

Monuments, mundanity and memory: Altering 'place' and 'space' at the National War Memorial (Canada)

Memory Studies

3(4) 379–394

© The Author(s) 2010

Reprints and permission: sagepub.

co.uk/journalsPermissions.nav

DOI: 10.1177/1750698010374286

<http://mss.sagepub.com>



Piotr M. Szpunar

University of Pennsylvania, USA

Abstract

On 1 July 2006, three youths were photographed urinating on the National War Memorial in Ottawa, Canada. This event affected Canadian collective memory in a very particular and subtle way. It acted as a catalyst for the (re)emergence of two discourses concerning Canadian collective memory. Each had competing claims and demands and became entangled in a negotiation that took place through the mass media. This negotiation led to the alteration of 'place' and 'space' at the National War Memorial through the introduction of particular tactics of surveillance. These aimed to limit the porosity of the site's boundaries and, consequently, affected the nature of citizens' interaction with the memory-site. This small event is important because its mundanity (and lack of intent) highlights the depth of the instability, and subtle dynamism, of collective memory.

Keywords

Canada, collective memory, materiality, political geography

Introduction

Collective memory is unstable. It is transient and variable (Zelizer, 1995). It is vulnerable to both actions intended to alter it, such as the production of counter-memories through protests at particular sites and counter-monuments (Young, 1997), and events that come to be known as national traumas (Alexander, 2004) which, consequently, 'change everything' (e.g. 9/11). However, its instability is also highlighted by more mundane events: ones that do not result in new 'landmarks' (e.g. Ground Zero in New York) and others that do not even intend to produce a counter-memory. It is such events that allow us to understand the dynamic nature of collective memory in a more subtle way. One such event occurred on 1 July 2006 in Ottawa, Canada. Directly following the Canada Day celebrations, three young men were photographed urinating on the National War Memorial (NWM), perhaps Canada's most sacred monument. What makes this example poignant is that (as will be laid out in this article) it was not a protest or a conscious contestation. Nor is it the stuff of national trauma. Its importance lies in its mundanity and lack of intent.

Corresponding author:

Piotr M. Szpunar, Annenberg School for Communication, University of Pennsylvania, 3620 Walnut Street, Philadelphia, PA 19104, USA.

Email: pszpunar@asc.upenn.edu

This article argues that this event affected Canadian collective memory, but in a very particular and subtle way: it altered the interactions that constitute, embody and regenerate collective memory; it led to the alteration of the configuration of 'place' and 'space' at the NWM through the introduction of particular tactics of surveillance – video cameras and a sentry. If collective memory 'exists in the world rather than a person's head, and so is embodied in different cultural forms' (Zelizer, 1995: 232), an embodiment constituted through citizens' interaction with(in) these forms, then an explication of how an event affected collective memory must focus on how it has altered these interactions at a particular site. Therefore, it should be clear that when I use the term 'Canadian collective memory' that I do not refer to some monolith entity; rather I refer to a set of practices, relations and interactions – collective memory that exists in the world.¹ Such interactions are constrained and guided by the particular configuration of place and space of a given site. Therefore, here I examine the changes made to this configuration at the NWM and their implications. This article shows that these changes were the result of a negotiation – played out through the mass media – between two (re)emergent discourses concerning Canadian collective memory, for which this mundane event acted as a catalyst.

Collective memory

The phenomenon of a group's shared memory has been studied under many different labels – public memory, collected memory, cultural memory, social memory, collective memory – all of which are not perfectly synonymous (see Olick and Robbins, 1998; Osborne, 1998; Sturken, 1997; Young, 1993). This article does not provide an exhaustive review of all this work but rather defines collective memory and its attributes in a way that provides a foundation for the arguments to be laid out later (for extensive reviews, see Kansteiner, 2002; Olick and Robbins, 1998; Zelizer, 1995).

Maurice Halbwachs (1992) emphasized the social nature of all memory stating that individual thought is capable of the act of recollection only insofar as one places oneself within the social frameworks of memory (p. 38). Along this line, Hutton (1993) defines collective memory as an 'elaborate network of social mores, values, and ideals that marks out the dimension of our imaginations according to the attitudes of the social group to which we relate' (cited in Osborne, 1998). This network is populated by what Pierre Nora (1996) calls 'lieux de mémoire', and what Halbwachs (1992: 175, 222–3) refers to as 'landmarks', that is, 'particular figures, dates and periods of time' which localize a society's mores, values and ideals. While Halbwachs states that 'landmarks' are always carried 'within ourselves' (1992: 175), he seeks to go beyond a psychological explanation of memory (Olick and Robbins, 1998). Indeed, collective memory 'exists in the world' and such 'landmarks' and collective memories are often 'material' and are dependent on how groups interact with them (Kansteiner, 2002; Osborne, 2001; Young, 1993; Zelizer, 1995, 1998). Monuments and memorials are common materializations of collective memory and are dealt with later.

Before moving on to the material aspects of collective memory it is important to distinguish memory from history. For Nora (1996: 3) memory is 'always embodied in living societies . . . subject to the dialectic of remembering and forgetting . . . [and] always a phenomenon of the present'. History, on the other hand, is a representation or reconstruction of the past that is always problematic and incomplete. In addition, Nora (1989) views history as an attempt to suppress memory. History here is seen as 'official' and associated with the state. Such an oppositional view is echoed in the work of Gillis (1994), who posits an elite–popular binary (cited in Osborne, 1998). In contrast, Sturken (1997: 5) states that it is better to view history and memory as 'entangled rather than oppositional . . . [and] that there is much traffic across the[ir] borders'. This distinction

between, and entanglement of, history and memory provides a reminder that any study of collective memory must keep in mind several considerations: questions concerning 'which memory?' and 'who remembers?' (Zelizer, 1998); that it is rare to find a unified public; and that memory is always used for present purposes and always involves power (Halbwachs, 1992; Zelizer, 1995). While these considerations are not explicitly expanded on in this article, it is important to keep them in mind in the discussion of the discourses surrounding the event under examination. That is, who is purporting which discourse and for what effect.²

