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Final Assignment _ Research Paper

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Too often, public education and memorial spaces succeed at making visitors feel something but fail at guiding those visitors to do something with that feeling, to move beyond the feeling to act. For example, a visitor tours a preserved memorial site such as a former residential school dormitory, hears survivor testimony, and is genuinely moved by the weight of the experience, then returns to everyday life with the experience filed away, as a memory. Michalis Zembylas identifies this as a “failure to make meaning,” and warns that human rights education risks producing a “cheap sentimental” response, one that moves us “to pity, patting ourselves on the back, and then resuming our ordinary life” (Zembylas, 2017, p. 1). The problem, as Zembylas frames it, is not the presence of feeling or emotion, but rather the absence of what follows.

This failure is not incidental, but structural in design. The question is not whether emotional response matters, but what conditions make it possible for that response to move them toward action (to act)? This paper argues that community led, trauma-informed third spaces are learning environments, situated beyond the classroom and home, which can move visitors from passive witnessing to allyship. This transformation is only possible when Indigenous communities govern the terms of the experience through design, curation, facilitation, protocols, and what next steps look like.

To examine this question, two sites have been chosen as they share a common commitment to Indigenous authority while using different forms of visceral design to shape the visitor experience and demonstrate what is possible. The two sites are the Secwépemc Museum and Heritage Park guided tours of the former Kamloops Indian Residential School (KIRS) at Tk’emlups te Secwépemc, and the Australian Museum's Unsettled exhibition in Sydney, an Indigenous led, testimony rich “truth-telling” exhibit (Lawrenson & O’Reilly, 2023, p. 188). Each site rejects the “failure to make meaning” (Zembylas, 2017, p. 1) and demonstrates what is possible

when Indigenous communities hold authority over their own learning environments. Through visceral design, both sites create an emotional and physical experience that Vlad describes as “visceral pedagogy,” where “not shying away from shocking and traumatic experiences deepens one's understanding” (Vlad, 2022, p. 27). Each site uses visceral design, positioning visitors as ethical witnesses to move them from commemorative witnessing of colonial harms, toward active allyship as a “source of agency” (Vlad, 2022, pp. 2, 33).

Before examining the theory that explains how visitors move from witnessing to allyship, it is important to establish what design technique each applies, because it is these design differences that provide theoretical analysis to ground this work. A small set of visceral design techniques across both sites will be examined which include protocol and consent, embodied space, first-person voice, sequencing and discomfort, and action pathways. Each technique complements the other to shape how visitors are prepared, what they feel and understand, and what responsibilities follow next.

To support this argument, four theoretical concepts and one governance framework will be examined starting with Kelly Oliver who frames witnessing as an ethical relationship grounded in response-ability, not passive recognition. Next, Roger Simon (through Di Paolantonio) explains how curatorial practice can guide visitors from emotional contact to public meaning-making without turning suffering into spectacle. Followed by Zembylas who provides the pedagogical test to inquire does emotional experience become action-oriented empathy, or does it collapse into pity and guilt? A foundational principle is Tuck and Yang's warning that decolonization is not a metaphor, this argument does not focus on the word itself but focuses on how reconciliation work remains accountable to those who hold authority and governance of the story. And Kirkness and Barnhardt's Four Rs of Respect, Relevance, Reciprocity, and Responsibility serves as the

governance framework to evaluate if Indigenous authority is real and what is produced flow back to community.

With these frameworks established, they can now be applied to the Secwépemc Museum and Heritage Park, which offers guided tours through the former Kamloops Indian Residential School site and raises the question of whether genuine witnessing and community governance are present or merely performative. The tour or exhibit is not reconstructed, but rather, it transports visitors through the actual spaces in which children were harmed such as the chapel, dining room, kitchen, boys' dormitory, and gymnasium which the guide incorporates photographs, videos, and survivor stories detailing “the history of what really took place at this school” (Secwépemc Museum & Heritage Park, n.d., n.p.). Visitors are not offered a comfortable commemorative pathway to soothe their settler discomfort, but rather they hold space in the actual rooms where children were harmed, and the design techniques introduced move the visitor physically and emotionally to carry the weight of the lived experiences that cannot be reproduced. The site's 2024 National Historic Site designation reinforces this authority, with Parks Canada naming the violence explicitly, stating that “this has been called genocide by Survivors, Pope Francis I, the House of Commons” (Parks Canada, 2024, n.p.), and included trauma-informed framing and a crisis line notice with the designation.

