which its aesthetics of abstraction, blankness, and anonymity function as a means of expressing “difficult knowledge” through the indirect, representational, and artistic, as opposed to the direct and testimonial.

### **Curating Difficult Knowledge with Children**

— Monica Patterson (Carleton University)

As South African author and activist Gabeba Baderoon has written, “What we choose to display in our public spaces, who curates our perspectives, who becomes visible to us in art—represents a national conversation [of] who ‘we’ are.” At global, national, and local levels, museums can thus extend the parameters of various communities’ visibility and engagement. Drawing from my work envisioning a Children’s Museum in Durban, South Africa, I will explore the possibilities for curating difficult knowledge with children, a process that involves including children’s experiences and perspectives in museum exhibits and programming, not just as subjects or target audience members, but as active participants and co-creators of museum content.

## SESSION 3: *Building the Museum, Making the Nation*

### **Curating the Fourth Framework: The Work in Progress**

— Deanna Aubert (McMaster University)

In keeping with current theoretical perspectives on the state-sanctioned museum, Canadian varieties are understood to distribute social recognition on the basis of “cultural difference” as an extension of the state’s multicultural logic. In the area of curating for difficult knowledge and human rights museology, Angela Failler and Roger Simon’s work considers how a new and radically different “fourth framework” can replace incumbent practices that assist in maintaining a perception of the museum as an institution with privileged authority over the content and significance of people’s cultural heritage. Drawing upon this work, this presentation will discuss points of conflict and tension that could arise if this theoretical approach becomes praxis at the Canadian Museum for Human Rights. Informed by the current controversies that surround the museum, it will put forward new ideas for the framework to adopt that can bring it closer to maintaining its integrity within a Canadian state-sanctioned institution.

### **It takes a lot of wrongs to make a museum of rights**

— Kirsty Robertson (Western University)

This presentation examines how outside activism and critique have potentially affected the design and content of displays at the Canadian Museum for Human Rights. In the late 1990s, the project of the CMHR was clearly initially imagined as retaliation against the actions of the Canadian War Museum (in Ottawa), which had recently decided not to include a Holocaust Memorial in its new building. As such, the idea for the CMHR came into being in a very specific moment and from a very specific perspective: a situation that was highlighted in much of the early coverage of the institution (especially that focused on its controversial founder). Over time, however, the importance of this creation story waned, primarily due to activism and agitation from a number of groups interested in a more pluralistic vision for the CMHR. In turn, this more pluralistic vision attracted its own criticism, with the former Director of the Canadian War Museum, for one, stating of the museum: “It’s the triumph of hope over reality. It’s simply not thinking through the difficulties of this sort of project.” Despite such critiques, coverage of fundraising for and design of the new institution shows a clear shift away from the Holocaust as the central topic, to a focus on how to deal with Canadian history, and especially the legacy of residential schools. The focus of this paper is on the importance of public inquiry, maneuverings, debates, critiques and agitations in the imagining of a museum dedicated to the “difficult topic” of human rights. Ultimately, I focus the talk on the following questions: have decades of activism and intervention into Canadian museums by First Peoples and allies affected the design of the museum? And second, in this case, is the focus on residential schools at the expense of other issues (land claims, cultural rights and so on), or does a narrow focus potentially open the door to continued intervention in such a way that the museum will remain constantly unsettled and fluid?

### **The Making of Nation: Situating the Canadian Museum for Human Rights**

— Karen Sharma (University of Manitoba / University of Winnipeg)

Those of us residing in the city of Winnipeg have borne witness to the change wrought to our urban landscape through the erection of Canadian Museum for Human Rights (CMHR). Both in its material and discursive formations, the CMHR positions itself as exceptional, not only because it is “founding a new conversation” for a “stronger Canada,” but also in its literal placement outside of the “national capital region” (CMHR 2014). My paper takes a particular interest in the location of museum, paying attention to how the CMHR re-inscribes meaning in local place as a means of imagining a national space. Drawing on museum and news media accounts of its architecture and archaeology, I argue that the CMHR’s location outside of the “national capital region” points to the shifting winds of nation in Canada, particularly through its implication of indigeneity and the West in a Canadian national imaginary.

