

Canada at the “Crossroads”: Global Citizenship, Narrative History, and The Canadian Museum for Human Rights

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This essay considers the intentions of the twenty-first century narrative history museum in relation to the museological genre’s predecessor in eighteenth-century France. In particular, the example of the newly-founded Canadian Museum for Human Rights, Canada’s first and only museum dedicated entirely to the subject of human rights, and the first federal museum to be erected outside of the nation’s capital in 40 years, signals great change in the contemporary concept of “nation”. The globalized world we inhabit has given rise to a new historiography: one that is transnational and that addresses such universal issues as human rights, oppression, violence, and pandemic crises such as AIDS. In light of the new historiography and political landscape of our shared global community, this essay considers the impact of globalization on the museum institution, by examining the foundations and conceptual development of the most recent type of narrative history museum to appear in Canada. Broadly speaking, this article asks what it means to present the new historiography in the context of the contemporary narrative history museum, while exploring the implications of exhibiting this subject matter and how it engages the critical consciousness and imagination of a universal citizenry.

Introduction: Home is Always an Imaginary Place...

In my previous presentations at NaMu (I + II), I discussed aspects of my doctoral research on a museological genre I refer to as the narrative history museum. As distinct from a history museum, whose mandate is to collect objects of history, the narrative history museum uses objects to evoke ideas and to tell a cohesive story about history. By definition, the narrative museum is philosophical, not rational, and creates meaning through the combined narrative of its collections, scenography, and architectural program. Contemporary examples of this genre include the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington, D.C., and Johannesburg's Apartheid Museum in South Africa. As a synthesized or "total" narrative environment, the narrative history museum is the museographic equivalent of the *gesamkunstwerk*. Today, this genre has undergone profound change, owing to transformations in societal attitudes toward time, representation, and historiography, in addition to technological innovations that permit simulated rather than authentic experience.

While the narrative history museum is a familiar feature of contemporary museum design, in my doctoral research I sought origins and intentions for this genre in France's first national museum of sculpture, the Musée des Monuments français (1795-1816), founded and curated by Alexandre Lenoir. This museum inaugurated the period room, while becoming one of Europe's first chronological museum displays. In this paper, I shall consider the example of a narrative history museum that is currently being planned for a site in Winnipeg, Manitoba – The Canadian Museum for Human Rights – and how the narrative museum in its twenty-first century form differs from its predecessor in eighteenth-century France, by responding to the multicultural processes of our contemporary, global condition.

One such distinction is in the devolution of the concept of "nation" in what is ostensibly a "national" museum institution. As a point of comparison, in the very title he gave to the catalogues he began creating for the *Musée des Monuments français* in 1800, Lenoir specifically stated that the Musée perform as both a history of nation and art – in an era when the concept of "history" had not yet been so narrowly defined as it would with the emergence of the nineteenth-century scientific discipline. For Lenoir and his society – a mere two hundred years ago – there was no inherent disjuncture in the notion that history and art narrated the past as one, and thus Lenoir used the opportunity of the museum to rally the French around a glorious national past that was, in the late eighteenth century, being born again.

The globalized world we inhabit has given rise to a new historiography: one that is transnational and that addresses such universal issues as human rights, oppression, violence, and pandemic crises such as AIDS. In this paradigm, the construction of the "Other" is no longer construed as the specific enemy of any single geo-political state, but rather occupies a more nebulous, borderless abode. Having recognized that its mission is far greater than to serve the populace of a given political territory, the new national museum has radically altered its message to address political issues and concerns of a heterogeneous and universal citizenry. In short, the new narrative museum has dispensed with that particular trope of Romantic historiography that centered on monarchical lineage and victorious military defeats, a trope that continues to define the exhibits of many history museums founded in the previous century, in favour of a storyline that engages themes with global – rather than local – resonance. As the literary historian Alberto Manguel recently mused while delivering the annual Massey lectures across Canada¹ – a series he dedicated to the themes of identity and