This paper draws on my direct personal experience as a visitor to tour the KIRS site, treating it as observational data within this paper, rather than as a general statement. Before the tour began, our guide Jackie Jules grounded the group in ceremony, opening with a Secwépemc prayer and song, establishing cultural safety for our journey with care and respect for everyone, and is guided by Secwépemc protocols, laws, and ways of being. Jackie next shared their own first-person experience with the residential school and the intergenerational trauma experienced

and navigated by family members and community - this was a generous gift of trust offered from a position of strength and resilience, rather than re-traumatization. By gifting each group member, the necessary time and space to process what was being shared as needed, grounds the experience with care and not re-traumatizing. From my observations, it was clear the Secwépemc community does not simply share their history at KIRS, but they model what courage and compassion look like for moving forward with resilience and strength.

Where the KIRS tours root visitors in a physical reclaimed site, where harm is present through the stairwells, rooms, and grounds surrounding the site, the Australian Museum's Unsettled exhibit is embodied differently through voice, testimony, and curatorial design rather than preserved physical site. Both, however different, operate from the same governing principle that Indigenous communities determine what is told, how it is told, and for whom.

Unsettled, curated by Laura McBride and Dr. Mariko Smith, was designed to actively engage visitors with Indigenous history through the reflection on past colonial practices, investing in relationships with Indigenous communities, and co-create new narratives through deep collaboration (Lawrenson & O'Reilly, 2023, p. 187). The exhibit recontextualized its collection with a strong importance on first-person experiences, with community members and artists playing a central role (Lawrenson & O'Reilly, 2023, pp. 188). More than 2,000 Indigenous people were consulted, with over 100 Senior Elders and knowledge holders contributing stories, objects, and artworks (Lawrenson & O'Reilly, 2023, p. 191). The curators describe the project as a “larger co-creation journey alongside Elders and communities” intended “to disrupt museum practice” (McBride & Smith, 2022, p. 77) and to offer “a long overdue truth-telling about our shared past” (Lawrenson & O'Reilly, p. 188). As Nagy (2020) argues, the exhibit was “governed and actualized by Indigenous communities to determine what stories were told, how they were presented, and for

what purpose” (p. 222). Lawrenson and O'Reilly frame *Unsettled* as part of a broader effort to disrupt colonial museum authority through Indigenous voice and collaboration.

Both sites are Indigenous led and refuse established governed neutrality, and orient visitors toward action rather than commemoration. What they each do through the technical design and governance can now become understandable through the theoretical frameworks which follow.

It is important to note right from the start that these frameworks do not operate in isolation. Kelly Oliver names what a genuine encounter demands of the visitor. Roger Simon explains how curatorial design can either honor or deflect that demand in public spaces. Michalis Zembylas tests whether the encounter produces lasting change. Kirkness and Barnhardt provide the Four Rs as the framework to measure whether any of it is structurally real. Each framework builds on the other, complimenting how they are interconnected.

Drawing on Kelly Oliver's ethics of witnessing, Oliver proposes witnessing as a “structure of subjectivity” and identifies “addressability and response-ability” as the linkages that make up an “infinite open system of response,” placing the ethical problem at the core of who we are and our subjectivity to others (Oliver, 2015, pp. 483, 485). For Oliver, witnessing is not simply “watching and learning,” but rather, it is a “turn toward bearing witness to otherness,” a “reaching beyond ourselves” that carries with it a “critical responsibility to interrogate our roles in structures of domination and to seek to transform our societies” (Jolles, 2005, p. 149; Oliver, 2015, p. 483; Nagy, 2020, p. 229). Witnessing is an ethical relationship grounded in response-ability, a relational practice of receiving testimony, never neutral, and carries an obligation to respond once received.

