

Empathy and Distanciation: an Examination of Holocaust Video- and Photography
in the Topography of Terror, the German Military History Museum and the
Canadian Museum for Human Rights

by

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Abstract

This project seeks to examine the ways in which the media of Holocaust photography and videography are represented in museums in Canada and Germany. Specifically, this project analyzes the Topography of Terror (Berlin), the Canadian Museum for Human Rights (Winnipeg), and the German Military History Museum (Dresden). The media of video- and photography are integral to a comparative examination of the intentional and unintentional effects and knowledge produced by these museums, since both media tend to be seen as more ‘authentic’ than text and remain somewhat outside the control of the museums; photographs and videos are often more than just a mouthpiece for museal goals. In order to adequately compare these representations in each of the three museums, they are analyzed simultaneously through the lens of distance and proximity between visitor and subject, and whether one is able to feel empathy for historical persons (and with whom) or not.

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Chapter I – Introduction

1. Introduction

Since the last decades of the twentieth century, museums, especially but not exclusively in the Western world, have undergone a sort of transformative boom. This process manifests itself in two different, interrelated ways. On the one hand, the number of museums which are associated with violent or military history, human rights violations, tragedies and mass atrocities has increased at an exceptional rate, in particular among those museums which serve a memorializing function. This increased rate of museal growth has also involved a somewhat sudden development of different types of museums beyond traditional memorial and historical museums. Simultaneously, memorial and historical museums have also evolved to incorporate, for instance, documentary and experiential elements. The central goal of this project is to analyze two axes of Holocaust representation in Germany and in Canada, with an eye towards the representational differences that occur in different styles of museums, and the difference in representation between either country. Specifically, this project focuses on the presentation of Holocaust photography and video, and the ways in which museums in Canada and Germany utilize the representational tools of empathy and distanciation. This project uses three museums as case studies, in part because they are each a different kind of museum: the Canadian Museum for Human Rights (an ideas museum located in Winnipeg), the *Militärhistorisches Museum der Bundeswehr* (the Military History Museum, a history museum located in Dresden) and the *Topographie des Terrors* (the Topography of Terror, a documentation centre located in Berlin).

2. Museal Categories

2. a. Canadian and German Museums

On a superficial level, one of the primary ways in which German and Canadian museums can be differentiated is in their compulsion to include or exclude certain subject matter. This is especially true in terms of how history museums incorporate the Holocaust. While museums purely dedicated to the Holocaust are a relatively new phenomenon in Germany (starting in the 1990s), the Holocaust is nevertheless commonly treated as inseparable from the rest of German history, especially the history of the Second World War.¹ Within the parameters of this project, this is in particular reflected by the Military History Museum. Although the museum does not have differentiated or dedicated space to the Holocaust – aside from a few cabinets – it nevertheless is present in different parts of the museum, including in the sections documenting the war in Eastern Europe, the interwar period and the development of the Nazi party, and in special thematic sections such as its exhibition *War and Suffering*. In this sense, the museum focalizes a pre-existing trend: the Holocaust is intertwined with German history. This does not just apply to military or war history. Traces of the Holocaust can be found throughout German museums.²

In Canada, conversely, the Holocaust is significantly less represented. On the one hand, this is a logical result of the Holocaust taking place in Europe rather than North America, and so there are no dedicated memorial spaces in Canada upon which to build a museum. On the other

¹ Hannah Holtzschneider, *The Holocaust and Representations of Jews: History and Identity in the Museum* (London: Routledge, 2011), 80-84.

² Angelika Schoder, *Die Vermittlung des Unbegreiflichen: Darstellungen des Holocaust im Museum* (Frankfurt: Campus, 2014) 152-160.

hand, the Holocaust is in some ways integral to the post-war Canadian national identity. As ‘victors’ of the Second World War, the existence of the Holocaust is often used to justify Canadian involvement in the war, even if this is factually incorrect. The incorporation of the Holocaust into the Canadian War Museum, for instance, suggests that the event itself is a result of a specific kind of evil which Canadians were honor-bound to combat. At the same time, efforts to incorporate specific, extensive Holocaust memorialization into the Canadian War Museum were met with resistance from veterans groups and government officials.³ Even the Canadian Museum for Human Rights resists fulfilling a memorial function in its Holocaust representation, and does the museum treat the Holocaust as extraordinary. Rather, the Holocaust is used in the context of the CMHR as an example of human rights violations which can serve an educational purpose.

The specific ways in which the Holocaust is treated in museums in both countries can also be differentiated. One marked way in which German museums traditionally represent the Holocaust, for example, is their tendency towards a documentary approach. Stephan Jaeger argues while discussing German history museums that rather than attempting to create a strong evocation of the past, “visitors are kept at a representational distance: they generally know that they are confronted with historical objects that document the past instead of being primarily immersed in a constructed experience of the past.”⁴

³ A. Dirk Moses, “Protecting Human Rights and Preventing Genocide: the Canadian Museum for Human Rights and the Will to Intervene,” *The Idea of a Human Rights Museum*, ed. Karen Busby, Adam Muller and Andrew Woolford (Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 2015), 30.

⁴ Stephan Jaeger: “Temporalizing History toward the Future: Representing Violence and Human Rights Violations in the Military History Museum in Dresden,” *The Idea of a Human Rights Museum*, ed. Karen Busby, Adam Muller and Andrew Woolford (Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 2015), 230.

It is important to bear in mind while discussing the Canadian and German museal landscape that stark categories are often inadequate to describe 21st-century museums. Many museums blur the lines between representational styles and museum types, including those discussed in this project but especially the Military History Museum. It may appear superficially easy to distinguish between different categories of museums since they theoretically involve different goals and approaches. The reality of making these distinctions, however, is more complex; even scholars who argue that it is possible to positively distinguish them concede that this is challenging, especially as museums continue to evolve and adapt to new representational trends and the need for new or amended contents. In his writings on memorial museums, Paul Williams defines them and distinguishes them from traditional history museums thusly: “More than almost any other institution, memorial museums purport to be morally guided. They invariably cherish public education as it is geared towards the future avoidance of comparable tragedies.” This pedagogical approach to tragedy also relies on an understanding of the interplay of personal, regional, national and international identity politics, especially as they pertain to the visitor’s positioning of themselves towards historical persons.⁵ Simultaneously, however, Williams notes that questions of visitor identity may also naturally occur in any kind of history museum, and that history museums also have strong pedagogical goals.⁶ Likewise, the line between ideas museums and memorial museums may sometimes be blurred - especially since ideas museums tend to also be moralizing in some way,⁷ and may also be strongly didactic. Additionally, one of Williams’s central criteria for a memorial museum is that it includes an

⁵ Paul Williams, *Memorial Museums: the Global Rush to Commemorate Atrocities* (Oxford: Berg, 2007), 131.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 8.

⁷ Jaeger, “Temporalizing History,” 229.

examination of the dynamic between victim, perpetrator, bystander and the museum visitor; however, this is also the case with ideas museums which often openly ask these questions. Additionally, two uniquely German subcategories of Holocaust representation are *Gedenkstätten* (memorial sites) and *Dokumentationszentren* (documentation centres). In some cases, they utilize museal techniques – the *Dokumentationszentrum* of the Topography of Terror appears very much like a museum, especially considering that it presents a causal view of history and presents facts without attempting to recreate a feeling of the past.⁸ Memorial sites may also contain elements of memorial museums as described above – they commemorate suffering and focus on victims, rather than perpetrators, although they tend to be more singularly focused, rather than using the suffering that they commemorate in an exemplary fashion.

It is not only memorial and ideas museums which share important and over-lapping ideas. Stephan Jaeger in his discussion of the Military History Museum suggests that despite its status as a history museum, it also incorporates concepts from, and in some ways, can be seen to act like an ideas museum: “Human violence and atrocities museums [as is the case with the MHM, which examines the ‘anthropology of violence’] tend ... toward documenting or experiencing aspects of the past. Despite this striking difference, neither can an “ideas museum” simply abandon the representation of the past nor can a history museums eliminate the expression of futurity when educating audiences and expressing hope in and beyond the past. Ideas and history remain inseparably intertwined.”⁹

⁸ Interestingly, as discussed in Chapter V, the museum does allow for visitors to understand and replicate the gaze of Holocaust perpetrators, and goes some way to collapse historical and spatial distance between past and present, although this is done in a mediated and controlled fashion.

⁹Jaeger, “Temporalizing History,” 229-230.

2. b. Holocaust Representation

One notable aspect of the Holocaust in both Canada and Germany is that it is often used in combination with other historical events; in some cases, it is treated as exemplary of other mass atrocities, genocides, and acts of state violence, while in others, it is portrayed as extraordinary. One aspect of Holocaust representation - which is of course also true of museums which strive to represent any historical event - is that even though the museums participating in this representation may be utilizing new techniques, curatorial philosophies, or pedagogical goals, the original, base materials and artifacts they are using remain the same. In the case of the Holocaust, there are specific artifacts which are commonly used in museal representations: personal objects belonging to Jewish families, concentration camp uniforms and shoes, and documents which clearly indicate the deliberate nature of the Holocaust (i.e. order forms for Zyklon B or architectural plans for Auschwitz, as contained in the Canadian Museum for Human Rights). Perhaps most prominent among Holocaust artifacts used for museal representations are photographs and video recordings. In the case of photographs, these objects tend to be contemporary to the Holocaust - for example, many museums display a combination of photographs taken by state or military organizations and sanctioned by the government, photographs taken privately or secretly for individual consumption or memorabilia, and photographs taken by Allied troops and journalists upon the liberation of the camps in 1945. Conversely, video testimony, which often exists in museums for documentary purposes as well, tends to not be older than the 1970s, the decade in which Dori Laub began conducting interviews for Yale's Furtunoff archive, which serves as the largest collection of video interviews with

Holocaust survivors. If the media being used by museums is somewhat dated, this is not necessarily true, however, of the representational techniques they utilize in exhibiting these media, nor in the analytical framework one can use to examine their museal presence, as will be discussed presently.

3. Project Synopsis

This project presents a comparative, analytical approach to the use of Holocaust and Third Reich video and photography in three museums in Canada and Germany: the Topography of Terror in Berlin, the Military History Museum (MHM), in Dresden, and the Canadian Museum for Human Rights (CMHR) in Winnipeg. While this project dedicates considerable space to a descriptive examination of each of the three museums, it relies fundamentally on the analysis of these media in a comparative, rather than competitive sense. In order to analyze the use of these media, this project evaluates them through the lens of the theoretical concepts of empathy and distanciation. In this case, the presence/lack of empathy within a given exhibition as experienced through photography or videography refers to the visitors' ability to comprehend the specific historical choices made by a given individual, and reflect on the choices they themselves may have made in a similar situation. It should be noted, and is discussed in significant detail in Chapter III, that this concept of empathy (drawn from the work of Dominick LaCapra, Silke Arnold-de Simine and Alison Landsberg) is an intellectual, rather than highly emotional, visitor experience. This project is not concerned with examining which museal representations provoke the most sympathy or pathos in visitors, but rather which give them the ability to better understand the perspective of a given historical subject, as well as the dimensions of that

understanding. Specifically, this project analyzes if or how this empathy is provoked – whether it is generated accidentally or engineered, and whether and how ones gets the perspective of groups or individuals (i.e. if the museum’s narrative strategy creates a sense of understanding between subject and visitor, whether this is accomplished through the use of objects, or through the physical structure of a given exhibition). This project also examines where and why empathy is not possible in all three museums.

In addition to the concept of empathy, this project will also analyze the museums via an adaptation of Mark Phillips’ concept of distancing. In this case, distancing refers to the ability for museums to use different media to create various levels of distance and proximity between visitor and subject based on a variety of different qualifications. Most prominently, Phillips suggests that distance or proximity may be experienced formally, ideologically, conceptually or affectively.¹⁰ In the case of this project, these categories have been adapted slightly: distancing is here measured on the axes of structure and form, historical distancing, intellectual distancing and emotional distancing.

3. a. Structure of Thesis

This thesis is broken down into three general sections, in addition to the introductory chapter and the bibliography. The first major section details the methodological background of this project. Chapter II discusses in detail the historiography and methodology behind the use of the use of Holocaust photography and videography. This not only details the history behind the

¹⁰ Mark Phillips, “Rethinking Historical Distance: from Doctrine to Heuristic,” *History and Theory* 50 (December 2011), 14.

proliferation of historical photography and video, but also the use of recorded video interviews in creating documentation of Holocaust survivor testimony. Finally, this chapter also emphasizes the ethical considerations both of consuming images of the Holocaust and how museums can work to resolve potential issues of voyeurism and over-identification among visitors. Chapter III involves a detailed discussion of the concepts of empathy and distanciation. While empathy as a concept used in museums is well-discussed by critics such as Silke Arnold-de Simine and Alison Landsberg, the concept of distanciation needed to be adapted from Mark Phillips' writing about history texts for use in a museum setting; as such, this chapter also explains the methodology behind the issues of adapting and utilizing this concept. The next part of the thesis presents a detailed analysis of empathy and distanciation in the Canadian Museum for Human Rights, the Topography of Terror and the Military History Museum. While analysis is a central part of these chapters, they also include detailed description of the goals of the museums, their physical layouts, and examinations of their use of architecture in addition to photographs and videos. The concluding chapter synthesizes these findings, addresses more broadly the limitations and accomplishments of these museums, and points to further discussions and topics of research for future projects.

3. b. Introduction to Museums

Each museum analyzed in this project has unique goals, representational styles and methodology, and each, despite their overlapping Holocaust representation, presents largely disparate subject matter. While the difference in subject matter and focus is a factor in the selection of the three museums, the main point of consideration for choosing them is that each

represents an example of a different type of museum. This means that not only do their representational models differ based on subject matter, but also based on their goals and the standards of curatorial praxis and historiography relative to each museum.¹¹ The types of museums themselves have a unique history which is partially dictated by regional differences. This is in part due to the physical locations of the museums in question. For instance, *Gedenkstätten* (memorial sites), dedicated to the Holocaust, are simply not possible to find in Canada due to the fact that the Holocaust took place overseas, and are necessarily located on sites near or at places of perpetration.¹² Likewise, *Dokumentationszentren* (documentation centres), such as the Topography of Terror, are uncommon to find in Canada but are common across Germany. In part this is due to the fact that, as the ‘losing’ side of the Second World War and because of the Allied discovery of concentration and death camps, Germans were forced much earlier and much more publicly to confront the Nazi past.¹³ In this sense, Canada, despite its involvement in Holocaust and the Second World War,¹⁴ in some ways appears to treat the Holocaust as a type of ancillary history. Finally, this project also discusses history museums. Superficially, these are the most straightforward type of museum, however, these museums have to deal with the ‘unrepresentability’ of the Holocaust and other ethical considerations.¹⁵

¹¹ Jay Winter, “Museums and Representations of War,” *Does War Belong in Museums?* Ed. Wolfgang Muchitsch (Bielefeld: transcript, 2013) 23.

¹² Holtschneider, *History and Identity*, 78.

¹³ Brad Prager, “On the Liberation of Perpetrator Photographs in Holocaust Narratives,” *Visualizing the Holocaust: Documents, Aesthetics, Memory*, ed. David Bathrick, Brad Prager and Michael D. Richardson (New York: Camden House, 2008) 19-20.

¹⁴ Which is in fact discussed in the Canadian Museum for Human Rights when the museum uses multiple exhibitions to point to Canada’s antisemitism and failure to respond to the need of Jewish refugees during the war.

¹⁵ Holtschneider, *History and Identity*, 12-41.

The Canadian Museum for Human Rights is a strong example of an ideas museum. Dedicated to the goal of raising awareness about human rights issues and violations in order to mobilize its visitors towards positive future action, the museum fulfills the primary criteria of an ideas museum by focusing on a positive, non-historic concept rather than on commemoration or memorialization of a specific event or era.¹⁶ The museum does contain representation of historical events and persons, however, these representations are not chronological but rather arranged into themes such as *Canadian Journeys* (a gallery which depicts human rights victories and violations throughout Canadian History) and *Breaking the Silence* (a gallery dedicated to the examination of national and international efforts to silence survivors of mass atrocities). The museum's use of video and photographic content is aimed both at providing documentation of genocide and mass atrocities as well as creating empathy between visitors and survivors and victims of these crimes, in order to motivate visitors to become advocates for human rights.¹⁷

In contrast to the relatively object-poor Canadian Museum for Human Rights, the German Military History Museum at first glance appears to be a straightforward example of a history museum. Out of the three museums, it is the only one to represent and organize historical events in a chronological fashion; it is also largely dependent on objects, including weaponry, art, clothing and personal items, in order to represent different historical events and eras. The museum's historical representation, however, is interrupting both physically and metaphorically by the themed tour, housed in Daniel Libeskind's five-story, 14,500 ton steel, glass and concrete wedge and bisecting the arsenal building housing the chronology. The thematic tour complicates

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 41.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 42.

the museum's existence as a history museum by representing themes, rather than specific events or eras, such as *The Formation of Bodies*, *War and Suffering*, and *Protection and Destruction*.

Despite interweaving specific themes and nontraditional installations which may invoke a certain affective response in visitors, and despite posing ethical and philosophical questions about the anthropology of violence as it relates both to everyday life and to military endeavors, the museum avoids didacticism by leaving its message up to visitors to interpret.

As a documentation center, the Topography of Terror differs from the two other museums not only in terms of content, since it focuses almost exclusively on the crimes of the Nazi regime rather than the victims and survivors of those crimes, but also in representation style. The Topography of Terror relies primarily on photographic documentation, facsimiles of documents and quotations from perpetrators in order to present the history of Nazi crimes, including but not limited to the Holocaust. Quotations from historians, audio-visual recordings of speeches and contextualizing text created by the museum's historians and curators play a secondary role in presenting historical events to the visitor. Since the museum is located on the site of the central offices of the SS and the *Reichssicherheitshauptamt*, it focuses on perpetration much more strongly than other sites, and as such, is a strong example of museums which purposefully create distance between visitor and subject. Despite its location, the Topography of Terror does not function as a Gedenkstätte; its focus on perpetrators means that it does not serve a commemorative function for the victims of the Holocaust and their suffering. Instead, it provides a unique function as a *Dokumentationszentrum*. On the other hand, however, since center relies heavily on photography, the nature of photographic montage presents the opportunity for visitors

to develop a certain closeness to the (literally visual) perspective of perpetrators and spectators of Nazi crimes, presenting a unique analytical challenge.

At first glance, it may appear to be an odd choice to bring three apparently unrelated museums together into a dialogue. Not only do all three museums represent different approaches to the Holocaust and its historical representation, but they also come out of entirely separate museal traditions, which is especially notable in the traditional differences of Canadian and German approaches to the Holocaust as discussed above. At the same time, the museums have the obvious commonality of not only their subject matter but their choice of representational media and content.

What especially makes it possible to compare these museums is the fact that the media of photography and video have the power to supersede the control of museum researchers, designers, and curators. That is to say, photography and video have enormous potential for creating visitor experiences and generating knowledge and understanding beyond the original intention of the museum. These media exist in multiple representational layers, as is discussed especially in this project's exploration of how framing, physical context and the structure of an exhibition can create space for the expression of both distance and proximity between visitor and subject on a variety of axes, some of which are contradictory to one another.

4. Methodology

4. a. Comparative versus Competitive Analysis

As stated above, this project functions as a comparative analysis of three museums. It should be noted here that while this analysis does directly contrast the three museums, and that

there are naturally places in which certain museums clearly excel over others, this is not a competitive analysis. As will be elaborated in chapters II and III, the nature of the specific methodological framework used in this project does not allow for the assumption of a ‘correct’ amount of either empathy, or distance, or proximity. Additionally, the goals of the three museums are diverse, and the museums in question were in fact chosen partly for this diversity. As such, the type of emotional distancing, for example, appropriate to an exemplary representation of the Holocaust in an ideas museum such as the Canadian Museum for Human Rights, is not necessarily sufficient, appropriate or useful in a documentation center such as the Topography of Terror. Likewise, while empathy functions somewhat as an incidental effect in different sections of all three museums, a lack of the possibility for empathy in other sections of them should not necessarily be seen as a failing. It should also be noted here that although the stated goals of the museum are important for understanding their representational strategies, they are certainly not the only points of consideration. As will be described in the following chapters, many of the effects the museums have on visitors are or may be entirely unintentional, and may in fact contradict the apparent goals of the museum in the first place.