## SESSION 4: Views from Here

### **Historical Dislocation: The Confluence of Monumental Architecture, Community Voices, and CMHR Programming**

— Tina Mai Chen (University of Manitoba)

This paper considers two aspects of the CMHR: (a) the decision to fund and build a piece of monumental architecture with the desire that it become a globally recognized landmark; (b) a model of community programming that rests upon co-sponsorship with local community groups of lectures, symposia, and other events. I argue that even though these two aspects operate in different registers, they share operative logics that are productively analysed as instances of (potential) historical dislocation. The idea that the building and its digital resources (rather than a physical archival collection) are the generative site of human rights dialogue increases the role of community programming, particularly with respect to public events and identifying possible interviewees for oral histories and temporary exhibits. This potentially democratizes knowledge production, while locating CMHR programming within complex international circuits of knowledge production and circulation. Through the example of co-sponsored events on the Nanjing Massacre and Comfort Women leading up to the opening of CMHR and planned for the future, I consider the ways in which the historical contexts of production of knowledge have been left largely unexamined by community groups and CMHR. Thus, even though knowledge of specific events may increase, the situated nature of that knowledge is not interrogated and conversations operate within a number of localized interpretive frameworks. The sought after global knowledge about and for human rights, in this case, is haunted by historical and spatial dislocation. One of the reasons, I suggest, for this potential historical dislocation is because community initiatives are not paired with concerted funding of inquiry-based research on the topics identified. Resources are, of course, always limited; and so resource allocations and the privileging of the building as recognizable brand must also be part of the consideration of the circuits of knowledge. In the case of CMHR, then, we also need to place it within a moment of neoliberal spectacle represented by ubiquitous large-scale architectural 'wonders' for museums, art, and theatre throughout China, including in provincial cities and their suburban townships.

### **Layers of Place: The CMHR as a Site of Invention**

— Jennifer Clary-Lemon (University of Winnipeg)

Barbara Biesecker (2006) suggests that historical place-makers like museums are “scenes of invention,” suggesting that museums invite us to deconstruct the material presence of the past, “issu[ing] an invitation to write rhetorical histories” (130). Similarly, Richard Marback (1998) emphasizes place-ness in rhetorical research, suggesting that “the built environments of contemporary cities continue to inhabit current rhetorical theories,” pointing to uses of rhetorical terms that “borrow from experiences of urban space and the movement of people among each other” like *contact zone*, *discourse community*, and *language-in-use*. (76). In this talk, I outline the CMHR as a scene of rhetorical invention by connecting spatiality, corporeality, and textuality—i.e., a material rhetoric that layers place by “grounding a space in texts and texts in space” (87). Examining the CMHR’s situatedness within competing discourses of tourism, nation, and culture, I explore what is currently known about CMHR exhibits and connect those to spatial and corporeal texts surrounding the museum which emphasize *gathering*, *peace*, and *nationhood*. I close in examining potential sites of new dialogue about rights that rest on the intersections of differing material spaces to emphasize the notion of invention to examine both what text-sites *mean* and also what they *do*.

### **Aesthetic Interventions: Local Artists Respond to the Canadian Museum for Human Rights**

— Angela Failler (University of Winnipeg)

This presentation explores the affective life of the CMHR in anticipation of its official opening; namely, how “hope” has been constructed by and in response to the museum, and the implications of this for orienting prospective museumgoers or an imagined “public” towards the CMHR as a centre for learning. Rather than understanding hope as a universal “vision of the future as shared as the sky” (CMHR 2014), I argue that expressions of hope (and hopelessness) by and about the CMHR reflect the historically and geographically specific situation of the museum, located in Winnipeg, Manitoba on Treaty One territory, as well as the particular cultural, political and economic stakes that invest the museum and its diverse publics in differing versions of a desired future and ways of getting there. Examples are drawn from official statements and promotional materials by the CMHR, news media coverage, and aesthetic responses to the new museum by prairie-based artists Kevin McKenzie, Paul Zacharias and Rebecca Belmore. These examples not only offer a glimpse into the affective life of a cultural institution at its inaugural moment, they help expand the range of what it could mean to be “hopeful” in relation to it.

