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Rachel Elizabeth Winkel
Brigham Young University

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Schools of Identity: Rhetorical Experience in the
United States Holocaust Memorial Museum

Rachel Elizabeth Paxton Winkel

A thesis submitted to the faculty of
Brigham Young University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts

Gregory Clark, Chair
Jonathan Balzotti
Brian Jackson

Department of English
Brigham Young University

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ABSTRACT

Schools of Identity: Rhetorical Experience in the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum

Rachel Elizabeth Paxton Winkel
Department of English, BYU
Master of Arts

In the following pages I assert that important rhetorical work is being carried out by aesthetic means in museums and memorials in order to facilitate experiences of identification. I describe in rhetorical terms how that work is done, especially within my primary artifact of study, the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. Specifically, this paper explores concepts developed in studies of epideictic rhetoric, the rhetoric of place, and museology. The theoretical framework of this paper is founded on the ideas of John Dewey and Kenneth Burke. Dewey's theories discuss how we learn from experience and the role of the aesthetic in creating such an experience. Burke asserts that people are primed for rhetorical identification by specific settings or "scenes," which he expounds upon in his theory of the dramatic pentad. I believe that the setting of an aesthetically vivid scene creates an emotional ecology in which museum and memorial patrons can have meaningful experiences. Furthermore, these experiences educate the patrons' emotions by allowing them to identify with (and develop empathy for) narratives and groups that they had not previously. In short, aesthetic elements set the stage for a meaningful rhetorical experience to take place, which ideally allows patrons to congregate and identify with the values and ideas they are presented with in the exhibit.

Keywords: rhetoric, museums, museum studies, place, Holocaust, Washington D.C., Kenneth Burke, John Dewey, dramatic pentad, experience, scene, identification, identity, rhetorical experience, aesthetic

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Introduction

First, my story.

On a steamy June morning in 2011, I toured the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum with my family for the first time. It wasn't our first trip to Washington D.C.: we had already visited to most of the Smithsonian fixtures on the National Mall in addition to the National Gallery. Now we stood in line to see one of the major attractions we had never visited previously. My dad, who felt strongly about the importance of this particular museum, arrived early to secure some of the limited tickets for our family. Flanked by dozens of other patrons with the same timeslot on their tickets, I entered the museum with my parents and two younger sisters.

The building was impressive from the outside and typical of what I had come to expect of architecture in the nation's capital: it was a stately, rotund, limestone building with nods to both the neoclassical and the modern in its smooth exterior. Altogether, it gave off an air of officiality. As we entered the lobby, we were surrounded by concrete, brick walls, steel beams in the rafters, and morning sun glinting off it all through skylights. Only by stepping inside the building did I begin to see its clear references to the harsh environment of labor and concentration camps. I noted this attention to detail as we were shepherded toward the beginning of our tour.

Before entering the exhibit on the fourth floor, we were divided men from women, as the Germans did the Jews, and given the identity booklet of a particular male or female Holocaust victim—a sort of victim's biography. We were instructed to turn the pages of the booklet as prompted by elements of the exhibit. On the elevator ride to the fourth floor, my sisters and I curiously compared our newly-assigned ages and cities of origin as the other patrons around us quietly read their own given biographies. My mom and I were assigned similar personas, both of

us having received the papers of teenage girls from Poland. We all examined the faces in the black and white photographs of the people whose stories we were about to inhabit. While no one ever explicitly instructed us to find parallels in our own lives with these people, a natural curiosity about them bloomed in our minds as we learned more about them from their photos and biographies. Having a knowledge of these Holocaust victims combined with our own life experiences would prove crucial to our interactions with this exhibit as we would later begin to consider these events from our own perspective, and that of a firsthand witness. This melding of perspectives and experiences between persona and patron would occupy my thoughts for the rest of the visit.

As we exited the elevator, we learned that the fourth floor chronicled the “Nazi Assault”— the German discontent following the first World War, the Nazis’ rise to power, and the outbreak of World War II, all of this in the years from 1933 to 1939. Gold-colored stars of David pinned to lapels and words like “Kristallnacht” were familiar to me thanks to my high school history classes, but things like the particulars of the Nuremberg race laws and anti-Semitic children’s books—reeking of old world prejudice and erroneous science—were not. The idea of forbidding two German citizens to marry (one “Aryan” and one a Roman Catholic) was confusing to me in its absurdity.

I had always known that the German government had begun persecuting Jews at this time, but somehow having it all spelled out in front of me made it clear that the effects of this persecution were so much more far-reaching than I had understood before. I brushed it off with jaded logic: “What could I really have expected from the Nazis? And why should hearing about one more war crime or atrocity bother me so much?”

Our self-guided tour of the fourth floor was punctuated by quick glances to our identity booklets to ascertain where these individuals' experiences were located in the narrative of the exhibit, putting a personal stamp on each moment.

The exhibit's path led us one floor down to the segment on "The Final Solution," comprising the period from 1940 to 1945, and the bulk of the wartime violence and extermination of the Jewish population of Europe. As instructed by a nearby sign, I turned the page of my identity booklet to find out what would happen to "me" next, crossing my fingers that my persona had managed to escape to another country or even just been relegated to living in a Polish ghetto.

Knowing as I did how many European Jews were shipped off to concentration camps, I shouldn't have been surprised that the young woman whose identity I held was one of them, but I was startled and disappointed just the same. What's more, I knew that being sent to Auschwitz did not only portend harsh labor, it was also effectively a death sentence, making it that much harder to look around the exhibit at the artifacts and instruments that contributed to the execution of millions.

Along with my wide-eyed little sisters, I peered into a dark train car, a relic of the Holocaust, that had carried people like us away from their homes to the concentration camps where they would likely spend their final days. As a family we examined a casting of a gas chamber door and read about the incinerators that were used to dispose of the evidence of the Nazis' crimes. My parents and I walked under an archway that used to stand at the entry to Auschwitz, which read "Arbeit Macht Frei," "Work makes you free" in German. I didn't know it was a replica at the time, but it hardly mattered; the cruel irony of the message was chilling enough. The plaques described to us in detail the kinds of people who were detained at such

camps: Jews, Poles, Roma, homosexuals, Jehovah's Witnesses, and political prisoners were all targeted and deported to horrific places like Dachau, Treblinka, and many others. I remember thinking that there were many people in my high school who fell into those categories.