In addition to the divergent representational goals of the three museums, another reason why a comparative analysis is appealing in the case of this project is the fact that each museum has evolved in a different cultural landscape. At first glance, the biggest cultural division exists between the Canadian Museum for Human Rights on the one hand, and the Topography of Terror and the German Military History Museum on the other. Put bluntly, the cultural landscape of Canada is not nearly as strongly influenced by the Holocaust and the legacy of the NS government and the Second World War in the same way that Germany is. The CMHR therefore

has representational challenges in terms of how (and why) to incorporate the Holocaust in its content that are entirely outside the scope of challenges faced by the MHM or the Topography. In this sense, it is vital to at least partially examine the CMHR in light of the unique position that the Holocaust occupies within the broader Canadian stories of the development of human rights, which has serious impacts on the museums representational choices. One example of this is that fact that, although the CMHR does dedicate significant floor space to its discussion of the Holocaust, since it also must incorporate many other stories related to human rights struggles and successes specifically within Canada (i.e. indigenous issues in a broad sense, immigration rights and language rights) it simply cannot dedicate the same amount of time to closely examining perpetration in the same way that the Topography can. Interestingly, although the MHM is closer to the CMHR than the Topography in this capacity, since it documents both the chronological, military history of Germany in addition to its exploration of the so-called “anthropology of violence.” However, Holocaust representations in the case of the MHM are not so physically limited as they are in the CMHR (where they are primarily found in the *Breaking the Silence* and *Examining the Holocaust* galleries). Rather, the MHM includes its Holocaust representation in a wide variety of cabinets in its chronology as well as in the themed tour of the museum.

4. b. Praxis

The practical methodology involved in evaluating these museums and ultimately creating these analyses has involved a combination of field research (primarily, extensive site visits to all three museums) as well as background research. Effectively analyzing the use of photography and audio-visual installations which seek to represent the events, consequences, and emotional

and psychological landscapes of the Holocaust within the museum concept, required several separate but interrelated research goals. Therefore, the beginning of my project involved research into the general theoretical development of “New Museology”¹⁸ in order to comprehend the ways in which the fields of both cultural and museum studies define, differentiate and analyze the praxis and goals of these museums.

In addition to broad background research, this project also necessitated in-depth research into the representation of empathy in museum settings, along with research into the historical and theoretical understandings of the use of photography and audio-visual installations within museums. The latter concept also required research into museum ethics, since especially photographic evidence of the Holocaust and its use in museums has unique ethical considerations, as discussed in Chapter II of this project. Incorporated into this analysis is a discussion of research regarding the application of the concept of distancing¹⁹ in the museum context, specifically with regard to the use of video and other visual media. Finally, this project utilizes research about the history of video representations of the Holocaust, especially but not limited to the use of archival video of survivor testimony as a source of both historical truth and representation, and (potentially) as a site for the generation of empathy.²⁰

¹⁸ Cf. Caroline Pearce, “Visualising ‘Everyday’ Evil: The Representation of Nazi Perpetrators in German Memorial Sites,” *Representing Perpetrators in Holocaust Literature and Film*, Ed. Jenni Adams and Sue Vice, (Portland: Vallentine Mitchell, 2013) 215; Williams, *Memorial Museums*, 8; and Winter “Museums and Representations of War,” 23-31.

¹⁹ Phillips, “Historical Distance,” 12-15.

²⁰ Cf. Silke Arnold-de Simine, *Mediating Memory in the Museum: Trauma, Empathy, Nostalgia* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013) and Jennifer Hansen-Glucklich, *Holocaust Memory Reframed: Museums and the Challenges of Historical Representation* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2014).

In addition to preliminary research, this project necessitated physically visiting the museum spaces in order to understand and evaluate them. Field work at the Topography of Terror and the Military History Museum was completed from September to October of 2015; physical visitation to the Canadian Museum for Human Rights was ongoing during the completion of the project due to the museum's location within Winnipeg.

4. c. Research Questions

In order to sufficiently analyze the museum, multiple visits to each one were broken into two categories. The first few visits to each museum were undertaken as general visits. In this case, this did not involve immediate documentation of the museums through taking photographs or making notes; these visits were rather to establish the overall layout and themes of the museums, to get a sense of their representational styles, and to take in their flow both architecturally and in a general narrative sense (i.e. reading over the museums hyper- and paratext to look for any noticeable narrative trends). The second category of visit was significantly more specific: rather than examining the museum as a whole, these visits concentrated on the analysis of particular exhibitions which incorporated Holocaust videography and photography, with special attention paid to the museum's potential for creating empathy and its use of distancing through these media. To this end, I formulated a series of questions which allowed for a focused, specialized museal analysis. The questions for all three museums were as follows, with minor variations where appropriate: 1) What are the goals of the museum and which type(s) of museum is it? How is this demonstrated? 2) Which representational methods does the museum use? Which methods are used where and to represent which events (or types of

events)? 3) Which voices and perspectives are given by the museum? To which degree? Which perspectives are missing? 4) Is empathy present in the museum? If so, who does the visitor feel empathy towards? Where does the museum purposefully create it, and where is it missing? 5) Which kinds of presentation style does the museum use for its representation of historical events? Is history causal, presentist, a mix of both? 6) How does the museum represent the Holocaust? Is it a specifically German event? Is it exemplary or extraordinary? It is presented singularly or contrasted with other atrocities? 7) How is history treated? Does the museum allow for continuity between past and present?

Although these questions are somewhat broad on an individual basis, their combination allowed for a more focused, coherent and suitably comparable examination and ultimate analysis of all three museums. Concurrent with these introspective, analytical museum visits, which focused on my own interpretations, I also conducted brief, informal interviews with curators, staff researchers and tour guides in order to answer specific questions in relation to the pedagogical goals of the museums, general information about visitors, and in some cases for elaboration on the creation of the museums and particular curatorial choices.

4. d. The Ideal Visitor

In evaluating the effectiveness of museal representations - especially when this pertains to the intellectual and emotional experiences of the visitor - one may be tempted to seek out visitor responses directly. This can be achieved in myriad ways: conducting interviews with visitors and tour guides, searching through guest books, reading reviews of museum exhibitions online and in print, or through the analysis of visitor surveys. This type of visitor outreach however can be

problematic for several reasons; most prominently among them, that surveys are rarely designed in such a way as to measure the success of museal goals but tend to focus rather on issues such as visitor enjoyment, accessibility, and cost-for-value analysis. Additionally, as discussed by both Susan Crane and Jay Winter, visitor feedback is notoriously unreliable and often skewed towards either overwhelmingly positive or negative reception of a given exhibition or museum.²¹ The other major problem in relying on visitor feedback for this problem in particular is a practical one: the level of time which one would need to spend in any of the three museums in order to reach this depth of understanding about them is simply not realistic for a majority of museum visitors. It is for this reason that this project instead relies on the concept of the “ideal visitor” put forth by Susan Crane.²² In this case, the ideal visitor is analogous to the literary concept of the ideal reader; this constructed visitor is one who is able to absorb a maximum amount of connections between different parts of the exhibitions in a given museum, is able to make detailed observation about the contents of said museum, and who is not limited by constraints of time or language barriers (i.e. an ideal visitor for the Topography of Terror and Military History Museum would be one who is capable of reading German and English; in the case of the Canadian Museum for Human Rights, they would be capable of understanding German, English and French). The resulting analysis, therefore, represents the possibilities and potential experiences of distanciation and empathy within museums rather than an account of first-hand experiences by real visitors.

²¹ Cf. Susan Crane, “Memory, Distortion, and History in the Museum.” *History and Theory* 36.4 (1997): 50; and Jay Winter, “Museums and the Representation of War,” *Does War Belong in Museums?* Ed. Wolfgang Muchitsch (Bielefeld: transcript, 2013) 25.

²² Crane, “Memory,” 51.

Chapter II. Photographs and Videos

1. Non-Textual Representational Modes

While certain aspects of historiography apply to museum studies as well as to textual forms of historical representation, there are certain aspects of museal representation which require their own methodological categories and considerations. To an extent, museums can be a more limited mode of historical communication than text media, since there is limited space in a museum, and museum visits are often comprised of shorter amounts of time than readers might devote to historical texts. That does not necessarily mean that museums represent a more shallow form of history, but rather that they must incorporate other media in addition to text. In the case of the museums analyzed in this project, video and photography are two prominent media which allow museums to express a wider range of viewpoints and offer greater interpretative possibilities to visitors than a text might. For instance, photographs may allow visitors a more in-depth understanding of a given historical event - not only do they document the event in question, but many visitors perceive photographs to be, to an extent, more 'truthful' an account of history than text. This is because photographs are often perceived as being able to give the visitor the ability to picture the past 'as it was' rather than being mediated by museal text, although, as is discussed below, this is not always the case. Likewise, videography affords visitors the ability to better understand and engage with the complex emotions involved in trauma, as well as gathering contextual clues about the retelling of certain events based on the tone, body language and appearance of the subject of the video, whether it is in the form of a testimonial, a state sponsored video, or a personal, amateur film.

2. Video Archives and Survivor Testimony

2. a. The Prominence of Holocaust Videography

While the concept of using video, rather than written or otherwise orally transmitted recordings of the experience of survivors of mass atrocities and trauma is by no means unique to the Holocaust, the association between Holocaust testimony and video archives is nevertheless a strong one. The reasons for this are numerous. Firstly, and most obviously, film is not necessarily an accessible medium for many survivors and historians of other genocides and mass atrocities - if one takes survivor testimony of the Armenian genocide, for instance, the timing of the genocide in and of itself is problematic since there are very few examples of documentary video recording from the early twentieth century. This means that, at least initially, those wishing to provide testimony or witnessing would de facto have to do it either in writing or in some form of oral transmission. There are also, of course, individual legal situations on regional and national levels to consider. For instance, those living in countries who have denied (and in some cases continue to deny) the existence of, or their direct participation in, an act of genocide, ethnic cleansing, or other mass atrocity would be unlikely to provide the resources for survivors to give testimony. Consequently, survivors wishing to record their witnessing in any form while minimizing their risk of censure or negative repercussions are often dependent on outside parties (such as foreign scholars, NGOs, or in some cases foreign governments or task forces such as those created by the United Nations²³) to not only tell and publicize but also to gather their stories in the first place - which brings its own sets of challenges, not the least of which are

²³ Edward S. Herman and David Peterson, *The Politics of Genocide* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 2010) 30.

adequate translation when language barriers are present, assurances of safety for those victims who choose to give testimony, and the establishment of trust between documentarian and witness.²⁴ Cultural barriers may also present challenges to scholars and advocacy groups, especially if the witness in question comes from a culture with strong taboos against foreign interference into its own affairs, or speaking out against the government in those cases where political leaders participated in, organized or were otherwise complicit in mass atrocities.

While video documentation of Holocaust survivor testimony also faces many of these challenges in one way or another, recording of Holocaust survivors are nevertheless among the most numerous examples of recorded survivor testimony in comparison to other, similar mass atrocities.²⁵ Nevertheless, the first major boom in Holocaust survivor video testimony did not occur until the late 1970s under the supervision of Dori Laub at Yale University as part of the Fortunoff video archive collection. Created in part due to the latter day realization that the population of Holocaust survivors old enough to have concrete memories of the NS regime and Second World War was rapidly dying out, the collection represents the testimony of thousands of survivors.²⁶ In addition to the sheer bulk of material collected by Laub, his work provided many of the methodological tools modern Holocaust scholars use to analyze videography, some of which, especially those pertaining to the generation of empathy via videography, will be discussed in the proceeding chapter. While these archives are tremendously useful in understanding certain aspects of the Holocaust, they also have important limitations and ethical,

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 15.

²⁵ Dorota Glowacka, *Disappearing Traces: Holocaust Testimonials, Ethics and Aesthetics* (Seattle, University of Washington Press, 2012) 2.

²⁶ Shoshana Felman and Dori Laub, *Testimony: Crises of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis and History*, (New York: Routledge, 1992) 4.

methodological and historiographical problems which must be understood by those analyzing their representational power. When one adds the context of utilizing and in some cases focalizing these video recordings within museum exhibitions, additional theoretical questions arise. These problems and limitations will be discussed below.

2. b. Framing

One of the primary concerns for those seeking to analyze video recordings of any kind, but especially interviews and testimony, is the question of framing. This concept has several dimensions, all of which are interrelated, although they function at different theoretical levels. In the most literal sense, framing refers to the physical ‘setting up’ of the video recording - the proximity to the subject, the use of editing, lighting, sound levels, and even the room in which the recording itself take place all have a bearing on one’s ‘reading’ of the video. On less literal level, framing can also refer to the way in which the interviewer or recorder orders the testimony - that is, how they lead their subject to speak about a giving topic. It is frequently the case that interviewers will edit their recording in such a way so as to have their leading questions erased, so that it appears that the testimony given by the subject is spontaneous, and that any memories, feelings or experiences they may choose to share are entirely unprompted and of their own volition.²⁷ On the one hand, this ‘erasure’ of the interviewer can be useful, since it deemphasizes the role of the mediator and allows the subject to (at least appear to) speak for themselves, and thus, the interviewer does not privilege his or her own view or appear to interrupt testimony

²⁷ Thomas Trezise, *Witnessing Witnessing: On the Reception of Holocaust Survivor Testimony* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2013) 16.

which is often difficult, if not outright traumatic in nature. Further to this self-removal, having a subject appear to speak spontaneously and at length about their own experiences may in some ways lend authenticity to the testimony; there is a decreased sense that the subject has been guided, cajoled, or manipulated into recalling certain events for the sake of fulfilling a specific agenda, whether it be historic, academic or political.²⁸ On the other hand, a total removal of the interviewer or mediator may make some types of testimony difficult to comprehend for viewers, since in many cases the mediator may be able to provide historical, cultural or theoretical context otherwise unavailable to the viewer. Additionally, having a testimony appear to be ‘unprompted’ or spontaneous, aura of authenticity aside, may also be deceptive. In this case, and particularly troublesome when video testimony is used to attempt to create a record or verification of historical events, viewers may get the impression that this testimony is the whole story of a given period of time or historical incident rather than a response to specific questions, which naturally leave certain facts or details aside.²⁹ Finally, the concept of framing may also refer to the theoretical framework used by the interviewer or recording. In this case, framing can be thought of in terms of the goals of the interview. For example, is the interview ‘framed’ in a specific context in order to elicit the empathy of the viewer for a historical victim? Is it ‘framed’ in the tradition of the sacredness of witnessing for its own sake or in homage to the dead and voiceless (as is often the case specifically with regards to Holocaust testimony³⁰)? Does the interviewer have a particular academic or political goal which forms the overarching basis for their questions and intentions in the first place?

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 29.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 19.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 3.

2. c. Videography in Museums

One of the primary reasons why it is necessary to analyze the framing of videography in museums is because of the fact that museums which utilize video testimony taken from academic and historical archives tend to alter them dramatically. Most often, this manifests as an alteration in length due to the limitations created by a museum's (virtual) space as well as a practical assessment of the representational expectations for museums; it is unlikely that a majority of visitors will spend an hour and a half (the average length of one of Dori Laub's Holocaust testimonial recordings)³¹ standing or sitting in the same space in order to watch the entire length of a single testimonial video. In addition to practical limitations, museum curators and historians are naturally inclined to select only those videos which conform to the specific representational goals of the museum. The Canadian Museum for Human Rights (discussed in detail in Chapter V), for instance, utilizes video recordings of Holocaust survivor testimony specifically to elicit affective responses in visitors as well as to document specific historical anecdotes not otherwise mentioned in the galleries; as such, it makes sense that the videos would be shorter in length. Likewise, the videos included in the Topography of Terror provide a purely documentary function (i.e. examples of speeches and news reels from the Third Reich) and so their length can be reasonably limited since the museum's goal is not to allow the visitor to develop empathy for Holocaust perpetrators but rather to understand its historical context. On the other hand, a

³¹ *Ibid.*, 34

similarly short video in the Military History Museum of a young women displaying obvious signs of trauma may be read as collapsing the structural distance between her and the viewer.

In addition to the virtual framing of museal use of videography in terms of length, selection of interviews and editing, one must also consider the physical framing of the video recordings in the museum in terms of their placement and context. Unlike in the context of an archive where videos are stored among other videos and must be deliberately selected and viewed by someone, videos in the museum context do not exist on their own. There are two layers to the context of videos in museums: first, one must consider their immediate surroundings in terms of other media. It is less common to find video testimony, however edited it may already be, as a stand-alone installation; in the museum setting videos as well as photography are almost always accompanied by an explanatory text. This paratext can range from simple, practical information about a given video (who is giving the interview, where and when it was recorded, to which archive it belongs and any additional copyright information) to information providing historical, political and/or cultural context. Occasionally, this text - whether it exists physically or is integrated in the form of voiceovers or other narration into the video itself - can direct viewers to pay attention to certain sequences or to narrate part of the testimony not shown to the visitor. Secondly, in order to analyze the use of video testimony one must also look at where it is placed in terms of the broader museal setting. It may be possible to have identical copies of a video testimony placed in an exhibition which deals with survivor testimony, harsh treatment of victims, discussions of the rise to power of the NS, and in a gallery which comparatively represents several different atrocities or genocides. While the content of the video may be

unchanged, its physical and curatorial location has a strong hand in shaping the way the video, and the testimony itself, is received.

The final concept of framing which remains to be discussed is that of how the viewer themselves frames the recording. An understanding of their reception of a given testimony must be cognizant of their pre-existing beliefs and experiences, whether the video in question is emotionally affecting (i.e. not so melodramatic as to be pastiche, but not so understated as to leave the viewer cold), and the place of the video within the context of the museum in general. Perhaps most importantly, one needs to consider whether the testimony itself confirms or elaborates on facts about the Holocaust already known to the visitor, or if it disrupts these frameworks. If the latter is true, then one must also consider whether or not the video in question is an example of ‘difficult knowledge’³² (i.e. knowledge which contradicts visitors previously held, positive beliefs about their own social, regional or national history) and the ways in which a given museum either permits the integration of this knowledge in its visitors or prevents it, which in turn reveals the museum’s overall successes or failures in its Holocaust representation.

3. Holocaust Photography

3. a. The Political Origins of Holocaust Photography

There is no doubt that photographs of the Holocaust and events surrounding it are invaluable to historians, curators and scholars who better wish to understand the genocide. Photographic evidence of the Holocaust has been used in all number of ways in the postwar

³² Angela Failler and Roger I. Simon, “Curatorial Practice and Learning from Difficult Knowledge,” *The Idea of a Human Rights Museum*, ed. Karen Busby, Adam Muller and Andrew Woolford (Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 2016) 166.

period: as proof the genocide did indeed happen, as a means of developing sympathy (and less commonly, empathy) among Allied nations for the plight of the Jews, and as evidence in debate about specific historical events, places, and persons. It is natural to therefore assume that using Holocaust photography in museums with the goal of illuminating, emphasizing or educating the public about specific aspects of the Holocaust is a strong enough ethical ground to justify the use of any and all Holocaust photography. This is however not the case.

Most obviously problematic about official, German Holocaust photography is its origins: the fact remains that no matter to what end museums use these photographs, their origins as propaganda tools make critical analysis of their viewing by visitors complicated in certain ways. Many published photographs of events surrounding the Holocaust put out by the NS in this case were used in some cases show the efficiency of the resettlement of Eastern Europe, or in other cases to focalize the supposedly 'humane' treatment of Jews and other prisoners of concentration camps.³³ In this case, the use of these photos in museums is problematic in two ways. Firstly, presenting visitors with a photograph of victims taken by their victimizers may metaphorically replicate a kind of dehumanization of the subject. That is to say, viewing 'victims' from the perspective of their perpetrators without critical analysis or thought - which is not necessarily a possibly for visitors unfamiliar with the nature of Holocaust photography, or, for instance, if a photo is not captioned or if its source is not provided - can be an act which continues to deny agency to the subject.

³³ *Ibid.*, 2.

One of the other most common sources of Holocaust photography is from Allied troops (often American and British) primarily taken upon the liberation of death and work camps. In many cases these photographs were taken partially, but not wholly with documentary purposes in mind. Certainly showcasing the horrors of the camps “as they were” was a deeply useful exercise in terms of our current historical understanding of the Holocaust.³⁴ Having documentary evidence beyond paperwork (much of which had already been destroyed by the time the NS abandoned the camps) providing the scope, brutality and deliberate nature of the Holocaust, as well as physical proof of the existence in the camps in the first place and the condition of their victims was invaluable in both proving that the Holocaust existed and in validating the experiences of those who were detained in them, both dead victims and survivors. However valuable these photographs are, to assume that they are de facto more ‘truthful’ than NS photographs of camps and prisoners is erroneous, primarily because it overlooks the fact that the Allied forces also used photography of Holocaust victims for propagandistic purposes. In this case, the propagandistic aims of the Allies served two purposes. On the one hand, it allowed both soldiers and civilians justified the number of lost soldiers and civilian casualties caused by the war. On the other hand, it also solidified the idea of Allied forces as inherently righteous victors, and allowed them to control the ways in which the German population dealt with the aftermath of the Holocaust, and went some way into encouraging the concept of German collective guilt for the Holocaust.

