Standard Article

Towards a resonant theory of memory politics

Jamie Ranger (iD)
St. Hugh's College, University of Oxford, UK

Will Ranger
University College London, UK

Abstract

It is argued that Hartmut Rosa's theory of resonance provides memory activists (those actors engaged in memory politics) with both a normative justification and qualitative metric by which sites of memory may be compared and evaluated. Resonance is a plausible candidate for an assessing concept on the grounds that there is overlap between Rosa's sociological approach and the implicit appeal to resonance in the memory studies literature.

Introduction

In its most fundamental sense, memory politics is the disagreement between different groups over interpretations and concretizations of history. Memory politics is not necessarily a disagreement over historical interpretation but instead centres on debates over meaning and historical truth(s). The most prominent examples of memory politics in action are controversies over the focus or intention of sites of memories insofar as they attempt to establish a certain perspective of history in the public sphere. Memory politics is the concretization of the inevitable intersection of history and politics in society.

We take a site of memory to mean a signifier, object or a physical space, which communicates a certain interpretation or idea of the past in a social setting (Nora, 1996). These sites subsequently take on other layers of meaning over time. In the literature, traditionally it was understood that sites of memory were produced and maintained by the state in its attempt to communicate, coordinate and facilitate a consistent historical sense of place, trajectory and identity, but now it is broadly

Corresponding author:
Jamie Ranger, Department of Politics & IR, St. Hugh's College, University of Oxford, Manor Road Building, Manor Road, Oxford OX1 3UQ, UK.
Email: James.ranger@st-hughs.ox.ac.uk

understood that the state is not the sole actor in these endeavours (Brüggemann and Kasekamp, 2008; Müller, 2002; Onken, 2010).

Scholars of collective memory have long accepted that the success of a site is contingent upon a society's emotional reaction (Savage, 2011: 261–284). The location, aesthetic and subject of a site of memory are often evaluated to predict and/or explain the resonant potential of a given site. For example, memory activists and scholars may object to a war memorial in an architectural style atypical of an area or suggest alternative acts of commemoration (Bruyneel, 2014; Mycock, 2014). Similarly, the intent of the commissioner and omissions made may also be subjected to academic scrutiny. Memory politics is disciplinarily linked to nationalism studies, and as such, it is often taken as read that sites of memory, through the production of social meaning, express an implicit ideological component, namely, the reproduction of a pre-existent national identity (Harrison, 2011; Winter, 1998). That which is not discussed is increasingly regarded as key for revealing collective amnesia and the durability of nationalist historical mythologies (Winter, 2010).

It is our contention that Rosa's sociological theory of resonance provides memory activists (those actors engaged in memory politics) with both a normative justification and a qualitative metric by which sites of memory may be compared and evaluated. Resonance is a plausible candidate for the universal language of evaluating the efficacy of a site of memory in communicating meaning and engendering fidelity to certain interpretations of the past.

First, we shall provide an overview of Hartmut Rosa's sociological theory of resonance. Second, we shall provide an overview of memory studies, the interdisciplinary study of recollections of the past in the broadest sense, and suggest that there is an unspoken acknowledgement of the phenomenon of resonance to which Rosa's account refers. In other words, scholars of collective memory regularly make claims regarding the quality of a site of memory at doing its purported job, while lacking a universally accepted discursive framework which we intend to suggest. Finally, we argue that resonance theory provides a normative framework for historian-activist practices on the grounds that sites of memory at their best cultivate the conditions for resonant experiences. We shall conclude that resonance provides a provisional universal language for normative and qualitative assessments of memory activism.

Resonance theory

Hartmut Rosa's sociological theory of resonance cannot be fully explained without first acknowledging its relationship to his prior theory of social acceleration. As Rosa (2019) contends in the opening passages, 'if acceleration is the problem, then resonance may well be the solution' (p. 1). Social acceleration can be understood as the 'dynamic stabilization' of our economic condition required to merely maintain our current social system. For Rosa, late modernity is a condition of being trapped in a relentless speeding up of our processes for the sake of economic growth. Described as a systematic tendency towards escalation, Rosa maintains that such material conditions cause a fundamental transformation of our social relationship to both time and space. It is hardly surprising that Rosa suggests such an escalatory framework leads to 'problematic, even dysfunctional or pathological, relationships to the world on the part of both subjects and society as a whole' (p. 2).

