

“Through a glass, darkly” : The Metaphor of the Lens in Public Discussions

about the Canadian Museum for Human Rights

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“The Introduction to Human Rights gallery will paint a broad vision of human rights to help our visitors appreciate what we mean when we talk about looking at the world through a human rights lens.”

Stuart Murray, CEO of the Canadian Museum for Human Rights (2009-2014)¹

“The Holodomor is the lens through which the museum can teach the crimes of communism.”

Ukrainian Canadian Congress, Press Release, “Promise Made – Promise Broken”

“Early spectators of the moving image in the sixteenth century saw...images upside down.

For this reason the lens was introduced – in order to turn the picture right side up.”

Marshall McLuhan, *Understanding Media*

With its opening in September 2014 The Canadian Museum for Human Rights (CMHR) in Winnipeg, Manitoba is added to the growing group of ideas museums around the world.² These

¹ This phrase is from the “Speech Delivered to RBC Employees”. The same phrase has been used in other speeches by then CEO Stuart Murray: “Speech Delivered to University of Manitoba “Thinking about Ideas Museums” speaker series”, “Speech delivered at the CMHR’s first Annual Public Meeting, December 6, 2011” and “Speech delivered to PCL Constructors Inc.”

² Other museums of this type include the Museum of Tolerance in Los Angeles, the Museo de la Memoria y los Derechos Humanos in Chile and the Caen-Normandy Memorial for History and Peace. Some scholars also include memorials within this group. Carter and Orange, for example, include the Museum of Genocide victims in Lithuania (113) in the group of museums that “are becoming increasingly responsive to human rights violations in their programming” (112).

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museums “are valued for their ability to stimulate dialogue and social change” rather than for “the strength of their collections” (Chinnery 269). Although they do include objects “assembled with different intentions and used to different ends” (Carter and Orange 113) these museums use events – atrocities, genocide, human rights abuses – to draw attention to certain issues regarding human rights and social justice and to be “instigators of social activism” (Carter and Orange 111). In shifting the focus from the concept of ‘museum as temple’ to that of the ‘museum as forum’ these museums raise questions about the role of the museum in the public sphere.³ Art historian Jennifer Carter notes that, in general, “museums continually shape, and are shaped by, the frames of reference that underpin the narratives they create, with considerable implications not only for the nature of the work that museums perform, [but] equally [for] the impact this work may have on visiting publics and society at large” (325). For museums of ideas, the ‘frames of reference’ are often slippery, unstable and full of tensions since the ‘ideas’ themselves have many possible interpretations.

The frame of reference for the CMHR is ‘human rights’ and when the museum opened its doors to the public, the physical manifestation of its mandate to “explore the subject of human rights [...] in order to enhance the public’s understanding of human rights, to promote respect for others, and to encourage reflection and dialogue” (CMHR “Mandate and Museum Experience”) was seen for the first time. The public that visit the museum will likely do so with some preconceived notions about the its purpose and content due to ongoing media coverage of the

³ In her article “Temple or Forum? On New Museology and Education for Social Change” Ann Chinnery discusses this distinction in more detail. She revisits Duncan Cameron’s 1971 article “The Museum, a Temple or the Forum?” and suggests that Cameron’s original question – whether the role of the museum in a society is to house things (as a temple) or to discuss ideas of the day (as a forum) – has not been resolved, but has been resurrected with the recent development of museums of ideas.

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CMHR that has included discussions about, among other things, funding arrangements, location and political involvement.⁴ However the discussion that has raised an impassioned debate and that, arguably, has involved the widest audience is about *what* should be represented in a Canadian museum with a focus on human rights and *how* it should be represented.⁵ The initial concept envisioned by the Asper family, of a human rights museum that will “incorporate the largest Holocaust gallery in Canada” (Asper Foundation),⁶ has become a debate which historian Dirk Moses has dubbed “the museum wars” (228). Declarations, in the form of media releases and public statements in the media, have been made by “genocide-affected groups” (Moses 216)⁷ and other groups that have suffered atrocities in order to demonstrate why and how their stories should be included in the museum in lieu of or in addition to the Holocaust. These have become “a scramble, almost like a competition for minorities to have their particular historical pain

⁴ News articles by Hamilton, Lewis, Kay and Basen all contain elements of these issues.

⁵ The reach of this discussion is evidenced by the press releases and articles written by or referencing comments by Aboriginal, Palestinian, Armenian, Ukrainian, Jewish and Rwandan groups.