³⁴ Jana Rech, *The Power of Images: The Use of Historic Images in Modern World War Exhibitions in Germany and Great Britain*, MA Thesis (New Castle University, 2012) 2-8.

The final common source of Holocaust photography comes in the form of ‘unofficial’ documentation. This category refers primarily to private photography taken by members of all ranks of the German army which detail Nazi crimes. In some ways these collections can be considered the most ‘authentic’ - subjects in them often do not know that they are being photographed, so there is little staging involved. These photographs often include scenes which were deemed not important enough to document by the higher ups of the NS, or else which depicted events denied or in some way altered by official NS channels.³⁵

The distinction between the two sources, as well as the distinction between which photos were deliberately staged or dramatized and those which were not, also becomes problematically blurry in a museum exhibition. While curators may strive to make the sources of photographs clear and accessible to the readers, it is nevertheless possible that the captions themselves may be overwhelmed by the presence of photos (especially if they are grouped together as in a collage, as discussed below). One must also account for a wide variety of caption styles. For example, captions which simply state the source of the photo and when and where it was taken may not add much to a visitor’s understanding of the photograph unless they already have a strong background in the history of Holocaust photography. Likewise, captions created by the photographer may be misleading or problematic in their own ways, as discussed below. Finally, the museum may use captions either that give historical context or the context of an individual or group experience. This in turn runs the risk that visitors begin to view the subjects of the photographs through the eyes of their photographers who may not view the subjects as human

³⁵ Prager, “Liberation of Perpetrator Photographs,” 23.

for a multitude of reasons. This risk, however, is somewhat mitigated by the medium of photographer in a particular sense however - in this case, the issue of framing. As discussed above in relation to videography, viewers must consider both the literal framing of a specific shot, for instance, in terms of composition and subject matter, but also in terms of its intended purpose. As is the case with videography, however, the intent of the photographer is not always the final result of what the viewer sees. In this case of photography in particular, while the photographer may be focusing on a specific detail in a given shot, the possibility is always present that details which have escaped their attention will appear in the photograph.³⁶ While it is clear in many cases what the intended subject of the photograph is, the possibility of multiple interpretations of the same photo is strong. While photographs taken either by NS or Allied forces are a vital component to many museal representations of the Holocaust, they are not the sole or arguable even the most prominent source of photographic evidence of the genocide and the atrocities and persecution proceeding. A tremendous number of Holocaust photos come from members of the *Einsatzgruppen* documenting persecution and genocide as part of the War in the East. Of equal importance to Holocaust representation is the use of photographs which fall into a grey area - that is, photographs taken as documentation or personal souvenirs rather than for the purposes of propaganda. While many of these photos depict highly graphic scenes similar to the genre discussed above, many of them represent no direct or explicit violence.³⁷ Many of these collections of photographs were taken not by members of *Einsatzgruppen* but by low-level camp guards or Wehrmacht soldiers charged with supervising pogroms, deportations, and life in

³⁶ Barnouw, *Germany 1945: Views of War and Violence* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1996), 91.

³⁷ Prager, "Liberation of Perpetrator Photographs," 20.

ghettos such as Lodz or Theresienstadt. In the case of photos which were taken as souvenirs or unofficial, personal documentation, some of the ethical implications are similar to those discussed above. On the other hand, there are some ethical issues that are unique to 'grey area' photographs, especially as they relate to their photographers. As has been well-documented elsewhere, one of the ethical challenges that museums face is the way in which they depict Holocaust perpetrators. On the one hand, it is important for reasons of ethics, integrity and historical accuracy to not whitewash the actions of perpetrators; on the other hand, depicting perpetrators solely in light of their crimes and thus dehumanizing and reducing them to sociopaths or psychopaths seriously risks 'othering' them to the point that visitors cannot possibly imagine themselves carrying out the same or similar acts of violence.

3. b. Ethics of Viewing and Voyeurism

Related to the problematic nature of using both NS and Allied sources as documentary photos in museum settings is the question of voyeurism. In this sense, voyeurism refers to the potential for the suffering of Holocaust victims and survivors to be viewed as a kind of spectacle.³⁸ The subjects of the photographs themselves become instead dehumanized objects. In some cases, scholars argue that this dehumanization is indicative of broader trends of global reception of suffering as portrayed in media. In this sense, however discreet or careful a museum is in displaying particularly brutal imagery is immaterial, since its presence, no matter what the context, is invariably dehumanizing. While this position is somewhat extreme, Uli Linke for

³⁸ Alison Landsberg, *Prosthetic Memory: The Transformation of American Remembrance in the Age of Mass Culture* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004) 116-119.

example makes a fairly convincing argument that the inclusion of intensely graphic or violent imagery as a ‘necessary’ method of shocking the public into thinking about a given issue of historical significance is an indication of a general trend in (western) society towards an increased de-sensitivity to violence, and the need to consume suffering as a commodity. She states, for example, that “... under globalization, with its destabilizing tendencies, we also encounter a new kind of memory market: historical memory as consumer product is increasingly centered on violence and on the body [...] News and entertainment industries have begun to realize their profit interest by documenting genocide, war, and human rights abuses. The global media rapidly appropriate and circulate images of people’s suffering: the memories of victimhood are commoditized; the remembrance of pain is commercialized.”³⁹

For curators who seek to represent the suffering of the Holocaust in any serious way, the question of appropriation of suffering and of horrific experience is one which needs to be considered. Often, deciding whether displaying a given photograph, artifact or other installation is more spectacle than education comes down to the circumstances and context of a given museum. A frequent site of debate among museums which seek to represent the Holocaust is whether, and how, to display personal effects and photography of Holocaust victims. In some cases, museums can use personal photographs as a memorialization function, as in the Documentation center below the Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe in Berlin or in the great hall of Yad Vashem in Jerusalem. These photographs can simultaneously be used to underline the fact that they are all the remains of Jewish families, such as in the Jewish Museum

³⁹ Uli Linke, “Emotional Anesthesia and the Museum of Corpse in Post-Holocaust Germany,” *Genocide: Truth, Memory and Reconciliation*, ed. Alexander Laban Hilton and Kevin Lewis O’Neill (Durham: Duke University Press, 2009) 155.

Berlin. Finally, photos can serve documentary purposes, as in the Canadian Museum for Human Rights, while at the same time producing a collage effect which can potentially give viewers the perspective of a bystander or perpetrator of the Holocaust, as in the case of the Topography of Terror.⁴⁰ The fact that the same object can have vastly different connotations and receptions depending entirely on its context and framing is also something which affects the use of photographs of the Holocaust. One of the most often replicated Holocaust photographs, for instance, is not a scene of brutality at all, but rather the opposite: frequently used by museums, the photograph of female and male concentration camp guards laughing while on a retreat is potentially as problematic as photos which depict graphic violence, suffering and brutality. Again, the reception of this photograph depends entirely on context. In a documentation centre such as the Topography of Terror, whose goal is to depict the machination and bureaucracy behind the Holocaust, depicting concentration camp guards as ordinary people who were able to enjoy themselves in spite of their work can go a long way to demonstrating the degree of normalcy with which the dehumanization, torture and murder of Jews and other NS 'enemies' was treated. Apparently, this behaviour was normal enough that it, at least in this photo, does not appear to have negative psychological or emotional effects on the people displaying it. So too might this photo be useful in a museum such as the CMHR, which strongly emphasizes the fact that most participants in the crimes of the Holocaust were ordinary citizens rather than sociopathic monsters, so as to underline the moral lessons of the Holocaust as applicable to contemporary Canadian life. At the same time, a photograph like this may be upsetting or

⁴⁰ Hansen-Glucklich, *Holocaust Memory Reframed*, 128-131.

unwelcome in a memorial museum dedicated primarily to the remembrance of victims rather than their victimizers. In this way, although they are highly demonstrative of the factual realities of concentration camps, photos of emaciated or brutalized children carry the strong potential to turn visitors into voyeurs if the rest of the surrounding photographs focus on the political and historical dimensions of the Holocaust. One of the biggest factors one can use to mediate the line between ethical viewing and voyeurism is through the use of empathy and distancing, which will be discussed in Chapter III.

Chapter III - Empathy and Distanciation in the Museum

1. The Possibility of Empathy and Understanding

The use of empathy in museums as a means of encouraging the understanding of specific historical circumstances and perspectives is simultaneously deeply useful and highly contentious. The concept of empathy itself can take on multiple forms, depending on the goals of the museum. In some cases, empathy is tied directly to an emotional response: a visitor reads, sees, or watches something from which they are able to better understand the perspective of an individual or a collective, and this understanding is in the first place spurred by an emotional response (sadness, horror or shock, especially in reaction to the depiction of atrocity). Typically, an emotional response as a starting point for empathy is used when the subjects of this empathy are victims. Conversely, it is also possible for museums to establish empathy for bystanders or perpetrators as well. In this case it is important to distinguish empathy from other emotions, since in a museum setting such as the Topography of Terror or certain aspects of the German Military History Museum, the goal of empathy is clearly not to engender sympathy or even identification. What empathy means in this context is simply that one is able to imagine the perspective of another person, and consider the choices this person made and perhaps how one would react in a similar situation. Simply put, for the purpose of this project, since it examines perpetrators, victims, and a range of experiences in between these two points, the concept of empathy will center around the museal goal of the visitor “perceiving and experiencing history

through [their] own sense and cognitive understanding of processes and ideologies involved”⁴¹ in combination with an understanding of the circumstances - with or without emotional involvement - of a specific person or group of people.

In terms of understanding empathy as a dynamic experience rather than a phenomenon which simply occurs to museum visitors, one can expand on Thomas Trezise’s analysis of the way in which audiences view Holocaust testimonials.⁴² This is in part due to the importance the Holocaust occupies in the Western imagination and its historical and cultural importance to Western society, partially due to the sheer bulk of available Holocaust testimony as compared to other genocides, and also to the spiritual and religious dimensions of Holocaust testimony for survivors and victims of the Holocaust.⁴³ His emphasis on empathy as a relationship rather than a feeling is especially important. Although some critics of the use of empathy for historical understanding dismiss an academic understanding of empathy as being a simplistic attempt to feel sympathy for an historical person, the actual work of effective empathy is difficult. Certainly, some hesitation when discussing empathy is appropriate. As discussed below, for instance, it is not always appropriate to strive towards empathy in a museal or historical setting, or, at least, empathy must be strongly mediated and controlled by the museum in question. In other cases, the over-identification, as discussed by Trezise, with a given historical subject can occlude one’s understanding of their experience or suggest an impossible understanding. This

⁴¹ Stephan Jaeger, “Historical Museum Meets Docudrama: The Recipient’s Experiential Involvement in the Second World War,” *Exhibiting the German Past: Museums, Film and Musealization*, ed. Peter M. McIsaac and Gabriele Mueller (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2015) 139.

⁴² Thomas Trezise, *Witnessing Witnessing: On the Reception of Survivor Testimony* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2013) 8-39.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 9.

scenario, problematic as it already is, is indicative of a broader problem among museums which attempt to elicit empathy in one way or another: which definition of the concept are they using? In some cases, it is simple enough to present visitors with the opportunity to understand, if not necessarily agree with, the decisions made by a given historical actor and to then reflect on the decisions the visitor themselves would make in a similar situation.

Seemingly in opposition to the perspective of those who are concerned about the over-identification of visitors with historic survivors or victims of atrocities to the point of the erasure of these victims are those who outright deny the possibility of developing empathy (whether useful or not) for Holocaust victims in the first place. While this view occasionally manifests as a reaction to what is perceived by a given scholar to be a societal shift away from the capacity for empathy and towards voyeurism,⁴⁴ there is also a scholarly objection to the very concept of empathy for historical persons specifically in the context of the Holocaust. This tends to come from scholars who view the Holocaust as inherently unrepresentable and who resist its historicization.⁴⁵ In this case, it is not so much the pursuit of empathy that is problematic so much as the very concept that the Holocaust can be represented in any ‘real’ way. That is to say, the Holocaust for these scholars represents a break in both societal and historical terms and is inherently unspeakable. This does not mean, however, that scholars, and especially Holocaust survivors themselves, should not seek to represent the Holocaust as such, especially in the case of those witnesses who give testimony out of a need to a) assert their own agency over a historical atrocity inflicted on them and b) the need to speak for the dead who cannot speak for

⁴⁴ Uli Linke in particular addresses this phenomenon in “The Limits of Empathy,” 156.

⁴⁵ Glowacka, *Disappearing Traces*, 5.

themselves.⁴⁶ Rather, this position posits that while the pursuit of representation is useful in some ways, it is inevitably doomed since that Holocaust is unspeakable, and often impossible even for those who have experienced it to transmit that experience to outsiders.

On the other end of the spectrum are those who either fully embrace the idea of the possibility of empathy or embrace it with some practical and methodological limitations. In particular, Dominick LaCapra's concept of empathic unsettlement combined with Silke Arnold-de Simine's exploration of empathy in specifically museum settings will be used in this project. In terms of the latter, Arnold-de Simine sets up practical boundaries for museums wishing to generate empathy for historical persons (in which she includes persons both real and imagined) by emphasizing a non-melodramatic, non-didactic approach to the portrayal of specific people. In this sense, it is possible to experience empathy when a historical person is depicted as making a series of choices leading to a given historical outcome.⁴⁷ This may not mean that the visitor experiences a deeply emotional connection to the historical person. However, the value of empathy in this case is similar to Trezise's position in as much as it allows the visitor to retain their own identity while considering the choices of others and then applying that knowledge to how they themselves may react in a similar situation.⁴⁸ This also indicates a certain degree of openness for empathy. Rather than focusing on empathy solely for victims - which runs the risk of quickly becoming melodrama, pastiche or sympathy and may also serve to dehumanize victims by removing their capacity for agency and self-determination - by focusing on a specific set of choices, circumstances and emotional and intellectual justifications for these choices,

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 13.

⁴⁷ Arnold de-Simine, *Mediating Memory*, 43.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 23.

visitors may feel a certain degree of empathy for *any* historical figure regardless of whether their experiences are similar or whether they are in ideological agreement. This is and of itself is neither ethically dubious nor methodologically problematic; where it has the potential to become problematic is when the line is crossed between empathy and identification.

Related to this concept of empathy as strongly distinct from sympathy is the idea of empathic unsettlement. In this sense, LaCapra's term refers to the fact that one can and should feel a certain amount of discomfort in 'inhabiting' the experiences of others.⁴⁹ This unsettlement may come from a variety of causes. Most obviously, those circumstances in which visitors are asked to identify either with those who were historically perpetrators or those whose experiences in some way contradict or conflict with their perceived experiences of a given event or ideology (which is discussed in the opening chapter of this project under the general umbrella of 'difficult knowledge') will naturally experience a certain amount of cognitive and potentially emotional dissonance from attempting to do so. On the other hand, unsettlement is not reserved for those view points which makes visitors uncomfortable for political or moral reasons. Unsettlement may also refer to the fact that, even when one is attempting to empathize with a 'pure' victim - one who is 'uncomplicated' by circumstances of collaboration, cowardice or other negative concepts - there is necessarily an unbridgeable gap between their experiences and that of a museum visitor. The attempt to put oneself in the shoes of another, particularly when that person is the victim of almost unimaginably difficult historical circumstance *should* be something which is unsettling, since it involves the same balancing of the roles of two subjects and the struggle to

⁴⁹ Dominick LaCapra, *Writing History, Writing Trauma* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 2001) 39-41.

ensure that one is not subsuming the experiences of another and thus turning them into a stereotype of a specific kind of victim or, more simply, an object. Maintaining one's own identity while identifying with another should be difficult; through this difficulty, visitors can temper their more sympathetic or dramatic emotions.

2. Distanciation and Proximity

While the concept of empathy in and of itself is useful to this particular examination of Holocaust videography and photography, it is only one part of the equation. Especially since the focus of this paper is on museums that attempt to represent history in one way or another, an examination of the historical methodology used by museums in relation to empathy is essential. In order to analyze the use of empathy as it pertains to historical representation, this project will utilize Mark Phillip's joint concept of proximity and distanciation. These terms refer to a general praxis of presenting history as well as the specific experiences of 'readers' of history - in this case, the ideal visitor.⁵⁰ In developing this concept, Phillips argues both against extreme proximity in the practice of history (i.e. an intense focus on micro-history, or the fabrication or projection of emotions and psychological states onto given historic persons for the idea of better understanding a given historical event) as well as the idea of pure objectivism.⁵¹ In the case of

⁵⁰ In this case of this project, Phillips theory – originally crafted as a tool to analyze historical text – is adapted for use in the museal rather than in traditional reading materials. This sort of interdisciplinary work, especially between museum studies and reading theory, is prominent in other analyses as well. One of the best examples of this is Heike Buschmann's discussion of how to use specific narratological techniques from literary theory to understand museal use of voice, narrative and perspective. Heike Buschmann, "Geschichten im Raum: Erzähltheorie als Museumsanalyse," *Museumsanalyse*, ed. Joachim Baur (Bielefeld: transcript, 2010) 149-169.

⁵¹ Mark Phillips, "History, Memory and Historical Distance," *Theorizing Historical Consciousness*, Ed. Peter Seixas (Toronto: Toronto University Press, 2004) 89.

the latter, Phillips argues that the perception that create an enormous historical, psychological and emotional distance from a given historic event does not, in fact, make a given representation any more true, accurate, or, most importantly, unbiased. His argument is in part based on the premise that no matter how far removed a historian may think they are from a given event, their own experiences will *always* dictate their presentation of historical circumstances. In particular, biases in this case come in the form of social conditions, the sense of morality or ethics of a given time period in which the historian is writing and their own experiences inasmuch as they colour their perception of events. To understand how and why museums create distance, therefore, one can refer to his statement that “[these questions] can be directed to a history’s ideological implication as well as its affective coloration, its cognitive assumptions as well as its formal traits⁵².” These criteria allow for a multi-dimensional analysis of museums’ deliberate use of proximity and distance in relation to how empathic (or not) the visitor is intended to feel at any given time, including when this empathy is unsettling or disturbing. By focusing on the idea of proximity and distanciation as a sliding scale rather than the idea that one should strive for one extreme or another, Phillips provides methodological guidance for navigating museum representations which are more complicated than the depiction of traditional, chronological history.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 89.

3. Empathy and Distanciation as Analytical Tools

This project relies on the understanding of two central aspects of empathy and distanciation. The first is that both of these concepts function on a spectrum. Different museal representations, exhibitions and individual stories within museums can apply varying levels of empathy and distanciation, depending on the function of these specific museal aspects. Secondly, this project rejects the idea of empathy as the ideal end goal of museal representation. In this case of this analysis, empathy is not an inherently positive concept which museums should strive to achieve. Rather, empathy functions as one analytical tool for examining a given museum's representational methods. Likewise, there is no ideal amount of distanciation that should be present in a specific museum. The concept of distance has traditionally implied that a certain amount of temporal distance between the historical events represented by a given media and the time in which a visitor consumes them, reader or viewer serves as an indicator of how 'truthful' a given representation is. That is, distance in this case is conflated with the idea of scholarly remove and objectivity, with the result that the greater distance that exists between past and present, the more accurate a historical account can be.⁵³ More recent attempts to redefine distance, however, posit that it exists on a spectrum, and can be evaluated in different ways. Mark Phillips in particular points out for different categories for analyzing distance: ideological distance, emotional affect, formal considerations and narrativity. The distanciation represented by these different categories may fluctuate; that is, while a specific representation might be strongly emotionally affective and bring visitors 'closer' to a given event or person depending on

⁵³ Phillips, "Rethinking Historical Distance," 12.

its content, the formal circumstances in which it is presented (in the case of this project in particular, the context of a video or photograph within a museum exhibition, as well as the framing of said video or photograph) may work to keep visitors removed from the event or person and suggest a strong sense of the distance between past and present.⁵⁴ This project will therefore analyze individual examples of photographs and videos in the museum context in terms of how and why they use varying degrees of distance and empathy, rather than using empathy or distance as a type of value judgment for how successful or historically accurate a given museum is.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 13.

Chapter IV. The Canadian Museum for Human Rights

1. Introduction

Opened fully⁵⁵ in November of 2014 in Winnipeg, Canada, the Canadian Museum for Human Rights (CMHR) is an exemplary ideas museum. Dedicated to raising awareness about human rights issues and violations in order to mobilize its visitors towards positive future action, the museum fulfills the primary criteria of an ideas museum by focusing on a positive, non-historic concept rather than on commemoration or memorialization of a specific event or era.⁵⁶ The museum does contain representation of historical events and persons, however, these representations are not presented chronologically, but rather arranged into themes such as *Canadian Journeys* (a gallery which depicts human rights victories and violations throughout Canadian History) and *Breaking the Silence* (a gallery dedicated to the examination of national and international efforts to silence survivors of mass atrocities). The museum's use of video and photographic content is aimed at providing documentation of genocide and mass atrocities as well as provoking emotional responses in visitors towards survivors and victims of these crimes, in order to motivate visitors to become advocates for human rights.⁵⁷

While the Canadian Museum for Human Rights is neither a war museum nor strictly a Holocaust museum, a large portion of its permanent exhibition is focused on the Holocaust. In this case, the museum utilizes the Holocaust as an exemplary genocide in order to focalize

⁵⁵ The museum had a 'soft open' in September 2014, but many of the galleries were not complete until November of that year.