The self-determination of subjects in late modernity plays out within our socioeconomic context, and as such the institutionalized structural elements become inevitable influences on how we see the world and ourselves (p. 21). Dynamic stabilization, the result of social acceleration, and competition, the ideological imposition required to generate the motivational energies needed to fulfil the former's imperatives of growth, thus constitute the background noise of everyday economic and cultural life. Rosa argues that due to these aforementioned factors, as well

as the supplementary factors that late modernity can be characterized 'as an age of open ethical horizons'; it is assumed that we are entitled to learn for ourselves what constitutes the good life; and 'the fact of ethical privatization, which has made the task of determining one's purpose in life into a nearly insoluble problem' leads to a near-ubiquitous self-determination (p. 22). In a world which requires us to increase our speed and compete for resources in the background, that leaves us 'free' to think the good life as a personal quest for meaning in the foreground, our cultural condition lends itself to the dominant conclusion that we must assess the value of our own lives in terms of our ability to accumulate resources (p. 22). For Rosa more specifically, 'the obligation to make something of oneself, to care for oneself, be active, and conquer one's "weaker self" may be the highest moral imperative in modern society' (p. 133), and it is through this prism that we may bear witness to the overlap between our narratives of personal fulfilment and the cultural conditions that legitimize the processes of social acceleration.

It is from this theoretical deliberation that Rosa's project becomes a sociological theory of resonance. Resonance is a tricky concept to pin down, with Rosa focusing on instances of its emergence and often telling us what it is not in anticipation of objections. For example, Rosa contends that resonance appears in our capacity for sympathy and empathy when we interact and cooperate with others and maintain meaningful relationships with others (pp. 29–30). Resonance is described manifesting 'as a multidimensional process' between the physical and mental aspects of the subject, between self and world, represented in dynamic 'moments of encounter or mutual address' (p. 137). Resonance is not 'a relationship of legal or economic possession' (p. 256), nor does it refer to an emotional or affective state; 'rather, it is a mode of relation that remains open to emotional content' (p. 164). To provide an example, resonance straddles both the act of being moved by art and the open disposition of a subject willing to be moved by art. Is there anything more annoying than somebody derailing a conversation to 'show you something funny' on their phone when you want to broach a serious topic? As anyone who has perhaps too enthusiastically recommended a television show, film or song to a friend will attest, often the quality of media is undermined by the resistance of a closed mind; we all know that we often need to be in 'the right mood' to truly appreciate certain things, either because other priorities are dominating our affective state, or because certain artistic forms require more effort on our part, a commitment to 'meeting it halfway'.

Rosa explains relations of resonance through a spatial analogy of 'mutual oscillatory adjustment as observed between celestial bodies' (p. 165), which intends to drive home the hermeneutical particularities of each resonant relation. When you read a novel, your reading will be distinctive, especially if it 'speaks to you', and if it does 'leave its mark' on you, it will do so in a way specific to your circumstance, as each reader comes upon the text from a different subject-position. Resonance is both descriptive and normative, understood as a basic human capacity and need, from which Rosa claims we may draw two descriptive conclusions: 'human subjectivity and social inter-subjectivity basically develop via the establishment of fundamental resonant relationships' (p. 171). Resonance is normative insofar as it is used to qualitatively assess how well our lives are going or how 'successful' a society is at allowing its citizens to flourish. At this point, Rosa moves from a descriptive account of something that subjects can and are wont to do, to an account of something subjects ought to be encouraged to do, the possibility of which is dependent on the existence of 'mutually accommodating resonant spaces' (p. 171). Resonance is not to be understood as a constant state of contentment, or a continuous ecstatic subjectivity, rather it refers to significant events, that 'flash of a connection to a source of strong evaluations in a predominantly silent and often repulsive world' (p. 185).

Rosa defines 'the world' in this theory as 'everything that is encountered (or that can be encountered)', the open totality within which things happen, objects are found, and subjects can experience (p. 34). 'The subject' in question is defined as having an inherent openness to the

world in a way that an object cannot, a distinctive condition of consciously (and unconsciously) relating to the world through perception (p. 35). The subject's objective body, therefore, can be heuristically conceptualized as a membrane, insofar as the way the world 'inscribes from without and on which it leaves its traces (inscription) and which at the same time expresses the subjective and reflexive subject (expression)' (p. 84). The world is found inscribed on the subject, just as the subject may express and imprint itself on the world, and we may argue it is from this series of interactions that identities are forged, meanings are made and our earlier sense of one's place in the world is deciphered.

The subject's relation to their physical body and the world do not exist independently as consciously within and externally present; rather, our relation to the world is the result of cultural and social practices as much as individual psychological dispositions (p. 109). Moreover, subjects experience themselves as situated in a world that 'addresses them': we look at the world and things speak to us, attract us, or repel and disgust us (p. 110). Thus, we may affix a qualitative assessment of our relationship to the world established by the fact we desire that which appears in the world as desirable, or we are repulsed by that which appears repellent, and it is an assessment of these series of determinations that 'forms the contours of subject and world' (p. 111).