After showing us the artifacts and instruments of destruction, our tour through the exhibit led us to the results, one of which initially appeared to be a large, leathery hump on an exhibit platform. As I approached, I realized that the hump was made up of hundreds of shoes of different shapes, materials, and sizes, all of which represented just a fraction of the thousands of shoes that were confiscated from prisoners at the Majdanek concentration camp in Poland. The musty smell testifying to the fact that someone bothered to keep all these shoes was unnerving and hypnotizing at the same time. When asked about it years later, my dad recalled, "I remember trying to think of what they would do with those and all the other things leftover. And how they represented so many individuals." The shoes were not disturbing just because of their numbers—there really should have been millions more. It was that they were so familiarly human that was unsettling. Shoes don't exist in isolation unless they're stiff and new sitting in a store. But these were wrinkled and bowed, used shoes that real, working people wore day in and day out. Some clearly belonged to fashionable women, others to large men or small children. And they all ended up discarded, like a tragic metaphor for their owners. As I researched the artifacts of the museum years later, I learned that if there is one thing people remember from their visit, it is the haunting pile of shoes in an empty room.

The same pervasive feeling accompanied us on our walk through "The Tower of Faces," a three-story high corridor whose walls are covered from floor to ceiling in prewar photographs of the members of a massacred Jewish community. The room was long, skinny, and looked almost out of proportion with its height and depth. An austere iron bridge cut across it,

suspended halfway between the floor and the ceiling. The bridge itself seemed to extend the concentration camp right through the middle of the silent hall as the people of Eisikes stared back at us.

On the final floor of the exhibit, we read about the end and aftermath of the war, resistance efforts on the part of European citizens, and the liberation of the concentration camps. My family and I wandered over to a continuously-playing film in which the rescuers and victims of the Holocaust shared their experiences. Nearly all of them were senior citizens by then, but they looked like my grandparents or the old couples at my church, not prisoners of war or undercover resistance workers. As we listened to the stories they had probably told a hundred times, I was struck by the matter-of-fact tone they used to describe unimaginably awful events.

The glimmer of hope and relief I felt at learning about the end of the war was overshadowed by what I found next in my identity booklet—the young woman whose name I held had died at Auschwitz just a few days before her camp was liberated. The person whose identity my mom carried did not survive either. She remembers, “As the parent of teenagers, I felt protective and anxious about her, even though her experience was decades in the past...I felt quite shattered.” Among my family members a few of our identities survived, but not many, underscoring the loss that so many Jewish families had felt decades earlier. Those who survived the concentration camps were not guaranteed to have whole, happy families and normal lives waiting for them. As one songwriter said of this war-torn era, “They came back different, if they came back at all” (Griffith).

As an 18-year-old young woman, I left the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum feeling different in obvious ways; I felt shocked, heavy, hurt, depressed, and grateful for my own life. But I also felt many things that I didn't have the words to express at that time, like why I

could be so profoundly affected by information that was not new to me, and by a tragedy that did not happen to me or anyone I loved.

Now, the lessons my story can teach.

Part of my purpose in taking on this project has been to explain to myself, more precisely than I could then, what I experienced in that exhibit and why that experience mattered so deeply to me. Rhetorical theory has provided me with concepts and language to do that. And what I have come to understand about my own experience is a rhetorical aspect of the work that museums, particularly memorials, do in their quest to educate the minds and souls of their patrons. That is to help them have experiences of identification.

Perhaps one of the things that bothered me most at the time, and still bothers me now, is that this had to happen to me (albeit virtually) for me to really understand, for me to really care. I had read books, seen films, and studied World War II and the Jewish Holocaust multiple times in school, and while I intellectually understood that it was tragic, I had no personal frame of reference by which to comprehend such trauma. I lived a very happy, normal, suburban childhood, and no amount of active teenage imagination can grasp the idea of a genocide and its repercussions in totality. I have since realized that at least part of my failure to emotionally identify with the victims of the Holocaust before I visited the museum was due to my own intellectual obstacles. As I said, I intellectually understood the Holocaust, but lacked a fully felt understanding. Certainly books, research, and study are necessary for the education of our minds, but how do we educate our emotions? I believe that an emotional education is the result of an internalized human experience. As humans, we are pattern seekers and we necessarily understand life through the patterns of our own experience, paradigms and points of view.

Therefore, it follows that if we want to understand the attitudes, actions, and feelings of others, we must immerse ourselves as deeply as possible into their life experiences.

For this to happen, there are few better teachers than an experience of identification, a concept which I consider to be central to the rhetorical work of memorial museums in general, and an explanation of my own experience of the Holocaust Museum in particular. In fact, identification (which will be defined in greater nuance later in this paper) is the hinge on which powerful rhetorical experiences turn. Providing diverse people with a shared sense of identification, of identity, and more specifically, the shared experience of empathy that is acquired in such an encounter, is an important and necessary rhetorical function of memorial museums in an increasingly tribalistic society. As both patrons and curators become more aware of these rhetorical processes, they will be better prepared to either partake in them or facilitate them for the benefit of all.

In the following pages I assert that important rhetorical work is being carried out in memorials like the Holocaust Museum to facilitate experiences of identification, and I will describe in rhetorical terms how that work is done. Specifically, I will use concepts developed in studies of the rhetorical effects of aesthetic by John Dewey—who theorized how we learn from experience—and Kenneth Burke, whose assertion that people are influenced primarily through experiences of identification comes to life in the context of what he described as “scene” in the language of his dramatic pentad. I believe that the setting of an aesthetically vivid scene creates an emotional ecology in which museum and memorial patrons can have meaningful experiences. Furthermore, these experiences educate the patrons’ emotions by allowing them to identify with (and develop empathy for) narratives and groups that they had not previously. As this happens on a large scale, entire communities come together, their individual narratives being united in a

shared one. Ultimately, a rhetorical experience in a place like the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum can allow a Mormon 18-year-old from Iowa to have an experience that lets her share in the story of a Polish, Jewish teenager whom she's never met.