⁶ The Asper family’s original interest in highlighting the Holocaust in the CMHR seems to stem from the early work of the Asper foundation. In 1997 it started a ‘Human Rights and Holocaust Studies Program’ in Winnipeg which included, for the students involved, a trip to the Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington, D.C. The thinking was that a similar type of institution in Canada would allow more students to visit it (Moses 223-224).

⁷ Those that have weighed in on the debate are Ukrainian, Palestinian, Armenian, Ukrainian and Jewish groups. Canadian Aboriginal groups have also made statements about the way that the history and treatment of Aboriginal peoples in Canada are going to be represented in the museum. In public statements by Aboriginal leaders and writers, the museum has been exhorted to label the past treatment of Aboriginal people by the Canadian government as ‘genocide.’ Palmater writes: “if the new Canadian Museum for Human Rights will not use the term genocide to describe what Canada has done to Indigenous peoples in Canada, then its own credibility will be called into question” and in an open letter to Stuart Murray, Chief Murray Clearsky of the Southern Chiefs Organization writes: “It is now abundantly clear that Canada again is choosing to sanitize the true truth and continue with their agenda of minimizing the many attempts of genocide perpetrated against the original peoples of this land. I call on you to exercise your humanity and use the proper term of genocide as this is exactly what has been done and is currently being perpetrated on First Nations through various means.” The discussion of the meaning of the term ‘genocide,’ the argument by Aboriginal groups for its use and the museum’s decision not to use it are all important considerations in discussing rhetoric and human rights. These considerations, in and of themselves, could form the basis for a larger discussion. However, my focus in this paper is not on the use of the term ‘genocide’ and, as seen above, the concerns of Aboriginal groups are different than those of “genocide-affected groups” (that is, it is the “struggle over meaning” (Hesford, “Human Rights Rhetoric of Recognition” 282) of ‘genocide’ rather than a struggle over the representation of one genocide instead of another), so I will not be including further discussion about it here.

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recorded” (B’nai Brith President Ruth Klein, qtd in Moses 221). Although at times quite heated⁸ and somewhat divisive, the debate is not surprising given the contentious nature of the elements that comprise the museum’s name. ‘Canadian’ ‘Museum’ ‘human’ and ‘rights’ along with the pairing ‘human rights’ are all terms that, in and of themselves, carry considerable tension and that are open to interpretation.⁹ Through the debate around the museum and the use of these terms as part of its official image it is clear that the CMHR is navigating the “contentious terrain”¹⁰ that Carter and Orange contend is part of the “work of human rights museology” (123). What is not as clear yet is the ways in which the discourse used in coverage of the museum has influenced the public’s (including potential visitors’) perceptions of some of the human rights concepts that the museum seeks to highlight. The heart of the debate, on the surface, seems to be the museum’s inclusion or exclusion of certain genocides.¹¹ However, the language used in CMHR documents, as well as public documents that discuss the CMHR, points to the larger tensions in the role and function of the ‘museum of ideas’¹² including the *what* and *how* questions of representation, the place of authorship and witnessing in the museum and the

⁸ A series of ‘open letters’ between Lubomyr Luciuk, Director of Research at the Ukrainian Canadian Civil Liberties Association and Rhonda Spivak of the *Winnipeg Jewish Review* is an example of the ‘heated’ nature of the debate.

⁹ The importance of making these distinctions was drawn to my attention by Dr. Diana Brydon.

¹⁰ Although Carter and Orange don’t note it in their article, the CMHR is being built on land that, literally, has been a source of controversy due to its sacred meaning to the Aboriginal people of Canada. So, for the CMHR, “contentious terrain” has multiple meanings.

¹¹ A number of the articles in the media about the CMHR focus on the concept that by placing the Holocaust at the centre of the museum, there is a type of ‘hierarchy of genocides’ being created. James Kafieh, of the organization Canadians for Genocide Education says: “when you elevate [...] any one case study over and above all other [sic], you suggest the suffering of some people is more important than others” it creates a “hierarchy of human suffering” (qtd in Hicks). Although this discussion is very important and raises many additional questions about the representation of atrocities and rights recognition, it is not the focus of this paper. It will be discussed in so far as it relates to the rhetorical concepts and questions being discussed.

¹² This term or ‘ideas museums’ are widely used in the scholarship about museums that have as their focus concepts or ideas rather than objects. However, Carter and Orange make the distinction between ideas-based and issues-based museums and use the latter “for its implicit insistence on a topic that is not only a theme of representation, but one of on-going debate” (112). In this paper, I will use ‘ideas museum,’ ‘museum of ideas’ and ‘ideas-based museum’ interchangeably.