Rosa opts for fear and desire as instructive concepts that represent the opposing forces and existential modes of being, understood as a fear of being alienated by the world becoming hostile or mute, the fear of losing our relatedness to the world as opposed to the desire for resonance (p. 114). Once a subject reaches the point of being alienated, they lack both fear and desire, and instead confront a world that appears 'flat and undifferentiated' (p. 121). Thus, social conditions that lay the groundwork for such relationships between subject and world, by producing relationships defined by anxiety and fear, are normatively objectionable (p. 121). Ideal social conditions would allow for the flourishing of 'axes of resonance', instances where the world 'strikes a chord' with the subject, and in turn, the world may respond accordingly. It is Rosa's contention that subjects desire the capacity to both generate and experience resonance (p. 158): to use another musical analogy, a songwriter resonates with the process of creation, but they are also receptive to brilliant songs written by others (occasional flashes of jealousy aside)! It is through these positive axes of resonance that subjects may affirm their sense of purpose and agency, they can see themselves in the world and identify aspects of the world with their own sense of self: by contrast, Rosa suggests a correlation between low expectations of self-efficacy and the feelings of powerlessness, lack of control, lack of attachment to others and the absence of emotional investment in the world that characterizes classic sociological accounts of alienation (p. 162). Rosa considers resonance to be the 'other' of alienation (p. 178).

Rosa then moves from the individual to the social: if as individuals we are compelled to desire resonant relationships with others and the world, it may follow that society ought to be organized in such a way as to maximize the proximity of subjects to moments of resonance with the world, and foster conditions that would proliferate such experiences. Nevertheless, Rosa is reluctant to make the case for an explicit politics of resonance, but is open to the notion of a resonant politics, in the sense that democratic participation could well be improved by creating political institutions and procedures that affirm a sense of agency and solidarity in citizens.

Rosa contends that any sociology of human relationships to the world must begin with our 'historical sensibilities' and their differentiations across social classes and individual subject-positions, as Rosa attributes our current escalatory tendencies to contemporary features of late modernity, rather than making universal claims regarding the human social condition (p. 22). Rosa argues that subjects tend towards making 'strong evaluations' about their lives and indeed the lives of others, and it is this combination of meaning-making and judgement that follows from our capacity to experience resonance and thus affirm our ability to shape ourselves and 'make a

difference' in the world, however unassuming. It is Rosa's ironic position that modernity, by priding itself on increasing self-efficacy, may be inadvertently 'geared solely toward domination and thus mute, reified relationships to the world' (p. 162). The systemic practice of attempting to achieve resonance through mastery of the world is the very practice that condemns us to alienation through its reifying effects.

Rosa's theory of resonance is a means to examine the facilitations and inhibitions of resonance found in institutions, practices and communications constitutive of late modern societies, with the underlying hypothesis that the pressures conferred on individuals by social acceleration and competition serve to undermine instances of resonance (p. 171). These axes of resonance are considered to be ever-changing and dynamic opportunities for connection, dependent on both cultural and individual processes, with one such primary example being the functions of rituals, in that they are culturally significant and distinctive customs of repeating actions for the purposes of experiencing resonant relationships, generally one of three modes: vertical (e.g. religious rituals to the gods and cosmos), horizontal (social rituals among members of a community) and dialogical (rituals that relate to objects in the world) (p. 173). Resonance thus describes a 'self-reinforcing reciprocal relation' that requires continuous cultivation from both social conditions and individuals with a psychological disposition of openness to such experiences, to be contrasted to the state of alienation, in which the world is confronted as fixed, mute and inexpressive, and individuals are reticent to engage (p. 179). Our experience of the world is always politically, economically, technologically, medially, culturally and institutionally mediated, and these overlapping modes of relation encapsulate the systems that both provide subjects with resonant experiences and contain the pathologies of alienation that a critical theory of resonance seeks to isolate, analyse and overcome (p. 182).

Resonance theory is not a sociological theory of everything: Rosa's project is to present a heuristic which allows for the examination of the conditions that make possible experiences of resonance and alienation within our cultural practices and institutions (p. 201). Just as we cannot experience resonant relations if we are not in the right 'frame of mind', the world to be encountered must also have 'culturally established and "practiced" strong evaluations' (p. 212). For example, the act of kicking a football into a goal is an arbitrary movement, but to repeat the action in the context of a competitive fixture cheered on by supporters is to place the act in a social context that provides the conditions for a potentially transformative experience (and a goal scored against an older brother in the back garden can be just as satisfying as any other). Nevertheless, it ultimately depends on the individuals involved: resonance does not exclusively occur during 'exceptional poetic forms of experience' and is sometimes an unexpected instant that happens during everyday life, a pleasant reminder from the world that we matter (p. 230).

