Theorizing Monument(al) Politics: How nonhumans can help constitute failure and denial in world politics.

Jordan Todd
Carleton University, Department of Sociology and Anthropology, Canada

Abstract
Bruno Latour has long argued that scholars must take seriously the role of nonhumans in social and political assemblages. In this paper it is argued that if International Relations (IR) scholarship is to robustly theorize failure and denial in world politics, then it must glean from object-oriented ontological approaches. This is notably salient when considering the role of monuments and memorials in national and international contexts – particularly in regards to the role that they play in networks of collective memory, national identity, and foreign policy. Drawing from a case study of the National Holocaust Monument (NHM) currently being built in Ottawa, Canada, this paper explores how memorials and the processes surrounding their establishment participate in local networks and how these local networks can potentially be entangled in what constitutes failure and denial in world politics. Additionally, this paper will explore a methodological approach to following entities between intratextual assemblages and the actor-networks where the texts are located. The discussion here will elucidate connections between these networks and the ontological security of the state – commenting on how these nonhumans act to help negotiate how failure and denial feed back into the political process. This paper concludes that monuments and memorials can play an integral role in how success and failure is governed, and further, that these nonhumans both open and close opportunities for political action.

Keywords
memorialization, actor-network theory, Holocaust, governance, ontological security

Introduction
If International Relations (IR) scholarship is to robustly theorize failure and denial, that is if scholars wish to explore what has largely resided in the background of world politics, then our object(s) of study must include those that are situated ‘behind the scenes’. In order to do this, we must simultaneously turn our attention to two modern practices of translation and purification and allow theoretical explanations of phenomena to be entangled in the tracing of hybrid networks of the humans and nonhumans that constitute them.

Failure and denial, like any other phenomenon, are composed of these hybrid networks where the proliferation of nonhuman actors produce evermore complex assemblages of mediators and translations. In order to account for these complex assemblages, our methodological approach must be symmetrical, one that does not allow for a priori reasoning that purifies ontological differences before our accounts even begin.

The main purpose of this paper, therefore, is to advocate for a symmetrical approach to the study of failure and denial. To accomplish this, I will first attempt to (perhaps ironically) setup a theoretical argument that will provide a certain amount of legitimacy (or to open the door) for the symmetrical approach taken here. This involves making connections between literatures on memory, monuments, actor-network theory (ANT) ontological security, and international relations. The outcome of this, I hope, will be to highlight the necessity of taking seriously nonhumans as potentially equal social and political actors within the context of these objects of study, and further, that the literatures themselves provide room to do so.

In addition I will demonstrate a methodological approach stemming from the principle of symmetry that has been applied to a specific object of study – the National Holocaust Monument, currently being built in Ottawa, Canada. The purpose of presenting this case is to show how the object-oriented ontological approach of symmetry exposes certain aspects of what constitutes both the object of study and the phenomena of failure and denial. In a circuitous way, a question that is asked here is what the composition or the constitution of failure and denial could be if such an approach to these phenomena was taken.
Due in part to its ubiquity, the Holocaust – its representation, politics, memory, and history, etc. – provides an appropriate example through which the concepts of failure and denial can be explored. In the case of the Holocaust and its legacy, forms of failure (and success) and denial (and recognition) can be understood in terms of local, national and international milieus. More particularly, Holocaust commemoration, collective memory, and narratives are and have always been locales where the composition of these concepts has been negotiated, mediated, and translated.

In the case study presented here, the object of study (Canada’s National Holocaust Monument) will be explored using actor-network theory, a toolkit of material-semiotic tools and methods rooted in Latour’s principle of symmetry. I argue that the National Holocaust Monument (NHM) represents a local milieu through which collective memory, history, state identity, failure and denial are being negotiated through assemblages of human and nonhuman actants. Equally important is the theoretical commitment to distributive agency that follows from this approach, which I argue should compel IR scholars to take up a similarly inspired approach to studying political objects and events.

**Actor-network theory and memory**

John Law describes ANT as, “a disparate family of material-semiotic tools, sensibilities, and methods of analysis that treat everything in the social and natural worlds as a continuously generated effect of the webs of relations within which they are located.” Law’s description alludes to two important ways that ANT should be understood – first, as an ontological critique and second, as a methodological toolkit.

Within the context of this research, ANT appropriately lends itself as a guide for a few specific reasons: (1) it is committed to a flat-ontological approach that treats a variety of ‘things’ – humans and nonhumans – equally in its analysis; (2) these ‘things’ are afforded the capacity to be able to exert force, join together, develop and change each other; (3) these things are understood to assemble together with other things form complex networks that are constantly changing, becoming more or less durable/stable; and (4) rather than focus on the things themselves, ANT focuses on the relationships between them, allowing for a complex array of potential actants that can include things as diverse as people, organizations, texts, culture, economics, ideologies, beliefs, global pressures, and so on.

ANT as an ontological critique assumes a flat ontology or ‘generalized symmetry’ that treats all human and non-human entities with the same potential to exercise agency within a network. It functions as a critique due to the tendency of traditional social theory to be extremely anthropocentric, meaning that various hierarchies have been maintained that go ahead of observation, privileging human social participation over nonhuman. As a methodological toolkit, ANT guides research in a way to help avoid anthropocentrism by suggesting some basic rules or uncertainties regarding how social scientists should approach ‘the social’.

**Distributed Agency, memory and objects**

The hyphenated term actor-network is not meant to delineate a difference between an actor and a network, but rather the complete opposite – it indicates the conflation of the two. What this means is that an actant does not refer to an individual agent, but an entity whose existence is defined by their alliances with others, or in other words, agency is never a possession of an individual, but is instead distributed throughout an

---

1 I use the term ‘actant’, however, one could also use the term ‘actor’. The latter tends to invoke human agency, whereas I would like to stress the heterogeneous (human and nonhuman) nature of entities that practice agency.


assemblage. This hyphenated relationship, “itself embodies a productive tension, putting structure and agency into an intimate relationship in which the network is made up of actors who are, in turn, the effects of the network”. The distribution of agency is of particular significance when the toolkit of ANT is applied to the study of memory (collective or otherwise), since memory literature has: (1) largely embraced the idea that memory is not simply located within the mind of a human actor, and (2) widely studied the role of nonhumans in memory composition.