⁵⁶ Moses, "Protecting Human Rights," 41.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 41.

extreme examples of human rights violations. To this end, the museum is not memorializing in its function; although victims of the Holocaust do get some focus, the primary Holocaust representation is concerned with mechanisms of state violence. This can mainly be seen in the museum's *Examining the Holocaust* gallery (1). As visitors enter the gallery, they are greeted with a text which describes its function and approach to history: "When the Nazi government used laws and violence to deprive people of their rights as citizens and humans, and the majority went along, genocide was the horrific result. We examine the Holocaust to learn to recognize genocide and try to prevent it." The physical space of the gallery is somewhat disorienting: two of its sloping walls are completely covered in text and images, while the centre of the gallery is comprised of a theatre which plays looped films. The theatre itself appears to be composed of bits of shattered glass that have been reassembled - deliberately meant to provoke the image of Kristallnacht. The theatre features a video which specifically addresses wartime anti-Semitism in Canada and the failure of the Canadian government to accept Jewish refugees leading up to and during the Holocaust. The gallery's text, photography and images are dedicated to showcasing the escalating human rights violations in the Third Reich through both societal attitudes (such as anti-Semitism and general xenophobia) and legal means (i.e. the election of the NS party and appointment of Hitler as Chancellor) eventually leading up to the Holocaust. The gallery is relatively object poor, in keeping with other ideas museums; the few objects present within the gallery include anti-Semitic propaganda tools and facsimiles of concentration camp architectural plans. The gallery also includes videos imbedded in its walls, which contain either interviews with or narratives about Holocaust survivors, victims, or resisters.



(1) Side view of entrance to *Examining the Holocaust Gallery*, Canadian Museum for Human Rights, Winnipeg, August 2016 © Erin Johnston-Weiss

The Holocaust is addressed again within the museum on a smaller scale in the *Breaking the Silence* gallery. This gallery is dedicated to mapping the ways in which genocides are covered up and silenced, in order to both be carried out and hidden from the rest of the world. In particular, the gallery focuses on the mechanisms by which governments were able to carry out mass atrocities with a special focus on the five genocides that the Canadian government officially recognizes: the genocides of Rwanda, Armenia, Srebrenica and Germany, and the Holodomor. This gallery is in a sense a practical application of the goals set forth in the Holocaust gallery: it contrasts and compares the ways in which genocides were carried out, using an adapted version of the⁵⁸ definitional criteria of genocide established by Raphael Lemkin post-Second World War and highlighted within the Holocaust gallery. Holocaust representation in this case primarily comprises videos that highlight both the historical facts of the Holocaust told through the personal lenses of survivors as well as the barriers to speaking about the Holocaust and the importance of doing so.

⁵⁸ Specifically, the CMHR sidesteps the fact that Lemkin imagined his definition of genocide “not in terms of abstract human rights and individual suffering, but in relation to a world civilization whose constituent parts were nation, religious and racial groups.” Rather, the museum, by including summaries of Lemkin’s writings and theory within the broader context of human rights violations, seems to imply that is *was* in fact the desire to realize a universal belief in human rights which motivated his work. A. Dirk Moses, “The Holocaust and World History: Raphael Lemkin and Comparative Methodology,” *The Holocaust and Historical Methodology*, ed. Dan Stone (New York: Berghahn Books, 2012) 275.

2. a. Video Representation and Structural Distance

If one evaluates the relative distance between the past and present in the CMHR purely through the lens of the potential to generate strong emotional affect,⁵⁹ certain aspects of its video representations of Holocaust victims and survivors may appear to invoke a closeness or intimacy between the museum visitor and historical persons. Although the testimonial videos in both the *Examining the Holocaust* and *Breaking the Silence* galleries do not focus enough on the minutiae of daily life in the Third Reich to qualify as micro-history, they nevertheless provide a certain closeness to the past by focusing on specific, personal anecdotes rather than presenting a broad view of history. These stories are often presented without excess mediation in the form of narration (although this is not universally the case), and the visitor's potential for being emotionally affected by these stories is high. The videos involve the retelling of deeply personal experiences of suffering, particularly in the forms of humiliation, terror, physical hardship and the death or loss of family members.

One of the best examples of the way in which the museum creates both proximity and distance of different types is the variety of the videos embedded in the walls of the Holocaust gallery. Each wall segment contains three different videos, each of which focuses on the individual story of a particular person. These videos are relatively short (averaging approximately two minutes each) and detail a certain aspect of life during the Holocaust. Aside from the subject matter, the videos vary in how much historical distance they create; in terms of empathy and structural distance, however, they are similar in many ways. One of the strongest

⁵⁹ Phillips, "Rethinking Historical Distance," 13.

contrasts in terms of historical distance can be observed between two of the videos. The first exists at the opening wall of the gallery. This section of the exhibit focuses on both the rise to power of the Nazi party, as well as the use of propaganda and the acceleration of anti-Semitism and xenophobia in German society. The three videos embedded in this wall present stories of the beginning of strengthened discrimination against out-groups in Germany. Two of the videos are excerpts from longer interviews with Holocaust survivors. In contrast, the third video details the story of Johann Trollmann, a Roma boxer persecuted by the NS government due to his ethnic background. Unlike the other two video subjects, Trollmann did not survive the Holocaust; therefore, no testimony of his experience exists. To work around this, the museum presents a series of photographs of Trollmann and of the Nazi party members, which is supplemented by voice-over narration. As with most of the surrounding text and the voice narration contained in other places throughout the museum (as in, for example, the museum's opening gallery which seeks to define human rights), the narration is somewhat moralizing and didactic. The narration also presents a linear view of history. Rather than simply telling the individual story of Trollmann's persecution, the video briefly describes the fate of many Roma and Sinti people who died during and before the Holocaust. The combination of a series of still, historical photographs and narration which directly links the persecution of the Roma and Sinti in the early 1930s to their later mass murder on the one hand creates significant historical distance between viewer and subject. In the first place, there are no individual photographs that one can focus on for an extended amount of time in order to examine and interpret them (unless one pauses every few seconds while watching the video). Secondly, the nature of historical photography, including the coloring of the images and the ways in which people are dressed also strongly stresses the

expanse of time between past and present. On the other hand, the fact that this video directly calls to mind the persecution of Roma and Sinti may for certain visitors actually close the historical gap between past and present in a structural sense. This is possible only if visitors create a link between this particular video (as well as the other information in the gallery about the persecution of Roma and Sinti) with a video within the *Canadian Journeys* gallery. In the latter video, a Roma man from Hungary details the ongoing racism and discrimination faced by the Roma in the present day, and emphasizes the fact that they are often unsuccessful in receiving refugee status in Canada since Hungary is considered by the federal government to be a safe country. Much of the discrimination faced by the subject of the video is similar in nature to that faced historically by Roma during the NS regime. If one is able to link these two people and circumstances together, it is possible for the gap between past and present to be considerably shortened.

2. b. Survivor Testimony and Emotional Proximity

In contrast to the complex nature of distancing in the Trollmann video is a video testimony by a Holocaust survivor present on the other side of the gallery. In this case, the video features an elderly Jewish woman named Carmela Finkel, who survived the Holocaust as a child. In some ways, Finkel's video acts as a compliment to the rest of the videography in the *Examining the Holocaust* gallery. Like the others, her testimony serves to fulfill specific historical gaps in the museum's narrative; in this case, Finkel details the manner in which her family managed to escape from persecution by hiding in a small hole in the backyard of a neighbour. The video does not immediately begin with Finkel's own experiences, but rather with

her father's escape from a mass killing of Jews in their home city. In this sense, Finkel provides details of persecution not otherwise seen in the museum through the story of her father.

Interestingly, although many of the videos may act to produce historical or structural proximity with visitors, this section of Finkel's video does the opposite, instead increasing historical and structural distance between event and visitor. This has mainly to do with the format of the video: although she is recalling a familial anecdote, it is clear that the mass killing was a traumatic event she had heard about second hand, and, due to her hesitation in re-telling the story, appears to have not yet fully come to terms with. During the first half of the video, then, the visitor is also kept at an emotional distance from Finkel's father since they never really get his interpretation of his own story; empathy with either Carmela or her family is also not a likely outcome of watching the beginning of the recording. In addition to the second-hand nature of the story of her father's survival, visitors are also kept somewhat emotionally and structurally distant from the events in question by the photo montages which interrupt the interview excerpts with Finkel. Although, like her story about her father, the photographs are personal in nature - the majority of which include the Finkel family in their daily lives enjoy recreational activities and practicing religious rites - they are also markedly generic.⁶⁰ Their origin is not enough to bridge the structural, emotional and historical distances between what they represent and the visitor themselves, since, provided the visitor has ever seen Holocaust photographic representation

⁶⁰ To be clear, this is not to suggest that every photograph, document or other representation of the Holocaust must be somehow unique or novel in order to evoke some sort of emotional response in the visitor. The problem here is that generic imagery linked with structural and historical distance can further the viewer's emotional distance from a given event since it is possible they will feel that they already 'understand' the event, having seen its representative images before with a similar amount of distance. Carolyn Dean, *The Fragility of Empathy After the Holocaust* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2004) 76-79.

before, these photographs are indistinguishable from countless other photographs of the same period and are not framed in such a way as to evoke some sort of new response. Conversely, the latter half of the video does contain the possibility for increased emotional and structural proximity, even if empathy remains distant from the visitor. What makes this proximity possible is the subject's retelling of her and her family's method of surviving the Holocaust – in this case, living in a hole in the soil in the yard of one of their neighbours. Interestingly, Finkel's story of survival in the video's second half does not - unlike the first portion – add as much to the overall museal representation of the Holocaust from a historical perspective, although the video does allow for the exploration of themes of resistance, of non-Jewish neighbours and friends offering refuge from persecution, and of the persecution of Jews experienced through the actions of the *Einsatzgruppen*, all of which are otherwise not detailed in the rest of the gallery. This video also achieves a strong structural and emotional affect and response in the visitor. This is accomplished by the videography itself. Unlike the first half of the video, where Finkel tells her father's story and generic-looking photographs of a pre-war Jewish family are layered with shots of her giving testimony, the second half focuses exclusively on pictures of the hole itself and on Finkel as she relates her experience. Finkel describes the hole thusly: "The walls, the ceiling, the floor, everything was soil. We went in there with no books, no toys, basically absolutely nothing... we never knew when it was day and when it was night." As Finkel is describing her family's life in the hole, images of it appear on screen. Unlike the images visitors have just seen, the hole is itself novel as well as shocking, albeit not necessarily in the sense that photographs of concentration camp victims are shocking. Visitors are thus, briefly, immersed in both the story of life in, and images of the hole itself, which combine to bring them emotionally and structurally

closer to the subject, rather than being held at a distance through the medium of videography. This immersion is continued to an extent by Carmela Finkel's final words: "They say that we survived, that we overcame. You never do. You know, you live and you act normal and you speak normal but there are certain things that will never go away... they're with you forever." Although this is not the only time the museum calls attention to the lingering effects of the trauma of the Holocaust, it nevertheless is almost singular in its ability to bring the reality of trauma emotionally close to the visitor through structural means. At the same time, some distance is reinforced by the sheer absurdity of Finkel's situation: the museum therefore subtly suggests that her individual trauma cannot be replicated or experienced by visitors, and thus simultaneously creates both distance from and proximity to her experience.

3. Shock Effects and Photographing Human Rights Violations

Another strong representational challenge faced by all museums that wish to depict the Holocaust is the way in which they decide to use photography. As discussed in the second chapter of this project, there are ethical questions involved in choosing which photographs to display in terms of their source and original purpose. This can be further complicated by the intention of the museum for the photographs themselves; using photos to humanize Holocaust victims, for example, might not be a viable option if the photographs being used were taken by the SS, SD, Gestapo and Wehrmacht with the intention to document the 'positive' progress of the Holocaust. In the case of the CMHR, the photographs used in the *Examining the Holocaust* gallery serve a vastly different purpose than the videos within the gallery. Unlike the short testimonial videos, which serve both to produce strong emotional responses within the visitor as

well as to fill in small details about the persecution of Jews in particular not mentioned elsewhere in the gallery (i.e. the strategy of one family to avoid capture; issues of starvation within the camps; the treatment of Jewish students in German schools in the years leading up to the Holocaust) the photographs in the gallery serve a primarily documentary purpose. While some photographs may elicit an emotional response simply due to the nature of their content, they are arranged in such a way to exemplify or document the treatment of persecuted peoples during by the NS. This documentary function can partly be seen by the different sizes of the photographs throughout the gallery, and especially in those photographs which the museum focalizes either by placing in a central location or by expanding to enormous size. One of first photographs encountered by visitors to the gallery, for instance, is a picture of a young girl performing a Nazi salute, which is replicated in its original size.

As with the other photographs within the Holocaust exhibition, the effect of this photograph is not to produce empathy within the visitor for German citizens; its size and content are highly distancing as well as somewhat shocking. The image is particularly effective at creating historical distance between the events of the Holocaust and life in the Third Reich with the visitors present since they combine to create a strong emotional affect and response. It is difficult to reconcile an image of a seemingly innocent child (due to both her very young age and her clothing, which is comprised of a white dress and a floral crown) with the context of the Holocaust and the fact that she is performing a Nazi salute. Especially jarring is the contrast between the image of this child and that of the child depicted later on in the gallery who serves as an example of children who were murdered due to mental illness and/or retardation. In this sense, the photograph serves as an introduction to the all-encompassing nature of the NS regime

and the reach of its propaganda and discriminatory practices, thus providing both documentation of violations within the Third Reich and highlighting a key aspect of the state mechanisms of violence which serve to perpetrate genocide.

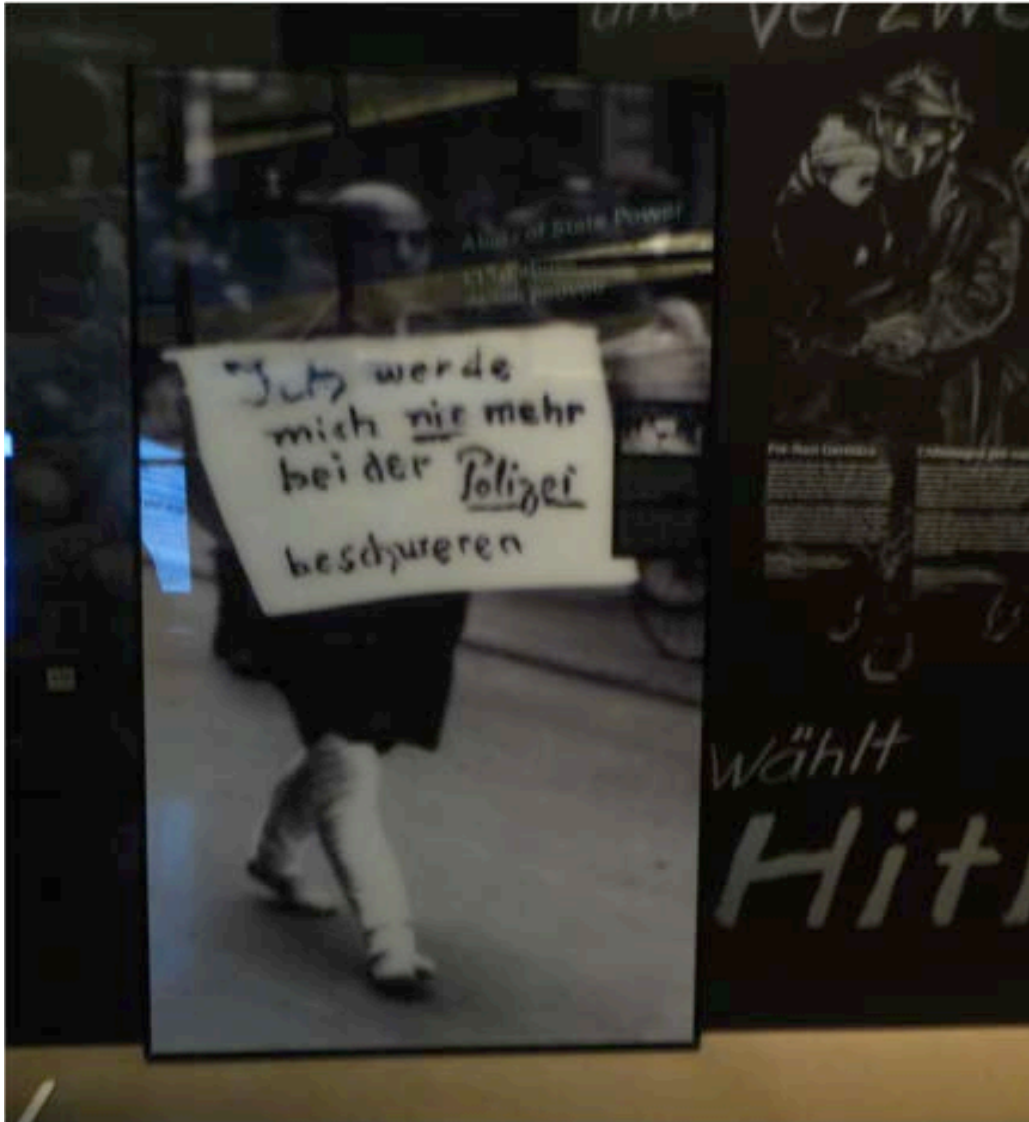


(2) Photo of young girl at a Nazi rally, “Abuse of State Power,” *Examining the Holocaust* gallery, Canadian Museum for Human Rights, Winnipeg, August 20 2016, © Erin Johnston-Weiss.

One of the other oversized photographs in the gallery focuses on a victim of the Third Reich. This second large photograph is a portrait of a lawyer who, having complained to local officials about one of his client's treatment as a Jewish citizen, is forced to walk barefoot with signage decrying his complaint in an act of deliberate humiliation (2). The sign, which reads "Ich werde mich nie mehr bei der Polizei beschweren," is translated in the photograph's caption.

Like the image of the young girl, this photograph also produces a shock effect. Interestingly, in contrast to the first photograph, this picture can be seen as collapsing a certain amount of historical distance between visitor and subject, albeit in a purely structural sense. Unlike the photograph of the young girl, which is relatively iconic and whose meaning is familiar to anyone with passing knowledge of Holocaust and Second World War history, the photograph of the man is not altogether clear in its meaning. Although it is clear that the man is being humiliated (as can be perceived from his expression and the fact that he is barefoot) it is not initially obvious to visitors who do not read German why he is being treated in this manner, although one can likely assume it is because he belongs to a group persecuted by the NS. Visitors are therefore literally drawn into looking closer at the picture in order to read its caption, which provides an explanation of the context and a translation of the sign. Interestingly, while the visitor is forced to approach the photograph in a physical sense to learn more about the content, they are simultaneously distanced from the actual picture itself, which becomes impossible to view at such a close angle. In this sense the museum plays with historical distance on the axes of understanding and structure; visitors who attempt to learn more about the Holocaust are

simultaneously pushed away from understanding it in a metaphorical sense, and thus can become overwhelmed in this specific way by small details and lose sight of the wider picture of history.



(3) Oversized photograph of lawyer with bare feet and sign (smaller photograph included in internal caption, "Abuse of State Power," *Examining the Holocaust* gallery, Canadian Museum for Human Rights, Winnipeg, August 20 2016, © Erin Johnston-Weiss.