Resonance theory provides a broader sociological context to assessment of sites of memory, placing memory activism in a more expansive social context and ties the aesthetic, architectural, spatial, material, discursive and material decisions made by those involved in the creation of a site of memory to a broader humanistic impulse to be open to the world (and indeed to the intentions of the site itself).

Politics and collective memory

Collective memory was first described by French sociologist Maurice Halbwachs and is an acknowledgement that memories, far from being the recollections of individuals, are primarily shaped by collective experiences of historical phenomena. These memories are communicable, exist extrinsically of individuals and are periodically reconstructed by social groups, resulting in individuals having a perspective on the past rather than a totally independent recollection of events (Halbwachs, 1992: 67). The act of remembrance itself, Halbwachs argues, is contingent upon the

internal and external dynamics of the group of which one is a member, and subsequent interactions shape the ways in which one considers the meaning of historical events (p. 52). The fluidity of collective memories enables institutions to shape views of the past and create meaning that holds distinct and individual ideological significance. Pierre Nora (1999) considered Halbwachs' view as fundamental for creating a unified historical foundation for national identity and supposes that a state can create 'sites of memory' where 'memories are crystalized and transmitted from one generation to the next' (p. 19). These sites go further than physical spaces where meaning is transmitted and omnipresent symbolism such as national flags and anthems can also invoke an emotional response that is crucial for binding national communities together (Nora, 1996). In addition, sites of memory can latch onto the natural landscape and thereby provide political constructions like the nation-state with a primordialist nationalist justification. The incorporation of a site of memory into a nationalist discourse establishes a hallowed space to create a feeling of patriotic resonance.

As well as building a sense of community through a shared past, sites of memory can also mark the ongoing social legacy of exceptional moments of collective trauma. Occupation, terrorism and genocide have all been commemorated through the creation of hallowed spaces that communicate a meaning so influential that knowledge of such events has been deemed worthy of noting for the sake of posterity. Marianne Hirsch (2012: 5) has gone as far as to argue that traumatic events like the Holocaust can be reproduced across generations thus causing a lasting imprint in the social and cultural consciousness of entire groups:

> 'Postmemory' describes the relationship that the 'generation after' bears to the personal, collective, and cultural trauma of those who came before – to experiences they 'remember' only by means of the stories, images, and behaviors among which they grew up. But these experiences were transmitted to them so deeply and affectively as to seem to constitute memories in their own right. Postmemory's connection to the past is thus actually mediated not by recall but by imaginative investment, projection, and creation.

Postmemory is central to a social acceptance of shared traditions and justifies commemorations that take place long after an event's eyewitnesses die. Not only are such commemorations central to nationalisms seeking to legitimize their own political institutions and structures, but postmemories also enable groups to create transtemporal links between their own societies and historical phenomena. The stories told during such commemorations reconstruct these postmemories anew and are mediated through the experience of individuals in given historical periods.

Memory studies as a discipline considers how historical memories influence a range of subjects including international relations (Langenbacher and Shain, 2010), discourses of identity (Ballinger, 2002; Gillis, 1996) and state culpability for historical wrongdoing (Olick, 2007). The discipline focuses on how shared experiences of historical events have been woven into complex narratives of glorification, sanitization and legitimization. By establishing semiotic totems of meaning, groups bind themselves to one another and memory studies seeks to uncover how and why communities remember and forget certain historical events.

More specifically, the politics of memory considers how political debates can be generated by disturbing dominant understandings and narratives of the past, and how these hegemonic views of historical events can be modified for new sociopolitical settings. The politics of memory concerns how political and social elites often make appeals to the past to justify their actions. Memory activists seek to influence which events, individuals and structures should be communicated to new students of history as a means of achieving their own political goals. Historical reinterpretation is essential for the deepening of academic understanding, yet memory politics has increasingly become a method by which reactionary political figures have sought to mobilize their populations and falsify knowledge of the past. As new historical information arises and diaspora groups

challenge the ideas of old, political elites have attempted to weaponize identities grounded in nationalistic collective memories with the goal of eliminating collective memories that produce new and subversive meanings (Domby, 2020; Stratton, 2019; Takenaka, 2015; Ward and Rasch, 2019). Tension has arisen in the public sphere over memories of the past and identity through the pluralization or fragmentation of these hegemonic narratives. Societies that previously held the hegemonic, homogenized understandings of the past use (and abuse) these commonplace simplifications to inform contemporary identity. The acceptance that memory and identity are areas of contestation like any other has been posed as an existential threat to the nation-state. In certain Western states – namely, the United States (Linn-Tynen, 2020), the United Kingdom (Müller and Geppert, 2015) and France (Barclay, 2013) – disputes over previous historical actions have descended into alleged 'culture wars' in which contesting the valorization (or implicit exceptionalism) of the nation is compared with political sabotage or even treason.