Oliver further argues that witnessing has a “double meaning” referring both to eyewitness testimony and to “bearing witness to something beyond recognition that can't be seen” (Oliver, 2015, p. 483). This distinction is especially important for understanding survivor testimony and

the incorporation of visceral design as “invitations to imagine life otherwise,” rather than as “dead historical facts” to be acknowledged or answered in ways that may be retraumatizing (Oliver, 2015, p. 483). If testimony is treated as information alone, or as a one-directional act with nothing flowing back, then the ethical experience is reduced to observation only, with no obligation. However, if witnessing is understood as an active ethical experience, the design of the space is no longer only a question of curation, but now an ethical one shaped by community protocols, consent, and clear next steps. In both cases, the KIRS tours and the Unsettled exhibit are deliberately designed so that the visitor is not simply an observer but now someone who is answerable for what they have witnessed. The obligation is built into the design.

Oliver also argues that genuine witnessing requires “a kind of loving perception that deliberately works to bridge connections,” because “the space between subjects is not empty... but potentially full of connective, productive energy and affect” (Jolles, 2005, p. 149). As Nagy (2020, p. 219) highlights, this aligns with Indigenous concepts of bearing witness: “witnessing involves a reaching beyond ourselves and responsiveness to the agency and self-determination of the other.” What matters is “not simply the information, the establishment of facts, but the experience itself of living through testimony, of giving testimony” (Nagy, 2020, p. 229) or rather, an ethical call that moves visitors beyond emotion toward allyship and action.

This ethical relation only works, as Oliver insists, when the terms of the experience are set by the community being witnessed, not by the hosting institution or the visitor passing through it. Without grounding the experience in community authority, witnessing risks becoming performative, functioning as ethical language that, as Nagy (2020) cautions, can serve as institutional cover rather than genuine structural commitment, repositioning the community as an object of concern rather than a source of power (p. 222).

Oliver establishes ethical demand, but the framework cannot operate alone to account for how curatorial decisions either honour or deflect that demand in public spaces. That is precisely where Roger Simon's work comes into play. Simon's work (summarized by Di Paolantonio) focuses on the public work of receiving and transmitting the “remnants” of historical trauma. Simon pushes us to consider “the pedagogical stakes in forging an ethical living relation with the remnants of past and presently unsettled, ongoing social wrongs” (Di Paolantonio, 2015, p. 264). Simon's caution is that memorial practices can drift into gestures of performance that feel meaningful, yet shield visitors from genuine transformation, what Di Paolantonio describes as a “spectatorial sensibility” that can leave us “intact,” at a distance, and “protected from being called into question and altered through our engagement with the stories of others” (Di Paolantonio, 2015, p. 267).

This is where curatorial practice creates and impact and becomes an ethical judgment: “to consider the pedagogical stakes in forging an ethical living relation with the remnants of past and presently unsettled, ongoing, historical wrongs” (Di Paolantonio, 2015, p. 263) or put differently, how the experience resists becoming spectacle. Di Paolantonio identifies this as “remembrance-learning” the task of ethically receiving and translating the remnants of a difficult past into the present (Di Paolantonio, 2015, p. 264). For Simon, the goal is not simply emotional impact, but rather it is a mode of looking in, to better understand which emotion supports responsibility. Di Paolantonio emphasizes that exhibits can help “frame... a mode of looking within which the affective force of images could be directed toward thought as to one's responsibilities as a viewer who might yet become an ethical witness” (Di Paolantonio, 2015, p. 271). This is where good curatorial practice does not just display artifacts or tell stories, it arranges them in ways that ‘jolts’ visitors. Drawing on Benjamin’s concept of the “flash,” Simon argues a curatorially inspired

pedagogy assembles remnants to “reframe and expand what can be sensed in the present,” creating a moment that makes “a new different and on-going relation to the past and future thinkable, imaginable and sensible” (Di Paolantonio, 2015, p. 267). It is this “flash” of recognition that alters one’s experience from being a passive observer to an ethical witness. The aim is not for visitors to absorb the information provided to then leave unchanged, but rather for the exhibit to create a strong emotion and sense of responsibility, where the suffering of people from another time impact how visitors understand their own position moving forward. As Simon (2011a) puts it, curating difficult knowledge hinges on “how exhibitions might be presented so as to serve a transitive function that could open up an indeterminate reconsideration of the force of history in social life”, so that encounters with those who “lived and died in times and places other than our own may yet have some force that enjoins our capacities and felt responsibilities” in the present time (p. 208).