Materializing memory: Monuments, memorials, place and space

Memorials and monuments have always been considered important sites of collective memory (Assmann and Czaplicka, 1995; Huyssen, 1994; Kansteiner, 2002; Olick and Robbins, 1998; Zelizer, 1995). Young (1993: 3) states that for many scholars, memorials have often been said to 'recall only past deaths or tragic events and provide places to mourn, while "monuments" remain essentially celebratory markers of triumphs'. Young (1993), however, takes issue with this in that each often contains what is attributed to the other; for example, monuments also recall past deaths. The NWM itself both mourns and celebrates; while it is a 'monument' within a 'memory-site', as Young (1993) defines both, it is also called a 'memorial'. Hence no clear dichotomy is used in this article and previous work on monuments is highly useful.

Monuments are the physical structures that 'house memories in a durable fashion, anchoring the transient and variable nature of memory itself' (Zelizer, 1995: 232). Their popularity in the West peaked in 1870–1914, a time of rapid change when governments sought such anchoring (Osborne, 2001). Soon after, the monument's 'poor aesthetics and shamelessly legitimizing politics' had caused it to fall out of repute (Huyssen, 1994: 253); one exception, post-1914 being monuments to the First World War (Osborne, 2001). The monument has also been criticized for being more a vehicle for forgetting, for materializing memory and taking the onus off actual people (Young, 1997). However, Huyssen (1994: 255) suggests that in a post-modern age, in a culture characterized by the fleeting image, the monument's very permanence, once derided, provides it with a newfound importance. This permanence is not absolute: though the monument may have the durability of stone, it 'is always built on quicksand' (Huyssen, 1994: 250). Monuments are contested – they are the sites of protests (Sturken, 1997) and places where counter-memories can be formed (Young, 1993) – largely because they are involved in relations of power (Osborne, 2001).

The instability (and stability) of monuments is also affected by their situation in 'place', as 'place', within 'space', or within a landscape. Landscapes are 'culturally loaded geographies' which contain markers, such as monuments, that aid in constituting a historical and cultural discourse for social groups (for a detailed review of this concept, see Osborne, 2001). Place and space are two concepts that have been theorized by many scholars, and 'given the different ways space and place have been operationalized, they remain relatively diffuse, ill-defined and inchoate' (Hubbard et al., 2004: 6). Indeed, there is no agreement on the definition or relation of these concepts to one another. Many scholars view place as a particular form of space (Hubbard et al., 2004), as something that arises or is formed out of space through action (Osborne, 2001) and is posterior to space (Casey, 1996). Henri Lefebvre criticizes this stance in that it assumes an empty, neutral and malleable space (Hubbard et al., 2004). Casey (1996), in a more radical stance, claims that human beings are always anywhere and 'anywhen' within place, that place co-locates space and time and is, consequently, anterior to space.

While these views are divergent and even at odds with each other, there is common ground from which to usefully operationalize these concepts. Here, because of their lucidity, Yi-Fu Tuan's

(1977) definitions will be used, but not dogmatically. For Tuan, places are security (p. 3), they are the concretion of value (p. 10) and require an instilling of control. An object becomes a place only when 'our experience of it is total' (p. 18). Space, on the other hand, is more abstract (p. 5); it is freedom (p. 3). Tuan sees place as constructed through a tapering of space. Here I diverge from Tuan's theory in two ways. First, I acknowledge that the control or concretion of value in place is never absolute (Hubbard et al., 2004) and that 'even the most culturally saturated place retains a factor of wildness, that is, of the radically amorphous and unaccounted for' and that this is due to an essential feature of place: the 'porosity of its boundaries' (Casey, 1996: 35, 42). Second, and as many scholars recognize, *both* place and space are constructed through citizen interaction with the world; Lefebvre's *rhythmanalysis* (Hubbard et al., 2004) and Casey's (1996) 'essentiality of the body' both deal with this. Such acknowledgments are not antithetical to viewing place and space in the ways outlined above. The 'spaciousness' that our modified version of Tuan's definition of space suggests is not synonymous with Casey's 'wildness'. However, the more spacious a site is, the more porous its boundaries are and, consequently, the more susceptible it is to the 'unaccounted for'. All this is to suggest that rather than defining place and space through an anterior-posterior relationship, it may be more fruitful to discuss how each is constructed, often without clear borders within landscapes or memory-sites. This maintains Casey's (1996) phenomenological point that one is never outside culture. Memory-sites and landscapes are populated by markers and penetrated by tactics that attempt to provide both security (place) and freedom (space) which aim to guide the body's interaction with the site. Such markers and tactics affect the porosity of a landscape's boundaries and, because monuments are often key components within landscapes, they are in turn affected by this porosity. I return to outlining the particular tactics used in altering place and space at the NWM after outlining its significance for Canadian collective memory and the event that took place there.

The National War Memorial: 'The response'

In 1925, a competition called for a realistic monument commemorating Canada's role in the Great War. This monument, however, was not to glorify war, but rather to express 'the feelings of the Canadian people as a whole . . . to keep alive the spirit of heroism [and] the spirit of self-sacrifice . . . exemplified . . . in the Great War' (Ministry of Public Works 1925 'Terms of Reference', cited in 'The Response', 1998). Vernon March's conception of 'the Great Response of Canada' was chosen and was officially unveiled in 1939 by King George VI to a crowd of about 100,000 people (Figure 1).