## **KEYNOTE: Memory Politics and/as Human Rights: What We Can Learn from the CMHR Debates**

— Karyn Ball (University of Alberta)

The aim of this talk is to propose a definition of memory politics that reflects recent scholarship in trauma and affect studies in order to elaborate on the role this conception could play in furthering the cause of human rights. The talk will also highlight various issues that arose over the past few years about the composition and lay-out of the CMHR. Ultimately, then, I will discuss my hopes for a CMHR vision that will serve human rights by facilitating critical explorations of Canada's relationship to the traumatic histories of its citizens.

## SESSION 5: *Comparative and Dialogic Approaches*

### **Expanding Museum Spaces: A Networked Analysis of the Canadian Museum for Human Rights**

— Nadine Blumer (Concordia University)

This paper analyses the development of the Canadian Museum for Human Rights (CMHR), a nationally backed project that has been entrenched in a so-called competition of victimhood since its inception. These disputes, over whose suffering is more legitimate and “worthy” of permanent exhibition space, produce difficult knowledge. Difficult knowledge here refers to the conflicts that arise when cultural groups are pitted against one another in order to make claims either for or against dominant historical narratives of suffering. How then might competing accounts of what is historically significant find adequate representation in the limited (physical) space of the CMHR? I propose a framework that imagines the broader network in which museum narratives and ideas are represented, debated and potentially, provides new ways of confronting difficult knowledge. The concept of the networked museum (Tan 2013) suggests that representation and reception of violent histories neither begin nor end in the physical space demarcated by the walls of the museum. *Spaces* of representation are multiple, dispersed, and networked with one another. That is, histories of violence—and the “lessons” we learn from them or the difficult knowledge they generate—are negotiated and enacted in discursive spaces such as media and political debate and speech, protest and activism; in symbolic spaces such as public apologies and through architectural design features; and increasingly, in the virtual spaces of the Internet and through digital technology. By looking at the entire matrix of representation within which individual cultural institutions—and the actors in charge of getting them off the ground—are embedded, this paper aims to make visible the multiple and networked spaces in which difficult knowledge is addressed.

### **The Canadian Museum for Human Rights (CMHR) in dialogue with the Inuit Art and Learning Centre (IALC): opportunities for new museological approaches.**

— Angeliki Bogiatji (Winnipeg Art Gallery)

The Winnipeg Art Gallery (WAG) is entering a transformative phase with plans to build the first national Inuit Art and Learning Centre (IALC). Envisioned to serve as a center of excellence for the research and exhibition of Inuit art, the IALC aims primarily to become a bridge between Inuit peoples and the rest of the world by fostering a meaningful cultural dialogue. As the WAG envisions and implements a change in curatorial practice with respect to the display of indigenous art, there is an important opportunity to contribute towards the new prioritization of the social history and cultural context of the Canadian Arctic beyond the IALC. This talk will explore potential new museological approaches for the CMHR and the IALC as they seek to address issues of memory, trauma and reconciliation in shaping indigenous representations for the public. The advantages of a meaningful dialogue between the two new national centers presenting official ideologies and contestation will be emphasized.

## **Museums and the Ongoing Crisis of Murdered or Missing Indigenous Women: Some Provocations from the Art of Pamela Masik and Rebecca Belmore**

— Amber Dean (McMaster University)

Just a month before the CMHR's opening ceremonies and "RightsFest," the body of 15-year-old Tina Fontaine of Sagkeeng First Nation was pulled from the Red River at the Alexander Docks, a short distance downriver from where the CMHR sits. Although the distinctive shape of the CMHR building is visible in numerous photographs of the public vigil held for Fontaine on August 19, 2014, the museum has remained silent about Fontaine's violent death and the ongoing crisis of murdered or missing Indigenous women that has sparked countless outcries for a national inquiry. In this paper, I turn to a controversy that erupted in 2011 at the University of British Columbia's Museum of Anthropology over artist Pamela Masik's "The Forgotten" project, an exhibit intended to draw attention to the disappearance or murder of more than 65 women from Vancouver's Downtown Eastside neighbourhood, in order to ask what we might learn from this controversy about the significant challenges of curating the "difficult knowledge" of the shockingly high rates of violence and murder borne by Indigenous women in Canada today. I then consider artist Rebecca Belmore's *Vigil*, a performance she gave in the Downtown Eastside in 2002, and *Trace*, her installation commissioned for the CMHR, to suggest how we might be provoked to better care for this particular form of "difficult knowledge" when colonial histories are made present through art.

