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A theatrical critique of humanitarian civility in the ICRC Museum

Introduction

In this article, I will review the permanent exhibition of the museum of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent (ICRC) in Geneva. The exhibition, which is dedicated to telling the story of humanitarianism, was renovated between 2011 and 2013. The renovation, which according to the director cost some 20 million Swiss Francs (approximately 17 million Euros or 15 million British Pounds), was motivated largely by the technological obsolescence of an old exhibition conceived in the pre-internet era as well as by a desire to lighten the old exhibition's sombre tone (Centre Culturel Suisse 2014). Since re-opening, the renovated museum has been a resounding success. The museum's website states that it won the European Museum of the Year Award in 2015 and continues to be a destination of choice for a range of publics, including schools and tourists from all over Switzerland, nearby France as well as the rest of the world.[1]

The permanent exhibition has a strong theatrical dimension, which I will be focusing on. However, my more fundamental aim with this article is to contribute to a critique of what I will be calling humanitarian civility of which the exhibition and the museum are an embodiment. The term civility is borrowed from Etienne Balibar's recent work *Violence and Civility* (2015) in which he writes that civility denotes 'the whole set of political strategies [...] that respond to the fact that violence, in its various forms, exceeds normality' (65). Through the concept of civility, Balibar aims to think about the necessity of a politics of anti-violence in a contemporary world characterised by the existence of extremes of violence and domination that threaten the very possibility of politics, understood as a collective project of transformation and emancipation.

Balibar suggests that there are two forms of extreme violence - 'ultrasubjective' and 'ultraobjective', shortened hereafter to subjective and objective (52). Subjective violence 'requires that individuals and groups be represented as incarnations of evil, [...] that threaten the subject from within and have to be eliminated at all costs'. (52) Subjective forms of violence include

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[1] According to the website, the footfall for 2016 was close to 125,000.

racism, acts of mass murder and extermination as well as violences that Balibar claims find their genesis in 'repressive' or 'sovereign' powers such as patriarchal violence or State violence (76). Extreme violence that is objective in form causes human being to be treated 'as things or useless remnants' (52). It includes as diverse phenomena as economic exploitation and ecological disasters, which tend to be naturalised or understood as subject-less despite having various social causes. Balibar does not suggest that these two forms of extreme violence are unrelated. On the contrary, he argues that subjective/objective forms of violence are produced by different kinds of practices, whether political or socio-economic, which find a unity in history or historical becoming. Balibar also suggests that history demonstrates that subjective and objective forms of violence very often determine and reinforce each other in different ways. In an apparent reference to French classical tragedy and the work of Antonin Artaud, he names the oscillation between the two extremes of violence 'cruelty' (53). While racism could be considered to be a subjective form of violence, Balibar also considers it to be paradigmatic of this oscillation. In the British context, one could think of the slave trade as one example of such cruelty. What the historian Mike Davis (2000) calls the 'late Victorian holocausts' or the 1943 Bengal famine – disasters in which tens of millions of British and European colonial subjects died as a result of a lethal combination of ecological disasters and imperial policy – provide other historical examples of this oscillation.

Civility names the possibility of responding to extremes of violence in order to displace or limit it. Consequently, civility constitutes a necessary complement to practices of transformation and emancipation, which are invariably implicated in the social production of violence. Balibar identifies a number of strategies of civility, including liberal or 'hegemonic' strategies as well as revolutionary ones that take different kinds of violence as object (2015, 107). For Balibar, the institutions of civil society (e.g education, trade-unions, social movements, art and culture) are central to the elaboration of strategies of civility because these institutions, which exist at the junction between the State and society, the public and the private realm, are at the very heart of the socio-political orders that produce and reproduce violence. Thus, these institutions

2

also provide sites wherein civility can be produced as an 'internal response' to or 'displacement' of violence (22).

The idea of civility is useful for the analysis of the museum of the Red Cross for a number of reasons. First, it is possible to conceive of the humanitarianism in terms of civility because it exists at the junction between state and non-governmental practices. Furthermore, humanitarianism is guided by the ethico-political imperative to respond to and limit the perpetration of extremes of violence through various juridical and institutional means. Humanitarian organisations also provide support structures that contribute to enabling potential targets of extreme violence and domination to resist and carve socio-political spaces of freedom for themselves.

Second, my argument will be that the ICRC Museum could also be understood as forming a cultural strand of a humanitarian practice of civility and, by extension, forms part of a cultural politics of civility. The museum and its exhibitions represent different contemporary strategies and techniques of intervention in the face of extreme violence. The museum is also a space in which extreme violence is historicised for the purposes of pedagogy and critical reflection. Thus, the museum's particular kind of historicisation of violence invites visitors to perform, what I will call in reference to Brecht, a form of distantiation in relation to our ultraviolent global history and, by extension, in relation to our own present collective identities.[2] I will also be arguing that, in line with the museum's pedagogical mission and cultural politics of civility, this form of distantiation creates a space to envisage more 'civil' alternatives to the cruelties that mark our past and present.