Simon’s role is particularly important and therefore connects Oliver and Zembylas to the level of practice producing lasting change. Where Oliver establishes why testimony creates ethical obligation, Simon explains how curatorial decisions either sustain or dissolve that obligation in public spaces. Yet what Simon cannot fully connect with is whether any individual visitor, however well positioned by design, will carry that ethical experience forward. Even when curation successfully moves visitors toward ethical witnessing, another risk remains where visitors may feel deeply, learn key facts, yet, to still return to daily life without acting. That is the question which Zembylas answers, the problem "after" the experience and providing the test for the emotional experience inspiring action or settling into pity and guilt.

Zembylas warns that human rights learning can slip into “cheap sentimental” responses when emotion becomes the end point rather than an open ongoing ‘beginning.’ Feeling guilt or pity is different from unity. Zembylas (2017) concept of critical sentimental education is “an

emotional ideology of sentimental education that intentionally or unintentionally, invests in feelings of guilt to motivate sympathy for others is unlikely to establish pedagogical opportunities for action-oriented empathy against social structures of injustice” (Zembylas, 2017, p. 17). A visitor who is moved but unchanged proposes the space produced feeling, but without the political movement that genuine witnessing requires. For Zembylas, emotion and critical thinking cannot be separated, and that feeling must be directed toward an understanding for power, where the possibilities for action then open for “stories of human rights abuse with both criticality and affective engagement, highlighting the importance of critical consciousness around issues of power relations and various types of injustices and inspiring transformative action to dismantle these injustices” (Zembylas, 2017, p. 16). The point is not to choose between feeling and thinking, but rather to hold both - together. In this paper, Zembylas serves as the "after" test to question when a visitor is moved, does the space support them in connecting that feeling to responsibility and action, or does it allow emotion to resolve into something else, that is released and moved on from?

Oliver names the ethical demand. Simon explains how curation can resist spectacle and direct the effect of the experience toward responsibility. Zembylas tests if the visitor carries responsibility beyond the visit. But what these frameworks do not fully address is what must be secured at the institutional level for this movement to occur, what is the governing framework to ground the experience, not just based on an exceptional guide or inspirational curation, but as a predictable structure. This is where Kirkness and Barnhardt's Four Rs of Respect, Relevance, Reciprocity, and Responsibility can provide the governance framework that makes all the above possible in a sustained and accountable way.

Kirkness and Barnhardt (1991) identify the core issue from an Indigenous perspective is not merely educational design but a need for learning spaces to “respect them for who they are, that is relevant to their view of the world, that offers reciprocity in their relationships with others, and that helps them exercise responsibility over their own lives” (pp. 95–97). Applied to the third-space contexts, the Four Rs position Tk’emlups and Unsettled as community led sites where Indigenous communities “feel at home” to educate and lead programs that connect with their “collective aspirations” and “capacity-building for self-determination” (Kirkness & Barnhardt, 1991, pp. 99–100). Their emphasis on “two-way exchange” and “institutional vulnerability” (p. 103) provides the evaluative framework for asking whether the benefits of each site genuinely flow back to community versus being absorbed by the institution or visitor interests. Together, Oliver provides philosophical and ethical ground, and Kirkness and Barnhardt provide the institutional means to ground these experiences to either held through emotion and memory or discarded. This is where the magic happens in partnership (in relationship to the other) rather than alone.

Underlying all of this is Tuck and Yang's insistence that decolonization "is not a metaphor" (2012, p. 1). Decolonization “doesn't have a synonym” (Tuck & Yang, 2012, p. 3), and decolonization work only qualifies as decolonizing when it is accountable to Indigenous sovereignty, with communities holding control over narrative and data, and when benefits flow back to the community rather than reinforcing settler comforts or elevating institutional reputation (pp. 1–4). This principle is not only foundational, but the standard against which both sites are measured throughout the analysis that follows.

With the frameworks established, it is now possible to examine how both sites move the ethical demands of witnessing into concrete design. There are five design techniques presented across both sites, and they include protocol and consent, embodied space, first-person voice,

sequencing and discomfort, and actionable pathways. As noted with each concept, these design techniques do not work solely in isolation, each build on the other and together they form an ethical design moving visitors from passive spectatorship toward action.