Revisiting the Rhetoric of Place

Before going any further into theoretical explanation of my ideas, I feel it necessary to acknowledge the rhetorical conversation and scholarship that exist in relation to the ideas I've presented. First, my work here falls under the broader category of the rhetoric of place, a concept that in modern scholarship has been developed at length in the book *Places of Public Memory*. In this compilation of essays, edited by Greg Dickinson, Carole Blair, and Brian L. Ott, the authors posit that "exploring the relations between rhetoric, memory, and place is of crucial importance to understanding contemporary public culture...strong understandings of public memory and of public memory places can emerge only by comprehending their specifically rhetorical character" (1-2). Elizabethada A. Wright's essay on cemeteries also discusses the intersections between memory, space and rhetoric, and their ability to "[include] and [exclude] certain discourse, and certain speakers" ("Rhetorical Spaces in Memorial Places" 52). The idea of place as a vehicle for rhetoric is further developed in "Joe's Rhetoric," Greg Dickinson's essay on "exploring the materiality of rhetoric through a close analysis of one Starbucks coffee shop," in which he deconstructs the use of rhetoric in the ever-trendy café.

Rhetoric of place, as we have seen, encompasses a variety of venues, from the organic (see also Greg Clark's *Rhetorical Landscapes in America*) to the constructed. More narrowly, the vein of scholarship I am writing in is centered on museums and memorials, a conversation to which Elizabeth Weiser (whose work is referenced frequently in this paper) has made significant contributions, particularly in her book *Museum Rhetoric*, whose case studies and examples

helped to inform my own research. Others, including Andreas Huyssen and James E. Young, have focused their study of museums and memorials specifically on those relating to the Holocaust. Young, a contributor to the field of German studies, documents Germany's wrestle with the rhetorical nature of memorials in his paper entitled "Germany's Holocaust Problem—and Mine." In the midst of great disagreement on the appropriate nature of a memorial to the Holocaust, Young notes that it would be better to have

a thousand years of [disagreements] than a "final solution" to Germany's memorial problem. This way...the debate itself—perpetually unresolved amid ever-changing conditions—might now be enshrined...Because no single site can speak for all the victims, much less for both victims and perpetrators (68-70).

Huyssen notes similar difficulties with memory and Holocaust memorials in his book *Twilight Memories*:

Remembrance shapes our links to the past, and the ways we remember define ourselves in the present...At the same time, the strongly remembered past may turn into mythic memory, and may become a stumbling block...the problem for Holocaust memory in the 1980s and 1990s is not forgetting, but rather the ubiquitousness (249-255).

In short, much has been said about the efforts of communities to preserve and create valuable rhetorical messages in these memorials. But what I'm contributing to this conversation is an exploration of the kind of *experiential* rhetoric that goes on in museums and memorials, as informed by Dewey's ideas on experience, which are seldom applied to museum studies. Many rhetoricians, including Weiser, have drawn heavily upon Kenneth Burke's theories of identification and his dramatic pentad in their study of museums. I agree that Burke's work has

myriad applications in museum studies, but I also propose that the experiential aspect of a museum, as constructed by aesthetic means, cannot be overlooked nor its importance overstated. What I experienced in the United States Holocaust Museum was a living synthesis of Burke's theory of scene and John Dewey's theory of experience. The scene built an aesthetic home for a vivid experience that rhetorically influenced my perception of myself and others. It brought about an experience of identification.

This experiential rhetoric, or as I will call it rhetorical experience, is an idea that is also explored in Greg Clark's essay "Rhetorical Experience and The Jazz Museum in Harlem." I propose that the elements of rhetorical experience, a scene, and an experience that facilitates congregation around certain values, are also elements of epideictic.

At this point, I feel the need to clarify a few general terms that I will use here in a specific way, the first of which being museums. There has been much added to the cannon of museology and museum studies within the last 50 years and it would be impossible for my comments to address the total breadth and depth of the museum genre within this paper. Each museum and its individual mission is part of a diverse body of artistic, scientific, and socio-historical study. While I believe that museums in general do educational work through rhetorical means, a natural history museum is decidedly different from an art museum, which itself stands in sharp contrast to a war museum. While each of them tells a story, they will each seek to do it from the perspective of a particular sort of experience to be shared, and with a certain rhetorical objective in mind. A natural history museum may hope to convince us of the necessity of preserving our natural resources; an art museum may hope to inspire young artists and educate society in matters of taste; and a war museum may be a means of kindling national pride and patriotism. The inescapable and wonderful fact about museums is that the sheer vastness of the genre lends

itself to great variety, while the semantic meaning may be ambiguous if not properly qualified. Therefore, for the purposes of clarity and specificity within this paper, my comments on museums will pertain primarily to historical museums and specifically memorial museums, since my primary artifact of study is the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum.

Even within the broader category of museums, the rhetorical work that memorials do is notable for its uncommon aim—to exhibit loss and tragedy as a means of bringing wholeness to a community. Memorials, even the smallest ones, are nearly always public, ranging in magnitude from a plaque on a park bench to a museum or national monument. Private monuments and tokens of grief indicate a need for personal grieving. It stands to reason that with the public nature of memorials comes a necessity (and an invitation) to experience them as groups of disparate individuals with varying levels of personal connection to the event or person being memorialized. An essential part of that process is the shared communion they experience because of the memorial.

In *Museum Rhetoric*, Weiser explains that memorials fall under the category of epideictic rhetoric, which serves the unique role of trying to unify communities

around shared values and beliefs...Museum rhetoric [uses] past events to evoke a consensus around present-day values and identities...When [museums] present a narrative of past deeds that reaffirms present values, and urges future actions in line with those values, then, they are using their assembled artifacts to construct an epideictic narrative (31-32).