This paper is not the first attempt to use ANT within the context of memory studies. Defining memory as, “a specific way in which persons relate to time… the capacity of persons to remember and recreate past events”, Michael Guggenheim highlights how, “objects outside the remembering persons or collectives may act as catalysts for the production and interpersonal adjustment of memories”. Objects (read actants) are able to mediate memories and help us to remember. Drawing from Pierre Nora’s Halbwachsian theory of memory, particularly his concept of ‘lieux de mémoire’, Guggenheim makes a connection between ANT and memory literatures, highlighting how some theorists have argued that as we are increasingly dependent on objects to mediate our memories, we are less able or likely to draw from non-object dependent memory.

According to Guggenheim, by performing remembrance, the work of a network is being done and this work or process of object-based memory involves several exchanges of meaning, using present actants within the context of past meanings and uses. This is as true for personal memory as it is for collective memory:

“Personal memory consists of a network between only one person and one or several objects. Such memories are ‘subjective’ in the sense that the network between the person, the object, and the memoires is only relevant and only enrolled by this person and is arbitrary for the environment, because the object is easily stabilized to have exactly one meaning, but only for one person. What makes personal memories so elaborate is the fact that the network between the object and the memory is often faint, distanced and difficult to explain to outsiders… Objects become enrolled in such memory networks, because under certain circumstances they are more stable and easier to reproduce than memories without such objects”.

Collective memory then only differs from personal memory because it is in part created via communication and the resulting necessity of negotiation and coordination. For example, writing (documents) are an important object in this process, however, they are only one potential entities of many attempting to help stabilize networks.

Actor-Networks and how to trace them.

Mnemonic networks can also function in the same way other actor-networks do. Actor-networks function through their actants attempts to, “define and distribute roles, and mobilize or invent others to play these roles”. To account for these attempts, ANT studies associations between heterogeneous actants in order to map, or trace how networks become larger or smaller, more or less influential, and more or less durable. Since actants are not individuals, but rather entities whose existence is dependent on their associations (actors are networks and vice-versa), it is the relationships between them that are the focus, not the

---

8 Guggenheim, Michael. "Building Memory: Architecture, Networks and Users.", 42.
9 Ibid., 43.
ontological category of the object itself. This means that actants enter alliances, mobilize and enroll others. In other words, actants can include:

“Any element which bends space around itself, makes other elements dependent upon itself and translates their will into a language of its own. An actor makes changes in the set of elements and concepts habitually used to describe the social and the natural worlds. By stating what belongs to the past, and of what the future consists, by defining what comes before and what comes after, by building up balance sheets, by drawing up chronologies, it imposes its own space and time. It defines space and its organization, sizes and their measures, values and standards, the stakes and rules of the game - the very existence of the game itself”.

Tracing these actor-networks involves finding material proof of actions where each participant causes a change in the network, or in other words, a traced actor-network is one that identifies entities that do something. These entities are referred to in ANT as mediators. Mediators (otherwise known as actants) always transform, modify or repurpose meaning or the elements that they are meant to transfer. In contrast to mediators, those who transport meaning without transformation are called intermediaries.

However, mediators are not effective unless they can enroll others. Translation is central to an actants pursuit for growth – for only through enrolling and transforming others can an actant strive for equivalence or the vanquishing of all relevant contradictory accounts. Translation is what is being accounted for or traced by ANT, for “there is no society, no social realm, and no social ties, but there exists translations between mediators that may generate traceable associations”.

Translation is first a process, and a contingent one at that. If translation is successful, if negotiations lead to shared definitions and meanings, then what follows is a network characterized by aligned interests.

Moments of translation

In perhaps the most frequently referenced account of actor-network theory (or the sociology of translation), Michel Callon employed ANT methodology to a study of scientists, scallops, and fishermen and in doing so outlined ‘four moments of translation’, which have been a part of my analysis of the monument. These four moments include: (1) the problematization, (2) interessement, (3) enrolment, and (4) mobilization.

The first move is one that involves the attempt(s) of an actant(s) to frame an issue as not only significant to others in an assemblage, but also as one that convinces others of their indispensability in relation to the resolution. This double movement simultaneously defines the issue while placing the actants at the center, or the ‘obligatory passage point’ (OPP) in the assemblage, thus rendering them invaluable.

---

12 Latour, Reassembling the Social, 39.
13 Traces must be empirically based or else they cannot be included in an ANT account.
14 Ibid., 108.
16 An obligatory passage point can be articulated by comparing it to a security point at an airport. Passengers who have already bought their tickets, have packed, and travelled to the airport are absolutely required to pass through security, one by one. No one can board the plane unless they pass through this point.
have been enlisted by the problematization then can either accept their role in the assemblage or challenge it. Interessement is, therefore, the attempts made by the actants who have defined the issue, the OPP, and the solution to ‘impose and stabilize the identity of the other actors it has defined through its problematization’.

Additionally, the actants go about defining the identity, the goals, and the inclinations of their potential allies, however, these definitions do not necessarily hold and often require devices which strengthen or weaken alliances. It is these devices of interessement that are used to cut or weaken alliances between competing entities. These attempts do not necessarily lead to alliances (or enrollment) and accounting for enrollment entails descriptions of multipartite negotiations, cunning, and battle efforts that allow the actants to triumph.

The final movement of translation, according to Callon, is the mobilization of allies. Quite simply, this involves the formation of delegates or spokespersons who on behalf of the masses, are authorized to represent them. These spokespersons can be any actant that has been interested in the name of whom they represent or claim to represent and can be a variety of things, both human and nonhuman. In turn, this delegation process is the end result of chains of intermediaries – the continuing mobilization of entities. Mobilization involves several displacements where the, “designation of the successive spokesmen and the settlement of a series of equivalencies”, through which entities are first displaced and then reassembled, occur at a particular place and time.