At KIRS, protocol is not preliminary but rather a key part of the design itself. The visitor is not positioned as a tourist consuming history but as someone entering a governed space where Indigenous authority sets the terms through Secwépemc protocol. Before the tour began, our guide Jackie Jules grounded the group with ceremony, opening with a Secwépemc prayer and song. This established the space as one grounded in cultural safety and respect, as noted, governed with Secwépemc protocols and ways of being, while creating space for visitors to prepare themselves emotionally and physically to not retraumatize before a single fact was shared.

In Unsettled, protocol is embedded in the curatorial process, “with over 2,000 Indigenous people and more than 100 Senior Elders involved for shaping every stage of the exhibit from consultation through curation, interpretation, soundscapes, and artwork, ensuring that what visitors experience has been authorized by community governance” (Lawrenson & O'Reilly, 2023, p. 191).

Protocol and consent transform the visitor from someone consuming information into someone who is genuinely present and accountable. As stressed by Tuck and Yang, decolonization “is not obliged to answer those questions” and “is not accountable to settlers, or settler futurity” (2012, p. 35). What Oliver (2005) describes as an “ethical obligation to construe vision as an act of bridging, not as an act of alienation” (Jolles, 2005, p.149) is made real through the protocol design choices in both sites. Visitors are not offered a comfortable commemorative pathway, rather they are held to the community's protocols on their terms.

As a reclaimed site, KIRS preserves the rooms where children lived and were harmed. The experience does not rely on words alone. The experience moves beyond what is heard or said into

something felt in the body, an emotional and physical response that builds as one move from room to room. The site bears its own witness to what happened here, and it is the Secwépemc guide who brings present-day meaning to what those rooms already carry.

This connects directly to Simon's warning that memorial experiences can collapse into spectacle, compressing suffering into images on a wall or information plate, which are felt briefly to then be set aside. The physical act of moving through these rooms works against that, slowing the visitor down, to melding the emotional and physical experience to chemically impact witnessing in ways that are harder to dismiss. It creates the conditions Simon calls for, where visitors are called into question rather than left unchanged. The experience carries what Nagy describes as the “affective dimension of storytelling” that is “unsettling” and makes the listener “aware of the painful intensity of these memories” (2020, p. 233).

Unsettled is not a preserved site, but a curated exhibit designed intentionally constructed through the spatial sequencing, large-scale artwork, and immersive elements shaped by Indigenous voices and collaboration. As Lawrenson and O'Reilly (2023) emphasize, voice and design work together to disrupt museum authority to challenge and shape a different experience with the past. In both cases, embodied design interrupts distance and time, makes the experience harder to file away, and supports Oliver's argument that witnessing is not just recognition, and Simon's argument that ethical witnessing requires carefully constructed conditions to resist consumption.

For both sites, first-person voice testimony is foundational for positioning the visitor within the experience. At KIRS, Jackie Jules offers her own lived experience of the former residential school and the intergenerational trauma, not as a performance to re-traumatize, but rather as a deliberate act of trust, grounded in strength and resilience. As noted earlier, space was provided

for visitors to process what was shared, with time to reflect and navigate the emotional and ethical weight of the testimony.

In *Unsettled*, the first-person voice is the primary design technique. In the exhibit, “the presence of historical objects was less perceptible than the inclusion of contemporary voices,” with interpretative materials guided by living Indigenous people (Lawrenson & O’Reilly, 2023, pp. 190–191). Indigenous knowledge informed every stage of the exhibit through early consultation, curatorial design, interpretation, soundscapes, and artworks, while ensuring all voices were amplified and genuinely represented rather than filtered through institutional lenses.

Oliver argues that when testimony is spoken in a first-person voice, it stops functioning as information and becomes an address, a direct call that demands a response from the listener. This is what Oliver means by witnessing as ethical relation: the witness is not a passive receiver but someone being spoken to, and therefore implicated. Simon extends this further, arguing that ethical witnessing requires the visitor to be genuinely unsettled, they must not remain intact as a detached spectator. As Nagy (2020) notes, the listener becomes a witness twice, first to the trauma and pain being shared, and then to their own emotional reaction to it (p. 229). Simon observes that “there is a difference between learning about and learning from the residential schools' history” (cited in Nagy, 2020, p. 220), and first-person voice is precisely the design technique that holds visitors in that discomfort, suspending them between knowing and being called to act.