In short, epideixis serves not only to express values, but to unite people around them in a sense of shared identity. When positing the idea of epideictic rhetoric, Aristotle didn't fully explain it beyond that of giving ostentatious ceremonial speeches. Contemporary studies, like

that of Chaim Perelman, however, have defined it as being about “promoting values that are shared in the community” (qtd. in “The Practical Celebration of Epideictic” 132). Lawrence Rosenfield adds, “Epideictic’s understanding calls upon us to join with our community in giving thought to what we witness, and such thoughtful beholding in commemoration constitutes memorializing” (133). When those values are present with us in a moment, we have the opportunity to either reaffirm our commitment to them, or reject them, which tells us something about ourselves and the groups whose values we share and identify with.

Identification

At this point, I’ll proceed with the details of my theoretical explanation. In order to be specific about what can be a rhetorically messy process of identifying with disparate narratives, it is necessary to define at least loosely what is meant by identity in the first place. Drawing upon the psychosocial theories pioneered by Russian psychologist Lev Vygotsky, cognitive scientists William R. Penuel and James V. Wertsch defined identity as “a form of action that is first and foremost rhetorical, concerned with persuading others (and oneself) about who one is and what one values to meet different purposes” (Penuel and Wertsch 91). This is a multi-faceted definition, but it is of note that even our identities themselves can be understood as rhetorical entities which are actionable and predicated on our values and goals. At least on some level, our identities can be read as what we do and why, which, though it may be a simplified explanation, dovetails well with Burke’s theories of agents and motives within the dramatic pentad of life, which will be discussed in greater detail in a following section.

Burke commented even more explicitly on the concept of identification (which can also be thought of as how we form and perceive our own identities) in his article entitled “Rhetoric—Old and New.” He explains that while the key term of old rhetoric was persuasion, new rhetoric

rests upon the fulcrum of identification. For Burke, identification is “...an acting-together; and in acting together, men have common sensations, concepts, images, ideas, attitudes that make them consubstantial” (*A Rhetoric of Motives*). It is a discovery of either real or believed commonality between two things or individuals. In the case of our attitudes and beliefs, identification becomes a fluid process. Identification can either be a means to another rhetorical end—as we often use it to persuade others to a course of action by making them believe we are similar to them—or it can be an end in and of itself, “as when people earnestly yearn to identify themselves with some group or other” (“Rhetoric—Old and New” 203). Burke continues by saying that in such a case as the latter,

they are not necessarily being acted on by a conscious external agent, but may be acting upon themselves to this end. In such identification there is a partially dreamlike, idealistic motive, somewhat compensatory to real differences or divisions, which the rhetoric of identification would transcend (Ibid).

In a way, identification becomes a sort of internal rather than external persuasion and is an effective means of achieving social unity and belonging. Identification is internal in that it becomes a means of persuading ourselves to choose to see the similarities between peoples, groups, situations, and cultures, and transcend what we may normally see as insuperable social barriers. Such moments of identification yield many emotions, not the least of which is empathy. In an experience of identification, empathy may be best described as vicarious feeling, meaning that while we do not have the immediate experience, our internal perceptions and interpretations can be linked to another person’s. Suzanne Langer also describes this kind of “feeling” as a blending between emotion and perception: “As I use the word, in defining art as the creation of perceptible forms expressive of human feeling, it takes in all those meanings; it applies to

everything that may be felt” (Langer 6). Vicarious feeling and empathy are natural by-products of identification because emotions are visceral, primal teachers that make the virtual or vicarious almost real.

As Greg Clark says in his book *Rhetorical Landscapes in America*, “Anything that prompts social cooperation by presenting to people symbols of collectivity with which they can each identify themselves is rhetorical” (5), and certainly a museum or memorial is one of the places where that process happens most explicitly. As Clark notes, each member of the audience is meant to identify with these symbols, though the specific reactions may vary widely; As a young woman of a religious minority, I certainly felt that I identified with the Jewish identity I was given, but I can only imagine how the Jewish descendant of a Holocaust survivor would have felt in the museum. Perhaps there would have been still different reactions from displaced Syrian refugees or even native Germans familiar with their country’s role in this narrative. Even my mother, whose Jewish identity was just a teenager, experienced that vicarious feeling and identified with the situation by almost unconsciously applying it to her own teenage daughters. Memorials and their epideictic display of common values, allow each visitor to take a piece of the story and apply it to themselves in a different way. Therefore, it is not a stretch to say that there will be as many moments of identification in a museum or memorial as there are visitors to it.

To confine the process of identification only to the individual, however, would be ill-advised. We do not come to pay homage or seek learning at shrines curated for our individual selves only; as we learn from the concept of the epideictic, there is a reason why we reserve public space to discuss shared beliefs. As Weiser says in *Museum Rhetoric*, “Rhetoric is concerned with the public sphere, and how individuals act in social scenes as they forge—in

unison and in opposition—the imagined community” (8). The development of this imagined community is of special importance in the realm of memorials, not only because most of them exist in the public sphere, but because we must all live in the world whose values these memorials are purportedly shaping. It is natural and necessary to posture ourselves against these values, thereby determining our individual *and* collective identities.

That is why it seems almost impossible to stand in the Hall of Remembrance after having completed a tour of the Holocaust museum and to not feel part of something. I was not the only one in the middle of a profound rhetorical experience in that exhibit, nor was I the only person considering the values I was being presented with. Aside from its main exhibit on the Jewish Holocaust, the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum seeks to educate people on the evils of anti-Semitism, genocide, discrimination, refugee crises, and broader human rights issues in general. There is a human equivalency made between each of these global issues that forces patrons to ask themselves what it is that they believe about humanity. If we generally believe that the Jewish Holocaust was an atrocity that should not be repeated, how do we feel about events in Rwanda and Bosnia that are not so far removed in time? What other ideas do we hold about race, war, and humanity? Americans in particular, on whose soil the museum stands, may have to reckon with the instances in which we have fallen short of our ideal of “liberty and justice for all.”