An important part of achieving translation are the inscriptions (or inscription devices) that get passed around in order to produce, refine, and make sense of knowledge. Effective inscription devices are both applicable and mobile and can include anything from a document to an organization, or a piece of laboratory equipment to a science conference. These inscription devices are passed around to help establish actor-networks by enrolling other entities into their program.

In my analysis, I hope to demonstrate how ANT’s commitment to generalized symmetry, distributed agency, attention to empirically traceable connections, and moments of translation (or the movement of translation) lend to it being fruitfully used in an analysis of memory and failure/denial. This being said I would like to make clear that mine is not an attempt to ‘import’ ANT as a holistic theoretical model into international relations scholarship. Instead, I see myself as willingly entering into a trial with IR scholars through which I hope to form relationships of equivalences between the concepts and objects that I present here and those which have already been established within IR literature.

---

18 Ibid., 8.
19 Ibid., 9.
20 Ibid., 14.
21 Callon’s example of displacement involves the scallops who, “are transformed into larvae, the larvae into numbers, the numbers into tables and curves which represent easily transportable, reproducible, and diffusible sheets of paper”, Ibid.
Memory, monuments and other mnemonic technologies

“A monument does not commemorate or celebrate something that happened but confides in the ear of the future the persistent sensations that embody the event…”24

“Memorialization can transform the meanings of the past and mobilize the present.”25

In his development of the concept of collective memory, Maurice Halbwachs argued that we have to focus less on memory as a property of the subjective mind and more on memory in terms of how minds work together in society as well as how memory is structured by social arrangements. For him, memories should not be understood as archives of past experiences, but instead as general “imagos” that require the social to be both preserved and contextualized. Moreover, memories, “are as much the products of the symbols and narratives available publically – and of the social means for storing and transmitting them – as they are the possessions of individuals”.26

An important aspect of how he conceptualizes memory as social involves ‘frameworks’ or identity markers such as family, class, and religion, etc., which he thought played a vital role in the construction and reconstruction of individual and collective memory. Adding to Halbwachs social frameworks, Jennifer Hansen-Glucklich calls scholars to take seriously the power of technology to shape memory.27 Although she focuses on the role of mass technologies (photography and film) and their ability to create both collective and individual memory28, the argument elucidating the influence of mass mnemonic technology on individual and collective memory is transferable to other public mnemonic devices.

Collective memory for Halbwachs is often repeated and re-collected. However, in the process memory is not transferred flawlessly but instead is being persistently altered. The diversity of accounts linked to a given memory over time fade away and give into stereotypical figures that form collective memory imagos.29 Memory is therefore ‘social’ in that it is effected by public symbols, narratives, and technology, and over time tends to amalgamate into a shared stereotypical account.

There is a notable tension in Halbwachs work that also exists in more general scholarship – between individualistic and collective theorizing of memory. Jeffrey Olick argues that even if we restrict something like collective memory to strictly commemorative activities, we still end up having to choose between these two analytic strategies. This is because there are two very different ideas of culture involved here, “one that sees culture as a subjective category of meanings contained in people’s minds versus one that sees culture as patterns of publically available symbols objectified in society”.30 In order to avoid this seemingly dualistic analytical approach to studying memory, Olick advocates an approach he refers to as ‘social memory studies’, which he describes as:

---

28 Ibid., 13.
“a sensitizing term for a wide variety of mnemonic processes, practices, and outcomes, neurological, cognitive, personal, aggregated, and collective… open to a variety of phenomena while pointing out that all remembering is in some sense social…”

He too utilizes this idea of mnemonic technologies as devices that can play intimate and important roles in memory creation and recollection, going as far as to say that we have become ‘cyborgs’ with ‘prosthetic memories’, with these technologies extending far beyond our capacities to remember. He also notes how neurological studies have conclusively demonstrated that memories are not whole, coherent pieces stored away neatly in order to be recalled whenever needed. Instead, it seems that memory is more like a network:

“Neural networks channel bits and pieces called engrams to different places in the brain and store them there in different ways. The process of remembering… does not involve the reappearance or reproduction of an experience in its original form but the cobbled together of a new memory”

He then moves on to quote Schachter:

“A neural network combines information in the present environment with patterns that have been stored in the past, and the resulting mixture of the two is what the network remembers… When we remember, we complete a pattern with the best match available in memory; we do not shine a spotlight on the stored picture”

When understood as a social process, approaches to studying memory must avoid dualisms such as individual/society, agency/structure, and internal/external, in favour of a network approach. Additionally, one must take seriously a variety of elements, from neurons, symbols, video, audio, and a world full of objects that come together to form mnemonic networks.

In the case studied here, the mnemonic technologies include both the intended product of the actor-network, a Holocaust monument as well as the various mnemonic devices that exist in the network(s) that have been traced leading up to its construction. Along with other types of memorialization, monuments are important to the study of modern memory due to their more recent proliferation and function as a mnemonic technology. Matt Matsuda writes that memory, “is not merely a theme to search out in literary texts, nor a convenient trope to impose generically upon recollections, rituals, or remembrances”, but rather it should be understood as a variety of distinct social forms - not one memory but many – making it possible to study and compare classical, Renaissance, and modern memory. The idea that there are many remembrances, that they are distinct social forms, that they are effected by social frameworks, and that one could study different periods of memory, is of particular significance in regards to monuments.

This is because scholars have noted a significant increase in the amount of monuments and memorials that have been established over the past four decades. The proliferation of such memorials, or what Elizabeth Jelin calls the, “fever for memorialization” has been documented by Peter Carrier, who understands memorialization as, “symptomatic of societies that have been actively seeking a symbolic reinforcement of collective memories”. Olick shares a similar conclusion, recognizing the increase of monuments as far back as the nineteenth century as one of a few examples of major alterations in the form of ‘sociation’, or a

31 Ibid., 34.
32 Ibid., 29.
33 Olick, Jeffrey K. The Politics of Regret: On Collective Memory and Historical Responsibility, 26.
34 Ibid.
shift in mnemonic activity. Shelley Hornstein goes as far as to say that this was a period of ‘overmemorialization’ or obsession with creating and rethinking memorials. What this suggests is that monuments play an important role in modern memory.