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function of the museum as activist or as a catalyst for action. In this paper, I will look at recent scholarship about ideas-based museums in conjunction with theories of the rhetoric of human rights in order to provide a context for a close reading of the use of the metaphor of the lens in the debate about the CHMR. Examples of this metaphor can be found in the first two quotations in the epigraph: one suggests that “human rights” is the lens through which atrocities such as genocide should be viewed and the other suggests that the atrocities are the lens through which human rights can be viewed. Although each use of the metaphor seemingly has the same aim – to encourage a public discourse about human rights – the different focus of each makes an important distinction between activities that can take place at different ends of a lens: observing and participating in that which is being observed. Examining the lens metaphor in this public discourse is important because the use of the metaphor suggests that there is a purposeful shaping, filtering and focusing of the public’s view of human rights. For the CMHR, and for ideas museums in general, an acknowledgement of this purposeful shaping can change discussions about what the museum should, might or can be for the public who visit it. In addition, these uses of the same metaphor to explain different concepts not only exemplify the continuing discussion about what should be included in the CMHR, but demonstrate a “struggle over meaning” (Hesford, “Human Rights Rhetoric of Recognition” 282) that raises larger questions about the nature of the ideas museum: How are rights “remembered, internalised, embodied” (Purbrick 168) in a museum? How do these museums shape the stories they are telling? How do they choose which stories to tell? Are they providing a credible witness to the audience who might become “engaged” by the museum’s content (Lyon and Olson 209)? Finally, I will suggest that the use of the lens metaphor is part of the “spectacular rhetoric” of

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human rights that, as argued by Hesford, “activates certain cultural and national narratives and social and political relations” (2011b, 9). As such this metaphor, rather than an all-encompassing one, as suggested in the language used by the CMHR,¹³ is a restricted one that “defines the parameters of the public’s engagement with key human rights issues” (Hesford, 2011b, 10).

Recent scholarship about the museum of ideas discusses the ways in which these types of museums negotiate the local and the global realities within the “frames of reference” that underpin their narratives (Orange 325). As Richard Sandell puts it, at a global level the idea of “Human Rights” has a wide appeal but there is controversy that can arise in “attempts to apply rights at the local level, to redraw the boundaries that distinguish those who enjoy rights from those who are denied them” (195). He notes that these local attempts “frequently reveal conflicting moral positions and mobilise opposing parties to deny or seek to undermine rights claims, resulting in fiercely fought and highly visible battles” (195). Carter and Orange point out that as museums reshape themselves, they face ethical and moral questions of how rights are defined and represented within the museum exhibits (118). Through these museums’ work of negotiating these questions, though, Carter and Orange suggest that they “not only reflect historical and current human rights but are also participating in the prospective shaping of those rights” (119). Similarly, Richard Sandell calls them “sites of persuasion” that “can be harnessed to build public and political support for fairness, equality and justice” (197). Included in this global-local dichotomy are also questions of how museums negotiate the political and social

¹³ In the museum’s Content Advisory Committee report, there is a lengthy description of what is meant by ‘the human rights lens.’ It includes various phrases about what the ‘human rights lens’ entails including: “It involves individual and collective commitments” (65), “A human rights lens has many facets” (66), “The lens also responds to experience” (66), “A human rights lens enables us to begin to address many complicated questions” (66). These phrases, only a sample of the attempted definition, suggest that the lens has the capability of ‘doing it all,’ which is why I have called the metaphor ‘all-encompassing.’

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pressures that come with things like funding contributions and governmental regulation. That is, how does the museum remain neutral or at very least represent human rights fairly even if it goes against the ideologies of the government of the time? If the museum is state funded, for example, it seems unlikely that it can truly “criticize state actions and policies” and therefore may be “producing propaganda that entrenches power in a government that violates human rights” (Carter and Orange 123). In negotiating these questions, a large challenge for these museums is rhetoric: the “complicated web of issues that underlie human rights discourse” (Carter and Orange 124). In attempting to unravel this web of issues, the ways in which museums interpret this discourse are important, as is the kind of language that the museums themselves use to represent human rights.