Scholars of collective memory have also sought to incorporate literature from the transnational turn in historical writing into their work to emphasize how traumatic memories, commemorative rituals and sites of memory can provoke a meaningful response from people of different national backgrounds. This was most notably argued by Michael Rothberg (2009) with his concept of multidirectional memories: 'against the framework that understands collective memory as competitive memory – as a zero-sum struggle over scarce resources – I suggest that we consider memory as multidirectional: as subject to ongoing negotiation, cross-referencing, and borrowing' (p. 3). By embracing multidirectionality Rothberg (2009) argues that historians, political elites and memory activists should 'reject the reductionism of the nation-centered, real-estate development model [of memorialization] in favour of a more open-ended sense of the possibilities of memory' (p. 310). The emergence of transnational (Assmann, 2014) and cosmopolitan (Levy and Sznaider, 2006) methodologies has also sought to challenge the position of the nation in historical scholarship and consider how understandings of the past are subjected to influences and reconstructions originating from outside the bounded geographies of nation-states.

Memory studies as a field has long used the emotional response of monuments, memorials and symbols as a means of evaluating their social and political relevance. Adopting Rosa's approach would establish a common method of communication among scholars and would allow memory activists to articulate a site of memory's value more concretely for a given social group. Rosa hardly coined the term 'resonance' and given our argument that memory scholars already implicitly engage with sites of memory by qualitatively assessing their resonance, it is unsurprising to find resonance as a concept utilized within the discipline (Beale, 2013; della Porta, 2018). By incorporating Rosa's richer sociological framework that fleshes out resonance, the implicit judgements made by memory scholars can be tied together in a shared language of assessment.

Sites of resonant encounter

Resonance is inextricably bound to our desire to change for the better through positive and transformative encounters. When we encounter new things and experiences, it may be our default inclination to resist change, find fault in difference or regress to habitual preferences, but our capacity for resonance allows us to encounter the new with an adaptive openness which constitutes the psychological basis for a resonant experience to occur (Rosa, 2019: 185).

Central to a site of memory is the transmission of meaning, and a valuable site that can provide social anchoring despite the passage of time also requires an emotional connection. Ideally, such a connection should be so profoundly moving that the social and cultural differences between generations become comparatively trivial, as visitors to a site are reminded that they are part of a larger

community, whether local, national or global, and this openness to a broader shared identity constitutes a resonant experience.

Memorials, monuments and symbols that do not evoke this intergenerational continuity require constant reconstruction, recontextualization and reimagination. Failure to adapt these sites to accommodate new generations or new layers of meaning risks the creation of 'memory wars' and endless public debate over the 'true' meanings of historical phenomena (Koposov, 2018). In this sense, Rosa's theory of resonance appears incompatible with bad-faith historical oversimplifications the likes of which culture war provocations hinge upon. If memory activists are engaging in the broader political debates surrounding public history, they are ostensibly wishing to support, encourage and participate in the production of *resonant sites of memory*.

Controversies over memorialization are almost an evitability, especially when the subject of commemoration has had a profound impact on a given society (Cubitt, 2007: 142–145; Young, 1993: 1–8). Everything from the aesthetic choices of the artist, the location and surroundings, and the choice of inscriptions have been contested and re-contested as communities of memory jockey for dominance in historical narratives. Although much scholarly attention is paid to controversies in the commissioning process, resonance allows researchers to document the ongoing emotional and cultural impact of sites as meanings shift and populations change.

Let us consider two examples of famously controversial memorials: (1) The Vietnam Veterans Memorial (VVM) in Washington, D.C. and (2) The Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe (MMJE) in Berlin. The sites both commemorate a tragic loss of human life, albeit under different circumstances, within the spatial landscape of their respective national capitals. Both adopt architectural styles that intentionally mark them out from their surroundings and were subject to significant backlash from those in positions of political and cultural influence. However, accounting for resonance allows scholars to qualitatively measure their social impact.