What could this important role be? Part of the answer is the role that a memorial can play in a variety of important settings. Carrier argues that the intensification of commemoration is in part a result of an attempt to reinforce tradition during a time of rapid and often disorienting historical changes. According to Carrier, part of the inherent strength of memorials are that they convey tradition in a way that provides a sense of ‘permanence’ in a contemporary culture filled with, “the fleeting image of the screen and the immateriality of communications” by evoking a sense of, “authenticity and… historical ‘refuge’ not offered by technological reproductions or archives”.

Hite discusses the power that memorial sites have to make visible, forms of consciousness and specific messages as well as their ability to provoke necessary conversations. Carrier also comments on these physical sites and their ability to promote discussion:

“[M]onuments are focal points of a complex dialogue between past and present, between historical events, producers of monuments, and successive generations of spectators who inquire into the significance of the past… between individuals, and between artistic, academic, religious and political institutions and their representatives in the present”.

Part of this dialogue is facilitated by the inherent ambiguity and rather open interpretation of monuments. This polysemous characteristic informally provoke political communication in order to foster consensus and cohesion of as large a group as possible. This sometimes involves integrating several different political viewpoints together with historical memory or by inviting community members to take on collective symbols whose legitimacy is not of obvious political significance.

Modern states have been ceaselessly making use of monuments, which could also point towards their use and importance. Traditionally it has been the state that has commissioned memorial sites (although that is increasingly not the case), and often with the intent of using these sites and their power for their own interests. Nations often use monuments and memorials to reconstruct the past, typically to make it less violent and less problematic. Memorials are also bound up in pursuits of political legitimization and a myriad of other political interests for the institutions that sponsor them. Young provides a well-articulated description of how memorials can work on behalf of state interests:

“In assuming the idealized forms and meanings assigned …by the state, memorials tend to concretize particular historical interpretations. They suggest themselves as indigenous, even geological outcroppings in a national landscape; in time, such idealized memory grows as natural to the eye as the landscape in which it stands. Indeed,

---

38 Olick, Jeffrey K. The Politics of Regret: On Collective Memory and Historical Responsibility, 33.
41 Ibid., 175.
44 Ibid., 38.
for memorials to do otherwise would be to undermine the very foundations of national legitimacy, of the state’s seemingly natural right to exist.”

There is a certain amount of consensus among scholars that monuments are one form of political mediation of landscapes, and that particularly through state-sponsored acts and objects of commemoration help reshape personal memories into collective memories. Quite often forms of political mediation can be acts of territoriality – a distinguished place, demarcated by specific symbols that together carve out a geographical space that tends to be rooted in some kind of homogeneous community that shares a specific identity or past. Spatial practices such as commemoration tend to promote and strengthen the power of a dominant group as they exercise their ‘ownership of the past’ and attempt to monopolize memorialization – an essential component “of the groups control over the hegemonic values that it represents”.

Places of memorialization reveal how a variety of political perspectives can be expressed through spatial practices revealing how meaning is produced and reproduced through these practices. These places are almost always spaces of representation and are often sites engaged in difficult knowledge work.

In the case of the National Holocaust Monument space, place, territoriality, and materiality is significant as it is part of an increasingly expanding field of landscape of which the Canadian War Museum, National War Memorial, the Parliament Buildings, and the planned National Memorial to Victims of Communism are part of. As the NHM is being built, it can be understood as one of the most recent examples of the institutionalization of Canadian identity that roots itself in the country’s military history. The monument’s location across the street from the Canadian War Museum reinforces the latter’s importance in this institutionalized identity. The significance of the Canadian War Museum in this respect has been discussed by Reesa Greenberg. She has noted its importance in this landscape:

“The scale and location of the new museum, so close to Parliament, serve as advocates for the importance of Canada’s military in the national psyche, as do the process of identification built into the projects design and the museum’s role in a new ceremonial landscape at the architectural heart of the nations capital… the expanded fields of landscape in which the new Canadian War Museum operates – specifically, the newly created urban, ceremonial route that passes in front of the Parliament Buildings linking the National War Memorial and the War Museum, and the war/peace landscape walking experience designed by the architect on site…”

Greenberg also comments on the notable placement of war memorials over politicians or monuments commemorating events that took place in Canada in a public spaced called Confederation Park, which she argues is another instance of the intentional connections being made between Canadian identity and war


51 Nadine Blumer defines difficult knowledge as, “the effects of conflicts that arise when community groups compete with one another… in order to make claims either for or against dominant historical narratives of suffering”. See “Expanding Museum Spaces: Networks of Difficult Knowledge at and Beyond the Canadian Museum for Human Rights.” *The Review of Education, Pedagogy, and Cultural Studies* 37, 125-146.

trauma that took place elsewhere. According to Greenberg, the subtext in all of this is, “that one cannot be a Canadian without understanding that history and the importance of giving the military a prominent place in Canada’s future.” This, Greenberg argues, is part of an institutionalization of a post-Trudeau national identity that hosts a strong connection between the military and social justice.

**Ontological Security, Securitization of Memory, Failure and Denial**

Over the past few decades, the concept of ontological security has enjoyed a significant amount of growth within IR literature. Within this body of work, there is a considerable amount of support for the idea that states value their ontological security at least as much as their physical security. With roots in psychology and sociology the concept was brought to IR by Huysmans, though many scholars traced its initial development to Anthony Giddens. Jennifer Mitzen takes ontological security to mean, “the need to experience oneself as a whole, continuous person in time — as being rather than constantly changing — in order to realize a sense of agency”. Ontological security requires a sense of self, and further that this self receives affirmation by others. It involves someone having an amount of certainty in the consistency of their self-identity as well as in the stability of the social and material environment around them. It calls for both the knowledge of what one is doing as well as the recognition of the purpose behind what is being done. Ontological security relies on the production and proliferation of a robust variety of identity markers that help to distinguish a person or group from others and these markers are not limited to primary kinds such as ally versus enemy.