4. Distance and Historical Determinism

One of the risks with enforcing a strong sense of distance - in the case of the CMHR, particularly through structure and ideological means - is the potential to portray history with a certain kind of prescriptiveness.⁶¹ This is one of the issues faced by the CMHR - more so in the *Examining the Holocaust* gallery than in the *Breaking the Silence* gallery, which is much less focused on temporality. The particular combination of the didactic nature of certain aspects of the Holocaust gallery, the strong distancing effect of the exhibition and the lack of focus on individual perspectives contribute to an overall sense of a determinist approach to history within the gallery. The combination of photographs and text within the interpretive panels of the gallery clearly demonstrates this. While photographs of individual people and video presentation of personal stories exist, the layout of the gallery is such that the linear timeline of the Holocaust risks overwhelming the visitor. Since the gallery focuses very little on specific historical incidences of discrimination or violence, and especially since it introduces the idea of historical (primarily German) anti-Semitism alongside the rise of the NS, and concludes with photographs of concentration camps and corpses, the gallery appears to suggest a certain inevitability to the Holocaust. In this sense, all that comes before the Holocaust, both physically and chronologically within the museum space, suggests that genocide is a natural end result of Nazi Germany's historical circumstances. This prescriptiveness is further emphasized by the central video within

⁶¹ Phillips, "Rethinking Historical Distance," 14.

the gallery. The story of the SS St Louis⁶² is told alongside that of the Canadian response to the German refugee crisis, with a strong emphasis on the failure of the Canadian government to take in Jewish refugees. Since the video ends by questioning how many lives would have been saved if the Canadian government had taken in refugees or relaxed its criteria for immigration, it draws a clear line of causality between the death of a large number of European Jews and the inaction of the Canadian government. Finally, this determinism is underlined by the museum's ideology which emphasizes that visitors need to view human rights violations and mass atrocities as things which can be prevented through human rights education, and therefore it needs, to an extent, to represent a direct cause-and-effect interpretation of history. This is underlined by several of the museum's mandates - primarily, the idea that with specific actions one can make a positive difference towards humans rights and thus have hope for the future, and the desire to clarify abstract, historical concepts through linear, first-person stories.⁶³

That being said, however, the museum's maintenance of a strong sense of distance between visitors, and the events of the Holocaust and the crimes of the NS regime has strong advantages. Since the museum focuses on state mechanics of violence much more than on perpetrator or victim groups, the problems associated with perpetrator and victim representation are largely avoided. Among other things, by focusing on the ways in which specific states can organize mass atrocities and genocide rather than on the perpetrators of these events, the museum does not

⁶² A boat full of Jewish refugees fleeing Germany in 1939, whose visas were denied at their original destination in Cuba, and who were then denied refuge and Canada and the United States, many of whom died on the voyage or were subsequently killed upon their re-entry into Europe.

⁶³ Jeremy Maron, Researcher for *Examining the Holocaust* and *Breaking the Silence* galleries, "Exhibiting Mass Atrocities at the Canadian Museum for Human Rights," (Brown Bag Lunch, St Paul's College, University of Manitoba) March 4, 2016.

risk the possibility that visitors may sympathize or identify with perpetrators. By not focusing exclusively on victim perspectives either, it ensures that individual perpetrators are not ‘othered’ by the visitor to the extent that it becomes impossible to see them as human, and thus allows the visitor to assume they would never be capable of perpetration since the perpetrators are not ‘like them.’ This is in part reinforced by the fact that the museum focuses primarily on the state perpetrating violence against its citizens rather than on individual stories of perpetration.

Creating strong historical distance between visitor and victim in a structural, ideological and narrative sense also ensures that visitors do not over-identify with Holocaust survivors or victims. Since the museum is not experiential, the only point at which it might risk the over-identification of visitors with Holocaust victims is if it were to focus overtly on the perspective of specific victims. While, again, the generation of empathy for victims can be seen as largely positive, representations which attempt to elicit empathy through affective or narrative means risk becoming melodramatic. In this case, the visitor’s own feelings may either overwhelm them to the point of shutting down, thus rendering them incapable of understanding the specific historical circumstances represented in an exhibition, or they may detract and draw attention away from the suffering of the subject of the affective response. This annihilation of the recognition of actual, historical suffering in place of one’s own experience when confronted with highly narrativized, first-person accounts has long been a subject of discussion among not only historians but also scholars from a wide variety of backgrounds. Carolyn Dean for instance quotes the psychologist Israel Charny’s reaction to Holocaust narrative thusly: “[t]he reading becomes exciting ... One murderous incident follows another... My excitement mounts... It is almost a sexual feeling... I flow into the next account of a killing and become one with the

murderer.”⁶⁴ While this example is clearly an extreme case, the risk of visitors confusing their own experiences in the museum with that of victims and survivors is a well-documented problem. In the case of the CMHR, although adopting a zero-focalized perspective does not eliminate this problem altogether, it can help to ensure that visitors do not over-emotionalize the suffering of others.⁶⁵

⁶⁴ Dean, *Fragility of Empathy*, 25.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 31.

Chapter V – The Topography of Terror

1. Introduction

The Topography of Terror has existed as a documentation center for Nazi crimes since 1987.⁶⁶ Unlike the Canadian Museum for Human Rights and, to a lesser extent, the German Military History Museum, the location of the Topography is of central importance to both its content and goals. The museum's physical site is neither an addition to a pre-existing museum (such as is the case for the MHM) nor does it occupy a somewhat neutral space (as is the case with the CMHR⁶⁷). Rather, the museum is specifically located at the axes of the headquarters of the Gestapo and *Reichssicherheitshauptamt* (Reich Main Security Office), destroyed at the end of the Second World War, as well as along the route of the Berlin wall. As such, none of the former buildings are present within the museum itself, in contrast to other historical sites such as the memorial site Haus der Wannsee-Konferenz, which seeks to represent the building more or less as it was; the only remaining architecture includes some rubble as well as the foundations of the Gestapo 'house jail' and the remains of the old underground garage which forms a sort of

⁶⁶ Although the museum is long standing, the actual current building was created after a series of failed architectural competitions beginning in 2004. The contents of the site have varied as well - it has been a memorial site as well as used to house exhibitions related to Berlin's 750th anniversary, for example. Sven Kellerhof, "Am Schreibtisch der Täter," *Die Welt* (May 7th, 2010). The building itself opened with its new permanent exhibition in 2010.

⁶⁷ This point itself is of course highly contentious - during archeological excavations done on the site of the CMHR it was revealed that the museum was built on ground rich with indigenous artifacts and other archeological evidence of material culture and historical activity. However, this is the case with the entirety of the Forks area in Winnipeg (as well as much of the city). In this sense, the museum is not built upon 'neutral' or 'empty' ground. Conversely, for the past several decades, very little modern use was found for the specific site itself, in contrast to the MHM. As such, even though the site contains a tremendous amount of history, its historical usage, though somewhat incorporated in the museum does not play nearly as big a part in determining the form, function, goals and representation of the museum in the same way as it does for the MHM or Topography. Karen Busby, Adam Mueller and Andrew Woolford, "Introduction," *The Idea of a Human Rights Museum*, Ed. Karen Busby, Adam Mueller and Andrew Woolford (Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 2015) 3-4.

moat housing the outdoor exhibition (referred to in German as an *Ausstellungsgaben*).⁶⁸ As of 2010, the museum now comprises three separate but interrelated components: a semi-permanent outdoor exhibition directly below the Berlin wall (which is usually dedicated to an exhibit about Berlin and the role of propaganda during the Second World War and under the Nazi government, and which is open in Spring, Summer and Fall); a walking tour with various information stations, including architectural photographs, which surrounds the entire museum and details the various NS buildings formerly located on the grounds; and a permanent indoor exhibition. The contrast of these various sections is notable especially in their architecture; while the outdoor exhibition is often densely populated by tourists who happen upon the site (due in large part to its proximity to Check Point Charlie) and is completely open to the elements, the indoor exhibition is housed in a largely neutral space which is almost completely covered in windows or white walls with no artifacts and virtually no art, therefore drawing one's attention primarily to the content of the exhibition rather than one's surroundings.

As a documentation center Topography of Terror differs from the two other museums not only in terms of content, since it focuses almost exclusively on the crimes of the Nazi regime rather than on the victims and survivors of those crimes, but also in representation style. The Topography of Terror relies primarily on photographic documentation, facsimiles of documents and quotations from perpetrators in order to present the history of Nazi crimes, including but not limited to the Holocaust. Quotations from historians and contextualizing text created by the museum's historians and curators play a secondary role in presenting historical events to the

⁶⁸ Andreas Nachama, "Introduction," *Topography of Terror Exhibition Catalogue* (Stiftung Topographie des Terrors: Berlin, 2010), 6-9.

visitor. Since the museum is located on the site of the former central offices of the Reich Main Security Office and Gestapo, it focuses on perpetration much more strongly than other sites, and as such, is an example of a museum which purposefully creates distance between visitor and subject. On the other hand, since the center relies so heavily on photography, the nature of photographic montage presents the opportunity for visitors to develop a certain closeness to the (literally visual) perspective of perpetrators and spectators of Nazi crimes, presenting a unique analytical challenge.

2. Emotional and Psychological Distancing

2. a. Perpetrator Psychology

Unlike museums such as the CMHR and, to an extent, the MHM, the Topography of Terror, despite its focus on perpetrators, does not generally attempt to understand the Holocaust from an emotional or psychological perspective. That is to say, at no point does the museum encourage the development of empathy for individuals or groups that it represents, including victims as well as perpetrators. Visitors are not generally given a deep enough understanding of individual mentalities in order to truly understand why specific people might participate in the Holocaust. Interestingly, it is not always apparent that this is the case. The museum in its opening segments, for example, spends considerable time discussing the forced-participatory and overwhelming nature of the creation of the Volksgemeinschaft, emphasizing the persecution of outside groups and the psychological, political and societal pressures for adopting Nazi ideology, as well as the harsh treatment of those who refused to do so even before systemic persecution became commonplace. Visitors may, for example, expect to be able to understand the emotional

or mental perspective of some of the central figures of the SS and SD in the exhibition's second 'chapter,' "Institutions of Terror." In the first place, this section centralizes Heinrich Himmler and his role in establishing and perpetrating state-sponsored terror. This strong focus on an individual (at other points of the museum, the focus on Himmler is either shared with or shifted to a focus on Reinhard Heydrich or Adolf Eichmann, depending on which governmental or military department is focalized) may set one up to believe that some part of their perspective will be revealed in a comprehensible way; this is however not the case. In all the centre's focus on Himmler, at no point is the visitor fully immersed in his perspective. In the first place, there are no objects in the museum; it is impossible to relate to Himmler through personal objects or candid photographs, and the museum, while not demonizing him or representing him as psychotic, makes little effort to make him relatable. This distance is accomplished primarily through narrative intervention. While the museum takes, to an extent, a causal view of history (this is the case, for example, when it, in its introduction, cites the authority to detain and imprison 'enemies' of the state as a consequence of the police force's historical anti-Semitism and a desire to assert greater control over Germany's citizens rather than a top-down order from the NS government) and utilizes a zero-focalized perspective which allows it to jump back and forth in time and between different geographical and bureaucratic areas, it nevertheless does not have a strong narrative perspective in and of itself. Again, this is due to the museum's documentary nature and its consequent lack of moralization and didacticism. Nevertheless, the museum uses this zero-focalized narrative voice to intervene throughout the museum. That is to say, although visitors are exposed to a tremendous amount of documentation and quotations by people such as Heinrich Himmler, they are never able to fully immerse themselves in his

perspective. As with other perpetrators (as well as victims) the museum's narrative voice is used to both contextualize individual quotes and to interrupt Himmler's perspective.

The museum chooses to do this for two central reasons. The first is the ever-present risk that visitors may over-identify with perpetrators or fetishize their belongings, and thus potentially view them as sympathetic or identifiable in a way which may work to overshadow their culpability as perpetrators. Over-identification with perpetrators may also have the effect not only of appearing to diminish an individual's role in the Holocaust and prior instances of persecution and discrimination, but may also diminish the horror, seriousness and intentionality of genocide in the first place, thus minimizing the suffering of victims. While, as previously stated, the museum does not seek to memorialize Holocaust and other NS victims nor directly develop empathy between them and the visitor, it nevertheless runs contrary to the goals of the Topography of Terror to dismiss their suffering. This mandate is tied into the second reason for which one will never fully get the perspective of not only men like Eichmann and Himmler but any participant in, bystander or victim of the Holocaust; the museum serves a documentary rather than memorializing function. It is not necessarily the case that the Topography of Terror denies the possibility of understanding the Holocaust on an emotional or psychological level in the sense that certain historians and cultural and academics critics do,⁶⁹ but rather that this is simply not the goal of the museum. Just as the CMHR has strong pedagogical goals, the Topography of Terror is rooted in an educational goal; since it does not have the same moral or ideological aims as the CMHR, however, its pedagogical functions are fulfilled without

⁶⁹ Glowacka, *Disappearing Traces*, 2-6.

didacticism. There is no need according to its mandate to emphasize the ‘right’ and ‘wrong’ sides of history or specific ideas as in the Canadian Museum for Human Rights since the Topography does not necessarily wish to alter the behaviour and attitudes of its patrons. This is reflected in part by its audience, of which a good number of school groups. Interestingly, however, due to the museum’s proximity to major tourist sites, some of which *do* serve memorializing functions,⁷⁰ a large percentage of its visitors are tourists who either stop to use the free washrooms or who accidentally wander through the external exhibition. In this sense, much of the information which has the potential to be emotional impactful within the context of pre-existing Holocaust knowledge (i.e., photography which visitors familiar with Holocaust history would recognize as being from concentration camps) may be entirely missed by these visitors. The museum therefore has a somewhat fractured sense of emotional proximity due to the unusual variety of information visitors may have before arriving at the museum.⁷¹ The Topography therefore fills an informational gap in which its ability to examine violence created by the state, and to allow visitors to better understand the perspective of persecutors in a little fashion supersedes other functions.

⁷⁰ Personal correspondence with Andreas Sander, staff researcher at the Topography of Terror, September 27th, 2016.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*

2. b. Gaze and perspective

Perhaps more so than in the museum's presentation of quotations and information about perpetrators and victims, the other place in which there is a possibility for the development of emotional empathy or identification with victims of state violence in particular is in the museum's use of photography. Although video recordings of propaganda speeches by Hitler are present in computer stations near the exterior walls of the museum- which has the effect that one must seek them out and they are not automatically incorporated with the rest of the indoor exhibition - as well as copies of documents from various government and military bodies, by far the most used medium within both interior and exterior permanent exhibitions (aside from text) is photography. As with the documents present in the museum, photographs of all kinds of events and persons from during and after the NS-period serve a documentary and verification function of the events of the Holocaust. The photographs present in both exhibitions are primarily those taken by the SS, SD, Gestapo or members of the Wehrmacht, although the museum presents a combination of both official and unofficial photography.

Just as it interrupts and deters the visitor's ability to empathize with historical persons via text, the museum's narrative also intervenes with the visitor's ability to empathize with victims of the NS state through photography. This is not to say that victim photography is not present in the museum; on the contrary, in the indoor exhibition in particular, a large segment of the museum's third chapter, "Terror, Persecution, and Extermination on Reich Territory" is dedicated specifically to various victim groups (Jews, Roma and Sinti, 'Asocial' elements, political dissidents and the physically and mentally disabled). Many of the photographs used by

the museum are iconic and repeated in other museums and exhibitions related to the Holocaust. This is the case, for example, with a photograph of a Roma woman who is having her eye colour recorded by a eugenics doctor (4), captioned in the museum as “A ‘Gypsy’ woman is examined for a ‘racial evaluation’ by a staff member (presumably Dr. Sophie Erhardt, but possibly Dr. Eva Justin) of the “Research Department for Racial Hygiene and Population Biology” headed by Dr. Robert Titter at the Reich Health Office, photo probably taken in Berlin, undated (ca. 1939/1940)”. Even in the relatively short contextualizing caption of this photograph, one can see the museum’s efforts at distancing visitors from the NS perspective, as well as the perspective of victims, at work. Most obviously, the use of quotation marks here and throughout the exhibition is indicative of the museum’s narrative intervention. Due to the nature of the museum, it is essentially impossible to describe the history and reality of Nazi crimes without using the terminology coined by the NS, especially terminology pertinent to persecution. To do this would not only involve the invention of new vocabulary and phrases but a certain ‘softening’ of the language (i.e. in order to avoid racism, anti-Semitic and ableist terms) may function to diminish visitors perceptions of the Holocaust and related crimes. On the other hand, repeating the same phrases used to effectively reinforce, or in some cases, create the idea of particular populations as subhuman out-groups deserving of persecution and extermination, risks not only re-victimizing those groups but may also lead visitors to subconsciously begin to think uncritically with this terminology. To this extent, the museum reaches a sort of compromise in its representation; at every point in which specifically Nazi propagandistic terms are used, they are clearly marked by either italicized letters or quotation marks. Additionally, visitors are pulled out of over-identifying with perpetrators through the interruption of their perspective in the form of

quotes from historians. Having visual markers in the captions of photographs and in the descriptive text throughout the museum has the central distancing effect of preventing the visitor to an extent from replicating the gaze of perpetrators by reminding visitors of the false nature of Nazi racial 'science'. On the other hand, the way in which the museum captions photographs such as these also keeps the visitor at an emotional distance and prevents the evocation of emotional affect for the victims of the Holocaust as well as the perpetrators. In the above example, the museum deliberately does not take a moral or didactic tone in describing the photograph of the doctor and her patient. The photo in and of itself does not mark the Roma women necessarily as a victim, although to anyone familiar with the Holocaust it is clear that she is one. In this sense the museum abandons its causal representation of history present elsewhere in the indoor exhibition; there is no direct indication that the reason for which the woman is being examined by a doctor is in order to justify the use of racism in the extermination of Roma and Sinti people. The museum gives the visitor no hints as to how they are supposed to feel about this image; it is also small enough that only those visitors who approach it very closely will be able to read the expression on the woman's face and thus make a sort of emotional interpretation of the photograph.



(4) Photograph of doctor verifying eye colour of a “Gypsy” woman, sourced from *Topography of Terror: A Documentation*, Trans. Pamela Selwyn (Berlin: Stiftung Topographie des Terrors, 2010) 221.

Although the museum shares a certain pedagogical perspective with the CMHR, the lack of didacticism here as discussed above is a clear point of differentiation between the two. In the CMHR, photographs of victims of medical experimentation have their own very large heading and are clearly indicated as such. It is impossible to view these photographs (except from extremely close up) without also taking in the surrounding context and the museum’s denunciation of this experimentation as immoral. The CMHR also chooses to focalize specific stories in order to bring the visitor to some sense of historical and emotional proximity with victims, which is especially clear in its emphasis on the suffering of children and the mentally ill.

Conversely, the Topography does not attempt overtly to tell visitors that medical experimentation is de facto a morally reprehensible concept, but neither does it suggest there are any merits to this experimentation. As with the rest of the museum's focus on victims of persecution, it merely presents the image with a bit of context and visitors must decide on their own how to respond to it. Again, this reinforces one of the fundamental differences between the two museums: the Topography of Terror has a vested interest in avoiding didacticism in part due to its status as a documentation centre, whereas, as an ideas museum, the CMHR has less investment in neutrality.

In a larger sense, it is not only the use of captions and the size of the photographs which reinforce emotional distance between visitor and victim. The museum also relies on the use of a collage effect in its representation of victims. This can be seen especially in the display of photographs of victims of those victims of Gestapo interrogation; the museum dedicates one wall to several dozen mug shots of people arrested by the Gestapo and taken into the Albrechtstrasse 'house prison' (5). Once again, as in the example above, those familiar with Nazi history may be able to experience emotional affect because of the knowledge that these people were all likely wrongfully incarcerated and in many cases tortured and killed. Nevertheless, the museum does not allow the visitor to see them as individuals with whom one may sympathize. In this first place, the museum only presents pictures of their mug shots with brief biographical details (primarily their names and the dates of their birth and death). There is almost no effort to humanize them or flesh them out, and no details of their lives before or after their arrests. In this sense, there is nothing for the visitor to emotionally cling to, nor is there the possibility for empathy since one never learns why they were arrested in the first place and thus it is difficult to

imagine oneself in a similar situation. The only places which present the possibility for a deeper understanding of victims or perpetrators are the background computer stations of the museum. As stated above, these computer stations are somewhat at a distance from the main content of indoor exhibition and must be sought out by the visitor. Their content is also not immediately apparent unlike the walls of the museum, and must be looked through in order to understand their contexts. Nevertheless if one does leaf through the binders attached to these stations one can find one of the only humanizing aspects of the museum in terms of victims. In this case, one of the stations contains lists of arrested persons along with the transcripts of a few of the prison interrogations and police interviews. One should be wary in automatically assuming that these transcripts create strong emotional proximity or empathy, however. While they do give visitors to some extent the direct perspective of persecuted persons, it is difficult to fully imagine oneself in their position since the interviews are constantly being interrupted and amended by notes and questions from the interrogating officers. As discussed above with the section on Himmler, it is difficult to truly understand their perspective since one never gets a long stretch of text without interruption and thus, immersion in the thoughts of the victims is challenging if not impossible. Likewise, the collage on the wall also lacks a strong possibility for emotional proximity since, because the photographs are mug shots rather than candid photographs, it is difficult to read into the victims emotional states based on the framing of the photographs or on their expressions.⁷²

On a larger scale, the museum also enhances its emotional distance between visitor and subject by presenting the victims in a sort of collage. Nominally, the photographs function as

⁷² Cf. Barnouw, *Germany 1945*, 7-11; and Prager, "Liberation of Perpetrator Photographs," 24.

discreet units. Each series of three mug shots of the same victim (in most but not all cases) from different angles are separated from all of the other victims by blank space, and no photograph is replicated. In the context of the physical space they occupy, however, it is impossible to separate one victim from another. This is accomplished through the sizing of the photographs; they are all small enough and close enough together that one cannot view them individually. Each photograph is visually linked to the ones next to, underneath and on top of it, and so the viewer's gaze is drawn to the wall as a whole rather than to individual victims. Interestingly, while this creates an emotional distance between victim and visitor, it can go some way into replicating the gaze of the persecutor. Since the visitor cannot help but see these photographs as a collection rather than as individual people, the possibility exists that visitors may begin to see the victims as unrelatable and not fully human, thus bringing them close to the perspective of their victimizers. To mediate this possibility, the museum occasionally interrupts the visitor's gaze of the collage with quotes from a small number of victims, as is the case with the quote by Ernst Thälmann; "Dann wurde mir der Mund vorübergehend zugehalten und es gab Hiebe ins Gesicht und Peitschenschläge über Brust und Rücken."⁷³ This small, personal detail of maltreatment has the effect to an extent of snapping visitors out of viewing the photographs as a sort of identity-less collage and reminds them to consider individual experiences, but stops short of creating the possibility for empathy.