It is uncontroversial to argue that the Vietnam War had a profound impact on the US collective identity, but the question of commemoration proved to be a multifaceted challenge and prompted a vehemently hostile response. The *New York Times* (1985) editorial board wrote in a 1985 opinion piece that early critics referred to the memorial as the 'black gash of shame' and an 'Orwellian glop' (p. E22). The National Review (1981) likened the way that the names were engraved onto the granite wall to a list of car accidents (p. 1064). In a *New York Times* magazine profile of Maya Lin, the architect of the VVM, criticisms of her design were characterized thus:

> the forces arrayed against her design ranged from the Texas financier H. Ross Perot and the conservative crusader Phyllis Schlafly (who called her plan 'a tribute to Jane Fonda') to Senator Jeremiah A. Denton Jr., a former Vietnam prisoner of war, and Tom Wolfe. (Tauber, 1991: 649)

Despite these early controversies, the VVM has since become a site that provides space for veterans and family members to quietly contemplate their lost relatives and comrades in arms. The simplicity of the design and the depth of colour in the black granite allow visitors to focus on the vastness of the list of names before them. The National Park Service does not collect feedback from visitors directly but observing the behaviour of visitors gives an indication as to the memorial's power. Tributes are frequently laid along the base where the granite hits the brick, visitors trace their relatives' names onto pieces of paper as a make-shift souvenir and men in uniform openly weep while saluting their fallen comrades. As Kristen Ann Haas (1998) notes,

> the things left at the Wall constitute more than just a response to the tragedy of lost lives [. . .] beyond grieving for the dead, the Wall inspires people to grieve the loss of patriotism, nationalism, and community in the wake of the Vietnam War. (p. 104)

A stronger claim to the resonant abilities of the VVM could be found through collecting oral testimonies of veterans when they encounter the memorial. Although photographs have been taken that indicate that visitors are displaying a deeply felt emotional connection with either a specific name or the site, this would be evidentially insufficient for proving a resonant encounter. Extensive oral history collections have been established about the Vietnam War and these have provided a space for veterans of the war to recall their experiences overseas. Notable repositories include the Vietnam Centre and Sam Johnson Vietnam Archive at Texas Tech University and more specialist local archives like the Rochester Voices project in New York.

Despite the comparatively low emphasis on documenting veterans' views of the VVM, there are some materials that could shed light on the VVM's resonant abilities. The Vietnam Centre contains a VHS recording celebrating the power of the VVM to provide a sense of closure for visiting veterans (The Wall That Heals, n.d.). The Centre also holds a DVD that brings together a musical tribute to veterans and recorded comments of visitors (Voices from the Wall, n.d.). These two sources both reflect upon experiences of visitors to the VVM and promote common themes of self-reflection and personal loss. The Centre has also digitized a series of short films from the Friends of the Vietnam Memorial, a veterans group formed to encourage educational and personal visits to the site. In one such recording, the host asks John Campbell, who is labelled as the '[New Jersey] in Touch Coordinator' what the purpose of the Friends is for ordinary people:

> The Friends is basically a service organization to The Wall. We have different programmes that allow people to become involved with the healing process that The Wall creates [. . .] we have several programmes, there is a name rubbing programme where people can send in a request and we have a group of volunteers who periodically go down to The Wall to make name rubbings and they come back and mail them. (Veterans Issues and Answers: Friends of the Vietnam Memorial, 1992: 01:06–01:39)

The desire of veterans to establish civil society groups solely dedicated to encouraging others to visit the VVM would suggest that the site was successful in 'speaking to' a social group open to the possibility of a resonant encounter. Accounting for this depth of feeling enables academics to track these relationships over time and record any emotional shifts. The VVM's interpretation as a conceptual eyesore by journalists while being a vehicle for social and psychic healing among veterans demonstrates the strong evaluations that sites of memory engender, and how one's social position influences the dynamic between subject and site.

As for the MMJE, the construction of the memorial in a location so central to Berlin's historic centre prompted a wider conversation about the legacy of the Holocaust in German collective memory. This broad-ranging dialogue rekindled functionalist-intentionalist debates (Till, 2005: 172–175) and led others, most notably the novelist Martin Walser, to call on Germany to 'move on' from the collective guilt of the Second World War (Carrier, 2005: 140). Despite these wider conversations about the nature of Germany's culture of remembrance and the long shadow of the Holocaust in German political and cultural life, scholars and public figures opined that the MMJE would challenge visitors to reconsider how they commemorated the Holocaust and how they understood the ethical nuances of collectively traumatic memories (Ouroussoff, 2005; Young, 2000). These predictions may be true for a section of the visiting public; however, by focusing in on resonance, researchers are more able to determine the breadth of a site's impact in each social and cultural context.