Its design was carried out with the very explicit purpose of affecting Canadian identity and collective memory (Gordon and Osborne, 2004). The Memorial (center of Figure 1) rises 21 meters from its base and consists of 22 bronze figures (soldiers), each 'historically correct in detail of uniform and equipment' ('Memorial', 1998), passing through an arch made of Canadian granite topped by the allegorical figures of Peace and Freedom. In 2000, the site gained new meaning as the remains of the Unknown Soldier were repatriated from France. The remains were placed in front of the Memorial, in a sarcophagus, also made of Canadian granite modeled after the altar at Vimy, 'interred in soil from Canada's 10 provinces, three territories and Vimy Ridge' (Osborne and Osborne, 2004: 42). Confederation Square, where the Memorial is located, now became a sacred ground, a sanctified burial place. The combination of the Memorial and the Tomb in this particular configuration attempts to structure collective remembering in several ways.

First, as in many memorials of the Great War (King, 1999), the figures are not shown in 'fighting attitudes' ('Memorial', 1998) which ostensibly constitutes a forgetting of the violence that



Figure 1. HM King George VI and Queen Elizabeth unveil the War Memorial

Source: © Rapid, Grip and Batten Ltd/National Archives of Canada / C-0006545.

marks such actions (King, 1999). The soldiers are called to defend Peace and Freedom against an unseen ‘other’; they are not aggressors. Also forgotten is that Canada was responding to its imperial leader, the United Kingdom; a response that was hardly spontaneous, but rather orchestrated with the aid of government propaganda (Murphy, 1998).

Second, the memorial itself negotiates between the ‘universal and the particular’ (Nora, 1996; Zelizer, 1995). The universal lies in the allegorical figures, nameless figures and the Unknown Soldier in the Tomb. The particular lies in the realism of the uniforms and equipment of the figures, the symbol-objects (helmet, Memorial Cross corner pieces) atop the Tomb (Figure 2) and the dates inscribed on the Memorial (of conflicts in which Canadian soldiers perished). Here, the interplay of the integration of (within the figures) and the juxtaposition of (between ‘real’ figures and allegorical figures) the universal and the particular attempts to create a shared past that is meaningful to a multicultural and diverse nation.

Finally, the Great War has immense significance for Canadian identity. While the Confederation took place in 1867, Canada did not then experience a ‘blood sacrifice’ (to use the words of Marvin and Ingle, 1999) with which to solidify the ‘nation’; rather, Canada’s beginnings were steeped in a loyalist tradition. It was not until this passing through (the arch), in response, that the nation was truly born (Figure 3); Canada ‘entered the war as a colony . . . [and] emerged as a nation’ (Berton, cited in Zuccherro, 1999). It was only after this that Canada itself had the right to demand the sacrifice of its people; during the Second World War Canada declared war independently for the first time (CBC, 1939). The addition of the Tomb made this more salient: the soldiers in the monument now march through the arch – in unaggressive poses and, hence, not resisting – toward a consecrated burial site, toward death (Figure 4). The event represented by the Memorial is indeed the messianic ritual at the beginning of Canada’s world – a lost and holy event (Marvin and Ingle, 1999: 133).



Figure 2. Tomb of the Unknown Soldier: detail: helmet, sword, and maple leaves (photograph by author)

The NWM is also part of a larger landscape. First, it is located in Confederation Square, which was important in attempting to solidify Canada as a nation through establishing a proper capital city. This location was purposively selected by the then Prime Minister, W.L.M. King, contrary to the designer, Jacques Gréber's original plan (for a detailed history of Confederation Square, see Gordon and Osborne, 2004). By doing so, Mr King sought to achieve his goal in creating a capital that could rival those of Europe (Gordon and Osborne, 2004) and be a 'focal point in the national imagination' (Osborne and Osborne, 2004: 54) or in Tuan's (1977: 173) formulation, be a city that 'drew attention to itself and was the center of ritual practice'.

Second, Confederation Square itself is part of a larger memorial landscape. It is surrounded by other sites of memory such as the Parliament Buildings, Parliament Hill and 'A Path of Heroes'. Such a landscape (or capitol-capital complex) is vital to the cultivation of collective memory in Canada (see Osborne, 2001; Osborne and Osborne, 2004). While all these features mark place in Tuan's sense, it should be noted that this landscape is overlapped by and penetrated by public spaces. It lies at the intersection of Ottawa's three main roads. It stands at the conjunction of 'the Market' (shopping and bar district) to the east, the National Arts Centre to the south and Sparks Street Mall, a pedestrianized road to the west lined with bars, shops and home to cultural events. This is not a defect of the site. King was not simply concerned with place. He wanted the Memorial to be somewhere where all Canadians could visit freely (Gordon and Osborne, 2004). In other words, he wanted to incorporate a spaciousness that allowed unrestricted access.

The aim of this section in the article has been to outline the significance of the NWM for Canadian collective memory and to place it within a particular landscape, one rife with elements of place and space that affect the porosity of its boundaries, through a semiotic and geographic analysis. However, what is central to collective memory – and this is articulated by almost every scholar cited so far – is how the citizenry interacts with such landscapes and memorials. I now turn to the



Figure 3. Passing through (photograph by author)

event mentioned in the introduction, one that altered these important interactions at – and citizens’ relation to – the NWM.