As suggested above, theatricality will be shown to be key in the construction of the museum's civility. I use theatricality in a general sense to denote the theatre-related qualities of the museum's designs and features. These might include the kind of atmosphere created by what the director of the museum refers explicitly to as the 'scenograhy' of the museum (Centre Culturel Suisse 2014). It also includes the manner in which the visitor is invited to engage

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[2] I chose the somewhat awkward term of distantiation in reference to the Brechtian *Verfremdungseffekt* in order to translate also the sense of displacement of violence that Balibar discusses in relation to civility. Balibar himself discusses the notion in the fourth chapter of the book in relation to revolutionary strategies of civility.

in ritualised behaviours, which Carol Duncan (1995) has argued are fundamental to the modern museum as a social space. The forms of ritualised behaviour discussed here will include modes of journeying through the exhibition and of interaction with its specific stations. I will explore how the theatricality of the museum is engaging and helps to produce a form of distantiation and estrangement that invites a partial dis-indentification with our ultraviolent global history and present.

The analysis will also be concerned with assessing the limits and ambivalences of the museum's civility, which is something Balibar explores in his own discussion of liberal and revolutionary strategies of civility. In this context, I am thinking of how humanitarians have probed, at different times, the limits and ambivalences of their practice by taking issue with the power relations or economic structures that underpin the field. Here, the ambivalences of humanitarian civility will be probed through the analysis of the exhibition's theatricality as well, thus showing that it hinders just as much as it enables the production of forms of distantiation.

In the following parts, I discuss the key features of the renovation. Through this discussion, which starts with a review of the thematic zones of the exhibition, I will start to present the ambivalences of the museum's civility. After reviewing the use of testimonies in the space, my exploration of the ambivalences of the museum's civility will be concluded through a discussion of a number of performative and theatrical installations.

The three thematic zones

The permanent exhibition is divided into three thematic zones titled *Defending Human Dignity*, *Restoring Family Links* and *Reducing Natural Risks*. Three different architects from three different continents designed the zones, a diversity that seemingly reflects the cosmopolitan ethos of humanitarianism.[3] Once the visitors descend the main flight of stairs that leads from the reception area to the space of the exhibition, they are confronted with a large open

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[3] A Swiss architectural firm, which designed the remaining spaces of the museum, coordinated the whole project (Musée international de la Croix-Rouge et du Croissant-Rouge 2013). Together with the permanent space, a smaller adjunct space was created in the basement of the building for temporary exhibits on societal themes relevant to humanitarianism. During one of my visits the temporary space was occupied by an exhibition from the Menil Collection in Houston on Gandhi and non-violence.

corridor that circulates between and connects the three closed off zones. While visitors could potentially go into any of these, they find the entrance to the first thematic zone immediately on their left.

Brazilian architect Gringo Cardia designed this first zone made up of four immersive spaces in which light is the main scenographic motif. Contrasts between brightness and darkness are used throughout to create a spatial allegory that evokes struggle between violent oppression and humanitarian hope or resilience, the latter being according to the director the key messages of the exhibition (BBC 2013). The first space of each zone is what the director calls an 'emotional' space, designed to set the mood for the journey in any of the three zones (Centre Culturel Suisse 2014). In this first emotional space, visitors enter into a room, which on account of its darkness appears to have great depth. At the centre of the space, the visitor finds a giant white sculpture of a foot, which includes the lower part of the leg. Black and white, images of people in confinement as well as moving images of contemporary war are projected, with accompanying sound, onto the giant foot – a symbol of the oppressions suffered by people all over the world. The same room also contains a white sculpture of the Red Cross founder, Henri Dunant, sitting at his desk. The room also contains a copy of the Geneva Convention, which binds governments and all parties that have agreed to it to respect humanitarian law in situations of conflict. Around the space, on all four walls, a multi-lingual digital chronology of humanitarianism is spread on which are displayed key historical moments in the cross-cultural development of humanitarianism.

This emotional space illustrates well how the theatricality of the design produces the cultural politics of civility embodied by the museum. The mis-en-scene and perspective created by the seeming depth of the room enables to juxtapose a historical narrative with a reflection on the nature of our present. The images projected on the giant foot suggest that modern times are, if not more violent than, at least as violent as many past epochs. The chronology, which shows that humanitarian consciousness is ancient, also suggests that modernity's claim to civilisation should be relativised. This kind of reflexive distantiation is reproduced in the content of the next room's displays, which

contain ICRC-related objects from different epochs as well as a detailed account of the ICRC's silence about the Holocaust for which the ICRC was heavily criticised. The questioning of the limits of modern civilisation extends here to a probing of the limits of humanitarian practice, inviting the visitor not to identify uncritically with the institution housing the exhibition.