Identification is an essential step in building empathy for those around us, even those who may be very different, but it is not without its pitfalls. Says Lauren Obermark as quoted in Weiser’s *Museum Rhetoric*,

While identification is generally viewed as the precursor to persuasion, over-identification can result in a simplified understanding of historical and

contemporary civic issues... [it is] often overly emotional, superficial, and [does] not allow for any exploration of difference, which I suggest inhibits cross-cultural communication and, ultimately, critical awareness (111).

Ultimately, the purpose of museums is not to entirely assimilate us all to identify perfectly with one narrative. That would be both self-defeating and impossible. The purpose is not to erase differences, but to make us more aware of the human similarities that are a powerful, uniting force in the lives of disparate and sometimes divided individuals. A museum that shows us only our differences is simply making obvious, surface-level observations which do nothing to educate us. A museum that shows us only our similarities or erases all nuance of narrative is just as rhetorically null in its inability to influence actions and attitudes. Therefore, the line that all museums must walk is between individual and group narratives, the similar and the disparate.

However, the very concept of personal identification in museums would seem to go against the Aristotelian maxim of appealing to the broadest audience possible, if not for Kenneth Burke's notion of the "personalization of essence." Burke describes this as the process by which "the individual characteristics that make up one's personal identity are translated into an abstract reflection, then translated back into a narrative now larger than oneself" ("Past as Future" 271). This is especially evident and important in a museum such as the Holocaust Museum that focuses so intensely on universal human issues like suffering, discrimination, and genocide. Though most museum patrons have never faced the issues encountered by the Jews in the Third Reich, their experience in the Holocaust Museum allows them to get one step closer. The second, and perhaps most critical component, is for that patron to realize through the personalization of essence that every person in that museum (both the living, and the dead who live in memory) has experienced some degree of exclusion or oppression, whether great or small. If nothing else, all

the other patrons who were also in the Holocaust Museum on that June morning had also walked through the nightmarishly haunting exhibit, seen the same artifacts, and probably experienced many of the same emotions as I did. Even as we shared in our virtual experience, we gained empathy for those around us for the simple fact that we were together in an emotional place. By fully experiencing the personalization of essence, patrons not only immerse themselves in meaningful historical narratives that expand their understanding of the past, but they also educate their own emotions by finding greater commonality within humanity.

Experience

Kenneth Burke's dramatic pentad and its concept of scene are not new in rhetorical studies, nor is the idea of applying them within the context of museums and memorials. Elizabeth Weiser's extensive research on rhetorical museums and the various forms they take are a testament to this. John Dewey's theory of experience, however, while also not technically new, is, I believe, rarely utilized to its full rhetorical potential, and is useful as a tool to explain meaning and the kind of experiential form that breeds moments of identification like the one I experienced. Most often, the use of the word "form" denotes something literal like the structure of a sculpture or the organization of a musical overture. However, form can also have broader and more abstract implications. Rhetorical theorist John Dewey proposed that experiences of form permeate our lives as we organize the flow of events and sensations into the narratives by which we make meaning of our lives and identities.

Dewey, a 20th century educator and philosopher, explains that our lives are made up of many mundane and workaday elements which "occur continuously" (36); such moments are rarely remembered or reflected upon (for example, no one remembers each kitchen utensil they loaded into the dishwasher last week). Less significant elements may be overlooked or forgotten,

but each of our lives is punctuated by important memories and profound experiences that change us in some way and prompt reflection long after the moment has passed. Such experiences are synthesized into what Dewey calls “experience,” stopping just short of capitalizing the specific usage. Experience occurs “when the material experienced has run its course to fulfillment” (Dewey 36). Dewey contrasts this by explaining what an experience is not:

Oftentimes, however, the experience had is inchoate. Things are experienced but not in such a way that they are composed into an experience. There is distraction and dispersion...we put our hands to the plow and turn back; we start and then we stop, not because the experience has reached the end for the sake of which it was initiated but because of extraneous interruptions or of inner lethargy (36).

In other words, these experiences have “a satisfying emotional quality” (40), and do not just lapse into cessation. Each one “is a whole and carries with it its own individualizing quality and self-sufficiency” (37). It is significant that Dewey references emotion, because almost all such experiences (including those of identification) are tied to deeply emotional memories, such as a wedding or a loss of a family member. Experience, then, is the form by which we make meaning of our lives and identities. These experiences, then, “become aesthetic as they enter into an ordered, rhythmic, movement toward consummation.” The ordered rhythm can be understood as narrative, the story that we piece together, comprised mainly of significant experiences. Consummation, in this case, is the end result of the experiential process; it is the point at which we make meaning of what has happened and who we are because of it.

This explanation allows us to craft a structured, emotional form out of the happenings and events of our lives and allows us to find patterns. All of us can point to poignant, life-changing, or emotionally rich moments in our lives and as we connect the dots from one event to

another, we better understand ourselves, what moves us, and what shapes us. In other words, our attitudes develop through this regular ebb and flow of Deweyan experience in our lives.

Kenneth Burke also discusses the importance of form as a tool for deriving and extrapolating meaning, while adding another emotional dimension. “Form,” he says, “is the creation of an appetite in the mind of the audience, and the adequate satisfying of that appetite. This satisfaction—so complicated is the human mechanism—at times involves a temporary set of frustrations” (*Counter-Statement*). Essentially, Burke is proposing that form, in whatever setting it may occur, necessarily involves the making and shaping of expectations. At any given moment, these expectations may be met, allowing us to continue on with the same belief concepts as before; or our expectations may be frustrated, forcing us to reform our perceptions based on our current reality in order to move forward. This is very much in harmony with Dewey’s ideas of experience, since these experiences are what give form to our lives and expectations. These expectations, when either met or frustrated, then become part of an emotional narrative.

In the context of a museum, the same principles apply. Patrons enter with a set of preconceived notions about the experience they are about to have—notions which are either maintained or thrown off. Through its meticulously crafted form, the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum uses both satisfaction and surprise to create an aesthetic experience for its patrons, an experience that allows them to consider others’ identities in a way they perhaps have not done previously.