From the perspective of emotional and historical distancing, especially in terms of its treatment of victims, the Topography may at first seem somewhat unusual. This is likely to be

⁷³ English: "then they held my mouth shut for a while and hit me in the face and whipped my chest and back."

the case if visitors, for example, are expecting to see a representation of victims in particular which fleshes out individual stories in order to evoke empathy or a strong sense of emotional proximity. Just because the Topography deliberately keeps a distance between visitor, victim, and - to a lesser extent, as discussed above - perpetrator, does not mean however that it fails as a Holocaust representation. Rather, by purposefully maintaining this distance, visitors are forced to look at perpetrators, and at Nazi crimes more broadly, from an unusual perspective, which ultimately allows for the possibility of potentially replicating the gaze of the perpetrators while simultaneously being pulled out of that same gaze. In this sense, the museum remains pedagogical without becoming didactic.



(5) Partial view of Albrechtstrasse House Prison mug shots, interior permanent exhibition, *Topographie des Terror*, Berlin, September 2016 © Erin Johnston-Weiss.

2. c. Propaganda and State Violence

In contrast to the indoor exhibition, which provides a wide overview of the history of the NS party and government as well as the Second World War with a specific focus on perpetration, the outdoor exhibition of the Topography specifically focalizes Berlin as the centre of the NS government. The exhibit does of course still focalize perpetration, but takes the slightly different approach of focusing on the importance and effects of state propaganda and terror (hence its title Berlin 1933-45: Zwischen Propaganda und Terror). In many ways, the contents of the two exhibitions begin similarly. Both examine the rise of Hitler and the Nazi party, and especially emphasize the importance of the concept and creation of the *Volksgemeinschaft* for both the rise and popular success of the government and for its role in Holocaust perpetration. Naturally, the fact that the outdoor exhibition specifically examines propaganda means that there is considerable content there that is not otherwise represented in the indoor exhibition (and vice versa). A more interesting and complex difference between them, however, is the way in which the outdoor exhibition goes to considerable lengths to collapse historical and structural distance in ways that the indoor exhibition does not.

One of the major differences between the exhibitions is the intense focus of the outdoor exhibit on the psychological effects of propaganda. Rather than focalizing pre-existing anti-Semitism (as is to a certain extent the case with the indoor exhibition), it examines the psychological repercussions and terror of living in a state in which propaganda is heavily used. This emphasis on psychology, which can be seen particularly, for example, in the way in which the outdoor exhibition slowly and deliberately develops the concept of the *Volksgemeinschaft* and Hitler's ascendancy, goes some way to collapsing the historical distance between visitor and

the people of Berlin, and Germany more broadly, focusing somewhat more on ‘everyday citizens’ and bystanders than the indoor exhibition. To be sure, this does not mean that the museum goes as far as to try to create strong empathy between visitors and bystanders or perpetrators (or even victims, for the matter). What the exhibit does accomplish by appearing to pose historical questions in terms of psychology⁷⁴, however, is to de-historicize the Holocaust to a certain extent. In this sense, the Topography is somewhat closer to the exemplary function of the Holocaust gallery in the Canadian Museum for Human Rights. The focus on the deliberate crafting of propaganda (as highlighted, for example, in the comparatively huge focus given to Goebbels’ work and life than in the indoor exhibition) allows one to take certain examples from the NS regime and apply them to other time periods and possibly to the modern day, since propaganda is a hallmark of repressive political regimes. In this sense, even though the outdoor exhibition has a given focus, the local collective of Berlin, it does not entirely get lost in the specific, despite the tremendous amount of information contained within it.

Although the *Ausstellungsgraben* focuses on propaganda through the constant, critical examination of newspapers, film reels, photographs, speeches, rallies and art (among others), the visitor is never fully drawn into the perspective of bystanders and perpetrators; one cannot exactly replicate their gaze in the same way one can in the interior exhibit. Partly, this is due to the same sort of structural interruption provided in the indoor exhibition; visitors are prevented from becoming immersed in any given perspective due to constant, critical museal text. This is further emphasized by some of the captions of the various sections of the exhibition, which

⁷⁴ Since the museum never directly interrupts the historical information to directly and literally ask questions of the visitor in its hypertext.

reflect the obviously skeptical tone of the museum towards ideas put forward by the Nazis: at various places one can find information on the “Führermythos,” “Mythos Wirtschaftsaufschwung,” “Mythos ‘Arische Familie’” and on the establishment of the “Führerdiktatur.” In this sense, even though the text itself is not didactic, the chapter headings alone give visitors a clear idea of the warped reality of the self and projected image of the NS. To this extent, the *Ausstellungsraben*, despite providing a sense of historical proximity not seen in the indoor exhibition, differentiates itself strongly from the latter by not truly allowing the same type of empathy-through-gaze. Unlike the photographic montages in the indoor exhibition, it is difficult to ‘get lost’ in the gaze of the perpetrator when one is surrounded by text deliberately meant to criticize this gaze and wherein large photographs which contradict each other (rather than small, complimentary photos taken of the same event, of the same place, or during the same session) are hung side by side.

3. Geographical and Historical Proximity

If both the indoor and outdoor permanent exhibition maintain a strong emotional distance between viewer and historical events and persons, there are several ways in which historical distance between visitor and subject is considerably collapsed, albeit it with a degree of subtlety. One of the most interesting ways in one can feel historical proximity in the museum is through the use of space, architecture and geography. Both exhibitions accomplish this in radically different ways.

3. a. Perpetration and Berlin

The outdoor exhibition, contained in on a lower level of the historical site in a former underground garage, is considerably more obvious in this capacity than the indoor exhibition. To begin with, the outdoor exhibition, though it covers much of the same information, focuses especially on the city of Berlin, reminding visitors that they are standing in the same place as many of these acts of persecution and terror took place, as well as cementing the idea that Berlin's history is inexorably tied to the history of the Third Reich. In a more physical sense, the exact location of the outdoor exhibition is also important. Unlike the indoor space, which completely replaces the SS, SD and Gestapo headquarters with an entirely new building, no effort is made in the outdoor exhibition to disguise where one is standing. Visitors consume information about crimes perpetrated by the NS directly within the ruins of one of its central buildings.

This sense of historical and geographic presentism is enhanced by the outdoor exhibition's use of photography. Unlike the indoor space, which contains occasional large photographs but is primarily a mix of smaller photos and text, the outdoor exhibit is mostly dominated by photography. Unlike its indoor counterpart, this section of the museum mounts its oversized photographs not on blank, white walls hung from a ceiling, but rather on transparent glass. This has the effect of constantly reminding visitors of where they are and of the consequences of the events represented by the photographs in question, since no matter how one looks at them, the foundations of the old SS headquarters are always in view. This is reinforced by the fact that the documentation centre exists on a site directly tied to one of the largest remainders of the Berlin Wall. Unlike other sections of the Berlin Wall which often serve to focalize art in some capacity

or which serve their own museal and memorializing function, on the site of the Topography of Terror, the Wall serves as a reminder of the continuity of history. If it is impossible to view a photograph of Hitler reciting a propagandistic speech, for example, without viewing a piece of the wall in the background, it is difficult not to acknowledge the way in which the partition of Germany and of Berlin in particular is directly linked to the outcome of the Second World War and thus to the actions of the NS government. In collapsing the distance between historical events separated by decades through presenting a sense of continuity to Berlin's history, the museum also enhances the proximity of the visitor's present to the historical past.⁷⁵ This collapse between past and present is vital in ensuring that visitors do not doubt not only the existence of the Holocaust, but also the wide participation of the public in many of the events and circumstances leading up to it, if not in the perpetration of genocide itself.

⁷⁵Phillips, "Rethinking Historical Distance," 14.



(6) Close view of “Etablierung der Führerdiktatur” and photo of Nazi rally, *Ausstellungsgraben, Topographie des Terrors*, Berlin, September 2015 © Erin Johnston-Weiss.

This undeniability of civilian participation in NS life, propaganda and actions is well represented in particular by some of the opening chapters of the outdoor exhibition. *Etablierung*

der Führerdiktatur, for example, highlights the nature of civilian participation in the establishment of the NS regime through several key photographs. This section opens with an iconic Nazi propaganda image of uniformed SS forces standing in front of the Reichstag (6). At first, this image may appear to reinforce rather than collapse historical distance between visitor and subject; the staged nature of the image may make it somewhat unbelievable or at best inauthentic, and represents perpetrators in a highly stereotypical setting. However, the image is followed shortly by other images which appear to be more authentic (whether or not this is actually the case) since they appear to be candid and not professionally shot. This is the case, for example, of a photograph taken in January of 1933 depicting citizens waving to Hitler as he is driven into the Reichstag (7). One gets the immediate sense that this image is in fact authentic primarily because of the fact that, technically speaking, it is not a very good photograph. Taken from above, the angle chosen by the photographer does not allow the viewer to view the scene as a whole; the only visible objects are a mass of people, the car, and a tree which takes up a large amount of space in the background. The photograph is also partially obscured by a person standing directly in front of the photographer which not only blocks the view of the scene they were attempting to capture but is also blurry and out of focus. The candid and authentic aura of the photograph is enhanced by the fact that, unlike the preceding image, none of the crowd can be visually identified as members of the Nazi party, military or police. All one can see of the crowd is the fact that almost everyone is wearing a coat and a hat, and, if anyone is wearing something which may visually indicate their membership to a particular group, it is not visible to the viewer, and so far all intents and purposes the group appears to be comprised of 'normal' citizens. Additionally, unlike the photograph which opens this section of the exhibition, there is

no formality to the group. The fact that the crowd appears disorganized and enthusiastic suggests that this gathering was spontaneous and born of popular enthusiasm for Hitler's appointment to Reich's Chancellor, whether or not this is the case.⁷⁶ The fact that the visitor views this seemingly 'authentic' scene in the literal ruins of the NS government's offices reinforces the sense of the proximity of past and present in this specific location.



(7) Close view of photograph of Hitler's car arriving at the Reichstag, "Assuming Power,"

Ausstellungsraben, Topographie des Terrors, Berlin, September 2016 © Erin Johnston-Weiss.

⁷⁶ As convincing as this image may be, however, there is the unfortunate but ever-present possibility that despite its disorder, it may have been one of many staged photographs of Hitler's popularity among ordinary citizens. In this case, visitors should be careful not to automatically assume that their first interpretation is necessarily correct.

3. a .i. Immersive Neutrality

One of the most understated, but highly important, aspects of the interior exhibition's representational strategy as it pertains to its use of distance and empathy is the very neutrality which differentiates it both from the Canadian Museum for Human Rights and the Military History Museum, as well as from the outdoor exhibition and walking tour. The neutrality of the indoor space does fulfill the necessary goal of clearly differentiating past from present: unlike the outdoor exhibition, there are no remnants of Nazi buildings or objects to be seen, and the space resists the influence of its past inasmuch as there is no attempt to represent the spaces of the NS government 'as it was' and thus, no accidental fetishization of Nazi artifacts or aesthetics.⁷⁷ To an extent, this resembles the attempt in the Military History Museum to avoid the fetishization of weaponry. This can be best observed in the MHM's representation of a V2 rocket: at no point in the museum is the rocket fully visible and therefore refuses the possibility of becoming an object of admiration; it appears broken and fractured throughout the museum.

There is however a secondary effect beyond this reinforcement of temporality and resistance to problematic aesthetics in the Topography, however: the neutrality of the building allows for a kind of immersive experience, without becoming experiential. This effect is somewhat subdued insofar as it is not immediately noticeable when one enters the museum. Certainly one can observe that most of the permanent walls are either white and relatively bare or else function as windows, but other controls for neutrality are not readily apparent unless one

⁷⁷ Wulf Kansteiner, *In Pursuit of German Memory: History, Television and Politics after Auschwitz* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2006) 293.

plays close attention. This is the case with the temperature control of the museum, whereby the windows open imperceptibly depending on the temperature outdoors to ensure that the museum continually sits at room temperature. Combined with the fact that almost all of the photographs and texts (with the exception of a few specific quotes and the beginning of a new sections, which are marked in orange) are presented in black and white, the overall effect of the interior exhibition is essentially that everything disappears from the eyes and mind of the visitor besides the content.⁷⁸ This has interesting consequences for one's sense of structural distance as well as presents an unusual possibility for empathy. Because the museum, physically, appears to not exist either to complement or contrast its content, visitors have the opportunity to become fully absorbed in what they are reading; as such, the experience becomes somewhat more private since they are not distracted by the space itself.⁷⁹ When combined with the collage effect as discussed above, this neutrality gives itself over to the possibility that the visitor may gradually become immersed enough in the exhibition to be able to begin to view things from the perspective of bystander or perpetrator and thus generate some empathy from this perspective. At the same time, however, the museum pulls one away from getting too emotionally close to the contents or viewpoints presented in its exhibition so that visitors are unable to feel sympathy for perpetrators.

As such, the Topography's limited immersion represents an interesting contrast to the CMHR, which also attempts to create a somewhat immersive experience but from almost a directly opposite viewpoint. Unlike the Topography, which uses architecture to collapse a certain

⁷⁸ Cf. Alison Landsberg for discussion of the opposite type of immersive experience in the case of the experiential museum. Landsberg, *Prothetic Memory*, 130.

⁷⁹ Hansen-Glucklich, *Holocaust Memory Reframed*, 29-31.

amount of structural distance to allow the visitor to focus solely on its contents, the *Examining the Holocaust* gallery does almost the opposite. As with the other galleries of the CMHR, the architecture of this particular exhibition, rather than disappearing in face of its content, can be seen as contributing to both the content itself and the overall emotional affect experienced by the visitor. Even before one enters the gallery, this effect is clear: if one follows the normal route through the museum to get to the gallery,⁸⁰ one enters it through an increasingly dark and secluded ramp with significantly lower ceiling than in the bottom half of the museum. On the way up to the gallery, various sounds are cycled through a small part of the ramp system, including the first few notes of a violin composition, the sound of many people speaking, and the sound of a train running across rails. Combined with the inward leaning walls, it is clear that the CMHR wishes to establish a sense of mild but increasing anxiety and/or apprehension before one enters the exhibition. When one emerges into the gallery, the architecture continues to dictate the mood of the visitor: the walls continue to slant dramatically; the lighting, other than that produced by the headings of various gallery sections, is fairly dim; and the entire room surrounds a glass video theater deliberately meant to invoke the shattered glass of Kristallnacht. In this sense, both museums provide a sense of immersion to the visitor. The CMHR does so by making the architecture responsible for the overall mood and ‘unescapability’ of the exhibition, whereas the Topography simply lets the structural formality of the museum disappear behind the emotional and intellectual power of its contents. Interestingly, the Military History Museum, despite being wholly distinct in its goals and contents from the both the Topography and the

⁸⁰ In this case, starting at the ground floor and heading upwards, and using the museum’s ramps rather than elevators to move between floors.

CMHR, in some ways acts as a representational middle ground. As discussed in the proceeding chapter, the MHM represents a combination of unapproachability, collapsing of distance, immersive and non-immersive structure and architecture that both compliment and contrast with the previously discussed museums.

Chapter VI – Military History Museum

1. Introduction

In spite of its name, the Military History Museum in Dresden can be viewed as a kind of hybrid museum rather than a traditional history museum. Re-opened with a new *Themenparcours* (themed tour) and interior exhibition in 2011 and housed in a 19th century former arsenal building in Dresden, the Military History Museum is now bisected by a five-story steel, glass and concrete wedge. The wedge houses the themed tour, which weaves in and out of the exhibitions housed in the old building. The wedge is a useful representation of the converging goals of the museum. As a history museum, the MHM seeks to represent a history of German warfare, both in terms of focalizing specific objects of historical significance (of which, in contrast to the Canadian Museum for Human Rights and the Topography of Terror, there is a tremendous number) and through the use of linear, chronological narration which examines the consequences of specific historical events without becoming didactic. On the other hand, the wedge containing the themed tour literally and metaphorical interrupts the space and representation of the chronology, and in some ways acts as its antithesis. In some senses this antipathy is purely formal; according to the museum guide, visitors are supposed to start the chronology on the first floor and move upwards, whereas the themed tour ‘begins’ at the top of the building with the fractured *Dresden Blick* (View of Dresden) and continues downwards. Whether one starts with the *Themenparcours* or the chronology is left open. The themed tour itself is also structurally distinct from the chronology inasmuch as it does not present a linear view of history. Rather, objects and contents are framed thematically and by abstract or concrete subjects, which are classified as follows: *View of Dresden, War and Remembrance, Politics and*

the Use of Force, Fashion and the Military, Music and the Military, Language and the Military, War and Play, Formation of Bodies, Animals and the Military, War and Suffering, Technology and the Military and Protection and Destruction. Taken as a whole, these subjects combine to examine what the museum refers to as the “anthropology of violence.”⁸¹ Since the chronology and the themed tour are hardly distinct entities, their goals also co-mingle throughout the museum, and as such the museum seeks to represent Germany military history through traditional representation while simultaneously focusing on the human realities, effects and consequences of violence.

Just as the museum’s representational techniques are diverse and complex, so too is its approach to distancing and to empathy. This is further complicated by the presence of both videography and photography in the museum, as well as the fragmented nature of the museum’s Holocaust representation. Unlike the Topography, which dedicates all of its space to the depiction of the crimes of the Nazi government, or the CMHR, which dedicates specific gallery space to the Holocaust, the Military History Museum contains traces of the Holocaust across various galleries and to different ends. This means that in order to understand specific empathy or distancing techniques utilized through video and photographs, one must not only take into account the actual representation itself, but also in which gallery it is contained and what kind of space it occupies.

⁸¹ Cf. Jaeger, “Temporalizing History,” 231, and Gorch Pieken und Matthias Rogg, *Militärhistorisches Museum: Ausstellungsführer* (Dresden: Sandstein, 2011) 27.

2. Holocaust in Chronology

Although the chronology in the Military History museum does contain specific sections dedicated to the Holocaust (the *Shoah*, *Barbarossa* and *Heimat und Hinterland im Zweiten Weltkrieg* cabinets, for example, contained in the 1914-1945 section), traces of both direct and indirect Holocaust representation can be found throughout the chronology. For the purposes of this study, however, the two most interesting examples of the use of distancing (especially from historical and structural perspectives) in regards to the Holocaust lie in both the similarities and contrasts between the representational methods in the *Victims of Nazi Terror* and *Barbarossa* cabinets. At first glance, one could argue these cabinets are fairly similar in their representational approach, especially as concerns the use of photography. Both seem to lack a strong sense of historical, chronological narrative (in contrast, for example, to what one sees in the different sections of both the Topography of Terror and the Canadian Museum for Human Rights) since photographs of victims and background events of Nazi and *Einsatzgruppen* crimes appear to jump to and from various times and locations - although naturally they do stay within the time frame of the Eastern campaign and the rise of the NS government, respectively. Both are also contextualized with substantial museum-generated text which provides historical context for the persecution of Jewish populations and the Eastern Campaign. In spite of this contextualization, however, both cabinets appear to lack a strong sense of chronological narration since they are comprised of photographic and object-based collages. The ramifications for the historical and structural distancing experienced by the visitor in regard to either cabinet are, however, distinct.