The third of Cardia's rooms contains art gifted to Red Cross delegates by prisoners. Monitoring the treatment of prisoners as well as ensuring the respect of the prisoner's rights constitutes one of the core activities of the ICRC. The objects displayed range from sculptures made out of bits of wood, soap or recycled materials to small puppets, miniatures and paintings. The objects are displayed in lit, bespoke rectangular boxes that are flush and placed low into high-ceilinged walls, which are made of alternating black or white rectangular brick-like units that extend to the floor. The fact that the individualised display boxes have been built into the dark wall avoids an objectifying effect while also functioning as an allegory for the condition of the prisoners. This sensitivity alludes not only to the 'incivility' of prisons but also to that of modern museums as material spaces of display and exhibition. Despite figuring confinement, the lit boxes are also suggestive of hope in the face of oppression. However, the height of the room, smallness of the lit boxes, the repetition of the pattern made by the other brick-like units and the dimly lit room suggest that the task of providing 'light' for prisoners is far from accomplished.

The second zone (*Restoring Family Links*) by Burkina Be Francis Kéré is very different. The design of the zone foregrounds the use of vegetal materials (wood and hemp), although other materials such as concrete and steel have also been used. Speaking on a promotional video made by the museum (museecroixrouge 2013), the architect states that these materials are symbolic of the socio-biological character of the family, which straddles the social and biological realms of reproduction. His architecture alludes also to the question of sustainable development, an issue Kéré is committed to in his wider practice.[4] In this respect, it should be noted that the choice of the architects also has a general allegorical value. An architect from Latin America – a continent readily

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[4] See his website for more detail: www.kere-architecture.com.

6

associated with a late 20th century history of dictatorship – has been chosen for a zone largely dedicated to subjective forms of violence. Conversely, the choice of an architect from West Africa – a continent commonly viewed as a zone of economic exclusion – is also a way of making visible, if not explicitly thematising, the questions of infrastructural development and by extension under-development and economic inequality. The introduction of these latter issues through Kéré's work can also be related to the argument that I am exploring: One of the strengths of the designs is that they appear to evoke objective forms of violence just as much as to subjective forms.

The zone follows a similar narrative pattern to the first. In Kéré's emotional space, the visitor passes through a corridor made of stainless steel chains that have been rigged to the ceiling. By performing this theatrical rite of passage, the visitor marks their physical entrance into the zone and performs a symbolic separation, which will lead, as the title of the zone suggests, to a reunion. After the curtain, the visitor walks along a corridor made of long glass exhibition cases containing the name cards of thousands of prisoners from the First World War. This corridor leads to a central area that hosts a giant, house-like block made out of hemp chip, which the visitor is confronted with once they emerge from the corridor. The monument is not obviously theatrical. Nonetheless, it brings together two different geo-political and historical scenes into one space while also bringing attention, through the particularity of the construction, to the nature of the space and time in which the visitors find themselves. On the convex side immediately visible to the visitor, displayed all over the wall from top to bottom, are hundreds of ID photos of Rwandan war orphans whom the ICRC helped to reunite with their families. The concave interior – the visitor needs to walk around the structure to access it – houses a memorial consisting of a giant banner made by the surviving mothers of the Srebrenica massacre in Bosnia and Herzegovina in memory of their lost male relatives. As well as exemplifying specific humanitarian techniques of anti-violence, the monument also invites the visitors to remember relatively recent forms of extreme violence and mourn its victims.

The rest of the zone stages and demonstrates the work of the ICRC with families in contexts of conflict. Nearby the monument, the visitor finds a series of photos of suffering family members trying to trace the missing, which are displayed on a greyish-blue flowery wallpaper by the side of which a lit house lamp with an orange lamp shade has been placed, suggesting the interior of a living room. Further along, the visitor finds tree-like concrete structures from which hang relayed letter exchanges between prisoners and their families.

The idea of restoration of familial ties is enacted throughout the zone but like the predominance of darkness in the Cardia's designs, Kéré's zone avoid creating an easy form of narrative resolution. Rather, the highly symbolised spaces (curtain of chains), the varying material qualities of designs as well as their imposing character have an unsettling effect on the visitor. The montage-like juxtaposition and articulation of different times and places within the same space (e.g First World War, war in ex-Yugoslavia, Rwanda) is conducive to producing a form of reflexive distantiation that draws the visitor into a reflection on the cruelty of our supposedly progressive modernity. It also invites to connect and synthesise seemingly disparate historical events and scenes in a reflection on the problematic character of our contemporary globalised world.

Ban's architecture of the third zone (*Reducing Natural Risks)* is characterised by a similar kind of seriality to the one found in the brick-like units of the prisoners room, the photos of orphans on Kéré's monument or even the archive glass-cabinets. A continuous line of giant cardboard tube pillars and corrugated cardboard roofing delimits different open spaces, which foreground the work of the ICRC federation and national organisations in relation to disaster prevention.[5] The zone displays a number of installations, including a short film and a series of historical posters on risk prevention. In a comparable way to Cardia and Kéré's architecture and designs, the theatricality of the Ban's tubes is allegorical. They create a particular atmosphere in the here and now of the visit while doubling up as a statement about humanitarianism in the field. The Japanese architect states on his website that 'the curves and waves created by

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[5] The ICRC was established in 1863. In the early twentieth century, the movement expanded through the founding of national organizations across the world (Musée international de la Croix-Rouge et du Croissant-Rouge 2013).

the tubes are reminiscent of a forest or wetlands — it gives a sense of organic flexibility, of strength and resilience'. Ban argues in a promotional video that despite paper being usually considered to be a 'weak' material, it is in fact an effective tool for reconstruction after disaster, thus also standing in for the moral fibre of humanitarianism (museecroixrouge, 2013b).