A theoretical approach to the language of human rights can provide a base for a discussion about the rhetoric of ideas museums. In “Human Rights Rhetoric of Recognition,” theorist Wendy Hesford discusses the language of human rights. She focuses specifically on the concept of “human rights history as *authorship*” (282; emphasis hers) and as such demonstrates the importance of examining “whose struggles speak through human rights history and rhetoric” (282). She suggests that since human rights is a living practice, it is also then a cultural system and because culture is contentious it is necessary to “approach the history of human rights as a struggle over meaning” (282). In doing so, she contends, it is possible to call into question “myopic” human rights narratives – those narratives which limit the recognition of certain subjects in human rights history by telling a story from a perspective that privileges certain (usually Western) politics, governments, or groups. Questioning these limited narratives serves the purpose of comprehending the “rhetorical mechanisms of assemblage, classification and

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categorization” (282) that form the history of human rights struggles. These struggles for recognition, Hesford says, dominate the history of human rights and yet the discourse of rights is limited in that it is not able to address the “structural violence and symbolic mechanisms that have functioned as modalities of subordination and exclusion” (283). Given the questions that can be asked about the representation of human rights in the ideas museum and the possibility that it is a “site of persuasion,” the museum that has a focus on ideas concerning human rights seems to be a contemporary site of the “struggle over meaning.” Within the discussions about selection and representation of different genocides in the CMHR (and similar discussions taking place in other ideas museums),¹⁴ there is also a continued struggle for recognition. The struggle here, though, is for a different type of ‘rights recognition’ than, I think, Hesford’s discussion considers. The groups vying for recognition in the CMHR have already struggled for the recognition of their rights, or their ancestors have, in the actual act through which the rights were violated: that is, in the actual event of the Holodomor, the Holocaust and other atrocities. Now, these groups are struggling for a public recognition that, according to Susan Sontag, serves to “ensure that the crimes they depict will continue to figure in people’s consciousness” which can be “called remembering, but [...] is a good deal more than that” (86-87). Sontag asserts that the photographs and other items in “memory museums” not only act as reminders of suffering, but “invoke the miracle of survival” (87). She suggests that the “perpetuation of memories” is a “task of continually renewing, of creating, memories” (87). In vying for space and recognition in the CMHR, then, the groups involved are struggling for recognition in a number of ways. They want

¹⁴ In his article “Museums and the Human Rights Frame,” Richard Sandell writes extensively about an exhibit in the Gallery of Modern Art in Glasgow called *sh[OUT]* that focused on lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex rights and that drew a storm of media controversy.

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to ensure the atrocities that have been committed against them are brought into the public consciousness so that others can understand and learn about these atrocities.¹⁵ But these groups also want to create an “illustrated narrative of their sufferings” so that they can “visit – and refresh – their memories” (Sontag 87). The struggle for recognition in the ideas museum, then, is a “struggle over meaning.” As museums such as the CMHR make choices about what to include, or exclude, from the museum galleries and how they present the rights struggles and scenes they have chosen to include, they are engaging in the ‘authorship’ that Hesford suggests writes human rights history and in doing so are participating in the human rights “discourse of public persuasion” (Hesford, 2011a, 283). By pairing this argument with the assertion by Carter and Orange that ideas museums can shape rights customs, it is clear that the language used by the museum, just like the language used by any author, is essential to understanding how the museum regards itself and its reader – the public.

While the museum-as-author has a certain role in shaping rights discourse, it is equally important to consider the museum-as-witness in a discussion of the rhetoric of human rights. Lyon and Olson, in discussing the role of witnessing and testifying in human rights discourse, suggest that “rhetorical inquiry examines how audiences identify with both rights themselves and the individuals or communities whose rights have been violated” (205). This, in conjunction with their comment that “the act must be received by a community of action” (208), echoes Hesford’s notions of authorship and meaning in human rights discourse. How else can human rights struggles be authorship and have meaning if they are not received by an audience? Although

¹⁵ In its press release “Promise Made – Promise Broken,” for example, the Ukrainian-Canadian Congress notes that “[t]he Holodomor further can teach and sensitize visitors about the use of food as a weapon to oppress and destroy a people. It can engage visitors to stand up and oppose similar human rights abuses taking place today in other parts of the world such as Somalia and Ethiopia.”