1 July 2006

On 3 July 2006, the front page of the *Ottawa Citizen* carried the headline ‘National Disgrace!’ along with photographs snapped by a retired major in the Canadian Armed Forces, Dr Pilon, showing three



Figure 4. Walking toward death (photograph by author)

young men urinating on the NWM. One photo in particular was considered especially incendiary as the subject's head was turned toward the camera displaying an ear-to-ear smile accompanied by a celebratory hand gesture. The incident resulted in intense media coverage. By 6 July 2006, all three had been identified ('War Memorial', 2006); the two minors through calls to police from people who had recognized them, and the eldest, Stephen Fernandes, 23, turned himself in after discovering he had made front-page news. By this time letters, calls and emails were pouring into newspapers, radio stations and television programs calling for everything from history lessons to a jail sentence to sending the three off to fight in Afghanistan; the eldest was charged with mischief. Within days of identification, it was clear that all three were extremely remorseful: one of the minors gave a 'tearful' apology to a local veterans group (Ditchburn, 2006); Fernandes issued a public apology directed to the Royal Canadian Legion, veterans and the public (Larouche-Smart, 2006); and all three performed community service. The Royal Canadian Legion accepted Fernandes' apology and the charges against him were dropped in light of his reparatory actions (Oliveira, 2007).

As the prosecution of the young men came to an end, it was not accompanied by an end to the public discussion concerning Canadian collective memory. The discourses that began to take shape instantly after the release of the photographs began to solidify. While all agreed that this act was insulting, there was a clear split regarding the nature of the insult and what it signified. Two dominant discourses (re)emerged: one saw the event as a mere *incident*, while the other saw it as an *incidence* – the distinction here being important as the latter entails a much larger problem. This

distinction best embodies what proponents of each discourse believed the appropriate measure(s) for restoring the dignity of the Memorial to be or what, in the words of Marvin and Ingle (1999), the 'apostolic ritual' should entail. In what follows I use an informal discourse analysis of what citizens and other players said through the media – via letters-to-the-editor, press releases, radio call-in shows, editorials and general news coverage – to outline these discourses.

Incident, personal atonement, public penance

Prime Minister Stephen Harper, responding to the incident, described the three young men as 'thoughtless' and that they did not 'represent in any way the views of any segment of Canadian Society' (quoted in Proudfoot, 2006). Here the isolated nature of this incident is clear. First, the use of the word 'thoughtless' suggests that the three young men were simply not thinking. Second, it does not represent the views of any other Canadians along the lines of cultural background or generation. Therefore, Canadians' memory was not imperiled or contested; the Memorial had simply been the scene of an unintentional act.

This view was echoed by others. Some stated that drunk young men who are 'full of beer' are not concerned with where they relieve themselves, while others pointed to the fact that it was an 'unintentional act' and that no one 'needs clarification that urinating on the monument was . . . stupid' (Russell, 2006). Indeed many saw it as simply an act of drunkenness (Gibson, 2006), 'just a couple of drunks looking for a place to have a quick leak' (MacGregor, 2006) and that the media and Canadians should 'get on with life' (Russell, 2006). Several editorials commented on how such people – dubbed 'stupid young men' – have always existed, especially in 'crowded urban areas' ('Let's Not', 2006) and that they 'often grow up to be fine and upstanding older citizens' (MacGregor, 2006). While this group did make the perpetrators 'other' as was necessary in order to condemn the act (as shown through the Prime Minister's comments), the designation was not absolute nor was it permanent. Their designation as 'stupid young men' was one that allowed them to re-enter the group after they repented and performed penance.

It is the portrayal of the event as *incident* that allows us to understand what proponents of this discourse saw as the appropriate apostolic ritual. While there were people who called for harsh punishments without drawing a connection to a larger problem, the majority of actors within this discourse, such as the Constable of the Ottawa Police, called for a punishment that would 'make them realize that what they'd done was serious and to actually have a positive outcome, a positive spin, to the incident' (quoted in Curry, 2006). Another called for the perpetrators to 'publicly apologize to veterans, then clean all of the public toilet facilities in and around Ottawa' (Grief, 2006). In other words, it was the job of the three young men to repair the damage they had done. To do so, they themselves had to atone by realizing the seriousness of their transgression, repent and perform a public penance. This, as mentioned above, is exactly what happened. For proponents of this discourse it was obvious that this incident was not a protest or an affront to Canadians' shared mores. Consequently, the matter should be closed. However, for proponents of the discourse of *incidence*, the matter was not so simple.

Incidence, systemic atonement

When the photographs first surfaced, a particular contingent believed the event to be an intentional act of disrespect to the Canadian Armed Forces and a protest against Canada's involvement in the war in Afghanistan ('Other Voices', 2006). There were even calls not to hand down a punishment so severe as to make 'martyrs of those who desecrated the monument' (NCVAC, 2006a). Once the

three young men had apologized and were shown to be 'extremely remorseful' (Ditchburn, 2006), the lack of intentionality (Brennan, 2006) only shifted this discourse, even if it silenced worries of explicit attack. For some, drunkenness was not enough to explain away this incidence (Proudfoot, 2006; Robitaille, 2006). The chairman of the National Council of Veterans Associations of Canada (NCVAC), Cliff Chadderton, recollected that he also drank at that age but chose to relieve himself at places more appropriate than a war memorial (Gibson, 2006). More importantly, they saw this event as an intensification of regular occurrences at the NWM as well as other sites (see Brennan, 2006). Over the years Dr Pilon had seen many people sitting on top of the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier who, when told what they were doing, were apologetic, but regardless were unaware of what they were sitting on (Pilon, 2006a). The NCVAC stated that they had 'voluminous reports regarding misuse of the entire site, including skateboarding, "wheelies" on bicycles, couples engaged in amorous proceedings, etc.' (NCVAC, 2006b). It is through these dimensions that these actors constructed and saw this event as an incidence. Therefore, for Chadderton, Dr Pilon and others like them, the incidence required a broader explanation.