The hope of a museum’s staff and curators, and especially those in a memorial museum, is that we have such an experience within their walls. As Dewey noted, there is much in life that is simply overlooked, and no museum seeking to educate or make a societal impact can succeed

if it is forgotten. Museums of all genres try, consciously or not, to foster this kind of experience within their exhibits; in a science museum, perhaps they will let children join in a simulation of a paleontological dig, or a presidential history museum may allow patrons the chance to walk through John Adams' home. While each of these differs in its specific ends within the exhibit, they all seek to be memorable experiences that, at the very least, kindle a desire to learn more. As explained previously, however, a memorial museum, with its epideictic nature, hopes not only to educate its patrons on the events of the past, but to unify them through shared experiences and values and possibly even bring them to empathetic identification with one another.

Within the constructed scene of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, I had an experience in the exact sense that Dewey meant the word. It was deep, emotionally provocative, and has been called to mind many times since then. The moments in that scene that stood out most to me—receiving a Jewish identity, walking through the gate of Auschwitz, staring at a mountain of shoes—became nodes in a narrative web I was weaving for myself in the exhibit.

Part of the emotional investiture I made in the museum is surely due in no small part to the identity I received at the beginning of my visit. Not only was she similar in age to me, but she was an inescapably real person, whose biography was laid out before me, almost forbidding me to disengage with and depersonalize the individual narratives that lived in the exhibit. This is also a deliberate choice on the part of rhetorically-conscious museum curators to make sure that the Holocaust doesn't become a sideshow of shocking statistics and history gone awry; the identities bring a level of humanity and currency to decades-old subject matter in a way that few things could. Furthermore, the fact that patrons walk through the story with this identity figuratively at their side encourages them to see a rhetorical exhibit through a rhetorical lens.

Each of them is invited to understand the Holocaust on an emotional level and to come to the end of consummation. Dewey would call this a complete experience, prompting change, emotional reflection, and the creation of a personal narrative. Burke might say that consummation involves drawing things out to their furthest development or creating wholeness. I would argue that when used in tandem, these two definitions are most effective in their descriptions of an intangible emotional process.

Consummation, in this case, becomes a culmination of all that has been experienced, a communion that can be experienced individually or as a group. As an individual in the Holocaust Museum, I felt a kinship with the young woman whose identity I was assigned, and I virtually experienced the tragic events of her life right along with her. I had never had the opportunity to be so personally invested in the life, happiness, and sorrows of a Holocaust victim before, and it changed my attitude and gave me greater empathy for those who were affected. This could have very easily happened to me, because it seemed to happen in real time to someone just like me. This kind of vivid experience and its subsequent emotional reckoning are the makings of powerful rhetorical narratives that have the potential to influence attitudes and lives, coming full circle in their consummation.

Scene

In order to understand these experiences of identification, it is also critical to understand the environment in which these experiences take place. This concept is perhaps best explained through the lens of Kenneth Burke's dramatic pentad, most specifically his concept of "scene."

This environment does not have to be a location only; in his own words, "we may examine the term Scene simply as a blanket term for the concept of background or setting in general" (*Counter-statement*). Burke's pentad is a cornerstone in the foundation of big rhetoric,

the idea that rhetoric applies not only to writing or speaking, but to the whole of human experience. In Burkean theory, the five points of his pentad, act (what took place), scene (background), agent (who did it), agency (by what means), and purpose (why) are a means of guiding thought and expression, just like Aristotle's topoi. The benefit of Burke's pentad is that its simplification of the topoi allows for exploration within more symbolic realms, rather than just oral or textual ones. Burke views rhetoric as a lens through which the entirety of human experience can be analyzed. In other words, he defines rhetoric as, "the use of language to form attitudes and influence action," and "a method of analyzing ways of talking about motives" (*Counter-statement*), definitions much broader than mere persuasion. Burke's language becomes not only linguistic in the classical sense, but anything that is imbued with meaning. Essentially, everything has meaning, and where there is meaning there is persuasion, and by extension, potential for identification.

In the case of museums and memorials, the scene is carefully constructed in such a way that not only will it not hinder a rhetorical process but may even encourage it. Everything from the artifacts to the lighting to the organization of the exhibit becomes part of the scene, the background for rhetorical interactions to occur. The displays, artifacts, and their arrangement are not for looks only—they play a fundamental role in relaying rhetorical messages to influences identities and actions. These aesthetic building blocks form a specific reality. In a history museum, those aesthetic elements may be artifacts, or, as Kenneth Burke said, "mythic objects" (qtd. in "National Identity Within the National Museum" 385), displayed prominently and reverently for the consideration of the audience. These objects become repositories of emotion and we endow them with meaning. The entire scene of the exhibit becomes rhetorical as we are encouraged to consider the meaning of the aesthetic elements being presented to us.

Once we find ourselves in such a rhetorically rich setting, we are primed for moments of emotional education and internal discussions of values and identity. This is more than evident in a place like the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, where the scene has been meticulously crafted for rhetorical purposes. While the same information could be conveyed in a building with modern architecture, floor to ceiling windows, and an open concept floor plan, surely it would begin to feel like the scene was at odds with the historical facts themselves. The breezy design, though it may not prevent us from understanding the events, would surely impede us from experiencing them on even the virtual level. It's no coincidence that the designers and architects of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum went to painstaking detail to recreate the essence of the prison camps where so many people were held during the Holocaust, nor is it coincidental that even visitors as young as I was should notice that. On their website, the Holocaust Museum describes the thought process of James Ingo Freed, the architect primarily responsible for the design of the museum (who was, notably, evacuated from his German homeland in 1938 with his family in order to escape the events of the Holocaust): "The Museum he built...is not a neutral shell. Instead, the architecture—through a collection of abstract forms both invented and drawn from memory—alludes to the history the Museum addresses" (ushmm.org). As an architect, Freed seemed especially aware of the rhetorical function of his work when he described his desire for inclusiveness in the narrative his designs would portray, "There are no literal references to particular places or occurrences...Instead, the architectural form is open-ended, so the Museum becomes a resonator of memory" (ushmm.org).