In the case of the *Victims* cabinet, the museum at first appears to create a strong structural, historical, and emotional sense of proximity between visitor and historical victim. While this can arguably be difficult to establish via photographic collections alone⁸², the inclusion of personal items belonging to Jewish victims of the Holocaust add a certain sense of emotional closeness between visitor and victim. In this way, the Military History Museum is strongly distinct from both the Topography of Terror and the Canadian Museum for Human Rights, since those museums primarily rely on photography and/or video recordings in their Holocaust representation. The inclusion of specific, personal rather than historical items (i.e., a chessboard belonging to Jewish victims prominently displayed in the bottom of the cabinet) allows for a certain collapse of emotional and historical distance since, in a sense, these items ‘flesh out’ the photographs included in the cabinet.⁸³ This is not to say that the museum attempts to establish a strong feeling of empathy between historical persons and the visitor, nor does the inclusion of personal items by any means give visitors enough information about a specific victim to truly view them as a three-dimensional person. What these objects do accomplish, however, is the representation of quotidian life of Jewish people which can help give them an identity outside of being strictly viewed as ‘victims’ - in this case, visitors have a brief glimpse of their lives outside of persecution, arguably making them more relatable. To an extent, historical distance is also collapsed in this cabinet since, as stated above, the photographs do not follow a strict, chronological timeline but rather layer together to provide a general portrait of persecution. Structurally, however, visitors are kept at a strong distance from the events of the Holocaust and

⁸² Cf. the sections on photo collages in the Canadian Museum for Human Rights and the Topography of Terror in the fourth and fifth chapters of this project.

⁸³ Hansen-Glucklich, *Holocaust Memory Reframed*, 126-129.

pre-Holocaust persecution. Unlike the *War and Suffering* exhibit, which structurally isolates the visitor and focuses strongly on a small handful of items and photographs to the exclusion of other artifacts, the visitor is much more strongly separated from the *Victims of Nazi Terror* cabinet in several ways. In the first place, the cabinet is relatively crowded with objects, so that it is impossible to focus on one or two at a time since, no matter where one stands, there are also other items in view. In this sense, the *Victims* cabinet is somewhat similar to the photographic collage of victims of the “House Prison” in the *Topography of Terror* as discussed in the previous chapter. To a certain extent, this structural distance can be somewhat overwhelming: on a meta-reflexive level, no matter where one looks, there always appears to be more victims. The design of the cabinet itself also offers no chance for structural proximity. Like the other cabinets in the museum, the *Victims* cabinet is comprised of a white background with a very large window in front of it, so that its contents reach above and below the visitor’s eye line, which means that the only way to see all of the contents simultaneously is to back far enough away from it that its individual contents become impossible to discern. Again, this structural distance somewhat resembles the structural distance present in the CMHR, where, in order to learn about oversized photographs by reading their captions, one must approach them so closely that the photograph itself becomes difficult to see.

In terms of historical distancing and intellectual/ideological proximity, the *Victims* cabinet makes for an interesting comparison with the *Barbarossa* cabinet (8). At first glance, these cabinets seem to have little in common other than the obvious overlap of their subject matter. Structurally speaking they are quite divergent: while the *Victims* display emphasizes personal objects as well as portrait-style and personal photographs, *Barbarossa* concentrates on

various points of the war in the East, highlighting what appear to be primarily personal (i.e. not state-sanctioned or official) photographs of not only atrocities but also landscapes and souvenir-style images. Included as well are a handful of propaganda posters, prominent among which is a map entitled “Victoria: la croisade contre le bolshevisme” (translated from the French as “Victoria: the crusade against Bolshevism”). At first, the cabinet may seem to negate any sense of empathy, especially for victims. After all, if the visitor is kept at an emotional distance and empathy does not exist in the *Victims* cabinet with all of its portrait photographs and personal items, then it is hardly surprising that it does not exist in the *Barbarossa* cabinet, where victims often appear as a (literal) speck on the horizon. What this cabinet arguably does accomplish, however, is the same sort of empathetic gaze that can be found by viewing the collages in the interior of the Topography of Terror. Although he does not explicitly compare the use of photography in the Topography and the MHM, Stephan Jaeger notes that “[t]he exact relation between [the photographs in the *Barbarossa* cabinet] are left open, but the cabinet narrates war scenes from the perspective of “the eye of the beholder,” shifting between proximity and distance, thereby creating the idea of war as all encompassing: military advancement and destruction, victory brutality and genocide, all under the ideological umbrella of the war based on worldview and ideology.”⁸⁴ Although he later argues that the cabinet is “a museum space that risks not giving enough guidance” to visitors in terms of how they should interpret its contents, in a sense this brings the empathy-through-gaze experienced by the visitor even closer to that

⁸⁴ Jaeger, “Temporalizing History,” 237.

experience in the Topography, since it appears that in this case, both museums avoid didacticism through over-interpretation.⁸⁵



(8) Partial view of *Barbarossa Cabinet*, contained in the 1914-1945 section of the chronology, *Militärhistorisches Museum der Bundeswehr*, Dresden, October 2015 © Erin Johnston-Weiss.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 237.

3. Videography and Photography in *War and Suffering*

From an analytical standpoint, the Military History Museum's *War and Suffering* section is one of the most complex and challenging sections discussed in this project. In terms of structural, historical and emotional distancing, the *War and Suffering* exhibition fluctuates strongly between enforcing distance and enabling proximity between viewer and subject; what makes it even more complex is the fact that these differences in distancing exist simultaneously and combine to create a dense and extreme layering effect for the visitor.

The simplest way to describe this layering effect is to describe both the exhibition itself and its place in the gallery from a physical and structural standpoint. All of the other sections in the museum (i.e. *Animals and the Military* and *The Formation of Bodies*, as well as the chronology) are open exhibitions, some of which contain shelves and compartments which must be opened by the visitor, or more secluded spaces such as the large 'archival' shelves in *War and Remembrance*. While the exhibitions exist on different floors (five in total), it is simple to travel between the chronology and the themed tour, and, depending on where one is standing, it is possible to view some of the contents of other exhibitions while examining a specific exhibit occupying the same space. One can easily see, for example, much of the content of *The Formation of Bodies* section while looking at the *Animals and the Military* exhibition, and different sections of the V2 rocket belonging to *Protection and Destruction* are visible at different levels and from different angles throughout the museum.⁸⁶ *War and Suffering* is distinct

⁸⁶ See Chapter V of this project for a description of the curatorial choices involved in displaying the V2.

from the other exhibitions inasmuch as it is almost wholly isolated. Interestingly, the museum does this structurally not by placing it on a separate floor or in a separate room, but rather through the use of a squat, geometric structure. This structure, which is a few feet thick and covered in what appears to be textured dark green, grey, and black felt, is located between the 1914-1945 and 1945-Present chronological exhibitions and on the same floor as *Animals and the Military* and *The Formation of Bodies*. Unlike the latter two exhibits, the majority of *War and Suffering* is sequestered, not readily apparent to the visitor either ascending or descending the main stairs from other floors of the museum, and must actively be sought out. Although the museum contains contents throughout its galleries that could be considered upsetting to visitors (for example, the 1914-1945 segment contains the severed foot of a soldier who served in the battle of Stalingrad), the walls of this structure are one of only two places in the museum with content warnings.⁸⁷ The plaque containing the warning is sobering: it states that the exhibition contains human remains and disturbing images, and that parents should seriously consider whether it is appropriate to bring their children into the structure. Inside of the cube, the visitor is isolated from the rest of the museum space as the walls are around two meters high. There is little natural light inside of the structure, and no objects or images are immediately on display; rather, one must manually (and with some force) open and close vertical drawers which contain a variety of contents. As with the rest of the museum, there is no explicit order in which one is supposed to experience the exhibit, but it appears to flow naturally if one enters and begins to walk clockwise. The cube is not entirely chronological, although it does begin with gravestones

⁸⁷ The location of the other warning is near the taxidermy cat in *Animals and the Military* which sits directly in front of a video detailing scientific experiments with phosgene gas and its effect on a cat; the video charts the cat's obviously violent and painful death and is somewhat disturbing. Pieken und Rogg, *Ausstellungsführer*, 92.

from the eighteenth century. Objects are primarily grouped by theme and type; one first sees lists of the dead and gravestones from various wars, followed by letters, examples of extreme persecution and psychological distress, then injuries, and finally artifacts and photographs representing the remembrance and commemoration of wartime suffering.

With a few exceptions (i.e. the mask of a face of a soldier with deformities due to wartime injuries and the skull of a soldier who committed suicide) the objects, photographs and videos presented within *War and Suffering* are not exceptionally more graphic or disturbing than anything one might see elsewhere in the in spite of the warning plaque on its outer wall. What does distinguish this gallery from the rest of the exhibitions, however, is the atmosphere which is created in the cube and the serious consequences it has on the visitor's experience of distanciation. As discussed above, the effect of distanciation is highly layered in this case and requires some dissection in order to be properly analyzed.

3. a. Structural Distance and Isolation

Structurally speaking, it is arguable that the exhibition primarily endorses a fairly strong sense of proximity between subject and visitor. As discussed above, this is largely due to the physical shape the gallery occupies. In the first place, it is more isolated than the other galleries and also physically removed from them; it is impossible to see any other exhibition from within the cube. This isolation effect means that the visitor is more focused on the singularity of what they are seeing, and have no chance of being distracted by other objects, contents or texts, providing in some ways a much more immersive structural experience than the open-plan galleries. As much as the cube isolates its contents from the rest of the museum, it also isolates

them from one another; due to the nature of the drawer system one can only see a small selection of its contents at a time. This is in stark contrast to the display techniques in the chronology, wherein cases which reach several meters high are full of a variety of different objects, media, and text.⁸⁸ In combination with the isolating effect of the physical space of the cube is the structural influence on the feeling of deliberation with which one experiences the exhibit. One must individually open each drawer with considerable effort in order to see the content in the first place. The fact that one has to put in physical work in order to see the contents of the exhibition and that one sees only a handful of things at a time makes it much more likely that visitors will take their time with the exhibit, and thus perhaps be more successful in understanding the contents and context in which they are presented. Consequently, this feeling of isolation and deliberation to view certain contents can partially collapse the structural distance between visitor and subject.⁸⁹ That being said, however, the same structural distancing techniques enforced in much of the rest of the museum are present here; all of the objects are firmly housed in glass cases, with obviously unnatural lighting. This has the layered effect of on the one hand, structurally drawing visitors close to the contents while also ensuring that one has no opportunity to interact with them.

⁸⁸ The exception to this is when the museum attempts to evoke specific strong emotions or shock effects such as when it uses one cabinet to focalize the trajectory of various pieces of shrapnel.

⁸⁹Phillips, "Rethinking Historical Distance," 13.

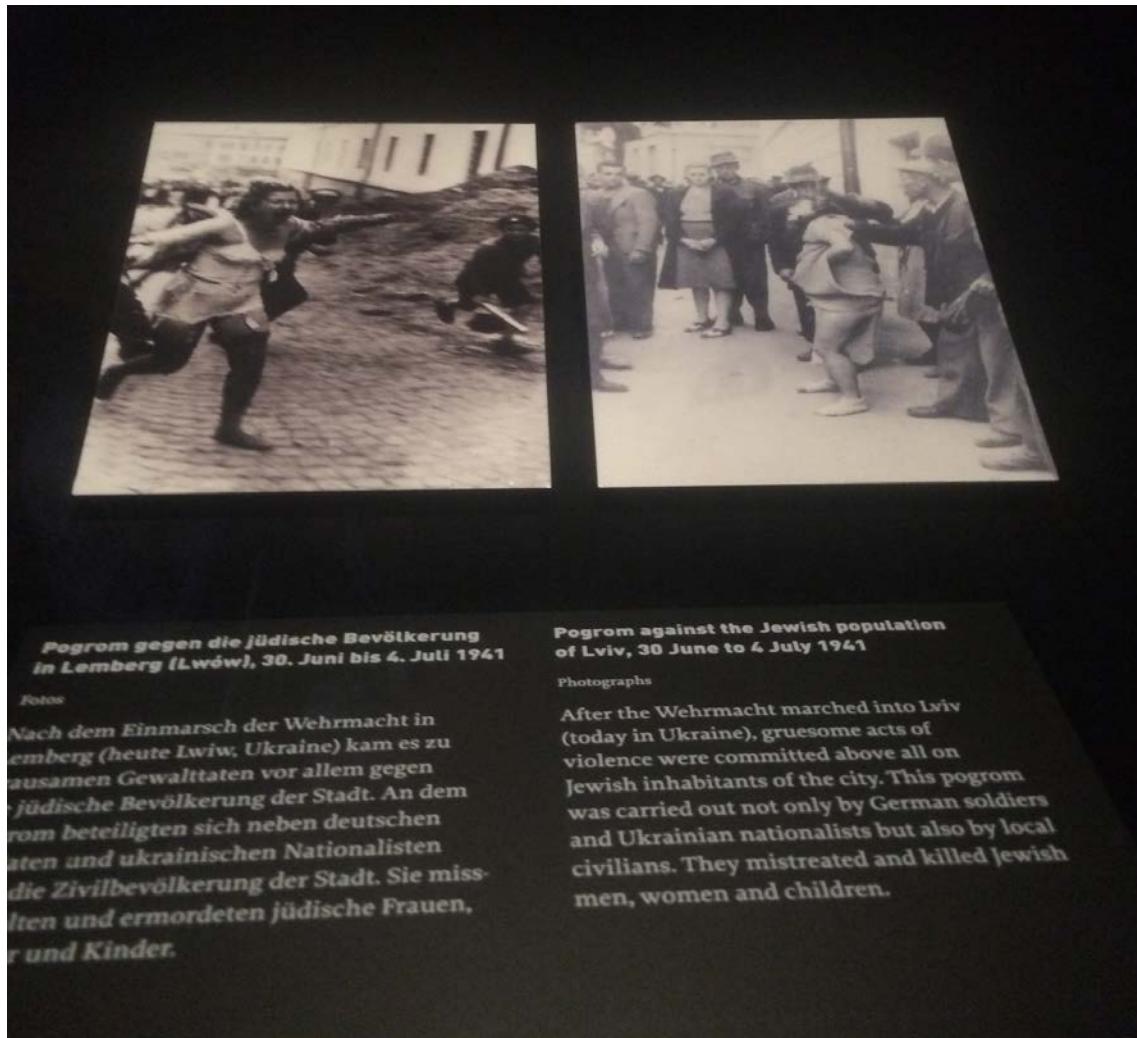
3. b. Emotional and Historical Distance through Photography

As is the case with structural distancing, *War and Suffering* partially collapses the emotional distance between visitor and object; it does so, however, to a much more qualified degree. On the one hand, the structural isolation of looking at objects, images and videos more or less on their own, in a silent and darkened space necessarily enables strong affective feeling on the part of the visitor.⁹⁰ The way in which one views the objects is strongly influenced by their surroundings. This is especially the case for Holocaust photography. In terms of eliciting strong emotional responses, two of the photographs used in the exhibit are especially evocative. Under the section of “War and Death” within the exhibition are two photographs detailing different aspects of the Holocaust which appear next to each other. The first is a photograph of several people running through the streets of Lvov in order to escape from persecution during a pogrom (9). While there are multiple people visible in the photograph, the foreground is dominated by a woman in obvious distress. The fact that she is undressed (she is only wearing a brassiere, garters, and stockings, and is barefoot) is both shocking and indicative of the immediacy and urgency of fleeing from pogroms; evidently she was caught unawares. Her state of undress, combined with the fact that the photograph is blurry, suggest that it was not staged, and thus also lends it an air of authenticity that is difficult to achieve in other circumstances.⁹¹ There is no given name of a photographer or source for the photograph other than historical details of where it was taken; even without the information, however, the photograph to a certain extent speaks for itself given its focus on the distressed expression of the woman. Again, since she is

⁹⁰ Hansen-Glucklich, *Holocaust Memory Reframed*, 73-76.

⁹¹ Prager, “Liberation of Perpetrator Photographs,” 23.

foregrounded, and since, even though she is wearing lingerie the photograph is not sexually gratifying but, rather, disturbing, she somewhat resists objectification, thus bringing the subject emotionally close to the visitor while avoiding voyeurism or melodrama.⁹²



(9) “Pogrom against the Jewish population of Lviv, 30 June to 4 July 1941,” displayed in *War and Suffering, Themenparcours, Militärhistorisches Museum, Dresden, October 2015* © Erin Johnston-Weiss.

⁹² Dean, *Fragility of Empathy*, 36.

While the above aspect of the exhibition may encourage emotional proximity between visitor and subject, other Holocaust photography within the cube enforces emotional distance. This is the case, for example, with the photo album of a Wehrmacht soldier. Since the photo album is kept at a distance from visitors and the photographs themselves are quite small, one is dependent on the paratext to understand the album's context and significance. The text reads: "Eingeklebte Fotos in einem russischen Schulheft, 1939-1942: Die zahlreich überlieferten Fotoalben von Wehrmachtsangehörigen blenden oft die Allgegenwärtigkeit von Gewalt und Tod im Frontalltag aus. Georg Gierth hielt sich nicht an diese Selbstzensur. Er dokumentierte und kommentierte auch die Grausamkeiten des Krieges und die Verbrechen seiner Kameraden. 1942 fiel er im Geflecht bei Schachina." The text itself is somewhat emotionally evocative inasmuch as the war crimes of which it speaks are, for many visitors, foregone conclusions. To the extent that one knows the details of the Eastern campaign and the pre-death camp Holocaust crimes perpetrated and aided by the Wehrmacht, one might have a strong emotional response to the object. This response is however mitigated by the fact that from a physical standpoint it is difficult to see the actual photographs themselves. In this way, a sort of double effect of emotional proximity and distance are simultaneously enforced since, if a visitor reflects on what they are experiencing, it is clear that they are reacting to the idea of the photo album rather than to any images - or persons - contained within it. In this sense, there is also a strong historical distance enforced by this section of the exhibition since visitors are forced to be meta-reflective about what they are feeling and how it is produced. Consequently, one cannot wholly become

immersed in the experience of viewing these photographs since one is being reminded of the tremendous historical gulf between their present and the events depicted in the album.⁹³ This is the context in which the Military History Museum most strongly resembles the Canadian Museum for Human Rights. Just as with the Holocaust album in *War and Suffering*, many of the photographs contained in the CMHR combine different modes of distance and proximity to create a layering effect of varying distancing that unbalances the visitor. The major difference between the two, however, is that while the *War and Suffering* cube for the most part collapses emotional and structural distance by physically bringing the visitor into the exhibit and strongly controlling what they see, as well as giving them a certain space and atmosphere with which to experience strong emotional reactions, it does not generally allow for historical proximity. The CMHR on the other hand keeps its visitors emotionally distant from the subjects of its photographs through structural means while collapsing historical distance.⁹⁴ In the case of the photo album in particular, the Military History Museum may here have more in common with the Topography of Terror, specifically in terms of the Topography's many 'every day' images. Since the latter contains many images which do not obviously represent persecution or violence, visitors are dependent on contextualization in order to feel any sort of emotional response and thus are more likely reacting emotionally to the context rather than the content itself. The major difference here, however, is that the entire museum of the Topography is dedicated to the crimes of the Third Reich and thus context is essentially readily available for even the most benign of

⁹³ Prager, "Liberation of Perpetrator Photographs," 31.

⁹⁴ The exception to the lack of historical proximity regarding the photo album is the fact that all of the captions are hand written rather than typed up. In this case, this may strike visitors as somewhat unusual since this would suggest that it is in some way personal rather than official, which may in turn lead them to question why the album was created and preserved in the first place.

images due to the nature of the museum.⁹⁵ Since the Military History Museum conversely is highly diversified in its themes (within the museum as a whole and within the cube specifically), context is somewhat harder to find for the object in question.

3. c. Videography

One other aspect which is relatively unique to the *War and Suffering* exhibition with regards to the MHM as a whole is the vital and integrated nature of the videos included in the exhibition. While the videos in the rest of the museum provide important content and context, it is generally the case that one must seek out the video displays contained in the museum's freestanding computer displays, which are often physically separated from the cabinets or exhibitions to which they pertain, and scroll through a variety of videos in order to select the one that one would like to watch. In this sense, the videos in the museum have a much more voluntary feel.⁹⁶ The two videos in *War and Suffering*, however, play in a loop and, when one opens the drawer which contains them, are essentially unavoidable.

Despite the fact that the two videos were taken decades apart, the subject is the same: both videos focalize the clear, physically, easily observable symptoms of someone suffering from Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder. In the case of the first video, the subject is a First World War

⁹⁵ As discussed in the previous chapter, however, the context of the museum is not necessarily apparent to all visitors since many groups who visit the museum do so extremely briefly and are often not specifically at the museum to learn about the Holocaust; many international visitors who walk through the outdoor exhibition for example may not actually be informed about the Holocaust in any meaningful way prior to visiting the museum. Personal correspondence with Andreas Sander, Sept.27th, 2015.

