



THE UNIVERSITY OF WINNIPEG

WORKSHOP INVITATION/CALL FOR ABSTRACTS

Caring for Difficult Knowledge: Prospects for the Canadian Museum for Human Rights

an invitational workshop hosted by
the University of Winnipeg Cultural Studies Research Group
at the University of Winnipeg
September 27-29, 2013

In their introduction to *Curating Difficult Knowledge*, Erica Lehrer and Cynthia Milton reflect on the term “curate” – originally meaning “to care for” – and its significance in the context of spaces dedicated to public engagements with traumatic histories and violent pasts, such as museums, memorial sites and heritage tours. They ask, what does it mean to care for difficult knowledge in these spaces? What curatorial practices or approaches are suited to this kind of care-taking? In turn, educational theorists Alice Pitt and Deborah Britzman use the phrase “difficult knowledge” to describe secondhand encounters with traumatic histories (via narratives or other re-presentations) that, due to their sheer affective force, unsettle our fundamental frameworks for making sense of ourselves and the world around us. They argue that what is difficult about difficult knowledge in these instances is not merely the terrible fact(s) of what happened in the past, but the problem of what to do with such knowledge in the present, precisely when it triggers our fears, confusion, aggression and/or hopelessness, bringing us up against the limits of what we are willing and able to understand. The problem of caring for difficult knowledge, then, is a problem for curators and educators alike: How do we encourage learning from traumatic histories and violent pasts when this learning threatens to undo our sense of certainty over the stories of our lives and the lives of others? How might we stay open to the unsettlingings of difficult knowledge, and what becomes pedagogically possible when we do?

The forthcoming Canadian Museum for Human Rights (CMHR) being built in Winnipeg, the city where we work and live, is indeed a space dedicated to public engagements with traumatic histories and violent pasts. As such, we might also imagine this museum as being charged with the task of caring for, or curating, difficult knowledge. We, the University of Winnipeg’s Cultural Studies Working Group, are inviting curators, museum educators, scholars, and past and present graduate students from our MA Program in Cultural Studies and Curatorial Practices to participate in a workshop to explore the notion of caring for difficult knowledge in relation to the prospects for the CMHR. Possible themes/inquiries for presentations may include:

- How might thinking through the CMHR as a site of difficult knowledge inform or generatively shift the current debates surrounding the museum?
- How have various communities and members of the public already anticipated the CMHR as a site of difficult knowledge? How has the CMHR already anticipated itself as a site of difficult knowledge, or responded to this kind of public attention?

- How might caring for difficult knowledge be enacted (or limited) by the museum's curatorial approaches, exhibition design, educational programming, use of technology, public relations strategies, community engagements, or governance? What are the institutional challenges to caring for difficult knowledge faced by curators and other staff at the CMHR?
- How might caring for difficult knowledge be reflected in or limited by expressions such as, for example, the museum's architecture, including the "discursive environment" constituted by its surrounding signage and billboard campaigns?
- What might be the role of museum-goers or "the public" in caring for difficult knowledge at/in relation to the CMHR? How might considering this question require a rethinking of dominant cultural conceptions of "the public"?
- How might university educators, cultural studies scholars, artists or other cultural workers be uniquely positioned to help care for difficult knowledge in relation to the work of the CMHR, or in relation to publics and counterpublics as they form alongside the museum and contribute to discourses on human rights?

You are invited to submit a proposed presentation including a title and abstract (250-300 words) relevant to the themes/inquiries outlined above, along with a short bio, by Friday, May 31, 2013 to:

Angela Failler (Research Group Leader): a.failer@uwinnipeg.ca

Please also cc: Chris Campbell (Coordinator): ch.campbell@uwinnipeg.ca

Presenters/participants and a preliminary workshop itinerary will be confirmed shortly thereafter.

Confirmed keynote speakers:

Dr. Erica Lehrer is Associate Professor of History and Sociology/Anthropology, as well as Director of the Centre for Ethnographic Research and Exhibition in the Aftermath of Violence (CEREV) at Concordia University where she also holds a Canada Research Chair in Post-Conflict Memory, Ethnography, and Museology. Her research looks at cultural practices and products that attempt to apprehend, represent, or come to terms with mass violence and its aftermath — from the stories told in theoretical and creative texts to films, monuments, exhibitions and the 'happenings' of everyday life. In addition to several published journal articles and book chapters, she is the co-editor of *Curating Difficult Knowledge: Violent Pasts in Public Places* (Palgrave MacMillan 2011) and author of *Jewish Poland Revisited: Heritage Tourism in Unquiet Places* (University of Indiana Press, forthcoming).

Dr. Rita Kaur Dhamoon teaches Political Science at the University of Victoria. Her current research program is grounded in critical race feminism, and includes a book project on Sikhs in Canada and nation-building; research on intersectionality and solidarity politics between people of colour and Indigenous people; an intersectional analysis of the Canadian Museum of Human Rights with Dr. Olena Hankivsky (SFU); research, as a collaborator, in a SSHRC Research-Creation grant for 'Project Barca: New Architectures of Memory & Identity' which brings

together intersectionality politics and performance studies; and a collaborative project that explores how students learn and how instructors teach 'difficult' topics on race and racism. Along with several published journal articles, book chapters, and co-edited collections, she is the author of a book called *Identity/Difference Politics* (UBC Press 2009).

Dr. Olena Hankivsky is Director of the Institute for Intersectionality Research and Policy at Simon Fraser University and is a Canadian Institutes of Health Research Gender and Health Research Chair and a Michael Smith Foundation for Health Research Senior Scholar. She is editor of the recently published *Health Inequities in Canada: Intersectional Frameworks and Practices* (2011, UBC Press), and co-editor of *Women's Health in Canada: Critical Perspectives on Theory and Policy* (2007, University of Toronto Press) and *Gender, Politics and the State in Ukraine* (2012, University of Toronto Press). She is also the author of *Social Policy and the Ethic of Care* (2004, University of British Columbia Press) and co-author of *The Dome of Silence: Sexual Harassment and Abuse in Sport* (2000, Fernwood & Zed Publications). With Dr. Rita Kaur Dhamoon (University of Victoria) she is conducting an intersectional analysis of the Canadian Museum for Human Rights.

Who we are: The Cultural Studies Research Group at the University of Winnipeg (UW) is an interdisciplinary group of scholars from across the Social Sciences and Humanities. The Group is led by Dr. Angela Failler, Chancellor's Research Chair and Chair of the Department of Women's and Gender Studies, and is supported by the UW's Research Office, the Chancellor, the President, the Vice-President Academic and the Vice-President Research and International. The Cultural Studies Research Group also supports and is supported by the UW's MA program in Cultural Studies.

WORKS CITED AND RECOMMENDED READINGS

- Lehrer, Erica, Cynthia E. Milton, and Monica Eileen Patterson. *Curating Difficult Knowledge: Violent Pasts in Public Places*. Houndmills (UK): Palgrave Macmillan, 2011.
- Pitt, Alice, and Deborah Britzman. "Speculations on qualities of difficult knowledge in teaching and learning: an experiment in psychoanalytic research." *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education* 16.6 (2003): 755-76.
- Simon, Roger I. "A Shock to Thought: Curatorial Judgment and the Public Exhibition of 'Difficult Knowledge.'" *Memory Studies* 4.4 (2011): 432-49.