Ban's zone will be discussed in more detail in the last part in which I will return to questions of distantiation in relation to this zone's designs and stations. In this initial overview of the thematic zones, I have argued that the architecture and the designs play a fundamental role in effecting a form of distantiation in relation to different kinds of historical and contemporary forms of cruelty. Next, I focus on the testimonies of the witnesses found at the end of each zone, which will provide the opportunity to explore the ambivalences of the museum's civility.

Testimonies

The visitor first encounters the twelve witnesses in an antechamber located just before the main flight of stairs that leads to the main exhibition area. As the visitor steps into the darkened room, they are faced with a line of mute human figures projected onto the opposite, semi-circular wall. One can guess from the faces, attire and different sizes of the figures that females, males, younger and older people from across the world are standing there. The visitor only discovers who they are at the end of each of the zones where the witnesses have been reproduced on touch screens in mini-groups of four, in dedicated spaces that the museum curators officially call 'the chamber of witnesses' (Musée international de la Croix-Rouge et du Croissant-Rouge 2013). There, the virtual witnesses need to be activated through a ritual touching of their outstretched palms or by sitting face-to-face with their projections. The witnesses are central to the construction of the museum's narrative because they impart information about key aspects and notions of humanitarianism as well as provide a thread between zones, embodying in a human form the message of hope and resilience that the museum aims to impart.

The testimonies vary in content, with some being more technical than others. For example, Boris Cyrulnik, a French neuro-psychiatrist, gives a

definition of psychological resilience. Toshihiko Suzuki, a Japanese dentist, tells the story of how he contributed to helping identify victims of the Tohoku earthquake by using DNA found in the teeth of the victims. Carla Del Ponte, a former chief prosecutor of two United Nations criminal law tribunals, testifies to the importance of prosecuting war criminals. Conversely, a good number of witnesses tell the story of how humanitarian aid changed their lives for the better. For example, Emmanuel Jal is a former child soldier who, thanks to an encounter with a humanitarian worker and agency, gave up warfare and went to school. He also recounts how rap and hip-hop provided means for him to find new meaning in life. A survivor of genocide and war, an economic migrant with an irregular legal status, landmine victims and a former Guantanamo prisoner tell diverse yet comparable stories of the manner in which humanitarianism enabled them to find hope in the face of oppression.

The testimonies need to be activated through a ritualised touching and are told in a sober style, which helps to avoid creating a possible form of objectification. In relation to the construction of a cultural politics of civility, the testimonies also present in a very tangible form the historical fact that very real people in different places and times have experienced forms of cruelty. In this way, the use of living memory, which Susan Bennett argues (2013) is a common feature of contemporary museums, enables to personalise the exhibition. Finally, the story-based testimonies, in particular, produce a form of theatrical triangulation between the witness, the institution and the visitor that places the visitor, as second order witness, in the position of performing what Shannon Jackson has called in another context 'acts of support' for victims, an idea that is partially synonymous with that of civility (Jackson 2011, 20-30). Connecting and listening to the stranger necessitates and fosters a form of ethical disinterestness by which the plights of others in elsewheres far from Geneva can be heard. This does not produce the same kind of distantiation discussed previously. Instead, it presupposes a capacity for projection and empathetic transportation out of one's self through which a catharsis of what we may call after Patrick Duggan (2012) the 'trauma-tragedies' experienced by the victims is produced. The downside of this dramaturgy of empathy is that the story-based testimonies, in particular, reproduce a form of sentimentality that is more problematic than the

theatricality of the rest of the zones. Witnesses, like Emmanuel Jal, appear as figures of redemption while the humanitarian organisation, which frames the interaction and includes the various expert witnesses testifying, appears as the implicit saviour.

It is my argument that this romanticisation of humanitarianism makes visible one of limits of the museum's civility, which I propose to unpick.[6] In order to understand this limit, we may start with the observation that despite constructing a 'civil' space of appeal, the witnesses, as protagonists of humanitarianism, have very little complexity. Rather, they appear as individualised figures largely decontextualised from their social and historical reality, examples of victims with whom the visitor re-performs a symbolic form of support via a virtual frame. In his recent critique of what he terms humanitarian performance, James Thompson (2014) suggests that this way of presenting victims is a paradoxical effect of a specific rhetorical structure of appeal. He states:

> It could be argued that the humanitarian movement, therefore, was made possible by the expansion of this unqualified empathy which not only requires a confrontation with sufferers but also a simultaneous extraction of them from their contexts (that is, from their historical and social specificity). [...] Distance ensures victims become generic not specific and therefore more easily incorporated into the observer's imaginary realm. (2014, 33)

Thompson draws attention to the manner in which humanitarian rhetoric produces and, to a certain extent, requires a personalisation and simplification of victimhood, which results in an idealisation of the victim(s) and victimhood. This idealisation of the victim as person waiting to be redeemed and the accompanying romanticisation of humanitarian work are necessary in order for the appeal to succeed, that is, for people to feel moved to support the cause. However, in this context, the de-historicisation consequent upon the extension of 'unqualified empathy' produces a demand for identification, which lacks the counter-movement of dis-indentification and distantiation.