Ontological security is also entrenched in ‘routinized relationships’ with relevant others and the environment around them. This routinization is a mechanism that creates basic trust, which in turn makes social life and the self more predictable and knowable. Routines often come unchosen, unquestioned, and with the possibility of reflexivity dampened. This lack of reflexivity is actually basal to the routines ability

53 Ibid., 189.
57 Zarakol, Ayşe. "Ontological (In)security and State Denial of Historical Crimes: Turkey and Japan.", p.6.
59 ibid.
to provide security to the self.\footnote{Jennifer Mitzen, ‘Ontological Security in World Politics’, p. 346-347.} As well, routinization often requires the avoidance of cognitive dissonance when one is met with an overabundance of information. This involves a reduction of information through filters of routinized demeanors which limit and translate knowledge that potentially threatens one’s sense of self.\footnote{Steele, Brent J. (2005) ‘Ontological Security and the Power of Self-identity: British Neutrality and the American Civil War’, 527.}

In addition to its usefulness as a psychological and sociological concept, many IR scholars have taken up ontological security within the context of the state, arguing that similar to individuals they are social actors which pursue security in themselves as well as from others.\footnote{Rumelili, Bahar. "Identity and Desecuritisation: The Pitfalls of Conflating Ontological and Physical Security."., 57.} Linked to the states pursuit for legitimacy, ontological security often involves the limiting if reflexivity, as well as the creation and emphasis on stable narratives about the state and its citizens.\footnote{Zarakol, Ayşe. "Ontological (In)security and State Denial of Historical Crimes: Turkey and Japan.", p.7.}

There is a connection between ontological security, the state, and monuments that has to do with collective memory. Drawing from collective memory studies and ontological security theory, Karl Gustafsson states that,

“If collective memory provides groups with a sense of Self (that is, with ontological security), such memories need to be protected and secured from fading into oblivion through security measures… An elaborate memory infrastructure, consisting for example of museums, memorials and school curricula, contributes to the institutionalisation of memories and reduces the risk of events being forgotten. In this way, museums function as a security measure against oblivion”.\footnote{Gustafsson, Karl. "Memory Politics and Ontological Security in Sino-Japanese Relations." Asian Studies Review 38, no. 1 (2014): 73-74.}

Remembering in this way is an important part of how a state constitutes and maintains a coherent narrative. Without narrative the identity of the state cannot exist, and therefore memory becomes an integral aspect of self-identity that is, “invoked to… form a core part of its consistent sense of the self in the present [and] thus becomes apparent as a prerequisite for an internally cohesive self”.\footnote{Mälksoo, Maria. "Memory Must Be Defended': Beyond the Politics of Mnemonical Security." Security Dialogue 46, no. 3 (2015), 224.} Maria Mälksoo has argued that there currently exists widespread attempts at the securitization of historical memory in international politics and that this essentially involves a discursive process that orients specific issues or entities as imminent existential threats requiring urgent address.\footnote{Ibid., p. 226.}

Attempts to construct and identify existential threats while promoting stability and durability of a narrative entail a substantial commitment to guarding certain ways of imagining the past by discursively framing, “certain ways of public remembrance as ontological security problems emerge”, enabling, “political actors to further their alleged ontological security needs with particular rigour and legal backing”.\footnote{Ibid.}

The need to promote a stable narrative within collective memory is not only entangled in righting past wrongs or identifying national and international threats, but I would argue that it is also bound up in cases where the state must negotiate failure and/or denial in order to guard or repair the ontological damage that such events almost inevitably inflict on the state and its ability to govern. Not unlike apologies for past crimes against humanity, if a state is forced to confront a failure – an admission of wrong doing or impotent
attempt – it almost definitely will also be forced to reconsider its sense of self, self-narratives, and self-regarding normative commitments.\textsuperscript{71}

When this is proved to be the case, any serious attempt to robustly understand a states attempt to negotiate such a position should also take into account how it assembles and reassembles collective memory and national history. This is perhaps even more true in the case of denial, where such assemblages must compete ardently against international opinion, witness, and/or well-regarded institutions/organizations (such as that of the sciences). There are few instances where success of efforts to assemble against such powerful networks is more impressive than in the case of global warming.\textsuperscript{72}

In a democracy, these attempts are arguably more complex and involve an array of translation efforts, of which the state may or may not play a central roll. Due to their complexity, these phenomena would be fruitfully pursued by the researcher, “towards the many local places where the global, the structural, and the total [are] being assembled and where they expand outwards”.\textsuperscript{73} The National Holocaust Monument is treated here as one of these local places where memory, ontological security, and perhaps even attempts to deal with failure and denial are all on the table.

Methodology

After gathering the transcripts from all House Debates and Committee meetings that took up the bill regarding the monument, I made an Access to Information and Privacy Request (ATIP) on all government information regarding the monument up until my request in 2014.\textsuperscript{74} Of particular significance to this paper are the documents gleaned from the ATIP request.

The ATIP request yielded an 818 page Portable Document Formatted file that was stored on a disc and delivered by mail. Almost all of the information was pulled from a Crown corporation of the Government of Canada called the National Capital Commission (NCC), which is the organization primarily responsible for the development, conservation, and improvement of the National Capital Region (NCR), “in accordance with its national significance”.\textsuperscript{75} The NCC plays a central role in the development of the NHM. Most of what was contained on the requested disc was inter-departmental emails between employees who were involved with the NHM project. These emails were an important source of context for the rest of the information included on the disc.

Other information included the following documents: NCC’s Commemoration Policy (Mandatory Evaluation Criteria), the Canadian Holocaust Memorial Proposal (submitted to the NCC by the Canadian Holocaust Memorial Project), NCC information packages about the proposed monument, several briefing notes on the project, proposed chronology of the project, several Power Point presentation slides which conveyed the intended meaning, scope, and organization of the project, international design competition outline and adjudication process charts, proposed visioning sessions, Process for Project Management, Statement of Requirements, letters of intent, feedback regarding the facilitation of international design competitions, member requirements for the NHM Development Advisory Council, and the document detailing the National Holocaust Monument Act. However, in order to render this study manageable, I limited the data to two of these documents.