Quentin Stevens' work documenting how visitors interacted with the MMJE is instructive of the site's limitations. Stevens (2012) photographs how visitors to the site behave in relation to the numerous grey stelae that compose the memorial (pp. 43–54). Given the gravity of memorial's subject, the fact that these photos document a range of actions – such as sunbathing, drinking beer and schoolchildren playing – demonstrates behaviours that would be more consistently shunned in

other memorial settings. As Stevens notes, there are public ordinances and regulations to prevent certain behaviours, but these are usual couched in the language of accident prevention rather than regulating tastefulness (pp. 46–51). It may still be possible to have resonant encounters at the MMJE, but it is likely that is made more challenging in an environment where people are absent-mindedly eating their lunch.

There have also been noteworthy news stories about how the site has become a meeting place rather than a location of sombre reflection. In an article in the Huffington Post, Meredith Bennett-Smith (2013) notes that the MMJE has become a popular background for LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender) men on the dating app Grindr. Emma Anderson (2016) has written of a similar trivialization of the site as players of the smartphone game *Pokemon Go* began to descend on the memorial. In both such instances, visitors did not deem it inappropriate to act in this way despite being surrounded by a site commemorating a genocide. Stevens' work and the reported interactions with the MMJE in the press clearly demonstrate that this site of memory is less capable of communicating resonance. A debate may be had as to why the memorial does not engender more powerful and solemn responses – whether it be the site's location, its aesthetic merits, the absence of other public facilities that encourages thoroughfare and city-dwellers to use the site for alternative ends – but the people interacting with the site are not unaware of the site's commemorative intention nor are they morally deficient: the problem lies with the site itself.

As Adrienne L. Burk (2006) notes, 'the act of inventing or evoking heroic and/or historic monuments stems from a tendency to centralize, specify and impose explicit social messages on public spaces' (p. 951). The MMJE seeks to resist such a top-down imposition of meaning and thus creates an ambiguity among visitors. This ambiguity appears to alienate visitors otherwise open to resonant encounters:

> visitors are generally well informed about the memorial's meaning. Nevertheless, the behaviour of most visitors to the MMJE suggests that they are not reflecting on the artwork's commemorative purpose. It is a distinctive characteristic of this memorial that the majority of its visitors treat it merely as an interesting object to explore. (Stevens, 2012: 41)

Whether counter-memorials such as the MMJE undercut the possibility of resonant encounters is beyond the scope of this article; however, it does seem plausible to suggest that sites designed to reject didacticism have an uphill task.

Nevertheless, the most impactful monuments are those which are not inflexibly didactic, but instead allow for a plurality of experiences to be articulated and respected without undermining the conceptual basis of a particular site of memory. Returning to the notion of multidirectionality, sites of memory achieve this status by their capability of creating a variety of resonant encounters. As Rothberg (2009) notes, multidirectionality opposes the notion of groups, and memories themselves, being in competition with one another over scarce intellectual resources (p. 3). By adopting Rosa's framework, multidirectionality can be more easily measured among different communities rather than simply asserted. For example, although a site *could* be understood in a multidirectional manner, understanding the extent of resonant feeling among a given community would be a way of more accurately tracking a site's emotional impact. Rosa's theory of resonance already incorporates multidirectionality in its hermeneutical understanding of the relation between a subject and object in any given encounter: recall the example of reading a novel and it 'leaving a mark' on each reader in a unique way.

It is hard to avoid the obvious similarities between how Rosa thinks about 'communities of resonance' and what we might consider the implicit default position of memory studies regarding collective identity formation. Rosa (2019) argues that communities may be called communities of resonance

insofar as they inhabit the same resonant spaces, sustained by their 'common repertoire of resonance-producing and resonance-directing stories' (p. 157). For Rosa, then, history is inherently a space of resonance because it is 'where past and present, or rather past and future, in the present, enter into a dialogue in which the past becomes alive and is perceived as an Other that concerns us in some way' (p. 299). Taken literally, physical sites of commemoration, museums and historical archives are such places, and in bringing history alive, they exist as spaces capable of transformative experiences in those subjects open to perceiving contemporary social reality as one in dynamic tension with its ideas about its own past, and its visions for its own future based on how the past is concretized in practices in the present. The production of historical spaces with the express intention of arriving at the conditions for resonance is a way of understanding the importance of the role of museum curators, architects of commemorative statues and researchers presenting archival evidence.