1 The Massey lectures are an annual lecture series created in honour of the Right Honourable Vincent Massey, former Governor General of Canada (Canada's highest political office). Alberto Manguel

storytelling – “The arrival of new cultures, the ravages of war and of industrial upheavals, the shifts of political divisions and ethnic regroupings, the strategies of multinational companies and global trade, make it almost impossible to hold for long on to a shared definition of nationality (...) Nationalities, ethnicities, tribal, and religious filiations imply geographical and political definitions of some kind, and yet, partly because of our nomad nature and partly due to the fluctuations of history, our geography is less grounded in a physical than in a phantom landscape. Home is always an imaginary place.”²

I would like to argue that the concept of nation in our contemporary moment is no less important than it was in the nineteenth-century, but with the crucial difference that nationhood today is defined increasingly by values, rather than geographic borders. I would also like to argue that it is precisely because we – as a social collective – live within a context that fundamentally recognizes the richness of multiculturalism and diversity as the product of these values, that it has become imperative that we resolve, at a social level, the issues of political instability that Manguel so aptly described. Manguel argues that only through greater inclusion and respect for difference can we achieve harmony and balance. It may therefore at first glance seem contradictory to speak of the museum’s role in this social project. Historically, the museum and its precursor, the curiosity cabinet, have been places marked by their exclusionary practices, rather than for their inclusiveness. Private collectors and national armies have historically mined foreign lands for exotic objects and priceless art pieces, objects which have, by virtue of their placement within the museum, retained something of the narrative of their initial displacement. It is thus a legitimate question to ask how, even in our contemporary moment, the museum might be re-imagined so as to enable Manguel’s concept of inclusion to exist.

Were he attending this conference today, I imagine that Manguel would proffer the uniquely human art and act of storytelling as the means to regain some form of political and social balance. Stories that bring together people communally, and probe the imagination to remind us of our humanity, have become essential to preserving this communality: “Dreaming up stories, telling stories, putting stories into writing, reading stories,” Manguel writes, “are all complementary arts that lend words to our sense of reality, and can serve as vicarious learning, as transmission of memory, as instruction or as warning.”³ He reminds us that in ancient Anglo-Saxon tradition, the very word for poet was *maker*, blending metaphors of stories with building the material world.

The narrative history museum – literally an architecture that aims to tell a story – seems the ideal venue for meaningful stories to be exchanged and yet, it has come to occupy volatile territory in Manguel’s landscape of words, if for no other reason than that of the contemporary propensity for museums to probe such difficult questions as those related to war and oppression, in highly evocative terms – Bonnell and Simon’s concept of “difficult exhibitions” (2007).⁴ If the narrative history museum (such as Holocaust museums and the Apartheid Museum) as a genre fulfills an important institutional function in addressing abuses of social and political power, in the specific manner these museums often position the visitor as victim the museum’s role is less convincing, and in some cases, the potential ethical

delivered his lectures in addresses to audiences at five separate Canadian universities in the month of October (2007). These lectures are published by the House of Anansi Press in Toronto under the title, *The City of Words* (2007).

2 Alberto Manguel, *The City of Words* (Toronto: House of Anansi Press, 2007) 143, 144-145.

3 Manguel, *City of Words*, 10.

4 Jennifer Bonnell and Roger Simon, “ ‘Difficult’ exhibitions and intimate encounters,” *Museum and Society* 5 (2) (July 2007) 65-85.

function of these museums has been compromised altogether by the high degree of moralizing, commodification and sensationalism in their exhibition designs.