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Lyon and Olson's discussion is based on first-hand witnessing of and testifying to rights abuses, it is possible to look at the ideas museum as another type of testifying and witnessing. The museum itself is providing witness or testimony to human rights abuses and is doing so in a certain, rhetorically constructed, way. It could be argued that museum visitors are the audience to this witness through their viewing of museum exhibits. If the purposes of witnessing and testifying are to activate the audience and lessen "the force of oppression" (Lyon and Olson 209) through the activation, then the mandates of ideas museums to, in general, "stimulate dialogue and promote social change" (Chinnery 269)¹⁶ considered along with Hesford's argument that human rights is a "discourse of public persuasion" seem to require the enactment of these purposes. Similarly the problem inherent in witnessing and testifying, that of the "fictive and rhetorical" (Lyon and Olson 209) nature of memory, recalls the question of what and how human rights are represented in the ideas museum. Lyon and Olson's question, "[h]ow should an audience be guided to understand the suffering and respond with appropriate action?" (209-210), is one that could equally be asked of the museum-as-witness.

The connection between scholarship about the museum of ideas and the rhetoric of human rights raises many questions and demonstrates the complexities involved in analyzing the work of these museums. An example of this complexity can be seen in public documents about the CMHR, many of which were written a number of years before the actual building of the museum and certainly before its opening. These documents include media reports, press releases and official documents of the CMHR itself. While the concept for the museum – human rights – is

¹⁶ The mission statement of the CMHR specifically includes the mandate of the museum to be "a centre of learning where Canadians and people from around the world can engage in discussion and commit to taking action against hate and oppression" (CMHR Website, "Mandate and Museum Experience").

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one that, in principle, is difficult to oppose (as even naysayer Jonathan Kay writes: “no one wants to be seen as opposing ‘human rights’”), the reality of negotiating the rhetoric of human rights and the roles of museum-as-author and museum-as-witness has set the museum in the middle of a maelstrom of opinions, responses, ideas and opposition from the media and the public. Although there has been varied rhetoric used in discussing the museum, much of which could be the focus of a case study, one metaphor stands out. The metaphor of the lens is used in two very striking ways in public comments about the museum: the CMHR uses it to promote the museum and the Ukrainian Canadian Congress (UCC) uses it to respond to the museum.

The CMHR itself uses the “human rights lens” as a guiding principle for explaining the museum’s mandate to the public. The museum’s use of the metaphor originates in the 2010 Content Advisory Committee (CAC) Report which is the result of cross-country consultations with the Canadian public about the museum. In the final chapter of the report, “The Way Forward,” which summarizes the committee’s findings, the authors write: “To answer the question about what opportunities the Museum needs to create, we offer a perspective that contextualizes and grounds the idea of human rights. This perspective is called the ‘human rights lens,’ and we believe it is one of the necessary actions that must form the foundation of the Museum’s work” (64). The committee provides a lengthy descriptive definition of their notion of the ‘human rights lens.’ They note that it is a concept that is employed by those who are working toward equality and justice in many different domains and that it is not merely utilitarian but “involves both individual and collective commitments” (65). They go on to say:

A human rights lens has many facets. As individuals the lens we each develop takes account of both the disadvantages and the privileges we simultaneously carry. Using a human rights lens is always self-reflective,

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but it is also more than that. When we come together as human rights experts, activists, Museum staff, or individuals who are experiencing assaults on their human dignity, the knowledge we have gained from using our individual lens informs others and they, in turn, inform us. (66)

Since the committee's report, the museum has used the metaphor of the human rights lens extensively in its public documents. In addition to the first quotation in the epigraph, there are a number of other instances of representatives from the museum using the same rhetoric. In the section of the museum's website entitled "A Museum that Stands on Principle," it is noted: "We strive to look at every decision through the lens of human rights." Additionally, in an article in the *Globe and Mail* the museum's then CEO, Stuart Murray, is quoted as saying: "we are here to be authentic historically and present it [genocide] from a human rights lens" (Basen). Similarly, in a press release entitled "Canadian Museum for Human Rights Response to Meeting with Representatives of the Ukrainian Canadian Congress" Murray says: "The role of the CMHR is not to memorialize human rights atrocities, but allow visitors to examine them through a human rights lens, to be able to recognize human rights violations, and to be empowered to take a stand against them."¹⁷ The museum, then, is using the 'human rights lens' as a part of its "discourse of public persuasion" (Hesford, 2011a, 283). In order to understand the role that this discourse has in the "struggle over meaning" taking place in the discussions about the CMHR, it is necessary to look closer at the way in which the museum is using this metaphor.

Despite the lengthy description in the CAC report, a number of questions can be raised about the metaphor: what does it mean to use a human rights lens? How do the report's authors understand 'human rights'? How is what we view through the lens recorded, acted upon, or

¹⁷ There are many other instances of the use of the lens metaphor in CMHR public documents. See the speeches by Murray cited in the references list.