Rosa underscores the importance of sociospatial context for the emergence of collective resonant encounters, arguing that numerous psychological and phenomenological studies have frequently demonstrated that the architectural design and arrangement of a space can effect mood and posture, as well as 'to a significant degree foster or inhibit sensitivity to horizontal resonance in social groups' (p. 386). Moreover, Rosa claims that 'we can observe resonant affinities which are cohort-specific' (p. 395). For a social group, it is both the prior shared experiences of the past and the simultaneous collective experience of the present that operate within a space. Nevertheless, the notion of collective resonance goes underexplored in Rosa's work and requires further theoretical support. Valerie Walkerdine (2010) has described communities as characterized by 'embodied affective relations' (p. 95). Furthermore, citing Didier Anzieu's (2016) psychoanalytic theory of the skin ego, Jacob Johanssen (2021) has suggested that groups are prone to imagining having a body to simulate 'organizational structure and a feeling of togetherness among its members' (p. 89). Thus, any reference to group affect by visitors to sites of memory remains tenable and coherent with Rosa's resonance theory as the means of articulating an embodied reaction of a collective (even though the individuals do not literally share a body). Referring to the earlier examples, there are further revenue avenues in assessing the relationship between affective groups and resonant encounter (e.g. when veterans with shared experiences resonate with the VVM more so than individual journalists).

Rosa (2019) describes the experience of historical resonance as powerful 'where and when one's personal history and contemporary "world" history come into mutual contact, i.e. where subjects enter into history or experience themselves as part of history' (p. 300). This description adequately captures the intention of many memory activists, and the experience of those individuals moved by the historical narratives communicated at a successful memory site.

Rosa's resonance theory intends to provide a normative framework from which 'new spaces and possibilities of being-in-the-world are opened up', in the hopes of informing 'experimental resonant oases for new types of social experiences' (p. 442). Resonance theory lends itself to political opposition to the privatization of public space, the division of spaces into strictly industrial and commercial zones, and other ways in which public space is constructed and reproduced in such a way that limits its social experiences. Resonant spaces are open-ended; they allow individuals to enter an encounter without an express preconceived intention of how such a space ought to be interpreted or used.

We welcome criticism of Rosa's resonance theory to sharpen the qualitative tools of assessment for memory studies and ensure that any methodological application does not contribute to myopia. Many scholars may remain reluctant to incorporate the entire normative baggage of Rosa's sociological framework: by way of example, there is criticism in the sociology literature that Rosa's position on certain issues of human subjectivity is too eurocentric (Susen, 2020), that situational identity is even more complex than Rosa's sociology suggests (D'Ambrosio, 2019) and Rosa himself has been open and encouraging about scholars adapting and changing his theory of resonance

to resolve any issues they encounter with its translation across disciplines or when it is brought to bear on topics he failed to anticipate (Rosa, 2020). Even with those reservations mitigated, memory activists may still have philosophical reservations operating under the pretence that they are part of a broader humanistic project providing the conditions for personal fulfilment.

Conclusion

To conclude, contemporary debates over political identity and cultural heritage continue to invoke collective memories of history and memory activism is increasingly seen as an important and worthwhile form of political engagement. Creating sites of memory, therefore, has become a significant method of activism for both progressives seeking to make a break from the lingering symbolism of nationalism and/or colonialism, and conservatives seeking to protect traditional understandings of the nation and culture in the face of societal fragmentation.

To ask the question 'is this statue/place/installation resonant with the environment/target audience/the history with which it intends to connect?', resonance becomes a valuable means of qualitative assessment within memory politics. Resonance becomes a normative category that offers a language of critique oriented towards the efficacy of the encounter between a site of memory and a member of the public. Scholars within the field of memory studies frequently refer to the communication of meaning and the creation of sacred spaces as ways by which nation-states create and reinvent their own legitimacy. In addition, it is commonplace for researchers to emphasize the emotional impact of sites commemorating traumatic events, namely, periods of persecution, ethnic cleansing and genocide. An integral part of this scholarship is providing an account for the ways in which the observer interprets a site of memory and establishes a deeper emotional connection with the past. Rosa's understanding of resonance is a method by which scholarship can more constructively evaluate the qualitative value of different sites of memory.

ORCID iD

Jamie Ranger https://orcid.org/0000-0002-4694-8900

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Author biographies

Jamie Ranger is a DPhil candidate in Politics (Political Theory) at St. Hugh's College, University of Oxford. His doctoral thesis explores the relationship between radical politics and the technical configuration of social life. His wider research interests include radical democratic theory, philosophy of technology and the history of political thought.

Will Ranger is a PhD candidate in University College London's Institute of the Americas. His doctoral thesis adopts an *histoire des mentalités* approach to US history to explore the entangled relationship between American patriotism and religious devotion between 1945 and 1976. His wider research interests include collective memory, nationalism and civil religion.