Proponents of this view claimed that the government (particularly a Liberal government) had not done enough to protect the site, had itself shown disregard for the Canadian Armed Forces and had set an agenda that did little to educate youth about Canadian history (Russell, 2006). It was this conflation of factors that allowed such a desecration to occur. Dr Pilon, who snapped the photos, himself stated in a letter to *The National Post* that ultimately, the onus was on the Government of Canada for its lack of attention to a problem that veterans have been pointing to for years (Pilon, 2006b; see also NCVAC, 2006a, 2006b). This sentiment was echoed by everyday citizens who called for more education of the young (Gibson, 2006), and that such an incidence was no surprise considering the 'scant attention' given to Canada's war history and given that 'most [Canadians] seem ashamed that [Canada] still need[s] a force that is trained and equipped to kill' (Calder, 2006).

This is a re-emergent discourse and one that has been prominent in the Canadian political landscape for some time; one that this incidence brought back to national attention. This discourse points to Canada's education system for failing to foster a strong collective memory (see Osborne, 2003). Perhaps the most emblematic and developed – and as I show, highly problematic – argument in this vein comes from the Canadian historian, J.L. Granatstein, who wrote *Who Killed Canadian History?* (2007[1998]). Granatstein essentially argues that a focus on social history, which attempts to include all the various peoples of Canada in its teaching, has led to the demise of any chronological sense of Canada. It has cut off Canadian identity and memory from the past; broken the chain of regeneration. Granatstein states that there are several reasons for this. First, he argues that 'an emphasis on intolerance, on racism and sexism, on the provincial, regional, and local aspects of history' that dominate the Canadian history curriculum, along with speaking of 'identities' rather than identity, makes factual chronological events too sensitive to teach and leads to a dull version of history (Granatstein, 2007: 123). Such themes and issues cannot come close to telling the whole story of Canada (p. 158). The Government of Canada's failure to create national institutions, such as the National Merit Scholarships in the US adds to this problem (p. 27).

Second, history is constantly played with by members of the media, who always look for a new angle through which to view the past, as well as by university professors and publishers that pen and press 'unreadable books on miniscule subjects' (Granatstein, 2007: 174). All this leads to not only a lack of knowledge, but also a disinterest in Canadian history and its vilification as 'boring'. This disinterest is made evident by Canadians' poor scores on the Dominion Institute's surveys of historical knowledge (Chapnick, 2007; Granatstein, 2007). The chronological approach needed to correct this 'scarcely exists outside of primary grades where it is . . . least useful' (Granatstein, 2007: 33).

This discourse ignores some key issues, and certain flaws should be pointed out. First, history and memory are conflated: articles with titles such as ‘Our Collective Memory is Slipping Away’ (Chapnick, 2007) only cite historical knowledge surveys. Not only do proponents of this discourse believe that history should represent official (dominant) interpretations of the past, more importantly they believe that a collective’s memory of the past should mirror this ‘official’ history. This is a problematic approach to collective memory in that a group ‘might subscribe wholeheartedly to certain historical interpretations, but [they] would not be able to identify their origins even if one undertakes the cumbersome task of asking [them] directly’ (Kansteiner, 2002: 194). For example, conventional wisdom suggests that Americans have a very strong sense of their collective memory, yet Americans’ scores on historical surveys are just as poor as those of Canadians (‘Failing American History’, 2006; Morton, 2006). Also problematic is that collective memory is never as monolithic or as stable as the ‘history’ that this group promotes.

Second, certain assumptions this discourse makes about the education system are erroneous. While Canadian history education exhibited the type of nation-building curriculum that Granatstein desires from 1900 to 1970, laments about its dull nature have existed since the 1920s (Osborne, 2003). In fact, many historians believe that history has flourished once an inclusionary curriculum was set because ‘Canadians have not been concerned mainly with the achievement of some monist aim of sovereignty and total unity, but rather with the realization’ of a pluralist society (Careless, 1969, cited in Osborne, 2003). Also, the curriculum is not void of nation-building features; initiatives that bring veterans into high school classes to speak about Canada’s war history do exist (‘Memory Manager’, 2006).

Finally, there are signs that Canadians do in fact care very much about their history and their collective memory. Cultural products concerning Canadian history are popular. For example, *Who Killed Canadian History?* among other books about Canadian history by Granatstein are national bestsellers, and documentaries such as CBC’s *Canada: A People’s History* have received very high ratings (Dick, 2004; West, 2002). Even more importantly, not only did the public help rein in two of the offenders, a majority of Canadians acknowledged both the unacceptable nature of the event and the importance of the NWM: a *Montreal Gazette* poll showed that 75 percent of respondents were in favor of Fernandes receiving a criminal record (‘Cast Your Vote’, 2006); a *Toronto Sun* poll showed that 80 percent favoured that Fernandes get jail time (‘Your Call’, 2006); and 60 percent of Canadians polled by Decima Research on behalf of the Government of Canada, supported a ‘round the clock sentry at the site’ (Woods, 2006).

Regardless of the flaws in the argument forwarded by this discourse, it was prominent throughout this ‘scandal’. In addition to the need for personal atonement described above, the discourse of *incidence* called for a variety of systemic reparations: legislation specific to such sites (Harrold and Zabjek, 2006), a revised and nationally standardized history curriculum, installing a chain link fence and having permanent sentry by the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier (Pilon, 2006a).

Altering the National War Memorial: Tactics and implications

A year later, while major press remembered the event as an act of several ‘young drunk party-goers’, the site did get guards (Pannetta and Pedwell, 2007). What does such a result tell us, if anything, about Canadian collective memory? While each discourse had a particular view regarding the state of Canadian collective memory, here no attempt is made in evaluating which is the ‘correct’ take. Nor is Canadian collective memory to be evaluated here as one grand unified phenomenon even if conventional wisdom suggests that it is in ‘trouble’ (West, 2002). Rather, the task of this article is much more modest. As outlined earlier, collective memory is taken here as

something that ‘exists in the world’ and is constituted, embodied and regenerated through interactions with(in) cultural forms. Hence, what is important here is that the discourses’ conflicting demands – or rather, the demands of the discourse of *incidence* against the lack of demands on the side of the discourse of *incident*, at least on the *systemic* level – led to a negotiation that resulted in particular changes to the configuration of place and space at the NWM; this configuration is crucial to the practices of collective memory therein. In addition, tracing such changes allows us to embed the NWM ‘in public discourses of collective memory’ (Huyssen, 1994: 258). These changes and their implications are outlined below.