\textsuperscript{71} Zarakol, Ayşe. "Ontological (In)security and State Denial of Historical Crimes: Turkey and Japan.”, p.7.
\textsuperscript{72} For an interesting account of what it took to convince skeptical climate scientists of anthropocentric climate change and what it took to convince the public otherwise see Weart, Spencer. “Global warming: How skepticism became denial.” Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists 67, 1, 41-50.
\textsuperscript{73} Latour, Reassembling the Social, 191.
\textsuperscript{74} For more information regarding what an ATIP is, what information can be requested and what the process is like, you can visit, http://www.cic.gc.ca/english/department/atip/requests-atip.asp
\textsuperscript{75} From the NCC website: http://www.ncc-ccn.gc.ca/about-ncc
After surveying the entire ATIP file I went through it in more detail analyzing documents for traces using actor-network theory inspired methods, identifying moments of translation, mediators, intermediaries, and inscription devices. After assembling the ANT narrative I then read through these two documents closely attempting to account for the meaning networks or more appropriately, intratextual assemblages that were being drawn together in each document. As previously mentioned, to speak of a ‘meaning network’ is not the same as an actor-network. The former assembles entities without necessarily or directly placing them in an actor-network. By this I mean to say that within the context of these documents entities are assembled at times without trials or translation, but instead are arranged purely according to the intentions of the author. This being said, what was arranged is certainly ad hoc and is affected by the actor-network that the document (or inscription device) is participating in as well as the events, places, and people that it is attempting to mobilize and/or stabilize.

Within ANT, texts are ‘instruments of coordination’ or inscription devices that mediate and coordinate entities in an actor-network by highlighting, “multiple voices and [indexing] contexts in which content is empowered, legitimated, or simply associated with specific acts of interpretation,” becoming, “sites in which distributed rhetorical identities and functions coalesce to structure and organize interpretations of the content that they combine to create.” Texts create order and localize narratives by speaking on behalf of a variety of entities, often utilizing their connection to well supported and otherwise inaccessible inscription devices. Often these entities are difficult to challenge because they are connected to a, “bundle of indefinitely extending and more or less routinized and costly literary and material relations that include statements about reality and the realities themselves”.

As previously stated, I think its important not to over-confl ate what is going on in the text with how the text is being circulated within an actor-network. This is why I chose a different way to explore how entities were being assembled within the text (i.e. meaning networks/intratextual assemblages). I recorded nouns and verbs in each sentence and inputted them as vertices or nodes into Node XL, a program that creates visuals of networked graphs. Each of the two input vertices represent a noun in a given sentence in a document, with the first vertex usually indicating the noun that is doing something in relation to another noun in the same sentence. The edge labels were then verbs that described the action or relationship between the two nouns being represented by the vertices. The nouns were all recorded verbatim, while the vast majority of the verbs were as well, with the exception of a handful which I had adjusted in order to better represent the meaning that was being communicated in the original document. Also worth noting is that the graphs are directional – meaning that they show the direction of action between any given relationship – though in the few cases where the verb used in the text was insufficient in its ability to communicate meaning independently and accurately, it was understood to refer to the context of the relationship rather than something that was being done by one entity to another.

The goal of treating the documents in this way was to have a basic idea of what entities were being assembled (nouns) and how they related to each other (verbs). This approach is limited in what it is able to say regarding these relationships, however I argue that it is an appropriate first step in comparing the assemblages in various documents within an actor-network.

The Data

Preamble

According to the narrative that has accompanied the National Holocaust Monument, the initial idea for this monument has been credited to Laura Grosman, who was at the time a student at the University of Ottawa. After the realization that Canada was the only World War II Allied Nation without a memorial to the Holocaust in its capital city, she was motivated to help initiate an attempt to change this. To do so, she

---


contacted her Member of Parliament Susan Kadis through which Bill C-547, An Act to establish a Holocaust Monument in the National Capital Region was introduced as a private member’s bill to the House of Commons in May of 2008. The bill died on the table during this attempt and then again when it was reintroduced by MP Anita Neville in December 2008 as Bill C-238 – the first time due to the dissolution of parliament following a call for election. The bill (almost identical to its previous versions) was then again reintroduced by MP Tim Uppal in September 2009 as Bill C-442, An Act to establish a National Holocaust Monument.

That this attempt to establish a national Holocaust memorial went through this legislative process is not insignificant. Typically memorials, commemorations, or any other use of public space in the NCR are not taken up in parliament at all, but rather they are negotiated directly through the NCC, the government organization that, under the National Capital Act, is held responsible for the approval and management of any projects that take place on federal lands in the NCR. The NHM was an exception in part due to the decision that Grosman made to pursue the monument through her federal representatives, rather than trying to raise private support on her own. This move drastically changed the way in which the project was pursued and undoubtedly attributed to the projects success.

This is particularly significant when considering past attempts at commemorating the Holocaust on a national level. The 1997 controversy over hosting a Holocaust gallery in the Canadian War Museum and over establishing the stand-alone Holocaust Gallery at the Canadian Museum for Human Rights attest to the real difficulty and conflict that can arise when different groups and their collective memory compete in spaces of national significance and identity. Though unlike these two, where the memorialization of the Holocaust was in tight quarters with the commemoration of Canada’s military history or other human rights abuses, the NHM enjoyed a less competitive spatial claim to territory in the NCR (across from the Canadian War Museum). Still, the potential for a project like the NHM to fail or have serious difficulties in light of these previous attempts marks the importance of the legislative process in order to ensure the projects success.