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communicated? In its public uses of the terminology, the museum itself seems unsure about the role of the lens in mediating vision. In the instances quoted in the epigraph and above, there is both a suggestion that the museum is the ‘witness’ that will be looking through the human rights lens (“We strive to look at every decision through the lens of human rights”) and another that asks the public to view the world through the human rights lens (“allow visitors to examine them through a human rights lens”).¹⁸ A lens, by its nature, denotes a step away from the event – a distance rather than an involvement. This suggests that by looking through the human rights lens both museum and museum visitor are witnesses. Yet the result of looking through a lens is an image – perhaps a photograph, perhaps a movie, perhaps a mental picture.¹⁹ In any case, it is certainly an image with limitations: the limitations of the frame of the picture, the movie screen or the memory of the mental picture. Even if it is possible to move the lens – change the angle, for example – what is seen through the lens is what is in focus; the rest of the world is out of focus. Through the use of the lens metaphor, the speakers are suggesting that there is a limit or frame to what is and can be presented; that there are choices being made about what is in the focus of the lens and what is left out. In these cases, the museum could be both author and witness – two rhetorically complicated roles of the ideas museum. The CAC report also describes the human rights lens as both “individual” and “collective” (65) and the individual lens as both “self-reflective” (66) and outward looking: “the knowledge we have gained from using our individual lens informs others” (66). With what type of lens is it possible to look at oneself?

¹⁸ Museum documentation also includes another lens, the “Canadian Lens”: “Multi-sensory exhibits explore human rights concepts with an international scope, but through a uniquely Canadian lens” (CMHR, “Mandate and Museum Experience”). This extension adds another layer to the metaphor and raises the question: what is a ‘Canadian human rights lens’?

¹⁹ I acknowledge that there are many ways in which a lens can be used. I have mentioned a few here to provide a way to further the discussion. Other types of lenses – in eyeglasses, microscopes or telescopes, for example – would follow similar principles.

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If I am looking at myself through a lens (perhaps the lens that has captured me in a photograph or a movie) it is an *image* of myself at which I am looking. The image, much like the shadows in Plato's cave, suggests a projected version of myself. It is important to consider the implications of seeing that framed self through a human rights lens and of the "individual lens inform[ing] others" (CAC, 66) and "they, in turn, inform[ing]" the individual. These multiple layers of lenses, rather than clarifying a possible vision, highlight Hesford's assertion that "all acts of self- and social recognition are contingent and involve identity negotiations and changes in subjectivity" (2011a, 284). For the human rights museum, this is an important realization as it will influence the museum's role as both author and as witness.

The second quotation in the epigraph, from a media release by the Ukrainian Canadian Congress (UCC), provides another perspective on the concept of 'lens' in a human rights context. In stating that "[t]he Holodomor is the lens through which the museum can teach the crimes of communism which were responsible for the subjugation, persecution and destruction of tens of millions of people," the UCC changes the perspective of the lens from one of distance to one of involvement. For the UCC, instead of the general concept of human rights being the place from which the atrocity is viewed, the specific atrocity, the genocide, becomes the situation from which human rights are viewed.²⁰ Similar language is used by groups who advocate for the Holocaust as the paradigm for discussing genocide and human rights. The CAC report notes that in its consultation with Canadians they "were exhorted to use the experience of the Nazi

²⁰ The UCC is the only group that uses the lens metaphor in the discourse about the CMHR. The language used by other groups, though, very much suggests a perspective that is situated in the place of the atrocity or danger. For example, in the article "Palestinian-Canadians feel ignored in human rights museum," Palestinian-Canadian Rana Abdulla says that as the opening of the museum approaches, she "become[s] more and more concerned that the lessons of the Palestinian experience" will not be heard. She says: "Our story is an excellent story to educate Canadians about human rights" (Hicks).