When discussing place and space in memorial landscapes, it is important to remember that each memory-site has its own particular configuration of both. As mentioned earlier, Confederation Square is very much overlapped and penetrated by public spaces and was designed to incorporate a certain amount of spaciousness. This is not so for similar sites in other countries; two short examples will make this clear. First, the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier in the US is located *within* the Arlington National Cemetery. One cannot get to the Tomb without being reminded that one is on consecrated land. Second, Il Vittoriano, which houses the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier in Rome, Italy, is much the same. It is so massive and blindingly white that one cannot simply stumble upon this memory-site. The porosity of the boundaries of both of these sites is limited: in the former by its location, in the latter by its sheer size. Neither of these two sites is overlapped or penetrated by public space in quite the same way as is the NWM. In other words, space is much more prominent in the NWM’s particular configuration. Such a positioning is more vulnerable to the ‘unaccounted for’, and, perhaps, that is how the event of 1 July 2006 should be classified due to its lack of intent.³ All this is not to insinuate that such spaciousness is a defect of the site. Rather, it suggests a greater trust in citizens and a possibility of collective memory without strict governmental or structural control. Regardless, such configurations change, at times in small ways, and this event allows us to see how some of these changes come about.

Following the event, the changes made to the site attempted to reflect a compromise between the call for a more concrete place and the desire to maintain the site’s original spaciousness. The Government of Canada was explicitly concerned with this. According to Veterans Affairs Canada, the government sought to ‘safeguard this sacred site while also maintaining public access to this important symbol of national honour and pride’ (MacEwen, personal communication, 9 April 2008). First, the memory-site did receive a sentry (‘Memorial’, 2006), but only from nine to five during peak tourist season. Second, the suggestion of a removable chain-link fence was eschewed in favour of security cameras (MacEwen, personal communication, 9 April 2008). These are measures of surveillance. In such a case, surveillance is meant to exercise power (for an overview of arguments concerning surveillance, power and space, see Koskela, 2000). Don Mitchell (2005), among others, points to how radically surveillance can change spaces. Several terms and ideas attempt to describe the effect of this type of exertion on space. Space can be: (1) molded into a ‘power-space’ which is ‘a space impregnated with disciplinary practices’; (2) transformed into a ‘container’; or (3) made to be ‘stage-like’ (Koskela, 2000: 250–1). ‘Power-space’, space as a ‘container’ and space as ‘stage-like’ all involve control, security and the concretion of value – Tuan’s (1977) definition of place; all three are an attempt to control the porosity of a site’s boundaries. Both of the tactics mentioned above aim to control or reduce this porosity in a more subtle, yet not necessarily less intrusive way.

The role of the video cameras here is clear: they keep a constant watch in an attempt to deter undesirable behavior and hence decrease the volatility of the site. However, in foregoing a fence, the physical openness of the area is maintained, as well as a semblance of the government’s trust in its citizens, even if their interaction with(in) the site became somewhat more constrained.

Similarly, the guards were placed there to deter and react to the 'unaccounted for'. Their role as surveillance is made more subtle by the guards' limited placement. They are standing at times when it is more likely that 'others' or strangers will be there (i.e. peak tourist season) and at times when citizens are at work (9 a.m.–5 p.m.). This suggests an attempt to retain at least a semblance of the spaciousness of the site by suggesting that they are simply marking off the area and protecting it against intruders (Tuan, 1977: 4).

The role of the guards, however, is more than just surveillance. They have both a ceremonial quality and a symbolic purpose which are closely tied. Every hour, there is a ceremonial changing of the guards. The guards themselves are popular and visitors are constantly taking pictures of them. The guards have become part of the site. Their placement also symbolizes a respect for the site, one that was welcomed by not only the proponents of the discourse of incidence but by a majority of Canadians according to one poll (Woods, 2006). These ceremonial and symbolic aspects can also be interpreted in a more skeptical manner. They can be seen as masking the main purpose of the guards (i.e. surveillance), a way for the government not to openly show its distrust of citizens. Regardless of interpretation, the guards make place more prominent in the site's configuration; they aid in the *attempt* to concretize value and control the porosity of the memory-site's boundaries.⁴

Conclusion

The memory-site in which the NWM is located is now a somewhat different landscape. The recently added tactics of surveillance attempt to limit the porosity of the Memorial's boundaries and yet maintain some semblance of spaciousness. While physical access to the site may still be quite unrestricted, the intimate nature of citizens' interaction with the site has changed. Figure 2 suggests just how close the physical contact between the citizen and the site can be. The alterations to the site do not remove the possibility of such close contact but do change the quality of such interaction. The sentry's presence and camera's incessant gaze have, if even in a modest way, altered the porosity of the site's boundaries by instilling security and control in an *attempt* to concretize value.