Document #1 – Bill C-442

The NHM project did neither fail nor have many difficulties. One of the reasons for this was that the monument project was taken up as a bill in parliament. There are several advantages to pursuing the monument project by tabling it as a bill. A bill is a powerful inscription device that allows actants to acquire credibility and coopt during the process of translation. From the moment that the bill was taken up in a parliamentary setting it was central to the framing of the translation process in the actor-network through which the NHM project was being pursued.
It problematized Canadian national identity, collective memory, and international reputation while simultaneously demanding that the Holocaust be an essential national pedagogical prerogative. It not only determined a set of actors and defined their identities, but by doing so established itself as a necessary obligatory passage point (OPP). This double movement (defining the problem and relevant entities while at the same time positioning itself as the OPP) was the essential first step to the translation process.\(^{78}\)

Though it is tempting to either mistreat Bill C-442 as a document that simply contains information, or solely as a resource used by human actors, to do so would disenfranchise its traceable impact on social/political interaction and organization.\(^{79}\) As soon the bill was tabled and introduced by the MP that sponsored it, it became entangled in a variety of relationships with other entities that allow it to act not only independently from it’s sponsor (or its author), but to accomplish more than they (or any other of the human actors involved) could have without it. This is not a simple re-description of Bill C-442 using ANT terminology, but an admission that the agency of the bill was both complex and distributed.

Of course the ability of the bill to problematize and define the actor-network cannot be attributed to the bill itself any more than it can be to the people who introduced and authored it. The bill gleans its agency from within a political center of translation which is part of an extremely large network that includes everything from politicians and secretaries to stone buildings, laws, files, and emails, etc. – all of which contribute to a rather durable network that could be referred to as the Canadian political system – through which this bill is given the opportunity to enroll the necessary actants into its own actor-network.\(^{80}\) It is important to note that this opportunity guarantees only so much – that a variety of actants (mostly politicians) address its attempts to enroll those it defines in its problematization.\(^{81}\) These actants can either strengthen or challenge these attempts, possibly even killing the bill on the table.

However, the bill presented itself at a key opportunity for politicians from all parties to align themselves with the symbolic meaning behind it. The bill received a tremendous amount of support from all parties, with various MP’s taking turns endorsing and implicating themselves in it. A robust answer to why this was the case is out of the scope of this account, but as far as memory, narrative, and national identity is concerned, both the bill and the political endorsements are telling. How the bill pulled together entities within itself in order to provoke such alignment has a strong connection to the significance and usefulness of the Holocaust narrative.

The graph in Figure 2 shows what was assembled in Bill C-442, with nouns and verbs representing a simplistic view of the ordering process (as described in the methods section of this paper). The size of the black circle representing the entity varies as it represents the betweenness centrality of the entity as calculated by the programs graph metrics function. Betweenness centrality is a measure of the entity’s centrality to the network, or its ability to bridge different sub-networks (clusters of entities that are closely connected to each other). In this case, the three largest entities – the monument, council, and minister – are most central and are important in that they connect other entities to each other that otherwise would not have a connection. It is perhaps not surprising that these three entities are most central to the assemblage, given that the majority of what a bill consists of is its defining of actants who are enrolled by the legislative body.

Apart from visualizing an assemblage of entities in a given inscription device, graphing these intra-document networks can reveal which actants the device is attempting to enroll, employ, and mobilize, and further which entities are the most responsible for connecting the rest of the entities together.

---

\(^{78}\) See Figure 1 in Appendix.

\(^{79}\) For an insightful read regarding how documents are/can be treated in the social sciences, see Prior, Lindsay. “Repositioning Documents in Social Research”, In *Sociology 42*, 5 (2008), 821-836.

\(^{80}\) Centers of translation… where network elements are defined and controlled, and strategies for translation are developed and considered.

\(^{81}\) It is important to note that it is likely that the problematization and interessemnt devices have already been negotiated before the bill was taken up in the House; however, this is beyond the data included in this study.
Days before Bill C-442 was given its second reading in parliament, Laura Grosman submitted a proposal for the Canadian Holocaust Memorial to the National Capital Commission (NCC), the government organization responsible for public lands in the National Capital Region. Like the bill, the purpose of this document was to be used as an interessement device in order to translate or align the interests of significant actants so that they would match that of the Canadian Holocaust Memorial Project, which Grosman was the Executive Director of.

The structure of the document was arranged in order to meet the requirements of such a submission to the NCC and addressed most of the Mandatory Evaluation Criteria that the NCC’s External Committee of Experts would use while reviewing the proposal. Criteria met by the proposal included; goals and objectives of the commemoration; unveiling dates; approximate budget; project partners; sponsors and supporting agencies; general site requirements; site-use intentions; definition of “the Holocaust”; and letters of support for the project. The purpose of these criteria was to ensure that any project that was to be approved by the NCC aligned with their mandate and would integrate well into their organizational structure and processes.

Though these criteria were addressed by the proposal, the majority of the document focused on defining the Holocaust, communicating a narrative about the Holocaust, linking both to the goals and objectives of the commemoration, and highlighting key people and organizations that endorsed her project. This becomes more obvious when considering the graph in Figure 3. In contrast to what was assembled in Bill C-442 (rather than focusing on entities charged with the duty of establishing the monument), the entities most paramount to connecting all the rest are the Jewish people, the monument, and the Nazi’s, followed by a variety of entities that are part of the narrative described in the document: death camps, Germans, Himmler, SS Einsatzgruppen, gas chambers, Allied forces, Auschwitz, decontamination showers, Canada, and Canadians, to name a few.

**Discussion**

In order to explore the entities that seemed to be more involved with the narrative inside the text than with what was going on in the network surrounding the text and wanting to keep true to the commitment I made to the principle of symmetry, I accounted for the entities as I found them in the text, regardless of whether or not I was aware of their mediation in the monuments assemblage.

Through visualizing the relationship between entities based on nouns and verbs in the text and then by accounting for their significance to the network based on the betweenness centrality metric, I began to see that some entities seemed to be more responsible for connecting other entities to each other. This alone is perhaps not that interesting, unless the researcher is interested in possible connections between the entities represented in the document and the entities entangled in the actor-network that the document is participating in.