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[6] The tagline of the exhibition – the humanitarian adventure – reflects this penchant for romance.

Another aspect of the sentimentality of the testimonies relates to the idea of witnessing itself. Performance scholar Maurya Wickstrom (2012) has recently restated how witnessing has become a key notion in humanitarianism since the schism between the Red Cross and Doctors without Borders. Doctors without Borders had taken issue with the alleged neutral stance that certain Red Cross workers maintained in the face of massacres perpetrated during the Biafra war in the late 60s. It is partly after those events that witnessing became a marker of ethico-political engagement and a central part of humanitarianism's politics of civility.[7] However, as suggested with the reference to trauma-tragedy, a more directly psychological idea of witnessing is also at work here, reinforcing the pattern identified in the previous paragraphs. It is perhaps easiest to understand by examining the testimony of the neuro-psychiatrist Boris Cyrulnik about psychological resilience.

Cyrulnik's testimony is found at the end of Kéré's zone in a round hut made of plywood. Cyrulnik is a white, balding male, wearing steel-framed round glasses, a dark-blue jacket with a light blue loose-collared shirt and a pair of beige chino trousers. The visitor sits face-to-face with Cyrulnik's standing figure on one of the benches that line the inner sides of the hut. Once the projection of the standing figure is activated, he says the following:

> For a long time, we thought that when our existence shatters itself, we would be lost for life. Thinking this way, we did not take enough care of those whose souls were wounded […]. The definition of resilience is very simple: it's about starting a new development after a traumatic shock […]. After 'trauma', the other key word is 'support'. First a discrete, affective form of support is needed, a co-presence that provides a source of additional security. Then speech, intimate speech that enables to fashion a coherent representation of what has happened, even if one has to settle a number of scores with one's own memory of the event. Then sharing the narrative with someone one trusts. (Musée international de la Croix-Rouge et du Croissant-Rouge 2013, unpaginated)

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[7] The silence of the Red Cross about the Holocaust, presented in the first zone, sets a precedent to Biafra.

Here as well there is a whole dramaturgy of empathetic witnessing that confirms the centrality of social structures of 'support' in responding to violence. However, this dramaturgy of empathetic witnessing also runs the risk of constructing the 'ideal' victim as a depleted subject who can only find a new path to development through the transformative therapeutic support provided by the humanitarian organisation. A number of applied theatre scholars have already drawn attention to the limitations of such a schema through their work in the field. For instance, Balfour et al. (2015) argue in the context of work with refugees that this schema runs the risk of constructing the violated subject as having little individual or collective agency outside of the official frame provided for him or her. Elsewhere, James Thompson echoes this view by arguing that the 'imperative to tell' (in Cyrunlik's words 'sharing the narrative with someone one trusts') can also contribute to negating the value of culturally-embedded strategies for dealing with collective suffering in different contexts of conflict or post-conflict (2009, 60-68).

Beyond revealing the practical limits of humanitarian strategies of civility in the field, I would like to highlight how this schema is problematic for the argument at hand. While there is no doubt that emphasising the dimension of hope and resilience is necessary, the idea of resilience and, by extension, the witnesses as figures of hope and resilience seem to obscure the possibility that certain forms of historical 'trauma' might prove to be what Balibar calls, in his discussion of extreme violence, 'inconvertible' (2015, 33-34). The witnesses who, in narrative terms, cannot not appear to be healed, seem to be the embodiment of what Feldman calls the 'trauma aesthetic', which 'smuggles in a medical narrative as a philosophy of history' (2004, 185). In this narrative and philosophy of history, violence is ultimately sublimated and leads to a cathartic, feel good ending in and with which the visitor is invited to partake and identify.

For the reasons stated above, I have argued that the testimonies contradict somewhat the logic of the zones. One could view this tension as a curatorial choice and, to a certain extent, a necessity insofar as the testimonies need to complement and balance out the rest of the journey by giving a message of hope. This may be true from a curatorial point of view. However, from the

point of view of my argument, the more harmonised narrative produced by the testimonies undermines the construction of a critical form of civility. In this regard, they constitute one of the limits of the museum's civility.

Installations

In this final section, I develop the ideas from the previous sections through a discussion of a number of installations found in Ban's zone. Previously, I argued that one of the strengths of the museum's civility is to represent objective and subjective violence. In spite of this, I would like to explore the manner in which the representations of objective violence are less reflexive as compared with those of subjective violence and how this trend marks another limit of the museum's embodiment of civility.