Casey (1996) states that 'place' is always changing. The changes that occurred at the NWM were not the result of a protest, which can take several forms – spray-painted slogans (Osborne, 1998) or demonstrations (Sturken, 1997), for example – all of which attempt to reappropriate the site for specific purposes. Nor were the changes the result of a trauma; the magnitude of the alterations and the fact that this event is all but forgotten some three years later do not warrant such a characterization. These alterations occurred because of a mundane act and the act's importance lies in its mundanity. While the act itself is no longer often discussed, it has left its mark on this particular memory-site. Memory-sites and landscapes are rife with markers and tactics used to influence interaction therein. It is when new markers or tactics are introduced that the interaction citizens have with(in) a given memory-site becomes more (or less) prescribed, that place and space are reconfigured and that the porosity of the boundaries is altered. This article does not claim that the aforementioned alterations to the NWM have altered or changed some monolith entity one might call Canadian collective memory; the definition of collective memory used here and the non-unitary nature of collective memory discourage such grand, general claims. What this article illustrates is more modest: the mundane event described here, an instance of the 'unaccounted for', highlights the subtle dynamism of collective memory in that it acted as a catalyst that led to the aforementioned alterations to the NWM. Such alterations indeed do affect collective memory in that – and perhaps *only* in that – they alter citizens' relation to, and interaction with, such memory-sites – interactions that embody, constitute and regenerate collective memory.

Acknowledgments

The author would like to thank Dr Barbie Zelizer, Dr Carolyn Marvin, Lauren Sessions and the anonymous referees at *Memory Studies* for their useful critiques, questions and suggestions.

Notes

- 1 None of this is meant to undervalue the individual and shared cognitive dimension of collective memory (see Halbwachs, 1992; Sturken, 1997; Zelizer, 1995). However, the evidence presented in this article allows only for a focus on the dimensions of collective memory set out above.
- 2 While some of the proponents of the discourse of incidence were part of veterans' organizations and of an older generation, the lack of affiliation and social-economic markers in most of the sources in which their comments appear makes it difficult to determine what particular 'segment' of society they represent – and hence what their particular political goals may be – if any.
- 3 Note that here I am only referring to a vulnerability to the 'unaccounted for'. Sites with a stronger sense of place, because of their important status, are equally if not more susceptible to being used as sites of protest and counter-memory formation.
- 4 This is indeed just an 'attempt' and does not guarantee that all citizens will interact with the site in the same way.

References

- Alexander, J.C. (2004) 'Toward a Theory of Cultural Trauma', in J.C. Alexander, R. Eyerman, B. Giesen, N.J. Smelser and P. Sztompka (eds) *Cultural Trauma and Collective Identity*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Assmann, J. and J. Czaplicka (1995) 'Collective Memory and Cultural Identity', *New German Critique* 65: 125–33.
- Brennan, R. (2006) 'National Disgrace, Part II', *The Toronto Star* 8 July: A01.
- Calder, B. (2006) 'Those who Died for Canada Deserve Better' [Letter to the editor], *National Post* 5 July: A13.
- Casey, E.S. (1996) 'How to Get from Space to Place in a Fairly Short Stretch of Time: Phenomenological Prolegomena', in S. Feld and K.H. Basso (eds) *Senses of Place*. Santa Fe, NM: School of American Press Research.
- 'Cast Your Vote' (2006) *The Montreal Gazette* 10 July: A2.
- CBC (1939) 'Canada Declares War on Germany' [Radio broadcast]. Available at: http://archives.cbc.ca/on_this_day/09/10/
- Chapnick, A. (2007) 'Our Collective Memory is Slipping Away', *National Post* 13 November: A20.
- Curry, B. (2006) 'Police to Lay Mischief Charge against Urinating Reveler', *The Globe and Mail* 7 July: A8.
- Dick, L. (2004) 'A New History for the New Millennium: Canada: A People's History', *Canadian Historical Review* 85(1): 85–110.
- Ditchburn, J. (2006) 'Pee Brains Make Apologies; 2 Teens, 1 Adult who Urinated on the War Memorial Tell Legion, Public They're Sorry', *The Toronto Sun* 8 July: 7.
- 'Failing American History' (2006) *The Washington Times* 14 October: A12.
- Gibson, J. (producer) (2006) *The Noon Show* [Radio broadcast]. CBC Radio Saskatchewan, 6 July.
- Gordon, D.L.A. and B.S. Osborne (2004) 'Constructing National Identity in Canada's Capital, 1900–2000: Confederation Square and the National War Memorial', *Journal of Historical Geography* 30: 618–42.
- Granatstein, J.L. (2007[1998]) *Who Killed Canadian History?* Toronto: HarperCollins Canada.
- Grief, A. (2006) 'My Kingdom for a Toilet' [Letter to the editor], *The Globe and Mail* 5 July: A16.
- Halbwachs, M. (1992) *On Collective Memory*, trans L.A. Coser. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.
- Harrold, M. and A. Zabjek (2006) 'Police Seek Montreal Man in Ottawa Urination Scandal', *The Montreal Gazette* 5 July: A1.
- Hubbard, P., R. Kitchin and G. Valentine (2004) 'Introduction', in P. Hubbard, R. Kitchin and G. Valentine (eds) *Key Thinkers on Place and Space*. London: Sage.