In light of the new historiography and political landscape of our shared global community, I will, in the remainder of this essay, consider this workshop's prevailing theme, the impact of globalization on the museum institution, by examining the foundations and conceptual development of the most recent type of narrative history museum to appear in Canada. The Canadian Museum for Human Rights, slated to open in the city of Winnipeg, Manitoba, in 2011 (construction to begin once funding is in place) is, not insignificantly, Canada's first new federal museum in 40 years, and its conception in this post-millennium moment indicates a provocative statement about the role that the contemporary museum may play in furthering world interest and knowledge about ideas of universal importance. It is also notable that this museum will be located far from the nation's capital, Ottawa, and is the only Canadian national museum sited outside of this region. Broadly speaking, this paper asks what it means to present the new historiography in the context of the contemporary narrative history museum, while exploring the implications of exhibiting this subject matter and how it engages the critical consciousness and imagination of a universal citizenry.⁵

'Nation' at the Crossroads

Dedicating an entire museum to the subject of human rights has not been without controversy for the advocates of the Canadian Museum for Human Rights (CMHR). The project of Canada's first and only museum of human rights was conceived by the late Dr. Israel Asper, who launched the CMHR on 17 April 2003, coinciding with the 21st anniversary of the signing of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms (on April 17, 1982),⁶ and a mere six months before the philanthropist's death. A lawyer who also dabbled in provincial politics,⁷ Asper built the media company he founded in 1974, CanWest Global Communications, into the multi-billion dollar industry that it is today. As one of Canada's largest international media companies, CanWest dominates the Canadian media landscape with its ownership of a major television network (Global Television Network), one of Canada's two daily national newspapers (*The National Post*), and more than 60 Canadian regional newspapers.⁸ A little over a quarter century since its foundation, CanWest now employs over 11,000 people, and has an annual budget that exceeds \$2.61 billion. With its head office located in Winnipeg's tallest building (CanWest Global Place), CanWest will – in more ways than one – tower over the posthumous construction of Izzy Asper's dream.

Dr. Asper chose the site of his native city of Winnipeg, near the geographic centre of Canada yet far from the nation's capital, as the home for this new national institution. "At the

5 For images of the future Canadian Museum for Human Rights, please consult the CMHR website: www.canadianmuseumforhumanrights.com.

6 This document was created in 1982 and integrated as part of Canada's Constitution, and guarantees Canadians' rights and freedoms. According to the website of the Canadian Department of Justice, "The *Charter* protects Canadians' rights and freedoms by limiting the ability of governments to pass laws or take actions that discriminate or infringe on human rights. This means that all individuals must be treated equally, regardless of their race, national or ethnic origin, colour, religion, sex, age or mental or physical disability. The *Charter* also protects Canada's linguistic duality and multicultural character." http://canada.justice.gc.ca/en/news/fs/2003/doc_30898.html (Accessed November 5, 2007).

7 Dr. Israel Asper was elected Leader of the Manitoba Liberal Party in 1970, where his views tended toward right-libertarian, or conservative ideas. He championed a laissez-faire economy, and fought for the elimination of the welfare state. Under his leadership the Liberals suffered defeat, and Asper resigned as party leader and MLA in 1975.

8 Beyond the frontier, CanWest owns three radio stations in the U.K., and until recently, held shares in New Zealand's MediaWorks NZ, including a number of radio networks and stations.

crossroads of Canada” literally describes the museum’s site at the fork of two significant waterways, the Assiniboine and Red Rivers. The Forks has been a historic meeting place for First Nations peoples to peacefully resolve conflict for centuries, while Winnipeg itself is said to have witnessed an impressive array of human rights struggles of its own – ranging from French language and Métis rights led by Louis Riel, to Labour rights, and the Women’s rights and suffragette movement headed by Nellie McClung. The site could not be more appropriately selected, we are told, as Winnipeg is today home to dozens of ethnic and cultural communities, no doubt with stories of their own.

However this museum at the crossroads of Canada also aptly describes the metaphor of an institution poised to address issues related to human rights – in a moment when Canada is itself embroiled in debates about political and religious intolerance. In Québec, the separatist *Parti Québécois* only recently attempted to introduce Bill 195 into the National Assembly, legislation which proposed that Québec issue its own “citizenship” while requiring that its citizens pass a French language exam in order to partake in such democratic processes as holding political office, while the Bouchard-Taylor Commission, appointed by Québec’s Premier, Jean Charest, in February 2007, was created to determine the extent of “reasonable accommodation” for religious minorities living in Québec and has unwittingly created a forum in which the most astounding and disappointingly anti-immigrant viewpoints have been voiced.