Signs of this imbalance are present in the discourse that frames the third zone, which is entirely dedicated to what I have been calling objective violence. Naming the third zone 'reducing natural risks' when the disasters in question also have social causes is suggestive of an inadequate form of reflexive distantiation. Equally, Ban's seemingly benign statement that 'like excessively authoritarian politicians, natural disasters always end up claiming victims' seems to conflate subjective and objective violence in a way that is indicative of a lack of reflexivity about the social character of 'natural' disasters as well as about the specificity of objective forms of violence (Musée international de la Croix-Rouge et du Croissant-Rouge 2013, 128). Finally, the predominance of memory in the production of historical perspectives (memorials, testimonies) can also be understood as an expression of a certain bias towards the representation of subjective forms of violence. The cultural critic Andreas Huyssen (2000) has shown how the contemporary importance given to memory in museographic and wider cultural practices results partly from late 20th century scepticism about grand historical narratives of progress, which spread around the same time as the appeal of alternative world historical projects such as socialism waned. A number of critical events contributed to this shift including the Holocaust and post-Holocaust reconciliation, the fall of the Soviet Union and the struggles against dictatorships in Latin America, which have all been construed as instances of totalitarianism or subjective violence.

14

My argument is that this imbalance is the mark of the specifically liberal form of the museum's civility, as a Marxist-inspired form of civility would most probably reproduce a bias for the representation of capitalism's objective violence.[8] Below, I explore this problem in more depth by analysing two theatrical installations that provide an example and counter-example of this trend. The first is an interactive game made by the British performance company Blast Theory in collaboration with Jon Sutton and Pete Gamlen. An online promotional video suggests that the game, which constitutes the emotional space of the third zone, is targeted at young audiences (museecroixrouge 2016). The second work discussed will one of Pierrick Sorin's optical theatres, which appear to be targeted at young people as well.

The touch-sensitive game *Hurricane* takes place around a round table that provides the players (visitors) with a smooth surface on which to play. Players activate the game through a touching of a flashing hand that appears on the table. Once the game is activated, a green island appears as a projection at the centre of the table, surrounded by a blue ocean rippling with waves, rendered in board-game style graphics. Players are told that a hurricane will hit the island in five minutes. The task of the players, as logistics coordinators of the operation, is to help as many islanders as possible to survive. With no time to waste, the players select the preventative measures they would like to put in place by touching icons displayed on the edge of the table. Players have the choice between three types of measure: building mangroves, constructing elevated shelters and stockpiling food. It takes time to select, prepare and build up the appropriate resources for each measure. It requires participants to assemble teams of villagers, community leaders, volunteers, experts and Red Cross workers who are also represented through icons, which also suggest that the imaginary island could be in the South-Western Pacific or another Hurricane prone region of the Pacific. Once the resources have been selected, the icon representing the preventative measure moves automatically from the edge to a place on the island, indicating it has been deployed effectively. All the while, sounds of wind

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[8] In spite of my argument, it should nevertheless be noted that the renovation of the museum was done in consultation with the Italian Economic Anthropologist Fabrizzio Sabelli whose scholarly work is aligned to Marxism (Centre Culturel Suisse 2014).

and rain can be heard and sirens warn the islanders about the hurricane. Red bars appear, one by one, around the border of the table, counting down the time remaining before the evacuation. When the bars form a full circle around the edge, all the icons disappear. Red arrows appear on the edge, pointing to the centre. Icons representing villagers flash up in different places along the red band, while the sounds of the sirens become ever more present. Players need to move fast enough to tap the icons before they disappear. For every icon tapped, one life is saved. The rush lasts about one minute before a giant white cloud-like mass blows over the island. Once the hurricane blows over, the game is finished. The total number of lives saved appears at the centre of the table.

The participatory structure of the game represents the civil and institutional collaborations essential to disaster prevention. The interest of the game, from a player and pedagogical perspective, is in being thrown into a situation of disaster that gives the visitor the chance to learn about the logistics of emergency response. The strategic character of game is arguably one of its strengths. It makes it both recognisable and easily playable by anybody. An additional strength of the game is that it is not easy save all the islanders and win, even when being played by many people at the same time. In this respect, it moves away from the narrative pattern of redemption and resolution identified in the testimonies.

However, the representations of objective violence lack reflexivity on two counts. First, the scenario the players are presented with creates a fascination for the moment of ecological disaster, which appears to be naturalised. While a fast tempo is a necessity for the gaming experience to take place, there could be moments before and after the play to allude to the social dimensions of the disaster. The creator or curators may not have deemed this necessary as the 'emotional' spaces precede the imparting of information to the visitor. However, I showed through the examination of the other emotional spaces that, if information is not always imparted, effects of distantiation are nevertheless created in such spaces and, in fact, are vital for marking the symbolic entrance into the zones.