Both sites refuse to give visitors an easy out or a tidy sanitized ending, and this refusal is itself a deliberate design technique. At KIRS, the guide does not rush the group through the rooms but creates space for reflection, allowing discomfort to settle rather than to be resolved. Visitors are asked to remain present with the full weight of what they are hearing and seeing. The pacing itself becomes pedagogical, slowing down inside these rooms, the same rooms where children ate,

slept, and were harmed, resists the kind of efficient emotional processing that leaves experience filed away rather than carried forward.

In *Unsettled*, the eight-section exhibit is scaffolded intentionally, moving visitors from historical documentation through to what Lawrenson and O'Reilly (2023) describe as a closing focus on “ongoing community strength” rather than historical conclusion (p. 195). This sequencing is a deliberate design choice that rejects settler colonialism as finished history and insists instead that its consequences are present and ongoing. Visitors are not asked to feel and move on, but rather they are asked to recognize the continuing structures of colonialism, therefore recognition when designed this way demands a response rather than an emotional release.

This is where Zembylas becomes essential to the argument. Zembylas (2017) warns that emotion and critical thinking cannot be separated and that discomfort must be directed toward an understanding of power for it to produce anything beyond feeling. When discomfort is scaffolded, that is, when it is paced, contextualized, and connected to the ongoing realities of colonial harm, it creates what Zembylas describes as experience that “touches learners affectively yet not superficially” (p. 6). In both sites, discomfort is not incidental to the design, because it is the design. It is the condition that holds emotion and critical thinking together long enough for the visitor to recognize their own position within the spaces being experienced.

Many public memorial spaces stop at emotion, leaving visitors moved but without a clear pathway for what comes next. Both *KIRS* and *Unsettled* resist this in ways that are structurally distinct yet ethically aligned, and it is here that Kirkness and Barnhardt's Four Rs of Respect, Relevance, Reciprocity, and Responsibility provide the framework for evaluating whether action is genuinely built into the design or merely implied.

At KIRS, the guide did not frame witnessing as a one-time event but modeled what it looks like to carry the weight of truth with resilience and courage, and in doing so, placed a quiet but real responsibility on visitors to take what they heard forward. Nagy (2020), writing about settler witnesses at the TRC, describes this precisely, that witnesses are “asked to store and care for the history they witness and most importantly, to share it with their own people when they return home” (p. 230). This is Responsibility made visible through facilitation. What is shared at KIRS, and how visitors are invited to receive it, is deliberate at every stage. The income generated from tours returns to the Secwépemc community, satisfying Kirkness and Barnhardt’s (1991) standard for Reciprocity, that benefits flow back to the community rather than being absorbed by the institution or visitor interests (p. 103).

At Unsettled, action pathways are woven into the exhibit’s design from the beginning. Because testimony is delivered in first person by living people, receiving it creates obligation rather than passive learning. As Nagy (2020) argues, the exhibit was built to “nurture the possibility in settler witnesses of active responses that disrupt or dismantle colonial structures in order to secure Indigenous futurity” (p. 238). Relevance is satisfied here through the curation of living voices and present-day community strength, ensuring the exhibit reflects Indigenous worldviews and ongoing sovereignty rather than settler curiosity or institutional prestige. Respect is embedded through the involvement of more than 100 Senior Elders and 2,000 community members at every stage of the design (Lawrenson & O’Reilly, 2023, p. 191), ensuring that what visitors experience has been authorized on community terms.

Together, the Four Rs give the question of action its framework and structural form. Feeling without responsibility is not enough, as both Simon and Zembylas warn. But responsibility without institutional structure cannot be sustained. Kirkness and Barnhardt (1991) make clear that

the Four Rs are not “a set of standards against which to examine policies and practices” alone but rather a framework that embeds accountability into the design of learning environments themselves (p. 103). Both sites demonstrate that community authority is not a gesture made only at the opening ceremony and quietly returned to the institutional hands but is held consistently by the community from first protocol through to final action pathway.