In light of the intense pressures that surround the creation of a museum dedicated to issues of human rights, it is not insignificant to consider that Asper – whose political leanings toward Zionism were well-known – used his media empire to wage his own battles on international politics. He was also opposed to public broadcasting media for competing with the private sector – in particular, the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation,⁹ who sponsored the very Massey Lecture series with which I began this essay. And while Asper has gone on record as stating that the museum “will be totally apolitical and antiseptic in terms of trying to preach a message of one kind of inhumanity over another,” his admonition that the CMHR not become “a propaganda device for a particular political point of view”¹⁰ is perhaps less evident. There are clear indications that Asper’s own causes will be well represented in the museum’s thematic plan, notably in the dedication of an entire hall to the subject of the Holocaust genocide. The Asper Family Foundation already sponsors annual student trips to the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum, a philanthropic venture that is designed to sensitize young students to the atrocities of the Holocaust. In the context of a museum devoted to the subject of human rights, the Holocaust is one of many narratives related to genocide that could be told, but in the personal context of Izzy Asper, it is the obvious one.

Almost four years to the day that Asper launched The Canadian Museum for Human Rights project,¹¹ the federal government declared the CMHR a federal institution, an act that brings with it the promise of a substantial infusion of financial aid. While the Canadian public eagerly awaits news of the results of this new government-community partnership, one can be sure that the government’s involvement comes with many strings attached. The branding of the museum a national institution has engendered the inevitable dialogue over what constitutes a national museum and its mandate. Clearly the content of the museum will be of national importance? It will reflect national sensibilities and common values over what constitutes human rights? Surely the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, a product of the Trudeau era and a model of democratic ideals for other young democracies, will constitute the keystone of the institution? According to the Canadian Museum for Human Rights’

9 With its said pro-Palestinian position.

10 Michael Friscolanti, “Tribute to Human Rights,” *National Post*, Thursday, April 17, 2004.

11 On April 20, 2007.

Mission statement, the museum has set for itself the ambitious task of advancing “understanding and support for human rights in Canada and throughout the world,”¹² while further claiming the CMRH to be “a powerful symbol of Canada’s unwavering commitment to recognizing, promoting and celebrating human rights.”¹³ It will, in this context, become a “national and international destination – a centre of learning and history where Canadians and people from other countries can engage in dialogue and commit to taking action to combat the forces of hate and oppression.”¹⁴

It would seem that realizing Dr. Asper’s dream of creating an institution for human rights would be the ideal incarnation of the museum as a means of addressing multiculturalism in a globalized world. According to its literature, the museum will trace the development of the human rights movement and the drafting of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights,¹⁵ it will highlight international stories related to genocides such as those of Bosnia, Rwanda and Darfur, and it will also address the struggles of historically disenfranchised social groups, including women, children, gays and lesbians, the disabled and refugees. As such, these are all universal themes. Moreover, the museum’s literature claims, the Canadian Museum for Human Rights will “change attitudes through education and empathy (especially amongst our nation’s young people) to combat bullying, racism, hatred, intolerance and ignorance.”¹⁶ But something in this same passage should give us pause. The museum will change attitudes “through education and empathy”? Empathy? Why must we impose empathy upon the already ambitious task of overcoming hatred, intolerance, and ignorance? Why must we assume that a state-imposed form of emotional transference be required to address human shortcomings?

The Walls of Inclusivity

Perhaps because I am an optimist, I would like to believe that there is a space for an institution dedicated to the issues surrounding human rights, although, as one writer has already remarked, it would seem more appropriate to locate such intentions in an institute of study rather than the more popular typology of the museum, where creating empathetic responses often trumps a truly critical engagement with the material at hand. The CMHR’s literature clearly states that it seeks inclusivity in its exhibit content, and for this reason it is crucial to ask what histories will be preserved, what human rights stories will be told, and perhaps even more crucially, how, in this new Canadian national museum.