- Huyssen, A. (1994) *Twilight Memories: Marking Time in a Culture of Amnesia*. New York: Routledge.
- Kansteiner, W. (2002) 'Finding Meaning in Memory: A Methodological Critique of Collective Memory Studies', *History and Theory* 41(2): 179–97.
- King, A. (1999) 'Remembering and Forgetting in the Public Memorials of the Great War', in A. Forty and S. Küchler (eds) *The Art of Forgetting*, pp. 147–70. Oxford: Berg Publishing.
- Koskela, H. (2000) '“The Gaze without Eyes”: Video-Surveillance and the Changing Nature of Urban Space', *Progress in Human Geography* 24(2): 243–65.
- Larouche-Smart, M. (2006) 'Canada Day Reveler Accepts Blame: “No Recollection” of Incident; When She Found Out, Dorval Resident’s Mother “Could Have Fallen to the Floor”', *The Montreal Gazette* 8 July: A1.
- 'Let's Not Overreact to a Few Louts' (2006) *The Montreal Gazette* 5 July: A16.
- MacGregor, R. (2006) 'Stupid Young Men Often Grow up to be Fine, Upstanding Citizens', *The Globe and Mail* 5 July: A2.
- Marvin, C. and D.W. Ingle (1999) *Blood Sacrifice and the Nation: Totem Rituals and the American Flag*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- 'Memorial' (1998) Available at: <http://www.vac-acc.gc.ca/remembers/sub.cfm?source=memorials/memcan/national/Memorial>
- 'Memorial May Get Guard of Honour' (2006) *The Montreal Gazette* 3 November: A12.
- 'Memory Manager' (2006) *The Beaver: Canada's History Magazine* 86(2).
- Mitchell, D. (2005) 'The S.U.V. Model of Citizenship: Floating Bubbles, Buffer Zones, and the Rise of the “Purely Atomic” Individual', *Political Geography* 24: 77–100.
- Morton, D. (2006) 'Canadian History Teaching in Canada: What's the Big Deal?', in R.W. Sandwell (ed.) *To The Past: History Education, Public Memory, and Citizenship in Canada*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press.
- Murphy, G. (1998) 'The Myth of Glory', *The Beaver: Canada's History Magazine* 78(4).
- NCVAC (National Council of Veterans Associations in Canada) (2006a) 'Veterans Group Says Government Must Not Shirk War Memorial Responsibility', press release, 4 July, Ottawa.
- NCVAC (National Council of Veterans Associations in Canada) (2006b) 'Veterans Group Calls for All-Party Committee to Resolve War Memorial Controversy', press release, 6 July, Ottawa.
- Nora, P. (1989) 'Between Memory and History: Les Lieux des Memoire', *Representations* 26: 7–25.
- Nora, P. (1996) 'General Introduction: Between Memory and History', in P. Nora, L.D. Kritzman and A. Goldhammer (eds) *Realms of Memory: The Construction of the French Past*, pp. 1–23. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Olick, J.K. and J. Robbins (1998) 'Social Memory Studies: From “Collective Memory” to the Historical Sociology of Mnemonic Practices', *Annual Review of Sociology* 24: 105–40.
- Oliviera, M. (2007) 'MPP Wants Jail Time for Urinator: Charge Was Dropped', *The Montreal Gazette* 15 February: A16.
- Osborne, B.S. (1998) 'Constructing Landscapes of Power: The George Etienne Cartier Monument, Montreal', *Journal of Historical Geography* 24(4): 431–58.
- Osborne, B.S. (2001) 'Landscapes, Memory, Monuments, and Commemoration: Putting Identity in its Place', *Canadian Ethnic Studies* 33(3): 36–77.
- Osborne, B.S. and G.B. Osborne (2004) 'The Cast[e]ing of Heroic Landscapes of Power: Constructing Canada's Pantheon on Parliament Hill', *Material History Review* 60: 35–47.
- Osborne, K. (2003) 'Teaching History in Schools: A Canadian Debate', *Journal of Curriculum Studies* 35(5): 585–626.
- 'Other Voices' (2006) *The Toronto Sun* 9 July: C8.
- Pannetta, A. and T. Pedwell (2007) 'Sweetheart, You Don't Look a Day Over 139', *The Globe and Mail* 7 July: A6.
- Pilon, M. (2006a) 'Why I Snapped Those War Memorial Photos' [Letter to the editor], *National Post* 11 July: A13.
- Pilon, M. (2006b) 'Ottawa Cenotaph Still Open to Abuse' [Letter to the editor], *National Post* 8 November: A21.

- Proudfoot, S. (2006) 'Police Searching for Men Who Urinated on National Monument: PM Adds His Voice to Outcry after Retired Major Snaps Photos', *National Post* 4 July: A3.
- Robitaille, K. (2006) 'Have Brought Shame' [Letter to the editor], *The Toronto Star* 5 July: A15.
- Russell, P. (2006) 'This Week in Letters', *National Post* 10 July: A11.
- Sturken, M. (1997) *Tangled Memories: The Vietnam War, the AIDS Epidemic, and the Politics of Remembering*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- 'The Response' (1998) Available at: <http://www.vac-acc.gc.ca/remembers/sub.cfm?source=memorials/memcan/national/Response>
- Tuan, Y.F. (1977) *Space and Place: The Perspective of Experience*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- 'War Memorial Urinators ID'd' (2006) *National Post* 6 July: A7.
- West, E. (2002) 'Selling Canada to Canadians: Collective Memory, National Identity, and Popular Culture', *Critical Studies in Mass Communication* 19(2): 212–29.
- Woods, A. (2006) 'Tomb Should be Guarded: Poll', *National Post* 3 November: A5.
- Young, J.E. (1993) *The Texture of Memory: Holocaust Memorials and Meaning*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.
- Young, J.E. (1997) 'Germany's Memorial Question: Memory, Counter-Memory, and the End of the Monument', *The South Atlantic Quarterly* 96(4): 853–80.
- 'Your Call Column' (2006) *The Toronto Sun* 6 July: 22.
- Zelizer, B. (1995) 'Reading the Past Against the Grain: The Shape of Memory Studies', *Critical Studies in Mass Communication* 12: 214–39.
- Zelizer, B. (1998) *Remembering to Forget: Holocaust Memory Through the Camera's Eye*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.
- Zuccherro, J. (1999) 'The Canadian National War Memorial: Metaphor for the Birth of the Nation', in *Mnemographia Canadensis: Essays on Memory, Community and Environment in Canada*. London, ON: Canadian Poetry Press.

Author biography

Piotr M. Szpunar is a doctoral student at the Annenberg School for Communication at the University of Pennsylvania. His general research interests include collective memory, the philosophy of communication, journalism and cultural theory. His dissertation research tracks the legacy of the Cold War 'other' in the popular American imagination/memory.