The pattern that emerges across both sites is that good design only does its ethical work when governance is real. When Indigenous communities hold authority over what is shared, how it is paced, and what follows, visitors have a genuine chance at becoming witnesses rather than spectators. As Tuck and Yang (2012) insist, the work only qualifies as decolonizing when it is “accountable to Indigenous sovereignty” and when “benefits flow back to the community” rather than to settler convenience or institutional gain (p. 3). The question is not only what story is told, but who holds it and what it asks of those who receive it.

At KIRS, that governance is visible through Tk'emlups stewardship over how the site operates and how visitors engage. The 2024 Parks Canada National Historic Site designation reinforces rather than replaces that authority, naming the violence explicitly and recognizing publicly that the residential school system has been called genocide by Survivors, Pope Francis, and the House of Commons (Parks Canada, 2024). Revenue generated from tours returns directly to the Secwépemc community, reinforcing sovereignty in practice as well as in principle. At Unsettled, Elders and communities were present from the beginning of the design process, ensuring the exhibit served Indigenous people on their own terms. Reciprocity here extends beyond the financial to narrative sovereignty: communities hold real authority over how their histories are understood publicly, not only over how they are described.

Without that community authority, Oliver's demand for genuine witnessing cannot be met, and the Four Rs framework collapses from a structural accountability tool into a procedural checklist. As Kirkness and Barnhardt (1991) make clear, the Four Rs embed accountability into the design of the experience itself, and that embedding is what makes everything Oliver, Simon, and Zembylas call for, that is actually possible in a sustained and predictable way (p. 103).

Community led, trauma-informed spaces governed by Indigenous authority do not simply improve on conventional public education about colonial violence. They change the terms on which that history is understood. The Secwépemc Museum's guided tour at Tk'emlups te Secwépemc and the Australian Museum's Unsettled exhibition are not simply well-designed experiences. They are actualized governed experiences in which community authority over the narrative, design, and facilitation makes genuine witnessing possible, and in which that witnessing is scaffolded through deliberate design toward critical understanding and action.

This paper has argued that the pathway from witnessing to allyship is not automatic but governed and shaped by Indigenous communities. Oliver's ethics of witnessing establishes the tension from the experience must be an active ethical relation, not passive reception, that the visitor is addressed, implicated, and made response-able of subjectivity (Oliver, 2015, p. 483). Simon, through Di Paolantonio, illustrates how curatorial design can either sustain or dissolve that obligation, with either creating the "flash" of recognition in the now that alters a visitor's sense of their own position, or allowing the encounter to drift into spectacle (Di Paolantonio, 2015, p. 267) or "forging an ethical-pedagogy of witnessing" (Di Paolantonio, 2015, p. 272). Zembylas provides the "after" test asking does the emotional weight of the experience get directed toward critical consciousness and action-oriented empathy, or does it resolve into guilt, pity, and release? His critical-sentimental framework insists that feeling and thinking must be held together, that "action-

oriented empathy against social structures of injustice” is only possible when both are present (Zembylas, 2017, p. 17). Kirkness and Barnhardt’s Four Rs then provide the governance framework that makes all of this possible in a sustained and accountable way, by embedding Respect, Relevance, Reciprocity, and Responsibility into the design of the learning environment itself rather than treating them as aspirational add-ons (Kirkness & Barnhardt, 1991, p. 103).

Both sites demonstrate that these frameworks are not theoretical ideals but operational realities when Indigenous communities hold genuine authority. Five design techniques, such as protocol and consent, embodied space, first-person voice, sequencing and discomfort, and actionable pathways, work together to move visitors from passive commemoration toward ethical witnessing and toward accountable allyship. None of these techniques operates alone, but it is their cumulative design, governed by Indigenous authority at every stage, which creates the conditions for genuine transformation.

The lesson is both principled and practical, where accountable allyship begins not with what visitors feel, but with who holds authority over what they experience and what responsibilities are asked of them in return. For Tuck and Yang (2012), the work only qualifies as decolonizing when it is answerable to Indigenous sovereignty, with community-led control over the narrative and story, and when benefits “flow back to the community rather than to settler convenience or institutional prestige” (p. 3). Both sites examined in this paper demonstrate that this is possible. And it is precisely this condition of possibility, why Indigenous governance over the terms of the experience within the third space, makes everything else, the witnessing, the discomfort, the obligation, and the allyship, possible.

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