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Holocaust as a lens through which to view all genocides” (43).²¹ This metaphor of the lens suggests that those who were involved in the atrocity as victims are the ones who can best represent a human rights picture. As such, these groups are not only witnesses, but they are also claiming authorship in the “struggle over meaning” that is being played out in the discussions. Moses’s brief discussion of the concept of individual and collective rights in relation to the groups involved in promoting their particular genocide as unique provides some perspective on the use of the lens metaphor in conjunction with authorship. He says that stories of victimization are related to group status and that immigrant leaders “tend to invest ‘their’ groups with ontological status, so that they, not the individuals, are the significant bearers of human rights and memory” (Moses 217). In the case of the UCC, the group carries the memory of the Holodomor and also continues to struggle for recognition of that history by providing witness to it through media releases, information on its website and other public writing. Their witnessing then becomes an authorship within a specific discourse. By publicly using the language of the CMHR – the concept of the lens that is so central to the museum’s image – the UCC works within the framework provided by the museum and changes the angle of the lens in order to create meaning. The UCC has shifted the perspective from one of human rights to one of genocide. Both may be part of the same larger reality, but the use of the lens metaphor in this way suggests a different specific focus than that of the museum’s lens. It is possible to question

²¹ The difficulty with this lens – the concept of the ‘unique Holocaust’ – has raised concerns among scholars and the public alike. Moses says that “the ways in which the holocaust is phenomenologically distinct make it a poor archetype for understanding all other genocides” (233). In an article by Charles Lewis in the *National Post*, Paul Grod, president of the Ukrainian Canadian Congress is referenced in relation to this discussion: “Every story of mass killing is distinct, comes with its own unique circumstances and the danger of filtering one through another risks obscuring how different people were targeted for different reasons, Mr. Grod explained, which is why he objects to other “mass atrocities” being filtered through the template of the Holocaust.”

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whether working within the museum's metaphor allows the UCC to engage in the discussion in a meaningful way. The UCC may be better served to work within a different framework, one that "overcomes its domination by power through an inescapable critique of power" (Hauser 443). However the UCC may be one of the groups for whom, as Hesford suggests, there are no rhetorical mechanisms available. So instead these groups use language that is part of the "symbolic mechanisms that have functioned as modalities of subordination and exclusion" (2011a, 283) throughout human rights history. The lens certainly seems to be a "symbolic mechanism" that, as has been seen in its two metaphorical uses surrounding the CMHR, raises questions of inclusion and exclusion.

The focus of the public discussion about the CMHR has thus far drawn attention to this dichotomy of inclusion and exclusion, rather than to the museum's mandate of promoting respect for others and encouraging reflection and dialogue. Hankivsky and Dhamoon use intersectionality theory to analyze this "Oppression Olympics" – the "intergroup competition and victimhood" (900) – taking place in the public discourse about the CMHR. In doing so, they point out that rather than addressing "the ways in which all group experiences, including minority group experiences, are connected" (912), the "prospect of being recognized by the state and the CMHR [...] necessarily implicates minorities in the oppression of others, even as these minorities experience exclusion and oppression" (912). Further, Hankivsky and Dhamoon suggest that rather than "replicate" or "mimic" the dominant power structure (914), as the UCC has done in using the language of the CMHR to make its case for the Holodomor as a lens through which to view human rights, such groups should engage in "alternative protocols" that are "more attentive to forces of power" (914). Hankivsky and Dhamoon call for "multiple

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interpretations of past and present structures and events within and among groups” in order to “reveal and disrupt the logics of domination” (915). These interpretations, outside of the metaphor of the lens and the dichotomy it represents, need to be built, as Hesford suggests, through the development of new rhetorical mechanisms.

The metaphor of the lens in this context – the public documents about the CMHR – seems to be a way for those involved in the discussion to contextualize a seemingly unwieldy topic. The metaphor – like any metaphor – is a way to “give shape to the amorphous” and “make real the abstract” (Donofrio 165). It is a way for the museum – and other groups – to give the public a concrete image for the abstract idea contained in the name and concept of an ideas museum: The Canadian Museum for Human Rights. Rhetorically, the two uses of the lens metaphor represent a “struggle over meaning” that involves the perspective from which one is looking: do we look at the world through human rights or at human rights through the events of the world? However, much like the assertions that the museum will “be authentic historically” (Murray qtd in Basen) and “be totally apolitical and antiseptic in terms of trying to preach a message of one kind of inhumanity over another” (Israel Asper qtd in Moses 224), the lens is a problematic metaphor for working through the “struggle over meaning.” A discerning public will understand that the museum will necessarily have to make choices about its authorship of the museum exhibits; they will understand that the phrase “authentic historically” is rife with controversy. They will ask, and have asked, questions like: whose history? Whose definition of “authentic”? In the same way, the lens, though presented by the CMHR as a metaphor that is encompassing, has inherent limits. As has been discussed earlier, the lens connotes a framing of what exists in the immediate focus of the lens, to the exclusion of what is out of focus. The concepts that underlie the ocular