As in any museum, architecture is central to communicating intentionality. In a lecture he delivered at McGill University, the Canadian-Israeli architect Moshe Safdie recently claimed that “exhibitory and architecture must come together as one,”¹⁷ as they have in works such as Yad Vashem and the U.S. Institute for Peace, to produce a unified message. It would seem that the Friends of the Canadian Museum for Human Rights share this opinion of the centrality of architecture to the museum project, for the Architectural Review Committee launched an ambitious international architectural design competition in 2003 that paired 62 initial entries from 21 countries and 5 continents, down to 30 architectural firms invited to

12 Canadian Museum for Human Rights website (www.canadianmuseumforhumanrights.com), Vision, p.5.

13 Canadian Museum for Human Rights website, Vision, p.3.

14 Canadian Museum for Human Rights website, Vision, p.3.

15 Adopted by the General Assembly of the United Nations on December 10, 1948.

16 From information package prepared by the Friends of the Canadian Museum for Human Rights, Montréal, 2007: Fact, “An Extraordinary Opportunity for Canada.”

17 Moshe Safdie, David Azrieli Lecture, McGill University School of Architecture, Monday, October 15, 2007.

submit conceptual design proposals for Stage 2 of the competition, to eight firms invited to present their proposals at the semi-final stage,¹⁸ to a final panel of three.

Ultimately, the Architectural Review Committee selected a design by internationally renowned and award-winning American architect Antoine Predock¹⁹ as one that could “fulfill the objectives for an inspirational building that achieves a complexity relating to the diversity of the human experience.”²⁰ The American firm beat out the two other finalists, Canadian firms Saucier + Perrotte Architectes and Dan S. Hanganu Architects & The Arcop Group, both of Montréal. Predock described the winning scheme as one that

is rooted in humanity, making visible in the architecture the fundamental commonality of humankind – a symbolic apparition of ice, clouds and stone set in a field of sweet grass. Carved into the earth and dissolving into the sky on the Winnipeg horizon, the abstract ephemeral wings of a white dove embrace a mythic stone mountain of 450 million year old Tyndall limestone in the creation of a unifying and timeless landmark for all nations and cultures of the world.²¹

Predock likens the journey through the museum to the epic journey that is life, injecting anthropomorphic and life-affirming metaphors that begin with the building’s roots, become cleansed by the Garden of Contemplation’s purifying lung, and culminate in the vaporous Cloud that is the Tower of Hope – like water, life-giving in its proclamation of humanity’s commitment to human rights.²²

The 100-metre high crystalline Tower of Hope will soar above the museum and recalls, in name and oversimplified intention, other famous towers crowning famous buildings, Daniel Libeskind’s Holocaust Tower at the Jewish Museum, Berlin, among them. The museum’s

18 These semi-finalists were Antoine Predock Architect (USA); Charles Correa Associates (India); Dan S. Hanganu Architects & The Arcop Group (Canada); Mashabane Rose Architects (South Africa); Michael Maltzan Architect, Inc. (USA); Saucier + Perrotte Architectes (Canada); Schmidt Hammer & Lassen (Denmark); and Frederic Schwartz Architects and EHDD Architecture (USA).

19 Antoine Predock was the recipient of the 2006 American Institute of Architects (AIA) Gold Medal. This award, given annually, is the highest honor the AIA confers on an architect. The Gold Medal honors an individual whose significant body of work has had a lasting influence on the theory and practice of architecture.

20 Canadian Museum for Human Rights website, Architecture, 1.

21 From Antoine Predock’s website (www.predock.com) accessed November 5, 2007.

22 Excerpt from the website: “The Journey through the museum parallels an epic journey through life. Visitors enter the museum between the Roots, protective stone arms suggestive of an ancient geological event. Clutching the earth, the roots are calibrated to block northern and northwestern winds and celebrate the sun, with apertures marking paths of equinox and solstice. Containing the essential public interface functions of the museum, the Roots create a framework for ceremonial outdoor events with roof terraces and amphitheater seating. The journey begins with a descent into the earth, a symbolic recognition of the earth as the spiritual center for many indigenous cultures. Arriving at the heart of the building, the Great Hall. Carved from the earth, the archaeologically rich void of the Great Hall evokes the memory of ancient gatherings at the Forks of First Nations peoples, and later, settlers and immigrants.