Second, while the game is seemingly premised on a participatory and horizontal form of collaboration, very little attention is given to the hierarchies that the game sets up between the visitors/players as coordinators standing at a safe distance from the event and the non-European subjects that they are commanding who, in contrast, do not appear to enjoy the same level of privilege. Furthermore, the bird's eye perspective on the island, objectified human resources represented on the icons, the enclosed atmosphere that is created by Ban's surrounding tubes make the game feel like an intervention into a war zone. Thus, the aesthetic of the game is suggestive of an oscillation between objective and subjective forms of violence. This does not so much confirm Ban's earlier statement about the likeness of both forms as bring us back to the suggestion mentioned in the introduction that subjective and objective violence could determine and reinforce each other. In the case of *Hurricane*, it appears that an objective form of extreme violence (the hurricane) is partly prevented by the measures put in place. However, the threat of the hurricane also appears to require a permanent state of emergency in which the humanitarian organisation and its logistical actors appear to act as surrogate, technocratic sovereigns. In a similar way to the testimonies, this oscillation may well be a contradiction and limit of humanitarian civility. However, instead of highlighting it, even in a subtle way, the work has a tendency to produce absorption in the moment of disaster and crisis.

I will contrast *Hurricane* with another work, which in my view performs a better form of distantiation in relation to the issue of objective violence. As visitors walk around the first space of the third zone, they encounter three mini 'optical theatres' made by the French artist Pierrick Sorin, titled *Cyclone*, *Tsunami* and *Latrine.*[9] The theatres consist of three long and thin boxes that are built into a white, freestanding wall. Two of the boxes are presented together and the third is situated on the other side. As their titles indicate, the mini-theatres stage different scenarios that are related to disaster prevention. The following

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[9] Sorin is known for an aesthetic inspired by early cinema and late nineteenth century illusionism. These optical theatres reproduce a similar aesthetic, although they are not authentic optical theatres.

description of *Tsunami* is valid for the other two, which operate on a similar principle.

Bending down, the visitor sees a backdrop landscape representing a sandy beach surrounded by cacti, exotic green plants and a deep blue sky. In this background image, you can see also two male characters, both played by the artist. Stage right, a white man dressed in a brown shirt, white trousers and trainers is sitting on a giant megaphone. He soon decides to slide off onto a stepping-stone placed to the right of the megaphone, and from the stone, onto the ground. On the other side, another character also played by Sorin is standing in front of another stone and a wooden platform. He is dressed in a hat and a flowery shirt, which suggests that he is a tourist.

The two figures, the stones, the platform and the megaphone are duplicated downstage but without the backdrop. There, the figures alongside their props appear as miniature, stand-alone, spectral projections between five and ten centimetres in height. On this lower plane, on the other side of the wooden platform, a third mini-Sorin is also visible. Unlike the other two men, he neither appears in the background scene nor to be acting out the same routine. He is dressed in a blue boiler suit and cap that make him look like a mad scientist. He stands with his hands behind his back observing the other scene, next to what appears to be an aquarium placed on a plinth in which you can see a miniature version of the backdrop scene. A bucket has been placed at his feet, to his right.

The men in brown and flowery shirts appear to be fairly relaxed. They are waiting. The first man, hands on his hips, shuffles on the spot. He looks at the ground and around him, he rolls up the sleeves of his shirt and continues to stand around for a while, waiting. In the meantime, the tourist takes up a position on the stone in order to read and listen to loud music on headphones. The first man takes a few looks at the tourist before reaching for his pocket watch. He looks stage right. He seems to be anticipating someone's entrance. This routine goes on for a little while before the man in the brown shirt starts gesticulating and calling out to the tourist, who, on account of the music blaring out of his headphones, is oblivious to his calls. The third man in the boiler suit

glances across, before gesticulating to the man in brown. At this point, the boiler-suited man picks up the bucket and starts pouring its contents into the mini aquarium. As he tips the bucket over the aquarium, the backdrop fills with murky water that looks like a tidal wave gushing onto the land, devastating everything in its path. As the water enters the frame upstage, the two downstage figures find high ground using the megaphone and platform. The image in the background, synced with the image at the front of the theatre, shows the two men being saved just in time. Once the sequence is finished, the video loops back to the beginning.

Sorin's staging of risk prevention complements Blast Theory's macro-theatre of emergency while also presenting a number of significant differences. The humorous tone of Sorin's work, the use of multiple personas, mise en abyme and play within a play is certainly clever and pleasurable to watch. Crucially, the distanciation effect these produce also create less fascination for the moment of disaster while acknowledging, in a more reflexive way, the complexities and contradictions of disaster prevention. For instance, the inclusion of the mad scientist figure goes some way towards acknowledging the socially constructed and uneven distribution of risk in disaster scenarios. In the case of the optical theatre about the hurricane, this could be seen to function as a subtle acknowledgment of the anthropogenic character of climate change.[10] Finally, the contemporary take on the nineteenth-century optical theatre also provides a playful way of pointing to what Witcomb (2003) claims are the exhibitionary origins of the museum and its related function of displaying the commercial power of industrial nations. Sorin's theatre subtly frames the viewer as the civilised voyeur looking down at the Lilliputian and phantasmagorical personas performing self-managed, disaster prevention in exotic lands.[11] This irony is simply not present in *Hurricane*, which stages a similar relation between the participant and islanders but without reflexively acknowledging the power relation that it stages.

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[10] Instead of a bucket of water, the blue man uses a hair dryer and fan.
[11] Sorin's works, like that of Blast Theory, are most probably targeted at younger audiences, which also explains the particular dimensions and aesthetics of his theatres.