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metaphor even further complicate its use in the context of the CMHR. The discussion surrounding the museum can be considered what Wendy Hesford terms a “human rights spectacle” and the negotiation of the metaphor of the lens within that discussion uses “social and rhetorical processes of incorporation and recognition mediated by visual representation and the ocular epistemology [...] that underwrites the discourse of human rights” (2011b, 7). In the use of the metaphor of the lens “human rights principles” seem to be “culturally translated into a vernacular that imagines” audiences (specifically Western audiences) as “moral subjects of sight” (2011b,8). If, as Hesford notes, “spectacular rhetoric activates certain cultural and national narratives and social and political relations” (2011b, 9), a specific “cultural and national narrative” is being activated through the use of the spectacular rhetoric of the lens. The use of this metaphor, I contend, creates a “myopic human rights narrative” that limits the possibilities for a move away from what Hesford calls “normative” scenes of rights recognition (2011a, 282-283). These normative scenes are the recognition of rights, rooted in historical precedents, that privilege political democracy in Western societies and that are often based on subjectivity and “recognition founded on subjection” (Hesford, 2011a, 283). A lens – whether it is in a camera, in glasses, in binoculars, or in the eye – provides a certain and defined scope of vision. It provides “a narrow view of something” which in turn can result in “a lack of foresight or discernment” (Merriam Webster). In *Ways of Seeing*, John Berger puts it simply: “We only see what we look at. To look is an act of choice” (8). This act, he argues, is a constant mediation of the “relationship between things and ourselves” (9) that establishes our place in the world. Therefore an image that is produced by looking through a lens (again, whether it be the lens of the eye, the camera) “embodies a way of seeing” (Berger 10) unique to the person who is doing the looking.

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And what is produced by these unique ways of seeing, as Sontag argues time and again about photographs in *Regarding the Pain of Others*, can be manipulated, “staged, or [...] tampered with” (53) so as to invite the question “is it the truth?” (46).

The lens then gives way to an authorship that, although well-meaning, still only represents a unique perspective: that of the author. As such this perspective can be called into question by those who wonder what the author has manipulated or left out. By using the lens metaphor the CMHR has not only defined its own participation in the authorship and witness of human rights, but by asking “visitors to examine” atrocities through a human rights lens and through the adoption of the metaphor by the UCC, it has also defined “the parameters of the public’s engagement with key human rights issues” (Hesford, 2011b, 10). In discussing the use of ocular epistemologies by human rights organizations and advocates, Hesford suggests that there has been a lack of consideration as to how “the moral vision of human rights internationalism becomes entangled with global capitalism and hierarchical structures of recognition and visual technologies to produce and regulate human rights subjects” (2011b, 29). I would argue that this is a consideration that should have been made by the CMHR before using the metaphor of the lens as a guiding image for its work. The situation of the museum – in a western democracy, as a national museum and with funding from government, corporate and private donors – will influence what it sees through its “human rights lens” and how it represents that vision in the museum. If, as Carter and Orange argue, ideas museums are “participating in the prospective shaping of” human rights (119), then the implications for viewing atrocities through a single lens from a single economic, political and physical situation are large.

In the Content Advisory Committee report for the CMHR, the authors write: “The human

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rights lens is not a term that has yet been picked up by scholars writing in the area. It is hoped that the discussion here will generate further scholarship as we feel it is an essential tool” (75). A search of databases of academic articles confirms the dearth of scholarship that uses the metaphor of the “human rights lens” as a way in which to view the world. Perhaps the absence of the metaphor from academic writing is an acknowledgement by scholars that its use is problematic and that it has a connotation that narrows, rather than broadens, the perspective of both the author and the witness. In the case of the CMHR, this narrow perspective has the possibility of calling into question the museum as a “credible and balanced learning resource” (CMHR, “Mandate and Museum Experience”). In addition, it limits a guiding principle of the museum – “inspiring human rights reflection and dialogue” (CMHR, “Mandate and Museum Experience”) – by drawing participants into a spectacular rhetoric that does not question the “underlying faith in vision” (Hesford, 2011b, 29) that the metaphor implies but instead prescribes a way of looking. The quotation by McLuhan in the epigraph suggests that the lens, as has already been discussed, is a fallible mode of seeing. In keeping with his purpose of understanding media, McLuhan goes on to explain: “to the student of media, the fact that ‘normal’ right-side up vision is a translation from one sense to another is a helpful hint about the kinds of activity of distortion and translation that any language or culture induces in all of us” (207). For the CMHR and the public it engages – and arguably for any museum of ideas – this is an equally important reminder.

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