Interestingly, the scene of the Holocaust Museum has been constructed in such a way, as to be purposefully ambiguous; specific enough to call to mind the era and the events, yet general enough to apply to a multiplicity of stories and places within this specific narrative. It can't be

positively identified as a replica Dachau or Treblinka or Ravensbrook, but at the same time it is meant to invoke all of these scenes and many more in order to reflect the millions of personal narratives whose paths intersected there.

As I noticed upon my first visit, the exterior of the building is not entirely dissimilar to dozens of other museums and official buildings that line the streets of Washington DC; it is a limestone building with a stately rotunda, if few windows. I learned later that this, too, was intentional as the smooth facade of the exterior belies its rough, industrial interior, much as the public portrait Germany painted of itself masked a darker story. The interior design of the museum is meant to emulate the look of the mechanical workings of an industrialized European yesteryear with its exposed bolts, cables, steel beams and catwalks. The main atrium (the Hall of Witnesses) looks almost like the courtyard of a railroad complex, with its brick walls opening on high, vaulted skylights, which would be a familiar image to those who were herded onto train cars only to find themselves in prison camps once they had disembarked. The various exhibits that jutted off from the bright, open hall extended off every which way, obscured by darkness. In his book, *Preserving Memory: The Struggle to Create America's Holocaust Museum*, Edward Linenthal described this space as "disorienting...Directions are not clearly labelled. The visitor must choose—go left, to right, go down, go up, go forward" (91), a feeling that is clearly meant to mimic the confusion and near panic that gripped the families and individuals who were only just beginning to realize that they had become strangers in their own homeland. The suspended walkways give the feeling of being watched from above, but whether it's by ghosts or guards remains up to the audience's interpretative lens, hence the name "The Hall of Witnesses."

The levels of the exhibit themselves are dimly-lit, not only echoing the feeling of the prison camps where so many people found themselves, but also calling to mind the pervading

darkness of genocide that silently encroached on Europe during this time. Additionally, there are almost no windows in the permanent exhibit, further enhancing the feeling of being trapped or boxed in.

Much of the rhetorical talking in the permanent exhibit is done by the artifacts that line its halls, which very much align with Burke's definition of "mythic objects," stated earlier. Many, such as the gate that reads "Arbeit Macht Frei" are merely replicas of actual artifacts from European prison camps, but others, such as the train car my sisters and I examined that carried thousands to their deaths, are primary artifacts, only a few generations removed from their original purpose. Visitors with the presence of mind to look down can even see original paving stones from the Warsaw ghetto beneath their feet (Dove), and, as previously mentioned, patrons encounter personal effects, like the mountain of shoes, at every turn. I remember encountering these shoes and visually searching to see the smallest pair, the largest pair, and the pair that most resembled my size that I could find, and I would not be surprised if many visitors did the same thing, searching for part of themselves in it. By seeing something other and projecting something of it onto ourselves, these objects take on more and more meaning with each patron who beholds them and considers their narrative history.

In doing further research, I found it interesting that what I considered one of the most melancholy and reverent spaces in the museum was inserted almost as a form of narrative insurance; The three-story Tower of Faces that surrounds visitors on all sides was designed by Yaffa Eliach and gives a comprehensive portrait of the citizens living in one of 6,000 villages that were wiped out by Nazi cruelty (Dove). Lest people forget that the victims of the Holocaust were not just nameless crowds herded onto trains and robbed of their belongings, the Tower is there to remind them. Many involved in the project of the museum's construction expressed

concern that the victims not be associated only with pictures of sheared hair and starved, naked bodies—these people had real, nuanced lives long before they met an untimely end. In retrospect, I can explain to myself that this is the reason I found myself so deeply affected by the Tower of Faces, because this was one of the only points in the museum where I saw the Jewish victims of the Holocaust living some semblance of a peaceful, normal life, unaffected by the terrible events that were memorialized around their still photographs.

Even the final destination of the exhibit, the Hall of Remembrance where my family watched videos of survivors' stories is steeped in the rhetorical power of its scene. The only thing that the museum's commission insisted Freed incorporate in his design was the six-sided hall, an allusion to both the six-sided star of David, and the six million Jews who were killed during the Holocaust (Dove). On the whole, the room is open, sparse, and made of white limestone. While it's certainly a contrast to the oppressively dark permanent Holocaust exhibit, it stops short of giving relief. According to Lauren Dove, a scholar of the museum, this is very much intentional: "Unlike several other plans which were considered and rejected, the exhibit does not fit the Holocaust into a redemption scheme. The ending is contemplative but not overly hopeful" (Dove). The exhibit, like the Holocaust itself, comes to an end, but not one that is without pain or unanswered questions. Both end on a complicated note.

Each piece of this Burkean scene is carefully selected and curated not only for the meaning it carried in its own time, but for the rhetorical meanings that can be extrapolated from it in our time as well. Even without the benefit of deeper research into the museum's construction and design processes, every member of my family could decode and internalize the deeper rhetorical messages being broadcast by this scene, regardless of our historical knowledge or age.

Rhetorical Experience

The synthesis of Burke's pentad and Dewey's experience leads me to the theoretical crux of my argument, which is that aesthetic elements within a scene have tremendous rhetorical power to create meaningful experiences for museum patrons, the kind that they may remember for years to come. Moreover, if internalized, these experiences become valuable opportunities to consider ourselves, our attitudes, and our very identities in conversation with the information we learn and the emotions we feel within an exhibit. For this reason, I refer to such an event as a rhetorical experience, an emotionally satisfying experience that prompts reflection, identification, and empathy, fostered by the aesthetic means of the scene.