Sorin's comedy demonstrates that the museum contains theatrical elements that produce an explicit and effective form of distantiation in relation to the issue of objective violence. However, in contrast to Blast Theory's work, I am not certain that Sorin's work moves away from the schema of redemption and resolution identified in the testimonies. Here the virtuoso performer, the humanitarian super-hero whom we can only admire and find ingenious, succeeds in producing a form of just-in-time prevention after all.

I will finish with a discussion of a work that, in my view, goes beyond humanitarian tragicomedy or romance. At the very end of the second zone of the museum, one encounters five masks by Beninese artist Romuald Hazoumè. The masks are made of jerrycans and other bits of discarded rubbish. They are made to look like faces of people: The handles of the jerrycan form noses and eyebrows, with the mouth of the jerrycan making up the bottom part of the faces. Other materials are used for decoration, including blonde wigs, hats, a telephone, plastic tubes, copper, and other bits of metal. According to Hazoumè, the people of Porto Novo, the capital of Benin, carry on bicycles and motorcycles jerrycans full of oil coming from oil-producing Nigeria. In doing so, they run high risks in order to conduct their everyday business, lives and survive in the world (QAGOMA 2016). The masks, then, allude to the resourcefulness of common people as well as the economic (objective) and political (subjective) systems that reproduce the subalternity of the Global South, which the discarded materials of the masks embody. By performing what Jenny Hughes would call 'transfigurations of waste', the masks confront visitors with their own priviledge and their implication in these systems of oppression (2015, 4). Devoid of ritual function, they also present an ironic critique of the ethnographic gaze as well as artistic primitivism that went hand-in-hand with imperial expansion. The face-like masks contribute to personalising the exhibition, functioning as historical witnesses of sorts. However, they are alien enough to produce a sense of estrangement that draws attention to the here and now while figuring something of an alternative logic to the world that they – the visitors and the masks – appear in.

Conclusion

In this article, I reviewed the renovated permanent exhibition of the ICRC in order to perform a critique of humanitarian civility, a term borrowed from the work of Balibar. The permanent exhibition and the museum, more broadly, were understood as forming a cultural part of a humanitarian politics of civility for two reasons. First, the exhibition represents strategies of humanitarian anti-violence. Second, the exhibition invites visitors to historicise our ultra-violent global history and produce a form of dis-identification with it, which I discussed through the Brecht-inspired idea of distantiation. Lastly, I proposed that the theatricality of the exhibition played a central role, both positive and negative, in the construction of the museum's civility.

In the first part, I explored the theatrical aechitecture and designs of Cardia, Kéré and Ban. The highlights of the three zones included the various emotional spaces, the prisoner's room, Kéré's hemp chip monument, Ban's paper tubes. I showed that the architecture of each zone provided the means for creating an allegorical space through which the precarious relation between violence and civility was narrativised and historicized. I also argued that the different architects and their respective architectures evoked the two different forms of violence – objective (Kéré and Ban) and subjective (Cardia) - theorised by Balibar as well as the means to limit or respond to these. Finally, I also the explored the manner in which the spatialisation of specific stations and features in the first two zones, such as Kéré's monument, helped to produce a form of distantiation by connecting and articulating, in a montage-like fashion, different and seemingly disparate geo-political and historical scenes.

In the analysis of the interactive testimonies, I explored the ambivalences of the museum's civility. I argued that the testimonies had strengths, including that of playing a key narrative function in the museum by providing a thread through the different zones and key information about humanitarianism. However, I also argued that the story-based testimonies, in particular, produced a sentimentalist and romantic narrative of redemption that sat uneasily with the critical spatialisation of the zones. Drawing on the work of Thompson, I argued that this tendency towards romanticisation is in part due to the paradoxical

structure of humanitarian rhetoric, which requires the production of identification with humanitarianism and victims but which in the process also produces a personalisation and de-historicised idealisation of victimhood. Through an analysis of Cyrulnik's testimony about psychological resilience found in the second zone, I also argued that a psychologising schema tied to the idea of witnessing contributes to fashioning this narrative of redemption and uncritical structure of identification.

The last part further probed the limitations of the exhibition's representations of violence and thus of its civility. In the first part, I acknowledged that one of the strengths of the museum resides in the manner in which it represents different kinds of contemporary violence. However, in the last part, I explored the manner in which the exhibition also tends to reproduce a liberal bias towards subjective forms of violence or a less historical reflexive treatment of the question. This problem was explored through two theatrical installations made by Blast Theory and Pierrick Sorin, both focusing on disaster prevention. While Sorin's work was provided a more reflexive representation of objective violence, I argued that it still reproduced the kind of harmonised narrative first identified in the analysis of the testimonies. In contrast, Hazoumè's masks provided a multi-layered presentation of contemporary violence (objective and subjective) that eluded easy resolution despite the personalisation that the masks effect. From this, I conclude that the museum does well to use art and theatre to articulate more 'civil' alternatives to the world as it is. However, it may do so best in the image of Hazoumè's masks that evoke hope yet do so by retaining the social contradictions of history and our present in a pure and unresolved form.

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