If a text as an inscription device functioning to coordinate and mediate entities in an actor-network, then which entities in the text where effectively doing so and how? Or in other words, what significance is an intratextual entity to an actor-network in which the text is found? Are all entities equally significant or are some mediating more than others? If these texts are embodying performance and ordering entities into a durable form which is then employed as an attempt to either stabilize or destabilize networks, then why are some entities more central to the ordering strategy? One way to identify which entities are potentially most central to the ordering strategy of a document is, as I have suggested above, making use of the betweenness centrality metric. This metric, I believe, is one way to highlight the entities that are doing the most work in a given text.
But identifying these entities is only a first step. In order to elucidate a mediation between an intra-textual entity(ies) and entities that are part of the broader actor-network, one must be true to ANT and follow them through empirical evidence of material traces.

Though entities such as ministers, councils, and organizations such as the NCC are potentially easier to identify and trace other more subtle entities that come out of the graphing process. For example, ‘death camps’ / ‘camps’ were identified as fairly central to the account provided in the Holocaust Monument Proposal. What about these entities were significant and did they lend to mediate encounters and translate within the actor-network?

After looking through the data I found a possible answer. During the House debates three separate MP’s had said the following (emphasis added):

“When we think of the Holocaust, the first images that come to mind are images of horror. Each of us here and each person watching remembers them well, no matter what our age, because we have seen the audiovisual documents that illustrate the horror of the camps”. – Michel Guimond

“When we think of the Holocaust, the first images that come to mind are images of horror. All of us have seen pictures of the concentration camps that shocked the entire world”. – Carole Lavalee

“Our country's Prime Minister, when he visited the Nazi death camp at Auschwitz in the spring of 2008, commented that, on the one hand, he was deeply moved by the suffering of the innocents who died, but that, on the other hand, he felt hope from the spirit and strength of the Jewish people”. – Tim Uppal

These comments are revealing as they suggest the potential agency of these locations and the usefulness of the images through which these locales are mobilized as intersessement devices used to help recruit other actants to take on roles in the network while simultaneously reinforcing the definition of the network. As the MP’s in the above quotes explain, ‘when we think of the Holocaust’ we rely on these objects in order to help us think. The above quotes also reveal that these images do something – they compel us to remember, to be horrified. Though a more thorough account would have to be provided, perhaps the ability of these objects to compel are an important part of the translation process and this is partially why they play an important role in the intratextual assemblage considered above.

The point of considering entities that are central to intratextual assemblages is therefore a method for allowing the actants of a network to lead you through the translation process. If an entity plays a central role in connecting other entities within a document, then this may be an indication that the entity is also leaving traces in the actor-network that the text is itself a part of.

**Conclusion**

Taken as a local example or case where collective memory is being assembled, the NHM project can be analyzed in order to explore how a state and various non-state entities translate each others interests into a national monument. Though ontological security and negotiating failures or denial are of primary concern for the state, successful narratives, memory, and history can directly or indirectly enroll entities that strengthen state attempts. In this case it has already been noted how the NHM as well as other memorials are being arranged in order to assemble Canadian collective identity, memory, and history in a way that closely aligns and makes essential the narrative of war and international intervention on behalf of the Canadian government. An exploration of how these realities affect the ability of the Canadian government to exercise agency regarding foreign policy initiatives would be particularly interesting.

More relevant to the constitution of failure and denial and the object of study here would be if there were any connections to be explored between the monument, including the larger assemblage surrounding it, and

---

82 Parliamentary transcripts retrieved from https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JGVViGdu9vQ
Canada’s history of failing to accommodate Holocaust survivors and additional cases of anti-Semitism.\textsuperscript{83} Additionally, the act of focusing Canadian collective memory and history on the Holocaust narrative – an event that occurred ‘far away’, ‘a while ago’, and in which Canada played an arguably positive role – potentially provides space to ignore or deny human rights abuses closer to home.\textsuperscript{84}

The brief analysis of these two documents is part of a larger research project that I am currently working on which include about a dozen other documents and several lengthy parliamentary transcripts, including both House debates and Committee meeting minutes. Within this broader context I attempt to follow traces left by mediating actants in the network, which is more or less a more common approach to applying ANT. This part of my analysis was only briefly touched on here within the context of these two documents and are only meant to provide brief examples of the tedious and local (but also global) nature of what constitutes collective memory networks – both intratextual assemblages and the actor-networks that they are found in. Consideration of the design process, the aesthetics of the monument, and interviews with those who are part of the project would add to the traceable evidence and to this account.

The long theoretical preamble was meant to establish valid connections between the phenomena of collective memory, ontological state security, failure and denial, while at the same time advocating for an analytical approach that is able to methodologically (and ontologically) provide a basis to account for the distributed agency of human and nonhuman entities that make up these objects of study. It is these assemblages that must be traced in order for us to fully account for failure and denial since memory-making and the ontological security in many cases may be the avenues through which states and their publics negotiate these phenomena.

\textsuperscript{83} MP’s referenced the rejection of the St. Louis by the Canadian government, a ship transporting Jews fleeing Europe during WWII, as well as “new forces of anti-Semitism” witnessed in Canada and internationally.

\textsuperscript{84} The focus on the Holocaust over more nationally significant human rights issues has provoked literature discussing the comparison between the Jewish Holocaust and what some describe as the ‘Indigenous Holocaust’. See MacDonald, David. “First Nations, Residential Schools, and the Americanization of the Holocaust: Rewriting Indigenous History in the United States and Canada”, in \textit{Canadian Journal of Political Science} 40, 4, 995-1015.
Appendix

Figure 1 – Problematization

Problematization:

Canadians have an obligation to honour memory of Holocaust victims; it is important that the Holocaust always have a place in national consciousness and memory; there is currently no national memorialization; a monument will help Canadians remember the Holocaust by acting as a tool to help teach future generations and prevent future genocides.

Goals of entities:
- To promote tolerance and religious freedom
- Recognition of partnership with Jewish Community and promotion of human rights
- To be recognized, remembered and honoured
- To prevent future acts of hate and genocide
Figure 2 – Bill C-442 with entities size based on the betweenness centrality metric.
Figure 3. Note: Graph simplified for clarity (the least significant entities based on the betweenness centrality metric were removed).