### SESSION 6: *Curating Memory and Testimony*

#### **"Territories" of memory: the activation of difficult pasts beyond the museological space**

— Florencia Marchetti (Concordia University)

This presentation will offer some notes from my recent fieldwork in Córdoba, Argentina, which is focused on three memorial sites created to preserve and communicate the experiences of political struggle and violent repression associated with the dictatorial period commonly known as Dirty War (1976-1983). They are the *Provincial Memory Archive*, the *Space for Memory and Human Rights Promotion "La Perla,"* and the *Space for Memory, Promotion, and Defense of Human Rights "Campo de la Ribera."* All of them are located in former clandestine detention and torture centres and are open to the public for visits. Conceptualized as "territories of memory" (Catela 2002, 2007) that have been "conquered" by memory activists, they develop a number of pedagogic, cultural, and research activities that expand the notion of museological space in multiple directions. What can we learn from these experiences and strategies? What new understandings of memory and curating (broadly construed) might they offer to more standard museum spaces and practices in this age of memorial museology?

#### **Competing Memory Entrepreneurs and the Challenges of Curating Human Rights in Public Places**

— Cynthia Milton (Université de Montréal)

As a member of the CEREV team and co-editor of *Curating Difficult Knowledge* (Palgrave, 2011) my presentation engages two themes invoked in the call for papers "Human Rights Museology" and "Curating Difficult Knowledge." In the booming field of memory studies, "memory" implicitly connotes human rights, specifically the defence of human rights that have been transgressed, and the rights of victims to recount, seek social repair and justice. Historical memory may hold positive connotations despite the negative memories themselves. It is through memory that we hope to attain the elusive "Never Again," a future based on respect, justice, and social inclusion. That the pursuit of memory holds these positive connotations in its institutionalized form in public spaces, namely national museums, has been largely driven by non-governmental organizations and survivors groups who argue that memory negates forgetting and oblivion, and academics have thus turned their attention to the myriad of ways that memory functions among individuals, groups, nations and transnationally. Yet, what about memories which do not necessarily promote a human rights narrative or may contort the meaning of "Never Again"? Indeed, memories of "martyrdom" and "salvation" by possible collaborators and perpetrators may also circulate in public discourse, and may be employed for political purposes when convenient, and also be housed in

museums. In an attempt to consider the curation of contested memories, this paper considers the conflicting social actors who make up the memory entrepreneurs, and their different engagement with the construction of museum spaces.

### **The changing roles of testimony in exhibition practices: From the provision of evidence to the challenge of shaping empathetic citizens**

— Andrea Witcomb (Deakin University)

In this paper I will be looking at the changing uses of first person narratives in exhibition making advancing an argument that these have changed over time. While first person testimony has become a central cornerstone in our understanding of how to represent historical trauma since the first attempts at dealing with difficult histories, such as those of the Holocaust, the experience of colonisation for Indigenous Peoples and the processes and experiences of migration, I would argue that the function of these narratives in exhibitions has changed since the 1980s when these exhibitions first came to the fore. I will be using a range of examples, from Australia and elsewhere, to argue that these changes reflect the needs of particular historical moments moving first of all from the need to provide evidential proof, to a more general need to represent the voices of minority groups and, more recently, to build an ethical ground for contemporary forms of citizenship based on developing a more empathetic population able to feel the pain of others. My argument will involve tracing a double shift – the first being a change in what constitutes 'testimony' in the museum context and the second the shift from a 'pedagogy of listening' to a 'pedagogy of feeling'. I will end by asking, in this context, what needs the new Museum of Human Rights in Winnipeg, Canada might be answering and how it understands the role of testimony.