These kinds of rhetorical experiences are critical in the emotional education that museums seek to bring about. If the goal were only to disseminate historical facts and information, there would be no need for museums, and certainly no need for memorials and their use of epideictic rhetoric. To that end, a textbook or a visit to a Wikipedia page would easily suffice. However, the ultimate goal of a memorial museum, particularly the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum is not knowledge, it is feeling. The use of aesthetic elements to relay a rhetorical message is meant to awaken an awareness of self and others. The formal elements in this museum bring about a consummation of the heart and mind as patrons learn to view the world through the lens of another's experience. They begin to identify with disparate groups and peoples dissimilar from themselves, which brings us to the final goal of such exhibits—to bring about communion through identification.

In such a public setting, this process is fueled by the epideictic nature of the exhibit or scene. As mentioned earlier, individuals and groups are meant to experience the exhibit by coming into contact with the values presented—in this case perhaps justice, humanity, mercy,

tolerance, or a host of other things. Each person must decide how their definitions of these values align with those presented in the exhibit, and therefore, whether or not they feel they are part of the group that values these things in this way.

Implications

As I draw to the close of my argument, I'd like to put forward a thought about the impact that the idea of rhetorical experience can have on the field of museum and memorial studies: I agree that the existence of memorials fills a societal need to grieve, and feel, and understand. In future studies, however, perhaps greater attention should be paid to the kind of rhetorical experience that a memorial can facilitate. In order to keep the memory fresh and meaningful, it needs to have an opportunity to take root in the souls of those who come generations later. This kind of connection is staunchly formed, in a way that can be new and relevant to each individual, in a rhetorical experience like the one I had in the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum.

If we accept the premise that museums operate within the realm of rhetorical experience, what does that mean for museums as institutions and for the visitors who patronize them? For one thing, it means that not only are memorial museums inherently rhetorical, most are also inherently manipulative to one degree or another, though not in the colloquial meaning of the word. A museum that seeks to give its patrons a rhetorical experience of identification must guide their emotions and expectations to bring about their desired end. The curators are persuading patrons to identify with the exhibit, utilizing Burke's duality of old and new rhetoric. Naturally, this places great responsibility on the shoulders of those who are crafting the message, as we trust that they will use their rhetorical power for important or noble causes, as in the Holocaust Museum.

Most museums, whether they realize it or not, are already striving to create rhetorical experiences for their patrons through various media, and some of the forms that these experiences take are becoming widespread in historical exhibits. Chronology as a narrative device is a common form seen in museums today, allowing visitors to walk through the narrative arc of significant events, as in the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Museum in Springfield, Illinois, and the World War I Museum in Kansas City, Missouri. Chronological narratives are helpful in exhibits that focus closely on a historical text over time because they allow the visitors to live a condensed version of the life of someone from another time; it becomes another way of seeking patterns and organizing information within an experience.

Still other museums craft a rhetorical experience in ways similar to the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, with an emphasis on the identity of the experiencer. When a colleague and I were in Johannesburg, we had interesting and lively discussions with our South African counterparts who were white, black, and “colored” (the South African term for mixed race) about their experiences living under years of apartheid, which was eye-opening on a new level. Better still, my colleague, who was American, white and female, was able to visit the Apartheid Museum with another of our associates, who was South African, black, and male. Both recounted their feelings of awkwardness at being asked to enter the museum through separate doors, one marked “whites,” and the other marked “non-whites,” and their subsequent discomfort at being separated for the initial portion of the museum. Like the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, the Apartheid Museum is setting a scene and building an experience so as to create a more realistic simulation of what our lives may have been like, had we lived in a different place or time.

Furthermore, many museums seem eager to incorporate more creative and abstract approaches to the creation of rhetorical experience. One such example comes (again) from the World War I Museum, where patrons enter the exhibit by crossing a transparent, glass bridge, suspended 20 plus feet above an indoor field of 9,000 poppies, each one symbolizing 1,000 deaths in the Great War. Any war historian will recognize this as a clear reference to John McCrae's famous poem "In Flanders Fields," but even those not familiar with the symbol of the remembrance poppy and its connection to the war cannot help but be transfixed by the vastness of the field and the casualties it represents. Though this is just one moment in an exhibit, it is itself a rhetorical experience that is made possible entirely by its stunning aesthetic properties—when we read the figure "9 million deaths" we more or less understand it, or at least we realize it's a staggeringly large number. When we see it symbolized in such a stark, delicate thing as thousands of scarlet poppy flowers, we actually feel the gravity of the figure.

That feeling is ultimately what stands at the intersection of museum studies and rhetoric. The priceless emotional education that lies at that crossroads is best obtained when aesthetic form and rhetorical experience are married and allowed to work off of one another's strengths. Words, information, statistics, and facts are easy to come by today—we can learn deeply about shallow things or even shallowly about deep things, and possibly remember none of it. It is similarly easy to find art, beauty, or aesthetic elements almost everywhere we turn in an age that shares more pictures and video than ever before. But it is rarer to find the combination of a and a carefully constructed aesthetic experience that invites us to drink deeply.

Rare as such experiences can be, they are worth having and worth creating because they can break down artificial social barriers while simultaneously adding a critical emotional dimension to an education that could easily be strictly factual. Museum directors are aware of

this. The United States Holocaust Memorial Museum has adopted “Never Forget” as both a tagline and a call to action in their work to raise awareness of prejudice and genocide, and its application is clear within the museum’s permanent exhibit. Years later, I, and millions of other patrons, still can’t forget the things we saw and felt in the museum. I may have forgotten specific statistics, dates, and other details from the Holocaust Museum, but the experience of identification that I had, facilitated by the aesthetic, experiential elements, will not leave me. The things I felt there and the human empathy I gained from them are lasting in ways that simple knowledge is not.

As Mr. Freed, the museum’s architect said, "To get closer to the Holocaust, I had to see its remnants, because what I knew I understood intellectually, not emotionally" (LA Times). Maybe, with the books I’d read and the movies I’d seen, I had educated my intellect so thoroughly that I had desensitized myself to the story of the Holocaust on an emotional level. On a topic as weighty as genocide, well-meaning patrons like me can’t afford to be blasé, and well-intentioned museum staff can’t afford to be flippant with their presentation. If the goal is that we “never forget,” then we must learn in a way that makes it truly memorable on an emotional level.

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