⁹⁶ The very major exception to this are the video art installations which play on the bottom floor of the chronology and in *War and Remembrance*. However, these installations remain representationally distinct, since they are art pieces, from the documentary videos contained elsewhere in the museum.

soldier who is being examined for 'shell shock' by physicians. The black and white content focalizes his unusual physical responses to various stimuli. Taken out of context, the video could appear almost comic; however, the video is contextualized by a brief text addressing the history of PTSD. The video beside it, in contrast, is considerably more difficult to interpret, and is structurally, historically and emotionally more complex. Unlike the previous video, there is virtually no context here: visitors learn through the museum's text that the subject is a woman wandering around the (presumably, but not necessarily) German countryside, captured on colour film by an American film crew accompanying Allied soldiers. Unlike the obvious medical focus of the video of the soldier, the reason for the existence of the video is not obvious, leading to a small collapse in historical distance since visitors are forced to speculate about why the video was created. Likewise, visitors are further tasked with interpreting the video since it contains no information about the woman. It is left open as to if she is a victim, a perpetrator, an ordinary citizen, an escaped concentration camp inmate, or another sort of person entirely. The caption for the video itself states that the woman is 'unknown,' although it also provides contextualizing hints. The caption includes information on the frequency of violence against civilians (and sexual violence against civilian women in particular) during the end of the war, especially in the East. While one can speculate as to whether this woman is a civilian victim or not, neither the museum nor the video provide viewers with enough information to make a strong guess. The main thing that is clear from the video is that she is displaying obvious symptoms of distress. Even her distress, however, is inconclusive: unlike the man in the First World War video, she is not expressing strong physical reactions to stimuli; she also is neither completely vacant and frozen in her expression, nor is she hysterical, both reactions which visitors will generally be far more

used to seeing in victims of trauma.⁹⁷ What is clear, despite all of these interpretative problems, is that there is something profoundly not right about the woman: her gestures, her expression and the way she is walking are all highly discomfiting and difficult to describe. Although the video is less than a minute long, the problems it produces for visitors are long lasting. While it completely collapses structural, historical and emotional distance in some ways, it also keeps visitors at a distance by being in a sense un-interpretable. To this extent, the video holds the visitor hostage in a feedback loop of enforced proximity and distance long after the video has finished. Additionally, when viewed in direct comparison with the ‘shell-shock’ video, which is an obvious example of war-induced psychological trauma, this video underlines the unspeakable and highly distancing and indescribable nature of trauma. This message, though subtle, as well as the unique nature of this kind of trauma is also supported by the repetition of more stereotypical representation of ‘shell-shock’ in the *War and Remembrance* section of the *Themenparcours* wherein an excerpt of the film *Regeneration* is shown. This excerpt once again represents trauma in an obvious and stereotypical manner (the character suffering from it is jittering and responding very strangely to stimuli). Viewed in this overall museal context, the video of the woman in the *War and Suffering* wedge collapses a certain amount of emotional and historical distance by creating what is essentially a representational puzzle for visitors to solve.

⁹⁷ Dean, *Fragility of Empathy*, 15.

Chapter VII - Conclusion

1. Synthesis and Comparisons

While the subjects and representational styles of the Topography of Terror, the German Military History Museum and the Canadian Museum for Human Rights are diverse, there is one commonality among the three of them: their representation models are considerably more complex than they may first appear. None of the museums allow for a totally immersive experience of empathy; nor do any of the museums keep visitors at such a distance that empathy in all forms is an impossibility. Each museum also layers historical, structural, emotional and intellectual distancing in such a way that one cannot say with confidence that they wholly embrace either proximity or distance. While the differentiated goals of the museums go some way to explaining their representational choices, depending on the stated aims of the museum in order to better understand them is not an entirely reliable method since, firstly, all museums contain some level of unintentional representational effect, and secondly, the representational effects of a given museum do not necessarily always align with the visitor's expectations about the museum's goals. For instance, those visiting a documentation centre such as the Topography of Terror might not anticipate being able to experience empathy for perpetrators through the experience of their gaze, nor for a sense of historical proximity to the events of the Holocaust. Likewise, visitors to a history museum like the Military History Museum may also expect to be kept a representational distance, rather than being drawn into to specific interpretations of the past due to the structure of the museum's exhibitions. Finally, visitors to an ideas museum such as the CMHR may not anticipate the lack of empathy inherent to the museum's representation of

Holocaust victims, since empathy may initially be seen as a way for visitors to better internalize the positive message of the museum.

Examining Holocaust photography and videography in particular allows for a deeper understanding of the way in which Holocaust representations function in a variety of museal settings. As discussed in Chapter II, these media are of special interest because they are more difficult to control than text or museal design. This is not to say that museums have no capacity to dictate how and why they use specific media. Certainly, museums are free to choose endless combinations of photographs and videos depending on their representational goals. In the case studies contained in this project, one can see for example the choices made by the CMHR and the Topography of Terror in creating photo collages, and to edit, crop, and change the sizes of specific photographs. Likewise, the MHM deliberately chooses to use a combination of videos in its *War and Suffering* wedge to represent the trauma of war and the effects of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder which, in other exhibitions addressing the psychological effects of war, would perhaps not be placed together.⁹⁸ Nevertheless, photographs and videos are capable of partially resisting curatorial intent and control, since there are multiple dimensions to both media which cannot necessarily be accounted for by museum designers, historians and curator. This is especially true for the way that framing influences visitors since, as discussed in Chapter II, framing exists on multiple levels which can create contradictory effects. Using empathy and distanciation as analytical criteria allows for an even more varied possibility of visitor experience and understanding since these concepts can also work on multiple levels.

⁹⁸ This is because, as discussed above, it is not immediately obvious what the purpose of the WWII-era video of the woman is, and it is not a traditional representation of trauma.

1. a. The CMHR's Lack of Empathy

Out of the three museums, the Canadian Museum for Human Rights is the museum whose representational choices deviate most wildly from expectations about the museum's goals. At first glance, an ideas museum about human rights could be considered an optimum setting in which to encourage empathy between visitor and subject.⁹⁹ Superficially, the designs of many of the museum's galleries seem to emphasize this line of thinking: most of the exhibitions devote significant space to the telling of individual stories of oppression or resistance. These individual stories could in turn inspire visitors to make positive choices towards the proliferation of human rights activism, provided they experience empathy with the individuals focalized by the museum.¹⁰⁰ A closer glance at the *Examining the Holocaust* gallery in particular reveals, however, that this assumption is false. Rather than embracing the concept of empathy, the structural, emotional and historical representation within this gallery actively work against it. It is true that the gallery does focus on particular victim groups, as well as showcasing the stories of specific victims, resisters and survivors of the Holocaust. Simply having individuals 'take up space' in the gallery however is not enough to ensure that the visitor experiences empathy with them, or even to encourage it in the first place. This resistance to empathy is notable in particular among the victim/survivor videos embedded in the gallery's wall. As noted in Chapter IV, these videos, despite their focus on individual stories, exist primarily to serve as stopgaps for historical details not otherwise present in the museum. The storytelling itself is not especially well

⁹⁹ Holtschneider, *History and Identity*, 29.

¹⁰⁰ Moses, "Protecting Human Rights," 57.

developed or emotionally open in the testimonial videos, and the formal realities of interview-style videography constantly pull the visitor out of what might be an intellectually and emotionally immersive experience. In the first place, the videos are clearly small excerpts taken from longer interview, as the subjects often begin speaking midway through a story of which the visitors are missing the introduction and often other historical and emotional contextual clues. The speakers are often cut off at opportune moments without concluding their stories, and the videos are intercut with voice-over narration, photographic montages, and generic, emotionally evocative music (usually involving swelling strings). Additionally, the subjects are all filmed against a black background which showcases the fact that they are in a film studio, lending more ‘inauthenticity’ to the films themselves.¹⁰¹ This sense of inauthenticity translates into a shutting down of the visitor’s ability to experience empathy.

This shutting down of empathy also happens through the photography in the gallery as well. While the oversized, individual or small group portraits discussed in Chapter IV to some extent draw the visitor towards them in order to learn about their historical context and to see the photos in greater detail, there is nevertheless little opportunity to develop empathy for their subjects, since each person photographed is clearly supposed to be emblematic of a given group of victims or type of perpetration, rather than being portrayed as individuals with unique stories and histories. At the same time, this is not to say that visitors are completely *repulsed* from the photographs. The CMHR is careful with its selection of photographs to ensure that while the images are provocative or disturbing in some cases (for example, photographs documenting the

¹⁰¹ Trezise, *Witnessing*, 29.

discovery and liberation of concentration camps are necessarily graphic), the visitor is neither distracted by the nature of the content nor do the photos fulfill a primarily aesthetic rather than documentary function.

1. b. Historical Proximity in the Topography of Terror

If the Canadian Museum for Human Rights represents a museum wherein one might expect to experience empathy but is largely unable to do so, the Topography of Terror can be seen in some ways as the direct opposite. This is not to say that the Topography necessarily deliberately encourages empathy, but rather that in specific circumstances opportunity for empathy *without emotional proximity* can be found in particular in the interior exhibition. This latter point is something which strongly distinguishes the Topography as a documentation centre from other museums which serve experiential, memorializing or commemorative functions. Due to the fact that the centre overwhelmingly focalizes the perpetrators and bystanders of the Holocaust and other NS government atrocities, it is unsurprising in a sense that the museum would not encourage a strong emotional response on the part of the visitor whereby they relate positively to perpetrators. While the centre very clearly takes steps to distance itself from the idea that all participants in the Holocaust were sociopathic, inhuman monsters, representation stops short of allowing visitors to close the emotional distance between themselves and perpetrators. To that extent, the information provided about perpetrators, in particular high ranking members of the SS, Gestapo and Nazi party, is simultaneously highly detailed while remaining purely factual and biographical, leaving the visitor unable to relate to them on a more than superficial level. Interestingly, this is also true for victims and survivors of the Holocaust. Although as mentioned

above, the museum does not primarily focus on victims, they are nevertheless present in the both the interior and exterior exhibitions. In the interior section of the museum especially, victims of the Albrechtstrasse House Prison are focalized in both the documentary computer stations and with a wall dedicated to displaying their mug shots. Interestingly, what the visitor gets out of these displays is not an increased amount of empathy or emotional closeness to victims. However, this collage does provide a sense of empathy through a sort of replication of the perpetrator gaze. This is possible because of some of the structural choices of the museum, primarily, the way in which the museum chooses to depict the victims of the prison. Rather than focalizing them as individuals, because their mug shots are all contained in the same wall next to each other, it is impossible to view one single photograph of one individual at a time. As discussed in Chapter V, this has the effect that the victims blur together, and the visitor begins to see them as a de-humanized, unfocused mass. While this might not provide an especially deep understanding of the psychology of perpetrators, it does allow views to see their victims as perpetrators may have seen them. Whether this is a deliberate choice on the part of the institution is difficult to tell, however, it is a notable effect of continually gazing at collages of victims and of photographic evidence of atrocities.

1. c. The MHM and Emotional Distance

In some ways, the use of empathy in the Military History Museum is similar to the Topography of Terror. To a certain extent, the idea of empathy through gaze is replicated here. As discussed in the previous chapter, the *Barbarossa* cabinet in the chronology is a strong example of this. Like the mug shots in the Topography, the photographs in this cabinet form a sort of a collage effect and seem to blur together. At first glance, these photographs do not appear to tell any sort of coherent story, let alone generate empathy. Certainly there is no empathy here for survivors and victims of the Holocaust, since they are only present in the backgrounds of photographs or else in-group shots. Upon closer consideration, however the same sort of empathy present in the interior of the Topography is present in the *Barbarossa* cabinet as well. The combination of scenic photos and unprofessional, action-style shots replicate the gaze of Eastern front soldiers. While this does not give the visitor any new historical or intellectual knowledge, the structure of the cabinet - especially in the sense that the visitor is forced to approach it at a very close angle in order to view the photos one at a time - is does add empathy to the visitors' understanding of perpetrators.

One of the most interesting places in which the Military History Museum uses distancing effects while simultaneously creating a type of closeness between visitor and subject is its use of video in the *War and Suffering* wedge. As discussed in the preceding chapter, the combination of a traditional video representation of a soldier with 'shell-shock' alongside a video of an unknown woman suffering some kind of trauma at once collapses and enforces structural and historical distance. On the one hand, historical distance is maintained if one views the first video in isolation – it is shot in black and white, and the classification of the soldier as being a victim of

‘shell-shock’ emphasizes the historical gulf being the visitor’s present and the past. Both videos are also located in a glass case, meaning that, unlike the video testimonies in the CMHR, the viewer has no control over them, and cannot approach them closely, pause or rewind them. Simultaneously, the viewer is structurally brought closer to the second video. Its contents, though straightforward in one respect, are unclear, and it can only really be understood that the woman who is the subject of the video is suffering from the same kind of trauma as the soldier due to the fact that the videos are placed side by side. The mysteriousness of her condition also collapses some emotional distance between visitor and subject since one is drawn to attempt to figure out why she is behaving in the bizarre manner that she is. At the same time, it is difficult to become emotionally close to either subject since one is given only a short clip with which to try to comprehend trauma. This may in turn be a deliberate point of the inclusion of the videos – here the museum might be suggesting that trauma itself comes in a variety of forms, and it is something which can never be explained, related to or represented to someone who has never experienced it.

1. d. Architecture and Focalization

One of the most interesting, and comparable, aspects of all three museums is the way in which they use architecture to dictate visitor experience. As discussed in Chapter IV, the way in which the Topography of Terror’s indoor exhibition utilizes architecture is markedly different than is the case for the other two museums. Since the architecture of the indoor exhibition is meant to be as unnoticeable as possible, it in a sense disappears behind its contents. In this way, the museum partially collapses structural distance between visitors and the contents of the

museum, which can partially work to create an immersive experience. In this way, it can be easy to become lost in the photographs, documents and text presented by the museum. One should be wary, however, of over-stating this sense of immersion. Although the architecture is subdued, the museum simultaneously maintains some structural distance from the visitor due to the nature of the photographic collages it uses. Since most photographs in the museum are grouped together, it is not generally possible to focus on only one photo, even if one approaches it very closely; there are always other texts or images encroaching upon one's line of site. To an extent, this is also true in the other museums as well, although, in the case of the CMHR, there are several large photos upon which one can choose to focus more exclusively.

As discussed in Chapter V, there are some notable similarities to the architectural design in the CMHR and the MHM. Certainly both museums use design choices – rather than the absence of design – to create a sense of unease upon entering the *Examining the Holocaust* gallery and the *War and Suffering* wedge, respectively. However, it is overly simplistic to state that the design in either museum is capable of entirely dictating visitor experience, especially in terms of how visitors understand the Holocaust. While *Examining the Holocaust* clearly uses Kristallnacht-influenced architecture, low lighting and sloping walls to create a sense of ominousness and dread amongst visitors, it is important to bear in mind that this is not the museum's only representation of the Holocaust. The gallery next to it, entitled *Breaking the Silence*, takes a completely different approach. Unlike the high walls of the Holocaust gallery, *Breaking the Silence*, which presents a comparative approach to five different genocides, is a small, quiet space complete with booths where visitors can sit in some isolation. In many ways, the content is similar to the Holocaust gallery. Both spaces present testimonial videos which

serve both documentary purposes and to provide examples of various kinds of mass atrocities and genocides. The fact that they create utterly different moods has important consequences for the CMHR's approach to Holocaust representation. That the galleries exist side by side suggests that, despite the prominence of *Examining the Holocaust*, there is no one, correct mood or aura to evoke while representing the Holocaust, and the museum itself allows for visitors to experience it in a multitude of ways.

The Military History Museum's use of architecture is also somewhat more complex than it may appear. While, as discussed in Chapter VI, the design of the wedge is both evocative of solemnity and effective at isolating visitors from the rest of the museum, it is not the only section of the MHM which represents the Holocaust. One could argue that the deliberate fragmentation of Holocaust representation within the chronology and the *Themenparcours* is in itself a method of collapsing structural distance between visitor and subject, since there is no one, imposing Holocaust display. Among all of the Holocaust photography and video included in the museum, there is only one apparently enlarged photograph in the museum related to the Holocaust (a photo of a burning synagogue in a cabinet concerning the fate of the Jews) which may put the visitor at a remove. At the same time, the uniqueness of this photograph in terms of its size in comparison to the rest of the Holocaust photography may have the incidental effect of drawing the visitor's attention.

While it is tempting to assume that the MHM creates this odd, nuanced feeling of structural proximity specifically with regards to the Holocaust, it is important to bear in mind that it essentially does this for all of the other historical topics it represents as well. This can be easily observed upon entrance to the chronology. Even when one begins in those sections which have

nothing to do with the Holocaust or the Second World War, one notices immediately that there is little to no direction as to how to navigate the museum. This is especially ironic since, theoretically, it should be easy to follow a chronological representation (i.e. by ‘moving forward in time’). This sense of lack of direction is further emphasized by the overwhelming amount of objects in the museum. Not only do cabinets such as *Barbarossa* contain a tremendous number of photographs, but physical objects and artifacts abound in the museum such that it is very difficult to pick one particular item to focus on. The exception to this is in the *Dresden Blick*, which, aside from architectural wreckage from Dresden, Rotterdam and Wielun, contains no objects. Nevertheless, a lack of direction is enforced here due to the fact that one’s view of Dresden itself is highly fractured and impossible to see without interruption from the wedge. In this sense, both the CMHR and the MHM can partially be seen as meta-reflexive in their use of architecture: the former by reminding visitors that there are multiple ways to represent and experience a single historical event, and the MHM by challenging the idea that even a traditional, chronological representation of history is necessarily straight forward or simple to navigate.

2. Discussion and Future Projects

While case studies of individual museums and exhibitions and their utilization of distanciation and empathy can provide significant contributions to multiple academic disciplines, in some ways these comparative studies also act as jumping off points for a broad range of potential topics. This is in part because, despite being comparative and interdisciplinary, this type of semi-isolated analysis is necessarily limited. Despite using methodology and theory from several fields - most prominently, German studies, literary and narratology studies,

historiography, history and museum studies - this analysis in particular does not incorporate work done in the fields of psychoanalysis, sociology, and religious studies, which have strong contributions to make towards the study of empathy in particular.

Secondly, this type of study relies on strong, positive assumptions about the possibility for museal representations to generate empathy in the first place. This requires a degree of skepticism towards those theorists who argue that empathy with survivors, victims, and, in some cases, perpetrators of the Holocaust is simply impossible, and many of whom who go so far as to argue point blank that the Holocaust cannot be understood historically. This study also does not especially engage with those critics (prominently, Alven Rosenfeld¹⁰²) who question whether visual representations in particular of atrocities can ever be considered anything but pornographic. Finally, there are also those¹⁰³ who question not the representational possibility of generating empathy, but rather the visitor's, and society's at large, ability to experience empathy at all, arguing for the recognition of so-called "empathy-fatigue," a phenomenon born out of the alleged over-exposure of twentieth and twenty-first century citizens to historical and contemporary atrocities.

In spite of these limitations, however, this sort of comparative analysis has its uses, especially in bringing one closer to an understanding of the interaction between curatorial intent, exhibition and museum space, museal goals and representational possibilities. As more museums begin to incorporate difficult-knowledge in their representation of historical and contemporary atrocities, comparative analyses of the way in which visitors interact with victim and perpetrators

¹⁰² Dean, *Fragility of Empathy*, 9.

¹⁰³ I.e. Ruth Klüger and Jonathon Boyarin; *ibid.*, 10-13.

viewpoints can provide important insight into how to create strong representational models which neither whitewash history nor entirely alienate visitors, and which neither turn representations of suffering into pastiche nor keep the visitor at such an emotional distance that they become inured to suffering altogether.

One final merit of this project, although it examines the specific media of photography and video, within the specific setting of the museum, is that it can also be abstracted. Museums are certainly not the only settings which utilize these media for pedagogical purposes, nor are they the only locations to employ empathy and distancing as tools. As discussed in the introductory chapter, the specific use of distancing to analyze museums is an adaptation of Mark Phillips' original usage of this concept to describe historical text. As academic work surrounding the Holocaust, or museums, or in fact photography and video becomes increasingly interdisciplinary, the ability to incorporate an understanding of empathy and distancing outside of their typical usage will allow for an increased depth of understanding for the ways in which visitors interpret history. The fact that this project is centered around not only museal goals but also the ways in which museums may unintentionally influence their visitors or subvert their own goals can help further museal scholarship as well. Analyzing the Holocaust is an important factor in its ability to contribute to further work, within and outside of the discipline of German Studies. Because the Holocaust, and its historical representation, is often treated as a template for how pedagogical institutes may interpret other atrocities, it is possible to abstract the analysis of these three museums into a guide for the examination of other spaces which represent atrocity. Finally, an understanding of the representation traditions inherent to the display of history in German and Canadian museums may lead to a closer examination not only of Holocaust history and its

representation in other countries as well, but also to increased awareness of the way museums and educational institutions may uphold – or subvert – their own national identities.

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