Like a mirage within the Museum, the Garden of Contemplation is Winnipeg’s Winter Garden. Basalt columns emerge from the top surface of the timeless granite monolith. Water and medicinal plants define space and suggest content. The First Nations sacred relationship to water is honored, as a place of healing and solace amidst reflections of earth and sky. The space of the Garden functions as a purifying “lung” reinforcing the fundamental environmental ethic, which grounds the building.

The journey culminates in an ascent of the Tower of Hope, with controlled view release to panoramic views of sky, city and the natural realm. Glacial in its timelessness, the Tower of Hope is a beacon for humanity. Symbolic of changes in the physical state of water, material and form, it speaks to the life affirming hope for positive changes in humanity. An allusion to the vaporous state of water, the Cloud, houses the functional support of the Museum. With strong overlaps to the visitor experience, the cloud is envisioned as light filled and buoyant, in marked contrast to the geologic evocation of the Roots and Stone Galleries, providing a visible reminder from the exterior, in tandem with the Tower, of the power and necessity of hope and tolerance.” Accessed 5 November, 2007.

literature proclaims of the tower that its “iconic symbol could be a beacon of light on the urban landscape and (would) surely be visible from Winnipeg’s grand avenue stretching from the Legislature and terminating at the historical Union Station at the western edge of the site.” Presumably this tower would also be visible from CanWest Global Place?

Of any comment one could make about Antoine Predock’s body of work,²³ it is that his designs are nothing if not spiritually and holistically grounded. His buildings rise solidly – at times, majestically – from the depths of a geological landscape to which they always pay utmost respect. Indeed, the natural elements play an essential role in Predock’s architecture, as they will at the CMHR, which is oriented around a central Garden of Contemplation filled with water and plants. At the CMHR, visitors will proceed through an entrance that appears to be carved out of the earth, and emerge into a space that metamorphoses into a glass embrace, only to then be enfolded into a cinematographic experience aided by digital media.

However the ability of architecture to symbolically communicate the continuing struggle for human rights notwithstanding, it is the proposed master plan for a multi-sensory visitor journey enhanced by drama, technology, and visual and audio presentations that demands further attention. The CMHR’s literature states that the exhibits of the museum will emphasize the necessity of respecting difference in order to achieve social dignity and equality. Its narratives are intended to be communicated in a compelling, engaging and otherwise interactive way through the combined uses of “experience theatres,” where visitors may engage in human rights stories; forums for discussion and engagement; multicultural viewpoints to ensure that a multitude of perspectives be conveyed, and a section called “Canadian encounters,” a nebulous category that promises a space for Canadian stories to be exhibited.²⁴ Ultimately, we are told, the museum hopes to produce a politically engaged citizen.

If the language and intentions of the museum to create a “compelling” visit sound at all familiar, it is because the visitor’s journey is being choreographed by Ralph Appelbaum Associates (RAA), a popular New-York based interpretive museum design firm. With offices in New York City, London, and Beijing, the firm has over one hundred built projects to its credit, notably museum exhibitions, visitor centres, and educational environments, covering subjects that range from natural history and the physical sciences, to cultural and social history and the fine arts. With its interdisciplinary personnel of more than 75 specialists in design and communications, Ralph Appelbaum Associates is not only the largest interpretive museum design firm in the world, but a well-oiled machine. In the context of the narrative history museum, it was RAA who produced the permanent exhibition at the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington, D.C., an exhibit that won the firm a host of top design awards.²⁵ RAA also designed the Nelson and Napoléon installation for the National Maritime Museum in Greenwich in 2005 (a museum which was the subject of a NaMu analysis at the previous workshop in Leicester in June 2007), and the firm’s influence is also keenly felt at the Apartheid Museum in Johannesburg, South Africa.

Appelbaum claims of the CMHR’s multi-levelled and multi-layered “journey of hope” that it is one in which the focus is squarely rooted in the present and future, and not the past, a claim that is not immediately apparent from the description of the master plan. Visitors will journey first through a theatre dedicated to issues concerning Aboriginal Rights and historic

23 Notable among Predock’s projects is the design he produced for the National Archive of Denmark in Copenhagen (1996; unbuilt); also the Tacoma Art Museum in Washington (1997-2003), and the Robert Hoag Rawlings Public Library in Colorado (2003).

24 Canadian Museum for Human Rights website, Exhibits, p.4.

25 Including the 1994 Gold Industrial Design Excellence Award and the Top Honors American Association of Museums Award (1994).

treaties with the British Crown and Canadian government; on to a Garden of Contemplation for an experience of solace and healing; through a two-storey gallery addressing human rights advocacy, laws and institutions in Canada; to a space promising a global perspective on human rights issues in “Eye on the World.” In this space, a real-time map of human rights issues will include a news wall of broadcast feeds from around the world, broadcasting the changing contemporary issues of concern. Yet another gallery explores the Human Rights Movement as a modern phenomenon, begun in the post-Holocaust era, while a separate space specifically addresses the Nazi Holocaust. A final Hall of Commitment, in the building’s uppermost gallery, provides the space of reflection for visitors to respond to their visit. Visitors will travel through the museum with a “smartcard,” a device used to gain access to many of the museum’s interactive exhibits, and also to retain information of their tour. In the manner it provides structure and narrative to the visitor’s journey, the smartcard is a convention reminiscent of the passport the visitor receives at the Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington, D.C., or the “racial identity” the tourist is arbitrarily given at the Apartheid Museum in Johannesburg.

There are many ethno-groups partaking in the dialogue surrounding the development of the Canadian Museum for Human Rights, including a well-pedigreed community of Human Rights “experts” and a Human Rights Advisory Committee. To be sure, the stakes are high in the decision-making process guiding the development of the content and form of this new museum type. But communities must be vigilant. For the narrative history museum to be truly effective as an educational venue, it cannot and should not mistake evoking empathy for bringing about change. The metaphors of journey-making that abound in this museum’s master plan are not, as Ralph Appelbaum has claimed them to be, intended to put “people in a personal journey.”²⁶ They are, rather, highly choreographed and technological environments that are designed to evoke a range of human responses, from shame and sadness, to enlightenment and inspiration. The CMHR may well be a space designed to engage the visitor morally, to have the visitor face her/his own conscience, and its designers may well hope that the visitor will emerge ready to engage the world as an active, sentient, and global citizen. But to impose such emotions and expect a homogeneous response is careless at best, if not, naïve, and moreover, is a misinterpretation of Manguel’s notion of inclusiveness.

Today, the Canadian Museum for Human Rights remains a project on paper, a project over which many people have collaborated to produce a space of reflection and a space of learning for the global citizen. With its shift from an object-based collection to an institution founded on ideas, the CMHR incarnates the museum institution’s attempt to adapt to globalization. The attendant shift in narrative, to one that engages universal issues and themes, is also a product of the contemporary era. Yet the founding ideal of the museum to be a pedagogical institution remains strong, and the challenges that this museum will undoubtedly face as it conceives of a master plan worthy of upholding a museum dedicated to issues of human rights are many. That which must remain at the forefront of the conceptual development of this museum is the fundamental paradox on which the institution has historically been premised, and yet which must be overcome: to truly be an institution of the global world, the museum institution must shed its ambition of creating a context of permanence, in order to create a space in which perspectives are always, inevitably, about change.

26 Darcy Keith, “Designer Unveils Vision for Human Rights Museum,” *National Post* (May 5, 2007).

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